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Thursday, February 13, 2025 €3.00 (Stg £2.70) The-Irish-Catholic-Newspaper @IrishCathNews www.irishcatholic.com

Christian marriage is not a 'Cupid candy floss spirituality'

Carmelite Prior says Christian love is sacrifice and sacramental

Chai Brady

The custodian priest of St Valentine's relics in Ireland has warned that the Christian idea of marriage as sacramental and not just romantic emotions is being lost as the "world markets the idea that marriage can come and go".

"The worry I have with St Valentine is that he gets mixed up with Cupid, this strange, almost candy floss spirituality of arrows shooting through the sky – that is not Christian marriage".

"Marriage is all about sacrifice... It's not just saying, 'I want to spend my life with you'—it's about getting to know you more each day and deepening the mystery of marriage" said Fr James Eivers O. Carm, the Prior of Whitefriar Street Church in Dublin which has housed the relics of St Valentine since 1836.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* Fr Eivers added: "It is not the priest who marries—the marriage is the sacrament between the two. Each day, what we see here in Whitefriar Street is the realisation that a married couple's life is sacramentalised – they are the sacrament to each other. We turn to the saints, these powerful intercessors, to help us in our vocation."

Fr Eivers said that married couples come to Whitefriar Street Church to renew their commitment to marriage, and many come to pray before the relic.

"We also have a book of intentions, and if you read through it, you will see that marriage is not plain sailing—it's sacrifice, it's work," Fr Eivers said.

"People committed to their vocation realise that to make it work, they need God's grace. Christian marriage

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All you need is love



The shrine venerating St Valentine at Whitefriar Street Church in Dublin's inner city. Photo: Chai Brady

Irish Govt must begin inquiry into Omagh bomb - O'Loan

Staff reporter

The former Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland has called on the Irish Government to establish its own inquiry into the Omagh bombing to create a clear picture of the tragedy.

Baroness Nuala O'Loan investigated the August 15, 1998 incident in which 29 people and two unborn children died, describing it as the "single worst terrorist incident since the start of The Troubles".

Following the beginning of the substantive Omagh Bombing inquiry, established by the UK government, Baroness O'Loan, writing in this paper said: "The Irish Government has promised full cooperation with the British Inquiry but has not established its own inquiry into what happened in Ireland

before the bombing. It should do so."

During Baroness O'Loan's investigations it was discovered, among many other findings, that those responsible for the bomb – the RIRA (Real Irish Republican Army) – had been operating across the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and that "there is evidence that the bomb was made in Ireland and driven into Northern Ireland".

Writing in this paper, Baroness O'Loan said: "These terrorists were working across the border. They were able to do so, despite the existence of anti-terrorist activity in the UK and Ireland.

"This is an opportunity to learn from the past, to care for the victims and survivors of Omagh. We need to be able to reassure them and the public in

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David Quinn

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Special Supplement

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Christian marriage is not a 'Cupid candy floss spirituality'

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does not make sense without God's grace, so they write, through the intercession of St Valentine, 'please help my marriage.'

He said that "people also give thanks for prayers that have been heard – God does hear our prayers".

"Love is an act of will. It is something you choose every day. In Christian marriage, you say, 'I choose to love you even when it's difficult, even when things are not perfect'. That is what makes it sacra-

mental. Emotions come and go, but true love is deeper. It is about self-giving, about sacrifice, about living out your vocation in a way that reflects God's love," Fr Eivers added.

St Valentine, a 3rd Century priest, lived during Emperor Claudius II's rule. The emperor forbade soldiers from marrying, believing single men made better warriors. St Valentine defied this law by secretly marrying couples. For this, he was arrested, tortured, and executed on February 14, 269 AD.

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Irish Govt must begin inquiry into Omagh bomb - O'Loan

» **Continued from Page 1**

general that we know what happened, that we have identified how the Real IRA were able to operate with impunity in 1998."

She added: "We have a responsibility to those so terribly affected by the Omagh Bomb to provide the most complete picture possible. This will emerge most effectively if there are two inquiries running side by side sharing all relevant information, with one aim; to establish what was known, whether the bomb could have been prevented.

"People need to know, above all, that their governments will not cover up at times like this, but will act with courage and integrity."

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St Oliver Plunkett didn't succumb to despair... neither should we

Staff reporter

The 400th anniversary of the birth of the martyred St Oliver Plunkett was celebrated at a service on Wednesday in Drogheda.

Fr Eugene Sweeney PP said: "Oliver Plunkett lived at a remarkably difficult and chaotic time. His resilience, courage and constant efforts for peace and justice are truly inspiring, and therefore it is appropriate to honour his memory not just in Ireland but further afield. We warmly welcome all to the National Shrine of St Oliver at St Peter's Church, Drogheda, in this special year to honour the martyred Archbishop. We urge pilgrims to pray for peace throughout the world through his intercession, to share with the Lord in the Saint's presence all their hopes and joys, and leave to him their stresses and sufferings, trials and tribulations. We are honoured that St Peter's Church has been designated a Jubilee Church in this Jubilee Year of Hope. St Oliver Plunkett did not succumb to despair, and neither should we 400 years later."

Discernment period for lay ministry commences in Kildare and Leighlin



Participants on the opening of the discernment period for lay ministry in The Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin on February 7.

Renata Steffens

The Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin is running a two-year diploma in Pastoral Ministry for lay people. Thirty one people started the period of discernment with a gathering on the evening of February 7. This period will end in June and the course starts in September.

The programme, announced in October 2024, had a series of information

evenings in November. "We had huge interest in it, and we have brought 31 people into a period of discernment, which began last weekend and will run until June," said Patrick Roche, Diocesan Director of Parish Development.

The course "is a combination of lectures and pastoral placement," Mr Roche said. "It is run by the school for Mission and Ministry at St Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth, in conjunction with Mount St Anne's."

Mr Roche said this is "historic for our diocese because it is the first time that we have offered formal training in pastoral ministry to lay people, and it is a significant investment for the diocese in the furthering of lay roles."

"The course is broad but will allow participants to identify areas of ministry that that they may have a particular interest in, which will become apparent as they go through the course," the Diocesan Director concluded.

New book helps Catholics to truly 'partake in the Mass'

Renata Milán Morales

A Benedictine monk based in Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick, has recently published a new book, *The people's celebration of the Eucharist*.

Fr Fintan Lyons explained to *The Irish Catholic* that the idea to write this book

came from a series of questions that some lay people have asked him on the Eucharist. "I was trying to explain to people what the Eucharist is about. And it seems to have gone down well because it's in its second printing."

"My feeling is that people are still going to Mass. But they're doing so based on

some older understanding of the Mass. To put it in very simple terms, they think of the Mass just as Calvary," said Fr Fintan. "There's no point in people's minds of the Mass being about not only the death of Christ, but the resurrection, the glorification, the ascension of Christ."

The book, as Fr Fintan

explained, is also meant to help the Synodal process of the people taking charge of churches. "People must partake in the Mass in a deeper way... Vatican II tried to get people to participate, to do the readings, to bring up the gifts, that kind of thing. But that stayed on a surface level. Compared to what was really needed."

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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, Dublin.

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'AI is a tool for an inclusive Church' says deaf chaplain

Renata Steffens

Accessible liturgies are an "absolute imperative", said the Chaplain for the Deaf Community in Munster, John Patrick Doherty. "Today, with Irish Sign Language (ISL) officially recognised as the first language of the Deaf Community in Ireland since 2017, there is an even greater responsibility to ensure that this language is fully integrated into the

life of the Church."

It "is not just about accessibility—it is about belonging. It is about ensuring that the Deaf Community can experience the fullness of the liturgy and feel truly part of the Body of Christ," the Chaplain said.

To guarantee accessible Masses and Services, the Chaplain said there are other tools, in case ISL is not available. If the priest is not fluent and no interpreter is available, speech-to-text software is a good

alternative. To "display the prayers, readings, and homily on a monitor or screen in real time," he said, "allows deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals to follow along."

Mr Doherty said there are "exciting and promising" recent advancements in AI-driven sign language translation technologies. "These developments have the potential to revolutionise communication for the Deaf Community, making real-time conversations and trans-

lations more accessible in a variety of settings."

For the Church, the Chaplain said, these advancements could open-up new possibilities for "making liturgies, catechesis, and pastoral care more accessible."

He said: "Imagine a future where AI-driven sign language translation can assist priests, catechists, and chaplains in reaching deaf individuals in real-time, ensuring that no one is excluded from the life of

the Church."

Mr Doherty encourages parishioners to help their parishes to become more accessible. "Whether it's advocating for accessible liturgies, learning more about the needs of the Deaf and blind communities, or simply fostering a spirit of welcome and understanding, each of us can play a role in building a Church that truly reflects the love of Christ."

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Sacred Heart Statue arrives in Donegal



One of the faithful venerates the Sacred Heart statue blessed by the Pope in St Eunan's Cathedral, Letterkenny.

Staff Reporter

One of the Sacred Heart Statues blessed by Pope Francis have arrived in Raphoe Diocese. The statue was first displayed in St Eunan's Cathedral, Letterkenny during Mass on the evening of February 7 and remains available for public veneration until today, when it moves on to Kilcar.

The Votive Mass was celebrated by Msgr Kevin Gillespie, who said that "like any image that we have in our homes, it can become commonplace, something we are used to." However, he reminded people "if we were to look at it carefully, it reminds us day in and day out that the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is not only burning for us but should be burning within us."

In a statement, Raphoe Diocese said, "the devotion to the Sacred Heart has been central to our faith for centuries." And that the visit of the statues is "a moment to renew our hearts in the love of Christ."

During his homily in the Mass, Fr Shane Gallagher, who works in the role of promoting devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus within the ecclesiastical province of Armagh, expressed his hopes that the statue visit will inspire many to return to prayer and devotion.

Fr Gallagher also invited parishes throughout Armagh

to welcome the Sacred Heart. "This pilgrimage serves as a sign of Pope Francis' encouragement for a renewed love for Jesus and a call for deeper faith."

The diocese said, "as we kneel before the statue and reflect on its meaning, may we ask ourselves: 'How have I loved today in imitation of Christ?' and if we struggle to

love as He does, 'let us ask for the gift of His grace, flowing bountifully from the same Heart.'"

The statues are touring Ireland as part of the Jubilee year. Each Irish province will receive one statue, which will be venerated in the dioceses and parishes until June, the month dedicated to the Sacred Heart.

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Irish religious believers face 'polite persecution'

Pedro Esteva

Many of the faithful in Ireland are facing 'polite persecution', according to a Belfast-based priest.

Speaking at a Mass for persecuted Christians on *RTÉ One* this past Sunday, Fr Tim Bartlett warned that religious freedom—one of the cornerstones of "a genuinely diverse, pluralist, and free society"—is increasingly under threat, even in nations that claim to uphold tolerance.

"Sadly, despite the welcome progress in respect for so many other areas of human rights in the world today, research shows that respect for the right to religious freedom is

under increasing threat, even in countries which pride themselves as being exemplars of respect for tolerance and diversity," Fr Bartlett warned.

While Christians in many parts of the world endure active persecution, Fr Bartlett noted that in Ireland believers often feel pressured to keep their faith private. Public expressions of Christianity, he said, are now seen as "politically and culturally impolite".

Fr Bartlett called on Christians to embrace their faith openly, regardless of societal pressure or fear of awkwardness. He echoed Pope Francis' invitation for believers to become 'Pilgrims of Hope' in the Jubilee Year 2025—a call to live out faith with courage, conviction, and joy.



Deacon Don Devaney is a Permanent Deacon in the Archdiocese of Dublin, Ireland. He is married with seven adult children and eleven grandchildren. He is Chairman of the Divine Mercy Conference in Ireland for the last 33 years. He is a presenter with Radio Maria Ireland of the Divine Mercy Hour, God's Healing Power Hour, The Healing Power of the Sacraments, Can we Be Saints, The Cell Communities (for prisoners) and a weekly Catechesis Programme Seeking Truth. He Holds a MSc in Education and Guidance Counselling and an MA in Pastoral Theology and Chaplaincy.

Aidan Byrne, B.Div. (Hons.), MA (Maryvale, UK), is a member of St. Patrick's Prayer Group in Co. Carlow. He has been a co-presenter on Radio Maria Ireland since 2023. Aidan is married and is engaged in a full-time prayer apostolate. His work takes him all over the world as a Consultant Lecturer, and in his apostolate of healing and liberation.



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Pupils with special needs are affected most by teacher shortage says expert

Chai Brady

A priority for the new Minister for Education must be to tackle chronic teacher shortages as it is causing schools to “struggle” to help children, particularly those with special needs, according to the Catholic Education Partnership (CEP).

Alan Hynes, CEO of the CEP told *The Irish Catholic* that “from the point of view of a Catholic ethos, if we can’t properly secure the welfare of kids with special education needs because of the lack of teachers – that will have to be a significant priority”.

A recent survey conducted by the

Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) of principals and deputy principals in 111 secondary schools found 75% of schools advertised positions in the previous six months for which no teacher applied, 64% have unfilled vacancies due to recruitment and retention difficulties, and 20% have been forced to drop subjects.

Mr Hynes said: “Schools are struggling to deal with the lack of teachers in the system, in post-primary several schools are cutting back on subject areas as well. If Catholics see education as being for the good of the person and a key contributor to the common good, well then we need to make sure people are adequately edu-

cated, we can’t do that without qualified teachers.”

He insisted that there should not be Government complacency in the area because of falling pupil numbers – that the situation will take care of itself due to changing demographics in Ireland.

“The teacher shortage issue is having an impact today on students,” Mr Hynes said. “It is a key issue of urgency within the Irish education system, primary and post-primary, and it is having real life impacts on the quality of education we’re giving to young people – particularly in special ed.

Mr Hynes said the Department of

Education must speak to school leavers, graduates and young people in the profession to find out what makes the profession unattractive.

“We have to ask ourselves why so many of our young teachers are opting to go abroad. What is it about the terms and conditions of employment here? The way to do that is to actually talk to those people, to understand why they have made the decisions they have made,” he said.

“That means a lot of work and it will eventually mean facing up to some awkward truths and making some difficult decisions about how to attract more people into the profession and to keep them in there.”

NEWS IN BRIEF

Christ and culture in Galway

In Galway this weekend a conference is taking place to discuss the intersection of the Christian faith and Culture. The February 15 event will feature a range of speakers including poet and spiritual director, Fr Paul Murray OP and Dominican friar, Fr Conor McDonough OP.

The central question is: How does the Christian faith shape the world around it, and how, in turn, is it shaped by the world?

To explore this question, the event will cover topics such as Christianity’s relationship with culture, the state of Christian culture today, and the role of story and history in Irish Christianity.

Teenager pleads guilty to attempted murder of Galway army chaplain

A 17-year-old has plead guilty to the attempted murder of Defence Forces chaplain Fr Paul Murphy, who was stabbed multiple times at Renmore Barracks in Galway on August 15, 2024.

During a brief arraignment at the Central Criminal Court, the teenager plead guilty to the charge. Due to his age, the defendant cannot be identified.

Justice Paul McDermott ordered a probation report and adjourned the case to March 7 for sentencing arrangements. Fr Murphy, who was attacked while in his car, received hospital treatment and later thanked the public for their support.

‘Children should be afforded the Right to Hope’, Mary’s Meals

Mary’s Meals founder and CEO Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow told world leaders at the recent first World Leaders Summit on Children’s Rights in Rome that it would cost just over \$3 billion USD per year to serve a daily school meal to those children most in need in the world’s lowest-income countries.

Following Monday’s day-long debate and discussions, political leaders and representatives of countries and faiths from around the world signed a Concluding Declaration, stating that, among other things: the rights of children are still widely violated, and that difference must not become the norm.

After listening to the Mary’s Meals founder, and his fellow contributors, Pope Francis announced that he will give continuity to this commitment and promote it. He will prepare an Apostolic Exhortation dedicated to children’s rights.

Celebrating 100 years of Weddings at Newman University Church

Renata Milán Morales

For the third year in a row, Newman University Church, located in Co. Dublin, will be celebrating couples that have been married in the same church for over 100 years. A special Mass will be hosted for the couples on February 16, followed by a reception with champagne and chocolates. During this

month, Newman University is displaying photographs of couples on their wedding day. 350 photographs have already been submitted.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Gary Chamberland shared that, “last year was delightful. We had about 400 people here. We were packed and there were some beautiful stories. One woman had come back alone because

her husband had passed during the year, but she still came back because the place and the event meant so much to her. An elderly couple from Sligo. They took the train in for the day.”

“What’s important to remember is that this is about families and couples. Couples could be married two and three or 50 or 60 years. These couples can

show the outcome of that life... You can see how love has transformed them. And it’s just wonderful to see them,” said Fr Chamberland.

The priest shared that he notices that very few people have any understanding of what marriage is going to be like before they get into

it. “There are difficult times and growth comes through them. Most people standing at 50 or 60 years married would look at some young people today and say, ‘stop worrying and just do it’. You continue to form as a person in the relationship, in the marriage.”



Granddaughter and grandmother going through couples’ photographs in Newman University Church, Co. Dublin.

Fr Willie Doyle SJ remembered at the Holy See

Staff reporter

Irish military chaplains, clergy and lay people recently gathered in Rome for the Jubilee of the Armed Forces, Police and Security Personnel. During this, Fr Willie Doyle SJ, who was killed in WWI while serving, was remembered.

Bishop Tom Deenihan of Meath addressed those present at the event: “It is remarkable that such a gathering would be hosted one hundred and eight years after Doyle’s death by both the Irish and British Ambassadors to the Holy See. There is a certain unity to this celebration which transcends nationality, politics, popular perception and creed. That is as it should be, and it is very

much appreciated.”

Bishop Deenihan continued, “Doyle was a man of intense spirituality which saw him, as well as risking and sacrificing his own life, as a spiritual director encouraging many towards priesthood and religious life... the heroic desire of Doyle to serve and promote God’s Kingdom found ultimate expression on the battlefield when he was ministering to soldiers.”

During this address the bishop explained that “The cause is progressing well. The theological investigation is complete, the historical commission is almost, and the Tribunal is making great progress. I expect to be closing the Diocesan stage this year.”

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Study says - More immigration means more religious practice

Over all the European countries – and North America – migration and immigration are among the most persistent topics which concern the public. In the crucial German general election, coming up on February 23, it's the prime issue. The French are obsessed with the topic. In Britain, Nigel Farage's 'Reform' party – deeply critical of mass emigration – is consistently surging ahead in the polls, destroying the Tories and eating away at Labour's base too.

Importance

And it is a subject of importance in Ireland too, especially in light of a severe housing crisis. And, some-



Mary Kenny

times, anxiety about public disorder.

“It should be possible to have free conversations about this without charges of ‘racism’, ‘far-right politics’ or ‘fascism’”

Immigration issues will be with us all for some time to come, and the pros and cons argued. One aspect that I often see mentioned is – “does a society change its

identity under the weight of mass immigration?” It should be possible to have free conversations about this without charges of ‘racism’, ‘far-right politics’ or ‘fascism’.

