

The Irish Catholic

**ARE THE
PALESTINIAN
PROTESTS JUST
LIKE VIETNAM?**

Mary Kenny
Page 5



**EUTHANASIA CAN
NEVER BE THE
'DECENT THING'**

Michael Kelly
Page 11



**UNIVERSITIES:
THE CULTURE WAR
BATTLEFIELDS**

Wendy Grace
Page 13



Thursday, May 2, 2024

€3.00 (Stg £2.70)

The-Irish-Catholic-Newspaper

@IrishCathNews

www.irishcatholic.com

'Major roadblocks' to synod in Ireland dioceses warn

EXCLUSIVE

Ruadhán Jones

A lack of formation and Canon Law are "major roadblocks" to embedding synodality and co-responsibility in Ireland, Irish dioceses have said in new submissions ahead of the October listening sessions in Rome.

Additionally, there is "complacency and paralysis" when it comes to laity assuming responsibility locally, despite the "pressing need" to involve laity in a variety of service projects, warn the dioceses' in submissions to the Irish synodal steering committee seen by *The Irish Catholic*.

In Dublin diocese, there is a growing awareness within Parish Pastoral Councils of the need "to better understand and implement co-responsibility locally".

"At the same time, the small groups indicated levels of 'complacency and paralysis' about assuming responsibility," the diocesan report added.

"Enthusiasm is mixed with a sense of frustration, doubt and disappointment about the synodal process, as it has evolved after the initial stages. The process is slow and some fear it may not bear fruit, while for others, there is a sense of trust that this is from the Lord and it will always take time," the report from Ireland's largest diocese said.

Those consulted called for "clarification about what co-responsibility is and what it is not".

Many of the 10 reports seen by this paper call for formation for both clergy and laity, as they struggle to grasp what

» Continued on Page 2

Knocking on Heaven's door...



Noora Rauhala, Lee Licayan and Roxana McCormack are pictured at Dublin diocese's annual pilgrimage to Knock Eucharistic and Marian Shrine on Saturday, April 27, led by Archbishop Dermot Farrell. Photo: John McElroy.

Less buildings, more mission needed says Archbishop of Dublin

Chai Brady

The Archbishop of Dublin has warned that the Church can't be reduced to buildings, particularly at a time when preaching the Gospel is needed more than ever before "in the history of the Church in Ireland".

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Arch-

bishop Dermot Farrell said that "the Church can't be reduced to buildings, or even to a geographical parish".

"The key thing in the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel, that's not limited to an infrastructure. In fact, we have a total surfeit of infrastructure that we don't actually need," Archbishop Farrell said.

"We could do with a lot less infra-

structure, but a lot more people who take on the mission and that's the mission of the Church to live the Gospel and to preach it. And we are in territory in Ireland at the moment where that is more needed than ever was needed before in the history of the Church in Ireland."

See Page 4

Divergent voices 'pushed off cliff' abbot tells TCD

Ruadhán Jones

Those who challenge modern certainties are "taken to the edge of the cliff", the Abbot of Glenstal said in a homily at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), encouraging openness to all knowledge in education at a time when free-speech debates rage on college campuses.

Fr Brendan Coffey OSB also railed against an "irrational fear" that lies behind a recent spate of attacks, violence, arson and xenophobia, in a homily given at the Service of Commemoration and Thanksgiving at TCD on April 22.

"Anything that might seem to threaten our narrow world of certainties was pushed off the cliff," Fr Coffey said, referencing the Gospel story of the people of Nazareth trying to throw Jesus off a cliff.

See Page 3

**IDEOLOGY REPLACES FACT IN
RESPONSE TO TRANS REPORT**

Dualta Roughneen

PAGE 10



**ROBOT PRIESTS AND
OTHER HERESIES**

Ian Dunn

PAGES 28-29



**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IS MORE
IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER**

Bishop Niall Coll

PAGES 14-15



'Major roadblocks' to synod in Ireland dioceses warn

» Continued from Page 1

co-responsibility and synodality means, and to define what a welcoming Church would look like, the diocesan submissions added. The submissions will be drafted into a national report by the committee to be submitted to Rome.

The Diocese of Derry's submission stressed the "need to invest in faith formation and ministry preparation for those young people who desire to participate in the leadership roles in the Church".

"There is a need to provide leaders who will help in the catechetical formation of young parents who are the first teachers of their children in faith and yet find themselves often alone."

Some dioceses expressed concern that the legal structures of parish life – as laid down in Canon Law – are a "major roadblock" to promoting co-responsible lay leadership.

"Lay people may not recognise themselves as subjects of

the call to co-responsibility," the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin said in their submission, adding: "clergy, because of their understanding and interpretation of Canon Law, may feel that this call is somewhat disingenuous in a reality where they are ultimately held responsible for the life of a parish".

If not addressed, both of these elements, but particularly Canon Law, "could be major roadblocks in progressing the vision of a co-responsible Church community", the diocese's submission continued.

All the same, there is a "pressing need" to involve lay people of all ages in a diversity of service projects, mission outreach and ministries within the Church, according to Ferns' diocesan report.

The reports were gathered based on consultations with small, targeted groups of the Faithful, including priests, religious, lay leaders and young people.

Proportion of Catholic weddings drops to almost a third – CSO stats

Ruadhán Jones

The number of Catholic weddings made up just 35% of all those taking place in the State – the lowest recorded figure since the year 2000 – with civil ceremonies (32%) catching up quickly, marriage statistics for 2023 show.

The proportion of Catholic weddings fell from 40% in 2022, while the percentage of civil ceremonies climbed from 26.2%, according to the Central Statistics Office's (CSO) latest figures. There were 21,159 weddings in the State in 2023, made up of 20,513 opposite-sex marriages and 646 between same-sex couples.

The figures are starkest in Ireland's capital, where the 263 Catholic weddings made up just 9% of the 2,898 that took place in Dublin city in 2023. This marks a drop from

27.6% in 2013.

In Leinster overall, the proportion of Catholic weddings fell from 53% in 2013 to 26% in 2023.

Bishop Denis Nulty, chair of the Irish bishops' council for marriage and the family, said the drop is "all the more reason to offer good preparation and accompaniment for those celebrating sacramental marriage".

The number of Catholic weddings has seen a steady decline over the last decade, dropping below 50% of all marriages for the first time in 2018.

Over 1,710 ceremonies last year were Humanist and the Spiritualist Union of Ireland performed 1,674 (7.9%) ceremonies. There were 242 Church of Ireland ceremonies in 2023, making up just 1.1% of total marriages.

Nearly 3,470 (16%) couples opted for other religious ceremonies.

Overall, the number of marriages was down 8.7% on the previous year (23,174), but it exceeded the pre-pandemic 2019 figure by 4.2%.

The age of brides and grooms remained largely the same: for opposite-sex marriages, the average groom in 2023 was 37.7 years old and the average bride was 35.8 years old, changed slightly from 37.8 and 35.7 years old respectively in 2022.

As regards when people are getting married, Friday remains the most popular day of the week while August is the most popular month.

In 2022, July was the most popular month. The least popular day and month, Sunday and January, remain unchanged from 2022.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Documentary to be aired in annual bikers' memorial event

The annual bikers' memorial will take place on May 3 in the Sacred Heart Church, Clones, Co. Monaghan at 8pm. The event has been taking place for over 20 years and is a way to remember and celebrate the memory of those lost in motorbike collisions.

A screening of documentary film *Freebirds* will take place during the memorial, at two different times, 5.30pm and 6.30pm in the Courthouse cinema, McCurtain street, Clones.

The event's chairperson, Ann Marie Marshall, invites all local people to attend the memorial and watch the film. "You don't have to be a biker to get something out of this thought provoking and emotional film", she said.

Tyrone Catholic school that defied odds to stay open shortlisted for award

The campaign to save a Co. Tyrone primary school from closure has seen those behind it nominated for a prestigious UK-wide award.

The Save St Mary's campaign, which successfully prevented the closure of St Mary's PS in Fivemiletown, has been shortlisted in the Best Community Campaign category at the annual Sheila McKechnie National Campaigner Awards.

The campaign saw hundreds march in protest and a legal challenge launched after the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) deemed the school, which has just over 40 pupils, "unsustainable".

Campaigners gathered almost 10,000 signatures against the planned closure, gained cross-community support, and were backed by both Sinn Féin and DUP MLAs.

First official walk of the Columban way in Ireland

The AGM of the Turas Columbanus Association at Dalgan Park unveiled plans for the first official walk of the full length of the Columban Way route from Myshall in Co. Carlow to Bangor in Co. Down this autumn.

According to Niamh Byrne, who was elected at the AGM to the Turas Columbanus committee, the walk will begin on August 17, the first day of National Heritage Week, in Myshall and it will conclude on the September 21, International Day of Peace, in Bangor.

'Zealots' of gender ideology are in heart of the Government

Theo McDonald

Hundreds of protestors gathered outside the RDS on Saturday as women's rights group The Countess held a conference highlighting the impact of 'gender ideology' on Irish society.

As protestors shouted "shame on you", some attendees reported being spat on as they tried to enter the conference. One attendee mentioned how she had to enter through the back of the RDS.

CEO of the Countess Laoise de Brún spoke of how despite

the setbacks "this is a landmark moment for the movement in Ireland". De Brún, who is a barrister, spoke of reforming the Gender Recognition Act 2015 as opposed to repealing it.

At the conference she highlighted several amendments proposed. One amendment would see the prevention of self-identifying women being imprisoned in female prisons.

She highlighted how 60% of male prisoners who "say they're women" are registered sex offenders according to a Freedom of Information

Request from the Department of Justice. This is compared to only 16% of the general prison population who are sex offenders, she said.

Former RTÉ Journalist Paddy O'Gorman discussed misleading media portrayals of transgender individuals in reporting.

"The essence of the lie is an intention to mislead. They'll say something like a woman has been sent to prison for molesting a woman or a woman is up for making death threats against other prisoners," he said.

Speaking to the *Irish Catholic* Ms De Brún said the Government's agenda is damaging to families and children. "The Government are determined to do and say anything to force their kind of hard left agenda on the country regardless of what the people on the ground want or actually care about."

She also said she's worried about the "zealots at the heart of Government" who are doing "untold damage" with reference to Children's Minister Roderic O'Gorman.

Support our Catholic Journalism and help us evangelise

For less than a cup of coffee a week, you could support our journalism and faith development campaign while strengthening one of the last independent Catholic newspapers in Ireland and the UK.

When you become a 'Friend' of *The Irish Catholic* we give you exclusive access to our premium newsletters and podcasts interviewing a wide range of interesting Catholic leaders plus discounts on books and on upcoming events.

Email garry@irishcatholic.ie to sign up today, or call 01-6874028. We greatly appreciate your support. Thank you.

Capuchin Day Centre
for the Homeless People
29 Bow Street, Dublin7



Every day The Capuchin Day Care Centre provides
1000 hot meals for people who are homeless and each
week 1400 Food Parcels for those on the poverty threshold.

Help Fr. Kevin Kiernan to continue
providing this caring service.

Fr. Kevin or Monica 01 8720770
www.capuchindaycentre.ie

Deputy Editor: Chai Brady, chai@irishcatholic.ie

Multimedia Journalists: Ruadhán Jones, ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Brandon Scott, brandon@irishcatholic.ie

Newsroom: news@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874026

Books Editor: Peter Costello, books@irishcatholic.ie

Advertising: advertising@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874027

Accounts: accounts@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874095

Magnificat: magnificat@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874024

Shop: shop@irishcatholic.ie

Annual Subscription Rates: Ireland €199. Airmail €320. Six months €105.

ISSN 1393 - 6832 - Published by The Irish Catholic,

Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford,

Dublin 18, D18 K277.

Printed by Webprint, Cork.

Place an Advert

Phone 01 687 4027 or advertising@irishcatholic.ie

Young saints set to be canonised in 2025 can bring Irish youth ‘to God’

Renata Steffens

Two young saints set to be canonised in 2025, Blesseds Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis, can bring young Irish people to God, an Irish priest involved in saints’ canonisation causes has said.

While most people think of saints as being older or from centuries ago, Blessed Pier Giorgio – who died age 24 – and Blessed Acutis – died age 15 – can encourage young people to embrace sanctity today, Fr John Hogan OCDS told *The Irish Catholic*.

“Pier Giorgio and Carlos Acutis had very different personalities,” said Fr Hogan, responsible for promoting saints’ causes in the Diocese of Meath. “But they both would bring the young to God,” the

priest added, when asked if they can be an example to Irish youth.

The blessed are set to be canonised during the 2025 Jubilee, Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, the prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, announced, saying that Pier Giorgio’s canonisation is “on the horizon”, while Fr Hogan commented that Carlo Acutis is also on the road to be canonised.

Fr Hogan said that “holiness is living virtue and it is personal and unique” and he believes the young saints will encourage the youth of Ireland to embrace the holiness as a way to enhance their lives.

Pier Giorgio is often recognised for his unique approach to evangelisation: going on hikes, climbing, and being an avid joker made him popular among his peers. It was on those informal activities

that the young blessed would talk about life in Christ, and bring more people to the Church.

During a speech for World Youth Day 2016, Pope Francis said that “Pier Giorgio was a young man who understood what it means to have a merciful heart that responds to those most in need,” and encouraged young people to look at him as an example.

Fr Hogan believes Pier Giorgio represents another side of the holy life and proved that the life in the Church is not only not boring but can also be an adventure. The canonisation of young saints will be “an encouragement to other young people to seek the Gospel and become holy,” concluded the Meath priest.

Divergent voices ‘pushed off the cliff’ abbot tells Trinity College

Ruadhán Jones

Those who challenge modern certainties are “taken to the edge of the cliff”, the Abbot of Glenstal said in a homily at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), encouraging openness to all knowledge in education at a time when free-speech debates rage on college campuses.

Fr Brendan Coffey OSB also railed against the “irrational fear” behind a recent spate of attacks, violence, arson and xenophobia, in a homily given at the Service of Commemoration and Thanksgiving at TCD on April 22.

“Anything that might seem to threaten our narrow world of certainties was pushed off the cliff,” Fr Coffey said, referencing the Gospel story of the people of Nazareth trying to throw Jesus off a cliff.

“Today, I am sad to say that this attitude is still alive and well,” he continued, saying: “We might have exchanged one set of certainties for another, but very little has really changed.

“Anyone who challenges the perceived orthodoxy is immediately taken to the edge of the cliff.”

True education, learning and knowledge are “essential” today to combat this narrow world view, and to tackle the irrational fear that “lies behind our recent spate of attacks, violence, arson, and xenophobia”, said Fr Coffey, a former president of the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious Ireland (AMRI).

“Not a knowledge which is closed in its own discipline, but one which is open to all disciplines,” he added.

New Croagh Patrick pilgrim path opens after three-year project

Staff reporter

A pathway running from the base to the summit of Croagh Patrick in Co. Mayo has been officially opened after the completion of a three-year building project carried out by hand. Thousands of tonnes of rock and soil were removed from the Reek to make it safe and accessible, as

well as protecting the mountain.

The 4km pilgrim path runs from the statue of St Patrick near the base of the mountain to the church at the top of the Reek. It marks the culmination of years of hard, physical labour by a team of people who made hundreds of climbs in all weathers over the past few years.

They have now achieved what many considered an impossible task - the building of a two metre wide path all the way to the top of Ireland’s ‘holy mountain’.

There have been ongoing concerns about the condition of Croagh Patrick and the safety of the original pathway which had worn down considerably over the years.

Sun, fun and Mother Mary...

Members of Ferns diocese’s youth retreat to Medjugorje enjoy the sights and the sunshine as they are pictured in front of St James Church in the town centre.

PILGRIMAGES

MAY & JUNE 2024

MEDJUGORJE

FROM DUBLIN | 7 NIGHTS | 8 MAY & 5 JUNE | €879pps

FROM CORK | 7 NIGHTS | 8, 15, 22 & 29 MAY | €879pps

PILGRIMAGE TO LOURDES

FROM CORK | 22 MAY | €929pps

FROM DUBLIN | 22 MAY, 5 JUNE, 10 JUNE | FROM €799pps

FROM SHANNON | 26 JUN | €899pps

FATIMA & LISBON COAST

FATIMA FROM DUBLIN | 7 NIGHTS | 30 MAY | £799pps

FATIMA & LISBON COAST FROM DUBLIN | 7 NIGHTS | 20 JUNE | €989pps

ITALY: CASCIA AND ASSISI

FROM DUBLIN | 5 NIGHTS | 17 JUNE | €1189pps

TO BOOK VISIT JOEWALSHTOURS.IE

info@joewalshshtours.ie | 01 241 0800 | 89 Harcourt St, D02 WY88

Tours are operated by Petriwa Limited t/a Joe Walsh Tours who are licensed by the Irish Aviation Authority TA 0804 TO 273.

Less buildings, more mission needed says Archbishop of Dublin

Chai Brady

The Archbishop of Dublin has warned that the Church can't be reduced to buildings, particularly at a time when preaching the Gospel is needed more than ever before "in the history of the Church in Ireland".

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Archbishop Dermot Farrell said that "the Church can't be reduced to buildings, or even to a geographical parish".

"The key thing in the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel, that's not limited to an

infrastructure. In fact, we have a total surfeit of infrastructure that we don't actually need," Archbishop Farrell said.

"We could do with a lot less infrastructure, but a lot more people who take on the mission and that's the mission of the Church to live the Gospel and to preach it. And we are in territory in Ireland at the moment where that is more needed than ever was needed before in the history of the Church in Ireland."

The decision to sell infrastructure is up to parishes, and

already some have sold buildings "because they've been repositioning themselves, realigning themselves and some buildings have become surplus to requirements and the community, the parish pastoral council, the parish finance committee, in conjunction with the parish priest have made the decision to sell off some of their properties," Dr Farrell added.

Looking at faith formation and preaching the Gospel, the prelate said that the archdiocese is moving forward with the synodal process, giving the exam-

ple of 45 new lay catechists receiving their certificates last month in Donnybrook.

"Those are people from our parishes who are going to work in conjunction with the priests in the parishes throughout the archdiocese. And we've been certainly pushing on with the whole synodal process because that is the future of the Church, you have to have lay involvement," he said, adding that there is a "great generosity of spirit" from people such as the new catechists "who have taken on this, to do that in their

parishes and do it at local level".

Regarding the idea of paying skilled individuals to work in parishes in a more formal capacity, as the number of volunteers is decreasing, the archbishop said: "Each individual parish is not going to be able to pay people, that's not possible. We do need a combination of volunteers and some paid people. The paid people will probably have to be shared, for example, for somebody to look after the maintenance."

"You don't need the sacrament of ordination to look

after buildings and grounds and heating systems and licences, to keeping them up to standard. That can be done by a layperson, but not in one parish because it's too expensive. But if three or four parishes get together, or five, they can employ somebody who can do that. It's kind of what I would call a parish manager, and we've been actually encouraging our parishes to go down that road, and some have, some groups of parishes have already made that move."

Seanad rejects amendment to protect silent prayer outside of abortion clinics

Brandon Scott

An amendment that sought to protect silent prayer outside abortion clinics, proposed by Senators Sharon Keogan and Rónán Mullen, resulted in multiple senators insisting that "prayer is a personal thing"

and that praying outside, even if the nature of the prayer is silent, "can easily be identified as protest". The proposal was eventually defeated.

Outlining her reasons for tabling the amendment, independent Senator Sharon Keogan said that the current Bill "makes

it quite possible that people would be arrested for silently praying if it happened to be within one of these sprawling 100m zones" and that it was "Orwellian".

Senator Rónán Mullen, supporting the amendment, said that "people who present

themselves to pray silently in the vicinity of an abortion facility are not praying against anybody. They are seeking to invoke the higher good into what they regard as a bad situation, for the benefit of everybody involved".

Responding to the proposed amendment, Fianna Fail Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee described herself as "a Catholic" and "was raised and taught to believe that God hears our prayers no matter where we are", therefore negating the need to pray at a specific location as "prayer is a personal thing".

Supporting Ms Clifford-Lee, Fine Gael Senator Martin Conway said that even if the prayer is silent "it can easily be identified as protest". The amendment was comfortably rejected when put to a vote.

Students 'positive' about religious ethos in schools – ESRI study

Ruadhán Jones

Students generally perceive the religious ethos of their school positively, but were less likely than staff to perceive ethos to be important, a new study on school identity has shown.

Some students saw their schools' religious ethos as playing an important role in promoting awareness, tolerance, and respect, while others disagreed with the religious ethos of their school or religion in schools in general, according to research from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) published Tuesday.

The research was welcomed by Catholic trust, the Joint Managerial Body (JMB), who funded the study.

Deirdre Matthews, General Secretary of the JMB said the findings reaffirm "the enduring values and value of voluntary secondary schools in fostering inclusive and holistic learning environments and celebrating diversity as the values underpinning the ethos of the vast majority of our schools as well as mitigating disadvantage in all its forms".

The research comprised of surveys and focus groups and was conducted across 21 such schools – most of which were single-sex, with a total of 2,243 teenagers surveyed.

Riverdance star says dancing for the Pope was her 'most extraordinary moment'

Staff reporter

When asked to open up about her most memorable moments in her life Riverdance dancer and captain Amy-Mae Dolan shared that getting the opportunity to perform in front of the Pope was one of the most career-defining highlights in her decorated Irish dancing career.

Ms Dolan, who is from Aghyaran in Castlederg, Co. Tyrone, recalled the role she played when the Pope visited Ireland in 2018, for a 'Festival of Families' in Croke Park, which was described as a faith-based cultural concert, when asked about which moments stood out the most in her budding career so far.

"There have been so many stand out moments! I am so grateful for them all," she



Dancer Amy-Mae Dolan (centre) promoting the World Meeting of Families in Croke Park with Irish dancers in 2018.

said. "Possibly one of the most extraordinary moments was performing in Croke Park for the Pope."

The Pope's visit to Croke Park in 2018 saw over 2,000

performers and 1,000 choir members mark the occasion which was the first time a Pope had visited Ireland in almost 40 years since the visit of St Pope John Paul in 1979.

The Irish Catholic



MAY 30
2024

LEGACY

SPRING EDITION

Living on in others

On May 30, *The Irish Catholic* Spring Legacy Edition will demonstrate the importance of making a will and the lasting difference that can be made through making a legacy donation.

The Irish Catholic provides a direct channel to 90,000 readers who are ideally placed to consider planned contributions through bequests. This bi-annual edition of the newspaper provides a respected platform through which your organisation can highlight the good work that can be carried out as a result of receiving a legacy donation. Our readers have shown time and time again that they are conscientious, socially concerned and very generous.

If you would like to feature in this special edition and let our readers know how a legacy bequest could help benefit your organisation, please contact us by phone or email.

advertising@irishcatholic.ie ☎ 01 687 4027

Prices:

€1000 FULL PAGE

€500 HALF PAGE

*Prices exclude vat



FULL PAGE ADVERT



HALF PAGE ADVERT



FULL PAGE ADVERTORIAL

Are the pro-Palestinian protests just like Vietnam?

The pro-Palestinian disturbances on American – and other campuses – have been widely compared to the youthful demonstrations which helped to bring an end to the Vietnam war in the 1960s.

Certainly, the protests against the American involvement in the Vietnam war were momentous (Australia and other allies also took part). Two Irish-American Catholic priests, and brothers, the Berrigans – Daniel, SJ, and Philip, a Josephite – were influential as leaders in



Mary Kenny

the anti-war movement.

Divided Vietnam – the North was Communist, the South aspiring to be democratic – was the first war which was televised. That is what made such an impact.

Compelled

The students initially started rioting because they didn't want to be compelled into military service, but then the

protests became wider. The chants that were both damaging and effective included a taunt against President Lyndon Johnson: "Hey, hey LBJ/How many kids did you kill today?"

I remember those anti-Vietnam protests well – because I joined them. Looking back, how much did I know about Vietnam? Not a lot.

But it seemed cruel and

wrong to bomb villages with families suffering as a consequence, and I was instinctively on the side of engaging personalities like the boxer Cassius Clay (Mohammad Ali), who refused to serve.

Parallels

Yes, there are some parallels with today's scenes – especially the point about younger people feeling emotionally

appalled by the horrors of war. And to be appalled by atrocities is appropriate.

There is also a parallel about the joy of rebellion. It is exciting, meaningful and brings an elated sense of solidarity to join others in a public demonstration. It's exhilarating to be 'against the Establishment'; and to believe you're on the 'right side of history'.

But only history can judge, in the long run, what the outcome may be. America and its allies lost the Vietnam war, but the flow of emigrants from Communist Vietnam over the decades – starting with the boat people – doesn't indicate that Ho Chin Minh won. Vietnamese people are now among groups of refugees fleeing a society whose norms they reject.

Life begins at 90



Lelia Doolan pictured receiving an honorary award from University of Galway

I'm surprised to learn – from former Senator Shane Ross – that the late Archbishop John Charles McQuaid called Lelia Doolan "mad, bad and dangerous." Firstly, because although John Charles could be fierce and a martinet, he also put much store by Christian charity. Secondly, as a man of literature, he would be aware that comparing anyone to Byron is a compliment.

And thirdly, Lelia – 90 on May 7 – is neither mad, nor bad, nor dangerous, by any stretch of the imagination. She is kind, clever, great fun, an

accomplished gardener and cherished by all who know her.

She had a distinguished career as a TV producer and director at RTÉ (she launched *The Riordans*), was Artistic Director of the Abbey, taught at DIT, has been Chair of the Film Board, and wrote a PhD thesis on "elements of the sacred and dramatic" in Belfast urban societies.

Shane Ross calls her a socialist and a feminist – that doesn't make anyone mad, bad or dangerous. And I'd suggest Lelia's feminism is nuanced: I recall that she had more a restraining than an endorsing

view of the wilder shores of equality feminists, speaking wisely about "the enriching differences between men and women".

Lelia is also so brave: for her 90th birthday, she is planning to do a parachute jump from an aeroplane, at Clonbullogue, Co. Offaly, this weekend.

Mr Ross wrote that Lelia "is unlikely to receive congratulations from the Drumcondra hierarchy". But let it be noted that she is honoured in *The Irish Catholic*. She asked me to pray for good weather for her momentous jump – and I will!

London was gripped recently by the sight of two cavalry horses – who had thrown their riders – wildly galloping six miles across the city, from Belgravia to Limehouse. One, a grey called Vida, was bloodied after a collision with a taxi.

Horses are 'flight animals', and their instinct to take flight erupted after hearing a terrifyingly loud noise from a nearby construction site. Four soldiers and a pedestrian were also injured when the horses bolted. (Vida is in a serious condition and in equine hospital).

It emerged that all the horses used by

the royal Household Cavalry come from Ireland, and are described by one equestrienne as "usually nicely mannered Irish draught-thoroughbred crosses".

