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Pope urges Irish Church to defend 'quality' Catholic schools

Michael Kelly in Rome and Paul Keenan in Dublin

Pope Francis has encouraged the Church in Ireland to maintain and enhance the strong values of Catholic schools, despite a background of negativity from some vested interests.

Speaking to the bishops in a closed-door meeting at the Vatican on Friday, the Pontiff said that to be truly Catholic, schools have to be of the highest quality, not merely intellectually but holistically.

As the Church here marks Catholic Schools Week, a celebration aimed at underling the unique importance of parish-based schools, Archbishop of Dublin Dr Diarmuid Martin revealed that the Pope told the Irish bishops in Rome that "it was important that we maintain the institution of Catholics schools".

Presence

He talked about education and the value of Catholic schools," Dr Martin said. He underlined the fact that the Pope emphasised that "the

real secret in any society, whether it be pluralistic or one that has a broad Catholic presence, was the quality of Catholic schools.

"Not just 'up here,'" the archbishop said referring to academic formation, "but in "the broad quality of education that Catholic schools can provide."

The Pope's intervention comes as it has been revealed that just 1.2% of applicants for admission turned down by Catholic schools in Dublin were on the basis of not being baptised, despite campaigners portraying the issue as a growing problem.

Prompted to undertake the study amid an ongoing debate around the so-called 'baptism barrier' and Minister for Education Richard Bruton's proposed consultation on the issue, the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) sent surveys to 456 schools in the Dublin area receiving 384 responses to its question on admission policy and baptism certificates.

Those responses demonstrated that only 17 schools

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Next time we'll see you in Ireland...



Pope Francis speaking with Archbishop Eamon Martin, Primate of All-Ireland, at the Irish bishops' ad limina visit to Rome this week. Photo: Servizio Fotografico/L'Osservatore Romano

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A Church up for a challenge



Editor's Comment Michael Kelly

Irish bishops have been in Rome meeting with Pope Francis and senior Vatican officials as part of the *ad limina* process. In theory every bishop in the world makes the trip to Rome every five years to report on the situation in their respective dioceses. In reality, however, it's tending to be every 10 years. I was with the bishops after their meeting with the Pope on Friday and to say they had a pep in their step would probably be an understatement.

It was obvious that the bishops had been energised by the two-hour encounter with the Pontiff. Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin recalled how he often understood, in the past, that when a Pope asked the bishops if they were tired, it was time to bring the meeting to an end. On this occasion, Pope Francis asked if the bishops were tired, before quickly adding that he wasn't tired and could continue the meeting.

Vision

Many of the bishops spoke during the meeting with the Pope and thanked him for his leadership and vision around the Church. One of the things that many bishops told me of was their belief that the Pope was genuinely listening to them and that they had experienced the *ad limina* as a period of encounter and dialogue, not just with the Pope but with the various Vatican departments.

One bishop, who has been on several such trips, told me he

genuinely felt that the Vatican offices were keen to listen to the bishops and offer advice where they could. Another bishop remarked to me how he was delighted that the various reports submitted by the dioceses in advance had been read and genuinely engaged with. He confessed to me that this had not been his experience in past such trips.

“There was encouragement to be fearless in the public square”

Some commentators had been anticipating that the *ad limina* would represent a 'slap on the wrist' for the Irish bishops over issues like a lack of priestly vocations, declining Mass attendance and the Church's diminished role in the public sphere. There was no such papal remonstrance, they tell me. But, instead, an encouragement to be fearless in the public square and an acknowledgement of the immense challenges faced by the Church in Ireland. What they experienced, was a Pope who was expressing fatherly concern and encouragement rather than a wagging finger.

The last *ad limina* visit was in 2006 to Pope Benedict XVI. Just 12 of the serving bishops present at Friday's

meeting with Pope Francis attended the meeting with Benedict. The shape and face of the Irish hierarchy is changing rapidly. Soon, seven more dioceses are expected to see new bishops appointed (Clonfert, Cork & Ross, Raphoe, Meath, Galway, Ossory and Clogher). In short, a huge generational shift will have occurred with probably more than half the bishops being under 60 years old and having the opportunity to bring fresh thinking and ideas around evangelisation and the promotion of vocations.

Pope Francis once said that Catholics had to understand the current situation as not so much an era of change, but a change of era. Archbishop Eamon Martin, Primate of All-Ireland, summed up the sense well in Rome when he said the bishops looked to the future with both realism and confidence. "We live in changed times," he said. "There are immense challenges facing the Church in Ireland, but we're up for the challenge."

In facing that challenge, Archbishop Eamon and his fellow bishops can count on the support of tens of thousands of committed laypeople and thousands of religious working quietly and unceasingly in parishes across Ireland.

Pope's call to defend quality Irish schools

» **Continued from Page 1**
refused enrolment on issues relating to baptism certificates, just 4.4% of the total. All of the 17 were oversubscribed by 2.1 applicants per place, the CPSMA further revealed.

Unveiling the findings, the CPSMA general secretary, Seamus Mulconry, said, "That the issue the Minister rightfully seeks to address is more to do

with the lack of school places, than anything to do with an issue surrounding baptism certificates is demonstrated starkly by these figures."

Focus

Mr Mulconry went on to describe the focus on the 'baptism barrier' as "frankly insulting to the principals, staff and volunteer boards of management of Catholic

schools throughout the State. No Catholic school requires a baptism certificate as an absolute condition of enrolment and Catholic schools are inclusive and welcoming environments to children from all faith backgrounds and none."

Pointing to the "acute shortage of school places" in Dublin revealed through the survey, Mulconry added that "the real issue is one of

resources and the need to create school places through the opening of new schools or the expansion of existing ones".

See also: *Women in the Church key issue for discussion, Page 9; 'We mustn't lose sight of the value of religious education', Pages 12 & 13; A very different approach to the ad limina, Page 36.*

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Volunteers urged to work with established homeless charities

Greg Daly

Irish people frustrated by the escalating homelessness crisis have been urged to give vent to their feelings by offering their time volunteering for charities working in the frontline.

The call comes after Irish bishops discussed the ongoing issue of homelessness during their meeting with Pope Francis in Rome at the weekend and told him about what local parishes and communities are doing to alleviate the crisis.

Kerry Anthony, CEO of Depaul, told *The Irish Catholic* that while she was glad the Home Sweet Home occupation of Dublin's Apollo House office block had drawn fresh media attention to the crisis, people who want to help should consider joining charities with proven track records.

Debate

"It's always welcome to have the debate in the media, but organisations like Depaul are working on this day in, day out, and we need volunteers to come and support our work," she said, adding that she would be "really keen that if people wanted to get involved that they get involved with established charities."

Ms Anthony said that the Dublin Homeless Network,

which draws together a range of charities across the city, combine their efforts in a coordinated way to share information and avoid replication of roles, adding: "I do think that a coordinated approach is the best way to go, so I would encourage people to come and talk to organisations like ourselves or others and see how they can get practically involved."

Her comments come at a time when a fresh spike in homelessness is expected, with Focus Ireland's Mike Allen telling *The Irish Catholic* that the numbers entering homelessness tend to be artificially suppressed in December only to rise dramatically in January.

Recently compiled figures show that the number of homeless families in Ireland rose from 400 in January 2015 to over 1200 before the end of last year, with the number of homeless people in the country almost doubling over the same period.

Stressing that "it's not all bad news", Mr Allen said the speed at which homelessness has been increasing has slowed, with charities making real progress in helping families escape homelessness. "This thing could seriously be getting better if we could just help people from losing their homes," he said.

See Pages 15 & 22.



'Dreamgirl' Hudson finds strength in faith

Oscar-winning singer Jennifer Hudson has spoken of the strength she found in faith after the trauma of losing her family to murder.

The star, currently a panellist on television's *The Voice*, became famous after an appearance on the reality show *American Idol* led her to a starring role in the film *Dreamgirls*, for which she received a Best Supporting Actor Oscar in 2007. However, in 2008, Hudson lost her mother, brother and seven-year-old nephew in a murder spree carried out

by a former in-law.

Withdrawing from the world in the aftermath of the tragedy, Hudson has since revealed that her Christian faith helped her to endure and led her back to her singing career.

"There would be no point in faith if it wasn't tested," she said during an interview on US television. She added that through her faith, she has found the ability to forgive her family's killer. "I feel like, for the most part, it's not his fault. It's how he was brought up."

Now a household name once again, Hudson also revealed that she continues to sing in the place where the roots of her singing career began.

"I sing in church every Sunday," she said. "I've been doing this my whole life. I'm still the same girl."

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'Baptism barrier' debate vastly overstated, school survey finds

Paul Keenan

Just 1.2% of applicants for admission turned down by schools in Dublin were on the basis of no baptismal certificate, a new survey by the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA) has shown.

Prompted to undertake the study amid an ongoing debate around the so-called 'baptism barrier' and Minister for Education Richard Bruton's proposed consultation on the issue, the CPSMA sent surveys to 456 schools in the capital, receiving 384 responses to its question on admission policy and baptism certificates.

Responses

Those responses demonstrated that only 17 schools refused enrolment on issues relating to baptism certificates, just 4.4% of the total. All of the 17 were oversubscribed by 2.1 applicants per place, the CPSMA further revealed.

Unveiling the findings, the CPSMA general secretary, Seamus Mulconry said, "That the issue the Minister rightfully

seeks to address is more to do with the lack of school places, than anything to do with an issue surrounding baptism certificates is demonstrated starkly by these figures."

Mulconry went on to describe the focus on the 'baptism barrier' as "frankly insulting to the principals, staff and volunteer boards of management of Catholic schools throughout the State".

"No Catholic school requires a baptism certificate as an absolute condition of enrolment and Catholic schools are inclusive and welcoming environments to children from all faith backgrounds and none."

Pointing to the "acute shortage of school places" in Dublin revealed through the survey, Mulconry added that "the real issue is one of resources and the need to create school places through the opening of new schools or the expansion of existing ones".

i 'We mustn't lose sight of the value of religious education', Pages 12 & 13.

Church will back rural revival efforts, says bishop

Greg Daly

Killaloe's Bishop Fintan Monahan has welcomed an ambitious new plan to revive rural Ireland and said the Church will do its best to be proactive in maintaining rural life.

The bishop's comments come following the announcement of 'Realis-

ing our Rural Potential: Action Plan for Rural Development', a €60 million plan intended to revive Ireland's rural towns and generate 135,000 jobs.

"This action plan is a most welcome announcement for rural areas," Dr Monahan told *The Irish Catholic*, continuing: "Country towns, villages and remote areas have been struggling terribly in

recent years and any grant aid will be a huge boost."

Dr Monahan, who spoke ahead of his September ordination about how boosting life in rural Ireland should be a key task for the Church, later saying the Government should give it more attention, said, "Over the past six months in various Church areas in the diocese of Killaloe

many people have expressed great concern about the struggle for communities to continue to thrive. In the few weeks before Christmas in almost every rural Church area, day centre and home for the elderly this, sadly, was a constant refrain."

Effect

The bishop complimented those tasked with authoring and giving effect to the plan, saying: "Well done to the public representatives who are working in this area to bring about this important initiative which will help overcome rural isolation and hardship," and added, "The Church will continue as far as possible also to be proactive in this area to ensure services are maintained, as far as resources will allow."

However, others have reservations about the plan, with Fianna Fáil's Éamon Ó Cuív TD saying it "lacks substance", while NUI Maynooth's Professor Jim Walsh said it "should be welcomed", but would be "challenging" to implement.

Expressing particular concern about the plan's meaningful targets, he drew attention on RTE's Morning Ireland to its failure to identify key issues. "What is missing from the plan is a prioritisation - of over 270 actions in there, there isn't a shortlist of what are the top 10," he said.

New Opus Dei prelate

Monsignor Fernando Ocariz Braña has been named as the new prelate of Opus Dei. The body's former Auxiliary Vicar thus becomes the third successor to Saint Josemaría, and replaces Msgr Javier Echevarría, who died on December 12.

Msgr Braña was born in Paris in 1944 to a Spanish family in exile. He graduated from the University of Barcelona in 1966 and received a licentiate in Theology from the Pontifical Lateran University in 1969 and a doctorate in Theology from the University of Navarre in 1971, the year he was ordained a priest. As a theology student in the 1960s, he lived in Rome alongside St Josemaría.



Students from the choir of St Mary's College, Derry, singing at an ecumenical service at First Derry Presbyterian Church during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Britain's Parliament chapel an example to Seanad 'prayer space'

Senators calling for a prayer room in a newly-refurbished Seanad could take inspiration from the success of the dedicated chapel for Catholics in Britain's Houses of Parliament, the duty priest there has said. Appointed in 2009 following a request from Catholic MPs to the Diocese of Westminster, Fr Pat Browne - a native of Rathoath in Co. Meath - has since witnessed a surge in faith-based activities.

In addition to ministering to parliamentarians in both Houses, and to staff, Fr Browne told *The Irish Catholic* this week that he sees at least

35 people at weekly Mass in the chapel of St Mary Undercroft, who "welcome the period away from the 'madness' in the oasis afforded by the chapel". St Mary's also regularly hosts weddings and baptisms. Fr Browne added that many Catholics have become members of Bible study groups established in Parliament since his arrival.

The Seanad's committee on procedure and privileges has made a formal submission to the Oireachtas to develop a quiet prayer space in Leinster as the Seanad undergoes its restructuring work.

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Before 6th February

Frances Fitzgerald should heed Shakespeare on sexual consent

Frances Fitzgerald, the Justice Minister, has a huge task before her in bringing legislation before the Oireachtas to define sexual consent.

The intention is excellent, and has been striven for in codes of conduct throughout the centuries, from the Renaissance chivalric efforts to instil 'gentlemanliness', to the Victorians stigmatising a seducer as a 'cad and a bounder'.

The Don Juans who 'took advantage' of women were always deplored – rightly so.

The law is now trying to replace manners and morals of yore by redefining this area in legal terms.

But can the law always define what 'consent' really means in a sexual relationship? Yes, if there is blatant evidence of rape or assault. And intoxication or drug-addled unconsciousness should be no defence against rape or assault. It may not be edifying if a woman is too drunk to know (or remember) what is going on, but sexual intimacy in these circumstances is still a wrongful act.

It's when you get into the more complex and subtle areas that



Mary Kenny



Portia and Bassanio: "Sometimes from her eyes I did receive fair speechless messages."

'consent' is so difficult to define in law. The law depends on evidence of what is said and what is done: the law cannot deal with the secret signals of the heart and the eyes which may be interpreted in any which way.

Shakespeare explains all this, with his customary insight

into human nature and finesse of language in *The Merchant of Venice*, when Bassanio says of Portia: "Sometimes from her eyes I did receive fair speechless messages."

Messages

Popular music is full of allusions to non-verbal messages which imply seduction or desire. The Everly Brothers had a great hit song which begins: "What do you want to make those eyes at me for?/When they don't mean what they say?" The lyrics of this hit could even be interpreted, today, as a threat of rape: the girl to whom the song is addressed is told she is "fooling around" with the boy, that she's "leading him on" and she's going to find that she's "messing with dynamite".

How, exactly, is Minister Fitzgerald going to translate the myriad messages of flirtation, emotional engagement, desire, and even lust, into a fair and satisfactory law? Impossible, I would say.

What's wrong with patriotic purchasing?

When I was growing up, we were constantly enjoined to 'buy Irish', whenever possible. There was an afternoon radio programme of Irish music, where the mantra went: "If you must sing, do sing an Irish song."

It was a matter of minor mortification to some that our wooden coat-hangers bore the shaming words: 'An tSualainn Tir a Dheanta.'

But today, when President Trump urges Americans to "buy American", it's considered xenophobic and narrow-minded nationalism.

Granted 'buy Irish' didn't always work out successfully, because sometimes Irish goods could not compete successfully.



Perhaps the standard wasn't as high, or they didn't have the big bucks to do the advertising and branding.

I still 'buy Irish' whenever I can. There's a fine skincare range of Irish beauty products called Green Angel (based on seaweed products, known to be healing and restorative), but it is more difficult to find, and it's hard to compete with the big international brands like L'Oreal and Revlon.

Sure, trade and commerce are about exchange, and there must be trading between nations. But I don't see anything wrong with Americans being encouraged to buy American any more than we saw anything wrong with 'buy Irish'.

An honour for a native son of Belfast

It's lovely that Belfast is embracing the legacy of C.S. Lewis. C.S. Lewis Square – just off the Newtownards Road – was formally named just before Christmas, complete with sculpture of Lewis himself and the famous wardrobe from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Obviously, movies bring a huge, world-wide audience to a story only previously known to devoted book-readers, and the films of *The Narnia Chronicles* did that for the work of C.S. Lewis. It's a magical world of awe and wonder with a Christian undertone.

Influence

His more polemical books have always had a strong following, and I remember being greatly influenced by *Mere Christianity*, and the very entertaining *Screwtape Letters*, in which a more seasoned devil instructs an apprentice devil on the how to employ wiles and cunning to corrupt mere mortals.



Clive Lewis – known as 'Jack' – was the grandson of a Church of Ireland clergyman. He fell away from his faith as a young man, but later, influenced by the Catholic writer Tolkien, he returned to it. His Christianity was Anglican, but always ecumenical.

As an Oxford don living in England, Lewis sought out

Irish friends, and always felt for his Irish heritage.

His stepson Douglas Gresham attended the opening of C.S. Lewis Square and said that 'Jack' would be delighted to be honoured in his native city.

And what a fine example of ecumenical Christianity C.S. Lewis is on the Newtownards Road.

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What the North's child abuse inquiry reveals



The latest revelations deserve greater attention, writes **David Quinn**

Another report of another child abuse inquiry was published last week. This time, the inquiry, the Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Inquiry, chaired by retired judge Sir Anthony Hart, dealt with abuse in institutions in Northern Ireland.

These institutions were run by the Catholic Church, by the state, and by other voluntary bodies such as Barnardo's and Protestant organisations. The inquiry covered the period 1922



(when partition occurred) until 1995.

It looked into the case of the notorious Fr Brendan Smyth, one of the worst

abusers on this island, Kincora Boys' Home, which was run by the state, the failure of state authorities to properly regulate or fund the

various homes, as well as their failure to properly investigate abuse allegations. It also looked into a scheme, called the 'Child Migrant Scheme', that sent at least 138 children under the age of 14 to live and work in Australia. It is a catalogue of shame.

A total of 65 institutions had allegations made against them, but in the end the inquiry settled on 22 institutions, which were the ones against which most allegations were made.

Residents

It invited former residents to come forward and tell their stories to the inquiry, just as similar inquiries in the Republic and elsewhere did, and 526 individuals applied to the inquiry with 493 actually engaging with the inquiry. The remaining applicants decided not to engage with it in the end.

Children's homes run by the Sisters of Nazareth in Belfast and Derry stand out because the most allegations were made against these. Of the 493 applicants who engaged with the inquiry, 189 had been in those homes and they spoke of emotional, physical, and sometimes sexual abuse. The sexual abuse was sometimes perpetrated by boys on other boys, sometimes by adult lay people, and sometimes by clergy.

Why do the Sisters of Nazareth stand out? There appear to be several reasons. The big one is that most children in non-state institutions were in institutions run by the Sisters of Nazareth. Indeed,

almost all of the non-state institutions (the so-called 'voluntary' homes) were run by the Catholic Church. Barnardo's ran only two small ones, for example. A Protestant organisation called Belfast Central Mission ran one small one.

Another reason is that children in the voluntary homes ('voluntary' in the sense that they were run by volunteers such as the sisters) were actually resident in those homes. The majority of children in the care of the state were 'boarded out' in foster homes. It is also the case that for the first three decades covered by the inquiry, most children were in non-state-run homes.

Taking 1955 as a representative year from those first few decades, 778 children were in voluntary homes, and of these two-thirds were in homes run by the Sisters of Nazareth, totalling 519. Only 73 children were in the two homes run by Barnardo's and 27 were in the home run by the Belfast Central Mission.

“What happened to children who arguably should have been in care, but were not?”

In 1947, two-thirds of the 1,501 children in care were in homes run by the voluntary sector, a proportion that steadily diminished with the passage of time. Interestingly, Northern Ireland in 1960 had far fewer children per head of population in care than either England or Scotland. The question arises; what happened to children who arguably should have been in care, but were not?

The contrast with the system in the South is striking. To begin with, there were far more children's institutions (industrial schools etc.) in the South than in the North, even taking into account the different population sizes. The Republic of Ireland during the first decades after Independence ran an institutional system it had inherited from before Independence and kept it going far longer than it should have. The Republic seems to have been peculiarly fond of institutionalising both children and adults.

The institutional system

in the South was also overwhelmingly run by the Catholic Church, whereas in the North the state was a much bigger player. In the North, as we have seen, there was also much less of an inclination to institutionalise children even compared with Scotland or England, never mind the South. It would be good to know the reasons for this, and the consequences. (The total report of the Inquiry runs to over 2,000 pages, so it is not easily absorbed, to put it mildly.)