Impact

Yet there are surprising developments in examining the impact of immigration on host societies. A new British study, carried out by the official Office of National Statistics, predicts that ten million more immigrants will be absorbed into Britain over the next twenty years.

And one salient outcome is that this development will



The 16th, 17th (St Patrick's Day), and 18th March

“New migrants are usually more devout, and they will increase religious sensibilities within the host society. Professor Davie thinks that the secularist mindset will need to adjust and change”

Freedom of speech

Like many brilliant tekkies, 'First Buddy' Elon Musk seems an odd character. At 53, he jumps around like an adolescent. He sometimes makes wild statements about matters he doesn't know much about.

It is reported that he has dyspraxia, which affects the co-ordination of movements – perhaps accounting for hyper-active appearances on public platforms. His genius for engineering and building rockets might perversely contribute to some of his rasher impulses – “act fast and break things” is said to be the motto of creative disrupters.

In his favour, he completely supports freedom of speech, and doesn't object to anything said about him, even on his own social medium, 'X'.

And he does something I've never seen a professional man do before – he takes his young son to work, the lad sitting atop his shoulders.

He is a fervent advocate of pro-natalism – constantly saying humanity needs more babies. He has twelve children (one deceased from a cot death) and says about fatherhood: “Of anything in my life, I would say kids by far make me happiest.”

Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco has applauded Musk's pro-child views as “lovely”, but he has added a coda: “But marry first and love your babies' mom too.”

Mr Musk's approach to marriage seems somewhat staccato – there seem to have been four marriages, including a divorce, a remarriage and a re-divorce. It doesn't look as though he's a candidate for taking the Archbishop's marital advice.

Still, I think we must applaud Musk's pro-natalism. He has the vision to see that societies perish when births fall, and he has the platform to make this point.

I'm in two minds about the annual jamboree involving politicians travelling abroad for St Patrick's Day. On the one hand, it's always been impressive to note just how universal St Patrick's Day is – bells ringing out in 800 churches around the world for our national saint. That puts Ireland on the map – why not trumpet it?

Moreover, there's always been a certain amount of “paddywackery” involved in the cel-

ebrations. Roistering and revels have also been associated with the March 17 tradition: there's a wonderful painting by the Scottish artist Erskine Nicol in Dublin's National Gallery of St Patrick's celebration in 1856. Even in that sombre post-Famine era, there was dancing and bibulous partying, held in the grounds of the church.

But the 'transactional' – that Trumpian word – element of the political Patrick's Day assignments is now so blatantly utilitar-

ian and instrumental. The presentation of shamrock at the White House is, on the American side, about the Irish-American vote; on the Irish side, it's been about attracting financial investment. The discourse over this year's event is more than usually overt about whose material interest is best served.

It would be nice if the significance of Patrick's spiritual and civilisational legacy was occasionally mentioned in the public realm.

make the country more religious.

Reversed

Grace Davie, sociology professor at the University of Exeter, says that the tendency of decline in religious practice in Britain is being reversed through immigration. New migrants are usually more

devout, and they will increase religious sensibilities within the host society. Professor Davie thinks that the secularist mindset will need to adjust and change.

To some extent, such changes are already happening. Perhaps surprisingly, London turns out to be the most religious part of

Britain – because it is most cosmopolitan, and attracts the young.

This pattern will surely be repeated in Ireland: ironically, the political class most inclined to the left, and most eager for secularisation, may find itself faced with an increased religious social presence.

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Martyred St Valentine is not Cupid



The Church presents an ideal vision of marriage but it must also minister to people in their real struggles, **Chai Brady** hears

As Ireland faces demographic challenges with fewer people getting married and fewer babies being born, there is an open question as to what the future may hold.

A recent study by the Iona Institute highlighted on last week's front page revealed that religious couples have significantly higher fertility rates than their secular counterparts. The report shows that practicing Catholics in Ireland have an average of 2.1 children per fam-

ily, compared to just 1.4 among non-religious couples.

This suggests that faith communities play a vital, yet often unseen, role in sustaining family life. Religious groups that uphold marriage and family values are expected to form the future core of the population. Amid this, Whitefriar Street Church in Dublin remains a focal point for couples seeking to strengthen their commitment to marriage, at least on February 14. Home to the relics of St Valentine, the church attracts visitors of all ages who recognise the value of sacramental marriage.

“Christian marriage does not make sense without God’s grace”

Fr James Eivers O. Carm., Prior of Whitefriar Street Church, spoke to *The Irish Catholic* about St Valentine's legacy. “Some people come here because they want to renew that commitment of marriage,” says Fr Eivers. “We get a lot of married couples praying in front of the relic. We

also have a book of intentions, and if you read through it, you will see that marriage is not plain sailing—it's sacrifice, it's work.”

Fr Eivers continued: “People committed to their vocation realise that to make it work, they need God's grace. Christian marriage does not make sense without God's grace, so they write, through the intercession of St Valentine, ‘please help my marriage.’”

Martyr for marriage

St Valentine, a 3rd Century priest, lived during Emperor Claudius II's rule. The emperor forbade soldiers from marrying, believing single men made better warriors. St Valentine defied this law by secretly marrying couples. For this, he was arrested, tortured, and executed on February 14, 269 AD.

“Why is St Valentine a martyr? Why is he the saint we look to for Christian marriage?” asks Fr Eivers. “Because of that sense of sacrifice. People pray before the shrine, seeking guidance in their marriage. The world markets the idea that marriage can come and go, the IKEA idea of marriage. But it is not plain sailing.”

Fr Eivers warned: “The worry I have with St Valentine

is that he gets mixed up with Cupid, this strange, almost candy floss spirituality of arrows shooting through the sky – that is not Christian marriage.”

He continued: “Marriage is all about sacrifice. Aquinas says the vocation to marriage is about really willing the good of the other. It's not just saying, ‘I want to spend my life with you’—it's about getting to know you more each day and deepening the mystery of marriage. It is not the priest who marries—the marriage is the sacrament between the two.

“Each day, what we see here in Whitefriar Street is the realisation that a married couple's life is sacramentalised – they are the sacrament to each other. We turn to the saints, these powerful intercessors, to help us in our vocation.”

St Valentine's relics

Whitefriar Street Church has housed St Valentine's relics since 1836. Pope Gregory XVI gifted them to Fr John Spratt, a Carmelite priest known for his charitable work in Dublin. After ministering in Rome, Fr Spratt received the relics as a sign of esteem, symbolising solidarity between the Irish Church and Rome.

Following Fr Spratt's death in 1871, the relics were placed in storage. In the 1950s, devotion to St Valentine was revived, and a new shrine was built, featuring a reliquary containing the saint's remains. The shrine, designed by sculptor Irene Broe, depicts St Valentine in red vestments, holding the palm of martyrdom.

“Many couples visit to receive blessings. We also welcome individuals, tour groups, school groups, scouting groups, and university students,” said Fr Eivers.

Guidance

Fr Eivers noted that people visit for different reasons. “Some come because they have lost a spouse, and that love is still there. There's still that profound connection with someone you've spent your whole life with. There's an element of coming and praying to St Valentine for consolation and healing.”

He said the depth of faith present at the shrine is evident, particularly when looking at the book of intentions. “One of the things with the book to St Valentine is that people also give thanks for prayers that have been heard—God does



The shrine venerating St Valentine at Whitefriar Street Church in Dublin's inner city.

hear our prayers.”

Catholic Marriage in Ireland

The Iona Institute report also found that religious married couples report higher levels of marital satisfaction. Over 75% of practicing Catholic couples surveyed said their faith played a key role in sustaining their marriage, compared to just 40% of non-religious couples.

“He stands as a witness to and a defender of love”

Fr Eivers said that while the Church presents an ideal vision of marriage, it must also minister to people in their real struggles. “The Mendicants, in terms of religious orders, are very much with the people. There's a sense of wanting to minister where they are at—there is the ideal the Church puts forward and then there is the reality in which people live.”

In an era where marriage faces societal challenges, Fr Eivers reiterated the importance of faith, “People pray before the shrine, primarily seeking guidance in their marriage. Marriage is not about perfection; it's about commitment and choosing to love even when

things are difficult.”

He added that marriage requires resilience and a willingness to grow, saying: “Love is an act of will. It is something you choose every day. In Christian marriage, you say, ‘I choose to love you even when it's difficult, even when things are not perfect.’ That is what makes it sacramental.”

He pointed said that nowadays people sometimes view love as merely an emotion. “Emotions come and go, but true love is deeper. It is about self-giving, about sacrifice, about living out your vocation in a way that reflects God's love,” Fr Eivers said.

St Valentine, as a martyr, can continue to inspire the faithful, according to Fr Eivers.

“He paid the ultimate price for his efforts by being executed. He stands as a witness to and a defender of love and marriage as well as freedom of religion,” he said.

Fr Eivers stated that people today can draw strength from St Valentine's story as he “reminds us that love is not always easy, that it sometimes requires courage. But it is worth it”.

Living tradition

As couples and individuals seek strength in their vocation, St Valentine can be an example to them. While St Valentine's feast day has become highly commercialised, the shrine at Whitefriar Street Church stands as a reminder of the power of sacrifice and faith. Each year, the tradition continues, with visitors from across Ireland and beyond coming to seek the intercession of the saint who gave his life for love and marriage.

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“Love is an act of will. It is something you choose every day. In Christian marriage, you say, ‘I choose to love you even when it's difficult, even when things are not perfect.’ That is what makes it sacramental”

We are all called to be 'living sacrifices'



Martina Purdy

It was a simple enough question, posed by a priest who had entered religious life as a youth around 50 years ago. "What is a priest's 'job'?" My first thought was: bringing the body and blood of Christ to us through the power of the Holy Spirit, the greatest 'job' in the world. But that wasn't the answer he was looking for. The clue was the morning's scripture, the letter to the Hebrews. "To offer sacrifice."

"What is sacrifice?" the priest then asked. It is one of those words we hear all the time but do not give much thought to. A sacrifice is in fact an offering to God. The words of St Paul came to me: "living sacrifice".

Venerable Fulton Sheen had his own description for the life of a priest and did not sugarcoat it. The American bishop would tell seminarians: be prepared to be "a divine victim". That is, to share in Christ's cross and, like him, to be rejected, vilified, falsely accused, persecuted, tortured and nailed to a cross.

Not exactly something we all yearn for, is it?

Vocation

These thoughts were dominating my mind when the priest asked another question: "Why do you think that, in all the years that this community has been here, in this place, we have had no vocations from this area?"

He pointed out that all the members of his religious order had come from other parts of Ireland. "To my knowledge," he said, "we have had no vocations from this area."

"Why is that, do you think?"

Why indeed. There is no easy answer to this question.

When I was a teenager in the eighties in Toronto,



“And as Valentine’s Day approaches, it is good to remember that it is only possible to give yourself totally when you are truly in love”

there was a big marketing campaign to attract vocations to the priesthood. It was the brainchild of Fr Sean O’Sullivan who had left his career as an elected member of the Canadian parliament to follow Jesus. When he later became Vocations Director, The Archdiocese of Toronto launched a series of roadside billboards, bearing the image of a bloodied and crucified Christ with the words: "Dare to be a priest like me!"

“You have to be called, or you have to be medicated”

A number was also displayed, and the phones were ringing off the hook apparently.

Why were so many hearts touched? Perhaps because there was something authentic in this invitation. Christ himself is the attraction. And, despite what people say, their heart longs for sacrifice. "Aaaagh, who wants an easy life?!" I once asked a priest. He jokingly put up his hand.

After this advertising campaign, I don't know how many men actually ended up as priests. After all, the priesthood is a gift and

is not for every man who comes forward. "You have to be called, or you have to be medicated, otherwise you can't do it!" - a convent sister used to say.

It is the same for priests. And as Valentine's Day approaches, it is good to remember that it is only possible to give yourself totally when you are truly in love. The invitation to the priesthood rarely comes with a direct word from the Lord, though it does happen. It is often an invitation or inspiration of the Holy Spirit through another person or persons.

Reccomendation

But how many priests, even those who love their priesthood, would recommend the priesthood in their own diocese?

The latest *The Irish Catholic* series 'Relentless Ministry' reveals the extent of the problems, and a high level of burn-out. There is a forlorn sense of working all night and catching little.

In my own Diocese of Down and Connor, a weekend of discernment for the priesthood is planned on March 9. (To my surprise, I just realised that Fr Sean O’Sullivan died on this date, aged 37.)

I sometimes tease a priest friend, who is cheerful despite the challenges of life, that there is no point in complaining. He did, after all, sign up to be a "divine

victim". He grins, because this priest knows, that I know, that all of the baptised have a share in this divine sacrifice, and a share in Christ's priesthood.

St Paul, in Romans 12:1, was appealing to all the faithful when he wrote: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and pleasing to God."

“We can all feel the pull to resist when we are called upon”

This is reasonable service to God. And yet too often when the laity serve in the church, there is a sense that our work is just 'helping father'. There is a big problem with, "Let me help you, father!" because Christ is the real master we serve, and we are tempted to stop helping when it no longer suits. In truth it is co-responsibility.

There is a reason Sr Clare Crockett's motto was "all or nothing". Whole-hearted sacrifice brings joy, but half-hearted service brings resentment. That is true for any vocation whether to marriage, priesthood or single life. We can all feel the pull to resist when we are

“We were reminded that the Lord commands his disciples to cast the net out into the deep - even when human reasoning thinks it is a mad idea”

This Valentine's Day I rejoice that three couples I know are about to get married in the Catholic Church. One of the bridegrooms is a young man of 27 who confided as we toasted his engagement, "You know if anyone had told me that I would be getting married before I was thirty, I would have laughed in their face! But I'm so happy!" Love changes everything!

He and his bride met online during the Covid lockdown. They had grown up in the same area of their Canadian city but had attended different schools. Lockdown gave them a sweet courtship, a chance to get to know each other. They were limited to long talks and long walks. A solid foundation for building a relationship which has blossomed into love.

called upon.

The need in the Church is overwhelming: children's liturgy, catechesis, bible study, evangelisation, funeral ministry, baptism and marriage preparation, to name a few. The Church, the body of Christ, desperately needs our talents, our prayers, our time, and indeed our offering.

The other day I attended a meeting in my family of parishes/vicariate about the formation of new pastoral councils. These are now mandatory across the Church: every parish must

have a pastoral council to build up the faith.

Reflection

Before being invited to serve, we were reminded that the Lord commands his disciples to cast the net out into the deep - even when human reasoning thinks it is a mad idea.

Remember when Peter, the experienced fisherman, was being told by the son of a Carpenter, how to fish? "I have been working all night," Peter declared "But if you say so..."

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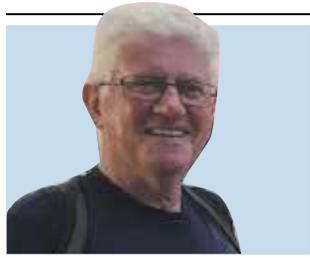
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All I know about sports is what seeps into my brain against my will. But I was interested to read about the death of Virginia Halas McCaskey at age 102. She was the mother of 11, and a Catholic and the wealthy owner of The Chicago Bears, a national league American football team. Her Sedan car had a bumper sticker which read, "Pray the Rosary". She also had a passion for The Bears and did not serve dessert on a Sunday if they lost. She liked to quote her son Pat that The Bears would stay in the family until "The Second Coming."

A new series
written by Priests

Relentless

Jesus was the champion of relentless ministry



Fr Tom Grufferty

When Garry O'Sullivan asked me to write an article on "Relentless Ministry" in the Catholic Church, I had never associated these two words as companions. I then began to investigate the topic myself personally. Here is my response: From the first day of my time at All Hallows College in the late 1960s the priestly ministry described perseverance, dedication, and sharing the Good News with others. Little did I realise then what that would mean in the real world, particularly in parishes.

Seminary

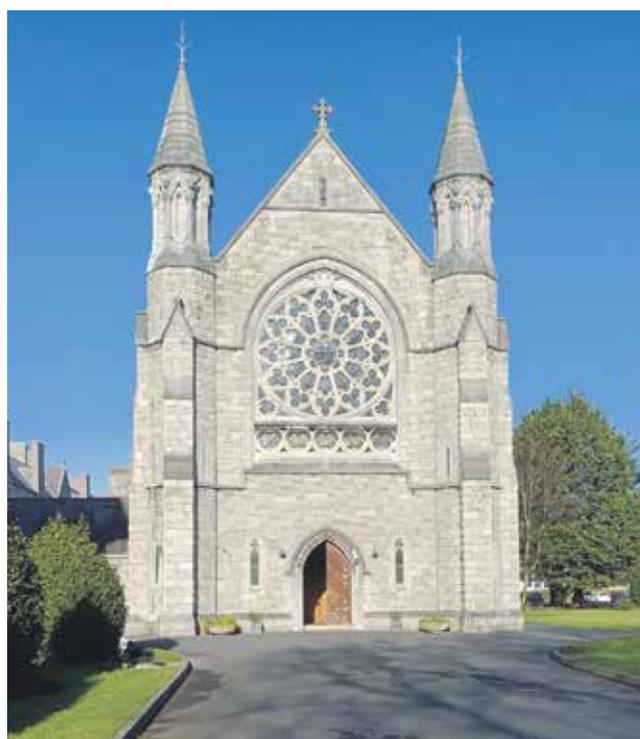
All Hallows was a missionary seminary for the English-speaking world. Sadly, it closed in November 2016. Leaving your family and loved ones added an extra dimension to relentless ministry especially if you loved your homeland. Spreading the gospel is demanding in your own culture but doing so in another country adds an extra dimension. You have to discover the main ingredients of the new people to minister to and that takes time. I was blessed in that I had nine years as a curate working with 2 outstanding parish priests who guided me in wonderful ways. When I spoke with other curates, I began to count my blessings. My curate friends said at the time that they were asked to do things by people who had

no clue how to do the same things themselves. The nine years of being an assistant priest were crucial in learning the United Kingdom's ways of life. In those days I pondered why we spent six years doing cosmology, epistemology and indeed other 'ologies' in Seminary.

“I was a Parish Priest for 22 years in the same place”

By our baptism, every one of us is called witness through words and actions we belong to Jesus Christ, but the priest has affirmed

“There is something to be said for leaving priests where they are if they are happy and doing a good job”



The church at All Hallows college

the duty to preach and teach actions that's where the relentless possibilities are challenging.

Much later in my ministry, I was a Parish Priest for 22 years in the same place. There is something to be said for leaving priests where they are if they are happy and doing a good job.