Since Ireland breeds the best horses in the world, it's natural for the royal household to choose Irish horses. The highlight of Queen Elizabeth II's 2011 state visit was spending a day at the Irish National Stud – and she told me so. "Did you have a good day, Ma'am?" I asked her. "I had a wonderful day," she beamed.

The horse has always been a peace broker in Irish-British relations – which have gone into one of their rocky patches over the fraught issue of immigration.

ALL IRELAND

Rosary Rally

KNOCK 2024 | SAT JUNE 1ST



9.30 am | St John's Centre
Marian Conference
 Fr Michael Donnelly | Sr Ana Margarita Lanzas, SCTJM |
 Fr Joseph Mary Deane, CFR

11.30 am | St John's Centre
 Meet 20 Apostolates from around Ireland



1 pm | Basilica
Rosary Talk
 Mother Adela Galindo, SCTJM (Foundress)

2 pm | Outside
 Stations of the Cross

2.30 pm | Outside
 Rosary Procession



3 pm
Concelebrated Holy Mass with
Bishop Phonsie Cullinan,
 Bishop of Waterford and Lismore
 (including Anointing of the Sick)

Rosary and Scapular making workshops
 in the marquee



Father Peyton Centre | Ireland



MARIAN PILGRIMAGES



Aid to the Church in Need

To see a list of buses going from around Ireland
 visit www.allirelandrosaryrally.com

Confidently proclaiming the Gospel and making Down and Connor fit for mission



Chai Brady

The recently installed Bishop of Down and Connor will no doubt face some tough, unpopular decisions as his diocese faces a dearth of priests and decreasing Mass attendance – much the same as dioceses across Ireland.

Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ, who was installed last month after serving as Bishop of Raphoe for almost seven years, comes at a time when there is an inevitable need to make changes more speedily than ever before according to senior priests in Down and Connor.

Currently there is a diocesan initiative entitled 'Planning for the Future' which is looking at creating 'families of parishes' to accommodate the sacramental and pastoral needs of parishioners in the years ahead.

This project is already well-developed and the parish consultation stage began in October 2023. It is ongoing. The diocese has also begun training lay parishioners to assist with bereavement ministry and funerals.

Obstacles

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* about the obstacles Bishop McGuckian will come up against, Chancellor of the diocese Fr Eugene O'Hagan admitted there are "big challenges" in making the mission of the Church effective and "fit for purpose in the modern era", which will inevitably involve parishes working much more closely together and sharing resources – particularly as the number of clergy declines.

Fr O'Hagan said: "I think that priests fear – because their numbers are declining, and they're inheriting the parish next door – that they are expected to maintain the same level of service.

"I think in our view, the Church will always give service to the people, but it will change. I think that's one of Bishop Alan's challenges, bringing the people and priests with him in that journey."

"I think there's a lot to be done in Down and Connor and across Ireland about actually confidently saying that we are missionaries with the best news in the world to tell people and we're not afraid to do it. That confidence in the Gospel is something that we need to work on"



Bishop Alan McGuckian is welcomed by young members of the congregation outside St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast, after being installed as bishop of Down and Connor on April 14. Photo: Peter Thomas

He added: "If we're going to be faithful to the mission of the Church, inevitably we will do things differently. And needless to say, with a greater lay participation and collaboration and involvement in that work."

Looking at issues faced in particular in the Diocese of Down and Connor, Fr O'Hagan highlighted the cost of living, "people who are teetering on the edge trying to make ends meet" and the fact there is much "hidden poverty", as well as the continued effects of Brexit.

"It manifests itself in areas of drug pushing – people who easily get into debt and remain within the grip of these kinds of influences"

He said that there is still a "residue" of paramilitary activity which manifests itself in various ways – and not always politically in communities in the North.

Fr O'Hagan said: "It manifests itself in areas of drug pushing – people who easily get into debt and remain within the grip of these kinds of influences. Cer-

tainly that unfortunately is one of the residual legacies of the Troubles. It happens across all societies I suppose, but nevertheless it has a particular resonance here because of our troubled background."

Looking at the effect on youth, and efforts of the diocese to combat these negative influences, he said: "We're very fortunate here. We've got very good youth centres and youth clubs that are funded by the education authority but work very much in a church environment – of course that's in addition to parish youth clubs and youth centres etc".

Concern

"But even there, the budget squeeze on youth outreach is of concern to the Church. The money is just not there that was available some years ago. It's part of the economic environment in which we're all living. But we would be keen, and I think Bishop Alan would be keen to shore up insofar as we possibly can, from our own resources, the outreach to the youth across the diocese. And that's one of the areas I think that he will concentrate on in the early months of his ministry."

Fr Martin Graham Adm. of St Peter's Cathedral in Belfast echoed Fr O'Hagan saying the North's paramilitary background is "not as prominent" and that "the political institutions we are hoping will work".

"It's the other big crises that society as a whole is facing, and that would be the likes of the huge influence of drugs and the consequences of that, families being ripped apart, an increase in suicide, all of those things. People taking drugs is one part of it but it's all the knock-on effects of that."

Looking at parish level, Fr Graham said one of Bishop Alan's main challenges will be "managing change and bringing the change in a positive way".

"You know that phrase 'moving from maintenance to mission': it's going to be bringing the clergy, bringing the people of the diocese with him. There will be so much negativity portrayed in the manner in which things are being changed, because no one likes change, but things do have to change," Fr Graham said, adding that this includes emphasising the positives – which is the diocese continuing to be fit for the work of evangelisation.

"The challenge is 'making that connection between how many people engage with us as an institution to really opening up people's experience of faith and encountering Christ'"

He said: "We talk about the 'families of parishes', so it will be a group of parishes working together. I suppose one of the most practical things is that people tend to go to where suits them, so people may say 'I'm a St Peter's parishioner', 'I'm a St Paul's parishioner', but they might go to St John's because the Mass there is at a different time which is easier for them to attend.

"That has already been happening so it is for him [Bishop McGuckian] to manage that change, helping the clergy and the people of the diocese to realise that change is not

necessarily negative, that sometimes it can work for the good."

New evangelisation

Fr Damian McCaughan PP of Ballymoney and Derrykeighan told this paper that fundamentally the changes that are needed come down to the "new evangelisation".

"We have a large Catholic community with some connection to the Church and to our schools and to our parishes, but a majority not practicing their Faith," Fr McCaughan explained, so the challenge is "making that connection between how many people engage with us as an institution to really opening up people's experience of faith and encountering Christ."

Speaking of Baptism, Communion, Confirmation, weddings, funerals, Easter and Christmas, he said: "There is still a lot of contact with the Church and most people are reasonably well disposed. They're not against the Church. So how do we create an encounter with God that can spark some response of faith, rather than just dealing with us on the personal level, the priest, the school, the hospital, chaplain, that type of thing. We're more than just offering a nice service when people need it, we're actually trying to connect people with God."

Fr McCaughan added there needs to be a "greater confidence in the Irish Church about proclaiming what we're about, both the Gospel and the good we do and the good we've done in the past".

"We've had to come to terms with problems, we had to deal with crises and crimes in some cases, but it seems to have knocked our confidence and our primary task is to be preaching and communicating and sharing the Good News. And I think there's a lot to be done in Down and Connor and across Ireland about actually confidently saying that we are missionaries with the best news in the world to tell people and we're not afraid to do it. That confidence in the Gospel is something that we need to work on."

Hopes

Outlining his hopes for the diocese, Fr Graham said: "Within parishes, we are blessed, and so many parishes have so many people who are willing and able to help. My big hope is that strengthens, that parishes will be able always to have that core of people who will work together, clergy and the laity, to help keep the parish running and that each parish is fit for mission as well.

"We need to give the bishop a certain amount of time to bed in, he's been out of the diocese for seven years so he would need to see where it has moved on, but my hope is both the clergy and the laity of the diocese will work with him to bring the diocese forward... that there is definitely a future for the diocese, there is a hope, and that everyone works with that hope instead of feeling that the changes are going to all be negative... focusing on what we're losing rather than the positives of what we can gain through it."

STATE OF THE NATION



Ireland's new alternative voice

Every week we tackle the stories that other media don't want to talk about.

Remember the one-sided referendum campaign? We said 'No No' to pulling the wool over people's eyes.

Now the Government want to ram through the Hate Speech bill which will allow Gardai enter your home and demand your mobile phone.

If you value freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and journalism with integrity, State of the Nation is the podcast for you!

Visit rss.com/podcasts/stateofthenation to listen to the full episodes. Also available on all major streaming platforms like Spotify, Apple Podcasts, etc.

For more information, e-mail info@stateofthenation.ie

Scan here to listen!



Schools must be proud of their Catholic identity

Dr Catherine McCormack

My first observation on the GRACE project's reports is the worrying number of stakeholders who report that they received no training for their roles in Catholic schools; and of those who received training, generally it was once-off or less often than yearly.

Also concerning is the fact that of those who received training many believe that Catholic ethos was not covered in that training to any great extent.

In the primary cohort, 40% of principals and teachers disagreed that opportunities for faith development are offered to them, while the same applied to almost 30% of staff in the secondary context.

Conclusions

So what conclusions can we draw?

There is an urgent need

for increased resources to be allocated by patrons and trusts to introductory and ongoing training/CPD, around identity and ethos, with the need particularly acute at primary level.

“So at the end of it all for me, it is about keeping Christ at the centre of life in a Catholic school”

Regarding faith development opportunities for staff: Only 50% of primary and 30% of secondary teachers agreed that faith development opportunities are offered to them. This does not appear to be receiving the priority accorded to it in ecclesial documents again, it is especially acute at primary level particularly among the youngest age cohort.

The structure of Catholic education in Ireland involves a range of education offices,

managerial organisations, and trust bodies, all of whom hold some responsibility for training. Duplication and overconcentration on areas of training (such as governance), needs to be avoided. Investment in ethos training needs to be prioritised.

So at the end of it all for me, it is about keeping Christ at the centre of life in a Catholic school, both within the religious education (RE) class and throughout the school. It is about ensuring that this happens by offering the best supports, mentoring, formational training and ongoing continuing professional development (CPD), to all those who share the responsibility.

Vision

Let us offer the coherent vision of life inspired by the teachings of Christ, that Pope Francis speaks about. Let us be proud of our Catholic identity and ensure that our schools best reflect that model for

living, which Christ, the true teacher, has gifted to all.

The GRACE report sets out the vision of four Irish ecclesial documents valuable in equipping Catholic school personnel, for their roles in fostering Catholic identity and ethos.

I will share just a few of the key highlights from the findings on knowledge of these documents and on the provision of training for stakeholders:

Regarding *Vision 08* (the Irish Catholic bishops' conference's pastoral letter for Catholic schools), 80% of the primary and 60% of the secondary cohorts hadn't heard of it or were unsure if they had. Across these cohorts, even those who have heard of *Vision 08*, many report little to no familiarity with it.

For *Share the Good News: The National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*, 83% of the primary cohort and almost 75% of secondary Boards of Management (BoM)

members, principals and RE teachers, hadn't heard of it or were unsure if they had heard of it, many have little to no familiarity with it.

“Lack of knowledge of the content of these documents raises questions about the depth of understanding that stakeholders hold about the vision and purpose for their schools”

Regarding the next two documents, *Understanding and living the ethos in a Catholic primary school: a process centred on conversations* (and the equivalent one for secondary schools), 75% at primary level and 44% of second level hadn't heard of it or were unsure if they had.

Again, even amongst those have heard of it many were not that familiar with it.

Such a lack of knowledge of the content of these documents raises questions about the depth of understanding that stakeholders hold about the vision and purpose for their schools. It also raises questions about the effectiveness of the follow up by patrons and Trusts after dissemination of them into schools.

Positive

There is some good news however, as despite the deficit in familiarity with the documents, the findings offer reassurance that there is evidence of the nurturing of Catholic identity and ethos in schools which does correlate with official expectations, in spite of gaps in a number of areas. So, schools are doing a great job but need to anchor their work in the vision set out in the documents.

Religious education stuck in a paradigm from the past

Dr Amalee Meehan

Religious Education (RE) internationally and in this country, is considered a key expression of Catholic school ethos and identity. In Ireland, as enshrined in the Education Act of 1988, it is the responsibility of the school patron.

A new in-depth study uncovers a mixed bag of results about the reality of RE in Catholic schools. On one hand, the excellence of Catholic schools is evident. Teachers, leaders and management are committed and inclusive, welcoming and sensitive to pupils of faith and world-views other than Christian, and intentional about environmental issues.

Primary

On the other, RE as a subject seems to be in some difficulty. At primary level, rather than the half hour per day, five days a week, it is supposed to enjoy, 40% of teachers teach the subject twice a week or

less. In fact, just 17% of teachers say they teach RE every day.

“With schools being so busy, the constant challenge of timetabling, and no external oversight of RE ‘religion is bound to suffer’”

Almost 40% don't seem to bother much with the curriculum and approved textbooks.

Principals appear at a loss on how to address this. They cite lack of personal faith/commitment to RE, time pressure, curriculum overload and especially no system of accountability or evaluation as reasons why RE require-

ments are not being met. One principal described how, with schools being so busy, the constant challenge of timetabling, and no external oversight of RE “religion is bound to suffer”.

Secondary

At second level, where the focus was Senior Cycle Religious Education (SCRE), the difficulties are stark. With no curriculum, no programme and no real guidance, the image of RE from Report 5 of the GRACE research (which addresses Religious Education), tells much of the story. A washed up fishing trawler lies broken and abandoned at the water's edge; it has lost its colour, lost its purpose, lost its confidence.

What has happened to SCRE?

The problem is not lack of qualifications among teachers: the findings show that the vast majority of RE teachers hold a degree or equivalent in RE. Nor is it lack of commitment among teachers. In fact, the interview data show an appetite and willingness to address the issue.

“With the right infrastructure, RE can thrive and make a positive impact on the lives of students and the school”

As one principal explains “the patron or the Church [should] give direction; there would be no benefit in evaluating RE through a checklist”. On the other hand, if there was collaboration on “how best to deliver non-exam RE, then this would be of great value to the religion teachers and the principal”.

It seems that as subjects, schools and programmes have become increasingly profes-

sionalised and evaluated over the last two decades, RE is stuck in a paradigm from the past. Where other subjects and programmes are held accountable by a State sponsored inspection system, RE is floundering with little support or oversight.

But the findings also suggest a path forward. There is almost universal agreement among participants that, with the right infrastructure, RE can thrive and make a positive impact on the lives of students and the school community. They call for a systemic consultative approach, with regular, high quality professional development and participatory co-professional oversight.

Findings

Findings at both primary and secondary level reveal that a model of oversight is urgently needed. Whereas the Church in Ireland does not have a standardised mechanism for evaluation, the State has a well-developed school

inspection system, ranging from assessment of individual subjects to Whole School Evaluation (WSE). As patrons' programmes, RE (primary) and SCRE (second level) are not part of this system.

This model has led to joint ventures with other groups, for example with Teagasc, the agricultural development authority, on quality measures for agricultural colleges using the co-professional and collaborative approaches developed for the schools' sector. Internationally, similar models have also met with success.

The patron has the right and responsibility to ensure that its own programme is taught, and taught well. The findings show that where RE is supported inside and outside the classroom, it can add to the life of the school in valued ways. Catholic schools may well benefit from a collaborative approach with the State Inspectorate, whereby the Church and State collaborate in oversight of RE.

Standardised sex ed erodes flexibility of Catholic and other faith schools

In my secondary school, we had a lovely English teacher called Sr Anna. To my 16-year-old self, Sr Anna, with grey wisps and translucent skin against a black veil, seemed at least 70. She was feisty though. And she was concerned for our teenage souls, often lacing our literary discussions with debates on morality.

Except one time when we were discussing *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers. She simply announced we would be skipping over a certain chapter. We all knew why. There was a sex scene between a teenage girl and boy. She left us to draw our own conclusions.

This memory from the 1980s arose as I listened to last week's debate at Stormont on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). Some members spoke of indoctrination in Catholic schools. But all I remember was getting some basic facts about puberty, sexual health, and how a baby is created.

Deprived

Nowadays I would be considered deprived. When did it stop being called plain old sex education?

RSE – mandatory in schools for years – has become a hot-button issue across Ireland. The Alliance Party, backed up by



Martina Purdy

Sinn Féin, and others, called on the NI Assembly to recognise the value of compulsory, standardised, inclusive, evidence-based, age-appropriate sex education. They also urged the Education Minister to bring forward a plan that would enshrine the rights of children and young people to access RSE.

“Teachers and pupils can still discuss moral, ethical and spiritual issues but let's face it: teaching abortion rights is not a neutral curriculum”

This motion seriously challenged parents and faith-based schools. It follows controversial new RSE guidelines, imposed by the NI Secretary of State. These require all schools to teach children as young as 13 that they have a right to abortion. We are in danger of not only raising generations who know all about their rights but nothing about their responsibilities.

Not only did the Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown, who chairs the Catholic Schools

Trustees Service object – but a recent consultation showed 73% were also opposed. Teachers and pupils can still discuss moral, ethical and spiritual issues but let's face it: teaching abortion rights is not a neutral curriculum. Archbishop Eamon Martin called it “ideological colonisation”.

Still, the Alliance party motion passed with the backing of Sinn Féin and the SDLP. No longer can they be relied upon to back Catholic education!

Alliance MLA Kate Nicholl, who led the debate, complained parents can exclude their children from “crucial lessons” on abortion access and issues such as LGBTQ. Parents can opt out until the child is Year 11 (aged 14-15) and after that only if the child does not object. Ms Nicholl argued that parental rights were not absolute. “There can be no dilution of children's rights,” said Ms Nicholl (ironic given that she opposes the right to life for every child before birth).

Dangerous

Her position is unpopular with many parents, but she pointed out children are vulnerable to sexual abuse and need to be educated. This is a valid point – but sex edu-



cation is already in schools and the DUP insists the Alliance stance is dangerous and authoritarian. “Let kids be kids!” is the party's position. This was controversially dismissed by another Alliance member as “a dog whistle to the far right”.

At present, school governors are ultimately respon-

sible for the curriculum, although parents and young people are entitled to be consulted under the latest regulations. But what happens if Alliance members and others get their way? Will parents be able to object to their children learning about transgenderism and puberty blockers?

Demanding “standard-

ised” and “compulsory” RSE erodes the flexibility currently enjoyed by Catholic and other faith schools.

Critical questions remain unanswered. What is appropriate content? What age is appropriate? What does inclusive RSE mean? What does evidence-based entail? Who gets to decide?

Making wiser choices

Personally I find children know far more about sex than my generation ever did. Five years ago, a 13-year-old, who was attending an upscale Christian school told me matter-of-factly that “six kids in her class were gay and three were bisexual”. I nearly crashed the car – her class was relatively small! On the other hand, young people seem to be less enlightened on how to deal with pornography, navigate

relationships, and avoid feeling used in a hook-up culture reliant on abortion for unwanted pregnancies. I once had a chat with a young colleague in the media who was from a Catholic family and was pro-choice. She seemed surprised I was pro-life. “But what happens,” she asked, “if you get really drunk and have a one-night stand and you get pregnant?” This seemed like normal behaviour to her. “How about making wiser choices?” I replied.

An attempt to destroy Christian attitudes to sex

Catholic convert and speaker Pam Stenzel talks to young people in the United States and abroad about abstinence and what she calls ‘The High Cost of Free Love’. She said young people are ill-equipped to deal with sexual relations when they escape parental control and enter college. Young women, she said, would

turn up at her clinics thinking their only problem was pregnancy. When offered a test for a sexually transmitted disease, they would say things like: “Oh no. I'm from a good neighbourhood!” She said many failed to realise the dangers of Chlamydia, and only discovered their infection had left them infertile when they settled down to start a family.

This is not just a battle for parental rights, or a case of prudish Catholics worried about their kids having sex. This is an ideological battle to keep Catholic teaching around sex out of the education system. The far left would like to destroy Christian attitudes to sex, knowing Christianity is one of the foundations of western civilisation. Destroy it at your peril.

CAMP VERITAS

Encounter Jesus. Tackle Adventure. Become a Saint.

There is a God and I'm not Him!

A week-long Catholic summer camp for Ages 12-17. Join us in Ireland. Register today!

Scan to visit campveritas.org

Ideology replaces fact in response to trans report



I hope Dr Hilary Cass wins in the battle for children's bodies, writes **Dualta Roughneen**

The response to the Cass Report in the UK must be strikingly familiar to people in Ireland. The Cass Report, a lengthy and in-depth review, led by Dr Hilary Cass, aimed to "ensure that children and young people who are questioning their gender identity or experiencing gender dysphoria, and who need support from the NHS, receive a high standard of care that meets their needs and is safe, holistic and effective."

The report describes what is known about the young

people who are seeking NHS support around their gender identity and sets out the recommended clinical approach to care and support they should expect, the interventions that should be available, and how services should be organised across the country.

The report found, and it is now well documented, that there have been severe and serious deficiencies in care provided to children and young people who were seeking support.

Also, children were provided with puberty blockers whose effectiveness is not proven, while affirmation was the preferred approach, which put children on a path to hormonal and surgical treatment that was harder to get off.

Majority

The majority of children experiencing gender incongruence would overcome this with time if not affirmed, and there was no way to determine which children gender incongruence would persist or desist.

The report said children who later de-transitioned, often after surgical intervention, did not receive support and there is no reliable evidence base upon which to



A person walks on a pedestrian crossing decorated with the pattern of the transgender flag on a street in London April 10. A report published in the United Kingdom April 10, said children had been 'let down' by a lack of research on the use of puberty blockers. Photo: OSV News/Isabel Infantes, Reuters

make clinical decisions.

Doctors were also reported to be fearful of getting involved or making decisions due to the toxicity of the debate.

The toxicity continues with Dr Cass telling *The Times* newspaper: "I have been really frustrated by the criticisms, because it is straight disinformation. It is completely inaccurate."

"It started the day before the report came out when an influencer posted a picture of a list of papers that were apparently rejected because they

were not randomised control trials. That list has absolutely nothing to do with either our report or any of the papers."

She added: "If you deliberately try to undermine a report that has looked at the evidence of children's health-care, then that's unforgivable. You are putting children at risk by doing that."

Over the past 20 years, a series of in-depth reports, led by eminent people in Ireland, were carried out to provide an official understanding of divisive societal issues.

The McAleese Report on the Magdalene Laundries, the Commission of Investigation into the Mother and Baby Homes led by Judge Yvonne Murphy, and even the report on symphysiotomy in Ireland from 1844-1984 by Dr Oonagh Walsh, were all subject to the same type of denial, undermining and misrepresentation by ideologically driven interests.

Investigations

Even the official investigations into the death of Savita Halapannavar were ignored because they did not support the narrative that she died because 'Ireland is a Catholic country' and was denied an abortion. Her tragic death was used to herald an abortion regime in Ireland that has cost more than 10,000 lives, and advocates continues to demand more.

The response to the Cass Report is reminiscent of the attacks on Judge Yvonne Murphy who led the Mother and Baby Homes report, forcing

her to send a public rebuttal to members of the government who attempted to bring her before the Oireachtas Committee to explain how the report came to the 'wrong' conclusions.

She wrote: "The independence, procedures and safeguards under which the commission carried out its investigation and its carefully considered conclusions would be set at naught by an appearance before your committee and in circumstances especially where prejudice is already manifest ... The independence of the commission cannot simply be abandoned because its findings are not acceptable to some at a political level."

She highlighted that even Government figures who were involved in overseeing the investigation sought to undermine the official findings once they were in the public domain.

“In Ireland, the monstrosity of the Church, its pernicious influence on Ireland's past is a totem for signalling virtue and being on the 'right side of history'”

"Some members of the Oireachtas Committee have already engaged in a public condemnation of the contents of the Commission's Final Report and of the methodology adopted. Regrettably some senior members of the Oireachtas have done that despite having been members of the Government that drafted and brought the Terms of Reference before the Oireachtas for approval."

On certain issues, irrespective of facts, there is only one socially acceptable perspective and anyone who diverges from it is to be vilified. In Ireland, the monstrosity of the Church, its pernicious influence on Ireland's past is a totem for signalling virtue and being on the 'right side of history'.

For the past few years, in the 'western' world, the only acceptable perspectives were that gender identity is to be affirmed, and anyone that dares question it is to be socially and publicly destroyed.

“The general perception, perpetuated by legacy media, is not the facts contained in those official reports of thousands of pages, but what we choose it to be”

It took months for Colette Colfer to have South East Technological University confirm that their gender identity policy which previously stated that refusal to use students' or staff members' preferred pronouns would amount to "unlawful discrimination or harassment" was factually incorrect.

This only happened after the release of the Cass Report which provided a window of opportunity for reason to raise its head. Perhaps Wilson's Hospital School who required Enoch Burke to use the pupil's requested pronoun will take a step back and accept that it was not in the pupil's interest to force a gender affirming approach on members of staff.

Society has a problem. There is a rapidly diminishing common ground for different perspectives to be debated. Ideology replaces fact. Independent in-depth reports are discarded, ignored and undermined by politicians, media, and a certain element in wider society when they do not come to the desired predetermined conclusions.

It has been claimed 800 babies have been buried in a septic tank in Tuam. Probably killed by the nuns. There is no evidence for this at all yet this is the accepted truth. It suits for it to be this way.

Prejudices

It reinforces the in-built prejudices of many in modern Ireland whose understanding of Irish history and the Church has been formed by campaigns of misinformation, staid stereotypes and constant reinforcement of the same narrative.

The headline to Rod Liddle's piece in *The Spectator* on April 24 'Why the Cass Report won't change a thing' is evidenced by how little impact the McAleese and Murphy reports had on the public consciousness. The general perception, perpetuated by legacy media, is not the facts contained in those official reports of thousands of pages, but what we choose it to be.

It is said that those who do not learn from history are destined to repeat it. How can lessons even be learned if history is not known at all? They say history is written by the winners. While Judge Murphy, Martin McAleese and Oonagh Walsh do not seem like winners in the battle for Ireland's soul, for the sake of children who are struggling with gender incongruence or other issues that manifest themselves as such, every reasonable person should be hoping that Dr Hilary Cass is the winner in the battle for children's bodies.

The Irish Catholic

NOW HIRING

A FULL-TIME NEWS REPORTER

Requirement & Qualifications

- Ideally a Degree in journalism/theology/philosophy
- Proven working experience as a Journalist or Reporter will be an advantage
- Proficiency and fluency in English
- Ability to follow strict deadlines and fast-check information
- Computer proficiency (MS Office, digital editing, web search, database)
- Excellent communication and networking skills along with an aptitude in extracting information
- Capability in photography and/or video journalism an advantage
- Passionate about journalism and freedom of speech/expression rights

Please send your resume, cover letter, to editor@irishcatholic.ie

Our hospitals are war zones – euthanasia will become the ‘decent thing’



Most politicians are dancing down the road to assisted dying with talk of meaningless ‘safeguards’, writes Michael Kelly

On Monday of this week, the British parliament discussed the issue of euthanasia. The House of Commons heard passionate pleas from many MPs calling for people to be allowed to end their lives in a way that they deemed appropriate.

