

# The Irish Catholic

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## Resource issues remain warns Ballinrobe PP after protests

Chai Brady

Rural communities "must be resourced" if they are to accommodate asylum seekers with dignity, a Mayo-based parish priest has said.

Following peaceful protests this week regarding a property in Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo which will house asylum seekers, Fr Denis Carney PP of Ballinrobe-Kilmaine told *The Irish Catholic* that the parish, the council and Government need to work together to "treat asylum seekers with dignity".

Protests ended after the Government stated that the former JJ Gannon's hotel in Ballinrobe would not be used to house 50 men as planned but families instead.

However, Fr Carney said the community is already struggling in terms of lack of transport, healthcare and education facilities.

"Everyone, no matter who they are, he or she, be they adult or young, deserves a dignified living," he said, adding that accessing these basic services is not unique to his parish.

"I think the main concern is lack of resources. Obviously the lack of consultation in advance has certainly played a part in it

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### A divine blessing...



Fr Vasyl Kornitsky blesses the congregation attending Divine Liturgy at the Ukrainian Catholic chaplaincy in Donnycarney on the feast of Christ's Baptism, January 7. Photo: Artem Kulnych

### Bishops called to take harder stance on 'hurtful' funerals

Staff reporter

Funerals that celebrate the life of notorious criminals are "particularly hurtful" to parishioners who see their church "taken over by those who prey on the community", according to a Dublin-based priest.

Fr Joe Keegan CC in Cabra West has called for Irish bishops to take a harder stance on what is permitted at funerals as in churches people are "boasting of the harm" caused by criminals.

"People are entitled to a Christian funeral, like someone who has had a bad past, but the assumption is that they are certainly not celebrating their bad past, they are asking for forgiveness for anything they have done," Fr Keegan said.

Auxiliary Bishop of Armagh Michael Router, who is the Vice Chair of the Irish Bishops' Drugs Initiative, told *The Irish Catholic* that all are entitled to a Christian funeral regardless of their past, but when it comes to criminality there should be "no glorification of their lifestyle".

The bishop said: "I realise very often that both pastoral councils and priests may feel intimidated if they try and stand against local drug dealers or gangs in terms of giving them what they want, and sometimes they will just go ahead and do things anyway that would be totally against our understanding of what would be a respectful and proper Christian funeral."

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# Senator Mullen: Govt 'allergic' to speaking up for persecuted Christians

Jason Osborne

There's a danger that persecuted Christians in Nigeria and other parts of the world are "out of sight, out of mind", Independent Senator Rónán Mullen has said.

The "least" Government can do is use whatever levers they have to try and pressure uncooperative countries, such as Nigeria and Nicaragua where attacks on Christians are rife, into cracking down on anti-Christian persecution, Senator Mullen told *The Irish Catholic* newspaper.

This comes after a Nigerian priest based

in Ireland warned that embattled Christians in Nigeria have been "left alone to survive" by the international community, following attacks over Christmas that left almost 200 dead and hundreds more injured.

The attacks on 20 Christian villages in Plateau State started on Saturday, December 23 and continued into Christmas day.

"There is a danger that the Government has almost an allergy to speaking up for Christians. I worry that it's not so much that they think that somehow they'll be

perceived as not caring about the rest, but you worry that it's some kind of distaste for any kind of solidarity with the Christian Church, that it's part of this ongoing painful adolescence that's going on within the Irish political and cultural establishment," Senator Mullen said.

"Those are temptations they should be aware of and careful to avoid. This is a problem, other countries are speaking up about it. It doesn't mean you don't care about others if you do speak up on this."

Asked by this paper for comment on the massacre

and ongoing persecution of Christians in Nigeria, a spokesperson for the Department of Foreign Affairs said that Ireland "strongly condemns all forms of persecution on the basis of religion or belief".

"The promotion of freedom of religion or belief is a priority for Ireland's human rights engagement at both multilateral and bilateral levels. It is an issue consistently raised by Ireland at the United Nations Council on Human Rights, and through the European Union," the spokesperson said.

# DCC social media ban of IC journalist lifted

Chai Brady

Dublin City Council (DCC) has admitted to blocking a journalist from *The Irish Catholic* from its X (Twitter) page in error, following an innocuous post about its 'Winter Lights' event.

Multimedia journalist Jason Osborne was blocked from the council's page after saying: "I appreciate the honesty of 'Winter Lights'. In no realistic sense are the majority of people celebrating Jesus' birth. That event 2000 years ago is just a distant foundation for our modern party season. That quiet, subtle world-shift will be celebrated by few in Ireland, 2023."

Asked why the account was blocked, a spokesperson for DCC said that following a "large number of distasteful and abusive comments primarily on X" about Winter Lights, it was decided to start blocking accounts.

Mr Osborne posted the comment on December 16, and it was not until this paper contacted the council that the ban was lifted.

In a statement to this paper regarding the decision, DCC said: "As you know, the brand, 'Winter Lights' was created in 2020 by Dublin City Council as a series of events featuring illuminated installations and projections at various locations around the Dublin City Centre,

transforming the urban landscape into a dazzling spectacle.

"We received a large number of distasteful and abusive comments from primarily X (Twitter) accounts in relations to this campaign. We took the decision to block a number of accounts, however @JasonOsborneIC was blocked in error. Thank you for bringing this to our attention and we have unblocked @JasonOsborneIC and he will be able to see posts from Dublin City Council's Twitter account once again."

The council did not state any policy they have for staff regarding blocking individuals from their social media channels.

## Lack of resources forced Ballinrobe community to peaceful protest says PP

» Continued from Page 1

too," according to Fr Carney. "I would hope that what has happened here in Ballinrobe – and the protest was very, very peaceful – that some lessons have been learned by everyone, certainly by Government departments. I think we're all a little wiser now than we would have been even a week ago.

"I think discussion is good, people have a civil right to protest, so it is lovely it was carried out in the manner where property wasn't damaged and there was no risk to life. It was good humoured, but at the end of the day we cannot lose sight of the worldwide problem and more and more communities are being

confronted with how to deal with this issue. I think we need a good debate on how to move forward and respectfully listen to others," he said.

Fr Carney said Ballinrobe has already "embraced a lot of people from different cultures and traditions, who have integrated well" and that the community is very welcoming, adding: "There are people in all protests who have genuine concerns, and there are also others who will maybe take advantage of that concern. That is true of any protest not just on this issue but of any issue you name under the sun. I think that element of nastiness has not come into the local protest here."

# Rotunda master 'can't remember' last time abortion protest took place

Ruadhán Jones

The Master of the Rotunda hospital has admitted he "can't remember" the last time a pro-life protest took place outside the Dublin hospital.

Prof. Seán Daly made the remarks when asked

about the abortion zones legislation set to make pro-life protest illegal within 100 metres of facilities providing abortion.

His comments appear to be at odds with statements in the Dáil regarding the frequency of protests, with TDs claiming they are

"constant, daily in some cases".

Sandra Parda of The Life Institute said "The Master of the Rotunda's own comments show that the claims that this legislation is necessary is not based on reality.

"In fact, we know the

truth is that the pro-life vigils and witnesses that take place, in the deeply concerning context of our rising abortion rate, are peaceful."

Pro-life groups have said that the zones are unnecessary and discriminatory.

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# US Irish Catholics defended after backlash to social media trend

**Chai Brady**

A trend on social media among Catholics in the US with Irish heritage, which was criticised by some online users who took issue with them describing themselves as Irish, has been defended by EPIC (The Irish Emigration Museum).

The TikTok trend involved people uploading videos of themselves starting sentences by saying ‘We’re Irish Catholics’ and

describing a personality trait they associate with their religious identity. Some critics levelled the claim that an Irish American can’t declare they act in a certain way because of their ‘Irishness’.

The condemnation was shut down by Dr Catherine Healy, Historian-in-Residence at EPIC who told the *Irish Star* that the Irish diaspora’s Catholicism gave families a sense of belonging “in a society where they often faced

discrimination”.

Dr Healy said: “It is understandable that people of Irish descent still identify with their Catholic roots. Catholics made up the vast majority of Irish emigrants to America in the decade after the Great Famine, and many of them retained a strong allegiance to their faith in the face of nativist hostility.

“Religion gave these families a sense of purpose and belonging in a society where they often faced

discrimination. Across the US, Irish communities provided huge sums of money to the building and maintenance of churches. They were arguably the most influential ethnic group in American Catholicism until the early 20th century.”

“Irish-American identity these days might be less focused on religion, but Catholic traditions remain an important cultural touchstone for members of the diaspora,” she said.

# Knock rector praises post-Covid bounce back to record numbers

**Jason Osborne**

Knock Shrine welcomed north of one million visitors this year in a return to pre-Covid numbers, even as the nearby Ireland West airport revealed that it had enjoyed its busiest year on record in 2023.

The Co. Mayo airport said that passenger numbers increased by 13% to 818,000 for the first time in the airport’s history, surpassing the previous record of 807,000 passengers reported in 2019.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Rector of Knock Shrine and member of the board at Knock airport, Fr Richard Gibbons said that everyone was “delighted” with the locality’s performance in 2023.

“Everyone worked very, very hard since the pandemic finished to get back, but they saw a huge bounce in visitors and people taking

flights from the airport, just out of a number of factors, really; destinations and also because of easy accessibility to the airport,” Fr Gibbons said.

While Knock Shrine didn’t see a ‘Biden bounce’ after the US President visited the holy site early last year, Fr Gibbons said the Shrine was back to welcoming “north of one million” visitors.

“It [President Biden’s visit] did get the shrine better known internationally alright, but our own numbers headed north of one million this year so that was fantastic.

“There were bigger numbers coming for new pilgrimages. The Syro-Malabar rite, for example, and other groups – Filipinos and other groups coming along as well,” Fr Gibbons said, adding, “We were delighted by the end of the year”.

# New report confirms positive effects of religion

**Staff reporter**

A Gallup report titled *Faith and Wellness* has confirmed that religious people are more engaged in their communities, have more social support and enjoy more positive mentalities.

The American analytics

company found that there were five key factors of spirituality that have a beneficial impact on a person’s wellbeing:

- Positive coping and a sense of purpose in life
- Faith-based social connections
- Community and civic engagement
- Structural stability

- Workplace support of holistic wellbeing

“An estimated 160 million more adults have positive experiences than would be the case if those adults were not religious,” the report reads, which is based on data collected from 2012 to 2022 by Gallup and also on a review of academic studies.

“Why are people turning away from a practice that can provide positive benefits to their lives?” the report asks, highlighting a lack of awareness as one contributing factor.

## Michelangelo’s cherub



A baby who was baptised by Pope Francis during Mass sits in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican on January 7, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Photo: CNS



## DIOCESE OF MEATH VACANCY DIRECTOR OF FAITH DEVELOPMENT 5 YEAR FIXED TERM CONTRACT

The Diocese of Meath is a Catholic community of sixty-nine parishes divided into eight regional deaneries living and working together in service of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Its geographical area comprises counties Meath and Westmeath, the greater part of County Offaly, one parish in County Louth and two parishes in County Cavan.

The Diocese is seeking to recruit for the role of Director of Faith Development in the Diocese of Meath. It is an exciting and challenging opportunity in the life and mission of the Diocese. The post holder will be required to lead and work under their own initiative as well as work as part of a team to develop and implement new approaches, resources and programmes to adult faith formation, sacramental preparation, and evangelisation in parishes across the diocese.

The terms are based on a 5-year Fixed Term Contract, working 35 hours per week, work pattern to be agreed.

**Salary:** Will be considered within the range of €40,000-€42,500 gross per annum – commensurate upon experience and qualifications.

Full details relating to the vacancy can be found on the Diocesan Website at: [www.dioceseofmeath.ie](http://www.dioceseofmeath.ie) clicking on the tab [job vacancy](#) where terms and conditions and application form relating to the role can also be accessed.

Applications are welcome from anyone who feels they meet the criteria as presented and are interested in playing an active role in faith development in the Diocese of Meath.

**Closing date for applications will be 5pm on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024**

The Diocese of Meath is a registered charity CHY 7230



# Parents reject teaching of abortion in Catholic schools

**Ruadhán Jones**

Parents in the North have overwhelmingly rejected a Westminster law that would force Catholic schools to teach about accessing abortions, a consultation has shown.

However, the department of education said its hands are tied and it will be releasing guidance on teaching access to abortion this month.

In response to a department of education consultation on sex education, almost 75% of parents

and members of the public slapped down a move to teach access to abortion and disregard the ethos of each school.

Some 43% said resources should include moral and ethical perspectives, with less than 1% saying teaching abortion should be held in school.

A significant number of respondents were "critical that 'abortion rights' had been imposed on Northern Ireland without consultation and over the heads of the Assembly and Executive", a report on the con-

sultation noted.

"Abortion is the murder of a child and it should not be taught as an option," said one parent/carer, while another warned it is not "moral or ethical" to give children information on accessing abortions.

Respondents stressed the importance of parents' rights as the primary educators of their children, with one saying "None of this should be taught to any child unless parental/carer consent has been obtained".

The department received 13,461

responses to its consultation, with the highest number coming from parents (47%) and members of the public (32%).

The consultation came after Secretary of State Chris Heaton Harris imposed legislation on the North that required schools to teach access to abortion regardless of ethos.

Mr Harris and the department claim that they have a legal obligation to introduce this law, which Catholic school leaders have already promised to resist.

The department's consultation, held from September to November 2023, sought views on legislation allowing parents to request to have their child excused from "age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion".

Introducing the report, the education department said it "must" issue guidance on the content and delivery of sex education this year.

# Contrasting tones mark Irish dioceses' response to *Fiducia Supplicans*

**Brandon Scott**

The Archdioceses of Armagh and Dublin have issued their respective response to the Vatican document, *Fiducia Supplicans*, with Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell describing the document as a tool which will "help us minister to our brothers

and sisters who long for the closeness and compassion of God".

Announced on December 18 of last year, the novel document heralds a liberalisation of Church attitudes to the blessing of couples who are not considered to be married according to Church teaching, including the blessing of same-sex couples.

Responding to the Vatican announcement, Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin called on parishioners in the diocese to avoid succumbing to the "exaggerated and confusing portrayals" that the document has generated in the media and online while explicitly maintaining that the Church, while quoting

the document, "does not have the power to impart blessings on unions of couples in irregular situations or on unions of couples of the same-sex".

Meanwhile in welcoming the document, Archbishop Dermot Farrell said:

"These are blessings without a liturgical format which neither approve nor justify the situation in

which these people find themselves."

The declaration makes clear that the blessings are to be spontaneous and pastoral—and 'without an approved ritual' or 'book of blessings'."

The controversial document has provoked a variety of mixed responses from Catholic bishops' conferences around the world with the Belgian and German bishops' conferences both welcoming the innovation – German Bishop Georg

Bätzing described the blessing as trusting in "God's goodness".

While in contrast most Eastern European and African bishops' conferences have rejected the document, with the Bishop of Abuja in Nigeria asserting that "the Church has emerged through turbulent times in its history before" and that this "current controversy caused by a dictatorship of modern secularism will pass away leaving the Church strong and cohesive".

## Blessed youth...



Fr Simon Jin blesses a young child in Portlaoise Parish church on the feast of Christ's Baptism, January 7. Photo: Agnes Sasiada.

# Irish among top 10 Camino visitors in record breaking 2023

**Staff reporter**

Irish men and women were among the top 10 visitors to the famous Camino de Santiago in 2023, as the Spanish pilgrimage saw record breaking visitor figures.

Nearly half a million people from around the world hiked this historic route last year, according to statistics from the pilgrims' office.

Nearly 200,000 of the pilgrims were from Spain, primarily from the southern region of Andalucia, with people from the United States, Italy and Germany the next highest.

Ireland saw the 10th highest number of visitors, just behind Korea and ahead of Australia. Almost 7,000 Irish people made the Spanish pilgrimage in 2023.

The major age groups represented were 18- to 45-year-olds, with 10,181 pilgrims, and there were 10,096 pilgrims between 45 and 65 years old. Women pilgrims also outnumbered males.

Despite the Camino being a traditional Catholic pilgrimage, 23.3% of those who walked the route completed it for nonreligious reasons.



# No country for old moans

It's been pleasing to see a revival in the old Irish tradition of celebrating January 6 as 'Nollaig na mBan', the 'women's Christmas'.

Although it had been a country tradition, I don't think it was very widely observed in Dublin, where January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany was known, traditionally, as 'Little Christmas'.

The authoritative *Encyclopaedia of Ireland* published in 2003 under the aegis of the Irish government doesn't even mention 'Nollaig na mBan'. Presumably because, in mainstream Irish society, the tradition had faded. But now it has come back and modernised in a variety of ways: events from wild swimming to competitive singing have celebrated the women's Christmas.

Originally, the idea was to give women a day off from domestic chores – always welcome, to my mind. There was also an element of honouring Mary at the time of the Epiphany.

## Renewed

But inevitably a renewed Nollaig na mBan will take on the contours of contemporary society.

What I hope is that it won't morph into yet another misery-boots lamentation about how wretched Irishwomen have always been. I call this the 'ochone agus ochone' version of history.

I get a taste of this trope, sometimes, when asked to contribute to a radio, or sometimes review a book, about how awful Irish wom-



Mary Kenny

en's lives were.

Yes, some people had difficult and tragic experiences. The mother-and-baby home enquiries depict a harsh regime to which single mothers were consigned, often by their own families.

**“The airwaves throbbed with popular Irish singers like Bridie Gallagher and Ruby Murray, and divas like Bernadette Greevy”**

Life could be hard in other respects – emigration often left lonely farms and women without much hope of personal fulfilment.

But plenty of women in Ireland also had happy and rewarding lives. When I was a



Siobhan McKenna, 1959

youngster, the lead violinist in the RTÉ orchestra was Geraldine O'Grady – at a time when some conductors elsewhere, like Sir Thomas Beecham, wouldn't have any women in the band.

One of the most acclaimed global couture designers was Sybil Connolly. Artists like Nano Reid and Evie Hone were widely admired. The airwaves throbbed with popular Irish singers like Bridie Gallagher and Ruby Murray, and divas like Bernadette Greevy.

There were many successful women writers, from Alice Curtayne to Maura Laverty and Mary Lavin. Iris Kellett led the way for schoolgirls mad about horses, show-jumping and gymkhanas, and Siobhán McKenna was our world-renowned thespian.

## History

If one were to write a history of Irishwomen according to magazines like the old Irish Tatler & Sketch, or Social and Personal, it would describe a world of champion lady golfers, arts patronesses, and, especially in January, glamorous Irishwomen at 'dress dances'.

But any academic history of Irishwomen is nearly always the 'ochone agus ochone' version.

Maybe 'Nollaig na mBan' is moving to include the brighter side of the story.

## Reverend's bad post...

One of the hottest talking-points in Britain has been the Post Office scandal: the British Post Office was shown to have prosecuted hundreds of innocent subpostmasters and subpostmistresses, charging them with theft and false accounting when the real problem was the faulty computer system they installed.

(An ITV drama-documentary *Mr Bates v. the Post Office* brought the story alive.)

It's been a shocking miscarriage of justice, and some of the PO staff have had their

lives ruined, served time in prison, lost their homes, were made bankrupt.

One of the oddest elements of the drama was the role of the PO chief executive, Paula Vennells, who, besides running the corporate body, was an ordained priest in the Church of England.

In the TV drama, she's portrayed praying sanctimoniously in church, while blocking enquiries about her company's cruelly unjust behaviour.

The Rev Vennells (Lia Williams in the screen version) was paid £4.9 million, plus bonuses, was awarded a CBE

honour and the Church of England appointed her to head an ethics committee on investments.

Honest to God, what on earth was an ordained cleric doing as CEO of a big business corporation?

And the Anglican Church showed little sense in hiring her for the ethics assignment. There are dozens of trained theologians with a grasp of finance who could have done that job, but no, they had to hire someone from the corporate world. A real case of ceding to earthly powers.

Gladstone was also a classical scholar who wrote books about Homer, a patron of poetry and the arts, read Dante and Molière in the original, and spoke Latin, Greek, Italian, French and German – getting by in Spanish and Norwegian.

How many politicians today – of any age – could rival that for mental energy?



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# Irish bishop among 20 missionaries killed in 2023

## Ruadhán Jones

Cork-born Bishop of Los Angeles David O'Connell was one of the 20 Catholic missionaries killed in 2023, according to the annual report from Vatican agency Fides.

Those killed while in

the service of the Church include one bishop, eight priests, two men religious, one seminarian, one novice and seven laypeople.

Known as 'the Peacemaker', Bishop O'Connell (69) was shot dead in his Los Angeles home last February.

Carlos Medina (62) is charged with the murder and pleaded not guilty last March to the felony count of murder. He is expected to face trial later this year.

The Irish bishop was one of six missionaries killed in the USA and Mexico, while Africa was the deadliest

continent for Church workers, with nine people suffering violent deaths.

In Asia, four Catholic lay people were murdered in 2023, including Gaza Catholics Nahida Khalil Anton, and her daughter Samar Kamal Anton, two active parishioners of the Holy Family Catholic Parish Church, who were killed by IDF (Israel Defence Forces) snipers on December 16.

Two Filipino Catholic students were among

the victims of the recent bombing attack during a Mass at Mindanao State University in Marawi City.

In Europe, there was just one death, a lay person who was killed in Spain in early 2023. Diego Valencia, sacristan of the parish of Nuestra Señora de La Palma, in Algeciras, in the province of Cadiz, was stabbed in January by a young Moroccan armed with a machete, who also injured other people.

In the introduction to the report, Fides explained that it used the term 'missionary' in a broad sense, referring to "all the baptised engaged in the life of the Church".

By virtue of their Baptism, "all the members of the People of God become missionary disciples", and "that it considered all those who died in a violent way, not only 'in hatred of the faith'", Fides said.

## Healing bodies to healing souls...



Deacon Mark Quinn, ordained to the diaconate for Tuam archdiocese on January 7, is pictured with Dr Margaret Naughton, who supervises the healthcare course Rev. Quinn graduated from in University Hospital Kerry.

## Children in State care placed in 'unregulated settings' doubles

### Staff reporter

The number of unaccompanied minors in 'Special Emergency Accommodation' has more than doubled in the past four months, according to statistics released by Tusla to the Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín TD.

