

The Irish Catholic

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Aux bishop-elect praises Dublin's strength in 'challenging times'

Chai Brady

The newly appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin has commended the "commitment and faith" of laity and priests in the archdiocese despite the "uncertain" road ahead.

Fr Donal Roche's appointment by Pope Francis was announced in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral on Tuesday. An experienced educator and pastor, he spent almost two decades involved in religious education and a further 19 years working in parishes across Dublin.

Following his appointment, Fr Roche said: "Everybody says that these are challenging times for the Church and that is true. We have been through difficult times over the last 20 years or so and the path that lies ahead is also very uncertain.

"But we have a strength in the commitment and faith of the priests and people of the archdiocese who draw nourishment from the Gospel of Jesus Christ and who are engaged in the process of Building Hope for the future. I have seen that faith and commitment in action in all the parishes and communities I have been involved in over the years," he said.

Fr Roche continued, saying that he still has "the same enthusiasm for the ministry today that I had at the start, despite all the ups and downs and upheavals of recent years".

"Being a priest has been my greatest joy and privilege and I hope I can continue to share that joy with the people I work with

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Youth for peace and justice...



Olga and Aimee Danylyuk from Ukraine are pictured at a Lenten gathering in Wilton Parish Centre, Cork, attended by Bishop Fintan Gavin, to mark Trócaire's work on climate change and water justice. Photo: Mike English

NO-ONE SHOULD BE AFRAID OF DIFFERENT OPINIONS



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Aux bishop-elect praises Dublin's strength in 'challenging times'

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ministry is my greatest strength," he added.

Archbishop Dermot Farrell said that he had asked the Pope for an auxiliary to assist him "in light of the rapidly changing needs of the archdiocese". The prelate pointed out that the diocese has a population of 1.5 million, two-thirds of whom identify as Catholic, spread over 197 parishes.

Archbishop Farrell said: "To the leadership of the Church in Dublin, Fr Donal brings extensive pastoral experience, as well as an inspiring personal witness and fidelity to the Gospel."

In a statement the Archdiocese of Dublin said that "with fewer clergy and greater lay involvement in parishes, the new auxiliary bishop will be supporting the archbishop in his role of leading the archdiocese along the synodal pathway: clergy and lay faithful working together to bring the message of the Gospel to a new generation".

Fr Roche's titular see will be the ancient diocese of Cell Ausaille, which is situated in the area of Killashee near Naas, Co. Kildare.

Fr Roche grew up in Drimnagh. He worked for four years for Dublin City Council as a clerical officer before entering seminary and being ordained in 1986. Fluent Irish speaker Fr Roche was a teacher in Coláiste Dhúlaigh, Coolock, a chaplain in St Mark's Community School in Tallaght and also served as diocesan advisor for religious education in primary schools.

Fr Roche's first parish appointment was in Lucan South, where he spent seven years, followed by 11 years in Wicklow Town. His current appointment is in the Cabinteely-Johnstown grouping of parishes, with additional responsibility for Cherrywood.

Fr Roche was appointed Episcopal Vicar by then Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin in 2019 and continues in this role under Archbishop Farrell, with responsibility for the deaneries of Bray, Donnybrook and Wicklow.



Archbishop Dermot Farrell and Fr Donal Roche on the day his appointment was announced at St Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin. Photo: John McElroy

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EU commissioner ignoring medicine for ideology over abortion – PLC

Ruadhán Jones

The Council of Europe's commission for human rights is ignoring medicine and rights in favour of ideology, the Pro Life Campaign (PLC) has said, after the commission called for Ireland and other EU states to remove "harmful barriers" to abortion.

It is "ideology versus science and medicine and experience" that motivates such calls, PLC spokesperson Eilís Mulroy told *The Irish Catholic*.

This ideological approach has become common across EU and UN bodies that "you would expect to uphold human rights", she added.

"Instead they're putting pressure on Ireland and other countries to 'liberalise' abortion laws."

They are "not doing the job they should be doing in terms of upholding human rights. The need to protect the very vulnerable people in the community", especially unborn children, Ms Mulroy added.

Her comments came after the commission criticised countries for having abortion laws that they said "impose" mandatory waiting periods in a report on the treatment of women's reproductive and sexual health in the EU.

"In most member states, a range of regulatory, pol-

icy and practical barriers continue to hinder access to abortion care in practice," the Commissioner for Human Rights Ms Dunja Mijatovic said.

"These include medically unnecessary restrictions such as short time limits for abortion on request, third-party authorisation requirements, restrictions on access to medication abortion, and restrictions on who can provide and manage abortion that are inconsistent with WHO guidance."

The commissioner also criticised the North's provision of so-called "abortion care", saying its conscientious objection laws "hinder

timely access to care".

The commissioner called for EU member states to "repeal laws and policies that criminalise abortion, so as to remove all criminal penalties for consensual abortion, including for anyone who undergoes abortion, assists with access to abortion or provides abortion care".

Their call came after France made the "shocking" move to enshrine rights to abortion in the country's constitution.

Ms Mulroy warned that there are a number of referenda coming up around the world that would see similar efforts to enshrine 'abortion rights'.

Oireachtas essayists...



The winners of the second annual Oireachtas Essay Competition organised by Senator Rónán Mullen are pictured after receiving their prizes from Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Fearghail TD at a ceremony in Leinster House. The overall winner in English Mikeala Dyer was praised by the judges for writing a "clear and coherent argument that Parliamentary Politics can foster peace and reconciliation in various historical contexts". Pictured are Eve Ni Chanainn from Colaiste an Eachreidh, Bothar Thuama, Baile Atha an Ri, Co. na Gallimhe (Overall winner in Irish); Jaceb Fegan, Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Belfast; Cormac Fulton Wygers, Mount St Michael Secondary School Co. Cork; Karo Bekker, St Brendan's Community School, Birr, Co. Offaly; Thomas Godfrey, Colaiste Iognaid, Galway City; Mikeala Dyer, Our Lady of Mercy College, Beaumont, Dublin. Photo: John McElroy.

Senator challenges Govt's 'draconian' safe access zones bill

Brandon Scott

Independent Senator, Sharon Keogan, has lambasted the

Government's safe access bill, insisting that the implications of the bill "are just as worrying as the hate speech bill in terms

of their impact on civil liberties".

Speaking in the Seanad, Senator Keogan said that she had "raised concerns with the House about this bill's draconian implications" which she believed "are just as worrying as the hate speech bill in terms of their impact on civil liberties ... Since any efforts to influence someone's decision to have an

abortion is criminalised under this law, this would, at the very least, create a chilling effect".

The bill was passed in the Dáil in November 2023 and is currently being debated in the Seanad for further consideration. It seeks to prohibit certain conduct, including silent prayer, within 100m of any healthcare premises where abortions are provided.

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Bishops call for complete and immediate ceasefire in Gaza

Ruadhán Jones

The Irish bishops' conference has called for an immediate and complete ceasefire in Gaza, urging Israel and Islamist terrorist organisation Hamas to work for a just peace.

"We join with many in our parishes, together with all people of goodwill, in demanding an immediate end to the daily horror of killing, wounding and destruction of property and infrastructure there," the bishops said in a statement from their Spring gathering on March 5.

Israel and Hamas have been engaged in a protracted war following Hamas premeditated terrorist attack on October 7 last year. The Hamas run health ministry in Gaza has claimed that more than 30,000 Gazans have been killed in the conflict.

The Irish bishops called on the Israeli government to comply with "basic human and international standards in ensuring that Palestinians have full and unimpeded access to food, water and basic safety requirements".

They also called on Hamas to release all hostages and end missile attacks on Israel. The Irish bishops condemned the attacks

on Palestinians in the West Bank, saying that what is happening in the region "cannot be morally justified".

The Irish bishops warned that "there is no future in the perpetuation of conflict and human suffering".

"This is especially so when one considers the intensity of what is happening in the Holy Land. The only future is one of dialogue and the putting in place of a sustainable plan for a just peace for Palestinians and Israelis," they said.

The bishops call came after the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem criti-

cised a February 29 incident that saw 100 Palestinians killed by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), saying that "in the aftermath of yesterday's horrifying events and their cruel context, we, the patriarchs and heads of Churches in Jerusalem, condemn the wanton attack against innocent civilians".

The patriarchs called for both parties involved in the conflict "to reach an immediate and lengthy ceasefire that allows for the speedy disbursement of relief supplies throughout the Gaza Strip, and for the enactment of a negotiated release of those held as captives and prisoners".

Book targeting evil welcomed by priest expert

Chai Brady

An Irish expert in deliverance ministry and exorcism has welcomed a booklet brought out by the Catholic bishops' conference of England and Wales said to help Catholics "protect themselves from the

powers of darkness".

In a statement, the bishops said *Deliver Us From Evil* does not provide a formula of words to be prayed over others, but is a set of "useful prayers and supplications, humble requests for the Lord's help, that can be used by Catho-

lics in times of fear, distress or temptation". The book is published by the Catholic Truth Society.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Dublin-based Fr Pat Collins CM said he was "delighted to hear" the bishops of England and Wales were bringing out such a

"timely booklet", adding that it is clearly dealing with "the everyday battle against the powers of evil which would come in different forms".

Speaking of the English version of the Rite of Exorcism published by the American bishops, Fr Pat said it has an appendix which includes

prayers that "could be said in the battle against evil, many of which are ones that lay people could say".

"I think what they have done is taken a lot of the prayers from that and augmented it with prayers that would have been fairly well known in England

and Wales and brought out a relatively modest little booklet of 64 pages, with prayer resources for those who want to win in the struggle with the dark side. We do very little original work like that in the Irish Church," he added.

Bl. Carlo Acutis attracts youth in Clogher



Young people receive a blessing with the relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis in St Macartan's Cathedral, Co. Monaghan.

Staff reporter

A relic of a young saint-to-be Blessed Carlo Acutis attracted hundreds of young people to gather in St Macartan's Cathedral in Clogher diocese.

Blessed Acutis, who died of leukaemia in 2006 at the age of 15, was known for centring his life around the Eucharist and

attending Mass and adoration daily.

On October 10, 2020, he was beatified by Pope Francis, becoming the first millennial to be declared 'Blessed' by the Catholic Church.

A relic of the young man toured Clogher diocese from March 3-5, visiting the cathedral in Monaghan and St Michael's Church, Enniskillen.

Relics of Blessed Carlo Acutis have toured many dioceses in Ireland, proving to be a draw for young people attracted by the teenager's example.

Seven other Irish dioceses have welcomed his relics since last June, with Blessed Acutis' home diocese of Assisi saying they attracted "thousands of pilgrims".

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World must be responsible for legacy left behind in climate change battle - Trócaire lecture

Brandon Scott

Speaking at the St Patrick's College Maynooth Annual Trócaire Lecture, Fr Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator SJ, the former President of the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar, warned that we must collectively commit to assuming "responsi-

bility for the legacy we will leave behind once we leave the world" and that modern Catholic social teaching can inform Catholics in their bid to be more environmentally conscious.

The conference, entitled 'Climate Justice and Catholic Social Teaching: 'Everything is connected' and 'No one is

saved alone", provided those in attendance with a broader perspective on the overlap between Catholic Faith and environmentalism, with Fr Orobator extolling Pope Francis' efforts to alleviate the global impacts of climate change.

Speaking at the lecture, Fr Orobator, said that "Pope

Francis advocates for an urgently needed broader perspective to enable the present generation to assume 'responsibility for the legacy we will leave behind, once we pass from this world'.

"Previously, in *Laudato Si'*, he identified a tripartite framework consisting of 'a sound ethics, a culture and spiritual-

ity'. Climate justice grounded in a tripartite ethical framework such as advocated by Francis in the tradition of Catholic social teaching offers a vision of an ethics of solidarity and compassion, a culture of care and encounter, and a spirituality of mutuality and safeguarding. This vision is not utopian; it is achievable" he said.

Parishes in Kerry and Cork remain vigilant after spate of burglaries

Staff reporter

All parishes in the Diocese of Kerry are being asked to review their security arrangements amid concerns about break-ins and burglaries in churches and other buildings.

Churches in Killarney have been targeted in broad daylight over the last number of months, including the rural Muckross Church near the Killarney National Park with money being taken from the collection box.

Killarney parish priest Fr Kieran O'Brien recently said

rural churches are still open each morning so people can drop in for a quiet prayer, but they are vulnerable.

Parish committees have been asked to review security procedures "with a view to ensuring that reasonable precautions are in place to protect parish property", a spokeswoman for the diocese said.

Parishes have been advised that valuable religious items and artifacts must be stored away in unmarked and secure cabinets, safes, or storage rooms when not in use.

Man remanded in custody over priest's house fire

Staff reporter

A man has been remanded in custody over the alleged arson of the parochial house in Athy, Co. Kildare, on February 18.

James Rowan (45) faces allegations of burglary and criminal damage, which caused hundreds of thousands of euros worth of damage, Naas District Court was told.

Garda Ken McDonald alleged the defendant stole cash and items from the house, after earlier coming to ask Fr

Liam Rigney PP for money for tea and a bus ticket.

The garda objected to bail being granted and said Mr Rowan has a hatred towards the clergy and the priesthood. He feared he would commit further crime to feed a drug habit.

He claimed the defendant said Fr Rigney should have been tied to the bed and burned in it. He further claimed he said "90% of priests in the country should be drowned".

Solicitor Brian Larkin said

the defendant has nothing against Fr Rigney. Mr Rowan said he bears no ill will to the priest, saying he was "molested years ago" but "that it is dealt with", according to *The Leinster Leader*.

Judge Desmond Zaidan said the defendant is presumed innocent and "you'd have to be inhuman not to feel sorry for drug addicts".

He refused Mr Rowan bail and remanded him in custody, directing that he receive medical treatment.

NEWS IN BRIEF

St Patrick Centre seeks young creative writers

A creative writing competition for young people has been launched in honour of St Patrick and a Co. Down writer and broadcaster closely linked to his life and legacy.

The competition is in memory of Maureen Donnelly, who wrote children's stories for the BBC and books as well as a Church of Ireland Gazette column, 'Diary of a Parson's Wife'.

Students in key stage 3 and 4 are invited to enter with cash prizes ranging from £400-£600.

Launched by the Saint Patrick Centre, the world's only permanent exhibition to St Patrick, the competition invites poems and essays inspired by the life and writing of St Patrick.

"This is our way of remembering a dedicated writer and good friend of The Saint Patrick Centre," said Dr Tim Campbell, Centre Director.

"We want to hear from young people who want to explore and examine what St Patrick's life and writings can tell us about our own world today."

New Catholic college in Clonfert as schools combine

A new Catholic college will open in Clonfert diocese after two Ballinasloe secondary schools announced their amalgamation.

St Joseph's College, Garbally, and Ardscoil Mhuire founded by the Sisters of Mercy have come together to form Clonfert College, set to open in September 2025.

The newly amalgamated school will "continue to draw on the richness of the Catholic tradition of education promoting Christian values and high educational standards in a coeducational setting", a spokesperson for Clonfert diocese said.

"The new school will not only serve Ballinasloe town, but the surrounding areas and the 21 feeder primary schools which have traditionally supported the two schools."

An amalgamation steering committee has been planning for the move since November 2023, with work complete on school uniforms, staff development and a mission statement.

The diocese welcomed the "exciting development" for education in Ballinasloe, while work continues to introduce co-education, integrate staff and parents associations, as well as aligning curriculum, booklists and admissions policies.

New confirmands for Diocese of Meath



Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan joins teacher Ruth Murtagh and students of St Joseph's Kingscourt, Co. Cavan, who were Confirmed by Dr Deenihan in Kingscourt parish.

History teaches the sources of war and suffering

“Thankfully, it’s not my field of expertise, so I don’t have to write about it,” I heard a journalist remark last week, in relief. He was referring to the Gaza-Israel conflict, how agonising it is, and how difficult it would be to produce a balanced commentary on these terrible events.

On the one hand, the situation and the suffering are heart-scorching, and the Israelis seem to be carrying out a pitiless military strategy. On the other hand, didn’t Hamas, with the backing of Iran launch this conflict? And on the other hand yet again, shouldn’t we sympathise with the Palestinian displaced people?

I wouldn’t try to compose a political judgment about the situation either. But my researches have led me towards some understanding of why the Israelis are acting with such unremitting ferocity.

I’ve been reading historical material about the situation of French Jews during the Nazi Occupation. My main object is researching the nuns and priests who hid and often saved Jew-



Mary Kenny



An Israeli tank re-enters Israel from Gaza, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, near the Israel-Gaza border, in southern Israel, January 11. Photo: OSV News/Tyrone Siu, Reuters

ish children during the years 1940-1944 in France.

History

Martin Gilbert, the Jewish scholar, sets the scene in his book *The Righteous*: “On August 28, 1942... the Germans ordered all Catholic priests who sheltered Jews to be arrested. Those taken

included a Jesuit priest who had hidden 80 Jewish children destined for deportation [to concentration camps].”

There were many priests who tried to save Jewish lives: Père Chaillet SJ, Abbé Monchanin, Canon Viollet, Père Devaux, Capuchin Père Marie-Benoit, Père Bonsirven SJ, Abbé Glasberg (himself a

convert from Judaism) being among the best-known. And some individuals and families were indeed successfully saved.

But, as was the case all over occupied Europe, the drive to annihilate the Jewish people was absolutely relentless and so many were tracked down and sent to camps. The most integrated Jews were deported, as were the most religious, as were those who had converted to Christianity.

“Only a Jewish state could guarantee that the events of the Third Reich wouldn’t happen again”

The most horrible roadside posters were erected all over France: “The Jews are your unhappiness.” “Sweep away the Jews out of the country”. Jews were physically portrayed as sly, cowardly and money-grubbing.

The story of St Edith Stein – along with her sister Rosa – illustrates the horror of it all. Despite being a Catholic convert, and a Carmelite nun, the Nazis came for her at a convent in the Netherlands, and with 243 other baptised Jews in Holland, brought them to Auschwitz where they were put to death. (The Dutch bishops had spoken out against the racism of the Nazis, provoking the Reich’s extra ire.)

Defense

It’s only when trawling through all this material that one comes to understand why, after 1945, the Jewish people committed to a Jewish state; and swore never again to be the victims of anti-Semitism. Only a Jewish state could guarantee that the events of the Third Reich wouldn’t happen again.

They resolved to become a warrior people – a very different identity from the caricature of European Jews as physically timid, bespectacled, bookworms. They aspired to become the *sabras*

– hard as nails in their own self-defence.

And so the Israelis did become tougher than tough – so that never again would they be subjected to a regime of extermination. Decades of being isolated and condemned by international organisations like the United Nations possibly hardened them more.

Perhaps, to our eyes today, they became too hard, too relentless in their war against Hamas in Gaza. The number of victims is horrific and the pictures of suffering Palestinian mothers and children, particularly, almost too much to bear.

“In a way, one terrible situation of history may often produce another”

Yet I’ve come to understand how Israel got to be how it is; and how, in a way, one terrible situation of history may often produce another.

Discipline for body and soul



Obesity is now a global health problem, according to the World Health Organisation: two-fifths of the world’s population is now obese or overweight, and it’s all due to get worse over the next decade.

In the United States, some 41% of the population is overweight or obese, while in Europe it’s not a lot better at around 36% generally. Though European countries

vary: Hungary, Malta and Croatia are all over one-third obese, and Ireland has hit 30.70% while the UK is a little lower at 26.34% obesity. The least overweight European countries are Spain (19.19%) Sweden (17.18%) and Denmark (15.70%). Of the developed nations, Japan is the slim champ at just 7.63% overweight.

It’s not difficult to see why there is so much obesity: walk into any general

foodstore and observes the stacks upon stacks of sweets, chocolates, crisps and processed snacks on offer.

Claire Byrne on RTÉ radio recently advised her audience to try and defer scoffing their Easter Eggs and other chocolate treats until Easter itself, for the sake of health. It’s as if the general populace had never heard of Lent, or the fact that many disciplines for the soul are also healthy for the body.

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For Ukrainians, there is still hope within horror



Brandon Scott

For a generation born after a certain period in Europe, war and its perverse consequences have thankfully not been all too intimately known. In fact, the vast majority of Europe's inhabitants - save the likely elderly of World War II and the middle-aged products of the Cold War and The Troubles - have largely been spared from the anguish of existential threat, famine, refugees and all of the myriad of tragedies that are synonymous with dialogue reaching a point of no return and aggression usurping sense and reason. As one man succinctly put it: when 'jaw-jaw' loses out to 'war-war'.

Hindsight, the most envied of all sights, demonstrates that Europe was a reasonably peaceful place, with the exception of the occasional temporary flare up, for a remarkable 30 years. Which is precisely why the colossal reverberations of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine were so horrendously felt by most who witnessed the shattering of a nation unfold before its very eyes our phones and televisions now becoming transmitters of the plight, suffering and agony of a nation ravaged by brutality.

Ramifications

As we passed the unwanted milestone of two years since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and sustained conflict, *The Irish Catholic* interviewed Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski, bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Holy Family of London and Apostolic Visitor for Ukrainians in Ireland and Northern Ireland, to collect his thoughts on how the war is continuing to impact society in Ukraine, how he feels Europe is collectively responding to the conflict in a world that is now grappling with the ramifications of another painful war and how the Ukrainian community has settled into their new home in Ireland with the able help of the Church.

When asked about his immediate thoughts in the aftermath of the invasion, Bishop Nowakowski said that he "couldn't believe what he was seeing" when he looked at his phone but admits that he was also "not shocked" by the development as many Ukrainians had already known that it was just a matter of time before the Russians struck.

"Certainly two years ago tomorrow when I woke up and looked at my smartphone, I couldn't believe what I was seeing - but I was not shocked," he said. "The Russians had been building up their troops on the borders for months. They weren't there just for ordinary wars games."

“Shortages of medical supplies are leading to a significant number of preventative deaths”

Analysing the distressing two years that have followed, Bishop Nowakowski described the period as "an unending nightmare" and warned that shortages of medical supplies are leading to a significant number of preventative deaths. "It's been two years of a one-day unending nightmare," he said. "It's disrupted families, it's disrupted ordinary life for everyone in Ukraine - whether they're in the war zone or not. Families have been displaced.

"We don't know of the exact number of the defenders, civilians and people who have died from illnesses that we in the west don't die that much from. High blood pressure pills, insulin, cancer medicines that are not readily available to those people who are living in the red zones where this is all happening."

Acknowledging the countless challenges Ireland has faced since it's undertaken the large-scale humanitarian endeavour of accommodating almost 105,000 Ukrainian refugees to-date, coupled with the pre-existing problems in housing, health and education, Bishop Nowakowski

“Ukraine needs all of the collective support it can get because it's fighting for the life 'we take for granted' and that governments are not removing Ukraine from its agendas



Fr Vasyl Kornitsky speaks to congregants at Our Lady of Consolation Parish, Donnycarney, Dublin.

believes most people understand that Ukraine needs all of the collective support it can get because it's fighting for the life "we take for granted" and that governments are not removing Ukraine from its agendas.