Not unlike our own legislators, many said that they had been on a journey and many criticised people opposed to euthanasia for – as one MP put it – not following the public mood.

It’s right out of the ‘there go the people. I must follow them, for I am their leader’ school of politics.

Sides

Supporter after supporter of euthanasia in the House of Commons trotted out the customary lines about ‘safeguards’ either uninterested or unaware that safeguards didn’t work anywhere else when it comes to protecting the vulnerable from being put down.

Of course, those opposed to assisted suicide have science on their side and the full weight of the credible medical community with both palliative care doctors and psychiatrists opposing it. But, they are on to a loser because they lack that one thing necessary to win political campaigns in this age: a celebrity backer.

On the other side, household name and national treasure Dame Esther Rantzen – who is suffering from stage IV cancer – has become a powerful voice to push the so-called ‘right to die’.

Our own Oireachtas Committee on Assisted Dying was a classic example of the triumph of emotion and hunch over science and law. Eminent legal academic Conor Casey, for example, was berated by Senator Mary Seery Kearney and Deputy Gino Kenny for daring to refer to euthanasia

as ‘intentional killing’ – what else, I wonder, would they call a doctor injecting a patient with poison?

On another occasion – which would’ve been hilarious had the subject matter not literally been about life and death – Senator Lynn Boylan demanded to know if legalist Prof. William Binchy opposed euthanasia because he thought it was sinful!

It was truly one of those moments when I appreciate that no-one beyond these shores sees what goes on in the Oireachtas.

Members of the Irish College of Physicians and the Irish College of Psychiatry got short shrift at the committee. Despite the courtesy of chairman Deputy Michael Healy-Rae, many members of the committee came and went during the evidence from the experts. Other, we were told, were ‘monitoring’ the debate from the comfort of their own office.

“Very little attention is paid to whether the suffering of those nearing the end of their lives can be eased”

What is intriguing about the debate about assisted suicide and euthanasia, is the extent to which it is manipulated and based purely on emotion and an understandable fear of suffering.

Very little attention is paid to whether the suffering of those nearing the end of their lives can be eased. My fellow columnist here Baroness Nuala O’Loan has spoken movingly in the House of Lords about the need for more investment in palliative care.

Similar pleas were heard here from eminent palliative care experts such as Dr Faith Cranford who almost begged for more focus and investment in helping people to die well – without taking their life.

Of course, just like with the abortion referendum the proponents of change tell us that there will be ‘safeguards’ – that there will be no rush to this, given that Irish people value life. Yet, a few years into the abortion legislation there are few safeguards, and around 10,000 unborn

“What is intriguing about the debate about assisted suicide and euthanasia, is the extent to which it is manipulated and based purely on emotion and an understandable fear of suffering”

children are losing their lives every year.

There is also the fact that what modest safeguards there were in countries like the Netherlands and in Canada quickly eroded. In Belgium, for example, children as young as 12 can apply to be euthanised for something as treatable as the fact that they have depression. In the Netherlands, several people with autism have been granted permission to avail of assisted dying because of their diagnosis.

In Canada, the Orwellian-termed Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) has been made available to military veterans diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following harrowing experiences fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Last year, *The Guardian* newspaper – no cheerleader for conservative values – asked bluntly “are poor Canadians being driven to euthanasia by poverty”? The stark answer was, yes.

Healthcare

But what is utterly baffling about the debate in Ireland is the extent to which opposition politicians – who don’t trust the State on anything – are willing to believe that safeguards will work here in a health service that was just days ago described as a “war zone” by doctors working in it.

Just days ago, an inquest returned a verdict of medical misadventure in the case of 16-year-old Aoife Johnston who died of sepsis in Limerick. Last month, another family told of how their father had fallen in hospital and died – they were never told he fell, and were led to believe he passed away peacefully in his bed.

What makes anyone think that the introduction of euthanasia will suddenly improve the care of vulnerable people? It will not, it will only further erode human dignity and it will quickly become a tool of the sort of bean counters that cruelly refer to our elder citizens – people who have given their entire lives to this country – as ‘bed blockers’.

We will pay a heavy price if we do not resist this push to euthanasia – it is not so much a slippery slope, the truth is it a moral cliff edge.



Opponents of euthanasia and assisted suicide are pictured in a file photo staging a ‘die-in’ in Canada. Photo: CNS

The Irish Catholic

FREE HOME DELIVERY

*geographical restrictions apply

Don't miss breaking news delivered directly to your home each week



With the closure of religious shops around the country, signing up for free home delivery of *The Irish Catholic* will ensure seamless arrival of the newspaper to your doorstep every Thursday.

Stay up to date with analyses that represent your voice on the national stage.

Regular contributors provide commentary to hot button issues of the day.

Local voices highlight the ongoing work of parishes and communities throughout the country.

News Delivery brought to you by **THE IRISH TIMES**

For further details

Ph: 01 920 3901 | Email: info@newsdelivery.ie | www.newsdelivery.ie

Unwanted guests at a party - Catholicism and Irish schools



Eoin McCormack

With the release of the comprehensive GRACE report (Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education) assessing the realities facing Catholic education in Ireland just a week after the Teacher's Union (INTO) called for the removal of the religious education qualification to teach in Catholic schools, it almost feels that when it comes to education in this country the Church now finds herself the 'unwanted guest at the party'.

This is despite the fact that in most instances the Church is the host of the party. The vast majority of these schools were founded and funded by selfless men and women who, in the name of God and their Church, dedicated their lives to the poor and opened these schools to provide free access to education for a population that was starved of opportunities by the prevailing state.

Ironically, despite having educated generations of people out of this perpetual sense of generosity as an act of faith, the very people who benefited from this system are now actively seeking to undermine the very ethos on which these schools were founded.

Or as the subsequent RTÉ Upfront programme styled it, to "take religion out of our schools", as if religion is some oppressive virus in need of 'taking out'. What is striking about the public discourse on this issue is precisely the impression that the Church somehow imposed itself on an already established free education system in some dubious power-grab.

In this sense, and as evidenced by the GRACE report, we have lost the public narrative as a Church, and we therefore seriously need to reassess how we communicate our vision of what exactly Catholic education is about and what our aspirations are for those who both attend and teach at these institutions.

Teachers

According to the GRACE report, 3 out of 10 religion teachers at second level make it very clear that they "don't witness to or support the Catholic ethos." 60% also do not describe themselves as committed and practicing Catholics.

Furthermore, only 55% of teachers under the age of 30 report to even having respect for the Catholic ethos of their school. Common sense surely urges that going for-



All the authors of the GRACE report pictured at the launch.

ward with these statistics is simply unworkable if we aspire in any sense to effectively pass on the Christian faith.

“Catholic educators in the US are choosing to teach at Catholic institutions not because of default but because they are authentically enamoured by the Gospel”

Vatican II's Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis* very clearly states that quality of the faith of the teachers in a given institution is fundamental to authentically live out a Catholic ethos. In fact, it states "the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals."

If we look to our neighbours in the US, a recent comparative study with Ireland carried out through University of Notre Dame on Catholic identity in education, finds that Catholic teachers in the US are likely to teach in Catholic schools specifically because of its ethos.

In other words, Catholic educators in the US are choosing to teach at Catholic institutions not because of default but because they are authentically enamoured by the Gospel. This vastly contrasts to the Irish context which the same research finds teachers are either 'ambivalent towards or opposed to' the Catholic faith.

The question now facing the Church in Ireland is how much longer is it truly viable to have people who are not committed to the faith tasked with passing it on? The General Directory for Cat-

echesis in fact necessitates that "teachers be believers committed to personal growth in faith." By not monitoring this situation, we are doing a disservice to the parents who wish for their children to be raised in the Catholic faith.

Additionally, by asking a teacher who is openly non-Catholic or perhaps even opposed to the Church, to pass on the Christian faith, we are not only facilitating dishonesty on the part of the teacher, but also facilitating an injustice on the part of the child's right to an informed religious education.

Pedagogy

Of course, it is not impossible for a non-Catholic teacher to teach a Catholic curriculum the same way they can teach any other subject, but this is where in much of the public debate on the issue seems to be misunderstood.

Implementing an ethos under a Catholic framework does not mean simply teaching a 'Catholic religion class' while the rest of the organisation operates the same as the non-Catholic ones. A truly Catholic ethos shapes the very fabric of the institution and should influence every aspect of the life and purpose of its day-to-day mission.

Vatican II described the purpose of the Catholic institution to "order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation." For this to materialise however the teaching body must be truly motivated to seek God in the service of truth and live out the spirit of the Gospel in all that they do and teach, not just during 'religious education' class.

Under the present structures this is not proving even remotely possible when 35% of teachers under 30 report to not even believing in God, while "one fifth

of teachers actively disagree that developing a personal relationship with Christ is a central educational aim."

As the Catholic ethos of our schools in Ireland becomes more frequently diluted, Prof. Conway writing in the GRACE report articulately summarises the reality of this point going forward: "We can't have a curriculum that is effectively secularist running alongside Catholic RE."

Simply put, when the culture's understanding of truth is radically different or opposed to the Catholic mission, it is simply not workable to combine the two. And how could we expect it to be any other way? We can simply no longer assume that the students attending our Catholic schools are coming from a Catholic framework.

“The Catholic faith is absent from life at home, absent from the culture, and the vast majority of them are absent from the parish, so how else should we expect them to understand?”

In one recent example when on a pastoral visit to a Catholic school in Dublin on Ash Wednesday, I asked the children if they knew what season was beginning. On more than one occasion the answer I received was 'Eid' or 'Ramadan'. In another class, the teacher also used 'Ramadan' as a point of reference for explaining Lent.

It wasn't that there was a Muslim majority in the school by any means, or that the teacher was coming from a Muslim background,

but rather that the children had no conception of Lent at all.

And who can blame them? The idea was as arbitrary to them as rocket science because the Catholic faith is absent from life at home, absent from the culture, and the vast majority of them are absent from the parish, so how else should we expect them to understand?

Contemporary catechesis is now at a pre-evangelisation stage. Belgian scholar Liven Boeve's appropriately writes on this that "religious education can indeed no longer (explicitly or implicitly) proceed from an existing overlap between Christian faith and present-day culture."

In discerning the implementation of a Catholic ethos of a school in the modern age, the question is now how to adequately introduce students to Christianity. We must honestly ask ourselves, if this is the case in a country where 90% of the primary schools are Catholic, is the status quo really working?

Vision

Pope Francis developed this point in a 2022 speech to Brothers of Christian schools: "To educate in this way is your apostolate, your specific contribution to evangelisation [...] In this sense, your schools are 'Christian': not because of an external label, but because they take this path."

It is therefore imperative that we do not cling-on to unworkable structures of the past for the purposes of maintaining these "external labels" as the Pope suggests. We must be courageous enough to acknowledge our present systems are not adequately contributing to the evangelising mission of the Church.

We must be courageous enough to want something better for our children. Fundamentally, we must be courageous enough to divest a significant proportion of our schools in order to allow for truly Catholic environments to flourish.

The Catholic tradition is embedded within the very fabric of the history of Western world. By maintaining the status quo and continuously diluting the Catholic ethos to align with wavering secular values is to do a disservice to the beauty of the Catholic tradition in all of its philosophy, art, language, truth seeking, and splendour.

We simply have too much to lose by holding on to structures that no longer serve the mission of the Gospel. As the Congregation for Catholic Education wrote in a 2022, there needs to be a "clearer awareness and consistency of the Catholic identity of the Church's educational institutions".

i Eoin McCormack holds a Licentiate in the Catechetical Sciences and is a Catechist & Pastoral Worker in the Parish of Rathmines, Dublin.

In our culture wars, the biggest battles are staged in universities



Wendy Grace

Last October the South East Technological University (SETU) launched their 'Gender Identity and Expression Policy'. But lecturer Colette Colfer, a lecturer in world religions questioned the document's impacts on compelling speech and policing language. One of her concerns was that the policy maintained that a refusal to use preferred pronouns was an example of "unlawful discrimination or harassment".

"I couldn't find where this could be justified under current legislation, so I started to ask questions of the college, that's when all hell broke loose, because I went public on my concerns."

Colette explained that she had been to several workshops led by groups like 'Shout-out and Teni' (Transgender Equality Network Ireland): "We were being told to put our preferred pronouns on our email sign offs and that puberty blockers were easily reversible".

Respecting

Colette also felt the policy was not respecting the diverse range of students and teachers on the campus, she believes that inclusion means respecting everyone, but that means respecting the reality that "not everybody believes that gender is a spectrum".

"You know, we're living in a multicultural world that has a plurality of beliefs and philosophies, and not everybody has a gender identity. Not everybody believes that gender identity should be prioritised over other sex-based rights, like safe-spaces for women."

Colette speaking up meant the document which was recently released, removed the language around 'unlawful discrimination', but still stresses the importance of using preferred pronouns.

While SETU has made the change, UCD, RCSI and TCD's gender expression policies still state that failure to use a preferred pronoun is "unlawful discrimination". This is in spite of the fact that there is no legal requirement in our legislature that would legally compel speech.



These policies are not being drafted because of legislation or out of a grassroots desire from students or teachers. Much of the impetus for writing them in the first place stems from the Athena Swan Charter, a charter that unless universities sign up to it they won't get funding from the higher education authority.

The charter originally included a commitment to overcome challenges faced by women, when originally written in 2011 it mentioned the word "woman" six times. The new 2021 charter doesn't mention the word woman, instead it includes a commitment to "fostering collective understanding that individuals have the right to determine and affirm their gender".

"I am not saying they don't have good intentions, but I believe we must have an evidence based approach and allow for diverse opinions on this issue"

So the policy has shifted on developing policies focussed on gender equality taking into account the specific challenges and needs of women to ones focussed on gender identity.

Collete explained that these types of 'gender identity' policies are not being created based on evidence and research but are heavily influenced by transgender lobby groups: "In Ireland, unfortunately, the approach to date tends to be ideological in politics, journalism, academia and education."

"The national LGBTI+ inclusion strategy by the government was drawn up with lobby groups who are informing the direction, I am not saying they don't have good intentions, but I believe we must have an evidence based approach and allow for diverse

opinions on this issue."

TENI is one of the representative groups on the LGBTI+ National Inclusion Strategy committee, this is a group that has spoken against men competing in women's sport, and suggesting 'training' for IBEC members who were uncomfortable sharing toilets.

They still support the use of puberty blockers despite the aforementioned research showing there is no reliable long-term evidence to support their use and increasing evidence as documented in the Cass review to show the harms they cause.

NGOs shouldn't have the authority to influence policy, but the Irish Government (and it seems universities) are unquestioningly accepting their recommendations. Even though much of this doctrine has huge implications for women's rights, women's advocacy groups are not included in the development of such policies.

Impacts

Collette also feels these types of policies are having stifling impacts on university life and intellectual growth and freedom of expression: "As lecturer, universities should be places where we foster debate rather than stifle debate, a lot of this is stemming from the Athena Swan Charter which needs to be reviewed, it's having a disastrous impact on the open exchange of ideas in universities, I think of gender identity theory as a belief system which shouldn't be imposed on people".

One of the purposes of college life is to be a place of facilitating discussion and exploration across our differences of opinion, vital for a functioning healthy democracy. Surely the findings of the recent Cass review should also be taken into account.

The study, the largest of its kind, pointed out that there was no "good evidence" available on the long term outcomes for use of puberty blockers. It also cautioned

against any pharmaceutical interventions for 'transitioning' before the age of 25.

It highlighted the lack of evidence to support a 'gender affirming' model of care for those questioning their gender, yet gender affirmation forms part of the blueprint that our colleges and Government is using.

"When it comes to exploring gender identity, the place where opinions should be allowed to flourish, is the one that is becoming increasingly stifled by the culture wars"

Countries like the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden collected longitudinal data from their public health authorities leading them to move away from gender affirmative approaches.

Surely our universities

would be one of the first places that begin to move away from unquestioningly accepting a movement that in some parts has caused serious harm to vulnerable young people, and trampled over their rights of women's safe spaces, single-sex services and sport.

College campuses are meant to be a place of learning, discovery, growth, debate and intellectual interrogation of important issues and life's big questions.

It can be that wonderful melting pot of people from different countries, cultures, faiths and social backgrounds. But sadly when it comes to exploring gender identity, the place where opinions should be allowed to flourish, is the one that is becoming increasingly stifled by the culture wars.

Vilify

How have we come to a place where the world of academia will vilify freedom to think critically? Take for example sociologist Dr Laura Favaro who was fired by the University of London after pub-

lishing her research findings which showed that academics are terrified of openly expressing any gender-critical views they might have.

Her research left her 'in no doubt that a culture of discrimination, silencing and fear has taken hold across universities in England and many countries beyond'.

Or what about Brown University's Lisa Littman, a social scientist whose research asked questions about whether social factors had an impact on the overwhelming increase in teenage girls questioning their gender. Brown, rather than standing by Dr Littman, caved to pressure from trans lobbyists and distanced itself from the research.

We are in an Ireland where academic freedom is threatened, intolerance and bigotry is veiled in the language of "inclusion". We need more academics like Colette Colfer to speak up to protect free expression, encourage debate and to give others courage to do the same.

Veritas Shops are closing...

By the end of 2024

Don't miss the latest in Catholic news from Ireland and abroad
Subscribe today and get *The Irish Catholic* delivered to your door

Featuring news and analyses that represent your voice on the national stage, regular contributors who provide commentary on hot button issues and local voices highlighting the ongoing work of parishes and communities throughout the country.

Special Offer for New Subscribers
3 MONTH SUBSCRIPTION

€55

Down from €65

Print Subscription
3 Months for €65
6 Months for €105
1 Year for €199

Digital Subscription
3 Months for €20
1 Year for €60

You can also send us a cheque/postal order to:

The Irish Catholic, Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18, D18 K277

For more information, please visit
www.irishcatholic.com/shop
or call on 01 687 4028

The Irish Catholic

Religious Education is more important now than ever



As Ireland becomes increasingly multireligious and multicultural, empathy to other faiths especially Islam is of great service to the common good writes **Dr Niall Coll, Bishop of Ossory.**

Let me say how incredibly helpful it is to have such an excellent quantitative and qualitative study of important aspects of the shape of Catholic education in Ireland today. Whatever its vicissitudes, we have a benchmark study which elevates that discussion above what may have been easily dismissed earlier as the anecdotal – even if much of that anecdotal intelligence was very often well grounded. Government, academia and media in Ireland all attach a special importance to empirical study and I have no doubt that they will find the data here both accessible and useful. So too will Church people, and perhaps them most of all, a cohort that in the past tended to prioritise, whatever the deficiencies in approach, the philosophical, historical

and theological elements to reflection on our schools and their mission. Now Catholic education in Ireland, while it needs to be faithful to its own rich heritage of scholarship, can be well pleased at having at its disposal such an accessible and useful study to help guide and orientate future reflection and planning on the work of Catholic education in the years ahead.

Findings

I hope that the publication of this report marks only the beginning of such comprehensive empirical research projects in Catholic education in Ireland. The good news about the excellence of our faith-based schools – excellence in the levels of academic, personal, social and spiritual achievement – is a very underworked theme in

public discourse in Ireland. More often than not the target of hostile voices in politics and media, Catholic schools here are in fact quietly to the fore in the ways they work for greater levels of inclusion and participation, not least in the ways they welcome and promote intercultural and interreligious education. More about that later.

“He went on to point out that there has been little evidence of indoctrination over the decades in the students graduating from Catholic schools”

Right now, let me acknowledge that much of what is outlined in the GRACE Report does not come as a surprise to many of us. We know well that Irish society, in line with developments throughout the West, has become increasingly secular over the last few decades and that not a few in our society have come to question and even reject the role that Catholic schools have played in our country over the last two centuries. I don't propose to rake over those issues just now but prefer instead to offer some responses to some of the key findings in the research. Before doing that, I would like to say that it is not for nothing that so many of the new Irish, peoples from different faiths (world religions) and none find the learning contexts of our Irish Catholic schools welcoming, sympathetic and conducive to their lives of faith and learning. This is a truth that is as evident in the schools in Kilkenny and Laois that I visit, as it was in the many Catholic schools in the North that I visited over many years in my capacity there, among others, as a teaching practice tutor in St Mary's University College.

Future comparative studies in the Republic, if they are to follow the pattern in the Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Australia and other countries too will demonstrate that Catholic schools in pluralist societies are well able to sparkle and more than hold their place in comparison to other types of schooling in terms of the quality of educational outcomes.

That's why in the face of so much criticism here at home of Catholic schools that I remain positive about their work and the contribution that they make in encouraging and developing young people as both citizens and disciples. I would like to take this opportunity to mention here some words of the late Irish Jesuit educationalist and historian, David Tuohy, when

he noted that many denominational schools in Ireland – Catholic, Church of Ireland and Presbyterian – are puzzled about why their positive approach to education is not reflected in a greater appreciation of the religious source which underpins their educational vision. And he went on to point out that there has been little evidence of indoctrination over the decades in the students graduating from Catholic schools.

Ethos

Now a few points of direct response to some of the Report's key findings. To begin, the research is striking in the way it points to the high levels of commitment to ethos, the education of the whole person and personal faith among principals aged

“Catholic schools here are in fact quietly to the fore in the ways they work for greater levels of inclusion and participation, not least in the ways they welcome and promote intercultural and interreligious education”

50 years and more. Levels are significantly lower, however, among their younger colleagues. Does this signal a hopeless situation for the long-term survival of Catholic education? Can schools survive if there are not the personnel to lead them in ways which are recognisably and credibly Catholic? It's undeniable that there is a growing trend to define the common good of education in terms of the economy rather than culture (with its close connection with faith), human capital replaced by knowledge capital.

“Is there no chance of a rethink, a retrieval of curiosity and sense of exploration that might mean that the direction of travel might change”

The GRACE Report sets out real deficits in introductory and ongoing training/CPD for all school personnel, particularly with regard to identity and ethos and offers a *cri de cœur* to patrons and trusts to address this matter urgently. This truly must be heard. There is no denying, to use the language of the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, that the ‘social imaginary’ of the younger generations has moved away from being permeated by religious faith. Marked instead by what he terms ‘expressive individualism’ and its tendency to relativise all meaning and truth to personal taste.

Is that the end then? Has

“Working towards good levels of knowledge of the Bible among young people from a Christian background better equips them to understand and empathise with Muslims for whom the Quran is immensely important. Such work is of great service to the common good”

history ended? Is there no chance of a rethink, a retrieval of curiosity and sense of exploration that might mean that the direction of travel might change. Let me suggest one possible theme, one which is taken up, however inchoately in the GRACE Report, namely the need for a better understanding and commitment to both intercultural and interreligious dialogue and education in our schools.

Islam

Damian Howard SJ (2016) has written tantalisingly about the relationship between ‘Christians and Muslims in tomorrow’s Europe’. While now estimated to be 7% of the European population, it is forecasted to rise to about a quarter by the end of the century, bringing about a substantial change in the religious landscape. Interestingly, Philip Jenkins estimates that France will be 30% and Germany 25% Muslim by 2050. Howard predicts that over time having Muslims in large numbers in Europe is bound to alter the questions that preoccupy Christians.

The current reality is, as Howard has argued, that secular modernity has cauterised the Christian imagination and reduced it to the bare bones of ethics and ‘values’. Muslims, on the other hand, have

no hesitation in affirming the reality of God. This new context made possible by the growing presence and confidence of Islam may, he suggests, liberate the European Church, Catholic and Protestant, to speak with a new confidence about God. Who knows, some from a Christian background may feel provoked and emboldened to return to their own traditions of prayer, ritual and fasting with a new vigour? In the long term this will have big implications for our schools.

“The human community is one because it comes from the creative hand of the one God and that variations in religious faith are a reflection of the rich diversity that characterises Humankind”

Back to our schools in Ireland now. A Catholic RE well-grounded in the direction set by Second Vatican Council (1962-65) would not reduce all religions to one and the same reality, to be set aside in the curriculum, as happens in schools where RE is marginalised or absent. Such

a ripping out of RE is particularly unfortunate at a time when Ireland is becoming increasingly multireligious and multicultural. For one thing, working towards good levels of knowledge of the Bible among young people from a Christian background better equips them to understand and empathise with Muslims for whom the Quran is immensely important. Such work is of great service to the common good.

Catholic religious education when it is properly valued and taught, as Dermot Lane has repeatedly asserted, respects the irreducibility of the other, values diversity, otherness and interconnectedness. After all, the Council’s Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate* (1965) acknowledges that the human community is one because it comes from the creative hand of the one God and that variations in religious faith are a reflection of the rich diversity that characterises Humankind itself. The article states that the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true in these religions and that these religions often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women. Consequently, the Declaration encourages ‘dialogue and collaboration’ with the followers of other religions in order to

promote common spiritual, moral, social and cultural values.

Global

We would do well to recognise how Vatican II and subsequent Catholic teaching recognises the other world faiths on their own terms. Thus the declaration praises Hinduism’s emphasis on contemplation, asceticism, meditation and trust in God; Buddhism’s recognition of the insufficiency of the material world, and Islam’s belief in the one God, its reverence for Jesus as a great prophet, honouring of Mary, his mother, its high moral standards, and its commitment to prayer, almsgiving and fasting. The document’s greatest emphasis is placed on Judaism, in which the beginning of the Church’s faith and election are to be found.

“With a strong sense of our own identity, we can, in the words of Pope Francis, have a deeper empathy for the other”

A word about a study of third level students (carried out by Rita George-Tvrtovic at a Catholic college in Chicago) which found that in a mixed

religious setting of Catholics and Muslims, that nominal Catholics who encounter their Islamic classmates finding satisfaction in their study of Islam, feel encouraged to examine their own home (Catholic) tradition, either for the first time or with a new perspective. Might this have parallels in future teacher training in Ireland?

Finally, in light of the Grace Report, I hope that we in Catholic education will be aware of how we need to engage more deeply with our own Catholic tradition. With a strong sense of our own identity, we can, in the words of Pope Francis, have a deeper empathy for the other. Such identity has much to offer in the work of equipping our pupils and students for intercultural and interfaith dialogue and, consequently, to the service of the wider public good. Catholic education has much to offer in our multicultural, multireligious Ireland of the present and the future. Indeed, The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector some years back noted that “interfaith and inter-cultural initiatives work best in schools where the Catholic students and parents are most committed to their own practice”. So, my advice and prayer for all involved in Catholic education is to press on with our important work and witness.