Previous replies to parliamentary questions from the Meath West TD showed a steady increase in the number of unaccompanied children seeking international protection who are ending up in what the Child and Family Agency admit are "unregulated placements mostly in rented accommo-

modation... with staffing from third party providers".

In the first week of October 2022 there were a total of 59 children in SEAs, 17 of whom were unaccompanied minors or separated children. Ten months later, in the first week of August there were 160 children in these settings, including 94 unaccompanied minors.

In the first week of December there were 200 unaccompanied minors in unregulated settings. This represents a more than 100% increase in the number of separated children in such settings. A figure was not provided on the total number of children in SEAs (ie including Irish children).

Mr Tóibín said: "This is an absolute scandal, and Tusla have some very serious questions to answer. We know from previous PQ replies that €93 million to private companies mainly for 'special' placements of children.

"We also know that in the past year some unaccompanied children were actually ending up homeless in tents on the streets of Dublin. We need urgent clarification from the Department of Children and Integration that this is no longer happening. Every child who comes to our country alone should be protected by Tusla – ideally in safe foster placements," he said.

## Death of former Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, William Lee

### Brandon Scott

The former Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, Bishop William Lee has died aged 82. The Tipperary native was ordained in 1966 at St Patrick's College Maynooth and went on to further studies which eventually culminated in being awarded a doctorate in canon law from the Gregorian University in Rome.

The bishop emeritus, who resigned from his role in 2013 due to health issues, was described as a man with "steadfast love for the Church" by current Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, Alphonsus Cullinan.

"From 1993 until his retirement in 2013, Bishop Lee served as the Bishop of Waterford and Lismore with unwavering dedication and compassion," Bishop Cullinan said. "He worked tirelessly to ensure that the spiritual needs of the faithful were met and that the Church continued to be a beacon of hope and guidance for all.

"His commitment to the people of this Diocese, his steadfast love for the Church and his wisdom and friendship will be sorely missed," the bishop added.

Bishop Lee's funeral took place on January 9 at The Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity, Waterford.



# “Everything is connected”: changing future generations’ fate with today’s farming techniques

Rising temperatures, endless droughts and devastating floods – an unrelenting cycle of extreme weather is pushing communities in Malawi into deadly hunger. But thanks to innovative new climate-smart farming techniques, local farmers can protect their families and livelihoods from the catastrophic effects of the climate crisis for years to come.

In the Neno District of Malawi, farmer and father, Kosimasi has been struggling with the increasing consequences of climate change for many years. Unprecedented levels of rainfall have eroded the land and swept away his fishing ponds – the source of his family’s food, income and security for the future. Poverty and the growing risk of life-threatening hunger became a terrifying reality.

## Adapt, rebuild, thrive

Kosimasi knows that the rains will continue to come, and the land that generations of his family have relied on for their livelihood will continue to erode, with devastating impacts.

But with support, his whole community is now beginning to build resilience, and overcome the catastrophic effects of climate change. Kosimasi says, “We learned from Concern Worldwide that nature has changed and we should change our farms.”

Having worked in Malawi for 21 years, Concern’s climate-smart agriculture programmes have taught local farmers new irrigation methods and farming techniques, like how to dig swales and stabilise



Kosimasi, a fish farmer, stands in front of a pond in Samu village, Malawi, where he and his community are fighting the terrible effects of climate change. Photo: Chris Gagnon/Concern Worldwide

**“Everything is connected. We are using the fish pond to irrigate our crops on the land, and we are using the same crops to make the feed for the fish. We are not devastating the environment, we are busy taking care of the environment.”**

Kosimasi, Malawi

dams, to improve rainwater runoff. Essential tools, such as water drums and slashers, as well as solar panels, are helping to protect crops from soil erosion, increase harvest yields, and offer new opportunities for climate-resilient farming. By working with the environment, Kosimasi is building a positive, lasting connection between the land and the families that rely on it for food.

## A global connection

Unfortunately, Kosimasi’s story is an all too familiar one. Around the world, millions of people are being impacted by changes to the climate and environment. In Malawi, where the land supports 80% of the population’s livelihoods, climate shocks such as floods and droughts are pushing people to the brink of survival.

Here in Ireland, the effects of the climate crisis are starting to become more evident, with increased rainfall and flooding. But in Malawi, where farmers like Kosimasi are on the climate frontline, adverse changes in climate are severely disrupting the natural balance of seasons that farmers have relied on for generations. Consecutive harvests are being destroyed, giving families no time to recover and no relief from the devastation.

As experts warn that more intense and more frequent droughts, floods

### THE LASTING LEGACY OF TOOLS AND TRAINING

Through the generosity of legacy donors, Concern Worldwide is able to support vulnerable communities now and for years to come with the vital tools and training they need.

### TECHNOLOGY

Rather than irrigating land by hand with buckets and cans, farmers can use solar powered water pumps and save time for other vital tasks.

### IRRIGATION

Through innovative irrigation training, such as how to dig swales to protect dams, farmers can continue to grow crops, even during droughts.

### TRAINING

With support, farmers are trained in organic fertiliser-making – a sustainable way to grow crops multiple times a year, with readily available products.

## A growing impact

“Everything is connected,” Kosimasi beams, as he explains how he was able to make fertiliser for the beds of his fishing ponds. His ponds keep the land irrigated with nutrient-packed water, which helps to grow maize used to make fish feed. These new techniques have also meant Kosimasi can sell his fish and harvests at market, raising an income to build a new house for his family, and send his daughters to school. And, most importantly, his family is no longer hungry thanks to their improved diets.

A powerful and sustainable way to support Malawi is with a gift in your Will.

Through support from Irish donors, almost 40 farmers are now dedicated to conserving the Sayamika river and surrounding land, which means Kosimasi’s whole community is no longer at risk of deadly hunger.

## A lasting legacy

For many of Ireland’s most compassionate people, playing a part in protecting the lives of future generations starts with leaving a gift in their Will. A crucial source of support, this life-saving gesture can give communities the training and tools they need to recover and adapt – and connect us all to a brighter future.

While climate change might be inevitable, through one act of kindness – choosing to leave a gift in your Will – you can make an extraordinary change. By leaving a legacy, you can help ensure every one has the tools and support they need to fight the effects of the climate crisis, so they can thrive in a world without hunger.

**Discover how you can support families to adapt and survive. Together, we can fight for a future without deadly hunger.**

**“That my support will help create incredible change, even when I’m gone, makes me so proud.”**

Eileen, Co. Limerick



In the past, the ponds Kosimasi and other farmers worked on would be swept away by flooding. Photo: Chris Gagnon/Concern Worldwide

and shocks are to come, millions are already being left without enough food to eat – and future generations are more vulnerable than ever.

## Building resilience

Through kind donations, including gifts in Wills, Concern is supporting climate adaptation, helping to provide the long-term support farmers like Kosimasi need to prepare for the future. It’s a vital connection between the work that can be done to adapt now, and the legacy of a more secure future for generations to come.

And the long-term impacts are already evident. Thanks to the tools and training he received, Kosimasi’s fish farming business has flourished, and he has also begun harvesting crops several times a year. The determination of farmers like him is protecting families from life-threatening hunger, now and into the future.

## Learn how you can help to protect families against climate change

To receive your free brochure about leaving a gift in your Will to Concern, please contact Siobhan O’Connor today.

**Phone:** 01 417 8020 **E-mail:** [siobhan.oconnor@concern.net](mailto:siobhan.oconnor@concern.net)

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# HOMELESS

## SUPPLEMENT 2024

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

Our editorial team will be presenting readers with up-to-date homeless statistics and discussing the implications for individuals and families.

This is undoubtedly an issue that will highlight the tireless work of national and regional charities and all interested groups nationwide, giving them the opportunity to voice to the many perspectives and challenges facing those who both work in and rely on the homeless services.

Please contact us via e-mail or phone to order extra copies of this special edition.

@ [info@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:info@irishcatholic.ie)

☎ 01 687 4028



## Breda O'Brien

### The View



# Little acts of love will see us through the Blue Mondays

**L**ots of people feel down in January. 'Blue Monday', or the third Monday in January, is often called the most depressing day of the year. However, Blue Monday was an invention of someone called Cliff Arnall, who created it as a publicity stunt for a travel agency.

In the way of the internet, which manages to highlight all sorts of dubious things, this thesis was then taken as hard science.

Whatever about Mr Arnall, January is still difficult for many people. It is often a dark month and there is real scientific evidence that some people are quite badly affected by lack of sunlight, or seasonal affective disorder.

Some people may have over-spent at Christmas. Others may be feeling lonely, as friends and family go their separate ways. People make an extra effort to stay in touch at Christmas time so it can intensify the feelings of loneliness when the goodwill does not extend into the New Year.

### Malaise

In my opinion, New Year's resolutions sometimes add to the general feeling of malaise, as so few of them are kept beyond a few days, or at most, a few weeks. It can reinforce a feeling of not achieving much, or even of being pretty hopeless people.

My aim is not to undermine the idea of people making positive changes. For example, regular habits of prayer



and participation in the sacraments are invaluable. There are a slew of helpful popular books about habit change and many people make real progress using their insights.

**“Catholics in this country have been through a tough few years”**

However, even though we all have habits that we would be better off without and there are definitely habits we should take up, at least

some time in January should be spent in reflection and gratitude, rather than beating ourselves up.

### Tough

Catholics in this country have been through a tough few years. I was just talking to one of my adult sons about the long-lasting effect of the 'Repeal' referendum on the morale of not just Irish Catholics, but pro-life people in general. (Yes, there are pro-life humanists, atheists and agnostics, and we are glad of them.)

It can seem that as people who uphold the dignity of every human life, we are in a constant, desperate, rearguard action. It can be debilitating and wearing.

It is depressing, for sure, especially as we face the prospect of medically assisted suicide being introduced in the coming years.

**“We are squinting at the back of a small square of a snarled tapestry. Only God has the full view of how it all weaves together for good”**

Yet I still believe we have to keep the flickering lights lighting for as long as we can. We must continue to be counter-cultural. Part of that

involves seeing the good in the battles we have fought so far.

I am immensely proud of the efforts family and friends made during the Repeal campaign. Yes, we lost but the rout would have been even more comprehensive without the courage of thousands of people.

### Gratitude

Gratitude for our friends and family, and those in public life, in particular, who continue to fight the good fight is very important. We should also bear in mind that metaphorically speaking, we are squinting at the back of a small square of a snarled tapestry. Only God has the full view of how it all weaves together for good.

We never know what good we have done and may not know until one day, please God, we enter eternal life.

I often tell a story of a cup of coffee I had with

one of my former lecturers in college, where she looked at me reflectively and pondered aloud: I wonder what you will end up doing.

For an insecure 20-something, those words were gold. This religious sister, whom I hero-worshipped, thought I might end up doing something! The words kept me going for years.

**“It is easier to see the good that others do. For example, it is easy for me to see the impact of the numerous acts of kindness that my husband does in an unself-conscious way”**

Then I met her again and told her how her encouragement had helped me. She told me with her trademark honesty that she could not remember the incident at all. Nonetheless, it helped me enormously, even though it is also a funny story to tell.

It is easier to see the good that others do. For example, it is easy for me to see the impact of the numerous acts of kindness that my husband does in an unself-conscious way. Wordsworth expressed it well in the poem, *Tintern Abbey*: 'That best portion of a man's life, his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love.'

However, it can be an act of humility to admit that we can be influential on others in ways we do not see and to be grateful to God for that.

Ultimately, everything is in the hands of God. Let us be grateful that in him, the victory is already won. It may help us to be patient with our flaws and failings and also grateful that he can use us in ways we may never suspect.

**“It can seem that as people who uphold the dignity of every human life, we are in a constant, desperate, rearguard action. It can be debilitating and wearing”**



# Freedom of expression in democractic Ireland

## The Irish Catholic

Freedom, in many of its manifestations, is under threat around the world, whether it be freedom of speech, freedom of assembly or freedom of thought and conscience. We know only too well of the many instances in 2023 where governments shut down journalists and media and in some cases actually targeted journalists and campaigning citizens for attack and murder.

In Ireland we are lucky to have an open free society where debate and critique of the government and its institutions can take place in the knowledge that, barring libellous or defama-

tory statements, freedom of speech is respected.

Which makes some of the recent developments at government and local government level worrying. Dublin City Council admits to 'blocking' on social media criticisms of its 'Winter Lights' initiative. It also blocked a journalist from this paper for an observation that was innocuous.

### Censorship

It has since unblocked the journalist after protest by this paper but this type of censorship by a city council is a worrying development in the contract between

civil government and the rights of the tax paying citizens to comment and express views on how civil government is spending their money and hold it to account.

What is even more worrying however are the comments of the Minister for Equality, Roderic O'Gorman in relation to the upcoming referenda, which his government has called and was under no pressure to do so.

**“What of those who don't see themselves as promoting a 'progressive' programme of change and prefer traditional values?”**

The Minister has expressed fears that the referenda on care and family due to be held on March 8th could be hijacked by the far-right and turned into a culture war.

“I think it's the job of Government and the job of everyone in civil society campaigning for a yes vote to push back against that, to talk about what this referendum is about, and talk about how this is the opportunity to do some-

thing that people have been talking about doing for years,” Mr O'Gorman said.

But what about those in civil society who campaign for a No vote, are they also going to be labelled 'far-right'? The Minister has said that “any organisation that sees itself as progressive and wanting to advance progressive change” would have to explain why they do not support the plan.

### Propaganda

This smacks very strongly of the ministry for propaganda style approach to communications. What of those who don't see themselves as promoting a 'progressive' programme of change and prefer traditional values?

Dr Eileen Culloty, an assistant professor at the DCU School of Communications and expert on disinformation, told *The Irish Examiner* while the two referenda may seem uncontroversial, there may be efforts made to turn them into a culture war issue.

“On the surface, removing a constitutional reference to women's place in the home seems uncontroversial. But gender and identity are at the heart of culture war activism,” Dr

Culloty said.

“Right-wing media and far-right activists in Ireland and elsewhere champion a return to traditional values.”

**“One could argue that Minister O'Gorman has launched what he says he fears most, a culture war, with the first shots fired by him”**

This may be true at the extreme end but is the Christian media 'right-wing' now? Many Catholics and Christians and people of different faiths espouse a return to traditional values.

Are they going to get the ultimatum that the progressive organisations got, back these referenda or be labelled as non-progressive and ultimately far-right?

Expressing the view that Christmas should be called Christmas and not reduced to 'Winter Lights' is a traditionalist view, and it's enough to get you black-listed by local government.

Central Government doesn't seem to be holding the bar much higher in its approach to an open and free democratic debate

about these referenda, one could argue that Minister O'Gorman has launched what he says he fears most, a culture war, with the first shots fired by him.

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### Ballinrobe stands up

It's a deeply lamentable situation we have in our country where the obstruction of roads has become the most effective means for a community and often its elected councillors to negotiate with our current government in the context of housing asylum seekers.

Rural communities are being asked to take in asylum seekers, often in large numbers at a time, with no attempt to improve transport, healthcare or education facilities, which are all under pressure already.

The people of Ballinrobe showed that the last resort is not violence or arson, but peaceful protest at the incomprehensible ability of this Minister and his department to be completely deaf to rural communities and their genuine concerns.

Irish people are not far-right and it's time that their government listened and engaged in real and honest communications with them.

## JOE WALSH TOURS



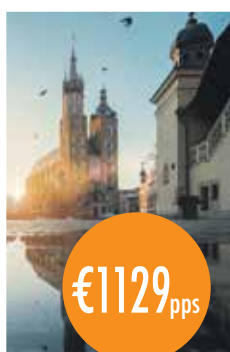
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# Church of peripheries must remember the centre

## Ruadhán Jones

Whatever its critics may say, the Church in Ireland has embraced Pope Francis' call to reach to the peripheries and Ireland is better for it.

For instance, the Church is a constant voice for migrants and the homeless, with Archbishop Dermot Farrell recently offering a stirring defence of the right of asylum seekers and refugees to make their home here.

The Church matches actions to fiery words, with laity, religious and priests at the forefront in providing emergency accommodation and care, while the Government repeatedly fails to

deliver on its housing promises.

While reaching to the peripheries, however, we can't forget the 'centre', the average Catholic who is not homeless nor seeking refuge, but who is working hard to live out the Church's teachings.

What kind of supports can we give to these Catholics? Some ideas immediately spring to mind.

In a time when young people are locked out of housing, a fact particularly affecting families, the Church should explore providing housing for those pursuing the vocation of marriage.

When we talk about vocations to the priesthood, it's

often said that the domestic Church is the seedbed. But if there's no houses, there's no families, no domestic Church, no vocations. The life of the Church depends on families.

In Germany, religious orders and dioceses are already offering former seminaries or religious houses on the cheap to young families trying to make a start – we should explore the same.

As Ireland becomes more secular, and the Church more peripheral, there is also an argument for investment in Catholic professionals.

If we want to reach out to secular Ireland, and also to build up the life of the Church, we're going to need a properly funded lay ministry.

This requires Catholics with a variety of skills from social media experts to therapists and anywhere in between.

Where are they are going come from without Church investment?

In our secular age, there's no other way. We need to band together as a shrinking community, a small outpost.

While Church infrastructure is in a state of flux and finances are dicey, it is only by investing in the future now that these issues can be addressed.

In tandem with our outreach to the peripheries, then, we need to strengthen the centre with proper investment.



# Tuam wasn't Ireland's version of a concentration camp



The true story of Tuam children's home may never be known, writes David Quinn

**S**oon enough, the Tuam children's home will be back in the news again. Exhumation of the bodies buried there will begin and a committee to advise on the process will convene very shortly.

It is now 10 years since news of '800 babies in a septic tank' broke upon the world. What happened in Tuam has been presented by some as Ireland's Holocaust, almost as though the babies were deliberately killed.

The news broke because a local woman, Catherine Corless, had compiled the death certificates for the babies and other small children who died there over the course of the home's existence from 1925 until 1961.

All died of natural causes such as influenza or measles. When vaccinations and antibiotics were developed, the number of deaths plunged.

## Inquiry

Since the news broke a decade ago, an official commission of inquiry has investigated county and mother and baby homes and published an enormous report, running to more than 2,000 pages. The commission refused to say more than the evidence would allow.

In respect of burials at the site, almost everyone accepts that the bodies of the deceased children were buried inappropriately. Some are in a series of chambers underground that



Denise Gormley and her 7-year-old daughter, Rosa, pay their respects at a cemetery in Tuam, Ireland, where the bodies of nearly 800 infants were uncovered at the site. Photo: CNS/Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters

may or may not have been used at one point for waste or sewage water. The chambers were reconstructed in 1937.

The home was opened in 1925. It had been workhouse before then. We don't know how many bodies are in the chambers. Other remains seem to be buried elsewhere on the grounds of the old home.

**“The fact is, we may never know who exactly buried the bodies over the course of the home's 37-year existence”**

We don't know who buried the bodies. However, we do know that Galway and Mayo County Councils, not the Bon Secours Sisters was ultimately responsible for the burials

because the commission of inquiry tells us so.

A report it produced on burials at the Tuam home categorically states: “All the residents of the Tuam Home were the responsibility of the Galway and Mayo County Councils.

“It seems to the Commission that responsibility for the burials of deceased children rested with the local authorities and Galway County Council had a particular responsibility as the owner of the institution.”

How many members of the public know this?

The fact is, we may never know who exactly buried the bodies over the course of the home's 37-year existence.

What we do know is that the home was very poorly resourced. It was cold. It had poor access to running water, never mind hot water, which made conditions there unhygienic, which would obviously increase the chances of disease. Food was often very basic.

## 1940s

The 1940s seem to have been the worst period there. World War II was raging, and resources were particularly scarce in the

country as a whole.

Galway and Mayo County Councils were responsible for funding the home and the nuns often fought with them over the lack of funding.

Reading the report of the inquiry, we see that the nun who ran the home for most of its existence was a Sr Hortense.

She seems to have been well thought of, including by some of the former residents who spoke to the inquiry or gave it written statements.

**“There are no negative eye-witness reports about Sr Hortense in the report. How many members of the general public are aware of this?”**

One woman, who was born in the home in the mid-1930s and (unusually) lived there until she was 18 (most children were boarded out, usually to foster homes, when they were much younger), told the inquiry

that “Sr Hortense loved children and helped them out”.

Another former resident said that Sr Hortense loved to give the children toys at Christmas.

Yet another former resident said: “I am shocked and appalled at the people who falsely accuse the Bon Secours nuns of abusing the children in their care”. She described Sr Hortense as having “a heart of gold”.

There are no negative eye-witness reports about Sr Hortense in the report. How many members of the general public are aware of this? Does it fit in with the widespread impression that Tuam was Ireland's version of a concentration camp?

It is true that some former residents hated the home. It was huge, cold, under-resourced, did not have enough staff, most of the children were born to unmarried mothers and the world was often a very harsh place for them.

## Unanswered

The inquiry leaves many questions unanswered due to shortage of evidence, especially about the burials. I suspect some of them

will never be answered.

Nonetheless, the report into the Tuam home does not match the very worst reports about it and everyone who can, should read it for themselves. It can be found online. Do so with an open mind.

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**“You must not take part in the deliberate killing of a patient”**

Every few years, the Irish Medical Council issues a new set of ethical guidelines. The latest came into force on January 1.

A stunning change has been made to the previous guidelines and it marks a watershed moment in the history of Irish medicine.

The old guidelines told medicals: “You must not take part in the deliberate killing of a patient.” This line is now gone. Clearly the way is being paved for euthanasia, and this is an extremely dark and sinister development.

**Here is the report:**  
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/89265-chapter-15-the-tuam-childrens-home/>

**“The inquiry leaves many questions unanswered due to shortage of evidence, especially about the burials. I suspect some of them will never be answered”**



# 'Hurtful' gangland funerals plague parishes



Priests have been encouraged to hold the line on improper requests at funerals, writes Chai Brady

Living in a community in which every neighbour knows who to watch out for in order to steer clear of drug dealing and violence is an unfortunate reality. To allow a church to be used to idolise a person during their funeral, who has caused so much distress, however, is a step too far according to a Dublin priest.

