

# The Irish Catholic

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Thursday, October 24, 2024

€3.00 (Stg £2.70)

The-Irish-Catholic-Newspaper

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## 'We must ensure the next generation believe in God'

### Archbishop: Some dioceses and parishes will not survive rationalisation

Chai Brady

Some dioceses and parishes will not survive financially in the future and while there is "pain in letting go" passing on the Faith is more important, the Primate of All Ireland has said.

Simply "ensuring that the next generation of Irish people believe in God" is the reality the Church is facing, not the expensive upkeep of buildings, Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin told *The Irish Catholic*.

"I'm very hopeful about the future but I do realise there is a lot of pain in letting go, there is a lot of worry. You look at the maintenance of buildings and huge churches and the expenses, financially the Church is going to be very, very poor – not to mention the impact of paying the just compensation to people who've been abused," Archbishop Martin said.

"We're going to find that some parishes, some dioceses perhaps even, are not going to be able to survive financially, and that's a whole new challenging landscape for us to inhabit.

"But remember the Faith, and the passing on of the Faith, is the really important thing, not the buildings, not the structures, but ensuring that the next generation of Irish people believe in God – you would never have believed that the Archbishop of Armagh would be saying that to you, but that is the reality that we are facing," he added.

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### Joy as relics of St Bernadette's tour continues



Arlene O'Toole with Gracie and Mary, and Caroline, Aoibhinn and Grace McCleary venerate the relics of St Bernadette in St Patricks Cathedral, Armagh during their tour of Ireland, October 19. Photo: LiamMcArdle.com

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The Irish Catholic



# ‘We must ensure the next generation believe in God’

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Already many parishes and dioceses are working more closely together across Ireland, with some priests in charge of several parishes and some bishops heading two dioceses.

It is clear that the Pope's representative in Ireland, Papal Nuncio Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor – who began his ministry early last year – sped up the process of bringing dioceses closer together. This can be seen in the effective merger of the Archdiocese of Tuam and Killala and that of Elphin and Achonry in the west of Ireland.

At diocesan level, Archbishop Martin thinks different models will emerge depending on the circumstance.

“I see that sort of rationalisation of resources continuing. I'm not too sure if we have yet properly thought it through. In some ways it's happening when a diocese becomes vacant that conversations begin. The Dromore situation is different to the situation in say Galway and Clonfert, which is in turn is different to the situation in

Tuam and Killala,” he said.

The archbishop asserts he would prefer that what emerges is what is best for evangelisation and that Irish dioceses are not treated like a “big jigsaw”.

“I'm hoping that our ongoing synodal journey and the synodal pathway for the Church in Ireland will enable a lot of that thinking to come through,” he says.

Archbishop Martin insists that for a long time Irish bishops have accepted that there does need to be change – but when the moments arise.

Looking at the situation in Dromore, he says: “It's difficult for a diocese to say, ‘we've been around for 1,000 years, are we going to lose something of our distinctiveness or our identity as a diocese or as a local particular church?’”

“And those conversations do need to happen, particularly when we're talking synodally nowadays. But sometimes it does take somebody to come in and say, ‘let's do it now, we need to take these decisions now.’”

See full interview pages 14-16

# Catholic schools advised to not make use of SPHE textbooks

Brandon Scott

Chief Executive Officer of the Catholic Education Partnership Alan Hynes has said that regardless of any apparent shift in tone from Minister for Education Norma Foley regarding the controversial content in the DCU course for SPHE teachers, with reports indicating that Minister Foley is “unhappy” with the content, which includes graphic descriptions of specific sexual acts, Catholic schools were advised not to make use of certain SPHE textbooks and this will remain the policy regardless of any decision the

minister may or may not make in the future.

“With regard to the textbooks issue, in one sense I'd almost view it as moot in the sense that Catholic schools were advised not to make use of these textbooks,” he said. “That was pretty much the advice we gave to schools and we directed them toward our own resources and supplemented those with resources found in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's website.”

“That was our advice and that remains our guidance and advice to schools. Whether or not the depart-

ment wants to look into what the textbook companies put into the textbooks, that's a matter for the department.

“This controversy will not affect any schools following the advice that came from the Catholic education bodies.”

Meanwhile, TDs who have been campaigning for the removal of the content in the SPHE curriculum questioned why material of this nature was ever considered for inclusion in schools in the first place.

Independent TD Mattie McGrath said that Minister Foley needed to answer questions about “how this situation had been allowed to arise”.

“The buck stops with the minister,” he said. “There's no escaping that. How did she allow SPHE to be taken over in this way? She needs to apologise and take action.”

Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín said it's clear that young people need to be taught about sex education but that any grounding in the subject must be free of “over-sexualised” themes.

“It is clearly not suitable and totally age inappropriate,” he said. “Obviously children and young people need to be taught about sex education, they need to be taught about consent, they need to be taught about safety, but this material coupled with the videos was over-sexualised in the extreme.”

Independent TD Carol Nolan said that “extremist voices” are to blame for the “relentless determination to sexualise children” and said that she will not accept this “poison” as “the new normal”.

“I'm absolutely certain that what I would term extremist voices are exerting a powerful sphere of influence on our children's school curriculum,” she said.

“What is driving this relentless determination to sexualise children or to prompt them toward the exploration of what, until 5 minutes ago, were adult only themes? Well I for one and the very many parents who contact me will not simply accept this poison as the new normal,” she said.

## St Brigid of St Alphonsus



The Redemptoristine community at the Monastery of St Alphonsus, Drumcondra in Dublin welcome Bishop Michael Router to the monastery to receive a new icon of St Brigid of Faughart for the Archdiocese of Armagh.

# Pope Francis' autobiography announced

Renata Steffens

The first autobiography written by a sitting pope will be published globally on January 14, 2025. In his memoir *Hope*, Pope Francis will talk about his life from childhood to the present day, covering the

whole of his papacy.

“The book of my life is the story of a journey of hope, a journey that I cannot separate from the journey of my family, of my people, of all God's people,” Pope Francis said. “In every page, in every passage, it is also the book of those who have travelled with me, of those who

came before, of those who will follow.”

The book will be published by Viking, an imprint of Penguin General, and took six years to be written. The choice of publishing it in January 2025 was thought to coincide with the 2025 Jubilee.

Written with Carlo Musso, for-

mer Non-Fiction Editorial Director of Piemme and Sperling & Kupfer and then founder of the independent publisher Libreria Pienogiorno, the book was intended to be published after the Pope's death.

“But the new Jubilee of Hope announced for 2025, and the needs of our times, have moved him to

make this precious legacy available now,” the UK publisher said in a statement.

Mr Musso said: “It has been a long, intense adventure that has taken up the past six years: work on writing it began in March 2019 and will be completed in the forthcoming weeks.”

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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.

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# Deal collapses as Veritas wind-down continues

**Chai Brady**

Discussions regarding the possible buy out and takeover of Veritas Ltd by another major religious publisher, St Pauls Ireland, have broken down, *The Irish Catholic* understands. Veritas stated this week on Twitter that its branch in Blanchardstown, Dublin will now close.

Veritas announced their wind-down in February last, saying it would be complete by the end of the year with the loss of approximately 80 jobs. Since

then, they have been exploring potential buyers, the most promising of which – St Pauls – is believed to have fallen through in the last two weeks.

It was subsequently announced that Veritas Blanchardstown would close on Friday, October 25. A source in Blanchardstown said there were hopes that the deal with St Pauls would have prevented any further store closures, and that there was “deep disappointment” in the community upon hearing the news.

A staff member said that the closure had been on the cards “for a long time”, and that they had actually “got longer than we thought”, adding that it was “sad after 20 years” of the shop being open.

This is the fourth shop closure, with the Limerick store officially closing on May 15, Tallaght on May 17 and the Cork branch on July 19.

This leaves shops in Letterkenny, Abbey Street, Derry and Newry still open, with their future unclear.

# Immigrants return spiritual legacy to Ireland

**Renata Milán Morales**

“The very faith Irish missionaries once spread to distant countries is now being brought back to Ireland by the descendants of those evangelised,” noted Catholic speaker, Paul J. Kim in an interview with *The Irish Catholic*.

“Last time I visited Ireland, it was both beautiful and ironic,” said Mr Kim, whose family was evangelised by Irish Columban missionaries in Korea in the 1960s. “I had this stereotype that I’d be speaking to redheaded Irish people,” Mr Kim remarked, “but when I

arrived, the majority were Indian.” He highlighted the nature of this reversal, explaining that the Indian Catholics he encountered are, in a sense, the spiritual children of the Irish missionaries who once evangelised in India. “Now, they were the ones evangelising in Ireland. It was quite profound to see how the faith had come full circle,” he added.

This shift speaks to a broader trend in contemporary Ireland, where immigration has brought a renewed faith to the Catholic Church in the emerald island.

See full interview on page 11

# An encyclical on the Sacred Heart of Jesus is due

**Renata Steffens**

Pope Francis is due to publish a new encyclical on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This will be the Pope’s fourth encyclical and he hopes this document will invite people to reflect on the Lord’s love and resonate with “a world that seems to have lost its heart.”

Devotion to the Sacred Heart was popular in Ireland, and for a long time, every home had its own Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The encyclical is titled *Dilexit Nos - Encyclical Letter*

*on the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ* and will be released today. ‘*Dilexit Nos*’ translates to ‘He loved us’. The document will include reflections of previous magisterial texts and history texts on the sacred Scriptures.

The encyclical will be presented by Monsignor Bruno Forte, theologian and Archbishop of Chieti-Vasto, alongside Sr Antonella Fracaro, General Superior of the Disciples of the Gospel on a press conference live-streamed on the Vatican News YouTube channel.



Sacred Heart of Jesus on a stained glass window from St Casimir’s church in Baltimore, US.

## A missionary jubilee...



Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty celebrated Mission Sunday in St Brigid’s Church, Kildare. On the occasion, the Silver Jubilee of Sr Maria Ijeoma was honoured in the presence of the diocese’s African family and the parish community. “A real sense of ‘Mission’ was obvious throughout the celebration,” the bishop said on a Twitter post.



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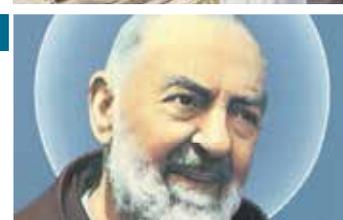


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# Too soon for border poll on Irish unity Archbishop of Armagh says

Chai Brady

The Archbishop of Armagh has said now is not the time for a border poll on Irish unity due to the current state of political flux on the island of Ireland and Europe.

His comments came before a new poll published on Tuesday revealed that support for the union dropped below 50% for the first time.

The figures published by *The Irish News*, contained in the Northern Ireland General Election Survey 2024, showed support for Irish unity at 33.7%, an increase of more than five percentage points over

the past five years. Some 14% of people said they do not know and 3.7% refused to say regarding the constitutional question.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* Archbishop Eamon Martin said: "I think the Good Friday Agreement asks for that conversation to happen with regard to how and when a border poll will be held."

"I think that at the moment, if you look at the relationships, we've just literally got a fledgling assembly back up and running, we have a new government in Britain, we have elections coming up in the Republic of Ireland, we have a new commission being established in Europe - I think this

is not the time for a border poll. However, I think the conversations towards having some decision-making about this issue can begin and have already begun," said.

Archbishop Martin said the Churches in the North could be part of the conversations around a united Ireland and border poll, as "one of my big regrets is that at the moment it's extremely difficult for a Northern unionist or loyalist to become in any way associated with the conversation about a shared island. So you would question whether or not this is the time to be springing a border poll".

He added: "We saw in Brexit,

if you hold the poll before you've had a discussion about the implications, you're into chaos. We're in the situation that we're eight years following the Brexit vote and people are only now beginning to realise the implications of having voted for Brexit.

"I would hate the same thing that happen over a border poll. Therefore, I think the front loading before a border poll is much more important to do than to try to pick up the pieces after you've held one."

See full interview on pages 14-16

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Radio Maria Ireland gets a new Spiritual Director

Radio Maria Ireland elected Deacon Don Devaney, a Permanent Deacon in the Archdiocese of Dublin, to the role of Spiritual Director. Mr Devaney is a married man with seven adult children and is known to many as the Chairman of the *Divine Mercy Conference* held in the RDS for the past 33 years. His role as Spiritual Director will include overseeing the content and presenting programmes such as: 'Divine Mercy Hour' and 'Can we Be Saints', among others.

Speaking after the announcement Deacon Devaney said, "I am deeply honoured to follow in the footsteps of Fr Eamonn, who has served with such dedication, faith, and love over the past seven years. It is my great joy to continue bringing the message of God's love and mercy to our listeners, trusting in His grace to guide our steps forward."

### Renowned columnist visits Ireland

Fr Ron Rolheiser OMI, priest, theologian, professor, award-winning author who writes a weekly column that is carried in over 70 newspapers around the world, including *The Irish Catholic*, will be visiting Ireland to give the Annual Newman Lecture at the Newman University Church on November 14 at 6pm in Dublin.

The topic of the talk is 'Not our tribal deity' with a subtitle 'struggling to free our concept of God from pettiness, tribalism, false fear, false piety, and lack of common sense.'

### The first Good Samaritan medal recipient has died

The first Irish priest to be awarded a Good Samaritan medal died on October 18. Fr Vincent Mulligan OMI died peacefully in St James' Hospital, Dublin.

Fr Mulligan received the award in 2014 for his services to the sick and vulnerable and his work as the director of pilgrimages with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) order. By the time he was awarded, the priest had already been to Lourdes more than 100 times.

His death is deeply regretted by his sisters-in-law, Ann and Helena, nephews and nieces and extended family, his Oblate Community and staff in the House of Retreat, Hospitalité and pilgrims of the Oblate Lourdes Pilgrimage, fellow teachers and former students of Belcamp College and a wide circle of friends.

The funeral Mass took place in the Church of Mary Immaculate, Inchicore on October 22 followed by burial at the Community Cemetery.

## From Romania to Navan



(R/L) Fr Sebi, Deacon Celestin and Fr Declan after the deacon's ordination in the Cathedral of Iasi in Romania on October 20. Deacon Celestin will exercise his ministry as deacon in Navan Parish. "We look forward to welcoming him to our Parish within the coming weeks", the parish said on a Facebook post.

## 'Profound gratitude' for Apostolic Work charity

Staff reporter

Apostolic Work, the charity led by lay people who support Irish missionaries abroad marked World Mission Sunday with a celebrated Mass by 14 priests hosted by Drumbo and Carryduff parish in the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

In his homily Fr Derek Kearney SMA, thanked all who had organised the Mass and recalled the great difference the generosity of Apostolic Work has made and continues to make in the mission fields since its foundation in 1923.

Fr Kearney said: "Over the years I received vestments and Mass kits and altar linens, finance for the

purchase of parish vehicles. But my deepest gratitude lay in my ability to purchase medical books for medical and nursing students in Nigeria and Zambia."

Delivering those books to the African students, Fr Kearney continued, "always filled me with profound gratitude when I saw the joy in their faces."

He added that there could be no way of knowing how much healing was brought to numerous African patients over the years.

Fr Kearney said along with the need for the proclamation of the Gospel abroad "there is the realisation of the need to proclaim the Gospel here at home in our post-modern culture".

## 'Get out and vote for pro-life TDs' conference told

Renata Milán Morales

Over 300 pro-life supporters met in Cork last Saturday for the Pro-Life Campaign's National Conference 2024.

Most of the speeches touched on the upcoming general election and the efforts needed to ensure more pro-life TDs are elected.

Eilís Mulroy of the Pro-Life Campaign stressed the importance of maximising the pro-life vote in the election, "It comes down to getting the word out. It comes down to each one of us setting aside the time to do leaflet drops for pro-life candidates... to canvass for them." She encouraged pro-life supporters across the country to consult the Voter Guide on the Pro Life Campaign's website before casting their vote.

Among the main guest speakers were Independent Ireland leader Micheal Collins TD and recently

elected Aontú councillor from Limerick, Sarah Beasley.

Dr Margaret Naughton, Clinical Pastoral Educational Supervisor at University Hospital Kerry, said it can be difficult and challenging at times to "defend those who are struggling, to defend the voiceless, to defend those on the margins" but that we have "an ethical and moral imperative" to speak out given what is at stake and the type of euthanasia regime that will be introduced if we don't.

There was a large youth presence at the conference and a panel discussion also took place on the work being done at present on various fronts to attract more young people to the movement.

Attendees at the conference included the Bishop of Kerry Raymond Browne, Bishop of Cloyne William Crean as well as representatives and leaders from other faith communities, including Pastor Stephen Cardy of Family.ie.



Baby Nellie O Shaughnessy enjoying the Pro-Life Campaign National Conference held in Cork City on Saturday. Photo: PLC

# A Latin Mass brings me back to the 1950s

I have no strong opinions, either way, about the practice of the traditional Latin Mass. My instinctive feeling is - let people have Mass in whatever form they chose, providing it follows the basic tenets of the faith.

So, visiting the lovely old spa town of Vichy in France this month, I took the opportunity to attend a Latin Mass, at the imposing local Church of St Louis (consecrated in 1865).

The experience took me back to my childhood in the 1950s. The priest, who was probably in his late 30s, faced the altar, not the people. He entered from the south transept area, wearing a flowing green cope and the square-shaped biretta. He partly disrobed by the side of the altar - assisted by two young men - and donned a Roman chasuble over his surplice. The surplice had guipure trimmings in the lower panels - an intricate embroidered lace.

## Formality

Proceedings had an air of formality. The sung parts of the Mass were undertaken by a lay choir - mostly composed of women - who stood in a group in the right transept. They seemed very dedicated. The church, which is large, wasn't full, but it was



Mary Kenny

reasonably well-attended: at least one woman wore a mantilla, and a family of four young children behaved impeccably, focused on their little missals.

**“The Latin Mass has a certain dignity, and the Latin words of prayers like the Pater Noster reverberate with historic universality”**

The sermon was delivered with tranquillity, though in content unremarkable - a reflection on the gospel. No lay people participated in the readings. There was no “peace” gesture amongst the congregation.

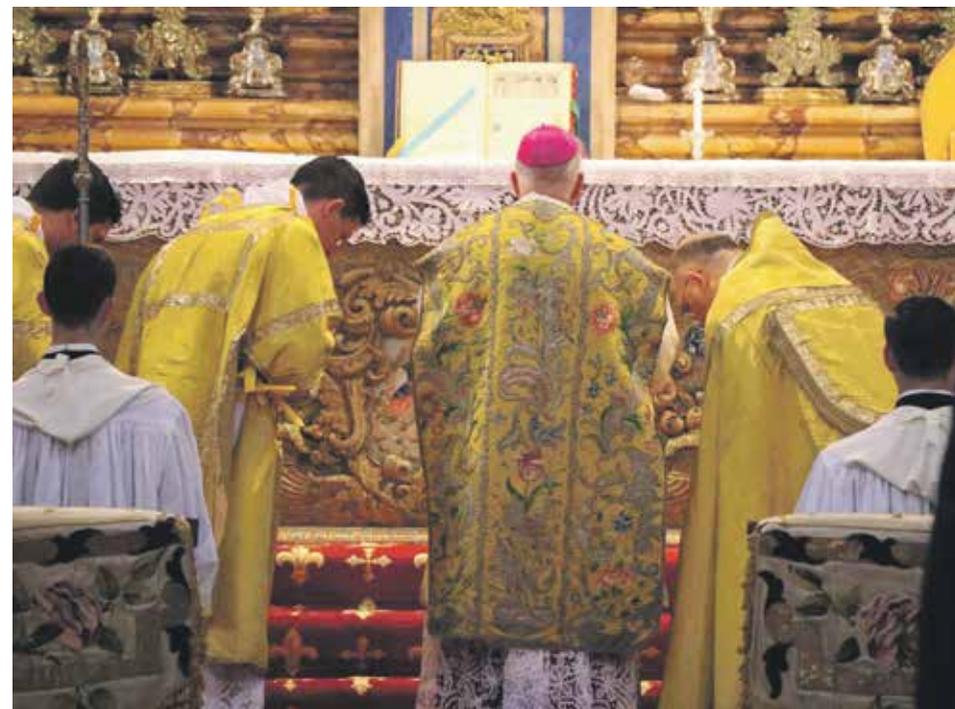
At Communion, the two male aides slid a movable Communion rail towards the chancel, at the front of the altar, covered in white linen.

Everyone was expected to kneel and take communion on the tongue, not in the hand. It's a long time since I've done that and I felt a little apprehensive. But the priest knew what he was doing and it was all carried out with a surprising air of efficiency. The Mass, which took an hour and a quarter, ended with a Salve Regina.

As we left the church, one of my companions, who is French, waxed critical. “That is so reactionary,” she said. “So Pius XI! These people are intolerant - they don't live in the modern world!”

Well, I said, didn't Jesus say his kingdom was not of this world? If people want to worship in a traditional way, let them. And how can we judge whether individuals we don't know are intolerant?

The Latin Mass has a certain dignity, and the Latin words of prayers like the Pater Noster reverberate with historic universality. All the same, I found it more warming, more participatory, to return to the post-Vatican II rite the following Sunday.



A Latin Mass being celebrated. Photo: Latin Mass Society of Wrexham.