Foster care

In the North, the state was strongly in favour of placing children in care into foster care, rather than to keep them in institutions. This was probably partly a resources issue. Foster care is expensive and became more prevalent in the South (today a big majority of children in care are in foster care) partly as a result of resources becoming more available.

While children can be abused in foster care, it seems to be far less likely than in institutional settings, Church or state.

Can we properly compare the safety of children in Catholic institutions with those in other institutions? It seems difficult to do so because so many more were in Catholic institutions than in other institutional settings.

As mentioned, few children in institutions run by non-state organisations were in institutions run by either Protestant organisations, or the likes of Barnardo's. Abuse, including sexual abuse, occurred in these places too, but was less common because fewer children were in them.

Within the state sector Kincora Boys' Home was a terrible place. Three child sex abusers worked there.

Mr Hart has made a number of recommendations, including that a memorial be established, an apology be made and compensation be paid out.

It is very unfortunate that the release of this important report was overshadowed by the collapse of the Stormont government, Theresa May's Brexit speech, and the Inauguration of Donald Trump. It deserves some more attention that it has so far received. The next Stormont government must make sure to give it the attention it merits.

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- *Fionnuala Flanagan*

"My Blood was boiling watching David Quinn"
- *Ray O'Connell*

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Historic pilgrimage from Knock to New York

Knock Shrine to pay homage to last surviving Witness with special Requiem Mass in New York

It is not every day that one can embark on a direct flight from Knock to New York, however on Monday 8th May 2017, for the first time in history, Knock Shrine will lead a pilgrimage from Ireland West Airport Knock direct to JFK International.

This will be a special and historically significant 7-day trip to have the remains of the youngest Knock Apparition witness, John Curry re-interred at Old St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York on Saturday 13th May where a special Requiem Mass will be celebrated by His Eminence Cardinal Dolan. It is a great honour bestowed by the Archbishop of New York for Knock Shrine and for John Curry's family to have his remains transferred to the historic centre of the Irish.

John Curry was a native of Knock, who was just five years old when he, along with fourteen others witnessed the miraculous phenomenon at the gable wall of Knock Parish Church on August 21, 1879.

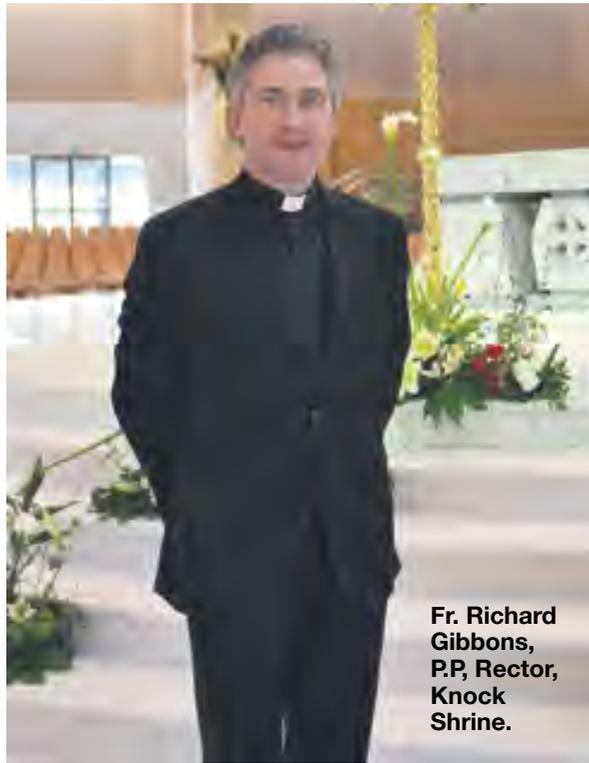
He lived out his final year with the Little Sisters of the Poor, and is currently buried at Pine Lawn Cemetery, Long Island.

Renewal of Knock Shrine – International Pilgrimage

This pilgrimage is a significant development, not only for the Shrine in recognising John Curry, but also in endeavouring to build long-term relationships with the Church and diaspora in the States.

It is also an enormous boost to Ireland West Airport having successfully welcomed pilgrimages with Aer Lingus, from New York in 2015 and Boston in 2016. This pilgrimage further highlights the possibilities of pilgrimage growth for Ireland's National Marian Shrine.

When speaking about the pilgrimage, Fr Richard Gibbons said: "It is a hugely significant step for the Shrine, the people of Knock and the Airport. We will have the honour of celebrating the Requiem Mass with Cardinal Dolan. I like to think of the re-interment as bringing us, the people of Knock, bringing



Fr. Richard Gibbons, P.P., Rector, Knock Shrine.

John Curry home.

"Rather than having the ability to bring him back home to Knock, he will be brought to Old St Patrick's Cathedral, which will give him the recognition he deserves as a witness to the Apparition and as someone who is so central to the rich history of the Shrine.

"Those coming on the pilgrimage will have the opportunity to be a part of something very special, as this is a once in a lifetime event, flying out from Ireland West Airport to New York, taking in the various sights and places of significance and taking part in the Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral.

"We expect it will attract a great deal of interest, not just here in Knock where there is great excitement, but also in other parishes across the country and for people that might like to consider sharing

this experience with us."

The pilgrimage to New York is just one aspect of the transformative development and renewal of Knock Shrine under the ambitious 'Witness to Hope' plan, which has incorporated the refurbishment of the iconic Basilica at Knock, a brand new offering of faith events, including lively day retreats, workshops, concerts and special ceremonies, and a number of high-profile guest speakers throughout the year.

This is all a part of a vision for Knock and the desire to offer pilgrims and parishioners something new, interactive and engaging.

At the centre of the great plan is the pilgrim, and how best to meet their needs, both practically and spiritually.

Fr Richard continued: "It's certainly been a challenge for me, but one that I welcomed because I have such a strong

sense that Knock is a very special and unique place. Aside from tending to the needs of our pilgrims and parishioners, I feel that an important aspect of my role is to go out into the world and bring the message of Knock abroad and invite to people to experience this wonderful place."

Knock Shrine began to forge new connections in 2015 when the first organised pilgrimage from New York was welcomed into Knock Airport.

The group of 170 were accompanied by His Eminence Cardinal Dolan and took part celebrations to mark the 130 year anniversary of the Apparition at Knock.

This was followed last year by the visit of Cardinal Sean O'Malley and a group from the Archdiocese of Boston. The visits were key in connecting with the Irish Diaspora abroad the hope of inspiring many others to make the journey home to experience a pilgrimage at Knock.

New York Connections to Knock's Youngest Witness

Anyone who is familiar with the story of Knock will know that there were fifteen official witnesses to the Knock Apparition, all of whom were ordinary people from the village and local area. Most of the witnesses lived out the remainder of their lives in Knock and ten of them are buried in the old cemetery there.

As a witness, John Curry is especially interesting, as he was the youngest of the group, aged just five years when the Apparition occurred in 1879. His testimony was given during the Commission of Enquiry which was held

in October that year. Due to his height, it was stated that during the Apparition he was held on the shoulders of his cousin, Patrick Hill so that he could see the figures.

He described, in an innocent and child-like manner, the "bright lights", and the beautiful images of the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph. One can imagine the impact that an event such as this would have on a young child.

Later, as a young man he, like many others at the time immigrated to America in search of work. He worked for many years as a labourer and later as an attendant in the City Hospital on Welfare Island, New York.

In later life, when his health began to fade, he went to live with the Little Sisters of the Poor on Long Island. He was described as a quiet, unassuming man who served Mass every day for the Sisters. It was not until shortly before the 2nd commission of enquiry in 1936 that it became known to them that he was one of the witnesses to the Apparition at Knock.

In a letter to Fr. Dan Corcoran, Curate of Knock Parish in 1936, he wrote 'The night of August 21, 1879, I remember it as well as I do last night' and goes on to describe in detail the Apparition as he witnessed it.

At the second Commission of Enquiry, John Curry was interviewed by a special tribunal which was established in New York to which he was asked to give evidence.

During the lengthy interview he described seeing Our Lady, St Joseph and St John the Evangelist along

with a Lamb and Cross on an altar with Angels:

"It appeared to me that they [figures] were alive, but they didn't speak. One of the women there, Bridget Trench kissed the Blessed Virgin's feet and tried to put her arms around the feet but there was nothing there but the picture. I saw her do that. The figures were life-size and I will remember them till I go to my grave."

He was remembered fondly by those at the home as a man of strong faith, serving Mass every day without fail until shortly before his death.

When asked in later years about the Apparition he would tell his story and his memories of growing up in Knock and of serving Mass for Archdeacon Cavanagh whom he remembered well.

He told the Sisters that the Blessed Mother never refused him anything that he asked for.

His words may well be remembered on May 13 at Old St Patrick's, a perfectly providential location as the historic centre of the Irish where he will be laid to rest, followed by a special Mass of Thanks also celebrated by Cardinal Donal the following day on Sunday May 14 at 10.15am in New St Patrick's Cathedral prior to departure later in the afternoon.

Those interested in taking part in the 7-day pilgrimage to New York can find out more by contacting the tour operators, Joe Walsh Tours. T: (01) 241 0800 E: bronwyn.clinton@joewalshstours.ie W: www.joewalshstours.ie



John Curry (centre) with Patrick Hill, another of the Knock visionaries and one of their friends in New York.

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Gunman turned statesman

For some, he has blood on his hands. But any objective judgement of Martin McGuinness reveals a remarkable man, writes **Martin O'Brien**



Martin McGuinness, genial and ruthless guerrilla leader turned statesman, now fighting serious illness, has been one of the most significant figures in the history of these islands over the past five decades.

From angry stone thrower during the Battle of the Bogside in 1969, through to IRA leader, visionary peacemaker, joint chief minister of Northern Ireland, McGuinness has played such a stellar role that his exit from the political stage will take some getting used to.

More seriously, his enforced departure leaves a serious gap that cannot be filled given his unprecedented experience, stature and rare qualities that are acknowledged across the political divide North and South.

Those qualities included having great charm – that can be a great political weapon too – and a disarming presence. I was once present at the wake of a relative of one of his political opponents and he appeared to light up the room.

McGuinness pursued peace and reconciliation with the same determination and ruthlessness that he deployed in maintaining what he once called “the cutting edge of the IRA”.

It has been said many times since his resignation as deputy First Minister that his

journey from holding sway in the Provisional IRA Army Council to becoming joint leader of a Northern Ireland government within the UK and toasting Britain's Queen Elizabeth II at a state banquet for President Higgins in Windsor Castle has been a remarkable one but it bears repeating.

McGuinness's journey, which included forging not just a good working relationship but a warm personal friendship with the Rev. Ian Paisley, Northern Ireland's most unlikely power-sharing First Minister in 2007-8, has been praised in many quarters in recent days, not least by Baroness Eileen Paisley, Ian Paisley's widow and by her son, Ian Paisley Jnr, the DUP MP who publicly thanked him for his contribution to peace and for his role in transforming Northern Ireland, in a remarkable TV interview on the BBC's *The View*.

He also wrote in *The Sunday Business Post*: “The measure of any person is not how they start a journey, but how they finish. Martin McGuinness has finished very differently from where he started out.”

Sentiments

Those sentiments are unlikely to be echoed by some of the loved ones of the IRA's victims – and others – who believe McGuinness has blood on his hands, including relatives of



Martin McGuinness beside a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II by artist Colin Davidson. Photo: Jeff Spicer/WPA

slain members of the Republic's security forces who repeatedly raised his past during his bid for the Irish presidency in 2011.

However, any examination of McGuinness's career will reveal an exceptional figure who in terms of ability, courage, resolve, creativity and attractive personal qualities stands head and shoulders above most of the political class in these islands.

“A Royal Marine major who had fought him describe him as ‘excellent officer material’”

His ability was first recognised by the Provisional IRA when as barely a 22-year-old he was chosen to join a delegation that secretly met William Whitelaw, the first British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the home of a NIO Minister Paul Channon in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea in 1972.

The delegation which included a 25-year-old Gerry Adams was led by Seán Mac Stíofáin, the Provo Chief of Staff who demanded that the people of Ireland as a unit should decide the future of Ireland as a whole; the withdrawal of all British forces by January 1975; the end of internment and a general amnesty for all ‘political prisoners’ and those on the run.

Their demands were flatly rejected and the ‘bi-lateral truce’ which had made the meeting possible quickly broke down.

McGuinness returned to the Bogside to lead a bombing campaign that destroyed

much of Derry city centre while ensuring that not a single civilian was killed.

Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie in their 1987 book *The Provisional IRA* described McGuinness as “a natural leader...handsome and brave, and willing to take as many risks as the most active of his men”.

They quoted a Royal Marine major who had fought him describe him as “excellent officer material”.

Few believe his claim that he left the IRA for good in 1974. As a republican hard man with impeccable credentials in the eyes of IRA members on the ground, he played an important role in persuading the militants of the merits of the ‘Armalite and ballot box strategy’ which emerged post the hunger strikes in the early 1980s.

At the 1986 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis he was crucial in ensuring the success of the new Northern leadership's radical move to take seats if elected to the Dáil by delivering a powerful speech in which he said that the policy shift would not undermine “armed struggle against British rule in the six counties”.

Ceasefires

Above all McGuinness, as chief negotiator of Sinn Féin and later deputy First Minister, played an indispensable role in securing the IRA ceasefires that paved the way for the Good Friday Agreement without precipitating a calamitous split in the Republican movement that could have undone everything, and he subsequently strove tirelessly to make the power-sharing government

work until he felt he had no alternative to pulling the plug on it.

His bold gestures in reconciliation included meeting Queen Elizabeth on several occasions and visiting the Somme and Flanders Fields.

However, he and Sinn Féin misjudged the mood in the Republic by boycotting the Queen's historic State visit to Ireland in 2011.

McGuinness revealed last week that Arlene Foster turned down his suggestion that they would jointly attend both a Northern Ireland and a Republic of Ireland game at the Euros last summer. He ended up cheering for both Irish teams while the First Minister went on her own to a NI match.

“McGuinness's role...will be recognised as long as the history of this part of the world is written”

He has also developed friendships across the community divide, most conspicuously a deep friendship with Derry Presbyterian minister, Rev. David Latimer, a great admirer.

I recall Bishop Edward Daly telling me over 30 years ago of his respect and regard for McGuinness the person while utterly opposing the IRA campaign.

It appears that a big part of why he came to believe that “my war is over” was not out of any moral qualms but because it became obvious to him and to his partner Gerry Adams – who was being

worked on by John Hume – that the British and the IRA had reached a stalemate and that the IRA campaign was going nowhere and pointlessly increasing the death toll.

McGuinness, whose parents were deeply religious and attended daily Mass, has described himself as “a practising Catholic” while adding: “that is just my opinion, others may disagree”. He later claimed that his support for same-sex marriage and abortion in certain circumstances was compatible with his Catholicism when Archbishop Eamon Martin pointed out that any Catholic politician who supported abortion would not be “in communion with the Church”.

What is not in dispute is that his relationship with Ian Paisley was strengthened by their common Christianity (how Paisley mellowed!) and Ian Paisley Junior said last week that his father and McGuinness prayed regularly together and that his father prayed for McGuinness at home.

McGuinness's role in taking enormous risks, including risking his life, in the cause of ending the bloodletting that the IRA and the others engaged in, and then working for the success of politics and for healing and reconciliation will be recognised as long as the history of this part of the world is written.

One can only join the countless people of all persuasions who are wishing Martin McGuinness a speedy recovery to good health.

i Martin O'Brien is Northern Correspondent for The Irish Catholic.

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Greater role for women amongst topics discussed at upbeat meeting with Pope

Irish bishops felt encouraged to face challenges by their Roman encounter, writes **Michael Kelly**

It's easy to dismiss the traditional *ad limina* visits that bishops make to Rome as out-dated. In an age of email and instant messaging, it hardly seems necessary for bishops from all over the world to travel to Rome every five years to furnish a report on their dioceses. But, as well as ignoring the spiritual significance of the bishops' January 15-25 pilgrimage to Rome, face-to-face meeting allow for a greater dialogue.

The bishops have spent most of their time in Rome visiting the various dicasteries of the Roman Curia and meeting with officials about topics as diverse as the place of women in the Church, the right to life, vocations and immigration.

Undoubtedly, the highlight was Friday morning's two-hour meeting with Pope Francis. Archbishop Eamon Martin summed up the sentiment when he told the Pope: "It is very special for us to have this opportunity to meet and have a discussion with you."

"Holy Father, we bring you warm greetings of affection from the Catholic people of Ireland and thank you for the powerful witness you are giving to the world – and especially for your emphasis on mercy for those who are on the peripheries of Church and society," the Primate of All-Ireland said.

Informal nature

At a press conference afterwards, the bishops made it clear that they appreciated the informal nature of the gathering. Archbishop Eamon described the meeting as "fascinating" and described it as a "conversation" with the Pope.

"What we have found since we've come to Rome, is a very open attitude," Archbishop Eamon said. He described the various Vatican offices as being in "listening mode", an atmosphere, he said, that continued with the Pope.



Pope Francis greeting the Irish bishops. Photo: Servizio Fotografico/L'Osservatore Romano

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, who was one of the few bishops who had been a previous *ad limina* visitor, described the meeting with the Pope as "quite extraordinary" in that the Pope presented no agenda. "He was challenging us, asking us 'what is it like to be a bishop today in Ireland?'"

"It was a very practical [meeting]. He told us we shouldn't be ideological, we should meet people where they are," Archbishop Martin said.

“The Pope encouraged the bishops to work hard to help people who feel disheartened”

He said that the Pope encouraged the bishops to take things as they come "rather than trying to plan a big strategy".

Dr Martin said that as a result of the meetings, the bishops "certainly didn't come here with the impres-

sion that you were under investigation or accusation", he said.

The Archbishop of Dublin revealed that the bishops had brought up the issue of the place of women in the Church at almost every meeting at the Vatican, including with Pope Francis. "There was certainly a willingness to listen and a recognition that we are asking valid questions, rather than something we should not talk about," Dr Martin said.

He said Irish bishops are "quite concerned" about the role of women in the Church. "One of the groups that is most alienated in the Catholic Church in Ireland is young women who feel excluded, and therefore don't take part," he said.

Archbishop Eamon said the "big themes" from the bishops' point of view was handing on the faith through the family and "the importance of our engagement with people where they are at in their family situations and encouraging them to play their part in the Church.

"We were very conscious that Ireland is in a time of transition in terms of the faith". He said that many of the things the Church in the past took for granted such as large numbers of vocations and high Mass attendance were no longer a reality. But, he said this meant that the Church is "more than ever called to bring the message of faith in to the public sphere in a new and inviting way".

“Many of the things the Church in the past took for granted were no longer a reality”

He said that the Pope encouraged the bishops to work hard to help people who feel disheartened to rediscover their relationship with Christ.

Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare & Leighlin said that one of the things he will take away from the meetings is the fact that "we have to work with people on the margins of

the Church and do our best to bring people with us".

All bishops were conscious

that, with a pep in their step, the real work now begins in trying to translate the Pope's vision to concrete reality.

The Archbishop of Dublin said that the end of the *ad limina* the bishops intend to stay in Rome for two days "ourselves, to try and analyse what emerged in our discussions. What are the things that we have to do much better, what are the things we haven't really been addressing at all."

This is not simply a conversation with the various dicasteries, it's a conversation among ourselves, a conversation which is developing and a conversation we will develop on those final two days going back to Ireland in a stronger position".

Primate pays tribute to Martin McGuinness

● Archbishop Eamon Martin [pictured] has paid tribute to outgoing deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness and confirmed that he has discussed the current political difficulties in the North with Pope Francis and other Vatican officials this in Rome this week.

"We did mention our concerns about the current situation in Northern Ireland with the collapse of the [political] institutions...and the calling of a snap election on March 2.

"We spoke [to the Vatican Secretary for Relations with States] about the importance of everyone in Northern Ireland stepping back from divisive

language that would lead to people putting up barriers rather than building bridges".

He also said that the bishops had updated the Pope about the current difficulties "and asked him to pray with us for bridge building".

On the retirement of Mr McGuinness, Archbishop Eamon said: "He's very much in our prayers, as is his family at this time. I personally acknowledge his friendship to me and his interest in my work, and I hope he will get well soon.

"He has made a major contribution to peace in Northern Ireland," the Primate said.



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Out&About

Catholic Schools Week launched



◀ **KERRY:** Kathleen McAuliffe, Principal Jerry Fitzgerald, Kerry's Bishop Ray Browne and senior students at Faha Primary School launching Catholic Schools Week.

▼ **FRANCE:** Members of the mission team on The Legion of Mary's annual 'St Andrew's Ski Trip', who enjoyed a week of skiing and mission in St Etienne de Tinee in the Southern French Alps. The trip was led by Navan's Fr Kevin Heery and Deacon Declan Lohan from Salthill, Galway.