In certain parishes across Ireland gangland crime is not some distant concept, it has and continues to have a devastating impact on the innocent. How does a priest tackle a funeral of a person who, as the Archbishop Emeritus of Dublin Diarmuid Martin said is involved in the "traffic of evil"?

## Unrepentant

In a letter to this paper Fr Joe Keegan CC in Cabra West in Dublin told *The Irish Catholic* that the "prominent funerals of unrepentant drug dealers and gangsters is particularly hurtful to ordinary parishioners, who see their church being taken over by those who prey on the community".

Asked about the issue, Fr Keegan said that some people treat churches like 'venues' during funerals and have no appreciation of the rite.

"People are entitled to a Christian funeral, like someone who has had a bad past, but the assumption is that they are certainly not celebrating their bad past, they are asking for forgiveness for anything they have done," he said.

**"When the deceased's crimes are made subject of admiration, and people 'are actually boasting of the harm they have done in the community openly in the church... If that is the case, I would nearly say they should not be allowed a funeral in a church if that is the attitude'"**

Fr Keegan pointed to funerals that have occurred, particularly in Dublin, in which a person's criminality was celebrated at their funeral by friends or family members.

Referring to canon law, regarding denying a Christian funeral, he said that someone can be "refused a Christian burial if they are a notorious, unrepentant sinner" and when the deceased's crimes are made subject of admiration, and people "are actually boasting of the harm they have done in the community openly in the church... If that is the case, I would nearly say they should not be allowed a funeral in a church if that is the attitude".

He said: "I think it would be helpful if there were more clear, uniform guidelines as to what is and is not permitted, in Dublin there are guidelines in fairness, but sometimes perhaps it's not as clear as it could be.

"In our parish there's one secular song at the end, as the coffin is coming out, people are entitled to that, but people want more and more and more..."

"If the priest is prepared to negotiate, and again if it's an 'important' person, a politician or a famous person, it just seems to be that they get away with having all sorts of things whereas the ordinary person if they approach their parish priest saying 'I would like five eulogies and a party' and everything, the priest will almost certainly say no.

**"I think people have come to this expectation that everything is done in the church"**

"When people come to the priest with an expectation because they have been at another funeral, when they approach the next funeral – if it's their own parents or something – they come



and they think 'I'm entitled to have a bunch of secular songs' or 'I'm entitled to have'... whatever," he said.

The disparity in treatment of funerals was highlighted recently for some parishioners, according to Fr Keegan, when watching the highly publicised funeral of famous musician Shane MacGowan.

Speaking of the funeral, he said: "I think a lot of people thought it was way overboard, it was daft. I think people have come to this expectation that everything is done in the church. Whereas I have been trying to encourage people on the days before or after that if they want to read a poem while they're gathered in the funeral home or at the graveyard, they can do that.

## Double standard

"It is a double standard when you see politicians or celebrities doing similar things – I don't know who is making these calls to allow them to do it – but I've seen quite

few funerals like that. Shane MacGowan's has been the most notable in recent times and it does seem like a double standard."

He added that when it comes to parishioners who have an expectation of how a Catholic funeral can be conducted based on what other priests have allowed, when a priest lays out the parameters: "Most people are very, very understanding, but it can create a feeling of resentment, or even just awkwardness where people come with an expectation."

**"Bishop Router said that to deny a person a Christian funeral would be 'putting ourselves into the shoes of God and we can't do that'"**

Fr Keegan called on the Irish bishops to take a strong public stance on what is permissible at funerals, particularly regarding funerals for notorious criminals.

Asked about the issue, Auxiliary Bishop of Armagh Michael Router, who is the Vice Chair of the Irish Bishops' Drugs Initiative, told *The Irish Catholic* that all are entitled to a Christian funeral regardless of their past, but when it comes to criminality there should be "no glorification of their lifestyle".

Bishop Router said that regarding the challenge in

dealing with inappropriate or unacceptable requests at the funeral of serious criminals: "I realise very often that both pastoral councils and priests may feel intimidated if they try and stand against local drug dealers or gangs in terms of giving them what they want, and sometimes they will just go ahead and do things anyway that would be totally against our understanding would be a respectful and proper Christian funeral."

However, he added: "It becomes very judgmental if you start saying 'you can have a Catholic, Christian funeral, and you can't', so it becomes a public judgment on that person, which even if they do have a notorious reputation, we can't make that final judgment but certainly we can ask that the rites of the Church be respected and that the sacred space is respected and that nothing is done or used in such a way as to promote the type of life that a particular person may have had."

Bishop Router said that to deny a person a Christian funeral would be "putting ourselves into the shoes of God and we can't do that".

## Parameters

Despite this, he added that a priest has every right to lay down parameters to ensure that the funeral is carried out in a very respectful manner, saying, "If somebody is obviously a very notorious drug dealer and member of a gang and didn't show any signs of repentance for that during their life – maybe they died as a result

of an incident in relation to drug dealing or whatever may be – there has to be very strict parameters of what can or cannot happen at the funeral".

**"Most priests are understanding and definitely will conduct funerals in ways which respect the person's life but also the sacredness of the funeral rites"**

He added: "There are clear guidelines in terms of funerals and how funerals should be conducted, and each diocese it's up to them, it's up to each diocese to regulate that as best they can, it's not always easy, it's a very, very difficult and a very sensitive area. I think most people are treated very well in terms of funerals and funerals for their loved ones and most priests are understanding and definitely will conduct funerals in ways which respect the person's life but also the sacredness of the funeral rites.

"It is a hugely difficult and sensitive area and particularly as we become more secular, as people have less understanding of what is involved in the sacred liturgy, you are going to find that these things happen from time to time. It is something that needs reflection... to see what help that can be given to parishes, pastoral councils and priests in terms of what they can do."

See page 28



# Covid inquiry should look at how quickly we turned on one another



Officials seem intent on mercy being the guiding principle, but that virtue was in short supply during pandemic writes **Michael Kelly**

**“B**lessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” is one of the best-known of the Beatitudes taught by Jesus. It’s a good mantra to live by, and even people who mightn’t describe themselves as religious can have little quibble with such a noble sentiment.

The problem with mercy, of course, is that we tend to be heavy on our own right to mercy and pardon, but less keen on dishing out what Pope Francis oft describes as “the medicine of mercy”.

I was thinking about the idea of mercy when the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar insisted at the weekend that our long-overdue inquiry into the State’s handling of the Covid-19 pandemic must not be “a blame game”.

Health Minister Stephen Donnelly went further, warning that the inquiry must not be “a witch hunt”.

## Tone

The tone of mercy being set before the inquiry even gets underway will no doubt elicit a sigh of relief from those who ordered elderly people with the highly infectious and potentially deadly virus to be discharged to nursing homes where Covid-19 rampaged through the residents like a plague.

People like Simon Harris, who spent months warning against facemasks insisting their use would make the pandemic worse before enthusiastically cheering the imprisonment of an elderly granny for having been discovered in



A man holds a sign outside Sts Anne and Mary’s Cathedral in Cork City, Ireland, protesting on Easter April 4, 2021 the closure of churches for Mass during the Covid-19 pandemic. Photo: CNS

the supermarket without a facemask, will also be pleased he won’t have to explain the reason for his U-turn.

Or what about NPHET (remember them?) boffin Prof. Philip Nolan who, just weeks before the Government started insisting we stockpile antigen tests and test ourselves before going for a slice of pizza, warned that such tests were akin to “snake oil”.

**“Covid-19 unleashed a nasty, preachy and judgemental side to Irish society. Gone was the so-called ‘valley of squinting windows’”**

Snake oil for the uninitiated, of course, is the derogatory term used to describe healthcare fraud, or a scam. Similarly, snake

oil salesman is a common label used to describe someone who sells, promotes, or is a general proponent of some valueless or fraudulent cure, remedy, or solution.

For the record, I’m not remotely interested in the Covid-19 inquiry being a witch hunt or being obsessed with apportioning blame. But mistakes were made, and those should be investigated so that they don’t re-occur in the future.

It’s also a crying shame that the mercy the politicians have in store for themselves and senior officials who appear before the inquiry was in such short supply during the pandemic itself.

## Society

Covid-19 unleashed a nasty, preachy and judgemental side to Irish society. Back was the so-called ‘valley of squinting windows’ – people felt empowered to judge their

friends and neighbours with the full force of the law behind them.

As a journalist, I was considered an essential worker and therefore exempt from most of the travel restrictions and able to move around to perform my duties.

But a ‘helpful’ neighbour was leaving nothing to chance. About a fortnight into the pandemic, I was leaving for work at the usual time – this lady, let’s call her Karen – was on her balcony sipping a cup of coffee when she spotted me.

She sprang into action in a manner that would impress even the most diligent of neighbourhood watch aficionados.

“Excuse me, are you an essential worker?” she shouted at me. “Excuse me, are you with the gardai?” I asked keen to comply with my lawful duties. “No,” came the simple reply. I went about my lawful business.

**“Newspapers, keen to join in the public flogging of the young women, even dubbed them the ‘Dubai Two’ for shorthand”**

Worse, much worse, was still to come. Remember the handful of students in Galway who were found to have attended a party in breach of the rules?

They were disciplined by the university, but that wasn’t enough to satisfy the public desire for blood.

Each student, under pain of being excluded from university, was required to write an essay explaining their wickedness and demonstrating their understanding of the gravity of the crime.

But that wasn’t enough humiliation for these students who had their adolescence disrupted by the pandemic, and mostly endured it cheerfully.

No, their essays were turned into wall art and put on public display so fellow students and members of the public could read their confessions while tut-tutting. It would almost be funny if it wasn’t so cruel.

Or what about the two working-class (yes, class was an issue) Dublin

women who travelled to Dubai for cosmetic surgery during the pandemic and found themselves hauled before the courts facing hefty fines?

Newspapers, keen to join in the public flogging of the young women, even dubbed them the ‘Dubai Two’ for shorthand.

I’m not a Covid-denier, or a minimiser, and I kept all the rules that I was required to. I am also fully vaccinated and took each jab with a cheerful heart and encouraged others to get vaccinated in good conscience. But the pandemic shone a light on a side of human nature that is unpleasant, to say the least.

## Judge

The fact is, we like to judge one another, we like to feel superior and more moral than people we consider to be sinners. This is in the

new, more tolerant Ireland that many people tell me is a much nicer place than the Ireland of the past.

The simple truth is, we’re still as judgemental and supercilious as past generations who looked down on unmarried mothers, we’ve just changed what we’re judgemental about.

The Covid-19 inquiry would do us all some service if it allowed those who had been scapegoated and humiliated to appear before it to explain how this alienation from their fellow citizens affected them.

No-one wants carte blanche for wrongdoing during a deadly pandemic, but in a world that could do with so much mercy it might be a good time to pause in the hope of building a more merciful culture.

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# A lesson for Cardinal Fernández



Mike Lewis

Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández has a tough job. Ever since he took over as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) in mid-September, the Argentine theologian has been working hard to be the doctrine chief that Pope Francis asked him to be.

When Fernández was appointed in July, a letter written by the Pope to him was published in the Vatican's daily press bulletin. In it, Pope Francis reminded him that among his tasks would be "increasing the understanding and transmission of the Faith in the service of evangelisation... especially in the face of the questions posed by the progress of the sciences and the development of society".

Already in his short tenure at the head of the DDF, his dicastery has published over a dozen documents, responding to questions on matters as wide-ranging as dealing with cremated remains, whether Catholics can join the Freemasons, if it is possible for transgender persons to be godparents, and feedback on a reported supernatural apparition in Northern Italy.

Until recently, the most noteworthy document on the DDF website was posted on October 2 — Pope Francis's response to a series of questions on doctrinal matters ('*dubia*') submitted on July 10 by five retired cardinals, most notably the controversial American Raymond Burke. Among the topics covered was the possibility of blessings for same-sex couples.

## Responses

The responses, which were given to the cardinals on July 11, were as thorough as they were prompt. Nevertheless, unhappy with the nuanced and highly-detailed responses they received, the cardinals decided to submit the questions again, requesting yes/no answers.

For these cardinals to not only request a do-over from the Pope, but to publicise these *dubia* on the eve of the synodal assembly, was a clear sign of bad will. The cardinals' stunt also showed that their "confusion" was really obstinate disagreement with the Pope's teachings. Francis and Fernández were wise not to dignify the "reformulated" *dubia* with a response. Cardinal Burke and friends were demanding surrender, not answers.

On December 18, Cardinal Fernández published the Declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* on the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings. In addition to drawing a distinction between formal or liturgical blessings and informal or spontaneous ones, it gives permission for irregular and same sex-couples to be given infor-



Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith

mal blessings under certain circumstances, but with clear restrictions. The document contained a number of doctrinal disclaimers about the Catholic understanding of marriage and sexuality and included precautions against giving the appearance of a wedding or a civil union ceremony.

*Fiducia Supplicans* also makes clear multiple times that the blessing of irregular or same-sex couples was not to be mistaken for blessing their union. At one point, the document states, "the Church does not have the power to impart blessings on unions of persons of the same sex".

**“Some of the condemnations were deranged — calling the document heretical or even blasphemous”**

Even still, this declaration — the first document of its kind in over 20 years and expressly approved by Pope Francis — was received warmly by LGBTQ Cath-

olics and many others. *Fiducia Supplicans*, although most recognised that it was not a change in doctrine, was seen as a pastoral gesture and a concrete change in the Church's approach and tone towards LGBTQ people.

## Critics

Unfortunately some bishops' conferences, particularly in Africa and Eastern Europe, were quick to push back against *Fiducia Supplicans*. Critics in Catholic media were also quick to pounce. Some of the condemnations were deranged — calling the document heretical or even blasphemous. Most of them seemed to fixate on the claim that they were confused and incapable of distinguishing the difference between a "couple" and a "union".

Fernández began to respond to the latest barrage of questions and criticisms, granting several interviews in which he painstakingly explained this distinction and defended the doctrinal orthodoxy of the declaration. And in his vigor to stand up for the document's fidelity to doctrine, he began to make strong statements that seemed to undermine the significance of the document, such as,

"If a priest gives this kind of simple blessing, he is not a heretic, he is not ratifying anything".

**“The truth has been that *Fiducia Supplicans* is easy to understand without any additional clarification — unless you won't accept any clarification”**

Then, on January 4, Cardinal Fernández issued a five-page press release further clarifying the doctrinal orthodoxy of *Fiducia Supplicans*. The press release recycled some of the examples and arguments used by Fernández in his interviews. It also seemed to grant a bit of deference to some of the bishops and episcopal conferences that have expressed an unwillingness to implement the document. The press release once again insisted on making the distinction between couples and unions, stating: "This non-ritualised form of blessing, with the simplicity and brevity of its form, does not intend to justify anything that is not morally acceptable. Obviously it is not a marriage, but equally it is not an 'approval' or ratification of anything either."

At certain points, the press release reveals clear exasperation with the document's critics. It even seems to imply that the blessings allowed by *Fiducia Supplicans* are virtually meaningless: "We are talking about something that lasts about 10 or 15 seconds."

I commend Cardinal Fernández for

trying to defend *Fiducia Supplicans*. It is a courageous, pastoral, sublime, and even at times beautiful document that I still believe represents a step towards the Church as a field hospital that welcomes all and heals our wounds.

## Convince

But I have learned that no matter how reasonable or righteous the cause it is impossible to convince those with bad will and those who do not want to change. And those who have set themselves in opposition to Pope Francis are committed to undermining him and everything he stands for. Hopefully, this has been a learning experience for Cardinal Fernández.

The public debate over *Fiducia Supplicans* has in many ways stripped away its hopeful message of pastoral charity and mercy, reducing it to the nuts and bolts of rules and definitions. Many of those who were given hope by *Fiducia Supplicans* are now discouraged.

All along, the truth has been that *Fiducia Supplicans* is easy to understand without any additional clarification — unless you won't accept any clarification.

I hope we can soon return to celebrating what *Fiducia Supplicans* was meant to be. At its core is a message of welcome and inclusion: we welcome you as you are, we bless you, we believe you are integral to our community, we are not here to condemn you, but to be with you together with our God.

**i** Mike Lewis is the founder and managing editor of Where Peter Is ([wherepeteris.com](http://wherepeteris.com))



# Rome has spoken, the case is partially closed



Brandon Scott

In simpler times, news was what you were given and you were happy for it. Today we can source news from anywhere while running the gauntlet of misinformation, disinformation and distortion.

To avoid confusing people, what we're told is that clear communication of factual information leads to clarity and doubts being dispelled. So why is the Vatican, which has considerable communications resources, digging itself into communications holes?

Whatever your stance on the recently released magnet of divisiveness *Fiducia supplicans* (the declaration allowing priests to bless same-sex couples issued December 18) is, for me one thing is undeniable, the Vatican's communications during and after the publication of the document have been nothing short of calamitous and now it seems like we're in a period of institutional damage control where the pontiff and the head of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Victor Manuel Fernández, are frantically attempting to appease all sections of the Church, sometimes inadvertently offending others in the process, whilst pleading for calm and rationale. Cardinal Fernández has even implied that those who take issue with the document and say it's anathema to Catholic teaching lack the faculties to grasp the situation. The problem is as Fernández appeals for calm, the Catholic world continues to pace and panic and more significantly, his pleas are falling on deaf ears.

## Fraught

In a very fraught era for our Church, we must all be aware that words and their effects have become more pronounced and with some sections of the Church baying to misrepresent and distort, clarity of thought and the subsequent communication of that thought



Pope Francis looks at the crowd during his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican, January 3, 2023.

have never been more vital and urgently needed to calm the accusations of calumny and transmit the truth of the matter.

**“To say that the Church couldn't have foreseen this imminent torrent of uncertainty is astounding and facetious at best”**

So if you had awoken on the afternoon of December 18 after a nap to see headlines such as 'In major doctrinal shift, Vatican approves blessings for gay couples' (this remarkably came from a Catholic media platform), and 'Pope Francis allows priests to bless same sex couples', reported by the eminent *New York Times*, at the very least clarification was warranted and deserved for Catholics around the world.

This is where the Vatican comes in, you see. As the institution composing the document, like any institution, it is incumbent on the entity in question to provide clear guidance to those who are either ignorant of or purposely misrepres-

sent the nature of the document. The initial assurances made by Cardinal Fernández in the document where he asserted that there would be no further clarification provided on the matter suggests that the Vatican was confident that amid all of the twists, turns and sometimes confounding language of the document, it would be readily received for what it is and not what people interpret it to be by all, irrespective of their understanding or proficiency on matters pertaining to our Church's basic dogmas and beliefs ... and that's before we even get to the more complex canonical or doctrinal matters. To say that the Church couldn't have foreseen this imminent torrent of uncertainty is astounding and facetious at best.

## Sensitivities

Considering that homosexuality is a criminal offence in the majority of African countries, Cardinal Fernández's shockingly cavalier approach in the context of respective cultural sensitivities in our universal Church is troubling as scant regard was given to African bishops and their individual country's response to their employer's



The Jesuit-led *America Magazine* advertisement displayed in *The New York Times*, promoting a 'changing Church'.

recent revision of a topic that is not of immediate concern in the continent and more dangerously, deemed a transgression in some countries. We must also bear in mind that some bishops are living under quasi-dictatorships and any ambiguity on the matter may result in dire consequences for them personally. But again, no need to further clarify any of this according to Fernández. The despots should know where we're coming from.

**“Why release an explosive document which precipitated the Jesuit-owned America Magazine purchasing an advertisement in The New York Times asserting that the Church was changing in its approach to LGBTQ+?”**

The contents of the document, unquestionably novel in its revised attitude to blessing same-sex couples (a revision from the recent 2021 verdict of Pope Francis where he described this very act as being “impossible” in the Church) coupled with the ensuing furore, ensured that the document was destined to be weaponised by those either in support of or against the decision, ultimately acting as the corroborating evidence traditionalists were finally supplied with to indict Francis as an enemy of the Church, or conversely the welcome evidence that

demonstrated to progressives that the Pope was one who cared about their presence.

Misinterpretations, deliberate or intentional, from media or commentators were surely anticipated by the Vatican hierarchs and one would've assumed that the Vatican would've had a robust contingency plan in place to stamp out the misinformation and champion truth. But nothing but telling silence marked the ensuing weeks before Cardinal Fernández made his January 4 intervention. Even if you were of the best intentions and without preference or partiality in our Church, it can be credibly argued that the subsequent online and media reaction to the document reflected the confusion contained in the declaration.

Cardinal Fernández declared in his January 4 message that basically nothing has changed in the Church and to proceed as normal but why release an explosive document which precipitated the Jesuit-owned *America Magazine* purchasing an advertisement in *The New York Times* asserting that the Church was changing in its approach to LGBTQ+? Again all of this is entirely preventable with good communication.

The old adage of 'if you're explaining, you're probably losing' has its merits, but I think in this case there's a more meaningful argument to be made. Cardinal Fernández simply had to disavow his previous promise all of two weeks later and provide a further explanation of the purpose of the document – which was quite necessary in spite of his original overzealousness in contending that it wouldn't need to be.

## Assertion

So while another explanation was needed, it's the original assertion and subsequent contradiction of this assertion that is most embarrassing for an institution that for all intents and purposes, should not struggle to effectively communicate its message and enforce guidelines that unequivocally affirm what it has and what it has not permitted.

The unrest and fallout of the document are not likely to dissipate anytime soon and there's a probability that they will intensify as we gradually move closer to the final assembly of the Synod of Bishops this October in Rome as African bishops and other critics will be able to voice their misgivings to the Pope and the world's Catholic episcopates.

In a turbulent time for all in the Church, with polemics and hostilities aside, let's hope and pray that 2024 heralds a new era of effective communications in the Vatican. It's the least us laypeople deserve.

**“Even if you were of the best intentions and without preference or partiality in our Church, it can be credibly argued that the subsequent online and media reaction to the document reflected the confusion contained in the declaration”**



# Future of Mary Immaculate College up in the air again



Failure of Catholic college's dialogue process raises serious questions, writes **Ruadhán Jones**

**W**hile most institutions were winding down over Christmas, teachers and staff at Mary Immaculate Catholic college received a bombshell announcement about MIC's "historic" dialogue with University of Limerick (UL).