## Female saints and faith practice

St Bernadette - and St Thérèse of Lisieux - are evidence of the importance of French women saints in our calendar. Stained-glass windows in French churches often illuminate the lives of a repertory of female saints, including St Jeanne de Chantal, St Margaret-Mary Alacoque, St Catherine Labouré, and, of course, St Joan of Arc (along with Bernadette and Thérèse).

The Catholic church may have a patriarchal tradition in priesthood and hierarchy, but the many images of these visionary holy women also attest to the strong participation, and wide acknowledgment, of females in faith practice.

As well as the French saints patriotically portrayed in artistic *vitrines*, the Italian St Rita often features prominently. She was (like Jeanne de Chantal) a married woman whose husband

was what we would now call a domestic abuser. We would nowadays counsel such a wife to seek shelter from domestic violence, but St Rita of Cascia, by her goodness and holiness, apparently won her brutish spouse back to repentance before he died.

She's seen in images with roses and the thorns of Christ, and prayers to St Rita often seek support in distressing circumstances. An enduringly popular saint in Continental Europe.

I hear comments to the effect that Catholic schools have gone too “woke”, especially on matters touching sex education. But will “wokery” soon be out of date? According to reports in *The Economist* magazine, “wokeness” has now peaked.

The fashion for DEI (“Diversity, Equity, Inclusion”) is cooling - often because in business, it

loses money (“Go woke, go broke”). Budweiser, the beer company, lost a shed of cash for promoting transgender polices, rather than their ale product. The public, literally, wasn't buying it.

In America, businesses have lost legal cases in which DEI policies added to discrimination: if someone is hired just for token reasons, this may unjustly discriminate against a

candidate who genuinely deserves the job. In Britain, scores of corporate bodies are unsubscribing from “Stonewall” because compulsive wokery is seen as a form of bullying.

Fairness and diversity are fine intentions, but the public doesn't like it when it gets silly and extreme. And parent-power, like public reaction, can defeat educational wokery.

December  
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# Politicians: 'Authoritarian' Safe Access Zones law is 'bad day for civil rights'

**Brandon Scott**

Politicians and a pro-life campaigner have decried the recent enactment of the Safe Access Zones legislation, a law that prohibits conduct 'aimed at impeding access or influencing decisions' 100 metres from an entrance or exit to a premises that provides abortion, as being "authoritarian", "draconian" and represents "a bad day for civil rights in Ireland".

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* in the aftermath of the controversial law coming into effect last week, Aontú leader and TD Peadar Tóibín said that the occasion represented "a bad day for civil rights in Ire-

land".

"The right to protest is a key democratic right, even when you don't agree with the object of a person's protest. Aontú will always stand up for that key civil right.

"The idea that we are going to prevent another mother or woman potentially offering solutions, such as economic solutions, to mothers on the verge of having an abortion is very sad and wrong. It shows you the authoritarian nature of this Government. When bans on democratic freedoms are introduced they often increase over time," he said.

Voicing her opposition to the new law, Independent TD Carol Nolan said that there is

"no credible evidential basis for this law" and that the motivations behind it seek to criminalise peaceful protest and pro-life discourse.

"This legislation is rooted in a defensive and resentful, authoritarian impulse," she said. "There is no credible evidential basis for this law beyond a desire to set pro-life discourse and peaceful protest on a trajectory toward outright criminalisation.

"Peaceful and compassionate outreach are now being reframed as a threat to democracy and acts of 'aggression' or 'intimidation'. This is an absurdity that almost defies description from a Government that is out of ideas on

how to really assist women in difficult circumstances," Ms Nolan said.

Independent TD Mattie McGrath, described the legislation as being the fruit of "an un-Christian Government" looking to "silence people".

"It's another attempt to silence people," he said. "I don't want and I'm sure that anyone involved in the pro-life moment doesn't want people feeling intimidated going into hospitals but literally this actually means that we can't have a march down O'Connell Street because we're within distance of a medical facility.

"It's just draconian legislation introduced by an un-Christian Government."

CEO of the Pro-Life Campaign Eilís Mulroy said that the legislation symbolised "a deeply troubling attack on the right of citizens to peacefully assemble and present the pro-life position in public".

"In 2020, the Garda Commissioner told the Government that the proposal to introduce the new law was unnecessary and unhelpful but they chose to ignore his advice," she said. "They caved instead to the whims of the most extreme elements of the pro-abortion movement.

"We will fight for as long as it takes to have this unjust law repealed."

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Bishop Router comments on the death of presenter Michael Reade

LMFM presenter Michael Reade has died at the age of 58 on October 21, just a few weeks after revealing he had received a terminal cancer diagnosis. Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Armagh, Michael Router said he "was deeply saddened to hear" the news.

"Michael invited Archbishop Eamon Martin and myself on to his show separately on numerous occasions over the last decade, and while he was straight talking and robust in his style, his interviews were always fair, forensic and insightful," the bishop said.

The bishop said the presenter had a deep sense of justice and care for those who were vulnerable. "On the topics that he spoke about to Archbishop Eamon and myself...we often found that we shared common ground.

"On Church issues Michael was challenging but was always respectful and willing to listen," Bishop Router added.

## Pro-lifers gather for minute silence for unborn in Belfast

**Chai Brady**

A pro-life activist has said "no law will stop us defending" unborn babies at a 'Life-Chain' rally in Belfast over the weekend.

Bernie Smyth, director of Precious Life, said that abortion is "barbaric", and its effects will prove detrimental throughout

society.

Ms Smyth was speaking ahead of a minute's silence for the 8,490 babies aborted in Northern Ireland since Westminster imposed abortion regulations just feet away from a 'buffer zone' in Belfast, which makes it illegal for anyone to protest within the vicinity of an abortion clinic.

She said prayer was even more powerful than protests. "They introduce buffer zones because they know that prayer works. People have been praying outside those centres and we know what happened in England the other day when even praying in your head is a crime now. No law will stop us defending these babies. We

can still pray...God knows no boundaries."

She contrasted abortion policy with plans for a new law at the Stormont power-sharing assembly to acknowledge babies lost through miscarriage with official certificates.

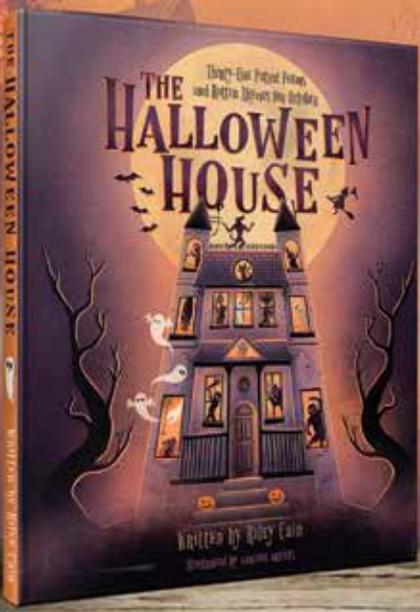
While welcoming the initiative, she attacked Sinn Féin's double standards and vowed to fight for the same right for all boys and girls before birth. She said: "The hypocrisy of what is happening at Stormont. If this

legislation goes through, I can assure you we will demand that certificates are issued for every single baby that dies through abortion."

"We will be at Stormont on Tuesday (October 22) and bring our display of baby shoes to remember every single one of these little babies that never got a birthday and never got a hug from their mothers and never got recognised as human beings."

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Kathleen Madden of Dungiven with son Jonathan and granddaughter Kayleigh (7) at the Belfast Life Chain.

### Appeal for Middle East launched

Christians in the Middle East to receive aid support from the Church of Ireland, as a new appeal was launched this week. They look "to help provide humanitarian aid for people in need across the Middle East," a statement said, and all parishes in the Church of Ireland are being encouraged to support the initiative.

Bringing hope through aid, the appeal has a focus time on Advent Sunday, but it will continue throughout Advent and Christmas. The funds raised will be shared "equally between the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem, which runs a number of schools and hospitals in the region including in Gaza, and Tearfund."

Hosam Naoum, the Anglican Archbishop of Jerusalem said "The whole system is collapsing but as Christians, we continue to have hope, and we are called to be resilient. We are called to be God's presence in the world."

## Worldwide baptisms in Church fall over 15% in 6 years

**Staff reporter**

The number of baptisms administered in the Church worldwide plunged from over 16 million in 2016 to 13,327,037 in 2022—a decline of 17% over six years, according to the appendix to statistics published by the Fides news agency (CWN coverage).

There were 18.1 million baptisms in 1991, 17,932,891 baptisms in 1998, and

18,408,076 baptisms in 2000. Between 2001 and 2016, the number of baptisms annually stood between 16 million and 18 million, falling slightly below 16 million only in 2015.

The decline in baptisms was particularly pronounced in 2020, the year of COVID-related lockdowns, but has continued steadily since then, from 14 million in 2020, to just over 13.7 million in 2021, to 13,327,037 in 2022.

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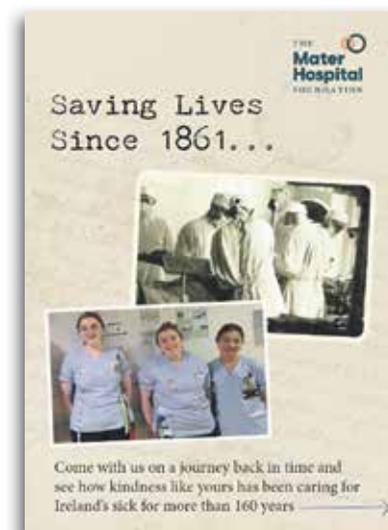
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# Pastoral letter on immigration avoids the tough questions



David Quinn

With a General Election coming up, various issues will come to the front of the public mind and one of them is bound to be immigration. It has been arguably the main topic of debate in the country for the last year or so and therefore it is fitting that the bishops have produced a pastoral letter on the topic.

Currently, Ireland has one of the highest immigration rates in the whole of Europe and the rate of population increase is one of the highest in the Western world, right up with countries literally built through immigration like Canada. The rate is currently far higher than in Britain, where high immigration has been a topic of debate for years and we even have Britain's Labour Government trying to bring the numbers down.

We also have one of the highest numbers of people entering the country seeking asylum, on a per capita basis, that is, compared with our population size. The miracle is that what is happening has not caused a debate before now. The amount of immigration we are seeing cannot but have a big effect on a country, both good and bad. It is as implausible to say the effects can only be good as to say the effects can only be bad.

## Migration

Let's look at this initially from the other end of the lens. Emigration, as distinct from immigration, can be vital and indispensable for the people affected. At various points in our history, enormous numbers of Irish have had to go overseas in search of a better life, and during the Famine, literally to avoid death, although many died of disease on the ships anyway, or after arriving in America or elsewhere.

But if emigration from a country becomes very high, that is extremely bad for that country overall, even if it is necessary, because the country begins to drain of its people, often its young, and that cannot be a good thing. We saw this in Ireland, with



Tents around the International Protection Office, Dublin. Photo: Collins.

whole areas of the country, especially in the west, being depopulated.

This has been happening for quite some time in Eastern Europe. Many Poles, Lithuanians, Romanians etc have come to live here, but those countries have lost many of their people and are depopulating. They also have very low birth rates (as does Ireland now).

Therefore, emigration creates gains and losses. We were worried for a long time that we would be a 'failed State' with so many leaving.

**“Catholicism is a faith that crosses national and ethnic boundaries and sees the faith of Christians in Christ as the most important thing we share in common”**

Net immigration on the other hand, that is, more people coming into your country than leaving, is a sign that your country is prospering. But is it still a perfectly legitimate question

**“The amount of immigration we are seeing cannot but have a big effect on a country, both good and bad. It is as implausible to say the effects can only be good as to say the effects can only be bad”**

to ask whether we can cope with the numbers coming in over a given period, and whether one group is easier to integrate than another. For example, it is easier to integrate Filipinos than Afghans? A question like that should not be forbidden.

The bishops' pastoral letter quite rightly draws attention to the universality of the Catholic faith, that is, Catholicism is a faith that crosses national and ethnic boundaries and sees the faith of Christians in Christ as the most important thing we share in common.

## Division

As St Paul said: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

But Christians also see everyone as their neighbour, and not just other Christians. Therefore, we must reach out the hand of friendship to those of other faiths as well, something we have not always done very successfully, as the problem of sectarianism has shown and the existence down the centuries of Christian anti-Semitism.

But tribalism and division

**“There is a determination to see only the upside of high immigration, but if you are someone in a long queue for social housing, you are entitled to get annoyed when you see demand for housing being constantly added to”**

seem to be as much a part of the human condition as sin itself and therefore keep surfacing everywhere under nearly all conditions and in all cultures, which is why we must always be alert to it. Therefore, the bishops are correct to strongly emphasise the need to 'welcome the stranger'.

**“We cannot pretend high immigration does not create strains of its own, and those strains can be seen precisely in areas like health and education and housing”**

But in my opinion, the pastoral letter does not tackle the issue of immigration honestly enough or engage properly with the trade-offs involved.

Yes, we need a high level of immigration at present to keep the economy going, including vital sectors like health and education.

But on the other hand, we cannot pretend high immigration does not create strains of its own, and those strains can be seen precisely in areas like health and education and housing.

For example, it should be clear that as the population grows, there will be more demands on the health service and that demand might grow too fast to cope with. If we do not have enough doctors and nurses of our own, perhaps we are not training enough? In addition, is it a good thing that lots of Sudanese doctors are working in our hospitals because where does that leave poor, shattered Sudan?

## Challenges

Some schools in the country actually need more pupils because our birth rate has dropped so much. On the other hand, some schools have so many pupils from non-English speaking backgrounds that integrating them all is a challenge and doing so can mean less class-time for learning the traditional subjects. It is easy for those unaffected by high immigration to lecture those

who are.

Or what about housing? The pastoral letter said that there were strains on the housing system since before high immigration, although this is arguable because we have had high immigration, with brief interruptions, since the late 1990s.

But it is simply not plausible to say that very rapid population increase does not affect the availability of housing, and this lack of admission diminishes the overall credibility of the document. We can only build houses so fast.

There are very brief mentions of the common good in the document. It says: “It is important to approach immigration policies in a way that serves the common good, which includes both migrants and citizens”. But it does not develop this point properly.

**“There is too much wishful thinking in it, and too much avoiding of the real trade-offs involved in trying to balance different demands”**

I have mentioned three examples of the need to balance competing demands in the areas of health, education and housing and the document does not tackle these competing demands with sufficient honesty. There is a determination to see only the upside of high immigration, but if you are someone in a long queue for social housing, you are entitled to get annoyed when you see demand for housing being constantly added to. What does the Church have to say to such people, people who are clearly suffering from social disadvantage themselves and who the Church is also supposed to be mindful of?

The pastoral letter is at its best when describing the sometimes heroic work parishes are doing integrating newcomers from different countries, newcomers who will hopefully help to revive the Church in Ireland. But overall, the document is a missed opportunity because there is too much wishful thinking in it, and too much avoiding of the real trade-offs involved in trying to balance different demands when a country has very high immigration levels.

Oliver and her family can see  
a brighter future ahead.

Photo: Chris Gagnon/Concern.

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# Modern paganism in a darker world



Martina Purdy

Wandering down a shopping aisle in Belfast this week, the signs of the times were on display: pumpkins and skulls of Hallowe'en on the right and left, and, straight ahead, the frosted glitter of Christmas baubles, with everything but the crib! Hallowe'en, which marks the eve of All Saints, is upon us, but too often resembles the old pagan festival of Samhain, a night when the Celts wore disguises to ward off evil spirits.

Aaah, how appropriate for our times that there is no longer a decent gap, of time or space, between Hallowe'en and Christmas. This is after all the age of pleasure, escapism, and choice. It is also the age of 'Modern Paganism', as Christ is being driven out of society, even his own birthday, with remarkable haste.

## Exodus

As I journeyed down the store's aisle, a lecture, "Christ the King and the Return of the Dark Gods" was echoing loudly. It was delivered this month by Gavin Ashenden, the former chaplain to Queen Elizabeth II, an Anglican bishop who entered the Roman Catholic Church in 2019. "Tragically, over the last 150 years," said Ashenden, "our culture has been slowly and methodically emptied of Christ's presence. Christ has been driven out of the schools, driven out of the instruments of government, driven out of the media, driven out of the professions, driven out of the public square, driven out of our literature, driven out of our imaginations".

"There is nowhere they have not sought to drive Christ out and what have they left? They have left an emptiness."

And what has filled the emptiness? Dark forces.

Jesus himself spoke, in Matthew 12:43-45 of how demons, once driven out, return to their old haunts,



A modern image in stores across the island

when they are well-ordered but vacant.

**“The spirit of anti-God is in every empty space”**

Ashenden spoke of a dark trinity of destructive spirits found in the Old Testament, Baal, the spirit of anti-God, Ashtoreth, a female spirit of sexuality and perversion, and Molech, the spirit of death and destruction. Even those who don't believe in what St Paul called 'the principalities' can surely recognise the principles at the heart of modern society: atheism,

**“The real values or gods of the so-called Christian western societies belonged to 'modern paganism'”**

transgenderism, and abortion/assisted death.

The spirit of anti-God is in every empty space. Just recently, a 2024 edition of an Irish school textbook deleted any mention of Christmas. Last year the annual blessing of the Aer Lingus planes was cancelled and Dublin Council now celebrates a "Winter Lights" festival.

## Paganism

'Modern paganism' is not a new term, by the way.

It was used by the writer and poet, TS Eliot in 1939. Eliot, an American who had settled in London, observed as the Second World War

erupted, not only Nazis in Germany and Marxists in Russia, but a hidden truth: that the real values or gods of the so-called Christian western societies belonged to 'modern paganism'.

**“This belief - that nothing is true and everything is permitted - creates a world where human life is cheap”**

"Western democracies," said Eliot, "had no positive principles. It's just sheer indulgence and escapism. It is just liberalism and tolerance. But that is a negative culture. These lack substance and they will be eventually dissolved and replaced by a

**“So in the aisle between the skulls and the snowman, see the signs of the times, and be aware of the choice: the creation of a new Christian culture, which lifts up the weak and the lowly, or the slavery of modern paganism, where only the strong are free”**

pagan culture.”

And, what did Eliot's "pagan culture" look like?

Well a lot like Irish society today: a culture dedicated to materialism, secularism and moral relativism (the idea that there is no universal or absolute set of moral principles. In other words 'to each his own').

This belief - that nothing is true and everything is permitted - creates a world where human life is cheap. Why? Because the great theological proposition that human beings are made in the image of God, and are therefore precious, is denied. (There is a reason Psalm 71 states that God frees us from oppression.)

## Warnings

Ashenden warns that pagan culture is defined entirely by power, with the strong subjugating or discarding the weak, and the weak, economically dependent on the elite, doing what they can to survive.

"All pagan civilisation," he said, "were slave empires. The more advanced they were, the more brutal."

It was Venerable Fulton Sheen, the American bishop, who warned in 1970 that Christendom - an economic,

political and social life inspired by Christian principles - was coming to a close. Sheen could see the signs of the times: the breakdown of family life, the rise of abortion and general immorality.

**“We can rebuild on the old foundations and our fortunes will be restored”**

Now, we have more signs of a modern pagan culture: moves to restrict freedom through so-called "hate laws" and to introduce assisted dying. What are the chances that soon only the rich and powerful will have the privilege of old age? After all, only the 'wanted in the womb' currently enjoy the right to life.

God promises us in Isaiah that if we are faithful, we can rebuild on the old foundations and our fortunes will be restored.

So in the aisle between the skulls and the snowman, see the signs of the times, and be aware of the choice: the creation of a new Christian culture, which lifts up the weak and the lowly, or the slavery of modern paganism, where only the strong are free.

On Mission Sunday, I was reminded of a friend's experience at a wedding in North America. The priest marrying the couple was African, and English was not his first language. He struggled through the homily. Afterwards, some of the guests grumbled about it. My friend spoke up: "I am not a priest. You are not a priest. My son is not a priest. Your son is not a priest. And if your son wanted to be a priest, you'd try to talk him out of it." The subject was swiftly changed.

Bertie Ahern was right! I shared a podcast with him during lockdown and the former Taoiseach said that, in his experience, people will not necessarily go to Sunday Mass, but they

will turn out in great numbers for devotions such as a novena or a special event. St Bernadette proves the point: as thousands are flocking to see her relics, and connect with the simple faith of this little saint.

# A 'beautiful and ironic' visit to St Patrick's land



Renata Milán Morales

Ireland has a long history in the Catholic Church's mission of evangelisation, a role that has left its mark not only within the country but across the globe. From Africa to South America, from India to Korea, Irish missionaries have spread the Christian faith. Paul J. Kim, a sought-after Catholic speaker, shares a personal perspective on this legacy. In a conversation with *The Irish Catholic*, Mr Kim shared his own family's faith journey, highlighting the influence of Irish Columban missionaries in Korea, reflecting on his recent visit to Ireland, and considering the importance of immigrant communities in re-evangelising the emerald island.

"My father and mother are from an eastern coastal town in South Korea," Mr Kim began, explaining his family's Catholic roots. "Sometime in the 1960s, my father, out of curiosity, wanted to see what the Irish priests were building in his neighbourhood. He discovered it was a Catholic Church. At that time, many Koreans, like my father, were eager to learn English, so he thought the Irish priests would be a good source to learn from." His father began attending the catechism classes led by the Columban missionaries, initially driven by the desire to improve his English. Over time, he found himself captivated by the message of the Gospel. "Eventually, he embraced the Catholic faith and became the first Catholic in my family," Mr Kim explained.