"The number of people that have arrived in Ireland and have found places of shelter, a place of refuge," he said. "All of this is very challenging for Europe but I think most people understand that Ukraine is not just fighting for its own survival but it's fighting for the life that we here in the west, in Ireland, in America, that we take for granted.

"We know that governments and people have not removed Ukraine from their agendas. We know that in parishes in Ireland, both Catholic and Church of Ireland, people are praying every Sunday for peace in Ukraine. We know when we encounter people on the street that everybody knows Ukrainians because people are employing, working or helping them."

Not shy in expressing his gratitude to the Irish people for their generous welcome, Bishop Nowakowski commended the Irish people,

particularly those "in various Catholic dioceses that are housing our priests and parishes" for enabling them to "gather for cultural events so [Ukrainian people] can keep roots and ties with their homeland and each other" in spite of the precarious times.

"We know that a large majority of Ukrainians arriving in Ireland are young mothers with dependent children," he said. "So they're in schools and the teachers in these schools are trying to make them feel as welcome as possible.

"I'm extremely grateful for the example of the Irish people who were so quickly able to welcome our Ukrainian brothers and sisters. Think of the various Catholic dioceses that are housing our priests and parishes. We have now five Ukrainian Catholic priests in Ireland working in five stable parishes and each of those priests now have other mission parishes that they serve."

Resonation

Bishop Nowakowski believes that the Irish and Ukrainian experiences of injustice and oppression "parallel" with one another and he attributes the generosity shown by Irish people to how the situation resonates with the nation's history.

"I think of the Irish history and I see it so parallel what's happening now in Ukraine," he said. "Ukrainians have fled because their place has been

invaded and their home has been destroyed. They've fled because they have no place to be. We know of now 6 million who have scattered.

"They're not fleeing persecution from their own government or their own people. They're fleeing because of their religious and ethnic background. They're fleeing the country that they love but has been invaded by a very aggressive neighbour."

Reflecting on the times he visited the Ukrainian communities spanning the length and breadth of Ireland, Bishop Nowakowski said he has found the welcome that Catholic parishes have shown to people in need of both some spiritual and communal relief "overwhelming".

“I felt a great resolve amongst the people. They're not demoralised. They're filled with resolve because they know they have to win”

"I've had the opportunity several times to come to Ireland and visit our clergy and be with our people. I think of my encounters in Dublin, Limerick and Waterford ... how people have described the welcome that they've received and the ability to find employment.

"I have to say that overall

the response has been positive. The Catholic dioceses that have welcomed priests and Ukrainians and given the opportunity for people to pray in the churches and also to have places of meeting being able to gather - it's overwhelming."

Bishop Nowakowski insisted that the ultimate goal for Ukrainians is to return home to their native land, their sanctuary, and when given the opportunity, they will be "bringing the best of Ireland with them".

Resolve

"When you talk to Ukrainians, their desire is to go home. But if you are from a war-torn area, where do you go home to? Your home has been destroyed, the schools, the hospitals and the universities have been destroyed. When Ukrainians do go home, they will be bringing some of the best of Ireland with them. The people of Ukraine will not forget all of the good things the Irish people have given them in their most needed hour.

"In my last trip to Ukraine, just before Christmas, I felt a great resolve amongst the people. They're not demoralised. They're filled with resolve because they know they have to win. If Ukraine stops fighting it may be eliminated and that's what Putin wants. We pray for peace but peace can't just mean the cessation of armed conflict, it has to be justice."

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

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

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

Adapt, rebuild, thrive

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

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

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



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

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

Kosimasi, Malawi

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

A global connection

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

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

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

THE LASTING LEGACY OF TOOLS AND TRAINING

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



TECHNOLOGY

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



IRRIGATION

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



TRAINING

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

A growing impact

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

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

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

A lasting legacy

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

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

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

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

Eileen, Co. Limerick



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

Learn how you can help to protect families against climate change

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

Phone: 01 417 8020 E-mail: siobhan.oconnor@concern.net

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Women deserve better than the meaningless platitudes from Govt



Wendy Grace

On Feiday you will be asked to vote on two changes to our Constitution. Perhaps you, like much of the country, don't really understand what it's all about, and I don't blame you because it seems neither does the Government!

Their stance has been one that is based on confusion rather than clarity, and hollow virtue signalling, using those old predictable buzzwords of a more 'inclusive' and 'progressive' Ireland.

From the outset, this campaign has been run with a huge democratic deficit with all the major political parties using their war chests and manpower to push for a Yes/Yes campaign. Couple this with the fact you have tax funded NGOs like the National Women's Council of Ireland pouring their resources into their Yes/Yes campaigns. This is what led Independent Senator Sharon Keogan to run a gofundme page to try and pay for printing posters and opposition literature.

So let's start with the family amendment which is asking us to extend the constitutional definition of family to 'durable relationships'. The only problem is the Government has been unable to define what a 'durable relationship' actually is.

Discussions

You might wonder if they figured it out over 16 hours of discussions that the interdepartmental group tasked with looking at this issue had. The only problem is, we're not privy to what happened at those meetings.

No/No advocate and former Attorney General Senator Michael McDowell tried to get this information through a Freedom of Information request, but for some reason Minister Roderic O'Gorman felt it wouldn't be in the public interest to be informed in advance of casting their vote. There was no pre-legislative scrutiny and even TDs debating possible implications of these changes had their debate guillotined.

The only jurisprudence we



A mother and daughter are pictured reading in their home. Photo: OSV News/courtesy of Misericordia University

have in the State, concerning a 'durable relationship', is that it is a sexual or intimate relationship, so the Government using a single mother and child to push their campaign is disingenuous, a yes vote will do nothing for single parents.

Ultimately the definition will be left up to the courts to figure out. We could end up redefining the whole family based on disputes brought to court, and if a case goes to the Supreme Court, this decision can only be reversed by a referendum (like we need more of those!).

“There is no clarity on when a 'durable relationship' begins, ends or even if there is consent”

So what do you put on your tax return? And what if I think I am in a durable relationship with you, but you disagree?

The goalposts with marriage are clear, you can't remarry while your first marriage remains. But if you're in a 'durable relationship' you could of course, easily end one relationship and

enter into another, and legal uncertainty ensues. There is no clarity on when a 'durable relationship' begins, ends or even if there is consent. The Government hasn't denied that you can be in a marriage and a durable relationship at the same time, so who wins that battle of rights?

The long term consequences in areas like tax, welfare, pensions, family reunification, and inheritance rights are far reaching. The courts have held that our Constitution does in fact protect relationships between members of non-marital families through the Children's Rights amendment.

Recognition

We've heard in recent weeks stories of cohabiting couples who have been together or engaged for years and how they want the same recognition as a married couple from the state. But if you want the State involved in your relationship by way of rights and protections, then you have to inform the State of your relationship via legal declaration, much the same way as you register the birth of your child to receive child welfare payments.

This process of a legal recognition of your commitment to another person is called... marriage! So why would we

want to disincentivise marriage? Marriage is something that swathes of research has established is good for society, relationships, and children.

The second vote is in relation to how care is defined in the Constitution and the recognition of the contribution of the role of women to the common good. The Government's proposal would effectively remove the only constitutional recognition for mothers.

“If you were serious about empowering and respecting women, you would work towards a society that values parents who stay at home just as much as those who don't”

I suggest you cast a No/No vote as a clear clarion call to the Government, telling them they are not off the hook, that they must fulfil the aspiration the Constitution sets out that no woman should have to leave the home out of 'economic necessity'.

Because sadly many women are in this position, in fact one recent message

I got from a listener to my radio programme said it all: "I tried for 10 years to have my little girl, now she is here I can't afford to be with her".

And she is not alone, the vast majority, seven out of 10 women, would like to be at home with their children if they could afford it, and around the same number feel undervalued by society. And to the faux feminists in who have ignored the choices that women are desperate to be empowered to make in caring for their children, if you were serious about empowering and respecting women, you would work towards a society that values parents who stay at home just as much as those who don't.

Penalised

You would fight for those who are penalised for staying at home to the tune of thousands via tax individualisation and fight for financial recognition and support for those who care for their children at home.

Could the language be modernised, yes! Should fathers be included, yes please! Except the Government has missed this opportunity and instead wants to erase women and their constitutional recognition.

The wording has been

carefully chosen to provide less accountability and responsibility from the government and as the 'Lawyers for No' group, upon launching their No/No campaign made clear, it would provide 'no justiciable rights' for people either giving or needing care.

“The Government has missed this opportunity and instead wants to erase women and their constitutional recognition”

On March 8 we have an opportunity to move away from the stifling groupthink that has engulfed Ireland over the last decade. Vote No to the reckless 'durable relationships' amendment and the chaos it will bring to family, tax, immigration and inheritance law, and Vote No to the care amendment that is regressive and insulting to women and seeks to erase motherhood from our Constitution.

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

No one should be afraid of hearing different opinions



Many universities are fast becoming cold houses for people who want genuine debate, writes **Michael Kelly**

I had the pleasure recently of speaking in a debate organised by the Literary and Scientific Society at Queen's University, Belfast. It was a civilised and convivial occasion, and we were debating the motion 'this house believes that society has moved too far from God'.

On my team, speaking in favour of the motion, I had three students, a young Jewish woman and two young Presbyterian men. As it happens, we won the debate after some lively jostling with our opponents and the entire evening ended with handshakes and libations in a nearby hostelry.

It struck me as the perfect model of how life at university should be: young people with very strong opinions ventilating these opposing opinions in a space where people are willing to listen, debate and disagree without being disagreeable.

Students at the University of Manchester who wanted to hold a pro-life meeting last week had somewhat of a less pleasant experience. The newly-formed pro-life society needed a police escort to leave their first meeting after a large mob of protesters gathered outside the building.

Protesters

Ironically, some women amongst the protesters described themselves as 'fearing for their safety' not because of the mob they were part of, but because the pro-life students were peacefully having a meeting inside.

More than 15,000 people have now signed a petition to have the society disbanded by the university. And shock-horror it has emerged that the president of the pro-life society "opposes abortion" according to the breathless report on the events in *The Daily Mail*.

According to eyewitnesses, the harassment began as soon

as students tried to access the building hosting the event. Eggs were thrown at windows, while students who arrived to attend the event were subject to what organisers described as "a torrent of verbal abuse and threats".

The intimidation escalated to a point where the police arrived to enable the pro-life students to enter the building. As students left the event, they had to proceed through a tunnel of protesters held back by police as the air reverberated with chanting: "Shame on you! Shame on you! Shame on you!"

The pro-life students were spat at and threatened with physical abuse, including one female first-year student reportedly being told to "get raped". Some members of the crowd then pursued the students while shouting and swearing at them.

You can see the videos online, and the scenes are reminiscent of the protests in the US in the early 1960s when young African American students tried to register at the University of Alabama.

“The very people who should be opening minds, are instead egging on impressionable minds to be closed, intolerant and censorious”

How has it come to this? How has it come to a point where universities, supposed to be places where ideas are trashed out and debated, have become areas where unpopular opinions are not critiqued but actually banned?

What has made so many young people – who would self-identify as liberal – so intolerant, closed-minded, and unable to hear views they don't like?

And it's not just students. Many of those demanding that the pro-life society in Manchester be driven from the campus, are academics and other professional staff at the university. The very people who should be opening minds, are instead egging on impressionable minds to be closed, intolerant and censorious.

Social media is undoubtedly part of the problem. The algorithms work to feed us more and more of the same articles. So, for example, if you 'like' an article on X, formerly Twitter, that is approving of so-called 'exclusion zones' that ban pro-

life campaigners from being near an abortion clinic, you will see more of the same. Like another one, and the platform has the measure of you and will drag you down a rabbit hole where you never again see an article that challenges you.

That makes the real world, where people have differing opinions all the time, a very scary place for many younger people. It also means that they are ill-equipped to articulate their point of view or argue with someone they disagree with, precisely because they are never confronted by arguments they disagree with. So, the default option is to use the real-world equivalent of the 'block' button on social media and call for dissenters to be banned.

It's a tendency that is even causing some older genuine liberals to challenge their younger fellow travellers. Former US president Barack Obama used a speech to young people in 2019 to warn them that "cancel culture is not activism".

He's right, of course, and our universities here are not immune from the sort of scenes on display in Manchester. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar last year used a speech at Dublin's Trinity College to warn about the issue.

"The core principle of free and open debate has never been more fragile, and never more important. I fear that, increasingly, debating chambers have been replaced by echo chambers. We have prevailing ideologies, accepted norms and unsaid rules about what is and what is not acceptable to believe let alone say."

"Increasingly there are subjects that people are afraid of speaking about for fear of causing offence," Mr Varadkar said.

"It is right that we are sensitive to those around us and choose our words carefully. But we also need to accept that we need to be able to educate, to persuade and to understand. And for that, people need to be able to be free to express their beliefs without fear of being cancelled," he said.

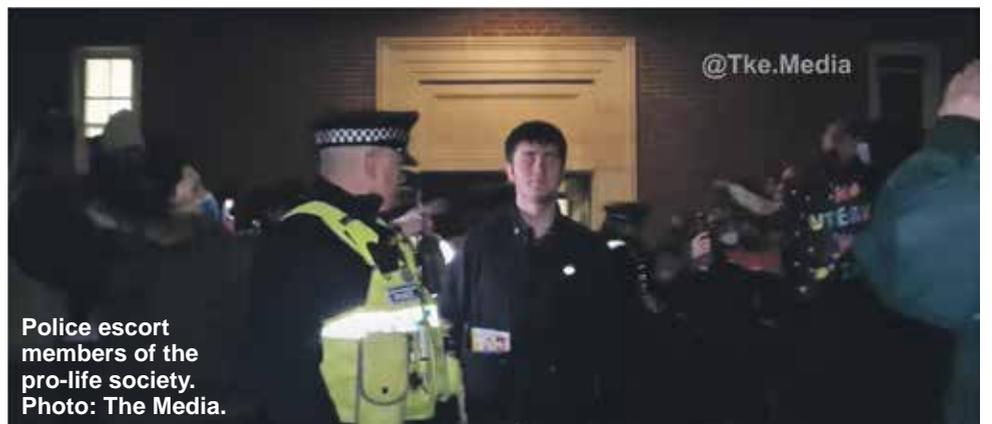
The irony, of course, is that Mr Varadkar's Government is pushing radical hate speech laws that lawyers warn will limit and restrict free speech.

If Mr Varadkar truly believes what he said at Trinity, he should tell Justice Minister Helen McEntee to drop her ill-advised and unnecessary hate speech laws.

We all have a right not to be subject to hate, but no-one should be afraid to hear opinions they disagree with. It's a basic principle in a free society.



The members of the pro-life society at University of Manchester pictured at their first meeting. Photo: Manchester Pro Life/Instagram.



Police escort members of the pro-life society. Photo: The Media.

The Irish Catholic Who Will Pass on the Flame of Faith?

It can be disappointing when some younger people don't share the beauty and wonder of our Catholic Faith. You can help spread the light of the Gospel to future generations across Ireland by remembering *The Irish Catholic* in your will. A future where young people are exposed to the power of the Good News can be part of your legacy.

For over 130 years now, *The Irish Catholic* has been the voice of hope and inspiration for Catholics in Ireland at tough times. During dark times, it has kept the flame of faith alive, and during good times it has been there to highlight the life changing power of our religion.

By helping people join the dots between faith and everyday life, we hope to inspire more young people to take on the adventure of friendship with God. Your gift will allow the newspaper to develop its mission in schools and deprived communities and challenge some of the negative messages targeting young people and uplift them with the Gospel so that they can confidently pass their faith on to others.

For more information about leaving a legacy to *The Irish Catholic*, please phone 01 6874028 or email info@irishcatholic.ie in strictest confidence.

A strange march for nuns to take part in



Nuns at protest raises questions about clashing views of justice, writes David Quinn

A big demonstration passed through Dublin on Saturday mainly to protest against what is happening in Gaza, but also on behalf of a whole plethora of minority groups from asylum-seekers, to Travellers, to transsexual people, to those with disabilities. Among those taking part in the march was a group of Dominican nuns.

Sr Mary Daly OP explained why they were attending. It was about justice, she told a reporter. "We have differences but we're human beings and we want justice for all. We must work together".

By "differences" I assume she meant that as Catholic nuns they would not agree with all the other groups on the march about everything, but mostly they were all motivated by the same thing, namely a desire for a better, fairer society. Some of the groups in attendance were decidedly pro-abortion, or 'pro-choice' to use their own term for themselves.

Le Cheile

The march was organised by Le Cheile, which is not to be confused with the Catholic education body of the same name. This Le Cheile describes itself as a "broad-

based cross-sectoral alliance working together to promote diversity in Irish society".

For me, it was a strange thing for the nuns to attend the march despite their explanation. It is one thing to say all the groups there were motivated by 'justice', but can it really be said that a society in which (according to early indications), something like 10,000 abortions took place last year is really more 'just'?

It is all very well to say you are for 'justice', but obviously different people have different conceptions of justice that might point in diametrically opposing directions.

Atheists often complain when those of us who believe in God say (wrongly) that atheists cannot be moral. But equally, some of those who said they are all for 'justice' do not have a monopoly on the use of that word either.

In many ways, the groups that took part in Saturday's march make for an extremely odd alliance. The protest was concerned mainly with the fighting in Gaza and chants were heard that said 'From the river to the sea, Palestine shall be free'.

“ Hamas believes in theocratic rule based on an ultra-strict version of Islam that allows little room for women's rights and certainly none for LGBT people ”

Some people who chant this might not know exactly what it means, but many do, and it means that Israel, the one Jewish state on the planet, must cease to exist.

No matter what you think about the present war, most reasonable people want there to be a two-state solution, that is the continued existence of Israel, and the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

Calling for the destruction of the state of Israel is a very

Dominican Sisters Cabra attend the Stand Together Rally in Dublin on Saturday March 2



strange version of justice. What do the Dominican nuns who took part in the march think?

But another reason why this alliance was so odd is that Hamas, which rules Gaza, is an ultra-fundamentalist Islamist organisation that is totally opposed to the main aims of many of the groups taking part in the march.

Hamas believes in theocratic rule based on an ultra-strict version of Islam that allows little room for women's rights and certainly none for LGBT people.

Illustration

As an illustration of the lack of women's rights in Gaza under Hamas, a Hamas-run court in Gaza in 2021 ruled that women cannot travel without the permission of a male guardian. How does this version of 'justice' square with that of other groups on the march?

In 2016, Hamas executed one of its commanders after he was accused of theft and having sex with a man.

Women's rights are only somewhat better in the West Bank where the Palestinian

Authority governs but the predominant flag on display at the march was the Palestinian one. It was waving alongside banners for the rights of transsexual people.

“ This is a view that actually has a strong strain of injustice running through it because it tends to classify people by the group they belong to, rather than viewing them as individuals ”

What explains such an incoherent alliance? The answer is a theory called 'intersectionality'. This view says that the campaigns being waged by various minorities all intersect because they are ultimately aimed at the same thing, namely 'justice'. Therefore, all these disparate groups are really on the same side.

Their struggle is against 'oppression' and all 'oppressed' groups should unite. But this is a view that actually has a strong strain of injustice running through it because it tends to classify people by the group they belong to, rather than viewing them as individuals.

It then says all members of any given 'oppressor' group are guilty by virtue of their

membership of such a group, while all members of this other 'oppressed' group are innocent (or less guilty at any rate) by virtue of being oppressed.

This leads to perverse outcomes that see (for example) white men, and especially older white men (the 'pale, stale male') as being somehow suspect because they belong to a group that has long been 'privileged' and oppressed almost everyone else. Your level of guilt is only magnified when you are a Christian and a heterosexual, as well as being an older, white man.

On the other hand, if you are non-Christian, a woman, LGBT, and a member of an ethnic minority (in other words of different intersecting minorities) then you are oppressed on multiple levels and you cannot be held to the same level of moral account as someone from intersecting oppressor groups.

Conflicting

But as I say, this sort of thinking leads to extremely perverse and conflicting outcomes because one minority group can easily oppress another, as we see in Gaza under Hamas-rule, pre-war and still today. Some minority groups are not natural allies at all. On the contrary.

Furthermore, it is hard to see how you can square the 'oppressor vs oppressed' viewpoint with Christianity.

Christianity obviously believes in sin, and the existence of oppression and injustice, but it also believes in redemption and forgiveness and therefore a way back.

“ That march through Dublin last Saturday, was really a march of incoherence that brought together hugely divergent and clashing views of 'justice' ”

An older, straight white man (like me) cannot become anything other than what he is, even if he takes part in a march like the one last Saturday. In a sense he is permanently guilty because of the overlapping 'oppressor' groups he belongs to. I don't see how you can get justice out of that.

Indeed, this view of justice led to enormous injustices in the likes of the Soviet Union as it sought to violently overthrow groups like 'capitalists'.

Therefore, at the end of day, that march through Dublin last Saturday, was really a march of incoherence that brought together hugely divergent and clashing views of 'justice' in the pretence that they are all facing in the same direction. They were doing no such thing.

“ Calling for the destruction of the state of Israel is a very strange version of justice. What do the Dominican nuns who took part in the march think? ”

A world obsessed with celebrating identity



There was no 'Women's History Month' when I was growing up and I wasn't oppressed, writes **Martina Purdy**

I find myself identifying with a man: the Hollywood actor Morgan Freeman.

Ironically, this self-identification began this month, with Women's History Month (which flows from International Women's Day, celebrated on March 8, and inspired by German marxist, Clara Zetkin).

Morgan Freeman stunned an interviewer almost 20 years ago when asked about 'Black History Month'.

Veteran journalist Mike

Wallace had assumed an African-American (Morgan rejects that label by the way) would want to celebrate Black History Month. And Wallace was taken aback when the Hollywood star called the idea "ridiculous", stating: "You are going to relegate my history to a month? What do you do with yours? Which month is 'White History Month'? Come on..."

Wallace answered rather feebly: "I'm Jewish."

"Ooooh," Freeman retorted. "Which month is 'Jewish History Month'?"

"There isn't one," said Wallace.

"Why not?" Freeman wondered. "Do you want one?"

"No," said Wallace.

And Freeman declared, rather controversially, that he did not want a Black History Month either. "Black history is American history," said Freeman.

Wallace then wanted to know how to get rid of racism without a black history month?

"Stop talking about it. I'm going to stop calling you a white man and you are going to stop calling me a black man."

Well, frankly I don't want 'Women's History Month'. It's all human history after all.

There was no Women's History Month when I was growing up in the 70s and 80s, and I wasn't oppressed as a result. It didn't stop my aspirations, or my career in journalism and it didn't prevent me from learning about famous women in history (or 'herstory', a term which never really took off).

"Women's History Month is just another trend in a culture, confused over pronouns, and determined to celebrate almost every identity except 'pale, male and stale'"

I graduated high school and university knowing all about Cleopatra, Brigid of Kildare, Elizabeth I, Joan of Arc, Mary Wollstonecraft, Marie Curie, Marie-Antoinette, Florence Nightingale, Amelia Earhart, Emily Pankhurst and the list goes on.

