

# The Irish Catholic

## THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION TO MORE CHILDREN

Breda O'Brien  
Page 16



## A CHURCH AT THE HEART OF CHILD SAFETY

Safeguarding analysis  
Pages 8-9



## A GREAT DAME AND A LITTLE SAINT'S SONG

Martina Purdy  
Page 7



Thursday, October 3, 2024

€3.00 (Stg £2.70)

The-Irish-Catholic-Newspaper

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## ‘Do not blame asylum seekers’

Sr Stan and Fr McVerry: Plenty of room for all homeless

Chai Brady

Recent figures highlighting increased pressure on Ireland's homeless services due to asylum seekers must not be "exploited" as there is space for both Irish homeless and those seeking international protection.

Homelessness campaigners have insisted that pointing the finger at any group is "very wrong" and that it is up to Government to respond appropriately to growing demand for emergency accommodation.

Fr Peter McVerry, the founder of housing and homelessness charity The Peter McVerry Trust, told *The Irish Catholic* that while there is increased pressure on homeless services it does not mean that asylum seekers should be blamed. He said: "If you want to blame anyone, you should blame the Government for not anticipating and providing for the increased number of asylum seekers."

"It's not their fault that they're homeless. They have been given permission to stay in Ireland and have to find somewhere to live, so it is very much the Government's responsibility."

Founder of the Immigrant Council of Ireland and Focus Ireland, Sr Stan Kennedy said that "we should have room for both people seeking protection and our own people that are homeless, it is possible to do both if we are serious about it".

» Continued on Page 2

## 100th anniversary of the 'Tin Church'



Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty celebrated Mass for the 110th World Day of Migrants and Refugees and the centenary celebration of the Church dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary and the Guardian Angels in Sallins Parish, Co. Kildare on September 29.

See page 6.

United Ireland discussions require 'massive sensitivity' – Baroness O'Loan

Brandon Scott

Former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar's call for political parties in the south to make Irish reunification "an objective" and not "an aspiration", has been met with a call for sensitivity and an understanding that Northern Ireland is still "not a united place".

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Former Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Baroness Nuala O'Loan, said that Mr Varadkar's comments have "moved the debate on Irish unity forward" but that the prospect of a united Ireland has many variables which need to be factored in during any debates about the future reunification of the island.

"In his recent comments Leo Varadkar moved the debate on Irish unity forward. Free of the responsibilities of government, he is now encouraging all Irish political parties to move from aspiration for a united Ireland, to a stated objective," she said.

"I can see the damage that was done by partition and the logic of a reunited Ireland. However, Northern Ireland is not a united place. It is still massively affected by the problems which resulted in the Troubles and by the distrust and sectarianism which has blighted

» Continued on Page 2

RENATA STEFFENS

Religious sisters who see stars

PAGE 3



POPE IN BELGIUM

A spiritual renewal has begun

PAGES 22-23



GERRY O'HANLON SJ

Rome synod will nourish Irish 'mini-synods'

PAGE 20



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## 'Do not blame asylum seekers'

» Continued from Page 1

"I know it is quite full [homeless accommodation], but we can make other accommodation available for people seeking protection, we must, it is our obligation. We should not be setting them up against each other at all," Sr Stan said.

"We do not want an anti-immigration sentiment here, we're seeing enough all over Europe with the rise of the right and it is scary so it is important that we are open to receive people."

Fr McVerry said the issue is deeper than just capacity, warning that those exiting direct provision, just like Irish homeless, face unsafe environments in homeless hostels and could even end up being pushed into drug use and addiction.

"I have been very critical for years of much of the emergency hostel accommodation, it's not safe, it's full of drugs," Fr McVerry said.

"People who are drug free just find emergency accommodation is driving them into drugs, we're creating drug users with the emergency accommodation that we provide. Drug users also need accommodation but we need far more drug-free accommodation for those who are drug-free so they are not going get into drugs in a hostel.

He added: "Most of those people who have permission to stay will be drug free, they won't have got into

the drug scene here in Ireland. I think anybody who goes into a hostel full of drugs is in danger of becoming a drug user. Life as a homeless person is very depressing, it's meaningless and they are the conditions that encourage and drive people into using drugs to escape the meaningless of life."

Sr Stan reiterated this point, telling *The Irish Catholic*: "I would be concerned about anybody who would find themselves in that accommodation. Drugs are very prevalent, they're very available and accessible, it's a whole new scene in Ireland, in Dublin, it's very easy for people who are homeless to get drugs and for them to use them. That is reality. It's true of Irish people as well as foreign nationals. It's not a good situation. That must be challenged, it must be changed."

Their comments come following Taoiseach Simon Harris saying last week that "there is an absolute direct link in our figures that are published monthly between people exiting direct provision and people presenting at homeless services".

He said: "There is no doubt that there is a link between the migration challenge we face and the homeless challenge – not the entirety of homelessness, of course. But if you look at the figures, for example, for the month of July in Dublin, the single biggest reason people gave for presenting at Dublin homeless services was exiting direct provision."

# Parents and Church leaders should stand up against inappropriate curriculum, says priest

Brandon Scott

A priest with decades of experience in education has described the Government's SPHE curriculum, which was brought to public attention by whistleblower-teacher Mary Creedon, who revealed that secondary school students were being exposed to explicit sexual content within classrooms, as being devoid of morals and respect and urged concerned parents and Church leaders to speak out against the startling content.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Patrick Moore, Parish Priest of Castlepollard and Vicar Forane, who has amassed decades of experience on schools' boards of management, said that it is his wish that school student's innocence be respected and not be subject to impositions "from the outside".

"None of this stuff should be

imposed on them from outside," he said. "If their parents saw a need when questions arose, they could very delicately deal with it. That's the healthiest and most sane way of going about."

Fr Moore has experience in dealing with particular impositions in his capacity on schools' boards of management and has rejected certain proposals, in vain. He discerns a new style of education that is not rooted in morals or gospel principles and in time, this will have a detrimental effect on children.

"In my school I did not pass at the board meeting the document authorising certain impositions of primary school children but it was to no effect because they said they're already doing it," he said. "There are no safeguards and not a word about morals or gospel principles – it's just pure mechanics. We're training children for promiscuity rather than self-control

and respect."

Fr Moore ultimately believes that priests speaking out about the matter has "limited value" in mobilising support against the inappropriate curriculum, but instead thinks that the key to drawing attention to the issue is encouraging parents and members of the hierarchy to express their concerns with "courage".

"I'm concerned that there's not a strong voice coming from the Church about it," he said. "A priest speaking out about this has limited value I think, parents have a stronger value in speaking out. But these concerned parents need guidance and they need courage for leadership in this matter, which has to come from higher-ups."

"I've great respect for the hierarchy but I think the hierarchy should be more in-tune with this situation and give leadership and guidance which are governed by the Holy Spirit."

## United Ireland discussions require 'massive sensitivity' – Baroness O'Loan

» Continued from Page 1

us for so long.

"Paramilitaries on both sides still hold sway in some areas, many involved in major crime. This situation has to be factored into any debate. Moving on from this situation will require massive sensitivity. It will take time. Reality and progress must lie in the accommodation of perspectives in so far as that is possible," according to Baroness O'Loan.

Clergy in the North were mixed in their response.

Fr Joe McVeigh, a priest in Fermanagh and longstanding advocate for a united Ireland, said that he "welcomed" Mr Varadkar's comments and believes the Church should play a central role in encouraging politicians to include the subject of a united Ireland on their agendas and in facilitating all in dialogue.

"The Church should encourage politicians to continue along the lines that Leo Varadkar has expressed in terms of making the aim of a united Ireland an objective of all political parties and to facilitate, if they can, parties to engage in dialogue and conversations about what kind of Ireland we're going to have and what role the churches will have in a new Ireland," he said. Every party and every politician needs to be included.

"I'm very pleased with Leo Varadkar's position, particularly when it hasn't been the way of Fine Gael to outright promote Irish reunification. I think it will have an impact down south where there's a fair bit of apathy and some opposition to the idea. It will get people thinking and talking about the future of the island down south."

Fr Paddy McCafferty, a priest ministering in Belfast said that he once

desired a united Ireland but now no longer feels that it's anything he wants to be a part of due to the social and political norms that now dominate the south.

"I don't care anymore about a united Ireland given what the 26 counties have degenerated into with their pro-abortion support and Varadkar presided over all of that," he said. "It's not a priority anymore I think for many faithful Catholics in the North. My concern as a priest is faith and the evangelising and the catechising of people into the Faith and what it means."

"I grew up very much wanting a united Ireland but now I don't want to be part of an Ireland that is pro-abortion and promotes the other nonsense they espouse. Our citizenship is not of this world, we belong to the Kingdom of God."

## Receiving a special grace



Shane Jenkins and Robyn Conroy after their recent wedding in Newman University Church, St Stephen's Green. Photo: Bradley Kearns.

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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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# Science priest commends honoured star-seeking sisters

Renata Steffens

Four nuns who mapped more than half a million stars between 1917 and 1921 have been honoured with asteroids named after them. Astrophysicist Fr Michael Connolly PP Oughterard, Co. Galway, said role models such as these religious sisters “remind us that there is a very important responsibility to speak up for the creator and sing his praises”.

Two asteroids named after Srs Concetta Finardi (1896-1975) and Luigia Panceri (1893-1982) were announced in the International Astronomical Union’s (IAU) Working Group on the Naming of Small Celestial Bodies announced in the September 2024 bulletin.

The first two sisters – Emilia Ponzoni (1883-1950) and Regina Colombo (1885-1953) – in the four-member research group had already been honoured in June.

Fr Connolly told *The Irish Catholic*: “I am sure that their meticulous work of cataloguing many tens of thousands of star positions on old photographic plates over many years, unnoticed, did not seem like working in the vineyard of the Lord. But every search for truth, in a spirit of service and not personal gain, is truly acceptable to God.”

The ‘nun-asteroids’ are located in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, the same belt has already over 40 celestial bodies named after Jesuits and one Pope. Fr Connolly said that “immortalising” these religious people “as asteroid name-bearers” also reminds us to “‘muck-in’ with the often meticulous and unrewarding work of scientific research which reveals more and more his majesty.”

In the 1880s the Vatican Observatory led by Barnabite priest Francesco Denza took part in the creation of a *Carte du ciel*, a celestial map. The Vatican was then allocated a section of the night sky to analyse and catalogue. When Fr Denza died in 1894 the project stalled.

In 1909, Jesuit priest John Hagen approached the Suore di Maria Bambina Order’s Superior General looking for “two sisters with normal eyesight, patience and an aptitude for methodical and mechanical work”.

From 1910 two nuns and later four were sent to the observatory to map photographic plates of the night sky using microscopes. By 1921, the sisters had catalogued the position and brightness of 481,215 stars, and by 1966 almost five million stars were recorded worldwide for the *Carte du ciel* project.

“What they did was build onto an ever-growing body of knowledge of the heavens, that reveals the grandeur and majesty of creation in a way that the ancients could never have dreamed of. This should inspire even more admiration and gratitude to the creator, God, through his Son; sadly the opposite seems to be happening,” said Fr Connolly.

# ‘Our Lady was also a migrant’, says priest

Renata Steffens

This year the Catholic Church celebrated the 110th World Day of Migrants and Refugees on September 29. The date is a moment for prayer worldwide and an opportunity for reflection on the reality of migration and its effect on the people, the world and the Church.

Commenting on the importance of Our Lady Aparecida on Brazilian migrants’ lives, Fr Severino Pinheiro da Silva Neto OFM Cap, Chaplain for the Brazilian Community in Dublin, said the Virgin “was also a migrant, she went to Egypt and lived the distress of the one who leaves their place, the one who goes towards the unknown but is certain God does not abandon us.”

To mark the annual celebration, Nenagh Parish, Co. Tipperary celebrated the veneration of the Relics of the Polish Martyrs. The Killaloe Diocese’s website underlines “the need to welcome the stranger into our lives.” The gospel read during the Mass in Nenagh “preaches acceptance of difference and

the setting aside of prejudice.”

Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty, during his homily in Our Lady of the Rosary and the Guardian Angels Church on Sunday, said: “Every encounter with migrant people is an encounter with Christ himself. For migrants, God is always a travelling companion.”

“It is also important for the Church at all levels to continuously set out and reflect on the great treasure of Catholic Social Teaching in terms of welcoming the stranger and building a sustainable sense of belonging and integration,” Bishop Michael Duignan, Chair of the Council for Immigrants of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference said.

Pope Francis’ message for the Day says that migrants “entrust themselves to Him before setting out and seek Him in times of need,” and that “thanks to Him, there are good Samaritans along the way.” “Let us unite in prayer for all those who have had to leave their land in search of dignified living conditions.”

# 2000 school children venerate St Bernadette’s relics

Renata Milán Morales

The recent visit of St Bernadette’s relics to Dublin drew around 2000 children and their teachers to Our Lady of Victories parish, an experience Fr Frank Reburn described as deeply humbling. He noted that schools had been contacting the parish office to request visits to the sacred relics. “We were getting phone


calls from schools to say, could they bring a class? Could they visit the relics? That was an extremely humbling experience,” Fr Reburn shared, adding that the overwhelming response left him emotional. “We are all journeying together,” he reflected.

The event, attended by both children and some of their parents, was marked by a deep sense of reverence. Fr Reburn noted how touching it was to see the children participating in the event, even in small ways, under the guidance of their teachers. “Just to see so many children there being part of this lovely event... dipping their feet in some small way,” he said.

The participation of the schools was particularly meaningful, with many taking the initiative to prepare in advance. Hymns had been sent to school staff

ahead of the event, and the children arrived ready to sing. Fr Reburn highlighted the atmosphere of dignity and silence that permeated the gathering, praising the children’s awareness and respectful behaviour. “We prayed with them a little bit and then invited them to come forward and bless themselves with the Lord’s water,” he concluded.

Armagh’s newest priest



The Archdiocese of Armagh celebrated the ordination of Fr Brian McNally, a native of Co. Tyrone, on September 29 in St Patrick’s Cathedral, Armagh. Photo: Archbishop Eamon Martin.



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# Dedicated volunteers and robust policies have made Church 'very safe'

**Brandon Scott and Chai Brady**

Two members at the forefront of the Church's safeguarding efforts have described the Church as being "very safe for children at the moment" due to the successes of the safeguarding reforms that have been implemented in dioceses across the country and that politically-motivated statements attacking the Church and calling for its removal from education are "unfair" to those working in safeguarding and "opportunistic" in nature.

Deacon Frank Browne, a deacon in Ballyroan Parish

and member of the Archdiocese of Dublin's Safeguarding Committee and Aidan Gordon, the newly-installed CEO of the Church's National Board for Safeguarding Children spoke to *The Irish Catholic* about how more stringent safeguarding practices over decades have led to the Church becoming "the safest place for children in terms of organisation".

Deacon Browne said that the meaning of safeguarding has been recently expanded to include other vulnerable categories of people, including the elderly.

"On our parish pastoral council's agenda, the stand-

ing item is safeguarding and what's really good to see, and it's close to my heart as well, it's no longer just about safeguarding children, it's safeguarding children and vulnerable adults," he said.

Deacon Browne said that the constant attacks by certain politicians who harbour personal grievances are "very unfair" to the dedicated volunteers who have sacrificed hours to make the Church a safer place for vulnerable people and that bishops and others in leadership roles need to actively promote this.

"It is very unfair to all of us that work in safeguarding, because we know that

children are more likely to be abused in the home," he said. "The reality is that the safest place for children in terms of organisation is actually the Catholic Church parishes. They're the safest places because anybody who is directly working with children has been recently vetted within the last three years.

"We need our bishops and others in leadership roles to speak up for the truth which is that we have a very safe Church and wonderfully dedicated men and women who give up their lives because we have a really good message and it will not be clouded by opportunistic attacks on

the current parishes that are doing their best to protect children and vulnerable adults."

Mr Gordon, who has 30 years' experience in safeguarding practice and management, called the Church a "very safe place for children" but that this does not warrant a more complacent attitude when it comes to the protection of children.

"In my view the Catholic Church in Ireland is a very safe place for children at the moment," he said. "However, we can't afford to be complacent or let down our guard."

[Read the full interview on pages 8-9.](#)

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Annual RE teachers gathering in Cork

The Cork and Ross Diocese's 'annual post-primary Religious Education (RE) teachers' In-service gathering' happened on September 26 at Innishannon House Hotel. The event received 60 RE teachers and school chaplains from 33 post-primary schools across the diocese. The schools' representatives were joined by Bishop Fintan Gavin.

The gathering started with morning prayer provided by teachers Anne Marie Nolan, Matthew Sweeney and Collette O'Donovan from Coláiste Éamann Rís in Cork City.

Nodlaig Lillis from the Youth and Adult Ministry Office in the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore gave a presentation on 'Resources for Junior and Senior Cycle Religious Education'. While Bro Richard Hendrick OFMCap. gave a presentation on 'The Challenge and Promise of Religious Education in Ireland today'.

Co-ordinator of Youth Ministry and Digital Communications in the Diocese, Sheila Kelleher provided updates on two new initiatives for young people. The 'Alpha Youth: exploring Life, Faith & Meaning' and the 'Maranatha 2025: a faith-based high energy music event for schools.' The day also counted with a discussion about the challenges and rewards of being an RE teacher.

To conclude the event, Bishop Gavin celebrated Mass accompanied by songs provided by students from Kinsale Community School with their music teacher Bríd Kearney.

### Homelessness reaches another record total of 14,486

Focus Ireland has urged the government to take urgent action on social housing allocation as homelessness in Ireland reaches another record. New figures for August 2024 show 14,486 people homeless, including 4,419 children and 2,099 families, marking a 14% rise since August 2023.

Focus Ireland CEO, Pat Dennigan, called for a targeted policy to allocate new social housing specifically for long-term homeless families, a strategy that had success during the pandemic. Ahead of a possible General Election, Mr Dennigan urged political parties to focus on solutions, stating that Ireland's growing population needs homes and communities, not just more emergency beds. "The goal should be to end long-term homelessness, not just manage it by adding more emergency beds," Mr Dennigan said.

## An Irish ordination in Rome



Lay catechist and contributor to this paper, Eoin McCormack, pictured at the Episcopal Ordination of Irish bishop, John Kennedy for the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in St Peter's Basilica, Rome. Photo: Eoin McCormack.

## 'Co-responsibility, the Church's future', Fr Gerard McCarthy

**Renata Milán Morales**

Recently, 40 Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Finance Committees were officially commissioned to serve from 2024-2028 across the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh, and Kilfenora. Training for these groups is currently taking place in the dioceses of Galway and Clonfert.

Fr Gerard McCarthy, Diocesan Pastoral Outreach Coordinator, in a conversation with *The Irish Catholic* said, "We have begun the journey, and that's the crucial part. We can accomplish more, but we are aware of the challenges ahead. It won't be an easy path... Will there be moments of friction? Without a doubt. But we are here to support them during those times, and I'm encouraged by the response we've received."

Explaining the system of these pastoral councils, Fr McCarthy noted that, "We must involve the entire laity. There are two key things we

want them to understand. First, we listen to everyone, and consensus is reached through prayer. Second, every meeting should include a time for prayer or scripture, to remind us that this is God's will."

He also mentioned the reality of priesthood - an ageing clergy and fewer numbers - when speaking about the motives for these councils to be built, "If you have three parishes and only one priest, it will fall to the laity to ensure that Eucharistic celebrations are dynamic, rather than having the priest racing between five Masses on a Sunday morning."

Fr McCarthy concluded emphasising the importance of co-responsibility between the clergy and the laity in this new chapter of the Church history, with the continuous supervision of the assigned priest pointing to animate parishes through the encouraged missionary outreach, "Co-responsibility is a work in progress, but it has to be where we're moving towards."

## St Bernadette's replica and relic at Dublin exhibition

**Staff reporter**

St Martin Apostolate, located in Dublin, is hosting an extraordinary exhibition featuring a life-sized replica of St Bernadette of Lourdes, along with a first-class relic.

This event offers a unique opportunity to see the saint's likeness as she appears in her resting place at the convent in Nevers, France.

The lifelike replica is housed in a crystal casket and stands at 4 feet 2 inches, the same height as Berna-

dette. The figure is a tribute to Bernadette's spiritual journey.

The replica on display at St Martin Apostolate was created around 20 years ago through a collaboration between Fr Anthony McMullan, the Prior of the Domini-

can Order at the time, and the Sisters of Charity in Nevers.

Fr John Walsh, Spiritual Director of the Apostolate, commented that the exhibition not only highlights the physical representation of St Bernadette but also encourages reflection on her life.

[Visiting hours will be from Monday - Friday only between October 7 to 25, 11am to 4pm. For more information about the exhibit, please contact St Martin Apostolate on 01 8745465 or info@stmartin.ie.](#)



# Cogitating on the Covid connundrum

**P**ope Francis received 'a frosty welcome' at the Catholic University of Louvain for his praise for the role of motherhood in history, adding "what is characteristic of women, what is feminine is not determined by consensus or ideologies. It is not written on paper, but in the flesh." Louvain expressed 'incomprehension and disapproval' at Francis's words, calling them "deterministic and reductive." They wanted to hear more about women as theologians and less of trad 'gender roles'.



**Mary Kenny**

I read the Papal speech on my eldest son's fiftieth birthday, when I was reflecting on the experience of being a mother, and how it had influenced my life. And I have come to realise that my entire life has been sharply divided between 'before' and 'after' motherhood. The experience of having a child completely upended everything I had thought, done and imag-

ined before. My worldview underwent a total revolution.

**"You will worry about this person you have brought into the world. Every single day"**

I see similar reactions occurring to younger women today, and I under-

stand exactly why. In modern times, young women assume they will have the same freedoms and opportunities as men in their work, habits, ambitions and lifestyles. And, for the most part, they do, which is all fine and dandy.

Until the day they give birth to a baby: and then, with all the force of nature, the extraordinary role of maternity hits with maximum impact. This is something that has altered you, body, mind and spirit. Life changes forever. "Until you go down into the grave," a friend told me, "You will worry about this person you have brought into the world. Every single day." What a responsibility!

## Motherhood

Young women today are, arguably, less prepared for this immense change of coming to motherhood. Families are smaller, so they may not watch older siblings, or cousins, experience birth and its aftermath. The freedom and equality that young single women now expect can be thrown

**"My entire life has been sharply divided between 'before' and 'after' motherhood. The experience of having a child completely upended everything I had thought, done and imagined before. My worldview underwent a total revolution"**

into such unexpected disaster: recovering from childbirth, or breast-feeding, you realise you can't rush off to report a war zone or take the same risks as before. Nor can you, usually, stay up all night clubbing. This comes as a surprise!

**"The laws of nature run deep and are written in the flesh. This natural force strikes, and strikes fiercely"**

Pope Francis is 87 years old and from a Latin culture:

it's perhaps predictable that he venerates femininity and motherhood. Though he must surely recognise that millions of women have had fulfilled and rewarding lives without being mothers – so many nuns, teachers, medics, scholars and saints, too.

But he is not wrong – pace progressive Louvain – to insist that the laws of nature run deep and are written in the flesh. This natural force strikes, and strikes fiercely, when this tumultuous event occurs in a woman's life.

Pope Francis celebrates Mass at King Baudouin Stadium in Brussels, September 29, 2023. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez



**I**an d'Alton, a much-respected Irish Protestant, has written a book, out next month, aptly named *Southern Irish Protestants: Histories, Lives and Literature*. I look forward to it: this minority forms a significant element in Irish history, and especially literature (Yeats, O'Casey, Synge, Beckett). In Sandymount, Dublin, where I grew up, there was a sense of neigh-

bourly ecumenism even before the official version appeared.

It's interesting to note that in current Irish literature – especially novels written by ex-Catholics – Protestants often appear as admirable and kindly folk, in contrast to the Catholic *sleeveens* who are sly and cowardly. This is a feature in Claire Keegan's very successful *Small Things like These* (the movie due soon), in

which the only decent person is an elderly Protestant lady. It's a similar picture in Sebastian Barry's *Old God's Time*. The slithery character of Irish Catholics, with their horrible Sacred Heart images – as opposed to the relatable Irish Protestants – is also a theme in John Banville's work.

Mr d'Alton's book is with the vibe of the times! I wish him success with it.

**I**'ve been offered a Covid inoculation this month, and I honestly don't know whether to have it, or not. Yes, I am somewhat influenced by reports of – admittedly unusual – deaths from the jab. I also have a knowledgeable friend who genuinely believes that Covid is a conspiracy dreamed up by Big Pharma, who urges me to refuse – she reels off the stats persuasively. I didn't get jabbed last year, and didn't seem to catch Covid (though one can have the infection without knowing, and a few days with a chesty cold and an unpleasant strep throat may hide it). While

family members of mine who got the injection nevertheless did catch Covid – several times.