## Conversion

This encounter was only the start of conversions within Mr Kim's family. His mother converted when his parents married, and later, his grandmother followed. "This led to a trickle effect that unexpectedly embedded Catholicism into our family narrative," Mr Kim said. "As a result of the missionary efforts of those Columban Fathers, my siblings and I were born and raised Catholic." The impact of Irish missionaries on his family did not end there. When

Kim's parents emigrated to the United States, they sought out community among other Korean immigrants, many of whom were Catholics. In Southern California, Korean Catholic parishes began to emerge, and some of the same Irish priests who had served in Korea were instrumental in founding these parishes. "I was baptised by one of those Irish Columban Fathers as an infant," Mr Kim noted.

Paul Kim, on a recent visit to the country observed that the faith that was once brought to distant lands is now, in many cases, being returned to Ireland by the descendants of those who were evangelised. "Last time I visited Ireland, it was both beautiful and ironic," he recalled. He had been invited to speak for a group called 'Jesus Youth', a Catholic movement largely composed of Indian Catholics living in Ireland.

**“Mr Kim’s reflection speaks to a larger trend in contemporary Ireland, where immigration has brought new life to Catholic communities that have been struggling”**

"Before going, I had this stereotype in mind that I'd be speaking to redheaded Irish people. But when I arrived, the majority were Indian," Mr Kim said. Most of these Indian Catholics were second-generation immigrants who had brought their faith with them from their homeland. For the online evangeliser, the significance of this encounter was profound. "It was peculiar to realise that these Indian Catholics were, in a sense, the spiritual children of the Irish missionaries who had originally gone to India. Now, they were the ones evangelising in Ireland. It was quite profound to see how the faith had come full circle."

Mr Kim's reflection speaks to a larger trend in contemporary Ireland, where immigration has brought new life to Catholic communities that have been struggling with

declining numbers. Paul Kim was also "struck by the emptiness" he encountered during a visit to a local parish for Mass. He noted that "most of the congregation were elderly. There was maybe one young family."

## Change

The Catholic speaker expressed concern about whether the younger generations in Ireland still possess the same fervour for the faith that once sent missionaries all over the world. "From what I saw, there are still young people on fire for their faith," he said, "but the overall situation in Ireland and Europe shows the Church has a lot of catching up to do." Ireland, once known as the 'land of saints and scholars,' seems now to be more focused on cultural rather than spiritual celebrations of its Catholic heritage. Mr Kim pointed to the example of St Patrick, whose legacy has been reduced, in many cases, to parades and parties, while the deeper meaning of his mission has been forgotten. "What Patrick did, returning to a land where he had been enslaved to evangelise those who once held him captive, is incredible... It was a faith-filled response to a profound call from God," Mr Kim said.

This sense of mission and response to God's call is, in Mr Kim's view, what is most

needed in today's world. "Our world is in bad shape," he warned. "In the West, the secular culture is doing a far better job of evangelising than the Church is. People are forgetting God and rebelling against Him, and the breakdown of family, marriage, and society follows." For Mr Kim, the values of the Gospel are more relevant than ever, but they are being drowned out by secular values that promote individualism, consumerism, and moral relativism.

**“The Holy Spirit, he believes, is still at work, inviting people to respond to the challenges of the present age, both in Ireland and around the world”**

"Catholicism," Mr Kim said, "once saved Europe, both culturally and spiritually, and it could do so again." He acknowledged the failures of individuals within the Church, but he firmly believes that the overall impact of Catholicism has been profoundly positive.

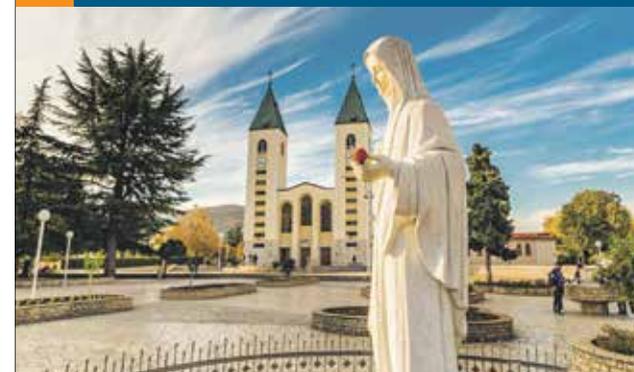


Paul J. Kim

"My hope for the Church, both in Ireland and globally, is that people will generously respond to God's call to be witnesses," Mr Kim concluded. "We desperately need more witnesses of faith

today – laypeople, priests, religious, bishops, everyone." The Holy Spirit, he believes, is still at work, inviting people to respond to the challenges of the present age, both in Ireland and around the world.

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# St Bernadette's visit, 'a sight to behold'



Renata Milán Morales

The relics of St Bernadette continue to draw thousands of faithful across Ireland, with a recent stop attracting parishioners from the Dioceses of Down and Connor, Dromore, Armagh, and Meath. Many travelled long distances to participate in a time of devotion and prayer.

James Tourish, a first-year student at Queen's University Belfast, was responsible for guiding visitors through the chapel and towards the relics during their visit to Belfast on October 16. His role was to ensure that the experience remained smooth and reverent for all. Talking to *The Irish Catholic* he described the day as a source of great joy, helping people of all ages and backgrounds witness the long-awaited arrival of St Bernadette's relics. "I took great delight in helping so many people, and everyone left feeling they were taking a bit of Lourdes home with them," he said.

The day was marked by an atmosphere of devotion, with confessions, the recitation of the Rosary, and the prayers of those present. Queues formed as people patiently waited to venerate the relics. The event attracted a large crowd, including schoolchildren in uniform and entire families. Commenting on the turnout, Mr Tourish told this paper, "It was a day that truly showcased the best of the Church in Ireland."

For Mr Tourish, the event was a hopeful sign for the future of the Church "despite the challenges and setbacks, the Church has faced in recent years." The overwhelming number of attendees who waited with reverence to venerate the relics demonstrated the enduring faith of the Irish people. "It was a sight to behold," he said. "So many still hold true to what is sacred, and I believe they will continue to pass this faith on to future generations."



Trinity College Belfast students are pictured with a replica of Lourdes Grotto in Newry



Bishop Emeritus of Raphoe, Philip Boyce, OCD, celebrating the 'Liturgy of Welcome' for St Bernadette's relics on October 11. Photo: Diocese of Raphoe



Students and parishioners venerating St Bernadette's relics in the Cathedral of St Patrick and St Colman, Newry



Faithful venerating St Bernadette's relics in St Mary's Church, Belfast. Photo: James Tourish



Members of the 'Letterkenny Youth Group' & the 'Youth 2000 Letterkenny' Prayer Group, who led the heart-warming 'Youth Prayer' Holy Hour in the Cathedral on October 12. Photo: Diocese of Raphoe



Candlelight ceremony during the visit of St Bernadette's relics to Newry

# Cathedral fundraiser is about ‘handing on the Faith’

**Brandon Scott**

**T**he Archdiocese of Armagh has recently begun a special fundraising campaign to raise much needed funds for the maintenance and repair of St Patrick’s Cathedral, a project that is as much about the vital handing on of the Faith than mere architectural aesthetics, according to Parish Administrator Fr Barry Matthews.

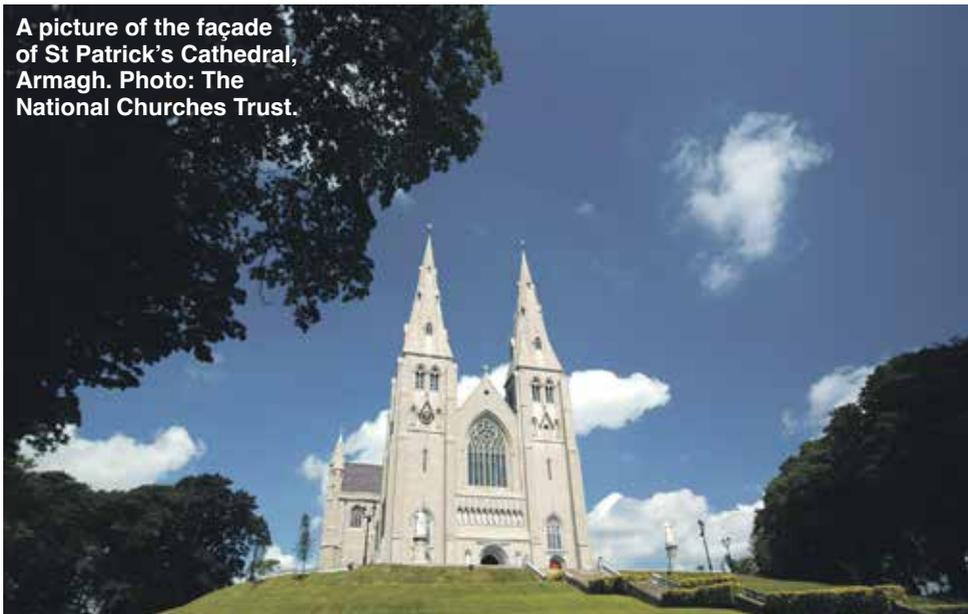
Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Matthews highlighted the features of the cathedral that need special attention due to wear and tear and how the work required needs a certain level of expertise.

## Dedication

“Since the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the dedication of St Patrick’s Cathedral last year we’ve been working behind the scenes looking to see exactly what work needs to be done at the cathedral,” he said.

“There are three areas that are really key and crucial. One is water ingress, there’s a fair bit of damp and water issues in the cathedral. Because it’s an old building, you have a lot of repairs to make so there are areas around the building that just need to be sealed and

A picture of the façade of St Patrick’s Cathedral, Armagh. Photo: The National Churches Trust.



secured.

“The iconic steps on the way up to the cathedral need to be relifted and relaid. But again, when you’re dealing with a Grade I listed building, anything you do like that has to be specialist workers and it has to be done in a way that keeps the integrity of the original structure in place.

“The third area we’re looking at is the organ. The great organ in the cathedral was built in 1878 so it needs to be maintained and repaired and

in some cases replaced. This is a big job.”

In order to achieve the fundraising goals, the archdiocese has launched various diocese-wide initiatives and

these have yielded a positive return so far.

“So what we’ve done so far is put the word out in the diocese,” he said. “We had a diocesan-wide collec-

tion and campaign where we asked people to support this. Any visitors that come to the cathedral have also been made aware of the fundraising. It’s going well so far – at this stage we’ve raised in the region of 10% of what we’re hoping to get. It’s a case now of putting a big push on to try and get the work done because we’ve quantified the work and know exactly the monetary value that we need to raise in order to achieve our goal.”

## Exceptional

The cathedral’s rich legacy, coupled with its association with St Patrick, makes it one of the most exceptional structures on the island but although its architectural excellence is unquestionable, Fr Matthews sees this endeavour as above all being part of a duty of the faithful to hand down what they’ve inherited

in the same condition as was given to them as custodians of the cathedral.

“I suppose the thing we’re really trying to remind people about is the idea that St Patrick’s Cathedral really is the seat of St Patrick in Ireland and it’s such an important pillar and space of faith and hope in the country,” he said.

“So many people who left the country left and have gone to the four corners of the world and the Faith is still so important to them still and we’re handing on the Faith that has been handed onto us to the next generation by supporting the cathedral and we all receive benefits from that.

“Each one of us has a sense of community and connectedness just because of our faith so we’re really trying to promote that. The cathedral really is iconic in its structure and it would be an awful shame to not see it being maintained. I’m very conscious as a custodian of the cathedral that I want to hand it on as well maintained as I’ve found it.”

**“I suppose the thing we’re really trying to remind people about is the idea that St Patrick’s Cathedral really is the seat of St Patrick in Ireland and it’s such an important pillar and space of faith and hope in the country”**

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# Be prepared for a Church that is small, poor and strong – archbishop



10 years on it is a strange but privileged vocation to be a bishop nowadays, Archbishop Eamon Martin tells Chai Brady

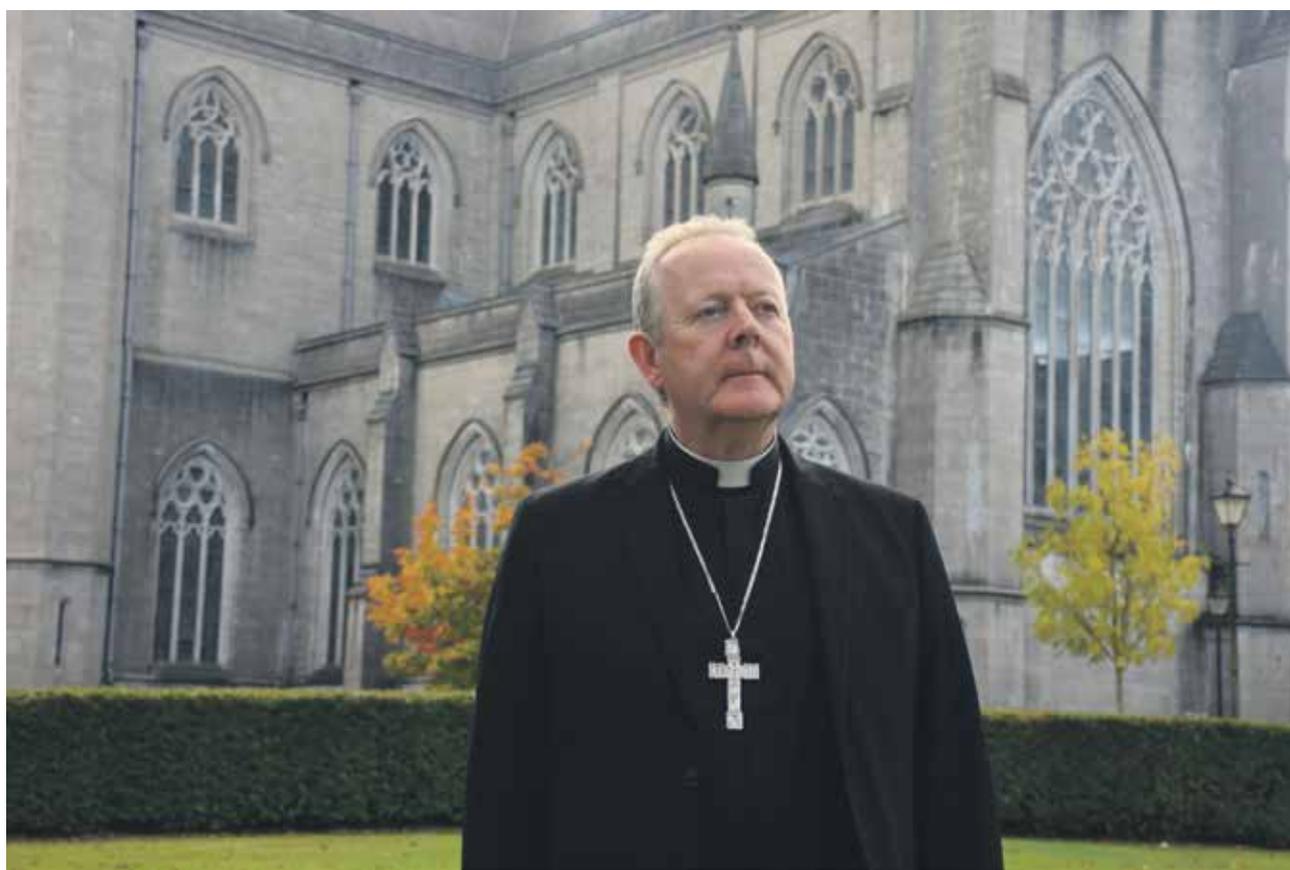
**T**he Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh was one of the last bishops to be appointed by Pope Benedict in January 2013, he says someone quipped that the former pope then “took the honourable step and resigned”.

The Derry-born Archbishop Eamon Martin was installed coadjutor in Armagh in April 2013. The appointment straddled the reign of two popes, as in February of the same year Pope Francis was elected. It wasn't until Cardinal Seán Brady resigned that in September 2014 Archbishop Martin officially became the Archbishop of Armagh. Ten years later, *The Irish Catholic* caught up with him to talk about the past, present and future of the Irish Church.

“There's never a dull moment,” Archbishop Martin says, when asked about his experience of the last decade as an archbishop, “it's really been an era of change, and a change of era – most definitely a change in the Church in Ireland and indeed in the universal Church under the pontificate of Pope Francis”.

An example of this ‘see’ change is reflected in the switch of the episcopal guard, with only three bishops still in the conference since Archbishop Martin started. He has since been elected three times as President of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. Twenty-four Irish bishops have retired or died in just over the past decade – a complete switch in the pastoral leadership of the Church.

Looking to the future, in the next 10 years, by 2034, there will be some significant anniversaries. Perhaps most notably the 200-year anniversary of Catholic emancipation in 2029.



Primate of All Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin pictured outside St Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh, October 11, 2024. Photos: Chai Brady

Archbishop Martin says: “That 200-year period has seen the Catholic Church in Ireland rise up after the penal times, really explode in terms of missionary outreach, vocations to the religious life, vocations to the priesthood, the whole rebuilding of a parish structure and diocesan structure.

**“The Church faces a very different reality, in order to ‘allow new shoots to emerge, new ways of being Church – whilst faithful to the Catholic Church, which is one, holy, Catholic and apostolic’”**

“Then Ireland becoming a deeply missionary Church, sending people all over the world, into English speaking countries to help them with vocations, but also to places in Africa and Asia.

“Then from around the 1950s-60s, we've seen a con-

traction of that again.

He adds that it is “very, very interesting that by the time we reach 2029, I have no doubt that we will be probably turning the page on that particular chapter in the life of the Church in Ireland. So I see my role and the role in this new bishops' conference as in some ways allowing this transition to happen”.

For Archbishop Martin it is the time to let go of the past, as the Church faces a very different reality, in order to “allow new shoots to emerge, new ways of being Church – whilst faithful to the Catholic Church, which is one, holy, Catholic and apostolic”.

Aided by the synodal pathway, and still noting anniversaries, he would like to see 2032 as a year to celebrate something new for the Church in Ireland as it is the 1,600-year anniversary of St Patrick bringing Christianity to Ireland.

Synodality is nothing new for the Irish Church, with Archbishop Martin saying the bishops announced the Irish synodal pathway before Pope Francis announced his synodal journey. “So in some ways, Pope Francis gate-crashed the Irish synodal

pathway,” he says, “but actually it's a lovely thing for us because we've been able to situate our synodal pathway in a much broader context because of the conversations on synodality that are happening just as we speak now in Rome”.

**“I do feel that the synodal conversations, whilst small, they are significant, because they are allowing a lot of people to talk about their faith”**

“So I would see this synodal journey for us as really trying to say, ‘how are we going to keep the faith alive in Ireland?’ I think there is a really strong group of young adults who are interested in their faith and who will be very vital collaborators with the clergy, with the religious, and with the bishops in being, I suppose, midwives to deliver something new for the Church in Ireland and I see this entire decade of the 20s as being the time for that reflection,

and I do feel that the synodal conversations, whilst small, they are significant, because they are allowing a lot of people to talk about their faith.”

Archbishop Martin mentioned a recent gathering of people in Newry, young adults in their 20s and early 30s, who spoke about the importance of their faith and were “really crying out for formation and for permission to be instruments of the growth of the faith”. He insists that while this event was small, it's happening all over the country.

**Faith not buildings**

With the decline in Mass attendance and many people moving away from the faith, and more and more empty churches, even on Sunday, the archbishop stresses the answer to this may be painful but there is a need to let go.

“I envisage the Church in Ireland during this decade probably increasingly allowing things to move on, to let go of some of the things we have had, but hopefully let God deter-

mine and the Holy Spirit lead us along the path that the spirit wants us to go,” Archbishop Martin says.

“I'm very hopeful about the future but I do realise there is a lot of pain in letting go, there is a lot of worry. You look at the maintenance of buildings and huge churches and the expenses... financially the Church is going to be very, very poor – not to mention the impact of paying the just compensation to people who've been abused.

“We're going to find that some parishes, some dioceses perhaps even, are not going to be able to survive financially, and that's a whole new challenging landscape for us to inhabit.

“But remember the Faith, and the passing on of the Faith, is the really important thing, not the buildings, not the structures, but ensuring that the next generation of Irish people believe in God – you would never have believed that the Archbishop of Armagh would be saying that to you, but that is the reality that we are facing,” he says.

**Diocese of Dromore**

Significantly Archbishop Martin has spent half his tenure looking after two dioceses, as five years into his time leading Armagh he was asked to become apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Dromore. The diocese has been attempting to assist and compensate survivors of abuse for several years under its redress scheme, with Archbishop Martin at the helm.

Because of the particular circumstances in Dromore, the archbishop says that “even though it's slightly different to some of the other [diocesan] situations where they have formally moved to amalgamate at this point, I think the Holy Father's preference is to allow me to continue this role overseeing the Diocese of Dromore”.

“We've built a lot of collaboration now into the workings of the two dioceses, maybe someday the two dioceses will formally amalgamate but I

**“We're going to find that some parishes, some dioceses perhaps even, are not going to be able to survive financially, and that's a whole new challenging landscape for us to inhabit”**

## Biggest regret

“The big regret moment for me was the passing of the abortion referendum. I think that was a watershed moment in Ireland. In terms of things that have shifted our culture, that was a very, very serious moment and one which I think Irish people will come to regret.”

Archbishop Eamon Martin seated below a picture of Pope Benedict XVI, who appointed him in 2013, in his office beside St Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh, October 11, 2024.



don't know, at the moment because of the particular circumstances there they want me just to run it as a second diocese, which is challenging, but it's also very rewarding because you see a different diocese at work."