Ministry

During those 22 years, we did some wonderful things together and many of these were not religious. The social events such as Parish Dances, Christmas bazaars and even car boot sales drew people from outside the ranks of Catholicism. Some of these people got

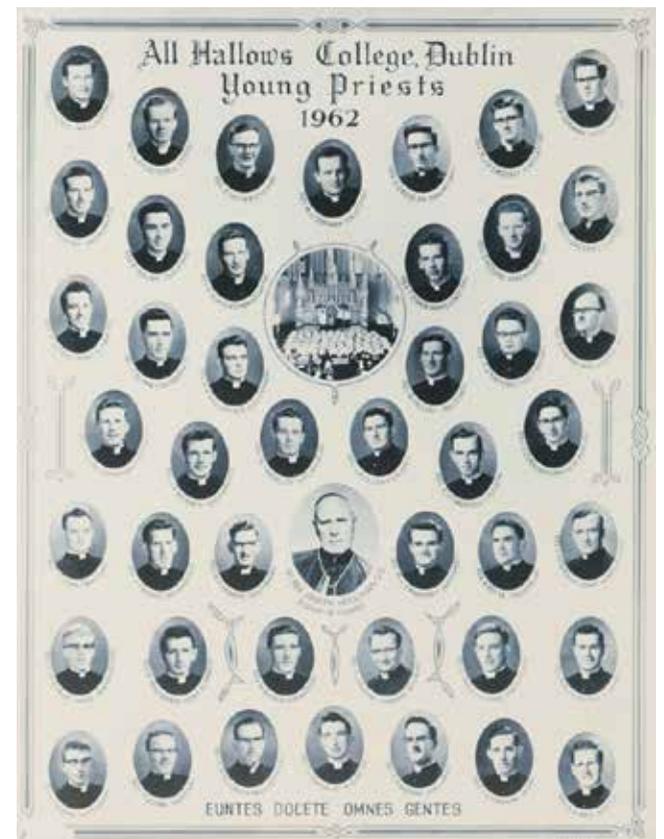
involved with enthusiasm and they worked hard for our Catholic Community. We had a Scottish Methodist who never missed a thing and even came to Mass. I called her the best "Catholic Methodist". And she loved it. On one occasion I saw a T-shirt in one of the shops with the words "living for others" and I couldn't resist wearing it at the Parish Summer Fair. There were very favourable comments coming from all directions. But the best Catholic Methodist said, "Tom is living for others while Jesus died for all". Needless to say, I have done a few sermons on that remark.

“In many ways that too set off alarm bells that we need to do more”

The other area we need to address is the social gathering of the clergy themselves. In former times we played Golf or Cards together or we belonged to walking groups and with these we exchanged pastoral approaches. These were weekly breaks from relentless ministry and more often than not returned home with a new enthusiasm and determination.

Priests too need holidays. They need a day off and we need the courage to tell our people what we can do and the issues we cannot cope with. When we used to do parish visiting there was a great opportunity for people to get to know their priest.

But most of all visiting people in their homes was a wonderful way to get to know the people of the parish. It did happen that people banged the door on



“They need a day off and we need the courage to tell our people what we can do and the issues we cannot cope with”

my face but thankfully only rarely did that happen. In many ways that too set off alarm bells that we need to do more. There was one wonderful occasion when the man of the house I called on shouted abuse and banged the door on my face but two hours later a couple rang my doorbell and to my amazement, the man was the same person who verbally abused me earlier. We became the best of friends, and they never missed Mass thereafter. We are still in contact 25 years later.

On another occasion, three people rang the Pres-

bytery Bell. There was a father and mother and their son, and they told me that their son's wife had just died having given birth to their first child three weeks before. They were all of Polish background. They asked me to do the Requiem Mass for the young wife and mother and here comes the challenge, would I baptise the newly born so at the Requiem as well? Relentless ministry confronted me in a new way as the young father carried his baby son as he led his wife's coffin into the packed Church. It was a great honour to con-

Ministry

Exploring the challenges of being a priest in Ireland today

nect the two ceremonies in numerous ways especially with the waters of baptism being the water of eternal life. Relentless ministry we may well have but surprising pastoral events like that elevate the people involved to the highest heavens. But priests too need to be raised to the highest heavens.

Retirement

Since retiring I have done chaplaincy work on Cruise Liners at Christmas. On one occasion as I went to the self-service restaurant for supper one evening a young member of staff who was welcoming people into the restaurant suddenly asked me to anoint him. In an instant, I decided to respond

because the chances of seeing that crew member again were remote. That sort of instant response is in essence what all ministry is about. Jesus always listened and responded without hesitation which makes him the champion of relentless ministry.

“I personally never worried about standing alone”

It is my experience that the people of a parish working together both in a spiritual way and socially quickly become a profound catalyst for the transformation

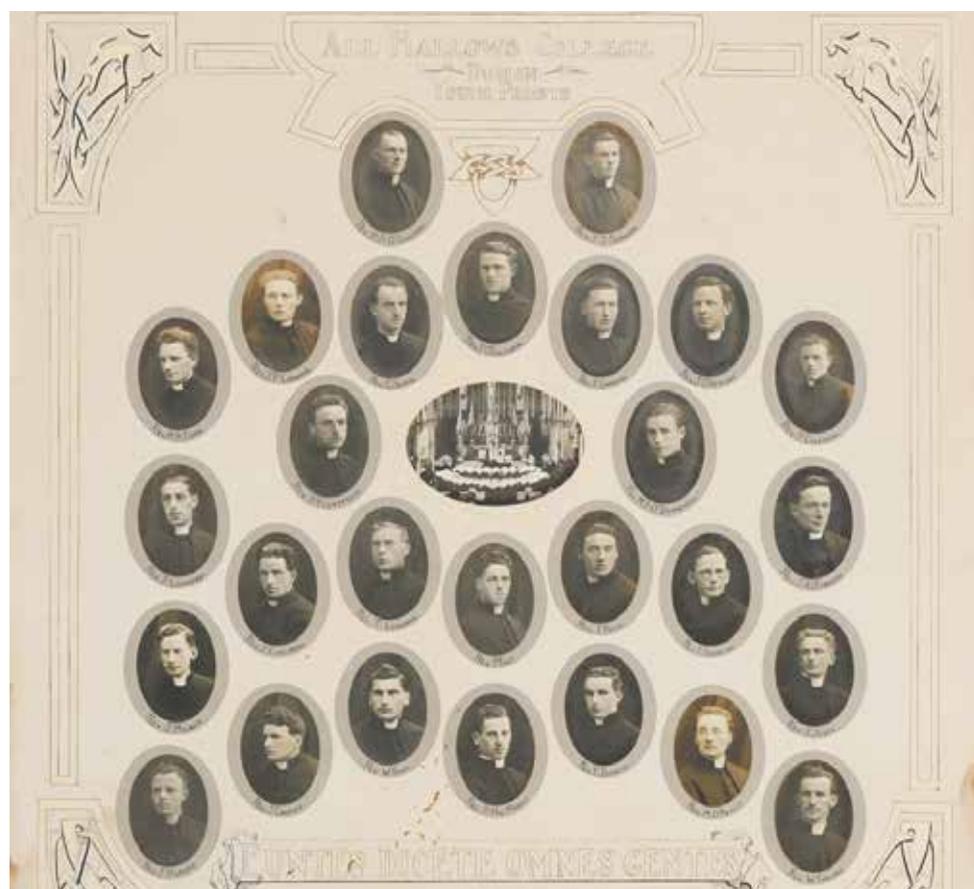
“Visiting people in their homes was a wonderful way to get to know the people of the Parish”

of hearts and minds which also happens far too rarely nationally.

I have tried to be positive in my reflections on relentless ministry and the greatest honour has been to see the FACE of Jesus in the thousands of people I have ministered to. We stood together in good times and in bad and I personally never worried about standing alone

We would do well to think of the first Christians of Antioch in modern-day Turkey. Shortly after the Resurrection the followers of Jesus were called “Christians” and of equal significance Jews and Gentiles had equal standing without circumcision. This equality shaped early Christian theology, practice and missionary outreach so much so that “The Way” became a global faith. The way is still the same, not forgetting THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE.

i Fr Tom Grufferty is a retired priest living in Knock, Co. Mayo.



All Hallows sent Irish priests all over the world

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Irish Govt must establish separate inquiry into Omagh bombing



Nuala O'Loan

Saturday August 15, 1998 was a glorious summer day. Like thousands of others, I will never forget it. At approximately 3.05pm that afternoon a massive terrorist bomb exploded in Omagh. Three telephone calls were made, the first at 2.29pm warning that a bomb was going to detonate in the town. Police were clearing the streets when the bomb exploded. Twenty-nine people and two unborn children died in the explosion. Some 250 people were injured, some of them seriously. There was very extensive damage to property. It was the single worst terrorist incident since the start of 'The Troubles' in 1969.

Responsibility for the bomb was claimed by the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA). A police investigation was established after the bombing, but no-one has been prosecuted for the murders in Northern Ireland.

Investigation

Nearly three years later I was Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland when, on July 29, 2001, the lead story in the *Sunday People* newspaper was about allegations from a man described as a former British security force agent, called Kevin Fulton. It was headed "I told cops about Omagh", and the implication was that the Omagh Bomb could have been prevented had the police acted on the information which Kevin Fulton had provided. The article also included other serious allegations.

I discussed it in detail with my staff and concluded, on balance, that it was in the public interest, to investigate the allegations being made by Kevin Fulton and any other surrounding

“There had been major failings in the investigation including the fact that significant intelligence held by Special Branch was not shared with the investigators”

and relevant issues in relation to this matter.

It was a profoundly difficult investigation but by the end of it, it was clear that there had been major problems with the investigation including the fact that Special Branch had not shared relevant material with the investigators, and that a detailed anonymous call was made to police on August 4, 1998 which stated that an unspecified attack would be made on police in Omagh on August 15, 1998. The police officer who received the telephone call informed Special Branch immediately. The Omagh Commander, who should have been informed of the threat, was not told about it until two years later on August 15, 2000. Had he been told about it he could have decided what action to take to protect the town and its police officers on August 15, 1998.

Other intelligence was also identified relevant to the Omagh bombing, which was not shared as it should have been.

We rapidly also established that, following a very good internal review of the Omagh investigation, the RUC were aware that there had been major failings in the investigation including the fact that significant intelligence held by Special Branch was not shared with the investigators. Little had been done to address the many issues raised.

“No attempt was made to investigate whether there were any links”

Among the intelligence not shared by Special Branch was material relating to previous linked explosions: in January 1998 in Enniskillen; in February 1998 in Moira; in April 1998 in Lisburn, in May 1998 in Belleek; in July 1998 in Newry, and in August 1998 in Banbridge. In July 1998 there had also been an attempted mortar attack in Newry. No attempt was made to investigate



The Omagh bomb memorial.

whether there were any links between those explosions and what happened in Omagh.

Then there emerged information about listening exercises by British authorities on particular telephones in Ireland during the relevant period.

Determination

It became clear that RIRA had been operating across the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Eventually a Garda sergeant, John White, produced copious information to me about the alleged involvement of a Garda informant in procuring cars for RIRA for use in the North. This information, he said, was reported back to Garda authorities, who took some action. His information included the fact that his informant had been asked to supply a particular car with a big boot, capable of carrying a very significant load to be used by RIRA before the Omagh bombing, that the informant had been unable to find a car and that eventually another car was found which was used by the Omagh bombers. I reported it to the Irish Government.

There is evidence that the bomb was made in Ireland and driven into Northern Ireland on August 15, 1998.

“The courage and determination of the relatives of those killed has been extraordinary. They sought a series of inquiries and brought court actions, north and south over decades seeking to establish what had happened”

I have always said that “The persons responsible for the Omagh Bombing are the terrorists who planned and executed the atrocity”.

The courage and determination of the relatives of those killed has been extraordinary. They sought a series of inquiries and brought court actions, north and south over decades seeking to establish what had happened and much more information emerged in court hearings about the activities of RIRA.

“The judge said there would be real advantage if one were to take place”

In July 2021, Mr Justice Horner in the NI High Court said he was satisfied that there were “certain grounds which give rise to plausible arguments that there was a real prospect of preventing the Omagh bombing that deserve to be fully investi-

gated through an Article 2 ECHR compliant investigation.” While not within his power to order an investigation in the Republic of Ireland, the judge said there would be real advantage if one were to take place simultaneously with one in Northern Ireland. In 2023 the British Government established a public inquiry to determine whether the bomb could have been prevented by UK state authorities. It held a preliminary hearing in July 2024 and began substantive hearings on January 28 this year.

Opportunity

The Irish Government has promised full cooperation with the British Inquiry but has not established its own inquiry into what happened in Ireland before the bombing. It should do so.

These terrorists were working across the border. They were able to do so, despite the existence of anti-terrorist activity in the UK and Ireland.

This is an opportunity to learn from the past, to care

for the victims and survivors of Omagh. We need to be able to reassure them and the public in general that we know what happened, that we have identified how the Real IRA were able to operate with impunity in 1998.

“People need to know, above all, that their governments will not cover up”

We have a responsibility to those so terribly affected by the Omagh Bomb to provide the most complete picture possible. This will emerge most effectively if there are two inquiries running side by side sharing all relevant information, with one aim; to establish what was known, whether the bomb could have been prevented.

People need to know, above all, that their governments will not cover up at times like this, but will act with courage and integrity.

More than 1,300 attend Kildare pilgrimage honouring St Brigid

Chai Brady

Bumper numbers of pilgrims attended Monasterevin Parish's 'Camino walk' to celebrate St Brigid on St Brigid's bank holiday Monday. This year saw more than 1,300 people taking part from across Ireland in the Camino's third year.

The walk was led by Bishop Denis Nulty of the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin and organised by Fr Liam Merrigan PP of Monasterevin in Co. Kildare, along with a team of local parishioners. The walk started in the morning of February 3, with pilgrims bussed out from the parish church to Mountrice, where there is a shrine to St Brigid. Camino passports were stamped, and people walked the 6km through Umeras – where St Brigid is reputed to have spent her childhood – following the new Barrow Blue way alongside the Grand Canal.

Finishing in the afternoon with refreshments being served at St Peter and Paul's Church in Monasterevin, there was Irish dancing and a ceremony of light in the church, involving many parish organisations carrying up lighted candles representing how, like St Brigid, the faithful are called to be bearers of light.



A long line of pilgrims, who started at St Brigid's Shrine at Mountrice, travel along the Barrow Blueway.



Bishop Denis Nulty and Fr Liam Merrigan PP.

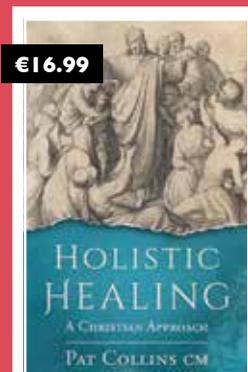


The Ceremony of Light in St Peter and Paul's Church, Monasterevin, Co. Kildare.



The Faithful hold up St Brigid's crosses during the Ceremony of Light in Monasterevin.

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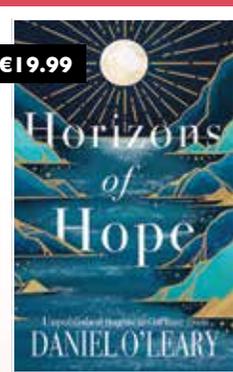
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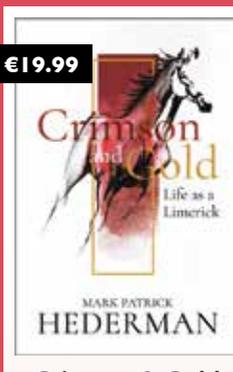
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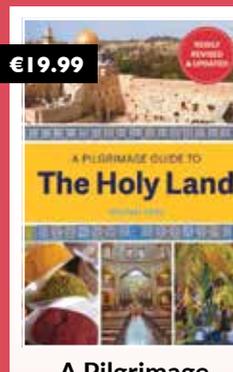
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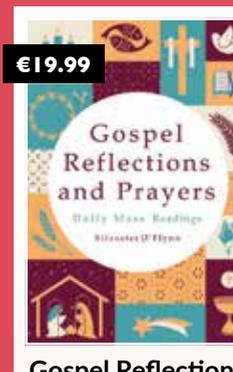
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Needed: an immigration policy that serves the common good



David Quinn

A major row has broken out between the Trump administration and the Catholic hierarchy in America over the issue of refugees and economic migrants. It is a row that promises to rumble on in the years to come and equally so in Europe, where immigration and asylum-seeking have become possibly the most controversial issue in European politics.

Ironically, the person who is chiefly at loggerheads with the American bishops is a Catholic convert, namely the US Vice-President, JD Vance.

President Trump wants to start deporting illegal immigrants *en masse*, and to slow

right down the number of people seeking asylum in America who mostly come across the American border with Mexico into Texas. Texas is the American version of Italy and Greece in that most people seeking asylum in Europe arrive first of all in one of those two countries.

Friction

The row between Vance and the bishops erupted when it emerged that the Trump administration is willing to even send immigration officials into traditionally protected areas like churches and schools if suspected illegal immigrants are hiding there.

Needless to say, the bishops are strongly opposed to their churches being invaded like this and then Vance added insult to injury by accusing them of being motivated by money because Church organisations that help immigrants and asylum-seekers do receive money from the State in order to do so. It was a low blow.

He said that the bishops need to “look in the mirror a little bit and recognise that when they receive over \$100 million to help resettle illegal immigrants, are they worried about humanitarian concerns? Or are they actually worried about their bottom line?”

“I hope it was an uncharacteristic moment,” the cardinal said”

In response, Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, someone who probably leans more towards the Republicans than the Democrats, said he was “hurt” by Vance’s “inaccurate” remarks.

“A guy who has struck me as a gentleman and a thoughtful man, and from whom I’m still expecting great things – I hope it was an uncharacteristic moment,” the cardinal said.

Still, he added: “You think we make money caring for the immigrants? We’re losing it hand over fist.”

Immigration

When Donald Trump became president first time around in 2017, he did so partly on a promise to ‘build a wall’ between Mexico and the US to stop illegal immigration. It is currently estimated that there are at least 7 million illegal immigrants in America with the number climbing rapidly.

Pope Francis pushed back saying we should build bridges, not walls.

But the issue of illegal immigration has not gone away and a failure to properly control the border with Mexico under Joe Biden helped to get Trump elected to a second term as president. Notably, Trump won the support of 45% of Hispanics in America, a very large number for a community that has traditionally voted Democrat and who you might think would be sympathetic to those wishing to start a new life in America.

However, a big majority of Hispanics living in America arrived legally, and many resent it when those following them, even if from the same country as them, do so illegally.

In a very strong signal, Pope Francis recently announced that the new Archbishop of Washington is Cardinal Robert McElroy, a persistent critic of Trump’s attitude to illegal immigration.

As usual, when discussing this issue, we need to make a sharp distinction between different types of immigration. There are genuine asylum-seekers who are fleeing persecution in their home country and are seeking safety elsewhere. Then there are economic migrants who are not fleeing persecution, but are simply seeking to improve their economic circumstances, as millions of Irish did in the past, and sometimes still do.

Finally, there are those who enter a country illegally, that is, they do not go through the proper routes. They might be falsely claiming to be fleeing persecution, and are really would-be economic migrants, and then there are those who are not pretending to be refugees but have still entered the country illegally.

What should the Christian attitude be? Do we agree with illegal immigration, or do we believe people should enter a country by legal routes only? Entering a country illegally,



Vice President JD Vance speaks during a press briefing in Damascus, Virginia on January 27, 2025. Photo: OSV News, Ben Curtis via Reuters.