But is it irresponsible not to avail of the inoculation? Is risking a bout of the lurgy also putting others at risk? And since I have a mild respiratory condition already, am I being cavalier with my own health?

And yet – could it be quite reasonable to let the body fight infections, and let the immune system do its work? Over-medicalisation is not healthy either.

So I cogitate over the conundrum.

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# Dioceses could look at outdoor weddings in response to decline in church marriages

**Brandon Scott**

Following the publication of the Iona Institute's new study 'The rapid rise of 'New Age' weddings in Ireland: how should the churches respond?', which reveals that fewer couples are opting for church weddings, journalist and commentator Breda O'Brien said that it can be challenging for churches to compete with the range of options on offer by alternative providers but one way they may respond is by permitting outdoor weddings in certain circumstances.

While Catholic Church weddings still remained

the most popular type of ceremony with couples last year at 34.3%, this compares to 91.4% in 1994. The second most popular option for couples getting married last year was a civil ceremony, which was chosen by 32%.

Highlighting the benefits of church weddings amid the decline to *The Irish Catholic*, Ms O'Brien said that the key distinction between a church wedding and any other form is that the couple are not just preparing for a lavish day-out, but for a life together and this aspect needs to be promoted in parishes.

"I think a wonderful

advantage in terms of marriage is that it's not just preparation for a wedding, it's preparation for a life together and I think if that aspect were pushed more and ordinary parishioners were encouraged to say this to people who are getting married, not to put pressure but just to facilitate the conversation I think that would definitely help," she said.

Considering ways in which churches might respond to the prevailing trends, Ms O'Brien said that it may be valuable for dioceses to permit other types of celebrations outside of the traditional church environment,

such as outdoor weddings, which have become increasingly popular in the US.

"Some dioceses in the US have experimented with allowing outdoor weddings but in very limited circumstances and with major commitment to marriage preparation and to being involved in your parish afterwards," she said. "Maybe that's something the Church could look at but it certainly wouldn't be the panacea."

Ms O'Brien believes that the underlying reason for the growth of non-church weddings is down to the luxury of choice couples are offered when they

inquire with alternative providers and coupled with the rise of individualism in society, the desire to explore other settings and customs becomes quite tempting for people.

"We're moving increasingly to an individualistic view of life," she said. "The alternative providers will say 'oh, we'll do whatever you want'. I've been at weddings where there are readings from extraordinary places and so on."

"People went to a church on autopilot 30 years ago, they're now almost on autopilot going to a venue like a hotel or a castle without really thinking about it."

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### National 'Come and See' vocations weekend

A national 'Come and See' Vocations Weekend will be held at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, from 15 to 17 November for men who have been in regular contact with their local diocesan vocations director.

There are four key upcoming events for any man interested in the diocesan priesthood. Three open days are planned for the East, South, and West regions. The open day for the East will be held on Saturday, 12 October, at University College Dublin. The open day for the West will take place on Saturday, 26 October, at St Columbanus Chapel, University College Galway. The open day for the South is scheduled for Sunday, 10 November, at Pallottine College, Thurles. "I believe that the emptiness of what secularity is offering is not fulfilling hearts and minds. The priesthood has and will always be central to God's plan, and we must commend all those people who pray for priestly vocations and who offer hours of Adoration," said Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan of Waterford and Lismore.

Anyone interested can access full details on the Vocations Office website: [www.vocations.ie](http://www.vocations.ie)

### New Abbess elected for Kylemore Abbey

Kylemore Abbey in Connemara, Co. Galway has elected their 20th Abbess. Sr Karol O'Connell OSB was elected with immediate effect for a 12-year term as leader of the monastic community of 15 Benedictine nuns.

Sr O'Connell was raised in Middleton, Co. Cork and received her education from the Presentation sisters. The new Abbess also studied music at the Liszt Academy in Hungary.

With over 40 years of classroom teaching experience, Sr O'Connell gives regular courses for teachers on the Kodály concept of music education. She has written eight books on that concept of teaching.

Sr O'Connell entered the monastery on the Feast of St Benedict, July 11, 1978. Since then, she has been a community organist, choir mistress, cook, gardener and artist as well as the Prioress for 16 years.

Abbess O'Connell's Abbatial Blessing will take place on November 5 in the Monastic Church of Kylemore Abbey.

## SVP Celebrates 180 years with Feast Day Mass



Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ, Bishop of Down and Connor, is joined by SVP Ambassador Malachi Cush, SVP Regional President Mary Waide, Fr Vincent Cushnahan, and Pauline Brown, SVP Regional Manager, at St Vincent de Paul Parish Church Ligoniel, in Belfast. Photo: SVP

**Renata Milán Morales**

The Society of St Vincent de Paul marked the Feast Day of their patron saint with a special Mass celebrated by the Most Reverend Alan McGuckian SJ, Bishop of Down and Connor, at St Vincent de Paul Parish Church in Ligoniel, Belfast, on September 24. Nearly 100 members of Ireland's largest voluntary charity attended the event.

Mary Waide, SVP Regional

President for the Northern Region, expressed her gratitude, saying, "It was an honour to welcome Bishop McGuckian to celebrate our Feast Day Mass in this important anniversary year for the Society of St Vincent de Paul... I would particularly like to thank Fr Vincent Cushnahan for his warm hospitality."

Fr Perry Gildea, the charity's Spiritual Advisor, reflected on St Vincent's legacy of charity, emphasising

his mission to help strangers in war-torn regions and raise essential funds to feed the hungry.

SVP members work across all communities to support people from all backgrounds, promoting self-sufficiency and advocating for social justice. Last year, SVP spent around £5 million to assist those facing poverty in Northern Ireland, responding to tens of thousands of requests for help.

## Tin Church in Co. Kildare celebrates centenary

**Renata Steffens**

The very unique church dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary and the Guardian Angels, in the Sallins Parish celebrated 100 years with Mass led by Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty on September 29.

In his homily during the Mass celebration, Bishop Nulty said "similar churches would be found in mission stations, frontier towns, mining camps and military outposts."

Known as the Tin Church, the building arrived in something similar to an 'Ikea' flat-pack that took a few months to assemble. The parts were corrugated metal for the exterior and wood planks for the interior, all parts manufactured by Harrison & Co. in London. Harrison's employees joined local men to assemble the building.

The bishop continued: "Our celebration this morning is a commendation of those along with Fr Norris [the priest who said the first Mass at the Tin Church] who had the foresight and vision of honouring the people of Sallins with a Church to call their own."

"Of course, worship of a faith community in Sallins goes much further back than the 1920s – while there was no chapel of ease or parish church here, there were people of deep faith here who travelled to attend Mass in Naas in the worst of weather conditions."

Apart from the altar moving place in 1972, when Sallins became a parish and floor refurbishment in 1990, the church remains unchanged.

*Read more about the church's history in next week's issue.*



# A great Dame and a little saint's song



Martina Purdy

I once knew a hairdresser called Anthony or AJ, a Belfast man, who lived with his male partner, and made a point of watching *The Song of Bernadette*, an old black and white starring Jennifer Jones, at least once a year. He had seen it dozens of times.

I met him when I was living as a religious sister in a Belfast convent. He once asked me how many times I had seen the film. "Um," I mumbled, "I have never actually seen it."

He nearly dropped his scissors. "Are you serious? But you're a nun – you must have seen it! How can you not have seen it?"

"No," I stammered "My mom used to tell me about the film when I was a child... I just never got around to it..."

I found myself apologising and then confessing. "And I've

never been to Lourdes either."

It became a running commentary whenever I visited his shop. "Have you seen *The Song of Bernadette* yet?"

I confess that I haven't seen it but I have, like Bernadette, peeled plenty of carrots in the silence of the convent kitchen!

## Bernadette

Sadly, Anthony, who was a lovely man and had a premonition he would not live beyond 40, died quite suddenly a few years ago, and as St Bernadette's relics are touring Ireland and heading north shortly, his memory and his love for this little saint are permeating my thoughts.

I plan to join the pilgrimage of her relics to St Mary's Chapel Lane, Belfast and remember Anthony's beautiful soul. St Mary's features a stunning outdoor grotto in honour of Our Lady of Lourdes, in the heart of Belfast. Thousands are expected to visit and participate in the ceremonies on October 15 and 16. I may even finally watch the film before then.

One thing I will do is listen again to a song that has haunted me since my youth – 'Song of Bernadette', co-writ-

ten by a trinity of talent: the late Canadian artist Leonard Cohen, and Americans Jennifer Warnes and Bill Elliott, who was born on October 2, the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels.

Singer Bette Midler recorded *Song of Bernadette* but the best version is the one sung by Warnes herself, whose birth name was Bernadette.

Her siblings preferred Jennifer and within a week of her birth, this name stuck.

**"I was...thinking about the great saint who held her ground so well, and was not swayed from what she knew to be true"**

Warnes was raised Catholic and went to Immaculate Heart College, and (I read recently) even entered a convent in the 1960s before discerning that her vocation lay in music.

Warnes, in 1979, was touring the south of France near Lourdes with Cohen, a Jewish-born truth seeker, when she

was inspired to write a series of letters between "the Bernadette she almost was" and the "Jennifer she became". "One innocent and the other," she said, "who had fallen for the world...."

"So the song arose in a bus nearby Lourdes. I was...thinking about the great saint who held her ground so well, and was not swayed from what she knew to be true."

Warnes also revealed that the song was rooted in her longing to return to a place that was "more pure, honest and true".

"I still long for this," she said, "and I think others do

too."

The song is very much about the healing power of chaste, spiritual love – in a fallen world, where we are, in the lyrics of the song, "torn by what we've done and can't undo".

## Message

Notably, Cohen, who had a hedonistic streak, and spent five years in a Buddhist monastery in the 1990s, had his own fascination with the saint. As a child in Montreal, his Jewish parents hired a French Canadian nanny who would read him the New Testament at bedtime and speak

of St Bernadette. His parents almost certainly would have objected, had they known, but the young Leonard, who loved to hear the stories, never let on.

This beautiful song is rooted in the message of Lourdes, of healing and mercy which was captured so well in the most recent film about Lourdes, *The Miracle Club*.

Sometimes on our journey, it is the artist – and those who live outside the rules – who have the most to teach us about the beauty of God, and the healing grace that flows from the heart of God.

I met a man the other day who said he had a very holy Irish Catholic mother who was full of faith. "She only had one fear," he said. "And it wasn't

death!" What was it, I asked? "Reincarnation. She didn't want to come back to this world!" The way this world is going – who could blame her?

Maggie Smith in a scene from her last film before her death, *The Miracle Club* (2023).

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A man walked into a crowded bar. And as he tried to order a drink, another man pushed in, but his female companion scolded him for his rudeness. The woman insisted he buy the man a drink in reparation. It turns out the injured party wasn't buy-

ing just one drink – but a round for eight of his pals. Even so, the woman insisted her husband buy the whole lot before they all sat down together for a memorable afternoon. Who was this remarkable lady? The late great actress Maggie Smith, who passed away, aged 89,

last week. I love this story – and also the fact that she intended to end her career as the Grand Dame of *Downton Abbey* – until she was made an offer she couldn't refuse: to star in a film about Lourdes. How wonderful her last film was *The Miracle Club*, a story of redemption.



# A Church at the head

**Safeguarding officers 2024**  
(paid and voluntary)

**293**  
In all 26 dioceses

**339**  
In religious congregations

**632**  
In total

**Safeguarding training 2014-2024**

**308**  
Separate safeguarding training events

**6,857**  
Attendees



Volunteers across Ireland have made parishes safer for children than anywhere else, **Brandon Scott and Chai Brady** hear

**T**he last month has formed part of another distressing chapter in the history of the Church on this island following the largescale abuse allegations discovered in the Government's scoping report into religious-run schools.

Emotions are understandably high. Some politicians are demanding that religious orders help foot the bill for any future redress scheme, others want the Church entirely removed from education - no exceptions. Some Catholic leaders in the country are asserting that no Church reform can take place until the abuse crisis has been conclusively dealt with, something that, according to them, has not been fully done yet.

## Safeguarding

It's easy to dwell on the things that disenchant, particularly when they're being so relentlessly examined and other key perspectives overlooked. But there are positives and those presently involved in Church safeguarding will proudly herald these as being the fruits of a determination to ensure that the failings of the past are never replicated

again.

Deacon Frank Browne and Aidan Gordon are two people who know the realities when it comes to the Church's relationship with child protection over the last number of decades. Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, the deacon in Ballyroan Parish, who is also a member of the Archdiocese of Dublin's Safeguarding Committee and Mr Gordon, the newly-installed CEO of the Church's National Board for Safeguarding Children, described the Church as being "a very safe place for children at the moment", and that the constant attacks undermine the excellent work that has been done by dedicated volunteers.

Deacon Browne first highlighted the practical steps taken by parishes, steps that have fostered a culture of vigilance and accountability in the context of safeguarding in the Church. "The key is that every parish has a safeguarding officer who's basically a parishioner who does the training and ensures that the policy and safeguarding requirements are happening in the parish," he said.

"So, for example, anybody who is in our sacristy must sign a sign-in book so you know who was there

on whatever day. That safeguarding book is a mandatory requirement. Any cleric and anybody who is delivering a programme or activity to children without their parents present has to be Garda vetted.

**"Safeguarding in the Church usually revolved around the safety and welfare of children, but as Deacon Browne explains, the meaning has been recently expanded"**

"There are training sessions for all volunteers. Parish pastoral councils are looking at the pastoral planning of the church. What we want people to say is, this is their name, this is their address and that they have never had a criminal record against them. Any volunteer, even though they mightn't be actively working with kids, is asked to complete a volunteer form."

Traditionally safeguarding

**"It's no longer just about safeguarding children, it's safeguarding children and vulnerable adults"**

**"There is nobody active in ministry in our diocese that has any apology to make for their actions. Yes, we do need to sympathise with the historic past but this is the reality and it's about balance"**

in the Church revolved around the safety and welfare of children, but as Deacon Browne explains, the meaning has been recently expanded to include other vulnerable categories of people, including the elderly.

"On our parish pastoral council's agenda, the standing item is safeguarding and what's really good to see, and it's close to my heart as well, it's no longer just about safeguarding children, it's safeguarding children and vulnerable adults," he said. "What that means is that we don't have volunteers that we don't know befriending elderly people. They have to fill-in a volunteer information form. We don't have individuals visiting people they don't know, they go in twos."

## Safety

The level of hostility from the media since the Scoping Inquiry has been "very unfair" to the people who have dedicated themselves to creating an effective culture of child protection in the Church, a culture that Deacon Browne believes has contributed to churches being "the safest place for children in terms of organisation".

"It is very unfair to all of us that work in safeguarding, because we know that children are more likely to be abused in the home," he said. "The reality is that the safest place for children in terms of organisation is actually the Catholic Church parishes. They're the safest places because anybody who is directly working with children has been recently vetted within the last three years. Everybody who volunteers has done the safeguarding course."

**"All the priests currently in ministry (in our diocese) have no allegations against them"**

"There hasn't been an allegation against a priest actively in the archdiocese for a long, long time. In certain sections of the media, there's an approach of guilty until proven innocent and there's a lack of impartiality."

Admitting that the constant barrage of negative media reports and public

discourse can be "demoralising" if you don't know the truths on the ground, Deacon Browne said that those in ministry in the diocese have no allegations against them and therefore have nothing to answer for. So while sympathy should always be given to those who suffered abuse at the hands of the Church, balance is also essential.

"It can be demoralising but it's really not if you can stand back and look at the facts and the facts are this is historic and not really beyond 1982-ish," he said. "So all the priests currently in ministry have no allegations against them. All those working in parishes, volunteers, young catechists have nothing to answer for whatsoever and our current bishops have not been the bishops who gave poor leadership."

## Highlighting

"So there is nobody active in ministry in our diocese that has any apology to make for their actions. Yes, we do need to sympathise with the historic past but this is the reality and it's about balance. I work in the HSE and helped out in local sports clubs and I can safely say the Church



# part of child welfare

**“We need our bishops and others in leadership roles to speak up for the truth which is that we have a very safe Church”**

has the best child protection procedures. Your children are safer in a Catholic parish than they are anywhere else,” Deacon Browne said.

“So we have no apologies to make for today but we can respect and acknowledge the pain and make sure we never take our foot off of the pedal in terms of child protection and the protection of vulnerable adults.”

Deacon Browne believes the best way to tackle the one-sided coverage in the media and highlight the truth is for the leaders in the Church to articulate the successes of the transformational reforms that have taken place across all of Ireland’s dioceses and to not let the safeguarding successes be clouded by “opportunistic attacks”.

“We need our bishops and others in leadership roles to speak up for the truth which is that we have a very safe Church and wonderfully dedicated men and women who give up their lives because we have a really good message and it will not be clouded by opportunistic attacks on the current parishes that are doing their best to protect children and vulnerable adults,” he said.

The new CEO of the NBSCCCI, Aidan Gordon is a qualified social worker with over 30 years’ experience in safeguarding practice and management, and from 2015-2024 was the Director of Safeguarding in the Archdiocese of Armagh.

Looking at the engagement of dioceses and parishes with safeguarding policies, he said: “In my view, and indeed the view of Dr Helen Buckley in her report to the Scoping Inquiry, they are engaging very well.

**“Everyone who has any ministry with children is appropriately vetted and trained for their role and they also conduct an annual self-audit”**

“For example, every diocese has in place dedicated safeguarding staff supported by a committee and assisted in every parish by volunteer safeguarding representatives.

The commitment of the entire Catholic Church in Ireland to child safeguarding, both diocese and congregations, is reflected in the numbers that attend our training.”

Lay volunteers are “absolutely key” to the delivery of robust safeguarding practices, Mr Gordon continued, saying that “at the end of the day it is not a policy or a procedure that ensures children are safe, but the volunteers in each parish in Ireland who ensure that we implement and adhere to that policy and procedure”.

“Our volunteers make sure that everyone who has any ministry with children is appropriately vetted and trained for their role and they also conduct an annual self-audit to ensure there is no complacency setting in.”

## Inquiry

Looking at the Government’s scoping inquiry into allegations of abuse at schools run by religious orders, Mr Gordon was asked how reports such as these might affect those working in safeguarding in the Catholic Church. He said: “It is always difficult to hear that children have suffered such horrific abuses from those who should have been upholding the Gospel value of treasur-

ing them. There is a sense that those who committed such abuses have betrayed not only themselves, but also those of us who believe that our faith should ensure that children are always safe when they are involved in any Church activity. Our role is to ensure that we do everything we can to prevent it happening again and to provide support and help to those who were the victims of abuse.”

**“In my view the Catholic Church in Ireland is a very safe place for children at the moment”**

Mr Gordon said people must be grateful to Irish media for the fact that much of the abuse which was perpetrated would not have come to light if it hadn’t been for “their persistence and willingness to listen to victims and survivors who had no other opportunity to tell their stories”.

“That in itself has been extremely helpful to those of us who work in safeguarding in the Church,” he said.

However, regarding the safety of children in Church-

**“Any volunteer, even though they mightn’t be actively working with kids, is asked to complete a volunteer form”**

**“The reality is that the safest place for children in terms of organisation is actually the Catholic Church parishes”**

related settings nowadays, Mr Gordon said: “In my view the Catholic Church in Ireland is a very safe place for children at the moment. However, we can’t afford to be complacent or let down our guard. Our experience tells us that those who wish to harm children will take advantage of any opportunity or small gap in safeguarding procedures to gain access to their intended victims, and so we must maintain the highest level of vigilance.”

## Policy

The NBSCCCI are continuing to update their policies, keeping up with changes in legislation, Canon Law and safeguarding practice and guidance – this can be seen in

their three standards outlined in the latest policy ‘A Safe and Welcoming Church’: a further development of the previous seven standards (2016).

Mr Gordon explained: “They [2024 standards] retain the requirement to report all allegations of child abuse to the appropriate statutory authorities in line with legislation while emphasising the role of the Church leader (bishop or provincial) in ensuring the highest standards are implemented within their organisation. The revised policy also places significant emphasis on support for those who make complaints about abuse they suffered from Church personnel.”

## Overview report of Ireland’s 26 dioceses from 2018-2023 (2016 Standards)

The quality of the Church in Ireland’s safeguarding structures and culture has “greatly improved” in the last 10 years according to the most recent and comprehensive overview report of Ireland’s 26 dioceses.

“A lot of progress has been made, and plans are in place to advance this further,” the February 2024 report from the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) stated.

The safeguarding policies of all 26 dioceses were reviewed between 2018 and 2023, measuring their progress according to the seven 2016 safeguarding standards and also the recommendations made during the previous round of reviews held

almost a decade ago.

Of the 210 recommendations made to dioceses to improve safeguarding procedures, 202 were implemented.

Some eight dioceses did not meet all standards, but the board said this “need not be a cause of disappointment or criticism” so long as feedback provided to bishops is taken on board and the required changes, mostly quite small, are implemented.

“It would be unrealistic to expect that every diocese would ‘score’ 100% in such an external audit.”

Volunteers, lay staff and Church personnel take their responsibilities seriously, the NBSCCCI said, so that children can participate in

Church ministries and activities, knowing that there are adults that they can go to if they are worried or concerned.

“The children, with whom the reviewers engaged, reflected very eloquently their feelings of warmth about and safety in Church life,” the board wrote in the report.

The opportunity to engage with children and youth groups provided “a very important new perspective for reviewers”, the report said.

Where possible, the reviewers also spoke with parents of participating children and young people, and with group activity leaders. “It was clear that parents are satisfied that their chil-

dren are safe when engaged in Church ministries and activities, and many shared that they have become more involved themselves as volunteers to support safeguarding at parish level.”

The management of cases of abuse has improved, with “better processes, better record keeping and greater understanding of the need for fair and just responses”, the board reported.

**i** The 2016 standards have since been updated. The three standards in the latest 2024 policy ‘A Safe and Welcoming Church’ are a further development of the previous seven standards which reflect changes in legislation, Canon Law and safeguarding practice and guidance.



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# Voices of faith can help shape a brighter future



Like it or not, the debate around reunification is here to stay, and the Church should be part of it writes

**Michael Kelly**

**T**here are many differences between the peace process in Ireland and the peace process in the Holy Land, such as it is now. And, in my experience, few things irritate both Israelis and Palestinians as the convenient transplanting of their own conflict over land to our own. I was in Belfast at the weekend, and the divisions between the two main communities are not so much marked now by tricolours and union flags but by Palestinian and Israeli flags. As if flying flags has ever helped anyone.

One of the obvious differences between the two peace processes is that, in the Holy Land, there is general agreement of the final outcome: all sensible people are committed to the so-called 'two state solution' with an Israeli and Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security.

In our own peace process, all signatories to the Good Friday Agreement politely agreed to disagree on the preferred final outcome of the process but did agree that whatever happened constitutionally it could only be brought about by peaceful means.

## Reunification

Of course, those who framed the Good Friday Agreement could never have envisaged the campaign for Britain to leave the European Union (EU) ever gaining serious momentum.

But here we are, 30 years on from the IRA and Combined Loyalist Military Command ceasefires and 26 years on from that fateful Good Friday in 1998 and Irish reunification has been thrust onto the agenda largely by the fact that many nationalists feel aggrieved that they have had



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. Photo: Chai Brady

to leave the EU against their wishes. The blow is softened, of course, by the fact that most Catholics in the north carry Irish passports and therefore remain citizens of the EU, even if they no longer live within the EU.

**“One can be a very good Catholic and have radically different opinions about the constitutional future of the two jurisdictions on this island”**

However, as much as establishment voices might like to imagine that talk of reunification is 'premature' or 'not a priority', people on both sides of the border seem genuinely enthused by it. Younger voters in the south, according to the polling, seem particularly in favour of reunification.

Whenever a border poll is eventually held, reunification is something that can

no longer be ignored. Even former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, hardly a man known for republican sympathies, says reunification must be an objective rather than an aspiration.

The Church has an important voice on the issue and shouldn't shy away from the debate. Here, an important caveat is necessary: the interchangeability of the words nationalist and Catholic are not particularly helpful. While it is true that the vast majority of northern Catholics are nationalist in their aspiration, a not insignificant minority would inevitably vote to remain part of the United Kingdom. One can be a very good Catholic and have radically different opinions about the constitutional future of the two jurisdictions on this island.

## Church

Crucially, the Church – as is the case with the main Protestant denominations – is organised on a 32-county basis.

You mightn't think it if you confine yourself to main-

stream media, but about one in three people on the island of Ireland attend Church every week. Quite apart from the genuine faith that is there, churchgoing remains one of the most important common practices that binds so many people.