### Amalgamation of diocese

It is clear that the Pope's representative in Ireland, Papal Nuncio Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor – who began his ministry early last year – sped up the process of bringing dioceses closer together. This can be seen in the effective merger of the Archdiocese of Tuam and Killala and that of Elphin and Achonry in the west of Ireland, which is considered the largest 'shake-up' in diocesan structure in over 900 years.

Regarding the future of Irish dioceses, many of which are already working very closely together, Archbishop Martin thinks different models will emerge

depending on the circumstance.

**“We're dealing with an entirely new episcopal conference now, and therefore, I think the bishops of Ireland are now much more open to recognising that change can happen – and in some cases should happen”**

“I see that sort of rationalisation of resources continuing. I'm not too sure if we have yet properly thought it through. In some ways it's happening when a diocese becomes vacant that conversations begin. The Dromore situation is different to the situation in say Galway and Clonfert, which is in turn is different to the situation in Tuam and Killala,” he says, adding that already good work has been done looking at the struc-

tural changes at home within the Church in Ireland.

The archbishop asserts he would prefer that what emerges is what is best for evangelisation and that Irish dioceses are not treated like a “big jigsaw”.

“I'm hoping that our ongoing synodal journey and the synodal pathway for the Church in Ireland will enable a lot of that thinking to come through,” he says.

“We're dealing with an entirely new episcopal conference now, and therefore, I think the bishops of Ireland are now much more open to recognising that change can happen – and in some cases should happen. I think that this Papal Nuncio [Archbishop Montemayor] has come in and said, ‘OK, we need to start doing this now and as opportunities arise, it is an opportunity to take another step.’”

Archbishop Martin insists that for a long time Irish bishops have accepted that there does need to be change – but when the moments arise.

He says that really what he would like to see in the future of Irish dioceses is “a better and a deeper discussion” about what might be our criteria here? What different models can we look at and can we use? It's a hard thing to do is to change”.

“I take for example, looking at the situation in Dromore, it's difficult for a diocese to say, ‘we've been around for 1,000 years, are we going to lose

something of our distinctiveness or our identity as a diocese or as a local particular church?”

“And those conversations do need to happen, particularly when we're talking synodally nowadays. But sometimes it does take somebody to come in and say, ‘let's do it now, we need to take these decisions now’.

While parishes and even governments are restructuring, Archbishop Martin says “I would hate to think that there's an automatic decision as soon as the diocese becomes vacant that it has to amalgamate; because remember the role of a bishop is as a pastor of his people, as a shepherd for his flock”.

So while rationalising something administratively or financially, or in a management way, he says he would “hate to think it would take away the closeness between a bishop and the bishop's flock. There are issues there which we have to grapple with and will continue to do, so this conversation is already happening and I think it's welcome”.

### Synod

Archbishop Martin acknowledged that “engagement with the synod has been moderate, and in some cases very small....”

He says: “If you asked me to give you a word that would characterise the Church in Ireland in the next decade, I think it is going to be small. I think from those small beginnings a new chapter will emerge. The Church will be small but hopefully a very significant voice for people in Ireland and we know there will be a need for this because as people in Ireland have drifted away from their Faith they are beginning to realise the implications of that for their lives. They are beginning to realise that particularly in the brokenness of today's society – that they need God, they need faith. That is something that I'm beginning to experience; people returning to faith, or for the very first time in their lives realising they need God in their life.”

**“I've said it to a lot of my friends in the pro-life movement, that they should not go away, we need to keep pronouncing the Gospel of life and that is Good News”**

The archbishop says that some people feel they are doing quite well without Faith “until something in their life confronts them with the emptiness, the meaninglessness, or purposefulness of living today without faith in God”.

“It's into that space that we will send the new teachers, the new adults, the new young people, and the new clergy and religious to reignite the flame

of faith in people's hearts,” he states.

### Pilgrims of Hope

Marked every 25 years, the jubilee year is a time of dedicated prayer to re-establish a relationship with God, with 2025's theme being ‘Pilgrims of Hope’.

In the same vein, Archbishop Martin says that around the country it is planned that the next phase of the Irish synodal pathway will more than likely take place next autumn, “which will be a big moment”.

He explains: “It will be a kind of a pre-assembly because we're committed to holding a National Assembly for the Church in Ireland in 2026, so the hope would be that next autumn, as part of the Jubilee that we would have the pre Synodal Assembly.”

Looking at the aim of the 2026 Synodal Assembly, Archbishop Martin says: “One of the things that is emerging in our conversations is that we need to select some particular theme so that we can hear from the people of Ireland on it. And at the moment, there are a number of things that are emerging, for example education is one potential, or how to support the sacramental preparation of our young people because we're so reliant on a school-based system: What's going to happen if we don't have Catholic schools so how can we engage with that in parish? Handing on the faith to our young people?”

But he says that the whole point of the pre-Synodal Assembly is to allow the theme to come from the ground.

“If we're going to have a really worthwhile National Assembly we need to choose a topic, we're not going to cover everything. Otherwise, it'll be a bit of a skim through of stuff. We need to choose a topic. Let's say, for example, Catholic education. And then we need to engage on the ground with people over a whole year on that topic and bring it to the assembly and then have the fruits of that. So I think we've learned all this already through our synodal pathway,” he says.

### Culture of death

Focusing on the changing trajectory of Morals/culture in Ireland, Archbishop Martin says that it is very difficult to change a culture, and one of his greatest regrets is seeing the repeal of the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution in 2018, allowing abortion to be legal in the Republic of Ireland.

Looking back over his years as archbishop he says that “one of my greatest regrets in the last 10 years is to see the way the abortion referendum went through and then how quickly the numbers of abortions in

Ireland have escalated and how the conversation and the discussion has moved off the agenda, and how easily people appear to be accepting this as part of the new culture of the new Ireland”.

“I do believe that deep down people will not buy it. I think that society will continue to project it, but I believe that it can be reversed. I've said it to a lot of my friends in the pro-life movement, that they should not go away, we need to keep pronouncing the Gospel of life and that is Good News,” he says.

The number of abortions in the Republic of Ireland risen to more than 10,000 in 2023, according to Government statistics, a figure that has risen by large amounts each year since legalisation.

Regarding the new push for assisted suicide across the island of Ireland, Archbishop Martin says: “To me that's just another inevitable outcome of a culture that moves away from life towards a culture of rampant choice.”

**“I do feel that the Catholic Church, and indeed all of the churches in Ireland, will have to continue to speak into that darkness, that there is the light of Christ, which is the light of life”**

The archbishop has said that any legislation allowing assisted suicide should be strongly opposed and constituents across Ireland should contact their local MP or TD to express their commitment to protecting life.

“Increasingly nowadays people are beginning to see the awful reality of being bombarded by bad news, by aggression, by violence, by war, by loneliness, depression, anxiety, people not able to cope, young children struggling with addictions – that's the reality of a society that has moved away from a culture of life,” Archbishop Martin says.

“And I do feel that the Catholic Church, and indeed all of the churches in Ireland, will have to continue to speak into that darkness, that there is the light of Christ, which is the light of life.”

He adds that this is why he does his best to attend pro-life marches and accompany those who are continuing, against the odds, to teach that “beautiful message, that every life is precious, every life is sacred”.

### Catholic education

Some extremist Irish politicians have called for the abol-

## Biggest joy

“The celebration in Croke Park for the World Meeting of Families with Pope Francis is one that stands out for me as a beautiful moment. I remember looking around in Croke Park that night seeing the presence of all the young people and families and music and joy.”

ishment of faith-based schools, proposing a one-size-fits-all model with ethos dictated by Government – whatever their standards of ethos may be at the time.

Speaking about the positives of Catholic education, having been a teacher of maths and religion in St Columb's College – with a degree in Mathematical Science and also in Divinity – and then subsequently becoming head of religion and then principal, he says: "I'd be very passionate in believing in Catholic education and its availability for those parents who wish to have their children educated in a Catholic or faith-based environment, and for that reason I feel that we are at a very important watershed moment when it comes to say the Church's involvement in education.

"There's no doubt that there are huge pressures on the Church, particularly in the Republic of Ireland, to divest a lot of the primary schools from their patronage, and that is something that I feel we're open to. However, within that I do feel that we're very anxious to maintain Catholic schools as an important element in a diversity of choice for parents. I don't think there's any desire within the bishops, for example, to have a monopoly on education either North or South of the border.

"However, we are very passionate, we deeply believe in a Catholic ethos and in a faith-based education, and I feel that so do a huge number of parents."

Archbishop Martin says that it is "rather strange" that despite the fact that there's been such a drift away from practise of the faith, from the sacraments, and with such a negative portrayal of faith and religion in Ireland, "people still value churches and the faith presence in education".

**“It's a very internationally recognised right for parents to have their children educated in a school with an ethos of their choice”**

Regardless, he says: "I think it's going to change, but I feel that it's up to us to show what Catholic ethos really means.

**“We saw in Brexit, if you hold the poll before you've had a discussion about the implications, you're into chaos. We're in the situation that we're eight years following the Brexit vote and people are only now beginning to realise the implications of having voted for Brexit. I would hate the same thing that happen over a border poll”**

I think our parents know it because they don't want to give it up. Every time we've gone to parents and asked them about the possibility of divesting the schools, they said 'No, we want the faith-based ethos. We want a Catholic school.'

"Now, that may change, and it's likely to change in the next decade or so, but I do feel that there should be a space for a highly committed Catholic ethos in enough schools for those parents who wish to choose that. It's a very internationally recognised right for parents to have their children educated in a school with an ethos of their choice. I think one of the big threats at the moment to the Catholic ethos is coming from those who don't even believe in the parent's right to choose, which is a rather unusual thing."

### Hostile politicians

Archbishop Martin said there is a disconnect between the ideology of some political thinking and the feelings of a politician's constituents, he explained: "It's a strange thing that the ideology is 'well we shouldn't have any influence of faith or religion or Church in our school' but on the ground they know that parents value this."

"Parents, they might not be able to describe what it is, but they know their children are valued, that the dignity of their children is valued – the pastoral strengths of our Catholic education system are very strong. Our teachers are excellent, albeit I do feel the Church has an obligation now to form its teachers for Catholic ethos and its principles.

"The Catholic school system is valued but it needs resources and it needs an injection of formation for the teachers and for the principals – not that all of them want this – but for those who do, to be able to maintain the ethos of the school."

### United Ireland

It could easily be said that one of the more challenging occurrences during Archbishop Martin's tenure was Brexit in 2016, which once again roused huge tensions between communities in the North.

Archbishop Martin says it "drove a wedge into the middle of Ireland in many ways, and it reignited a lot of ill feeling and difference within our communities".

When asked about the pos-



Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh speaks with then Foreign Affairs Minister Simon Coveney, far left, and former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson following a service to mark the centenary of the partition of Ireland in Armagh, October 21, 2021.

sibility of a united Ireland in the next decade, he states: "Well, I'm not so sure about the next 10 years, but certainly the conversation is alive and well."

Ecumenism is at the heart of these discussions, particularly when it comes to questions about a border poll or a united Ireland.

Archbishop Martin says his relationship with the other Christian Church leaders on the island of Ireland "very, very important to me".

**“I really do feel that a united Ireland in the sense of united harmonious sharing is one where we will have those relationships matured”**

"I have worked very hard at this. I have given a lot of time to building relationships with my Church of Ireland counterpart here in Armagh, initially Richard Clarke, now John McDowell, with the Presbyterian moderator, the Methodist president, with the President of the Irish Council of Churches and I think that we together have grown deeply in our understanding of each other and of

the people we serve.

"I really do feel that a united Ireland in the sense of united harmonious sharing is one where we will have those relationships matured. I am a nationalist myself and I believe that at the moment it is very important to open up the conversation about what a united, shared Ireland would look like, and how we accommodate those who have different political and cultural backgrounds, not to mention of course, the massive number of new Irish who are also to be part of the united Ireland."

He pointed out that during an ecumenical visit to Brussels, all of the Christian churches on the island of Ireland are all-island churches. "So we don't see the border from the point of view of faith. And I think the church leaders could have a very significant part to play in the conversations about relationships," Archbishop Martin says.

"So if you think, for example, when Brexit happened, a lot of people in the Catholic community, nationalist community, republican community, felt in some ways that they had been cheated by Brexit, interestingly enough, the more I have had conversations with my brothers and sisters in the other Christian traditions, I realised that they say in the Windsor framework that they've been cheated in terms of their belonging to the union. So somehow it's through those conversations that we learn about each other's perspectives."

Archbishop Martin mentions the controversy surrounding the service organised by the Christian churches reflecting on 100 years since the North's partition in 2021 – which notably the President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins refused to attend – which he says honoured all narratives respectfully.

He says: "It turned out to be an important moment for people to reflect. If we're going to have a shared island, and I hope one day we will, then we will have to take with us the understandings, the cultures, the attachments that people have to the union and how we do that within a shared Ireland."

### Border Poll

Asked about a border poll in terms of the Good Friday Agreement, Archbishop Martin says: "I think the Good Friday Agreement asks for that conversation to happen with regard to how and when a border poll will be held. I think that at the moment, if you look at the relationships, we've just literally got a fledgling [Stormont] assembly back up and running, we have a new government in Britain, we have elections coming up in the Republic of Ireland, we have a new commission being established in Europe – I think this is not the time for a border poll. However, I think the conversations towards having some decision-making about this issue can begin and have already begun.

**“I think the front loading before a border poll is much more important to do than to try to pick up the pieces after you've held one”**

"I think the churches could be part of the conversations because one of my big regrets is that at the moment it's extremely difficult for a Northern unionist or loyalist to become in any way associated with the conversation about a shared

island. So you would question whether or not this is the time to be to be springing a border poll.

"We saw in Brexit, if you hold the poll before you've had a discussion about the implications, you're into chaos. We're in the situation that we're eight years following the Brexit vote and people are only now beginning to realise the implications of having voted for Brexit. I would hate the same thing that happen over a border poll. Therefore I think the front loading before a border poll is much more important to do than to try to pick up the pieces after you've held one."

### Abuse

Regardless of all else, Archbishop Eamon highlighted that in his ministry, almost on a daily basis, he is dealing with the aftermath of abuse.

He says: "For me, one of the most heartbreaking experiences is meeting the survivors of abuse in the Church and realising that the impact of that is long lasting, traumatic and we are still nowhere near through it.

"Meeting with abuse survivors has been one of the most difficult things but also one of the most privileged moments in my life as a bishop. Very, very painful but very, very privileged that people are even speaking to me after what they have been through."

Archbishop Martin aims to keep survivors of abuse at the forefront of the new synodal pathway. He also wants to protect life from conception until natural death, ensure children are given solid education through a Catholic ethos despite cultural adversity, inspire young people looking for meaning, and overall, keep the fire of faith alive in Ireland.



# Christmas

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– 2024 –

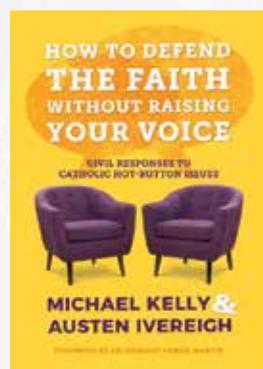
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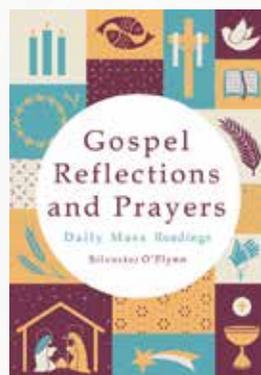
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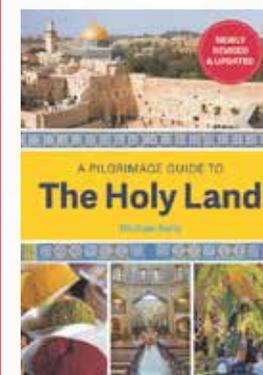
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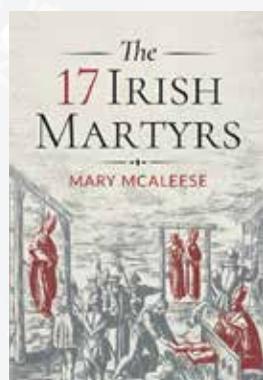
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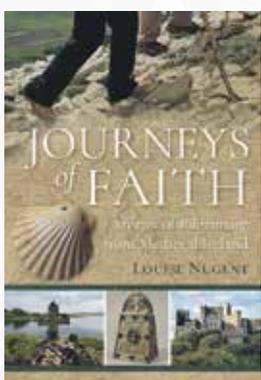
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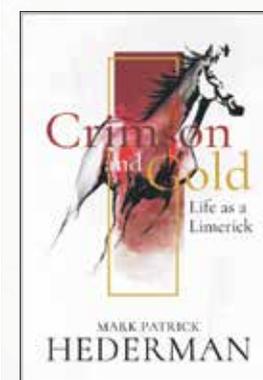
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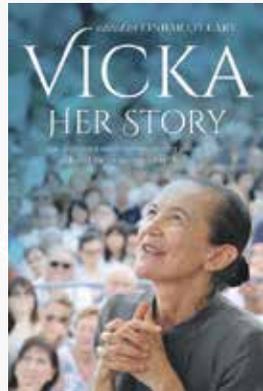
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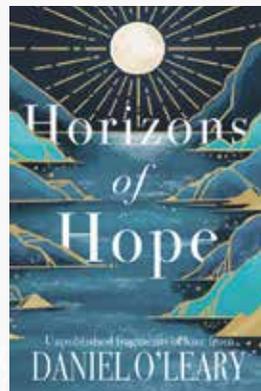
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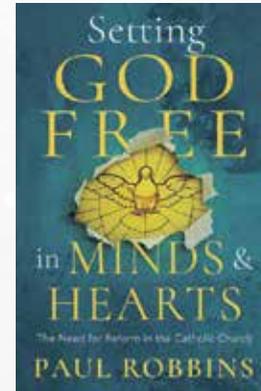
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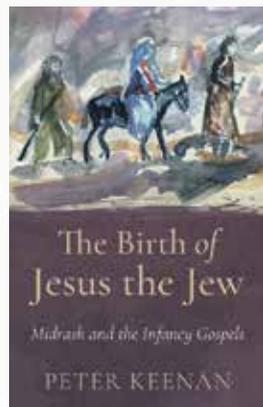
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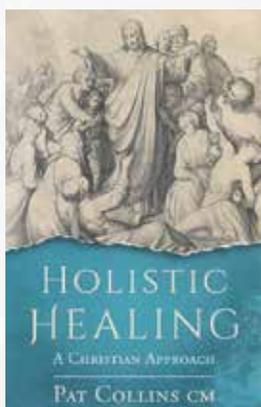
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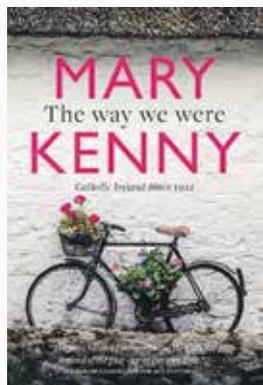
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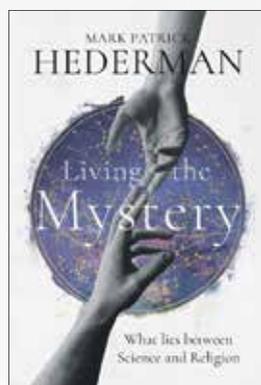
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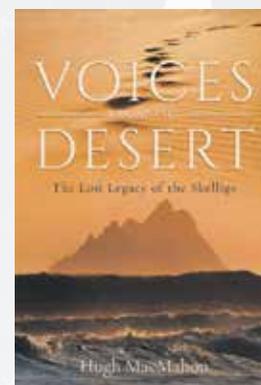
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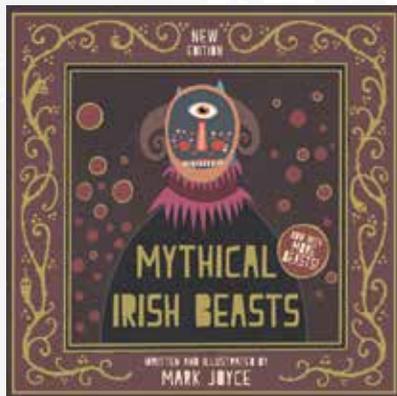
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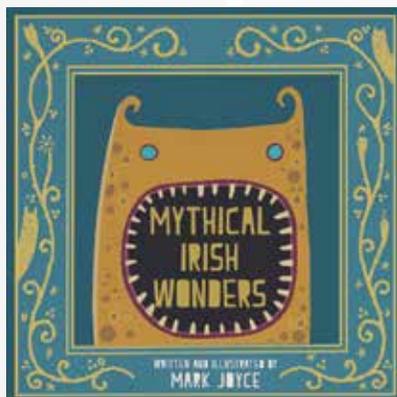
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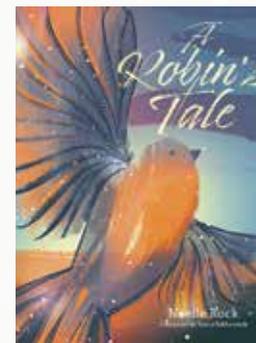