In an email sent December 19, MIC President Eugene Wall admitted that after almost a year of negotiations between the institutions to draft a model for "closer structural alignment", they have been sent back to the drawing board by the Government.

The exact details of the model haven't been released but Prof. Wall described it as a "hybrid" one whereby closer alignment is achieved... but does not involve merger or incorporation.

## Framework

However, after getting the proposed model signed off by the trustees, when they put the proposal to Minister for Further Education Simon Harris and his department officials, they were told there is no legal framework for the "closer alignment"

**“Is the Government likely to change the legislation to suit a Catholic college, risking the ire of the chattering classes? The simple answer is no, particularly not in an election year”**



President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins and his wife Sabina are shown around by curator Naomi O'Nolan at the official opening of a retrospective exhibition by Imogen Stuart, one of Ireland's foremost sculptors, at Mary Immaculate College.

model MIC-UL proposed.

The only legally recognised procedures are incorporation or merger and the Government do not intend to change the laws for MIC and UL.

**“There was an ‘erroneous assumption’ that the department was being properly informed during the process”**

Minister Harris and his officials were “not well disposed” to the proposal, according to Prof. Wall, with the college's union (IFUT-MIC) also suggesting the hybrid model did not find the minister's favour.

According to IFUT,

there was an “erroneous assumption” that the department was being properly informed during the process.

Prof. Wall contested the accuracy of this, but in correspondence sent to MIC staff on December 20, IFUT noted that the Department for Further Education “clearly felt otherwise”.

## Disquieting

Regardless, the president's announcement raises serious questions about what IFUT describe as a “long, disquieting” process.

MIC management – including the trustees, governing body and chair Bishop Brendan Leahy – oversaw a process which resulted in a proposal that “was never really going to happen” how they wanted, IFUT said.

The failure leads IFUT to wonder if the dialogue has left MIC “in a stronger or weaker position” then when it began.

**“Now that the Government have rejected this proposal, staff are questioning whether this leaves the college ‘strategically weaker’”**

One of the aims of the negotiations was to achieve university status, something staff thought the college had already. “Do we now not have it,” IFUT ask?

It's not an idle question, especially as we don't know what will happen next.

The purpose of the dialogue, which was announced in June 2022, was to ensure the security of the college, while maintaining its Catholic identity, by deepening its relationship with UL.

Given that UL already accredits the degrees given out by MIC, this presumably would have meant MIC becoming a college of UL.

Now that the Government have rejected this proposal, staff are questioning whether this leaves the college “strategically weaker”, sources told *The Irish Catholic*.

Minister Harris told the colleges to go back to negotiations – but the only outcome the Government will accept is a merger or incorporation, something Bishop Leahy, chair of MIC's governing body, has discounted from the outset.

He would have to get the Holy See's sign off too and its an open question if they would.

## Possibility

Another possibility is that the dialogue will grind to a halt.

President Eugene Wall is set to retire at the end of this academic year. Is he going to push to get it done before leaving?

Equally, it has long been rumoured that on UL's side there's not as much interest because it has its own, well-publicised internal issues to iron out.

The trustees, governing body and chairman Bishop Leahy could have a big role to play here, but the imminent departure of

a number of the trustees whose term is coming to an end complicates the picture.

**“We are seeing a huge push for the divestment of Catholic schools and there was the huge fuss over a new maternity hospital on the land of a religious institution”**

Is there now any actual will to drive this forward?

That's the big picture, but there are procedural issues that won't go away even if the dialogue carries on sometime in 2024.

For a start, how is it that the two institutions came to a meeting with department officials and a Government minister with a proposal that couldn't legally work?

If they didn't know this was the case, how come they hadn't done their research and gathered the information?

And if they did know, what did they expect the outcome of the meeting to be – was there a belief that a new legal structure would be drafted to suit MIC-UL's preferred model?

If that was the case, it suggests a degree of naivety about the political and cultural landscape in Ireland.

For instance, we are seeing a huge push for the divestment of Catholic schools and there was the huge fuss over a new maternity hospital on the land of a religious institution.

Is the Government likely to change the legislation to suit a Catholic college, risking the ire of the chattering classes? The simple answer is no, particularly not in an election year.

Ultimately the buck stops with the governing body, the trustees – who had their term extended specifically to oversee this process – and chair Bishop Leahy.

Sources have told this paper that there is a great deal of “unease” among staff, with fears that the college is “drifting”.

Where will it end up? Only time will now tell.



# Timeline of a ‘disquieting’ process

June 2022

Plans for MIC-UL dialogue announced by President Eugene Wall, Bishop Leahy denies merger. Staff not allowed to ask questions.

September ‘22

MIC trustees’ terms extended to oversee what Bishop Brendan Leahy described as a “historic” dialogue process.

December ‘22

President of UL Kerstin May and MIC Prof. Eugene Wall meet Prof. Tom Collins, independent chair of negotiations as institutions form negotiating teams.

March 2023

Negotiators meeting every four weeks to draw up proposed models.

May ‘23

Staff outraged at being “left in the dark” over the college’s future.

August ‘23

Inconclusive meeting with Higher Education Authority to propose model.

September ‘23

First deadline to propose model to governing bodies MISSED. Speculation of merger “rife” according to sources.

December ‘23

Minister Simon Harris rejects proposed model and sends MIC-UL back to drawing board. Staff criticise “opaque, disquieting” process.

January ‘24

Negotiators to meet again – no end in sight?

1

Bishop Brendan Leahy

2

MIC President Eugene Wall

3

UL President Kerstin Mey

4

Minister Simon Harris

5

6

7

8



# Out&About

## Childlike wonder



**LEITRIM:** Carrick-on-Shannon youth enjoy the spectacle of the town's crib after Fr Séamus O'Rourke CC blessed it.



**LAOIS:** Audrey Whelan is pictured with her husband Michael and Fr Mícheál Murphy PP, after she retired as organist and Director of the St Joseph's Sunday Choir, Mountmellick. Photo: Cathy Bishop.



**TYRONE:** Deacon Paul Mallon and altar servers bring their Bambinelli to St Mary's Church, Loughmacrory to have them blessed on Bambinelli Sunday.

## IN SHORT

### Leitrim town gives thanks after tornado

During Mass in St Joseph's Church, Leitrim Village, the site of a tornado last year, Fr Séamus O'Rourke CC Carrick-on-Shannon gave thanks to the Lord for protecting the lives of those in the town.

"Tonight, here in Leitrim village, we come together in thanksgiving for the Lord saving the lives of people during the recent tornado," said Fr O'Rourke.

"We thank you too Lord for the work, the skills and dedication of all who work in emergency services: for ambulance crew and paramedics, for the fire services, the Gardaí, council workers and all who worked to help each other."

As the town continues to rebuild damaged property, the Leitrim priest prayed for "the safety of the workers who will repair damaged building and for the wellbeing of their families".

Following Mass, Fr O'Rourke blessed the village crib, erected adjacent to a statue of Our Lady, which was untouched in the tornado of Sunday, December 10, despite being within 50 metres of the worst damaged property in the village.

### Indian priests appointed chaplains in Cork

Two Indian priests from the Order of St Camilus have been appointed as healthcare chaplains for the diocese of Cork and Ross

by Bishop Fintan Gavin.

Fr Biju Ilanjikkal Devasia MI was appointed chaplain to St Finbarr's Hospital and South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital. Fr Devasia will join Fr Michael Forde CSsR as part of the chaplaincy team in both hospitals.

Fr Jaison Mathew MI will join the Pastoral Care Team as a healthcare chaplain *pro tem* in the Bons Secours Hospital, the diocese also announced.

Both priests are members of the Order of St Camilus. The charism of the Order is ministry to the sick and dying and it is the first time that members of the Order of St Camilus will minister in the Diocese of Cork and Ross.

### Derry Syro Malabars inaugurate Sunday school

The Sunday School of the Syro Malabar community in Derry was inaugurated by Fr Joshy Parokkaran for the year 2023-2024 in a small ceremony after Holy Qurbana.

The headmaster, Mr Joseph Augustine welcomed the new and continuing students, and encouraged them to persevere in their studies of the Faith this year, *The Net* reported.

Afterwards, a small prayer service was led by the Sunday School teachers, before students took part in a football tournament in Belfast, run by the Syro Malabar Youth Movement.





**KILKENNY:** The 21st annual Kilkenny Church Crib Walk took place in Kilkenny City on St Stephens Day, when over 150 people walked to the churches in Kilkenny to visit the local cribs led by Fr Willie Purcell.



**BELFAST:** Bishop Donal McKeown blesses the coffin of Bishop Patrick Walsh during his funeral in St Peter's Cathedral. Photo: George Pennock.



**BELFAST:** A large congregation gathers to bid farewell to Bishop Walsh, the late bishop of Down and Connor, as his coffin was processed out of the church to the graveyard on January 2. Photo: George Pennock.



**TYRONE:** St Mary's Church choir and St Teresa's Primary School choir, Loughmacrory, lead the Advent Carol Service in Loughmacrory parish.



# COLUMBA SUPER SALE

## NEW YEAR SALE

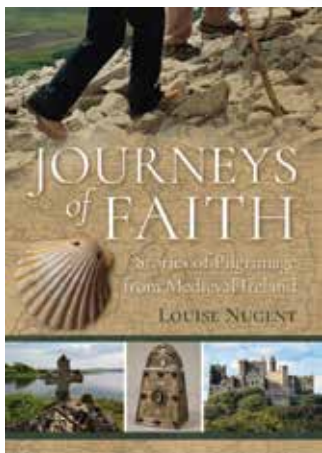
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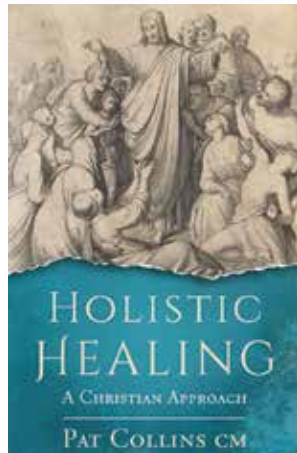
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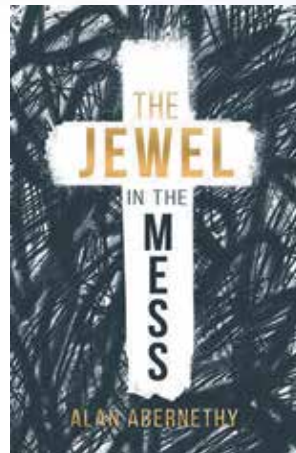
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Louise Nugent

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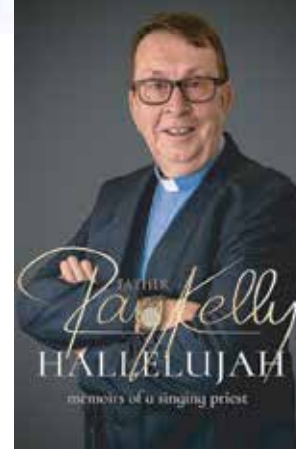
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Pat Collins CM

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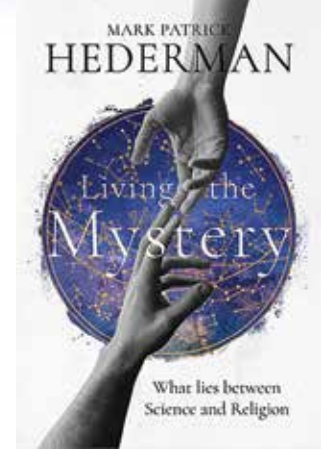
**The Jewel in the Mess**  
Alan Abernethy

Bishop Alan Abernethy examines how his years in the church caused him to lose sight of the original awe of his faith



**Hallelujah**  
Fr Ray Kelly

A poignant memoir describing Fr Kelly's fascinating journey from parish priest to global fame.



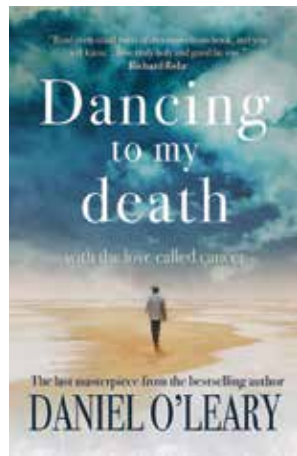
**Living the Mystery**  
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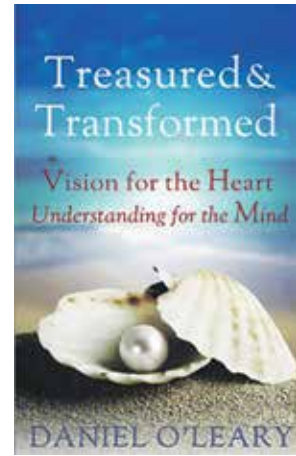
**Already Within**  
Daniel O'Leary

A thought-provoking collection of Daniel O'Leary's contributions to the Tablet over a period of three years, touching upon seasons of the year, liturgies and the heart.



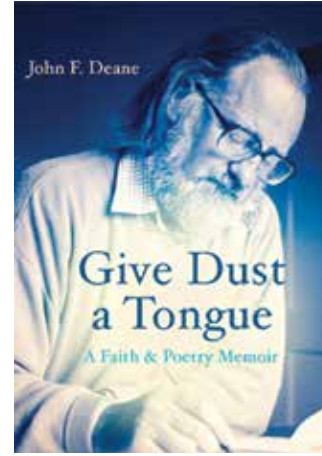
**Dancing to my Death**  
Daniel O'Leary

Priest, teacher and bestselling author Daniel O'Leary journals his thoughts and feelings during his cancer journey in this courageous book.



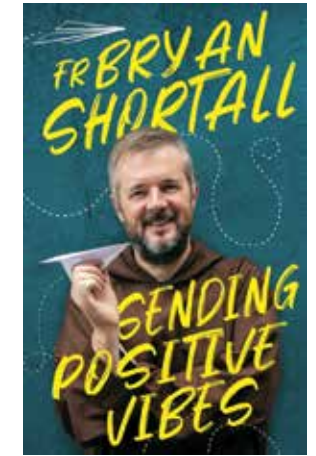
**Treasured & Transformed**  
Daniel O'Leary

In this book Daniel O'Leary has written a collection of reflections, thoughts and advice on how we can live more fulfilling spiritual lives.



**Give Dust a Tongue**  
John F. Deane

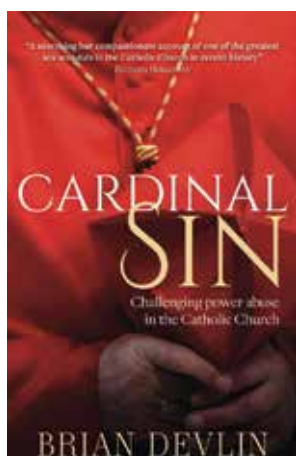
A memoir that views the spiritual developments of internationally acclaimed poet John F. Deane from his upbringing on Achill island, his time with the Spiritans, to his marriage and widowhood.



**Sending Positive Vibes**  
Fr Bryan Shortall

Dublin-based Capuchin Priest Fr Bryan Shortall spreads the Good News in this positive collection of homilies, blogs, talks and reflections.





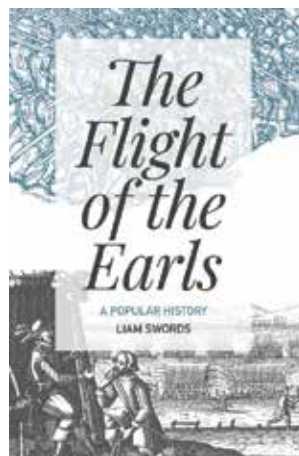
**Cardinal Sin**  
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A critical work, a whistleblower asks the Catholic Church hard questions and provides ways the Church can heal and regain the trust of its faithful.



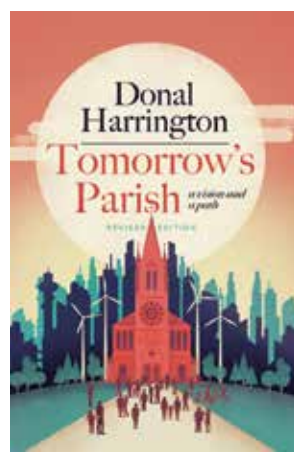
**Early Irish Saints**  
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These short essays on well-loved saints present a very readable mix of historical fact and folklore.



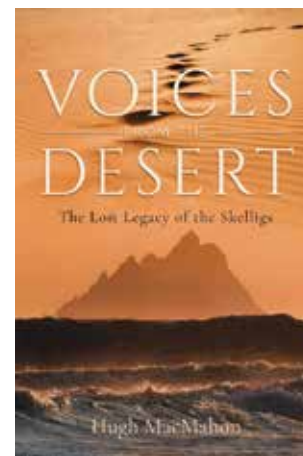
**The Flight of the Earls**  
Liam Swords

A detailed but highly readable account of the event that saw the Plantation of Ulster which led to sectarian division for 400 years.



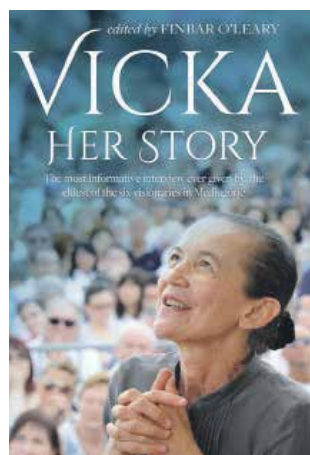
**Tomorrow's Parish**  
Donal Harrington

This book is for those interested in the future of the Church, especially in parish ministry and parish pastoral councils.



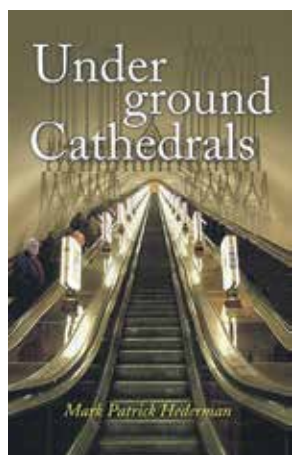
**Voices from the Desert**  
Hugh MacMahon

What the Desert Fathers had to say about Christianity and their own spiritual practices is as relevant now as it has been through the ages.



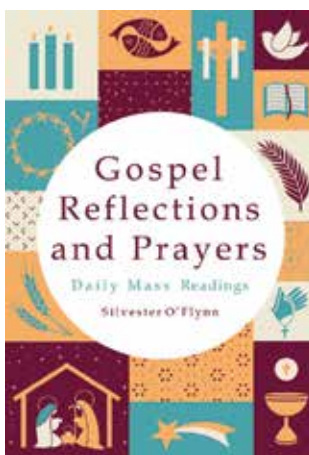
**Vicka Her Story**  
Finbar O'Leary

A full account by the eldest visionary Vicka of her story and extraordinary experiences with Our Lady.



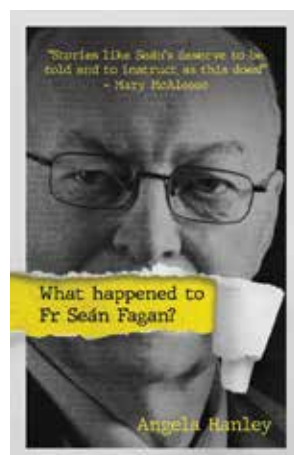
**Underground Cathedrals**  
Mark Patrick Hederman OSB

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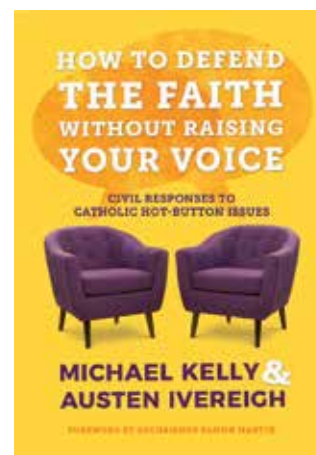
**Gospel Reflections and Prayers**  
Silvester O'Flynn

This book offers two very short reflections on the daily gospels. An invaluable resource for preachers and any prayer group.



**What Happened to Fr Seán Fagan**  
Angela Hanley

What happens when theologians are asked to obey rather than discover? When the Church doles out punishment to those critical of the Vatican's stance on issues? Fr Seán takes the opportunity to tell his side of the story.



**How to Defend the Faith Without Raising Your Voice**  
Michael Kelly & Austen Ivereigh

This book answers common criticisms of Catholicism and helps in understanding the Church's stance on controversial topics.

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- \_\_\_ Cardinal Sin
- \_\_\_ Early Irish Stories

- \_\_\_ The Flight of the Earls
- \_\_\_ Tomorrow's Parish
- \_\_\_ Voices from the Desert
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**MAYO:** Bishop of Killala John Fleming, Fr Joseph Hogan and members of the Knights of St Columbanus present the Pope John Paul II award to recipients at a ceremony in St Muredachs Cathedral on December 14.