**“A true conversation about reunification will not be left to the bean counters but will draw forth courageous conversations where we dare to imagine brighter possibilities”**

People of faith will be at the heart of the debate around future constitutional arrangements on the island, and the Church should be there arguing for the common good – not in trying to shape some sort of new confessional state, but in asserting that

we believe strongly that the principles of Catholic social teaching act to maximise the greatest potential human flourishing, and this is therefore good for everyone.

The Church could also act as a counterbalance to reduce the risk that a consensus on reunification doesn't become a project of the dreaded groupthink with disastrous consequences.

A “Church that goes out” as Pope Francis puts it, will be a Church that will ask the piercing questions about a potential new state on the island: like what will separate it from every other free market liberal economy in the world? Or what hope would a new state offer young people that is not there now with the status quo.

## Politics

A true conversation about reunification will not be left to the bean counters but will draw forth courageous conversations where we dare to imagine brighter possibilities rather than worrying about the colour of the post-boxes (if people will still be sending

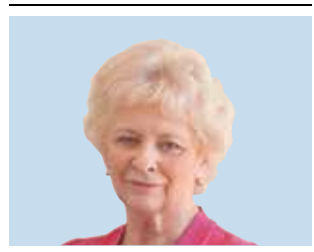
letters) or whether signposts will be silver or black and white.

Given the many pastoral challenges and evangelical priorities facing the Church in Ireland, it would be tempting to leave the bigger conversation around the future of the island to politicians or other civil society groups. This would be a mistake. As Archbishop Eamon Martin proved in 2021 when he attended the ceremony to mark (not celebrate) the partition of the island, sometimes Church people can lead difficult conversations when politicians can't resist the temptation to point score.

The conversation is too important to be left solely to those who think principally in terms of electoral cycles or short-term advantage over political opponents, it requires ownership from all of us – and the Church should not be shy in taking a place at the table, or be excluded by a narrow vision of the separation of Church and state framed by aggressive secularists.



# A united Ireland must envisage a solid, respectful future



Nuala O'Loan

In his recent comments Leo Varadkar moved the debate on Irish unity forward. Free of the responsibilities of government, he is now encouraging all Irish political parties to move from aspiration for a united Ireland, to a stated objective. He also recommends two referendums, one to enable the people to express their views in principle, and a second on a proposed new constitution.

Reflecting on the situation in which the six counties were detached from the rest of Ireland, and having lived in Northern Ireland for nearly 50 years, I can see the damage that was done by partition and the logic of a reunited Ireland. However, NI is not a united place. It is still massively affected by the problems which resulted in The Troubles and by the distrust and sectarianism which has blighted us for so long.

Paramilitaries on both sides still hold sway in some areas, many involved in major crime. At last the authorities are moving away from the absurd pandering to some of these paramilitaries which has marked the past decades. This situation has to be factored into any debate.

## Difficult

It is profoundly difficult for some people in Northern Ireland to contemplate not being British. It is their identity; their allegiance lies to the UK, their music, their culture, their sports, are fundamentally British. They recognise and are united to the United Kingdom in exactly the same way as those who seek Irish reunification, who long for a truly Irish identity, separated from the UK.

Moving on from this situation will require massive sensitivity. It will take time.

Somehow, if there is to be a United Ireland a way must be found to enable most people, to envisage a solid future in which there is real and palpable respect for everyone. There must be an understanding of the very fundamental principles of identity which are so important to NI's Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities, and attempts must be made to facilitate ways



Former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar.

in which their British identity might be preserved and respected.

Of course it will not be possible to bring all the people to unity.

It was probably partly for this reason that the question of Irish unity was one of the matters left unresolved by the Good Friday Agreement. It did however "recognise the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its status, whether they prefer to continue to support the union with Great Britain or a sovereign united Ireland".

It also recognised that it is "for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts... and without external impediment to exercise their right of self-determination, to exercise this right with and subject to the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland".

**Both governments have articulated commitment to honouring the Good Friday Agreement, but neither sees this as the time to be proactive"**

It demands of the UK Government "rigorous impartiality" on behalf of all the people in the diversity of their identities and traditions. An equal duty is imposed on the Irish Government if it becomes the government of the whole island.

In the Downing Street Declaration following the Good Friday Agreement, the British government said that "it has no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland." That statement must be honoured.

Both governments have articulated commitment to honouring the Good Friday Agreement, but neither sees this as the time to be proac-

tive.

However, the reality is that the necessity for a border poll is to be determined by the people of Ireland, not the Governments, though they must call the necessary referendum when the evidence shows that a majority of people on both parts of the island want one.

Even then a border poll indicating that a majority on both sides of the border want unity will not, on its own, deliver the foundations for a peaceful United Ireland. Without some form of consensus which goes way beyond a simple majority vote, we could not be sure of an Ireland at peace.

## Evidence

There is little hard evidence that a majority of people in Northern Ireland wanting a united Ireland yet. A poll, published in November 2023 revealed support for a United Ireland in Ireland stood at 64%, with just 16% opposing unity. Six months later an Ipsos Mori poll established that a majority of the population in Northern Ireland would still not vote for change – 51% would vote for remain while only 30% would vote for unity.

The figures certainly seem to indicate greater support in the south than in the north.

Yet this question of whether, when and how Ireland could or should be reunited is much more complex than this.

Were Northern Ireland to leave the UK this would involve massive constitutional change for the people of Northern Ireland and for the rest of the UK's population. Equally the reunification of Ireland would have enormous political, economic and social impact both side of the Irish border.

The economic uncertainty, business difficulties, the problems of travel, and all the other chaos which resulted from the most recent constitutional change – the withdrawal of the UK from membership of the EU in 2016, are a salutary marker of the need to plan strategically and effectively for change. Although Northern Ireland remained part of the EU

internal market in goods, some businesses experienced very significant difficulties in accessing supplies, from medicines to food, in making deliveries, in importing and exporting. It was, and continues to be very complex. Major problems affecting farming, such as the absence of a veterinary medicines agreement, continue to exist eight years on.

**Varadkar is right to suggest two referendums. A period of some years – at least five – between two referendums, one on the issue of principle, the other on the detail would be essential"**

The outrage expressed as the consequences of Brexit became clear will be insignificant compared to what might occur

were reunification to become a reality. If NI leaves the UK, her people would be third country citizens when travelling into the UK. When you think of the enormous difficulties created by the Irish Sea border, it is not difficult to anticipate that even greater difficulties could ensue were NI to become an integral part of Ireland.

## Referendums

Varadkar is right to suggest two referendums. A period of some years – at least five – between two referendums, one on the issue of principle, the other on the detail would be essential. Such a period would enable the detailed work to be done to establish how the political systems, economies, health and social care services, education systems could be integrated. Pensions currently payable in the UK would have to be transferred, assets owned by the UK would have to be provided for, agreements would have to be made to maintain and develop policing and counterterrorism processes. Many other issues

will have to be dealt with before the people on both sides of the island of Ireland will be able to know what they would be voting for.

**Reality and progress must lie in the accommodation of perspectives in so far as that is possible"**

The debate at the moment seems to be between two positions, that of the two governments who think that this is the time for gradual movements to improve relationships, to stabilise the Good Friday Agreement to allow discussion to take place in better circumstances, and those like Leo Varadkar who think we are ready for more ambitious steps towards unity end that this outcome will be the best assurance of reconciliation. Reality and progress must lie in the accommodation of perspectives in so far as that is possible.

December  
19, 2024

The Irish Catholic

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# Ireland's strange lack of affinity for the Jewish people



David Quinn

**H**ow strong an affinity is there between Ireland and the Jewish people? I would say, little enough. As a country we do not have a history of warm relations with them. We have never had a strong Jewish presence in the country. In World War 2 we did not take in many Jewish refugees (mind you, we were not alone in that), and there was quite an amount of Catholic inspired anti-Semitism in the past, although anti-Semitism was (and is) widespread in non-Catholic cultures also.

It is now one year since Hamas terrorists came over the border from Gaza into Israel intent on killing as many Jews as they could. This was not a military strike in which innocent civilians got caught up in the fighting or were near a military target. No, the direct intention was simply to kill Jewish people, and the more the better. Some died in horrific and sadistic circumstances.

The Hamas fighters live-streamed what they were doing, glorying in the killing and boasting about it. Hundreds of Israelis died at a music festival, hundreds more in nearby kibbutzes. In total, around 1,200 were killed, including soldiers and police. Many were raped. Hundreds were taken hostage.

## Solidarity

You have to try and imagine something similar happening in Ireland. Imagine a large number of terrorist fighters suddenly invading the likes of Cavan and Monaghan and killing as many people as possible and in deliberately sadistic ways. And imagine if the organisation behind the killings said

they wanted to do it again and again and again, as Hamas said after October 7? How would we react? How would we want our own Government to react? Certainly, we would want the threat removed.

When the massacres happened on October 7 of last year, Ireland was one of the very few countries in Europe not to display the Israeli flag with its Star of David – the symbol of the Jewish people – anywhere. It was not to be found on or near any public building, as was happening elsewhere in Europe. We must remember that this was the biggest deliberate killing of innocent Jewish people since the Holocaust and Hamas would have killed many, many more if they could. If they could, they would have driven the survivors into the sea.

**“We can express solidarity with the suffering of each, even though much of the time they are inflicting suffering on each other”**

Instead, Palestinian flags were displayed by many. Irish Christian leaders did not seek out Jewish leaders to express public solidarity, which they did in some other countries. This was very odd, and basically indefensible. Both the Catholic and Protestant Churches tolerated, and even encouraged, too much anti-Semitism in the past so how could they not be aware of the need to express solidarity with the Jewish people in light of that history and what happened a year ago?

This is not even a question of having to choose either the Palestinian people or the Jewish people to the exclusion of the other. We can express solidarity with the suffering of each, even though much of the time

they are inflicting suffering on each other.

We can condemn Israeli actions in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon while giving equal attention to the murderous activities of Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and their big backer, namely the Islamic theocracy in Iran (whose president our own President Michael D Higgins recently chose to congratulate).

The Irish feeling of solidarity with the Palestinian people is not surprising. We suffered occupation for a very long time and so we feel a natural affinity for those who are struggling for their own freedom.

Still, there are many people in the world seeking independence, for example the Uighurs and Tibetans in China, and we seem to spare no thought for them.

But we could also feel a deep affinity for the Jewish people if we chose. No people have suffered more in history. The Holocaust was merely the capstone on a very long history of persecution.

## History

The Jewish people fled their homeland at the time of the Roman Empire and became homeless for almost 2,000 years. Yes, some continued to live in their ancestral home, but they had lost control over their destiny as they were flung out sometimes to the far corners of the world, always leading an extremely insecure existence, never knowing when they might be attacked and forced to move on again.

Many of the Jews who came here in the late 19th and early 20th centuries arrived from various parts of the old Russian Empire or Eastern Europe, forced out by pogroms.

If you have ever seen Fiddler on the Roof, that took place against the background of a looming new pogrom in Russia, and at the end we see Tevye and his family loading all their possessions onto their carts as they prepare to flee to America.



Since the war began the Israeli ambassador has faced calls to be kicked out of Ireland

Dohány Street Synagogue, Dohány Street, Budapest, Hungary.

**“We can condemn Israeli actions in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon while giving equal attention to the murderous activities of Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and their big backer, namely the Islamic theocracy in Iran”**

‘Zionism’, a now hated term associated in the minds of many people with Nazism, is simply Jewish nationalism, similar to Irish nationalism and our desire to have an independent Ireland where we could control our own destiny.

**“The tragedy of history is that this inevitably gave rise to a conflict between the Arabs and the Jews”**

The Jews decided they need to return to their ancestral home, the ‘Promised Land’ in the Middle East because they were safe nowhere. They couldn’t even

be sure, ultimately speaking, of America. Jewish people take a very long view. Even if they are safe there now, what about in 100 or 200-years-time?

Even before the Holocaust, the British, who now ruled over Palestine, had promised them a homeland based on dividing the country between the Arabs already living there and the Jews. The Holocaust gave this massive added impetus. There are many Arab and Muslim homelands, but there was no Jewish one.

## Awareness

The tragedy of history is that this inevitably gave rise to a conflict between the Arabs and the Jews. Arabs did not want to have a Jewish State in their midst and so they sought repeatedly to eliminate it.

Israel for its part has often been extremely brutal towards the Palestinians and we can see this taking place now as Israel seeks to eliminate Hamas and ensure something like October 7 can never happen again. They are also seeking to remove the threat posed by the terrorist group, Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Most people still support a two-State solution. Is one possible? I don’t know. But what I do know is that Ireland needs to have a more balanced, more nuanced view of the situation in the Middle East, one that is aware of the plight of the Palestinian people but is also far more aware of the extremely vulnerable situation of the Jewish people in the past, the present day, and going forward.

**“The Irish feeling of solidarity with the Palestinian people is not surprising. We suffered occupation for a very long time and so we feel a natural affinity for those who are struggling for their own freedom”**



# The diocese leading the way in vocations



Brandon Scott

**I**t's been well-documented by now and anyone working in the area long enough will readily confirm it: Vocations are simply hard to come by. They require resources, ingenuity, planning, an appreciation of small successes and an almost undying patience ... from both those discerning and those directing.

As recently reported in *The Irish Catholic*, the overall health of vocations in Ireland appears to be improving ever-so steadily. We have a diocese that is preparing to greet its first seminarian in 6 years (Clogher Diocese), we have a healthy number of two or more men entering seminary (5 dioceses in total) and there are reports that some vocations directors are encountering more inquiries about priesthood than they have in recent history.

## Attention

One diocese that really captures the attention among all of the others is the Diocese of Down and Connor, and it's for good reason. This year, the diocese is sending 5 men to explore their vocational discernment more fully as they undertake a propaedeutic year, a precursor to formal seminary studies. To put it in greater context, 5 out of the 21 men undertaking the propaedeutic year on this island will come from the Diocese of Down and Connor.

That begs the question, what's encouraging more men from the Diocese of Down and Connor to step up and take the risk for Christ when compared with the other 25 dioceses on the island and what sort of insights can long-suffering vocations directors, many of whom are investing the work but failing to reap the rewards, take from the diocese's recent successes?

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Director of Vocations for the Diocese of Down and Connor, Fr Conor McGrath, reveals that the diocese doesn't fixate on overcomplicated ways of making vocations attractive to men, they just emphasise one core mission and that's simply a sense of firm accompaniment on the vocational journey.

**“I think it's that idea that on this journey you're not alone. There are other men who God is calling and that sense of responsibility and companionship is integral on that vocational journey”**

“One of the things I believe in and I've tried

to create for those who are discerning is a sense of accompaniment with each other”, he said. “Every month we meet together as a group for meal and for a bit of input from another priests or people involved. So from that, these men have developed a friendship with each other and a sense of being on that vocational journey together.

“I would say they're friends as well and organise things outside of the official vocations gatherings – maybe trips to Lough Derg and Croagh Patrick climbs. So I think it's that idea that on this journey you're not alone. There are other men who God is calling and that sense of responsibility and companionship is integral on that vocational journey.

## Support

“I really believe that being with each other is the reason why they have continued on that journey because they are a good support to

each other. Ultimately diocesan priesthood is about relationship, whether it's the relationship with your parish or the relationship with your brother priests and of course the relationship with God. If we don't have that then we have nothing. The priesthood of the future needs to be firmly built and supported by those relationships.

**“It's not unique it's just that we're being deliberate and I hope that this is a beacon of light across the island”**

Fr McGrath outlined that there's a real collaborative effort between the vocations directors in the

region and these efforts have culminated in initiatives that have appealed to men at various stages of their lives, in a broad spectrum of careers, even those in specialised professions with considerable financial security.

## Vocations

“In the Armagh province we do work closely as directors of vocations,” he said. “We work on initiatives together and we try to meet regularly. So it's not unique it's just that we're being deliberate and I hope that this is a beacon of light across the island.

“One of our guys who has just gone to France was a trainee surgeon so we're not talking just about young people who are using priesthood as a fallback. We're talking about those

in professions who have made a courageous choice to give up a very lucrative and comfortable life in order to follow the Lord.”

Ultimately, Fr McGrath's main goal is to transmit a positive message about priesthood, a portrayal of priesthood that mightn't necessarily be promoted in modern media but exists in abundance in the daily lives of priests.

“If we get the message out there that priesthood is a joyful, life-giving vocation to follow then the more people it will attract, just to show that joyful side of priesthood,” he said. “It is not as it is sold by media outlets or even on social media – there's a lot of hope there and those who come forward sense that hope and are inspired by that hope.”

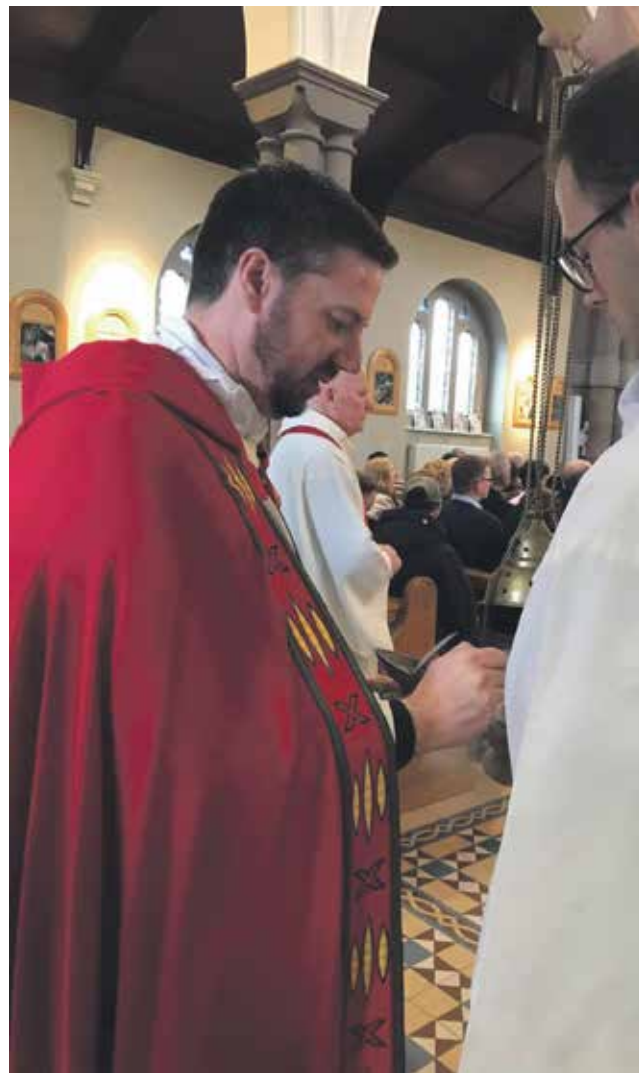
## Who will pass on the flame of faith?

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Director of Vocations for the Diocese of Down and Connor Fr Conor McGrath prepares to celebrate Mass. Photo: St Colmcille's Parish.



# The Irish Weeping Madonna:

## The sacred bond between Hungary and Ireland



Renata Milán Morales

Ireland has welcomed the gifting of a painted replica of the sacred *Weeping Virgin Mother of Győr*, presented by His Excellency Bishop András Veres of Győr, Hungary, on a recent visit to the island. This gesture reaffirms the deep historical and spiritual bond between Ireland and Hungary – a connection that extends over 350 years.

The painting, often referred to as the 'Irish Weeping Madonna' in Hungary, originally came from the Diocese of Clonfert. Its significance dates back to 1650, a time of great upheaval during the Cromwellian Wars, when Ireland was suffering under ruthless colonial rule. At that time, the Irish bishops declared the image 'Our Lady as Queen and Patroness of Ireland' during a solemn proclamation. A year later, Bishop Walter Lynch, exiled from Ireland, took the painting to Győr for safekeeping, where it remained after his death in 1663. This painting became a symbol of the shared Faith and hardships faced by the Irish people, as it was linked to the experiences of persecution and exile.

### Feast

In 1697, on the feast of St Patrick, the Virgin Mary's image in Győr shed tears of blood for three hours. This miraculous event occurred after the imposition of penal laws in Ireland that banned Catholic bishops and priests from the country. The timing of the Virgin's tears was seen as an expression of solidarity with the suffering Irish, symbolising the deep connection between the two countries, despite their geographical distance.

A series of events were



From left to right: Bishop Michael Duignan of Clonfert and Galway, Bishop András Veres of Győr, Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland HE Luis Mariano Montemayor, HE Gergely Bánhegyi, Ambassador of Hungary to Ireland and Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin Paul Dempsey pictured with a painted replica of the sacred Weeping Virgin Mother of Győr on September 22, after Holy Mass. Photos: Embassy of Hungary.



Painting replica of 'The Irish Weeping Madonna'

recently organised to commemorate this bond, including the private reception on September 19 and the public exhibition on September 20, highlighting the significance of this shared history. The climax of the celebrations was the unveiling of the replica of the Weeping Virgin at the Cathedral of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and St Nicholas in Galway.

One cannot overlook the historical parallels that have drawn Hungary and Ireland together. Both nations endured centuries of foreign domination. During this time their cultural and religious identities were systematically suppressed. For Hungary, 1541 marked the fall of Buda – Hungarian capital – to the Ottoman Empire, leading to nearly 150 years of Turkish rule. That same year, Ireland saw King Henry VIII declare himself King of Ireland, beginning a prolonged period of Eng-

lish domination that lasted until the 20th century. These countries are rooted in a shared reverence for the Virgin Mary, whose role in both Irish and Hungarian history is deeply intertwined with the struggles and triumphs of both nations.

### Refuge

In 1650, when Bishop Walter Lynch fled Ireland with the sacred image, he found refuge in Hungary – a nation that had its own deep devotion to Mary. Hungary's dedication to the Virgin Mary dates back even further, to 1038, when the country's first king, St Stephen, consecrated the nation to her protection shortly before his death.

The bond was further reinforced in the 20th century when Ireland offered refuge to Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty, a prominent Hungarian figure exiled after the Communist takeover. Ireland's response to Mindszenty's plight – issuing him a passport within 24 hours – was a gesture of solidarity that echoed Hungary's earlier protection of Bishop Lynch.

These historical events, tied together by the figure of the Weeping Virgin, highlight the deep, centuries-old connection between Ireland and Hungary. Both nations have found solace and strength in their shared reverence for the Virgin Mary, a bond that transcends borders and time.



Mass celebrated in Dublin on September 21. From left to right: Bishop Michael Duignan of Clonfert and Galway, Bishop András Veres of Győr and Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin, Paul Dempsey.



Private reception in the Embassy of Hungary, Dublin, on September 19.

**“Hungary’s dedication to the Virgin Mary dates back even further, to 1038, when the country’s first king, St Stephen, consecrated the nation to her protection shortly before his death”**



# St Bernadette's relics tour: an opportunity to nourish people's faith



Renata Milán Morales

**"I** think today people are searching and beginning to realise that what society is offering is just not enough. There is something missing in our lives. I met people and I know others met people who have not been to a church in a long time. And this is kind of a step back," said Fr Frank Reburn to *The Irish Catholic* after St Bernadette's relics' visit to Our Lady of Victories parish, Dublin.

St Bernadette's relics continue to attract faithful across Ireland, with a recent stop in the dioceses of Tuam, Elphin, Ardagh and Clonmacnoise and Dublin.

The relics, which have been journeying through-

out the country, represent an important spiritual connection to St Bernadette of Lourdes, "I think the Irish people have always had a special place for St Bernadette in their hearts. From the very beginning, right through our history, there's been a close association with Lourdes and with St Bernadette. And then when you kind of touch St Bernadette's story, when you delve into it you see that is an incredible story," said Fr Frank Reburn.

"Talking to some of my colleagues, we're beginning to notice little green shoots beginning to appear. The relics coming here to our church [Our Lady of Victories, Dublin] and our diocese was an opportunity to nourish and nurture people's faith. Maybe to bring them back to the bit closer to God," concluded Fr Reburn.

The relics tour is set to continue throughout Ireland in the coming weeks, with further stops planned in various dioceses.



A group from Clarehaven Nursing Home pictured after the Mass for the sick in Our Lady of Victories Church, Dublin. Photo: John McElroy.