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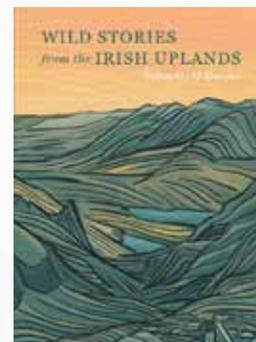


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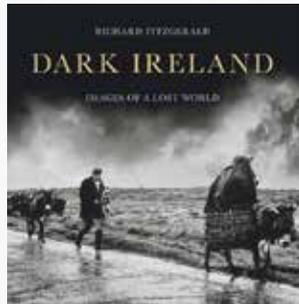
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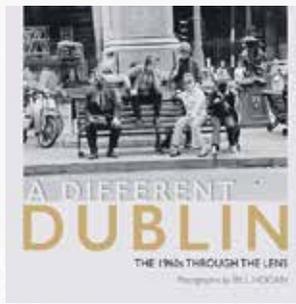
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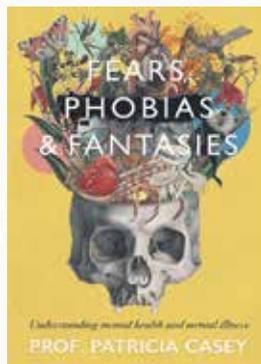
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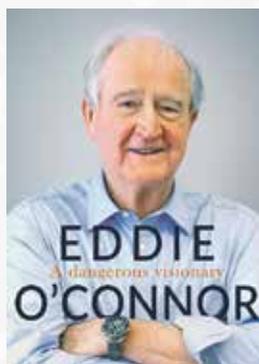
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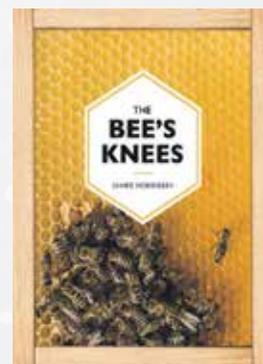
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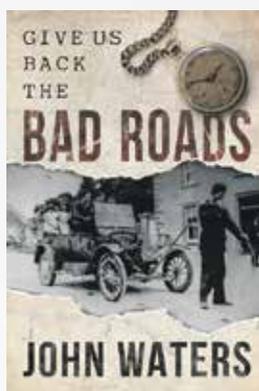
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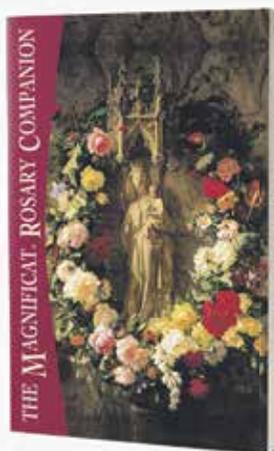
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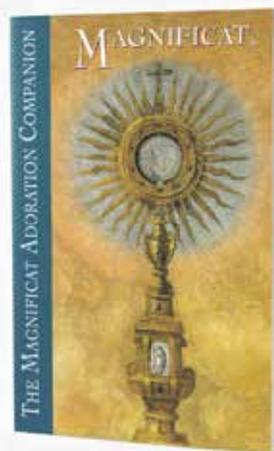


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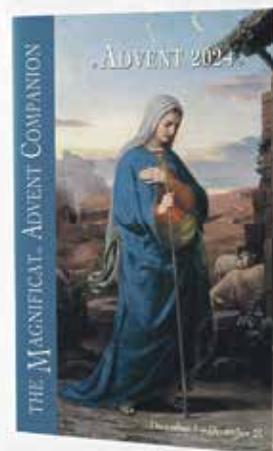


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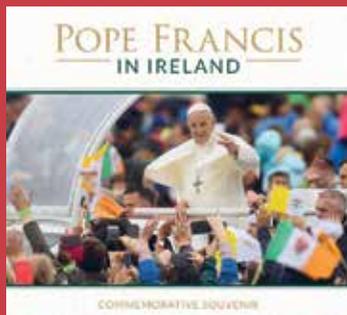
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# THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

## Synod likely to force bishops to consult laity

### Editorial

The final report of the Synodal Assembly in Rome will go to the floor on Saturday and will be voted on by all present. Key issues are well flagged – the importance of the Global South, accountability and transparency in governance. Hot button issues are essentially off the table, (Today, Thursday, Study Group 5 is meeting with Cardinal Fernandez and members of the Synod are expected to create a lot of push back to the Cardinal to get more feedback about the process of deliberation of the Study Group and remove some of the secrecy around it and its members) which has allowed the synod to focus on governance issues. The Pope, who has brought the Church to this point, needs his synod to have a win and the likely wins are in this area.

The final document is likely to re-iterate the Instrumentum Laboris (IL) which calls for the decisive implementation of decision-making and taking processes. It describes a “phase of engagement and elaboration...which informs and supports the decision that is subsequently made, which is ultimately the responsibility of the competent authority, the bishop.

There is no competition or conflict between the two phases, but by their combination, they contribute to ensuring that the decisions made are in conformity with God’s will as much as possible: “Working things out is a synodal task; the decision is a ministerial responsibility”.

### Real listening

What this means is that dioceses will have to have pastoral and diocesan councils and bishops will be required to hear the voice of the faithful and truly listen. They will have to explain their reasons and their thinking. The IL states: “This ecclesial consultation cannot be omitted and goes far beyond listening because it obliges the authority not to proceed as if it had not taken place. The authority remains free from a juridical point of view since the consultative opinion is not binding, but if a general agreement emerges, the authority will not depart from it without a convincing reason (sine praevalenti ratione; CIC, Canon 127, §2, 2°). If the competent authority were to do so, it would isolate itself from those consulted, injuring the bond



Pope meets the Irish: Pope Francis pictured with (Left to Right) Sr Mary Barron, USIG President, Bishop Alan McGuckian and Bishop Brendan Leahy (representing the Irish Church) and Fr Eamonn Conway, expert theologian to the Synod and Sr Pat Murray, Executive Secretary of the IUSG.

that unites them. In the Church, the exercise of authority does not consist in the imposition of an arbitrary will but rather constitutes a moderating force in the common search for what the Spirit requires, as a ministry at the service of the unity of the People of God.”

**“Any opposition between consultation and deliberation is therefore inadequate: in the Church, deliberation takes place with the help of all, never without the pastoral authority that takes decisions by virtue of its office”**

This means that there will be structures where the role of the laity is active and they are agents of action operating in structures where accountability is embedded. “Merely consultative” is not acceptable anymore.

The responsibility of the bishop to

make decisions is not unconditional. “The aim of synodal ecclesial discernment is not to make the bishops obey the voice of the people, subordinating the former to the latter, nor to offer the bishops an expedient to make decisions that have already been taken seem more acceptable, but rather to lead to a shared decision in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Any opposition between consultation and deliberation is therefore inadequate: in the Church, deliberation takes place with the help of all, never without the pastoral authority that takes decisions by virtue of its office. For this reason, the recurring formula in the Code of Canon Law, which speaks of a ‘consultative vote only’ (tantum consultivum), diminishes the value of consultation and should be corrected.”

### Corrected

It is likely that this will be corrected on Saturday or at least the final document will call definitively for it to be corrected.

We can expect tangible changes, as the IL states: “Without tangible changes, the vision of a synodal Church will not be credible. This will

alienate those members of the People of God who have drawn strength and hope from the synodal journey. This applies most especially to the effective participation of women in drafting and decision-making and taking processes, as called for in many of the contributions received from the Episcopal Conferences.”

**“Bishops recognise that they are tired, that they’re jobs are all but impossible, that they need help, expertise, co-responsibility to work if they are serious about Vatican II”**

The IL also calls for transparency and this will mean laity involved more and more in pastoral councils, financial committees, abuse committees at parish and episcopal level. It is also possible that the Synod will look at the restoration of Diocesan Synods where bishops will have to give account of their stewardship as

was the case in the reforms of the Council of Trent.

### Measures

In short, what is likely is that the Synod will vote for measures like these and Pope Francis is saying to bishops, put up or shut up. Bishops recognise that they are tired, that they’re jobs are all but impossible, that they need help, expertise, co-responsibility to work if they are serious about Vatican II which said that by virtue of baptism, laity have a say and a role, and that the bishops are servants of the baptised and according to the Pope, are at the bottom of the pyramid! It is also likely that more authority will be suggested for episcopal conferences but how that works canonically and theologically remains to be seen.

For those who may say that nothing really has come out of three years of synodality, the fact that we are talking about all of this would appear to be a huge move. And if Canon Law is changed to give teeth to these moves, then real progress will have been made.

# The Spirit of the Synod



**Timothy  
Radcliffe OP**

As Jesus' passion drew near, John tells us that he said: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:23-24). The Synod on Synodality, a three-year process of listening and dialogue that will reach its climax in Rome next October, will be fruitful only if it also turns out to be a time to die a little. After the first assembly of the Synod concluded last October, protests arose that not much had been accomplished. After all the fuss, the final document, the Synthesis Report, declared that the issue of women deacons needed to be "studied"—for the third time! The document also seemed to backtrack on the preparatory document on openness to LGBT people. The word is not even mentioned. Many saw this as a failure.

## Misunderstanding

The Synod anticipated this misunderstanding. When seeds fall into the ground, not much seems to happen. They germinate quietly until spring. Pope Francis has insisted time and again that the Synod is not a parliamentary body, gathered to make quick decisions. The protagonist of the Synod is the Holy Spirit. Every change is profound, organic, and barely perceptible. It is God's way of working. When Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected on Easter Sunday, the world seemed to be going on as usual. The Empire seemed unchanged. But the Kingdom had arrived.

I see the Spirit at work in the Synod in at least three ways, and each of these invites us to a kind of death so that we can live. The first way is by learning to share in divine friendship. It may seem strange to say that the first step on the synodal journey, whether in Rome or in a local parish, is to be open to new and unexpected friendships. But the Kingdom of God broke into the world two thousand years ago when Jesus began to offer his friendship to every kind of sinner, even the most marginalized or foolish. Jesus ate and drank with



Cardinal-designate Timothy Radcliffe, a theologian and former master of the Dominican order serving as spiritual adviser to the Synod of Bishops on synodality, speaks during an afternoon synod session in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

prostitutes, with tax collectors, with the corrupt and despised. This was sharing in the life of God, which Thomas Aquinas understood to be the eternal and equal friendship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**“A Vatican archbishop told me: ‘Look at those Roman cardinals. They are forced to listen to the baptised in respectful silence. They will never be the same again’”**

During the first session of the Synod, the Holy Spirit worked through encounters with others. Barriers fell and friendships were born. I have attended three Synods in the past. They were characterised by what I call the “ecclesiology of hats”: in the centre was a white hat; then a couple of circles of red hats; then many purple hats; and at the ends were those without hats, like me. Back then, each of us was called to give an eight-minute speech prepared at home and then we had to leave. Overall, pretty boring. But this time we were all sitting around round tables. Cardinals and bishops sat next to young people, women from Latin

America, men and women religious. The youngest person was 19 and from Wyoming.

All the members of the Synod were involved in “conversations in the spirit.” Everyone at the table was asked to speak for four minutes. No one was allowed to interrupt. Then, after a short moment of silence, a round of reactions and, finally, an evaluation of where there was agreement, disagreement or where there could be convergence. Each table had a facilitator, often a woman, who stopped anyone — including cardinals — who spoke too long. A Vatican archbishop told me: “Look at those Roman cardinals. They are forced to listen to the baptised in respectful silence. They will never be the same again.”

## Friendship

In friendship, not only can you become closer to others, but you yourself are transformed.

You have to die a little, let go of the person you are. Every deep friendship takes you out of yourself. You become a new person, even if only in a small way. I recently had a serious bout with cancer, for the second time. As I came to terms with my mortality, I began to write down my life, realising that I am the fruit of all the friendships and loves I have created, and sometimes even of my failure to love.

**“The main requirement for a good life is to live without a self-image”**

Who we are, as citizens of the Kingdom, has yet to be fully revealed. St John, in his first letter, writes: “...it does not yet appear what we will be; but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Our iden-

ty is hidden in Christ. Being open to friendship requires that we not be too concerned with our own identity. As Iris Murdoch said: “The main requirement for a good life is to live without a self-image.”

## Challenge

So the challenge for the Church is to become the community of God's friends. And that is incompatible with “clericalism,” the elevation of the ordained to a higher caste above the baptised. It is not surprising that some priests and bishops have been the most resistant, among groups within the Church, to the synodal journey. It may seem like a rejection of their priestly identity. But without the support of the clergy the synodal process will not get off the ground. It is urgent that we develop an affirmative vision of priestly identity that guards its vocation as a magnificent calling to the heart of the Church. What this

new priestly identity should look like is not yet clear to me, although it certainly involves being ordained, ordained in every fiber of one's being, in friendship, as Our Lord was. Visiting a gathering of tribal peoples in northern Pakistan, I spotted their priest, an American Dominican, sitting on the ground among the people, wearing his clothes and no doubt smelling of “his sheep,” as Pope Francis likes to say. And I thought: yes, this is what priesthood must be like.

**“For Christians, identity is not chosen or constructed. It is discovered or even abandoned as we say, Jesus is Lord”**

We are all invited to a kind of Good Friday to die to the narrow, defensive identities we construct to solidify our sense of who we are. Our society is obsessed with identity. Gender, ethnic, or class (especially for the British), sexual, political. Identity has to be chosen and constructed. On a trip to Australia, I had the opportunity to see the movie *Barbie*, and found it surprisingly profound. *Barbieland*, Barbie's world, embraces the American dream, which is that you can be anything you choose to be. Absurd. I could never be a mathematician or run a four-minute mile. For Christians, identity is not chosen or constructed. It is discovered or even abandoned as we say, Jesus is Lord.

In *Barbieland*, death is not even to be mentioned. But Christians embrace Good Friday, when the solitary seed falls into the ground and dies so that it can multiply. This began to happen at the Synod when the barriers began to fall and we were invited to step beyond the narrow identities of left and right, north and south and also, I hope, young and old to become one in the Lord, as the Son and the Father are one. It is a sign of hope in a world increasingly divided by war and violence.

And this brings me to the second way I think the Spirit is at work in the Synod. The Holy Spirit invites us to leave our comfort zones as Westerners. At Pentecost the Spirit descended on the community gathered in Jerusalem, then sent everyone to the ends of the earth. But the apostles did not want to go. They wanted to stay in the Holy City, enjoying each other's friendship, a small Jewish community. It was persecution that drove them out of the nest to

**“When I lived in Rome, some falcons built their nests above the windows of my office. Every year the drama of the parents pushing their young out of the nest was repeated. They hovered in front of my window, desperately trying to fly. The Holy Spirit is like a great mother falcon that pushes us out of our comfort zone”**

**“The seed must fall into the ground and die if it is to bear fruit. In a world that sees identity as chosen or constructed, divine friendship invites us to let go of our self-image and discover who we are in the mystery of Christ”**

embrace all of us Gentiles. If that hadn't happened, we wouldn't be here today.

This is what the Spirit does. He leads people out of their comfort zone into the vast world of God's friends. When I lived in Rome, some falcons built their nests above the windows of my office. Every year the drama of the parents pushing their young out of the nest was repeated. They hovered in front of my window, desperately trying to fly. The Holy Spirit is like a great mother falcon that pushes us out of our comfort zone.

### Westerners

Something similar began to happen to many of us Westerners at the Synod. We came with our Western agenda. We had our burning issues. We saw the world through Western eyes. But we had a shock. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, many said we had entered a new era, the triumph of Western liberal democracy. Every nation was destined to “evolve” towards our way of life. If some countries, especially in the South of the world, did not agree with us, for example, on welcoming gay people, sooner or later they would have had to adapt.

We were wrong. We are entering a multipolar world. The West is no longer the automatic point of reference for a large part of the world's population. I am not sure that we have even begun to imagine what it means to be one in Christ with our brothers and sisters in Africa, Asia and Latin America. During the first Iraq war, the Dominican family organised a month-long fast for peace in Union Square in New York. We had created bumper stickers: “We have family in Iraq.” Can we imagine the consequences of truly being their brothers and sisters? We are called primarily to be citizens of the Kingdom of God, before any national identity.

And here we are at the crucial point for the synodal process. It is necessary to open up to other cultures, other sisters and other brothers.

the Pope had approved

the statement. Cardinal Ambongo confirmed that African exceptionalism is an example of synodality. And he pointed out that unity does not mean uniformity. The Gospel is inculturated differently in different parts of the world.

**“Is the refusal to bless gays in Africa an example of inculturation or a refusal to be a nonconformist? Inculturation for one person is another person's rejection of the nonconformist Gospel”**

But this raises more complex questions than that. True, the Gospel is always inculturated in different cultures, but it also challenges every culture. Jesus was Jewish, yet he challenged the religion of his ancestors. Is the refusal to bless gays in Africa an example of inculturation or a refusal to be a nonconformist? Inculturation for one person is another person's rejection of the nonconformist Gospel. Another concern raised by *Fiducia Supplicans* is that there appears to have been no consultation—even with bishops or other Vatican offices—before its release; not exactly, perhaps, a good example of synodality. African bishops are under strong pressure from Evangelicals, with American money; Russian Orthodox, with Russian money; and Muslims, with money from the rich Gulf countries. There should have been a discussion with them before, not after, the statement was released. Whatever we think about the statement, when we face tensions, and to overcome them, we all need to think and engage with each other on a deep level.

The third way I see the Spirit working in the Synod is in his leading us into the fullness of truth. This is another kind of Good



Cardinal-designate Timothy Radcliffe, theologian and former master of the Dominican order, who serves as spiritual adviser to the Synod of Bishops on synodality, covers his face with his hands after speaking during the afternoon session of the synod in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

Friday. From time to time in the life of the Church we experience painful moments when we die to a certain understanding of our faith and Christian life, so that we can move more deeply into the mystery of God. It is like when you kiss a person. You see someone across a room. You see them in their entirety. They come to you and you embrace them. And they disappear, except for their face. You kiss them and they become invisible, not because they are gone, but because a new intimacy has been created. So it is with God. Occasionally we seem to lose God, to enter a dark night, but only so that we can draw near.

It has happened throughout the history of the Church. It happened in the 13th century, when the West rediscovered the lost works of Aristotle. This led to a theological transformation, largely through the teaching of Aquinas. It happened again during the Renaissance, often through Jesuit theologians. The Synod is continuing the seismic movement that began with the Second Vatican Council. Each of these moments was a dying and rising again.

### Alarms

This alarms many people. Some of my friends say they became Catholic because they wanted certainty, clarity. The certainty remains: God became man, died and rose again, and gave himself to us in the Eucharist. All the doctrines expressed in the Creed remain unshakeable. But our search to understand more deeply what those doctrines mean some-



Synod members, along with Pope Francis, attend the afternoon session in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

times leads us to perplexity. In the 13th century, Aquinas commented that “Blessed are those who mourn” was the beatitude especially of those who seek knowledge and understanding: “We are united to God as to the unknown,” he said. We must die to our old ways of thinking to delve deeper into the mystery. And that can be hard.

Not all the search for truth can be done by the Synod alone. Pope Francis has established various commissions to reflect on pressing issues, from the role of bishops to different forms of ministry and the role of women. This is part of our testimony to a world that has fallen out of love with truth, lost in the waves of fake news and crazy conspiracy theories, where there is “your” truth

and “my” truth, rather than the truth. As Pope Benedict XVI liked to say, we have lost our sense of the greatness of reason.

**“The Spirit invites us to die to our old ways of thinking so that we can enter more deeply into the mystery of God. This will be the task in the months ahead”**

Good Friday is the right day to think about the Synod. It reminds us of the different ways of dying so that we can live. The seed must fall into the ground and die if it is to bear fruit.

In a world that sees identity as chosen or constructed, divine friendship invites us to let go of our self-image and discover who we are in the mystery of Christ. And there is also a dying to our Western-centric identity as we seek to understand what it means to live as citizens of the Kingdom. And finally, the Spirit invites us to die to our old ways of thinking so that we can enter more deeply into the mystery of God. This will be the task in the months ahead. In the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa said that we will always be at the beginning of our understanding of God, but Jesus “is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8).

**i** This article was first published by *Observatore Romano* in Italian and was translated by The Synodal Times.

# Cardinal from Amazon: 'Many of our women are true deaconesses'



**Almudena  
Martínez-Bordiú**

Cardinal Leonardo Steiner, the archbishop of Manaus in Brazil who is participating in the Synod on Synodality, said during a daily press briefing at the synod that "many of our women are true 'deaconesses'" and pointed out that Pope Francis "has not closed the question" of the ordination of married men.

The cardinal is known for being a defender of the poor, Indigenous people and is also considered "pro-LGBTQ". In the past he has stated that "there will be a way" to end mandatory priestly celibacy.

At the 2019 Synod on the Amazon, the Brazilian cardinal also emerged as a staunch defender of the ordination of married men, an issue on which Pope Francis has not given a definitive word, according to what the prelate said last week.

During the briefing held at the Holy See Press Office, the 74-year-old cardinal said that during that day's session, corresponding to the third module of the *Instrumentum Laboris* (working document), the participants of the synod reflected on "the places of the Church."

The cardinal also commented that the Church must be open "to listening to cultures and religions" so that the Gospel can be "enculturated".

## Indigenous

In Manaus there are nearly 2.3 million people, of which 71,713 (3%) are Indigenous. In total there are 753,357 Indigenous people in the whole Amazon, according to official data from Brazil.