Indeed, my childhood reader, *The Book of Saints*, revealed as many holy women as men.

Women's History Month is just another trend in a culture, confused over pronouns, and determined to celebrate almost every identity except "pale, male and stale" – that tired racist, sexist and ageist mantra. Yet how often do we see women using this term, as if they have no father, brother or husband to offend or defend? There is no history without both male and female, nor is there a future.

Issues

When International Women's Day (IWD) was thought up a century ago there were serious issues to be addressed about the women's right to vote. Fast-forward to IWD 2024: there's a dodgy referendum vote to remove references to motherhood from the Irish Constitution – and a ridiculous row because Newry, Mourne & Down District Council invited a man as a keynote speaker to its IWD event. The council didn't anticipate a backlash because one of the themes of IWD 2024 is "inclusion". So it invited motivational speaker Billy Dixon to join a female host and two other women speakers. That row is laughable compared to debates

about where transgender women (men actually) fit into Women's History Month. Dixon has since withdrawn from the IWD event.

"In the story of Genesis (The Beginning), Eve, the first woman, is created from Adam's side, a sign, I was taught in Catholic school, of equality"

This obsession with identity is unhealthy and actually contrary to our Christian identity in which Paul tells us: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus" [Galatians 3:28].

The Catholic Church, for all her failings, had the radical idea of educating women, producing some of the world's first notable women scientists and scholars.

The Old and New Testaments date back thousands of years and recount the sto-

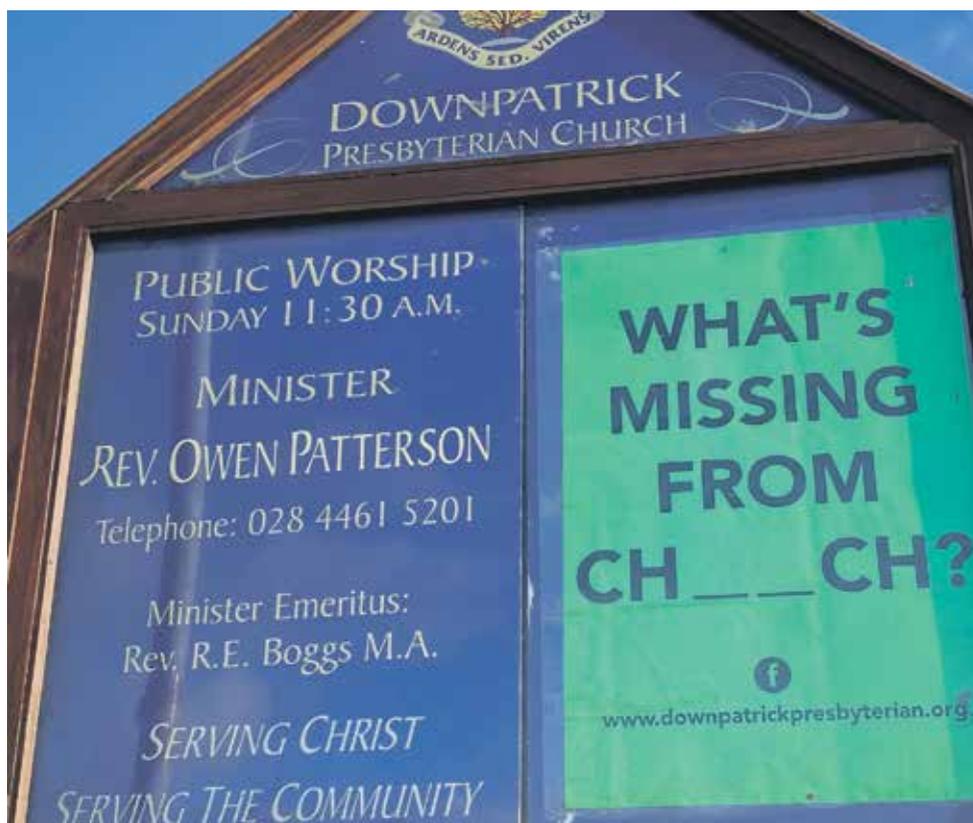
ries of both men and women. Gospels record the encounters Christ had with men and women, each with a distinct and unique role. John's resurrection account – written around 1,900 years ago – reveals Mary Magdalene to be the first witness to the resurrection and records that Jesus commissioned her to proclaim it. This was absolutely radical, as the testimony of women of her time was dismissed by the culture of the day. So the male writer did not ignore the fact that Jesus himself chose a woman for the job.

In the story of Genesis (The Beginning), Eve, the first woman, is created from Adam's side, a sign, I was taught in Catholic school, of equality.

Calendar

The secular calendar is jammed with celebrations but if we must mark certain days and months, I prefer the Church calendar, where male and female saints are celebrated day in and day out, where the liturgy is rich in stories of men and women, and where Mary, the most celebrated woman in history, is given her own month in May, for the good of all.

What is missing from church?



There's nothing inspiring about someone wagging their fingers and nagging: "Get you to Mass!" But I did smile at this message posted by a Presbyterian minister out-

side his Church in Downpatrick, Co. Down, where St Patrick began his Christian mission. His question? What's missing from Ch--ch? Picture below!

Frank Skinner 'missed the incense'



Comedian and actor Frank Skinner

Comedy and Catholicism are usually at odds but faith is a funny thing. For the British comedian Frank Skinner, they were his route out of addiction.

And he is blissfully counting his blessings. He wears a rosary ring for prayer, and in an interview with *Saga Magazine* (Experience is

everything), he admits exploring other religions but "missed the incense" and so embraced his Catholic faith with all its "strangeness".

The difficulties of predicting the next pope



Cardinals from around the world enter the Vatican's Sistine Chapel March 12 as they begin the conclave to elect a successor to Pope Benedict XVI in 2005. Photo: CNS/L'Osservatore Romano via Reuters

John Allen was in Los Angeles to give a talk to Catholics entitled 'What's Next? The Today and the Tomorrow of Francis's Papacy'. *The Irish Catholic* sat down with John and asked him the question that will be on his audience's lips – who's the next Pope going to be and what will his style of governance be like?

"Well, let me preface this by saying that in 1999 I published a biography of then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the final chapter of which contained four reasons why he would never be Pope. A point that Pope Benedict reminded me of on multiple occasions over the eight years he sat on the throne of Peter. So what the hell do I know fundamentally!

"That said, the Catholic Church isn't like secular politics; candidates don't declare themselves, we don't have an open process, people don't form exploratory committees and then announce their candidacies and test themselves in primaries. All we are left with is speculation."

Would it be fair to say what they are not looking for?

"Every conclave comes down to a referendum on the papacy that preceded it; basically, it's a vote for continuity or discontinuity. If we take 2005, after the death of John Paul II, I think cardinals believed they had just witnessed one of the most massively successful papacies in the entire history of the Catholic Church and they voted overwhelmingly for continuity. And that gave us Benedict XVI. After eight years of Benedict I think they felt that they had witnessed a tragically flawed papacy and they voted for discontinuity. And that gave us Pope Francis. So the question is, what's the mood of the college going to be when that moment comes? And look, let's just say, every conclave in its own way is unpredictable. On March 12, 2013 would you have bet your life savings on Pope Francis? Would you have seen that coming? Jorge Mario Bergoglio was a reasonable bet but that he would become Pope Francis, the Pope Francis we have seen for the last 11 years, I don't think anyone

saw that coming. In October 1978 would you have bet on the first non-Italian pope in 500 years? A pope who would bring down communism, which seemed immutable at that point of history, so you just never know.

The unpredictability of the conclave is compounded this time by an additional 'X factor' which is Pope Francis is very much a pope of the peripheries and that has translated into the cardinals he has named; look at the guys he's appointed, cardinals from Tonga, from Laos and so on. Places that we'd find difficult to find on a map let alone speak intelligently about. Knowing what these guys are going to be thinking as they

file into the Sistine Chapel I think is a fool's errand.

“I think the problem was for the discontinuity camp, they didn't have a candidate around whom they could crystallise”

The one thing we can be confident about is that there is going to be a continuity block in this conclave and there is going to be a discontinuity block. To me the intelligent question to ask is who are the candidates of those two

blocks.

For the continuity block, that is those who want to keep the momentum of the Francis papacy going, it seems to me there is an embarrassment of riches; Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, President of the Italian Bishops Conference and the Pope's handpicked mediator on Ukraine, product of the community of Sant'Egidio, certainly he would be high up that list. I would think Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, who heads the Pope's dicastery for human development and who has been the Pope's right hand man on refugee issues, Conrad Konrad Krajewski, the Polish Cardinal who is the Pope's right hand man on charity issues, I think he

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would appeal to a lot of people, and one could go on.

Then it comes to the discontinuity block and who do you look for? And until very recently that was a very hard question to answer, I mean what most people would have said is Cardinal Péter Erdő of Hungary as a kind of centre-right, not part of the anti-Francis brigade – not a Burke or a Vigano – much more centrist than that. The problem with Erdo is when you are electing a pope you want to elect somebody who's going to have charisma, who's going to be able to stride onto the world stage and play that card. And Erdo, while a brilliant guy and a very talented canon lawyer among many other things, I would defy you to google 'Peter Erdo and charismatic' and find any articles where those two terms are associated. Some people were talking about Cardinal Willem Eijk from Holland, again an extremely bright guy but maybe a little too far to the right to build consensus. So I think the problem was for the discontinuity camp, they didn't have a candidate around whom they could crystallise. Now, post *Fiducia Supplicans*, they do. I think it's Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu from the Congo. Because he does two things at once that are almost impossible to combine: opposition and loyalty to the current pope. Let's think about that for a second, we've got plenty of examples of opposition, plenty of examples of loyalty, how many examples do we have of both? With Ambongo he led the African bishops that basically said 'No' to *Fiducia Supplicans*, but he did it in profound concert with Pope Francis and his doctrinal Tzar Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez, head of the DDF. Ambongo and Fernandez were in front of a lap-top working out a statement together, in concert and it came with the Pope's blessing. I don't know if anyone else in contemporary Catholic life who has threaded that needle quite as artfully as Ambongo did. So I think if you are a centre-right Catholic today and you want a pope who is going to be more conservative but not utterly reject the Francis legacy but put a bit more conservative traditional spin on it, I think Ambongo is your guy. If I were a betting man, which thankfully I'm not because I would have lost my shirt a thousand times by now, but if I was I would say the early stage of the next conclave will shape up as Zuppi v Ambongo.

Will Ambongo continue on synodality?

“Do you remember in the JPII and Benedict papacies how you could not have a conversation at the Vatican without using the phrase 'new evangelisation', everything was new evangelisation and today everything is synodality. I think that is going to go away; that's not to say that new evangelisation has disappeared and that synodality will disappear, it's just going to become less ubiquitous because the new pope will have his own sound byte whatever that turns out to be. But I think the thing with Ambongo that is par-

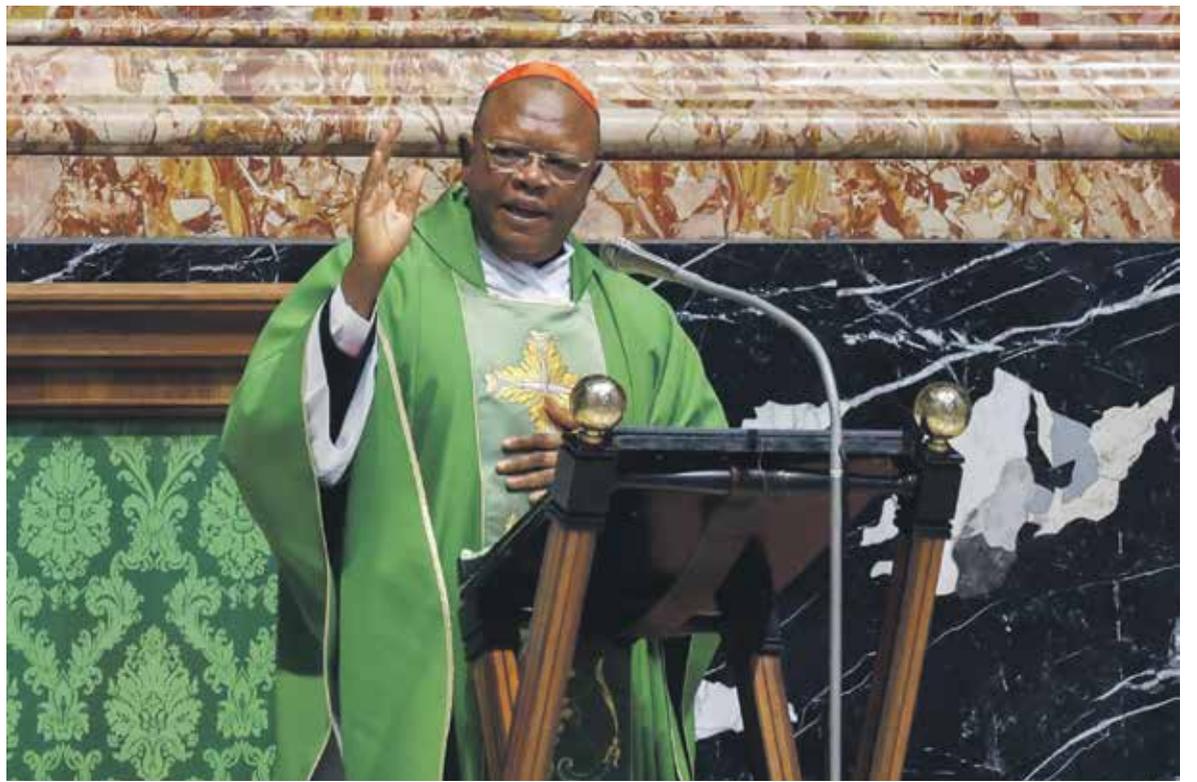
ticularly attractive is one, he's a Capuchin. Their reputation in the Church is that they are a solid by the book guys but not ideologues, they never have been, they're pastors. That appeals to a lot of people and I also think the way Ambongo has been able to blend his defense of traditional doctrine on the gay issue while at the same time have a position of real fidelity and effective communion with the Pope, I've never seen another example in 30 years of a churchman that is able to do that. The only problem is he doesn't have good English and that's important on the world stage, but then again, neither does Pope Francis and he's been able to pull it off. Another negative would be is Africa ready to produce a pope? I think there are probably some in the Catholic world that feel the Church in Africa is too new but I think they are fairly minor points.”

What about the African views on homosexuality, is that a problem for a world Church?

“It might be in the broader court of secular opinion in the west but in the College of Cardinals, no. Look, Robert McElroy of San Diego probably isn't going to be voting for him, Marx of Munich isn't probably going to be voting for him but on the whole the College of Cardinals right now today still is centre-right in its basic orientation and when it comes to the homosexual question the line is 'we should be against discrimination and hatred but we shouldn't be promoting it'. The practical reality is that this is an issue that has huge symbolic importance but little practical real world meaning. The truth of it is that priests who are willing to do same-sex blessings have already been doing it for the last 40 years and they will continue to do it and they don't need anyone's permission to do it. And priests who don't want to do it aren't going to start doing it because of this document (*Fiducia Supplicans*).

“This is a pope of surprises, he's a maverick to his core and there is some part of him that just delights in the fact that nobody knows what he's going to do next”

“I think the extent to which there would be a vote for Ambongo – and let's face it there are harder anti-gay guys in the Catholic episcopacy – so the vote for Ambongo wouldn't be a vote against same sex unions it would be a vote in favour of a more conservative and traditional reading of Catholic doctrine but one that is not at all inclined to an open repudiation or break with this papacy. So what I think a lot of cardinals would like in their heart of hearts, first of all they would like more stability. Cardinals do not like surprises, they don't like going to bed nervous because they



Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo of Kinshasa, Congo, president of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, gives his blessing at the end of a Mass in St Peter's Basilica for participants in the assembly of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez



Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, president of the Italian bishops' conference, speaks to journalists as he arrives at the Basilica of St Sebastian to pray along with other participants in the assembly of the Synod of Bishops as part of their pilgrimage to Rome's ancient catacombs. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

are not sure what the next papal bomb shell tomorrow morning is going to be, left, right or centre, they don't like surprises. This is a pope of surprises, he's a maverick to his core and there is some part of him that just delights in the fact that nobody knows what he's going to do next. Ambongo would not be that guy; anything he would do would be much more carefully thought out and the groundwork would be laid and everyone would know what was coming. I think that would appeal to a lot of people but I think fundamentally what a lot of these guys want, many of them anyway, is somebody they can count upon to defend orthodox Catholic teaching but without rejecting what they like about the Francis papacy. We should remember that the people who would reject the Francis papacy to its core are a very small minority. Most bishops and cardinals would say there is a lot

we really like about this papacy and they just don't want to throw it on the trash heap of history, they just want a somewhat more stable predictable, traditional interpretation of it.

Now I probably have just delivered the kiss of death to the Ambongo candidacy, I'm not trying to say he's the odd on favorite. Here's the thing, in 2005 when John Paul died and the cardinals gathered and elected Benedict, I personally knew three quarters of those guys and I felt I could speak knowledgeably about what they would be looking for today because of all these appointments. There are so many cardinals who come to Rome to get their red hat and then go back to their obscure corner of the world and you never hear from them again, I honestly do not think I can speak knowledgeably about more than one-third of this next conclave.

Many cardinals will also not know each other.

“Yes and that can break one of two ways, total chaos and unpredictability, the other is follow the leader dynamic where all these cardinals are going to show up and just defer to whoever should know what's going on. The problem for both continuity and discontinuity camps in this regards is who is the leader? For the continuity camp there are too many potential leaders, there are so many guys who could claim to inherit the mantel of the Francis agenda. And so the question would be which one of them would be the king maker. For the center-right the real problem for that crowd is that they lost their king maker when George Pell died and there's nobody else who has stepped up that has the gravitas with that community that George Pell did. And so I think both of these camps are in a way leaderless. So we will have to wait and see what emerges.”

Out&About

The freshest of the Faithful



DUBLIN: Fr Gareth Byrne is pictured at a full Pro-Cathedral with those seeking Christian Initiation and Full Communion during the Rite of Election on February 18.



CLARE: Bishop Fintan Monahan joins the Indian Catholic community for an Anointing Fire retreat on Ash Wednesday in St Flannans College.



LAOIS: Bishop Denis Nulty blesses the ambo at a packed Holy Cross Church Ratheniska, where he celebrated Mass for the reopening of the Church on Sunday, February 11, accompanied by Msgr John Byrne PP, Fr Kevin O'Rourke SJ, Fr Nick Harnan MSC, and Fr Ciprian Matei CC. The Church was closed since last August.

INSHORT

Irish charity aims to be first nationwide 'baby bank'

An Irish charity supporting mothers and babies are running a drive and drop National Donation Weekend on March 9 and 10, as they seek to be Ireland's first nationwide 'baby bank'.

Community Connect, a charity dedicated to providing practical support to pregnant mothers and vulnerable families with small babies, is appealing for donations of baby hygiene items and packs of new baby clothing and blankets, to be given to pregnant mothers and families with newborns across the country.

The charity operates from five hubs across the country, in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Kilkenny

and Athlone.

CEO Elaine Noonan said they have seen demand for the services they provide continuing to grow.

"Every hospital maternity bag or pack of essential items makes a real difference to a pregnant or post-partum mother and her baby, and we want to help as many as we can."

Church reopens after €600k refurb

Holy Cross Church Ratheniska, Co. Laois, reopened after a €600,000 renovation project with Mass celebrated by Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty.

The church was closed since last August and is the oldest of the three churches in

Portlaoise parish, opening in the year 1800.

Bishop Nulty was accompanied by Msgr John Byrne PP, Fr Kevin O'Rourke SJ, Fr Nick Harnan MSC and Fr Ciprian Matei CC as he celebrated a Mass of rededication.

The works involved a complete renovation of the church including a new roof, a new heating system, a webcam and granite Sanctuary furnishings – the altar, ambo, reredos and tabernacle were originally placed in the Mercy Convent Chapel in Templemore, Co. Tipperary, now decommissioned.

Irish sister dies after 67 years' service

Sr Anna Maria Keenaghan OSF (86) died in Assisi House on Monday, February 19 after being a professed member of the Sisters of St

Francis of Philadelphia for 67 years.

Born in Lumcloon Cloghan, Co. Offaly, Sr Keenaghan entered the congregation in 1953 and professed her first vows in 1957.

She earned a BS in Education from Neumann University (then Our Lady of Angels College) and an MS in Education from Loyola University. She ministered primarily in education and pastoral ministry.

Sr Anna Maria ministered for 51 years in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, as well as serving in South Carolina, in the Charleston Diocese, for seven years.

In 2015, she moved to Assisi House, the congregation's retirement residence in Aston, Pennsylvania, where she served in prayer and hospitality ministry until her death.

Sr Keenaghan was laid to rest on Friday, February 23.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



MAYO: Pictured after the blessing of a St Don Bosco monument in Tooreen are Jimmy Kelly, Fr Jerald David, Sr Ann Marie Shaughnessy, Mary Judge, Maria Tant and Paul Tant.



MAYO: Fr Jerald David Adm. Aghamore Parish blesses a new monument to St Don Bosco in Tooreen.



ROSCOMMON: Young people from across the diocese of Achonry are joined by Bishop Paul Dempsey as they receive their John Paul II awards for service to the local Catholic community.



ROSCOMMON: Fr Michael Molloy PP is joined by members of Clonfad choir after celebrating Mass for the feast of local St Caireach Dergain of Clonburren in Our Lady of Rosary Church on February 9. Pictured (from left) are: Lucy Fahy, Sabina Reynolds, Maria Reynolds, Maura Kelly, Xandra Kilduff, Josie Greene, Kathy Fahy, Patricia Monaghan, Padraic Kilduff, Hugh Collins



LAOIS: A children's choir accompanied Mass in Holy Cross Church.



CORK: UCC Chaplaincy team, Focus missionaries and students meet with Bishop Fintan Gavin as he visited the campus on Ash Wednesday.

ARMAGH

Any young adult aged between 18 and 28 who would be interested in joining a new initiative in St Patrick's Cathedral aimed at encouraging youth participation are asked to contact Fr Barry Matthews or leave their name in the parish office.

CARLOW

Parish Biblical Studies Group with Dr Amelia Fleming, take place each Friday 10.30am-12pm in the Cathedral Centre.

CAVAN

Bishop Martin Hayes will be the principal celebrant of a Mass to commemorate a milestone anniversary in the Cathedral of Sts Patrick and Felim on Saturday, March 16 at 11am.

CORK

Maria Vadia to lead a weekend of Healing and Renewal in Rochestown Park Hotel, Cork, March 9 and 10 from 9.30am-6pm. Mass both days at 12 noon. Free admission. For more information contact Pat 087 2505528 or 087 6468658.

DONEGAL

Companioning your grief weekend experience to take place in Ards Friary Friday March 8 to Sunday March 10, a chance for participants to reflect on and share their experiences of grief in a safe, non-threatening atmosphere. Facilitators are Fr Philip Baxter and John Keane

DOWN

A Lecture by Una Walsh in Newry Parish Centre on March 11 illustrating 'The legacy of Fr Tom', Cardinal O'Fiaich.