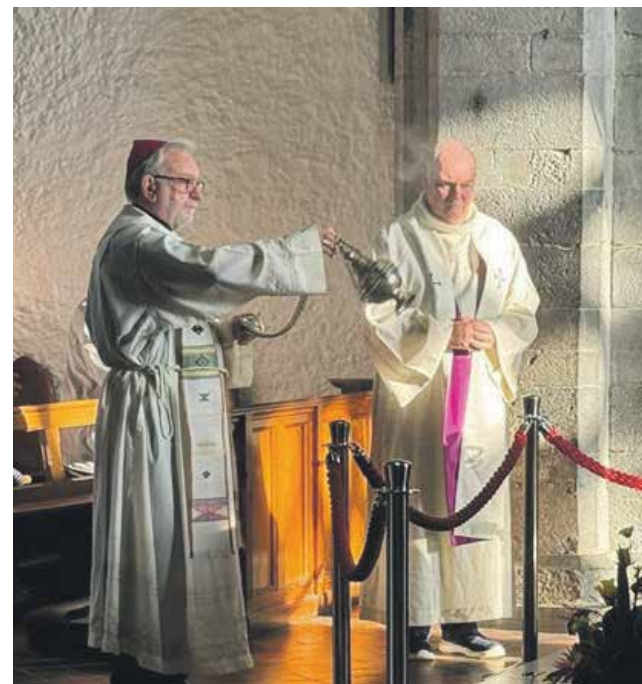
Fr Joe Tynan hands over care of the Relics of St Bernadette to Fr Tony O'Connor, Pilgrimsge Director of Ossory Diocese as they leave Holycross Abbey. Photo: Cashel and Emly Diocese.



Syony and Jinny Malazarte lining up to venerate the relics of St Bernadette after the Mass for the sick in Our Lady of Victories Church, Dublin. Photos: John McElroy.



Large crowds venerating the relics of St Bernadette after the Mass for the sick in Our Lady of Victories Church, Dublin, in September 26. Photo: John McElroy.



Welcome ceremony with Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly and Fr Jimmy Donnelly. Photo: Cashel and Emly Diocese.



Candlelight procession on September 19 around the grounds of Holycross Abbey during the visit of the relics. Photo: Cashel and Emly Diocese.



# The forceful political opposition to helping people have more children



Breda O'Brien

**T**he Green Party's proposal of a one-off child benefit payment of €560 for parents in the first month their child is born has met a surprising amount of opposition. Their coalition partners object because it breaches the terms of the Summer Economic Statement, which sets out spending limits for the budget.

Others feel that it would be better to target the money at the many services that provide sub-standard or disastrously delayed care for children, whether it be Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, school places for children with autism, or surgery for scoliosis.

Others object because it is not targeted. The wealthiest parents in the country would receive it along with the poorest.

## Interventions

There are some reasonable objections here, for example, about targeting interventions for the poorest parents. However, it is surprisingly complex and expensive to means test any provision like this. The administrative burden is quite sizeable and no matter where you set income limit for any measure, it can be tough to avoid penalising people who are just over the limit.

Trying to overcome the unfairness on people close to the limit often involves tapering off benefits, which again accrues an administrative burden.

It may be that the Green Party is just trying in a cynical fashion to buy votes among hard-pressed parents. However, it is also true that some of the people objecting to this provision have no objection to free abortions. Aside altogether from the rights and



wrongs of abortion, some women would be well able to pay for their abortions.

Nor did some of the objectors to additional payments around the time of birth balk at providing free contraception for women aged 17-35 or even for sixteen-year-olds, who are under the legal age of consent.

**“Subsidising what might be termed institutional childcare discriminates against those who would like a family member or friend to mind their children”**

The opposition to a measure that might encourage

people to have children rather than prevent them having them is much more vociferous.

Of course, a one-off payment is not enough. John Lowe of moneydoctors.ie estimated that it costs €70,000 per child to educate a child until the end of second level education, but an additional €42,000 is needed for third level education.

For many parents, childcare costs are crippling. Yet subsidising what might be termed institutional childcare discriminates against those who would like a family member or friend to mind their children, not to mention those making significant sacrifices to have one parent full-time in the home.

## Windfall

The Irish Government were recently a reluctant ben-

eficiary of a €14.1 billion windfall due to a European Commission ruling that Apple should have paid more tax between 1991 and 2007. Although tax rules have changed since, Ireland has always tended to side with multinationals, given their importance to the Irish economy.

Taoiseach Simon Harris said that this windfall could not be spent on day-to-day spending, which is odd, given that if Apple had been liable at the time for this tax it presumably would have been spent on important day-to-day spending like housing and health.

**“Ogra Aontú suggested that to acknowledge the expenses around the time of birth, child benefit should be paid from 27 week’s gestation”**

It should be possible, however, both to give a grant that gives a boost to parents and to work on improving the conditions of children out of home and in

other forms of poverty.

There is an important symbolism in encouraging people to have more children. Ogra Aontú suggested that to acknowledge the expenses around the time of birth, child benefit should be paid from 27 week’s gestation, an additional three payments for each child.

The symbolism here is also important as it acknowledges that passing through the birth canal does not confer humanity on children. There would be some administration involved, particularly in the tragic case of stillbirth or late pregnancy loss where child benefit could not continue. But it would be far less than the administration of means-testing for additional child benefit.

## Conservative

Being pro-natalist is seen as right-wing and conservative. It is true that some versions of pro-natalism are simply thinly veiled anti-immigrant or racist sentiments.

For example, Emmanuel Macron suggested earlier this year that France needed a ‘demographic rearmament’ to increase the French birth rate while at the same

time, poor black women in the French protectorate of Mayotte, which has a high birth rate, were being offered sterilisations.

**“The proposed baby bonus should not be dismissed. It would be even better if it were paid from late in pregnancy as Ogra Aontú proposed”**

There are Irish people with the same prejudices, who believe we need more babies born to Irish parents to combat the rise in those coming from abroad.

However, on a different part of the political spectrum, encouraging births in any shape or form is seen as an imposition rather than facilitating choice. Yet right across Europe, people consistently express a desire to have more children than they currently have. While only a small step, the proposed baby bonus should not be dismissed. It would be even better if it were paid from late in pregnancy as Ogra Aontú proposed.

**“On a different part of the political spectrum, encouraging births in any shape or form is seen as an imposition rather than facilitating choice. Yet right across Europe, people consistently express a desire to have more children than they currently have”**

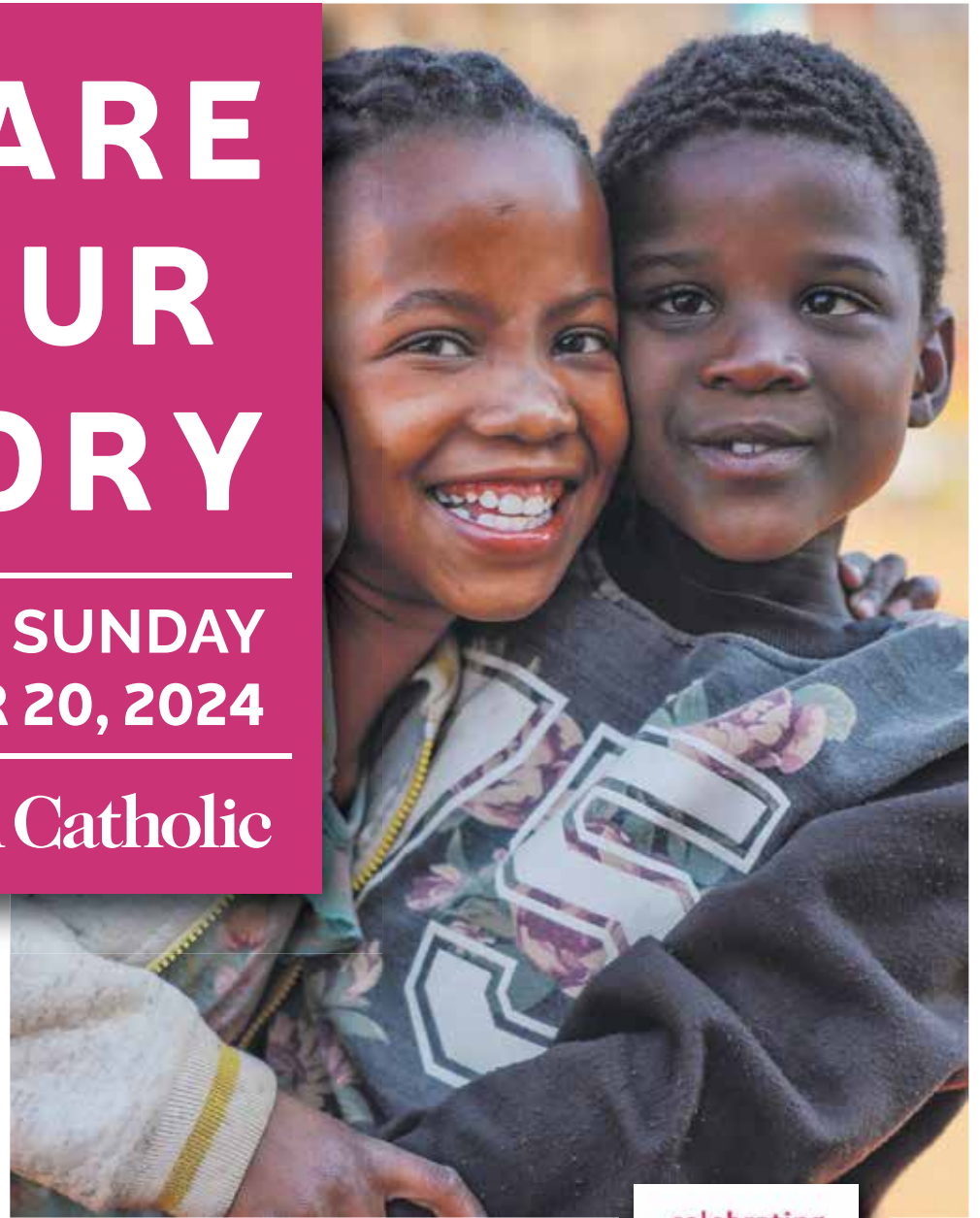




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# Out&About

## Limerick gathered in prayer



**LIMERICK:** Recently, the Diocese of Limerick celebrated the Eucharist, Ceremony of Healing and the Torchlight Procession led by Bishop Leahy in Our Lady of Lourdes Church.



**MEATH:** Fr Octavius of the Kingscourt Parish visited Carricleck School and talked to children on a recent non-uniform day in support of children in Liberia. Principal Jackie Ward is pictured on the left.



**GALWAY:** Tom Corbett playing his banjo at the St Grellan Mass at Tobergrellan, Kilclooney, Ballinasloe on September 17.

## IN SHORT

### 'We are called to live humbly' on Feast of Padre Pio

Last week, Catholics worldwide celebrated the Feast of St Pio of Pietrelcina, also known as Padre Pio. To mark the day, Archbishop Emeritus of Dublin Diarmuid Martin celebrated Mass for members of the Padre Pio Apostolate in Ireland in the Church of Our Lady of the Angels, Church Street.

"We gather on this Feast Day of St Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, to celebrate this extraordinary Saint. We give thanks to God for the many ways in which God showed the power of his mercy through the ministry of Padre Pio," the archbishop said in his homily.

He added: "We reflect and pray on how we are called to live humbly in our own lives the model of holiness that Padre Pio showed." Padre Pio never put aside his calling to share in the suffering of Jesus Crucified. Pope Paul VI, some years earlier had described Padre Pio

as 'a man of prayer and suffering'.

"Padre Pio's caring was not simple dogmatism. His deepest concern always was that people might return to God and so might be able to experience his mercy and rediscover the beauty and joy of being Christians and of putting the Gospel into practice."

### First 'SNA Appreciation Day' celebrated last week

The first-ever 'National SNA (Special Needs Assistance) Appreciation Day' happened on September 26. The movement launched by Fórsa's Education Division was embraced nationwide and many education facilities across Ireland celebrated a day to honour these important professionals and the work they do in Irish schools.

"SNA Appreciation Day came about because we had members enquire in Fórsa about having their own day. Teachers have Teacher's Appreciation Day and our members felt there was a gap in the market for SNA Appreciation Day," SNA and Fórsa's Equality

Office, Linda O Súilleabháin told *Extra.ie*.

"At the moment the SNA contract is being re-negotiated and it's a hugely crucial time. We felt this year was the year we should roll out this successfully," Ms Súilleabháin said, and added: "SNAs are working with the most vulnerable children in society. Special education has been in the news every day in relation to lack of school places. SNAs are crucial to our education system."

"It's about the time the work we do is appreciated. There has been a huge shift, but there is definitely more to do."

### Carlow pupil awarded Student of the Year

A Carlow student was awarded 'Student of the Year 2024' at the KCETB Student of the Year Awards at the Woodford Dolmen Hotel. A pupil of Coláiste Eoin Hacketstown, Adam Kinsella was among the 13 awarded 'future leaders' from Kilkenny and Carlow schools.

The award recognises personal and aca-

ademic achievements, including extra-curricular activities and kindness to others. After Cllr Andrea Dalton, the chairperson of KCETB handed the awards, Eileen Curtis, KCETB chief executive addressed the students and parents present.

"Having listened to all the citations, I'm sure everyone will agree that these students are exceptional young people and marvellous ambassadors for our schools." "They have shown leadership skills beyond their years and have flourished through learning during their time in secondary school," Ms Curtis said.

Ms Curtis also encouraged the winners to "continue to set high standards and confidently embrace the many opportunities which will present in the years ahead."

A Coláiste Eoin Hacketstown spokesperson told the *Irish Independent*: "On behalf of everyone at Coláiste Eoin, we extend our heartfelt congratulations to Adam and his family." We are excited to see all the incredible things he will accomplish in the future", they added.



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Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



**CORK:** Karen Casey, Head of Community Engagement and Outreach for Trócaire, with cousins, Lucy Ryan and Aoibhinn Casey, Kildare at the charity's photo exhibition 'Climate Justice Now' at Cork City Library on Cork Culture Night. Photo: Mike English.



**CORK:** Visitors to the Trócaire exhibition 'Climate Justice Now' at Cork City Library on Cork Culture Night enjoying the music provided by Carlos Mena from Cuba. Photo: Mike English.



**DONEGAL:** A group of pilgrims from Co. Kildare travelled by bus to St Patrick's purgatory Lough Derg to take part in a one-day retreat on Saturday, September 21.



**LIMERICK:** Bishop of Kerry Ray Browne with Ciara Ní Shúilleabháin, Director of Marketing & Communications, MIC at an event held recently in Mary Immaculate College to mark the retirement of Prof. Eugene Wall.



**MAYO:** Thanksgiving Mass was said by Fr Joseph Gavigan PP in gratitude to Paddy Nyland for his 62 years as a Sacristan in St Celsus' Church, Kilkelly.



**GALWAY:** Fr Bolus, Fr Garvey and Fr Gregory who concelebrated Annual St Grellan's Mass at Tobergrellan, Kilclooney, Ballinasloe on September 17 and Padraic Kilduff gave a history of the 5th century St Grellan.

## ARMAGH

From October 16 to 20 there will be a display of the activities of Irish missionaries in St Patrick's Cathedral. All are welcome to come and see this exhibition and rejoice in the varied ways in which Irish people shared their skills with others.

## CORK

Carrigaline Parish, Prayer Circle for vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life in the Diocese of Cork and Ross. First Sunday of each month 5pm - 6pm in the Church of Our Lady and St John Carrigaline. All welcome.

First Saturdays Conference to 'Help bring peace to our troubled world' happens on October 12 from 10am to 4pm at Firgrave Hotel, Mitchelstown. Event counts with four speakers and also includes Mass, rosary and meditation. Suggested donation €10-15. For more details see [firstsaturdays.ie](http://firstsaturdays.ie).

Prayer circle for vocations to the priesthood and religious life in the Diocese of Cork and Ross. First Sunday of each month 5pm - 6pm in the Church of Our Lady and St John, Carrigaline. All welcome.

## DERRY

Silent Retreat at the Termonbacca Carmelite Retreat Centre happens from October 11 to 13. The event will be led by Fr Stephen Quinn and is a great opportunity to grow in contemplative prayer and friendship with Christ. For queries and bookings contact [termonbaccaderry@gmail.com](mailto:termonbaccaderry@gmail.com).

## DOWN

Confession at St Patrick's Church happens on Mondays from 6.45pm to 7.30pm, on Fridays from 3pm to 4pm, and on Saturdays from 12noon to 1pm.

## DUBLIN

'Decanting Dominic' an initiative of young adults with Dominican Friars invites people aged 18-25 to meet in a local bar to make friends and discuss the Catholic Faith. The next meeting will happen on October 16, at the Snug Bar at Lotts Café, Bar 9, Lower Liffey Street, at 7.15pm. No booking necessary, for more info email [op.evangelisation@gmail.com](mailto:op.evangelisation@gmail.com).

The Brazilian Community are celebrating Mass in English on October 5 at 6pm in honour of Our Lady of

Aparecida. The Mass is part of the 'Novena to Our Lady of Aparecida' which is happening from October 4-12 at Saint Mary of the Angels, Church Street. Mass with procession will happen on October 13 at 4pm.

## GALWAY

If you are a Catholic man over the age of 18 and are considering exploring priesthood, come to the 'Vocations Discernment Day' in NUIG on October 26 from 11am to 5pm. For more information and to register access [vocations.ie/exploring](http://vocations.ie/exploring).

## KILDARE

Irish Theological Quarterly Lecture with theme 'Equal Dignity and Agency: Catholic Social Teaching and the Lives of Women' happens on October 14 at 7.30pm at the Renehan Hall, St Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth. Speaker will be American Prof. Meghan J. Clark. To register and more info contact [specialevents@spcm.ie](mailto:specialevents@spcm.ie).

## LOUTH

All are welcome to 'Prayer Around The Cross' in candlelight. A quiet and reflective time, with the music of Taizé followed by tea/coffee. On October 4, from 8pm to 9pm at Bethany House of Prayer, 34 Point Rd, Dundalk.

The Our Lady Of Lourdes Hospital's Annual Service of Remembrance for families affected by pregnancy, infant and child loss, will take place in MMM Auditorium, Hardman's Gardens, Drogheda on Sunday, October 6 at 3.00pm. All welcome.

## MAYO

The next Latin Mass will take place on Sunday October 13 in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock at 6pm.

## MONAGHAN

Mary Mother of Mercy, Inniskeen's Eucharistic Adoration happens each week on Tuesdays from 7pm-9pm, Wednesday from 10.30am-9pm and Thursday from 7pm-9pm. All welcome to join in adoration.

## WATERFORD

The Eucharistic adoration at the Holy Family Church, Luke Wadding St continues each Monday after 11am Mass until 4pm. All are welcome to come along and spend some quiet blessed time with the living presence of our Lord Jesus.



# THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

## Rome Synod will nourish Irish mini-synods



Gerry O'Hanlon SJ

**B**ack in 2021 Austen Iver-  
eigh, distinguished Church  
commentator, told *Crux*  
magazine that the Synod  
on Synodality (2021-4) “...may be  
the biggest consultation exercise in  
human history. Yet I think few Cath-  
olics are even aware of it yet, and  
bishops are mostly lying low”. Now,  
as the culmination of the Synod  
arrives with its Second Assembly  
in October 2024, has the situation  
changed?

The question is important, not  
least because when Pope Francis  
first launched his project of Church  
reform and renewal under the rubric  
of synodality in this 50th Anniver-  
sary Speech commemorating the  
founding of the Synod of Bishops  
(October 2015) he himself noted the  
difficulty of translating the “beau-  
tiful rhetoric” of synodality into  
the everyday reality of Church life.  
This would involve a long and often  
tedious and wearisome process, he  
warned, with lots of talking and lis-  
tening, of committee meetings, but  
with enormous rewards.

As I noted here back in July, the  
response in Ireland at least, judging  
by our response to the 2023 Synthe-  
sis Report (Towards October 2024),  
is positive. However that response  
is formed chiefly by the already  
committed – what about the wider  
Catholic family, the general public,  
the reception in other parts of the  
world? One would have to be tone  
deaf to ignore the ongoing difficulty  
of gaining wider traction, the seem-  
ing lack of enthusiasm, the scepti-  
cism which often overflows into  
cynicism. Is the process too complex  
and complicated, the documents  
too numerous, the high hopes of the  
recent past assuming all the charac-  
teristics of a damp squib?

### The analogy with marriage

Two general points may help  
towards an answer. First, as  
Pope Francis tirelessly insists,  
the Holy Spirit – and not our-  
selves – is the chief protagonist  
in this synodal journey. This



Synod assembly members from Latin America participate in a meeting at the headquarters of the Latin American bishops' council in Bogotá, Colombia, August 12, 2024. Photo: CNS/ADN CELAM

is primarily God's work, rooted  
firmly in our encounter with Jesus  
Christ, and driven by our mis-  
sionary desire to share the good  
news we have experienced in  
that encounter with our wounded  
world. Secondly, as Liverpool  
based theologian John Sullivan  
has pointed out so well, synodality  
may helpfully be understood after  
the analogy of marriage: occasions  
like Synods, including the Synod  
on Synodality, are like the wed-  
ding, public celebrations of the  
much more mundane and routine  
process and life of a marriage.

**“We are on our way to the reform and renewal Francis has in mind. I think the Irish report is a positive indication that this journey has begun”**

Ultimately synodality will be  
judged on how deeply synodality,  
with its call to co-responsibility  
of all the baptised, takes root in  
everyday Church life. This will  
mean a retreat from clericalism,  
the search for a new identity  
and role for clergy, and a call to  
all the People of God to have a  
meaningful say in Church teach-  
ing and governance. When we  
see this reflected at parish, dioc-  
esan, national, regional and uni-  
versal levels, and in the church's  
dialogue with 'the world', then

we are on our way to the reform  
and renewal Francis has in mind.  
I think the Irish report is a posi-  
tive indication that this journey  
has begun.

### Issues emerging

There are several issues which  
are now emerging more clearly as  
obstacles and helps to continuing  
this journey. The first, an obstacle,  
may seem very small, but I think  
it points to a deep seated culture  
which even those with the best of  
intentions have difficulty over-  
coming. In several recent press  
interviews and photo opportu-  
nities to advertise the October  
Synod a panel of mostly clerically  
clad men were pictured smiling on  
a platform at the Vatican as they  
outlined what we could expect at  
the Synod. Given the deeply inclu-  
sive synodal logo, the repeated  
insistence on the Church as being  
for all, male and female, cleric  
and lay, this continued resort  
to the default clerical and male  
leadership is a shot in the foot.  
The optics are terrible, and, the  
suspicion must be, they evidence  
a deeper malaise, behind all the  
beautiful rhetoric of equality.

Secondly, we need to move as  
quickly as possible to abandon-  
ing the position that synodality  
has nothing to do with doctrine  
and acknowledge that by tapping  
into the '*sensus fidei fidelium*'  
one is always touching on what  
effects Church teaching and that  
this is healthy. It is disingenuous  
to continue to insist that what is

involved is 'only pastoral', as if the  
pastoral and doctrinal were not  
just distinct but completely sepa-  
rate, a proposition which would  
have the great Karl Rahner spin-  
ning in his grave!

**“This is an opportunity for theology to make a positive contribution, in all humility, to clarifying the synodal project, and not least in mediating between often extreme positions on 'hot button' issue”**

Thirdly, as seems likely in  
October given a study group on  
this issue and a public seminar to  
discuss it also, there needs to be  
attention given to the Pope's own  
concern to reform the papacy,  
and to explore how it might be of  
greater service to the Church in  
promoting a healthy decentralisa-  
tion. I have proposed something  
like a strengthening of the institu-  
tion of collegiality by giving delib-  
erative powers to the Synod of  
Bishops while retaining the papal  
power of veto.

Fourthly, it is welcome, as  
desired by the 2023 Synthesis  
Report, that theology is beginning  
to play a more prominent role in  
the synodal journey which, to date,

has been predominantly a matter  
of 'conversation in the Spirit'. The  
findings of the 10 different study  
groups will be eagerly awaited.  
I would simply note that this is  
an opportunity for theology to  
make a positive contribution,  
in all humility, to clarifying the  
synodal project, and not least  
in mediating between often  
extreme positions on 'hot button'  
issue. It is not a time for theo-  
logical show-boating.

Fifthly, I wonder about the  
position of bishops. Up to now  
the insistence, rightly, has been  
on the responsibility of the  
bishop to consult, to listen, but  
less on what he himself might  
think, especially if his thoughts  
may be at some variance with  
some official teaching. Sup-  
pose, for example, a particular  
bishop might be sympathetic to  
the ordination of women and be  
delighted if tomorrow the Pope  
were to allow same, and yet for  
now stays 'stumm' because of  
reasons of unity? While that  
position invites some sympathy,  
I'm wondering if in the end it's  
not a habit which we need to  
question and begin to allow more  
open discussion also at episcopal  
rank? After all, as Vatican II made  
clear, a bishop has responsibil-  
ity not just for his own diocese  
but for the whole Church, and  
Church teaching is promulgated  
in the name of all the bishops  
even when some clearly are of a  
different view...can we not allow  
for a more authentic expression  
of a unity which we now accept  
must include diversity?