Taking these figures as an example to highlight the cultural differences between the West and the inhabitants of

Cardinal Leonardo Steiner of Manaus, Brazil, speaks during a press briefing on the synod at the Vatican October 15, 2024. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez



his diocese, the cardinal said that despite the fact that for "more than a hundred years there has been no priests" in the communities, they have organised themselves and continued to pray "with different ways of praying".

**“Unfortunately we do not have an adequate word for their role, but ‘what they do and their responsibility within our Church is admirable’”**

Cardinal Steiner emphasised that "women participate a lot" and that they are in turn "leaders of our communities".

The Brazilian cardinal emphasised that he wishes

"that some more distant communities could celebrate some sacraments, for example baptism, without the presence of a priest."

He continued by saying that "many of our women are true 'deaconesses' without this being official". He also stressed that they would like to call them "deaconesses" since they are "for all purposes", although he preferred not to use this term "so as not to create confusion with the ordained ministry".

For the cardinal, "unfortunately we do not have an adequate word" for their role, but "what they do and their responsibility within our Church is admirable".

## Lead

"There are many women who lead the community, who make the word of God known,

who gather the community in a moment of prayer and who are active, for example, in prison ministry, in catechesis, in Caritas activities. They are the ones who carry out this activity, they are active alongside street people, they are the ones who represent our Church in many places," he said.

Cardinal Steiner emphasised his position in favour of the ordination of women to the diaconate and pointed out the existence of a commission that is "charged with studying this issue".

**“The door should not be opened to a question of gender” but rather that it is ‘a question of vocations in the Church. The vocation of women within the Church and within our community’”**

"Why not restore the ordained female diaconate? We have already had a Church like this, with this face," he said, referring to deacons.

"The permanent diaco-

nate for men can go forward with that of women. I think we must reflect a lot on these questions, we must go deeper and we must remember the essential and fundamental role of women in the Church."

He also stated that "the door should not be opened to a question of gender" but rather that it is "a question of vocations in the Church. The vocation of women within the Church and within our community".

Responding to one of the journalists present at the press conference, the cardinal pointed out that the Synod on the Amazon "opened the possibility" of holding the Synod on Synodality.

Regarding this "process", he commented that "a path has been opened from which there is no turning back" since "there is no point of return".

## Essential

"It is essential that we all enter into the interior of a movement that is the Church" and to feel the responsibility of the mission through baptism and the grace of God, he said.

Asked about the ordination of married men, an issue that has "disappeared" from the study groups of this second and last session, the car-

dinal emphasised that after the Synod on the Amazon "there was disappointment on this subject".

He nevertheless emphasised that "the Holy Father has not closed the issue" and assured that "in some circumstances it would not be a difficulty".

He also expressed his hope that Pope Francis "has the capacity to move forward" while indicating that he has not wanted to do so yet due to "his great sensitivity".

Cardinal Steiner reiterated that "we must continue to talk" about this issue and that "we must go deeper into the ministerial role", since "sufficient steps" have not yet been taken.

"In some cultures celibacy is a great difficulty. That's what I feel," he explained.

Speaking at Fátima, Cardinal Steiner said he "lays hands" on all those women who exercise the ministry of baptism or other sacraments.

"These are very tense issues in the Church. We must not stop discussing and reflecting. And if at some time we come to the conclusion that in the past there was a female diaconate, why not reintroduce it as the permanent diaconate was reintroduced?" the cardinal reiterated.



Edited by Brandon Scott  
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## When you think 'metaphysical protection' means something else...



A New York City police officer helps block an intersection from vehicular traffic as participants of a Eucharistic procession pass through Midtown Manhattan October 15, 2024. Photo: OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz.

# Paris archbishop condemns firing of Catholic school principal

The archbishop of Paris spoke out last week against the firing of a Catholic school administrator who was accused of violating French laws prohibiting religious expression in educational settings.

"We must be able to proclaim the Gospel in Catholic schools," Archbishop Laurent Ulrich stated in an interview with Radio Notre Dame, OSV News reported.

"It must also be possible, in these schools," he added, "to set up small groups of Christian pupils who really want to cultivate their Christian faith, for catechism classes, outside school hours but nevertheless at times when the children are still at school."

According to the OSV News report, the prelate voiced his concerns in light of the recent controversial expulsion of a principal from a Catholic school in southern France who was accused of breaching the country's constitutionally mandated secularism, otherwise referred to in French as "laïcité".

Christian Espeso was accused of allowing confessions and Mass to take place during school hours, mandating catechism courses, inviting a local bishop to a conference at the school, and pulling materials he had deemed inappropriate from the school's library.

Laïcité is a principle born out of the French Constitution that essentially enforces

the separation of church and state by prohibiting religious expression or proselytising in the public sphere.

Private schools in France operate under the same regulations and follow the same curriculum as public schools and are state-funded. Catholic schools are allowed to maintain their religious identity and offer catechism classes, so long as they are not mandatory for students.

On September 11, local education authorities removed Christian Espeso, 61, from his position as director of Immaculate Conception School in Pau, a small French town located in southern France, following an inspection by local education authorities.

The directorate of Catholic education of the Diocese of Bayonne, which is about 70 miles west of Pau, released a statement on September 13 stating: "[The] decision, which we consider to be totally disproportionate in light of the facts for which he is accused, leaves many of us stunned".

As reported by local French news outlets, parents and students of Mr Espeso submitted written testimonies defending the former school administrator to educational authorities. Their accounts, which included statements from teachers, parents, and elected officials, Mr Espeso told *La Vie*, refuted the accusations against him "point by point".

## Italy criminalises surrogacy sought by Italian citizens abroad

The Italian Senate of the Republic last week passed a bill making it possible to prosecute surrogacy sought even outside Italy, with violators potentially facing both prison time and a fine as high as €1 million.

Surrogacy has been illegal in Italy since 2004. The prohibition is contained within the country's Law 40, which regulates medically assisted procreation.

With the October 16 vote, Italy will amend Law 40 to

extend its jurisdiction to criminalise even surrogacy "committed abroad", now referring to it as "universal crime" in Italian law.

The current article 12, paragraph 6 of Law 40 states that "anyone who, in any

form, carries out, organises, or publicises the commercialisation" of maternal surrogacy will be punished by up to two years in prison and a fine of €600,000 to €1 million.

## Vatican shares Pope Francis' schedule for December cardinal consistory

● The Vatican last week published the schedule for Pope Francis' consistory to create new cardinals, stating that the liturgy will take place on December 7 — not December 8, as previously announced.

On October 6 the Pope said he will add 21 members to the College of Cardinals — 20 of whom are eligible to be cardinal-electors. The future cardinals come from every continent.

According to the liturgical schedule released by the Vatican's master of ceremonies October 12, the ceremony to create the new cardinals will be held in the afternoon on December 7 in St Peter's Basilica.

The following day, on the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, Francis and the entire College of Cardinals will celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving together in the Vatican basilica.

While the Pope typically goes to venerate a statue of the Virgin Mary close to the Spanish Steps early in the morning on the solemnity, this year he will visit the statue at 4 pm instead.

## Cardinal Zuppi returns to Moscow as Vatican peace envoy

● Cardinal Matteo Zuppi returned to Moscow last to meet with Russian authorities as part of the peace mission entrusted to him by Pope Francis.

The cardinal's trip to Moscow was to "evaluate further efforts to promote family reunification of Ukrainian children and the exchange of prisoners, with a view to achieving the much-

hoped-for peace", according to the Vatican.

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni confirmed on October 14 that the Italian cardinal began a visit to Moscow on Monday after Russia's ministry of foreign affairs published a photo of Cardinal Zuppi shaking hands with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

## Cardinal says being pro-life is about more than just abortion

● With less than a month to go before the United States presidential election, the cardinal archbishop of Washington has stressed the importance of having a broad understanding of key national challenges and has urged Catholics not to be single-issue voters.

Speaking to *Crux* while in Rome for this month's Synod of Bishops on Synodality, Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington said, "No political party and certainly no individual candidate that I've experienced embraces the full range of Catholic social, moral teaching."

On the issue of abortion and whether a Catholic can in good conscience vote for a pro-choice candidate, Gregory said, "If you isolate it in those terms, does that mean you dispense with voting for someone who denigrates immigrants, who promotes capital punishment?"

"Yes, it is foundational, the dignity of unborn life, but does it dispense with all of the other awful proposals that are out there? Can I sleep saying I didn't vote for this person because of their position on abortion, but I'll ignore the other issues that also fall under the umbrella of the dignity of human life?" he said.

## Pope Francis canonises 14 new saints

● Pope Francis canonised 14 new saints on Sunday, including a father of eight and Franciscan friars killed in Syria for refusing to renounce their faith and convert to Islam.

"These new saints lived Jesus' way: service," Pope Francis said. "They made themselves servants of their brothers and sisters, creative in doing good, steadfast in difficulties, and generous to the end."

The newly canonised include St Giuseppe Allamano, a diocesan priest from Italy who founded the Consolata missionary orders, and St Marie-Léonie Paradis, a Canadian nun from Montreal known for founding an order dedicated to the service of priests.

Also among the saints are St Elena Guerra, hailed as an "apostle of the Holy Spirit", and St Manuel Ruiz López and his seven Franciscan companions, all martyred in Damascus in 1860 for refusing to renounce their Christian faith.

The final three canonized are siblings, Sts Francis, Mooti, and Raphael Massabki, lay Maronite Catholics martyred in Syria along with the Franciscans.

# Letter from Rome

## Vatican's doctrinal czar fires back at criticism over women deacons

Crux

Responding to criticism that he failed to show up for a discussion last Friday for members of the Synod of Bishops that was to include the question of female deacons, the Vatican's doctrinal czar insisted on Monday that Pope Francis has made it clear that now is not the time to resolve that issue, but that in the meantime other possibilities for empowering women already on the books are being under-utilised.

Argentine Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández said that a commission to study the possibility of women deacons created by Pope Francis in 2020, and led by Cardinal Giuseppe Petrocchi of Aquila in Italy, has reached partial conclusions which will be published shortly, but nonetheless its work "continues" and is open to "considerations, proposals and concerns".

Cardinal Fernández's communique, released Monday by the Vatican Press Office, came after a series of meetings on Friday, intended to give synod participants an opportunity to interact with the members of ten study groups Pope Francis established in advance of the October assembly to consider some of the most contested issues.

### Appearance

By far, the largest number of synod participants showed up for the session with the group dedicated to theological and canonical matters related to ministry, which is the group to which the female deacons question has been assigned. Most of those participants expected Cardinal Fernández to be present, since he was the one who presented an overview of the group's mandate in an October 2 address.

**“Many participants came away expressing disappointment and irritation, which was compounded by the fact that two junior officials of the dicastery appeared instead, but without authority to answer most questions”**



Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, arrives in the Paul VI Audience Hall to attend a morning session of the synod at the Vatican October 21, 2024. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez.

When Cardinal Fernández didn't show up, many participants came away expressing disappointment and irritation, which was compounded by the fact that two junior officials of the dicastery appeared instead, but without authority to answer most questions.

**“On the core issue of women deacons, Cardinal Fernández said the Pontiff has made it clear the issue ‘is not yet mature’”**

In response to the umbrage, Cardinal Fernández noted that he's not actually the coordinator of the

**“One form of that ministry would be a catechist who actually leads a faith community in the absence of a priest, a role which implies real leadership and authority, and which women can perform. Yet, Cardinal Fernández said, ‘very few’ bishops’ conferences have acted on the possibility, saying it hasn't ‘been received’”**

group, a role which belongs instead to the doctrinal secretary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Italian Fr Armando Matteo. According to Cardinal Fernández, Fr Matteo had a medical appointment Friday, which is why the other officials were dispatched.

Cardinal Fernández said when he realised that people had expected him to appear, he offered to arrange a second meeting on Thursday, October 24. At that time, he said, he will also reveal the names of the individuals who make up the study group, responding to grumbling that up to now it's the lone group whose membership has been kept secret.

### Empowerment

On the core issue of women deacons, Cardinal Fernández said the Pontiff has made

it clear the issue “is not yet mature,” but insisted that Pope Francis is “very concerned for the role of women in the Church,” and has asked the dicastery for the faith to explore other possibilities that don't involve holy orders.

**“He said that there are concrete ways of empowering women that haven't been fully exploited”**

Cardinal Fernández then asserted that a focus on the diaconate “does not resolve the question of millions of women in the Church”. He said that there are concrete ways of empowering

women that haven't been fully exploited.

### Options

First, he pointed to the new ministry of catechist, created by Pope Francis in May 2021 and opened to women. He said that one form of that ministry would be a catechist who actually leads a faith community in the absence of a priest, a role which implies real leadership and authority, and which women can perform. Yet, Cardinal Fernández said, “very few” bishops' conferences have acted on the possibility, saying it hasn't “been received”.

Second, he pointed to the ministry of acolyte, opened to women by Pope Francis in January 2021.

“In fact, it's been conceded only in a small percentage in the dioceses, and

many times priests don't want to present women to the bishop for this ministry,” he said.

Third, Cardinal Fernández noted that even the diaconate for men is underdeveloped, with many dioceses in the world not having any deacons at all, and many of those that do treating it only as a step towards priesthood. (Statistics confirm the point; according to Vatican data, 97% of the roughly 48,000 permanent deacons in the world, meaning men who are usually married and not preparing for the priesthood, are in North America and Europe.)

**“There's nothing in the nature of a woman that prevents women from occupying very important positions for the leadership of churches”**

“These few examples make us understand that hurrying to request the ordination of deaconesses is not the most important response to promote women,” Cardinal Fernández said.

Defending his dicastery's focus on ways women can exercise authority in the Church without ordination, Cardinal Fernández said that “reality is superior to ideas.”

The interest, he said, is in leadership roles women have played “not because they were imposed on communities, or as the result of a study, but because [women] have acquired this authority under the impulse of the Spirit and facing a real need of the people.”

“I'm convinced that we can move forward, step by step, and arrive at every concrete thing, so that we may understand that there's nothing in the nature of a woman that prevents women from occupying very important positions for the leadership of churches,” Cardinal Fernández said.

“That which truly comes from the Holy Spirit can't be stopped,” he said.

# Letters

## Letter of the week

### She took her last breath and death was defeated

**Dear Editor,** Unfortunately, none of us escapes death. It waits for us around the corner, and can appear suddenly, very unwelcome. You can't dodge or jump over it. You are going to die.

How does it happen? I have followed several people at the end of life, as part of my professional practice. Physically, the heart gives up, there is a very last heartbeat and then a last breath, and the blood supply with oxygen and glucose cannot reach the brain, whose functions therefore cease and physical awareness goes out. The body starts to get cold and muscles relax, the stiffness comes later. And it is noticeable that it is empty, something has left this body, a shell remains.

Eternity is laid in people's hearts, that is why the finality of death and that

one would cease to exist feels unreasonable and impossible. And so it is, we are eternal beings. The only question is whether, from the Christian point of view, "the elevator goes up or down", where the soul spends its eternity. But, how do we want to face death?

Those who faced death in peace and security, yes almost longing, have been warm believers. They have believed in a person who said "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me shall live, though he die". This Jesus who thus defeated death itself, to give eternal life. Many are the strong and proud who at the deathbed tremble in terror before the last heartbeat, and many others have smilingly embraced death in peace, when they seemed to see their beloved Jesus standing with

open arms welcoming them to the abodes of eternity in Heaven, where no more pain reaches, no sorrows and troubles haunt and dark clouds weigh.

I held the hand of a dying Christian. She had long pauses in her breathing, semi-conscious. I prayed silently for her, suddenly she opens her eyes and looks at me with a big smile. Time stood still and eternity descended upon the room, the joy and peace she radiated in that moment I will never forget. She took her last breath, the hand became limp and cold, she was no longer there, death was defeated.

*Yours etc.,  
Peter Kujala  
Trångsviken, Sweden*

## Opposing 'assisted dying' legislation

**Dear Editor,** As the debate on assisted dying is forging ahead, congratulations are due to Archbishop Eamon Martin who urged parishioners to voice concerns to TDs and oppose the legislation proposal for assisted dying. "They didn't suffer" is a natural and common response when someone dies amid a quiet admission that some people do. For the unfortunate or unsupported the final weeks or months can involve a considerable amount of pain, indignity and distress. That assisted dying is being considered at a time when Ireland's mental and physical health is worsening and destitution is spreading only adds to this. With patients struggling to access treatment from the HSE and older and disabled being bereft of basic community care, economic and social factors shape individual choices. Canada has one of the highest global rates of euthanasia with 4% of deaths aided by doctors, but moves to make it more accessible are being paused.

*Yours etc.,  
Gerry Coughlan  
Kilnamanagh, Dublin 24*



## Curriculum contrary to parents' wishes

**Dear Editor,** I was very pleased to read what Archbishop Eamon Martin is saying about the very unsuitable material which is now being included in the resources for SPHE and RSE [The Irish Catholic - October 17, 2024]. The Catholic Secondary Schools Parents Association represent

approximately 50% of all Irish secondary school parents.

Yet, I understand that they were not consulted about the new SPHE curriculum. This new curriculum, contrary to the expressed wishes of many parents, is based on gender ideologies, which many believe will have pro-

found and negative effects on our young people. This is an important matter which we can raise with every politician who calls to our doors over the next few weeks.

*Yours etc.,  
Eamon Fitzpatrick,  
Strandhill Road, Sligo*

## Enhancing our recitation of the Creed

**Dear Editor,** The Creed is a summation of the doctrines we as Catholics hold and believe in. Great battles were fought by great minds on our behalf, during the history of the Church, to gift us with a succinct profession of

our Faith.

Is there a way we could enhance our recitation of the Creed at Mass on Sundays, to allow some of its meaning to sink in and penetrate our being?

Very often it seems to be

like a bullet train tearing through a station, leaving no trace behind.

*Yours etc.,  
Judith Leonard  
Raheny, Dublin*

## A society where bad ideas have driven out good

**T**he saying goes that nature abhors a vacuum. Bad money drives out good. These idioms are not to be dismissed in any walk of life. The evidence of this is clear when it comes to the changes being seen in the school curricula on SPHE. We are seeing it in our healthcare systems. We are seeing it in the proposed hate speech laws that are in the pipeline.

This is the nature of the socio-cultural political system we live in and in others around the world. Ironically, the Judeo-Christian heritage has sown the seeds of its own demise. As articulated by Tom Holland in *Dominion*, amongst others, it was Christianity that paved the way for liberal social democracy to become the dominant force in the West.

The European Union - even Europe itself as a less clearly defined entity - was founded on Christianity. Pope Benedict said "There is no disputing the historical role of the Christian faith in giving life to Europe. It is to the great credit of Christianity that it gave birth to Europe after the decline of the Greco-Roman Empire and after the period of the barbarian invasions. Not only that, but the rebirth of Europe after World War II was likewise rooted in Christianity".

But that heritage is increasingly denied and finding itself in conflict with the culture it created:

Pope Benedict noted with great foresight that "[i]f we eventually find ourselves in a clash of cultures, it will not be because of the clash of the great religions ... but it will be because of the clash between this radical emancipation of man and the major cultures of history ... It is rather the expression of a mind-set that would like to see God erased once and for all from the public life of humanity and relegated to the subjective sphere maintained by residual cultures from the past Relativism, which is the starting-point for all of this, thus becomes a dogmatism that believes itself in possession of the definitive knowledge of reason."

And this is where it seems we are at not just in Europe, but in Ireland in particular. Our Christian heritage, which - factually - accompanied the country on its evolution from a subservient dominion status, through emancipation, before developing into one of Europe's wealthiest countries.

People may disagree with the level of attribution that ought to be applied to Ireland's Catholicism in this transformation. Some try to liken Ireland of the 1950s to a theocracy, but the facts are that Christianity supported and enabled - and justified - Ireland's evolution into a liberal social democracy.

But now that Ireland has evolved (just like many TDs' consciences on certain issues), the country is determined to repudiate its heritage.

A vacuum has been created in Irish society, ironically, through the success of our Christian heritage, offering tolerance, religious freedom and freedom of (properly formed) consciences.

The response has been to push Christianity from our social structures, erasure of the foundations, leaving just the shell of the ideas that have been instituted. And without those foundations, a shallow understanding of human dignity replaces the substantive Christian understanding.

That shallow interpretation has no need for Christianity. In its place, where Christianity has been too easily pushed to the margins, the vacuum has been filled with 'progressive' ideas such as pre-teenagers being taught what ought not even be talked about amongst respectable adults; where healthcare facilities valued life, they have now take life; where blasphemy was considered to be anachronistic, we are now faced with new forms of censorship.

The disappearance of a full understanding of Christian values from society has created a vacuum that has allowed bad ideas to permeate our culture and institutions. And those bad ideas further drive out the good.

## Letters to the Editor

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

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication

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

# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, October 24, 2024

**I want to see**

Deacon Greg Kandra

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**S**oon before I left California this August to live in Ireland for a couple of months, a woman in my Catholic community texted me and told me that she'd pray for me. "Seek God first," she wrote.

Ah, words to live by. With the endless new opportunities available when traveling, not only is it practically helpful to have God as your number one priority, but it is also wise.

Going to any foreign country is a neat opportunity, because it sets your life and the customs you are used to against a different backdrop, and you gain a more vivid picture of your life, allowing you to reflect on how you're living it. A similar thing happens in the spiritual life during a silent retreat, as Sister Clare Crockett would say, "alone, with Christ alone." In the encounter with Christ in that silence, you see more clearly where your daily habits distract you from the not-so-distant or foreign land of Heaven, our true native land.