“In this way, no one would ever be breaking immigration law because there would be no such law to begin with”

or pretending to be something you are not (e.g. a victim of persecution overseas), is obviously a form of cheating, or false witness, and can Christians really condone this?

“People should be able to go where they like, when they like, and settle anywhere”

No pope, no bishop, no priest, no Christian lay person, could ever condone cheating and therefore, logically, must oppose entering a country illegally.

The question then changes; perhaps there should be no immigration rules at all, and no borders? That is, people should be able to go where they like, when they like, and settle anywhere. In this way, no one would ever be breaking immigration law because there would be no such law to begin with.

But does this seem like a sustainable position? What happens to the people living in your own country if there are no limits on immigration? What does that do to your welfare system, to the cost of accommodation, to our schools and hospitals, to the jobs market? What kind

of downward pressure does it exert on wages? Do we end up with high unemployment and social discontent? What happens to the poor already living in your country as the welfare system starts to collapse? What happens to the common good?

There are all questions anyone interested in offering true moral leadership on this issue needs to address honestly.

Position

So this brings us to another possible position for Christians to hold, which is not in favour of opening the borders, but rather seeks a generous immigration system, one that treats asylum-seekers fairly (while looking out for those falsely claiming asylum), and admits as many economic migrants over a given period as the country can sustain, while not harming itself and especially its own poor.

Christians cannot favour mass deportation of illegal immigrants who have put down deep roots in their new country. They might have broken the law, but we need to be humane in our response.

As usual, Christians must seek the common good in their approach to immigration. Open borders are extreme. Closed borders are extreme. Mass deportations are extreme. What we should seek is a balanced and proportionate immigration policy.

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David Quinn, CEO, The Iona Institute

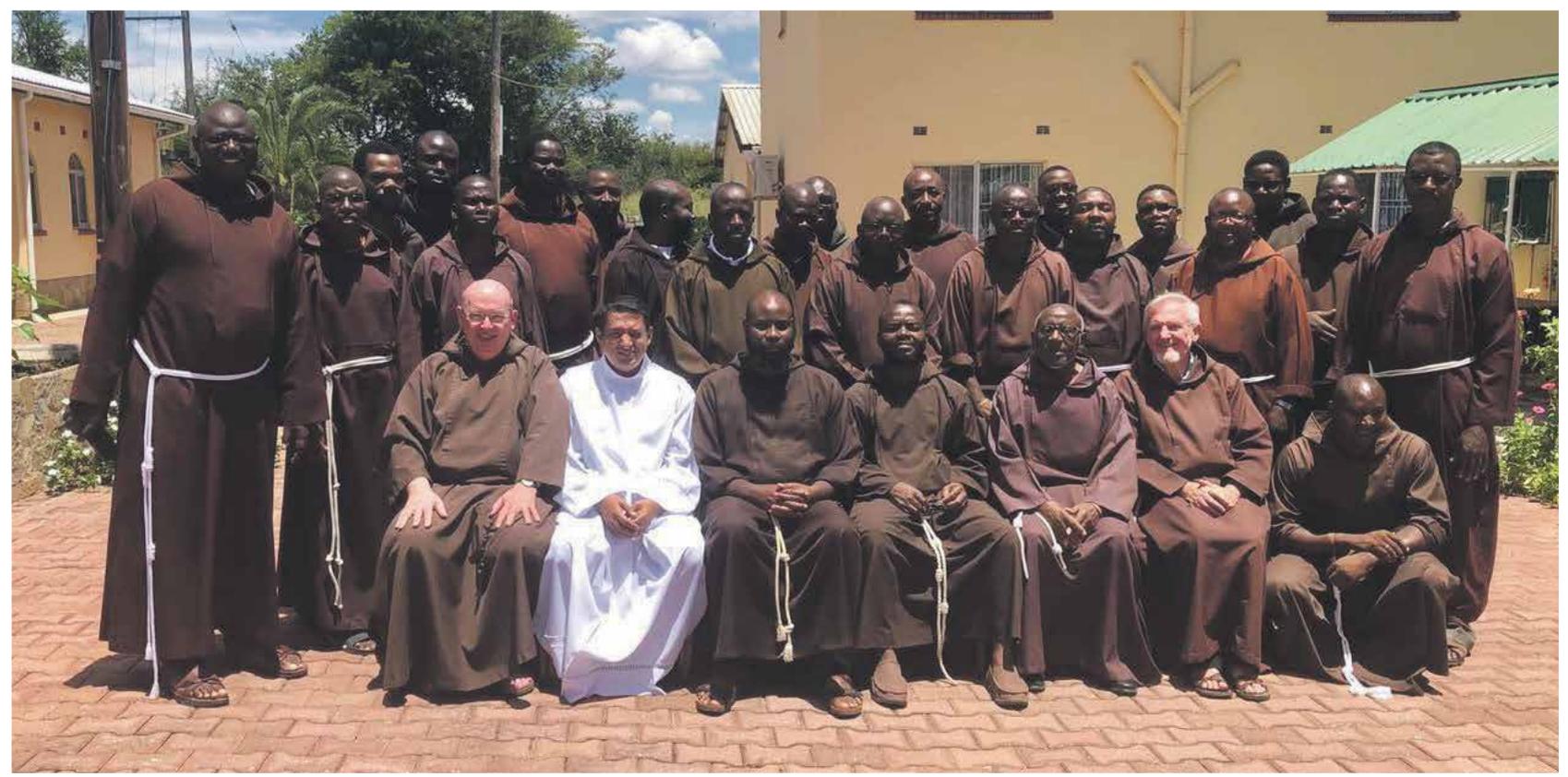
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Living Witness

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Consecrated Life Supplement 2025

The Irish Catholic

‘We are called to self-giving love’



Renata Milán Morales

“The consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission.” (*Vita Consecrata*, 3).

Consecrated life is a gift that has shaped Ireland for centuries. In monasteries, schools, hospitals, and among the poor, men and women have given themselves entirely to God. They are witnesses to a joy that does not disappear and a peace that is over our understanding. Over 130 religious orders and congregations are currently in ministry in Ireland.

Consecrated men and women have carried the Word of God, helped those in need, and lifted countless souls

toward Heaven, not for recognition, but for love. “A prophetic sign to the world,” as St John Paul II called them (VC, 39), their lives expose that true freedom is found not in holding on to things, but in letting go. Their presence is an invitation to look deeper, to listen closer. As Bro. Oscar McDermott OSB explained, speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, “God, in his love for us, gives us freedom, and we are all called to be a good Christian. That is a good priest, a good monk, or a good husband or wife. That’s up to us.”

Most consecrated men and women find it hard to explain in a way that others might truly understand. Sr Mary Mother of Merciful Love, SSVM shared that “People often ask me how I can be so happy all the time. The secret, I tell them, is being a spouse of Christ.” She explained that it is a calling that is so often misunderstood by the world because of the pursuit of self-fulfillment and pleasure, “but we are called to self-giving love.” This is for Sr Mary the very essence of consecrated life.

Consecrated life, as John Paul II reminds us, is a vocation that

comes wholly from the Father. In living this call, the religious are witnesses to the truth that a life dedicated to God is “true freedom.” Bro. Antony Sahayampillai FPM explained that the decision to live a life dedicated to God brings “immense fulfillment” and a deep sense of community.

Bro. Oscar McDermott OSB’s experience could be significant to many. For him, the idea of becoming a monk did not come from the

influence of his family nor friends. It was a quiet discernment and mature decision to step forward. “I had to make a conscious decision to seek it out.” Whether you are discerning religious life or another path, gathering information and speaking with others who have lived it is essential, advised the Benedictine monk. Bro. Oscar pointed out that self-awareness is a critical part of any vocation, and in the end, the

freedom to choose becomes a way to live “fully, with purpose and joy.”

As Bro. Oman Ashraf OSA shared, “discernment isn’t always a sudden revelation; it’s often a gradual awakening.” For him, it began with a homily, followed by years of prayer, reflection, and guidance. It wasn’t until he embraced the vocation that he found his true happiness. Bro. Jander Maria de Jesus O.Carm also explained

that “once you truly find your place in the Church, a sense of fraternity and joy comes to your life.” The friar explained the importance of the religious garments as a symbol of consecration: “it isn’t just a piece of clothing but a powerful sign of consecration and spirituality.”

The Consecrated life is a sign that there is a deeper freedom found in surrender, as these brothers and Sr Mary told this paper.



Bro. Oman Ashraf OSA



Growing up in a strong Catholic family, I never imagined becoming a priest. My vocation story began on a Pentecost Vigil when I heard a priest preach about the scarcity of vocations. He spoke with urgency and passion.

I did not make a hasty decision. Instead, I spent two years discerning whether I was truly being called to the priesthood. After much prayer, reflection, and guidance, I finally took the leap of faith and entered religious formation. One of the deepest motivations for my vocation is my desire to serve young people and bring them back to the Church. And the Augustinian charism of community life has been a blessing for me, as it allows me to grow alongside my brothers, supporting and encouraging one another.

Many people think religious life is easy, but it demands sacrifice, discipline, and commitment. However, I have come to realise that once we embrace these sacrifices with joy, we begin to truly love our vocation.

Sr Mary Mother of Merciful Love, SSVM

People often wonder, How can they be so happy all the time? The secret is in being a spouse of Christ. I’m sure people are familiar with that image of Jesus as the bride. We get to live a spiritual matrimony. The consecrated person attests that what many have believed impossible becomes with the Lord’s grace possible and truly liberate. Yes, in Christ it is possible to love God with all one’s heart. Putting him above every other level. This testimony is more necessary than ever, precisely because it is so little understood by our world. Love is the goal of consecrated life.

John Paul the Second says this is the meaning of the call to the consecrated life. It is an initiative coming wholly from the Father that the world cannot understand. The world is focused on self and pleasure. But we are called to the self-giving love to sacrifice, to embrace the cross.





Bro. Antony Sahayampillai FPM



Being called to consecrated life is a profound invitation from God to give myself fully to Him. Ever since I was small, I have been deeply moved by the struggles of the

poor, those who are sick, hungry, and without shelter. I always wanted to go to them, help them, and be present with them. I believe that is why God has called me here, and I trust that He will give me the strength

and grace to remain faithful to this calling.

Education is also fundamental as it provides knowledge and critical thinking skills essential for making good decisions. Family and friends

offer support and diverse perspectives. Choosing a life dedicated to spiritual values brings fulfillment, community, and the opportunity to help others. It's a valuable and enriching choice.

Bro. Oscar McDermott OSB

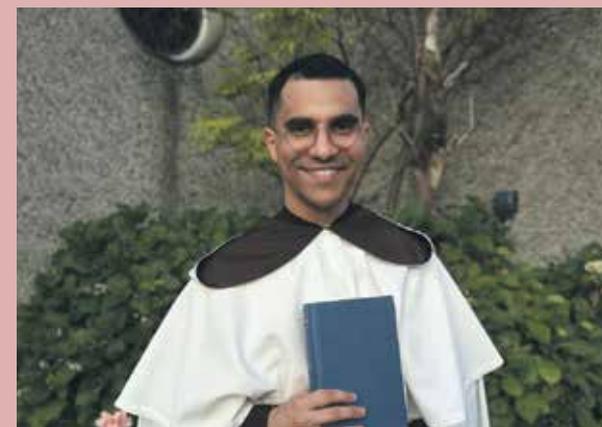


I had in mind that I'd like to be a monk. I was hoping that the other monks would see me and go, 'Oh, there's a young man down in his knees and he is very devout'. There was a prayer in my mind all the time: 'they should ask me'. And nobody came near me. Nobody asked me. Nobody said anything. Then through my own prayer, I realised that there is freedom, and I needed to be an adult about it. I had to be mature and step forward and say, 'I would like to explore this'.

No big voice was going to come out of the heaven, at least not for me, and say, 'I want you to be there'. I needed to step forward and explore.

I studied theology as a layperson. It was through my studies in Dublin, as a layperson that I came across Glenstal Abbey. When it comes to our vocation is very important to gather as much information as possible. No matter what you are deciding - if it's to get married or to join religious life. You have to get information and meet with vocations directors and talk to them. A lot of self-awareness is required too about your own strengths and weaknesses.

Bro. Jander Maria de Jesus O.Carm



One day while the priest was giving the homily I imagined myself preaching. I found it a silly thing and I did not even consider seriously the possibility of a vocation to religious life or priesthood. Then, during my final semester at university, one of my friends invited me to a retreat for young people. I was a bit reluctant, but I finally accepted to go.

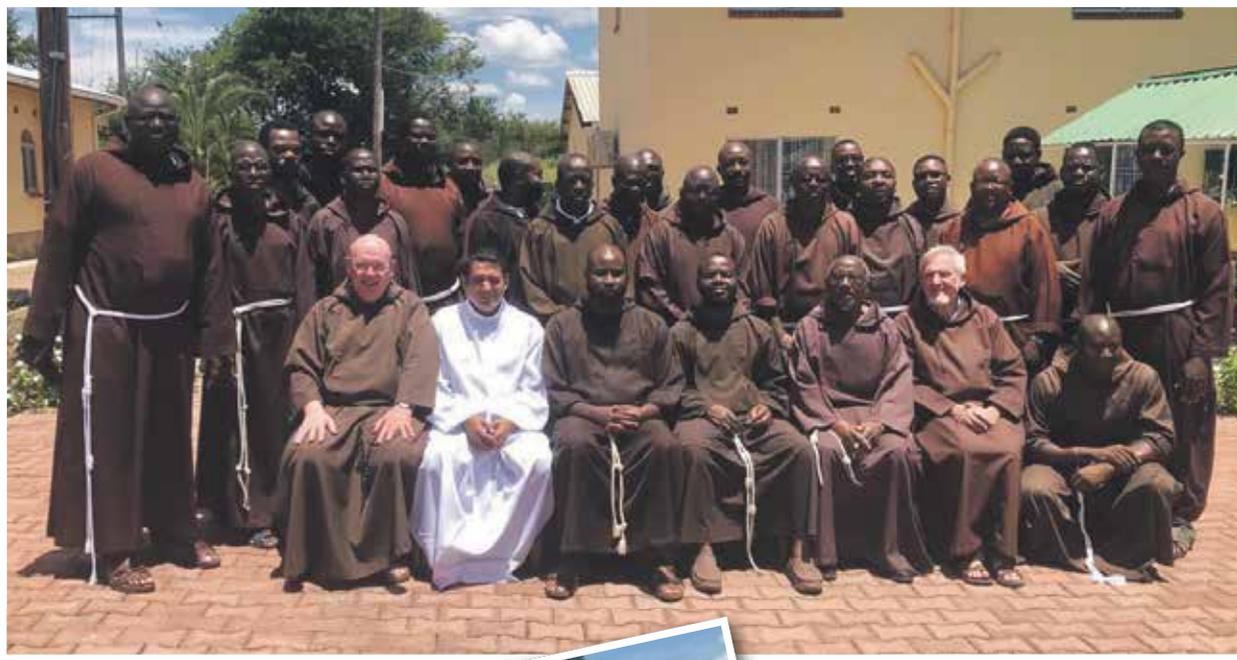
After a few weeks, I went for that weekend retreat, and it was a turning point in my life. I had a deep and powerful experience of God's love there and it shook everything in my life. All my cer-

tainties were gone. Because that love I experienced was greater than anything I was looking for, it brought a real meaning to my life.

It was with the Carmelites that I found my place in the Church. The joy of living as brothers in fraternity and service. I also must mention the beauty of the Carmelite habit which is a powerful sign of our consecration and spirituality.

After a time of discernment, I joined the Carmelites in 2015, made my first profession in 2018 and my solemn profession in 2023. I must say that I am very happy as a Carmelite brother.

The Capuchin Way of Life



800 years ago, St Francis had a dream to live life centred on the Gospel of Jesus. In doing this he began to see everyone, all living creatures, and all created things, as brothers and sisters. This kind of connectivity linked St Francis and his followers to Christ in a way that leads us, even today, to desire to follow this transformative path of peace and reconciliation. As we celebrate the Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life we pray in thanksgiving for our call to be followers of Francis and followers of Christ.

What path has the Lord prepared for you?

To find out more about life as a Capuchin Franciscan Friar, contact our Vocation Director by emailing: vocations@capuchins.ie

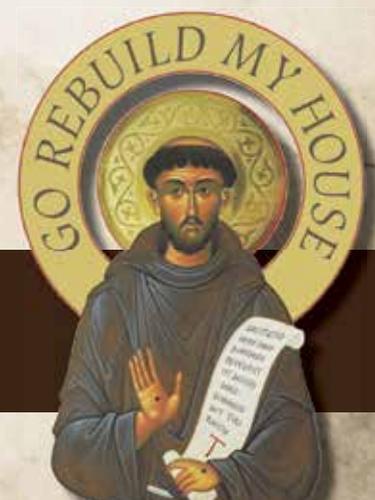
Living the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi



Today's world often tends towards short term rewards - 'I want it', 'I get it' and soon it's gone. Consecrated life stands as an antidote to this way of being. As consecrated religious we forsake much now in order to connect with the bigger picture. Is this a challenge? Of course it is. However, it is always a way of life blessed in so many ways. As Capuchin Franciscan Friars we are part of an international brotherhood of over 11,000 Friars spread throughout the world. Each Capuchin community, no matter where it is in the world or no matter what language is spoken, has the same spirit and desire: the spirit of St Francis of Assisi and the desire to be brothers to all.

Our communities in Ireland are made up of men young and old. Men who have each in their own way, responded to a call to connect with the bigger picture. Some did this straight from school, others after some years of work. No matter what path each of us took to the Capuchins, we are sustained in our mission and life together by our deep belief in Christ's command to love God and neighbour. This is what keeps us together and what keeps us going. What we do, our ministry, flows from this.

As we celebrate the Jubilee of Hope, let us always remember the words of Jesus to his Apostles: "I am with you always even to the end of time." In the words of Capuchin Friar, Padre Pio, this is summarised as: "Pray, Hope and Don't Worry."



If you feel God is urging you to life as a Capuchin Brother or Priest Friar, please contact our Vocations Director at: vocations@capuchins.ie

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Over the years, our work has changed, but the focus of bringing health and healing and the love of God to women and children in need has been constant.

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One Heart, One Mission... Witnessing to God's Love in the World

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As we approach our 150th Jubilee year, we find ourselves reflecting on the meaning of consecrated life in today's world—looking back with gratitude, looking forward with hope, and standing firmly in the present. Consecrated life is neither a solitary pursuit nor a static reality; it is a living, breathing response to the evolving needs of the world and the gentle, persistent whispers of the Spirit—a life of commitment, presence, communion and deep listening.

The recent Synod has offered a profound opportunity to deepen our understanding of this shared journey. Our congregational leader, Sr Mary T Barron, having been part of the Synod, shared her thoughts on the role of women in the Synodal process. She spoke with clarity about the reality: "We are being listened to," she said simply, "Women may be fewer in number, but their voices are present and woven into the Synod's ongoing conversation." Her words remind us of what our 150-year history has taught us: consecrated life is not about grand gestures, but about presence—being where we are needed, responding with compassion, and remaining steadfast in hope.