### Conclusion

We can expect greater clarity  
from this October Synod and  
the Papal Apostolic Exhorta-  
tion which will follow it on the  
nature of 'differentiated co-  
responsibility' which is at the  
heart of synodality. This in turn  
will feed into our lives together  
at parish and diocesan levels,  
and will nourish the series of  
mini-synods which the Irish  
Episcopal Conference has pro-  
posed in Ireland over the next  
few years. There is real hope  
then that we can recover the  
'embers under the ashes' of our  
Irish Catholicism and Christian-  
ity, and be, once more, of ser-  
vice to our world and part of the  
'reckoning' which the victims,  
survivors and families of the  
abused so richly deserve.



# A synodal style is here to stay



Fr Eamonn Conway

**T**he Second General Assembly of the 16th Synod of Bishops began at the Vatican this week with over 400 participants from all over the world. It marks the last stage of Synod 2021-2024 and will conclude on October 26 with a Final Report read aloud and voted upon paragraph by paragraph before being entrusted to Pope Francis. Synods are consultative and advisory to the Pope; in due course it is expected that the Pope will issue a post-synodal exhortation based upon the Final Report.

Last year, the General Assembly began with an Ecumenical Service that underlined the importance of Church unity; increased representation from other Christian churches is a key feature of this synod. This year, in place of the Ecumenical Service we began with a Penitential Liturgy that recognised the suffering caused especially through abuses of various kinds, war, and forced migration. Some of the participants in the General Assembly come from countries most directly impacted.

## Stifling the yawn

There was a background mood music of expectancy to the General Assembly last year. This year, the mood is more subdued, as captured in the headline in last week's *The Irish Catholic*: "Synodality? Stifle that yawn!" It can be difficult to sustain momentum for change over an extended period in a culture conditioned to appreciate only immediate or headline grabbing outcomes. Some people who had expected Synod 2021-2024 to deliver change quickly in the Catholic Church seem to have despaired of anything



Members of the Synod of Bishops on synodality gather in the Vatican's Synod Hall September 30 for the opening of a two-day retreat before the monthlong synod assembly begins. Photo: CNS screen grab/Vatican Media

meaningful coming from it. Others, fearful that the Synod would betray essentials, have perhaps become less anxious but yearn, as they see it, for a return to stability with a focus on core teaching and practices. In truth, they are already looking to the next pontificate.

**“These are conducted in an atmosphere of equality, mutual respect and truthfulness that enables discernment of what the Holy Spirit”**

Synod 2021-2024 has been more demanding on participants than any other synod since Vatican

II. I took part in the 13th Synod of Bishops in 2012, the last synod under Pope Benedict XVI. In effect, the one month-long General Assembly was the entire synod, preceded by minimal consultation and then only of bishops. Most of the time we sat in tiered seating listening to pre-scripted submissions interspersed with group meetings which were largely devoted to drafting or modifying texts. In contrast, the methodology for the General Assembly that began work this week provides time not only for prepared as well as free interventions, but also for integrated personal and communal prayer, liturgies according to different Catholic rites, facilitated listening and theological input when required. The result is what is being referred to as “conversations in the Spirit.” These are conducted in an atmosphere of equal-

ity, mutual respect and truthfulness that enables discernment of what the Holy Spirit is asking of the People of God at this time.

## Much has already changed

This General Assembly marks the final stage of a three-year process that began with the largest global consultation ever known, which involved not only many national gatherings but also regional meetings around the world. There were many outcomes from these meetings, all of which were important but not all of which were directly relevant to the theme of this synod, namely, fostering a spirit and practice of co-responsibility for the Church's mission among the entire People of God. Outcomes directly relevant formed the agenda for the General Assemblies.

At the Synod in 2012, voting was confined to the

ordained among whom only a few, the male religious superiors, weren't bishops. One of the biggest differences in Synod 2021-2024 is that of the 368 voting members, 96 are not bishops. 70 of these are worldwide “witnesses of the synodal process” tasked with bearing witness to the Synodal Process in which they took part at diocesan, national and continental levels. Until Pope Francis changed the rules for participation, local churches were dependent on their bishops to represent them and report back to them.

**“Questions have arisen about the representative roles and rights of auxiliary bishops and bishops working in the curia”**

This is no longer the case and, importantly, this development significantly enhances accountability at grassroots level. It also adds, however, to the cost

both material and personal for lay people participating away from home for extended periods. This is something that needs to be addressed going forward.

The impression is that most bishops currently participating in the Synod welcome the presence of non-bishops and some admit to having undergone a conversion in this regard. Meanwhile, questions have arisen about the representative roles and rights of auxiliary bishops and bishops working in the curia. This is because they do not have a people or diocese of their own whose “joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1) they can bring to the table.

Synod 2021-2024 is unique in having two General Assemblies. Since Vatican II the closest we have experienced to this were the two separate synods on marriage and the family held back-to-back in 2014 and 2015. The period between these two General Assemblies was very similar to the past year and demonstrates the importance of giving time for local, national and international conferences and for various working and discussion groups to take place and publications to emerge before final decisions are taken.

## A synodal style in the Church is here to stay

All of the above shows that while there is more to be done, much has changed and changed quickly in regard to synodality and its role in the life of the Church. It is difficult to imagine another pope reversing the reforms of the synodal process implemented by Pope Francis.

**❶** Fr Eamonn Conway is the Professor of Integral Human Development at the University of Notre Dame Australia and has been appointed by Pope Francis as an expert theologian to the 16th World Synod of Bishops.

Read part II of his Synod analysis in next week's edition of *The Irish Catholic*.

**“The impression is that most bishops currently participating in the Synod welcome the presence of non-bishops and some admit to having undergone a conversion in this regard”**



# Even in little Catholic Belgium spiritual renewal has begun



Children cheer as Pope Francis arrives at King Baudouin Stadium in Brussels to celebrate Mass September 29. Photos: CNS/Lola Gomez

**Thomas O'Reilly**

**A** four-day visit to Belgium by Pope Francis acted as the perfect bellwether in what many regard as Western Europe's most secular country as greater than-expected numbers flocked to see the Pontiff, dissuaded by showery weather and a last-minute attempt by political elites to dredge up abuse scandals. In the first papal visit to Belgium since John Paul II in 1985, the Pontiff called for "honourable compromises" from world leaders as he warned that peace was threatened even in Europe by a spate of emerging conflicts engulfing the globe.

While without the institutionalised *laïcité* of its French neighbour the Belgian state nonetheless maintains a broadly secular civil outlook with the domestic Church rocked by abuse scandals

culminating in the shock resignation of Bishop of Bruges Roger Vangheluwe in 2010.

## Hope

Speaking ahead of the visit, spokesman for the Belgian Bishops' Conference Fr Tommy Scholtes expressed hope of religious renewal describing how the country's inherent cosmopolitan nature including the presence of EU and NATO headquarters as well as a substantial Islamic community made Brussels somewhat unusual terrain for the papacy.

Landing in Luxembourg on Thursday before making his way north for an audience with King Philippe of Belgium at the royal palace of Laeken in northern Brussels the Pope met with victims of clerical abuse vowing that the institutional coverups of the past will never be repeated.

In a tour defined by much greater than expected public interest and awakening

by young Catholics, both the international and domestic media were keen to highlight comments made by Belgium's liberal prime minister Alexander De Croo around clerical abuse as the prospect of financial compensation was raised.

## Thousands of mainly young Catholics lined the streets around Saint Peter's Church in Leuven for a glimpse of the Pontiff last Thursday afternoon

While touring the historic Catholic university town of Leuven for its 600th anniversary, the Pope and Vatican officials articulated the continued importance of Belgium's Christian inheritance when dealing with issues such as social inequality and climate change.

Thousands of mainly young Catholics lined the streets around St Peter's Church in Leuven for a glimpse of the Pontiff last Thursday afternoon despite claims by members of the university's faculty that secular authorities within the university were attempting to sabotage or overlook the papal visit.

## Degradation

Inside the university hall, Pope Francis engaged with students in a dialogue on his *Laudato Si'* encyclical which focused on environmental degradation as a product of theological decay warning against "a rationalism devoid of wonder that reduces life to the measurable" when it came to modern consumerism.

Outside of the event, I spoke to young Catholics as well as many of their secular colleagues in the shadow of a memorial to the French priest and humanitarian Fr Joseph

Wresinski about what drove them to risk the inclement September weather.

## Perhaps the only positive mainstream media coverage of the trip came on Saturday morning when Pope Francis made a surprise visit to the relatively impoverished Saint-Gilles parish

Referencing an unexpected stampede to get tickets that left many even within his religious order unable to attend, Indian-born Dominican, Bro Jason from a nearby convent in Leuven, described the Belgian trip by Pope Francis as "culturally and religiously significant"

as well as helping to stir the faith, particularly among young Catholics.

## Connection

Leuven's Irish connection was also raised in conversation by students with the university town playing host to the internationally renowned Irish College founded by Franciscans fleeing from the Nine Years' War in the 17th Century.

Regardless of its Catholic inheritance and perhaps the wishes of its Franciscan founders, the Irish College itself spent the day of the papal visit opening its doors to a Buddhist conference and a meeting of international urologists when the author chanced a quick visit before the Pope's arrival to Leuven.

Saturday saw Pope Francis address a meeting of Catholic civil society organisations and EU officials at the National Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Koekelberg as the Pontiff again





Pope Francis celebrates Mass at King Baudouin Stadium in Brussels.



Children cheer as Pope Francis arrives at King Baudouin Stadium in Brussels to celebrate Mass.



A man greets Pope Francis outside the French-speaking UCLouvain campus in Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium, September 28. Founded in 1425, the world's oldest Catholic university was celebrating its 600th anniversary.



Pope Francis arrives for a meeting with university students at the French-speaking UCLouvain campus in Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium, September 28.

**“If elites had wanted to use the occasion of the papal visit as an ecclesiastical punching bag what they found instead was an increasingly youthful Church more adept at addressing the problems of the modern world than its secular counterparts”**

asked for contrition following meetings with survivors of clerical sex abuse.

While Pope John Paul II was afforded speaking time at the European Parliament during his visit in 1985, Pope Francis had to make do with brief meetings with two EU Commissioners Margaritis Schinás and Dubravka Šuica.

**“The culmination of the Papal visit came on Sunday at Roi Baudouin Stadium where just under 40,000 Catholics attended a morning Mass presided over by the Holy Father”**

Perhaps the only positive mainstream media coverage of the trip came on Saturday morning when Pope Francis made a surprise visit to the

relatively impoverished St-Gilles parish to breakfast with undocumented migrants and the homeless community, taking time to learn about their plight individually.

In an area riven by recent violence between rival Algerian and Moroccan gangs the Pope heard from one African refugee about a crisis of faith they had suffered after traversing the Mediterranean and arriving at the Italian island of Lampedusa.

The culmination of the Papal visit came on Sunday at Roi Baudouin Stadium where just under 40,000 Catholics attended a morning Mass presided over by the Pope.

### Punctured

For a brief window, the grey secularism of the Belgian capital was punctured by a celebration of the Eucharist that united Catholics not just in the fractured European kingdom but from around the world.

In a country divided into the binary of Wallonia and

Flanders, railway lines around the Brussels stadium were festooned with Belgian tricolours and international flags ranging from Albania to Paraguay as tickets were immediately sold out hours after going on sale earlier in the week.

**“The community of believers is not a select circle of a privileged few; it is the family of those who are saved”**

The Sunday Mass was dedicated to the canonisation of Spanish-born nun Anne of Jesus who brought St Teresa of Avila's reform of the Carmelite Order to Belgium and most of the Low Countries with Pope Francis praising the continuum of Catholic saints who had operated in Belgium such as St Damien de Veuster, St Guy of Anderlecht, and St Gudula.

“The community of believers is not a select circle of a



Pope Francis has breakfast with migrants and people who are homeless in the Church of St Gilles in Brussels September 28.

privileged few; it is the family of those who are saved,” declared the Pope in his homily as crowds thronged the arrival of the Popemobile to the stadium's altar.

### Surprise

To the surprise of many following Sunday Mass official Vatican sources confirmed that the beautification process would begin on Belgian's King Baudouin who governed the country in the post-war period and who was known for his devout Catholic faith

as well as opposition to abortion, for which he was briefly removed from the throne in 1990.

In a city defined more by dry European Commission protocol and the goings on of NATO, the Gospel message took to the streets in an act of defiance against Belgian elites and the Christ free society they had created.

Against the backdrop of a moribund Belgian administrative state and an ethnically heterogeneous capital city Catholic solidarity appeared

once more in a region forged by the faith of monks and missionaries centuries before.

If elites had wanted to use the occasion of the papal visit as an ecclesiastical punching bag what they found instead was an increasingly youthful Church more adept at addressing the problems of the modern world than its secular counterparts. Within Brussels small mustard seeds are stirring showing signs that even in what was formerly little Catholic Belgium spiritual renewal has begun.



# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Christians arrested for distributing religious literature in North India

● In India, police arrested 19 Christians for distributing religious literature at two government-run schools without the permission of the school staff.

The arrests took place on Friday in Bihar, a state in Eastern India, on September 26.

According to the *Times of India*, the police said 17 of the 19 arrested persons were from the South Indian state of Telangana.

The religious literature included Bibles, photos and pamphlets. This literature – along with three four-wheelers and a bike – were seized by the police.

The arrests were made after a complaint by the headmaster of a school in Nibiya village.

Bihar is the third most populous state in India, with over 130 million people. However, there are only around 100,000 Christians.

The Christians were charged with trespassing, obstructing government work and propagating religion in an illegal manner. They were granted bail after the charges were issued.

### Catholic Church in Israel helps Christian migrants seeking safety

● Christian migrants and asylum seekers struggling in Israel are receiving emergency help from the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Sunday marked the 110th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, and Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa said he has been providing help Christians from various parts of the world searching for safety and employment in the Holy Land.

According to Aid to the

Church in Need – a Vatican-affiliated charity – there could be up to 85,000 people under the pastoral care of the Patriarchate's Vicariate for Migrants and Asylum Seekers (VMAS), which was established in 2021 to help Christian immigrants face the challenges in their daily lives.

The administrator of VMAS, Sr Gabriele Penka, said those living in Israel without being a citizen of the country often work in difficult jobs that no one else wants.

### Catholic groups in India support law weakening power of Islamic charity

● As India's parliament debates a controversial law over a traditional Muslim religious endowment, a Catholic archbishop claims the endowment has put Christian-owned property under threat.

Currently, Waqf – a Muslim religious endowment usually in the form of a property made for purposes of charity and community welfare – is governed under the Waqf Act of 1995, which non-Muslims say give it religious rights not allowed by India's secular constitution.

The law being debated in the Lok Sabha – India's lower house of Parliament – would put non-Muslim members on the Waqf Board and remove the requirement for a Muslim chief executive officer. Muslim groups say the new law would allow the occupation of land given to the Waqf, much of which is claimed by other people, including Christians.

Archbishop Andrews Thazhath of Thrissur in Kerala wrote a letter to the joint secretary of the Lok Sabha secretariat alleging that numerous properties belonging to Christian families for generations in the two villages have been unlawfully claimed by the Waqf Board.

### US diocese launches affordable housing project

● The Archdiocese of Boston broke ground last week on a 19-story affordable housing project in downtown Boston.

The archdiocesan Planning Office for Urban Affairs (POUA) is partnering with the largest day shelter in Massachusetts, St Francis House, a secular nonprofit that serves about 9,000 individuals annually, to build the residential apartments. Work began on Tuesday, September 24.

The development, located on La Grange Street, is set to include 126 units, about 70 of which will be reserved for people coming out of homelessness. The unit is mixed income, meaning that the shelter will house a variety of middle and low-income families and individuals.

## Latest research confirms first-century date of Shroud of Turin

For centuries Christians have attributed a first-century date to the Shroud of Turin. Nuclear engineer Robert Rucker says that his latest research on the shroud verifies that.

"The Shroud of Turin is the second-most valuable possession of the human race next to the Bible itself," Mr Rucker told CNA. The shroud is currently preserved in the Chapel of the Holy Shroud adjacent to St John the Baptist Cathedral in Turin (Torino), Italy.

For more than 10 years, Mr Rucker has studied the physics of the disappearance of the body of Jesus and its imprint on the shroud. His website, Shroud Research, challenges conclusions that the shroud dates to the period of 1260 to 1380 AD, leading sceptics to conclude it is a medieval fake.

In 1988, scientists used tiny samples snipped from the shroud to determine the amount of carbon 14 isotopes they contained, destroying the samples in the process. The radioactive carbon 14 isotope is a variant of carbon-containing excess neutrons, which are particles smaller than atoms. Over time, carbon 14 decays into nitrogen 14 in organic materials such as bone and plant matter. The ratio of carbon 14 atoms



Archbishop Cesare Nosiglia of Turin, Italy, is pictured in front of the Shroud of Turin in the Cathedral of St John the Baptist in this 2015 file photo. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

remaining in a sample provides the data needed to estimate the sample's age.

Mr Rucker said his calculations show that the 1988 carbon 14 dating is erroneous because it does not take into account the radiation emitted from Jesus' body at the resurrection, which included neutrons that were absorbed by the shroud and formed new carbon 14 atoms, thus leading to a misinterpretation of the data.

"Carbon 14 dates can be vastly wrong if something has changed the ratio of

c-14 to c-12 in the sample, other than the decay of the carbon 14," Mr Rucker explained. "There have been six different explanations for the carbon date of 1260-1380.

The first explanation was in a letter to the editor of *Nature* magazine in 1989. Tom Phillips, who holds a PhD in particle physics, suggested to *Nature* that the most obvious explanation is that new carbon 14 atoms were produced by neutron absorption in the shroud.

"That proposal," Mr

Rucker said, "was never followed up on until I did the nuclear analysis computer calculations in 2014".

Mr Rucker will offer a workshop about his research on October 6-7 at St Thomas the Apostle Parish and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor as well as professional engineering certificates in nuclear engineering and mechanical engineering.

## Christians stand firm against war in Lebanon

"No to war!" has become a rallying cry among Lebanon's Christian communities, who have maintained this stance since clashes between Hezbollah and Israel began heating up. As large parts of the country are being pulled into the escalating military conflict, Christians in Lebanon are preparing to endure a new period of destruction, fear, and displacement.

The fighting between Hezbollah and Israel is spreading to different areas of the country, and missiles launched from Lebanon are reaching further into Israel while Israeli strikes are targeting specific areas across Lebanon that are linked to

Hezbollah, including the south, the Bekaa region, and the southern suburbs of Beirut. Despite this being the worst escalation since 2006, it's not yet considered a "full-scale war".

While Christian towns have so far avoided direct shelling, they haven't escaped the consequences. In a situation all too familiar to the Lebanese since 1975, an important question arises: How are Christian communities coping with the growing conflict?

Raquel, who lives on the coast of Keserwan and works at a Catholic school, told *ACI Mena*, CNA's Arabic-language news

partner: "We're trying to live normally as much as possible, but we're consumed by fear. Nowhere feels safe anymore after the bombing of a nearby town [Al-Ma'a'sarah]. We want a normal life. We want our children back in school. We pray that God will save us from this madness".

The local sentiment is unanimous: "We're not afraid. St Charbel is here with us. Bombing a town on the road to his shrine won't stop people from visiting the monastery. Our prayers won't stop. Lebanon is under the protection of its saint", locals told *ACI Mena*.

### Sri Lanka leader says he will uncover the truth of the 2019 church attack

President of Sri Lanka Anura Kumara Dissanayake says he will do his utmost to uncover the truth on the 2019 Easter Sunday bomb attacks through a fresh probe.

Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, the Archbishop of Colombo, told journalists that the new president gave this assurance

when he called on him on Monday after swearing in as the new president of Sri Lanka.

"The new President told us that he would do his utmost to find the truth about the Easter Sunday bomb attacks," Cardinal Ranjith said.

"The people have voted in the NPP [the ruling party] to

bring about a big change. This is a difficult task. We fully support him and invoke our blessings on the new President and his administration to bring about this change which the people wanted," the cardinal continued.

On April 21, 2019, which was Easter Sunday, three

churches and three luxury hotels were bombed in a series of coordinated attacks that left over 200 people dead. ISIS spokespersons would later claim responsibility for the bombings, saying the targets had been Christians and citizens of countries involved in the anti-ISIS coalition.





Edited by Brandon Scott  
brandon@irishcatholic.ie

## A blessing on the go



Pope Francis waves to a woman kneeling on the street as he arrives at St Joseph's Home in Brussels, a residence for the elderly run by the Little Sisters of the Poor, September 27, 2024. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

## Jerusalem patriarch announces 'day of prayer and fasting' on October 7 anniversary

The Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, has invited the faithful to participate in a day of prayer and fasting on October 7, one year after Hamas launched its brutal surprise attack on Israel.

"The month of October is approaching," Cardinal Pizzaballa wrote in a September 26 letter addressed to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, "and with it the realisation that for the past year the Holy Land, and not only, has been plunged into a vortex of violence and hatred never seen or experienced before".

"The intensity and impact

of the tragedies we have witnessed in the past 12 months have deeply lacerated our conscience and our sense of humanity," Cardinal Pizzaballa added, noting how the conflict has "struck a profound blow" to the social and political consciousness of the region.

According to the latest reports, Hamas terrorists killed an estimated 1,200 Israelis during the attacks on October 7, taking an additional 251 civilians hostage.

The Hamas-run Palestinian Health Ministry estimates that a total of 40,005 Palestinians, and a further 623 in the West Bank, including Hamas

militants, have been killed since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

Meanwhile, the situation between Lebanon and northern Israel has continued to escalate, with ongoing bombings and missile strikes launched on both sides since October 7.

In the latest September 23 attack, Israel unleashed a series of bombs on Lebanon, which resulted in the deaths of at least 558 people, including 50 children and 94 women. A further 1,800 were also injured in the attacks.

Israeli forces have since intercepted a Hezbollah

ballistic missile fired at Tel Aviv on September 25. It is believed to be the first ballistic missile launched by Hezbollah into Israel.

Since the start of the conflict, Cardinal Pizzaballa has tirelessly advocated for peace and a cease-fire in the region. In the letter, the Latin patriarch declared that the faithful must continue to call on leaders to recommit themselves to justice, freedom, dignity, and peace.

Cardinal Pizzaballa also reminded his audience in the missive that the Church celebrates the feast of Mary, Queen of the Rosary, on October 7.

## Pope viewed favourably in Americas but support dropping

The latest Pew survey found that most Catholics in the US and Latin America still view Pope Francis favourably, although this percentage has declined over the years.

In his native Argentina, over the last decade his favourable rating has fallen from 98% to 74%. Chile has seen the second-largest decline, going from 79% to 64%.

In Colombia, the Pope's favourable rating has fallen from 93% to 88%, in Brazil from 92% to 84%, and in Mexico

from 86% to 80%.

In the US, his favourability has fallen from 85% to 74% and in Peru from 83% to 78%.

The survey also found that most Catholics believe "Pope Francis represents a change in the direction of the Catholic Church", though whether that change is considered major or minor varies significantly.

In the United States, 42% of Catholics surveyed consider that Pope Francis represents a major change in the

direction of the Catholic Church, while 30% say he represents a minor change, 12% say he represents no change at all, and 14% aren't sure.

In Colombia, by contrast, 62% believe the Pope represents a major change, while 19% see only a minor change. Chile is where Catholics are least likely to believe Pope Francis is bringing major change to the Church's direction, with 21% seeing it as major and 26% as minor.

## Vatican roundup

### Vatican jubilee czar voices concern about Rome's readiness

● With less than 90 days to go before the formal launch of the 2025 jubilee year with the opening of the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica, the Vatican official in charge of organising the jubilee has raised questions about Rome's readiness.

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, pro-prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelisation, said the concerns are pertinent not only for next year, but for another jubilee in eight years, in 2033, to mark the 2000th anniversary of the death and resurrection of Christ.

During a Tuesday session to Rome's University of International Studies titled "Jubilee and Mobility: Sustainable Welcome in the City of Rome", a city official vowed that all the public works planned for the jubilee will be complete before it begins.

That assurance, however, was met with a degree of scepticism from Archbishop Fisichella, who offered the example of upgrades planned for the Piazza Risorgimento, a large square near one of the principal entrances to the Vatican.

### Vatican reveals theme for World Youth Day 2027 in South Korea

● The Vatican last Tuesday unveiled the theme of the next international World Youth Day — which will be in Seoul, South Korea, in 2027 — and the theme of the local World Youth Day happening during the Jubilee Year 2025 in Rome.

The theme of World Youth Day 2027 in South

Korea (and in 2026) will be: 'Take Courage! I Have Overcome the World', taken from the Gospel of John 16:33.

Next year, World Youth Day will take place as part of the Jubilee Year celebrations in Rome, during the Jubilee of Youth from July 28–August 3, 2025.