ⓘ This is a slightly edited text of the speech by Dr Niall Coll, Bishop of Ossory, who launched the GRACE (Ireland) Research Project 2021-24 at All Hallows College, Dublin 23 April 2024.

“In light of the Grace Report, I hope that we in Catholic education will be aware of how we need to engage more deeply with our own Catholic tradition”

Nurturing the pool of people keeping the Catholic ethos alive

To divest or not to divest – we need a detailed examination of how schools can be Catholic in a challenging secular culture writes Dr **Brendán Ó Caoimh**

The GRACE Report presents a profile of the people who lead, manage and teach in Catholic schools, at both primary and secondary level. Therefore, it serves as a backdrop, and it provides context for each of the other reports. The data that are presented in this report are drawn from survey

respondents’ answers to questions about personal characteristics, including age cohort, gender, religious affiliation and religiosity.

This information is significant for Catholic schools. Not only does this report provide a contemporary profile of the members of boards of management, school principals, RE teachers and other teaching and non-teaching staff, it gives us insights into how this profile is evolving and what it will be like in the future.

Data

While there might not be any major surprises in this report, the data provide clarity, and they move us beyond hunches and anecdotes. We now have hard data that confirm, for example, that:

- Almost 94% of school personnel, both voluntary and professional, describe themselves as ‘Roman Catholic’; yet

- Only 60% describe themselves as ‘Committed and Practising Catholics’; and
- Just under 40% attend a religious service on a weekly basis.

Levels of religiosity are highest among Board of Management Members, School Principals and RE teachers, particularly those aged 50+. They are lowest among subject and classroom teachers, who are aged under 50. Indeed, age emerges as the single biggest determinant of religiosity. On all of the indicators covered by this survey, we observe a clear linear relationship between age and religiosity. This is the case at both primary and secondary levels.

Thus, the survey findings show that the Christian mission in Catholic schools is relying on a declining and ageing pool of personnel. Furthermore, the findings indicate that our schools have a declining pool of

Catholics from which to recruit future school leaders.

The statistics have clear implications for our schools in respect of supporting and nurturing the dedicated pool of people who are keeping the Catholic ethos alive and relevant in our school communities. They also point to the having conversations with, rather than making assumptions about, younger and more secular personnel. Furthermore, the underpinning recommendations arising from the other GRACE reports in respect of ethos-driven training and professional development, transparency and accountability.

Diversity

In addition to drawing on the survey questionnaire, this report synthesises data from the Central Statistics Office and other sources, such as the European Social Survey. Those secondary sources confirm and

triangulate the data that emerged from our survey, and they add to the contextual information that is essential in appreciating and understanding the findings that are presented in all of the GRACE reports.

The information and analysis reveal that while the religious profile of our school personnel, both voluntary and professional, is becoming increasingly diverse, and less Catholic, it is less diverse than is Irish society as a whole. Over the last ten years, there has been a greater and more rapid decline in religious affiliation, in Ireland, than in any of the preceding decades.

Both sets of data illustrate the significance of age. We have a declining proportion of Catholics among parents, and as a consequence, we have a declining proportion of Catholics among our student populations. This is particularly the case in the Greater Dublin Area and

other metropolitan zones.

These trends suggest that divestment would bring about a greater alignment between school patronage and local socio-demographic realities. Yet, as we have seen divestment is not a straightforward process, and it is not always a desirable outcome.

It behoves us, therefore, to examine, in greater detail than heretofore, how Catholic schools can be relevant, inclusive and contribute to spreading the Gospel message in an increasingly secular context and operating environment.

ⓘ Dr Ó Caoimh is a geographer and social scientist and an independent consultant in social research, planning and evaluation. He was one of the authors of the Grace Report and this is an edit of the talk he gave at the launch in All Hallows on April 23.

Out&About

St Mary's gift to Trócaire



CORK: Trócaire acknowledges the long standing support of St. Mary's High School, Midleton. Caoimhe de Barra makes a presentation to staff and student representatives in recognition of the school's efforts on behalf of the charity over the past 27 years. Included are Janet Twomey, Trócaire Centres and Volunteer Officer and on extreme left, Religious Education teacher, Ms Anne Leahy Rooney. Photo: Mike English



ARMAGH: Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin is pictured with the nephew of Fr Davis Habicorn, after ordaining Fr Habicorn to the priesthood.



ARMAGH: The seminarian community for Redemptoris Mater in Dundalk, Co. Louth, are pictured in St Patrick's Cathedral prior to the ordination of Fr Davis Habicorn and Fr Francesco Campiello.

IN SHORT

Conflict in Sudan leaves millions at risk of starvation

The year-long conflict happening in Sudan has resulted in the world's worst displacement crisis, an Irish charity has warned.

According to the United Nations (UN) half of the country's population needs assistance, as over 8.6 million people were forced to leave their homes and 18 million are at risk of starvation.

Aid and health workers and local volunteers are being harassed, injured and even killed, Concern Worldwide said in a statement.

"This is a crisis of epic proportions; it is also wholly man-made," said Rosemary DiCarlo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

Edem Wosornu, director of operations and advocacy at the UN Office for the Coordination

of Humanitarian Affairs, said the next step needs to be a guarantee of the security of humanitarian workers and international engagement to stop the war.

During the International Humanitarian Conference for Sudan in Paris, Sean Fleming, Minister of State for International Development and Diaspora, announced Ireland will contribute €12.3 million in 2024 to humanitarian efforts in the country.

World meeting in Rome in preparation for synod

Fr Kevin McElhennon and Fr James Fegan from the Dioceses of Derry and Ferns respectively, were nominated to represent Ireland in the World Meeting of Parish Priests, happening from April 28 to May 2 in Sacrofano, Rome.

The international meeting entitled 'Parish Priests for the Synod' is a preparation for the Synodal Assembly in October. This is a direct

result of the Synthesis Report from the first session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023, that points the need of involving the clergy more actively in the synodal process.

Some 300 priests from around the globe were appointed to participate in the meeting, the theme of which is 'How to Be a Synodal Local Church in Mission'.

The participants will share the synodal experiences they are having in their parishes and dioceses, and exchange views and ideas. The meeting will also generate draft material for working documents for the synod's second session.

Armagh safeguarding director appointed as national CEO

Former director for Safeguarding for the Archdiocese of Armagh, Aidan Gordon, has been

appointed as new Chief Executive Officer for the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church.

With extensive experience in child protection, management and family support, Mr Gordon is a qualified social worker with over 30 years of experience in management and safeguarding.

Established to provide advice, service and assistance to constituent members of the Church in continuing the development of safeguarding of Children in Ireland, the board has a role in monitoring Church bodies compliance with civil legislation.

"I am aware that we need to maintain our vigilance to ensure the Church continues to be a safe and welcoming place for children," Mr Gordon said.

He believes it is important to ensure a pastoral response to victims of abuse in the Church and assist these victims accessing justice. The new CEO also thinks it is a priority to seek actions towards those who are accused of abuse.



LIMERICK: Blessings and congratulations to Babs Meskell from Lisnagry, Castleconnell parish who turns 100 years old, pictured here with Bishop Fintan Monahan and Fr Willie Teehan.



DUBLIN: Confirmation boys from St Patrick's National School, Drumcondra take part in a ceremony of light in preparation for the Confirmation ceremony held in the Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Chapel, DCU St Patrick's Campus, Drumcondra.



DUBLIN: A group from the St Dominic's Catholic Society, Dublin City University are pictured with University chaplain Fr Ultan Naughton sscc.



KERRY: Dr Margaret Naughton congratulates the January 2024 group of Clinical Pastoral Education students who graduated April 23 in University Hospital Kerry.



DUBLIN: Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan, along with national vocations director Fr Willie Purcell, are joined by priests, religious and Laity in RTÉ studio for the broadcast of Mass for Vocations Sunday, April 20.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



CAVAN: Students of Muff NS, Kingscourt, greet Chevalier Thomas Kilduff.



CAVAN: Chevalier Thomas Kilduff with students and teachers of St. Joseph's NS, Kingscourt.



DUBLIN: On Saturday, April 20, the St Brendan Network hosted an art exhibition displaying the work of 13 contemporary Irish artists. Fr Conor McDonough OP and Ruth O'Connell (MPhil Art History) are pictured debating the motion. The Renaissance was a Pagan Art Movement, during the event.



CAVAN: Students of Carrickleck NS welcome Chevalier Kilduff, communications officer for the Lieutenancy of Ireland. Chevalier Duff visited four students in the Parish of Kingscourt at the invitation of Fr Gerry MacCormack.



CAVAN: Corlea NS students and staff are pictured with Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre's Chevalier Kilduff.



CORK: Doon CBS Primary School student council members Evan Fahey, Billy Murphy and Leo Armstrong with school principal Joanne O Connell attend the ERST Student Council Conference in Blarney Street Primary School.



CAVAN: Sabrina Donnelly of the Family Addiction Support Network, Dundalk and Darren Butler of the Irish bishops drugs initiative, Maynooth, who at the invitation of the Kingscourt Parish Pastoral Planning Team, lead a day for the newly Confirmed pupils of parish, raising the challenges for individuals and families coping with substance addiction, so prevalent in our society and affecting communities throughout the country.

ANTRIM

Pentecost conference takes place Saturday May 18 from 10am-10pm with guest speakers Fr Oisín Martin CFR and Fr James O'Reilly for talks, prayer ministry, fellowship, worship, Confession, adoration and Mass, in St Joseph's Church 56 Grey-stone Road BT41 1JZ.

ARMAGH

Armagh parish Legion of Mary invites new members to join junior (7-11 years) and intermediate (12-17) groups on Mondays 6-7.30pm in SVP Centre, 1-5 Chapel Lane, Armagh.

CAVAN

Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Clare's Chapel, Cavan Cathedral, from 11am-7pm daily.

DERRY

A conference and gala dinner on following Christ as an Irish Catholic, takes place Saturday, May 11 at 9am in the Guildhall. Contact 0949375993 for more information.

DONEGAL

Home of the Mother Regional Encounter takes place Saturday May 18 11am-6pm for Mass, lunch, rosary, faith formation, adoration, Confession, and the Pentecost Vigil in St Patrick's Church, Parochial House, and Hall Crossroads, Killygordon F93PN0X.

DUBLIN

A Jesuit young adult ministry retreat takes place Friday May 17 from 7.30-9.30pm and Saturday May 18 from 10am-5pm on Spirituality and Sexuality with Fr Kevin O'Rourke SJ in St Francis Xavier's Church, Gardiner Street, D01 RK07.

GALWAY

Youth 2000 Connaught retreat takes place May 10-12 in Calasancius College Oranmore for ages 16-35. Visit Youth2000.ie

LAOIS

Rosary prayed in the Church of the Assumption, the Heath, Portlaoise parish, daily at 2pm and at 3pm on Sundays.

LIMERICK

St John's Cathedral annual novena to St Anthony

takes place June 5 and concludes on Thursday, June 13.

LOUTH

Prayer around the cross in candlelight, a quiet and reflective time, with the music of Taize takes place Friday, May 3 from 8-9pm followed by tea/coffee in "Bethany" 34 Point Road, Dundalk A91W0C 9. For more information contact 042-9331602.

A retreat for primary teachers takes place Saturday May 18, 9am-4.30pm held by the Association of Catholic Teachers in Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary, Ardee A92 F8FP.

MAYO

A youth evangelisation seminar takes place Friday, May 10, in the St Johns Centre in Knock Eucharistic and Marian Shrine at 8pm.

The next Latin Mass will take place on Sunday, May 12, in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock 6pm.

SLIGO

A retreat for women takes place May 17-19, facilitated by Louise and Frank McGuinness, in Our Lady Star of the Sea Mullaghmore.

TIPPERARY

A 'Life In The Spirit' seminar takes every Sunday at 7pm with adoration, music and talks in St Peter and Paul's Church Clonmel. Contact info@holymission.ie for more information.

TYRONE

YouCat study for ages 16+ years takes place on Tuesdays in the Oratory, at 7 Main Street, Newtownstewart, starting at 6.30-7.30 pm. For further information contact 028 81661445 or email ard-straweast@derrydiocese.org.

WATERFORD

St Saviour's Church, Bridge Street to host two events dedicated to Our Lady of Waterford. Dr Cormac Begadon to give a talk on the history of the image on May 16 at 7pm. On May 18, a public procession to take place, beginning in Bridge Street, passing the city walls and the ancient Dominican friary, before being received into Waterford cathedral.

THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

‘SYNODALITY: A RENEWED CALL TO THE PROPHECY OF HOPE’

PAGES 20-21

THE APPEAL OF OUR DEVOTION TO MARY

PENELOPE MIDDELBOE

PAGE 22

Cardinal praises Synod’s ‘mutually enhancing authority’

Cardinal Blaise Cupich in *America Magazine*

I have to admit that despite the clarity of the pre-synod explanations, I did not fully grasp what was being asked of me as a participant until I attended the retreat given by Fr Radcliffe. His three-day retreat set the stage because it provided an experience of a true conversation in the Spirit.

I have selected three of Fr Radcliffe’s insights that I found particularly helpful. First, as a pathway for us to confront our fears, doubts and divisions, he invited us to walk together courageously with a Eucharistic hope.

Second, he urged us to offer each other the friendship of Jesus, and third, he asked us to recognise and accept that each person speaks with authority and should be honoured.

Eucharistic hope in a time of division

Fr Radcliffe began our retreat by noting that he was greatly encouraged by the response to Pope Francis’ call for a synodal Church.

“We are gathered here because we are not united in heart and mind,” he noted, given the many existing and potential divisions in the Church. However, “the vast majority of people who have taken part in the synodal process have been surprised by joy.”

He continued: “For many, it is the first time that the Church has invited them to speak of their faith and

hope.”

Fr Timothy offered the Gospel scene of the transfiguration as a metaphor to help us confront our fears, doubts and divisions on the retreat. He pointed out that we are not unlike the disciples at the “first synod,” as he called it, the one in which they made their way to Jerusalem, where Jesus would suffer and die. The Lord’s prediction of his demise left them fearful and divided over conflicting hopes.

It was at this moment, walking together on the way to Jerusalem, that Jesus took Peter, James and John on retreat to Mount Tabor to offer a much wider vision of their journey. We should imagine that he is doing the same for us on this retreat, Fr Timothy said.

So, too, now, our Dominican preacher suggested, the Lord invited us on this ‘Tabor on the Tiber’, as it were, before we set out on walking together, aware that it will involve a kind of dying for us to have new life.

The same Jesus offers us in a fresh way the hope found in the Eucharist as he “lead[s] us onwards towards the death and resurrection of the Church.” It is a hope that “makes the conflict between our hopes seem minor, almost absurd.”

It is a hope that inspires us never to be discouraged that what is being asked of us seems beyond our means or that it will be too costly.

That same Eucharistic



generosity should compel us never to discount the value of what others offer because we disagree or think it too little. And so, as Catholics, when we listen to one another, instead of saying, “No,” we should be open to saying, “Yes, and...”

This is the hope we receive in the Eucharist and which should inspire us to be generous in our conversations in the Spirit.

The friendship of Jesus

When I returned from Rome after the synod, I was asked many times, “What happened at the synod?” I simply replied, “I made a lot of new friends and no new enemies.”

The synod is a moment, Fr Timothy argued, for us to recalibrate how we make friends. He urged us to ask ourselves whether we have set limits on whom we befriend and if doing so has harmed our ability to listen

to each other.

So, too, we should not be afraid of people who are different from ourselves or who differ with us on certain issues. These kinds of friendships free us to share our doubts and seek the truth together, regardless of our starting points.

Seeking truth in the synodal process comes in the kind of conversation that asks what is in the heart of another, what troubles and worries the other.

This is how our conversations in the Spirit should occur: listening to what is in the heart of the other person, not trying to control the conversation and not being afraid where the conversation will go.

Timetables should be set aside. There is no schedule for completion. Time is in God’s hands, a reality that is particularly challenging for Americans.

What is required is the kind of conversation that

leads to conversion.

Mutually enhancing authority

Many laypeople involved in the synod were astonished that, for the first time, Church leaders actually listened to them. But none of the delegates should doubt their authority to speak.

We have good examples in the early Church of speaking truth to power that should guide us.

Fear is often behind the hesitation to speak the truth when it is uncomfortable. Those speaking hesitate because they fear rejection. Those hearing the truth fear it will require giving up control or change.

Leaders especially need to be observant of the fear of letting go of control and being open to change.

The fear of losing con-

trol runs deep in the psyche of Church leadership.

A transformative power

Fr Radcliffe’s talks helped us to understand that the Holy Father is calling us to envision a renewal of the whole church as a conversation in the Spirit.

It is a new ‘model of the Church’, which I believe has the promise of bringing about a renewal for how we make decisions in the Church and how we relate to one another at the universal, continental, national and local levels.

It is not surprising that the first name for the Church was ‘The Way’, for it was at the first synod, when the disciples went to Jerusalem, that they came to understand that the Lord, ever by their side through the Spirit, was the one leading them on the way and that their mission was to discern his movement.

That is the legacy the early church left us, which Pope Francis has made his own - and is inviting us to embrace - so that we, too, can be ‘surprised by joy’.

i This is an extract from Cardinal Cupich’s article in *Jesuit journal America magazine*, in which he believes the synod’s conversations can ‘revolutionize’ the Church. For the full interview go to <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2024/04/24/cupich-synod-conversations-spirit-radcliffe-247793>

‘Synodality: A renewed call to the prophecy of hope’

Interview with Sr Mary T. Barron, OLA, President of UISG



Mary T. Barron pictured with her first table group during the pre-synod Retreat in 2023 and for the first and last module of the Synod.

Luca Attanasio

This is the theme of the residential meeting which took place in November 22 to 24 at the “Fraterna Domus” Spirituality House in Sacrofano (Rome), organised by the executive councils of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) and the Union of Superiors General (USG). The event, which saw the participation of over 250 Superiors General, evenly distributed between male and female religious leaders, marked the first joint meeting of the two unions. It has been a response to the shared desire of the unions to continue walking together. The two unions, no strangers to joint initiatives, have intensified their collaboration since their online reflection on Pope Francis’s encyclical “*Fratelli Tutti*”. They also made a joint contribution to the first phase of the synodal process in 2022. To better understand the aims, the outcomes and the meaning of such an important event which is a contribution of the two unions to the path of the Synod on Synodality, *The Synodal Times* turned to Sr. Mary T Barron, OLA, President of UISG.

What were the main outcomes? and next steps?

Both Unions – the USG (men) and UISG (women) have their own manner and frequency of meeting with

their membership which is very different because by nature the two Unions are very different in terms of number and location of membership. There is already good collaboration between the two Unions. At the level of the two Boards, there are meetings every six months. There are also shared experiences and collaborations with joint commissions in different domains: JPIC, Care and Safeguarding to mention just some. Following the publication of the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, an online Assembly was organised which was well attended and well appreciated by membership. But this meeting in Sacrofano was the first in person gathering of such a large number of leaders of male and female Religious Congregations and Societies of Apostolic Life.

The focus of the meeting was in the first instance to share with the participants the experience of the recently completed first session of the Synod and to also help us begin to focus on the upcoming Jubilee 2025, hence the title: “Synodality: A Renewed Call to the Prophecy of Hope.”

As with the Synod, the fruitfulness of the process used during the meeting is of much greater importance than any outcomes in terms of concrete actions. We replicated the Synod methodology by using round tables, engaging in conversations in the Spirit

and punctuating the sharing with many moments of pause to allow the words of others to sink in and to allow us to notice what was moving in us as we listened, coming to a sense of where the Spirit was guiding us as table groups. This time there was an equal number of men and women participants at each table which was very refreshing. Of course our time was very limited but we sensed the call to return to our sources, to reclaim a more contemplative stance in all aspects of our lives. We realised that to be synodal and to be prophets of hope we simply need to live authentically the call to Religious Life which is meant to be radical and from the peripheries. By so doing we are bearers of Christian Hope. We simply need to recalibrate, and go back to the Source.

Commenting on the sense of the meeting, you stated that it “can give new impetus to the synodal journey together, helping us to imagine new possibilities, calling us to live out our responsibilities, to continue the synodal path to deeper communion, to wider participation and to an ever more fruitful mission with all members of the Church.” Did it realise this desires of yours? How?

I am very excited by the possibilities offered by

this first in presence meeting. It was a very profound time together of prayer and sharing. It allowed us to get to know each other better and the first step in any good collaborative initiatives has to be the development of relationships rooted in trust and in our common faith in Jesus Christ.

As we are called to continue the Synodal Journey with all the People of God, more opportunities will emerge for male and female religious life to contribute together along this journey.

What was the first reaction of the world of religious life to the call of the Pope to start and concentrate efforts on a Synod with a totally new format and with a different and large participation? And what does being involved in such a demanding and inspiring process mean for your world?

Being involved in the synodal process, which is both demanding and inspiring, is a great privilege for all in Religious Life and is an opportunity for profound renewal. Back in 2021 when the Synod on Synodality was announced



with the various steps beginning at local level and culminating in the 2023 Synod Assembly, we Religious welcomed this call enthusiastically, recognising the potential the process offered for renewal. We are deeply appreciative of the new format, and the wider participation. This enthusiasm and appreciation for the process has not waned, and in fact has deepened, as the journey evolved and the synodal path was extended to 2024, including two Synod Sessions in Rome. We are particularly appreciative that lay participants and female religious participants, for the first time, are recognised as full members, with voting rights. This synodal journey is an area in which USG and UISG have worked closely: initially offering all membership

the opportunity to reflect on the key synodal questions from the perspective of Religious Life. A summary document was offered to the Synod Secretariat which is the fruit of the reflections of global Religious Life and is an important document for us as we continue the journey and which we have struggled to put into practice. Within Religious Life we also sense this call to renewal and to a recalibration of returning to the essence of our being. It is true that for many in Religious Life, processes for listening, dialogue, seeking the common wisdom of the group under the guidance of the Spirit of God, are not new but rather are constitutive of how we live out our communal consecrated life. Notwithstanding this reality, the shared reflections of USG and UISG pointed to five

“Just as we sense this call to Synodality is not a new fad within the Church but is simply a Spirit-guided process to help us live into the beautiful vision of Church that emerged in the second Vatican Council”

“We will live into an epochal change in our Church which will bring us back to the essence of the early Church”



calls for Religious Life: *to be rooted in the Spirit* recognising that Synodality requires conversion and becomes our path to formation and spirituality; a call for a *new type of mutual relations* which invites Institutes to make a clear call for dialogue between cultures and generations within their membership and beyond; *openness to collaboration* with other Institutes and with all the faithful so our witness is stronger and mission is more fruitful; *formation for synodality* which calls for wisdom, openness, exercise and apprenticeship; and *leadership and governance* calling us to take the necessary time and processes to invite fuller participation of all membership.

Religious Life is challenged by the Synodal process, to live fully into the radical prophetic witness that is its call and its place in the Church and Society. As the USG-UISG contribution to the Synod highlighted, *Synodality challenges ministries that are not located in areas of need but in comfort zones. The cry of people who are poor and vulnerable on all continents must be heard.*

We in Religious life

have to have an honest self-reflection of how synodal our own processes actually are, of how prophetic our witness is in today's world and continue the synodal processes to help us recalibrate under the guidance of the Spirit.

Do you think this time is a time of real changing in the Catholic Church, an epochal change similar to that triggered by the Second Vatican Council? And if so in what ways?

Having participated in the synodal process since the opening in October 2021 and having just completed the first session of the Synod in October 2023, I have the sense that we are in an era of epochal change. I have been following many people's contributions and follow-up after the Synod 2023 and there is a common thread in many: we cannot go back to how we were.

I sense we are in a moment where we have pressed pause: pausing our learned habits of how we are Church, pausing to truly listen and be moved by what we have heard from our brothers and sisters from all around the world, pausing to take the time to pray together and try to

The Pope with all the 10 delegates sent by UISG (female) and USG (male).



detect what the Spirit is saying to us as a Church, pausing to review how we have been doing with implementing the vision of Church from Vatican II. The image that comes to mind is of Elijah in the book of Kings, waiting for God to pass. And God is not in the powerful wind or in the raging fire. God is in the gentle breeze and Elijah immediately knows it is God and covers his face.

As we take the time to truly listen to each other, to pray with what we have heard, and to respond from a deep inner conviction that is of the Spirit, we will live into an epochal change in our Church which will bring us back to the essence of the early Church we find in the Acts of the Apostles, a Church rooted in service for mission.

What can the reality of religious life offer and take from the process of the Synod on Synodality?

Religious Life has a very wide-reaching and committed membership in all the local Churches across the world. With our experience of communal process of discernment, we do have a certain wisdom to offer on the journey. With our presence in the peripheries we can also be attentive to ensuring that 'people in poverty are truly protagonists of the Church's Synodal Journey' as the synthesis document states.

The synod on Synodality offers Religious Life the opportunity to evaluate the Synodality of our own processes, inviting us to an honest assessment of how participative, how spirit-guided our processes actually are. It invites us to look at our life and see if all we are and do is rooted in service for mission. We are invited to see if our ministries are in the peripheries in areas of need or if we have become somewhat

comfortable in comfort zones. The calls emerging from the synod process for accountability is also a call to Religious Life for greater accountability.

Finally, another novelty of the synod was the large and extensive call for representatives of the so-called global south to take part in the assemblies, what do you think?

Our Church has been a Western Church for centuries and we are in a time of change where the youth and vibrancy in the Church is located very much in the Global South. It was extremely important to have many voices from all parts of the universal Church represented at Synod 2023. Each culture has different expressions of being Church and the cultural experiences of decision making and taking are also extremely informative and interesting for us as we grow into our essence as a synodal missionary Church.

I am from an international

Congregation founded for Evangelisation in Africa. Forty years ago when our Constitutions guiding the Congregation were being updated for that time, there was a phrase included that when choosing delegates for General Chapter, care must be taken to ensure African Sisters are well represented. This came from the wisdom and realisation that we had to intentionally create the space for participation because with our blindness and unintentional prejudices, these things do not happen automatically.

I think the same is true in the synodal journey: we have to intentionally create the spaces for participation and I think we must continue to do better in fostering a more just representation of the universal Church in synodal gatherings.

i This article is republished from January as Sr Mary T Barron will be speaking in Dublin this week as part of an AMRI/All Hallows initiative



A visit to the Catacombs - four sisters from UISG from four continents Sr Maria Cimpermann, USA, Elysée Izermana Burundi Africa, Maria Nirmalini India and Irishwoman Sr Mary T. Barron.