ANTRIM: At North Belfast's Houben Centre, Peter Osborne, Chair of the Community Relations Council, presents Fr Gary Donegan, who was priest at Ardoyne's Holy Cross Church for over 15 years before recently moving to the Tobar Mhuire in Crossgar, with the Annual Community Relations Exceptional Achievement Award.



WATERFORD: The new diocesan adoration committee for the diocese of Waterford and Lismore, pictured at the committee launch with bishop Phonsie Cullinan.



KILDARE: Some of the Award coordinators representing dioceses throughout Ireland and the UK who attended the Annual meeting of Pope John Paul II Award Coordinators in St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

Edited by Greg Daly
greg@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



ROME: Rome: Bishop Fintan Monahan of Killaloe meets Castlebar's Fr Sean Cunningham and Westport's Fr Patrick Burke in St Peter's Square, during the Irish bishop's *ad limina* visit to Rome.



ROME: Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin with Caroline and Paul Johnstone and Brenda Gogan-Harrington in the Basilica of St John Lateran after Mass celebrated during the Irish bishop's *ad limina* pilgrimage.



KNOCK: Children from Ballyhaunis who will make their Confirmation on February 8 and who had their retreat at Knock Shrine.

CLARE: Members of Killaloe's Diocesan Council. Front (L-R): Blaitnaid Sexton, Yvonne O'Rourke, Catherine Tooher, Bishop Fintan Monahan, Liz O'Dea, Mary Hayes Teresa Browne and Susan King. Rear (L to R): Director of Pastoral Development Fr Ger Nash, Denis Bates, Michael Nevin, Fionnuala Moran, Co-chairperson Leonard Cleary, Co-chairperson Cora Guinnane, Gerry Sheeran, and Fr Tom Ryan.



CLARE: Mary Daly and Nicola Hynes Fitzgerald with Margaret Jordan on her presentation with a Benemerenti medal from the Vatican for her many years of service as sacristan at St Patrick's Church, New Quay.

ARMAGH

Eucharistic Adoration in St Malachy's Church, Armagh daily from 6am to midnight, and all night on Wednesdays.
Adoration chapel, Edwards St, Lurgan, adoration weekdays, 9am-9pm.

CORK

A pro-life Mass is held on the last Friday of every month at the Poor Clares monastery, College Road, Cork at 7.30pm.
Medjugorje prayer meeting in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament every Wednesday at 8pm in Holy Trinity Church, Father Matthew Quay. Prayers for healing first Wednesday of every month.

DERRY

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, in Dungiven parish from 8am to noon, and 3-9pm, Monday to Friday.

DUBLIN

St Gabriel's Church, Dollymount with host the Archdiocese Celebration of the 25th World Day of the Sick at 3pm on February 12, with Archbishop Diarmuid Martin as chief celebrant. All welcome, please contact Anne on info@stgabrielparish.ie or 01-8333062

Divine Mercy Mass 7.30pm every Tuesday in St Saviour's Church, Dominick Street followed by holy hour. Also prayers of Divine Mercy every day at 2.30pm at the shrine with the relic of St Faustina.

Life to the Full (Jn 10:10) book club for young adults meets every Thursday from 7-8.30pm in St Pau I's Church, Arran Quay (Smithfield) to meditate, share and discuss life & faith. Refreshments provided. www.facebook.com/lifetothefullbookclub

Celebrate the feast of St Brigid - 'Muire na nGael' - at 7.30pm on Friday February 2 on 13 Geraldine Street, Dublin 7. Free Admission. Organised by the Legion of Mary.

FERMANAGH

A Mass to St Peregrine for all the sick each Wednesday evening in St Patrick's Church, Derrygonnelly at 7.30pm. All welcome. www.churchservices.tv/derrygonnelly

GALWAY

Monastic experience day with the Poor Clares in Galway City from 10am to 5pm on Saturday, February 4, so young women between the ages of 21 and 40 can learn about the Poor Clare way of life with a view to vocation discernment. Contact: poorclaresgalwayvocations@gmail.com

KILDARE

A centring/contemplative prayer group continues to meet in the Old Baptistry of St Michael's parish church in Athy every Thursday at 8pm. Everyone welcome. For more ring Dolores at 086-3474679.

Suncroft parish church: Eucharistic Adoration each Wed in the sacristy 10am to 6pm.

KILKENNY

Traditional Latin Mass every Sunday at 5pm in St Patrick's Church, College Road, Kilkenny (opposite St Kieran's College).

LIMERICK

Eucharistic Adoration each Friday in Raheen church following 10am Mass until 10pm, Crecora on Thursdays following morning Mass until 12pm and from 6-10pm, and in Mungret Church on Wednesdays, from 10am to 12noon.

LOUTH

Renowned healing priest Don Michele Barone will celebrate mass with Fr Paul Montague in The Church of the Redeemer, Dundalk at 1pm on Saturday, January 28.

Annual candlelight procession in honour of St Brigid will begin from Faughart Hill at 8pm on Wednesday, February 1, preceded in some local churches with a triduum of devotions and prayers, with Mass in the oratory at St Brigid's Shrine, Faughart, on the three days before the procession.

Holy Hour with music and reflections in St. Mary's Church, James Street, Drogheda at 8pm on Wednesday, February 8.

MAYO

A Latin Mass in Extraordinary Form will take place in the Parish Church Knock at 5:30pm on Sunday February 12.

MEATH

Christ the King Prayer Group, Enfield, meeting every Monday evening, 7.30-8.30pm, Enfield Parish Centre. All welcome.

OFFALY

Eucharistic Adoration in the chapel of Tullamore General Hospital 24/7.

ROSCOMMON

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at St Croan's Church, Ballymoe, every Monday 10-11am and Thursday 8-10pm. Also at St Bride's Church, Ballintubber, every Wednesday 7.30-8.30pm.

SLIGO

Latin Mass in Carraroe on the last Sunday of each month at 3pm.

WICKLOW

Eucharistic adoration, St Mary & Peter Church, Arklow, every Tuesday & Friday 2-7pm and Sunday 2-5pm.

Holy Rosary for priests, Aras Lorcain, every Friday at 7.45pm.

St Patrick's Prayer Meeting on Tuesday evenings at 8pm in the Scout Hall, South Quay, Wicklow. All are welcome to get together for prayer, scripture, music and a cuppa.

Holy Hour of Adoration, Prayer and Music continues every Wednesday, 8pm-9pm, in St Patrick's Church, Wicklow Town. All welcome. You can also join us on the live stream: <http://www.churchservices.tv/spatrickchurchwicklow>



As Catholic Schools Week begins, the CPSMA's Seamus Mulconry speaks with **Paul Keenan**

With the closing of the first month of the year, it is all too clear to those across Ireland involved with - and in defending - Catholic education that 2017 is set to be as busy a period as the preceding 12 months.

Barely had the New Year begun than fresh predictions were being aired as to the ending of the core status of Religious Education in schools (based on the much-anticipated report of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment). Just two weeks later the issue of school admissions was back on the public agenda as Minister for Education Richard Bruton offered his four options towards tackling the right of faith schools to prioritise children of their respective faiths during the admissions process, all under the claim of dealing with oversubscription of school places.

Plenty of material here, then, to mull over as *The Irish Catholic* sits down with Seamus Mulconry of the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA).

"I often say that that we are the *Bondi Rescue* (after the popular Australian TV show about the lifeguards on Bondi beach)" he said. "We run a telephone advice line for principals and boards of management to support them on difficult issues and we provide training to hopefully keep them out of difficulties. We also represent Catholic Primary Schools with Government, that makes us a great listening post for anyone who wants to know the issues facing Irish Primary Education." Some quick research reveals that the CPSMA receives 7,500 calls annually (with no downturn outside term times as some might expect). The calls range from issues such as bullying, those around social media, parental complaints.

"Our people could be on the phone for 45 minutes or more dealing with complex issues," Mulconry explains

"Let me be blunt, everyone either wants to get into our schools or to take them over so we (Catholic Primary Schools) must be doing something right." Having come from outside the education

'We must not lose sight of the value of religious education'

sector, Mulconry adds that since assuming his role with the CPSMA in June 2016 he has been really impressed by "the high quality of people involved in education - we have excellent teachers who are committed, dedicated and adaptable." These, he insists, are the real core to an excellent educational system and "a huge asset and advantage to that system. They are the backbone of the primary sector."

Volunteers

He is no less impressed by boards of management: "Volunteers all across the country who offer their time with no return, no reward, for what they do and do well.

"In fact next to the GAA school boards of management are the biggest generators of Social Capital in the country. We also have principals, who do an extraordinary job in the running of a school, handling procurement, finance, and leading a staff of teachers."

None of the roles, he insists, are fully appreciated by the public the media or by Government.

Nor is the role that faith schools have played in integrating newcomers to Ireland. "Talk to migrants, and they will tell you they prefer to come to a faith-based school," he says. "The untold story of immigration to Ireland is the huge contribution Catholic schools

have made to making newcomers and their children feel welcome, and helping them to integrate to the wider society. Catholic schools are open and inclusive".

The normally mild mannered and softly spoken Mulconry reacts with a flash of anger at suggestions that Catholic schools are in the business of indoctrination. "The use of the word indoctrination to describe Catholic education is deeply, deeply insulting to all



Seamus Mulconry.

Catholics, and is a despicable slur on the professionalism and reputation of the thousands of dedicated teachers in our schools. "If it was indoctrination we would be failing miserably in what we are doing," he argues, stating further that "Catholic education is all about the full development of the human person" For him, he adds, a guiding

principal lie in St John Paul II's words - quoting St Irenaeus - that "the glory of God is in a man being fully alive".

"Catholic education is a holistic education for all, addressing the academic, spiritual, personal and social dimensions of pupils."

“Ethics remains a key element of the Catholic sector. ‘What do they think we’re teaching?’ he wonders”

"Religion is a critical part of the curriculum, and I believe the new religion programme 'Grow in Love' will help schools to help parents and parishes pass on the faith to a new generation" Mulconry argues that religion as a subject has huge value. By way of one small example, he offers: "Over Christmas we saw children taking part in Nativity plays. This introduced them to drama. The subject of those plays allows now for discussion of homelessness, and refugees, and all in an age-appropriate way. We mustn't lose sight of the value of religious education."

For all that, Mulconry concedes that many schools no longer devote a full two-and-a-half hours per week to religion, describing

constant highlighting of that as "an exaggeration".

But where religion might not be forced out as a core subject, it must surely see a challenge in the mooted Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics course, with the NCCA yet to release the findings of its consultation process on this. "It seems from leaks regarding this report that again there is virtually no demand for a separate course when schools are already doing what the course proposes," Mulconry says.

And, he points out, in relation to Catholic schools, world religions are already being dealt with in the classroom, and similarly, ethics remains a key element of the Catholic sector. "What do they think we're teaching?" he wonders.

Ethos

When people talk about Catholic education the talk inevitably turns to ethos. "There is a lot of talk of ethos," Mulconry concedes, admitting that "I struggle with the word. It is very easy to recognise Catholic ethos when you encounter it in a school in the respect and inclusivity that is fundamental to the sector - but it is hard to put into a clear language.

"Ethos is the Greek word for character, so it is the character or culture of the school. The Catholic ethos in education has to mean a



Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin visits St James' in Basin Lane. Photo: John McElroy

focus on excellence, and respect for every child as made in the image and likeness of God."

Ensuring that CPSMA supports boards of management in developing the Catholic ethos of schools is a key priority of the board of CPSMA who have set up a working group to look at practical ways of strengthening the Catholic culture of schools.

At last, then, we come to the many points of contention launched against Catholic education over the last number of years, and which may define the coming year. But even here, Mulconry surprises with his insider knowledge of the sector.

"There are critical challenges that become lost in the almost obsessive focus by policy makers and the media on limiting the role of religion in schools," he says at the outset.

"There is a clear lack of resources," he says, pointing to figures that show how schools are expected to get by on 92 cent per pupil per school day or €170 per year. "Many parents pay more for childcare in a month than the

Government pays in a year. Buy every child in the school a happy meal and you've blown the budget for the week.

"The system has been run on the cheap for a long time. If this were the manufacturing sector, it would be classed as 'lean manufacturing, but now it is sliding from lean to anorexic."

The pressure to make ends meet is causing real problems for principals and boards.

"Last November almost every call we got ended with any news of the minor works grant, some schools were just running out of cash."

“What we need is to retain a focus on the core of what pupils need”

He goes on: "Parents are supporting schools through fundraising, not for the niceties for pupils, but for the necessities." Here he adds that "a boosting of capitation back to the original level of €200 per child would ease some of the pressure in this regard".

Beyond hard money considerations, there are also burdens such as admin overload on teachers and principals.

"Admin on teachers has dramatically increased over the last 20 years," he says, "there are also about 136,000 children in classes of 30 or more, if you have child with special needs in that class and one or two disruptive pupils the

time, you are in management mode rather than teaching mode for a lot of the time.

"We need investment in a system that is fraying yet working because of the quality of the people in it," he says. "These are the real challenges to work on."

Foundational level

Tackling these is no optional question for Mulconry. "Primary schooling is the very foundational level for society," he argues. "It is here the child is given their own solid foundation for life, their ethical standards in addition to the core areas of literacy and numeracy."

This brings us to the 'timetabling battlefield' that gains so much reportage over those real and common issues Mulconry has flagged.

"There is much pressure now to add stuff to the curriculum," he says, "when what we need is to retain a focus on the core of what pupils need."

Beyond the blasts offered by those with agendas against Catholic education, another challenge for the sector lies in the stark reality that the level of religious literacy in Ireland has declined across the years and Catholic schools are having to cope with that. Yet, again, Mulconry brings a clear perspective: "If you ask parents, they want a high quality education for their children that includes values."

Continuing on the topic of a

'changed Ireland', he says, "we have no problem with choice, but we want people to also have the choice to select Catholic education. Having said that, I think the level of demand for change is another area that is exaggerated. Let's not force change that is not popularly demanded," he adds, referencing the low level of such in surveys concerning change, such as that conducted as part of the Forum on Pluralism and Patronage in 2012.

"There is a general acceptance of a need for choice in the school's sector," he acknowledges, "and there is no problem with that. And, if it were to become a question of competition, that is not a worry."

“We have hard data that only 1.2% refused applications in Dublin relate to baptism”

Bringing us naturally to the question of divestment. What about that?

"The Church has been criticised for not divesting. But it is extraordinarily difficult to hand over schools where it is hugely unpopular among local communities. And people have made their feelings known on this."

Local schools have the emotional clout of rural post offices by a factor of 10," he says, he also points out "My local school was one of

these surveyed by the Forum, I voted no as did almost all of the other parents, and I would have fought anyone who tried to push it through"

The most immediate challenge however is the announcement by Minister for Education Richard Bruton of moves – and a consultation process – to tackle the so-called 'baptism barrier' – a term Mulconry dislikes and describes as "misleading".

As he reiterated at the time in response to the Minister's words: "Over 95% of Catholic primary schools accept every pupil. Over-subscription mainly arises in areas of Dublin and pockets of the commuter belt surrounding the capital and we have hard data that only 1.2% refused applications in Dublin relate to baptism.

"This policy change won't impact on Catholic Education but it could wipe out Protestant schools.

"It is a classic example of changing something that works for something that sounds good.

Thus, while 2017 promises ever evolving challenges, Mulconry assures that the work of the CPSMA will evolve to meet them.

"Our focus in the CPSMA will be on improving the service and support we provide to Boards of Management and schools and creating a stronger voice for Catholic education because Catholic education is not just worth defending but celebrating."

“Over Christmas we saw children taking part in Nativity plays. This introduced them to drama. The subject of those plays allows now for discussion of homelessness and refugees, and all in an age-appropriate way..”

Teaching the world to sing

Cathy Burke describes a new choral project for Dublin's primary schools



Students from St Mary's National School, Donnybrook.

Catholic Schools Week has long been welcomed in Ireland with many of its regular features, e.g. Grandparents Day, looked forward to eagerly. It is clearly of value to continue to celebrate the core events, but it is also important to give regular consideration to how the message of Catholic Schools Week may be augmented or further extended.

Laudate is a pilot project of the Dublin archdiocese involving over a thousand pupils from primary schools in the singing of congregational hymns culminating in two celebratory festival nights during Catholic Schools Week 2017.

The project came about as a result of a discussion at a meeting of the Dublin Council of CPSMA (Catholic Primary Schools Management Association) in spring 2016, when it was proposed as an idea that could add a different and lasting dimension to the celebration of Catholic Schools Week 2017 in the Dublin Archdiocese.

A sub-committee was set up, in association with the Education Secretariat and the Diocesan Liturgy Office to organise the project and 22 schools were invited to participate, each responding quickly and enthusiastically. No effort was required to 'sell' *Laudate* to schools and no substantial waiting period was requested before a response arrived!

Hymns

A repertoire of congregational hymns was selected for use in the festival events and for inclusion in liturgical and assembly celebrations in the archdiocese's schools and parishes.

The selection consists of a variety of traditional and current popular congregational hymns along with hymns from the Gospel tradition.

The hymns were selected with a view to building a common and lasting repertoire across the generations so all may share a familiar language of song and music when gathered for liturgical celebration.

Teachers from the participating schools were invited to an introductory meeting in September where the repertoire was sung

and discussed, with associated supporting materials being made available. At least two teachers came from each school even though schools had been asked simply to send 'a representative'!

The hymns were sung with gusto and great harmony, and the meeting's discussion about *Laudate* was engaged in with tremendous enthusiasm, prayerfulness and positivity. The attending teachers returned to their schools with CDs, PowerPoint presentations for all the hymns, along with music for teaching and for instrumental accompaniment.

to learn that the more senior members of their local parish congregation know the same hymns as themselves! The first steps of enjoying and using this shared repertoire are already bearing fruit.

All the parishes in the archdiocese have been provided with material regarding *Laudate 2017*, including a list of the hymns for this year's programme. Parishes in which the participating schools are located are encouraged to engage with their parish school in this project by attending the festival celebration, providing

to learn hymns of the praying community as well as those which serve the purpose of Religious Education in school.

School and parish

As well as leading the singing, the pupils will also guide people through the interspersed reflections on both evenings. Members of the school and parish communities, parents, families, parish choirs, parishioners and all who are interested in celebrating Catholic Education in the shared context of school and parish are invited

seek/build an event or opportunity at which the repertoire may be revealed, extended and celebrated locally. There are many ways by which the value of *Laudate* could be extended:

- Shortly after the celebration of the festival evenings during Catholic Schools Week 2017, the parish school could perhaps lead singing of the learned repertoire at one of the Sunday Masses or a weekday morning Mass in the parish.
- The Parish Team may choose to formulate a parish prayer service at which the pupils could lead singing of the *Laudate* repertoire.
- The school and parish community may gather for a shared evening of song, reflection and celebration.
- Pupils from the school may be asked to join the parish choir on a regular basis or for particular events.
- Hymns from *Laudate* may be played on piped music when a choir or cantor is not leading singing.
- The Parish Pastoral Council may provide the pupils who participated in *Laudate* with certificates on behalf of the parish.
- Pupils may be invited to be part of a sub-committee of the Parish Liturgy Group or Parish Pastoral Council so that they may have a voice in choice of music used in the life of the parish.
- *Laudate* hymns could be included in school assemblies, Masses to celebrate school events, sacramental celebrations, funerals and weddings.

It is envisaged that this year's celebration of *Laudate* will be the first of many so both school and parish communities may continue to build their shared repertoire and to build a purpose of celebration together, with teachers playing a key role in helping manage and foster the project.



Students from St Francis of Assisi Primary School, Balmayne, Balgriffin, Co. Dublin.

All were encouraged to teach the repertoire to all pupils and then to select 50-60 pupils to represent their school at one of the festival celebrations.

“The pupils will also guide people through the interspersed reflections on both evenings”

Many schools report that their pupils are enjoying the repertoire and that the hymns are being used in assembly and other liturgical celebration in both school and parish. Practice sessions in schools for *Laudate* have been welcomed by pupils who have said the songs are enjoyable and fit with their experience, with some being declared as 'cool'!

Children are being surprised

opportunity for the local choirs to engage with the school *Laudate* choir and including the hymns from the repertoire in liturgical celebrations through the year.

It is hoped that *Laudate* will bring about the experience of young people arriving at liturgical celebrations and feeling a level of comfort and inclusion in parish community by nature of the fact that they can join in the singing of hymns.

It is beneficial for young people

and encouraged to attend and to sing along with the participating school pupils.

“All the parishes in the archdiocese have been provided with material for *Laudate*”

What happens after the event? Is that the end? Schools and parishes will be encouraged to

***Laudate 2017* will be celebrated at two festival evenings of song and reflection, with 500-600 pupils singing at each of the two venues: Our Lady of Victories Church on Ballymun Road at 7pm on Tuesday January 31, and in St Laurence's Church in Kilmacud at 7pm the following evening, Wednesday, February 1.**

Entry to each event is free and advance reservation is not necessary.