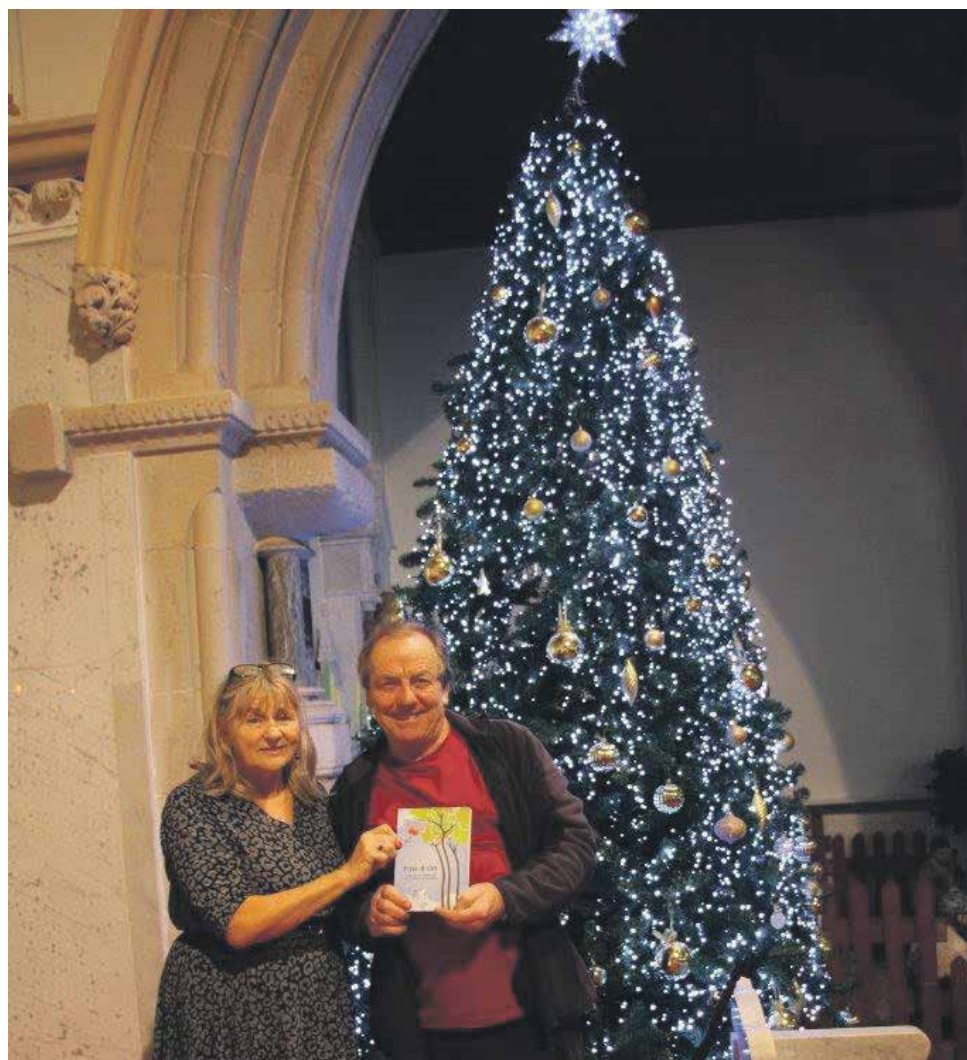


**DUBLIN:** Jason, Marta and baby Daniel Osborne ring in the New Year with Ruadhán, Kiley and baby Cairtriona Jones.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**CAVAN:** Pictured is Ann Burns of Kingscourt making a presentation to Eddie Caffrey of LMFM Radio at the penultimate Mass which was broadcast from the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, which he has produced throughout the dioceses of Meath and Armagh for 30 years to the listeners of LMFM Radio.



**WEXFORD:** The Benemerenti medal is presented by Bishop Ger Nash to Frances Cooney for life-long voluntary service to the parish of New Ross.

## ARMAGH

The Missionaries of Charity host one hour of prayer, Scripture and song before the Blessed Sacrament every Wednesday from 7-8pm in the Missionaries of Charity House.

## CAVAN

Lectio Divina takes place every Tuesday for 30 minutes in the Conference Room (Ss Patrick and Felim Cathedral) behind the altar after 10am Mass.

## CLARE

Mid Clare Youth Connect meets on a monthly basis in Fahy Hall/Church of Our Lady, Roslevan, Ennis for games, to learn about their faith and grow in friendship. For more information contact Fr Donagh O'Meara on 087 232 2140 or Myriam Black on myrblack@gmail.com or Joanne O'Brien on joannebrien07@gmail.com

## CORK

Alpha training days for parishes and families takes place in Blackrock Parish Centre on Saturday, January 27 at 10am and Clonakilty Parish Centre on Saturday, February 3. To register visit corkandross.org.

First Friday devotions take place in St Patrick's Church, Whitechurch, with adoration from 6-8pm, beginning with two hearts devotion from 6-7pm followed by a holy hour of reparation until Benediction.

## DERRY

The Open Door Community Café in Bellaghy is open on the last Sunday of each month, from 11.30am until 1pm.

Dungiven Lectio Divina Group meet on Wednesdays, from 7.30-9pm, in Dungiven Parish House, while St Canice's Prayer Group meets each Thursday in Dungiven Conference Room at 7pm and invites anyone who wishes to deepen their faith through shared Scripture, prayer and praise.

## DONEGAL

Alcoholics Anonymous Amazing Grace Group, Buncrana, has five meetings per week: Sundays at 8pm, Tuesdays at 8.30pm, Thursdays at 11.30am, Fridays 8.30pm, and Saturdays

at 11.30am. If you think you may have a problem with alcohol, please come along. Venue for all meetings is St Teresa's Room.

## DOWN

Lectio Divina in Newry Cathedral takes place in the Parish Centre on Thursday after 10.30am Mass, usually getting underway by 11.15am.

## DUBLIN

Abiding Together youth group for women (18-35) who want to journal, chat and listen meets via Zoom on Thursdays at 8pm. Contact flemingmairead@yahoo.com

## FERMANAGH

A novena Mass to St Peregrine, patron of those who have cancer, is celebrated every Tuesday at 7pm in Holy Cross Church in Lisnaskea. It is also live streamed at Churchservices.tv/lisnaskea.

## GALWAY

Roundtower association to host conference on 'Our Lady, the Liturgy, the family and the crisis of modernity' with guest speakers Dr Joseph Shaw and Fr Philomeno James Mary in Galmont Hotel, on February 10 at 9am To register contact info@roundtower.org.

## KILKENNY

St John's Parish Scripture group meets in the presbytery at 7.30pm each Thursday to reflect on Scripture texts for the following Sunday's Mass.

## LAOIS

The rosary will be prayer at the grotto of the Church of the Assumption at 8pm on the first Friday of every month. The Divine Mercy Chaplet is prayer at 3pm every Sunday in Portlaoise parish church.

## LEITRIM

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

## LOUTH

Oasis of Peace addiction recovery group takes place in the Oasis of Peace Centre, Collon, on the last Saturday of every month from 12-1.30pm. Contact 085 8101614.

## MAYO

The next Latin Mass will be celebrated in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock Shrine on Sunday, January 14 at 6pm.

## MEATH

Drumconrath and Meath Hill parish to host an evening of praise and worship, prayer, Scripture and healing with Colin McGurnaghan on Tuesday, January 16 from 7.30-9.30pm in Drumconrath parish centre C15PYK2. Contact parish house 041 685 4146.

Fr John Byrne to continue his introduction to the Bible on Mondays at 12 noon via the Kells webcam, accessible on www.kellsparish.ie. This year he will introduce the St John's Gospel and each session will last 25 minutes. For queries, you may contact Fr John on email: jplowebyrne@gmail.com

## MONAGHAN

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place every Friday in St Joseph's Church immediately after 10am Mass, ending at 6pm.

## OFFALY

Tullamore parish to host an eight-week Bible study course in January and February 2024, with the next meeting Monday, January 15 at 7.30pm in Tullamore parish centre with tea after.

## TYRONE

A one hour interactive YOUNG programme, for those aged 16+ years, takes place on Thursdays in Ardstraw Oratory, on 7 Main Street, Newtownstewart, starting at 6.30pm. For further information contact 028 81661445 or email ardstraweast@derrydiocese.org.

The rosary is prayed in St Mary's Church, Killyclogher every Monday after 10am Mass, and in Corpus Christi, Mountfield every Thursday evening at 8pm.

## WEXFORD

Church of the Immaculate Conception recites the rosary twice a day, in the morning at 9.30am and in the evening at 8pm. The prayer is broadcast via the church's webcam on www.churchmedia.ie





# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Ukrainian Churches council calls for recognition of Russia as 'terrorist state'

● The Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations, which represents the various Christian, Jewish and Muslim bodies of Ukraine, called on the world to recognise Russia as a terrorist state and provide Ukraine with the means necessary to protect life.

For the second time in a row, Ukraine welcomed a new year amid war with a series of Russian attacks on major cities, including the capital, Kyiv, and the western city of Lviv.

The Council of Churches urged the world "to condemn the actions of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, recognise Russia as a terrorist state, and provide Ukraine with the necessary means to protect life, including additional air defence equipment, aircrafts, and all that is necessary for the defence and restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine".

### Priest laments kidnapped migrants in northern Mexico

● Fr Francisco Gallardo López, who heads migrant ministry for the Diocese of Matamoros located in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, decried the fact that migrants are being kidnapped in the country's north "on a constant basis".

Mexican authorities reported January 3 the rescue of 31 migrants who had been kidnapped the night of December 30 as they were traveling aboard a truck on the highway that connects the cities of Monterrey and Matamoros on their way to the United States.

Matamoros is located in the northeastern corner of the country across the border from Brownsville, Texas. In an interview with *ACI Prensa*, Fr Gallardo lamented that the practice of kidnapping migrants, far from being "an isolated event, has become a constant occurrence that seriously affects those seeking a better future".

### Magi find smaller crowd amid war as they reach Bethlehem

● The Magi arrived in Bethlehem this year bearing their gifts, as the Faithful held out their hands for grains of incense and drops of myrrh in the annual reenactment of the Epiphany by the Franciscan friars of the Custody of the Holy Land.

The afternoon celebration on January 6 brought together a small crowd of believers, young and old, in the Latin Church of Saint Catherine, part of the complex of the Basilica of the Nativity.

The Magi made their appearance for the recitation of the Second Vespers of the Epiphany, marking the conclusion of the solemnity and also the end of the Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem.

### Italian priest excommunicated for calling Pope Francis 'usurper'

● An Italian priest has been excommunicated by his local bishop for saying in a homily that Pope Francis "is not the Pope" and calling him "a usurper".

The Diocese of Livorno in Tuscany issued a decree notifying Catholics that Fr Ramon Guidetti "publicly committed a schismatic act" during Mass and has ipso facto incurred "*latae sententiae excommunication*," or an automatic excommunication.

Bishop Simone Giusti informed his diocese that Catholics are not to attend any Masses offered by the excommunicated priest or they would also "incur the very serious penalty of excommunication".

The bishop cited Canon 751, which defines schism as "the refusal of submission to the Supreme Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him".

## Ortega regime publishes photos of Bishop Álvarez as international community calls for his release

The US Department of State among others has demanded the release of Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa and other imprisoned Nicaraguan religious leaders following a wave of detentions targeting Catholic clergy over the Christmas season.

The January 2 statement described Bishop Álvarez and the other religious leaders – including Bishop Isidoro Mora of Siuna – as "unjustly detained" and deplored the conditions in which they were being held. Bishop Álvarez has been held for more than 500 days.

"Nicaraguan authorities have kept Bishop Álvarez in isolation, blocked independent evaluation of the conditions of his imprisonment, and released staged videos and photographs that only increase concerns about his well-being," read a statement, signed by US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller.

The regime of President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, "continues to impose severe restrictions on religious communities and deny Nicaraguan citizens the ability to freely practice their religions and express their beliefs. We once again call on the Nicaraguan government to release Bishop Rolando Álvarez immediately and without conditions".

At least 13 priests – mostly in the Archdiocese of Managua – were detained between December 26 and December 31, according to exiled Nicaraguan lawyer Martha



The Nicaraguan government released photos January 2 of Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa receiving medical attention from a prison doctor. Photo: OSV News

Molina, who has tracked attacks on the Catholic Church in Nicaragua. Many were taken from their parish residences by police and paramilitaries.

The Nicaraguan government – seemingly responding to the US statement – released photos January 2 of Bishop Álvarez receiving medical attention from a prison doctor.

Dressed in a pink dress shirt and grey slacks, Bishop Álvarez appeared pale and gaunt as a physician took his blood pressure and performed tests. A government statement claimed the bishop's "vital signs are fine" after being seen by an internal medicine

specialist.

The government has released photos of Bishop Álvarez from time to time – visiting with two siblings or receiving medical attention – but the state of his health is unknown.

Church observers have expressed concern for the wellbeing of the arrested priests, whose status as detainees remains unknown. Bianca Jagger, the Nicaraguan human rights activist, said on X that she received information that "one of the priests that they kidnapped was transferred to the hospital. I demand proof of life".

Pope Francis expressed concern for Nicaragua and the captive priests January 1 at his New Year's Angelus prayer.

"I have been following with deep concern what is happening in Nicaragua, where bishops and priests have been deprived of their freedom."

The Pontiff expressed his "closeness in prayer" to the detained priests and their families, "and to the entire Church in the country".

"I hope that we will always seek the path of dialogue to overcome difficulties. Let us pray for Nicaragua today."

## Pope Francis greets Benedictine nuns moving into Vatican monastery

Before Mass on the feast of the Epiphany, Pope Francis welcomed a small community of Benedictine nuns from Argentina who had just moved into the Mater Ecclesiae Monastery in the Vatican Gardens.

The sisters' arrival January 3 renewed the building's purpose as home to a cloistered community of women dedicated to supporting the Pope's ministry with their prayer. Pope Francis greeted them at his Mass January 6 in St Peter's Basilica.

St John Paul II had established the monastery in 1994 and said members of different contemplative orders would live there for a period of three to five years.

The last community, a group of Visitation nuns, left in November 2012, and Pope Benedict XVI moved into the monastery after his resignation in 2013. The retired pontiff and his staff lived there until Pope Benedict died December 31.

In October Pope Francis decided that "the Mater Ecclesiae Monastery

would return to its original purpose: that contemplative orders support the Holy Father in his daily care for the whole Church, through the ministry of prayer, adoration, praise and reparation, thus being a prayerful presence in silence and solitude," the Vatican press office said.

Pope Francis invited the Benedictine nuns of the Abbey of St Scholastica in Victoria, Argentina, to staff the monastery and they accepted, the press office said.

## Chinese bishop removed from diocese by Communist regime is arrested

Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of the Diocese of Wenzhou in the eastern region of Zhejiang, China, was arrested by Chinese security forces on January 2, according to a report by *AsiaNews*.

During his arrest, the bishop was, according to an *AsiaNews* source, instructed

to "take clothes for spring, summer, autumn, and winter," indicating that his detention will be for a prolonged period of time.

As is often the case when senior clergy are detained, the exact location of the bishop's detention is unknown.

The report went on to

speculate that the reason for his arrest resulted from a letter he wrote to the state-approved diocesan administrator in which the bishop expressed his dismay over changes made in the diocese without his consent.

Bishop Shao was ordained a priest in 1989 and was

made coadjutor bishop of Wenzhou by papal mandate on November 10, 2011. His appointment took place during a period that marked a low point in Sino-Vatican relations when there were a series of illicit episcopal consecrations without the approval of the Apostolic See.





Edited by Jason Osborne  
jason@irishcatholic.ie

## Blessing France's future



Pope Francis gives his blessing to a group of young Catholics and organisers from the France-based Missionary Fraternity of the Cities at the Vatican January 4. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

## Senior Churchman argues in favour of considering married priesthood

The Archbishop of Malta and close confidant of Pope Francis, Charles Scicluna, has called for a "serious discussion" about celibacy. The Catholic Church should consider revising its rules to allow Catholic priests to marry, Archbishop Scicluna told the Times of Malta newspaper.

"This is probably the first time I'm saying it publicly and it will sound heretical to some people," Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta, who is also adjunct secretary in the Vatican's doctrinal office, told the newspaper.

Pope Francis in 2019

ruled out any chance that he would change the Roman Catholic rule requiring priests to be celibate, but as it is not a formal doctrine of the Church, it could be changed by a future pope.

"Why should we lose a young man who would have made a good priest just because he wants to get married?" asked Archbishop Scicluna. Celibacy was voluntary in the first millennium of the Church's existence – "and it should become voluntary again". The archbishop also pointed out that some priests entered into secret

relationships as a result of celibacy, which in some cases resulted in children. This is a "global reality".

Last year, Pope Francis had not ruled out abolishing compulsory celibacy for Catholic priests. When asked by a Latin American news site whether this was possible, he replied: "Yes, yes" – and referred to the Eastern Churches united with Rome, where clergy are already allowed to marry. He also considers a voluntary decision on celibacy before ordination to the priesthood to be conceivable. It is "not a

contradiction that a priest can marry", Francis said at the time. He considered celibacy in the Western Church to be "a temporary rule" which – unlike ordination – does not have an eternal character.

The 64-year-old archbishop and legal expert Charles Scicluna is chairman of the Bishops' Conference in Malta and Assistant Secretary in the Vatican's Office for the Doctrine of the Faith. He is regarded as the Pope's "chief investigator" in cases of abuse.

## Runaway US cleric Alex Crow no longer a priest

An Alabama Catholic priest known for talking about demonology and exorcism has now been fully returned to the lay state months after he fled the country with a recent Catholic high school graduate.

The Archdiocese of Mobile announced in a January 5 statement that it had "received notice that the laicisation of Alex Crow is complete, effective immediately" in a decision confirmed by Pope Francis. The archdiocese said Crow initiated the process and "this decision of

Pope Francis is final. There is no appeal".

On November 20, the former priest civilly married Taylor Victoria Harrison, 18, a June 2023 graduate of McGill-Toolen Catholic High School with whom he had travelled to Italy in July 2023 after abruptly leaving his assignment as a parochial vicar at Corpus Christi Parish in Mobile, Alabama.

Ms Harrison turned 18 in June prior to travel, but her family repeatedly expressed grave concerns their daughter had been groomed by Crow, 30, while

she was a minor as he provided pastoral ministry to students.

Crow handwrote her a Valentine's Day love letter where he described himself to the minor (at the time) as "married" to her and indicated plans for the pair to be in Italy together "with our family".

Mobile Archbishop Thomas Rodi had suspended Crow's priestly faculties in late July, ordering him not to present himself as a priest, and in a January 5 statement thanked Pope Francis for his decision.

## Vatican roundup

### Pope takes aim at war and surrogacy in address to diplomats

● Pope Francis called on the international community to ban surrogate pregnancy, calling it "deplorable" and a "grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child, based on the exploitation of situations of the mother's material needs".

The path to peace requires respecting every human life, "starting with the life of the unborn child in the mother's womb, which cannot be suppressed or turned into an object of trafficking," the Pope told diplomats accredited to the Holy See during his annual New Year's address January 8.

The Pope told the ambassadors gathered in a formal, frescoed hall of the Apostolic Palace that greater efforts are needed to prevent conflict and war through dialogue, disarmament and respect for human rights. "We must not forget that grave violations of international humanitarian law are war crimes, and that it is not sufficient to point them out, but also necessary to prevent them," he said.

### Cardinal Becciu speaks of 'drawing up a balance sheet' of one's life

● After being convicted on several counts of embezzlement of Vatican funds, Cardinal Angelo Becciu gave a New Year's Eve homily recommending the congregation draw up "a balance sheet" of one's personal life before God, according to an Italian media outlet. Cardinal Becciu, who was sentenced to five and a half years in prison by the Vatican's criminal court on December 16, celebrated Christmas in his hometown on the Italian island of Sardinia and presided over a Mass in the Cathedral of the Blessed Immaculate

Virgin of Ozieri December 31.

"Recalling the past means drawing up a balance sheet of our personal lives before God, without closing our eyes to the issues that grip the society in which we live both locally and universally," Cardinal Becciu said in his homily, according to the Italian Catholic blog Korazym.org.

"It also means having a calm and practical look at that reality, that mystery, which we hold most dear: the Church of God," he said.

### Pope sends condolences to victims of two suicide bombings in Iran

● Pope Francis expressed his condolences and prayers after two bombings in Kerman, Iran, claimed the lives of 84 people and wounded scores more at a memorial for an assassinated Iranian military officer.

In a telegram sent on behalf of the Pope January 5, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, said the Pope "was deeply saddened to learn of the loss of life caused by the recent explosions in Kerman".

"He sends the assurance of his prayers for those who have died and for their grieving families" and expressed "his spiritual solidarity with the injured," the telegram said.

The Pope also "invokes upon all the people of Iran, the Almighty's blessing of wisdom and peace," it said.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the January 3 attack in southern Iran, saying it was caused by two of its members wearing and detonating explosives.

The blasts went off outside a cemetery where thousands had gathered for the anniversary of the assassination of Qasem Soleimani in 2020.

Soleimani, whose militia force had fought against the Islamic State in Iraq, had been killed in Iraq in 2020 by a US drone strike.



# Letter from Sudan

## Sudan bishops praise religious for courage in the face of violence



Ngala Killian  
Chintom

**A**s a deadly conflict continues to rage in Sudan, Catholic bishops both inside the country and in neighbouring South Sudan used their Christmas message to praise the clergy and men and women religious for continuing to serve despite the risks.

"To you, our dear clergy and religious men and women, we would like to extend our sincere gratitude for your courage and resilience," they said.

"When the war broke out, you and your bishops got scattered all over the country and even across the border. It deprived you of the use of churches and centres of worship... [and] made you lose essential properties and commodities for sustenance," the bishops of the two countries said in a collective statement issued December 26.

"Despite all these challenges you continued to serve the people of God," they said. "We will seek ways to improve the conditions of lives of the priests and religious who were forced to abandon their areas of evangelisation."

**“They said villages in regions such as Darfur and Kordofan have been burned to the ground, leaving citizens with no shelter or accommodation”**

Fighting erupted in Sudan in mid-April, when former allies couldn't agree on a power-sharing agreement. The Sudanese armed forces, broadly loyal to General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, went into conflict with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF),



Sudanese refugees who have fled the violence in their country sit in their shelter in Koufroun, Chad, near that country's border with Sudan. Photo: OSV News/Zohra Bensemra, Reuters

a collection of militia loyal to former warlord General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as 'Hemedti'.

In 2019, the two men headed an uprising that led to the ouster of former leader Omar El Bashir. But attempts to transition to democratic rule failed, and the two men ended up as rivals for power.

The fighting is now entering its ninth month and has killed more than 12,000 people, with over 7.2 million others forced to flee from their homes, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA.)

### Child displacement

The UN body says Sudan is now the country with the largest number of displaced people and the largest child displacement crisis in the world.

According to the bishops, the destruction of lives, property and livelihoods has been overpowering, noting that many people "never expected such an

unfortunate situation to unfold in Sudan". They said villages in regions such as Darfur and Kordofan have been burned to the ground, leaving citizens with no shelter or accommodation.

In an earlier statement in June, the bishops stated that the people of Sudan, through non-violent protests, had made their preference for democratic rule known.

"They want a democratic civilian government, and they want the two separate military forces to be merged and to come under civilian control. We call upon the warring parties to respect the will of the Sudanese people."

Catholic bishops in both countries now believe that the fighting is meant to divide the people.

"We have a strong feeling that the chain of events in Sudan is an attempt to block your aspiration for a society where people live as brothers and sisters," the bishops said.