Pope Francis' call to synodality—an invitation to walk together in faith, engaging in a shared process of listening and dialogue with one

another, and with the Holy Spirit—resonates deeply with our understanding of consecrated life. It speaks to the essence of our commitment and is a practice that has shaped our way of life since our foundation in 1876. This call to humility and openness requires a willingness to listen and to be shaped by the needs of our time, trusting that God's call unfolds in each moment.

In the words of Sr Mary, "We are on a journey." This journey is not about arrival but about accompaniment—standing with those who are vulnerable, listening to the voices that challenge us, and embracing the unknown with faith. We are invited to surrender to this journey, always trusting that we are a part of something greater, that consecrated life is a dynamic witness to God's love in an ever-changing world.

As we mark this milestone, we do so with deep gratitude—for the sisters who have gone before us, for the communities that have welcomed us, and for the Spirit that continues to call us forward. We remain committed to this path, knowing that the essence of consecrated life is found not in doing, but in being—being present, being faithful, and being open to the continual unfolding of God's love in our lives and in the world.



Mary T. Barron

Consecrated life is, at its core, a radical trust in God's fidelity. It is a commitment to live with open hands and open hearts, to seek wisdom in community, and to embrace the unknown with courage. It is a call to remain present—to the joys, the struggles, and the quiet revelations of everyday life, trusting that God's work is present in the everyday, in small gestures, in quiet faithfulness.

Explore ways to be a part of our mission by visiting our website. Join us as we witness to the presence of God in our lives and strive to make a difference in the world.



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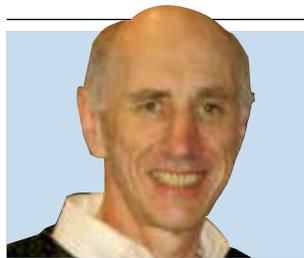


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Matt Talbot: The man who loved books



Fr Hugh O'Donnell SDB

The title must appear an unlikely one given that Matt left school basically illiterate. His time in St Lawrence O'Toole's Christian Brothers' school, aged 8/9, is summed up in the phrase, "kept home through necessity". His next enrolment at age 11 in O'Connell's is no brighter as there in the margin of the roll book is Bro. Ryan's enduring estimate of him as "a mitcher".

It seems that he attended for three weeks in 1867 to prepare for Confession and Holy Communion and for a similar time the following year before his Confirmation. By May of that year, he was 12 years old. It was time to close his books.

For the next 16 years his only real interest in life was alcohol. There was never anything else on his mind. Later he would say to his neighbour, Mollie Breslin, "Ah, don't be too hard on Harry. At least he won't take off his boots and sell them for drink as I did when I was young". That such a thirst for alcohol could have been replaced by an insatiable thirst for God is remarkable. The progress of that reversal would enlarge the next 40 years of his life.

Journey

On this journey the spiritual directors he met along the way were essential guides. In particular, Dr Michael Hickey, Professor of Philosophy and later president of Clonliffe College, who was his anam cara and personal friend for 30 years. He would regularly visit Matt in his flat where they would converse about spiritual (and secular) reading, (much of which he recommended); or sing and pray together.

Learning to read so late in life required a herculean

effort but Matt was tenacious, inching forward step by step, finding help where he could. Afterwards, when asked about his ability to read the spiritual classics of St Francis de Sales, St Augustine or Cardinal Newman (now canonised), he explained that he prayed to the Holy Spirit to enable him to understand – and so was led forward into a deeper appreciation.

“Matt always carried a book in his pocket so that even on his lunch break he could read or pray. He didn't waste a moment”

Indeed, without his wide reading to inform the mystical path he undertook, Matt's spiritual adventure would have largely been hidden from us. Little did he realise that he would leave behind him a treasure trove in the shape of his box of books, (now held in the diocesan archives). On the basis of these, his esteemed biographer, Mary Purcell, would be able to establish what books Matt was reading at different periods of his life and how that reading showed a growing maturity and confidence.

This facility to read in depth also allowed him to engage in deep spiritual conversation with Dr Hickey or with Ralph O'Callaghan who lent him many books; (he also borrowed from the libraries of his sodality in Gardiner Street and the Third Order library in Merchant's Quay). Probably one of the most significant books Ralph put in his way was *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* by St Louis de Montford. Here Matt first learnt about wearing a chain as a sign of handing over his life to Jesus through Mary.

Matt always carried a book in his pocket so that even on his lunch break he could read or pray. He didn't waste a moment. The gospels were a big part of his reading especially the four accounts of the Lord's passion, many verses



The faithful take part in a 'Matt Talbot Walking Tour' on February 2 led by Terry Fagan.

of which he had underlined. In the Old Testament, too, he had marked passages for reference in the book of Wisdom and the Psalms.

Fascinated

Although he was fascinated by the lives of the saints, the women mystics were particular favourites of his, especially St Catherine of Siena, St Teresa of Avila (both declared Doctors of the Church in 1970!), whom he once referred to, in his homely but not demeaning way, as 'grand girls' or 'great girls'. He was very taken by

Catherine's vision in which God the Father addresses her as, "my own daughter, Catherine"; he, too, desired that closeness.

“It cost him most of a week's wages to acquire it from the publishers. It's an eye opener to see how a man so frugal in his lifestyle could value books and purchase them if necessary”

During the Great Strike and Lockout of 1913, he was often consulted by the other men for an educated answer on the rights of workers and

the rights of employers. On one occasion, Matt said that he didn't know the answer to the question posed, but knew where to get it. Some months later he appeared at lunchtime with a book called, *Democratic Industry* by Fr Husslein, SJ. Somehow, he knew of this book but found it was only available in the US. It cost him most of a week's wages to acquire it from the publishers. It's an eye opener to see how a man so frugal in his lifestyle could value books and purchase them if necessary.

Fluent

His writing may not have been as fluent, but good enough for him to write down on pieces of paper particular sentences from his reading that spoke to him. Inserted in his books, they open up a view on his inner world. Like

this one, "Blessed Mother obtain for me a share of your Son's folly"; or "I long for you to be Master of my heart, Loving Jesus". For a man intent on keeping his way of life hidden, it's providential that in his box of books and these writings he would reveal so much to us.

Indeed, that Matt, leaving school semi-literate, should go on to read and understand in such depth the lives of some of the greatest Christian saints, reveals his lifelong desire to follow where they led. As he records in his own hand, "in prayer one speaks to God, in spiritual reading God speaks to us".

i Salesian priest Fr Hugh O'Donnell SDB is a curate in the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes, Sean McDermott Street, in Dublin's inner city.

“I long for you to be Master of my heart, Loving Jesus”. For a man intent on keeping his way of life hidden, it's providential that in his box of books and these writings he would reveal so much to us”

Out&About

A day of prayer in Ennis



CLARE: Diocese of Killaloe's celebration for the Jubilee of Religious took place on the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life, February 2 in the Cathedral of St Peter and Paul, Ennis. Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan is pictured with some of the attendees of the celebration.



LIMERICK: A group of religious sisters who celebrated the jubilees of their profession in religious life gathered recently. Front Row: Sr Geraldine Lennon, Sr Mary Dolora Keating, Sr Martina Bourke, Sr Therese Barry. Back Row: Fr Richard Hendrick, OFM Capt. (guest speaker), Sr Phyllis Moynihan, (Vicar for Religious in the Limerick Dioceses), Bishop Brendan Leahy, and Sr Evelyn Doyle.



MONAGHAN: Pictured are some attendees in the procession at St Patrick's Church, Bawn in honour of St Brigid. St Brigid's Crosses were blessed by Fr Peadar Cronin and everyone processed into the church for Mass concelebrated by Fr Peadar and Fr Tom Quigley.

IN SHORT

Statue unveiled to honour Medical Missionary Sisters founder

A statue to honour the Irish founder of the Medical Missionaries of Mary, Mother Mary Martin was unveiled at Boyle O'Reilly Terrace beside the Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda to mark the 50th anniversary of Mother Mary's death.

The opening of the event started with an introduction by Sr Sheila Devane to those gathering and welcoming words by Sr Irene Balzan. Archbishop Eamon Martin was present at the unveiling event, among politicians from the area and representatives of religious orders.

The present enjoyed an afternoon of music and shared stories about Mother Mary's life. One of the musical performances was given by the boys and girls group 'Loving Life Choir'.

During the celebration, Medical Missionaries of Marry Communications Coordinator, Nadia Ramoutar interviewed Sr Rita Kelly on the book *A Wonderful Little Story Arranged by God* she co-wrote with Sr Brieghe Rafferty. The book is based on Mother Mary's life and stories from staff, children, neighbour and friends in Drogheda.

By the end of the event, Sr Maria Gonzaga thanked the people of Drogheda who were open and welcoming to all the Medical Missionary Sisters, and those who helped to organise the celebration in honour of Mother Mary.

Laudato Si' Movement Director attends inter-faith festival

The annual '4 Corners Festival' in Belfast, received Dr Lorna Gold in her first official engagement as the new Executive Director of the Laudato Si' Movement. Recognised internationally for her role in shaping climate campaigns and scholarship in Catholic social justice and ecology initiatives, Dr Gold is the former Board Chair and one of the founding members of the Laudato Si' Movement.

The 4 Corners Festival was established in 2013 to bridge divides in Belfast and bring together people from different backgrounds to share ideas, build relationships

and explore urgent social and ethical issues.

With the theme 'Home?', this year's festival gathered many faith leaders, climate advocates and community members marking a significant moment for the city, highlighting its growing role in the global conversations on faith and climate action.

Dr Gold was involved in a number of events from February 1 to 3. She participated in an inter-faith forum discussion and award ceremony, talked about "our shared responsibility for the Earth as a common place", explored the Bible's call to care for Creation and led a discussion on the development of the newly launched Women, Faith, and Climate Network in Northern Ireland.

Dr Gold called people to keep moving forward. "The Earth is our home," she had reminded everyone. "We need to take care of it together."

Edited by Renata Steffens
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If you have any stories, photos, or events you wish to be considered for publication, email a week in advance of publication



LIMERICK: The Limerick Diocesan Pastoral Council met recently in Kilmallock, after which a meeting took place with three local Pastoral Units. The group had a discussion around Youth Ministry. Scoil Mocheallóg, Kilmallock for hosted the meeting.



CORK: Gathering in St Colman's Cathedral Cobh for Jubilee 2025 celebration of World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life on February 2. Pictured with Bishop of Cloyne William Crea are religious of the diocese from many congregations.



ANTRIM: Attending the 4 Corners Festival were Rev. Steve Stockman (Fitzroy Presbyterian Church), Clare Sands (Fiddler and Bilingual Singer), Dr Lorna Gold (Executive Director of the Laudato Si' Movement), Andrew Muir (Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs) and Fr Martin Magill (St John's Parish - Falls Road).



TIPPERARY: To mark the Feast of St Brigid students at the Cistercian College Roscrea organised a project led by Paddy Smyth and Fr Aodhán. The pupils created a real-life St Brigid's Cross with all the students from each year throughout the school forming the Cross and a drone captured the scene.



ANTRIM: Dr Lorna Gold (Executive Director of the Laudato Si' Movement), Prof. Colin Harvey (Professor of Human Rights Law at QUB and Director of the Human Rights Centre), Lynda Gould (NICVA, Project Coordinator Faith-based engagement), Rev. Dr Bill Shaw (CEO 174 Trust), Sheikh Anwar Mady (Belfast Islamic Centre) during the annual 4 Corners Festival in Belfast.

ANTRIM

Belfast regional launch of the book *The Rock From Which You Were Hewn* takes place on February 16 at 12.30pm following 11am Mass. Dom Basil Mary MacCabe OSB will launch it at the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Antrim Road. Refreshments provided.

CORK

Irish Dominicans 'Vocation Weekend' happens from February 28 to March 2. If you are considering following the footsteps of St Dominican and serve the Church through preaching and studying contact Fr Benedict McGlinchey for more info on 0871852759.

Mass for the African community in St Finbarr's South Church happens on February 15 at 11am. For more information contact 0863650596.

DERRY

'Ignite the Spark' a weekend of fun, faith and friendship for 12-16-year-olds takes place in Termonbacca from February 21 to 23. For more information contact Brendan on 0868067973.

DONEGAL

'Crochet Club' in Desertegney Parish Hall meets every Tuesdays from 9.30am to 11.30am. Tea and coffee served. All welcome, from levels beginners to advanced. €5 per person.

DUBLIN

AFCM is organising the 'Awake Dublin: Catholic Charismatic Conference' taking place on March 1 from 10am to 1pm in the Church of Mary, Mother of Hope, Pace Crescent Littlepace, Clonee. Event will be led by Fr George Adzato and Fr Priesh. Come for rosary, worship, adoration and more. For more info contact Anne on 085 734 0862.

KERRY

St John's Parish Pastoral Council invited parishioners to a coffee morning on February 14 in the Parish Centre after 10am Mass. All welcome.

KILDARE

Irish Theological Quarterly Lecture 'Humility versus Clericalism: Juan de Avila and Pope Francis on Spiritual Formation and Reform' by Prof. Christopher Bellitto takes place on March 4 at 7.30pm in Renehan Hall, St Patrick's University,

Maynooth. To register email specialevents@spcm.ie.

MAYO

Anointing and Healing Service led by Pat and Noreen Buckley takes place on February 16 from 1.15pm to 4pm in the Church of the Holy Rosary, Upper Chapel Street, Garryduff, Castlebar. For more information contact Carmel on 086 383 6055.

MONAGHAN

Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Monaghan Charismatic Prayer Group take place from February 7 at 6.30pm to February 9 in the 4 Seasons Hotel. Opening Mass will be celebrated by Bishop of Clogher Laurence Duffy. Talks will be given by many guest speakers. Admission is free but donations accepted. More information on 087 9717447.

SLIGO

'Baby Bonding Classes' are sessions with gentle and playful activities to help you build a strong bond with your baby. Leand how babies develop and how you play a role in it. Dates to be decided. Suitable for newborns to 8-months-old. Cost is €10 and places are limited. Bookings on 071 918 6926.

TIPPERARY

A retreat for young adults (18-40yrs) takes place from February 14 to 16 in Mt St Joseph Abbey, Roscrea. Step aside from the busy world to focus on the love of Jesus. Full meals and a single room are offered. Admission is a donation. More information with Michael on 086 2453123 or Sr Úna 090 6481666.

TYRONE

'Jubilee of Sport' celebrated by Termonmaguirc Parish takes place in St Colmcille's Church, Carrickmore on February 20 at 7.30pm. Speakers are Niall Morgan who plays football with Edendork, and Neamh Cleary who plays football with Drumragh and has played for Tyrone ladies.

WATERFORD

An afternoon of Prayer takes place on February 16, from 2pm to 5.30pm in the Edmund Rice Chapel, celebrating Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church. All welcome! More information with Síle on 086 8590394.

‘The Church is enriched by its diversity’, says deaf chaplain



Renata Steffens

“**B**ecoming profoundly deaf at the age of seven shaped my perspective and gave me a unique understanding of the challenges faced by the Deaf Community,” John Patrick Doherty, Chaplain for the Deaf Community in Munster told *The Irish Catholic*.

Mr Doherty believes that was God’s way to prepare him to serve others with compassion and empathy. “My faith and spirituality gave me the confidence to embrace this calling, and I feel truly honoured to serve as a lay chaplain for the Deaf Community in Munster.”

He said that by growing up as a deaf person, he could understand firsthand “the struggles and barriers that can sometimes make it difficult for members of the Deaf Community to fully participate in the life of the Church.” He saw the opportunity to “help bridge that

gap, to ensure that no one feels excluded from the sacraments, the liturgy, or the love of Christ,” by becoming a lay chaplain.

Journey

Working as chaplain since 2013, his career journey started much earlier, when he worked in a deaf school in Africa for five years. That time “was one of the greatest privileges of my life. It was a journey of learning, understanding, and growing,” he said.

For Mr Doherty, “teaching the deaf children was nothing short of amazing, and it deepened my faith and sense of purpose in ways I could never have imagined... This experience taught me that love and faith transcend all barriers, including those of language and circumstance.

“It reminded me of the Church’s mission to be a home for all, especially the most vulnerable. As Pope Francis often says, we are called to go to the peripheries, to accompany those on the margins of society, and to bring them the love of Christ. My time at the deaf school was a living example of this call, and I am forever grateful for the opportunity to serve in this way.”

Facing the struggles and challenges of communications during his early years



Mr Doherty and Fergus Dunne (Helper) in a moment of reflection at the top of the Accueil (Hospital) building in Lourdes.

in mainstream education, Mr Doherty found comfort and strength “in my strong soul. This deep sense of God’s presence has been a constant source of peace and reassurance, guiding me through life’s difficulties and preparing me for the ministry I am privileged to carry out today.”

“His job in the chaplaincy influences Mr Doherty’s own faith”

As part of his journey, he pursued qualifications in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). “Through CPE, I gained valuable skills in providing pastoral care with greater sensitivity and attentiveness to the spiritual and emotional needs of those I serve,” he said. He also completed a master’s in theology at St Patrick’s College, Maynooth.

As a chaplain, Mr Doherty’s role is to assist members of the deaf community on their spiritual journey, “offering them

pastoral care, support, and access to the sacraments.”

He interprets liturgies in sign language, provides catechesis and provides them necessary resources to nourish their faith. It “also involves simply being present listening, offering encouragement, and walking with people through the joys and challenges of life... One of the most important aspects of my work is fostering a sense of inclusion and belonging.”

His job in the chaplaincy influences Mr Doherty’s own faith. “It has taught me to see Christ in every person and to trust in His providence, even in the face of challenges, he said. It “has shown me the beauty of diversity within the Body of Christ and the importance of inclusion and compassion.

Collaboration

“As a chaplain, I am constantly drawing strength from the Eucharist and from my own relationship with God. This work has brought me closer to Him and has helped me to grow in humility, gratitude, and love.”

The way Mass is celebrated for the Deaf Community can vary, Mr Doherty

“The priest celebrates the Mass speaking, while I interpret the liturgy into ISL. This collaboration is essential to ensure that the beauty and depth of the Mass are accessible to all”

explained. It depends on “the resources and the priest’s abilities.” Sometimes, the priest knows Irish Sign Language (ISL) and will celebrate Mass himself, others he depends on qualified ISL interpreters’ assistance to ensure the deaf community can fully participate in the liturgy.

“Small efforts like these reflect the Church’s mission to include everyone”

“In Munster, where I work closely with priests during Deaf Masses, the approach is often collaborative,” he said. “Typically, the priest celebrates the Mass speaking, while I interpret the liturgy into ISL. This collaboration is essential to ensure that the beauty and depth of the Mass are accessible to all.”

Technology is also a useful tool in making Mass

accessible, he explained. “I use speech-to-text technology to follow along with the priest’s words, and we work together closely to ensure accuracy and clarity.”