### Vatican secretary of state warns of Europe's low birth rates

● Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state, said in a recent interview that Pope Francis wants Europe to rediscover its founding principles in order to approach problems — including a looming "demographic winter" caused by low birth rates — with "a forward-looking spirit of solidarity".

Speaking to Vatican Media the day before Pope Francis' departure on a trip to Luxembourg and Belgium, he outlined the Catholic Church and state actors have a responsibility to support families.

"I believe that to counter the dramatic decline in birth rates, a series of actions by distinct actors are necessary and urgent. The Church, states, and intermediate organisations should all become aware of the importance — I would dare say 'vital' importance — of this issue and intervene with a series of measures that should be well coordinated, if possible," Cardinal Parolin said.

### Pope Francis condemns pornography as 'a language of the devil'

● Pope Francis at his general audience last Wednesday called pornography a work of the devil and warned Christians to reject this and other temptations accessed through the internet.

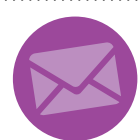
"Any cellphone has access to this brutality, this language of the devil," the Pope said at the weekly audience in St Peter's Square on September 25.

While modern technology has many positive resources to appreciate, he noted, it also gives the devil an opportunity to tempt us, "and many people fall for it".

"Think of internet pornography, which there is a thriving market behind," he continued. "We all know the devil works there."

He said pornography "is a very widespread phenomenon, but one that Christians must be very careful to guard against and strongly reject".





# Letter from Rome

## How the Church's vast talent pool represents an ironic obstacle to reform



John Allen

Fans of the Roma soccer team, one of the two professional squads in the Eternal City, are in a grumpy mood these days. In part that's because of the team's uneven performance, but even more so because of perceived mismanagement by its American owners, Texas billionaire Dan Friedkin and his son Ryan.

Things came to a head when the team's popular manager, a beloved former player, was unceremoniously fired just four games into the new season, leading to the most devoted fans boycotting the first half-hour of the next home game and then marching into the stadium chanting the coach's name.

It's not that the Friedkins aren't willing to spend – since they took over, they've pumped almost €1 billion into the franchise. It's rather that those expenses sometimes seem more about building a new stadium and creating buzz rather than actually winning games.

Recently a lifelong Roma fan who lives across the street asked me, as an American, if I could explain. My answer was simple: To the Friedkins, Roma is like the Chicago Cubs. It's a team with a passionately devoted fan base, who will fill seats, pay for bloated TV and streaming deals and buy swag, no matter whether they win or lose.

### Valuable

That, in a nutshell, explains why both teams are listed among the more valuable franchises in sports, despite the fact that the Cubs have won exactly one World Series in 116 years and Roma hasn't won the Italian *scudetto*, or championship, since 2001. If people keep showing up no matter how disappointing the product, what's the incentive to excel?

As we were speaking, it hit me: "My God, I could be talking about the Vatican".

In fact, one of the premier ironies of contemporary Catholic life is that the seemingly endless pool of passionate



Pope Francis begins his weekly general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican September 25, 2024. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

and devoted Catholics out there, forever ready to serve if the Pope asks, actually constitutes a principal obstacle to reform.

Here's a dynamic I've watched play out over and over again in the Vatican during the 25 years I've been covering the place.

**“It took the system a full six months just to issue a tessera, or card, to allow this person to enter the Vatican without having someone accompany them”**

The Vatican has a tough job it needs someone to do – it might be finances, clerical sexual abuse, communications, human resources, whatever. They'll recruit a talented person to do it, and then steadfastly refuse to give that person the resources, support and authority they need to accomplish the task.

(One minor example,

among far too many: Some years ago, the Vatican hired a veteran lay professional to handle a particularly sensitive task, which had been proclaimed an urgent priority by the Pope. It took the system a full six months just to issue a *tessera*, or card, to allow this person to enter the Vatican without having someone accompany them to and from the office.)

### Underlying

When this person eventually, and inevitably, crashes and burns, rather than resolving the underlying problem, Vatican mandarins simply go find someone else – because there always is someone else willing to take the job.

To consider the case I know best, I've known every Vatican spokesperson since Spanish layman Joaquin Navarro Walls, who served during the St John Paul II years, before

they took up the post. To a person, they've been incredibly smart, gifted professionals, and also people of deep integrity and commitment.

They've also gone into the job eyes wide open, knowing it's basically an impossible task.

**“There's no requirement of “religious submission of intellect and will”, to use the canonical phrase, to take a job you know full well can't be done”**

As things stand, a Vatican spokesperson has extremely limited access to the Pope, almost never is in the room when important decisions are

made, and is forced to wade through layers of bureaucracy to get an answer to even the least sensitive matters. In no other institution would anyone with even a modicum of background in communications, not to mention self-respect, ever agree to become the public face of an operation under those conditions.

When I inquired, as I inevitably did, why these people would agree to take the job anyway, all gave me some version of the same answer – that when the pope asked them to serve, they felt obligated to say yes.

### Respect

With all due respect to people I consider friends, that's just not so. In fact, I would argue they would have served the pope better by refusing until the system was changed in a way that would allow them to actually do the job for which

they were being hired.

When a pope declares the Immaculate Conception of Mary a dogma of the faith, okay, then Catholics are obliged to accept it, because he's the supreme teacher of the faith. If a pope asks you to work in the Secretariat of the Economy, on the other hand, it's different. There's no requirement of “religious submission of intellect and will”, to use the canonical phrase, to take a job you know full well can't be done, at least as presently constituted.

Frankly, my suspicion is that lasting reform of the Vatican will never occur until Catholics around the world, especially lay professionals, refuse to work there until the system itself changes. As long as there's always someone else ready to paper over a dysfunctional situation, there's no real incentive to remedy the dysfunction.

To put the point differently, the greatest service a Catholic can offer a pope, no matter who it is, isn't always saying yes. Sometimes, the better answer actually would be “no... at least, not like this”.

**“When I inquired, as I inevitably did, why these people would agree to take the job anyway, all gave me some version of the same answer – that when the pope asked them to serve, they felt obligated to say yes”**



# Letters

## Letter of the week

### We must not be complacent on hate speech laws

**Dear Editor,** I was heartened to read that the proposed hate speech legislation had been shelved, at least for now, as reported in your recent article [*The Irish Catholic* – September 26, 2024]. The decision by Minister for Justice Helen McEntee to withdraw the most controversial aspects of the Criminal Justice Bill is certainly a relief for all who value free speech. However, as Senator Rónán Mullen and Councillor Emer Tóibín have warned, this may only be a temporary reprieve. It is likely that the government's decision was motivated by a desire to avoid contentious debates before the upcoming election, rather than a genuine shift in

policy direction.

I believe in upholding the dignity of every human person, regardless of their background or identity. However, we must remain vigilant against laws that could undermine free expression and suppress legitimate debate, particularly when it comes to deeply contested issues such as gender ideology. Senator Mullen rightly pointed out the dangers of enshrining ideological definitions of gender into law, definitions that deny basic biological realities and impose an NGO-driven agenda.

Councillor Tóibín's description of the bill as a "veiled attack on democracy" resonates with many concerned

citizens. Free speech is the cornerstone of a healthy democracy, allowing us to engage in open, respectful discussion. The shelving of this bill may be a short-term victory for those who champion free expression, but we must not be complacent. We need to continue advocating for laws that balance protecting individuals from genuine harm while safeguarding the fundamental right to speak freely.

All who value free discourse should remain watchful and engaged as this issue is sure to resurface.

*Yours etc.,  
Darren Williams  
Dublin 5*

## International surrogacy, human trafficking and exploitation

**Dear Editor,** I would like to commend Breda O'Brien for her article addressing the ethical concerns surrounding surrogacy, particularly in light of Ireland's recent legislation on assisted human reproduction [*The Irish Catholic* – September 26, 2024]. Her piece sheds much-needed light on a subject that has been largely ignored by both the media and public discourse.

O'Brien points out the significant dangers international surrogacy poses, particularly with regard to human trafficking and exploitation. The fact that Ireland has passed legislation that could, knowingly or unknowingly, contribute to the exploitation of vulnerable women abroad is deeply concerning. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's warnings about this legislation, and the grim realities of trafficking for surrogacy purposes, are not mere hypotheticals—they are already happening, as we see from the horrifying cases in Crete and elsewhere.

Surrogacy, particularly international commercial surrogacy, undermines the dignity of both the surrogate mother and the child, treating both as commodities to be bought and sold. This raises serious questions about our responsibility to uphold the sanctity of human life



## Teachers and the serious business of surviving

**Dear Editor,** Joe Duffy for the last two weeks has exposed the extreme violence and brutality inflicted on young children in our schools circa 1940 to 1980.

It is hard to believe that such savagery was not rare but common, Joe Duffy does a great job in letting victims speak. Despite the unforgivable actions of some teachers, an historian should investigate and tell us what happened and also why it happened. Joe Duffy does not do balance.

and the rights of the vulnerable. O'Brien's article rightly emphasises that these issues cannot be ignored, even under the guise of creating families.

*Yours etc.,  
Sarah Barry  
Cork City, Cork*

Just say four million children went through our national schools in these years, of which the callers reporting vicious atrocities against children represent 500,000 victims, that means that 3,500,000 million were not brutalised.

The general consensus from Joe and all contributors is to blame the Catholic Church even though the evidence presented contradicts this view. An equal number of the perpetrators in national schools were lay teachers as were religious. At one stage the Bible was blamed. The reason it happened does not in any way excuse the criminal behaviour of these perpetrators, but it explains why they got away with it. With almost no State help and big families to look after life was

it was a serious business of providing food and clothing for your family and surviving.

Because of this, parents wanted schools to toughen their children for the harsh world. A common question I heard asked by relatives in my childhood was "are the teachers tough?". If you said no they would think it was a bad school. The perpetrators took advantage of the national consensus to commit these crimes. I went to school in this period and never experienced brutality. While Joe is very good to the victims and should be admired for this, he like all people in RTÉ holds a strong anti-Catholic bias, which is very unfair to good practicing Catholics.

*Yours etc.,  
Yours J. Hyland  
Killiney, Co. Dublin*

# Healing the Irish Church

**T**here is a new dimension at play as the Church in Ireland seeks to come to terms with the latest round of outrage in regard to past abuses. In the intervening years, partly in response to the need for specialist expertise but also due to the decline of numbers of priests and religious, many Catholic organisations have highly trained lay people in leadership positions. They are to be found in safeguarding offices up and down the country, for instance, and in charge of the various trusts and management bodies in charge of Catholic education. This is a game changer. They should not and cannot be ignored.

It means, that these lay experts must now be given a seat at the table when it comes to resolving and addressing the present round of the crisis. This is for several reasons:

- They have the expertise and competence;
- They have invested themselves in their roles as a service to the Church and are in the front line in dealing with civil society on these matters;
- Without such an approach synodality is dead in the water.

The patrimony of the Church is no longer something for bishops or religious to decide the fate of on their own. It belongs to the whole Church as the People of God. Lay people because of their various professional experiences are more competent to contribute to decisions on these matters than many bishops or religious.

The word on the ground is that the formal structures for co-operation between religious orders and the Irish Bishops' Conference are not working well if at all, and this breakdown in relationship, which was contained in the Synodal report to Rome by religious, needs to be overcome as a matter of urgency.

There is a need to bring together a carefully selected group of people, some of the more able

bishops and religious but also lay experts from different fields, to consider all the aspects of the scoping report and issues that have been raised in the various speeches made by the Taoiseach and ministers subsequently, and to begin to shape a response. This group should not be made up of the clericalised laity, the usual suspects who kow-tow but rather those who will have the courage to speak differently... speak courageously as Pope Francis says. International advice and perspectives should also be sought.

A need to be proactive not reactive, to anticipate issues and shape the discourse and not always be on the back foot is needed. Neither the bishops conference as an institution or the religious orders seem able to do this. The past has been described as an open wound by voices representing the Irish Church at the Synod and some of the Episcopal leadership. Yet no remedy is offered to deal with the past in such a way that it is not able to constantly pull down the present and hobble the future.

In parishes, Catholics are not preoccupied with this issue, they are trying to promote the gospel in their parishes and families as best they can. Catholic life continues, renewal is taking shape, new shoots are springing up. The 'wound' of the past needs to be comprehensively examined and dealt with, and no amount of lawyers and pr gurus will do that. Many of the bishops in office now had nothing to do with those times but their ministry is not immune to the collective reputational damage due to the lurking smoke trails of the past and its regular eruptions into the present. And there's more to come.

The courage to deal with it head on will require bishops and religious working together. If the Church is a field-hospital, then the old proverb rings through for the Irish Church, physician heal thyself.

## 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 3, 2024

When  
is fear  
healthy?

Fr Rolheiser

Page 33



## Seeking God's will in all things

I want to begin by saying that God has been gracious to me. Often-times I fail to acknowledge His gifts and grumble over the difficulties in my life, but when I have the opportunity to reflect on things such as this, I can see His goodness in all the experiences and gifts that I have received. My story starts in County Mayo where I was brought up in a large Catholic family that frequented the Sacraments and taught us about God and the Saints. My faith came easily to me as a child - I was your typical zealous little girl with a fascination for St Therese of Lisieux (who I later chose as my Confirmation Saint... very typical!). However, my child-like faith and trust changed as I grew older and more aware of the world. As a teen, I started to take a personal interest in living out my faith and seeking like-minded friends to walk alongside. Although there were normal ups and downs in life, my faith was always a source of comfort and peace to me and something that I always strove to keep in the centre of my life.

### Turning point

The turning point in my ordinary-enough story was actually the Leaving Certificate Examinations, but not in the way that you would expect! In approaching the Leaving Certificate, I lacked the certitude that my other friends had as to what career and college programs I wanted to pursue. I was open to many options, but not passionate about any of them. I settled on one career that I thought I might be suited to and awaited the Leaving Certificate results in relative peace. During this time, through an act of Providence, I was offered a full scholarship to a three-week course with a Catholic American College in Don-



**God has been gently guiding my little boat along the stream, taking the greatest care of me despite my spontaneous actions, says Michelle Kelly**

egal, and I jumped at it! The Catholic College in question was Christendom College from Virginia, which hosts its St Colmille Institute in Ireland for three weeks every summer. I jumped at the opportunity and had a wonderful experience with the group - I loved attending their liberal arts classes, witnessing their joyful faith, speaking with their professors, befriending the students, and seeing Ireland and its historic sites in an enlightened way.

**“My job as a Healthcare Assistant in Galway City gave me the opportunity to meet some of the sweetest and kindest hidden souls I have ever met”**

After those three weeks, the Leaving Certificate results were released: I had scored five points less than I needed to get into my program, which really changed up my plans! Thanks be to God for those missing five points. Otherwise, the experiences, friends, and education that I received would be very different from what God had in store for me. As a result, I decided to take a year out to work and save while I would determine what

career and study I wanted to pursue. My job as a Healthcare Assistant in Galway City gave me the opportunity to meet some of the sweetest and kindest hidden souls I have ever met. I loved meeting and caring for these people, as it taught me many life lessons through their suffering, joy, and faith. When I thought that my life was on track to apply for nursing, God gave me a gentle nudge in the form of an email from a friend. She encouraged me to apply to Christendom “just to see what would happen,” and so I did. To my surprise, I was accepted, and after my initial visit to the campus I felt definitively that I was meant to attend Christendom. Again, it was truly God who brought this all about, as He provided funding for me when there was no college funding for foreign students at that time, and He guided my hand in filling out the various visa forms and paperwork!

### Growth

Christendom College has played a huge role in my growth as a person and particularly in my faith. It gave me authentic friendships, rich theology, incredible opportunities to travel and study, a love for literature and art, and so much more. I am indebted to Christendom and its professors and mentors for their formative role in my life,

and grateful to God that He essentially handed me such a beautiful opportunity. It was the perfect place for me to learn more about who I am in God's eyes, what gifts and strengths I have and how to cultivate them, and how to ‘restore all things in Christ’ per Christendom's motto.

**“I was moved by people's selfless generosity to support these mothers and their babies, and how faithfully all the Christians rallied behind our work and provided for our material and spiritual needs”**

My time at Christendom came to an end in May 2023, when I was proud to graduate with my BA in Liberal Arts as a Theology Major and Philosophy Minor. I was further blessed to stay in Virginia for an extended period to work at a local pregnancy centre. This opportunity gave me many insights into the human person and helped me to cultivate an attitude of compassion and outreach to those who are struggling in a way that I had not experienced. I was moved by people's selfless generosity to support these mothers and their babies, and how faithfully all the Christians rallied behind our work and provided for our material and spiritual needs. I finished working there earlier this year and returned home to Ireland after almost five years. I now work for ‘Pure in Heart Ireland’ as their General Manager. ‘Pure in Heart’ is a charity

and community run by young adults who strive together to learn, live, and share the truth, beauty, and meaning of human sexuality. Our mission is to promote the integral development of each person with a view to draw more young people into a closer relationship with God, which is so needed in our society. Our culture dismisses these integral needs, but we all deeply need God, real love, and authentic friendships and community.

### Guiding

Throughout my life, God has been gently guiding my little boat along the stream, taking the greatest care of me despite my spontaneous actions. Nevertheless, there are times where He has let me make my own blunders and capsize, or run aground, which can all serve as a reminder of my utter dependence upon God. This past year was personally a testing one for me, so by no means can I claim that everything is always rosy, and I am always 100% on fire for the Lord and my faith. Like everyone, my faith has gone through dry spots, but I know that God is there throughout, so it is easier to weather the storm. When the train tracks shift from where you thought you were going, it is comforting to know that God can bring good out of any situation and that He has a plan for your life. He invites us to freely respond to Him and to trust in His goodness. The gifts and experiences that I have received are a clear reminder that nothing of what I have done is by my own merit, but by His sheer goodness. Jump into the deep with Him, and He will keep you afloat: “The glory of God is man fully alive” - St Irenaeus



# Seeds of truth in all religions



Prophet Isaiah, Antonio Balestra (18th Century)



Pope Francis meets with young people engaged in interreligious dialogue in Singapore September 2024. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez



Pat Collins CM

**R**ecently, when he was in Singapore, Pope Francis said, "All religions are paths to God, I will use an analogy: they are like different languages that express the divine. But God is for everyone, and therefore, we are all God's children. 'But my God is more important than yours!' Is this true? There is only one God, and religions are like languages, paths to reach God. Some Sikh, some Muslim, some Hindu, some Christian."

Predictably, some Catholics have criticised the Holy Father's words by accusing him of implicitly saying that all religions are equally true paths to God. That is neither what he said nor believes. Pope Francis knows, only too well, that ultimately "there is only one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ" (1 Tim 2:5). But what the Pope was saying is that there are true pointers to God in all religions. Justin

Martyr (100-165 AD), one of the Fathers of the early Church made that point when he wrote, "God scattered seeds of truth before his incarnation, not only among the Jews, but also among the Greeks and barbarians, especially among philosophers and poets, who are the prophets of the heathen. Those who lived reasonably and virtuously in obedience to this preparatory light were Christians in fact, though not in name... Socrates was a Christian as well as Abraham, though he did not know it." St Thomas Aquinas echoed that point when he wrote, "If something is true, no matter who said it, it is always from the Holy Spirit."

## Appearances

We have an outstanding example of these points in the book of Wisdom

2:12-20 which foretold, like Isaiah 53, that the Saviour to come would be despised and rejected, smitten and afflicted. It is worth mentioning that there is a passage in the writings of Plato's *Republic*, (375 BC) which is surprisingly reminiscent of the ones already mentioned.

**"After enduring every humiliation he will be crucified, and learn at last that in the world as it is we should want not to be, but to seem, just"**

Aeschylus, a man of simplicity and moral integrity, wanted to be

**"The recipients of prophecy may be angels, devils, men, women, children, heathens, or gentiles; nor is it necessary that a man should be gifted with any particular disposition in order to receive the light"**

good and not merely to appear to give the impression of being good. His envious opponents said to themselves, "We must, indeed, not allow him to seem good, for if he does, he will have all the rewards and honours paid to the man who has a reputation for justice, and we shall not be able to tell whether his motive is love of justice or love of the rewards and honours. No, we must strip him of everything except his justice, and our picture of him must be drawn in the opposite way to our picture of the unjust man; for our just man must have the worst of reputations even though he has done no wrong... we shall give him an undeserved and lifelong reputation for wickedness, and make him stick to his chosen course until death... The just man, then, as we have pictured him, will be scourged, tortured, and imprisoned, his eyes will be put out,

and after enduring every humiliation he will be crucified, and learn at last that in the world as it is we should want not to be, but to seem, just."

## Inspiration

This passage, which was written by a pagan, is intriguing. It is obvious that is similar to the ones in Wisdom and Isaiah which were written by inspired Jewish prophets. Apparently, it is unlikely that Plato had read the Old Testament or that the author of Wisdom 2 or Isaiah 53 had read Plato. It would appear, therefore, that Plato was a bit like Balaam. He was a pagan who received a prophetic revelation about the coming of the messiah (cf. Number 23-24). It is worth noting that Pope Benedict XIV said in the 18th century, "The recipients of prophecy may be angels, devils, men, women, children, heathens, or gentiles; nor

is it necessary that a man should be gifted with any particular disposition in order to receive the light of prophecy provided his intellect and senses be adapted for making manifest the things which God reveals to him. Though moral goodness is most profitable to a prophet, yet it is not necessary in order to obtain the gift of prophecy."

**"Pope Francis wants Catholics to engage in that respectful but discerning type of interreligious dialogue"**

What Pope Francis was encouraging was respect for one another's religions. He also wanted to foster interreligious dialogue as an important aspect of evangelisation. John Paul II used to refer to the Areopagus in Athens where Paul dialogued with the pagans about God. Benedict XVI used to refer to the Court of the Gentiles in Jerusalem, where Jewish people dialogued with pagans about religious matters. Pope Francis wants Catholics to engage in that respectful but discerning type of interreligious dialogue.

**"We must strip him of everything except his justice, and our picture of him must be drawn in the opposite way to our picture of the unjust man; for our just man must have the worst of reputations even though he has done no wrong"**



# Empowering the baptised: The essential role of laity in Ireland's Church renewal



'Intentional Young Adult Ministry' gathering in Clongowes Wood College, June 2024. Photos: John McElroy.



Fr Barry White

The understanding of the laity's role in the Church has evolved considerably, especially since the Second Vatican Council, which emphasised their central participation in the Church's mission. Rooted in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, laypeople are called to share in Christ's kingly, priestly, and prophetic office. Their participation is not merely a privilege but a responsibility that is essential, especially as the Church faces modern challenges, including renewing parish life and engaging young people. However, the *Synthesis of the Consultation in Ireland for the Diocesan Stage of the Universal Synod 2021–2023*, highlighted a common concern that the Church was underutilising: the gifts of lay people. With adult faith development, support for lay ministry, and collaborative decision-making being described as "inadequate" or "absent". Some viewed Church structures as "patriarchal, hierarchical, and fe-

dal", while at the parish level, there was a perception of passivity regarding lay ministry.

**“Canon law affirms this, stating that all baptised Christians are ‘called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world’”**

Before the Second Vatican Council, the role of the laity was often considered to be quite passive, summarised by the phrase 'pray, pay, and obey'. However, the Council's key document, *Lumen Gentium*, redefined the role of the laity, stating that they are not second-class members of the Church but are integral to its mission. According to *Lumen Gentium*, by Baptism, the laity are "constituted as the People of God" and share in Christ's threefold mission – priestly, prophetic, and kingly (LG 10, 31). Canon law affirms this, stating that all baptised Christians are "called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world" (Canon 204 §1).

Pope John Paul II expanded on this in *Christifideles Laici*, emphasising that the laity have their own unique voca-

tion and mission within the Church and the world (CL, 23). The laity are not just participants but collaborators in the Church's mission. The concept of co-responsibility was developed by Pope Benedict XVI, who at the Sixth Ordinary Assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action in 2012, introduced the term 'co-responsibility' of the laity. The concept of co-responsibility goes beyond mere cooperation, stressing a deeper participation in governance, pastoral responsibility, and authority.

## Foundation

Baptism and Confirmation are not just sacraments of initiation but are also the foundation for lay mission. Through Baptism, Christians become part of the Body of Christ and share in his divine life. Confirmation equips them with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, empowering them to live their Christian vocation more fully. These sacraments form the basis of the layperson's identity and mission within

the Church. In their priestly role, laypeople actively participate in worship, prayer, and the sacraments. Their kingly office involves taking co-responsibility in their parishes, organising parish life through participative bodies like parish pastoral councils, and service. Their prophetic mission calls them to evangelise, teach, and provide catechesis. This threefold mission is both a calling and an obligation, inviting laypeople to be active agents of the Gospel in the world.