The appeal of our devotion to Mary



Penelope Middelboe

Catholics devote the entire month of May to Mary. In the West, May is a most beautiful time of year when new life appears everywhere, bursting forth at unexpected speed. So it's only fitting to dedicate this month to the woman who gave new life to the world.

Flowers have traditionally been associated with Mary because of their sheer loveliness. Medieval Christians apparently adopted the rose as the emblem of Mary's love of God (Rosary means 'Garland of Roses'); the white lily (Madonna lily) for her purity; and the marigold for her radiant heavenly glory. Herbs represent her bitter sorrows and her healing mercy. The flowers of the rosemary bush turned blue when Mary hung her coat on a rosemary bush during the Holy Family's flight to Egypt. In fact, I have a Spanish friend who has a Mary Garden in her 'huerto' or allotment where she grows flowers in honour of Mary to decorate the Church. Her dark house is full of lilies and roses in vases being kept cool for their moment of glory on the altar.

I was lucky enough to make my first communion in May. It was held at a nearby convent with beautiful gardens. It is now an old people's home. After the Communion breakfast (we fasted for 12 hours in those days) we were taken out into the gardens. The girls were given little baskets of May flowers to scatter solemnly in our white dresses and veils along the winding paths. It remains a precious, very Catholic memory.

Value

This got me thinking about what it is that we particularly value about being a Catholic. And I've turned to the synodal feedback from a parish I know. They gathered their parishioners' views in an extremely user-friendly way by seating them in small groups at tables, with paper and pencil, and asking "What keeps you in the Catholic faith?"

Top, naturally, was Jesus and his teachings - faith itself ("without God there lurks despair" one said) - but to this they added the Sacraments, the Sunday Obligation, and the appeal of our devotion to Mary.

This was followed by being



part of a community, attending Mass as a family, and a children's liturgy (all of which had been damaged by the pandemic with no online services).

Then they emphasised having a good priest (as in an effective spiritual leader). They were clearly aware that this is not a given. Next up was the power of prayer - being able to spend time with God, away from outside pressures, and through prayer being encouraged to be a better person, being helped to find contentment and peace in a troubled world.

“We pray to her because she is the Mother of God, because she represents obedience to God's will”

Finally they mentioned involvement from birth, and habit (which they didn't see as necessarily a bad thing) - the comfort of rituals and traditions and hymn singing. Good Catholic schools also made the list along with ecumenical groups (they added “we need more of these”)

and interaction with others - including all faiths and none.

Now of course a lot of the above is not peculiar to being a Catholic Christian, but this is what they wrote down. I'll skip over for now the feedback to the second question, “What stops Catholics from practising their faith?”

But let's look more closely at “the appeal of our devotion to Mary” - at the top of the list. A friend who calls herself Anglo-Catholic says she loves the Eucharist and the Mass but “can't do Mary”. I try to explain that we do pray to Mary but not because Jesus won't listen. We pray to her because she is the Mother of God, because she represents obedience to God's will, because she bravely risked being shunned by society or worse when her pregnancy was discovered, because she lived many years pondering in her heart the pain of the crucifixion of her son, because she understands what it means to bring about the Kingdom of God on Earth? Yes, these and many other reasons.

Magnificat

The Magnificat is the creation of the Gospel writer Luke. He has envisaged Mary's response to her

cousin Elizabeth, her song of praise to God, and God's plan for his Kingdom on earth - to “scatter the proud; bring down the powerful from their thrones, and lift up the lowly, fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty”.

“The Magnificat is a revolutionary song of salvation whose political, economic, and social dimensions cannot be blunted”

Luke may well have turned to the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel written about 550BC for inspiration. Hannah was another faithful young woman. She believed that God had made it possible, finally, for her to conceive the child she longed for. In her song of praise, Hannah discerns (is perhaps the first person to discern?) the universal laws of the Kingdom. It's because of this she is called a prophetess:

He raises the poor from the dust

and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honour.

American feminist theologian Sr Elizabeth Johnson wrote in 2012: “The Magnificat is a revolutionary song of salvation whose political, economic, and social dimensions cannot be blunted. People in need in every society hear a blessing in this canticle. The battered woman, the single parent without resources, those without food on the table or without even a table, the homeless family, the young abandoned to their own devices, the old who are discarded: all are encompassed in the hope Mary proclaims.”

Frighten

The Magnificat does indeed frighten the powerful. I was amazed to learn it was banned in India under British rule; banned in Guatemala in the 1980s and banned by the military junta of Argentina after the mothers of the desaparecido - the children who disappeared during the Dirty War (1976-1983) - placed Mary's words on posters. Theologian Warren Carter gives us some helpful historical background. In the time of Jesus 2-3% of the population was rich, while the majority lived a subsistence-level existence. “Mary articulates an end to economic structures that are exploitative and unjust. She speaks of a time when all will enjoy

the good things given by God,” he said. No wonder Oscar Romero, priest and martyr, drew a comparison between Mary and the poor and powerless people in his own community.

“It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung”

However, perhaps it's theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who is most helpful for me in shining a light on why we pray to Mary. Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor born in Poland who was executed by the Nazis in Flossenbürg concentration camp in Bavaria in April 1945. He was 39 years old. He said of the Magnificat, the Song of Mary, “it is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings... It is a hard, strong, inexorable song about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind”. In our prayers to Mary we acknowledge our powerlessness and the power of God, as she did.

“This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings... It is a hard, strong, inexorable song about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind”

The real purpose of Israel's occupation of Palestine



Fr Shay Cullen

It was a shocking and painful 'no' vote by the United States to veto a draft declaration at the United Nations (UN) Security Council recognising Palestine as a full member of the United Nations.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas condemned the US veto and said it was "unfair, unethical, and unjustified".

Some 12 members of the Security Council approved the recommendation to the 193-member UN General Assembly for its approval that "the State of Palestine be admitted to membership" of the UN. Only the conservative British and neutral Switzerland abstained.

The United States is more and more isolated by the world community by its seemingly endless support for Israel even when it bombed and killed 35,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, starving more to death, and bombed Iran.

All this was done with US-supplied munitions and missiles in retaliation for the killing of 1,200 Israelis and taking of 250 hostages by Hamas, named as a terrorist organisation by western countries.

In a strong emotional statement, the Palestinian Ambassador Riyad Mansour at the UN said: "The fact that this resolution did not pass will not break our will and it will not defeat our determination. We will not stop in our effort."

Natanyahu

The declared hope of most nations and of Palestine is for an end to hostilities, peace-making and a two-state solution. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel is totally against a two-state solution and so are some of his backers. The question is why?

He is the longest-serving prime minister in the country's history, having served for a total of over 16 years. He is very unpopular in Israel for his savage retaliation and conduct of the war against Hamas and the killing of so many innocent Palestinians



A man grieves over the body of an employee from the World Central Kitchen (WCK) non-governmental organisation, at Al-Aqsa hospital in Deir Al-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip April 1. The worker was killed along with six others, including foreign aid workers, in an Israeli airstrike. Photo: OSV News/Ramadan Abed, Reuters

“Netanyahu allowed this money to flow to Hamas was to keep the Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza corrupted, appeased, divided and fighting each other politically”

and his failure to win the release of 150 or so hostages held by Hamas.

In 2019, Netanyahu was found to have committed criminal acts such as breach of trust, bribery, and fraud. When he is out of power, it is likely he could be convicted and go to jail.

“Netanyahu indirectly armed Hamas, a policy opposed by Israeli military commanders”

He formed an extreme fanatical right-wing government to stay in power and avoid prosecution. He is also criticised for his total opposition to any two-state solution.

It was on his watch that the savage attack by Hamas fighters took place October 7, 2023. He is also responsible for allowing Hamas to grow so strong by allowing huge sums of money to flow

to them from Iran and Qatar and other sources.

These payments in US dollars were flown into Israel and delivered directly to Hamas in the Gaza strip.

That is proven in a powerful video expose, well-documented by the *BBC Panorama* programme titled 'Hamas's Secret Financial Empire' by John Ware.

Prime Minister Netanyahu indirectly armed Hamas, a policy opposed by Israeli military commanders who warned Mr Netanyahu.

The *BBC*, citing documents and interviews with retired Israeli military intelligence commanders, showed that there was nothing secret about these funds.

Plans

The reason Benjamin Netanyahu allowed this money to flow to Hamas was to keep the Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza corrupted, appeased, divided and fighting each other politically.

The policy and plan are that they must never be

allowed to unite and form a single Palestine state. That would defeat the long-term goals of Zionist elements in Israel.

Their plan is to permanently divide and conquer, and to claim all of Palestine lands as part of the State of Israel. The surviving Palestinians would be powerless and contained.

But Israel's policy is to occupy more and more of Palestine land with illegal settlements, even killing and driving away the original owners and making their stolen lands their own.

“What they are doing has reached a state of mass killing, called 'genocide' by the International Court of Justice last January 2024”

The same goes on in East

“Genocide is the gross violation of human rights and is immoral, criminal, illegal, wrong and unjust. It is the total destruction of the Palestinian homes and is a war by starvation driven by greed”

Jerusalem. There is little or no justice for the Palestinians.

There is hardly a squeak of protest from Western politicians and leaders other than vocal Irish campaigners and politicians that denounce the destruction that Israel does in the name of self-defence.

While Israel has a right to self-defence against terrorist attacks, what they are doing has reached a state of mass killing, called "genocide" by the International Court of Justice last January 2024.

Genocide is the gross violation of human rights and is immoral, criminal, illegal, wrong and unjust. It is the total destruction of the Palestinian homes and is a war by starvation driven by greed.

Resources

The military assaults fuelled by revenge in retaliation for the biggest defeat suffered by the Israeli army ever by Hamas are indefensibly funded by Mr Netanyahu

himself as explained above, thanks to the *BBC Panorama* investigative report.

There is a grim and deadly impunity for all this granted to Israel by the western world. No demand for a ceasefire by them other than a weak whimpering cry for restraint. Millions of people around the world are calling for an immediate ceasefire but they are ignored while Israel continues bombing.

One compelling explanation of the massive western support for Israel to continue to occupy Palestine and even take total control of the lands and sea is of course the massive deposits of oil and gas that lie beneath Palestinian land and waters off the coast of Gaza.

“The Palestinians have no share so long as they are divided and not recognised as a sovereign state”

A UN Trade Development Report says "geologists and resources economists have confirmed that the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) lies above sizeable reservoirs of oil and natural gas wealth, in Area C of the West Bank and the Mediterranean coast off the Gaza Strip".

The new discoveries of oil and natural gas in the Levant Basin, amount to 122 trillion cubic feet of natural gas at a net value of \$453 billion (in 2017 prices) and 1.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil at a net value of about \$71 billion.

This offers an opportunity to distribute and share about US\$524 billion among the different parties in the region and promote peace and cooperation among old belligerents, the study notes.

Israel is presently tapping into those resources with a huge oil rig in the Mediterranean. These resources are partially owned by the Palestinians and denied to them.

The Palestinians have no share so long as they are divided and not recognised as a sovereign state. Is that what is behind the veto by the United States?

If there was an independent Palestine state, it would have total control over its own natural resources and reap the benefits for the well-being and recovery of its own people.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Franciscans file petition to stop cable cars from passing over Holy Land Catholic cemetery

● This past February, the Custody of the Holy Land filed a petition in the Jerusalem District Court against the confiscation of a piece of land inside the Catholic cemetery, which is located on the southern hillside of Mount Zion and serves as a parish cemetery.

The affair is part of a project to build a cable car running from First Station (the shopping and entertainment area in West Jerusalem) to the Old City's Dung Gate (the main access to the Western Wall and close to the City of David archaeological site), passing over the Hinnom Valley (or Geenna). The cable cars would be strung over some 15 pylons, from about 30 to 85 feet high, and would ferry up to 3,000 people per hour in up to 72 cars that can each hold 10 people.

US birth and fertility rates drop to record lows, according to report

● Provisional data published by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) last week showed that the fertility rate in the United States hit a record low and the total number of births in the country was the lowest it's been in decades.

According to the report, slightly fewer than 3.6 million babies were born in 2023, or 54.4 births per 1,000 women aged 15 through 44. This was a 2% decline in total births and a 3% decline

in births per 1,000 women when compared with the previous year.

The total fertility rate, which estimates how many children an average woman would have over the course of her life based on the yearly data, was just over 1.6 births per woman, which was a 2% decline from the previous year. This is well below the replacement rate needed to sustain a population, which is about 2.1 births per woman over her life.

Most priests in African country are sons of Muslims, bishop says

● Bishop Natale Paganelli, 66, arrived as a Xaverian missionary in 2005 in Sierra Leone. In an interview with the Catholic magazine *Omnes*, he noted that the majority of Catholic priests in that African country are sons of Muslims.

"Most priests are sons of Muslims. Why? Because of the schools," explained the prelate of Italian origin, who also spent 22 years in Mexico and who was apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Makeni in Sierra Leone from 2012–2023.

"When the Xaverians arrived they used a very interesting strategy. Since there were almost no schools in the country's north, they began to establish them, first primary schools, then secondary schools. Evangelisation came through the schools," he continued.

Pro-life group celebrates over 22,000 lives saved from abortion

● A US national organisation that organises sidewalk counselling - the practice of giving women information outside abortion clinics about their other options - is celebrating more than 22,000 lives saved this month on its 10th anniversary. Sidewalk Advocates for Life (SAFL) president Lauren Muzyka said that even in a post-Roe America, their work is very much needed.

The latest numbers from Planned Parenthood reported more than 374,000 abortions, its highest-ever number, the year after *Roe v. Wade* was overturned. Abortion pill access is on the rise, with the pro-choice Guttmacher Institute reporting that this accounts for more than 60% of abortions in 2023.

Meanwhile, the US Supreme Court is currently hearing arguments about the safety of the abortion drug mifepristone.

But Ms Muzyka is able to offer a perspective from "out on the sidewalk", where Sidewalk Advocates encounter women seeking abortions every day.

Islamists burn down homes of Egypt's long-suffering Christians

Muslim extremists set on fire several homes of Christians in Minya, a province in southern Egypt, in a continuation of anti-Christian violence less than two weeks before Orthodox Christians celebrate Easter.

According to *The New Arab*, when anti-Christian fanatics failed to dispossess Christians of their homes in retribution for attempting to build a church in Al-Fawakher village, they proceeded to burn down the houses on the evening of April 23.

On his official Twitter account, Coptic Orthodox Bishop Anba Macarius wrote on April 24 that Egyptian security forces "brought the situation under control, arresting the instigators and perpetrators", and that the government "will compensate those affected and hold the perpetrators accountable".

After noting that calm now reigns in Al-Fawakher, Macarius added: "May God protect our dear country, Egypt, from all harm".

CNA reached out to authorities of the Coptic Orthodox Church but did not receive a response by the time of publication. Video of the burning homes was shared on social media that featured celebratory music and Arabic lyrics.

Christianity in Egypt dates to the very beginnings of the faith and nearly 10% of the country's population of 111 million are Christian. Most



A crucifix is pictured in a file photo as Coptic Christians pray in Cairo. (OSV News photo/stringer via Reuters)

Egyptian Christians belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church, while about 2.5% belong to the Coptic Catholic Church and other particular churches.

Christians constitute the largest minority in Egypt, and Macarius leads the Coptic Christians of Minya Province, where approximately one-third of the country's Christians live. He narrowly survived an assassination attempt more than 10 years ago.

The Open Doors organisation, which monitors

persecution against followers of Christ, ranks Egypt as the 38th most dangerous country in the world to be a Christian. In 2018, seven Christians were killed by Muslim terrorists who attacked a bus carrying pilgrims.

In 2017, Islamic State terrorists bombed two Coptic Orthodox churches, killing over 40 people. And in December 2016, a terrorist detonated a bomb killing himself and 189 worshippers at Sts Peter and Paul Church, injuring more than 400 oth-

ers.

On his 2017 visit to Egypt, Pope Francis celebrated a Mass for the small Catholic community and called on Christians to forgive the atrocities. Relations between the Vatican and the Coptic Orthodox Church, the leader of which is Pope Tawadros II, have improved in recent years.

Earlier this year, Pope Francis recognized the Coptic Orthodox Church's canonisation of 21 Coptic Orthodox Martyrs of Libya.

Prosecutor in Congo investigates Cardinal Ambongo

The Archbishop of Kinshasa, Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo, a consistent critic of the Congolese government and adviser to the Pope, has evoked the wrath of the Public Prosecutor General's Office in the country as a consequence of several statements in sermons about the running of the country.

The cardinal, who does not hold back with his criticism of the Pope on

occasion either, was informed that the Public Prosecutor General's Office of the Democratic Republic of the Congo launched an investigation at the weekend because of several statements in sermons and the media about the country's security and government, Radio France Internationale reported.

According to the report, Attorney General Firmin M'Vonde had already

formally summoned the archbishop, who is close to Pope Francis, April 22, but the cardinal "declined the invitation". According to RFI, the archdiocese of Kinshasa stated that the summons had not reached either the diocese or the cardinal. A new summons and possibly the opening of criminal proceedings are now likely to follow.

Pope's top deputy calls EU abortion vote a 'radical attack' on life

In a wide-ranging interview, Pope Francis's top diplomat said a recent vote by the European Parliament to style abortion as a fundamental right constitutes a "radical attack" on human life.

"When life is attacked in such a radical way, you truly have to ask what kind

of future we want to build," said Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's Secretary of State, adding that the situation has produced "great sadness in the depths of my heart". The comments came ahead of June elections for the European Parliament, when abortion rights are

expected to be among the voting issues.

"When life is attacked in such a radical way, you truly have to ask what kind of future we want to build. I feel a great sadness in the depths of my heart, and I don't even have the words to express it adequately," he

said.

"I repeat, I feel extremely sad facing this way of approaching the situation. How can we think that abortion is a right? That it can assure a future to our society?" Cardinal Parolin asked. "I don't understand," he said. "I truly don't understand."



Edited by Brandon Scott
brandon@irishcatholic.ie



Listening to the cry of the faithful



Pope Francis gestures as he rides the popemobile around St Peter's Square before a meeting with members of the Italian Catholic Action lay association at the Vatican April 25. The Vatican said some 60,000 people were present in and around the square. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

Catholic school parent stabbed outside Mass celebrated by US archbishop

San Francisco police arrested a homeless man last Sunday for allegedly stabbing a parent from a nearby Catholic school after an altercation involving the two outside a historic Catholic church in the city.

Twenty-five-year-old Marko Asauluk of San Francisco was charged with attempted murder and eight counts of assault with a deadly weapon.

The Catholic school father, who was released from the hospital Sunday, only suf-

fered a minor injury to his leg, Fr Tho Bui, pastor of Sts Peter and Paul Church, told CNA News in an email.

San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone was conferring the sacrament of confirmation on the parish school's students and students from a nearby parish during a noon Mass when a "disruptive man" entered the church, as Fr Bui described him.

The man was walking up and down the main aisle of the church holding a bottle of

wine, ABC7 reported. Fr Bui said a group of parishioners and parents told the disruptive man to leave the church and escorted him out.

ABC7 reported that the man was speaking with someone outside the church and said "Jesus is not real". A "scuffle" then occurred on the sidewalk and that's when the man stabbed the parent in the leg, according to the priest.

The suspect, who was reported to be homeless, was arrested the same day, Fr Bui said. Police said when

they arrived at the scene, aid was given to the victim, who was brought to the hospital with "non-life-threatening injuries". Witnesses helped the police locate the suspect, police said.

Fr Bui called the incident "sad" and "extremely disturbing" but noted "the good news is that the criminal is behind bars, charged with attempted murder, assault with a deadly weapon, and is being held without bail".

Scottish bishops say assisted suicide bill 'takes us down a dangerous spiral'

In a pastoral letter addressed to all Scottish Catholics, the bishops of Scotland have called for people to urge the country's parliament to reject proposed legislation legalising assisted suicide. The Scottish Parliament saw the "Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scot-

land) Bill" introduced on March 27 by parliamentary member Liam McArthur. If passed, the bill would make Scotland the first country in the UK to permit assisted dying to its residents.

"Assisted suicide, which allows us to kill our brothers and sisters, takes us

down a dangerous spiral that always puts at risk the most vulnerable members of our society, including the elderly, the disabled, and those who struggle with mental health. All those in fact who cannot stand up for themselves," the bishops say in their statement.

Pope Francis may visit the US this year

● Pope Francis is reportedly considering returning to the United States in September to speak before the United Nations General Assembly.

The news was initially reported by the French Catholic newspaper La Croix and has not yet been officially confirmed by the Vatican. A source from the Vatican Secretariat of State, meanwhile, told CNA that "a formal invitation has arrived from Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and Pope Francis seems inclined to respond positively".

If the New York trip occurs, the Pope would visit the United Nations during its "Summit of the Future", which the international body will convene from September 22-23.

Pope to celebrate Mass in 'floating city'

● This weekend, on Sunday, April 28, Pope Francis will celebrate Mass in St Mark's Square during a one-day trip to Venice, Italy. Afterward, he will privately venerate the relics of St Mark the Evangelist inside the basilica.

This papal visit to the iconic basilica puts a spotlight on the famous church dedicated to St. Mark and on its significance to the famous "floating city."

St. Mark's Basilica, also known as the "Church of Gold", is a Byzantine cathedral in St Mark's Square. Founded in 828 AD after the remains of St Mark were transported from Alexandria, Egypt, the basilica has undergone several transformations.

6,000 grandparents gather in the Vatican

● "A Caress and a Smile" is the name of the event that will take place Saturday, April 27, in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall where elderly people, grandparents, and grandchildren from Italy will meet Pope Francis.

A total of 6,000 grandparents and their grandchildren will arrive this week at the Vatican for a special gathering with the Holy Father, an initiative presented by the Holy See's Press Office today.

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, noted that Italy has the second-highest number of elderly people in the world and that for the first time in history, four generations are living together, which "had never happened before".

Top CEO signs Vatican's AI ethics pledge

● The CEO of Cisco Systems signed the Vatican's artificial intelligence ethics pledge last week, becoming the latest technology giant to join the Church's call for ethical and responsible use of AI.

Chuck Robbins, the chief executive of the multinational digital communications conglomerate, met privately with Pope Francis on April 24 before signing the Rome Call for AI Ethics, a document by the Pontifical Academy for Life.

The document, first published by the pontifical academy in February 2020, has previously been signed by Microsoft President Brad Smith and IBM Executive John Kelly III.

Vatican belatedly weighs in on Italian abortion row

● After appearing to largely avoid a burgeoning Italian debate over abortion policy, the Vatican has belatedly entered the fray in a way perceived as at least indirectly supportive of a proposal from the country's centre-right government. Abortion has been legal in Italy since 1978.

Recently, the conservative coalition under Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni proposed allowing pro-life groups to be included among the consultants to publicly funded family planning clinics, where women seeking an abortion are required to obtain a certificate attesting to the state of their pregnancy.

Asked for a comment on the government's proposal, Cardinal Pietro Parolin said he didn't want to enter into the "technical details" of the proposal. Nevertheless, he did comment on its substance. "We're in favour of life, and also of all those instruments which can help to affirm the right to life, above all for women who find themselves in difficulty," Parolin said.



Letter from Brussels

European bishops back EU enlargement, but warn against ideology, 'narrow visions'



Elise Ann Allen

Europe's bishops have voiced support for the European Union's future enlargement plans, saying it provides a unique opportunity to showcase the value of fraternity, but they also cautioned against the imposition of ideology and the pursuit of particular interests.

In a statement issued during their April 17-19 spring plenary assembly in Łomża, Poland, the Commission of Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) praised European integration as a process aimed at guaranteeing "peace, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and prosperity".

It is also a process, they said, that is "based also on Christian values, like the recognition of the dignity of the human person, subsidiarity, solidarity and the pursuit of the common good". The bishops recalled the EU's significant enlargement process in May 2004, when it added 10 new member states, marking what the bishops said "was the realisation of a united Europe that could 'breathe with its two lungs', bringing Eastern and Western Europe together into one community of different peoples, but sharing a common history."

This step, they said, made Europe "closer to what it is called to be, and a powerful witness to our times of how fraternal cooperation, in pursuit of peace and rooted in shared values, can prevail over conflicts and divisions".

Challenges

According to COMECE, a larger union has also brought new challenges with it, with a political and economic integration accompanied by what can often be a "questionable" dialogue among various nationalities, cultures and historical experiences.

"As long as a true European spirit that includes a sense of belonging to the same community and of a shared responsibility for it, is not fully developed, trust within the European Union may be undermined and the forging of unity may be confronted with attempts to put particular interests and narrow visions above the common good," the bishops said.

They noted that while various crises in past years have brought an "enlargement fatigue", recent developments such as the war in Ukraine have created a new drive for access to the EU, especially for the Balkans.



European Union flags flutter outside the EU headquarters in Brussels. Photo: CNS/Yves Herman, Reuters

"Beyond being a geopolitical necessity for stability on our continent, we regard the prospect of a future EU membership as a strong message of hope for the citizens of the candidate countries and as an answer to their desire for living in peace and justice," the bishops said.

Expansion of the EU is an opportunity "to update the idea of a united Europe rooted in practical solidarity"

However, they said accession to the EU is "a two-way process", and that countries desiring EU membership must continue making structural reforms in crucial areas such as "the rule of law, strengthening of democratic institutions, fundamental rights, including religious freedom and freedom of the media, as well as fight against corruption, tackling organised crime."

A fair and citizen-centred enlargement process must also encourage and respond adequately to these efforts, while avoiding any "double-standards in the treatment of the candidate countries", the bishops said.

Enlargement efforts also require the EU to be ready to welcome new

members, they said, saying expansion of the EU is an opportunity "to update the idea of a united Europe rooted in practical solidarity" and to recover the great ideals that inspired its foundation.

"An enlarged Union will also have to re-think its ways of governance, in order to allow its members and institutions to act in a timely and effective manner," COMECE said, saying any adjustments to EU budgetary frameworks, policies or other areas of cooperation, should weigh the potential impact on people, especially the most vulnerable populations of current and potential future member states.

Reflection

The bishops called for a deeper reflection on the "common value basis and the special bonds that unite us as a European family", saying, "Europe has a future if it is truly a union, cherishing unity in diversity".

"The principles of subsidiarity, of respect for the different traditions and cultures that all together form Europe, and of following the path of practical solidarity against the one of ideological imposition, are paramount," they said.

Bishop Mariano Crociata of Noto

opened COMECE's spring plenary by pointing to the importance of upcoming EU parliamentary elections, scheduled for June, saying they are a unique and critical way to strengthen the EU.

"In a multipolar world that sees the rise of new leading powers, a European Union divided by internal quarrels, unable to speak with one voice, can only prepare itself to pay the high price of marginalisation"

"It's vital to help our countries, starting with our faithful, to take the elections seriously, valuing participation and responsibility, possibly in line with mature Christian awareness," he said, repeating pleas from COMECE leaders for Europe to remember its Christian roots as the elections approach.