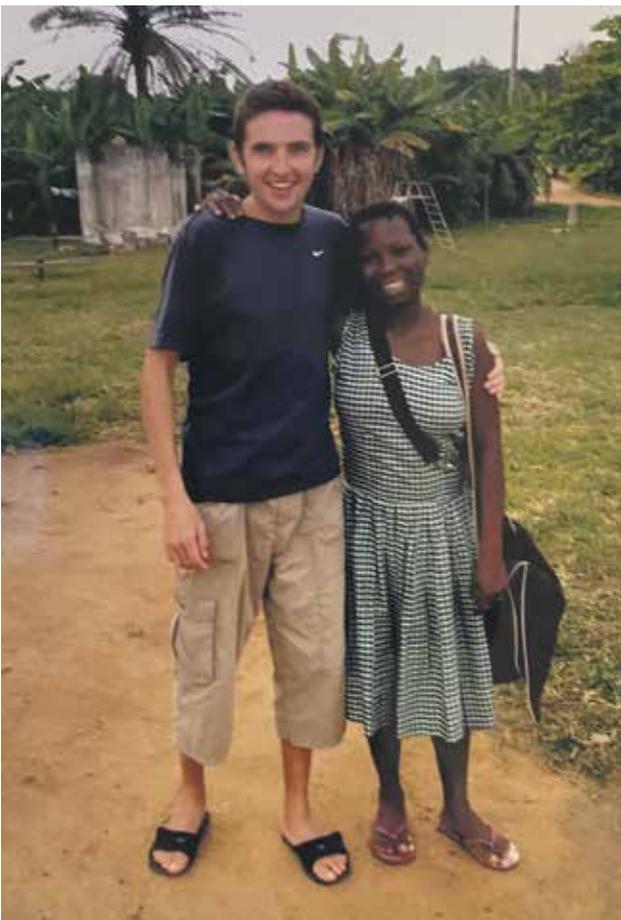
For the chaplain, “it is absolutely imperative that liturgies are accessible, particularly for the deaf community, for whom ISL is their first language.”

“Accessibility is not just a matter of convenience,” he explained. “It is a matter of inclusion, dignity, and the Church’s mission to bring the Gospel to all people.”

“The Church teaches that the liturgy is the ‘source and summit of the Christian life’ [Sacrosanctum Concilium, 10],” Mr Doherty said. “This truth applies to every member of the Body of Christ, including the deaf and hard of hearing.”

Accessibility

He explained that “when liturgies are inaccessible, the deaf community is effectively excluded from the fullness of the Church’s worship and sacramental life. This is why it is so important to provide interpreters, priests who are trained in



The Chaplain alongside a deaf student in Africa.

“As Pope Francis often says, we are called to go to the peripheries, to accompany those on the margins of society, and to bring them the love of Christ”

sign language, and chaplains like myself who can bridge the gap and ensure that the beauty and richness of the liturgy are accessible to all.”

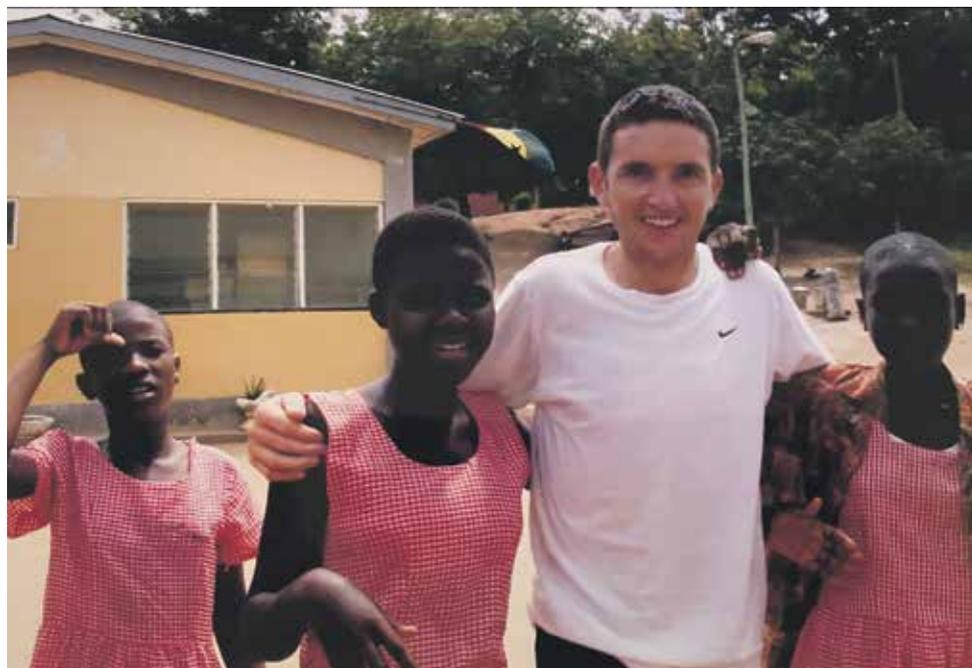
One of the challenges in making the Church life accessible, is “ensuring that the deaf community has full access to the sacraments and the life of the Church. This requires ongoing efforts to provide resources, training, and support, not only for the deaf but also for those who minister to them. Communication can also be a barrier, especially in areas where sign language is not widely used or understood.”

“As St Paul says, ‘Let all things be done for edification’”

When ISL is not available, used or understood, there needs to be alternatives to make Mass more accessible. “One effective option is using speech-to-text software to display the prayers, readings, and homily on a monitor or screen in real time,” Mr Doherty said. “This allows deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals to follow along.”

Another alternative would be the priests emphasising “gestures and symbols, like the Sign of the Cross or the elevation of the Eucharist, which communicate meaning visually,” he

“When liturgies are inaccessible, the Deaf Community is effectively excluded from the fullness of the Church’s worship and sacramental life”



John Patrick with some of his students during his time in Africa. “Teaching and learning together.”

said.

“Even small efforts like these reflect the Church’s mission to include everyone in the liturgy. As St Paul says, ‘Let all things be done for edification’ (1 Corinthians 14:26)”

Experience

Every person experience God in unique ways during the liturgy. “For those of us who are deaf, the Holy Spirit often speaks to us through what we see and feel,” the chaplain explained.

“This is where *Visio Divina*, the prayerful contemplation of sacred images, becomes so important. Stained glass windows, the Stations of the Cross, the gestures of the priest, and the beauty of the Eucharistic elevation—all of these are like visual prayers. They draw us into the mysteries of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.”

When a blind person attends Mass, even if they cannot see the Holy Spirit, they can ‘feel’ Him in their heart. Similarly, a deaf person can ‘see’ His presence in the sacred symbols and images.

The chaplain believes it’s important to recognise “how the Church, as the Body of Christ, is enriched by the diversity of its members. Whether someone is deaf, blind, has a disability, or faces any other challenge, each person brings unique gifts to the Church,” he said. “Every member of the Body of Christ is indispensable, and the Church



Mr Doherty (left) with the deaf community for Advent Mass with Bishop Brendan Leahy last Christmas, at Redemptorists Church, Limerick.

becomes more beautiful and complete when everyone is included.

“Those who have a disability have much to teach the Church about faith”

“For the deaf community, this means embracing the richness of visual prayer, sacred art, gestures in the liturgy, and even the physical and sensory aspects of worship. For example, the smell of incense during Mass can be a profound experience. The rising smoke of incense is a visual and sensory representation of our prayers ascending to

“Whether it’s advocating for accessible liturgies, learning more about the needs of the deaf and blind communities, or simply fostering a spirit of welcome and understanding, each of us can play a role in building a Church that truly reflects the love of Christ”

God,” Mr Doherty explained.

“For those who cannot hear the prayers or music, the fragrance of incense becomes another way to feel connected to the sacred mysteries... For the blind, deaf, or anyone with sensory differences, these elements of the liturgy become powerful ways to encounter the Holy Spirit.”

Those who have a disability have much to teach the Church about faith, Mr Doherty believes. “Silence, stillness, and contemplation are gifts that can deepen our relationship with God. The deaf, for example, can teach others to ‘listen’ with their hearts and to see God’s presence in ways that go beyond words or sound. Likewise, the blind can guide others in trusting God’s light even when they cannot physically see it.”

Witness

Mr Doherty invites people to reflect on how they can help their parishes to become more inclusive. “Whether it’s advocating for accessible liturgies, learning more about the needs of the deaf and blind communities, or simply fostering a spirit of welcome and understanding, each of us can play a role in building a Church that truly reflects the love of Christ.”

Each September, he takes

part of the sick pilgrimage from Dublin to Lourdes. Deaf pilgrims from all across Ireland join the “sacred journey”, when Mr Doherty goes not only as a chaplain, but also as a helper.

“It is truly a blessing to witness the deaf community come together in Lourdes, especially those who may feel isolated—whether they are living on their own, in care homes, or in situations where they struggle to connect with others spiritually.”

“It is important to make every person to feel included”

“For me, being part of this pilgrimage is a reminder of the Church’s universality,” he explained. “In Lourdes, we see the Body of Christ in action—each person, whether deaf, hearing, sick, or helper, plays a vital role in creating a community of faith, hope, and healing.” For the chaplain, it is a privilege to serve and to witness “how Our Lady of Lourdes continues to intercede for all of us, especially those who carry heavy burdens.”

For Mr Doherty, “The deaf and hearing helpers them-

selves are a testament to the beauty of service. Their willingness to give their time, energy, and love reflects the Gospel message of caring for the most vulnerable.”

Besides caring, it is important to make every person to feel included and one of the ways of doing that is to making sure they can understand that preaching and prayers.

Making liturgies accessible, “are not just practical but deeply evangelistic, embodying the Church’s universal mission. As Pope Francis reminds us in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Church must go forth to include those on the peripheries. By embracing these tools, we ensure that no one is excluded from the joy of the Gospel.”

“Inclusion is not just a practical matter—it is a theological one,” the chaplain explained. “The Church is called to reflect the love of Christ, who reached out to all people... By prioritising accessible liturgies and embracing advancements in technology, we can ensure that the deaf community feels fully included in the life of the Church. This is not just about accessibility—it is about belonging. It is about proclaiming, in word and in action, that the Gospel is for everyone.”

The respectable prejudice: anti-Catholicism in post-Catholic Ireland



Dualta Roughneen

I came across a video a few weeks ago from a mediocre Irish band from Dundalk, who were talking rubbish about religion. It was clear that they were not impressed: “We hate Imams as well.”

“I shudder to think of what sort of a fella would say ‘I want to be an Imam when I grow up.’”

“All the mosques could be made into pubs. A mosque would make a great pub.”

“In 15 years all them people are going to be gone. I effin’ hope so.”

“There is kinda like a new age bunch of people being super Muslim now, effin’ twerps.”

That is horrific. To speak like that should surely have the human rights groups, the equality groups, and the long arm of the law, raining down hellfire on you in modern Ireland.

Direction

In fairness to them, they weren’t talking about Islam, imams and mosques. I misheard. They were talking about Catholicism, priests and churches. Thus, there was no bru-hah-hah about it at all.

It feels very different when you replace the words, doesn’t it? Directing such hate towards Islam and something foreign to Ireland sounds like that which would be described as “far-right”. It would, in all likelihood, be construed as hate-speech. It would be unacceptable except maybe to a small minority. And rightly so. It is what we call stereotyping. It is what we call bigotry. It would be even called xenophobic.

But hate towards the Catholic Church, towards priests, towards Catholics in general. This has become the acceptable bigotry. Even readers of this paper are partially immune to thinking the anti-Catholic bile that pervades polite discourse as hate-speech and bigotry.

It can be spewed out

“For all their bravery, they are imprisoned by their imagined bitterness, seeking validation from their fellow-travellers in an echo-chamber of small-minded bullying”



“They are not pushing boundaries. They are living through the past and hiding behind today’s prejudices and bigotry. They are not taking on authority”

without a second thought and it will be promoted on soft-thinking media outlets without any hint of a repercussion. They deserve it, they think, because it has become the respectable middle-class prejudice.

“Our sister was stolen by the Catholic Church and we don’t know whether she’s alive or dead”

It isn’t hate speech when it is somehow deserved, when there is a cosy consensus amongst a certain smug portion of society.

The band in question, from Dundalk, have a history of Church-bashing (I won’t give them the publicity by using their name). Being inter-

viewed in *Hot Press* a few years back, there are hints at family reasons for the hate. “We’ve known about the evils of the Church our whole lives,” says one band member. “Our father was Protestant and our mother was Catholic. Our sister was stolen by the Catholic Church and we don’t know whether she’s alive or dead.”

Hate

Yet, they equally admit, “We were lucky enough that we didn’t go to church growing up”, so it is hard to find what exactly is the first-hand reason for the venom. Let’s give them the benefit of the doubt and accept that someone associated with the Church did something bad towards them and their family. But, in any other walk of life, when talking about any other population group it is not permissible to extend from the individual to the wider social group. That is generally called

bigotry. Sometimes it is called racism.

“We absolutely and wholeheartedly despise the Church,” another member adds. “After all the Catholic Church did to this country, I feel priests should be afraid to walk around the streets. The evils that they committed are unimaginable.”

“Bravery in Ireland today would be taking on the zeitgeist”

Ireland’s proposed law on hate speech would render what the band says about the Church and priests criminal for sure. But even under current laws, where hate is defined as needing incitement to violence, the band is treading a very fine line.

Maybe when calling priests ‘twerps’ they should listen to Fr Dominik Domagala when asked “Why did you become a priest, and how did it happen?”

“To which I typically provide a quick and insightful response: ‘Well, it’s complicated.’ Indeed, the journey of anyone who has chosen to enter religious life and priest-

hood, is intertwined with mystery, great expectations, discernment, and a sense of unworthiness. It is a path filled with questions and a search for answers, some of which emerge only after a lengthy exploration.”

Or maybe they should read about Mill Hill missionary Fr Declan O’Toole (31) of Headford, Co Galway killed in Uganda after a peace meeting in 2002 when he was ambushed and shot dead at point-blank range by a lone gunman. Or Kenyan native, Fr Victor-Luke Odhiambo, who had studied in Dublin, shot dead in South Sudan. Or Fr John Hannon from Killula, of Newmarket-on-Fergus, Co Clare, brutally beaten to death in Kenya. Or 57-year-old Irish priest, Rufus Halley, murdered in the Philippines by a gang of men in 2001, having been there since the 1960s to work in dialogue and conflict resolution between Muslim and Christian communities.

There are plenty of priests and nuns who admit to living in fear, in their homes, or walking down the street.

Bravely, they tell *Hot Press*, “Our father was very anti-authority, and I suppose our brothers and sisters were too. In school and everything, we were anti-authority as well. It’s no sweat off our backs to challenge stuff.”

Priests, and religious in general, are bottom of the food-chain in Ireland these days. These tough lads are not attacking authority. It is clear that they never fell under the authority of the Church. Their stance is not brave. It is cowardly.

Bravery in Ireland today would be taking on the *zeitgeist* rather than being cosily aligned with the liberal-establishment viewpoint. This band is not railing against authority. It is very much part of the social and cultural authority that seeks to choke diversity of opinion from the melting-pot.

Bravery

These brave lads choose to go after the one section of society that is most maligned in modern Ireland. They don’t see individuals. They don’t see the lives many priests and religious have led, whether here in Ireland, or in some of the poorest parts of the world, giving everything for others. They see only what they read in the popular press and hear in their bunkered social circles.

They are not pushing boundaries. They are living through the past and hiding behind today’s prejudices and bigotry. They are not taking on

authority. They are punching down. But they don’t realise it because they live in an echo chamber that tells them what great fellows they are.

They arrive clinging on to the coattails of present-day populism dressed up as rebellion, living through a reductionist and historically illiterate understanding of the past. Like their fellow-travellers, from further north, Kneecap, they are ‘bobo’ – bohemian bourgeois – dressed up as a singing political statement. They think they are at the cutting edge of reactionary politics, but the truth is they are in the soft centre.

“This band from Dundalk aren’t old enough to know what Catholic Ireland was like”

It is far braver, for reasons that this band and their ilk regularly demonstrate, to choose to be religious or a priest today in Ireland than it is to dress up in the clothes of middle-class respectability masquerading as rebels.

This is the Ireland of today. It is a country still defined by Catholicism in only that it is post-Catholic resentment that determines how the country talks and thinks. For the many who are struggling to find meaning in its absence, they find only satisfaction in being anti-Catholic. For all their bravery, they are imprisoned by their imagined bitterness, seeking validation from their fellow-travellers in an echo-chamber of small-minded bullying.

This band from Dundalk aren’t old enough to know what Catholic Ireland was like. It was well on the road to extinction by the time they were out of nappies. It is a good while since they were teenagers but appear to be in a state of perpetual adolescence all the same.

It is becoming a staid truism to say ‘you wouldn’t say that about Islam’, but it is a sad truth in Ireland today. It isn’t acceptable to talk about any other identity group in this manner. To be honest, if a band wants to talk like that, in a shallow, ill-informed and uneducated way, it doesn’t really bother me. But if it is fine to talk about priests in this manner, then let’s be consistent and speak about every identity group through prejudicial generalisations without consequence.

THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

Cardinal Koch rejects extreme traditionalist and progressive positions on Vatican II

Nicolás de Cárdenas

In his acceptance speech for the honorary doctorate awarded him by the Catholic University of Valencia, Cardinal Kurt Koch rejected the extreme positions of progressives and traditionalists regarding the Second Vatican Council.

The prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity reflected in his address on the tension between the two essential parts of the Second Vatican Council: fidelity to the sources and fidelity to the signs of the times.

For the cardinal, “the relationship between these two dimensions has always characterised the Church, but the tension has become more acute in a new way after Vatican II.”

Faced with this dichotomy, Cardinal Koch argued that “beyond secularist conformism and separatist fundamentalism, it is necessary to seek a third path in the Catholic faith, which has already been shown to us by the council.”

According to the prefect, both the so-called progressives and the traditionalists “conceive of Vatican II as a rupture, although in opposite ways.” For the former, the rupture occurred after the council, while the latter understand that it occurred during it.

In light of this, the cardinal considered that “the two extreme positions are so close, precisely because they do not interpret Vatican II within the general tradition of the Church.”

In his address, Cardinal Koch recalled, with regard to the traditionalist view that focuses solely on the sources, that Pope Benedict XVI stated that “the magisterial authority of the Church cannot be frozen in 1962.”

The risk of worldliness in the Church

On the other hand, “if the emphasis is placed solely on ‘aggiornamento’ [updat-



Cardinal Kurt Koch, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, speaks at press briefing for the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican October 10, 2024. Photo: CNS photo/Lola Gomez.

ing], there is a danger that the opening of the Church to the world, desired and achieved by the council, will become a hasty adaptation of the foundations of Faith to the spirit of the modern age,” the cardinal noted.

“The Church must not be defined in such a way that it separates itself from the world”

“Many currents in the post-conciliar period were so oriented toward the world that they did not notice the tentacles of the modern spirit or underestimated its impact,” the cardinal observed, “so that the so-called conversion to the world did not cause the leaven of the Gospel to permeate modern society more

“In this sense, he added that the dialogue between the Church and the contemporary world ‘must not make Faith and the Church adapt to the world in a secularist way, dangerously renouncing her identity’”

but rather led to a broad conformism of the Church with the world.”

Cardinal Koch’s proposal in the face of both positions, which he considers equally disruptive, is “the restoration of a healthy balance in the relationship between the faith and the Church on the one hand and the world on the other.”