**“Parishes must become centres of missionary outreach and places where the vocation of all the baptised is rediscovered and fostered”**

Pope Francis has been a vocal advocate for renewing

parish life, envisioning parishes as centres of missionary outreach. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he describes the parish as "a community of communities" and a "sanctuary" for those seeking spiritual nourishment (EG, 28). To realise this vision, both clergy and laity must work together in a spirit of co-responsibility.

The 2020 *Instruction on the Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church* accentuates the need for "new discernment" in parish life and calls for greater lay participation. It stresses that parishes must become centres of missionary outreach and places where the vocation of all the baptised is rediscovered and fostered. Collaboration and synodality – journeying together – are key to this transformation.

## Vital

Young people hold a unique and vital role in the Church's

mission. Pope Francis, in *Christus Vivit*, calls for a "synodal" youth ministry that journeys with young people and appreciates their gifts (CV, 206). This has been seen in Ireland through the active involvement of young people in movements like FOCUS, Youth 2000, Pure in Heart, and Living Water. These movements offer spiritual formation and community, helping young Catholics live out their Faith in an increasingly secular world.

**“This conference provided models for how young people can take leadership roles in evangelisation and parish life, pointing toward future gatherings, such as the Jubilee of Youth in Rome in 2025”**

At the 'Intentional Young Adult Ministry' gathering in Clongowes Wood College in June 2024, hosted by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, which was synodal in nature, Bishop Fintan Gavin of Cork and Ross observed, "We need young adults as protagonists who are formed for

**“We need young adults as protagonists who are formed for the very mission of animating our local parishes – bringing their commitment, talent, and love of Christ to the local community”**





**“The future of the Church in Ireland rests in the active, co-responsible participation of the laity. Rooted in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, laypeople are not mere bystanders but are called to live out Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission”**

the very mission of animating our local parishes – bringing their commitment, talent, and love of Christ to the local community”. This conference provided models for how young people can take leadership roles in evangelisation and parish life, pointing toward future gatherings, such as the Jubilee of Youth in Rome in 2025 and World Youth Day in South Korea in 2027.

#### FOCUS

One model of successful lay involvement, particularly with young people, is the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS). This US-based organisation has established a presence on Irish university campuses, using three core principles: Divine Intimacy, Authentic Friendship, and Spiritual Multiplication. These principles guide FOCUS missionaries as they form deep relationships with students, lead them in

prayer and the sacraments, and equip them to evangelise others.

**“Financial constraints are a major issue. Many parishes struggle with financial stability and cannot afford to pay lay ministers or provide adequate training”**

This model offers valuable insights for parish renewal in Ireland. By emphasising personal relationships and spiritual growth, parishes can create a more vibrant, mission-oriented community. The success of FOCUS on college campuses in Dublin, Cork, and Belfast provides a potential template for expanding this approach to parishes nationwide.

Despite these positive

developments, significant challenges remain for lay involvement in Irish parishes. Financial constraints are a major issue. Many parishes struggle with financial stability and cannot afford to pay lay ministers or provide adequate training.

#### Nature

Moreover, there is often a lack of understanding about the true nature of parish life. Some still see the parish primarily as another community group or civic structure aligned with the local GAA club, rather than as “the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration,” as described in *Evangelii Gaudium* (28). This misunderstanding hampers the development of co-responsibility and



lay leadership in parish governance. There is also a need for better catechesis and Faith formation, both for young people and for mature Catholics. Without this formation, laypeople cannot fully understand or exercise their role in the Church’s mission. Addressing this gap requires a significant investment in education and pastoral care.

The future of the Church in Ireland rests in the active, co-responsible participation of the laity. Rooted in the sacraments of Baptism

and Confirmation, laypeople are not mere bystanders but are called to live out Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission. While financial difficulties, insufficient formation, and outdated perceptions hinder progress, the potential for renewal is undeniable.

#### Potential

Movements like FOCUS and conferences like the one at Clongowes Wood College over the summer demonstrate the potential impact of lay leadership, especially

among young people. By investing in formation, fostering co-responsibility, and fully engaging the laity in parish life, the Church in Ireland has the opportunity to become a vibrant, mission-oriented community once again, a beacon of hope for the future.

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# Padre Pio is beloved, but most people misunderstand why



Fr Patrick Briscoe OP

**W**hen I think about the saints most beloved by modern Catholics, Padre Pio tops the list. His weathered face and brown Capuchin habit are iconic. His remarkable personal story, his strong-willed personality and the intensity of his spiritual life are absolutely captivating. But here's the thing: I think most people get the reason this saint is beloved entirely wrong.

## Mystery

At first glance, Padre Pio's life is one of mystery and miracle. "I can certainly say that Padre Pio is one of us, and yet so different," writes Capuchin Fr John Aurilia in *Dearest Soul*, a new book about Padre Pio. Fr John knew Padre Pio well, having served as his secretary in 1967. The stories shared in the book are legendary: bilocation, the reading of souls, the stigmata and countless miracles of healing. For many, these remarkable

events are what make him stand out. But the key to why people love Padre Pio is at once much simpler and more mysterious.

**“He knew when to strike a blow with tough love and when to anoint with mercy. And that's where so many Catholics - penitents and confessors alike - often go wrong”**

One of the things I most admire about Padre Pio is his extraordinary devotion to the sacrament of confession. For decades, he spent hours each day hearing confessions, often up to 10 or 12 hours at a time. The sheer number of penitents who flocked to him was staggering. Fr John shares in his book that one day, his brother Capuchins asked Padre Pio why everyone went to him for confession. The saint replied, "They think I am deaf."

Padre Pio had a keen awareness of sin, and most importantly, as Fr John puts it, "He was abrupt and tough with some people and compassionate and gentle with others." He knew when to strike a blow with tough love and when to anoint with mercy. And that's where so many Catholics - penitents and confessors alike - often go wrong.

We live in a time when Catholics are often reluctant to confess their sins, where guilt is downplayed, and the very concept of sin is widely rejected. And yet, the sacrament of confession remains one of the most potent sources of grace we have. Sometimes we all need a stern talking to, to be held to account. But at other times, we just need someone to gently tell us that God loves us and that we'll be okay. Padre Pio could deftly navigate the tension.

Padre Pio's other great secret was his love for the holy Eucharist. Fr John recalls how, when the saint celebrated Mass, people would yell things like, "Miracolo, miracolo!" (miracle) or "Evviva Padre Pio!" ("Long live Padre Pio!"). The holy friar insisted that those who interrupted the Mass in this way be escorted from the church. Padre Pio always knew that he wasn't the focus; Jesus was the centre of it all.

## Eucharist

Padre Pio reveals his deep love for the Eucharist, saying: "How happy Jesus makes me! How sweet is His spirit! But I am confused and can do nothing but weep and repeat: Jesus my food!" The Eucharist was Padre Pio's life. Describing how he felt after holy Communion, Padre Pio writes: "I almost forget that I am in the world; mind and heart desire nothing more and sometimes for quite a long time even the will to desire anything else is lacking in me." That is a special grace of union!

In Padre Pio's life, confession and the holy Eucharist did what they were ordained by God to do. They made the beloved friar holy. But here's the bottom line, and the thing Padre Pio would want us to know above all else: These sacraments can make us holy too.

**i** Fr Patrick Briscoe, OP, is editor of Our Sunday Visitor. Follow him on X @PatrickMaryOP

**“How happy Jesus makes me! How sweet is His spirit! But I am confused and can do nothing but weep and repeat: Jesus my food!”**



St Pio. Image: Elia Stelluto and Paupisi Parish

## Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

**Why do Catholics emphasise the body more than the blood of Jesus in Communion reception?**

**Q: I've often wondered why Catholics emphasise the Eucharist more than the wine, as the wine is not offered at Communion time. Jesus said to do both in remembrance of him. Isn't it wrong to not receive both as Jesus taught?**

**A:** First, the Eucharist is both the bread that becomes the body of Christ and the wine that becomes his blood. Usually after the bread has been consecrated - that is, changed into the body of Christ - we refer to it as the 'host' to reflect the fact that despite outward appearances it is no longer bread; similarly, we refer to the wine after it is consecrated as the 'precious blood' or we might refer to 'drinking from the chalice'. In more technical terms, we might also refer to both together as 'the sacred species' or speak of 'receiving communion under both kinds'.

The Church has a teaching called the doctrine of concomitance, which holds that both Eucharistic species are fully consecrated, and that receiving Communion under either kind means that we are receiving Jesus fully in his body, blood, soul and divinity. That is, we are not receiving 'less Jesus' when we receive under only one kind.

As we read in Paragraph 1390 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Since Christ is sacramentally present under each of the species, Communion under the species of bread alone makes it possible to receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace."

This same paragraph of the catechism goes on to tell us: "For pastoral reasons this manner of receiving Communion has been legitimately established as the most common form in the Latin rite [i.e., among Latin or 'Roman' Catholics]."

The catechism doesn't go into detail about what these "pastoral reasons" are. But historically, at the time of the Council of Trent in the mid-1500s, there was concern about the need to emphasise the doctrine of concomitance among the faithful. This was to counteract the arguments of some Protestant reformers that receiving under both kinds is strictly necessary for salvation.

In modern times, my own thought is that such "pastoral reasons" might tend to lean closer to practical logistics. For example, a parish might have concerns about the danger of the precious blood accidentally spilling if the chalice was offered. Additionally, it is far easier to reserve the consecrated hosts in the tabernacle, and to bring Communion to the homebound under this species.

Still, I would not say that this means the Church intends to emphasise one of the sacred species over the other in general. Despite the permissibility of receiving under only one kind, the Church today has a stated preference for Communion under both kinds in contexts where this is feasible.

As the General Instruction of the Roman Missal clearly states: "Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clearer expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the connection between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of the Father" (GIRM 281).

Even beyond this, it is the consistent traditional practice in Eastern Catholic churches to administer Communion under both kinds as a matter of course.

And on an even more foundational level, the Church's emphasis on the importance of both elements of the Eucharist is evident in canon law. For instance, although the lay faithful may receive holy Communion under only one kind, the Church always requires both bread and wine to be consecrated at every Mass. As Canon 927 of the Code of Canon Law states: "It is absolutely wrong, even in urgent and extreme necessity, to consecrate one element without the other."

**i** Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to CatholicQA@osv.com.



# When is fear healthy?



**W**hy don't we preach hellfire anymore? That's a question asked frequently by a lot of sincere religious people who worry that too many churches, priests, and ministers have gone soft on sin and are over-generous in speaking about God's mercy. The belief here is that more people would come to Church and obey the commandments if we preached the raw truth about mortal sin, God's wrath, and the danger of going to hell when we die. The truth will set you free, these folks assert, and the truth is that there is real sin and there can be real and eternal consequences for sin. The gate to Heaven is narrow and the road to hell is wide. So why aren't we preaching more about the dangers of hellfire?

## Hellfire

What's valid in this kind of reasoning is that preaching about mortal sin and hellfire can be effective. Threats work. I know. I grew up subjected to this kind of preaching and admit that it affected my behavior. But that effect was ambivalent: On the one side, it left me scared enough before God and life itself to fear ever straying very far morally or religiously. On the other side, it also left me religiously and emotionally crippled in some deep ways. Simply stated, it's hard to be intimate friends with a God who frightens you and it's not good religiously or otherwise to be overly timid and afraid before life's sacred energies. Fear



**Fr Rolheiser**

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

of divine punishment and fear of hellfire, admittedly, can be effective as a motivator.

**“What kind of God would say to a repentant person in hell: ‘Sorry, but you knew the rules! You’re repentant now, but it’s too late. You had your chance!’”**

So why not preach fear? Because it's wrong, pure and simple. Brainwashing and physical intimidation are also effective, but they are antithetical to love. You don't enter a love relationship because you feel afraid or threatened. You enter a love relationship because you feel drawn

there by love.

More importantly, preaching divine threat dishonors the God in whom we believe. The God who Jesus incarnates and reveals is not a God who puts sincere, good-hearted people into hell against their will on the basis of some human or moral lapse which in our religious categories we deem to be a mortal sin. For example, I still hear this threat being preached in our churches: If you miss going to Church on Sunday it's a mortal sin and should you die without confessing it, you will go to hell.

## Underwrite

What kind of God would underwrite this kind of a belief? What kind of God would not give sincere people a second chance, a third one, and seventy-seven times seven more chances if they

**“The famous psychiatrist, Fritz Perls, was once asked by a young fundamentalist: ‘Have you been saved?’ His answer: ‘Saved? I’m still trying to figure out how to be spent!’”**

remain sincere? What kind of God would say to a repentant person in hell: “Sorry, but you knew the rules! You’re repentant now, but it’s too late. You had your chance!”

**“When scripture tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, the kind fear it is talking about is not contingent upon feeling threatened or feeling anxious about being punished”**

A healthy theology of God demands that we stop teaching that hell can be a nasty surprise waiting for an essentially good person. The God we believe in as Christians is infinite understanding, infinite compassion, and infinite forgiveness. God's love surpasses our own and if we, in our better moments, can see the goodness of a human heart despite its lapses and weaknesses, how much more so will God see this. We have nothing to fear from God.

Or have we? Doesn't scripture tell us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom? How does that square with not being afraid of God?

There are different kinds of fear, some healthy and some not. When scripture tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, the kind fear it is talking

about is not contingent upon feeling threatened or feeling anxious about being punished. That's the kind of fear we feel before tyrants and bullies. There is however a healthy fear that's innate within the dynamics of love itself. This kind of fear is essentially proper reverence, that is, when we genuinely love someone we will fear betraying that love, fear being selfish, fear being boorish, and fear being disrespectful in that relationship. We will fear violating the sacred space within which intimacy occurs. Metaphorically we will sense we are standing on holy ground and that we'd best have our shoes off before that sacred fire.

## Appears

Moreover, scripture tells us that when God appears in our lives, almost always, the first words we will hear are: “Don't be afraid!” That's because God is not a judgmental tyrant but a loving, creative, joy-filled energy and person. As Leon Bloy reminds us, “joy is the most infallible indication of God's presence.”

The famous psychiatrist, Fritz Perls, was once asked by a young fundamentalist: “Have you been saved?” His answer: “Saved? I'm still trying to figure out how to be spent!” We honor God not by living in fear lest we offend him, but in reverently spending the wonderful energy that God gives us. God is not a law to be obeyed, but a joyous energy within which to spend ourselves generatively.



# Because you were so hard-hearted



The Wedding Feast at Cana, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1819)

Gn 2:18-24  
Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6  
Heb 2:9-11  
Mk 10:2-16 or 10:2-12

As Eve to Adam in the purity of Eden, as bride to groom in the joy of a wedding: it is a primeval holiness, the holiness of a woman in love with a man in God's providential ordering of things. It belongs to the mists of the beginning of everything. It is a love repeated pristine in each new pure love. It is love jealous for its holiness, rightly so. It is unashamedly an ideal, a perfection, a grace given in original grace.

Which is why Jesus doesn't give in. It's why in this passage from Mark's Gospel Jesus appears to be so unyielding, so uncompromising. The Pharisees were "testing him" (Mk 10:2). Really, they were initiating Jesus into an age-old argument about marriage and divorce.

They wanted to know Jesus's opinion on Deuteronomy 24, the passage where Moses allows a husband to divorce his wife if "he finds in her something indecent" (Dt 24:1). What does Jesus think about that? The Pharisees want to know. An old debate, some interpreted this passage broadly; 'indecent' could

## The Sunday Gospel

Fr Joshua J. Whitfield



mean anything, bad cooking even. Could a husband divorce his wife for something as silly as that? Should divorce be as easy as that? Or should 'indecent' here be defined in a narrower sense? Should we understand indecency to mean only adultery?

### Dismisses

Where does Jesus stand? If he dismisses the passage out of hand, he could be accused of dismissing the word of God. If he sides with one or the other prevalent schools of thought on the matter, he'll be consumed in an interminable and divisive moral squabble like some fight on

social media. That's the trap as the Pharisees imagined it, the corner they think they've painted him in.

**“He was pointing to the ideal, to the perfection, to the grace given in original grace, that ‘what God has joined together, no human being must separate’”**

But Jesus isn't cornered. Rather, he transcends the argument by reminding them of the larger context, the original plan of God's creation. "But from the beginning of creation," Jesus says. Moses may have permitted divorce, but that was due to

*sklerokardia*, the hardness of human hearts. But that's not what God intended; he didn't create marriage to be something renegotiable and impermanent.

### Perfection

He was pointing to the ideal, to the perfection, to the grace given in original grace, that "what God has joined together, no human being must separate" (Mk 10:6-9). Mark's account of Jesus' teaching is plainly more uncompromising than what is found in Matthew. Matthew's Gospel includes parenthetically an exception for *porneia*, a highly debated term to say the least (Mt 5:32). Mark gives us no such wiggle room. Unfit for any category, neither liberal or conservative or permissive or rigid - we could attach to Jesus all of these labels but also none of them - Jesus simply reminds his listeners of the

love of Eden, what God really wanted for his creatures, and that is indelible love, like the love that is God himself.

**“The grace given in grace, nonetheless remains part of reality, part of our moral thinking no matter the magnitude or frequency of our sins and imperfections”**

Thus, the question Mark's Gospel in particular poses is what do we make of ideals? To let go of an ideal, even in the name of 'realistic' compassion, Jesus suggests is the fruit of *sklerokardia*. Here we're talking about the Edenic ideal of marriage. Is that something you believe in? Is it something the Church should hold up? Is the idea of man and woman married and one flesh forever something we should cherish and strive to live out faithfully? At least as we encounter him in Mark's Gospel, Jesus would say clearly yes.

Now none of this ignores the brutal realities of human brokenness and sin and horri-

ble things like abuse and doing what sometimes you have to do. Yet it does remind us that the ideal, the perfection, the grace given in grace, nonetheless remains part of reality, part of our moral thinking no matter the magnitude or frequency of our sins and imperfections. Even for those who have suffered from broken loves or who have been hurt so much they wonder whether any of this is true, the pristine love Jesus speaks of here includes everyone. It is a light shining always as truth, mercy and hope.

### Understanding

Yet this still holds that as Christians, it is clear from the Gospels that we should not in fact settle for a degraded understanding of marriage as something impermanent and renegotiable; but instead, we should hold on (just as Jesus did here) to the ideal of Eden. For that is more like the kingdom Jesus talks about - not the normalising of sin and the reduction of our moral vision but the idea of a life and love that, after mercy, is so beautiful it's almost angelic.

Fr Joshua J. Whitfield is priest of St Rita Catholic Community in Dallas and author of *The Crisis of Bad Preaching* and other books.

**“For those who have suffered from broken loves or who have been hurt so much they wonder whether any of this is true, the pristine love Jesus speaks of here includes everyone. It is a light shining always as truth, mercy and hope”**



# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## The desire to find refuge in fiction

It would be great to live in a world where life was valued. At the moment, the right to life is undermined so often, whether through war, capital punishment, euthanasia or abortion. And that's not an exhaustive list.

The news during the week featured a man, Marcellus Williams, who was executed in the USA despite there being serious doubts about his conviction. The war in the Middle East escalated further, even while there was talk of ceasefire. The news programmes last weekend were dominated by reports of the ongoing rocket exchanges between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. I was impressed by the reports from Sally Hayden of the *Irish Times*, reporting from Beirut for **The Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk, Friday) and **News at One** (RTE Radio 1, Wednesday) when she told of visiting a Jesuit church that was sheltering internally displaced persons – something that should give us a sense of pride but not complacency.

What started the current intensity of the conflict was the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7 last year – expect to hear a lot more about it in the media as the anniversary approaches. **Surviving Oct 7th: We will dance again** (BBC Two, Thurs) was a tough watch as we got to look back on that awful atrocity. It was



Nightsleeper, BBC One

an episode in the Storyville series and followed the assault on the Nova Music Festival with moving testimonies from survivors and footage of that morning from mobile phones, dashcams, security camera and, most chilling of all, from the bodycams of the attackers, which showed them revelling in their callous and murderous onslaught, scandalously convinced that God was on their side. We were spared very little in this shocking documentary – only the faces of the dead were blurred out. There were so many impactful moments – the attackers shooting into portaloos in case anyone was

hiding there, the murder of a partygoer in a wheelchair, grenades being thrown into a bunker and promptly thrown out again by brave young people inside – it didn't end well for most of them. A young mother hid for ages in a fridge, determined to live for her son.

The young survivors were catapulted traumatically into sober adulthood. Many started as naive partygoers, often high on drugs, and yet found courage and determination to try and save their friends, even at the risk of their own lives.

Many of you will have heard of the 'suicide pod' controversy from Switzerland.

The device may look cool, sleek and oh so modern, like a spaceship from a sci-fi movie, but it's a killing machine – the machine equivalent of a euphemism. It was featured on **Press Preview** (Sky News, Tuesday), when journalist Jenny Kleeman was very critical of this approach to the end of life – she saw it as driven by "opportunists" who love publicity. I'm not sure she's entirely against euthanasia, but she felt this wasn't the way to go, literally. She thought eventually we'd come up with a good solution to end-of-life issues, but unless deliberate killing of patients is ruled out, any solu-

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### SUNDAY SEQUENCE

**BBC Radio Ulster Sunday October 6, 8.30am**

Topical religious and ethical issues with Audrey Carville.

#### SONGS OF PRAISE

**BBC One Sunday October 6, 1.15pm**

Claire McCollum introduces favourite harvest hymns from Jubilee Farm, Northern Ireland's first community-owned farm, a place with faith at its heart.

#### SPIRIT OF JOHN PAUL II: STORIES OF HIS INTERIOR LIFE

**EWTN Sunday October 6, 9pm**

This documentary provides insights into the interior life of Pope John Paul II. Hear fascinating stories shared by those who knew him best.

tion will be ugly. Her fellow reviewer, PR consultant Alex Deane, was likewise critical of the "charlatan" approach, but was blunter, referring to "killing" and the "bump them off" attitude. He could see one positive in the suicide pod – at least it didn't 'distort the medical profession' – here the death was self-inflicted. Side tracking the medical profession had led to arrests and was why the device had fallen foul of the already liberal law in Switzerland.

Sometimes it seems like a good idea to seek refuge in fiction. BBC's high-profile drama series, **Nightsleeper** (BBC One, Sunday, Monday) was about a train hijack or "hackjack" as they called it. Such a situation has a built-in

tension, especially as it seems to be happening pretty much in real time, but they made a mess of it – the leading actors and their characters were weak, the secondary characters were annoying, and it was hard to care what happened to them – their stories were like 'soap on a train'. Plot developments were implausible, tension drained (or trained?) away, there were wads of turgid digital dialogue as a virus infected the anti-virus (yes, that's the plot).

The budget seemed to have been spent on special effects, with pennies left over for script and acting. And yet I kept watching – wanting to see what would happen at the end of the line. Silly me!

# Film

Aubrey Malone



## Battle of the Bottle on Scottish Island

A young woman wants to save the planet. But can she save herself?

Rona (Saoirse Ronan) is an alcoholic. The condition has cost her dearly. Friends have deserted her. Her boyfriend Deynin (Paapa Essiedu) has fled. She becomes a victim of violence.

She enters the 12-Step Programme to try and deal with her problem. For much of this incredible film it seems like it isn't working. She lapses, changing her moods as often as she changes the colour of her hair.

Then comes the killer line: "I can't be happy sober."

*The Outrun* (15) isn't an easy watch. At times it seems like recovery is beyond Rona.

But ultimately the film utters a cathartic "Yea" to life. And to the richness of the human spirit.

Ronan is in every scene of the film. You can't take your eyes off her. She makes everyone else look like holes on the screen. Her empathy with the character she plays is phenomenal.

She tries to recapture an innocence she took for granted in her youth in the Orkney Islands. Her face speaks volumes. The accent, as one might have expected, is pitch-perfect.

She talks to people without really talking to them, communicating monosyllabically. The lights are on but there's nobody home. The isolation of the locale mirrors her pre-



The Outrun  
dicament.

There's an invisible lacuna in almost every conversation, the lacuna of lostness. The earplugs she wears can't block out the sonic boom of life.

She travels from the hurly-

burly of London to the wilds of Scotland, there finding some kind of tenuous tranquillity. She becomes at one with nature. She experiences the healing power of the sea.

She knows there's no sub-

stitute for the "one day at a time" mantra. "It never gets easy," a fellow sufferer tells her, "It just gets less hard."

In investigations into marine biology and mythology she finds a new reason to go on. Her voiceover disquisitions on such themes, delivered almost laconically like some disembodied narrator, act like a corollary to the chaos in her head.

She delivers lambs. She talks about seaweed, corncrakes. She gets excited looking at the turgescence of waves.

Her mother (Saskia Reeves) tries to help her through prayer but can't get through to her. Her father (Stephen Dillane) oscillates between cheeriness and dropping out. There are flashbacks to a time

when life was simple, elemental, pure.