DUBLIN

The feast of Divine Mercy will be celebrated on Sunday, April 7, in St Vincent De Paul church in Marino. Holy hour from 3-4pm followed by Mass at 4pm. Confessions will be available from 3-4pm. Collection to Capuchin Day Centre.

Rosary of reparation and conversion takes place first Saturday every month at 2pm on North Earl Street.

GALWAY

A Lenten Bible study led

by Fr Benny McHale on St Mark's Gospel to take place on the Monday nights of Lent in the Athenry Pastoral Centre at the Church of the Assumption, Athenry. Next session takes place March 11 at 8pm.

LAOIS

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place each Sunday of Lent from 5-7pm and concludes with the rosary.

LOUTH

Fr Willie Doyle SJ prayer group takes place in Holy Family Church, Drogheda every Thursday at 7pm. Includes Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and a prayer for vocations.

Testimony by All-Ireland winner and current Louth GAA manager Ger Brennan in St Mary's Church Knockbridge on March 18 at 7.30pm. Includes Eucharistic Adoration and prayer and worship music.

MAYO

The next Latin Mass will take place in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock on Sunday March 10 at 6pm.

MONAGHAN

Rosary for Lent - the rosary is recited each Wednesday evening at 6.50pm and each Sunday morning at 10.20am before Mass in Corduff and Raferagh.

TIPPERARY

The upper room gathering for young professionals takes place in Holy Family Mission, Glencomeragh, E91H584 takes place every second and fourth Monday of the month. Begins 6pm with supper, ends with Mass at 8pm. RSVP to info@holymission.ie

TYRONE

A Eucharistic healing service takes place every Sunday during Lent at 4pm in Camus Parish, Strabane.

WATERFORD

The Focolare Spring Gathering will take place from April 4-7 in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford. For more information contact Gerard at 086 2243631 or focolare.ireland@focolare.org

Thousands bring prayer to the heart of Dublin

Ruadhán Jones

The Catholic faithful turned out in their thousands to attend the Divine Mercy conference in Dublin's RDS over the weekend of February 24-25.

With guest speakers galore, along with Mass, Confession and adoration, they turned the RDS into a hub of prayer to the heart of Dublin's southside.

Bishop of Waterford and Lismore Phonsie Cullinan headlined the annual Catholic event, with other speakers including Fr Pat Collins CM, Fr Brendan Walsh SAC and Sr Mary Claire Kenneally OLM.

Attendees came from across the island of Ireland, Derry and Donegal to Cork and Waterford, for the event.



Paul Cole from Rostrevor, Co. Down and Fr Frank Trias CP enjoy the Divine Mercy conference. Photos: John McElroy.



Elaine Noonan and Emer Maguire O'Kelly of Community Connect attend the conference in the RDS.



Mojca Carapina, Mary Fields, Tanja Nizic, Danijela Vuletic and Ozana Matijevic at the Marian Pilgrimages stand.



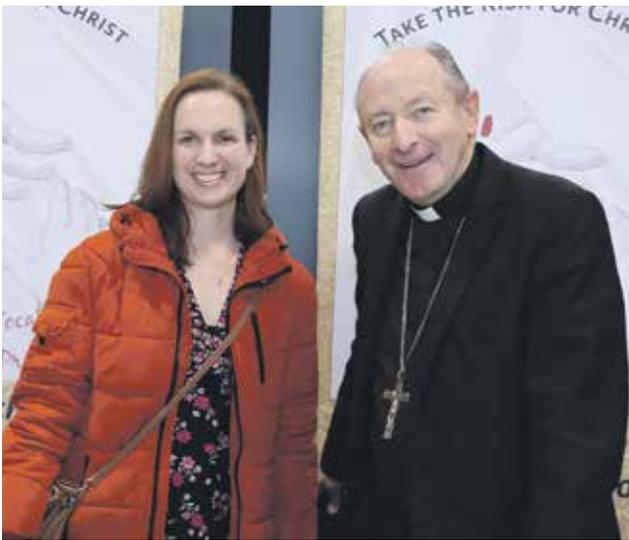
Carol Cairnduff and Aoife Brauders man the Family and Life stand.



Pictured at the Flame Of Love stand are Geraldine Halton and Eileen Boden.



Fr Pat Collins and Aisling Byrne of Shalom World take in the stands at the Divine Mercy conference.



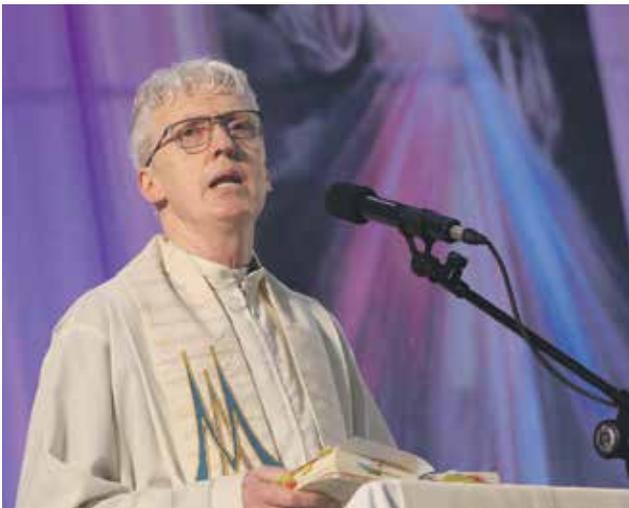
Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan, guest speaker at the Divine Mercy conference, is pictured with Iva Beranult.



Marie Donohoe and Sr Peter Coleman (St Clares, Harolds Cross) take care of the El Salvador stand.



Fr Brendan Walsh SAC offers people in the crowd a blessing with the Blessed Sacrament.



Fr Brendan Walsh SAC addresses the large crowd that gathered for the annual Divine Mercy conference in the RDS Dublin.



Bros. Antony, Bryan and Godfrey ensure the Capuchin presence is felt at the conference.



Representing *The Irish Catholic* at the Divine Mercy conference are Mahak Verma and Elica Dhakal.



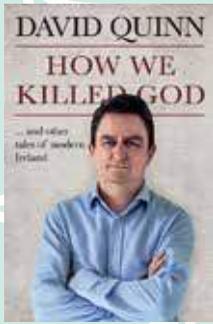
Helen and Brigid Maloney enjoy the conference.



Enjoying the conference are Paddy and Lucia Stokes.

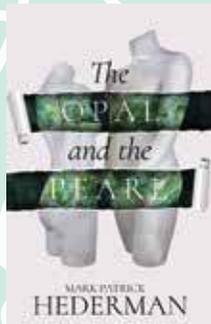


Be Restored Prayer Group from Kilkenny enjoy the talks at the conference.



How we killed God
David Quinn

From the controversies that have plagued Church and State, this collection of David Quinn's columns offer a different take on tumultuous change in Irish Society.



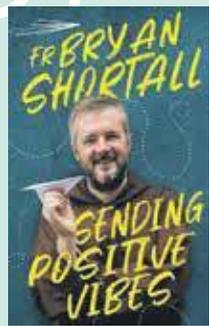
The Opal & the Pearl
Mark Patrick Hederman

Benedictine monk and author Mark Patrick Hederman delivers a stimulating critique of the Catholic Church's monosexual stance in this best-selling book.



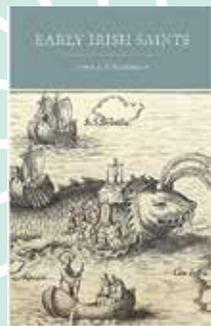
Tomorrow's Parish
Donal Harrington

This book is for anyone who has an interest in the future of the Church, particularly those involved in parish ministry and parish pastoral councils.



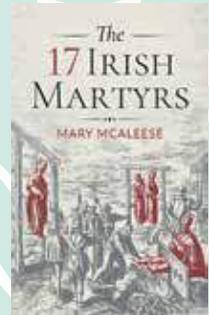
Sending Positive Vibes
Fr Bryan Shortall

Dive into Fr Bryan's life – his vivid memories of childhood, his challenging experience as a hospital chaplain, and the difficulties of being a minister of Gospel in today's Ireland.



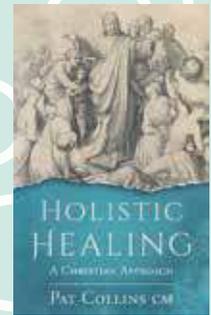
Early Irish Saints
John J. Ó. Riordain

This collection of short essays on fourteen well-loved early Irish saints presents a very readable combination of historical fact, folklore and legend.



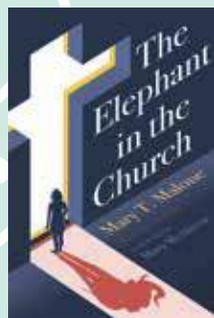
The 17 Irish Martyrs
Mary McAleese

An historical account detailing the inspiring stories of the 17 Irish martyrs beatified by Pope John Paul II and what made their causes for martyrdom stand apart from others.



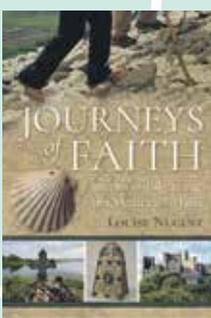
Holistic Healing
Pat Collins CM

This timely book describes how the gift of healing has been rediscovered in recent years and stresses the therapeutic power of the Eucharist, while addressing questions like, 'why isn't everyone healed?'



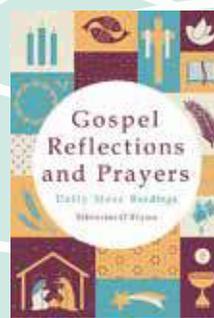
The Elephant in the Church
Mary T. Malone

Women have long been the 'Elephant in the Church'. Christian feminist Mary T. Malone explores 'Woman Christianity' from a historical perspective in this revised edition.



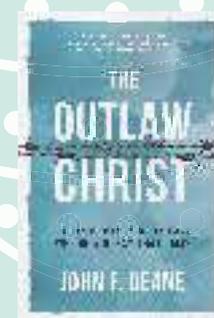
Journeys of Faith
Louise Nugent

Embark on a journey with Louise Nugent as she uncovers the goals and destinations of faith with medieval Irish pilgrims. Includes colour photos and illustrations of archaeological evidence.



Gospel Reflections and Prayers
Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap

Let this book be your guide through Daily Mass Readings, the weekly liturgy providing food for the soul in the form of hope.



Outlaw Christ
John F. Deane

This book questions the evolving views of who the 'outlaw' Christ was and what he stood for by examining the great poetry that focused on answering 'Who do you say that I am?'

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THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

A CHURCH AT THE HELM OF HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS IN SOUTH SUDAN

PAGE 22



CATHOLICS WEATHERING THE STORM OF EXTREMISM IN TURKEY

PAGE 20-21



Extending the hand of participation to women at Synod 2023/24

Ángel Alberto Morillo

The *Synodal Times* sat down for an exclusive interview with academic and advocate for women deacons in the Church, Phyllis Zagano about the pioneering role of women in Synod 2023-24 and her views on the inclusion of women deacons in the Church.

What do you think about the first phase of the 2021-2024 Synod, especially about the participation of women?

The fact that 54 women—both secular and religious—were among the 365 voting members demonstrates the Church's progress in recognizing women's abilities and importance. From the outside looking in, the Synod meeting in Rome seemed to be a collegial gathering of like-minded individuals—men and women of various states of life—all willing to help in the building up of the Church.

The participation of women in the October 4-29, 2023 Rome meeting partly represented women's participation in earlier Synod stages, from the initial diocesan and episcopal conference meetings, through the continental stage consultations, to the process for nominating continental representatives to the Rome meeting.

Continents were asked to name twenty possible participants, half of them women, of whom ten were named as Synod participants. The participation of women at the Rome Synod marked an important step forward.

The permanent diaconate of women is a 'sensitive' issue for many in the Church, especially in the hierarchy. Do you think it can prosper?

The restoration of women to the ordained diaconate recognises the past, the present, and the future. The Synod Synthesis Report, entitled 'A Synodal Church in Mission', presented the discussion about women deacons as follows:

Different positions have been expressed regarding women's access to the diaconal ministry. For some, this step would be unacceptable because they consider it a discontinuity with Tradition. For others, however, opening access for women to the diaconate would restore the practice of the Early Church.

Others still, discern it as an appropriate and necessary response to the signs of the times, faithful to the Tradition, and one that would find an echo in the hearts of many who seek new energy and vitality in the Church. Some express concern that the request speaks of a worrying anthropological confusion, which, if granted, would marry the Church to the spirit of the age.

The Synthesis Report demonstrates the uneven knowledge of the diaconate and of women's participation in it. It is important to remember that not all the Synod members are theologians or historians and not all come from cultures that respect women's baptismal equality. To be fair, the Synthesis Report proposed that:

Theological and pastoral research on the access of women to the diaconate should be continued, benefiting from consideration of the results of the commissions specially established by the Holy Father, and from the theological, historical and exegetical research already undertaken. If possible, the results of this research should be presented to the next Session of



Julia Oseka, a synod member and junior at St Joseph's University in Philadelphia, attends a working session of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops in the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall October 18, 2023. Photo: CNS Lola Gomez

the Assembly.

The most important point in the Synod proposal is the request that research "already undertaken" be included in the presentation to the October 2024 Synod meeting.

Even with all the historical evidence about the female diaconate, is there resistance?

The resistance to restoring women to the ordained diaconate does not accept the historical facts of

their ministries, the sacramentality of the liturgies used to ordain women, the distinction between the diaconate and the priesthood, the Baptismal equality of women.

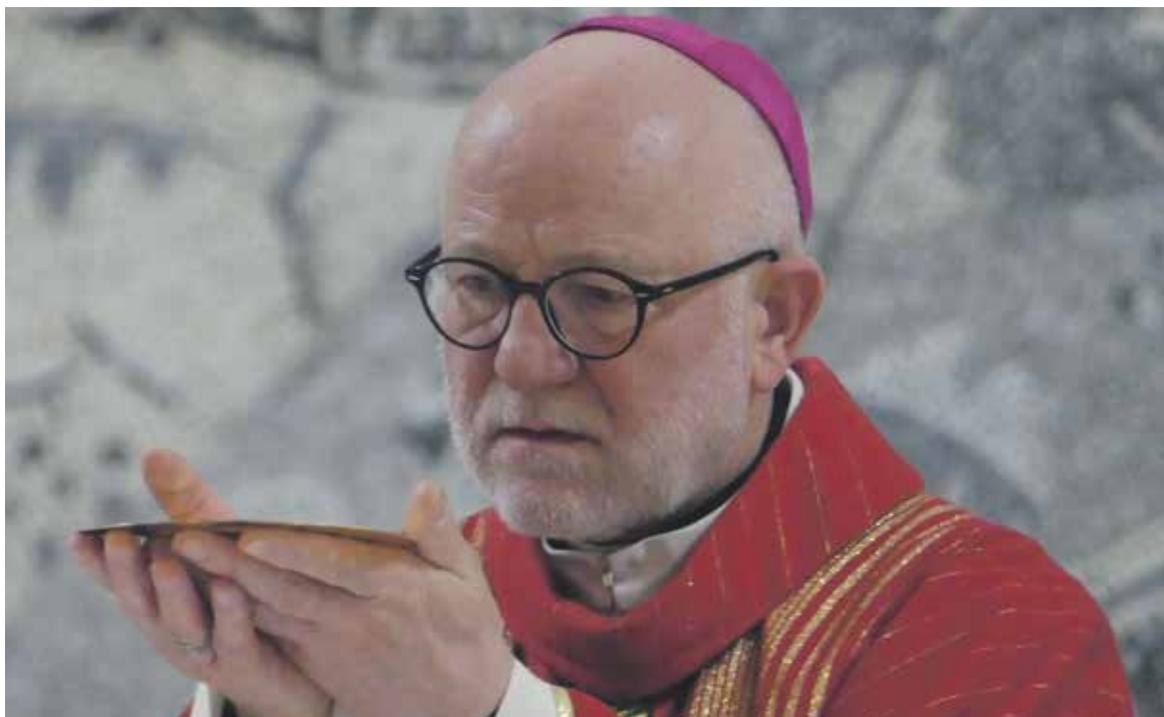
Therefore, there are two categories of objections to the historical evidence of women ordained as deacons: 1) female deacons did not perform the same tasks and duties as male deacons; 2) female deacons were only "blessed", not

ordained.

In addition, there are two categories of theological/anthropological objections to women being ordained as deacons: 1) the "unicity of orders", which argues that because women cannot be ordained as priests, neither can they be ordained as deacons; 2) the "iconic argument", which states that women cannot image Christ.

NEXT WEEK: DON'T MISS OUR EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH IRISH NUNS DISPENSING HOPE AND CHARITY IN UGANDA

Catholics weathering the storm of extremism in Turkey



Paolo Affatato

“We are small, but we cling to Christ Jesus the Eucharist, who comforts us in difficult and painful situations”. Thus speaks Martin Kmetec OFM Conv, Slovenian Franciscan religious, Archbishop of Izmir since December 2020 and currently President of the Catholic

Bishops' Conference of Turkey. In an interview with *The Synodal Times* in Rome, the Archbishop describes the situation and the psychological and spiritual condition of the Catholic community in Turkey.

Archbishop Kmetec, how do Catholics in Turkey live today? What is the spirit that animates your community, struck by a recent attack inside a Church, during a Mass?

We are small, as Catholics in Turkey we are a drop in the ocean (Catholics, of different rites, number about 60,000, 0.07% of the population, ed.), but we want to be a living Church, attached to Christ the Lord: we are called to live and bear witness to his love here in Turkey, in sometimes difficult and painful situations, like the attack in Istanbul. We live this time of suffering

with faith in God, that generates charity towards our neighbour, in our predominantly Islamic environment. Prayer and the Eucharist are “the medicine” for the Catholic faithful in Turkey, wounded by fear, sadness and bitterness, following the attack on the Catholic Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Istanbul on 28 January, where two armed terrorists broke in during mass, killing a Turkish citizen. We are living the ‘Year of Prayer’, in preparation for the Jubi-

lee, but for us it is also, in a special way, the ‘Year of the Eucharist’.

What does this mean in particular?

Gathering around Jesus in the Eucharist, in adoration, in silence, in consigning our lives into his hands is our profound consolation: it means consolidating the certainty that he does not abandon us, he is and will always be with us, especially in times of fear and pain. Trust in God means that our churches do not close: they will

remain open, even if it saddens us to see that some want to harm us. We live the year 2024 as the ‘Year of the Eucharist’, which will end on 24 November 2024, the Solemnity of Christ the King, with the desire to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus better and better, and to recognise Him present, like the disciples of Emmaus, in the act of breaking bread.

On your recent *ad limina apostolorum* visit to the Vatican, you met the Pope and prayed at the tombs of Apostles Peter and Paul. What do you bring to your land?

From these two great pillars of the Church we first of all draw the courage of witnessing the faith. It is courage that does not come from our own abilities but is a gift from God. Then, on a concrete level, ours was a pilgrimage to express love,

“Trust in God means that our churches do not close: they will remain open, even if it saddens us to see that some want to harm us”



Eucharist and synodality

Paolo Affatato

Synodality in Turkey is lived around the Eucharist. It is the Eucharist that creates synodality and the unity of the Church, the country's bishops are keen to say. In 2024, a special 'Year of the Eucharist', proclaimed by the local Church, all Catholic communities in the country, in fraternal communion, will dedicate a special time to Eucharistic Adoration, so that the Eucharist may be the centre of community life and, starting from this, bonds of communion may be built or strengthened, renewing pastoral action. "We have invited the faithful to live the Year of the Eucharist", the Bishops report, "both on a personal level, with choices of conversion of heart, and to do so together, as a community. During the year, a special celebration will also be planned in Istanbul, where the consecration of Turkey to the Sacred Heart of Jesus will take place, a very important moment

in the life of the Church in Turkey". The intention is to deepen, through catechesis and other means, the faith of the Church community, which finds the common path. The Bishops conclude in a common appeal: "The Sacrament instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper as a memorial of his Passover is spiritual nourishment for the faithful, a sign of unity and a bond of charity, a promise of future glory. It shows the continuous fulfilment of the promise of the Saviour who said 'I am with you always, until the end of the world'. Truly we can say together with Pope St John Paul II: the Church lives from the Eucharist. The Eucharist is God-with-us, who will provide for his flock, even in suffering". This profound spiritual awareness is also the foundation of the attitude of dialogue and openness to the other that the faithful live in a predominantly Muslim society, promoting experiences of inter-religious dialogue and friendship with conviction.



fidelity and communion with the Pope and the universal Church. From the various Dicasteries of the Holy See we received encouragement and concrete support for our mission.

In Rome you commemorated Fr Andrea Santoro, the Italian missionary killed in Trabzon in 2006. What significance does his memory have today for the Church in Turkey?

The memory of Fr Andrea Santoro means for us today to be faithful to what he lived in fidelity to the Church, in fidelity to Christ, in fidelity to his priestly vocation. We are called to be strong even in weakness, as St Paul says. We have prayed in the church of Saints Fabian and Venantius in Rome, where his body rests. We prayed, as bishops, alongside so many other faithful, that the witness of

“Churches are a visible sign of our presence, they are above all the place of community, they are meeting places for worship, for pastoral care, for charity”

Fr Andrea would bear fruit like the grain of wheat that dies.

It has been a year since the devastating earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria in February 2023. How is the reconstruction work progressing?

One year after the devastating earthquake in the Anatolia region, more than three million people are still displaced and living in tents or makeshift shelters. Caritas Turkey has been distributing humanitar-

ian aid thanks to aid received from abroad. There are people injured by the earthquake who continue to receive treatment. Our thoughts and support go out to the Apostolic Vicariate of Anatolia, a vast area covering half of Turkey, and to the many displaced people. We try to give them back some hope to rebuild their whole lives. This reconstruction is also a sign of a renewal of life: we begin again, we say to the faithful, and the Lord is close to us and helps us.

Several churches have been damaged: how are you organising the restoration work?

In Izmir, we are working on the restoration of the Church of St. Polycarp; the same work is being done in Antioch, while in Iskenderun, where the cathedral has collapsed and has to be rebuilt, the process will take longer. The reconstruction of the churches is important: the Catholic Church, in fact, does not enjoy legal recognition by the state, and therefore has no state support for the reconstruction of its temples, nor permits for new buildings. We are called upon to act on our own strength, which is why we also need help from outside. The status of Christian communities in Turkey is deeply linked to the presence of historical buildings. Churches are a visible sign of our presence, they are above all the

place of community, they are meeting places for worship, for pastoral care, for charity. They are essential points of reference for the faithful who, precisely because they feel this belonging, are working hard to rebuild.

How can the faithful in other churches in Europe and around the world help you?