Homeless

– not hopeless

An eight-page special on how some of Ireland's most active charities are tackling a social tragedy



Leading campaigners tell **Greg Daly** about the realities of Ireland's worsening homeless crisis

DePaul CEO Kerry Anthony describes herself as a naturally optimistic person, but faced with the worst homeless crisis that she has seen in 20 years of working with homeless people, she occasionally finds herself asking herself in dismay how we have got to where we are now in Ireland, and what can be done about it.

"I think that's important for us as organisations, to always say: 'What more can we do? How can we play the best part we can play in ending the crisis and helping to alleviate the crisis?'"

"For us as an organisation we talk about wanting to end homelessness and change lives and for me that is the key – homelessness is a horrendous place to find yourself and you want to get people out of homelessness as quickly as possible," she stresses, continuing: "Our job is to help people get out of it and make sure it's only a point in time in their life rather than the defining factor of their life."

There's no exaggeration in Kerry's belief that she's not known a homelessness crisis so stark. Having drawn together data from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Focus Ireland have shown that between July 2014 and November 2016, the total number of people known to be homeless in Ireland rose steadily from just over 3,000 to almost 7,000 (figure 1). Much of this rise was due to the new phenomenon of family homelessness, which over the same period rose from just over 300 to over 1,200 (see figure 2 on Page 22).

Homeless charities simply weren't prepared for this, Kerry says, explaining that an unexpected housing shortage has driven this crisis. "Around about 2010 we had a plan in place called 'The Pathway to Home' that really was about ending the use of emergency accommodation and focusing on housing-led or Housing First approaches to ending the homelessness crisis," she says, continuing, "I think at that point in time you wouldn't have had any argument from the main service providers that that was the way to go, that if we put people into accommodation and provided them with the wraparound support that they would need then they would be able to live in the community again and we would be able to move towards ending long-term homelessness, accepting that short-term homelessness would always be with us."

Plans

However, she says, "all of that was predicated on the availability of housing", and once the housing crash came, homeless charities were unable to deliver on such



plans, while a new influx of people into homelessness began.

"We saw such an increase in the number of families becoming homeless, mainly because austerity brought with it a reduction in people's take-home salaries, but they still were paying very high private rental charges. In addition, people were defaulting on their mortgages, and there weren't measures out in place to keep them in their own homes, maybe through 'mortgage-to-rent' schemes, things like that," she says, observing, "I think probably what happened is that we were behind the curve: we had a plan in place but didn't really recession-proof that plan. I'm not sure how we could have done that differently because it was a huge financial crisis."

Matters don't look set to improve in the immediate future, says Mike Allen, Focus Ireland's director of advocacy. While the month-on-month increase in the number of families entering homelessness seem to have slowed since last summer, numbers are



Figure 1.

Left: Kerry Anthony.

still on the rise overall. Although figures for December and January won't be available until next month, he expects the numbers to show a big spike for this month, as happened in previous Januaries (see figure 3 on Page 22).

“Homelessness is delayed in December, and then it emerges in January”

"Whether it will be as large as in previous years we hope not, but it would be very surprising if it wasn't similar," he says, continuing, "What happens is that homelessness in December is delayed, and then it emerges in January."

"There's a couple of factors. One of them is landlords who are evicting tenants are likely to be reluctant to do that in the run up to Christmas, and will give people the extra month and hang on for that period of time, or if people are made homeless at that period of

time, they go to family rather than to emergency accommodation so they are homeless in December but they don't turn up at homeless services until January."

Families tend to stick together over Christmas, he adds, but overcrowding and other tensions emerge in January, causing people to seek emergency accommodation.

Evictions are playing an important role in this rise, he says, cautioning that the most recent figures have been delayed but that there are suggestions that about a third of families become homeless because their landlord is selling up, with this becoming an increasingly prevalent factor driving homelessness.

"We don't actually know what's behind that," he says, continuing, "The landlord could be selling up because property prices have recovered and it's a commercial move to do so, but anecdotally that's not really what's happening. Anecdotally, what's happening is that the landlord is under

» Continued on Page 22

At a Place Called Riverbank: The Beacon of Ireland's Homeless and Hungry

A hot meal. A helping hand. A fresh start. Stand at the threshold of Merchants Quay Ireland's spotlessly clean Riverbank Centre, and it's incredible to think that in the heart of Dublin nearly one hundred thousand meals will be served right here to people in dire need, this year alone – at absolutely no charge and as a direct result of kind donations from the Irish public.

But for those who are homeless and hungry and struggling with addiction, more than meals are at work here. Discover some surprising ways that generosity and compassion keep this beacon of hope shining for Ireland's most vulnerable...

OPEN ACCESS

Welcoming the homeless and hungry

"Riverbank opens at half seven – earlier than any other service. Those extra minutes are often critical when you've slept on the pavement or in a doorway, especially in winter. But the warm welcome they receive is just as vital. Explains MOI Project Worker Martina Mannix, "Somebody coming in from the streets that has been out all night, it's not easy. People passing by – people passing them by – they mightn't have heard their name in a long time. To give them that cup of tea and meal, to say, 'How are you, Pat? How did you sleep?', it opens a whole new experience for them. Thanks to our supporters we're open right through the day."



"Our homeless men and women are so grateful to come in from the cold. We make sure they get the best of what MOI has to offer."

— Martina Mannix, MOI Project Worker

NIGHT CAFÉ

Near 24-hour access for those in need

And now a new option exists. MOI's Night Café:

- Open 11pm -7:30am at Riverbank homeless centre, 7 days a week
- Giving people entrenched in homelessness near 24-hour access to safe respite, meals, hot showers, crisis medical care, and addiction intervention.



"Riverbank's drop-in medical service is so impactful to them. Often they're denied access elsewhere. As their wounds heal, it gives them the strength to heal other areas of their life. It has a real knock-on effect."

— Enda Spain, MOI Medical Nurse

You, Forever Loved...

By leaving a gift to MOI in your Will, large or small, you can make a tremendous difference to the lives of people who need help right here in Ireland. And for your kindness, we will always remember you.

For details on how you can leave a legacy, please ring Emma Murphy on 01 524 0965 or email emma.murphy@mqi.ie.

NOTE: If you made your Will more than 5 years ago you should know that the threshold of tax-free inheritance for children has been significantly lowered to €225,000 – above which the rate of tax is now 33%. Contact Emma for more (see above) or ask your solicitor.



of Hope That Shines for



“They confide in me, ‘I didn’t sleep at all. I was just lying on my bit of cardboard looking at the stars and thinking about my children or my mother and father at home.’ You can see that they were crying and they don’t want anybody to know.”

— Mick Latimer, MQI Street Outreach Team

RESPIRE ZONE

Easing the fear of sleep

“On the streets it doesn’t matter how long you’ve been there,” describes Brenda Kane, Programme and Drugs Services Coordinator at MQI’s Riverbank “the risk of your stuff being stolen, of beatings and abuse, of poor weather – you always sleep with one eye open. It’s exhausting. So it was a godsend when supporters helped us to open our Safe Sleeping Room.

“From 9:30am to 12:30pm we roll out mats with pillows and blankets on the floor and clients can up and have a sleep. There are staff with them in the room, so it’s safe and quiet. Right now we can only fit sixteen clients, but with more funds we hope to expand it.”

To come for a staff-led tour of Riverbank and explore all the work that happens here thanks to good people like yourself, see “Come for a Cuppa?” at right. We’d love for you to join us!

MOI MEDICAL UNIT

Healing with humanity

Homelessness and addiction take their toll in other ways. “A lot of our men and women are faced with such complex problems,” says Enda Spain, Nurse at MQI’s Medical Unit. “Many of our men and women have chronic ulcers from walking miles and miles day and night to stay warm. Apart from the intense pain, they can and do smell. They feel embarrassed being around other people. You can imagine how demoralising that is, how difficult it must be to consider any other aspect of your life while that’s going on. But sometimes it’s lots of little answers, like healing a chest infection in the dead of winter, or getting a good meal, or the flu vaccine.”



PLEASE JOIN US:

Come for a Cuppa?

Each month for a few hours when MQI’s Riverbank Centre is quiet and not in active use to clients, we open our door exclusively to you – Irish Catholic readers, new friends and supporters. Join us for free refreshments and private staff-led tours of the good work that happens here...



THURSDAY COFFEE MORNINGS AT RIVERBANK:

- 9th February, 9th March, or 13th April starting at 10:30am
- To book a place for you (and your honoured guests), ring Emma now on 01-5240965

In the quietness we’ll show you the food kitchen where we’ll serve almost 100,000 meals this year, the safe sleeping room, and the dental surgery where we fix the pain and stigma of a neglected mouth. You’ll meet MQI’s nurse, who dresses ulcers on feet that walk miles each day, and more. And you’ll hear the success stories too. Because here, thanks to the kindness of people like yourself, homelessness and addiction don’t have to be a dead end. We hope to see you soon.

Receive Ireland's Beloved Newsletter, FREE:

Four times each year we’ll post you more true stories of hope and change in *Quay Times*, the newsletter of MQI. To request yours FREE ring Emma on 01 524 0965 or write to us at: Merchants Quay Ireland, PO Box 11958, Dublin 8.



Depaul: An innovative app

Across Ireland, we have seen a worrying increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness over the past number of years. In the Republic of Ireland, almost 7,000 people are homeless right now [1]. In Northern Ireland, 18,628 households presented as homeless in 2015 [2]. Following in the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul, Depaul is dedicated to addressing this issue.

Depaul was established in Ireland in 2002, following the deaths of two young homeless people with entrenched addiction issues on the streets of Dublin. Although homeless, due to their addiction issues and complex needs, they were not allowed to access homeless accommodation in the city. At the request of the SVP, Daughters of Charity and Vincentian Fathers, Depaul UK was asked to come to Ireland to set up Depaul as a new charity to specifically support this client group, because no such service existed in Ireland.

Over the last fifteen years, Depaul has innovated and expanded their services to meet the needs of those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. They now have over 20 accommodation and community-based services in Ireland across four main areas: homelessness and families, homelessness and addiction, homelessness and criminal justice, and homelessness prevention.

How Homelessness Impacts Families

Due to the housing crisis, family homelessness has increased dramatically in the Republic of Ireland. In Dublin alone, there are over 1,000 families with 2,100 children who are homeless [1]. This represents a doubling of figures since July 2015. In Northern Ireland, almost 6,000 families presented as homeless last year [2].

Depaul believes that a stable home is the ideal foundation for a child to grow and develop, and works diligently to provide a homely atmosphere in their family accommodation services, which include Rendu Apartments in Dublin and Cloverhill and Mater Dei in Belfast. The organisation's community outreach services support families in their homes to help them maintain their tenancies and prevent homelessness.

Homelessness and Addiction In many cases, homelessness and addiction are closely intertwined, with addiction both a catalyst and by-product of homelessness.

Depaul operates from the belief that everyone, regardless of their issues, deserves shelter and support and so offer a number of specialised services for people suffering from addiction. Stella Maris in Belfast and Sundial House in Dublin are long-term accommodation services for men and women with entrenched alcohol addiction and extended periods of street homelessness.



Depaul's Mater Dei service in Belfast offers 13 self-contained apartments for homeless families.

Left: The playroom in Depaul's Rendu Apartments service in Dublin provides homeless children with a safe space to play.

Through their compassionate, person-centred approach, Depaul works with each person who uses their service on a one-to-one level to help them reduce the harm associated with their addiction and reach their full potential.

Working with Women Leaving the Prison System

Many women leave the criminal justice system in Ireland with no home to go back to. This can lead to rough sleeping and repeat offending. In 2003, Depaul set up Tus Nua

in Dublin to provide temporary accommodation and support for vulnerable women who are homeless leaving prison. The staff in Tus Nua support the residents to reintegrate into their communities, minimise social exclusion and



prevent re-offending. Depaul helps them to address the issues which led to their criminal behaviour, access more permanent housing and build the foundations for a brighter future.

Homelessness Prevention

For every person who is homeless, there are many more who are at risk of homelessness for reasons including social isolation, financial difficulties, mental or physical illness and addiction. Prevention is always better than cure and through Depaul's community-based services, they have helped hundreds of households to maintain their tenancies. The charity's Floating Support Services in Northern Ireland provided 10,505 floating support phone calls and 5,002 visits in 2015

Depaul helps 47 young people to move out of homelessness from its youth



In Peter's Place Depaul provides young people experiencing homelessness with accommodation and support to reach their full potential.

Peter's Place, Depaul's youth service, offers 35 accommodation places to young people experiencing homelessness.

Depaul supported 47 young people to move out of homelessness from Peter's Place in 2016, including 19 people who moved into their own private accommodation through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme. HAP is a form of social housing support for people who have a long-term housing need. Along with all of Depaul's services, Peter's Place has a strong focus on finding long-term suitable accommodation

and on resettlement into communities, and the 47 young people who have moved on in 2016 are in some cases continuing their education and moving into further training and employment.

How Young People May Become Homeless

There were over 700 people aged between 18-24 who were homeless in Ireland in 2016, with 511 of these young people based in Dublin (1). Young people may become homeless for a variety of reasons – such as issues in the home relating to violence or substance abuse, or due to their own addiction

roach to homelessness



Depaul's new emergency accommodation provides shelter and relief

In December, to help ease the homeless crisis, Depaul opened a new 65-bed emergency accommodation service for men and women on Little Britain Street in Dublin. The service provides the first step off the street for individuals and couples at risk of sleeping rough. Warm meals, showers and laundry facilities are provided as well as onsite health support.

Trained volunteers also deliver social and recreational activities such as photography, art and music activities for the men and women using the service.

Walking through the door, the warmth of the communal area and the bright paintings on the wall invite you into a space that provides shelter, security, a sense of community and a respite from Ireland's tough winter conditions. As a Depaul service though, Little Britain Street is much more than just a bed for the night – it also offers supports to take steps away from homelessness.

This is done through its Assertive Engagement approach which builds the capacity of each person, according to their needs, to live independently within the community.

Kerry Anthony, CEO of Depaul said: "Depaul's Assertive Engagement approach helps us to ensure that homelessness is only ever a temporary condition for those experiencing it. We are continually innovating and adapting to the needs of the people who use our services every day, providing support so that each man and woman in our services can



Newstalk's Richard Chambers interviews Depaul CEO Kerry Anthony, left, and a service user of Little Britain Street for *The Pat Kenny Show*.



Depaul's Little Britain Street service offers 65 beds for single men and women and couples who are homeless in Dublin.

move out of homelessness."

Depaul continually works to ensure each person that comes

through their doors has a place to call home and a stake in their community.

alone.

In Dublin, Depaul's Ballymun Case Management Team and Migrant Homeless Action Team work with individuals and families in the community to help them maintain their homes. In the current environment in Ireland, with the housing crisis and spiralling rents, prevention is more important than ever before.

More and more people every day are arriving at the doors of Depaul's services. Thanks to the generous support of its donors and volunteers, Depaul was able to help 4169 people



in 2015, double the number of people the organisation supported in 2014. In 2017, Depaul is committed to continuing its work with those who are most in need.

To find out how to help Depaul end homelessness and change lives by becoming a Depaul donor or volunteer, visit <https://ie.depaulcharity.org/> or call +353 1 453 7111 (Dublin) or +44 28 90 647 755 (Belfast) to find out more.

Notes

[1] Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government – Homelessness Report November 2016.

[2] Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland – Annual Homelessness Statistics 2015-16.

service in 2016

issues or complex needs. A number of young people may become homeless after leaving the care system at 18, and current housing pressures and escalating rents are also contributing factors in young people experiencing homelessness in Ireland.

How Depaul Helps Young People

Depaul believes that every person deserves the chance to reach their full potential. Inspired by their Vincentian ethos, the organisation works on a daily basis to improve

the life chances of young people who are homeless in Ireland, supporting them to live independently within society and to work towards fulfilling their own hopes and wishes for the future.

This support is offered in a number of ways, such as providing secure accommodation and life skills training, and where possible, working to reunite young people with family members and to help them reconnect to friends and support networks. Depaul also works in the community, providing

outreach services to prevent young people from moving into homelessness. With the number of people who are homeless at a crisis level in Ireland, Depaul strongly believes that no one should be in a homeless situation and continue to appreciate support from members of the public in their work.

Notes

[1] Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government – Homelessness Report November 2016.



Depaul believes that people with addiction issues deserve compassion and support to help them address the root causes of addiction. Photo taken in Depaul's Orchid House service, Dublin.

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Combating the crisis in Cork

If you go back five or six years to 2011, we used to have empty beds in emergency accommodation," Dermot Kavanagh says, continuing, "That's no longer the case – that hasn't been the case in a long time. We've been housing more people and accommodating more people year after year because of the growing numbers."

Stressing that Cork Simon has been under increasing pressure for some years, with the number of properties available to rent declining, and where even positive economic news can have negative side-effects as people seek to move into the city even though rental property is in short supply. Maintaining that Cork is dealing with a "significant rental crisis", with rents having increased by over 14% last year, he says this has affected homelessness in two main ways.

Unsustainable rents

"First of all," he says, "it means that some people become homeless because they get unsustainable rent increases they simply can't afford, and on the other hand it means that people who are homeless find it very hard to get accommodation in the private rental sector, which is so important in terms of ending

The national housing and homelessness crises may be focused on Dublin, but the rest of Ireland is hardly immune from the problem, Dermot Kavanagh of Cork Simon Community tells **Greg Daly**



Left: Dermot Kavanagh.



homelessness."

One small mercy, he says, is that family homelessness is not yet the problem in Cork that it is in Dublin. "In Cork the numbers are considerably lower," he says, continuing, "I think over the course of 2016 it's been in and around 30 families homeless at any one time." At the same time, he adds, he would be concerned about the problem growing.

Cork Simon are engaged in tackling homelessness in a variety of ways, he says, ranging from

the community's nightly soup run and emergency shelter, to addiction counselling services and employment and training services, to its own housing and related services.

"We have our own housing and our Housing First team which provides support for people leaving emergency accommodation, we have aftercare housing and a whole aftercare service which is about helping people with alcoholism and other addictions to find a way into treatment and then

out of treatment into step-down accommodation and ultimately independent housing – that's been very successful," he says, adding that the community has high-support houses across the city for people who would no longer be capable of independent living.

Simon's approach

Explaining that Housing First – which requires finding and developing accommodation for homeless people – is key to Simon's approach, Dermot says Simon

prioritises housing for those who have been homeless for the longest periods and have the most complex needs, as this takes most pressure off emergency accommodation.

"We have what are called 'social rentals', where we rent properties directly from landlords and we sublet them to homeless people," he says, continuing, "That's been successful, but the amount of properties available over the last few years has decreased substantially."

While he thinks matters will continue to worsen in the short term, he has hopes in the medium term for such new initiatives, as the 'repair to lease' scheme, "where landlords with vacant properties – and there are 4,500 vacant properties in Cork city can essentially get some financial support to bring the property up to a rentable standard on the basis that they then lease it to the likes of ourselves or local authorities so housing can be used to house people who are homeless or in housing need".

Stressing that what's needed is "housing, housing, and more housing", he says that while the Government's policy on housing and homelessness has huge potential, "The time now is for delivery."

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The Cork Simon pram collecting donations in the 1970's.



A Cork Simon service user taking part in a computer literacy course.

Homeless – not hopeless

» Continued from Page 15

enormous pressure to sell up through what the banks call ‘encouraged sales’ when they’re falling behind in their mortgages, or banks have repossessed the property from the landlord, and therefore the tenant gets evicted.”

Admitting that it’s difficult to gather proper data on this, he says he thinks the Department of Housing should be investing in research into that area.

Despite extensive coverage of the effects of so-called ‘vulture funds’, he notes that the impact of such funds haven’t really been seen by Focus. “It’s not surprising that we wouldn’t be seeing those, because they’re such a tiny portion of the market, though extremely dramatic,” he says. “Over 95% of landlords own one or two properties, so the number of cases where landlords own 20 properties is miniscule. This doesn’t mean that it’s not having an impact on the housing market, but it’s not large enough for us to see it.”

Pressure

The effect of this on people working for Focus has been predictably gruelling, he says, noting that “specifically on the family homelessness side, there’s been enormous pressure on the team, who’ve been running very hard to stand still”.

Pointing out that the homeless executive has increased funding for the charity, enabling it to take on more case managers so more families can be helped, he says, “There are more people doing it, but that service is under a lot more pressure as all the services are. It’s very hard on the staff.”

Many of the staff are young and relatively young, and so are themselves under the kind of rental pressures faced by the



Mike Allen.

people they help, Mike adds, commenting that, “This isn’t a problem affecting the homeless, who are a different group of people over there: this is a problem affecting people right up to the average and even substantially above the average wage, beginning to be very insecure in their housing”

Despite these pressures, he says, Focus are doing well. “We are actually moving more families out of homelessness every month than we were before – we moved far more families in 2016 into secure homes than we did in 2015 – there’s been a real ramping up of that,” he says, describing as “a success” the slowing down of the national rise in homeless families, with “substantial achievements” being made.