On the EU's role in the world, Crociata also stressed the importance of unity, saying, "in a multipolar world that sees the rise of new leading powers, a European Union divided by internal quarrels, unable to speak with one voice, can only

prepare itself to pay the high price of marginalisation".

Anniversary

During their assembly, COMECE members reflected on the 20th anniversary of the big 2004 EU enlargement and they engaged with various political and religious figures in evaluating the successes and failures of that step.

Among those with whom the assembly met were Ján Figel, a member of the Board of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, former Special Envoy for the promotion of Freedom of Religion and Belief outside the EU, and Chief Negotiator in Slovakia's EU accession process.

They also met with Alojz Peterle, former Prime Minister of Slovenia and former Member of the European Parliament, and Professor Tomáš Halík of Charles University and President of the Czech Christian Academy.

Currently the EU is considering several new accession requests, including that of Ukraine and Moldova, and after having granted official candidate status to Georgia. COMECE's next assembly is scheduled to take place this fall in Brussels, from November 27-29, 2024.

Elise Ann Allen is a journalist for Crux.

Letters

Letter of the week

Selflessly ministering in dangerous situations

Dear Editor,

I am writing to commend the courageous work of priests like Fr Ademir Marques OFM Cap., who selflessly minister to individuals experiencing homelessness and poverty, often facing dangerous situations in the process.

The recent incident at the Capuchin Day Centre in Dublin, where Fr Marques was attacked – thankfully not badly injured – while volunteering, highlights the inherent risks involved in serving vulnerable populations. Despite the dangers, Fr Marques and countless other priests continue to dedicate themselves to this noble cause, embodying the spirit of com-

passion and service.

Their commitment to providing assistance and support to those in need is truly inspiring. Fr Marques's swift recovery and subsequent determination to return to his ministry demonstrate his unwavering dedication to his calling.

It is essential to recognise the vital role that priests play in our communities, particularly in addressing the complex issues of homelessness and poverty. Their presence offers comfort, hope, and a sense of dignity to individuals who often feel marginalised and forgotten by society.

In the face of adversity, priests like Fr Marques exemplify the values of

empathy, solidarity, and resilience. Their actions serve as a reminder of the transformative power of love and kindness in the midst of adversity.

As members of the Catholic community, we owe a debt of gratitude to these courageous individuals who tirelessly serve others, often at great personal risk. Let us continue to offer our prayers and support to Fr Marques, his fellow priests, and all those who work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of the most vulnerable among us.

Yours etc.,
Deirdre Higgins
Ballybough, Dublin 3

Our design is for complete dependency on God

Dear Editor,

I saw a comic book sketch of a boy kneeling by his bedside saying his evening prayers as his dad walked by the open door of the bedroom. The boy looked up and said, "Hi Dad; just saying my prayers; do you need anything while I'm here?" His dad looked like he'd had a long day.

At first it made me laugh; but as I pondered it I realised something. Our design is for complete dependency on God and Intimacy with Him. We are not meant to figure out life on our own. Prayer is in fact the only way to make life work.

In our day, as the pace of life quickens, the pressure mounts, and demands are placed upon people that our ancestors would never comprehend; perhaps everyone in the modern world could embrace the Navy Seals saying "The only easy day was yesterday". We are even harassed by our own telephones!

Often at best people try to shoe-horn God in on Sunday morning and a quick prayer as they run out of the house. But we need a lot more than that to survive let alone thrive. Jesus spent whole nights in prayer. Even



Jesus needed to. To commune with the Father, the only one who truly knew him (and the only one who knows and understands us).

Prayer is the oxygen for the soul, without it we will shrivel up and die. The human heart is the meeting place for God and man, he is already there waiting for us to enter, share our troubles with him so he can immediately get to work on them.

Once we realise the importance of prayer, we will see the difference it makes. Mother Teresa commented once that if she had a lot

to accomplish she would pray for an hour first and if she knew she had a great deal to do that day then she would pray for two hours first. That's how it works, the economics of the Kingdom of God. And in doing so we also receive peace in our hearts; instead of agitation.

Try it and see!

Yours etc.,
Stephen Clark
Manila, Philippines

Best catechism produced in 2,000 years

Dear Editor,

I never quite agree with the regular voices that highlight the shortage of catechetical formation – like *The Irish Catholic* article 'Laity 'crying out' for good faith formation' [*The Irish Catholic* – April 4, 2024].

I don't know of a more accessible and better faith formation than reading YOU-CAT, short for Youth Catechism. It is easily accessible online at Amazon and I believe it to be the best catechism that we've ever

produced in 2,000 years.

To quote from the back cover: "YOU-CAT is an accessible, contemporary expression of the Catholic Faith... [and] includes questions-and-answers, highly readable commentary, summary definitions of key terms, Bible citations and inspiring and thought-provoking quotes from the saints... It explains: What Catholics believe and why (doctrine); How Catholics celebrate the mysteries of the faith (sacraments);

How Catholics are to live (moral life); How Catholics should pray (prayer and spirituality)."

For those who can use the internet there are 50 excellent catechetical talks by Ven Archbishop Fulton J Sheen 'You shall know the Truth' at www.tiny.cc/AFJSTALKS.

Yours etc.,
Fr Morty O'Shea SOLT
Inver, Co. Donegal.

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.

Formation is important but not everything

The latest round of Irish diocesan submissions to the global Synodal Pathway renewed an urgent call for formation – adult formation, youth formation, seminary formation, formation across the board!

Without formation it will be practically impossible to embed synodality or co-responsibility in the Church in Ireland, because nobody knows what exactly they mean, dioceses told the Irish synod's steering committee in reports seen by this paper. These will be synthesised into a national summary which will be sent to Rome ahead of the October listening sessions.

Dioceses are already pushing ahead with a variety of courses at local level and linking up with education institutes to form future lay leaders.

This is all very welcome – the absence or poor quality of faith formation in Ireland has a damaging impact on the Church, with past synodal conversations revealing that many want to share the Faith, but feel they are ill equipped to do so.

There is a lot of catching up to do, but it is encouraging to see an increasing focus on and interest in forming a laity with a firm grounding in the Faith.

However, formation cannot be everything or else the synod, co-responsible leadership and the works of the Church more broadly risk becoming elitist and unattainable for the average lay person.

If participating effectively in the synod requires undertaking a weekly course or if catechising means heading off to college, the Church will be forced to rely on those who are retired or who have flexible jobs.

Busy parents, young people starting out in careers, the hard-worker with a taxing schedule – all of them will be locked out of the synod and our co-responsible future.

Similarly, stressing academic qualifications and formation programmes will exclude many who struggle with studying,

even if the spirit is very willing.

We need concrete systems to embed the life of the Church in the average person's daily life – what one diocese describes as 'seeable' examples of synodality and co-responsibility in action.

Though they seem to have been forgotten by the synod so far, Ireland is blessed with a wealth of such examples.

The likes of St Vincent de Paul, the Legion of Mary, Knights of Columbanus, Net Ministries, Youth 2000 and more are all well-established examples of co-responsibility and synodality in action.

Think of the hundreds – if not thousands – of SVP or Legion volunteers who visit homes and work with deaf vulnerable, preaching and witnessing to Christ crucified every week. Or of the young people in Net Ministries and Youth 2000 who go out into parishes and light them on fire with the love of Christ.

These volunteers come from all walks of life – bankers, retail workers, students, and so-called 'unskilled labour'.

Together they discern the needs of their local communities, working closely with priests, and respond with practical solutions fitted to the needs of every person they meet.

Their models of 'master and apprentice' systems means they are open to all to learn, without needing any extra courses or qualifications. They treat their work as a craft or a trade, more than an intellectual exercise.

Dioceses want 'seeable' examples and they have them at their fingertips. If they want formation that is embedded in the practice of synodality, rather than treating it as an abstract exercise, they should encourage and nourish such lay organisations. Many already encourage them, without recognising that they are prime examples of synodality at work.

The push for better and more widespread formation is vital and welcome, but it must be open to more than those with the time and means to study.

Robot priests and other heresies



This week, an AI ‘priest’ sparked consternation among many Catholics, but it is just the latest in a long line of attempts to merge theology with technology. **Ian Dunn** explores why the idea of a robot priest won’t go away.

As laicisations go, it was quick. Barely a day after American Catholic apologetics website Catholic Answers released an AI-generated priest named Fr Justin, who engaged in conversations with users to provide answers to questions about Catholicism, it demoted him to plain old Justin.

Fr Justin — a bearded priest whose digital avatar sat before the Basilica of St Francis of Assisi in Italy’s Perugia province — was named for St Justin Martyr, a second-century convert and apologist, said Catholic Answers in its release.

Concerns

Catholic Answers IT director Chris Costello stated that the app’s priest character was intended to “honour real-life priests and the role they play in people’s lives,” conveying an “authoritative yet approachable” demeanour that befits “the spirit and nature of the responses

“Catholicism, after all, is deeply concerned with the real presence. So anything that seems to compromise the real can set off alarms”

users can expect.”

“Artificial Intelligence priests? Buddy, I’ve barely got natural intelligence!”

However, following fierce criticism on social media regarding some of the answers given by the app’s character, Catholic Answers President Christopher Check announced that Fr Justin had been renamed as just “Justin.” Check noted that “many people have voiced concerns” about the decision to create a priest character for the app.

“We hear these concerns, and we do not want the character to distract from the important purpose of the application, which is to provide sound answers to questions about the Catholic faith in an innovative way that makes good use of the benefits of artificial intelligence,” Check continued. “We have therefore decided to create, with all due speed, a new lay character for the app. We hope to have this AI apologist up within a week or so.”

As one “real” clerical wag quipped, “Artificial Intelligence priests? Buddy, I’ve barely got natural intelligence!”

But there was something

about the idea of an AI priest that made Catholics of all types recoil. Catholicism, after all, is deeply concerned with the real presence. So anything that seems to compromise the real can set off alarms.

Successors

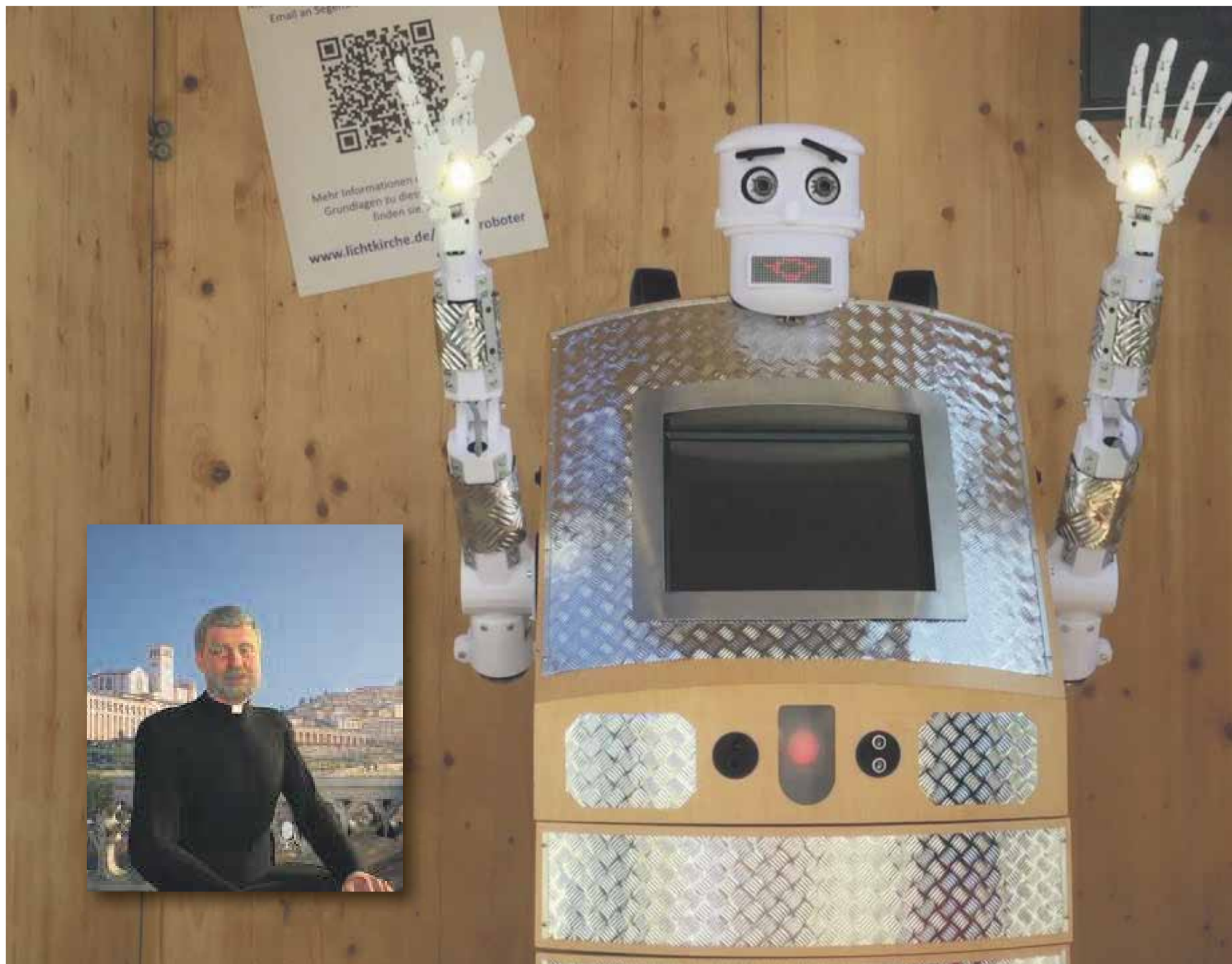
Certainly, a similar attempt to create a Catholic ‘artificial intelligence’ Magisterium AI attracted much less hostility when it launched last year. Although it seems in execution very similar to the late Fr Justin, Magisterium AI’s creators say it can answer “any questions” on Church teaching, practices, or other

topics, helping to “explain complex theological, philosophical, and historical concepts in simple, understandable language.”

“SanTO is powered by artificial intelligence, filled with information about the Church, and can respond to questions from worshippers”

So it seems it’s less AI involvement than the concept of a priest separated

“We do not want the character to distract from the important purpose of the application, which is to provide sound answers to questions about the Catholic faith in an innovative way”



from flesh and blood that makes us uncomfortable. Despite this, it's an idea that won't go away.

Last year saw the launch of SanTO: the world's first-ever Catholic robot, according to its creator Gabriele Trovato. The robot stands at about 17 inches tall and has the appearance of a statue of a saint. A light-up halo encircles its head, glowing as its deep, digital voice echoes from a speaker.

Inside SanTO (Sanctified Theomorphic Operator) is a computer, microphone, sensors, and a facial recognition-enabled camera that allow it to interact with the faithful.

SanTO is powered by artificial intelligence, filled with information about the Church, and can respond to questions from worshippers — a bit like Catholic Alexa, its creator said.

Users of the SanTO robot in its native Poland have been surprisingly receptive, and an upgraded version

“Technology can and has fixed so many of the practical problems humans face that there will inevitably be attempts to use it to fix spiritual problems”

of SanTO has a permanent exhibition at the Copernicus Science Centre in Warsaw.

Expansion

Other religions have gone further. A 400-year-old Buddhist Japanese temple brought in a robot named Mindar to preach sermons in 2019. It's now a staple.

The adult-sized android, modelled after Kannon Bodhisattva, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, is programmed to deliver a 25-minute sermon on the Heart Sutra, a Buddhist scripture, while moving its torso, arms, and head.

A Lutheran Church in Germany also created the BlessU-2, a robot priest that

delivers blessings in five languages as it raises its arms and beams light from its hands.

“Catholicism should ‘reimagine’ the priesthood and consider robots instead of, or alongside, men”

The robot's head features moving eyebrows and a digital mouth that can alternate between serious and smiling. Users press the touchscreen chest to choose the type of prayer they'd like (encouragement or renewal), as well as

their preference for a male or female voice. BlessU-2 speaks in German, English, French, Spanish, and Polish and even prints out its invocations.

One notable Catholic theologian, Franciscan Sister Ilia Delio, who holds the Josephine C. Connelly Endowed Chair of Theology at Villanova University, has said that Catholicism should “reimagine” the priesthood and consider robots instead of, or alongside, men.

Advantages

“The Catholic notion would say the priest is ontologically changed upon ordination. Is that really true?” she said. “We have these fixed philosophical ideas and AI

challenges those ideas — it challenges Catholicism to move toward a post-human priesthood.”

“For AI, robots, and all points in between are tools, as useful and corruptible as the humans that use them”

She said robotic priests would have certain advantages, including being incapable of committing sexual abuse.

All of which goes to show that while the idea of a robot priest may seem far-fetched,

it is persistent.

Technology can and has fixed so many of the practical problems humans face that there will inevitably be attempts to use it to fix spiritual problems.

Surely if new and glittering advances can help the lame walk and the deaf speak, they can move us closer to spiritual enlightenment?

Alas, it seems unlikely. For AI, robots, and all points in between are tools, as useful and corruptible as the humans that use them. They cannot give us the love of a mother or the light of the Lord. And the attempt to try may ultimately distract us from what we truly need and what is truly real.

“We have these fixed philosophical ideas and AI challenges those ideas—it challenges Catholicism to move toward a post-human priesthood”

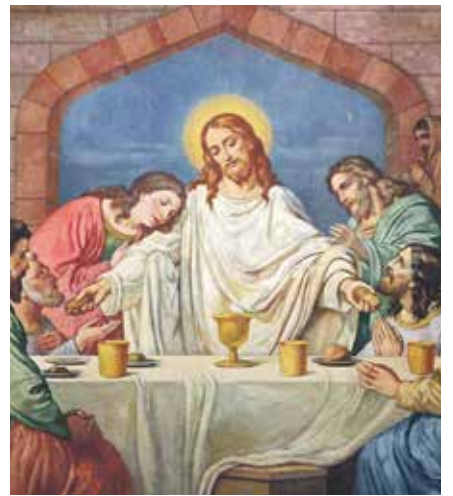
Your Faith

Live as a
friend of Jesus

Jem Sullivan

Page 34

The Irish Catholic, May 2, 2024



Pentecost: Breathe, forgive, renew

We need to let go of negative feelings that come from being offended, writes Mike Nelson

What could be more essential to life than breathing – or forgiving?

Breathing and forgiving: One follows the other. Forgiveness, as Jesus makes clear throughout his earthly ministry, is part of the deal for all who call themselves his disciples.

Forgiveness

Such as in the Gospel reading for Pentecost Sunday, when Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (Jn 20:22-23).

“All Jesus does is breathe forgiveness,” says Franciscan Fr Richard Rohr in his book, *The Wisdom Pattern: Order, Disorder, Reorder*.

“It’s interesting,” Fr Rohr continues, “that Jesus identifies forgiveness with breathing, the one

thing that we have done constantly since we were born and will do until we die.

“He says God’s forgiveness is like breathing. Forgiveness is not apparently something God does; it is who God is. God can do no other.”

Forgiveness is something we seek and offer, as is clear at each Sunday Mass.

In the penitential rite, we confess our sins, we beseech the prayers of Mary and we hear the presider ask, “May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life”.

In our profession of faith, we proclaim our belief “in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life”.

And when we pray the Our Father, we ask the Lord “to forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who have trespassed against us”.

“Forgiveness has to work both ways or it doesn’t work at all”

Many years ago, I heard a priest use a good share of his homily to address this last phrase – “as we forgive those who have trespassed against us”.

He suggested that if we didn’t

feel the need to forgive someone for however he or she may have offended us, we didn’t have to, because we have God-given free will, right?

“But,” the priest added, raising and shaking his finger, “don’t expect forgiveness for what you have done if you’re not going to forgive someone for what they have done to you.”

“Forgiveness has to work both ways or it doesn’t work at all.”

Anger

If we hold on to the hate, the bitterness, the anger attached to an offense committed against us – real or perceived – who does that hurt? Hint: not the offender.

And even if we feel ready to forgive, we often aren’t sure that the offender wants or is even aware of the need for forgiveness.

What I have learned – slowly, I admit – is that if I want to move forward in my life, I need to let go of the negative feelings that come with being offended. I need to make peace with my offender.

I need to acknowledge that this person, no matter how serious and hurtful the offense, is a creation and child of God like myself, and for that reason alone deserves to be treated with the respect and dignity that all of God’s creation deserves. That includes offering

forgiveness.

Which isn’t to say that forgiveness means we tell our offender, “Hey, whatever, no problem”, any more than we should expect the same response from those whose forgiveness we seek.

We would hope that the action of forgiving is accompanied by a sincere resolve and effort to change for the better.

“Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth”

No, we can’t control how others respond. But we can choose to move forward and not “retain”, as Jesus said, the anger, bitterness and hurt.

Think of the responsorial psalm for Pentecost Sunday: “Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.”

Exactly how does the Spirit renew the face of the earth?

Through us, it would seem. Pentecost Sunday’s first reading reminds us that the descent of the “tongues of fire” upon the disciples of Jesus so filled them with the Holy Spirit that they began chattering in different languages “of the mighty acts of God”.

Soon those disciples “moved forward” to spread the good news

– to breathe new life into a world that needed renewal. Sound familiar?

Indeed, in these times when so much vitriol and vilification is in our midst, what could happen if each of us took time to really reflect upon the hurts we’ve been dealt and made a serious effort to “breathe some forgiveness” into this world?

Gift

I know one thing: When I am able to forgive or when I am forgiven something very powerful and wonderful takes place inside me. I feel like I can breathe, as if a great weight has been lifted off my chest.

Letting go of anger and bitterness and hurt is an amazing gift to myself. When I forgive, I have let God into my life in a way that heals and renews.

The Pentecost sequence phrases it nicely:

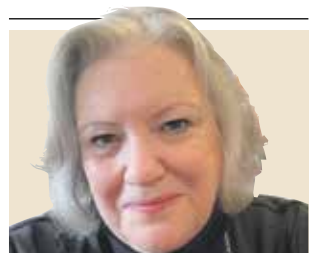
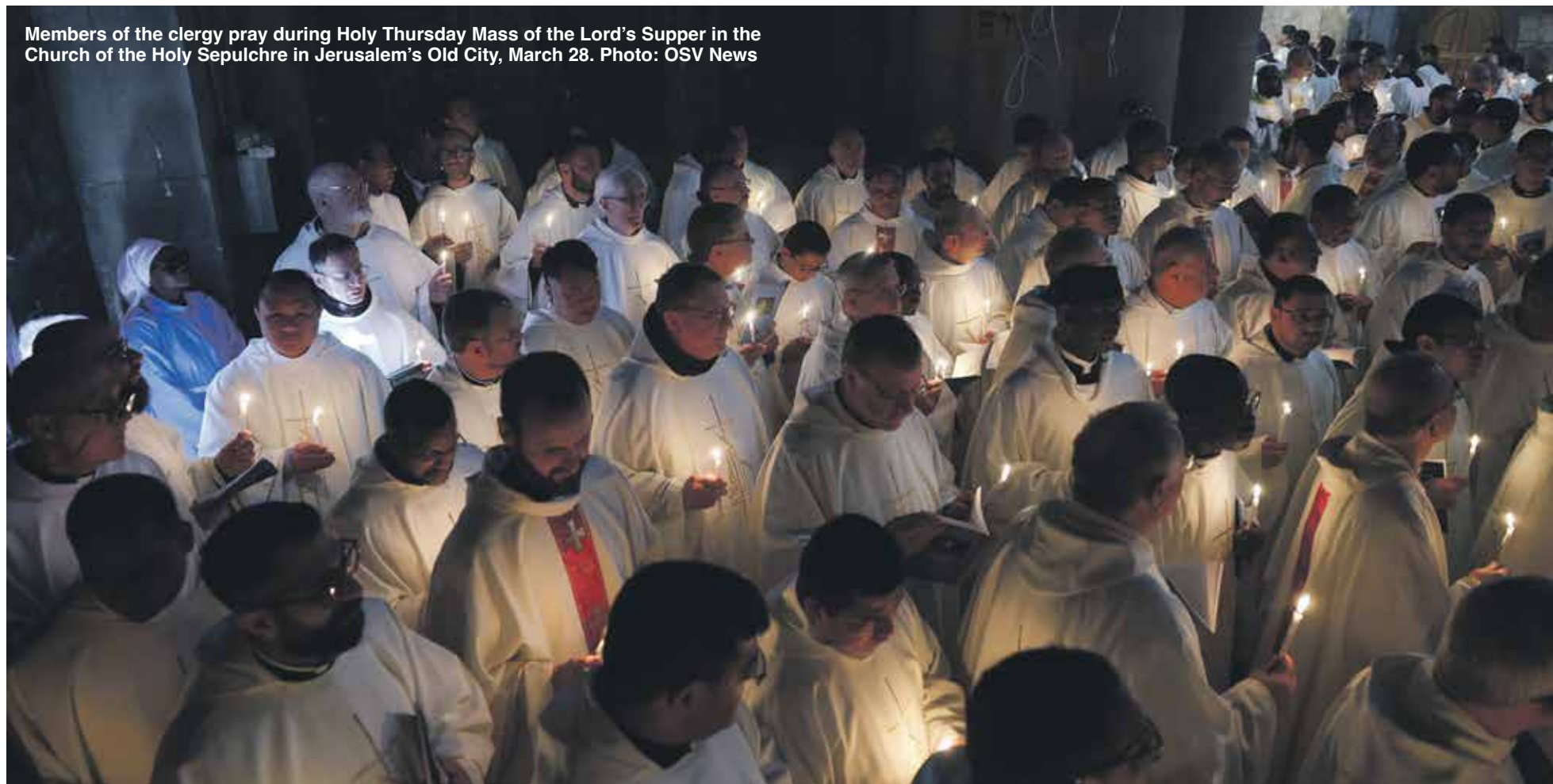
“You, of comforts the best; You, the soul’s most welcome guest; sweet refreshment here below; in our labour, rest most sweet; grateful coolness in the heat; solace in the midst of woe.”

Yes, come, Holy Spirit, come!

Mike Nelson writes from Southern California.

Praying through the headlines in the year of prayer

Members of the clergy pray during Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem's Old City, March 28. Photo: OSV News



Elizabeth Scalia

In discussing the removal or transfer of a pastor, Canon 1752 reads, "... *prae oculis habita salute animarum, quae in Ecclesia suprema semper lex esse debet*", in English, "... keeping in mind the salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law of the Church".

The phrase resonates so deeply with me that I lately bring it to every matter of the Church and faith I spend time thinking about.

I consider the reminder so fundamental to everything that touches the practice of Catholicism that part of me wishes the line concluded every pronouncement in the code.