With global attention laser-focused on the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, the bishops also charged that Sudan has been abandoned.

**“It's not only risky to get supplies [to civilians], but it's also so challenging because of all the impediments”**

"We would like to appeal to the international community, the troika, and the UN not to sit back, but to continue its responsibility of working towards addressing the crisis and providing the necessary support to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the Sudan," the bishops said.

In the context of Sudan, the "troika" refers to joint efforts among the US the UK and Norway to broker a peaceful solution to the

conflict.

"Indeed, the best gift the people in Sudan need now is an immediate ceasefire and an end to the conflict," the bishops said in their Christmas Day statement.

### Sense of hope

The Church leaders also sought to give the people of Sudan a sense of hope amid the turmoil. Noting that prayer still has the power to change the narrative, the bishops promised to continue engaging the warring parties in view of finding a solution.

"As bishops, we believe that our strength comes from the power of prayers, an act which raises our hope for a better tomorrow. Using different platforms, we will continue to engage the leaders of the various parties in Sudan to put the interest of the people first, in their struggle for political power," they stated.

The clerics expressed

regret that humanitarian organisations, including Catholic organisations, are not being given access to deliver essential services.

Alain Ouattera, the deputy head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Sudan, recently told *Al-Jazeera* that the army impedes aid shipments to RSF-controlled areas.

"For us to get aid to [civilians in Gezira], we have to cross all these regions under [the Sudanese army's control]. But to get the travel permit required to take aid from one state to the other takes ages," he said.

"It's not only risky to get supplies [to civilians], but it's also so challenging because of all the impediments."

The bishops also warned that the conflict could grow into a regional conflict in a region already beset by several crises.



# Dicastery doubles down: Bishops shouldn't stop blessings for gay couples



Justin McLellan

**W**hile bishops may take a cautious approach to the Vatican's guidance on blessing same-sex or other unmarried couples, they should not deny their priests the possibility of discerning and imparting blessings on people who ask for them, the Vatican doctrinal office said.

"Prudence and attention to the ecclesial context and to the local culture could allow for different methods of application, but not a total or definitive denial of this path that is proposed to priests," said a press release issued January 4 by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

## Responsibility

Each bishop has a responsibility to discern the local application of the declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* (*Supplicating Trust*) on "the pastoral meaning of blessings," signed by Pope Francis and published by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith December 18, but a bishop should not deny priests the ability to bless people who come to them, the press release said.

Signed by Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the dicastery, the statement said it hoped "to help clarify" the reception of *Fiducia Supplicans* among bishops' conferences.

Besides causing both outrage and celebration on social media, the declaration was greeted by bishops' conferences with reactions that ran the gamut from embracing its guidance to outright banning local priests from applying it.

Many bishops' conferences in Western

countries, underscoring that the declaration did not change Catholic doctrine on marriage, reacted positively to the document. But others, particularly in Africa, were vocal in their opposition. The Zambian bishops' conference issued a statement December 20 stating that the Vatican document should "be taken as for further reflection and not for implementation in Zambia". In Malawi, the bishops' conference directed that "blessings of any kind for same-sex unions of any kind are not permitted in Malawi".

Bishop Robert Barron, chairman of the US bishops' Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, said in a statement December 21 that the document "in no way calls for a change in the Church's teaching regarding marriage and sexuality".

Bishop Georg Bätzing, president of the German bishops' conference, wrote December 18 that he welcomed the document and was "grateful for the pastoral perspective it takes".

Bishop Oscar Ojea, president of the Argentine bishops' conference, said December 30 that it would be "inappropriate" to inquire about the moral life of someone asking for a blessing, and he surmised that bishops and ministers who disagree with the Vatican guidance on blessings have not had the experience of witnessing someone simply asking for God's help or, perhaps, have not even acknowledged a need for God's mercy in their own lives.

The statements made by bishops' conferences "cannot be interpreted as doctrinal opposition," the dicastery's January 4 statement said, since *Fiducia Supplicans* clearly states the Church's perennial teaching on marriage and sexuality.

"There is no room to distance ourselves doctrinally from this Declaration or to consider it heretical, contrary to the Tradition of the Church or blasphemous," the



Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández comments on changes in the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, where he serves as prefect, as meets a *CNS* reporter in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican after Pope Francis made him a cardinal September 30, 2023. Photo: *CNS*/Lola Gomez

statement said.

Still, it acknowledged that while in some places "no difficulties arise" for the immediate application of the declaration, "in others it will be necessary not to introduce them" or to wait until more time is provided for study and for catechesis.

**“The Vatican statement said some bishops have given priests encouragement to discern when such blessings may be appropriate”**

Some bishops have forbidden priests in their diocese from imparting the pastoral blessings laid out in the Vatican document. Archbishop Tomash Peta and Auxiliary Bishop Athanasius Schneider of Astana, Kazakhstan, said in a December 19 statement that they "prohibit priests and the Faithful of the Archdiocese of Saint Mary in Astana from accepting or performing any form of blessing whatsoever of couples in an irregular situation and same-sex couples".

In other local contexts,

the Vatican statement said some bishops have given priests encouragement to discern when such blessings may be appropriate, but the dicastery insisted a priest may perform the blessings "only in private".

## Reactions

The variety of reactions is not "problematic if it is expressed with due respect for a text signed and approved by the Supreme Pontiff himself, while attempting in some way to accommodate the reflection contained in it," it said.

The statement also discussed at length the situation in countries where homosexuals are threatened with prison, torture or death for being gay. In those places, "it goes without saying that a blessing would be imprudent," it said. "It is clear the Bishops do not wish to expose homosexual persons to violence."

But beyond blessings for same-sex couples, the "real novelty" of *Fiducia Supplicans*, the dicastery said, is not the possibility of blessing couples in irregular situations, rather "the invitation to distinguish between two different forms of

blessings: 'liturgical and ritualised' and 'spontaneous or pastoral.'"

The statement recognised that while some bishops will choose not to impart pastoral blessings to couples in irregular situations, "we all need to grow equally in the conviction that: non-ritualised blessings are not a consecration of the person nor of the couple who receives them, they are not a justification of all their actions, and they are not an endorsement of the life that they lead".

**“Catechesis will be necessary in some places to help people understand that such blessings are ‘not an endorsement of the life led by those who request them’”**

"When the Pope asked us to grow in a broader understanding of pastoral blessings, he proposed we think of a way of blessing that does not require the placing of so many conditions to carry out this simple gesture of pastoral closeness, which is a means of promoting

openness to God in the midst of the most diverse circumstances," the statement said.

Concretely, the dicastery said such pastoral blessings last only "a few seconds" and must be performed "without an approved ritual and without a book of blessings".

If two people approach a priest for a blessing, he "simply asks the Lord for peace, health and other good things for these two people who request it" and that "they may live the Gospel of Christ in full fidelity".

A simple, brief and non-ritualised blessing "does not intend to justify anything that is not morally acceptable" and is "not an 'approval' or ratification of anything either," the statement said.

The press release also noted that catechesis will be necessary in some places to help people understand that such blessings are "not an endorsement of the life led by those who request them" or a form of absolution, but "simple expressions of pastoral closeness".

**“There is no room to distance ourselves doctrinally from this Declaration or to consider it heretical, contrary to the Tradition of the Church or blasphemous”**



# Letters

Post to: Letters to the Editor, The Irish Catholic,  
Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford,  
Dublin 18, D18 K277 or email: letters@irishcatholic.ie

## Letter of the week

# Debating wild requests at funerals

**Dear Editor,** Over the past few years, dioceses around the country have been debating how to balance the demand for funerals with the diminishing numbers of priests. Before this issue can be addressed, there is however a more fundamental conversation that needs to be had: the question of what a Requiem Mass is

and what it is not.

At present there is widespread confusion on this issue, both among laity and among priests. While this confusion persists there may be justified anger and hurt among families when it is perceived that celebrities, politicians, the famous and the talented can dictate what

they wish to add to the Requiem Mass, while this is often not an option for ordinary people.

There is also justified hurt among ordinary Mass-goers, who perceive that their local church is regularly booked to be used as a venue by people who have no understanding or respect for what the Church or the Mass is.

An addendum to this, in recent years, the prominent funerals of unrepentant drug dealers and gangsters is particularly hurtful to ordinary parishioners, who see their church being taken over by those who prey on the community.

Until the Church has had this conversation, there will be

continued hurt among families and parishioners, and frustration among priests as they attempt to accommodate undiminished numbers of funerals with ever wilder requests.

Yours etc.,  
**Fr Joe Keegan**  
Cabra west, Dublin 7

## Celebrating midnight Mass in every county

**Dear Editor,** Your headline [*The Irish Catholic* – December 14, 2023] calling for a 'Call for spirit of mission to urge people back for Christmas Mass' was very welcome and it would indeed be great to observe more people attending same. Sadly, however apathy has been allowed to reign and fester in more recent years with the phasing out of midnight Mass. The excuse that the time coincided with disruption from the closing of the pubs no longer holds sway even though same was never witnessed by me in over 40 years! It's now all about convenience and getting home early to prepare for the following day's festivities which involves everything but the celebration of the birth of Jesus! There has to be scope to host at least one midnight Mass in every county which might just be the catalyst to attract those disaffected as it will demonstrate that tradition and hope are not lost when it comes to celebrating the greatest event ever!

Yours etc.,  
**John Burke**  
Clontarf, Dublin 3



## Essential we pray regularly for souls in purgatory

**Dear Editor,** Further to the article by Jenna Marie Cooper [*The Irish Catholic* – December 7, 2023] I am writing to provide some useful information that will hopefully help the deceased souls and be helpful to your readers.

The plight of the Holy Souls is not helped by the fact that some priests at a funeral do not encourage the congregation to continue to pray regularly for the soul of the deceased person. There is a variety of prayers

we can say for the Holy Souls but Our Lord showed St Gertrude a vast number of souls leaving purgatory and going to Heaven as a result of the following prayer: "Eternal Father, I offer thee the most precious Blood of Jesus with all the Masses being said all over the world for the souls in purgatory."

Apparently St Gertrude was accustomed to reciting this prayer daily.

Some of your readers might

be interested to know that according to St Catherine of Bologna she received great favours from the saints but still greater favours from the Holy Souls.

The Holy Souls can help us but they cannot help themselves, so it is essential that we pray regularly for them and offer indulgences for them as well.

Yours etc.,  
**Jim McCarthy**  
London, England

## Love one another, as I told you

**Dear Editor,** In her article 'Framing a faithful priest' [*The Irish Catholic* – December 14, 2023] Mary Kenny confers hero status on the World War I chaplain Fr Francis Gleeson. In an imposing photo he is shown on horseback blessing and giving absolution to soldiers before battle with fellow Christians on the German side. It is a fair assumption that a German priest was doing likewise on the other side. Apparently on one occasion Fr Gleeson actually joined in the combat.

An uncomfortable but important question presents itself: Was this conferring of divine approval on the war pleasing to Jesus: the same Jesus who clearly and consistently teaches nonviolence "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44)?

Equally clear and consistent was Jesus' vicar on earth, Pope Benedict XV who totally opposed World War I. He was not interested in the arguments which the Allied and central powers both used to justify the war: for him the con-

flict was simply unjustifiable because of the horrific extent of the killing from the very beginning. A year into the war he wrote this message to them: "In the holy name of God, in the name of our heavenly Father and Lord, by the precious Blood of Jesus, the price of man's redemption, we adjure you, whom Divine Providence has placed in authority over the nations now at war, to put a final end to this horrible butchery which has been disgracing Europe for a whole year. It is the blood of brothers that is being poured out on land and sea..."

So what would Jesus have done in such circumstances? I can picture him in no-man's-land between the two armies, kneeling on the ground, arms outstretched, eyes raised to heaven and crying out "For the love of God, stop this killing! Love one another as I told you!"

Yours etc.,  
**A.P. Breen**  
Bronx, New York, USA

## Parishes taking responsibility for initiation

**Dear Editor,** We like to think that our parish-run national schools are the faith formators. However, the poor teachers – the majority of whom at this stage are no longer practising Catholics – are trying to teach religion as a subject to children who have not been brought up in the Faith. And the only time these young people ever go to church is for First Holy Communion, Confirmation, funerals, and the anniversary Masses of family members.

What Church leaders have to learn is the difference between knowledge of the Faith and faith itself. Yes! It is nice and good that there are religious-knowl-

edge classes and that there is a Christian ethos in the schools. However, as long as we continue to believe that the seed of faith is being sown and cultivated in our schools, the Church, as we know it, will continue to decrease. Anyone, who has studied the stages of faith development, would know how the Faith is formed and developed in young children. And it does not depend on attendance in the religious knowledge class.

The solution to the imminent demise of the Church is, in my opinion, for the Government to make our schools totally secular. This may seem like a terrible move from the Church's point of view.

However, it would through necessity, prove to be a major positive turning-point in the life of Catholic Church here in Ireland. At that stage, each parish would have to take responsibility for the initiation of its new members. Then, parents would have to decide, whether or not, to bring their children to the after-school religion programmes run by the parish. The numbers would be very small, but those who eventually made their First Holy Communion and were confirmed would be genuine followers of Christ.

Yours etc.,  
**Fr Pat Seaver**  
Farranshone, Co. Limerick

## Letters to the Editor

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

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication date, acknowledge unpublished letters or discuss the

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



# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, January 11, 2024

## Sunday Gospel

Learning to listen to the Lord

Page 34



## What is the liturgical calendar?

**T**he liturgical calendar is omnipresent in Catholic life. Many parish bulletins list the liturgical days of the week and corresponding Scripture readings. In December, tables in the narthex may be piled high with free calendars that identify the principal feasts of the Church year (along with civic holidays). And, of course, each holy day of obligation we are reminded that Catholic worship is not simply a matter of showing up on Sundays; there is a larger pattern of feasts and fasts of which Sunday worship is only part.

But to say that the liturgical calendar is omnipresent is not to say that we always notice it. We often look past



**The liturgical calendar is a spiritually transformative tool of the Church, writes Chene Heady**

objects, such as street lights or telephone poles, precisely because they are pervasive. It is easy to treat the liturgical calendar merely as part of Catholicism's décor, the ornamental mantle clock with Roman numerals that looks nice but which no one really uses to tell time.

Many holy men and women through the ages, however, have set their internal clock to

the liturgical calendar and have found their lives reshaped in the process – for the purpose of the liturgical calendar is to orient our days around the person of Jesus. This process begins with Sunday worship, which is the cornerstone of the whole liturgical calendar. We celebrate Mass each Sunday – rather than on the Jewish Saturday – in recognition that when Jesus resurrected

on Easter Sunday he began the renewal of the whole world and the universe was fundamentally changed.

**“The Church, ‘in the course of the year ... unfolds the whole mystery of Christ’”**

But, while the Resurrection is the central Christian event, every moment of the life of Jesus is a revelation of the nature and character of God. For this reason, we need not merely Sunday worship but the entire Christian year. The Church year is structured around the life of Jesus. It pursues him from the first signs of his coming in Advent

to his birth at Christmas, to his trials in Lent and death on Good Friday, to the wonders of his Easter resurrection and ascension, and finally catches an apocalyptic vision of him enthroned as King in glory. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, “The Church, ‘in the course of the year ... unfolds the whole mystery of Christ’” (No. 1194). The Church leaves nothing out and skips no days; she asks us to meditate on Jesus at all times and in all circumstances.

### Jesus in all things

The Church's desire to see Jesus in all things, and all things in light of Jesus, also influences the scriptural readings chosen for use throughout the



liturgical year. Since Jesus is God's ultimate self-revelation to humanity, the entire human attempt to know God – the complete story of religion and all of salvation history – also culminates in him (see Catechism, No. 102). Inspired by this insight, the Apostolic Fathers in the early days of the Church developed the reading method known as typology.

Typology treats events and images recorded in the Old Testament (the type) as prefiguring the life of Christ and the Church (the antitype). The fullness of God's revelation as expressed in Christ exposes patterns and symbols in his earlier dealings with humanity that we might otherwise miss. To give just two famous examples: Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, who nonetheless does not die, is a type of Christ's divine sacrifice and resurrection; Noah's ark, the vessel in which humanity is saved from physical destruction, is a type of the Church, the vessel in which humanity is saved from spiritual destruction.

The Church assigns appropriate scriptural readings – generally an Old Testament passage, a responsorial psalm, a portion of an epistle and a Gospel story – for each day of the year. The Old Testament reading and the responsorial psalm are often chosen because of their typological relationship to the Gospel

reading. While the basic pattern of our liturgical observances remains constant each year, our cycle of readings for these observances varies. We follow a two-year cycle for daily Mass and a three-year (A, B, C) cycle for Sundays, primarily so that we might encounter Scripture as fully as possible. The Church uses the liturgical calendar to teach us to see “Christ in all the Scriptures”.

### The feast of Christ the King

Since I have already referenced it, the feast of Christ the King, the final Sunday of the liturgical year, may serve as a convenient example of this dynamic. The first reading for Christ the King in Year C is 2 Samuel 5:1-3; here the Israelites collectively accept David as their king. In the corresponding Gospel reading, Luke 23:35-43, the good thief on the cross accepts Jesus, the Son of David, as his king, and becomes in death the first person to pass into the heavenly kingdom. David's divinely ordained but temporal kingship is a type of Christ's permanent spiritual kingship.

The liturgical calendar's frequent memorials of saints teach us another method of viewing all experience in light of Christ. The saints are a diverse bunch; they include men and women of nearly every race, region, occupation, economic status and psychological



temperament. In the roster of the saints, we find a template of the many different ways in which salvation may be worked out, the varied human images that may comprise a reflection of the one Christ, the disparate forms his kingdom may take on earth. By commemorating these saints in the liturgical calendar, the Church presents us with the entire picture of

human sanctity, and asks us to evaluate our life's challenges and the people around us accordingly.

### Calendar patterns

The liturgical calendar, then, possesses the potential to transform the way we see the world. If we were truly sensitive to its patterns, we would view our own lives, other people, the Bible, human history and the passage of

**“In the absence of the liturgical calendar, we will structure our lives around whatever shouts at us most loudly and whatever is most materially tangible, and our lives will be correspondingly hollowed”**

time itself differently. And the decisions we would make while seeing the world in this very different light would change us into different people.

The Church understands human nature. Human beings naturally make sense of the world by telling themselves stories. We also structure the smaller stories of our personal lives in terms of the wider and more all-encompassing tales we know.

By superimposing Scripture over the days of our lives, the liturgical calendar trains us to understand our experience in terms of Christ. We neglect this training to our own detriment. If we allow the liturgical calendar to fade into the background, lost as a mere ornament, we will still imagine our lives as a reflection of a larger story, but it will be a vastly impoverished story.

In her work *The Pantheon Papers*, the novelist and Christian humanist Dorothy Sayers vividly depicted this truth. Sayers constructed a satirical liturgical calendar for modern materialism.

This new calendar exposes the secular values that too often structure our lives and our days. Here the season of Advent is replaced with the season of advertisement; Christmas is replaced with “the Birth of Science”; the feast of Easter with the feast of the Enlightenment; All Hallows with All Hollows.

In the absence of the liturgical calendar, we will structure our lives around whatever shouts at us most loudly and whatever is most materially tangible, and our lives will be correspondingly hollowed. In the liturgical calendar the Church offers us an important tool for spiritual enrichment and renewal.

**i** Chene Heady, PhD, is associate professor of English at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia, and author of *Numbering My Days: How the Liturgical Calendar Rearranged My Life* (Ignatius Press).

**“The saints are a diverse bunch; they include men and women of nearly every race, region, occupation, economic status and psychological temperament”**





# God is calling your name. Will you respond?



**Gretchen Crowe**

**O**ur sweetest not-such-a-baby anymore turns 20 months old this month. Like any proud mama, I could write an entire column on John Francis's adorable qualities, like his propensity to silly dance anytime he catches a whiff of a beat, or how he quacks at anything that has wings, including, lately, the angels in Nativity scenes.

But what is really making us laugh these days is his love of the family "roll call". While our little guy isn't talking all that much yet, what he does do – with gusto – is say the names of his favourite people on repeat. This means the soundtrack of our home in this season of life centres on the words DADA, MAMA, DOHDOO

(that's big bro Joseph) and NNNEH (big sis Anne). And he means business. When he calls your name, he expects acknowledgement and response, pronto, or the calls will continue, with increasing intensity. It reminds me uncannily of the movie *Star Trek 4: The Voyage Home*, in which a cylindrical probe in outer space in the year 2286 seeks response from humpback whales on Earth and, upon hearing none from the now extinct creatures, begins utter destruction of the planet. One must acknowledge the baby roll call or face a harrowing future.

## God calls us to himself

While this has offered us much laughter at home, this game of call and response has also been tugging at my heart.

**“In prayer, the faithful God’s initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response”**

Consider for a moment how endlessly the Lord, too, calls us to himself, and how greatly he wants us to respond. We have been created by God for life everlasting with him, and he desires us more than anything.

**“Through words and actions, this drama engages the heart. It unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation”**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church makes clear this probing love of the Father and how much he desires to bring all people to himself: “Man may forget his Creator or hide far from his face; he may run after idols or accuse the deity of

having abandoned him; yet the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer,” the catechism says. “In prayer, the faithful God’s initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response. As God gradually reveals himself and reveals man to himself, prayer appears as a reciprocal call, a covenant drama. Through words and actions, this drama engages the heart. It unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation” (No. 2567).

These words are a reassuring balm to my soul. We are so beloved of God that, despite all of our human failings – despite all the ways in which we seek to hide from the Lord, or seek to blame him for abandoning us – he will lovingly and persistently call us to himself. He will tirelessly call our names, and, if we are listening and open, we will be led to respond.

## Searching for God

As a member of the Pauline Family, I think this time of

year about the call received by our founder, Blessed James Alberione, on the night of December 31, 1900 – what is now known as the “Night of Light”. While praying before the Blessed Sacrament, Bl. Alberione heard the Lord call “Come to me, all of you ...”. From this distinct, life-changing moment, Bl. Alberione’s mission in Catholic communications was born and, more than a century later, continues to thrive. But it was not just the call that made it so; a call is nothing without a response. It was Bl. Alberione’s own fiat, his own obedience to the will of God, that allowed for such abundant fruit.