In his view, if the Church cannot be confused with the world, “the original identity of Faith and the Church must not be defined in such a way that it separates itself from the world in a fundamentalist way.”

In this sense, he added that the dialogue between the Church and the contemporary world “must not make Faith and the Church adapt to the world in a secularist way, dangerously renouncing her identity.”

What does the reform of the Church mean?

For the prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, the reform of the Church cannot imply “a change of essence” but consists in “the elimination of what is inauthentic” through

a process of purification of the Church “based on its origins,” so that “the form of the one Church willed by Christ can become visible again.”

“It aimed at a renewal of faith and a Church renewed on the basis of the spirit”

“For the council, fidelity to its origins and conformity to the times were not opposed to each other. Rather, the

council wanted to proclaim the Catholic faith in a way that was both faithful to its origins and appropriate to the times, in order to be able to transmit the truth and beauty of the Faith to the people of today, so that they can understand it and accept it as an aid to their lives,” he emphasised.

For the cardinal, “the council did not create a new Church in rupture with tradition, nor did it conceive a different Faith, but rather it aimed at a renewal of Faith and a Church renewed on the basis of the spirit of the Christian message that has been revealed once and for all and transmitted in the living tradition of the Church.”

This story was first published by ACI Prensa, CNA’s Spanish-language news partner. It has been translated and adapted by CNA.

DON’T MISS NEXT WEEK: WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE FUTURE OF SYNODALITY
HOW WE MOVE FORWARD FROM HERE BY KRISTIN M.COLBERG AND JOS MOONS, SJ



World Report

IN BRIEF

African priest says Trump budget pause should urge Africa to be more independent

● One Catholic leader in Africa says US President Donald Trump's pause in foreign aid shows he doesn't accept it as a tool of diplomacy.

The Director of the Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) of the South Africa Bishops' Conference, Fr Stan Muyebe told *Crux* that it is time for Africa to come up with a new definition of ethical leadership.

The priest was reacting to Trump's January 20 executive order initiating a 90-day pause on new foreign aid programs to review their alignment with US foreign policy, saying it has disrupted important life-saving services across Africa.

Each year, Africa receives over \$8 billion from the United States. The money helps to feed starving kids, supply lifesaving drugs, and provides aid to people hit by disaster or war.

Catholic International University launches new program in AI

● Catholic International University (CIU) is launching a master's degree program designed to form Catholic-minded students in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI).

CIU's master of science degree in the prudential design of emerging technologies is designed to teach graduates how to integrate Christian principles into the design of AI.

The programme organ-

isers took inspiration from the growing commentary from the Catholic Church about AI, including the Vatican's recent *Antiqua et Nova*, which offered guidelines on the use of AI and its ethical and anthropological implications.

What makes the department "so unique," Mark Amelang, vice president of marketing and communications at CIU said, is that it brings together technology and theology.

Building leaders in Catholic education: US Archdiocese partners with local university

● The Archdiocese of Miami and St Thomas University (STU) in Florida, have collaborated on a unique programme designed to train handpicked teachers, creating a "bench of new leaders" for Catholic education in the archdiocese.

Jim Rigg, the superintendent of Catholic schools in the archdiocese, developed the two-year, cohort-based master's program in partnership with David Armstrong, the president of STU.

The master's program is a fusion of St Thomas University's educational master's program with courses exclusively targeted toward mission and ministry. Students involved in the Catholic Educational Leadership Cohort — most of them handpicked by Mr Rigg — receive scholarships to attend the programme.

"We came together to integrate the best of our respective organisations," Mr Rigg said. "We took the existing master's in educational leadership program at STU and 'baptised' it, infusing each course with Catholic-focused content."

US Sunday Mass attendance back to pre-pandemic levels

● The Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University noted in a February 5 post on its 'Nineteen Sixty-four research blog' that Sunday Mass attendance in person has risen to 24% in the US since the declared end of the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2023. That rate has held through the first week of 2025.

From the start of the pandemic lockdowns in March 2020 to May 2023, attendance had averaged 15%. Prior to the pandemic, the average attendance was 24.4%.

Mark Gray, CARA's director of polls, told *OSV News* that attendance figures recently released by the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia, had underscored a trend he and his colleagues had identified.

Pope Francis: Defending Indigenous rights 'a matter of justice'

Hannah Brockhaus

Defending the rights of Indigenous people is a matter of justice and a way to guarantee a sustainable future for everyone, Pope Francis said in a message on Monday.

"Land, water, and food are not mere commodities but the very basis of life and the link between these [Indigenous] peoples and nature," the Pope said in a message to participants in the Seventh Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum, taking place in Rome on February 10-11.

"Defending these rights," he continued, "is not only a matter of justice but also a guarantee of a sustainable future for all."

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is hosting the meeting in order to strengthen IFAD's partnership with Indigenous peoples and its initiatives in their communities.

Pope Francis said the theme of the two-day gathering — "The Right of Indigenous Peoples to Self-Determination: A Path to Food Security and Food Sovereignty" — "calls us to recognise the value of Indigenous peoples as well as the ancestral heritage of knowledge and practices that positively enrich the great human fam-



Pope Francis shares a moment with Mundiya Kepanga, a Papuan activist and leader from Papua New Guinea, at the Vatican May 8, 2024. Kepanga is known for advocating for the rights of Indigenous peoples and for raising awareness about the challenges they face, including environmental issues and land rights. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

ily, colouring it with the varied traits of their traditions." Ancestral heritage and traditions, he added, open up "a horizon of hope" in a challenging time.

The pontiff also emphasised that preservation of Indigenous culture and identity goes hand in hand with recognising the value they bring to society and the

importance of safeguarding their existence and the natural resources they need to live.

He closed his message by expressing a hope that people will work to ensure future generations also have access to a world "in keeping with the beauty and goodness that guided God's hands in creating it."

"I beseech Almighty God that these efforts may be fruitful and serve as an inspiration to the leaders of nations," Francis said, "so that appropriate measures may be taken to ensure that the human family will walk together in the pursuit of the common good, so that no one will be excluded or left behind."

Catholic leader highlights desperation as eastern DRC war intensifies

As the situation gets worse in the DR Congo, the Director of Communication at Caritas Butembo-Beni has decried the desperation that has enveloped the people of eastern Congo following an upsurge in violence between the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels and the Congolese Armed Forces.

M23 took control of the mining town of Nyabibwe last week, located some 60 miles from the capital of South Kivu, Bukavu.

Elie Mbulegheti, Director of Communication at Caritas Butembo-Beni, told *Crux* that the fighting has created a situation where people aren't even free to flee.

He said the war has resulted in thousands of orphaned children who now live in orphanages within the diocese, and "they struggle daily to access education, food, and proper living conditions. Their caregivers often rely on neighbourhoods and city residents to help feed and care for them."

In a statement, members of the Episcopal Conference of the Congo, CENCO expressed their spiritual closeness with the people of eastern Congo so battered by conflict.

They voiced "great sadness and much concern" at the violence in a statement signed by Archbishop Fulgence Muteba Mugalu of Lubumbashi,

the president of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO).

"The intensification of fighting between the FARDC (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo) and the AFC/M23 rebels, along with their respective allies, has caused enormous loss of human life," the bishops said.

"We wish to express our fraternal closeness and solidarity with Bishop Willy Ngumbi of Goma Diocese, and Archbishop François Xavier Maroy, Metropolitan Archbishop of Bukavu, as well as with the entire People of God living in these afflicted regions," the Church leaders said.

Catholic Sister founds first formation centre for women religious in Namibia

Sr Anne Arabome, a member of the Sisters of Social Service (SSS) of Los Angeles, has established the first theological and spiritual formation centre in Namibia.

The Sophia Institute for Theological Studies and Spiritual Formation is dedi-

cated to empowering African women religious through theological education, leadership training, and spiritual formation.

Sr Arabome, returning to Africa after years of ministry in the United States, recognised the urgent need for

such an initiative to support the growing number of religious vocations in Africa.

The Sophia Institute aims to equip women religious with the necessary skills to serve marginalised communities and promote social justice.

"Sophia Institute offers an oasis of serenity and peace to all religious women who seek to connect with their spiritual depth and discover and discern God's will in their lives to enhance their mission in life — virtually and in person," she told *Crux*.



Edited by Renata Steffens
renata@irishcatholic.ie



Cheers and colours in the Vatican



A group of children cheers while waiting for Pope Francis to arrive at the Paul VI Audience Hall for his weekly general audience at the Vatican on February 5, 2025. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez.

Latin American Church strategies after Trump's immigration policies

President Donald Trump's new policies concerning undocumented immigrants have been causing shock and outrage among many in Latin America. The region's Church is one of the institutions currently trying to figure out how such changes will impact its work and is establishing strategies to deal with them.

The new US president's pledge to promote "mass deportations" and the scandalous ways his administration has been enforcing his policies were received with criticism in Latin American countries.

Latin American bishops like Archbishop Roberto González Nieves of San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Archbishop José Domingo Ulloa Mendieta of Panama

City, emphasised that the new US immigration policies should consider the needs and the rights of the immigrants. Archbishop Ulloa said that the new rules will transform the borders into "human dams."

A high number of Catholic groups work with migrants in Latin America. Not only congregations like the Scalabrinians, whose charism is precisely to assist refugees and immigrants, promote actions to help people crossing the region towards North America. Orders like the Jesuits and the Verbites also keep temporary shelters and refectories along the way, as well as numerous parishes, dioceses, pastoral ministries, and Caritas organisations.

One of the recent initiatives aiming develop strategies to deal with the new situation was an online meeting promoted by Red Clamor (Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesial Network on Migration, Displacement, Refuge and Trafficking in Human Beings), which gathers dozens of Catholic groups, on January 31. More than 100 people discussed the challenges posed by Trump.

"The new measures' impacts are manifold. They menace people now traveling to the US, people who have been living there for decades, and institutions that directly or indirectly receive money from the US," Bishop Eugenio Lira of Matamoros, Mexico, who

heads the Mexican Human Mobility Pastoral Ministry, told Crux.

In the opinion of Fr Conrado Zepeda, a Social Science professor at the Ibero American University in Puebla who headed the Jesuits' migration and refugees service for years in Mexico, the Latin American Church is "on the immigrants' side, more than ever.

"More conservative parishes or groups that didn't have any work connected to immigrants have been launching initiatives over the past few years, thanks to Pope Francis's insistence on that theme. The Latin American Church is almost unanimous now in that regard," he said.

Attack on priest at Spokane cathedral's Lourdes service points to mental health needs

A man attacked the parochial vicar of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes during a February 4 healing liturgy. The incident occurred on the second night of the cathedral's Lourdes Novena for Healing.

The attacker rushed from the pews and swung at Fr David Gaines, who remained calm, saying, "You'll be OK." Parishioners,

a deacon, and security subdued the man, who was later arrested.

Bishop Thomas Daly, who witnessed the event from a few feet away, resumed the prayer service after the man was escorted out. Bishop Daly told OSV News he was grateful for the quick security response and that no one was hurt. He said the attack raises questions about men-

tal illness and possible demonic affliction, and the importance of the Church's role in outreach and healing.

The bishop said that he feels that the Church has a responsibility to follow up with this man and his needs. The attack, he said, "calls attention to both illness on all levels and the importance to heal and ask Mary's intercession."

Pope Francis reiterates desire for 'full unity' among Christians

● Pope Francis reiterated his desire for "full unity" with other Christian confessions when he received in audience young priests and monks of the Oriental Orthodox churches.

The Holy Father told the group of young priests and monks of the Oriental Orthodox churches "Christians who remain divided are like fragments that must find unity in the confession of the one faith."

This audience was part of a curriculum for young Oriental Orthodox priests and monks organised by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity.

The pontiff expressed his gratitude for the "exchange of gifts" promoted by the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox churches and noted that "it allows the dialogue of charity to go hand in hand with the dialogue of truth."

Pope confirms Cardinal Re as President of the Cardinals

● His term of office had expired three weeks ago. But only now has the Vatican made the announcement: 91-year-old Giovanni Battista Re remains Cardinal Dean - and thus the highest-ranking wearer of the purple.

Pope Francis had already confirmed his re-election on January 7, the Vatican announced on Thursday. He also confirmed the re-election of the Argentinian curia cardinal Leonardo Sandri as

sub-dean. The Pope had limited the term of office of the cardinal dean to five years in 2019. Re's term of office expired in mid-January, but nothing had yet been announced about his re-election.

In the event of the death or resignation of a Pope, the Cardinal Dean summons the other cardinals to Rome and leads their first consultations. If the dean is younger than 80, he also presides over the conclave and the papal election.

Pope leads global summit on defending children's rights

● Pope Francis hosted last week an international summit on the rights of the child, lamenting the millions who daily endure war, poverty, abuse, exploitation, depression and a lack of hope for the future.

The summit was held in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican's Apostolic Palace and titled 'Love them and protect them'. In an opening address, the Pope, lamented that throughout the world, children's rights "are daily trampled upon and ignored."

Children across the world have to deal with various difficulties, he said, and those in developed nations often experience anxiety and depression, and many are "drawn to forms of aggression or self-harm."

He called the situation a "global moral crisis" and urged summit participants to not let these situations "become the new normal."

Vatican envoy announces suppression of all branches of Peru group

● On February 2 the Vatican official tasked with suppressing a Peru-based lay group plagued by scandal announced that not just one, but all four entities belonging to the so-called 'spiritual family' have been suppressed.

Last month news leaked that after over a year of inquiry by the Vatican's top two investigators, the Pope had decided to suppress the Peru-based Sodalitum Christiane Vitae (SCV), founded by Peruvian layman Luis Fernando Figari.

Speaking during a Mass at the SCV-run Our Lady of Reconciliation parish in the neighbourhoods of Camacho in Lima, Spanish Monsignor Jordi Bertomeu Farnós announced that in addition to the SCV, "everything that Figari founded" had been suppressed.

He insisted the decision was "not a punishment," but the product of a discernment that came at the end of "a very difficult and very complicated special mission."

Letters

Post to: Letters to the Editor, The Irish Catholic, Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18, D18 K277 or email: letters@irishcatholic.ie

Letter of the Week

Where are the feminists when we need them?

Dear Editor, Three cheers for historian Fr Conor McDonough OP for exposing the 'paper thin' reasoning for deposing St Brigid in favour of some pagan goddess. The latter, he tells us, is only mentioned once in the 10th-century manuscript, 'Sanas Cormaic'. She never enjoyed any importance in Ireland.

Where, one might ask, does that leave

her modern 'followers'?

St Brigid existed and is still venerated, 1,500 years after her death, as 'Mary of the Gael', one of our three patron saints. It is outrageous that an attempt is being made to airbrush her out, in favour of someone who never existed and by those who don't know. Are we getting into face-painting territory here?

I know some of the 'Imbolcers' and they have one thing in common: they don't have a clue what they are talking about and manage to combine a devastating combination of ignorance and arrogance. Have we not already more than our fair share of intellectuals without an intellect? The real St Brigid has been honoured not only in Ireland but across continental

Europe. We should be proud of having had such an inspiring Irishwoman, not least at a time when women generally were regarded as inferiors. Where are our feminists when we need them? Where – apart from Fr McDonough – are our historians?

*Yours etc.,
Desmond Egan
Newbridge Co. Kildare*

Creates doubt around a biological fact

Dear Editor, There were certainly positive aspects in the sermon given by Bishop Marianne Edgar Buddy at President Trump's inauguration. There are real worries in relation to some of the US President's proposed policies which it was appropriate for Bishop Buddy to raise.

However, I was concerned at her use of the term 'transgender children'. This reflects the false idea that children who are experiencing distress in relation to their sex may have the option to transition. This may then involve a young person embarking on an irreversible medical, pharmaceutical and surgical journey involving significant bodily mutilation. Of course, there are indeed some children, (mainly girls) who experience distress and anxiety about their sex, and they should be responded to with respect, compassion and support. However, Bishop Buddy's approach reflects a culture of contagion in which some young girls are affirmed and encouraged and directed towards the ultimately disastrous pathway referred to above. It is a form of child abuse, based on a mistaken ideology that sex is in some way assigned at birth and can be changed. It creates doubt around a biological fact when there shouldn't be any. As our Church teaches, and science confirms, biology cannot be separated from identity.

*Yours etc.,
Gerry Heery
Belfast, Co Antrim*

Prioritising diversity over competence could cost lives

Dear Editor, I appreciate Mary Kenney's recent article [*The Irish Catholic* – January 6, 2025] mentioning Silent Witness and the broader conversation surrounding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in employment. While inclusivity in the workplace is a commendable goal, I believe it is crucial to recognise that rigid DEI policies could have unintended and even dangerous consequences—especially in professions where public safety is paramount.

In fields such as firefighting,

policing, and emergency response, the ability to perform under extreme pressure, physical endurance, and quick decision-making can mean the difference between life and death. When hiring decisions prioritise diversity over competence, there is a real risk that the best candidates may be overlooked, potentially endangering both their colleagues and the public.

The primary focus in these roles must be on selecting the most capable individuals, regardless of

background, to ensure that those entrusted with public safety can meet the highest standards.

This is not to say that diversity and merit are mutually exclusive. There are undoubtedly many individuals from diverse backgrounds who are highly qualified and excel in these roles. However, hiring processes should remain rooted in objective criteria, ensuring that the most skilled and prepared individuals are chosen. DEI should encourage fairness, not impose rigid quotas

that could compromise public safety.

We are called to uphold justice and fairness. True fairness means selecting individuals based on their ability to perform the job effectively, particularly when lives are at stake. A thoughtful and balanced approach to diversity ensures inclusivity without undermining the critical functions that keep our communities safe.

*Yours etc.,
Laura Sheridan
Drumcondra, Dublin 9*

Christianity can not be fulfilled through good works alone

Dear Editor, It was heartening to read about the wonderful humanitarian relief provided by Knock parishioners in the aftermath of Storm Éowyn – the letter of Tom Grufferty 'Christianity in Ireland has a glorious future' [*The Irish Catholic*

– February 6, 2025]. By all accounts it was an admirable witness of "real fraternity and fellowship".

However, I believe it is important to remember the total Christian life in its horizontal dimension of "Love your neighbour as yourself"

(Matt 22:39) and its vertical dimension "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt 22:37). Jesus says that this love of God is "the great and first commandment" (v38).

This first commandment involves seeking a relationship with Jesus, looking to him as our personal Lord and Saviour. This encounter in turn requires a commitment to daily prayer, Mass on Sundays and Holy Days (our perfect act of divine worship/the "source and summit of the Christian life" – Vatican II), the Ten Commandments (God's gift of Truth for right living).

We need to guard against a type of Christianity that is

fulfilled through good works alone apart from belief in Jesus.

One of the great summary statements of the whole Bible is John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave [sacrificed] his only begotten Son that whoever believes [trusts] in him [Jesus] should not perish but have eternal life."

*Yours etc.,
A.P. Breen
Bronx, New York, USA*



Do not use God for ungodly purposes.