Discipline

For instance, pondering the ongoing priesthood of Fr Marko Rupnik amid scores of claims of sexual and spiritual abuse, the weird, foot-draggingly slow inves-

tigation surrounding said abuse, and the continued use of the priest's artwork in prominent places and publications, I read Canon 1401, on 'Processes' and 'Trials in General,' which states that the Church "has its own and exclusive right to judge" cases that "refer to matters which are spiritual or linked with the spiritual" and "the violation of ecclesiastical laws and whatever contains an element of sin, to determine guilt and impose ecclesiastical penalties".

“Keeping in mind the salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law in the Church”

My own broken instincts to despise Fr Rupnik became tempered a bit when I applied "... keeping in mind the salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law in the Church", to both the code and the whole frus-

trating story.

Reminder

On one hand, the words are an excellent reminder to Church leadership to finally move on the case and either laicise Rupnik or produce the findings that might absolve him of all of those credible accusations – 'for the salvation of souls' who are increasingly fed up, distrustful and wary.

On the other hand, they are an excellent reminder to me, too – that despite my own impatience and endless judgment, and 'for the sake of the salvation of souls' (including my own), I must permit the traditionally slow-moving processes of the Church to in fact proceed slowly – if only for the sake of thoroughness, so that when the denouement of this dreadful drama descends and the headlines blare, there may be no room for doubt, no sense that justice has not been rightly applied or that other considerations have superseded what is just.

“Doubt eats away at belief, and ‘the salvation of souls must always be the supreme law of the Church,’ the integrity of the Rupnik process must be above reproach. If that needs a bit more time, so be it”

“I also turned to Jesus Christ, offering to him the increasingly disordered, chaotic and dark world and begging that we might grow in wisdom and creativity”

Because doubt eats away at belief, and 'the salvation of souls must always be the supreme law of the Church,' the integrity of the Rupnik process must be above reproach. If that needs a bit more time, so be it.

Headlines are often sensationalistic and even when not, they are still jarring; they can quickly move us to gasping fury or fearful wondering.

In our current Year of Prayer, perhaps they should also be moving us to engage with heaven as we read.

It is an important and, yes, powerful thing to invite our guardian angels to guide us, as we peruse the news, toward stories most worthy of our attention; to guard us against rash judgment or bitter cynicism.

It is good to ask our sainted friends to intercede for the people we read about – for instance to beg St Basil and Gregory Nazianzen to intercede on behalf of an Orthodox bishop who was attacked and stabbed during a liturgy in Australia.

It is good, also, to pray for his assailant, a 15-year-old boy who might yet benefit from the intercession of the recently beatified and similarly aged Carlo Acutis or the gentle Solanus Casey.

“We may imagine and explore new solutions – policies and programmes that can produce real healing by wedding justice to mercy”

Here in New York, an Orthodox woman climbing the stairs of her church was shoved back down to the cement sidewalk and severely injured, her pockets rifled through and car stolen by a 16-year-old who had already been arrested five times for robbery.

In my prayers I asked our Blessed Mother, the Theotokos, to pray for the woman

– and for the young man, too, who is clearly in trouble and needs real help, which prison is quite unlikely to provide.

Into those prayers I also invited St Dymphna, patron of the mentally ill, and St Therese of Lisieux, who prayed for criminals with great efficacy.

I also turned to Jesus Christ, offering to him the increasingly disordered, chaotic and dark world and begging that we might grow in wisdom and creativity; that in order to better address the mayhem before us in our city streets, we may imagine and explore new solutions – policies and programmes that can produce real healing by wedding justice to mercy.

Solutions

Such solutions will likely be complicated or controversial or both. Because that is so, perhaps the Church – which practically invented social services and has pondered the phrase, "justice and mercy shall kiss" (Ps 85:10) for 2,000 years – is precisely the place from whence such urgently needed ideas should arise ... always keeping in mind the salvation of souls.

Elizabeth Scalia is editor at large for OSV.

The fruits of spiritual communion



Michael R. Heinlein

As Catholics, we recognise that the holy Eucharist is the 'source and summit' of our faith. The innumerable gifts received in holy Communion draw us more closely to Christ. But there also are a variety of reasons why someone might not be able to receive sacramental holy Communion.

Sometimes reception of holy Communion is not possible because of one's own actions.

Perhaps the individual is in the state of mortal sin, by which we turn ourselves away from God, and in which case only sacramental confession may repair the relationship.

Or maybe an individual is fasting from the sacrament for the purposes of spiritual growth or out of a general sense of unworthiness.

Catholics also are obliged to refrain from food or drink (other than water) for an hour before reception of holy Communion. Not doing so would ordinarily leave one unable to receive holy Communion.

Situations

Then there are the situations in which someone is unable to receive holy Communion through no or little fault of their own.

For instance, one might be restricted from access to the sacraments by sickness, handicap or food allergy, or one might live in a remote area where sacraments intermittently are celebrated.

One's limited access to the Eucharist can also be the result of other conditions such as

war, epidemic, imprisonment, emergency travel, or other outstanding complications that might limit one's access to the Eucharist.

There can also be those situations when life can get unwieldy and not allow us to pray as often or for as much as we might desire.

With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the limited access to sacraments it brought, many Catholics were reintroduced to the practice of spiritual communion, and even though the pandemic is (blessedly) behind us, the practice can still be a useful one.

Spiritual communion is a devotion for those who are unable, for whatever reason, to receive sacramental holy Communion at a given time or in specific situations.

“There is grace even in expressing our desire for Christ in the Eucharist, which can be an impetus to help us reorganise and reprioritise our spiritual lives”

The Church offers no prescribed ritual or formula to make an act of spiritual communion, but all the baptised are able to do it.

Such an act of prayer must simply express one's belief in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist and the heart's desire for communion with him.

Acts of spiritual communion are a fitting solution to situations, like those mentioned above, in which we may find ourselves unable to physically receive holy Communion.

Such acts of spiritual communion can increase our desire to achieve fuller unity with Christ in holy Communion.

The more we express our longing to receive the Eucharist, the more apt we might be to make it a priority. There is grace even in expressing our desire for Christ in the Eucharist, which can be an impetus to help us reorganise and reprioritise our spiritual lives.

Refraining from the Eucharist for the purposes of spiritual growth is also undertaken at times by the spiritually mature.

Appreciation

By adopting a fast from the Eucharist, one can intensify one's appreciation for the sacrament. As the saying goes, 'absence makes the heart grow fonder.'

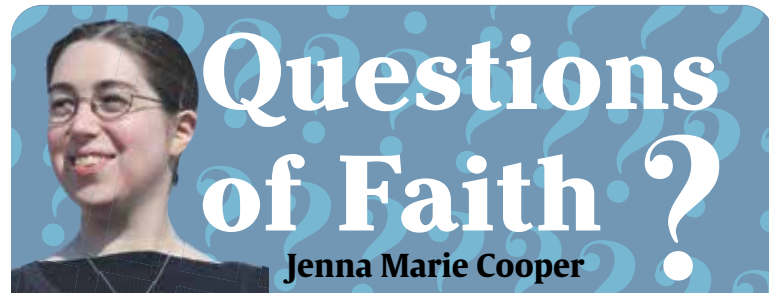
"Do we not often take the reception of the Blessed Sacrament too lightly?" Pope Benedict XVI once pondered. "Might not this kind of spiritual fasting be of service, or even necessary, to deepen and renew our relationship to the Body of Christ?"

Pope Benedict suggested such Eucharistic fasting "could lead to a deepening of personal relationship with the Lord in the sacrament. It could also be an act of solidarity with all those who yearn for the sacrament but cannot receive it."

"Sometimes we need hunger, physical and spiritual hunger, if we are to come fresh to the Lord's gifts and understand the suffering of our hungering brothers. Both spiritual and physical hunger can be a vehicle of love."

Whether the conditions for not receiving holy Communion are internal or external, the practice of spiritual communion can bear fruit in our lives and should be more widely practiced and encouraged.

i Michael R. Heinlein is author of *Glorifying Christ: The Life of Cardinal Francis E. George, OMI and a promised member of the Association of Pauline Cooperators.*



Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

What's going on with the Latin Mass?

Q: What's going on with the Latin Mass, and why do some priests like to celebrate it while others don't?

A: It's good to keep in mind that priests are human beings who, like the rest of us, form personal opinions about things that are important to them. So your question is a rather complex and nuanced one, which is impossible to answer in a clear-cut way that will universally apply to everyone. But I'll still try to hazard some guesses based on broad observable patterns.

For context, although the main liturgical elements of our Mass – such as the reading of the Gospel and the consecration of the Eucharist – have remained the same since the time of the Apostles, over the centuries there have been various evolutions and changes to some of the less central aspects of the liturgy.

Historically, it is not unheard of for ecumenical councils to make changes to the liturgy or to mandate uniformity to some degree.

One such ecumenical council was the Council of Trent, which convened in the mid-1500s. The Council of Trent revised the Roman Missal (ie, the book of prayers for the celebration of Mass).

Although there were a few minor adaptations over the years to the liturgy that the Council of Trent gave us, for the most part this same 'version' of the Mass was in use until 1962. This is the liturgy that has been referred to by a number of names such as the 'Tridentine Mass,' the 'Traditional Latin Mass,' or the 'Extraordinary Form.'

Some 400 years later, the Second Vatican Council convened with the primary goal of 'updating' various aspects of the life of the Church to be more accessible to the faithful in the modern world.

In particular, in Vatican II, the Church sought to make the liturgy a more participatory experience for the lay faithful. As the Vatican II document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* phrases it: "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy" (No. 14).

Some of the concrete changes that Vatican II introduced included an expanded cycle of readings and the possibility of celebrating Mass in the vernacular, or the local language of the people, instead of Latin.

Some people – clergy and laity alike – for various reasons remained attached to the way Mass was celebrated in 1962. So, in some circumstances, an 'indult,' or special permission to celebrate Mass in the pre-Vatican II way, was granted to priests on a case-by-case basis.

Then in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI issued the document *Summorum Pontificum*, which essentially gave open permission to any priest to celebrate the older 'Extraordinary Form' of the Mass. However, Pope Francis was concerned that this open permission was leading to discord in the church, and with the 2021 document *Traditionis Custodes*, special permission was once again required for a priest to celebrate Mass with the 1962 missal.

My thought is that priests might have strong feelings for or against the 'Traditional Latin Mass' because they have personal experiences of their non-preferred form of the Mass being celebrated badly. For example, many younger priests might recall troubling instances of the Vatican II Mass having been celebrated irreverently; many older clergy might recall rushed and mumbled celebrations of the pre-Vatican II Mass that left them feeling like a dissociated onlooker.

Other priests today might not have strong feelings against the 1962 missal by itself but are concerned with fostering a broader sense of unity by focusing on the main 'Ordinary Form' of the Mass.

One thing that is clear in any case is that as Catholic Christians we are called to approach all things in a spirit of patience and charity – including the issue of other Catholics' liturgical preferences.

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. Send your questions to CatholicQA@osv.com.



A young woman prays during the opening Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington Jan 18, 2024. Photo: OSV News

Who are our real faith companions



Photo by pressfoto for Freepik

I work and move within Church circles and find that most of the people there are honest, committed, and for the most part radiate their faith positively. Most churchgoers aren't hypocrites. What I do find disturbing in Church circles though is that many of us can be bitter, mean-spirited, and judgmental in terms of defending the very values that we hold most dear.

It was Henri Nouwen who first highlighted this, commenting with sadness that many of the bitter and ideologically driven people he knew, he had met inside of Church circles and places of ministry. Within Church circles, it sometimes seems, almost everyone is angry about something. Moreover, within Church circles, it is all too easy to rationalise that in the name of prophecy, as a righteous passion for truth and morals.

Justification

The algebra works this way: because I am sincerely concerned about an important moral, ecclesial, or justice issue, I can excuse a certain amount of anger, elitism, and negative judgment, because I can rationalise that my cause, dogmatic or moral, is so important that it justifies my mean spirit, that is, I have a right to be cold and harsh because this is such an important truth.

And so we justify a mean spirit by giving it a prophetic cloak, believing that we are warriors for God, truth, and morals when, in fact, we are struggling equally with our own wounds, insecurities, and fears.



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

“We justify a mean spirit by giving it a prophetic cloak, believing that we are warriors for God, truth, and morals when, in fact, we are struggling equally with our own wounds, insecurities, and fears”

Hence we often look at others, even whole churches made up of sincere persons trying to live the gospel, and instead of seeing brothers and sisters struggling, like us, to follow Jesus, we see “people in error”, “dangerous relativists”, “new age pagans”, “religious flakes”, and in our more generous moments, “poor misguided souls”. But seldom do we look at what this kind of judgment is saying about us, about our own health of soul and our own following of Jesus.

“The truth of that doesn't override everything else and give us an excuse to rationalise a mean spirit”

Don't get me wrong: Truth is not relative, moral issues are important,

and right truth and proper morals, like all kingdoms, are under perpetual siege and need to be defended. Not all moral judgments are created equal, and neither are all churches.

But the truth of that doesn't override everything else and give us an excuse to rationalise a mean spirit. We must defend truth, defend those who cannot defend themselves, and be faithful in the traditions of our own churches. However, right truth and right morals don't all alone make us disciples of Jesus. What does?

Genuine

What makes us genuine disciples of Jesus is living inside his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and this is not something abstract and vague. If one were searching for a single formula to determine who is Christian and who isn't, one might look at the Epistle to the Galatians, Chapter 5. In it, St Paul tells us that we can live according to either the spirit of the flesh or of the

Holy Spirit.

We live according to the spirit of the flesh when we live in bitterness, judgment of our neighbour, factionalism, and non-forgiveness. When these things characterise our lives, we shouldn't delude ourselves and think that we are living inside of the Holy Spirit.

“We should not nurse the illusion that we are inside of God's Spirit, irrespective of our passion for truth, dogma, or justice”

Conversely, we live inside of the Holy Spirit when our lives are characterised by charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, longsuffering, constancy, faith, gentleness, and chastity. If these do not characterise our lives, we should not nurse the illusion that we are inside of God's Spirit, irrespective of our passion for truth, dogma, or justice.

This may be a cruel thing to say, and perhaps more cruel not to say, but I sometimes see more charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, and gentleness among persons who are Unitarian or New Age (people who are often judged by other churches as being wishy-washy and as not

standing for anything) than I see among those of us who do stand so strongly for certain ecclesial and moral issues that we become mean-spirited and non-charitable inside of those convictions.

Choice

Given the choice of whom I'd like as a neighbour or, more deeply, the choice of whom I might want to spend eternity with, I am sometimes conflicted about the choice. Who is my real faith companion? The mean-spirited zealot at war for Jesus or cause, or the gentler soul who is branded wishy-washy or “new age”? At the end of the day, who is living more inside the Holy Spirit?

We need, I believe, to be more self-critical vis-a-vis our anger, harsh judgments, mean-spirit, exclusiveness, and disdain for other ecclesial and moral paths. As TS Eliot once said: The last temptation that's the greatest treason is to do the right thing for the wrong reason. We may have truth and right morals on our side, but our anger and harsh judgments towards those who don't share our truth and morals may well have us standing outside the Father's house, like the older brother of the prodigal son, bitter both at God's mercy and at those who are, seemingly without merit, receiving it.

“Our anger and harsh judgments towards those who don't share our truth and morals may well have us standing outside the Father's house, like the older brother of the prodigal son”

Live as a friend of Jesus



St John lays his head on Jesus' chest in this depiction of the Last Supper from a painting at Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Church in Southampton, New York. Photo: CNS

*Scripture Reflection
for May 5, 2024, Sixth
Sunday of Easter
Acts 10:25-26, 34-35,
44-48
Ps 98:1, 2-3, 3-4
1 Jn 4:7-10
Jn 15:1-17*

In a digital culture dominated by social media and technological means of communication, the idea of friendship can often be reduced to superficial exchanges.

Friendship is measured by numbers of followers and instant 'likes' on social media posts.

Today's Gospel offers a deeper notion of friendship in the invitation to love one another as God loves us.

So how do we know of God's love?

Catechism

The catechism notes that, "the first man was not only created good, but was also established in friendship with his Creator" (CCC 374).

The Sunday Gospel

Jem Sullivan



For, "God created man in his image and established him in his friendship. A spiritual creature, man can live this friendship only in free submission to God" (CCC 396).

"The eternal community of the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the original circle of divine friendship that overflows into the world"

Created through a gratuitous act of divine friendship no human being, however holy, can ever return an adequate response of thanks to God.

God creates each one of us in love for love.

This is a great mystery of Christian faith and the good news the Church never ceases to proclaim to the world.

On the path of friendship with God in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit we learn to will the good of the other, a definition of love offered by St Thomas Aquinas.

The eternal community of the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the original circle of divine friendship that overflows into the world.

Fulfilled

God's desire for friendship with all of creation is fulfilled perfectly in the sending of his own beloved son Jesus who, by

his suffering, death and resurrection, reconciles humanity to God.

"I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends"

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to reflect the same divine love in which we were created.

So, Jesus says, "this is my commandment: Love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's

friends".

Jesus goes on to say, "I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends."

This promise of Jesus of his friendship with each one of us is deeply personal and reassuring.

To be a friend of Jesus is to recognise the primacy of divine grace in our lives.

Radiate

For examples we look to those friends of God, the saints of the Church who radiate into the world the fruit of their friendship with God, deepened over a lifetime of prayer, nurtured by the Church's

sacraments, and formed by virtues of faith, hope and charity.

In the sacraments, Jesus' invitation to friendship continues into the present day.

The sacraments initiate, restore, heal and lead to true happiness as "God shows forth his almighty power by converting us from our sins and restoring us to his friendship by grace" (CCC, 277).

May this Easter season be a time to rediscover in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit the true meaning of friendship with God as missionary disciples of Jesus to whom we pray, "Speak to me, Lord".

Question: What does it mean to live as a friend of Jesus?

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.

"God shows forth his almighty power by converting us from our sins and restoring us to his friendship by grace"

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Cheap shots at Catholic education on RTÉ

Most TV services have a rake of channels down the list that few people ever watch. Most are happy with the Irish channels and the main UK services like BBC, ITV and Channel 4. But good stuff often lurks far down the list – eg Sky Arts and PBS America. Both are home to excellent documentaries.

When I saw a listing for *The Good Nazi* (PBS America, Thursday) I was taken aback. I had recently been on a visit to Dachau concentration camp and so, 'good' and 'Nazi' clashed horribly.

Reminiscent of the Oscar Schindler story, this was the story of Karl Plagge, a German army officer who was assigned to run a work camp in Vilnius, Lithuania. Horrified by the atrocities he saw being perpetrated on the Jewish population, he set about protecting as many as he could – e.g., pretending they were mechanics for his workshop.

Plagge felt guilty as, on one occasion, when he thought all were safe, he visited his family in Germany. The SS took the opportunity to violently round up the children when the men were out at work. Some children who made it to the hiding places survived.

One, who was 10 at the time and survived what was known as the 'child capture'



Still from *The Good Nazi*.

or 'Kinder Action', described mothers crying for days. Later when there was the 'final action' as the Soviet Army approached and the Nazis tried to cover up their dirty work with more of it, he described hearing crying, screaming, shooting and then silence.

Plagge was tried for war crimes but acquitted when survivors from his camp testified on his behalf, but his godson described how he fought against acquittal because he didn't feel innocent.

The programme also fea-

tured efforts by modern researchers to locate hiding places and mass graves using high tech ground imaging devices. The highly dramatic music and to a lesser extent the dramatisations were unnecessary, but, overall, the impact was strong – in an especially emotional moment researchers and survivors gathered for prayer on the grounds of the former work camp.

In other news, *Newstalk Breakfast* (Wednesday) raised the question: 'Does a Catholic ethos still have a

place in our schools?' This was prompted by the recent report on the state of Catholic education in Ireland. Presenter Ciara Kelly outlined some findings – half the primary teachers not believing in God, less than half practicing the Catholic faith, though 90% of schools are supposed to be Catholic.

Alan Whelan, President of Catholic Secondary School's Parent's Association was not surprised at the findings but thought bishops and trust bodies should be ashamed of the way things had deteriorated and was surprised there weren't resignations. He asked the rather urgent question – how can non-believers prepare children for the sacraments?

Jillian Brennan of the Humanist Association also had concerns – that teachers were being forced to teach religion, which didn't align with their personal values. She thought divestment was moving too slowly, and wanted religion taught outside of the school day.

Children could be taught good values and morals based on things like kindness, empathy and critical thinking. I suspect this would also involve imposing things like controversial and contested gender theory on students, which very likely would not 'align' with parents' values, and they, as Alan Whelan

PICK OF THE WEEK

SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC One Sunday, May 5, 1.15pm

Pam Rhodes celebrates the 75th Anniversary of one of the world's most cherished hymns, *How Great Thou Art*, and explores the remarkable story of its composition.

MARCH FOR LIFE CANADA

EWTN Thursday May 9, 4.30pm

Thousands of people descend upon Ottawa's Parliament Hill as EWTN provides complete coverage of the annual National March for Life, Canada's most significant pro-life event.

EVERYBODY LOVES RAYMOND:

Channel 4 Friday, May 10, 7.45am

Debra's hippy sister shows up unexpectedly and announces that she's decided to become a nun.

pointed out, are the primary educators.

Drivetime (RTÉ Radio 1, Wednesday) also tackled the report, but from a different angle – they spoke to Dr Daniel O'Connell of Mary Immaculate College in Limerick, principal investigator on the report. He found that much of the work on ethos in Catholic schools was by older staff members, with the younger ones not understanding ethos as clearly.

There was an urgency for patrons to invest more in schools' understanding of ethos, but also for more divestment as dioceses weren't equipped to resource all the existing Catholic schools. The schools scored highly when it came to envi-

ronment, respect and caring for the poor, but younger teachers were more hesitant when it came to the issue of knowing Jesus. There wasn't enough about the wishes of parents, but most teachers were happy to work in Catholic schools.

On a related topic, on *Oliver Callan* (RTÉ Radio 1, Wednesday), the host referred to the Church controlling 90% of the primary schools, and "disastrously" the sex education programme – a cheap shot, I thought, and thoroughly one-sided – using a privileged position in state funded media to push personal agenda?

Film

Aubrey Malone



McGahern's leisurely swansong finally reaches the screen

"That blasted book near killed me," John McGahern said to me of his final novel, *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. He put more of himself into it than any of his other ones. That's saying something. It has now been made into a film (Cert 15).

I didn't 'get' the book when I read it first. It wasn't chaptered. There were many lengthy paragraphs bedecked with apparently inconsequential details. Was 'The Master' losing his discipline?

Then it dawned on me that the non-eventfulness was deliberate, that he was seeking to convey a Zen-like tranquility. Pat Collins brings the same sense of susurating

uneventfulness to the film. We're not watching a plot unfold but rather life going on.

Joe and Kate Rutledge (Barry Ward, Anna Bederke) have come from the hustle-bustle of London to a closely-knit community of local colour in Leitrim. They become touchstones for neighbours who drop in to relay their tidbits of news to them over tea – or something stronger.

A year in their lives is presented to us. We witness a wedding, a wake, an emigrant's unwanted return. The seasons pass. There's a plaintive sense of transience.

Joe writes and farms. Kate paints. They keep bees. Their visitors – Johnny Murphy



A scene from *That They May Face the Rising Sun*.

(Sean McGinley), The Shah (John O'Leary), Mary Murphy (Ruth McCabe), Bill Evans (Brendan Conroy), Jamesie Murphy (Phillip Dolan), Patrick Ryan (Lalor Roddy) – are all 'characters'.

Handyman Roddy gives the most cerebral performance. Ward underwhelms as McGahern's *alter ego*. In the book he was a kind of sha-

man. Here he's a somewhat smug hail-fellow-well-met observer, an 'ordinary' Joe.

Bederke gets to do little except smile benignly – and speak in a rather mysterious accent.

There are brilliant vignettes. Collins piquantly portrays McGahern's world of diaspora, lonely bachelors, rutted lanes, earthy banter...

and an ambivalent attitude to religion.

This world is disappearing. We experience its rough-hewn parameters through big and little lives.

Patrick Kavanagh said, "Gods make their own importance." The profundity of the quotidian is fomented by the bucolic quirks of these amiable eccentrics. Their emblematisation is the votive lamp that sustains Collins' bittersweet pastoral.

We smile at – and with – them. They provide pub stool soundbites about marriage, farming, the past, the future... and what the weather is doing.

It may appear like a cliché to say the landscape is like another character in the film.

Richard Kendrick's stunning cinematography makes it so. An elegiac script from Collins and Eamon Little (with an over-abundance of expletives) completes the package.

The film has received multiple kudos far and wide but at times it overplays its underplaying, if that doesn't sound disingenuous. I still think *Korea* is the greatest McGahern film out there. There's something missing here, something that should lift it to the cathartic level of the book.

What would the man himself think of it? Considering the fact that he didn't watch adaptations of his books he probably wouldn't have said much more than, "Arrah sure I suppose it'll do."



BookReviews

Peter Costello



Democracy in today's world: can it survive?

Adventures in Democracy: The Turbulent World of People Power, by Erica Benner (Allan Lane, £25.00 / €29.50)

Felix M. Larkin

This short book by political philosopher Erica Benner is a timely meditation on the nature of democracy, both ancient and modern.

It is timely because democratic values are under threat everywhere today, including in the United States which Benner regards correctly as the birthplace of modern democracy.

Dr Benner, by the way, currently teaches at the Hertie School for Governance in Berlin, is President of the European Society for the History of Political Thought, and a founding editor of the Brill series *History of European Political and Constitutional Thought*.

Beginnings

The opening sentence of her book notes that "modern democracy will celebrate its 250th anniversary in 2026". The first shots of the American Revolution fired at Lexington and Concord were indeed "heard around the world".

The clearest and most succinct definition of democracy is Lincoln's formulation in his Gettysburg address:

"government of the people, by the people, for the people".

This is the gold standard, and most democracies fall short of the ideal even in the best of circumstances. Benner writes that "wherever democracies have sprung up over the past 2,500 years [since democratic Athens], the people who live in them have been notorious for misbehaving".

“Inequalities make people distrust democratic ideals and the elites, local or foreign, who promote them”

Perhaps the most blatant example of such misbehaviour in modern times has been the United States, where – in Benner's words – "democracy was born trying to get away with the ultimate contradiction: claiming to be the beacon of universal equality while allowing a roaring slave trade".

This contradiction persisted with so-called 'Jim Crow' segregation laws for another 100 years after the fighting in the Civil War ended.

Benner's central thesis is that democracy cannot long survive "where people are vastly unequal in



status, wealth and material security". She argues that "inequalities make people distrust democratic ideals and the elites, local or foreign, who promote them".