**“Even after losing through his sin his likeness to God, man remains an image of his Creator, and retains the desire for the one who calls him into existence”**

We must do the same! And, thanks be to God, responding to God is inherent to our nature as human beings. “Man is in search of God,” the catechism reminds us. “Even after losing through his sin his likeness to God, man remains an image of his Creator, and retains the desire for the one who calls him into existence” (No. 2566). All we need to do is listen, discern and, like Mary and all the saints after her, say “yes”.

The start of a new year is a clean slate, a new beginning for each one of us. On this very day, at this very moment – not unlike our persistent not-so-much-a-baby-anymore baby – the Lord is calling our names. He is calling us to him. Will we hear the call and respond?

**i** Gretchen Crowe is the editor-in-chief of OSV News.



# How to be more thoughtful about your screen time



**Sr Hosea Rupprecht**

**T**he week before Christmas, I encountered airport crowds waiting to board their flights, but spilling out of the gate area and hampering the rest of us trying to get where we were going. I got stuck behind a guy dragging his bag but laser-focused on his phone. His bag kept hitting people in the ankles, and he was causing a bottleneck in the flow of traffic. Frustrated with his obvious oblivion, I thought to myself, "Dude, just look up from your phone!"

Curious, I decided to do a very unscientific experiment and asked various groups of people, "How many of you feel like you spend too much time on your screens?" When most raised their hands, I concluded that many people know they spend too much time with their electronics. Certainly, we all need to be on our gadgets for some of that time, but for all of it?

## Benefits

What's something you've been wanting to do for a while, but just can't seem to find the time? Maybe you mean to increase the time you spend with your kids or would like to get caught up on projects around the house. Perhaps you've been wanting to visit a sick friend or spend a little more time with God in prayer.

Whatever it is, a bit less screen time might help you fulfil these

desires.

As you consider the new year, perhaps God is inspiring you to spend less time looking at a screen and more time looking at the people and places around you? Here are some things to remember as you try cutting back on your digital consumption.

First, practice discipline. I tend to get sucked down the rabbit hole when I hit YouTube, even for valid reasons. As I click from one video to the next, an embarrassing amount of time is wasted before I realise it. Now, when I go on YouTube, I set a 30-minute time limit. Then, I say a quick prayer to Blessed Carlo Acutis for help. He was a gamer but only allowed himself an hour a week at it, because he knew how easily one gets lost while playing.

**“We don’t want to be so absorbed by technology that we lose sight of who we are or find ourselves in the throes of an addiction”**

Second, take responsibility for yourself and know your online habits. Acknowledge the legitimate needs you have for being online but make sure to spend appropriate time with loved ones face-to-face. Show real interest in people by listening attentively to them without judgement, and show real interest in deepening your relationship with God.

Next, be discerning. Ask questions when you're engaging with online media. We don't want to be so absorbed by technology that we lose sight of who we are or find ourselves in the throes of an addiction. Is what you're doing online

bringing peace and serenity, or is it causing anxiety? Perhaps you need to bring what you're seeing in the digital realm into prayer? Is your digital life an authentic reflection of your life as a disciple of Christ? Ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of discernment when it comes to choosing online activity and deciding how long you'll spend there.

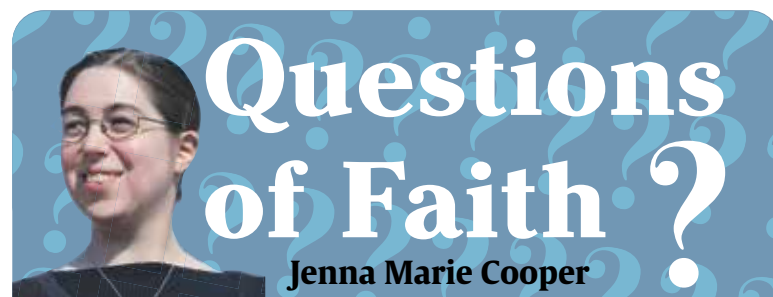
## Cultivate silence

Finally, cultivate times of silence. Recently an errand took me along the Pacific Coast Highway. On a whim, I pulled (safely) to the side of the road. I turned off the car, rolled down the window on the side facing the ocean, closed my eyes, and listened to the sound of the waves for a few minutes. This might not strictly qualify as silence since I could still hear the noise of cars whizzing by, but I quieted my mind and heart for three minutes and it was good for my soul.

We all need silence in our lives. With silence comes reflection and the ability to hear the many ways God is constantly reaching out to us in everyday life. Silence not only enables us to hear God, but to hear the needs of others more clearly.

If you resolve to decrease your online screen time, I suspect you won't only be helping yourself but also those around you to live a more balanced, peaceful and holy 2024.

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



**Jenna Marie Cooper**

## What is Church teaching on Protestant Communion and the Real Presence?

**Q: What is the Church currently teaching about the Real Presence in other denominations? I thought that at one time we recognised both the Lutherans and the Anglicans as having the Real Presence. Does that still hold true? Others?**

A: For context, let us recall that the Catholic teaching on the "real presence" in the Eucharist means that we believe that the bread and wine offered at Mass literally become the body and blood of Christ when the priest prays the prayer of consecration.

This doctrine has been a part of the Catholic Faith since the time of the Church's foundation. For example, as we read in St John's Gospel, Jesus himself states: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. ... For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." (See Jn 6:53, 55)

Later, in the Middle Ages, scholastic theologians such as St Thomas Aquinas were able to describe this teaching in more technical philosophical terms. Specifically, "transubstantiation" is our word for what happens when the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ at Mass – namely, the "substance" (basically, the essential nature, identity or "being" of a thing) changes, even while the "accidents" (i.e., the physical, observable qualities) of the bread and wine remain.

During the Protestant Reformation and afterward, the vast majority of Protestant denominations distanced themselves from characteristically Catholic sacramental theology. Most of these denominations rejected the idea of the Real Presence in the Eucharist; that is, if they had any practice similar to holy Communion, this was understood as a purely symbolic means of recalling the Last Supper. Naturally, the Catholic Church is not going to see the Real Presence in situations where the denomination in question does not.

A few notable exceptions to this are, as you note, some Anglicans and Lutherans. Historically, the Church of England was established on the more organisational and political premise that the king or queen of

England should also be considered the head of the Church in England, as opposed to specific theological differences. So although Anglicanism now has many branches (such as the Episcopal Church in the United States) that might believe different things today, at least initially the Anglicans did not specifically reject the doctrine of the Real Presence. Similarly, while Martin Luther did not teach the Catholic understanding of transubstantiation, he did believe in the similar idea of "consubstantiation," where the "substance" of Christ's body and blood coexists with the "substance" of mere bread and wine after the consecration.

But today the Catholic Church does not recognise any Protestant denomination as having the Real Presence in the Eucharist. The reason for this is that, even in Protestant denominations that call their clergy "priests," we do not believe that these clergy were ordained through apostolic succession. That is, we as Catholics believe that all our bishops – and the priests whom they ordain as their co-ministers – were ordained by bishops who were in turn ordained by other bishops in an unbroken chain reaching back to the first bishops, the apostles, who were consecrated in their vocation by Jesus personally. Jesus gave the apostles the power to consecrate the Eucharist, a power which the apostles then handed down to their successors, and a power which cannot be obtained in any other way.

However, in contrast, we as Catholics believe that the Eastern Orthodox Churches, despite not being in union with the Pope in Rome, have nearly identical understanding of the sacraments as well as priests and bishops ordained via apostolic succession. Therefore, the Orthodox do have valid sacraments from a Catholic perspective, and thus we also recognise the Real Presence in their celebrations of the Eucharist.

**i** Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News.





# Preserve us from false piety!



**P**ietism is the enemy of humour, at least whenever something less than piety is masquerading as piety. Here's an example: I once lived in community with an overly serious man who, after someone would tell a colourful joke, would bring us back to earth with the question, "Would you tell a joke like that in front of the Blessed Sacrament?" That not only deflated the joke and its teller, but it also took the oxygen out of the room.

## A joking response

There's a response I would have liked to have given to his question, namely, a joke my Oblate novice master used to tell, one whose irony exposes false piety. The joke runs this way: A young woman was getting married and her family could not afford a venue for a reception for the wedding. The parish priest generously offered them the foyer at the entrance of the church, telling them they could bring in a cake and have a reception there. The father of the bride asked whether they might also bring in some liquor. "Absolutely not," the priest replied, "you can't drink liquor in a church!" "But," protested the bride's father, "Jesus drank wine at the wedding feast of Cana." "But not in front of the Blessed Sacrament!" replied the priest.

Admittedly, humour can be impious, crass, offensive, dirty,



**Fr Rolheiser**

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

but whenever that's the case the fault normally lies more in the aesthetics than in the content of the joke. A joke isn't offensive because it is about sex or religion or any other area we surround with sacredness. Humour is offensive when it crosses a line in terms of respect, taste and aesthetics. Humour is offensive when it is bad art. Bad art crosses a line in terms of respect, either vis-à-vis its audience or its subject matter. What can make a joke offensive or dirty is when it is told, or how it is told, or to whom it is told, or the tone in which it is told, or the lack of sensitivity to what is being told or the colour of the language as it is being told. Whether or not it can be told before the Blessed Sacrament isn't a criterion. If a joke shouldn't be told in front of the Blessed Sacrament

it shouldn't be told in front of anyone. There aren't two standards of offensiveness.

## Genuine piety

Still, bad piety is the enemy of humour. It's also the enemy of robust, earthy living. But, that is only the case for bad piety, not genuine piety. Genuine piety is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit and is a healthy reverence before all of life. But it's a reverence that, while healthily respectful, is not offended by humour (even robust, earthy humour) providing the humour isn't aesthetically offensive – akin to nudity which is healthy in art but offensive in pornography.

False sensitivity that masks itself as piety also strips all spirituality of humour, save for the most pious kind. In doing that, in effect, it makes Jesus,

Mary, and the saints humourless, and thus less than fully human and healthy. One of our mentors at our Oblate novitiate told us, young novices, that there is not a single incident reported in scripture of Jesus ever laughing. He told us this to dampen our natural, youthful, rambunctious energy, as if this was somehow a hindrance to being religious.

## “A healthy God does not undergird an unhealthy theology, ecclesiology or anthropology”

Humorous energy is not a hindrance to being religious. To the contrary. Jesus is the paragon of all that is healthily human, and he, no doubt, was a fully healthy, robust, delightful human person, and none of those words (healthy, robust, delightful) would apply to him if he hadn't had a healthy, indeed earthy, sense of humour.

For 15 years I taught a course entitled 'The Theology of God' to seminarians and others preparing

for ministry. I would try to cover all the required basis asked for in the curriculum – biblical revelation, patristic insights, normative Church teachings, and speculative views from contemporary theologians. But, inside all of this, like a recurring theme in an opera, I would tell the students this: In all your preaching and teaching and pastoral practices, whatever else, try not to make God look stupid. Try not to make God look unintelligent, tribal, petty, rigid, nationalistic, angry, or fearful. Every homily, every theological teaching, every ecclesial practice, and every pastoral practice ultimately reflects an image of God whether we want it to or not. And if there is something less than healthy in our preaching or pastoral practices, the God who underwrites it will also appear as unhealthy. A healthy God does not undergird an unhealthy theology, ecclesiology or anthropology.

Hence, if we teach a Jesus who is humourless, who takes offense at the earthiness of life, who is uncomfortable hearing the word sex, who flinches at colourful language, and who is afraid to smile and chuckle at irony, wit, and humour, we make Jesus appear as rigid and uptight, a prude, and not the person you want to be beside at table.

**“Still, bad piety is the enemy of humour. It's also the enemy of robust, earthy living. But, that is only the case for bad piety, not genuine piety”**



# Learning to listen to the Lord

1 Sm 3:3b-10, 19  
Ps 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10  
1 Cor 6:13c-15a, 17-20  
Jn 1:35-42

**T**he new year is a good time to begin anew in our spiritual lives. Along with resolutions to improve our health, habits and relationships, a renewed commitment to prayer gives direction to our inmost longings for renewal and regeneration.

## Speaking and listening

Prayer is a dialogue with God that responds to God who first thirsts for us, says the Catechism of the Catholic Church. We speak to God in the prayers of the liturgy and the psalms, in familiar devotions of the Church, and with words that flow spontaneously from the heart. And while speaking to God is a necessary dimension of Christian prayer, listening is even more fundamental. We cultivate a heart of listening to hear God call each one of us by name. The more we listen, the more we hear God's voice.

When we open to the voice of the Holy Spirit, we attune ourselves to God's voice and welcome his holy word as wisdom for daily life.

Samuel had never heard God's voice until he heard the Lord call him by name. The young boy mistakenly thought it was Eli, the temple priest. Three times the Lord called to Samuel, and three times Samuel ran to Eli's side. Eventually Eli, a wise and prayerful man himself, understood what was happening to Samuel. So, he said to the youth, "Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'"

## Eternal love

Eli taught Samuel the way of prayer. He guided Samuel to recognise God's voice calling to him as a gift of faith. In the same way, the Church teaches us how to pray, opening our hearts and minds to hear God call us by name with his eternal word of love and mercy.

**“Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening’”**

## The Sunday Gospel

Jem Sullivan



This openness to God's voice continues in the Responsorial Psalm as we join in the psalmist's prayer - "Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will". Now it is the psalmist who teaches how to pray with a listening heart, attentive to God's word and will.

## “Discipleship flows from listening to the voice of God”

In the Gospel, Jesus encounters Peter and Andrew, who accept the call to discipleship after they hear the witness of John the Baptist. We hear that John was standing with the two disciples, and as Jesus walked by, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God". John was a missionary disciple of Jesus, preparing hearts to attend to the presence of God in their midst. Peter and Andrew heard the message of John and followed Jesus.

Discipleship flows from listening to the voice of God.

When John proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God, the disciples responded in faith and discipleship. Their example is given to us today as we hear God's word. Will we respond in faith and discipleship as we hear God call us by name - as we pray in faith, "speak to me, Lord". Question: In this new year how can I cultivate a heart that listens to the word of God?

**i** Jem Sullivan holds a doctorate in religious education and is an associate professor of Catechetics in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.





# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## The gravest injustice I have ever seen

**W**hen organisations are caught out doing something wrong it often happens that they get defensive and opt for cover up and obfuscation. Whistleblowers can be treated as pariahs rather than being welcomed as liberating the organisation from corruption or malpractice.

This certainly seemed to be the case in **Mr Bates v. the Post Office (UTV/ITV and Virgin Media One, Monday-Thursday)** a drama series that ran for four nights last week. It told the story of what has become known as the Great Post Office Scandal – when the Post Office in England accused a large number of sub-postmasters and post-mistresses (over 700) of stealing funds, when in fact it was a fault in the new Horizon computer system, though the Post Office wouldn't admit that.

Instead, they pursued these vulnerable people through the courts, even to the point of some being jailed. The Post Office insisted on restitution and so people lost life savings, jobs, houses, and even lives. At least one of those portrayed in this drama committed suicide under the pressure and disgrace they felt – in reality there



The stars of *Mr Bates v. The Post Office* show their support for the victims of a grave injustice.

were at least three more.

It was one the gravest cases of injustice I've come across and this drama conveyed the human stress and suffering so well, with the help of a brilliant ensemble cast, with faces that will be familiar to those who watch British TV drama on a regular basis. Particularly outstanding were Toby Jones (*Mr Bates*) and Julie Hesmondhalgh (*Susanne*).

It was moving, sad, scary and absorbing, more than most fictional thrillers. It was marked by a warm humanity – the characters

cared for and supported each other, as, I felt, did the programme makers. It will certainly be on my list for top dramas of 2024 and it's only early in January!

It is also a testament to the power of storytelling. Though the controversy has rumbled on for years, this drama has propelled it into prominence and it has dominated the UK news and current affairs since broadcast – eg. one of the sub-postmasters was interviewed on **Laura Kuenssberg (BBC One, Sunday)** and it was covered extensively on **Times Radio**

**Breakfast** last Monday morning.

Political Editor Kate McCann gave a particularly good summary of the complexity of the legal processes involved, describing how the drama had built up a "head of steam". It shouldn't have taken a drama to inject such urgency.

The drama was followed by a documentary on the issue **Mr Bates v The Post Office – The Real Story (UTV/ITV, Thursday)**. *ITV* does this kind of thing really well, showing how well they matched the actors to the real people they portrayed, and how re-enactments matched the news reports of the time.

One victim said that God had got her through the crisis, another was shown in a little oratory, with the scriptures opened. Religion had come into the original drama in a rather unexpected way – one of those in the Post Office hierarchy, not presented very sympathetically, was a part-time vicar!

Her homily scene seemed designed for irony. Of course, the key theme in all these programmes was justice and the hunger for it. What happened was described widely as the worst miscarriage of justice in British legal history.

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### THE LAST PRIESTS IN IRELAND

**RTÉ One Monday January 15, 9:35pm**

Actor and comedian Ardal O'Hanlon examines the role of Catholic priests in Irish life, from earliest times to the present day, to see how they shaped Irish lives.

#### THE LAST NUNS IN IRELAND

**RTÉ One Tuesday January 16, 10:15pm**

Broadcaster Dearbhail McDonald examines the role of nuns in Ireland to see how they have shaped Irish lives, including her own, for better or for worse.

#### MARCH FOR LIFE

**EWTN Friday January 19, 2.30pm**

Live and complete coverage of the most important pro-life event of the year: the annual March For Life in Washington DC.

If religion was thin on the ground in these programmes apart from the overarching, and not exclusively religious, theme of justice, I thought it was even more thin when **Sunday Morning Live (BBC One)** returned at the weekend.

The main discussion was about the role of the monarchy in England, with a monarchist versus republican line up. The anomaly of the monarch being also head of the Church of England wasn't discussed, which was, I thought, a lost opportunity.

It seems like every show has to have a comedian these days, perhaps in the role of court jester, and that's fair enough if

they're not all joking from the same hymn sheet, or just parroting approved or trendy narratives.

On this show comedian Dom Jolie showed distaste for conspiracy theories, especially of the far-out flat earth and Q-Anon variety. However, I remembered that old saying 'Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you'.

Logically, there are some actual conspiracies, it's listed as a crime in law, and there are elements in the Post Office scandal that smack of it. I'd say there's nothing conspirators love more than people believing there's no conspiracy!



Aubrey Malone

# Film

## Race against time for Britain's Oskar Schindler

It's 1988 and we're coming up to Christmas. Elderly Jew Sir Nicholas Winton (Anthony Hopkins) is decluttering his study to please his wife Grete (Lena Olin). In the process he discovers a scrapbook from World War II.

Flash back half a century. Nazism is about to sweep across Europe. The young Nicky (Johnny Flynn) is a 29-year-old stockbroker. He's horrified by the plight of refugee children. They're fleeing from Austria, Germany, Sudetenland. He wants to guide them to safety before Hitler's troops deport them to God knows where.

Against the wishes of his mother, a Jewish German immigrant played by Helena Bonham Carter, he makes his

way to Prague. There he meets former teacher Trevor (Alex Sharp). They discuss how they might make his wish come true.

*One Life* (12A) isn't a tract against anti-Semitism. It isn't even an anti-Holocaust film. It's the simple story of a man who, along with a crew of like-minded Good Samaritans like the refugee facilitator Doreen Warring (Romola Garai), performed random acts of kindness.

The film couldn't have arrived in cinemas at a more relevant time as the world lays devastated by atrocities in Gaza and Ukraine.

It's based on a book written by Winton's daughter Barbara called *If It's Not Impossible*. Debut director James Hawes



Anthony Hopkins in *One Life*.

– his previous experience is in TV – weaves a cathartic tale against the backdrop of a haunting score by Volker Bertelmann and a screenplay succinctly co-written by Lucinda

Coxon and Nick Drake.

Juxtaposing scenes of past and present, Hawes captures the convulsive circumstances of the time as Winton becomes frustrated by bureaucratic

delays in procuring visas and foster homes for the children in the UK. They're ferried there on eight trainloads ('Kindertransport'). He guilt-trips himself over the fact that a ninth one doesn't depart.

Hopkins generally excels at playing real people. Here he's in vulpine form, mixing paternalism with poignance as he becomes an unlikely saviour to the beleaguered Czech and Slovak children, pursuing what seems at first to be an impossible dream.

The title of the film comes from a Hebrew proverb: "He who saves one life saves the whole world." Winton saved 669 of them.

The heartache of children waiting for trains, the red tape Winton has to negotiate before

he gets them moving, the manner in which he donates his scrapbook to the BBC for a show called *That's Life*, all this is seamlessly transmitted to us in a film that thankfully avoids being saccharine (though it milks things a bit in the final scenes).

Hopkins slots into the role like a key into a lock. There's already 'whataboutery' regarding the chance of him netting a third Oscar for his performance. If he does, he joins a very exclusive club.

The world needs a Nicholas Winton at the moment. It needs one anywhere children are caught up in the crossfire of warring factions, thereafter being dismissed as 'collateral damage' when they're bombed to smithereens.



# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## The Nativity narratives of Matthew and Luke in the light of recent events

Peter Costello

Every year it has been customary on these books pages to recall aspects of the accounts of the Nativity given in two of the Gospels. Each year, surprisingly enough, there always seems something new to say.

This is as true this year as in all those earlier years; all 2,000 or so of them going back to the 1st Century. For this is the one time of the year perhaps when the Books Pages can focus not on a book, but on the book, that is to say the New Testament.

This year my interest focused on the identity of the Magi. Previously I had always seen these 'wise men' as Chaldean philosophers of some kind. But now I have moved away from the view that rather than being Chaldean *astronomers*, experts in the movements of the stars for proto-scientific reasons, they were actually Jewish *astrologers*, members of the large Jewish community then settled in Mesopotamia.

This would make more of their query to King Herod: "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose in the east and have come to worship him." They were not pagans, but were Jews themselves, seeking out the Messiah.

This serves as reminder that the Jews have always been a dispersed people, long before the diaspora, who reached in their travels nations as far apart as China and West Africa, while retaining their unique identity. They were truly the first citizens of the world.