Depaul, meanwhile, are no less busy in their efforts to help homeless people in especially challenging situations. “Our background is Vincentian,” says Kerry, “so our commitment is to working with people who need us most and those that others might struggle to work with – we’ve always

been committed to working with people who have very complex needs, with addictions, with chronic mental health issues.”

“The charity has been providing about 480 bed-spaces every night across the island of Ireland”

Explaining that Depaul is currently working in the areas of prevention, vulnerable families, addiction and criminal justice, Kerry says, “We have a range of services to put support into the community, day centre services, long-term accommodation – it’s right across the spectrum what we do.”

Of late, she says, the charity has been providing about 480 bed-spaces every night across the island of Ireland, with about 320 in Dublin alone.

Most recently, she says, they opened a 65-bed emergency hostel on Little Britain Street. “It really is the kind of frontline work we’re doing to try to alleviate the immediate crisis of people

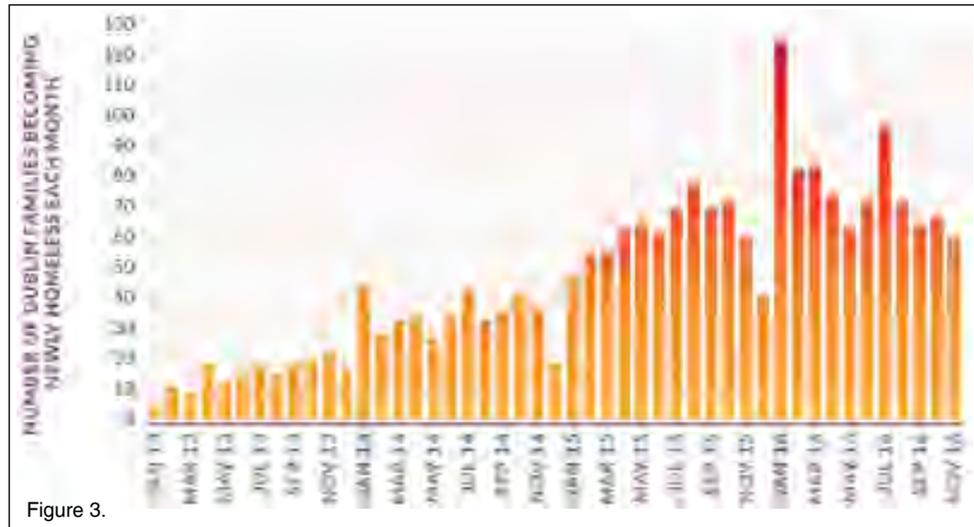


Figure 3.

sleeping on the streets,” she says. “Five years ago I would have been saying very clearly that we need to move away from emergency hostels, we need to move to housing, and now it feels like I’m contradicting myself five years on, but the situation is that when you have a crisis you have to take a pragmatic approach and see what you can deliver in the short term.”

At the same time, she says, such beds should not be retained any longer than necessary. “They should only be there as long as they’re needed and then they should not be there,” she says, explaining that the new hostel provides about a third of the emergency beds announced by the Government before Christmas, and is intended as a stepping stone out of homelessness.

“A night shelter as only a night shelter really doesn’t offer very much at all, it really just offers a bed and then people have to get up and go in the morning,” she says, “so we advocated to have three workers attached to Little Britain Street.”

Support

These support workers help register, assess and support those people who use the hostel, she says, with a view to helping them get six-month beds, and then eventually move into regular accommodation.

“We are, through our six-months beds, moving people into housing,” she says, continuing, “it’s just much, much slower than we would want and much slower than we need in terms of people coming into the system.”

The occupation of Apollo House over Christmas by the newly-established Home Sweet Home group helped draw a fresh spotlight onto the homelessness crisis, but, Kerry says, “What people were calling from within Apollo House, we’ve been calling for year in, year out, advocating to Government around the issues to do with housing.”

Noting that “It’s always welcome to have the

debate in the media, but organisations like Depaul are working on this day in, day out, and we need volunteers to come and support our work,” she points out that the Dublin Homeless Network is composed of an array of such established charities as Depaul, Focus, Simon, Merchant’s Quay Ireland and Crosscare, saying that she would be “really keen that if people wanted to get involved that they did get involved with established organisations”.

Replication

The charities in the Homeless Network work together in a coordinated way so replication of roles is avoided and information is effectively shared in order best to help people experiencing homelessness, she says, “And I do think a coordinated approach is the best way to go, so I would encourage people to come and talk to organisations like ourselves or others and see how they can get practically involved.”

Apollo House reflected a very real sense of frustration about the homelessness crisis, Mike Allen observes, noting that “people working in homeless organisations know that there is a very strong public sense among the majority of Irish people that they don’t want people to be homeless. They don’t want families to be homeless, and they don’t want single people to be homeless, whether on the streets or in miserable accommodation.”

This attitude to homelessness has long been strong in Ireland, he says, and has historically been expressed in generosity to homeless charities.

While he worries that “there is a real sense that people are beginning to feel that very large scale family homelessness, which we didn’t have four years ago, is a natural phenomenon that’s there in the background,” he says that overall a growing sense of frustration with the homeless crisis is clear. A big part of the problem, he says, is that “the Government has

been saying the same things – the same good things – again and again, but it’s not happening”.

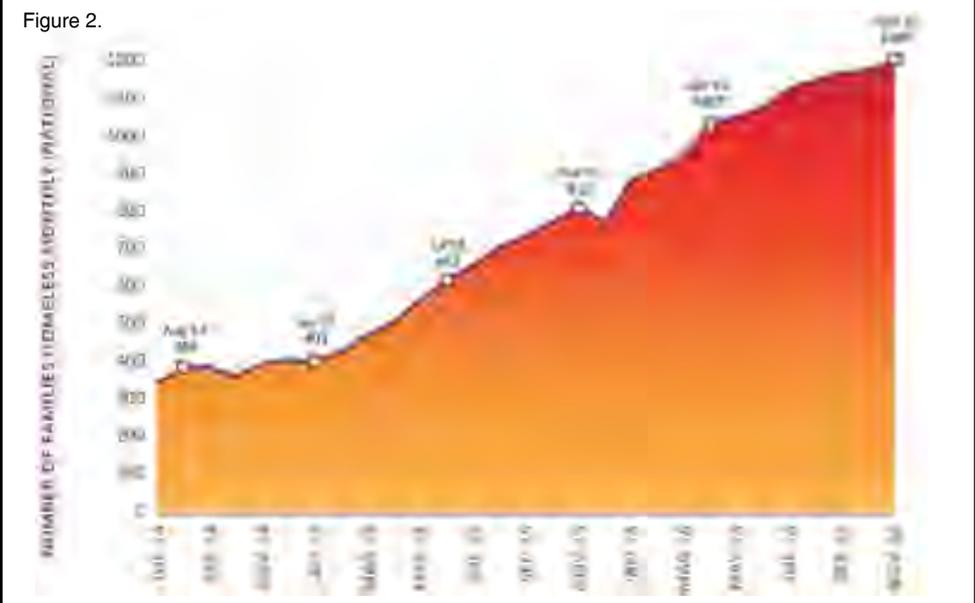
Apollo House, he says, “was an expression of that frustration, but also a lightning rod for it – because somebody was seen to be doing something”. It remains to be seen, he says, whether it should have a sustainable effect with its energies being harnessed to drive genuine progress.

“The real risk of sudden expressions of concern about homelessness is that they turn into more emergency beds, and that isn’t the answer,” he cautions, noting that Dublin had about 1,300 emergency beds when Jonathan Corrie died just metres from Leinster House in December 2014, and that the capital has about 2,000 emergency beds now.

“That isn’t really any better: it’s keeping people off the streets, obviously, but it’s not solving the problem,” he says, continuing, “what people need to do is a political question, so they do need to communicate to their TDs and politicians that they’re looking for nobody to be on the street but they don’t think that’s enough.”

Stressing that “it’s not all bad news” when it comes to homelessness in Ireland, Mike points out that 70 people who averaged 10 years on the streets each were moved into Housing First accommodation earlier this month, and says “This thing could seriously be getting better if we could just prevent people from losing their homes.”

He mentions how an anti-evictions bill Focus had helped draft was voted down by the Government last week, with Fianna Fáil abstaining. “People need to be asking Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael TDs why they’re voting these things down, and if they’re flawed, when are they going to bring in something that isn’t flawed,” he says, adding: “Politicians will respond to that question being asked.”





Letter from Rome

A problem shared...



John L. Allen Jr

As Donald Trump takes office, he enters that vaguely defined set of “major world leaders”. Though we could debate who else belongs, it would include the Prime Minister of Britain, the Chancellor of Germany, the Secretary General of the UN, the President of Russia, and the President of China. Probably, the Prime Minister and President of Israel and Iran belong there too, though it’s less of a slam-dunk.

One other figure, however, is clearly a member of the club, though in a highly unique fashion: The Pope.

A president’s success is, to some extent, dependent upon carving out good working relationships with those other titans of the earth. Trump would seem to face challenges with several, but perhaps no partnership promises to have more of an ‘odd couple’ quality to it than Trump and Pope Francis.

Where Trump is brash and flamboyant, Francis extols humility and simplicity; where Trump is a business tycoon, Francis is legendarily averse to the corrupting influence of money; where Francis is a progressive-minded reformer, Trump ran as a strong conservative; and where Trump projects an ‘America first’ attitude, Francis has a special passion for the peripheries.

In other words, this isn’t quite a match made in Heaven.

Administration

It’s remarkably easy to project where the Trump administration and the Vatican under Pope Francis may clash, from immigration and climate change to crime and punishment and the use of military force. In fact, it often seems the more challenging thing is to identify possible areas of agreement, aside from a cluster of pro-life issues.

However, here’s one point where Trump and Francis may find common ground, if only in the sense of sharing the same headache: Russia.

As is well known, Trump came under fire on the campaign trail for his alleged coziness with Russian President Vladimir Putin, to the extent that many Americans believe Russia actively conspired to tip the election to Trump, and the FBI and five other intelligence and law enforcement agencies



As President Donald Trump takes office, he and Francis share a common concern

are reportedly examining that possibility.

Undeterred, Trump essentially doubled down on his pro-Russia line by nominating as his Secretary of State Exxon executive Rex Tillerson, who takes pride in his “very close relationship” with Putin and his extensive business dealings with Russia.

“Francis also has pleased Moscow by not coming down harder over eastern Ukraine”

As his term begins, Trump faces no greater risk of blowback from his base than over Russia, with important elements of both the Republican leadership and conservative opinion-makers calling for resistance.

A recent Economist/YouGov poll found only 37% of Republicans have a favourable view of Russia, which, admittedly, is a huge jump from 10% in July 2014, but still nowhere close to a majority.

In his own way, Francis has come under fire for the same thing. Though Francis doesn’t have

quite the bromance with Putin that Trump does, he’s earned considerable political capital in the Kremlin on a variety of fronts. For one thing, Putin credited Francis in late 2013 with helping to head off an anti-Assad Western offensive in Syria, and in general the Vatican shares Moscow’s diagnosis that trying to dislodge the Syrian leader would be a mistake.

On the Vatican’s side, that’s partly because most Christian leaders in the region are telling Rome that the alternative to Assad isn’t a vibrant democracy, but chaos that would put even more Christians at risk.

Francis also has pleased Moscow by not coming down harder over eastern Ukraine, at one stage even outraging his own Greek Catholic Church by describing the conflict as “fratricidal”, suggesting it’s largely internal, rather than the result of Russian aggression.

Reconciled

Francis since has reconciled with the Greek Catholics, and he’s taken up a special collection to support relief efforts in Ukraine, but in general he’s avoided rhetoric that

would be taken as provocative.

In terms of why, ecumenism has a great deal to do with it. Francis is serious about the quest for Christian unity, beginning with the Orthodox, and he knows that the Russian Orthodox Church is the 800-pound-gorilla in that world. He pulled off a first-ever encounter in February 2016 with the Patriarch of Moscow at the Havana airport, and doesn’t want to do anything that would roll back the clock.

Given the tight relationship between church and state in Russia, above all that means not being perceived as hostile to Russia’s national interests.

“Many Catholics charge him and the Vatican with excessive ‘ecumenical correctness’”

Like Trump, Francis faces criticism from his base over his Russia policy. Many Catholics charge him and the Vatican with excessive “ecumenical correctness”, insisting that he should be more outspoken on Ukraine, and that he should challenge the Russian

Orthodox to drop their hostility to the Greek Catholics and the Eastern churches generally.

Basically, those Catholics think the Russians always want ecumenical dialogue to be on their terms, and they’d like to see the Pope remind them who the real 800-pound gorilla of Christianity actually is.

Of course, both Trump and Francis have a powerful argument to offer that in a multilateral world, one in which Russia’s economic and military resources make it an important centre of power, engagement beats isolation. In the Middle East, for instance, they may plausibly contend Russia is a necessary partner in the long-term struggle against Islamic extremism.

In any event, the point is that when it comes to Russia, Trump and Francis find themselves in more or less the same boat, albeit for very different reasons. Perhaps if they start to row together, they’ll find other shores to which they can steer as well.

John L. Allen Jr is Editor of Cruxnow.com

World Report

IN BRIEF

German priests call for end to celibacy rule

A group of 11 retired priests in Germany has issued an open letter arguing for the end of compulsory celibacy among the clergy.

The document has been penned as a reflection on the many years of ministry offered by the priests and states in part: "What moves us is the experience of loneliness. As elderly people who are unmarried because our office required this from us, we feel it vividly on some days after 50 years on the job... We agreed to this clerical life because of our jobs, but we didn't choose it."

Interviewed by German broadcaster Deutsche Welle, one of the letter's authors, Fr Franz Decker, said: "We think, every Catholic should be allowed to choose if they would rather be celibate or not, regardless of whether they want to work as priests or not – just like in the Protestant Church or the Orthodox Church, really, every church but the Catholic Church."

EWTN premieres new pro-life show

The global Catholic broadcaster EWTN today launches a new half-hour weekly programme focused on promoting the culture of life.

Timed to coincide with the annual March for Life in Washington DC, the broadcaster's Pro-Life Weekly, after the Thursday inaugural, will air each Friday, Sunday, and Monday

from March 3.

Programme host Catherine Szeltner said of the new show: "We want to help viewers become actively involved in the pro-life movement."

EWTN said Pro-Life Weekly will offer coverage of pro-life groups and guidance for viewers on how better to engage with the life movement.

Pope calls for calm amid angry reactions to Trump presidency

Pope Francis has called for people to "wait and see" what newly-inaugurated US President Donald Trump does in his leadership role and not rush to judgement.

Amid a weekend of protests worldwide and angry denunciations on both sides of the political divide in America, Pope Francis' was a voice of calm as he warned against making a premature judgement on the new American administration.

Speaking to the Spanish newspaper *El Pais*, the Pontiff said "I don't like to get ahead of myself nor judge people prematurely. We will see how he acts, what he does, and then I will have an opinion."

As television screens filled with mass demonstrations in Washington DC, and even outbreaks of violence among some elements, the Pope said, "Being afraid or rejoicing beforehand, because of something that might happen, is, in my view, unwise."

"I think we must wait and see."



A police officer tries to tackle a protester during protests against the inauguration of Donald Trump. Photo: CNS

Earlier, the Pope issued a goodwill message to Mr Trump in time for his January 20 inauguration, assuring the new president of his "prayers that Almighty God will grant you wisdom and strength in the exercise of your high office".

"At a time when our human family is beset by grave humanitarian crises demanding far-sighted and

united political responses," the message continued, "I pray that your decisions will be guided by the rich spiritual and ethical values that have shaped the history of the American people and your nation's commitment to the advancement of human dignity and freedom worldwide. Under your leadership, may America's stature continue to be

measured above all by its concern for the poor, the outcast and those in need who, like Lazarus, stand before our door.

"With these sentiments, I ask the Lord to grant you and your family, and all the beloved American people, his blessings of peace, concord and every material and spiritual prosperity."

Anti-Christian persecution surges in India – annual report

A sharp rise in anti-Christian attacks in India across 2016 has seen that nation ranked 15th worst in an annual list of the worst countries in which to be a Christian. In the newly released 2017 World Watch List from the Open Doors group, India is cited as the location for 10 cases per week of church arson or violence against a Christian cleric to October 31 last year. The report adds that over the last four years, India has

jumped from 31st in the rankings to its present spot.

Such violence against Christians is most often at the hands of Hindu fundamentalists who have become steadily more emboldened since the 2014 election of Prime Minister of Narendra Modi of the Bharatiya Janata Party, a party which has been linked to outbreaks of anti-Christian violence in the past.

The Open Doors report once again lists North Korea as the worst offender in terms of suppression of Christians, the 16th year in a row the country has held its dubious Number 1 ranking.

Meanwhile, with millions having fled Iraq and Syria amid the conflicts in those countries, they were overtaken in 2016 for anti-Christian persecution by Afghanistan, Pakistan Somalia and Sudan.

Venezuela's prelates urge elections amid economic disaster

The Catholic bishops of Venezuela have called on the government of President Nicolas Maduro to set a date for elections as the nation continues to sink into economic disaster.

Following a plenary meeting of the hierarchy, the bishops issued a pastoral exhortation, 'Jesus Christ, the Light and the Way for Venezuela', in which they state that "the country requires a plan for elections, just as was agreed upon during the round-table discussions [with opposition figures]. "A great darkness covers

our country. We are going through dramatic situations: the serious shortage of medicine and food. Never before had we seen our brothers rummaging through garbage in search of food!"

In a plenary meeting reportedly dominated by the unfolding crisis, the bishops discussed numerous aspects to Venezuela's woes, including the failure of the government to comply with agreements reached during Church-mediated talks last October.

Church ready to facilitate El Salvador truce talks

The Church in El Salvador has signalled it is ready to mediate at any dialogue between gangs and the government, following recent reports that the nation's biggest gang, Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS13), is willing to engage in talks towards ending its violent pursuits.

In his usual weekly press conference, Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez of San Salvador addressed the issue of social violence and stated the Church's willingness to play a role in mediating a path to peace if the sides invited representatives to do so.

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The way of the cross



A participant paints a crucifix as part of a drug addiction rehabilitation programme at a Catholic church in Manila, Philippines. The Archdiocese of Manila built the rehabilitation centre for drug dependents amid Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs, in which more than 6,000 people have been killed. Photo: CNS

Maltese prelate laments negative reaction to *Amoris Laetitia* guidelines

Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta has voiced his sadness at negative reaction to the Maltese bishops' new guidelines on the implementation of *Amoris Laetitia*.

Following the January 13 issuing of Criteria for the Application of Chapter VIII of *Amoris Laetitia* which advised priests that divorced-and-remarried Catholics who are "at peace with God...cannot be precluded from participating in the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist" and, further, that "a previous call for remarried Catholics to abstain from sexual activity so as to be allowed receive Communion [could] give rise to greater harm", opposing voices were raised in various online forums against these interpretations of the Pope's already

hotly disputed exhortation.

Among those responding was US-based Canon law expert Edward Peters who described the guidelines as "a disaster", while Phil Lawler, editor of the online Catholic Culture resource site said one inevitable outcome of allowing those who self-identified as being "at peace with God" would be to allow Mafia assassins and paedophiles to present for Communion.

In response, Bishop Scicluna said: "I am saddened by the reaction from certain quarters and invite priests who may have concerns to come forward and discuss them directly with us [the bishops] because we want to be a service to our people."

US abortion rates at 40-year low

Abortions in the United States have fallen to their lowest number since legalisation with the 1973 Roe v Wade ruling.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, a research and policy organisation committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights, 926,200 terminations were recorded in 2014, a decline of 32,500 over the previous year and the lowest in 40 years of collating such figures. In percentage terms, the decline is a 12.5% decrease on 2011's figure of 1.06million abortions.

Papal videos reach millions

The monthly video broadcasts in which Pope Francis explains his specific prayer intentions reached more than 13 million people across 2016, the Vatican has revealed. The 90-second video segments, first launched in 2016, were designed to make it easier for Catholics to join with the many millions already involved with the Pope's Worldwide

Prayer Network, officially known as the Apostleship of Prayer. In each video, the Pontiff speaks in his native Spanish, with subtitles available in English, French, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese and Arabic. Of the more than 13 million views in 2016, 45% were in the original Spanish and 13% were with English subtitles. www.thepopevideo.org

President Duterte reaches out to Rome

President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines has sent a personal letter to Pope Francis assuring the Pontiff that he values his nation's "special relations" with the Holy See.