She notes that "glaring inequalities are the reality in most democracies today [and] they are growing at an alarming speed"; hence the threat to democratic values everywhere.

Intentions

The dynamic here, as Benner explains, is that we all

“Democracy was born trying to get away with the ultimate contradiction: claiming to be the beacon of universal equality while allowing a roaring slave trade”

desire "to be safer, richer, cleverer, more respected, more powerful than others – first among equals, maybe way-ahead first" and most modern democracies are "hypercompetitive societies whose ruling ideologies praise economic super-achievers and shame the less successful".

These instincts need to be curtailed in the interests of preserving a healthy democracy: it is necessary "to regulate extremes of wealth and poverty".

“This book is an important wake-up call for all of us who are concerned about the future – even the survival – of democratic values in the modern world”

This requires constant vigilance since, to quote Benner: "sometimes it takes a very long time to recognise ... that economic inequalities have been driving deep political and cognitive wedges between different sets of citizens".

“Personal freedom is ‘not an open invitation to chase your dreams unchecked’”

Benner's analysis prompts questions about the trade-off between freedom and equality.

She addresses that issue in a chapter which traces her own progress from being a disciple of Ayn Rand and sharing Rand's belief in the "virtue of selfishness" – in other words, always follow your self-interests – to a realisation that one's personal freedom, if it is to be sustained within a democratic society, "needs support from a wider, well-organised scheme of shared freedom".

She concludes that personal freedom is "not an

open invitation to chase your dreams unchecked. It's a give-and-take scheme that protects my personal freedom within limits that leave space, opportunities and decent options for everyone else".

Equality

She thus reiterates the importance of equality in a democratic society: "It follows that democratic freedom needs a commitment to some kind of equality. Not the kinds that strike dread in some freedom lovers' hearts: fixed economic leveling, indoctrination in 'woke' egalitarianism, etc. Just equal respect for all, equal consideration of their concerns, equal voice, equal freedom."

This book is an important wake-up call for all of us who are concerned about the future – even the survival – of democratic values in the modern world.

It is based on a deep understanding of the history and philosophy of democracy, but Benner carries her learning lightly and most readers will find her book both accessible and enlightening.



The Moth and the Moon, by Margaret Anne Suggs (Bee Hive / A Veritas imprint, €9.99 / £5.99)

Peter Costello

Margaret Anne Suggs is a professional illustrator. Some readers will already be familiar with her work as the illustrator of the 'Pigin of Howth' stories by Kathleen Watkins, and also *Holy Shocking Saints* with Sine Quinn.

However, this new book seems to be a very personal project. She

tells us that she has long held a curious affection for moths, "the butterflies of the night".

As most children, and indeed adults, are on the contrary fascinated by butterflies, this is an unusual kind of affection. But it is this affection that illuminates this little lovely story, aimed at younger readers of all ages.

The tale's gallant little heroine Rose the Moth is infatuated with the moon – as folklore and legend have related for ages.

It was love at first sight, for as

she wriggled from her chrysalis to get closer to the radiant glow. Night after night she attempts to fly to the moon, but failed or was thwarted and had many curious misadventures with other bright objects on the way.

The telling little details in the pictures relating to the street lamps and lanterns make it clear that these misadventures took place in and around Dublin.

She is not alone for she has the faithful support of her friend Gary. When she becomes upset

that the moon is slowly vanishing and then disappears, he explains to her what is happening and that is nothing to be afraid of. But all turns out well in the end.

Rosie and Gary in a few dexterous lines and muted colours become very much alive. This is a book to be warmly recommended. It is not only well designed and carried out, it is good fun – which these days is an achievement. It also shows just what female pluck and daring can achieve.

The tale of a high achiever

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.

A pirate's life for me

Ireland's Pirate Trail: The Quest to Uncover Our Swashbuckling Past,
by Des Ekin,
new edition (O'Brien Press, €14.99 / £12.99)

Peter Costello

Forget Captain Jack Sparrow, Errol Flynn, or even the real life Annie Bonny, that terror of the West Indies born in Kinsale. The pirates in Des Ekin's book haunt our own cosy little island, working out of little harbours and small ports around our coast line, in from the 16th to 18th Centuries.

The content may well come as a surprise to those who know such places as Dalkey, Wexford, Kinsale, Baltimore, Killybegs, Dunfarnagh and even Howth; recalling little chronicles of crime and pillage hardly known to us today.

For an island that prides itself on our saints and scholars, we Irish also seem to take an inordinate delight in our bandits, raparees, and as here, our pirates. Rory of the Moor, The Wild Colonial Boy, and that premature Australian democrat Ned Kelly are celebrated, rightly or wrongly.

History

Of course, historians of a certain tendency are likely to see these people as 'primitive rebels', and it is really as such that they have appealed to the Irish in the past.

Des Ekin is well known as the author of *The Stolen Village*, which deals with the wholesale kidnapping of the population of Baltimore, the people, men women and children, being carried off

to slavery in Muslim North Africa.

Of course, these days we are carefully instructed by the *bien pensant* groups here and in North America that such white slaves are not 'real slaves', being white.

The straight forward views held by many in the USA, are not to be confused by having to consider the history of the seraglio of Istanbul, the makeup of the people of Brazil, or the still dumb-founding history of Haiti.

“Good luck trying to write about Granuaile. You'll find that all the interesting stories aren't true, and all the true stories aren't interesting”

So what about the Irish pirates that are the subject of this new edition of another of Ekin's books? This book is full of good stories, and it certainly adds a large dimension to Irish local history that more conservative historians have long avoided.

However, he is a conscientious and careful researcher. Des Ekin is rightly sceptical about all the romantic nonsense generated about Grace O'Malley, as well he might be.

A more academic historian friend, he says, once warned him, “Good luck trying to write about Granuaile. You'll find that all the interesting stories aren't

true, and all the true stories aren't interesting.” Anyone who even dabbles in history will agree how true that is.

But stripping away the romances, we are left with a book which is indeed an unusual addition to Irish local history, in an area all too often neglected by those more academic writers. His own style is easy, fluent and entertaining.

The book is full of interesting, indeed astonishing stories, such as the connection of the global pirate Henry Avery with charming Dunfarnagh and beautiful Achill, a story which ends in the Old Bailey in London.

Tales

This is a book of piratical tales with at times a global reach that readers will enjoy for its entertainment value, but we might also give a moment's thought to the reality of piracy, which was often far from romantic, but rather raw, cruel and brutal.

There are those who see pirates in all periods from Julius Caesar onwards as thugs and robbers, well deserving hanging. Yet given the number of Irish people, Africans and other marginalised groups that resort to it we should have a care.

Wherever pirates appear, as today off the coast of Somalia or the south China seas, we should get clear in our minds who they are and what they want and why. Their cause may be more righteous than some imagine.

“This is a book of piratical tales with at times a global reach that readers will enjoy for its entertainment value, but we might also give a moment's thought to the reality of piracy, which was often far from romantic, but rather raw, cruel and brutal”

Il Vangelo secondo Matteo: one of the most important religious films ever



Peter Costello

At a recent press conference Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, speaking about the Vatican's Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (as discussed last week in these pages), went out of his way to remind the reporters of the international arts press that it is 60 years since Pier Paolo Pasolini launched at the same venue his film *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (otherwise *The Gospel According to Matthew*) on September 4 at the Venice Film Festival, where it won the Grand Jury Prize. It was later awarded Catholic prizes as well and was shown at the Vatican Council.

Matthew

In this context, the Cardinal recalled that Chapter 25 of St Matthew's Gospel, which begins, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat...”, remains “one of the most commented biblical texts by Pope Francis” throughout his pontificate.

The following year, as I recall, I saw the film in a university context in the USA. Shot in monochrome, which added to the starkness of the landscape standing in for Palestine in the time of Jesus, it also used non-professional actors in the tradition of the Italian neorealism that had developed since the

fall of fascism in 1944.

“The man of the Right presents a bloodstained fictional drama, the man of the Left the actual message Jesus expounded”

It was perhaps the last great achievement of that school of film making. With a mobile, often hand-held camera in *cinéma vérité* style, it had a sense of urgency that carried the viewer forward at a hectic pace.

The presentation of The Sermon on the Mount, as the central teachings of Jesus, I found thrilling and uplifting.

The Jesus of the film is a Jesus of the rural roads, impoverished villages and ordinary life; they cast people with lived in faces, scared by life and disease.

What a contrast this is to something like Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), which cannot escape all the insincerity of Hollywood, despite its intense presentation of suffering.

But the script suffered from a complicated mixture of visionary, legendary and traditional matter with the genuine Gospel text.

“The Jesus of the film is a Jesus of the rural roads, impoverished villages and ordinary life; they cast people with lived in faces, scared by life and disease”

In contrast Pasolini presents, with powerful directness, in the very words of the Gospel, the teaching of Jesus. The man of the Right presents a bloodstained fictional drama, the man of the Left the actual message Jesus expounded.

Pasolini

Pasolini is now dead, as is his lead actor, in later life a professor of literature and a chess expert, but the film is still shown and admired. There is a universal critical view that it represents one of the most important films ever made.

(It is available on DVD; but avoid the later colourised version, which vulgarises the total sense of reality that Pasolini achieved; and also the American film with nearly the same title whose values also belong to Hollywood.)

In the anniversary year I understand that there are plans for *The Gospel According to Matthew* to be rereleased; certainly in the Vatican of today there is renewed enthusiasm for the film, as the warm remarks of Cardinal Mendonça clearly demonstrate.

Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4027 or email advertising@irishcatholic.ie

We will pass on the flame of faith.

For over 130 years, The Irish Catholic has been a voice of hope and inspiration for Catholics in Ireland. Find out more by scanning the QR code below



Phone: 01 6874028
The Irish Catholic

(Our Lord promised St Gertrude He would release 1000 souls from Purgatory every time this prayer is recited)

Prayer of Saint Gertrude the Great

Eternal Father I offer you the Most Precious Blood of your Divine Son Jesus in union with the Masses said throughout the world today for all the Holy Souls in Purgatory, for sinners everywhere, for sinners in the universal Church, for those in my own home, and in my own family. Amen



The Gift Of A Lifetime

Be there for others after you're gone.

A gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation is a meaningful way to help ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

Email Anna Sadlier at anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie or call 01 679 3188



www.hospicefoundation.ie

Remembering
MEMORIAM CARDS
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
CARDS & NOTELETS
BOOKMARKS

Samples / Information
KENNEDY PRINTERS
BANTRY, CO. CORK, IRELAND
Tel. 027 50102
www.kennedyprinters.ie
email: info@kennedyprinters.ie

Listen to
The Confession Box



Available now
on all major
podcast
streaming
services!

When you remember
Trócaire in your
Will, you bring hope
to people living in
the world's
poorest places

trócaire

It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call Grace Kelly on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Will the MSC Missions

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart bring hope to the poorest people living in over 48 countries worldwide.

Please help us with a gift in your Will

Contact:

MSC Missions Office, PO Box 23 Western Road, Cork.
Tel: 021-4545704 Email: info@mscmissions.ie

www.mscmissions.ie

LOUGH DERG

3-DAY PILGRIMAGE CO. DONEGAL. 2024 dates are: 31st May – 2nd June; 5th July – 7th July; 9th Aug – 11th Aug. Tel: 0863853027 / 01-4941171

FRIENDSHIP/RELATIONSHIP

KILDARE MAN 62 SINGLE wishes to meet sincere single lady 35-60 for friendship/relationship in the county Kildare area or surrounding counties. Box No: PT0

MYRIAM TOURS

ROME AND SAN GIOVANNI ROTONDO, NOV 4-10. Aer Lingus flights. Well-located quality accommodation. All the sights of Rome, visiting Pietrelcina, Benevento, Montecassino and Monte' Sant Angelo. Excellent value at €895 including checked-in luggage, most dinners, some lunches, all coaching, tours and taxes. Contact Myriam Tours, info@myriam.ie. Phone 057 9355050.

SERVICES

ALL UNWANTED home waste removed. Cookers, fridges, beds, suites, wardrobes, carpets etc. Removed and disposed of in a proper manner. No job too small or big. Contact Tommy, 087 6406015.

Please pray for the beatification of
Little Nellie of Holy God

"May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model"

– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

MQI
Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

You're Invited

Come for a FREE, behind-the-scenes tour of Merchants Quay Ireland's homeless drop-in centre.

See first-hand how your kind donations and legacy bequests work to bring hope and relief to people who've slept rough overnight.

To find out more please ring Shauna at 01 524 0139.

We'd love to meet you

A hot meal. A helping hand. A fresh start.

DCU DCU School of Theology, Philosophy, and Music
Enduring Questions. Global Issues. Big Ideas.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Study Theology at Dublin City University (All Halls Campus, Drumcondra) | BA in Theology and Religious Studies Part-time, flexible programme with evening lectures designed for mature students (23+) | MA in Theology and World Religions Flexible full-time and part-time options with evening lectures |
|---|---|---|

Key topics include:

- Christian Theology and Church History
- Sacred Texts in Judaism, Christianity, and Other Traditions
- Faith and Justice
- Pastoral Ministry and Community Development
- Interreligious dialogue between Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism
- Politics and Religion in the 21st century

Undergraduate enquiries:
E: john.murray@dcu.ie P. 086 087 3438 W: www.dcu.ie/dc300

Postgraduate enquiries:
E: joseph.rivera@dcu.ie P. 085 825 1047 W: www.dcu.ie/dc693

Classifieds: 01 687 4028

Leisure time

Let Your
Compassion
Live On



CHY: 9768 | RCN: 20024505

For more information, please contact James at jsullivan@materfoundation.ie or phone 01 830 3482.

THE
Mater
Hospital
FOUNDATION

A gift in your Will to the Mater Hospital Foundation is the promise of help, hope and healing for the next 100 years...

Leave a Lasting Legacy to Rehab Group: Empower others through your will.

RehabGroup

Investing in People, Changing Perspectives

Leaving a gift in your will to Rehab Group enables people to pursue opportunities, be more independent, participate in society and live the life of their choosing.

To learn more about the difference your legacy will make.
Call: (01) 2057200
Email: fundraising@rehab.ie

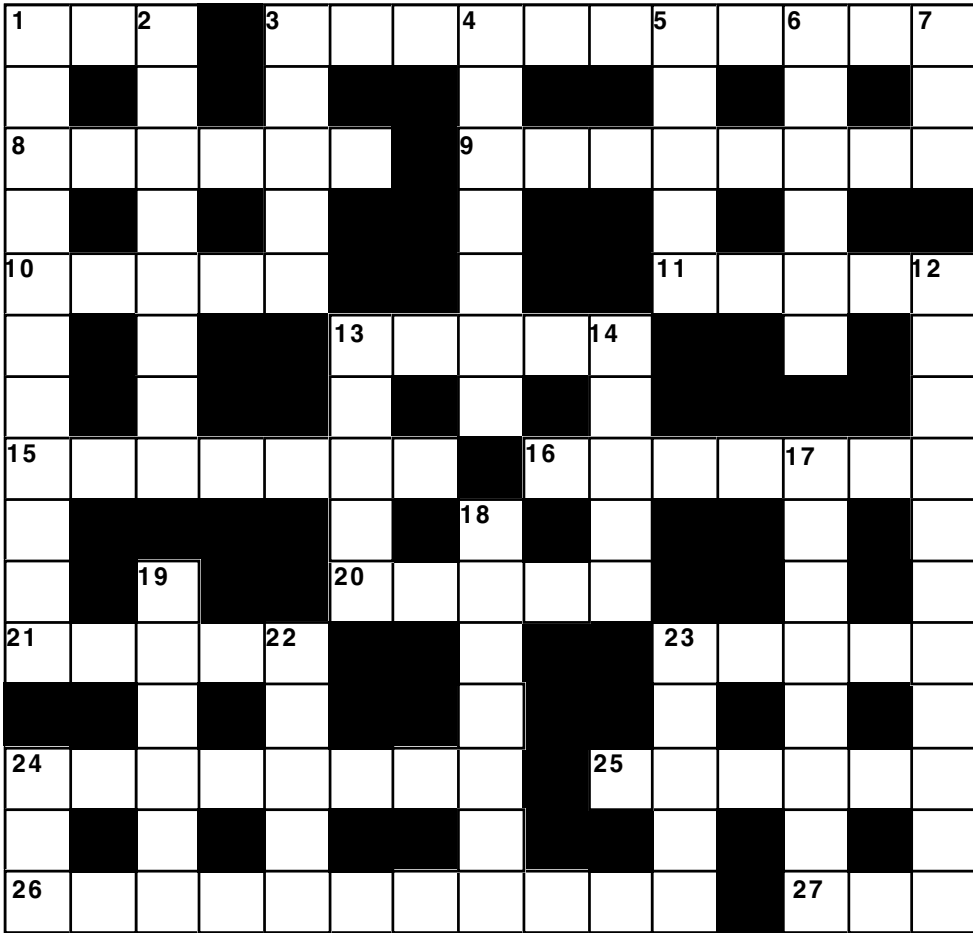


For further enquiries contact:
Fundraising Department
Rehab Group Head Office
10D Beckett Way, Park West Business Park, Dublin D12 K276
Charity number: CHY 4940
Registered Charity Number (RCN): 20006716

Crossword

Gordius 661

- Across**
- 1 Little devil (3)
 - 3 Item of forensic evidence (11)
 - 8 The capital of Austria (6)
 - 9 One who sailed Jason in search of the Golden Fleece (8)
 - 10 Remain on one's feet (5)
 - 11 Peach or lemon, perhaps (5)
 - 13 Cartridge without a bullet (5)
 - 15 Infinite (7)
 - 16 Vehicles using a road at a given time (7)
 - 20 It is made up of links (5)
 - 21 Obliterate (5)
 - 23 Gamble with some money (5)
 - 24 Important church, such as that at Knock (8)
 - 25 Chessboard prelate (6)
 - 26 Fitting, seemingly (11)
 - 27 Placed (3)



- Down**
- 1 Financial commitments in one's portfolio (11)
 - 2 Got ready (8)
 - 3 Charged money as punishment (5)
 - 4 Scandinavian salmon dish (7)
 - 5 Verification (5)
 - 6 In Greek legend, he died when the sun melted the wax in his wings (6)
 - 7 Add up (3)
 - 12 One who gets preferential attention at school (8,3)
 - 13 Elementary, fundamental (5)
 - 14 Holy book of Islam (5)
 - 17 The principal vessel of a flotilla (8)
 - 18 Variety of rice (7)
 - 19 Tomato sauce, especially in southern USA (6)
 - 22 Word of greeting (5)
 - 23 Scribble (5)
 - 24 Large constrictor (3)

SOLUTIONS, APRIL 25

GORDIUS No. 660

Across

- 1 Wet 3 Down-to-earth 8 Tenors 9 Thurible 10 Rainy 11 Rooks 13 Fangs 15 Sternum 16 Rallies 20 Thorn 21 Lurid 23 Clove 24 Altitude 25 Lean-to 26 Ballot boxes 27 Awl

Down

- 1 Water-pistol 2 Tangible 3 Derby 4 Nothing 5 Error 6 Ribbon 7 Hue 12 Sausage roll 13 Fault 14 Stain 17 Insomnia 18 Torpedo 19 Gretel 22 Ditto 23 Chefs 24 Alb

Sudoku Corner 531

Easy

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | | | 4 | 8 | | 6 | | |
| 7 | | | | | | | | 1 |
| | | | | | 7 | 2 | 4 | 8 |
| | | 1 | | 4 | | | 9 | 5 |
| | | | 1 | | 5 | | | |
| 5 | 6 | | | 2 | | 8 | | |
| 1 | 7 | 4 | 6 | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | | | | 9 |
| | | 3 | | 5 | 4 | | | 7 |

Hard

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 8 | | | | | | | |
| | | | | 5 | | | 1 | 7 |
| | | | | 9 | 8 | 2 | 4 | |
| 6 | | | | 4 | 8 | 2 | 7 | |
| 2 | 7 | | | | | | 8 | 3 |
| | 9 | 8 | 2 | 7 | | | | 6 |
| | | 5 | 4 | 9 | 1 | | | |
| 9 | 6 | | | 2 | | | | |
| | | | | | | | 9 | |

Last week's Easy 530

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 9 |
| 9 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 2 |
| 7 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 4 |
| 5 | 6 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 8 |
| 4 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 9 | 6 |
| 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 4 | 5 | 7 |
| 3 | 9 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 6 | 8 | 1 |
| 8 | 4 | 6 | 9 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 3 |
| 1 | 2 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 4 | 5 |

Last week's Hard 530

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 8 |
| 1 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 9 |
| 9 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 3 |
| 3 | 9 | 8 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 6 | 1 |
| 7 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 9 | 4 |
| 5 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 8 | 2 |
| 8 | 6 | 9 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| 2 | 5 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 7 | 9 | 1 | 6 |
| 4 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 9 | 8 | 2 | 5 |

Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



A Rome reunion to remember...

I became a priest in 1984, 40 years ago this year. In that year, 44 of us were ordained after studies at Maynooth. By my reckoning, 20 of us still serve in active ministry in this country.

Many classmates have met up every year since for a reunion, each organised in a different part of Ireland. Fr Pat O'Hagan, who gathered us together in Limavady, Co. Derry, last year, suggested we do something special for our 40th: the plan for a trip to Rome was hatched. Ten of us managed to get away from parish and other duties after Easter for this trip of a lifetime.

That's how we ended up at the crack of dawn, queueing on the Via della Conciliazione, down from St Peter's Square. This queue was a real test of endurance. On all sides were Italian priests and nuns and lay folk, trying to muscle in on those waiting in line, as only they can. Before we got into the Square the Pope had already begun his talk on fortitude; it's a gift one would need in Rome.

Meeting

After stringent airport-style security and three or four other checkpoints, we ended up on the platform just in front of St Peter's Basilica where



The class of 1984 concelebrate in Rome during their reunion: Back row (left to right): Frs Hughie Loftus, Tuam, Eoin Whooley, Cork and Ross, Tommy O'Connor, Meath, Michael Woods, Armagh, Peter Rabbitte, Galway, Liam Lawton, Kildare and Leighlin, Pat O'Hagan, Derry. Front row: John Conlon, Meath, Joe McGuinness, Clogher, Bernard Cotter, Cork and Ross.

the Pope speaks from — we and over 500 others. We thought this was as good as it was to get. But then, a papal aide, in a fancy morning suit decorated with elaborate papal arms, came looking for the *sacerdoti irlandesi* (Irish priests) whom the Pope was to meet. Imagine our

surprise! Several other groups got an audience too — Pallottine priests, African sisters, many individual lay people, others in uniform — and us.

The Pope was duly wheeled along in his wheelchair to where we were positioned, all ready for our group photo with him. Luckily,

Fr Pat, our leader, speaks fluent Italian, so he understood the gentle joke Pope Francis told us. The Pope shook hands with each of us, smiled a lot and posed for a photo with the group, right there in his wheelchair. As he was whisked away, he made one request: "Pray for me."

Highlights

The meeting was the highlight of the trip, maybe even the highlight of my life. And like every event, it had a prelude and a postlude. Its prelude was Mass in the Irish College the evening before, with a reception for us and a meal following it for our whole group in a nearby hostelry.

The postlude took place in a kerbside cafe near the Vatican. As we sipped coffee and reflected on the papal audience, a bishop paused to ask where we were from. We identified our Irishness, to which the prelate replied, "Ah, that country that used to be Catholic."

Further conversation revealed that he was from Maastricht and served as armed forces bishop in the Netherlands. To which one of our number replied: "Ah Holland, that country which also used to be Catholic!" Touché, bishop!

Access for differently abled parishioners...

After a few days in Rome, some of us visited other parts of Italy, including Venice. Here, preparations were in full swing for Pope Francis' one-day visit there. In ancient St Mark's Basilica, a solid steel ramp was being installed right up the middle aisle of this centuries-old church. Planning permission is hardly needed for such modern intrusions when the Pope comes to town.

Would that this were the case in every church in the world! Would that every building was made accessible on the off chance that the Pope might pop by. It would make differently abled parishioners very happy indeed.



YOUR EASTERTIDE GIFT TO OUR RISEN SAVIOUR

HELP TRAIN A YOUNG MAN FOR THE LITTLE WAY MISSIONARY PRIESTHOOD IN MYANMAR

The Little Way Missionary Priests of St Therese were founded in Myanmar by Archbishop Mang Thang with the assistance of the late Miss Mary Doohan, founder of The Little Way Association. There are now 27 LWM priests, six major seminarians and 77 minor seminarians in various dioceses in Myanmar. Two LWM priests are now serving in Cambodia and four in Papua New Guinea, in tribal areas. Our Association has funded the Little Way Priests since their inception, especially with the costs involved in training and maintaining them as seminarians, paying for food, medical aid, clothing, housing and other needs.

It costs approximately €84 a month (€1,000 per year) to feed and educate a student for the priesthood.

The great majority of young men who come forward to offer their lives to God, and His people, come from poor families. Their parents do not have the means to support them financially.

These young men are Myanmar's future priests, carrying the Gospel and message of Christ's love to people who would otherwise have little or no opportunity of hearing it.

His Grace asks you urgently, our faithful supporters, for any donation you can send this Eastertide to help with the heavy costs involved in training and supporting a seminarian for the priesthood.

Archbishop Nicholas and our Little Way Missionary Priests of St Therese remember all Little Way friends and benefactors every day in their prayers and Masses. On their behalf, we appeal to you wholeheartedly this Eastertide for ANY gift, large or small, you can send us. They will be forever grateful to you. Please pray for them, for Myanmar and for all its people, in the ongoing conflict.



"True glory is that which will last eternally, and to reach it, it isn't necessary to perform striking works but to hide oneself and practice virtue in such a way that the left hand knows not what the right is doing." — St Therese

HELP FEED THE HUNGRY

Please spare a thought for the thousands who die each year of hunger and disease. Your donation will be forwarded intact to enable a missionary to provide food and medicines for the needy..

WOULD YOU LIKE TO VOLUNTEER AT OUR THERESIAN HOUSE IN KNOCK?

The work involves general house-keeping duties, providing guests with a light breakfast, prayer and welcoming pilgrims. If this work appeals to you, and you could offer one month of your time, please write to Maria Grcar at the address in the coupon, giving details, experience and a contact telephone number.

Email: contact@littlewayassociation.com

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLEWAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **TRAINING LITTLE WAY MISSIONARY PRIESTS OF ST THERESE**

€..... **HUNGRY, SICK, AND DEPRIVED**

€..... **REPAIRING MISSION CHAPELS**

€..... **MASSSES (please state no.)**

We ask for a minimum of €6.50 or more for each Mass

€..... **LITTLEWAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

To donate online go to
www.littlewaysassociation.com

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.

1C/05/02