First of all with prayer. Then, as far as possible, also with material help to be able to carry out our projects. Visits and pilgrimages to Turkey, in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul, are also means of help: we would like our land to be not just a tourist destination but a place for prayer. Often tourist agencies, at all levels, leave Christian places out of itinerary proposals in Turkey. We wish that the traces of the faith of the past could be fruitful today for the faithful of the whole world.

A Church at the helm of a vital humanitarian mission



Paolo Affatato

Sudan is travelling towards total disaster in the complete indifference of the international community. Ten months after war erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (Saf) and the Rapid Support Forces (Rsf) on 15 April 2023, Sudan is facing one of the fastest unfolding crises globally, with unprecedented needs emerging in such a short period.

About 25 million people – of whom over 14 million are children – need humanitarian assistance and support. Approximately 10 million people – about 20% of the total population of the country – have fled their homes since the conflict started. The majority of them have found refuge within Sudan while nearly 2 left the country and reached neighboring countries such as Chad (633,000), South Sudan (532,000) Egypt (415,000) and tens of thousands in Ethiopia and Libya, all countries that experience instability, clashes, huge problems themselves, and from whom many flee.

The war makes Sudan the largest displacement crisis in the world with 50% of the population in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. According to the World Food Program, less than 5% of Sudanese can afford a square meal a day.

In such a disastrous situation, which almost no one talks about in a world completely absorbed by the crises in Ukraine and Gaza, *The Synodal Times* reached by phone an Italian missionary who has been in Sudan for many years to find out more about the situation, to turn a spotlight on a forgotten crisis and to understand how Christians live in that troubled land. The mis-

“In order for a negotiation to work, neutrality is needed for the two sides to sit down and talk, knowing full well that if the war continues, it could proclaim a victor who would find himself with the whole people against him”



Civilians who fled war-torn Sudan following the outbreak of fighting between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces are seen camping May 1, 2023, at a transit center operated by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Renk, South Sudan. Photo: OSV News photo/Jok Solomun, Reuters

sonary, for security reasons, asked to remain anonymous **What is the situation at the moment?**

Unfortunately the situation is serious, there are no major changes and over the months the map of the different areas in the hands of the two factions has become fossilised. The last big change came before Christmas when the Rsf arrived at the town of Wad Madani (in the state of Aj Jazirah, over 150 km south-east of Khartoum, ed).

It was one of the few areas spared from the conflict and it was there that practically all of Khartoum, where the war has been raging since the beginning, had moved. The capture of the city by the Rsf has disrupted everything with hundreds of thousands of new refugees. We must bear in mind that Wad Madani is the agricultural capital of Sudan, a strategic place for

many reasons including roads: now the main artery from El Obeid to Port Sudan is cut off, the whole of the south and west is cut off.

How is the civilian population, the main victim of the conflict, living?

According to the statistics there are 11 million displaced persons, 2 million of whom have left the borders, some have even gone to Eritrea, a country from which people are desperately fleeing. Everything is at a standstill, agriculture, the economy, there is a very high risk of malnutrition, especially for the children. Since February 4, then, there has been a total blackout of all communications, telephones, internet, they work very very rarely, only in Port Sudan does it work for a few hours, but in fact there is no contact with Khartoum, Wad Madani and all of Darfur.

It is very difficult to get news from our Catholic communities in the country. The little we have managed to find out is thanks to sisters who recently left El Obeid. They say that the army has regained control there, there has been little or no shooting for at least two months and life is fairly quiet. Christians have started going to church again, the markets are working. I am certainly not saying they are back to normal, but

at least there is some breathing space. Something similar is happening in Kosti and Sennar.

What is the situation in the capital Khartoum?

The rumours that have reached us is that about ten days ago the army reportedly made important advances in Khartoum and also in Omdurman (the twin city of the capital from which it is 6 km to the north-west, located on the western bank of the Nile, it is the main commercial hub of Sudan and constitutes, together with Khartoum and Bahri, the cultural and industrial heart of Sudan, ed). Perhaps these are propagandistic reconstructions, let's say that control of the city is 50-50 between the regular army and the Rsf.

There are still Salesian nuns and a priest stranded there (last November a bomb hit the house of a mission run by Salesian nuns causing serious damage, in a district of Khartoum) but we have no news. There was an evacuation attempt in December by the International Red Cross, but the army, which is unheard of, fired on the ICRC vehicles and so no one is moving”.

What is the Church's presence at the moment?

Sadly, many members of the Church had to leave the country. In El Obeid there must be

about ten religious and diocesan left; three in Kosti, I have no news of Wad Madani. In Port Sudan there are five or six priests, three in the north. In Port Sudan there are some Sisters of Mother Teresa, and then, as I said, the Sisters and a Salesian priest stuck in Khartoum.

Let's say that compared to before the war there is a presence reduced to a quarter. The faithful gather and pray as they can, but continue to live their faith. Estimates before the war spoke of 1 million Catholics and one million of other confessions, let us say 4/5% of the population, 80% of whom are South Sudanese. Now we are much less.

How are the three bishops experiencing the current terrible situation?

Mgr Tombe Trille, Bishop of El Obeid, is very courageous, he travels all the time, visits parishes, goes to South Sudan and returns. And this despite the fact that on his way to Juba (capital of South Sudan) in January, he was attacked: they put a gun to his temple and threatened him with a knife. He was very shaken but did not let it get him down and continued to visit parishes and faithful, even managed to inaugurate a new parish on the Feast of the Epiphany.

Monsignor Didi, Archbishop

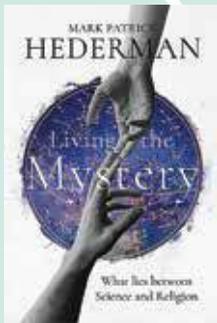
of Khartoum is in Port Sudan at the moment, he moves less than Trille but manages to make regular visits to the diocese. Daniel Marco Kur Adwok, Auxiliary Bishop of Khartoum is currently in South Sudan but is on his way back.

There have been several negotiations but none have been successful, what is missing?

A big problem is that the host countries, Saudi Arabia in one case and Ethiopia on the other, are siding with the opposing factions. By now, the Arab countries have aligned themselves with the army while the African countries, like Ethiopia in fact, but also Uganda, Chad, and the Rsf.

In order for a negotiation to work, neutrality is needed for the two sides to sit down and talk, knowing full well that if the war continues, it could proclaim a victor who would find himself with the whole people against him. Neither faction enjoys the slightest favour with the population, either they stop or whoever wins will reign over a graveyard and a hostile people.

i Paolo Affatato is a journalist and essayist, he is responsible for the Asia editorial team in the Fides Agency of the Pontifical Mission Societies.



Living the Mystery

Mark Patrick Hederman

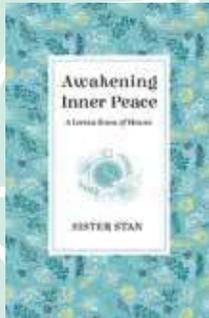
There is a mystery beyond the comprehension of our normal understanding. A Benedictine monk explains how to engage with this mystery and bring a new sense of the sacred into it.



Mindful Meditations for Everyday

Sr Stan

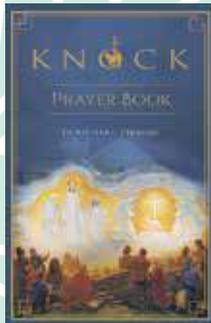
A little gem of a book filled with meditations and reflections, to act both as a guide to the practice of mindfulness and as a source of daily inspiration.



Awakening Inner Peace

Sr Stan

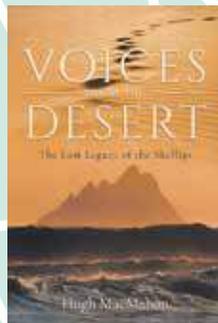
This beautiful book from Sr Stan is the perfect antidote to the stresses of modern life, providing readers with short but inspiring prayers, poems and biblical quotes.



Knock Prayer Book

Fr Richard Gibbons

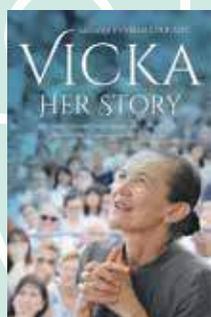
The Knock Prayer Book is the perfect accompaniment for those who are beginning this period of reflection and repentance wanting to go back to basics.



Voices from the Desert

Hugh MacMahon

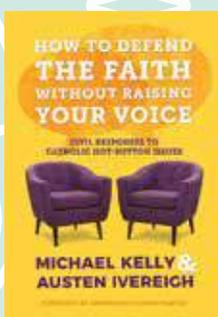
Individuals looking for a fresh view of what it means to be a Christian, or to understand the Skelligs' legacy, will appreciate its authenticity, clarity and relevance.



Vicka - Her Story

Finbar O'Leary

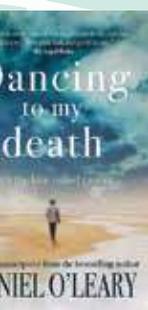
In conversation with the eldest of the six visionaries, Vicka tells of her special relationship with Our Lady and relays many of the Messages which the 'Queen of Peace' has given to her.



How to Defend the Faith Without Raising your Voice

Michael Kelly & Austen Ivereigh

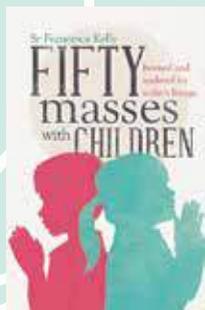
Answering some of the most common criticisms of the Church, this book aims to help people defend their beliefs in a calm and rational manner.



Dancing to my Death

Daniel O'Leary

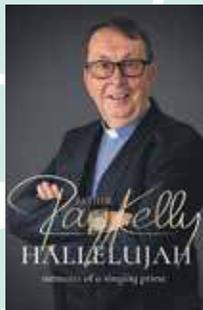
For a piece, it is an account of cancer diagnosis and the rollercoaster of facing his own illness. Daniel found that his Faith meant to him.



Fifty Masses with Children

Sr Francesca Kelly

Fifty Masses with Children is an invaluable resource for all teachers and priests working with children who are now adapting their celebrations of the Masses to the new liturgy.



Hallelujah

Fr Ray Kelly

In 2018, Fr Kelly reached the semi-finals of Britain's Got Talent, demonstrating his ability to connect with people through singing. His memoir describes his fascinating journey from parish priest to fame.

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World Report

IN BRIEF

Finnish study: Transgender surgeries for minors do not solve mental health issues

● A comprehensive new study from researchers in Finland found that providing adolescents with transgender drugs or surgeries does not appear to solve the underlying mental health problems faced by youths who struggle with their gender identity.

While some lawmakers and transgender activists have claimed that puberty-blocking drugs and transgender surgical procedures are “life-saving medicine”, the study disputes that claim. The research did not find any statistically significant reduction in suicides among adolescents who received “medical gender reassignment” through hormonal or surgical interventions.

“[The research] does not support the claims that [gender reassignment] is necessary in order to prevent suicide,” the researchers wrote in the study. “[Gender reassignment] has also not been shown to reduce even suicidal ideation, and suicidal ideation is not equal to actual suicide risk.”

US Military makes policy providing abortions for service members permanent

● The US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is making permanent a policy to provide abortions in certain circumstances to service members even in states where abortion is illegal.

The policy, which has been in place since 2022, was made final in a rule posted in the federal register last Monday. Under the rule, the VA is authorised to perform abortions on service members and their family members in its health

care facilities in cases of rape, incest, and to preserve the life or health of the mother. The rule also allows VA facilities to provide service members with abortion counselling.

Though the policy has already been in effect on a temporary basis, the new rule will take permanent effect on April 3. The department reported providing 88 abortions under this policy in the first year of it being in effect.

Catholic activists denounce migrant crisis in Costa Rica

● Church organisations in Costa Rica are saying the state is not acting to help migrants after the tragic deaths of an Ecuadorian immigrant and her six-year-old daughter. The 33-year-old woman was traveling on February 28 with her daughter along with a group of seven people when the vehicle that was taking them to the Nicaraguan border, in the northern region of Costa Rica, fell into the River Medio Queso, near the city of Los Chiles.

Mother and daughter were the only passengers who were not able to escape, and their bodies were retrieved from the riverbed by divers. Fr Luis Carlos Aguilar is a coordinator of the Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesial Network on Migration, Displacement, Refuge and Human Trafficking (known as Red Clamour) in Costa Rica.

“Their deaths are a signal of a general migrant crisis in Costa Rica. People have to walk through dangerous locations and end up being caught by criminals thanks to the lack of governmental action,” Fr Aguilar told *Cruce*.

Head of Ukrainian church says country will win if unified

● In remarks at the start of a visit to the United States, His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, thanked Church leaders for their support and expressed his belief that continued solidarity can carry Ukraine to victory over Russia. “Thank you very much for your tireless prayer and work for the good of Ukraine and our speedy victory in the Russian invasion,” Archbishop Shevchuk said. “We will definitely win if we are together – together with God, together with each other, no matter where we live in the world, and together with Ukraine.”

Archbishop Shevchuk, the archbishop of the Archeparchy of Kyiv-Galicia, made the remarks in a March 3 sermon he gave at the Ukrainian Catholic National Shrine of the Holy Family in Washington, DC.

Church leaders in Holy Land condemn ‘wanton attack’ in Gaza

After a disputed incident in which more than 100 Palestinians were killed while attempting to access humanitarian aid in Gaza, Church leaders in Jerusalem have condemned what they described as a “wanton attack” and called for a ceasefire.

In a March 1 statement, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem pointed to the February 29 incident, saying that “in the aftermath of yesterday’s horrifying events and their cruel context, we, the patriarchs and heads of Churches in Jerusalem, condemn the wanton attack against innocent civilians”.

They called for both parties involved in the conflict “to reach an immediate and lengthy ceasefire that allows for the speedy disbursement of relief supplies throughout the Gaza Strip, and for the enactment of a negotiated release of those held as captives and prisoners”.

Their statement comes after at least 112 people in Gaza were killed and 760 injured on last Thursday while trying to get desperately needed humanitarian aid from trucks dispersing it. Accounts of what happened differ, with Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) claiming that Gaza residents surrounded the trucks and began looting the supplies,



Destroyed buildings lie in ruin in central Gaza, as seen from Israel January 13, 2024, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, near the Israel-Gaza border. Photo: OSV News/Amir Cohen, Reuters

prompting soldiers to fire warning shots as the scene turned chaotic and people were trampled to death by the crowds.

The Palestinian Health Ministry, however, says Israeli forces opened fire onto the crowd, and that many of those who died and were injured suffered gunshot wounds. In their statement, the Church leaders in Jerusalem faulted Israel.

Some of the dead, they

said, were “victimised after being either trampled by panicked crowds or hit by aid trucks fleeing the horrific scene”.

The Church leaders condemned remarks made by Israeli National Security Minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, a controversial right-wing politician accused of ethnic and religious discrimination, who called IDF soldiers “heroic” after Thursday’s incident and said they

“acted excellently against a Gazan mob that tried to harm them”.

In their statement, the Church leaders in Jerusalem voiced solidarity and prayer for the Christian communities throughout Gaza, specifically the more than 800 people who have been sheltering at St Porphyrios Orthodox Church and Holy Name Catholic Church in Gaza City for five months.

UK Catholics glad parliament committee doesn’t endorse assisted suicide

A new report from the UK Parliament’s Health and Social Care committee has not recommended a change to country’s law against assisted suicide, despite claiming evidence it has led to better end-of-life care in countries where it is legal.

In England and Wales, the 1961 Suicide Act makes it illegal to encourage or assist someone to take their own life, while laws in Scotland and Northern Ireland prevent dying people asking for medical help to die.

The report did call for improved mental health care for terminally ill people and said there should be a “national strategy for death literacy and support following a terminal diagnosis”.

Auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Westminster, John Sherrington – who serves as the bishops’ conference for life issues – said he welcomed the decision of the committee not to recommend the legalisation of assisted suicide.

“The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales opposes its legalisation out of concern for the good of every person in society, the protection of this good in law, and the spiritual and pastoral care of the sick and dying,” he said.

“The act of assisted suicide violates the dignity inherent to every person’s life, which is to be cherished and cared for at all stages until natural death,” the bishop added.

Burkina Faso bishop says ‘faith has grown’ after jihadist attacks

A Catholic leader in north-east Burkina Faso says Christians in his country have refused to give up their faith in the face of rising jihadist attacks. Bishop Justin Kientega of Ouahigouya was addressing journalists at a February 28 online press conference organised by the

pontifical charity, Aid to the Church in Need.

The message came in the wake of the brutal killing of over a dozen Christians in Dori Diocese on February 25. Burkina Faso has been plagued by an insurgency for years, with the pontifical charity Aid to the Church in

Need estimating that 40% of the country is controlled by terrorists. The continued attacks have forced over two million people – about 10 percent of the population – to flee.

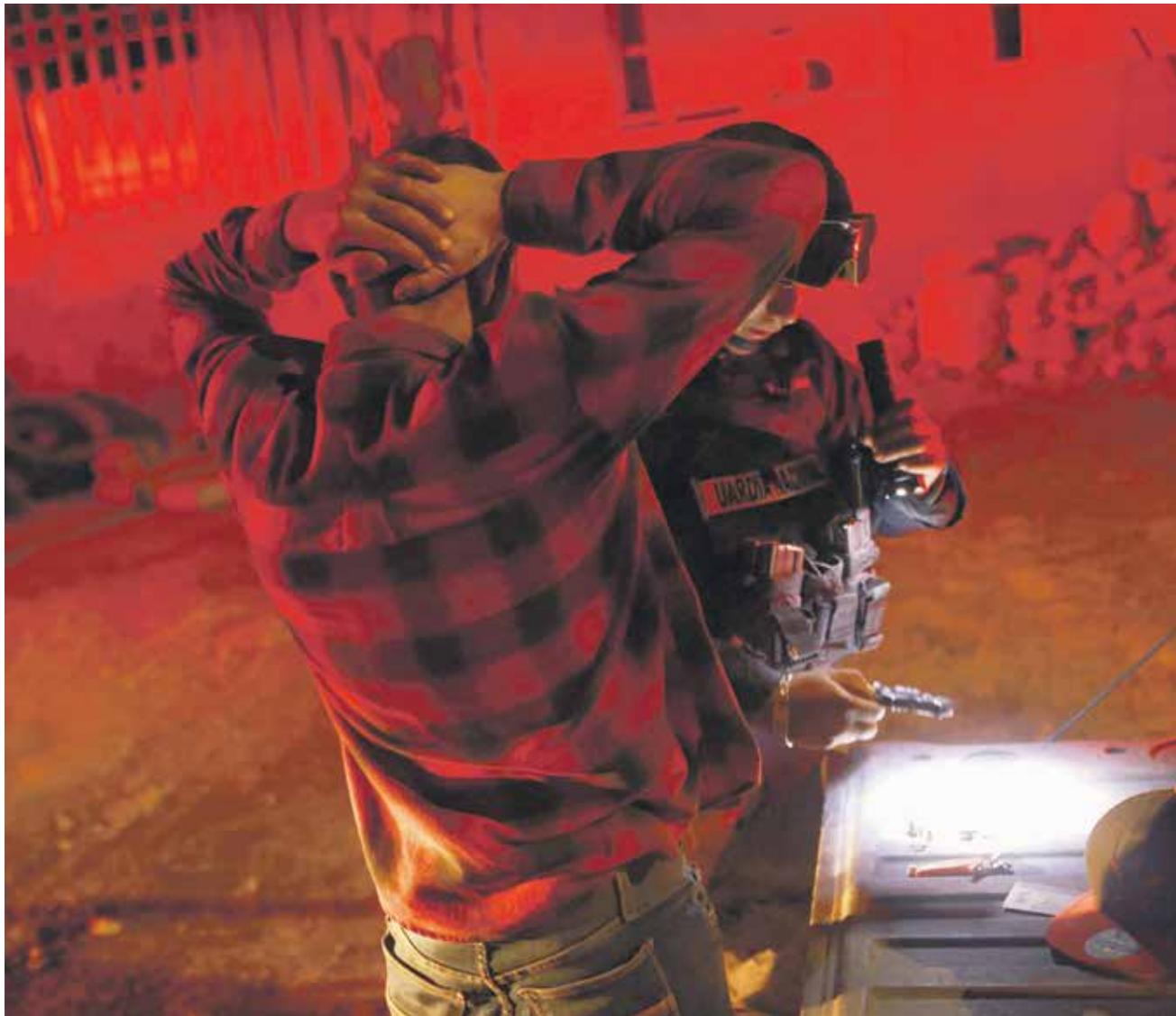
“Faith has grown,” the bishop said as he outlined the various ways Chris-

tians have stood up to the demands of the jihadists. “Some Christians accept to die,” he said, and explained that when jihadists want Christians to remove their crosses, and many turn that request down, very often at the expense of “being tortured or even killed”.



Edited by Brandon Scott
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Confronting the scourge of a society



Picture caption: Mexican Army and National Guard members search a person as they participate in 'Operation Juarez' in Ciudad Juarez, February 17, aimed at reducing violence. Photo: OSV News Jose Luis Gonzalez, Reuters

US President Biden says he disagrees with Catholic Church's stance on IVF

President Joe Biden expressed on February 29 his disagreement with the Catholic Church's position that in vitro fertilization (IVF) is immoral because it kills countless unborn human babies.

As the controversy continues after an Alabama Supreme Court ruling established the personhood of unborn babies

conceived through IVF, Biden was asked by EWTN White House correspondent Owen Jensen what he thought about the Church's position on the issue.

"The Catholic Church says IVF is immoral and wrong because it destroys countless human embryos. What do you say to that?" Mr Jensen asked. "I don't agree with that position," Mr Biden responded

before walking away.

IVF is a medical procedure that fuses sperm and egg in a lab environment to conceive a child outside of the sexual act. The live embryo is later implanted into a uterus to continue developing until birth.

While the Church encourages certain fertility treatments for couples struggling to have children, the use

of IVF is contrary to Catholic teachings because it separates the marriage act from procreation and destroys embryonic human life.

Although Mr Biden is a professed Catholic, he criticised the Alabama ruling as a "disregard for women's ability to make these decisions for themselves and their families".

Catholic chapel where two men celebrated 'marriage' now subject to deconsecration

The private Catholic chapel where two Spanish men celebrated their civil 'marriage' last weekend is subject to 'canonical effects' and deconsecration, according to the Archdiocese of Madrid and a Catholic priest with jurisdiction in the area.

According to photos on social media,

some elements of the Catholic liturgy apparently were used during the ceremony, including an image of the Virgin of Hakuna by sculptor Javier Viver.

Fr Florentino de Andrés, pastor of St Bernabé Parish in El Escorial, told *ACI Prensa* that the chapel has not been deconsecrated and that the ceremony

was carried out without his knowledge. The priest was emphatic that "it was not with my permission".

Fr De Andrés also said that he will speak with the owners of the property to determine what took place and if confirmed as reported, he will call for the chapel to be deconsecrated.