After a long record of derision for the Catholic Church and its representatives in the Philippines – who have repeatedly tackled the leader on his murderous campaign against suspected drug dealers – Mr Duterte said in his communication: "Your Holiness, with profound respect, I have the honour to extend my own and my people's warmest greetings to Your Holiness. "The Philippines values its special relations with the Holy See and regards with gratitude Your Holiness' gracious stewardship of the Catholic faith...Please accept, Your Holiness, the assurances of my highest esteem and respect."

The letter also refers positively to Pope Francis' 2015 visit to the Philippines, ignoring the fact that during the visit, the president referred to Pope Francis as "s son of a b****h".

President Duterte continues to draw criticism from the Catholic Church locally, not least for his recent order for the widespread distribution of contraceptives in the face of an ongoing AIDS crisis and his plan to re-introduce the death penalty with a promise to execute at least six criminals every day.

Holy Land dig uncovers Old Testament battle site

A team of archaeologists in the Holy Land has uncovered a large perimeter wall dating to the 10th Century BC, which some experts believe is linked to a biblical battle referred to in the Second Book of Samuel.

The team, working in Israel's southern Arava desert – within the ancient borders of the Kingdom of Edom, excavated a wall that, when

fully complete, is estimated to have stood 5 metres high and which ran for many hundreds of metres. Dating of the wall places it in the era of King David.

Of equal significance to researchers, the dig also turned up a multitude of sling stones, offering evidence of a great battle in the area about the wall. This, experts believe, is a

battle referred to in 2 Samuel 8:13, which states: "And David became famous after he returned from striking down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt."

The head of the excavating team, Erez Ben-Yosef of Tel Aviv University said of the site: "We are discovering more and more evidence of a concentrated, hierarchical society that

interacted extensively with its neighbours, which matches up with texts from the Bible and other sources."

Rivals to the Kingdom of Israel, the Edomites were previously defeated in battle by King Saul, and according to historical sources, were later part of the invading forces of Persia's Nebuchadnezzar II, whom they helped in sacking Jerusalem.



Vatican roundup

Vatican demands Order of Malta cooperate with commission

The Vatican has demanded that a defiant Order of Malta cooperate with its inquiry which seeks to investigate the circumstances of the removal of one of the order's most senior members.

Following the sudden departure of Grand Chancellor Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager on December 8 amid allegations he had backed the distribution of condoms in a medical project back by the Order of Malta, Pope Francis instructed that a five-member commission be set up to look into the matter. The order reacted angrily to this, stating in late December that the issue at hand was one of internal governance and not one for religious superiors.

This stance was repeated in a release this month, which went on to described the papal commission as legally "irrelevant" and an attack on the order's sovereignty. The leadership has now insisted it will not cooperate with the commission and instructed members who might engage with it not to contradict the official stance on the dismissal of von Boeselager.

The Vatican responded: "The Holy See counts on the complete cooperation of all in this sensitive stage" and added it "rejects...any attempt to discredit (committee) members".

For his part, von Boeselager has said of the issue that ousted him that, far from condoning any distribution of contraceptives, once this became known to him in relation to three distinct Order of Malta programmes in the developing world, he ordered two to be shut down immediately, holding off on the third as a sudden closure would have caused an unacceptable stop to vital medical services to the poor.



Paul Keenan

The fate of Fr Joaquin Hernandez Sifuentes was all too inevitable. Immediately after the priest went missing from his home in the state of Coahuila on January 3, authorities of his Diocese of Saltillo issued appeals for the security forces to do all in finding him and for his captors to release him unharmed.

But this is Mexico. Thus, the terrible news came on January 13 that among three bodies found in Coahuila the previous day, one was Fr Sifuentes.

And so, Fr Sifuentes became the first Catholic cleric to perish by violence in Mexico in 2017. It is safe to describe him as 'the first' as the Latin American nation will no doubt build on the priestly body-count that made 2016 the worst on record in those terms and saw Mexico become joint first with Brazil for clerical murders – three each last year (and four catechists in the case of Mexico).

Murders

Most commentators look at murders in Mexico from the commencement of then President Felipe



A man throws water on burning tyres during a protest against the rising price of fuel in San Miguel Totolcingo, Mexico. Photo: CNS

Calderón's declaration of the War on Drugs in December 2006, a major inauguration announcement on his part that saw rates of violent crime in the country skyrocket as the cartels struck back at the interference in their trade. From that date to the grim discovery on January 12, no fewer than 32 priests have been kidnapped from their parishes and murdered.

Shocking as the killings are in isolation from the rest, they also serve as a symptom of a graver malaise in Mexico that threatens the stability of the state in 2017.

"We live in a wrecked environment, in a shattered society," Bishop José Raúl Vera López of Saltillo lamented when news of Fr Sifuentes' death filtered out, and in this, the prelate was accurately summing up his country's present state of affairs.

“The country has been struck by outbreaks of violence”

Even leaving aside the issue of drugs for a moment, Mexico today faces a raft of

threats to its wellbeing.

Most recently, the country has been struck by outbreaks of violence amid protests at rising fuel prices – petrol jumped by 20% on January 1 – which are now having a knock-on effect in other areas of Mexican life, from upwardly creeping fares for public transport to food prices.

Having previously sold moves to deregulate the petrol sector as good for consumers, national ire has not unexpectedly turned on President Enrique Peña Nieto. Media observers of the petrol protests reported

that some Mexicans now rate their president as worse for their country than his counterpart, President Donald Trump.

On events north of the border, the incoming Trump administration is also piling on the pressure for Mexicans. Ignoring pre-election bluster of the 'Great Wall', President Trump has already prompted a major rethink by US firms which normally opt for the lower costs of manufacturing their goods in Mexico, the latest being car giant GM Ford which cancelled plans for a Mexican plant in favour of pleasing the US

president with jobs creation in the state of Michigan. Fiat Chrysler has signalled that it may follow suit. The Mexican peso, meanwhile, already under pressure slumped even further before the Trump inauguration when his nominee for Commerce Secretary announced that, once installed, he will renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

“It is the Church which defies the inevitable”

The outcome to all of this is as sadly predictable as the fate of Fr Sifuentes. Facing increased poverty, the loss of hoped-for jobs and spiraling costs, how long before an unknowable number of Mexicans decide that the drugs cartels offer their best prospects for the immediate future?

It is into this breach that Mexico's Catholic Church has always stepped. Through education, provision for the poor, and any number of programmes designed to offer alternatives to young and despairing Mexicans, it is the Church which defies the inevitable. And it is its priests who pay the ultimate price when the Church's message becomes inconvenient to drug dealers and those corrupted by their bribes.

Priests like Fr Sifuentes, murdered for preaching the hope that there can be a better path for Mexico, despite the challenges ahead.

Iraqi Christians daring to hope as Mosul falls

"Confidence and hope" were the feelings reported last week among displaced Iraqi Christians as news emerged that forces combating so-called Islamic State (ISIS) in Mosul have driven the terror group from all parts of the east-side of the city and are set to launch a final push for the remainder.

The reports of elation were offered by Chaldean Fr Paul Thabit Mekko to *AsiaNews* from the camp he oversees in Kurdish-controlled Erbil, providing for some 700 people, mainly from Mosul, who fled the ISIS advance in 2014.

Having reported the military gains to his rudimentary 'congregation', Fr Mekko reported that families now live in fervent hope of being able to return to their city. Indeed, a group from the camp felt confident enough to travel to the liberated zones in order to learn firsthand what has become of their homes.

Small measure

Fr Mekko's dispatch offers a small measure of the desire and willingness of Iraq's Christians to return to those areas of Iraq so violently altered first by war and



Archbishop Yohanna Moshe of Mosul, Iraq, left, and Bishop Oscar Cantu of Las Cruces, New Mexico, pose for a photo in Iraq.

then by the excesses of ISIS.

Their ability to do so is now being argued for by other Church figures.

With Iraq shaking off the grip of ISIS a little more each day (it is reported that all ISIS military commanders in Mosul are now dead), Iraqis of all creeds can entertain the hope that life that is 'everyday' and 'normal' can be regained in the country.

There has been no shortage of supporters in this, not least among those calling for action on behalf of hard-pressed Christians to enable them to endure into the

future; one of the most favoured proposals has been the creation of a 'safe haven' on the Nineveh Plains.

It is something Christians soundly reject, even at this early stage of rebuilding.

According to Bishop Oscar Cantu of Las Cruces, New Mexico, who last week visited displaced Iraqi Christians in both Iraq and Jordan, anything less than reintegration with their Muslim neighbours is unacceptable and counter to the Iraq that was. Speaking to *Catholic News Service* on behalf of Syriac Catholic

Archbishop Yohanna Moshe of Mosul, Bishop Cantu quoted his fellow prelate: "We don't want to live in a ghetto. That is counterproductive. That makes us a target for our enemies. We have to live in a secure but integrated community where Chaldean Catholics, Syriac Catholics, Sunni Muslims, etc., have relationships with each other. We need an integrated reality, rather than a 'Gaza' where there's a wall and someone is guarding people going in and out."

“Anything less than reintegration with their Muslim neighbours is unacceptable and counter to the Iraq that was”

Such words lend weight to those of yet another prelate, Kirkuk's Chaldean Archbishop Yousif Mirkis, who visited France last week to call on Western countries to re-pledge money that has been used to help Iraqi refugees in those countries to now help Iraqi Christians stay at home

and rebuild.

"Staying and resisting as a Christian minority is the right way," the archbishop stated.

As a side note to such things, while international media has focused with renewed horror on the return of ISIS to the ancient and historic city of Palmyra, and the fresh architectural damage accompanying that, a local Kurdish broadcaster, Rudaw, has offered some measure of Mosul's fate with a short video of the damage wrought to another site of historic importance, the Tomb of Jonah.

In a two-minute segment, which can be viewed at www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/170120171 something of the scale can be appreciated amid the precincts of the tomb, with mountains of rubble piling up to the very door of the site.

The same segment then shows brief footage of soldiers of the Iraqi Security Forces taking a brief respite from the fight that has brought them this far, and the hopes of Christians with them.



Letters

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

Letter of the week

Danger of being cut off by Brexit

Dear Editor, Nuala O'Loan and Bishop Donal McKeown's articles in *The Irish Catholic* of January 19 make for sobering reading, and should be read and reflected upon by any British – or indeed Irish – supporters of withdrawal from the EU.

Ahead of last June's Brexit referendum, Irish people north and south of the border sought to warn our friends and family in Britain that Britain quitting the EU would be detrimental both to the economies of the Republic and the North and to the still fragile Peace Process. Such warnings, however, were too often dismissed as hysterical scaremongering and needless panic, presumably based on the conceit that

our neighbours across the Irish Sea are better informed on the realities of Ireland than we ourselves are.

That the Good Friday Agreement explicitly assumes the UK and Ireland are members of the EU, that the agreement's second strand deals in no small part with EU matters, that the European Convention on Human Rights is integral to the agreement, and that the people of Northern Ireland are entitled to Irish citizenship – all these points were waved aside with the claim that the North is at peace, and that any threats can only come from violent Irish people who are opposed to peace in any case.

Perhaps so, but if we remove the structures that have upheld our fragile

peace, the threat from such people becomes all the more dangerous and meaningful.

The North's constitutional structures are far from robust, as events in recent weeks have shown, and as Baroness O'Loan says, direct rule from England may be inevitable for the next couple of years. What this will mean when – as Dr McKeown has already observed – nationalist communities face rising unemployment because a largely English Brexit vote cuts them off from their natural hinterland remains to be seen.

*Yours etc.,
Sinéad Fitzgerald,
Belfast, Co. Antrim.*

Late Late insult must be addressed

Dear Editor, I write in order to protest at the RTÉ Eucharist mockery on *The Late Late Show* of January 6 when it sank to an all-time low.

I cried bitterly on hearing the Blessed Eucharist which we are privileged to receive referred to as "haunted bread".

Immediately I thought

of all those boys and girls who would be making their First Holy Communion in 2017 and all those devout people who throughout the length and breadth of Ireland are involved in Eucharistic Adoration.

Pope Francis in his beautiful prayer for the Year of Mercy reminded us that

Jesus was the visible face of the invisible Father who manifests his power above all in forgiveness and mercy.

I am asking the God of Mercy to forgive those who took part in that part of *The Late Late Show* where our dear Lord in the Eucharist was referred to as the "haunted bread". I believe

that the best description of the phrase is 'satanic', and think that *The Late Late Show* of January 6 should be removed from the RTÉ Player.

*Yours etc.,
Raymond Cullen,
Clones, Co. Monaghan.*

Teaching on Mass attendance is clear

Dear Editor, I usually find Fr Rolheiser's articles very interesting. He has a keen understanding of the complexities of the human condition and how we can grow in the Lord through all this. However, on reading his recent article 'Orthodoxy, sin and heresy' (IC 12/01/2017), I found it somewhat confusing.

In this article Fr Rolheiser raises the question of non-attendance at Sunday Mass and the effect of that on

our relationship with God. Rightly, he distinguishes between the objective wrong of an action and the subjective guilt of the person who performs that action. That distinction was always in the teaching of the Church.

However, the article left a certain ambiguity in my mind. I consulted the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and I read: "The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the

faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason [...] Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin" (CCC 2181).

I found this clarification helpful and perhaps it will also help some of your readers.

*Yours etc.,
Sr Marie-Joseph Catney OP,
Belfast, Co. Antrim.*

The Eucharist is a mystery of love sustaining life

Dear Editor, The charge of cannibalism resulting from Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist is recorded in the Gospel of John, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (6:52) and, "This is intolerable language, who can accept it?" (6:60).

John then adds that: "After this, many of his disciples drew back and no longer walked with him", (6:66). But Jesus was insistent: "Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you..." (6:53).

An image that can help us understand this mystery of life being sustained by eating the flesh and blood of another, is the mystery of motherhood. While the baby is still in the womb it is sustained by the flesh and blood of the mother. It is a mystery of love sustaining life, in this case earthly or temporal life. The Eucharist is also a mystery of love sustaining life, in this case eternal life.

*Yours etc.,
Fr Freddy Warner SMA,
Portumna, Co. Galway.*

A question of colour

Dear Editor, I was glad that in his January 19 interview in *The Irish Catholic* the American journalist R.R. Reno told Greg Daly that religious freedom must be defended for Muslims as much as for Christians, and that given his record of boasting about sexually assaulting women, Mr Trump is not exactly a convincing pro-life champion. Much of what Mr Reno had to say about political utopianism was fascinating.

Despite this, though, his analysis of Mr Trump's electoral success rang hollow for me. In particular, his suggestion that objections to racist language are simply a class marker and that use of such language is not necessarily racist struck me as deeply unconvincing.

If, as he says, interracial marriage is (like racist language) more common among working class communities than among the more 'polite' classes, might this not simply reflect the reality that America's middle and upper classes are disproportionately white, whereas the demographics of poorer Americans are far more diverse?

*Yours etc.,
Brendan Mulcahy,
Clondalkin, Dublin 22.*

We're all going to Heaven?

Dear Editor, Whilst reading the revolutionary manifesto of theological reform advocated by Barra Ó Caoimh (Letters, IC 12/02/2017) I had to check a couple of times that I was not in fact reading yet another review of Damien Chazelle's fluffy, feel good film: *La La Land*!

It's sure to clean up on Oscar night, as the pundits say it will; however, I doubt that its spiritual version, penned by Mr Ó Caoimh, will do likewise in the area of beatifications and canonisation – the ultimate Oscar experience for the Church.

So, are his views solid spiritual food for the soul? I don't think so! Or are they a fluffy niceness – a mindset where we're all going to Heaven? Most definitely!

*Yours etc.,
Fr John McCallion,
Clonoe, Co. Tyrone.*

Outraged at Late Late Eucharist slur

Dear Editor, I write to voice my sense of outrage at the January 6 edition of *The Late Late Show* which contained an outrageous slur against the Eucharist and Catholics across the island of Ireland. That someone could be so indifferent to the feelings of devout Catholics in describing as "haunted bread" the central tenet of the Mass is one thing, but for this to go unchallenged by host Ryan Tubridy brought the insult to an entirely new level of repugnance.

How on earth can the powers that be in RTÉ fail to recognise that a major cohort of its viewership, and not least for the flagship *Late Late Show*, is the Catholic community in this, a Catholic-majority country? The 'oversight' is such as to beg the question whether they are more knowingly uncaring than oblivious.

While being possessed of a cynicism that any direct complaint to RTÉ will go unheeded, I nevertheless believe that should Catholic ire at this outrageous slight be couched in terms of the all too eagerly accepted proceeds of our television licences, the broadcaster will quickly take note.

*Yours etc.,
Donal B. Mullins,
Phibsborough,
Dublin 7.*



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.

Acedia and Sabbath



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

Early Christian monks believed in something they called *acedia*. More colloquially, they called it, the noonday devil, a name that essentially describes the concept. *Acedia*, for them, was different from ordinary depression in that it didn't draw you into the dark, chaotic areas of your mind and heart, to have you diseased before your own complex and infinite depth; it was more of a flattening out, a dearth of energy, that put you into a semi-vegetative state that simply deadened all deep feeling and thoughts.

The early Church considered it one of the seven capital sins. Later it was renamed as sloth. There's an abundance of good spiritual literature on the concept of *acedia*, not least Kathleen Norris' rather definitive work on how *acedia* was understood by the early Church.

But until recently, *acedia* hadn't been studied in depth as a psychological concept. Happily that's changing, with important implications for spirituality.

Synopsis

To offer just one example: I recently attended a lecture on *acedia* given by a Jungian specialist, Lauren Morgan Wuest. I cannot do justice to her full thesis here, but let me risk an over-simplified synopsis.

Having read the literature of the Desert Fathers and the various commentaries on the idea of *acedia*, she attempted to

interface that spiritual literature with the insights of contemporary psychology, particularly those from the Jungian school of thought. What were her conclusions?

In brief, her view is that *acedia* is not a clinical diagnosis, meaning that it isn't a pathology requiring treatment, nor is it an ordinary depression. Rather the symptoms of *acedia* are the result of a healthy instinctual reflex of our bodies and minds which, when they not given something they need, sometimes forcefully shut us down, much like an ordinary depression shuts someone down; except that in the case of *acedia*, the shutdown of

energy is for the purpose of health.

Simplistically put, because we won't sit down on our own and give our bodies and minds the rest, nourishment and space they need, our bodies and minds conspire together to sit us down, forcibly. In essence, that's *acedia*, and, in essence, it's for our own health.

Implications

As a psychologist, she didn't go on to draw out the potential ramifications of this for spirituality, particularly how this might relate to the practice of Sabbath in our lives, but all the implications are there.

When you read the Judeo-

Christian Scriptures, particularly the early sections in Genesis, which chronicle the creation of the world and how God "rested" on the Sabbath, you see that there's a divinely-ordered rhythm to how work and rest are supposed to unfold in our lives.

Briefly stated, there's to be pattern, a rhythm, to our lives which works this way: You work for six days and then have a one-day sabbatical; you work for seven years and then have a one-year sabbatical; you work for seven times seven years, and then have a Jubilee year, a sabbatical for the whole planet; and then you work for a lifetime and go on an eternity of sabbatical.

In essence, our lives of work, our everyday agenda and our normal anxieties, are to be regularly punctuated by a time in which we lay down the hammer, lay down our agenda, lay down our work-a-day worries and simply sit, rest, vegetate, enjoy, soak-in, luxuriate, contemplate, pray and let things take care of themselves for a while.

That's the biblical formula for health, spiritual, human, psychic and bodily. And whenever we don't do this voluntarily, in effect, whenever we neglect to do Sabbath in our lives, our bodies and minds are likely to do it for us by shutting down our energies. *Acedia* is our friend here: We will do Sabbath, one way or the other.

It's no secret that today the practice of Sabbath is more and more disappearing within our culture. Indeed, our culture constitutes a virtual conspiracy

against the practice of Sabbath.

Among the many culprits responsible for this, I highlight our addiction to information technology, our current inability to go for any stretch of time without being connected to others and the world through a phone, a commuter pad, or a computer screen.

“It's no secret that today the practice of Sabbath is more and more disappearing within our culture”

We are finding ourselves less and less able to step away from all that we are connected to through information technology, and consequently we are finding ourselves less and less able to simply rest, to let go of things, to be in Sabbath-mode. Perhaps the most important ascetical practice for us today would be the practice of Cyber-Sabbaths.

Already 700 years ago, the Sufi poet, Rumi, lamented: "I have lived too long where I can be reached!"

That's a cry for Sabbath time that went up long before today's information technology placed us where we can always be reached, and that cry is going up everywhere today as our addiction to information technology increases.

One worries that we will not find the asceticism needed to curb our addiction, but then *acedia* may well do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.



TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Scheduling Trumped by presidential coverage

Well, for better or for worse, for richer but hardly for poorer, it was Trump week.

The dust had hardly settled on Martin Luther King Day when the media went into overdrive in anticipation of inauguration day. I can remember the hype for Obama's first inauguration, and there were indeed some touching and emotional moments, but I don't remember such a huge build-up a week out from the big day.