### Pilgrims

Every year in centuries past Christian pilgrims would visit Bethlehem at the Christmas season as pilgrims. But this year the town was almost a dead place. This naturally gives rise to concerns about what may happen to the town in the coming year.

But whatever comes to pass, things will not be the same as they were for Christians in the region.

In the present conflict I was greatly saddened to see that the



*Sojourn in Egypt* (gouache c. 1889), by JJ Tissot.

only Catholic church in Gaza, which I wrote about recently, had come under attack. A grandmother and a small girl were shot dead by a sniper (supposedly a regular member of the IDF) overlooking the church and its precincts. The Catholic Patriarch of Jerusalem has protested after the fact.

Other chapters in Matthew read differently too this year. The passage which the author of Matthew quotes from the prophet Jeremiah for instance: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her

children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

### Renaissance

In the Renaissance some came to believe that up to 20,000 children had been killed on the orders of Herod. Later sceptical historians settled on much, much lower numbers; indeed I was of the opinion, given the size of the town, the high incidence of perinatal death, and other social facts, that maybe only a dozen or 20 had been killed.

Other historians think the

whole incident an invention. Could a Middle Eastern ruler, they ask, really kill such huge numbers of children?

**“In this time of war the country where the Holy Family found refuge and peace has a great attraction for many”**

It is likely that in the coming year few if any pilgrims will want to visit the Holy Land. Their piety does not call for them to place themselves in danger.

But turning their thoughts to where they might go, many Christians of all kinds are already taking organised pilgrimages to Turkey, the Asia

Minor of Apostolic times. Others favour Greece or the further travels there of St Paul.

But then there is too the call of Rome itself which appeals to many.

### Egypt

But worth thinking about is a pilgrimage to Egypt in the steps of the Holy Family on their flight into safety. The early Christians developed an itinerary of places over the length of the Nile, where Mary and Joseph and the Holy Child rested, lingered a while, or actually lived for a time.

I wrote about this a few years ago, and plan to write about again a little later in the year. Even historians who have doubts about the historicity of the Flight into Egypt accept that these places represent locations where Jews and

early Christians lived.

In this time of war the country where the Holy Family found refuge and peace has a great attraction for many.

The Flight into Egypt was a theme which appealed to many great painters of the past, such as Rembrandt, one of whose images can be seen in our own National Gallery. Tissot's *Sojourn in Egypt* shows Mary with Jesus aged two collecting water for the home from the Nile.

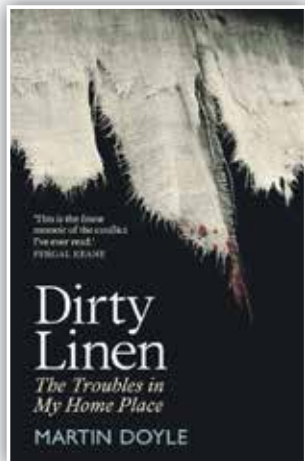
But perhaps things will change, and in the months to come, peace may come again to the Holy Land and there will be no further need for a special Wartime Cabinet to run things, and a new Israeli government will once again welcome Christian pilgrims wholeheartedly to the Holy Land.

**“It is likely that in the coming year few if any pilgrims will want to visit the Holy Land. Their piety does not call for them to place themselves in danger”**



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.

# Terror and atrocities across a generation in the Linen Triangle



**Dirty Linen: The Troubles in my Home Place,**  
Martin Doyle  
(Merrion Press, £24.99).

**Felix M. Larkin**

**M**artin Doyle tells us in the introduction to this book that the Linen Triangle “stretched from Lisburn across the southern shore of Lough Neagh to Dungannon in Co. Tyrone and south to Newry, the heartland of a trade that was both agricultural and industrial and wove its way into the North’s identity”.

It is almost coterminous with the so-called Murder Triangle, the scene of some of the worst atrocities of the Troubles in Northern Ireland over a period of about 30 years. The ‘home place’ in the subtitle of Doyle’s book is the parish of Tullylish, Co. Down, which falls within these triangles.

Doyle’s focus is on lives lost and maimed through paramilitary violence in the few square miles of Tullylish parish, and his purpose is “to make it easier to understand what communities went through” during the Troubles. In other words, the particular will serve to illustrate the generality. He believes that “society would benefit ... from a greater understanding and appreciation of the trauma that two generations endured” in Northern Ireland.

## Trauma

He leaves us in no doubt about the trauma. In chapter after chapter, he disinters the toxic horror of the violence and counter-violence that infected his home

place. He tells the stories of the victims – those who died and those who were maimed – and, perhaps more poignantly, the stories of those left behind to mourn their dead.

It was mostly violence by one community against the other – “bitter orange” against “green bile”, to quote one of Doyle’s many memorable phrases in this book.

Much of the violence he records was by loyalist paramilitaries against the nationalist community – his ‘tribe’ – and he explores the scandal of the involvement of members of the security forces in the loyalist gangs and the fact that a blind eye was turned to this by the authorities both in Belfast and in London despite widespread knowledge of it.

One aspect of the all-pervasive violence not covered by Doyle is that of the paramilitaries on both sides terrorising their own communities in order to enforce their unholy writ – in effect, a subaltern code or “subversive law” (the term used by the cultural historian, Heather Laird, in relation to an earlier period of Irish history, 1879-1920).

## “We had the wisdom not only to remember but to forget”

One of Doyle’s interviewees traces the beginnings of the descent into violence in Tullylish to “the vitriol of Ian Paisley preaching in the [local] Orange hall ... in 1966”. The testimony of the person in question is that “Paisley brought hatred into the community. People were enraged with temper against us [nationalists and Catholics]. A lot of Protestant people held their common sense for a good number of years and still were friendly enough, but then when the IRA murdered cops, that done the harm [sic].”

Doyle himself is not in the business of assigning blame. His view is essentially that of Haines in Joyce’s *Ulysses*: “history is to blame”. In his introduction he refers to the Plantation of Ulster in the early 1600s which cre-

ated “a divide that defines the region to this day”, and also to the massacre of Protestants by Ulster Catholics, under Sir Phelim O’Neill, in 1641.

He adds that “what was believed to have happened [in 1641] became more influential than what actually happened ... Contemporary historians exaggerated atrocities and death tolls for propaganda purposes, to justify violent retribution.”

Regarding the wrongs inflicted on Protestants in 1641, Doyle quotes the father of the poet, Louis MacNiece – a Church of Ireland minister in Co. Antrim – as hoping that “we had the wisdom not only to remember but to forget”.

In a similar vein, the American journalist, David Rieff, has written memorably “in praise of forgetting” – arguing that a better understanding of the past does not necessarily facilitate forgiveness or reconciliation.

He suggests that “the price of remembering, at least in certain political circumstances and at certain social and political conjunctions, might still be too high”.

## Fear

So, a fear I have about this book is that Doyle’s belief in “the power of storytelling and the healing power of nurturing, not neutering, the memories of loved ones we have lost” may be misplaced – at least in the public sphere. Memories can too easily be used to justify violence, both in the past and in the future.

In the conclusion to this book, Doyle pays heartfelt tribute to those who have had the courage to share their stories of pain and sorrow with him – and have thus enabled him to share their stories with us.

He notes that his experience in speaking with them has made him “even more intolerant of the apologists on all sides for the violent actions of their comrades – their moral casuistry, their ideological blinkers, their capacity for accommodating atrocity”.

Not for him the claim that there was no alternative to violence.

# A talented priest devoted to theatre for the people

**J. Anthony Gaughan**

**I**n writing my selection of a ‘Book of the Year’ before Christmastide descended on us all, I ended up writing about what was for me a special book of importance, but was not the one I first intended to celebrate.

But because of that change of plan, always inherent in writing for a weekly paper, I would still like to say a few words here at the opening of a New and hopefully peaceful year in 2024, I would not like to lose the chance to remind readers of what is another very remarkable book indeed, one that that goes to the very heart of Irish tradition and culture as celebrated and enjoyed in rural Kerry and as expressed by the people themselves.

So the most important book I read during the year was Fr Pat Ahern’s *Forging the Dance: Eachtraí mo Shaoil – Exploring the Concept of Folk Theatre and the Birth of Siamsa Tíre* (O’Riain Publishing, €20.00). It is an account of his life both as a priest and as the co-founder and developer of Siamsa Tíre.

Pat’s life-long ministry at St John’s parish in Tralee (1957-present) was interrupted on two occasions. He was seconded to the Catholic Communications Centre in Dublin (1968-73) and served later as a curate in Knocknagoshel on the Kerry-Limerick border (1985-1990).

## Legend

Knocknagoshel, it will be recalled, was a place remembered in modern Irish legend on account of a large banner carried by local nationalists to a meet-



The Siamsa Tíre theatre in Tralee.

ing in Newcastle West in 1891, which was addressed by Parnell himself.

The banner was inscribed in large letters: “Arise Knocknagoshel, and take your place among the nations of the earth!”

Urban sophisticates then and later were inclined to smile at the innocence of the Kerry men; but we should bear in mind those wise words from Patrick Kavanagh about his native place at the time of the Munich Crisis in 1938. Was a small Irish townland really important in the greater scheme of things:

*I inclined  
To lose my faith in Ballyrush  
and Gortin  
Till Homer’s ghost came  
whispering to my mind.  
He said: I made  
the Iliad from such  
A local row. Gods make their  
own importance.*

It is a reminder to us all that what we call ‘universal history’ is always at heart local history.

*Pari passu* with his priestly ministry at St John’s, Pat pursued his second vocation, promoting Irish song, dance and music and Irish traditional folk culture. While recruiting for his choirs, he was ever on the look-out for talented traditional musicians and dancers.

With 20 or so of these

he formed a permanent group of performers and with them presented concerts and began a series of experiments in the concept of ‘folk theatre’. When they performed on *RTÉ* they were named ‘Siamsóirí na Ríochta’ (The Entertainers of the Kingdom).

## Staple

In time the content of these programmes became the staple element in the folk entertainment developed and fostered by Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland, founded in 1974 and in which Pat served as artistic director until he retired in 1997.

The resurgence of interest in Irish music and dance has been remarkable in recent years. This book clearly records the unique and seminal role Siamsa Tíre and Fr Pat Ahern had in that resurgence of interest: he too made his own importance from local things.

This book is also important for another reason. The most modest of men, Pat’s narrative tends to be all about others never about himself. Thus the contribution of the others who with Pat have given us the national treasure that is Siamsa Tíre is duly acknowledged.



A folk performance of the group.



Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4027 or email [advertising@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:advertising@irishcatholic.ie)



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**FOCUS**  
Ireland

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By choosing to leave a gift in your will to Missio Ireland, you are choosing to share God's love with those who need it most.

To learn more about the Holy Father's official charity for overseas mission, call Fiona on 01 497 2035 or visit [www.missio.ie](http://www.missio.ie)



**Classifieds: 01 687 4028**



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# The Irish Catholic

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# Leisure time

## Crossword

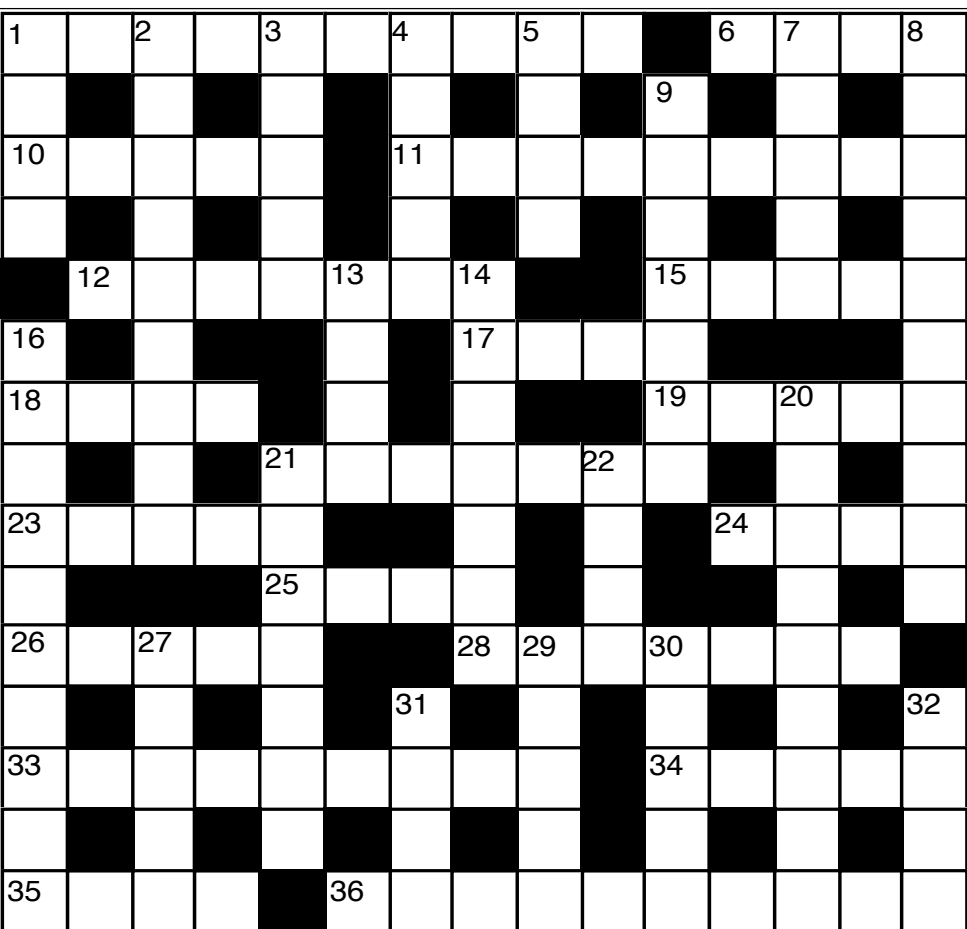
Gordius 645

### Across

- 1 A fresh start, ignoring any earlier mistakes (5,5)  
6 Top cards (4)  
10 At no time (5)  
11 Principal church of a diocese (9)  
12 Material used to surface roads (7)  
15 Terminated (5)  
17 Popular flower (4)  
18 Merit (4)  
19 Lid (5)  
21 Egocentric, greedy (7)  
23 Contribution to a meeting or discussion (5)  
24 Leaping insect (4)  
25 Fury, tantrum (4)  
26 Dodge (5)  
28 Asleep, inactive (7)  
33 Vegetable that may be of the Globe or Jerusalem variety (9)  
34 Molars, for example (5)  
35 Engrave (4)  
36 A burst of birdsong at daybreak (4,6)

### Down

- 1 Biscuit that is an ice-cream container (4)  
2 Listen covertly (9)  
3 Direction at the top of a compass rose (5)  
4 In the neighbourhood (5)



- 5 On-course betting service (4)  
7 Healed (5)  
8 You might pour it on a cool summer dish (5,5)  
9 Implore (7)  
13 Part of a church that is often semicircular (4)

- 14 Treated in an off-hand manner, without due respect (7)  
16 Intentional (10)  
20 Willing recruit (9)  
21 To extend, or slang for a jail sentence (7)  
22 Fly majestically (4)  
27 Ancient Central American (5)

- 29 Large sea area (5)  
30 Sporting contest (5)  
31 Francisco, Spanish painter, from that country's Golden Age (4)  
32 Therefore (4)

## SOLUTIONS, JANUARY 4

GORDIUS No. 644

- Across** - 1 Fit 3 Treacherous 8 Yellow 9 Transept 10 Nasal 11 Extol 13 Hands 15 Tangent 16 Goliath 20 Drake 21 Trend 23 Macaw 24 Lamppost 25 Peanut 26 Go to the dogs 27 Ash  
**Down** - 1 Flying start 2 Talisman 3 Troll 4 Antenna 5 Ernie 6 Omerta 7 Sit 12 Light switch 13 Honed 14 Scone 17 Anaconda 18 Fainted 19 Hermit 22 Depot 23 Meets 24 Lag

## Sudoku Corner

515

### Easy

1				4	3	9		6
4	8	3	6		9			
			8	7			4	
		6		1		3		
	9						2	
		1		8		6		
	1			5	6			
			1		8	5	7	2
8		2	4	3				9

### Hard

		3					9		
			6	9				8	
		5		8	2				6
				9		4			5
7	1	4							
							6		7
1	2							9	
			9	2					
		6	1					7	

### Last week's Easy 514

8	7	9	5	3	4	6	1	2
1	3	2	9	6	7	5	4	8
6	5	4	2	1	8	7	3	9
7	8	5	6	9	1	3	2	4
4	6	1	8	2	3	9	7	5
9	2	3	7	4	5	1	8	6
3	1	9	4	8	6	2	5	7
5	4	6	1	7	2	8	9	3
2	7	8	3	5	9	4	6	1

### Last week's Hard 514

1	3	5	7	2	8	6	9	4
6	7	8	9	4	5	3	2	1
4	9	2	6	3	1	7	5	8
9	2	4	8	1	7	5	6	3
3	1	7	4	5	6	2	8	9
5	8	6	2	9	3	1	4	7
2	4	1	3	6	9	8	7	5
7	5	9	1	8	2	4	3	6
8	6	3	5	7	4	9	1	2



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— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

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 Irish Hospice Foundation

[www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie)



Notebook

Fr John Harris OP

# Coping with the silence of God

**The movie, *Silence***, tells the story of how in the 17th Century two Portuguese Jesuit priests travelled to Japan in an attempt to locate their mentor whom it was rumoured had committed apostasy. Their task was to locate him to discover if this was true and if so bring him back into the Church. Fr Sebastian Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) and Fr Francisco Garupe (Adam Driver), embark on a perilous journey to Japan to find their missing mentor (Liam Neeson). While there, the two men minister to the Catholic villagers who worship in secret. If caught by feudal lords or ruling samurai, they will be forced to renounce their faith or face a prolonged and agonising death. I won't tell you the plot of the movie but I find it a very challenging movie since it really brings to the fore how at times God seems to be silent, if not indeed absent altogether.

**Believer**  
Of course this is a real issue for anyone who claims to be a believer. There are times in all our lives when we experience the absence of God. It is easy to believe in God when life is



Adam Driver and Andrew Garfield are two Portuguese Jesuit priests in the 2016 film *Silence*.

going well and God is answering all your prayers. It is delightful when you go into prayer and you feel his presence and the reality of being loved and understood. But for most of us that may not be the everyday reality. Indeed, we see from the story of Mother Teresa, that for most of her later life she felt utterly abandoned by God, receiving no spiritual consolation from prayer.

In recent years we all have been praying for peace, initially in Ukraine and now the Holy Land. Our prayers seem to go unheard and indeed the

possibility of war engulfing the whole world seems more real with each passing day. So how do we face this great challenge to our faith, how can we cope, as believers, with the silence of God?

**Generation**  
Needless to say we are not the first generation to have these questions. Believers over the centuries have battled with these same trials. The great tradition of prayer tells us that at such moments when God seems furthest away from us he is

actually bringing us deeper into his life. Our relationship with God is not about being satisfied all the time. Our Heavenly Father is not some fairy-godmother who sprinkles gold dust. Rather our relationship with God involves us allowing his ways to become our ways. Prayer is not so much asking God into our lives as God inviting us in to his life. That is why it is so important that we read and reread the gospels. We see in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the life that God is inviting us into. As we begin this new year let us be renewed in our daily rosary, meditating daily on Jesus and how his life invites us to live our lives. In this way we too can enter into the silence of God and find the true meaning of life.

**Enjoying the moment**  
Over the Christmas season I was helping out in a parish. When I arrived the parishioners, whom I have gotten to know, asked me when I was leaving, and when I was leaving, they asked me when was I returning. Why can't we just enjoy the moment?

**The importance of situational awareness**  
When visiting a foreign city, I visited its world-famous cathedral. While looking around I noticed a queue which I presumed was for Confession. I decided to join the line. I was somewhat annoyed by the lack of recollection by those in the queue with me. Some were taking photos; others were discussing their various lunch or dinner appointments. The queue moved very slowly and people were getting annoyed. Every time I felt like leaving the line another tourist would point out that this was the way the queue for Confession. So I continued to stay in my place. As I got to the top of the line, I was about fourth or fifth in the line, I noticed when the door opened, a sink. Finally, I asked the two ladies in front of me if this was the line for confession. It was not they told me, rather it was the line for the bathroom. That's 40 minutes of my life I will never get back again.





# YOUR NEW YEAR GIFT COULD SAVE A CHILD'S LIFE

Millions of children throughout the world are suffering from hunger and malnutrition due to conflict, disease, displacement, and other factors. And the situation in Africa is only getting worse. Millions of women and children are struggling with inadequate diets which can lead to stunting and other health problems. Countless children are dying of malnutrition each day.

The Little Way Association is receiving requests from missionary priests and Sisters who urgently need funds to purchase sacks of wheat flour, sorghum, maize and beans for their people and for medical needs of their clinics such as intravenous feeding of children and babies. For a helpless child, prolonged hunger is a devastating, bewildering, intensely painful experience.

**Your New Year gift will assuredly help a missionary to relieve a child's suffering. It could save a life. Whatever you can spare will be sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION and will be gratefully received.**

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

**THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION**  
**Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR**  
**(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466**  
**[www.littlewayassociation.com](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)**

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

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€..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**

€..... **WELLS AND WATER**

€..... **MASSES** (please state no. )

€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

**Name** (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss) (Block letters please)

**Address**

To donate online go to [tinyurl.com/lwadonations](http://tinyurl.com/lwadonations)

**DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.**



*"Insofar as you did this to one of the least of My brethren, you did it to Me".*

**As 2024 begins, please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for children.**

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent without deduction, to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a deprived, abandoned or orphaned child.

**Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.**



**We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and peaceful New Year.**

May St Therese reward you in a special way for the sacrifices you make to support our work, and may she obtain all the blessings and graces you need for 2024.

**Daily Mass for your intentions**

You and your intentions are remembered in a special Mass offered in the Missions for all Little Way benefactors and friends.

It was St Therese's vocation to be **"love in the heart of the Church, and to assist priests, missionaries and the entire Church"**, and this has been the continuing inspiration of The Little Way Association. Ever since St Therese's death on 30th September 1897, countless priests and missionaries have given witness to the extraordinary way in which she has helped them. Let us pray for the fulfilment of her desire that the Gospel message would be spread throughout the world.

IC/01/11