## Home

I found that being in Ireland taught me a lot about what it means to be in search of our heavenly home. New surroundings, faces, and customs. The more I went out and explored my surroundings, the more familiarity I gained. It reminded me that I am really a pilgrim wherever I go on Earth, because Heaven is my true native land. The kingdom of Heaven is the best land to begin discovering. If getting to know the kingdom of Heaven is anything like the difficult adventure of finding my way around Dublin the first weeks I was here, then I don't want to waste



**I found that being in Ireland taught me a lot about what it means to be in search of our heavenly home says, Maura Collins**

time before I seek, look, and knock, to see what it is that makes up the 'City of God'. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7-8) This seeking never ends, because the riches contained in the Catholic faith are never exhausted. They ultimately lead us to God, who renews us constantly in a life that is more vivid and lush than the beautiful, green grass that lays across all of Ireland. The more we get to know God in His Church, and try to conform our lives to His, the more we become citizens of our heavenly homeland, whose King is 'ever ancient, ever new'.

**"The life of grace we are offered a share in, renews itself, constantly. It is even more abundant than the number of cafes and restaurants in Dublin"**

The Kingdom of Heaven is best explored with friends. Not only earthly ones, but heavenly ones too. I love that Ireland is full of opportunities to befriend some heavenly companions: walk-

ing in the footsteps of so many holy people, such as St Brigid, St Patrick, and St Kevin. To be in the places where they prayed, worked, evangelised, and lived out their daily lives in love of our Lord gives one a sense that Heaven is not so far off.

## Bountiful

They redirect our focus to God and help us open ourselves to Him. God is SO bountiful. He is constantly showering us with opportunities to know Him better so we may love Him more. The life of grace we are offered a share in, renews itself, constantly. It is even more abundant than the number of cafes and restaurants in Dublin. God gave me so many opportunities while in Ireland to get to know Him a little more clearly and to love Him a little more dearly, with so many beautiful and inspiring people and places, and solid, Catholic events that enriched my life. I travelled to St Brigid's Holy Well, explored the Monastic City at Glendalough, saw Croagh Patrick from a distance, and visited the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock. With so many Masses offered every single day in Dublin, in beauti-

ful, old churches, there is a keen sense of the depth and newness that exists in Catholicism. Ever ancient, ever new. But what is the ever-renewing reality of Catholicism really for?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "All the activities of the Church are directed... to the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God." (CCC 824) I experienced this truth in a unique way while in Ireland: attending daily Mass at St Teresa's on Clarendon street in Dublin. The sanctuary there gave me a unique image to reflect on: one that helps illustrate what it means to be Catholic.

**"Each day, God's love for us is renewed on altars all across Ireland and across the world and Christ's life is participated in by the members of His Church, and it requires us to align our heart, soul, mind, strength, our very being, with God"**

The front of the altar there is a glass case in which a statue of the crucified body of our Lord Jesus lays, amidst His burial cloths. The Paschal Mystery is fully on display in a vivid way when you attend Mass at St Teresa's. It truly sanctify us. We are incorporated (literally) into His body through reception of the Eucharist. The paschal mystery is renewed each day in the

Masses of the one, holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Faith. Receiving the Eucharist at St Teresa's is like a picture of what it means to be Catholic: to be one with Christ in His passion, death, and resurrection.

## Renewed

Each day, God's love for us is renewed on altars all across Ireland and across the world and Christ's life is participated in by the members of His Church, and it requires us to align our heart, soul, mind, strength, our very being, with God, so that He might be glorified, and we might be sanctified. Just as the rhythm and melody of a traditional Irish tune carry you into it and a whole room of people all at once, the life of Christ enters into you and makes you live something in common with the other members of His Body. Just as the tune connects you with those who played the tune in years gone-by, the flame of life, especially the life of grace, is passed on when it is lived. Just like an Irish tune is cyclical, living the Paschal Mystery every day creates a cyclical pattern in your life. Each round draws you deeper into the Mystery. God's Life is that mysterious and beautiful melody. Ever ancient, ever new.

My time as a Catholic in Ireland was the invitation and the scene set by Divine Providence where God allowed my life to become a little more Eucharistic, to join me more deeply into his Life in that Kingdom that is ever ancient, ever new.

May God bless Ireland and all its faithful!

# Mature love or just going through the motions?

As a Lutheran priest, Dietrich Bonhoeffer would frequently offer this advice to a couple when he presided at their wedding, "Today you are in love and believe your love will sustain your marriage, but it can't. Let your marriage sustain your love."

Wise words, but what exactly do they mean? Why can't love sustain a marriage?

What Bonhoeffer is highlighting is that it is naïve to think that feelings will sustain us in love and commitment over the long haul. They can't, and they wouldn't. But ritual can. How? By creating a ritual container that can keep us steady inside the roller coaster of emotions and feelings that will beset us in any long-term relationship.

Simply put, we will never sustain a long-term relationship with another person, with God, with prayer, or in selfless service on the basis of good feelings and positive emotions. This side of eternity, our feelings and emotions mostly come and go according to their own dictates and are not given to consistency.

## Inconsistency

We know the inconsistency of our emotions. One day we feel affectionate toward someone and the next day we feel irritated. The same is true for prayer. One day we feel warm and focused and the next day we feel bored and distracted.

And so, Bonhoeffer suggests we need to sustain ourselves in love and prayer by ritual, that is,



Fr Rolheiser

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

by habitual practices that keep us steady and committed within the flux of feelings and emotions.

**“They ritually kiss each other as they leave the house in the morning with the words, ‘I love you!’ Are those words a lie? Are they simply going through the motions? Or is this real love?”**

For example, take a couple in a marriage. They fall in love and commit themselves to love each

other and stay with each other for the rest of their lives, and at root they fully intend that. They respect each other, are good to each other, and would die for each other. However, that's not always true of their emotions. Some days their emotions seemingly belie their love. They are irritated and angry with each other. Yet, their actions toward each other continue to express love and commitment and not their negative feelings. They ritually kiss each other as they leave the house in the morning with the words, 'I love you!' Are those words a lie? Are they simply going through the motions? Or is this real love?

## Family

The same holds true for love and commitment inside a family.

**“The book we need on love will not be written by passionate lovers on their honeymoon, just as the book we need on prayer will not be written by a religious neophyte caught up in the first fervor of prayer”**

Imagine a mother and a father with two teenage children, a boy of sixteen and a girl of fourteen. As a family they have a rule that they will sit together at dinner for forty minutes every evening, without their cellphones or other such devices. Many evenings when the son or daughter or one of the parents comes to the table (without their cellphone) out of dram duty, bored, dreading the time together, wanting to be somewhere else. But they come because they have made that commitment. Are they simply going through the motions or showing real love?

**“It can be an empty ritual. As scripture says, ‘we can honor with our lips even as our hearts are far away’”**

If Bonhoeffer is right, and I submit he is, they are not just going through the motions, they are expressing mature love. It's easy to express love and be committed when our feelings are taking us there and holding us there. But those good feelings will not sustain our love and commitment in the long-term. Only fidelity to a commitment and ritual actions that undergird that commitment will keep us from walking away when the good feelings go away.

In our culture today, at most every level, this is not understood. From the person caught up in a

culture addicted to feelings, to a good number of therapists, ministers of religion, prayer leaders, spiritual directors, and friends of Job, we hear the line, 'If you aren't feeling it, it's not real; you're just going through the motions! That's empty ritual!'

Indeed, it can be an empty ritual. As scripture says, "we can honour with our lips even as our hearts are far away." However, more often than not it is a mature expression of love because it is now a love that is no longer fueled by self-interest and good feelings. It's now a love that's wise and mature enough to account for the human condition in all its inadequacy and complexity and how this colour and complicate everything – including the one we love, our own selves, and the reality of human love itself.

## Book

The book we need on love will not be written by passionate lovers on their honeymoon, just as the book we need on prayer will not be written by a religious neophyte caught up in the first fervor of prayer (nor by most enthusiastic leaders of prayer). The book we need on love will be written by a married couple who, through ritual, have sustained a commitment through the ups and downs of many years. Just as the book we need on prayer will be written by someone who has sustained a life of prayer and church going through seasons and Sundays when sometimes the last thing he or she wanted to do was to pray or go to church.

# I want to see



Healing the blind man,  
Václav Mánes  
(1793-1858)

Jer 31:7-9  
Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6  
Heb 5:1-6  
Mk 10:46-52

## The Sunday Gospel

Deacon Greg Kandra



Like so much of the gospels, Jesus' encounter with a blind beggar this Sunday boils down to one simple question: "What do you want me to do for you?"

If we met Jesus along the road, would we be able to answer? What would we say?

For so many of us, faith boils down to things that are difficult to pinpoint. We turn to the Lord for peace, or reassurance or maybe to pray for some vague intention - health or prosperity or a better job. Often, our prayers are simply for things to be better and for our lives to be less complicated.

But here, the blind man named Bartimaeus, knew exactly what he wanted: "Master, I want to see."

### Yearnings

In that one short sentence lie all the hopes and yearnings of a lifetime - and, in a sense, all our own aspirations, as well.

Whether we realise it or not - whether we can name them or not - so much of what we want God to do for us is like what Bartimaeus was asking. We want to see. We want clarity. We want understanding. We want light to scatter what is cloudy and uncertain.

**"Son of David, have pity on me.' Despite being rebuked, he would not be silent. He didn't, couldn't give up"**

We want the Lord to help us follow the right path, to see the right direction for our lives, and to guide us to do his will. And we want to see, perhaps more urgently, just what

that will might be.

In this way, we are all Bartimaeus, helplessly lost in the shadows and calling out to God to show us the way. Bartimaeus, of course, had the immeasurable good fortune of encountering on the roadside near Jericho the one who is The Way - and The Truth and The Life.

### Relentless

And once he realised who was passing by, he was relentless. At least twice, he cried out the same plea: "Son of David, have pity on me." Despite being rebuked, he would not be silent. He didn't, couldn't give up.

For that, and for knowing exactly what he needed, his faith was rewarded. "Your faith has saved you," Jesus said. Here, too, is

another valuable lesson. Bartimaeus was healed because he knew what he wanted, and he wasn't afraid to keep asking for it - no matter what those around him said. He was fearless. And he was certain that the one he cried out to would not only hear him, but heal him.

That, in a nutshell, is faith.

**"Restore our fortunes, O Lord... those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing"**

Examining our own faith, are we that certain, that bold, that humble, that persistent? It is tempting sometimes to give up when we think God doesn't

answer our prayers. We can feel helpless or hopeless, ignored or forgotten. But the words of the psalm, the pleas of a grateful people, should offer reassurance in times of despair: "Restore our fortunes, O Lord...those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing."

### Limitless

Again and again, scripture calls on us to trust in God's limitless love and generosity, and to be grateful for all he gives to those who have the confidence and courage to trust. This is the true measure of faith. The familiar words from St Paul, captured in a popular hymn, tells us all we need to know: "We walk by faith, not by sight." That was true of Bartimaeus, who was rewarded for his faith by receiving sight.

Are we courageous enough, confident enough, to trust like that?

**"He received his sight and followed him on the way." A new disciple was born"**

It's important to note, finally, how the story of Bartimaeus ends. The beggar who was given sight didn't just head home - maybe to enjoy looking at all that he had never been able to see - but, instead, made another choice. Mark tells us: "He received his sight and followed him on the way." A new disciple was born.

May we all give thanks to the Lord for all he does for us and resolve in our gratitude to follow him wherever he leads.

*Deacon Greg Kandra is an award-winning author and journalist, and creator of the blog "The Deacon's Bench."*

**"Again and again, scripture calls on us to trust in God's limitless love and generosity, and to be grateful for all he gives to those who have the confidence and courage to trust"**

# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan

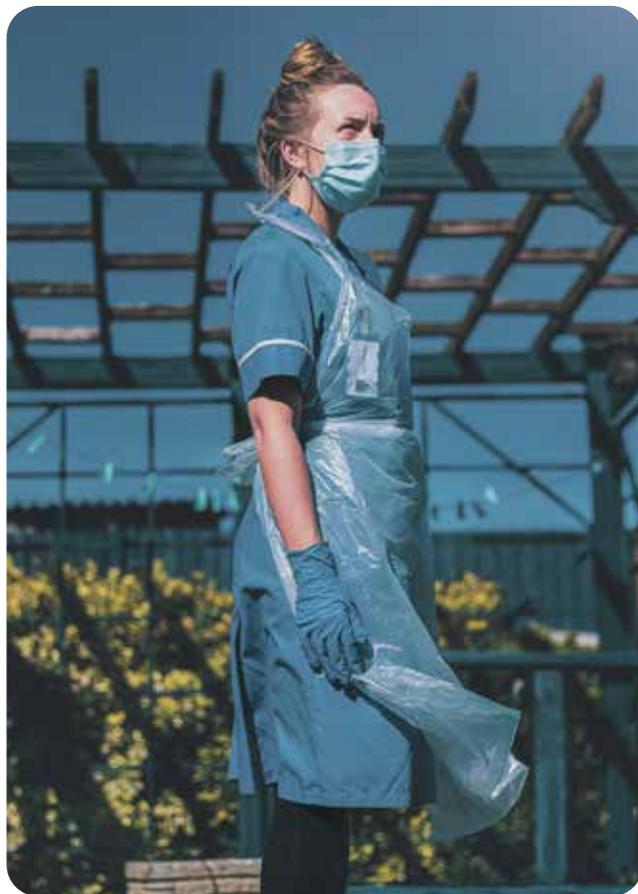


## Blind to the beauty of humanity

So much of what is on TV is froth, trivia and superficiality, so it's good to see a programme that goes deeper.

*The Meaning of Life* (RTÉ One, Sunday) returned for a new season last weekend, when the first guest was Sinead Burke, disability rights campaigner, businesswoman, fashion guru and teacher. It was an engaging interview, and as Sinead was such a great communicator, presenter Joe Duffy didn't have a lot to do. She grew up in a Catholic family and remembers the rhythm of Mass and church going. This had faded, but she has kept the moral compass and values of those early days. She described a "deep respect" for religion.

She paid tribute to her parents, her "amazing advocates", and to the schools where she experienced "acts of generosity and thoughtfulness and creativity". Later she became a teacher in a Catholic ethos school and though she never had classes for Communion or Confirmation, she would have been happy to engage. If back then there had been the variety of school types available nowadays, she said she might have made a different choice. She described herself as a very happy person who has "an amazing life". Her status as a small person has made her conscious of accessibility issues for herself and for



others. She loves that she can now lead an independent life.

She wasn't sure about what happens when a person dies, but if she did meet a Person at "the pearly gates" she would primarily have a feeling of gratitude. At one point, on a very serious note, when Joe Duffy referenced Nazi

medical experimentation on disabled people she decried the practice of eugenics - the idea that the world would be better off without certain types of people.

Not entirely unrelated, on *Mornings with Wendy* (Spirit Radio, Wednesday) Dr Brendan Crowley gave a

timely response to a recent report to the effect that only 1% of doctors were willing to get involved in doing abortions. It was telling, he said, that the focus of media coverage was on that, rather than highlighting the 90% that weren't involved. The Government's values were shown by a particular anomaly - doctors providing abortion services, which involved three visits, were given €450 in each case. Those caring for mother and baby to term (12 visits) were given only €250 - paid more to end life than to sustain it, as presenter Wendy Grace pointed out. Dr Crowley suggested that "undeniable humanity of the unborn child" was being ignored, and instead the lie was peddled that abortion was some sort of genuine health care. He accused the Government of not dealing with the socio-economic pressures that propel women towards abortion, pushing just one approach only, the one that involved a "culture of death".

On this topic it was telling that on *Sky News* (Friday) I noticed the scrolling news reported a sad event where a mother 'and her unborn baby' were killed in a traffic accident. And you might say there's nothing remarkable there - in every situation where abortion isn't an issue the entity in the womb is rightly regarded as a baby.

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### SUNDAY SEQUENCE

**BBC Radio Ulster Sunday October 27, 8.30am**

Topical religious and ethical issues with a Northern Ireland flavour.

#### THE REFORMATION

**EWTN Sunday October 27, 9pm**

Chronicling the tumultuous religious upheaval in the 16th century by Martin Luther. With expert commentary from world-renowned theologians and historians and dramatisations filmed throughout Europe.

#### THE MEANING OF LIFE

**RTE One Sunday October 27, 10:35pm**

Joe Duffy speaks to former RTÉ broadcaster and journalist, Bryan Dobson, who talks openly about his reasons for retiring early from Radio & TV News.

Dehumanising or, to use a popular term, 'othering', kicks in when activists and even some doctors, opt for ending that life in a clinical or medical setting - reality denial in the cause of ideology.

On that same news programme, I heard Kamala Harris speaking of wanting to represent all Americans if she becomes president - really? Even pro-life people? The signs are not promising. And she spoke of protecting women and young girls - except the living unborn ones of course, but she didn't mention that.

Damage to children was an issue on *Ayesha Hazarika* (Times Radio, Saturday) when Matt Newport, a British doc-

tor, spoke of working in "atrocious" conditions in Gaza. The idea of procedures being done without anaesthetic and pain relief was upsetting. A texter upbraided it for being one-sided, but as the host rightly pointed out that it wasn't an 'either or' situation, that you didn't have to favour one side or the other. She excoriated Hamas for the brutality of October 7. So often the debate is polarised so it was good to see some balance.

On *Sunday Morning with Trevor Phillips* (Sky News) one commentator hit the nail on the head - Stephanie Flinders of Bloomberg Economics said that both sides were unable to see the humanity of the other side.

# Music

Pat O'Kelly



## A unique experience between music and image

Earlier this month the National Concert Hall highlighted the music of US composer Philip Glass in a number of programmes that included the NSO and the visiting Philip Glass Ensemble. This octet has made Glass part of its own identity but maybe not surprisingly as Glass was one of its founding fathers in 1968.

I attended the final concert devoted to Glass' *Naqoyqatsi*. Taking my seat I noticed a large screen behind the orchestra but then *Naqoyqatsi* - conducted by Glass enthusiast Michael Riesman, is a work involving film, orchestra and solo cellist - the exceptionally expressive and at times

boldly dramatic Kate Ellis.

The US director, and former contemplative Christian Brother, Godfrey Reggio, conceived the film that Philip Glass maintained is "a work that evokes a unique experience between the image, the music and the viewer".

*Naqoyqatsi: Life as war*, completed in 2001, is the last in a trilogy of works in a Glass/Reggio collaboration that the composer told us, "presented a cohesive and poetic vision of the modern world as it rocketed towards the end of the 20th century and, in its last moments, anticipated the century to come."

I must admit I found *Naqoyqatsi* somewhat per-

plexing. Its basic three movements have further sub-divisions within themselves but regrettably I failed to find the relationship between what I was seeing and what I was hearing. Indeed, as the ninety-minute work progressed I found music and visuals seeming to be at odds with each other and wished the visuals could have been switched off leaving the music to make its own impression.

This may appear heretical on my part and, no doubt, *Naqoyqatsi* had many admirers in the audience as the composer is a highly respected figure enjoying an international reputation. Where did I go wrong, I wonder?

Philip Glass, born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1937, is a graduate of both Chicago University and the Juilliard School in New York. On a Fulbright Scholarship, he spent two years intense study in Paris with the eminent teacher/composer Nadia Boulanger and in order to supplement his meagre finances while there he transcribed Ravi Shankar's Indian music into Western notation.

He formed the Philip Glass Ensemble in 1968 as "a laboratory for his music with its purpose being to develop a performance practice to meet the unprecedented technical and artistic demands of his compositions." In pio-

neering this approach, the group became a creative wellspring for Glass and its members remain inimitable interpreters of his work. Commissioned by the National Symphony Orchestra, Glass is currently working on his 15th symphony.

As well as his orchestral music, Glass completed fifteen operas, numerous chamber operas, a plethora of string quartets and many film scores.

Glass says he developed his love of music from his father who ran a music shop in Baltimore. Any unsold scores and records ended up in the family home. The Glass forebears came from Latvia and Russia.

Before establishing him-



Philip Glass

self in the realm of music, Glass earned his living as a plumber and a cab driver - nothing if not versatile.

# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## The Synod and the crisis of authority

**Communal Discernment: A Lamp for our Synodal Journey,** by Michael Bach and Esdac Tea, edited and with an introduction by Brian Grogan SJ (Messenger Publications, €14.95 / £12.95)

Frank Litton

I am inclined to think that the Synodal process is as significant an event in the history of the Church as was the Second Vatican Council. The Council was about the Church catching up with the world, finding in its teaching and tradition, the resources, the stance, to engage with a world transformed by two World Wars and cultural, social, political upheavals.

The Synodal Process is about responding to the crisis of authority whose symptoms are manifold. For instance, authorities worry about the speed with which lies spread coalescing into conspiracy theories that distort politics and feed hatred. They understand disinformation as a problem that comes with new technologies that vastly increase the power of political rogues to cause mischief.

Censorship together with greater efforts to propagate the truth will help resolve the problem and reduce the damage.

This, however, is to misconstrue the problem. The problem is not new technology, though it undoubtedly plays a role, nor are individuals with evil intent, though of course they are active.