As the media reaction to Obama was overwhelmingly positive, so the reaction to Trump was overwhelmingly negative, and I was surprised by how so many reporters and commentators lost any sense of neutrality or objectivity – check out the start of last Monday's **Pat Kenny Show** for example.

The inauguration was quite impressive. The strong faith aspect of the ceremony was largely Christian, with a rabbi's input as well. There were hymns and blessings, with a gravitas that left one under no illusion but that this was a serious business.

Last Saturday's prayer event at the National Cathedral was more religiously diverse. I'm not a great fan of pomp and ceremony, but there seems to be something in human nature that craves it, for the events we consider important.



President Donald Trump's inauguration.

Trump's inauguration speech was a hit-and-miss affair after a promising start, though I wouldn't go along with one commentator's description of Trump's speech as 'terrifying'. What?

On the **Pat Kenny Show** last Thursday morning, author Michael Chabon typified the most extreme of the anti-Trump community (I consider myself one of the moderates!). He said Trump "did not legitimately win the election", and when Kenny pointed out that he won under the electoral college system in place, Chabon said "the rules may be the rules

but the rules don't necessarily mean anything". And this guy is a Pulitzer Prize winner. A toys-out-of-pram moment!

Then there was a woman interviewed on the same show last Friday morning, who was crying at the thought of Trump's inauguration: "We've lost our country", she wailed.

Donations

A less distraught woman declared she was donating more to Planned Parenthood and that "we'll have to go to Canada for our abortions".

On Friday's News coverage we saw some of the most

extreme protestors burning cars and smashing shop windows. On BBC's **Newsnight** that evening a wired guy in a Trump mask was crazily abusive to a bunch of 'bikers for Trump'.

On the same show there were the anti-Trump protestors who were giving out free marijuana, wanting it legalised. 'Make American Stoned Again' I suppose.

Back on Newstalk's **Drive** programme Sarah McInerney was puzzled by at least one aspect of the speech, where Trump declared he was giving power back from Washington to the people – more like to white millionaires, suggested McInerney, as she reflected on who he was appointing to prominent positions.

Speaking of which, the media over here gave little attention to the Senate

confirmation hearings, but I thought they were one of the most fascinating aspects of the week.

On CNN I watched Sen. Elizabeth Warren tearing into Betsy DeVos, Trump's nominee for Education Secretary. She was far from her comfort zone, and came up with one clanger that will haunt her – asked for any reason why schools should have guns, she suggested that in some places it might be to ward off "potential grizzlies". Promptly that became a hash tag on Twitter.

Sen. Bernie Sanders grilled Scott Pruitt, Trump's nominee to head up the Environmental Protection Agency. He was roasted for his vagueness on climate change, though he did accept that some of it was due to human activity.

Somehow, I doubt that after last week there will be any climate change in US political culture. If anything divisions, polarisation and conflict are likely to increase, and last weekend's spat over the numbers at the inauguration didn't help.

Predictably the media gave plenty of coverage to the Women's March against Trump last Saturday, but apart from EWTN's live coverage I couldn't find any trace in mainstream media of the **West Coast Walk for Life** in San Francisco. That event featured plenty of impressive speakers, including abortion survivor Melissa Ohden, a



Sarah McInerney.

PICK OF THE WEEK

40
EWTN Saturday, January 28, 9.30pm

A pro-life film with a focus on how the legalisation of abortion in America has affected women, children, and society for over 40 years.

MASS
RTÉ 1, Sunday, January 29, 11.00am

A Liturgy to launch National Catholic Schools Week 2017.

QUEST FOR SHAKESPEARE
EWTN, Friday, February 3, 7pm

The Wisdom of Fools and the Sanity of Manmen – Catholic motives are explored for Shakespeare having written *King Lear*.

recent visitor to Ireland, and was inspirational, providing a 'transfusion of courage' as one speaker put it.

Now, let's see if there's any coverage of this Friday's **Walk for Life** in Washington, an event that annually attracts well over half a million people.

boregan@hotmail.com



Aubrey Malone

Film

Plaintive tale of bonding for family hit by tragedy

Manchester by the Sea (15A)

If there's a more natural actor than Casey Affleck working in films today I'd like to hear about him. I wait for his films to come out like I once waited for those of Robert de Niro. He's our new James Dean, our new Montgomery Clift.

He understands the conflicts inherent in every scene with an innate intelligence. He seems to do very little, slouching through his parts with that lazy high-pitched voice. But his apparent nonchalance hides a multitude of insights into the nuances of behaviour.

Here, as Lee Chandler, he

gives a performance one can only call inspired.

Lee loses his children in a fire for which he's responsible. His wife Randi (Michelle Williams) leaves him as a result. Then his brother, Joe, dies of a heart attack. Lee now goes off the rails – understandably. He takes to drink and gets into fights in bars.

He's like a dead man walking for much of the film. When people speak to him he seems to take a few seconds to process what they're saying even when it might appear obvious to the rest of us. This is great acting because it's what we all do in real life. We don't have scripts like actors do.

There are some sexual elements in the film which might



Michelle Williams as Randi with Casey Affleck's Lee.

Excellent
★★★★★

offend viewers. If you can get past this you have a mini-masterpiece in store for you. It's a poignant tale of longing and loneliness set against the raw beauty of the harbour town of the title. Haunting choral music underscores the

action in seminal scenes.

The main plot concerns the troubled relationship between Lee and Patrick, Joe's 16-year old son.

Joe's wife has deserted him after hearing he had a bad heart.

As a result he has appointed Lee as Patrick's guardian in his will.

Lee has too many problems of his own to want the extra burden of looking after a nephew.

Tragedy

The pair of them flash off each other. Both have been scarred by tragedy and both also have hair-trigger tempers.

Patrick is selfish. In many ways he regards Lee as a deadbeat. But a closeness develops between them, all the more powerful for simmering below the surface.

The last few scenes, chronicling this burgeoning closeness as they plan to part geographically, are brilliantly

understated. Affleck can convey more by bouncing a tennis ball than most other actors could with a truncheon. The final image of them fishing together is one of the most sadly beautiful I've ever seen in a film.

Shortly before this the equally brilliant Williams has a scene with Affleck that's a master class in acting from both of them. Each is on the point of tears – and you might be too. It's heart-wrenching.

Lucas Hedges is also brilliant as the awkward, gawky Patrick.

He may never get a part as good as this again even if he lives to be 100.

Children's Corner

ERIN FOX



Brigid leads the way in a feast of feasts

Three feast days are approaching next week – all within just a few days of one another! The feast day you are probably most familiar is the feast of St Brigid on February 1. So you will no doubt be gathering bunches of rushes this weekend to make St Brigid's cross.

Traditionally, her crosses are made the day before her feast day on January 31, which just so happens to be the feast of St John Bosco. And a few days after this, is the feast of St Blaise on February 3.

St John Bosco is the patron saint of many things, but most notably of children. This is for the work he did for poor, neglected boys. Story has it that when he was a young boy, he cheerily greeted a priest one afternoon. When the priest didn't return the warm greeting, John Bosco was hurt and disappointed and so he proclaimed that when he grew up, he would become a priest and always be kind to children.

“You can make two more crosses and also write the prayers associated with them across the arms”

John is also known as patron saint of magicians, and it was his flair for magic tricks, as well as his kindness and dedication that made him popular among children.

In Ireland, St Brigid's Day marks the beginning of Spring. For the feast day, make her cross out of strips of paper and write the prayer associated with her over the four arms of the cross. And seeing as John Bosco and Blaise's feast days are so close to hers, you can make two more crosses and also write the prayers associated with

them across the arms. This way you can create a link between all three saints.

Sore throats

St Blaise is the patron saint of sore throats and wool. His icon is usually depicted with him holding two candles in the form of a cross.

In Germany, on Blaise's feast day, they have a blessing of the throats ceremony, and this motion with the candles is made across a person's throat.

Seeing as St Blaise's feast day falls on a Friday, organise an after school quiz with your family for the weekend. Base the questions on facts about all three saints and award whoever gets the most points with a small token associated with one of the saints, such as a medal or prayer card, or small book about their life.

Darragh McGann describes how a year of loss and illness brought him back to God

With the exception of two years, I have lived all of my life at home with my mother. My dad died before I reached the age of six and having been adopted as a baby, I didn't have brothers or sisters, it was just Mum and me. What I did have though growing up was tremendous family and also a very strong faith. I served as an altar boy for eight years in the cathedral and it came as no surprise to anyone when I decided to enter seminary straight from school to train to be a priest.

Sadly, that endeavour only lasted one year as I just felt it wasn't for me at the time. A few years later I was sponsored by my diocese to go back to college to study a Diploma in Sacred Liturgy. This was a year I absolutely loved and the dream of been able to both teach and do liturgy when I would come home was something that really drove me forward.

Graduated

Having successfully graduated, I returned home to my mum but that was it. No one came knocking on my door and in many ways I became depressed both with life and with the Church.

Knowing that I needed to get out there in the world to earn a living, I decided to go driving taxis, which I continued to do for the next 20 years. There were frequent early mornings and late nights and while at the end of each year I would make the resolution to do something different, I didn't.

I stuck at it as I really didn't believe that I could make a go of anything else.

“I have no doubt that I did miss out on many opportunities over those years”

I would think about the two years I spent away from home in college and thought that perhaps I had failed in some way and now no one would want me doing anything different than drive a taxi. My music was always very important to me and my faith had been too, but I allowed the job to control my life and I have no doubt that I did miss out on many opportunities over those years. I became very miserable in myself and began to blame God



for not doing more for me. It got so bad that for a time I packed up praying and going to Mass. I just thought that if God won't help me, then why should I bother.

I often read that famous piece called 'Footprints' about how, when at your lowest, it was God who carried you. I did love that story but I never believed in it, well not until August of last year. For the past 14 years, mum

and I had a little dog called Charlie. He was most certainly a huge part of our family and whenever either of us needed a friend, he was always there. For me, he was like the brother I always wanted and never had and he was the greatest critic of music I have ever known.

Office

He would sit in the office with me when I would write music and then when I would sing it

to him, if he liked it he would lick my foot and if he didn't, well he would have raised the dead with his barking!

In late August, Charlie became very ill, almost overnight. I spent many hours crying over him, trying to do what was right for him and even in his weakest moments, he would look into my eyes.

The morning mum and I got called to the vets as Charlie was very weak, I shall never forget

Mysterious ways



how he gave me one last kiss and as he looked into my eyes, I thought about all the loved ones I have said goodbye to and how I always found comfort and strength in prayer and in God to get me through the following days.

“I turned to my late uncle John, who had served as a priest with in America”

In a very deep way I knew in my heart that Charlie was ready to go and to this day I believe he is alive and well again in Heaven and that he will be always looking over me. That very evening, when Charlie passed away, I returned to actually attending Mass. Two days later, mum and I went to Knock, and I went to confession for the first time in years.

As the weeks passed by following Charlie's passing, I began to feel very unwell. I had been experiencing panic and anxiety attacks, but became aware of a numbness in my fingers which quickly spread to my arm and then a large part of my upper body. Having presented to the hospital, nobody was telling me anything definitive and this worried me even more.

My symptoms got worse to the point I was losing the sight in my right

eye. Again, I couldn't find anyone in the hospital who would tell me what was going on and finally I was admitted to the Bon Secours Hospital. From the moment I walked in and saw the Chapel there before me, somehow I knew I was in the right place.

The doctors agreed to take over my case and assured me they would look after me, but it would be the next day before they would have a full diagnosis.

When awaiting a diagnosis, so many things go through your mind and the majority of those thoughts are negative filled with fear and worry. I began to think it might be the end of the road. I was so worried that first night that at about 4am, I visited the chapel and alone in there, I began to speak out loud firstly to the Lord, asking for his help.

Medical team

Then I turned to my late uncle John, who had served as a priest with the Holy Ghost Congregation in America and was like a father to me. I used to serve his Masses when he was home and I called on him to help me and not to leave me alone. I returned to my room some time later but decided to attend Mass at 11am before meeting my medical team.

I fell asleep on the bed, however, and only the ringing of the bell

to announce that the Eucharistic Minister was arriving actually woke me. But when I opened my eyes, standing there before me, I could see my uncle, wearing the vestments of Our Lady of Guadalupe with the Blessed Sacrament in his hand. It was of course the minister, but for a moment it was my uncle I could see.

“I entered 2017 with one just one certain resolution: to keep my Faith and love of God”

After I received communion, my medical team came to talk to me. I felt a huge grace and strength right there and then and I knew, deep down I was ready to face whatever was coming.

The doctor sat on my bed and confirmed to me that I had MS and while I cried like a baby, he assured me it wasn't the end of the road; both he and his team would look after me and the prognosis, however life changing, was positive. After he left, I went directly to the chapel and I thanked both the Lord and my uncle for looking after me and for carrying me when I could not walk.

Speaking to me later, one of the nurses said she thought the loss of Charlie in many ways

had led to this. The grief and upset that I had been experiencing had brought on the attacks and symptoms which led to a very early diagnosis. My faith had been firmly restored.

After last year I entered 2017 with one just one certain resolution: to keep my Faith and love of God at the centre of everything I will do. Yes, there will be life changes and I welcome them. Yes, I want now to focus more on my music and my desire to bring Hope to others in times of worry and distress. Yes, I need to get fit and look after myself but I now know and perhaps even when I doubted I still knew, that I can never go it alone.

And even when I thought I was alone, I also know that God was always there with me, just waiting for me to come back to him again. Sometimes his guiding light is right in front of us, but we have become so blinded that we fail to see it. My prayer and hope for 2017 is that we shall all see that Light in front of us and whenever we feel we can't go on, just close our eyes and know that it is then that the Lord is carrying us.

📌 Darragh McGann is a singer/songwriter from Cobh who has appeared on such TV shows as Britain's Got Talent, The Voice and Seoiré on RTÉ.

Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



Ireland never lets go of an Irish heart. The further we go from our homeland, the stronger it calls us home. French Canadians were never known for singing maudlin ballads lamenting the day they left Paris.

English immigrants to Australia were not known to weep out of a heartfelt yearning for Suffolk. Yet we Irish experience an emotional pang for our homeland like no other nation. This yearning has been documented again and again down the centuries, in rhyme and in song.

The kids are happy in England. We live in a peaceful village by the sea. Their little school is lovely and they have many friends. We see friends and family from Ireland regularly, since Cork and Dublin are but an hour's flight from our local airport. There is more sunshine and more peace here than there was in Dublin. Yet, after a year and a half on the idyllic Isle of Wight, the siren of Erin visits them with ever increasing regularity, it seems

I know she has been in the night when the one of the kids awakens, with a faraway look in their eyes, recounting a vivid dream of having been back in our old house in Cork, surrounded by family and friends. "When are we going back to Ireland?" they ask, over breakfast, as tears well softly in their eyes.

Within moments, the tears are forgotten as they rush into another busy and happy day. Yet we parents are left wondering where in the world our family would truly be happiest.

James Joyce called Ireland "the old sow that eats her farrow".

“Ireland's economy has been perennially badly managed”

Although Ireland is, on paper, wealthier than the UK *per capita*, its economy has been perennially badly managed, resulting in the explosive boom and bust of recent decades.

Those of us who lived through the Celtic tiger years, and the collapse,

cannot but feel betrayed by a State which wrecked the economy, then burdened its taxpayers with the debts of foreign bondholders, and then harassed its own citizens – working hard to survive a recession - with taxes and levies to pay for its folly. Many were forced to emigrate. How many will return? Yet nobody returns to Ireland for the weather, nor for good economic governance.

There is something about the people, and the deep landscape, that draws us back. Even those of us in geographically and culturally proximate places like England, Scotland or Wales know that yearning. For me, I sometimes find myself longing to throw a leg over



my motorcycle, and ride in to the snowcapped mountains of Kerry, the bike wailing like a banshee along lonely mountain roads. I miss meeting friends for a quiet jar by the fireside in some old pub. I even find myself watching TG4 programmes online, sometimes, drawn back to the Gaeilge. But I can't remember the Irish word for homesickness. Nor am I even sure of that diagnosis.

The kids' accents are changing. Sean's Cork lilt survived two years in Dublin, but it is being slowly submerged by the southern English sounds he hears each day. My one hope was that his accent might survive. I've considered flying in Cork election experts for swift restorative action: "Repeat after me: one, two, tree." As always, our decisions as parents will have a huge and lasting impacts on our children. There is much we love about life here, but the kids' dreams of Ireland tug at the heartstrings. However, balance is essential. Perhaps next time they have a vivid dream of being at home, I'll ask them, "was it lashing rain outside, did you notice? Was the postman arriving with a stack of brown envelopes with harps on them, perhaps?"



BookReviews



Peter Costello

Recent books in brief

The Editor Regrets...

by James Good (Lettertec; copies from the author, Parkview, Church Street, Douglas, Cork)

Ah yes, what novice contributor to the press has not received one of those rejection slips that give Fr James Good of Cork the

title of his collection of essays, largely unpublished? As his own publisher, Fr Good can present these pieces from over the years not just to his small circle of his many kinds of friends, but to readers everywhere.

Fr Good was ordained in 1948 and followed a life of scholarship and teaching until 1975 when he departed to work among the proud local people of Turkana in Africa, where he laboured for two decades.

In general they are both thought provoking and entertaining. They are all very short and written to be understood by every kind of reader. There is very little theology-speak. All the pieces are interesting, one of the first Easter Sunday for instance, which discusses in a straight forward way the evidence for the resurrection.

A surprisingly little piece on Opus Dei, puts simply all the doubts and fears that its critics have of that organising. Fr Good suggests that members of Opus Dei should "come out" and rejoining the world and set to work about the real work of God, "helping the poor and the poor and the marginalised, of who there are many in our capital today".

Praying to God Our Father

by Patrick Delargy (copies from the author; contact kirmriola@aol.com)

The author of this book is a parish priest in Ballymena. At first glance reminded me of those sermons that used to be given by Presbyterians and others in which a biblical reading was slowly parsed in the course of a long sermon. But here, though he does indeed parse the Lord's Prayer, Paddy Delargy is inspired by the example of St Francis of Assisi. He remarks at the very beginning that "it was the profound achievement of St Francis to grasp that faith in God can be childlike without being childish".

This very simplicity is perhaps paradoxically the most effective way of dealing with some very profound matters. Take for instance the phrase: "And deliver us from evil".

Both the nature of evil and the question of just punishment absorb people; often in a way that must be damaging to them. But we cannot in any way limit the mercy of God: "Every one can be transformed. Perhaps that is why St Francis prayed 'deliver us from evil: past present and to come?'"

That the evil of the past continues to affect the living is something we have all seen.

The whole of this little book, which certainly ought to be read far beyond the bounds of Ballymena, is informed by the prayer of the spirit of Assisi: There is a dimension to this book that may not be obvious: that the sentiments and insight of St Francis inspiring it are also those which inform the warmth and charity of the Pope himself.



A lively but partial life of Jonathan Swift

Jonathan Swift: The Reluctant Rebel
by John Stubbs
(Viking, £25)

Andrew Carpenter

It is hard to know what to expect from a new biography of Swift so soon after Leo Damrosch's massive *Jonathan Swift: His Life and His World* (Yale University Press, £10.99pb) in 2013, especially if the latest book is clearly designed for the same kind of general audience as Damrosch's.

The facts of Swift's life were established by Irvin Ehrenpreis in his definitive three-volume biography (1962-83), which has been the foundation of several one-volume works since. Where Ehrenpreis and his followers have questioned the reliability of many of the stories about Swift that have circulated for years, Damrosch investigated them and accepted some of them as likely to be true.

Swift's biographers, from Ehrenpreis on, have also interwoven assessments of Swift's works into their books.

So what, I wondered as I picked up John Stubbs's 740-page *Jonathan Swift: The Reluctant Rebel*, could a new biography possibly offer that was new.

I found many enjoyable passages in this book – and Stubbs does repeat the liveliest stories; the style is entertaining, and though a dedicated Swiftian will take issue with several of Stubbs's judgements and question the book's accuracy in places, its imaginative approach does add something new to Swift studies.

Contention

Stubbs's contention is that, despite being born in Ireland, Swift always thought of himself as an Englishman and would, in normal circumstances, have sided with England in any dispute.

However, after his return from England to Ireland as Dean of St Patrick's in 1713, Swift experienced the way in which English politicians and authorities consistently mistreated Ireland – the Declaratory Act of 1720, the Wood's Halfpence controversy of 1724, and so on.

He took up the pen on behalf of Ireland and, in doing so, became the 'reluctant' rebel of the title. Stubbs also addresses the questions of Swift's relationships

Jonathan Swift by Charles Jervas.



with Vanessa and with Stella (whom he rather disconcertingly calls by her surname 'Johnson') and spends a lot of time filling in the background to Swift's works.