Pope Francis weakened by 'a bit of a cold'

● Pope Francis, still visibly suffering from a 'cold', visited a Rome hospital for diagnostic tests last week following his weekly general audience, at which an aide read the Holy Father's prepared remarks.

The Holy See Press Office later confirmed the hospital visit, adding that the Pope already had returned to the Vatican.

"I still have a bit of a cold, which is why I asked Monsignor [Filippo] Ciampanelli to read today's catechesis," Pope Francis said at the start of the morning general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall. He arrived at the hall in his wheelchair shortly before 9am and did not walk to his chair with a cane as he typically does.

Restoration of Bernini's baldacchino begins in St Peter's Basilica

● Restoration work has begun on the baldacchino over the main altar of St Peter's Basilica designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Workers will scale the scaffolding surrounding the 92-foot-high canopy each day to meticulously clean the dust and grime that has darkened the baldacchino over the centuries.

The 400-year-old twisting bronze columns of the large canopy will remain covered by scaffolding until the works are complete in December in time for the start of the Catholic Church's jubilee year.

Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, the archpriest of St Peter's Basilica, has said that the scaffolding was set up in a way to allow papal liturgies — including this year's Holy Week liturgies — to continue to take place

in the basilica amid the restoration work.

Vatican releases Pope Francis' schedule for Holy Week and Easter 2024

The Vatican has released Pope Francis' schedule for Holy Week 2024, which will include five papal liturgies, Stations of the Cross at the Colosseum, and other traditions to mark the most sacred week of the year.

Easter is the highest feast in the Catholic Church, known as the 'solemnity of solemnities', celebrating Jesus' resurrection and defeat of sin and death, and the Vatican celebrates Holy Week with pomp, reverence, tradition, and a busy schedule.

The 87-year-old Pope is scheduled to preside over liturgies on each day of the Easter Triduum as well as Palm Sunday.

Holy See: Religious freedom is violated in one third of the world

● Human rights, including those against freedom of thought, conscience and religion, continue to be violated on an alarming scale across the globe, the Holy See's Permanent Observer to the United Nations and Other International Organisations in Geneva said last week.

Speaking at the 55th Session of the Human Rights Council, which kicked off on February 26, Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, remarked that discrimination and persecution of believers are on the rise worldwide.

He cited the data from the Pontifical foundation Aid to the Church in Need which show that religious freedom is violated in almost one third of the world's countries, affecting around 4.9 billion people.

The former Nuncio to the Democratic Republic of the Congo also lamented that in some Western countries, "religious discrimination and censorship are being perpetrated under the guise of 'tolerance and inclusion'".



Letter from Jerusalem

A fast for peace and plenty



Justin Robinson OSB

Pilgrims who have walked Jerusalem's *Via Dolorosa* will likely have visited the birthplace of the Virgin Mary at St Anne's church, at the start of that hallowed route. The Crusader structure possess beauty in its noble simplicity, and it sits next to the Bethesda Pools where Jesus healed the paralytic man. What pilgrims might have missed, however, is the Greek Orthodox church of the same name just next door, whose nondescript exterior makes it easily passable.

There, a 50-something year old monk from a village close to Acre lives and ministers. *Tfaddal, tfaddal*, "welcome, welcome", Abouna Meletios urges me, as I enter his home for our pre-Lenten exchange of greetings. It's a tradition in the Arab world to visit the *diwan* of one's relatives and friends around the time of religious festivals or major life events, where a never-ending flow of sweet tea, bitter coffee, nuts and sweets flows from the kitchen.

Fasting

Although the Western Lent has begun, the Great Fast of the Orthodox Church is still some weeks away and I've come to pass on my best wishes to the archimandrite for the upcoming fast.

Already a doctor of psychology before entering the monastic life, Abouna Meletios sought the life of prayer and solitude which the monastery offers. Nowadays he's living alone in the hustle and bustle of the Old City's Muslim Quarter, assigned to celebrate the liturgy each day at Gethsemane and to teach some courses in local universities.

I ask him about the situation these days, and he sighs "*fauda, dayman fauda*" in reply. I'm not surprised by his description of "constant chaos" as I once lived in this bustling yet charged Quarter where the tension in the air can be palpable.

Pouring splendid *qahwa* into two small cups, we drink the earthy and bitter coffee as Meletios explains how the Great Fast begins with four preparatory Sundays, a time of gradual transition as meat and cheese are given-up before 'Clean Monday' commences the 40 days of fasting from meat, oil, dairy products and so on.

The rounds of liturgical prayer will increase greatly in length and there will be various periods of more intensive fasting, but what



Men carry a large wooden cross during a Good Friday procession on the Via Dolorosa, 'The Way of Sorrow', the path believed to be taken by Jesus to his crucifixion, in Jerusalem's Old City April 7, 2023. Photo: OSV News/Ammar Awad, Reuters

struck me most was Meletios' sadness at this year's expected lack of pilgrims, a sadness echoed across the Holy Land.

“It's like organising a banquet for oneself; nobody celebrates alone”

"I'm a monk, so I love the Great Fast a lot. It resets our relationship with God, and it's good for the health. Of course I look forward to Easter too, but when it comes this year we'll be alone. The Christian Palestinians can't come, and the pilgrims from abroad won't come. It's like organising a banquet for oneself; nobody celebrates alone."

After saying farewell and promis-

ing to meet again after our respective celebrations of Easter, I walk the *Via Dolorosa* back to my home. On the way I come across James, Jerusalem's well-known *poverello* who is walking barefoot, staff in hand, thumbing his rosary with his breviary tucked underarm. I ask him how is Lent is faring. "Lent in the Holy Land is something special, like nowhere else in the world" he says with his signature smile.

"We're walking in the footsteps of Christ on the *Via Dolorosa*, we're praying at Calvary and we're reflecting in the empty tomb, all for a real and tangible experience of the Passion and Resurrection."

Spiritual

James has depended solely on God's providence for the past 30 years, urged on by a discerning Jesuit spir-

itual director in his hometown of Detroit. He now lives and sleeps in and around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where he's a constant feature at prayer times and a welcoming presence for pilgrims.

“Nowadays there are no pilgrims, and Jerusalem doesn't feel the same. It does feel more spiritual”

"The Holy Sepulchre is a hub for the world, for people of all nations. I interact with them, and build relationships with them", he explains. "Nowadays there are no pilgrims, and Jerusalem doesn't feel the same. It does feel more spiritual, however, not to be distracted in the holy

places by tourists or money-makers, but rather to immerse oneself into the reason for this place." "But I hope the groups will be back soon" he adds.

Continuing back to the monastery on the Way of Sorrows, it's now a quick journey through the Old City's *souks*. Before the war, it meant squeezing past pilgrim groups from all denominations from right across the world, with a constant feeling of festivity even on the most solemn of religious occasions.

As our Lent continues and the Orthodox Lent approaches, I hope the Holy Land's current fast from pilgrims might produce fruits of peace and plenty in the coming year.

i Justin Robinson OSB is a monk of Glenstal Abbey in Co. Limerick currently residing in Jerusalem.

Letters

Letter of the week

Adapting to parenthood's changing needs

Dear Editor, I am writing in response to Mary Kenny's thought-provoking article on modern parenthood, particularly its emphasis on 'positive parenting' and the potential consequences thereof [*The Irish Catholic* – February 29, 2024]. As a grandmother reflecting on the evolution of child-rearing practices, I'm particularly interested in Ms Kenny's pertinent questions about the impact of contemporary parenting approaches on children's development and mental well-being.

Indeed, the shift towards encouraging children to voice their needs and fostering their autonomy reflects a commendable aspect of modern parenting. Acknowledging and respecting children's individuality can undoubtedly contribute to their emotional resilience and self-esteem. However, as she astutely notes, there are concerns

about whether this emphasis on positive reinforcement may inadvertently lead to self-centeredness or a lack of consideration for others.

The insights shared by child psychologist Abigail Shrier highlight the consequences of shielding children from life's challenges. The psychologist's observations about the rising prevalence of mental health issues among young people underscore the importance of striking a balance between nurturing resilience and providing support.

The findings of the Resolution Foundation report further emphasise the urgency of addressing the mental health challenges facing today's youth. While advancements in diagnosis, as well as the need to label every small character trait as some sort of malady – pushing more young people to

be unnecessarily medicalised, undoubtedly play a role, it is crucial to examine how parenting practices may contribute to the heightened prevalence of depression and anxiety.

While positive parenting has undeniable merits, we must remain vigilant against its potential pitfalls. Cultivating a holistic approach to child-rearing that fosters resilience, empathy, and a sense of responsibility towards others is paramount.

Ultimately, the well-being of children hinges on parents' ability to adapt and evolve in response to the changing dynamics of parenthood, as well as, of course, parent's ability to pass on the Faith.

Yours etc.,

Mary Hegarty

Blanchardstown, Dublin 15

Deleting word mother from Constitution

Dear Editor, Those of us who are still lucky enough to have mothers will run around this week buying cards, gifts and flowers to say thank you on Mother's Day for all their unconditional love, advice and support.

At the same time, we will be voting to delete forever the word 'mother' from our Constitution.

While I agree that

the current language in the Constitution is archaic, it is a great pity that our legal wordsmiths could not come up with a new wording that would still include the word 'mother'.

The word 'carers' does not quite capture the multiple roles of the modern 'Irish Mammy' for me.

Yours etc.,

Ger O'Brien

Drogheda, Co. Louth



Ordaining married men to address vocations crisis

Dear Editor, Bishop of Waterford Alphonsus Cullinan is right to highlight the need for a review of the arrangement of Masses across parishes [*The Irish Catholic* – February 29, 2024].

Clearly with the ever growing shortage of priests, some action is needed to ensure our aging priests are not overburdened. Greater lay ministry is an important part of the solution, but the elephant in

the room is surely the option to ordain married men and women deacons, something the Synod in Rome will address next October. Perhaps it is time for our bishops to show leadership on

this issue now, and advocate for positive changes that will help address the vocations crisis in our Irish Church.

Yours etc.,

Deacon Frank Browne,
Rathfarnham, Dublin 16

Moving forward with married priests

Dear Editor, Your story about Bishop Cullinan's suggestions for the future deployment of priests and churches in his diocese led me to some personal reflections [*The Irish Catholic* – February 29, 2024].

In my time as principal of two English Catholic secondary schools I enjoyed the good fortune of having married priests on the teaching staff. These priest-teachers

helped out in local parishes at weekends and holidays.

In my last school in rural Essex there were several married priests, mostly former Church of England clergy, in charge of local Catholic parishes. Nobody found this the least bit odd.

On a recent family visit to our former London parish, I met a married friend from Iraq, who serves as one

of the many parish volunteer catechists with special responsibility for preparing those many adults seeking to join the Church. During a recent visit to that parish by a Chaldean archbishop he was, to his surprise, invited to become a priest.

Here in Kerry about a year ago I attended the local synodal meeting in our very rural pastoral area. In our discussion

group and in other gatherings that evening many of those present expressed the opinion that having a married clergy was far preferable to having no priests and no Eucharist.

Given the choice most Catholics I meet would prefer to move forward in hope rather than decline in despair.

Yours etc.,

Alan Whelan
Killarney, Co. Kerry

Overcoming 'analysis paralysis' in the Church

The Irish Catholic

There's a phrase in sport to describe when a player has thought so much about what he is doing that he can't do it anymore: analysis paralysis.

With the proliferation of coaches, experts, statisticians and the recording technology, the wealth of information and advice can overwhelm even the most talented sportsman or woman.

You take in so much information that you forget the purpose of what you're doing, going round in circles analysing the various analyses.

The best learn to take in what they need and tune out the rest. Once they have enough, they get on with the business of playing well and winning matches.

There are times in the Church in Ireland that we seem struck by the analysis-paralysis malaise. Our response to the various crises that afflict us – whether it be in vocations, church attendance, catechesis, etc. – often appears to be more meetings and more consultation so that we can better 'imagine' a new way of being the Church.

The end result is a proliferation of possibilities and increasingly refined discussions about what it means to be this or that kind of Church – in other words, talks about talks and analyses of analyses.

It looks impressive and it seems that we are getting somewhere, but in fact it threatens to take us further and further from the root of the Church's life.

We have warned in this paper previously that parishioners and priests are suffering from consultation fatigue resulting from a series of consultations and reports over the past few years, which appear to lead only to further meetings and reports.

This is the danger that faces the synod in Ireland and at a global level, that it becomes self-referential and self-regarding.

Already the language and the symbols of the

synod – round tables, co-responsibility, conversations in the spirit – are in danger of becoming code-words understood by a select elite, but confusing to the average parishioner.

If we don't want to get stuck in analysis paralysis, we have to learn from the sportsman and woman to tune out useless information by testing it against our mission.

For the sportsman, that's to win the game; for the Church, it is the to save souls by sharing the Good News of Christ. The aim of any meetings or analyses should be: are we ready for this mission? And if not, what do we have to do to get ready?

The answers we need are not vague resolutions to do this or that, which only leads to lethargy – we need firm commitments and intensive activity.

That is a daunting task and a grave responsibility. If we fail, we are potentially risking the salvation of many thousands of people.

But it is also the main measure against which we can test if what we are talking about is fruitful or paralyzing.

On Friday, February 23, came the by now monthly report that Ireland is facing record levels of homelessness.

The number of people in homeless accommodation has risen by 213, bringing to 13,531 the number of people living in emergency accommodation.

Almost a third of people in homelessness are children (4,027) and 197 are pensioners.

Almost as regular as the shocking figures are Government promises to address the issue through their latest housing plan. For how long have we been hearing that we are 'about to turn the corner'?

The fact is that it is now going to take a great deal of work to overcome the more than decade-long stagnation in the housing market and inadequate, if any, interventions.

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.

How a shy Irish farm boy changed countless lives in Uganda

Laura Dodson

A shy Irish farm boy taught to be open to God's gifts and opportunities in every harvest, egg clutch and milk bucket courageously responded yes to God's call to priesthood.

He ultimately became pastor of a sleepy central Florida parish ripe for awakening to God's ways that would then transform not only their parish and local community, but also 32 tiny villages and countless lives in Uganda.

"Giving is what we grew up with," explained Msgr Patrick Sheedy, or 'Fr Pat' as he prefers to be called. "Everybody is part of a team.

"We prayed the rosary together as a family every night; we worked the farm – the animals, crops, dairy. We just had to cooperate with God and bring God's gifts to the family and community. If you're tuned into God, if you have a relationship, you will see the opportunities."

The fourth child with 11 brothers and sisters raised on a 160-acre farm in County Clare, Ireland, Fr Pat was ordained a priest June 13, 1965, for the Diocese of St Augustine, Florida. He completed several parish assignments preparing him to be pastor of Blessed Trinity Parish in Ocala in 1988.

Outreach

Founded as a mission in 1883, the parish had a strong outreach to people in poverty. Fr Pat brought his team concept to organise and energise the parishioners.

"God gives of himself," Fr Pat told *OSV News*. "The high point of giving is the Mass – Jesus' sacrifice of himself for our salvation. All giving flows from that. It's not about money. God gives us all gifts. I don't have to have a dollar – I can still imitate God."

At a 1991 pastoral council meeting, controversy arose regarding the parish subsidy of the school and a member recommended a stewardship video from St Francis of Assisi Parish in Wichita, Kansas. They watched the video; Fr Pat and Deacon Vernon Krajewski visited St Francis Parish for three days and returned home committed to developing a stewardship way of life.

They presented the plan to the parish council which wholeheartedly approved. They began with a 24/7 Perpetual Adoration Chapel which has been attended by parishioners every hour for the past 30-plus years. The plan makes Jesus Christ's presence in the Eucharist the constant focus of their stewardship way of life by putting God first.

Within three years, the entire community of Blessed Trinity Parish had embraced the spirituality of stewardship. Their commitment was obvious in the fruits.

The parish ministry guide lists 12 boards that lead and administer more than 100 stewardship opportunities in the parish and out into the community.

"The spirituality of putting God first with our time, talent and treasure is not only a unique blessing to



Fr Patrick Sheedy leads the entire school assembly in the lighting of the parish Christmas tree in December 2021 encouraging them to light their own candle and go out to be a light to the world. Photo: *OSV News*

everyone who actually tries to live it out daily, but is also and maybe more so a huge blessing to the God-given mission of the parish," Fr Pat said.

“The parish and its parishioners have benefited from the free services of doctors, nurses, dentists, teachers, deacons, tutors, counselors, architects, engineers and musicians”

As an example of that blessing, he said that in more than 25 years the parish hasn't bought a single bucket of paint despite building more than 20 new buildings and painting all of them on rotation every seven years – because a parishioner owned a paint manufacturing plant.

In addition, he indicated the parish and its parishioners have benefitted from the free services of doctors, nurses, dentists, teachers, deacons, tutors, counselors, architects, engineers and musicians – the list seems endless.

The parish school more than tripled its enrolment; it currently has 660 students. Wanting to strengthen the Catholic identity, three Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Reparatrix were welcomed in August 2000 from a convent near Kampala, Uganda.

Sr Juliet Ateenyi Nakalema showed a third grade teacher a photo of her village church – a small hut of sticks and mud which the teacher shared with her students. The students wanted to build Sr Juliet's village a "real church." They sold T-shirts and the whole parish joined in.

Expanded

The local bishop of the Diocese of Hoima, Uganda, expanded the proposed 300-seat church concept to 800 seats. After raising \$185,000 (€170,587), the new church was paid for and Fr Pat visited for the blessing of Blessed Trinity Parish in Nalweyo, Uganda, in 2004.

"I was afraid of the assignment," Sr Juliet told *OSV News*. "What was I going to do in America? My English, taught by the British, wasn't the best and I didn't know computers.

"When the photo of my stick church was shared with the parish, I worried that they would be con-

cerned about my teaching the children. But this is God's work. It is God who made everyone so welcoming and giving."

“Over 120 students have graduated from college and university and are now teachers, engineers, policemen, doctors, nurses and midwives. Vocations are thriving – 12 men are priests and five women are nuns”

Today, there are 32 village churches, a Perpetual Adoration Chapel staffed 24/7, a convent, rectory, 22 village schools, 40 deep water wells, a 120-acre farm, two medical/dental clinics, a remodelled and expanded orphanage, 22 catechist houses to teach the faith to those living out in the bush, six eight-bedroom teacher houses, a 21-bedroom teacher/staff house that also welcomes visitors and five duplexes for married teachers.

Dormitories were needed for

children in outlying villages to be able to attend school and today there are six dorms for grade school and high school students with an 1,100-student capacity; four village dorms for grade school students; a boys' carpentry school; a girls' domestic school and sponsored education of 1000 students annually.

Graduated

Over 120 students have graduated from college and university and are now teachers, engineers, policemen, doctors, nurses and midwives. Vocations are thriving – 12 men are priests and five women are nuns. Several graduates work in carpentry and plumbing.

The boys' carpentry school is currently making thousands of desks and pews for the village churches and schools.

"I believed it was going to be," said Fr Pat, who has written a 2023 book *God is Able* about his many opportunities with the Lord. "God gives me people who believe and help me and by the time we're finished, we have more than we need."

Laura Dodson writes for OSV News from Florida.

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, March 7, 2023

Love Makes Room

George P. Matysek Jr.

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What is 'Catholic Enough'?

Children participate in Eucharistic adoration during summer day camp at Notre Dame Church in New Hyde Park, New York, July 2023. Photo: OSV News Gregory A. Shemitz

A discussion among practicing Catholics occurred in a social media group, inevitably landing on current divisions between Catholics - those who would describe themselves as 'orthodox' vs the 'more progressive;' those who pronounce themselves 'proudly cafeteria' versus those who identify as 'proudly traditionalist'.

For Christians in touch with their own failings, it seems pointless to be 'proudly' anything, and yet the stink of pride eventually attaches to most of us, no matter how pure our practice.

That led to questions about what 'purity' means in a fallen world, and debate on following all the 'rules' promulgated by



Jesus keeps 'left' and 'right' in balance, writes Elizabeth Scalia

the church in the face of Christ's own teachings. For instance, is Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son - in which he depicts the father running toward the imperfectly contrite son, even "while he was still a long way off" (Lk 15:20) - contrary to the mandate that we all be in a 'state of grace' before we may approach Christ in the Eucharist?

It is good that such conversations happen, good to see people

still actively wondering. Wonder grounds the work of better-knowing God. Still, after lengthy exchanges, someone finally wailed, "How can any of us ever be 'Catholic enough?'"

That *cri du coeur* is worth pondering in prayer: What is 'Catholic enough?' The answer might be as simple, and as difficult, as 'love moving without limits, yet unchained to human excess.'

As any parent will tell you, rules matter. Honest parents will admit that sometimes love requires carefully reconsidering even the most entrenched and principled of family rules. Does that touch the modern Church? Some Catholics fear any 'development of doctrine', while others clamour for it.

Perhaps we should read St John Henry Newman's 'On the Development of Doctrine', wherein he makes helpful distinctions between principles and doctrine: "Principles are abstract and general, doctrines relate to facts; doctrines develop, and principles at first sight do not; doctrines grow and are enlarged, principles are permanent; doctrines are intellectual, and principles are more immediately

ethical and practical. Systems live in principles and represent doctrines. Personal responsibility is a principle, the Being of a God is a doctrine; from that doctrine all theology has come in due course, whereas that principle is not clearer under the Gospel than in paradise, and depends, not on belief in an Almighty Governor, but on conscience" (Chapter 5.2).

As a both/and Church, we entwine with the supernatural and the world - 'all things visible and invisible'. Does this contribute to our branching away from each other, aligning with factions rather than working the faith together? We want to embrace the (mostly undiscussed) supernaturality of the Church, but instinctively wish to



A man and woman pray during Ash Wednesday Mass at Sacred Heart Church in Prescott, Arizona, February 14, 2024. (OSV News photo/Bob Roller)



A picture of St. John Henry Newman. (OSV News photo/courtesy of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales)

serve humanity in humane ways.

Both efforts can be taken up in good faith but brought to extremes, weighing too heavily in one direction or the other. The thudding end to extremism is, well, pride.

It is entirely possible to become prideful as a Pharisee, preening as we follow all the rules while also overworking the supernaturalism - and yes, the urge and action toward prayer is supernatural, as in the inspiration to serve.

“It made me wonder how often we proclaim our faith while not trusting that prayer can be both simple and ‘enough’”

I knew someone who prayed a full rosary every day, reciting not just the Fatima prayer but also the prayer to St Michael at the end of each decade and calling it “necessary”. It made me wonder how often we proclaim our faith while not trusting that prayer can be both simple and ‘enough’.

Did pride cause my acquaintance to deem a powerful prayer as inadequate to the world’s needs? God knows. But if we offer prayer yet don’t trust God enough to believe that prayer is both efficacious and plenty, then what are we

“The crucifix shows us right and left - justice and mercy; the worldly and the supernatural – borne on the horizontal beam from which Jesus spreads out his arms”

really offering? Is prayer without trust part of our pride?

Commitment

On the other hand, I know people so committed to the world-service side of faith that they’ve become detached from the supernaturalism of prayer. I was sneered at once by an ardent ‘social justice’ Catholic who called Eucharistic adoration “a medieval relic, too passive in the face of so much human need”.