### Authority

The root of the problem is a loss of authority. The mainstream media that once informed citizens of the big picture into which their individual, local, lifestyle were set have lost the trust of increasing numbers.

The impact of the crisis on politics is obvious. Up to the 1970s, political parties across western Europe could rely on solid blocs of voters. For these loyal voters, parties were a source of identity found in belonging to a group. They did not support the party because they judged that its programme matched their interests, they trusted the party to instruct them in

Pope Francis addressing a church audience on Synodality large



they could best be defended in the broader scheme of things.

**“Has any Pope in recent times been written or spoken about with the disdain and contempt directed at Pope Francis by devout Catholics in both liberal and conservative?”**

This trust had to be sustained and nurtured, hence the importance of local organisation and a partisan press. In the 1970s surveys reported that some seventy-five per cent of voters were ‘loyal’. Today the figure is about twenty-five per cent. The political landscape has been transformed, and not in a good way. Could you explain to your children what attachment to a political party meant to their grandparents?

The Church cannot escape the crisis of authority. We can add it to the list

of institutions whose public authority has weakened or evaporated: political parties, the media, trade unions..... The growing factionalism within the Church shows that its internal authority is challenged. Has any Pope in recent times been written or spoken about with the disdain and contempt directed at Pope Francis by devout Catholics in both liberal and conservative camps?

We commonly suppose that that authority is based on some attribute, office, or position of the person who exercises it. But is this correct? I listen, respectfully, to the consultant and obey her instructions though they include painful surgery, unpleasant medication, and a restrictive regime.

### Restore

She has authority because of what I lack--- good health and the knowledge to restore it. Her degrees, her appointment as consultant, the recognition of her colleagues, are not the basis of her authority. They are evidence that she has the competence to restore

me to health. The basis of her authority is my recognition of a need that she can satisfy. So it is with all authority.

How can the teaching authority of the Church be secured, restored?

When I think of teaching authority, I remember Fergal O’Connor OP. Fergal was a remarkable teacher as generations of students of politics and philosophy in UCD will attest. A good teacher is surely one who answers their students questions.

**“At the end of a lecture, Fergal would ask ‘are you confused?’ ‘Yes’ we would reply; ‘Good’ he would say”**

Not so, as Fergal’s example demonstrates. A good teacher provokes questions, providing the need that guides students into the work that they are studying. So in lecturing on Hobbes, he made the questions that Hobbes addressed alive and compelling.

His lectures quickly

became Socratic dialogues in which our all too ready assumption that we had the answers were challenged. At the end of a lecture, Fergal would ask ‘are you confused?’ ‘Yes’ we would reply; ‘Good’ he would say. Students clustered around the podium with supplementary questions or challenges before adjourning to continue the discussion in the cafe.

### Compelling

If the Church is to make its teachings compelling, it must make real the questions that teaching answers. This starts with challenging our too ready assumption that we know the questions and the answers. We have to escape our ‘bubble’ into the context of the universal Church. As Fergal demonstrated, this is not accomplished by instruction, still less diktat, delivered from a pulpit, or podium. Learning is communal; dialogue is essential. Of course, Fergal did not invent his teaching style, he inherited from the Dominican tradition in which he was formed.

This book, translated from the French, draws on a different tradition. The notion of

‘discernment’, the prayerful openness to what the spirit is telling us in this particular time and place is central to Jesuit spirituality and teaching.

**“A start has been made, the synodal process its underway”**

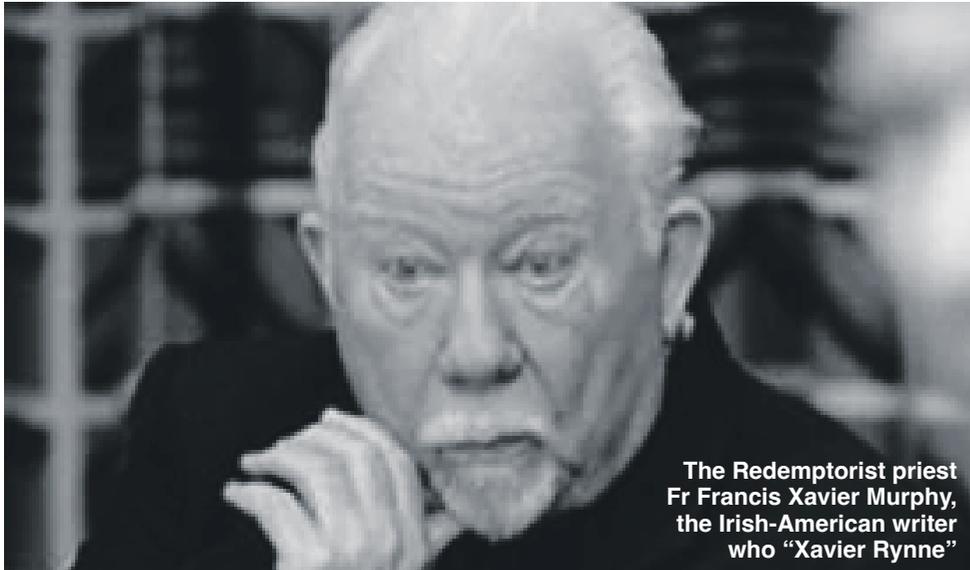
The long experience of teaching and practising discernment is put to work to provide a practical guide to how we can learn to listen attentively to each other as we seek together, in prayer and discussion, the questions and answers that guide us to the teachings of the spirit.

No doubt, the Dominican and Jesuit traditions differ in this or that aspect. But they belong to the same ‘family’ and demonstrate that Church has the resources to address its crisis of authority.

A start has been made, the Synodal Process its underway. Let us hope that the world will ‘catch up’ as it struggles with its authority crises and their devastating effects.

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

## An agent of change taking notes among the cardinals



The Redemptorist priest Fr Francis Xavier Murphy, the Irish-American writer who “Xavier Rynne”

**The Mole of Vatican Council II: The True Story of “Xavier Rynne”**, by Richard A. Zmuda (Acta Books, US\$ 29.95; available online through Amazon.us)

Peter Costello

Looking back the death of Pius XII, the election of Pope John XXIII, and the calling of the Vatican Council II were momentous events of the first order which still have their continuing effects to this day.

One would also add into this the Encyclical *Mater and Magister* (May 1961), a restatement of Catholic social teaching for a new era: the little yellow pamphlet was carried about in many school bags, and read with intense interest.

But it was the calling of an Ecumenical Council in January 1959 that was the most stunning moment.

The Council first met on October 11, 1962 and continued to December 1965. One way or another its discussions and decisions shaped the coming decades in a direct way.

What the general public learned about the Council's inner working came not from Catholic journals, but, beginning in the issue of 20 October 1962, the *New Yorker* carried a column entitled “Letter from the Vatican City”, these were latter reissued in book form, and are still in print.

The author's signature was a pen name for Fr Francis Xavier Murphy, a Redemptorist who was on the staff of a bishop attending the Council as a theological expert. His identity was unknown for many years, despite best guesses, until Fr Murphy revealed himself late in life.

### Engaged

To issue in 1999 a new edition of the letters from the Vatican Murphy engaged writer and teacher Richard Zmuda as an editorial assistant. Zmuda thus has available to him the recollections of Fr Murphy (whose friendship he cherished, and to whom this book is dedicated), but was able to make use also of many other archives and sources.

This book is subtitled ‘an historical novel’. This might suggest to some readers that it might be akin to a work by say Hilary Mantel. For many readers, it was once said, an “historical novel was once described as “a modern story in fancy dress, projected onto the past”. This never applied to the best of such novels, of course. Nor does it apply to this book.

Zmuda has carefully documented his account of the activities of “Xavier Rynne”; so the book is more what the French once called a *roman historique*, an account of historical facts cast in literary

rather than academic form.

He makes some concessions to the needs of fiction in describing the personal relations of Fr Murphy with two women friends in Rome -- nothing salacious mind you -- but everything else can be documented. In a few places his editor Gregory Pierce should have seen that the remarks about the Council of Trent and the emergence of the Protestant Churches could have been more clearly expressed.

But on the whole this is vivid and fast moving narrative, with some likeness to a Netflix movie perhaps, but most often to a well written long-form article in a superior magazine (such as the *New Yorker* indeed). To a younger generation of readers this book can be recommended as telling the story as faithfully as possible.

**“Seated in St Peter’s they were not prepared to accept the hyper-colonialist attitude of the Curia that “Rome”, that is to say Ottaviani in person, knew best”**

The Roman Curia under the direction of Alfredo Cardinal Ottaviani is presented as the villain of the piece. The death of Pope John XXIII and the election of Pope John Paul I made little difference to the trend towards a new openness in the Church.

But the overwhelming free votes of the Council ran against the Curia, and shortly after the Council closed Cardinal Ottaviani resigned from his position.

Many of the assembled bishops came from countries that had already cast off their colonial overlords or were in the process doing so, transforming the social situation globally of the globe. Seated in St Peter’s they were not prepared to accept the hyper-colonialist attitude of the Curia that “Rome”, that is to say Ottaviani in person, knew best.

They and the societies they represented were determined to have their way. This is my opinion. Zmuda and Murphy do not express the matter this way; but to newly liberated peoples that was the way it seemed.

This book is a very singular and entertaining book. It will please those who want to know what happened at Vatican II, but have not the time or desire to wade through an academic treatment. This is the truth in tabloid form, and is more quickly absorbed. But the medication is just as effective.

## Treasures of Spanish religious art in Dublin



One of the important Spanish art treasures in the National Gallery: “The Immaculate Conception”, by Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664), early 1660s (© National Gallery of Ireland).

Peter Costello

Recently Dr Peter Cherry retired from his post as a long time lecturer on the history of art in Trinity College.

Among his other activities there was directing a seminar for final-year students on “Art and Religion in the Hispanic world”.

Of essential assistance to his teaching programme at all levels was the nearby presence in the National Gallery of Ireland of an internationally significant collection, built up since the gallery's earliest days in the nineteenth century, of Iberian religious art, a mere two minutes walk for students from Trinity.

Dr Cherry's retirement was marked by an all day seminar in Trinity attended by many art historians. But there was also an event open to the general public of an afternoon lecture on “Spanish art in Dublin - a fond farewell.” As Dr Cherry is moving to Madrid he will

have even larger collections of art to explore in more detail on a year round basis.

Spanish religious art can, however, present problems for viewers. Dr Cherry mentioned, indeed, the confusions in the minds of his students (and perhaps a great many others) about the concepts of “The Immaculate Conception of Mary” and the “Incarnation of Jesus Christ”. These confusions are perhaps shared by many others these days, when precise theological definitions seem to belong to a distant and now lost world of certainty. Dr Cherry aimed in his lectures to dissipate some of those confusions.

Many of the Spanish religious works on display in the NGI were not intended for private houses, of course -- other kinds of portable art filled that role. These images, however, came from palaces, cathedrals, churches and convents. They were created as aids to devotion; but now they are appreciated largely for their artistry and mastery.

In retirement Dr Cherry who has widely published articles mainly in *The Burlington Magazine*, will be able to find the time, uncluttered by administration and teaching to draw together his discoveries and insight into writing a book, perhaps even the definitive book, on Velásquez, who came of a *conversos* family (that is to say a formerly Muslim family), and much of whose life's work was devoted to religious subjects. In the NGI the enigmatic *Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus* has always attracted attention. For a long time the background scene of Jesus with the disciples, was covered over. Only the restoration work of art historians brought it to light. It is a reminder to us that even well known works of art have still much to reveal to us. It is all a matter not just of looking, but of really seeing what is there.

His friends, colleagues, and former students will look forward to more from Dr Cherry on Velásquez.

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# Leisure time

## Crossword

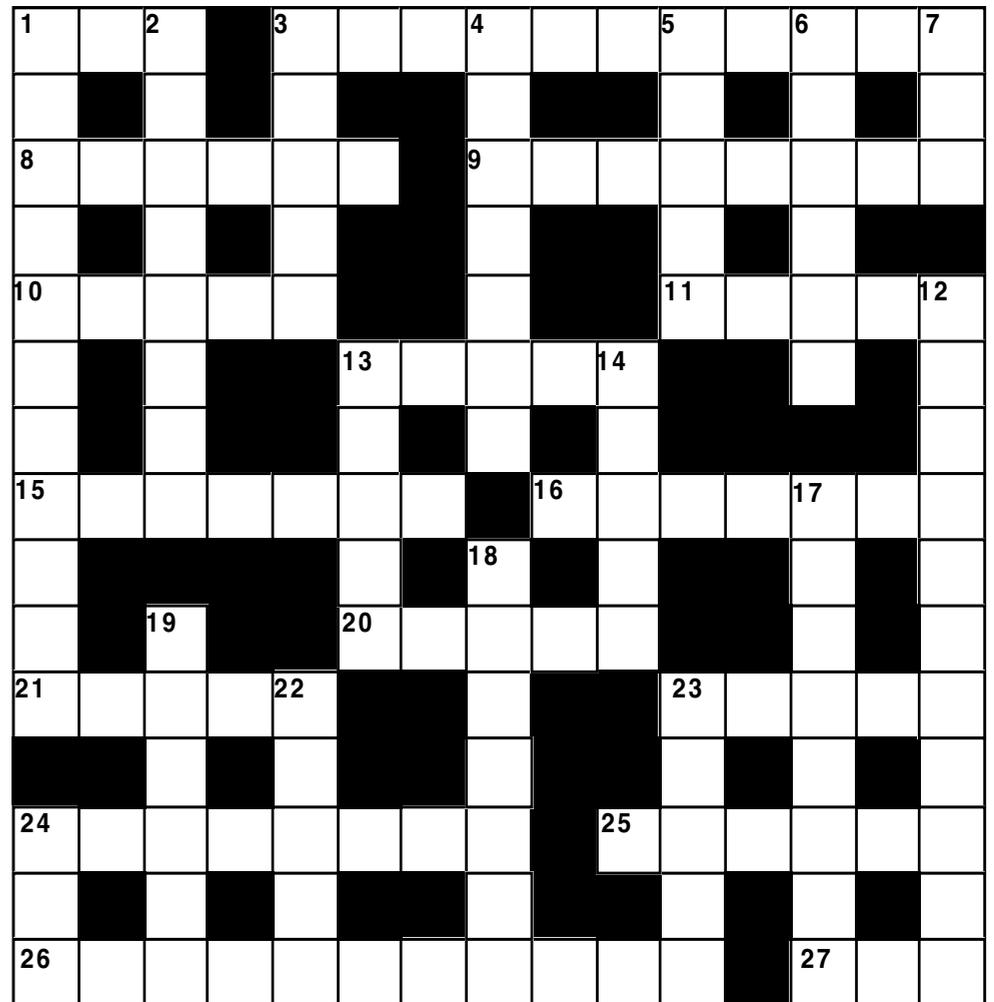
Gordius 686

### Across

- 1 In which peas grow (3)
- 3 Rigidly vertical body position (4,7)
- 8 & 9 Summer papal residence (6,8)
- 10 Gallic distinction (5)
- 11 Crannies (5)
- 13 Variety of flower (5)
- 15 The world's highest mountain (7)
- 16 Sweet sticky liquid (7)
- 20 Frightening (5)
- 21 Piece of live coal or wood (5)
- 23 Jordan's rose-red city (5)
- 24 The sound of such a musical instrument is not electrically enhanced (8)
- 25 Hooded coat (6)
- 26 Relating to the regions of the Earth adjacent to the equatorial zone (11)
- 27 The Scottish Grand National is traditionally run on this racecourse (3)

### Down

- 1 Domestic wooden palisade (6,5)
- 2 Wretched, forlorn (8)
- 3 The sound of a sheep or goat (5)
- 4 Female big cat (7)
- 5 Inert gas (5)



- 6 Eight pints (6)
- 14 Layout, selection (5)
- 19 Take in moisture (6)
- 7 A pair (3)
- 17 Facets and standards that form the basis of a judgment (8)
- 22 The vertical face of a step (5)
- 12 Thief who can break into strongboxes (11)
- 18 Last book of the Old Testament (7)
- 23 Group of pundits (5)
- 24 Donkey (3)

## SOLUTIONS, OCTOBER 17

### GORDIUS No. 685

#### Across

1 Big Brother 6 Also 10 Ambit 11 Aeroplane 12 Bridled 15 Ideas 17 Eric 18 Laid 19 Oasis 21 Protect 23 Creel 24 Form 25 Ebbs 26 Sofia 28 The Oaks 33 Exonerate 34 Doubt 35 Port 36 Presbytery

#### Down

1 Brag 2 Gabardine 3 Rated 4 Trade 5 Ears 7 Lease 8 Open sesame 9 Apricot 13 Liar 14 Dentist 16 Black sheep 20 Stock cube 21 Pleased 22 Core 27 Flour 29 Heels 30 Oddly 31 Lair 32 Stay



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# The Irish Catholic

## Sudoku Corner 556

### Easy

					2		9	
	1					6	4	
		2	6	3	1	5		
			5	7				4
7								3
5				1	4			
		5	8	9	3	2		
	2	3					7	
	9		4					

### Hard

					5			
		2			8			3
					2	7	8	9
	3						6	5
6	2						1	4
7	5							9
1		8	6	3				
9			1			6		
			5					

### Last week's Easy 555

2	9	4	3	1	8	5	6	7
8	5	7	6	4	9	2	1	3
6	1	3	5	7	2	4	9	8
9	2	1	7	8	3	6	5	4
4	8	5	9	6	1	7	3	2
7	3	6	2	5	4	1	8	9
1	7	8	4	3	5	9	2	6
5	6	2	8	9	7	3	4	1
3	4	9	1	2	6	8	7	5

### Last week's Hard 555

5	1	2	7	4	8	9	3	6
8	9	7	6	2	3	4	5	1
6	3	4	5	9	1	7	8	2
7	5	6	4	8	9	1	2	3
3	2	9	1	5	6	8	4	7
4	8	1	2	3	7	5	6	9
1	4	8	9	6	2	3	7	5
2	7	3	8	1	5	6	9	4
9	6	5	3	7	4	2	1	8

Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



# The appeal of being a jumped-up curate

**What is a Co-PP?** The question posed in two separate editions of *The Irish Catholic* over recent weeks has certainly caught the attention of priests, judging from the feedback I have received from all over Ireland. Many priests, it seems, find themselves appointed as Co-PPs and know little about what that means.

One who ministers in a large diocese reported his experience there. He wrote as “PP (in effect) or Co PP or God-knows-what” and added that “this ridiculous title was brought in without the slightest consultation” to his diocese... Wherefore synodality indeed. My correspondent also believed that “partnerships/ families of parishes are clerical solutions” and went on:

“What we need I believe is to form leaders at local parish level who will succeed us in the parishes.” Which I believe also.

So what is a Co-PP? Maybe I am asking the wrong question. Instead of asking that, maybe I should ask what a moderator is, the one in charge? Unlike the title ‘Co-PP’, the title ‘Moderator’ is found in the Code of Canon Law. When you read from Canon 542 on, you see that when a group of priests jointly take care of a group of parishes, their work is done under the direction of the moderator (which makes it sound like he is the boss). Furthermore, in juridical affairs, only the moderator acts in the person of the parish or parishes entrusted to the group

(Canon 543). Everything you read here makes it seem that the Co-PP is much less than what a PP was. But it’s not all bad.

Clerical wags once had a title for priests who were not quite parish priests, whether their title was ‘priest-in-charge’, or Rector of a church, or Administrator, or head of a mission. ‘Jumped-up curates’ was their moniker. Maybe this is what I, as a Co-PP, really am – a curate, senior or junior, with “notions”. Maybe my fellow Co-PPs and I, who willingly gave up the title PP at the suggestion that a Co-PP was much the same thing, were ever-so-slightly misled.

But maybe there is an upside to my new designation. Maybe it means that I can trundle along under the radar, doing those things I was ordained for: preaching God’s word, presiding at the sacraments, being close to people in times of sorrow or loss, praying a little, golfing a little, holidaying a little and generally hanging out with the people of the parish in all their ways. Meanwhile the moderator gets the privilege of negotiating terms for employment of sacristans and secretaries, and going through all the legal niceties to do with selling a field here

or disposing of a closed school there – keeping the charity regulator and Revenue (and the diocese) happy. Given a choice between endless paperwork and pastoral work, I know which appeals to me (even if JUC rather than Co-PP should be my suffix).

What do you think? I’ll be happy to hear your verdict on my conclusion: frbernard1984@gmail.com.

**The use of Latin is not entirely dead**

Latin was always a popular language in clerical note-keeping, before GDPR restricted its use. I once inherited a visitation book where my predecessor made comments in his own brand of Latin. *Bellum* (war) was a common note, either *inter spon-sos* (domestic) or *cum invicem* (fighting with the neighbours). He also had his own way of alerting a successor to someone who wasn’t the full shilling: *min hab*, he would note. This use of Latin is not entirely dead. A colleague recently told me his way of encouraging participation in ministries by *coax-iorum*. Which probably translates straight to Irish as ‘plámás’!

**Funny how history repeats itself...**

● Every Saturday night, I talk with a priest-friend on the phone. When I had written the main article on this page, I told him about it and my ‘jumped-up curate’ status. He told me the origins of the description. Apparently Fr John Walsh, who once lived in the house where I dwell, was appointed to the care of this parish, while it was still a mensal parish of Skibber-reen. A friend congratulated him on becoming a PP, to which he replied that he was no PP but rather an administrator, really just a ‘jumped-up curate’. Funny how history repeats itself.



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