This is all fair enough, though in areas where there are few facts to go on, Stubbs is thrown back onto words like 'possibly', 'probably' or phrases such as 'it is impossible to know...'

However, this is part of the point of the book – that it sets out to recreate, as vividly as possible, the world which gave rise to Swift's works.

Stubbs describes, with gusto, what he imagines the furniture, tableware, paintings and people that surrounded Swift to have been like.

At one point he notes that, in a portrait by Jervas, Swift's face is that of 'a man you have seen in a pub, looking up from a newspaper as you brush past his table; and where you might expect a huffy look of annoyance or even hostility, instead you catch a glimpse of unnerving intelligence, humanity and suspended humour.'

Whatever this means, it is more the approach of a creative writer than a sober biographer. This is, in fact, a characteristic of Stubbs's book – his tendency to insert personal commentary, often highly imaginative. This adds to its entertainment value, but is questionable from a scholarly point of view.

To appreciate Swift's work, one needs a good understanding of the context in which he was writing. Quite reasonably therefore, a portion of Stubbs's book is devoted to trying to explain the background to Swift's political views by investigating his family's background; but there is so much detail here that the readers may find themselves lost.

“Swift's face is that of 'a man you have seen in a pub, looking up from a newspaper'”

Stubbs is a scholar of 17th-Century England, but the reader of this book gets more than is needed on the English background to Swift, and not enough on the Irish background. Stubbs's chapter 'Ireland and the Civil Wars' relies more on English than on Irish sources, and throughout the book there are signs that he has not consulted recent editions of texts from the period, or even significant historians' books on

17th- or 18th-Century Ireland. Specifically, any biographer should be aware that many valuable articles on Swift have been published in the six volumes of *Proceedings of the Munster Symposium on Jonathan Swift* (1985-2013). They have, between them, changed the face of Swift scholarship, but do not figure in Stubbs's book.

Key work

A key work Stubbs has not consulted is A.C. Elias's wonderful edition of the memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington, published in 1997 – the first biography of Swift – one entire volume of which is devoted to exhaustive notes on Pilkington's text with information on many of the characters in Swift's Irish life.

This was made full use of by Damrosch – Stubbs has used Damrosch, but he has not consulted Elias.

Also there are recent editions of the works of Thomas Sheridan and Patrick Delany – as well as good work on Mary Barber, Constantia Grierson, and Swift's other friends, to which Stubbs makes no reference.

So, enjoyable as this book may be, those who want to keep abreast of Swift scholarship will need to supplement it.

i Andrew Carpenter is Emeritus Professor of English UCD.

Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.

An heroic figure of charity



St Vincent's Hospital, St Stephen's Green.

Friend of the Poor. Mary Aikenhead: Woman of Vision, Commitment and Inspiration
by Rosaleen Crossan
(Columba Press, €12.99)

J. Anthony Gaughan

Pope Francis declared Mary Aikenhead to be Venerable on March 18, 2015. This is the first step towards canonisation. It was a much deserved accolade.

Mary was born in Cork on January 19, 1787. Her father, David Aikenhead, was a doctor (then known as an apothecary) and the proprietor of a chemist shop. He was a Protestant, the son of a Scottish military officer. Mary's mother was the daughter of a Cork Catholic merchant family.

Under the penal laws she was not allowed to raise her family as Catholics so Mary was baptised in the Protestant church. However, in her early years because of her frailty Mary was fostered to a poor Catholic family on the outskirts of the city.

She accompanied her pious foster parents when they attended Mass and formed friendships with the other children in the poor Catholic neighbourhood.

For her teenage years Mary was returned to her family home. Soon afterwards her father converted to Catholicism just before he died and Mary also became a Catholic.

Mary became aware of a vocation to dedicate her life to God as a religious sister, serving the poor. She admired the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul

who worked among the poor in France. However, at that time all religious congregations of women in Ireland were bound by rules of enclosure.

She consulted Archbishop Daniel Murray of Dublin in 1811. Provisionally he was then hoping to establish the kind of congregation Mary had in mind and he invited her to be part of it. With his assistance Mary and a companion after completing a novitiate took over the administration of an orphanage for girls in North William Street in Dublin. Soon other young women joined them and they were able to visit the sick poor in their own homes as well as running a primary school for local children.

“On her death-bed she assured her Sisters that the congregation would flourish”

Thus began the Religious Sisters of Charity, whose members were vowed to the service of the poor, especially the sick poor, with the motto *Caritas Christi urget nos* ('The love of Christ motivates us'). Mary was appointed head superior and the congregation was canonically erected by Archbishop John Troy on December 1, 1816.

The congregation's first foundation at Stanhope Street was followed by 13 others in Mary's life-time, including one in Parramatta in Australia, where the

Sisters worked among women convicts and their children.

Mary constantly emphasised that the aim of the congregation was ministering to the poor in general and the sick poor in particular. During the cholera epidemic in Ireland in 1832 the sisters in Dublin and Cork worked heroically among the victims of the disease.

In Ringsend they opened a small temporary hospital for the poor. Seeing its usefulness, Mary determined to build a 'real' hospital for the poor.

Donation

With a generous donation of €3,000 she purchased the Earl of Meath's townhouse on St Stephen's Green and opened St Vincent's Hospital in 1834.

For 27 years before she died on July 22, 1858 Mary was challenged by severe illness. This did not deter her from writing thousands of letters, ably administrating the congregation and pleading for donations for various projects.

On her death-bed she assured her Sisters that the congregation would flourish after she had left them. Today the sisters are ministering to the poor in the US, Zambia, Nigeria, Malawi, Australia, England, Scotland and Ireland. And in Dublin St Vincent's Hospital, now removed to Elm Park, still flourishes.

This excellent monograph will be a source of inspiration, not only to members of the Religious Sisters of the Poor, but to many others besides.

WebWatch

Pro-life Catholics at a pro-choice march? Own it!

It's hard to imagine a more inflammatory title for a blogpost than 'Catholic pro-lifers at the Women's March? Get used to it', but American blogger Simcha Fisher has never been one to pussyfoot around.

Writing at simchafisher.com, she starts with a bang. "Were you surprised, even shocked, to see Catholics and other pro-lifers joining in at the Women's March — the march that was funded and organised by pro-choicers, and which backed out of partnering with pro-life groups?"

Plenty of good and well-meaning Catholics were. As Simcha puts it: "Numerous Catholics told me it was a scandal that they were there."

"Well," she says, "get used to it. The pro-life establishment abandoned women and children when they threw in their lot with Trump. Get used to seeing pro-lifers strike out on their own, welcome or not."

Asserting that by backing Trump, the Republican establishment told the world that Donald Trump is what a pro-life leader looks like, she says by this definition a pro-life leader is a serial adulterer who responded to an unplanned pregnancy by asking his mistress what she intended to "do about it", and who tells the world a woman isn't qualified to lead if we don't enjoy looking at her face.

Torture

He's a man who's enthusiastic about torture, is glad to turn his back on refugees, and has promised repeatedly to repeal a law that gave millions of women basic healthcare for the first time.

A pro-life leader, we are now effectively told, would appoint "ludicrously unqualified cabinet members whose only asset is their promises to cut funding for food and housing, programmes which disproportionately support women and



Simcha Fisher.

children", and has chosen as his education secretary someone who thinks children with special needs have no right to an education.

“Tell me again that Catholic women who marched on Saturday aren't real Catholics”

And so much more... "You elected Trump and told the world that we had to vote for him, because he is pro-life," she continues, linking to a story about an Arizona priest as she goes on. "You even said that it was a mortal sin not to vote for him. And then you told women that they weren't real Catholics because they marched against him. Tell me again that it's shameful and disgraceful when women go tell the world that this man does not represent us. *They're* the disgrace. Not him. Tell me again. Tell me again that Catholic women who marched on Saturday aren't real Catholics."

Highlighting how huffingtonpost.com had reported on pro-lifers joining the march in Washington, one saying, "we're all in favour of women's rights — we just think they start earlier than some other people do", with other left-leaning websites doing likewise, she dares people to tell

her it's a scandal that the phrase "pro-life feminist" is now a reality.

"God bless you, Destiny Herndon De La Rosa, Abby Johnson, Aimee Murphy, Students for Life and all the strong, smart women who had the courage to face not only the abuse of pro-choicers but the abuse of your fellow Catholics," she says. "God bless you for telling the world that abortion hurts women, that pro-life is pro-women. God bless you for turning over your lives to the pro-life cause, when even other pro-lifers refused to help."

Praising them for walking the pro-life walk, not just talking the talk, she says, "You are the ones who are changing hearts; and that is how abortion is defeated. Not by signing bills, not by babbling catchphrases when it's politically expedient and shrugging them off when it's not. Not by yanking help away from the needy."

Maintaining that pro-lifers who do respect women will shun the party of Donald Trump, she says, "If Trump is the leader of the Republican party, then the Republican party is no longer the home for people who value family, who cherish children, who respect women. Pro-life Americans are now politically homeless; and so, like so many of the homeless, they took to the streets."

Read it, and ponder it.

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BOOK UPDATE
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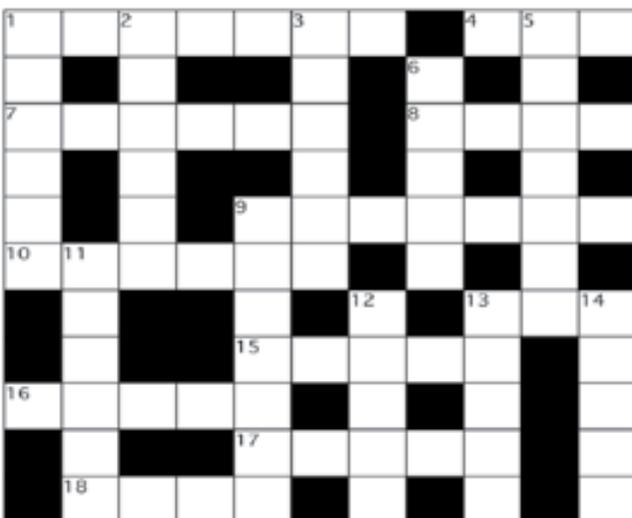
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Crossword Junior

Gordius 166



- Across**
- This bird flies over salty water (7)
 - A dog will do this to his tail to show he is happy (3)
 - Out of the country (6)
 - You may get a puncture in this (4)
 - You sleep here in the house (7)
 - Cleans with soap and water (6)
 - A pig lives here (3)
 - Fight with a sword for sport (5)
 - You can have different toppings on this Italian food (5)
 - You might order just a _____ of 16 across (5)
 - Tasty pastry filled with fruit (4)
- Down**
- You cast a _____ on a sunny day (6)
 - Crossword clues are set out as _____ and Down (6)
 - Sometimes, a speech begins with the phrase "_____ and gentlemen" (6)
 - Go here to take a flight (7)
 - Begin (5)
 - The biggest city in Northern Ireland (7)
 - Painter, or sculptor perhaps (6)
 - Creature with a shell (5)
 - Used a needle and thread (5)
 - Shouts (5)

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS

GORDIUS No.282

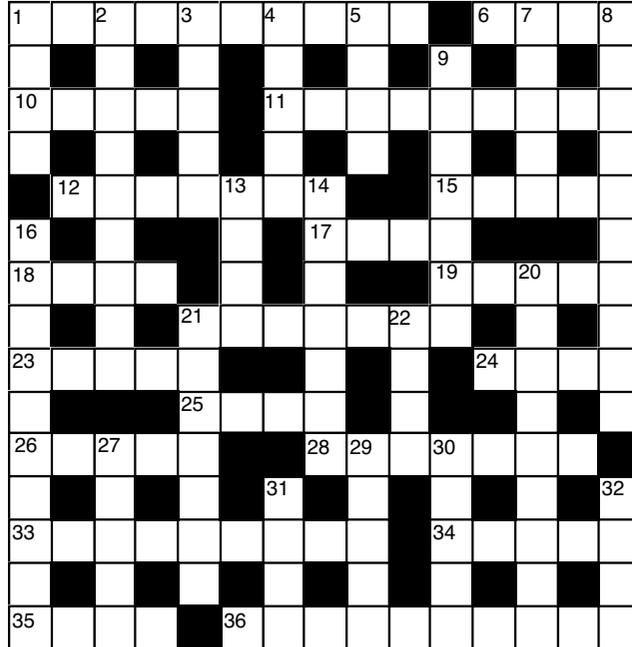
- Across** - 1 Flight plan 6 Marc 10 Isaac 11 Charlatan 12 Possess 15 Cycle 17 Walk 18 Oval 19 Edges 21 Hoarded 23 Shore 24 Bono 25 Mule 26 Broil 28 Detroit 33 Reluctant 34 Maize 35 Yoda 36 The year dot
- Down** - 1 Foil 2 Inamorato 3 Hocus-pocus 5 Ajax 7 Attic conversion 9 Clucked 13 Euro 14 Swerved 16 Gooseberry 20 Glorified 21 Hemlock 22 Exit 27 Ogled 29 Entry 30 Rumba 31 Gash 32 Pest

CHILDREN'S No.165

- Across** - 1 Motorbike 7 Rip 8 Captain 9 Sad 11 Discover 15 Comic 16 Oval 17 Test 18 Enid 19 Reel 20 Enemy
- Down** - 1 Microphone 2 Taped 3 Roads 4 Inn 5 Erase 6 Spud 10 Arrested 12 Include 13 Compose 14 Victory

Crossword

Gordius 283



- Across**
- Here in Scotland you'll see Mum get healthy (10)
 - Did the planks he used in boatbuilding consist only of two-by-twos? (4)
 - Natural sweetener (5)
 - Baltic republic, capital Vilnius (9)
 - Tales related by southern Conservatives (7)
 - Watchful (5)
 - The entrance to a mine will be found in the wadi tomorrow (4)
 - Violent civil commotion (4)
 - Closer to the periphery (5)
 - Be quiet! Speak only to part of the camera (7)
 - Resided (5)
 - 24 & 31d N.B., no beaten mixture here (4,4)
 - Back (4)
 - The copper gets the priest a drink (5)
 - Everlasting (7)
 - False, duplicitous (9)
 - Once more (5)
 - Middy (4)
 - Metric measure which can split the centre? About time! (10)
- Down**
- 1 & 16d Large-scale output - of religious services? (4,10)
 - Circus high-wire (9)
 - Mistake (5)
 - Oscar - playwright, poet and wit (5)
 - Take the top off a woodwind instrument and find a stringed one (4)
 - Imperial weight measure (5)
 - Great sorrow occasioned by a cardiac respite? (10)
 - Museum manager who finds a dog a rock (7)
 - Small imperial unit of length (4)
 - Cross such as that on the Scottish flag (7)
 - See 1 down
 - Assumed a role and dismantled it (4,5)
 - Stresses there's a locomotive on board (7)
 - Convenience, comfort (4)
 - Such sauce has poets in a frenzy (5)
 - Nice surprise (5)
 - Kingdom (5)
 - See 24 across
 - Joint in the leg (4)

Sudoku Corner

166

Easy

				9			7	
			7		8	4	9	
					5			
	6						5	
				1	6			
3			5		9	8	6	
	5	9		2		6	8	
	8		9	5	2	1		
6	2			4	3			

Hard

		1	5	9				
7			6	2	8			
						6	8	4
		5	1	3	2			
	4	3				7	2	
			4	7	6	5		
2	1	8						
			2	4	1			5
				6	3	9		

Last week's Easy 165

4	9	2	3	8	1	7	5	6
5	8	7	6	4	2	1	3	9
6	3	1	7	5	9	8	2	4
1	6	4	2	9	8	3	7	5
3	5	8	1	7	6	9	4	2
7	2	9	5	3	4	6	8	1
9	4	5	8	6	7	2	1	3
2	7	3	9	1	5	4	6	8
8	1	6	4	2	3	5	9	7

Last week's Hard 165

9	2	3	5	6	1	7	4	8
4	8	6	2	7	3	9	5	1
7	5	1	9	8	4	2	6	3
2	6	8	4	5	7	1	3	9
3	9	7	8	1	6	4	2	5
1	4	5	3	2	9	8	7	6
5	3	9	1	4	2	6	8	7
8	7	4	6	9	5	3	1	2
6	1	2	7	3	8	5	9	4



Michael Kelly

Notebook

Nothing is off limits at papal meetings with Francis

AT THE VATICAN press office on Friday morning, dozens of journalists waited patiently for the script of what Pope Francis [pictured] would say to the Irish bishops present for their *ad limina* visit. It wasn't so much that the journalists were particularly interested in the Irish situation (many were). But, it was more the fact that Pope Francis had not received a delegation of bishops on an *ad limina* visit in well over a year. Such trips had been suspended during the jubilee 'Year of Mercy' to free up the Pontiff.

Francis has changed much in the workings of the Holy See, and the traditional bishops' visits are not immune from this.

In recent decades, Popes have tended to read speeches to the bishops on an *ad limina* trip. This allowed journalists to parse the text and tease out what the Vatican interpreted as priorities for a particular country or group of bishops.

Speculation

Early on Friday morning I had asked Paloma García Ovejero, deputy director of the Vatican Press Office, when I could expect a copy of the text. The press office had not, as yet, received such



a text. She speculated that she thought the Pope would speak off-the-cuff. It was unclear, she said, since it has been a while since he'd

hosted *ad limina* visits.

Sure enough, there was no papal text. At the press conference afterwards, Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin summed up the mood.

"He [the Pope] said at the beginning, 'I'll throw in the ball and let's see what happens', so it turned out to be a conversation about the Church in Ireland, about the struggles and challenges we're having, but also about the importance of a ministry of presence, a ministry of the ear, where we're listening to the hopes, struggles and fears of our people."

In his meeting with the Irish

bishops, the Pope seemed to be ushering in a new style for the *ad limina* visits, one that would be more based on dialogue. There's also the fact that the previous space for dialogue is probably lacking in the new *ad limina* arrangements since Pope Francis no longer meets privately with individual bishops, preferring the group setting.

Challenges

During their meetings the bishops said they spoke frankly of problems and challenges facing the Church in Ireland. Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin said that "no subject was off the agenda.

"Pope Francis again said to talk about our experiences, our challenges, our criticisms... One theme that came up on numerous occasions was the position of women in the Church, we brought it up in almost every congregation we went to and there was a willingness to listen and a recognition that we were asking a valid question, because the Irish episcopal conference is quite concerned about that theme," Archbishop Martin said.

Pope's informality sets an example

Pope Francis has become famous for his informality and the way in which he shuns long-established protocol if he feels it unnecessary.

A few bishops told me about a slightly unnerving moment during the audience with the Pope when, as one of the bishops was speaking, the Pope got up from his chair

and darted across the room. More than a few bishops assumed he was leaving the room to use the bathroom. But, just as he was passing a few of the bishops he said gently that the interpreter, who had been translating between Italian and English and vice versa, needed some water. The Pope proceeded

to a press which he promptly opened and took out a bottle of water, poured a glass and brought it back to the interpreter to slake his thirst.

It's a powerful example of service and one, I suspect, we'll hear from bishops in Holy Thursday homilies for quite some time to come!

Vatican's golden arches

Roman newspapers have been full of conversation in recent weeks about the new branch of fast-food giant McDonald's that has opened right beside the Vatican.

Now it has emerged that McDonald's is working with charity Medicina Sociale to provide free meals for Rome's homeless community.

Volunteers will distribute meals made up of a double cheeseburger, an apple and a bottle of water to homeless people in and around the Vatican, every Monday lunchtime.

They expect to serve the free meal to up to 1,000 homeless people every Monday.



DESTITUTE MOTHERS AND CHILDREN IN THE HOLY LAND NEED OUR HELP



The Comboni Missionary Sisters in the Holy Land seek our help with supporting refugee African women and children in Tel Aviv, and disabled Bedouin children in the West Bank. Sr Azezet Kidane and Sr Agnese Elli write from Jerusalem: "Female asylum seekers, many of whom are victims of torture, and/or single mothers with disabled children are among the most vulnerable asylum seekers in Israel. We provide practical and psychosocial support to the women, who have no access to state healthcare. Also, while visiting the Bedouin villages of the West Bank, we have come across many handicapped children, who are also deprived of basic support." The sisters ask for our help with healthcare for these two vulnerable groups of women and their children. They add: "Our appreciation and gratitude goes to all those who in their generosity will contribute to our requests."



LITTLE WAY HOUSE FATIMA AVAILABLE FOR GROUP BOOKINGS

Would you like to take a group to Fatima for the Centenary celebrations? Casa Little Way is available for parish or group bookings for pilgrims wishing to participate in the celebrations commemorating the 100th anniversary of Our Lady's apparitions to the three shepherd children.

The house is about 20 minutes walk from the Shrine and can accommodate up to 22 pilgrims in shared rooms.

You would need to book your own flights but transport can be arranged between Lisbon airport and Fatima for group bookings.

Ph: 00 44 207 622 0466

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