“Yet it supports the work you do,” I argued. Were we both prideful? Again, God knows?

A both/and Church is a Martha-and-Mary Church of ‘being’ and ‘doing’. We broken humans constantly forget that, leaning one way or the other. It’s a tricky but necessary thing to take time to sit quietly before the Lord while also putting your time and talent into service for Christ’s sake. If we all worked on that, there might be less discontent and distrust between Catholics, and fewer questions about whether we’re doing Catholicism ‘correctly’.

The crucifix shows us right and left - justice and mercy; the worldly and the supernatural – borne on the horizontal beam from which Jesus spreads out his arms. His body - our Eucharist - fills the vertical beam, grounded, yet heavenward.

“Because there is nothing purer or more perfect than being in balance with Christ”

Jesus is the balance. He alone is what keeps either side from crash-landing. Perhaps when we habitually join our crosses to his, questions of purity and perfection will become moot.

Because there is nothing purer or more perfect than being in balance with Christ.

i Elizabeth Scalia is editor at large for OSV.

Almsgiving and fasting can both be about money



US dollars are seen in this illustration photo.
Photo: OSV News Yuriko Nakao, Reuters



Phil Lenahan

In word and deed, Pope Francis continues to encourage Catholics to reach out to the poor and not succumb to a consumerist mentality where what we have is deemed more important than who we are. The season of Lent provides a special opportunity to take the Holy Father's words to heart and live them out more fully.

Lent is a time to meditate more deeply on the life of Christ, especially on his passion and crucifixion. By better understanding and appreciating the love he has for us, the more able we are to respond to him with love.

The Church provides traditional Lenten practices that help us focus

on our relationship with Christ. "The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice," according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. "These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works)" (No. 1438).

While the primary emphasis of these practices are spiritual, you will be surprised at how much they enhance your ability to fulfil your daily responsibilities as well - not just during Lent but throughout the year. Since my focus is on personal finances, I'd like to discuss how two of these practices can assist you in becoming a better steward of providence.

Fasting and our desires

The first is fasting. One of the most common difficulties Ameri-

cans have with their finances is living beyond their means. This tendency is linked to our fallen nature. The catechism describes it this way: "Our thirst for another's goods is immense, infinite, never quenched" (No. 2536).

“Fasting provides a discipline that helps us corral this tendency to overspend. It promotes temperance”

The ramifications of our overspending are great and are apparent at the national, state, local and personal levels. Overspending leads to a failure to save, leaving future obligations unfunded. It also leads to unproductive debt, which creates major obstacles to having a successful financial future.

Fasting provides a discipline that helps us corral this tendency to overspend. It promotes temperance, which "is the moral virtue

that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honourable" (CCC, No. 1809).

While the Church requires fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, many faithful practice it on a more regular basis. They recognise how it builds their character not only in the virtue of temperance, but in other virtues as well.

Practice charity by Giving alms

The second Lenten practice I want to touch on is almsgiving. Generosity is a key part of our Christian journey, having a direct impact on our relationship with God and neighbour. With American Catholics giving about 1% of their income to charity, it's clear that our practice is to give from what's left over rather than following the Scriptural principle of giving from our first fruits (Prv 3:9).

Renewing our commitment to almsgiving in a special way dur-

ing Lent stretches our ability to love. Tobit 12:8-9 says, "It is better to give alms than to store up gold, for almsgiving saves from death, and purges all sin".

“Most importantly, they will lead to spiritual closeness with our Lord”

Just as fasting strengthens the virtue of temperance, almsgiving builds the virtue of charity. I encourage you to make both of these practices part of your Lenten plan in a meaningful way. Most importantly, they will lead to spiritual closeness with our Lord.

Secondarily, they will help you become a more effective manager of your finances and a better steward of providence. Those are benefits worth pursuing throughout the year!

i Phil Lenahan is chief financial officer and treasurer of Catholic Answers.

Love makes room

George P. Matysek Jr.

My heart started beating faster and my face flushed when I glanced at the messages popping up in text bubbles on my phone one early morning last March.

"Are you at work?" one asked. "Can you let me know when you are there?" another said. "Uh-oh," I thought. "Someone died."

Stepping away from a conversation with a colleague, I closed the door to my office and called Treasa - bracing for bad news. The voice at the other end of the phone lacked urgency, however, and even had a carefree quality. My wife said she wanted to text me a photo and "get my opinion on something".

In the next instant, I was staring at a pregnancy test that showed two telltale vertical lines. "You think it's positive?" Treasa asked. "Yes," I said.

Treasa continued chatting about this life-changing development in a relaxed way that would arouse no suspicion among our five kids. Despite the hushed tone of her voice, however, I could tell she was ecstatic.

My heart was still beating furiously. I, too, was overjoyed. Yet, part of me was thinking back to earlier conversations my wife and I had about growing our family. We have always been unconditionally open to life, but questions lingered in my mind.

“Welcoming a new baby would teach our children to be more generous, she said. Our little ones would give and receive love in a new way”

Was I too old at 50 to be the father of a sixth child? How would we pay for the countless expenses that would go into raising an even larger family? Would we need a new van to fit two adults and six kids? Having lost our first-born son six weeks before his due date, what would we do if we had that experience again, or if the baby was born with health challenges - and how would that impact our children, who ranged in age from 4 to 9?

News

When we started sharing the news with family and friends, most were supportive. But a few weren't exactly encouraging. "You need to find another hobby," one person told me.

Another's jaw literally dropped, and someone else asked if I thought I was a Hollywood movie star - Al Pacino or George Clooney - still having kids later in life.

"Reeeally?" said one, rolling his eyes. I knew they were teasing ... mostly. Yet, I could tell in some of the reactions that the path we walked was perceived as weird, naive and maybe even foolish by some. Treasa had a different outlook.

Welcoming a new baby would teach our children to be more generous, she said. Our little ones would give and receive love in a new way. They would learn to make sacrifices and bond more strongly. Their support system

would grow.

We brought the newest Matysek child home from the hospital in December, an early Christmas gift. The reaction of the children squashed any earlier concerns I had. One by one, each held his or her baby brother, beaming proudly.

“In these first few weeks, they've showered him with love, doting on him and offering to help with everything”

In these first few weeks, they've showered him with love, doting on him and offering to help with everything from getting his binky to reading him stories and voluntarily (!) cleaning up around the house.

During his epic 1979 visit to Washington, DC, Pope St John Paul II noted that decisions about the number of children in a family "must not be taken only with a view to adding to comfort and preserving a peaceful existence."

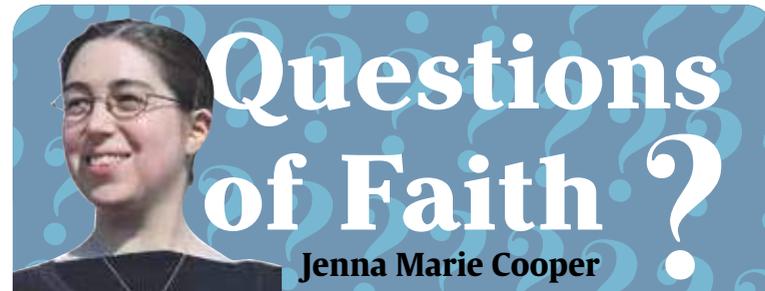
Parents, he said, "will remind themselves that it is certainly less serious to deny their children certain comforts or material advantages than to deprive them of the presence of brothers and sisters, who could help them to grow in humanity and to realise the beauty of life at all its ages and in all its variety."

He and Treasa are right. Love makes room.

i George P. Matysek Jr. is managing editor of The Catholic Review.

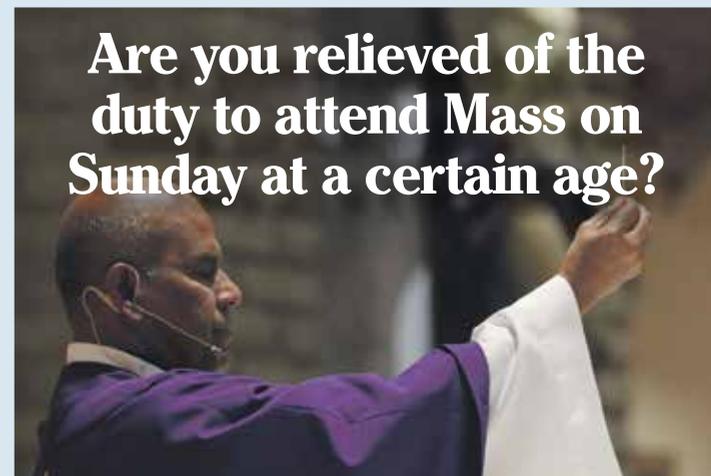


A woman is pictured in a file photo holding a newborn at Holy Land Family Hospital of Bethlehem in the West Bank. Photo: OSV News courtesy HFH Foundation



Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper



Are you relieved of the duty to attend Mass on Sunday at a certain age?

Q: My older sister told me that after age 80, you are relieved of the duty to attend Sunday Mass. I didn't believe her until a friend who is 86 told me the same thing. I have never heard of this. Is it true?

A: I have never heard of this either! The relevant citation in Code of Canon Law, Canon 1247, indicates: "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass". But canon law never mentions an upper age limit for this obligation.

There are some obligations for Catholics which do have stated age parameters. For example, Canon 1252 tells us that the obligation to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday "binds those who have attained their majority, until the beginning of their sixtieth year", meaning that once a Catholic turns 60 they are no longer required to keep the fast. The fact that our law demonstrates its willingness to set upper age limits for some obligations makes the lack of a stated age limit for the Sunday obligation all the more striking.

That being said, nobody is bound to an obligation that is impossible or gravely difficult to fulfil. It can happen that by the time a person reaches 80, various age-related issues could prevent them from attending Mass in person. For example, health issues might leave them too ill to go out to church, and transportation might become an issue if an elderly person is no longer able to drive. In colder climates, winter weather conditions might also present more of a concern for a senior citizen than they would for someone a few decades younger.

But if an octogenarian thereby found themselves to be no longer bound by the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays, this lack of an obligation would be directly attributable to one of these kinds of above-mentioned reasons, and not simply due to the year they were born.

An 80-something Catholic in good health who was capable of physically traveling to Mass would be just as bound to observe

the Sunday obligation as their younger counterparts. And, by the same token, a 20-something Catholic who was legitimately impeded from attending Mass due to reasons of health or logistics would be likewise excused from the Sunday obligation.

At the end of the day, our discernment of whether or not we are excused from the duty to attend Mass is a matter of conscience. That is, the Church trusts us to make this determination in good faith; we're not asked to provide 'proof' to anyone that attending Mass is prohibitively difficult for us.

But if an older adult is having a hard time weighing whether their circumstances truly excuse them from the Sunday obligation, it might be helpful for them to ask for advice from one's confessor or parish priest.

And although it would not be strictly necessary, if it helps to bring clarity or ease the conscience of a Catholic who is on the fence about whether or not they should stay home from Mass, it is possible to request a formal dispensation from the Sunday obligation. Such a dispensation can be granted by either the local bishop or - as would likely be more convenient for most people - from the pastor of one's territorial parish. (See Canons 87 and 1245.)

As per Canon 1245, a bishop or pastor can also 'commute' the Sunday obligation to 'some other pious work'. This means that the proper authority can essentially set some other prayerful activity as a substitution for the Sunday obligation for a specific person in a particular case.

So, for example, if a senior citizen feels uncomfortable traveling to Mass, their bishop or pastor can 'change' the Sunday obligation to something like prayerfully reflecting on the readings of the day or watching a televised Mass.

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

Aging as a natural monastery



Helen Lou Barden and her grandson, fourth-grader Brett Barden, work together to construct a paper dragonfly. Photo: OSV News

What is a monastery? How do monasteries work? St Benedict (480-547AD) who is considered the founder of Western monasticism, offered this counsel as an essential rule for his monks: Stay in your cell and it will teach all you need to know.

Properly understood, this is a rich metaphor, not a literal counsel. When he is telling a monk to stay in his cell and let it teach him what he needs to know, he is not referring to a literal monk's cell in a monastery. He is referring to the state of life in which a monk or anyone else finds himself or herself.

Sometimes this has been expressed in Christian spirituality as being faithful to your duties of state. The idea here being that if you are faithful in love and in good heart to the situation in life in which you find yourself, life itself will bring you to maturity and virtue.

Selflessness

For example, a mother who gives herself over in selflessness and fidelity to raising her children will be brought to maturity and altruism through that process. Her home will be her monk's cell and she will be metaphorically the Abbess of the monastery (with some very young monks) and staying inside that monastery, her home, will teach her all she needs to know.

She will be raising children, but they will also be raising her. Motherhood will teach her what she needs to know and will turn



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

her into a wise elder, a biblical and archetypal Sophia.

“In the first centuries of Christianity, martyrdom was seen as the ideal way for a Christian to end his or her days here on earth”

The process of aging is a natural monastery. If we live long enough, eventually the aging process turns everyone into a monk. Monks take four vows: poverty, chastity, obedience, and perseverance.

The process of aging which moves us (seemingly without mercy) toward marginalisation, dependence on others, away from an active sex life, and into a living

situation from which there will be no escape, in a manner of speaking, imposes those four vows on us.

But, as St Benedict counsels, this can teach us all we need to know, and has a unique power to mature us in a very deep way. Monks have secrets worth knowing. So does the aging process.

This can be particularly instructive vis-à-vis how we can make our final days and our death a more radical gift to others. In the first centuries of Christianity, martyrdom was seen as the ideal way for a Christian to end his or her days here on earth.

Radical

It was seen as a radical way of imitating Christ and giving your death away as a gift. Of course, this had to be rethought after Christianity became the state religion and emperors

no longer martyred Christians. What followed then were various attempts at doing this, metaphorically martyrdom.

One fairly popular way of doing it was that, after raising their children and reaching retirement, a couple would leave each other and each would go off to a separate monastery and live out the rest of his or her life as a monk or a nun.

“The aging process will do it for us. It will turn us into a sannyasin and put us into the dark night of the spirit”

Classical Christian mystics speak about how in the last phase of our lives we should enter something they call the dark night of the spirit, namely, that we proactively make a radical decision grounded in faith to move into a situation in life where we can no longer take care of ourselves but must trust, in raw faith, that God will provide for us. This parallels Hindu spirituality which suggests that in the last,

fully mature stage of life we should become a sannyasin, a holy old beggar.

I suspect that most of us will never proactively cut off all our former securities and, on purpose, place ourselves in a situation within which we are helpless to provide for and take care of ourselves. But this is where nature steps in. The aging process will do it for us. It will turn us into a sannyasin and put us into the dark night of the spirit.

Marginalised

How? As we age and our health declines and we find ourselves more marginalised in terms of having a vital place within society, we will progressively lose our capacity to take care of ourselves. Eventually, if we live long enough, for most of us it will mean moving into an assisted facility, which is in effect a natural monastery.

What an apt metaphor! An assisted living facility as a natural monastery. The metaphor is also apropos for what it means to (by conscription) enter the dark night of the spirit and what it means to be a holy old beggar, a sannyasin.

In essence it means this: When someone is in an assisted living facility, irrespective of whether he or she is a millionaire or a pauper, the rules are the same for everyone. Since you can no longer take care of yourself (and indeed you don't have to) you live a monastic life of obedience and dependence.

In assisted living, you live by the monastic bell and you die as a holy old beggar.

“When someone is in an assisted living facility, irrespective of whether he or she is a millionaire or a pauper, the rules are the same for everyone”

Lent: Staying nourished by the Word of God and the Eucharist



Evita Tiro Wada and her children pray before eating lunch in their home in Indonesia. Photo: OSV News Laura Elizabeth Pohl, Catholic Relief Services



Jem Sullivan

Need a summary of the Christian faith? This Sunday's Gospel offers one. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). The evangelist John leads us to the heart of the Gospel and the heart of Christian faith.

At the midpoint of Lent, we take stock of our Lenten observances. Are my Lenten practices bringing me closer to the mystery of Jesus' life, death and resurrection? Am I growing in friendship with God and love of neighbour through prayer, acts of penance and almsgiving?

Covenant

The people of Israel took stock of their relationship with God from time to time. God was always faithful to Israel, calling them into a covenant relationship of love and mercy, as the first reading highlights. Yet the people were unfaithful to God.

The author of the Second Book of Chronicles describes their failings in stark terms: "all the princes

of Judah, the priests, and the people added infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations and polluting the Lord's temple which he had consecrated in Jerusalem".

“In the midst of busy days and many responsibilities, the Word of God calls us out of ourselves”

God sent messenger after messenger to return the people to God's deep and faithful love. Lenten observances are meant to open our hearts and minds to those messengers who call us to return to God's love.

The Word of God and the Eucharist invite us, time and time again, to return to the mercy of God who is rich in kindness and fidelity. In the midst of busy days and many responsibilities, the Word of God calls us out of ourselves, to leave behind self-absorption, weakness, despair and failure and to move into the light of God's mercy, joy and covenant love.

Faith

Lent summons and guides our return to the Lord. Why? So we may not perish but entrust ourselves to the love of God whose only son, Jesus, shepherds our journey to the joy and peace of eternal life. As St Paul reminds the Ephesians, and us, "for by grace

you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God".

In these remaining weeks of Lent, the Lord calls each of us by name to return to the forgiving, merciful embrace of God. In response to God's word, we renew our resolve to set aside time for prayer, to offer sacrifices that purify our hearts and minds, and to share our resources with those in need, as we pray in humble faith, "speak to me, Lord".

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

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Govt's 'ideological allergy' to gendered terms

There's so much going on in society that is just so grim. The crises seem to be served up in rotation by the media.

One of the minor crises was the unexpected amount of snow that fell last Friday. On **Drivetime** (RTÉ Radio 1, Friday) we heard from homeless men queuing up out the International Protection Office in Dublin. The snow had collapsed some of tents, and surely they shouldn't be on the streets in this weather anyway.

We heard of a People Before Profit activist handing out new tents, while the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive was trying to sort better shelter. The men interviewed came from various places – one, from Afghanistan, was fleeing the Taliban, very understandable!

I was reminded of the previous day's Gospel about the rich man ignoring the poor man, Lazarus. The Government can find money in a crisis – it's about priorities. One texter suggested that churches open their doors in such a situation.

This was also suggested by callers on **Liveline** (RTÉ Radio 1) earlier that same afternoon. Presenter Joe Duffy said that "some columnists" said the Church was "very silent on the refugee issue". A quick web search would show that to be unfair.

He did point out the work Jesuits had done with



Pope Francis greets refugees at a Mass for migrants in 2018. Joe Duffy said "some columnists" accuse the Church of silence on the issue, a contested claim. Photo: Vatican Media

refugees and suggested that churches wouldn't have sufficient sanitary facilities. Later in the show he put out a call for portaloos. Homelessness campaigner Alice Leahy said we were "great at knocking churches" and spoke of the good work the Church did to support people in difficulties, but also pointed out that the Church often got criticism when it did get involved in stuff considered to be matters for the Government.

She hit the nail on the head when she said we never plan for things, never plan for services. She had campaigned for years for public showers, and to get the old Baggot St hospital turned into a shelter, with no success.

Through the show Joe Duffy updated the statistics

– as of that afternoon there were 1,103 International Protection Applicants not offered accommodation – all men, as women and children were prioritised for shelter. Around 200 were reported to be in tents in Mount Street at the International Protection Office.

Callers who volunteered with these men were livid that they were left without shelter in the freezing weather. Apart from the Churches, State bodies and private companies were put under the spotlight of moral challenge. One caller called on the multi-national companies to help because they subscribed to "corporate social responsibility".

Last Friday the crisis was immediate and some relief was apparently found, but on

last Monday's **Morning Ireland** (RTÉ Radio 1) the Irish Refugee Council was reported as criticising how temporary this was. I suspect media urgency was temporary too, as other matters, important or trivial, elbow their way to the top of the news agenda.

Meanwhile the Referendum debates bubbled away. **The Week in Politics** (RTÉ One, Sunday) had the best quotes. Minister Simon Harris accused Senator Michael McDowell of being a "regressive democrat" for supporting the No campaign. Catherine Connolly TD (Ind) said the "care amendment" was a "waffle amendment" and "absolutely useless".

On **The Late Debate** (RTÉ Radio 1, Thursday) Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee (FF) had

PICK OF THE WEEK

SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC One Sunday March 10, 1.15pm

Rev Kate Bottley is in Stockport to celebrate Mothering Sunday at a Christian-inspired nursery that welcomes children of all abilities, and meets mums empowered by their faith.

LIVING THE CHRISTIAN WAY

EWTN Wednesday March 13, 7pm, and Thursday March 14, 8am

As the LGBT movement becomes more open and vocal, it's important to understand this alternative lifestyle from the perspective of our Catholic faith.

AG TRIALL AR AN TOBAR

TG4 Thursday March 14, 8pm

A new 6-part documentary series that dives into the myths and legends associated with Ireland's holy wells, presented by Manchán Magan.

argued that the current wording of the Constitution in relation to family didn't reflect where we were as a society. She said that nearly half the children born here were not in a marriage situation, and so constitutional change was desirable, presumably to be more inclusive.

Senator Rónán Mullan (Ind) criticised the "shocking carelessness and recklessness of the Government in putting before the people wordings in both cases the meaning of which we don't know". Senator Clifford-Lee said the Constitution was not the place for "descriptive detail".

She did what I've heard other Government speakers doing (presumably they've

been to the media factory) – she referred to "red herrings" in the No vote arguments and sought to make it personal, suggesting Senator Mullen hadn't supported other referenda either (not a crime)!

He reminded her that he had supported the Children's Referendum. Further, he said elements in the Government had an "ideological allergy" to gendered terms like men, women, fathers and mothers, which would explain a few things.

I'm thinking that might explain why they would seek to remove the word 'woman' from the Constitution on International Women's Day and the word 'mother' two days out from Mother's Day.

Film

Aubrey Malone



Cillian Murphy set to scoop gold at Oscars

The Oscar ceremonies, Hollywood's annual ritual of patting itself on the back for delights real or imagined, are taking place next Sunday night. Unless you're one of those obsessives who likes to stay up into the wee hours to hear the results, California time being ten hours behind us, you won't know who won until Monday morning.

The bookies feel they know already but they don't always get it right. There are too many extenuating factors – sentiment, politics, money, last minute shifts of interest.

As we all know, the films and stars that come through aren't always the most deserving. Woody Allen likes to

say: "You win when it's your time." That's another factor – patience.

I've always felt the Golden Globes are a better yardstick for quality. It's interesting that George C. Scott, who famously refused an Oscar for *Patton* in 1970, accepted a 'Globe' for the movie that year. The New York Film Critics Award is also a good barometer. The Oscars is a razzle-dazzle affair that owes as much to spectacle as class.

Irish people have a special interest in the proceedings this year as Cillian Murphy is regarded as a shoo-in to win Best Actor for *Oppenheimer*.