This is a must-see exploration of an age-old theme. It's right up there with all the classic films on alcoholism: *The Lost Weekend*, *Days of Wine and Roses*, *Leaving Las Vegas*.

Nora Fingscheidt directs in a muted style, investing Amy Liptrot's highly-acclaimed memoir – the two women co-wrote the screenplay – with a cerebral overlay. Scenes are threaded together in staccato fashion. A sense of dreaminess permeates.

People have been wondering for many years what film Ronan will get her Oscar for. Here's a message for the Academy: Why wait until March? Just give it to her now. Okay?



# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## Celtic arts and crafts: Nicola Gordon Bowe collected essays

**Visualising the Celtic Revival: The Arts and Crafts movement in Ireland,** selected writings by Nicola Gordon Bowe, edited by Róisín Kennedy (Four Courts Press, €55.00 / £50.00)

Peter Costello

**T**he late Nicola Gordon Bowe was one of the most distinguished art historians of her time in Ireland. She was widely admired for her books about the stained glass artists Harry Clarke and Wilhelmina Geddes, which brought these artists into greater prominence after long periods of neglect.

But important as they were, these books represent only a small part of her research interests, as the essays collected in this book demonstrate. They have been selected by the editor from Bowe's most impressive bibliography of writings (selectively listed at the book's conclusion).

Of the sixteen essays in this book, only two are focused on stained glass. The other fourteen range widely over artists, industries and issues relating to the Arts and Crafts movement in Ireland, a part of an international trend in art in Britain, America, Scandinavia and the Slavic countries, under the initial influence of the prophetic and practical John Ruskin and William Morris.

### Identity

In all of these places the movement was connected with developing notions of identity. Here in Ireland they presented a 'handmade vision of Ireland' between 1886 and 1925, that was and remains profoundly moving.

Inevitably some individuals and groups will be familiar: An Túr Gloine, the Dun Emer Guild and the Cuala Press.

So it is the essays on lesser known figures that will stand out for many readers, for it is in these that Bowe's researches are most penetrating.

The essay on Lord Dunsany as a collector and patron of architecture is fascinating. Dunsany, though his books are still widely read in North America where they are a



Nicola Gordon Bowe

part of that world of fantasy and science fiction which has, or perhaps had, a dominant influence there.

Here in Ireland he is now very often seen merely as an eccentric Anglo-Irish man who would bring his own salt with him to dinner parties, a man of fads and fancies galore. But in these pages he emerges I think in something like the figure that impressed so many of his contemporaries, and appears as a man whose ideas and notions were so well informed by the past that they were ahead of their time in the days of the early Free State.

The essay focuses on what he did to restore Dunsany Castle. But it suggests that it is time a proper book was researched and written on the restoration and fitting out of Yeats' Thoor Ballylee, and its importance in the life and imagination of the poet. Such episodes in the life of artists and writers are often far more revealing than full length biographies, as Bowe shows with Dunsany.

Equally fascinating is the essay on Percy Oswald Reeves, a metal worker and

enamellist, whom she calls a "forgotten master of the Irish Arts and Crafts movement". Here is a new area for collectors, private and public.

One of the essays deals with the furniture of the Arts and Crafts movement in Ireland between 1894 and 1935; again a new area for collectors which is hardly explored.

**“A theme that runs through all these essays is how the work of these artists found little response in the Irish Free State and later”**

Another essay on the same theme harks back to a recent article in these pages about Edward Richards Orpen at Monksgrange, Wexford, and the company he established there between 1927 and 1932. His expert craftsman was a local carpenter who saved both the family from death and the Monksgrange itself from destruction in the troubled times of



The virgin ironing the Baby Jesus' chemise

the Civil War. Orpen's talents were many and he is an interesting figure now emerging from the fog of neglect.

Two important essays are devoted to the book in the movement, and to Sir Edward Sullivan, a leading expert on the Book of Kells, who was an important patron of well-printed and well-bound books. The heir of all this was Liam Miller at the Dolman Press.

A theme that runs through all these essays is how the work of these artists found little response in the Irish Free State and later. Again and again it is noted how creations were hard to sell, hard to find patrons for, or to have fully appreciated, facing as they did competition from Munich stained glass makers and the dominance of foreign industries.

### Appreciation

Now, however, in the light of all this scholarship on the part of Nicola Gordon Bowe,

be created, even if it is too late for the artists themselves to benefit.

The skills and achievements of Beatrice Elvery (Lady Glenavy) are described and illustrated in an evocative way. William Orpen felt that her work came to her so easily she did not work at it; but there is great charm and pathos in her pictures.

**“The fusion of nursery imagery with fanciful Irish details became familiar to many through their diffusion as prints and hangings from the Cuala Press”**

Bowe comments that “her works illustrating an attractive Virgin Mary tenderly driving the child Jesus beside

a wooden bathtub or ironing his gown beside an open window, were admired as representing 'sacred interiors' such as 'might be seen by the eyes of simple loving country folk in Ireland' “. The fusion of nursery imagery with fanciful Irish details became familiar to many through their diffusion as prints and hangings from the Cuala Press.

(Oddly, for a book so steeped in research, there is one curious error. We are told that a vase made for Dunsany in 1908 by Gordon Forsyth depicts a galleon on the high seas, with lines attributed by Bowe to the poet John Masefield, “They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep”, words which are, of course, from Psalm 107: 23-24: an error Dunsany could not have made, and which must be a



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.

## Our poets shape the places where we live

Iveragh, dominated by sea, mountains and mythology



**The Amergin Step: An Exploration in the Imagination of Iveragh**, by Paddy Bushe (Dingle Publishing Services, €30.00 / £25.00; contact Ard na Caithne, Ballyferriter, Tralee, Co Kerry; email: info@dinglepublishing.com; tel: +353 89 483 3793)

**Gabriel Fitzmaurice**

**P**addy Bushe, one of Ireland's outstanding poets both as Gaeilge and in English, has with this, his latest book, *The Amergin Step*, gifted to us a precious treasure. Beautifully written, it surveys his part of Iveragh not just topographically but also historically, mythologically, archaeologically, folklorically and geologically.

Here is a poet whose scholarship is immense, listening to the landscape, listening for the stories it tells, stories that cross barriers of language, class, literacy, stories which still inheres in the place for anybody open to listening. Listening to the landscape becomes an embodiment of story, of belief, and indeed of creative art. And in this wonderful book Paddy punctuates great scholarship with great poetry, his own and others.

### Myth

Myth, he tells us, can be at least as powerful as history in informing how we see the past, the present and the future. In this light, he begins his story with the *Leabhar Gabhála*, with the coming of Amergin and the Milesians

who landed in Ballinaskelligs Bay in the mythic past, in Ireland's Dreamtime.

From the early medieval monastic site of Cill O Buaine he proceeds to Skellig Michael, recalling the words of George Bernard Shaw who describes it as "the most fantastic and impossible rock in the world" and laments the intrusion of Hollywood into this most hallowed of sanctuaries.

In a chapter devoted to *An Glór Conallach*, the *Poetic Voice of the O'Connells of Iveragh*, we encounter, among other poets, Ellen O'Connell (Fitzsimons), daughter of the Liberator, who in 1863 published her *Darrynane in Eighteen Hundred and Thirty Two and Other Poems* which serves as Paddy's guide to Derrynane.

**“In writing *The Amergin Step*, Paddy Bushe tells us that his purpose has been redemptive - “our planet”, he writes, “is in urgent need of redemption”**

I must mention here Sean Ó Conaill, the poet, not the seachai, whose poem *Tuireamh na hÉireann / The Dirge for Ireland*, written in the mid 1650s after Cromwell's campaign of death and destruction, has been described as one of the most important poems ever written in Ireland.

And, of course, Eibh-

lin Dubh whose *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* he so majestically translates and which provides a most welcome Appendix to this book. The Dubh in her name does not signify raven black hair or any dark features, rather that she is of the Ó Duibh branch of the O'Donoghues of the Glen (Glenflesk) one of whom, Séafraidh Ó Donnchadha an Ghleanna, who died in 1678, was one of our most important Gaelic poets.

### Purpose

In writing *The Amergin Step*, Paddy Bushe tells us that his purpose has been redemptive - “our planet”, he writes, “is in urgent need of redemption.... If, like Amergin, we can imaginatively identify with - rather than simply exercise domination over - wind and sea, with falcon and flower, with stag and salmon and dew-drop, we will surely choose not to further wound ourselves”. And he concludes that “When we delve into the imaginative shaping of the places we live, we will immeasurably enrich our lives”.

*The Amergin Step*, published by the creative and innovative Dingle Publishing Services, includes maps and drawings by sculptor Holger Lonze and calligraphy by master calligrapher Timothy O'Neill which are brilliant as they are delightful. *The Amergin Step* is a joy to behold and to hold. I wholeheartedly recommend it.

**📖 Paddy Bushe is the Winner of the O'Connell Award 2024.**

## Unbecoming for the Weaker Sex?



Niamh McLaughlin (Donegal) against Ellis Roynane (Mayo) in full play.

**Unladylike: A History of Ladies Gaelic Football**, by Hayley Kilgallon (New Island, €24.95 / £19.50)

**J. Anthony Gaughan**

**B**eginning in the final quarter of the twentieth century, despite medical, religious and social objections, there was a remarkable increase in the number of girls and women participating in what were traditionally regarded as men's sports.

This trend was particularly noticeable in Gaelic football. It also occurred in rugby and soccer. It led to the establishment of the Ladies Gaelic Football Association in 1974. In this study Hayley Kilgallon provides a comprehensive account of the first fifty years of this Association.

At the outset Kilgallon lists reports of women playing Gaelic football in earlier times. She claims that the first recorded game was in St James's Park, Dublin, in September 1920. In that same month a ladies Gaelic football match was also held between teams representing Templeogue and Inchicore.

There was also a report that a Co Clare schoolteacher, Tom Garry, organised a ladies Gaelic football match between Cooraclare and a local parish, Leitrim, in 1926. The match, it seems, was refereed by Fr Michael Garry, his son. From the 1940s onwards ladies football matches featured at carnivals, festivals and fund-raising events throughout the country and were sometimes included in GAA tournaments.

### Flourished

The more women's Gaelic football flourished the clearer it became that it needed an overseeing organising body and a standard set of rules. The interest and publicity aroused by inter-county matches played by Kerry, Offaly, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford in 1971-1973 prompted the promoters of ladies' football to announce the holding of an All-Ireland Ladies Football Convention on July 5, 1974 to organise an All-Ireland Championship. The venue was Hayes's Hotel in Thurles, Co Tipperary.

The selection of the venue was a nod in the direction of the fact that the GAA was founded there in 1884. At the convention - eventually held on July 18 - the Ladies Gaelic Football Association was established with a Central Committee on which Jim Kennedy, who for many years

had been prominent in ladies football in Tipperary, was elected president.

The draw for the championship was made with the games to begin in August. The cup to be competed for was donated by Offaly-native Brendan Martin, the new assistant treasurer, as it has been ever since.

**“The aphorism mens sana in corpore sano is as relevant with regard to girls and women as with their male counterparts. Hence, the warmest of welcomes is due to the LGFA”**

At subsequent meetings in Roscommon and Portlaoise the LGFA set out its Charter, Constitution and Rules. The rules which differed from those in the GAA rule-book concerned the size of the ball and some rules of play. In this last regard, while it was permissible to pick the ball directly off the ground, the shoulder-charge and rough play were banned.

The LGFA met representatives of the General Council of the GAA in an unsuccessful attempt to gain its recognition in 1976. This recognition was won in 1983 and four years later the LGFA All-Ireland final was held in Croke Park for the first time. Ellen O'Rourke became the LGFA's first member of staff when she became CEO in 1997. The Countdown clock was introduced to the game in 1998. Concentrated but unsuccessful efforts were begun in 2015 to amalgamate the Camogie Board and the LGFA with the GAA. The discussions to this end continue.

Kerry and Cork have been the most successful teams in the LGFA All Ireland County Championship; Kerry with 12 wins, Cork with 11. Waterford club, Ballymacarbry, is the most successful LGFA club. Mary Joe Curran (Kerry) and Cora Staunton (Mayo) are tied for the most All-Stars at 11 awards each. The attendance at the LGFA All-Ireland finals in 2019 was 56,114.

The aphorism *mens sana in corpore sano* is as relevant with regard to girls and women as with their male counterparts. Hence, the warmest of welcomes is due to the LGFA, its world-wide membership of almost a quarter of a million and this splendid lavishly illustrated and meticulously researched account of such a remarkable achievement.



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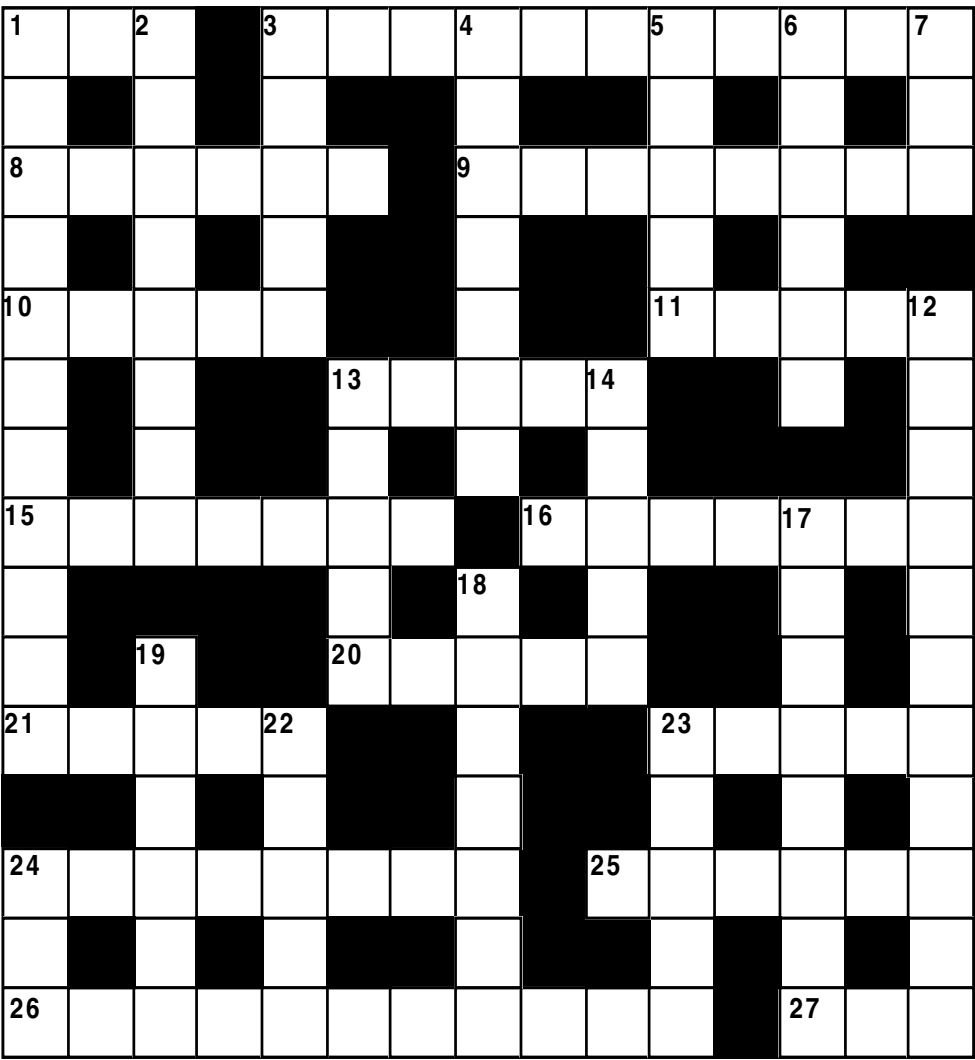
Gordius 683

Across

- 1 Spider's trap (3)
- 3 Harmful substance in the bloodstream (11)
- 8 Language (6)
- 9 Embassy official (8)
- 10 Moorland (5)
- 11 Digit on the hand (5)
- 13 Quoted (5)
- 15 An addition to a will (7)
- 16 Derisive cry (7)
- 20 Wintry precipitation (5)
- 21 Get as far as (5)
- 23 White poplar (5)
- 24 Deduced, opined (8)
- 25 & 26 Fresh ideas that come to the mind from God (6,11)
- 27 Equipment (3)

Down

- 1 Shaman (5-6)
- 2 Bound wounds (8)
- 3 Sofa (5)
- 4 Person who abhors new technology (7)
- 5 Words on a tenancy ad (2,3)
- 6 Hearsay, unconfirmed story (6)
- 7 Biblical character whose wife was turned to salt (3)
- 12 Warlike, aggressive (11)
- 13 French fries (5)



- 14 Unedited copy, or in America, conscription (5)
- 17 Printed star (8)
- 18 Green gemstone (7)
- 19 Sign of the Zodiac, The Bull (6)
- 22 Caribbean country that borders the Domini-
- can Republic (5)
- 23 Extraterrestrial (5)
- 24 Travel on snow or water (3)

SOLUTIONS, SEPTEMBER 26

GORDIUS No. 682

Across

- 1 Anthracite 6 Agra 10 Apron 11 Mausoleum 12 Giblets 15 Linen 17 Hype 18 Rain 19 Cries 21 Ballast 23 Hydra 24 Acne 25 Dime 26 Eased 28 Rampage 33 Chipboard 34. Raise 35 Need 36 White smoke

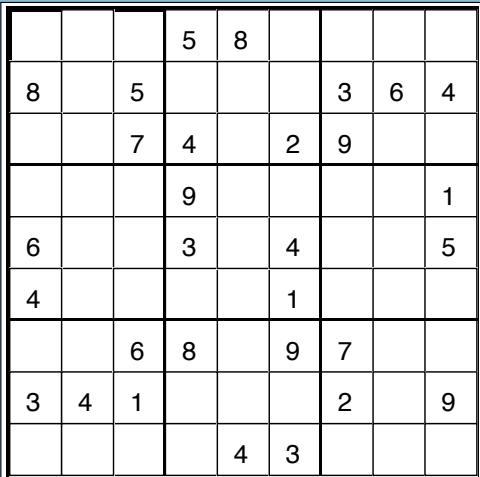
Down

- 1 Ahab 2 Terrified 3 Renal 4 Comet 5 Tour 7 Green 8 Administer 9 Collect 13 Elba 14 Shelter 16. Archdeacon 20 Incognito 21 Bad debt 22 Seam 27 Spine 29 Audit 30 Paris 31 Wash 32 Sere

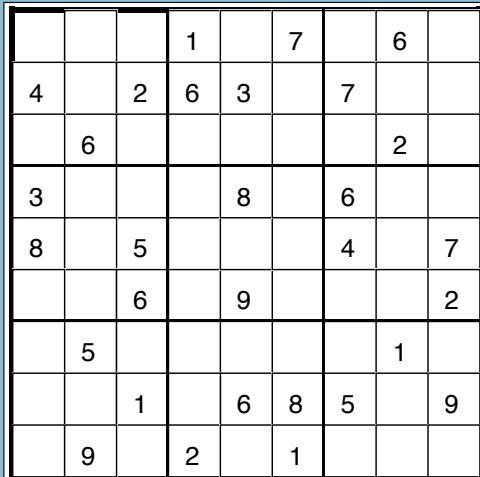
Sudoku Corner

553

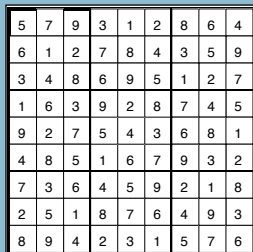
Easy



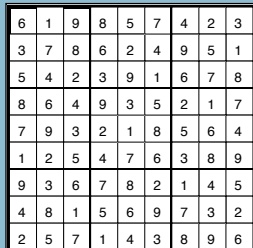
Hard



Last week's Easy 552



Last week's Hard 552





Notebook

Fr Vincent Sherlock



# Having faith and showing kindness

**The driver was not having a good day!** First he was annoyed by two children on bicycles and then was seriously irked by an elderly driver whose car stalled at traffic lights and, to cap it all, another motorist made it almost impossible for him to overtake. The children, the elderly driver and the road-grabbing motorist, were left in no doubt that they had all done wrong. Horn blared, voice was raised, and gestures were offered.

All the while, the driver was unaware of the unmarked Garda car behind and when the siren sounded and lights were flashed, the motorist came to an angry halt. On approach, the Garda was reprimanded by the driver: "What are you stopping me for? You saw how much of the road those children took up on their bicycles and that old one at the traffic lights should not be on the road. As for that last one, I had to follow for nearly two miles before I could pass him out. And you stop me? What about the others?" The Garda said, "I know, it's just that there are two bumper stickers on the back of this car – one reads 'I LOVE JESUS', and the other 'JESUS IS MY GUIDE' – so we



assumed this car must be stolen!"

Not my story, of course, but I like the point it makes. In one of the readings at a recent Sunday Mass, we were reminded that to say we have faith and not show kindness is a contradiction. It belies the life we should live if we are truly people of faith. In practical terms, we are told, that it is not enough to say to a poor person, "Now mind yourself and keep warm" if we don't do something concrete to allow for the minding and the warming.

I remember once seeing a man on a street. He had all the hallmarks

of a heavy drinker, he sat on an old blanket and in tattered clothes. At his side was a small container, into which he hoped a few coins might be dropped, and on it he had written – in large and urgent lettering, 'DRINK'. I smiled as I made a modest contribution and he smiled too. He was saying to me and anyone who chose to help him that day, I will be using this to buy drink. Of course, there is a deeper truth here, around the man needing help but there is honesty in it too. Sometimes we can justify not helping someone because we know the help might

not be well used. There is a practicality in that we cannot deny, but maybe sometimes we just need to help people where they are. There are times it may simply be enough just to give the gift and leave how it is used to the one receiving.

That is not to say that we cannot be, and are not, taken advantage of. That, to me, is different and we have a right to protect ourselves from those who use us without respect, gratitude or sincerity.

We need maybe to fine tune our antennae of kindness to try to make a genuine judgment call around who is sincere and who is using us. This is not easily done and sometimes we get it wrong on both fronts but at the day's end, if we can say we tried our best, that is literally the best we can do.

We are living in a time when many call out to us to be charitably aware and there are times when this puts undue pressure on us. All we can do is try our best, giving when and what we can whilst being grateful that maybe we have the bit to give.

The bumper sticker must correspond with the one in the driver's seat.

## Bumper stickers and Morris Minors...

Thinking of the above. A priest friend, in his early days of ministry was appointed to the diocesan college. An old, retired priest lived there and he drove a Morris Minor. On the chrome back bumper, he had a bumper sticker which read 'PRAY THE ROSARY'. My friend put a matching sticker on the other side, unknown to an unnoticed by the priest. For many months, he drove around the town with the two stickers: 'PRAY THE ROSARY' and 'DANCE YOUR A\*\* OFF TO TWEED'!



LITTLE WAY MISSIONARY SISTERS ASSISTING DISPLACED FAMILIES

## The Little Way Missionary Priests, Sisters and Seminarians in Myanmar urgently need our help

Many of our supporters will be aware of the difficult situation and hardships facing the Little Way Priests and Sisters of St Therese at present in Myanmar. These two religious congregations were founded by Msgr Nicholas Mang Thang, when Bishop of Hakha, with the assistance of the late Miss Mary Doohan, foundress of The Little Way Association, in Myanmar. There are now more than 200 Sisters, 27 priests, six major seminarians and 77 minor seminarians in various dioceses in Myanmar.

Mgr Nicholas urgently appeals for help to support them. The young men are Myanmar's future priests, carrying the Gospel and message of Christ's love to people who would otherwise have little or no opportunity of hearing it. The Sisters serve the poor, the sick, the displaced and the uneducated, they bear witness where the love of God and neighbour can be recognised far and wide. They are doing the work which St Therese longed to do, and need our help.

**Can you spare a donation for the Sisters?  
Even the smallest donation will help them.**

*ANY gift you can send, large or small, to support the Sisters work amongst the needy and poorest of the poor, or to help train and educate a young man for the missionary priesthood, will be most gratefully received. Mgr Nicholas, the Little Way Priests, Sisters and seminarians pray fervently and daily for our donors and their intentions. Please pray for them, for Myanmar and for all its people, in the ongoing conflict.*



*"I would travel to every land to preach Thy name, O my Beloved, and raise on heathen soil the glorious standard of Thy Cross."*

— St Therese —

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It was St Therese's vocation to be "love in the heart of the Church, and to assist priests, missionaries and the entire Church", and this has been the continuing inspiration of The Little Way Association. Ever since the death of St Therese on 30 September 1897, countless priests and missionaries have given witness to the extraordinary way in which she has helped them. Let us pray for the fulfilment of her desire that the Gospel message would be spread throughout the world.

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