Cillian is an actor's actor. Not for him are the red carpet or the paparazzi. He's been fly-



Cillian Murphy stars as J. Robert Oppenheimer in *Oppenheimer* (2023)

ing under the radar for many years now, delivering high quality performances in a raft of projects that don't generally get him into the gossip

columns.

Now that he's odd-on to be awarded the industry's highest honour, that's changed. There's 'heat' around him.

He doesn't relish that but it couldn't happen to a nicer guy if he wins.

Does he deserve to? There are those who will tell you it's the part that wins the Oscar rather than the actor. That's a factor but let's not begrudge it to him. He's laboured long enough in the vineyard to earn it.

Oppenheimer is up for a hatful of other awards as well. It will probably win most of them – the Academy liking to 'big up' a given film in a given year. Robert Downey Jr is expected to win Best Supporting Actor for it. It should also scoop Best Picture, Best Director (Christopher Nolan), Best Editing and Best Original Score.

The smart money is on Emma Stone to win Best Actress for her OTT turn in the gothic comedy *Poor Things* with Lily Gladstone as an outside chance for *Killers of the Flower Moon*. Da'Vine Joy Randolph is favourite to win Best Supporting Actress for her role as a cook in *The Holdovers*.

Best Documentary will probably be *20 Days in Mariupol*, not only for its worth but its topicality. The Best Original Screenplay award looks like going to the French courtroom drama *Anatomy of a Fall* unless *The Holdovers* sneaks up on the blind side.

Best International Feature? It has to be *The Zone of Interest*. You can take that to the bank – with interest.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Life stories written on the faces of the young and old



Girl in a Red Hat, Johannes Vermeer (Andrew Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC)



Head Study of an Old Woman, Peter Paul Rubens (Phoebus Foundation, Antwerp)

Turning Heads: Rubens, Rembrandt, and Vermeer, an exhibition mounted in collaboration between the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, and the National Gallery of Ireland, curated by Dr Lizzie Marx, Curator of Dutch and Flemish Art, and Dr Brendan Rooney, Head Curator National Gallery of Ireland; run to May 26 2024; Rooms 6-10, Beit Wing | Tickets from €5; pre-booking essential.

Turning Heads: Rubens, Rembrandt and Vermeer, edited by Nico van Hout and others, for the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (Hannibal / Thames & Hudson, €46.00 / £45.00)

Peter Costello

The latest partnered exhibition at the National Gallery, featuring as it does the works of a series of great artists, Rubens, Rembrandt, Vermeer and a few others, is a remarkable show, not so much for its bravura accomplishments of style and set-

ting, but for its concentration on the wonderful landscapes of the human face through all those stages of life that Shakespeare a near contemporary wrote about.

Paintings

The landscape of Holland being very flat and open might almost say plain, marked by woods, streams and fields, rather than mountains, lakes, or dramatic seacoasts. The harmonious domestic and private setting are what has always attracted people to such painters as these and their peers.

The accompanying paintings, *Girl with a Red Hat* and

Portrait of an Old Woman, illustrate the theme at the heart of this exhibition – the drama is the quiet play of life through human features. The painters capture a sense of unique individuality.

“There are also other pictures of smaller intent which are very striking”

This provides the unique interest of the show. This interest simply in the human reminds me strangely enough of a quite different era of art, the coffin portrait of Egypt, around the 1st Century AD, which also strove to provide a unique record of an individual.

Yet others of the more

grotesque figures and clowns recall both Darwin in *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, and other records from that time of the deranged and alienated. Indeed some actually come from the first books to take a proto-scientific interest in human physiognomy. Others, more grotesque and carnival-like, recall Rabelais.

But there are also other pictures of smaller intent which are very striking: images for instances of Africans, including one stunningly drawn in ink, which utilised developments in ink manufacture to provide a more articulate sense of the black skin.

“One is left haunted by some of the images, the faces of the young strangely enough filled with social anxiety, and the all-knowing placidity of the elderly”

Reading in Lent: a different approach

Peter Costello

Even for those who, as they say these days, ‘are not religious’, reading the New Testament is an experience which few set themselves to have. I also believe people should, in this day and age, have some acquaintance with the Torah and the Quran, and try to understand what they mean to Jews and Muslims, both a revelation and a source of law, if only for reasons of cultural knowledge.

Recently I remarked to a friend who is more religious that I am that I was surprised that Premier Netanyahu did not seem to recognise the words of the parable of the Good Samaritan. “But should he read the New Testament?” he replied, “it’s not his scripture”. But that I feel is the wrong idea.

If one is trying to fully understand what monotheism means, just as a matter of general knowledge, one should try to know about all the religions derived traditionally from Abraham. But perhaps this is a counsel of perfection, in a very imperfect world.

But then it is up to readers in Lent to try to alter that situation to arrive at a deeper understanding of what they claim to believe, by understanding these other two faiths.

Understanding that Jesus was a religious Jew – one who paid the Temple Tax indeed – and that many of the first Muslims were former Christians, makes this a tangled history. But one cannot make a judgement on others until you know how what they believe impinges on what you believe.

Though the captions see these figures as unlocated, they must reflect the rise of the Dutch sea-borne empire and its penetration of the East Indies, which pivoted on its South African colony. But the imperial background is hardly alluded to. The focus here is on native Holland.

Echoes too of the Middle East, one image is perhaps of a Jewish scholar, though the caption does not suggest this; there are others with Arab costumes.

Altogether this is a fascinating show. One is left haunted by some of the images, the faces of the young strangely enough filled with social anxiety, and the all-knowing placidity of the

elderly, to whom perhaps nothing they hear is really new. They have heard it all before.

But the faces are truly remarkable, these are people as seen with clarity by the eye of the artist (and perhaps the eye of God sees them too), exposed in all their vulnerable humanity.

People

This is a show for all the family, for everyone, especially young children will be quite taken by pictures of the kind of people we all know but never really concentrate our attention on.

The book reproduces the images with informative captions, but the essays explore other aspects of social and artistic history that relate to the recording of the human face.

The supporting illustrations on these pages, the young women in a red hat and the old woman, whom one can imagine to be her grandmother, will give a vivid idea of what is on show.

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.

At home in Ireland: How and why our ancestors lived the way they did

Dwellings in Nineteenth-Century Ireland, ed.

by Heather Laird and Jay R. Roszman
(Liverpool University Press, €125.99)

J. Anthony Gaughan

A love of home, 'one's own place', is said to have characterised Irish people from the earliest days. These days, when people remove themselves to as far away as the Antipodes, there is still, even in the sunshine of Bondi Beach, that melancholy longing for the old place at home.

How we lived in the past is a subject that interests everyone, and which this book, a collection of papers presented to a conference organised by the Society for the Study of Nineteenth-Century Ireland, focuses on.

Its publication is timely. Much of the public discourse at present includes the difficulties newly-weds are facing when attempting to secure their first home, as well as widespread concern at the number of homeless people sleeping rough in our cities and elsewhere.

Cabins

At the outset the Irish peasant cabin is examined from several angles. Charles Dickens described the miserable Irish cabin as featuring a "pig in the parlour, fever in a dung heap,



A Victorian home in Rathmines, Dublin

seven naked children on the damp earth floor".

There have been more depressing descriptions of it. For Charles Lever in *Tom Burke of Ours* (1844): "It was a low mud hovel, with a miserable roof of sods, a wretched attempt at a chimney occupying the gable, and the front to the road containing a small square aperture, with a single

pane of glass as a window, and a wicker contrivance in the shape of a door... A filthy pool of stagnant, green covered water stood before the door, through which a little causeway of earth leads."

England

By the mid-18th Century the mud cabin had become an important item of propaganda

for the British authorities and press. Clean, industrious and enlightened English culture was portrayed as the solution to the dirty, lazy, barbarous, criminalised Irish living in a mud cabin. Hence, the vindication of the imperial project.

Owing to urban stagnation and decline and a deteriorating housing stock, the working-class housing in Irish provincial towns was just as miserable. One of the most graphic accounts of the poor housing conditions of the time was published in *The Tuam Herald* in 1912 by its proprietor Richard Kelly.

“A bed, stretched on the cold damp floor, was the only family resting place in the building”

He described a section of the town as follows:

"The houses with few exceptions are small thatched dwellings... I took the liberty of an inside inspection, standing at the entrance door through which a medium-sized person would have to stand low... In several of these hovels large families were occupying a single room and

A small girl's creative walk with her father

Skiping Stones,
drawn by Tatyana Feeney
(Beehive Books, €16.99 / £15.30)

Peter Costello

This is an original book. Whereas most books for young readers try to involve them in word and meaning, this is a book without words. But it still manages to speak volumes.

Significantly it is dedicated by creator Tatyana Feeney to her own father, so the pages must carry for her a hidden level of trust, affection and perhaps gratitude as well.

So this walk is like countless walks of the same kind familiar to all parents, parent and child encounter Creation together. The narrative line is as simple and charming as possible. A father and daughter set off from their home in the village and walk into the woods which are filled with birds and busy insects, like dragonflies, and curious things to touch and pick up. Among them are flat stones, which the father explains can, with a little dexterity, be skipped across the water of a large pond.

In the pond they can see fish and oddly turtles. One of these comes to hand and is lifted out of the pond by the little girl. She shows it to her father and it runs around among the stones. But eventually it makes its way back into the pond to its mother and its own proper home.

The father and child then make their way out of the trees to their own proper home and the tale ends happily. A simple story, but which can be freely adapted for tale telling, as it's unprompted by a written text. An inspirational tale of an encounter with Creation.

This is however also a sad book to review. Beehive is the non-fiction and children's imprint of Veritas, the Catholic publishing house run by the Catholic bishops. It has just announced its closure at the end of this year.

This is a very disheartening moment for all readers in Ireland, for the closure of any publisher, but especially one founded to reach out to all with exposition of a religious outlook, is alarming for all those who love books and reading.

No publisher is an island, one might say, entire unto themselves, so the bell that tolls for Veritas may well be tolling for other Irish publishers too, however confident they may seem. Perhaps the age of reading printed books is coming to an end, marking an epoch in the development, or perhaps in reality, the decline of civilisation.

old sacks fastened on cross-bars served the purpose of portioning off a small corner, in which a bed, stretched on the cold damp floor, was the only family resting place in the building."

Brian Griffin provides a magisterial account of the dwellings and housing occupied by the Royal Irish Constabulary across Ireland. Many were former military barracks; some were even former medieval castles. A number were built in a manner which mimicked the defensive features of medieval castles.

According to RIC folklore these were built from plans which had been prepared for installations on India's North-West Frontier.

But the majority of the barracks were ordinary dwelling houses, many of which were built by landlords with the express purpose that they should be used as police dwellings. (One of these, for instance, was the setting for John McGahern's first novel,

still in use for the police of the new Irish state.)

There are accounts of middle-class housing in Belfast and Dublin. It was associated with suburbanisation. Thus the upward social mobility, enabled by economic growth, in Belfast shaped suburban development and middle-class housing there in a way that was not seen in any other part of Ireland.

Professions

The middle-class who occupied these houses was a broad social group with varied occupations ranging from industrialists and business owners to members of the professions. By contrast Kathryn Milligan describes middle-class housing in Dublin in terms of the family and professional life of the painter Walter Osbourne (who died in 1903) in Rathmines, also still in use today.

The contributors are to be congratulated on these deeply researched and well-presented studies.



The lowest of the low: a cabin of stone in Mayo about 1911, photo by WJD. Walker

Leisure time

Crossword

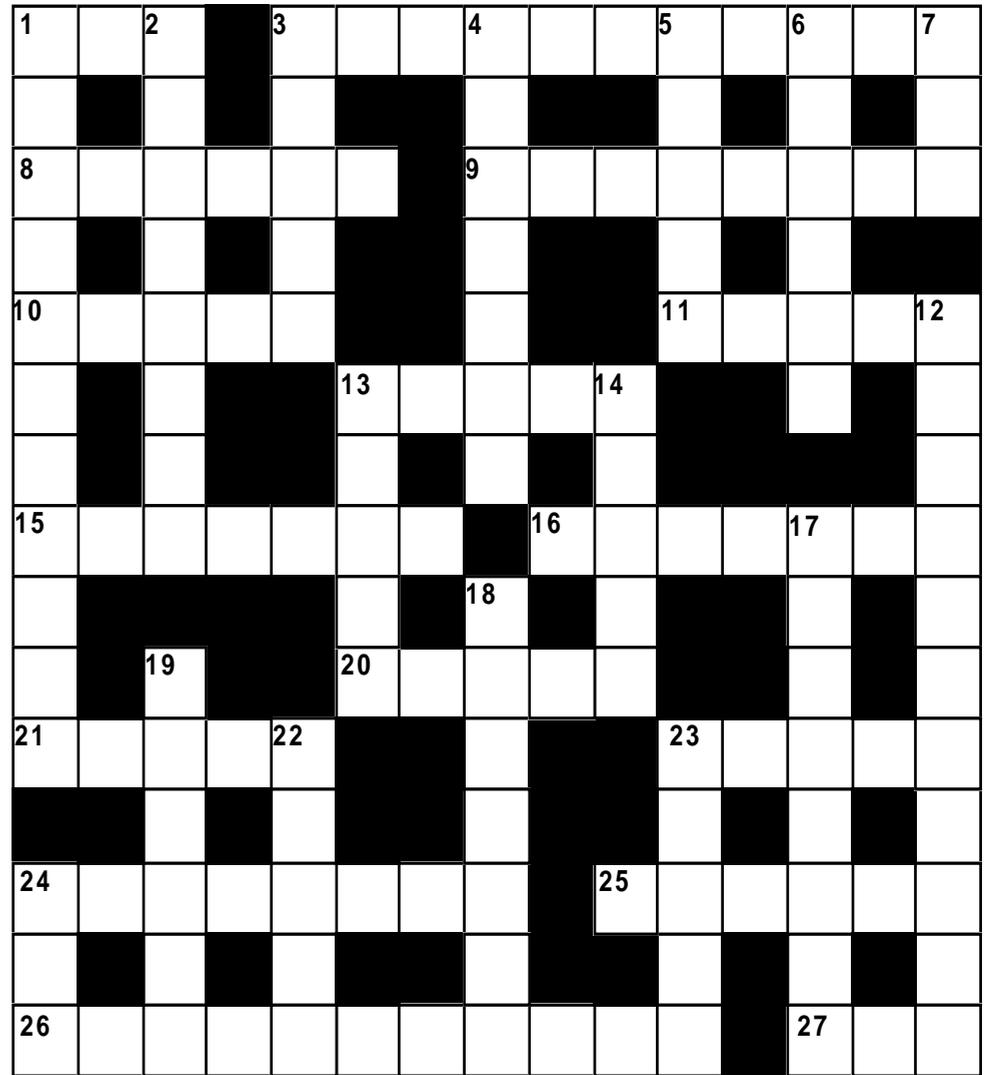
Gordius 653

Across

- 1 Surface beside a fire-place (3)
- 3 Confucius or Socrates, for example (11)
- 8 Unlucky occurrence (6)
- 9 Rare (8)
- 10 Coming from the Emerald Isle (5)
- 11 Holy artefact (5)
- 13 A devil or demon (5)
- 15 One who retails meat (7)
- 16 Cure-all (7)
- 20 Abode, residence (5)
- 21 Whimsically humorous (5)
- 23 The vertical face of a step (5)
- 24 The 'family tree' of an animal (8)
- 25 Dormant (6)
- 26 Unrealistic aspiration (3,2,3,3)
- 27 Definite article in grammar (3)

Down

- 1 Its wings beat faster than any other avian creature (7,4)
- 2 Old-fashioned pram (8)
- 3 Fruit with a stone (5)
- 4 Pilgrimage town in France (7)
- 5 A smell (5)
- 6 Sermon (6)
- 7 Sprinted (3)
- 12 Disaster, calamity (11)



- 13 Newly-baked or newly-picked (5)
- 18 Joyless (7)
- 23 Potentially dangerous (5)
- 14 Male duck (5)
- 19 Item of food you may find in a soup (6)
- 24 Nickname of the hero of 'Great Expectations' (3)
- 17 Characteristic moon shape (8)
- 22 Major river of Belfast (5)

SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 22

GORDIUS No. 652

- Across** - 1 Lit 3 Journalists 8 Unruly 9 Tomorrow 10 Heavy 11 Sepia 13 Bonny 15 Gunshot 16 Curragh 20 Mulch 21 Steer 23 Photo 24 Cloister 25 Canine 26 Demonstrate 27 Hoe
- Down** - 1 Laughing gas 2 Tarragon 3 Jelly 4 Retsina 5 Laois 6 Stripe 7 Sew 12 Archdiocese 13 Broom 14 Youth 17 Admonish 18 Clearer 19 Reform 22 Resin 23 Place 24 CodTankard 16 Crosswords 20 Ascension 21 Leather 22 Gear 27 Rider 29 Apron 30 Lunch 31 Stet 32 Here

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The Trust provides accommodation in one-bedroom apartments for ladies over 50 years of age of the Roman Catholic Faith of limited means living in Dublin. The present contribution to services is €350 per month. Application Forms can be obtained from O'Keeffe & Moore Solicitors 6 Merrion Square Dublin 2 or Phoning **087-2482533**.

Sudoku Corner

521

Easy

			6		7			
5				4				9
9	3						1	4
2		8	9		5	3		1
4				7				2
3		6	2		4	9		7
6	4						5	8
1				5				3
			4		8			

Hard

6	7				5			
			4	3	8			
							9	5
5				8	7			
1								8
				3	6			2
4	8	3						
				8	2	9		
				1			6	7

Last week's Easy 520

4	8	6	2	5	1	9	7	3
3	1	9	4	6	7	5	8	2
2	7	5	3	8	9	4	6	1
5	6	2	9	4	3	8	1	7
9	4	7	6	1	8	3	2	5
8	3	1	7	2	5	6	9	4
1	5	4	8	9	2	7	3	6
6	9	3	1	7	4	2	5	8
7	2	8	5	3	6	1	4	9

Last week's Hard 520

1	7	4	2	3	5	8	9	6
2	5	9	6	7	8	4	1	3
3	6	8	9	4	1	2	7	5
4	1	2	5	6	9	7	3	8
6	9	3	7	8	4	1	5	2
5	8	7	1	2	3	9	6	4
9	3	6	4	1	2	5	8	7
8	2	1	3	5	7	6	4	9
7	4	5	8	9	6	3	2	1

Notebook

Fr Billy Swan



Theology helps us see the bigger picture

I recently led a day of reflection with 30 people from my diocese who are in discernment about proceeding to the ministry of catechist or pastoral care worker. The brief I was given and the title of my talk was 'An Introduction to Theology'. For most present, this was their first formal introduction to the study of theology. Listening to the group at the beginning, I sensed a certain anxiety about the study of theology. For many, the following questions were uppermost in their minds: Will theology be difficult? Will it be dry and academic? Is it boring and too abstract?



ones' knees in prayerful contemplation of what God has revealed of himself through creation, the Scriptures and the living Tradition of the Church.

Yet theology cannot be done from an ivory tower or written in libraries in a manner detached from the real world and the everyday lives of people from all corners of the globe. This approach to theology tries to follow Jesus' example who revealed God to us in a way that we could understand and using language that we could comprehend, while drawing us deeper into the mysterious life of the Trinity.

Theology helps us see things in a new way. It expands minds and changes hearts. It helps us see the bigger picture and helps us imagine a new but real world. Consider for example the

vision of St Paul who, having contemplated the mission of Christ and faithfully preached his word, came to understand that the purpose of God was "set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time; to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). Earlier, Paul stated that he and all the baptised have been called and chosen to serve this purpose of unity in God. This is how theology changes us. It does not tantalise us with a vision of how things ought to be but empowers us to participate in how things could be in a future that God is inviting the Church to embrace. For many years to come, hundreds of lay people from dioceses across the country will begin to study theology. Never in the history of the Church in Ireland will theology become more studied by so many and accessible to the whole people of God. This is a reason to rejoice and to hope. The doors of limited access have been finally thrown open and thousands are about to discover the goodness, beauty, truth and wisdom of our Catholic Christian faith. *Deo gratias.*

The parish newsletter...

For most parishes, the weekly newsletter is an important tool of communication. It contains the notices for the coming week and keeps people in the loop about what is going on. Many parishes print these notices on one side of a page with the Sunday readings printed on the reverse side. Therefore, the Word of God is taken home by the people into their homes where it can be pondered again throughout the day and even seen by other family members who did not, for whatever reason, come to Mass. The parish newsletter is also a powerful symbol of mission and outreach. By giving one to the sick, the housebound and those in nursing homes, we are keeping them connected to the faith community and reminding them that they have not been forgotten.

'Lord teach us how to pray'

A recent tweet from Pope Francis (March 2) caught my attention where he talked about prayer. He wrote: "This is the Church's essential task: to pray and to teach people to pray. To transmit the lamp of faith and the oil of prayer from generation to generation." Have you ever been taught how to pray? Or is it the case of everyone finding their own way? If the Church is the home and school of communion (Pope St John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Inuente*) then surely she must also be a home and school of prayer.



Theology

Theology is for religious professionals but surely not for me? I tried to address these questions and to help them see that theology is not difficult nor is it for a select few. At the heart of theology is God and what he reveals about himself to his beloved people. In this sense, theology is for all the baptised to discover, to be inspired by and to love. Nor is theology dry or abstract. Theology must always be done on



Please help the destitute this Lenten season



Missionaries are deluging the Little Way Association with heart-breaking descriptions of their people's sufferings and impassioned appeals for us to help them.

Just one of the many projects we are financing is supporting destitute elderly people being cared for by the Divine Word Providence Sisters in south-west Ethiopia. Sr Etalem Getahun has written to us asking for our help. "We are running a project at Gassa Chare town to provide food, clothing, healthcare, shelter and burial costs for destitute and marginalised individuals.

"Every Thursday more than 100 aged men and women come for a nutritious lunch and will take home 5kg bowls of cereal or flour for their weekly consumption. We treat those with minor ailments at our clinic. The more serious cases we transport to the government hospital.

"We shall be very grateful if you will enable us to continue with this much-needed project for another year. May God bless you and all the benefactors of the Little Way Association.

Every penny you donate will be forwarded without deduction

This Lent, we urge you to give alms to our fund for the hungry, sick and deprived. Without any kind of deduction for administration, this fund is used to support missionaries providing life-sustaining assistance to destitute families and individuals.

As well as donating by post, you can email contact@littlewayassociation.com for details of giving via the internet and standing order via our AIB account in Dublin. Please be generous in supporting the world's poorest people this Lent.



In 1893, St Therese of Lisieux wrote to her sister Celine:

"Jesus wills that we give alms to him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give to Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight."

The three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving

The Catechism says: "Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God."

In Lent, we can serve Christ and help the destitute with our almsgiving

The Little Way Association uses the world's network of missionaries to help those in direst need. Priests, Sisters and Brothers work in some of the world's poorest areas and in political trouble-spots. Our policy is never to deduct anything from donations earmarked for the relief of poverty or for missionary work.

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Address