Dear Editor, As a practising Catholic, I cannot but welcome Donald Trump's exhortation to "bring God back" into our lives. He plans to set up a task force to "move heaven and earth to defend the rights of Christians and religious believers..." (Trump speech, February 6, 2025).

The problem with this rhetoric is how to square it with ethnically cleansing Gaza of over two million Palestinians to create a lucrative piece of real estate in their place. Or indeed with Israel handing over Gaza (which it doesn't own) to the United States when the killing is over.

Palestinian Arabs are believers in God so how about defending their rights? Predominantly they are Muslim and many are Christian. So, what about their right to live (and practise their faith among other things) within their own sovereign state in their native Palestine?

Yes, by all means, bring God back into modern life but let us not use him for ungodly purposes.

*Yours etc.,
Sinéad Boland
Co. Wicklow.*

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

A Catholic approach to relationships

Rohith Kinattukara

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The Irish Catholic, February 13, 2025

Campanile of Trinity College Dublin

The long road to surrender

I don't think there was ever a time in my life when I didn't believe in God, not truly. My story is more about how I placed limits and barriers in different areas of my life - areas where God wasn't allowed to enter. Over time, this became a journey of breaking down (and sometimes uncovering) those barriers together with Him.

I was born and raised in Dublin, and Catholicism has been a part of my life from the very beginning. When I began to practice my faith seriously, I used to divide my life into a simple 'before' and 'after' - a time when I wasn't really a Christian, and then a time when I was. But looking back now, I realise this view was oversimplified. People who knew me back then would describe me as unusually religious for my age. So, what changed?

I think what changed for me was that, for most of my life, my religion was the one of the mainstream Church in 21st-century Ireland. I deliberately use the word 'religion' here, rather than 'faith' or 'relationship with Jesus', because that's what it was. It was a set of practices, and little more.



I still put barriers up in my soul to God, and He keeps breaking them down, says Ciarán Heelan

Like many Irish Christians at the time, I was willing to let God into certain aspects of my life, but always on my terms. I was determined to be the one in control of the relationship, not Him.

“Now that I have come to Him, I still face those same struggles”

This began to change in 2020. I was halfway through my undergraduate degree at Trinity when the world went into lockdown. So, when I saw that the Trinity Catholic Society (the Laurentians) was hosting a Bible study on Zoom, I thought, 'Well, I'm Catholic, I'll join that. That turned out to be a turn-

ing point. The Laurentians were the first group of Christians my age that I'd ever met who weren't awkward, strange, or judgmental. They talked about Jesus as if He were a real person who mattered in their lives, not the distant, abstract figure I'd known from my parish church growing up. Just as importantly, the literature they recommended to me (particularly CS Lewis) challenged the half-life I'd been living. It forced me to decide whether I was truly willing to give my life to Jesus, instead of pretending I could follow Him on my own terms.

My testimony isn't as exciting or dramatic as others. There were no issues with drug abuse, no time spent in prison, and there wasn't even really a 'come-to-Jesus' moment. It was a slow, gradual process that took about

two or three years before I could honestly say that Jesus was the cornerstone of my life, rather than just a part of it.

It also feels different to me because some people talk about how they were miserable before they knew Jesus, and now they're full of joy all the time. My conversion wasn't like that. I frequently struggled with depression and anxiety before coming to Jesus, and now that I have come to Him, I still face those same struggles. The clear and beautiful vocation story I had been praying for took an unexpected turn, and I'm still dealing with the aftermath of that, months later. I continue to face difficulties in my life, and there are days when bearing the cross Jesus has asked me to carry feels incredibly hard. I backslide, I get angry with God, I break down in pain and frustration, and sometimes I wonder if He is truly on my side or why I'm even doing any of this.

Value

Was it worth it? I think so. The difference between my 'before' and 'after' is that no matter how

hard life can be sometimes, God exists. Jesus is the Truth, and any existence not rooted in truth will inevitably crumble when it faces reality (as any lie eventually will). Reality can be painfully difficult at times, but it's only by confronting reality, rather than living in our own illusions, that we can truly address the problems we face - and offer up the ones we cannot fix to someone who can. God didn't wave a magic wand to make all my problems disappear, but He did provide me with teaching, structure, and often the infusions of supernatural grace I needed to get through each day.

So, what changed after I came to Jesus? All I can do is return to the beginning. I still put barriers up in my soul to God, and He keeps breaking them down. Sometimes I put them back up again, but God, in His patience, always knocks them down once more. That said, I believe there are fewer barriers now than when I started, and that gives me some grounds for hope.

Who needs Jordan Peterson when you have the Book of Wisdom?



Jason Conroy

“If only life came with a user manual!” I once heard someone say. Today there’s not much emphasis on teaching rules of good behaviour. We’re free to express ourselves and make up our own minds about things. But ‘do what you feel’ very often ends up as ‘what do I do?’ Since I can do almost anything, I have no idea what to do. It’s like having a ship with no compass, nor map, nor destination. Is this freedom?

It turns out that for many things, ‘just be yourself’ is not very helpful advice. Sadly, my personality and inner creativity do not include the ability to spontaneously speak Cantonese or play a piano concerto. More is required.

Languages, instruments, dances: in all these we become free by learning the rules and practicing them until we become so fluent in the skill that we can do it without thinking. So, when we are no longer taught clear rules and forms, we end up not freer, but less free.

Virtue is basically the skill of being good at life. Just as a pianist is skilled at playing the piano, so a virtuous person is a virtuoso at being a human - and all those rules of good behaviour help train us to be virtuous. It’s one thing never to be taught to play the piano, but it is entirely tragic never to be taught how to be human.

So, when into this gap stepped the straight-talking Jordan Peterson, it’s not hard to see why he was so well received. ‘Tidy your room.’ ‘Throw your shoulders back.’ ‘Treat yourself like someone you’re responsible for helping.’ For many, this provided the much-needed guidance and challenge that self-esteem culture lacked. Peterson also intrigued many with his psychological readings of the Old Testament. Much like the Platonists did for St Augustine, he has led lots of people to Catholicism without himself being a Catholic.

“He who meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who grabs a stray dog by the ears”

But Peterson’s advice has both good and bad in it; truth mixed in with falsity, like all human wisdom. We Catholics have been given something far better: and will it be said that we have neglected it?

The ‘Wisdom Books’ of the Old Testament - Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Sirach and The Book of Wisdom in particular - are a huge storehouse of sound advice and rules for life, written for us by God, teaching us to be virtuous and wise; and by our Faith, we have the key.

The Book of Proverbs at first seems a random collection of shrewd sayings: “He who meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who grabs a stray dog by the ears,” or: “Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” But underneath these pithy sayings, the Book of Proverbs answers a



The wise and foolish virgins, Jacopo Tintoretto (Jacopo Comin, Jacopo Robusti). Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, the Netherlands.

deeper question: will doing the right thing always end up best for me? The author’s answer is a vehement ‘Yes!’

Acceptance

Though it often seems that bad men prosper, and immoral deeds yield better rewards, in reality ‘the fear of the Lord’ and goodness towards others is always rewarded, and evil always ends in disaster; beneath all the appearances, Providence always has the last word.

Ecclesiastes teaches us some hard truths, and a certain healthy detachment. Uncer-

tainty is a fact of life; and the outcome of all our efforts is uncertain; and sooner or later we meet our Maker. The conclusion? Acceptance: don’t found your life on chasing fleeting things like success or pleasure. Instead, as the various things in life pass you by, accept them and embrace them with a sense of perspective, without being too attached to them. God has made the one as well as the other.

“Toward what your neighbour is looking at, do not put out a hand; nor reach when he does, for the same dish”

The Book of Sirach has advice for almost every situation:

“Never repeat a conversation, and you will lose nothing at all. If you’ve heard a story, let it die with you; be brave! It will not make you burst.”

“My son, with humility, have self-esteem; prize yourself as you deserve. Who will acquit whoever condemns himself? Who will honour him who discredits himself?”

There’s even advice on table manners: “Are you seated at a banquet table? Bring to it no greedy gullet! Toward what

“The deepest wisdom of these is that they introduce us to the only Wisdom we can ever really live by: Christ Himself”

your neighbour is looking at, do not put out a hand; nor reach when he does, for the same dish.”

The final book, known simply as ‘The Book of Wisdom’ is the most epic of all: Wisdom appears as an actual person, who is to be loved and pursued, and who is searching for us too; Someone who makes people wise and virtuous by the gift of bread and wine; Someone who crafted the whole world, who even seems to be divine, and equal with God. Who is this mysterious “Wisdom”?

Virtue

We already know that if we want to live truly human lives, we need to learn the rules and virtues. But is that all there is to it? It’s one thing to know what the right thing to do is: it’s an entirely other thing to do it. The ancient Greeks and Romans knew quite a bit about goodness and virtue but couldn’t live it out. What was missing?

For some, the question remains unanswered. But by our faith we understand that the same “Wisdom” who holds the answer to our questions, was born in Bethlehem and died on Calvary. He is the missing key.

We find here, then, at the end of our quest for virtue, not a series of principles or rules, but a Person: “He has become our wisdom and our virtue and our holiness and our freedom.” Virtue turns out to be nothing other than the relationship with Him - He is our virtue. Before He came, we weren’t free to live the good life. To live a wise, a free, a truly human life: this isn’t possible without Him. When Christianity first spread in the ancient world, one of its most noticeable and unprecedented effects was that bad men became good: prostitutes became saints; scoundrels became honest men; and even to this day every twelve-step program begins with total dependence on the help of God.

The very best rules for life you can find are already there in the wisdom books; but the deepest wisdom of these is that they introduce us to the only Wisdom we can ever really live by: Christ Himself. And this is where, like a plane taking off a runway, we go from moral codes and rules, and on to the mysteries of the life of Christ and His sacraments. “And if the Son makes you free, you are free indeed.”

Chivalrous Scouts

Codes of moral behaviour were not always so hard to come by. Take, for example, the famous Boy Scouts Handbook, originally written by Baden Powell in 1908. It features a whole section on ‘chivalry’, that is, the code of honour and courtesy followed by the knights of the Middle Ages. He writes: “One aim of the Boy Scouts scheme is to revive amongst us, if possible, some of the rules of the knights of old: Defend the poor and help them that cannot defend themselves; Do nothing to hurt or offend anyone else; Never break your promise; Rather die honest than live shamelessly; Do good unto others.”

He gives a model example of manly courtesy towards one’s enemies: When the Japanese were besieging the Russians at Port Arthur

in 1905, a Russian soldier threw a letter for his mother into the Japanese trenches, complete with a gold coin for postage. Rather than keeping the money, the Japanese soldier “did what any boy scout would do” - he sent the letter to the Russian’s mother and even threw a note back saying he had done so. Many confused notions of masculinity emphasise assertiveness and conquest, but these older ones are all about service, restraint, and self-sacrifice.

Baden Powell himself refers to another great classic, *The Broad Stone of Honour*, written by Sir Kenelm Digby (a Galway man) in 1822, which concludes that chivalry is nothing other than living by the eight beatitudes. Sir Kenelm’s close study of medieval knighthood led to his conversion to Catholicism soon after the book was published.

A view from the Quays

By their fruits you will know them



Fr Alan Hilliard

“He took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). Isn't this one great line! Isn't it so descriptive. Isn't it a line that, though written two centuries ago, brings many things to mind today?

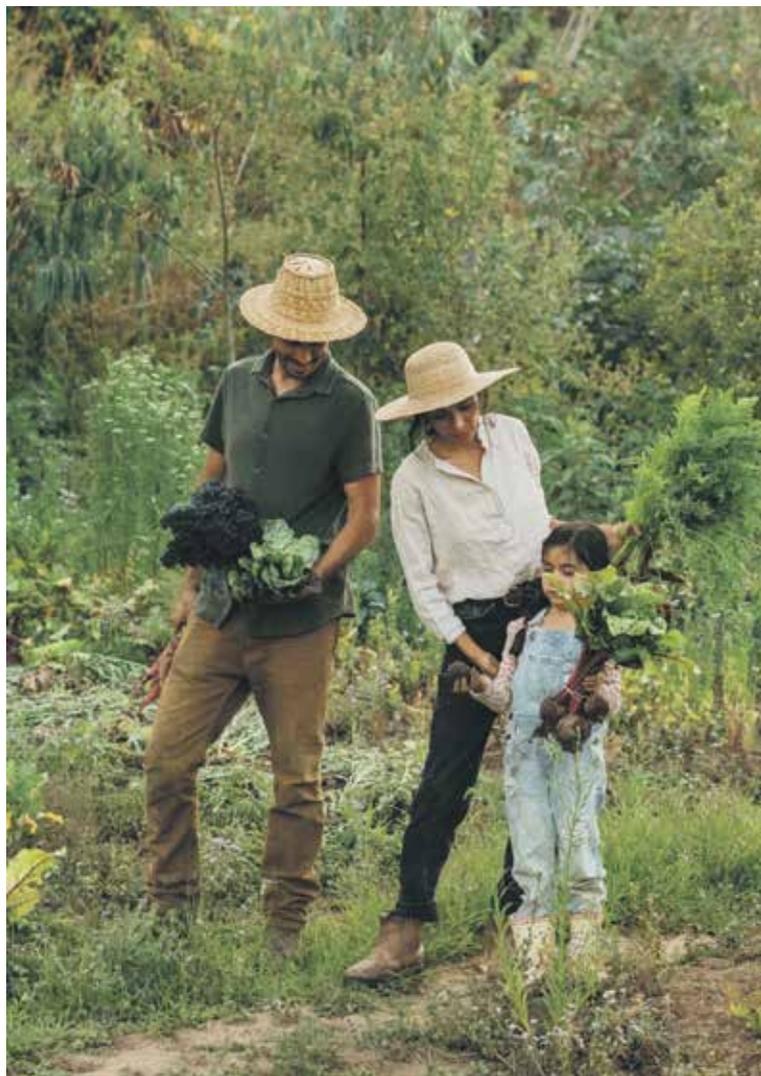
We have situations where flocks are being destroyed and scattered because of bad leaders, shepherds that lack integrity and care and it is only the sheep that suffer.

Facing this situation, what did Jesus do? “He set himself to teach them at some length,” we are told. Teaching, in the sense in which he speaks, isn't preparing them for the equivalent of a leaving certificate or college exams. From Jesus's perspective it's introducing them to a different way of living, another way of being. In teaching them, I'd imagine he wasn't telling them what to do but was helping them see that they had the power to make decisions.

The writer, Victor Frankl, who spent time in the Nazi Work Camps, said that you can find meaning in three possible places: work, love and courage. I don't suppose you know how meaningful and enjoyable work is until you are in a job that you don't enjoy, and it drags the whole of your life down. Probably the most meaningful thing in life is a combination for all three which is work that cares for others and where you overcome adversity together. What better definition of a 'good shepherd' as one who helps us find meaning in our labours, who loves and cares for you and helps us face obstacles that are thrown across our path.

Admiration

One person I admire greatly is Hubert Joly. He is a French businessman who, at one stage of his life made a disaster of every business he ran, but over several years became an expert in bringing business that had gone over the edge back to life. A friend of his asked him to do a retreat inspired by the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order. The exercises are like sitting at the feet of Jesus while he teaches you. They are rooted in contemplation i.e. deep prayer, self-



examination (not in a critical way) and under the guidance of a director. This was a life changing experience for him. It brought him back to what he considered his calling was in life and helped him see that this was the most important thing. Finding his own purpose in life helped him approach his task as a manager, helping others find their purpose while developing a community of belonging in the workplace. Purpose and connection were his key motivators. In delivering this methodology he truly became a shepherd to the lost sheep. Through the spiritual exercises he helped people, after helping himself of course find four things: What you love, what you are good at, what the world needs and what you get paid for.

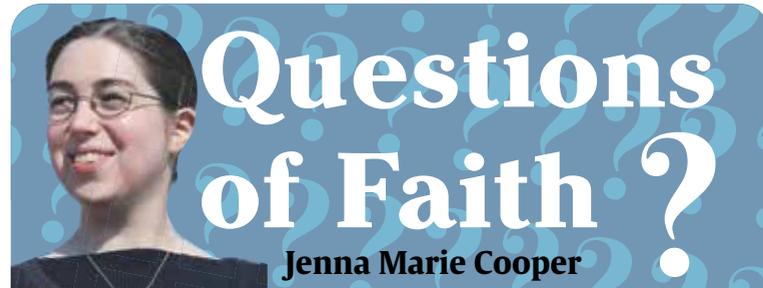
I remember bringing a group of students away to a monastery for a weekend. The monks enjoyed their honesty and their humour. When we were leaving, and they really enjoyed it, I asked the students what they liked most about the experience. They said that they didn't realise that you could live life differently and still be happy. They

were so caught up in what people said a happy life was and they couldn't believe that you didn't have to fall victim to all the nonsense in the world.

“It's a way of being free of not being a prisoner and of living differently”

There are ways of living other than the often-destructive patterns that people find themselves stuck in. Even we can have patterns of behaviour that we'd be better without them. It might involve doing something or neglecting to do something, but it doesn't have to be this way. When someone would let you down another of my mother's saying was “people make their decisions child.” In other words, they just didn't forget – they just decided, or decisions were made for them to do something else. Christianity is essentially not an imposition; it's a way of being free of not being a prisoner and of living differently. This is given expression in the following tale of two masons during the Middle Ages, performing the exact same tasks, who were asked about their work. “Don't you see? I'm cutting stones,” said the first one, whereas the second took an entirely different view: “I'm building a cathedral.”

“They were so caught up in what people said a happy life was and they couldn't believe that you didn't have to fall victim to all the nonsense in the world”



Can you receive Communion twice in one day?

Q: Can a Catholic receive holy Communion twice in one day? Also, is it possible to ask to receive Communion outside of Mass under normal circumstances, or is this something that is only possible for the sick?

A: To start with the second part of your question, the short answer is yes, it is possible for a Catholic to receive holy Communion licitly outside of Mass, even if they are not ill or homebound.

As we read in Canon 918 of the Code of Canon Law: “It is most strongly recommended that the faithful receive holy communion in the course of a eucharistic celebration. If, however, for good reason they ask for it apart from the Mass, it is to be administered to them.”

Canon 918 does take care to underscore the importance of the relationship between the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice - which takes place “in real time” at Mass - and our own personal participation in this same sacrifice via holy Communion. Especially since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has always taken care to foster a lively awareness of this connection in the minds and hearts of the faithful.

Yet even if receiving holy Communion during Mass is the ideal, reception of holy Communion outside of Mass is still straightforwardly permitted by law. Holy Communion can be administered more privately to members of the faithful if they have a “good reason” for making this request.

Canon law does not give us a definition of what constitutes a “good reason,” but here the Church trusts us to use common sense. One concrete example that comes readily to my mind of a “good reason” for requesting holy Communion outside of Mass is a situation where a daily communicant cannot make it to the regular parish daily Mass because of a travel schedule. But of course, there can be many other similarly reasonable scenarios.

Turning back to the first part of your question, a faithful Catholic may indeed receive holy Communion twice in one day - but the

second reception must be within the context of a Mass.

As we read in Canon 917 of the Code of Canon Law: “One who has received the blessed Eucharist may receive it again on the same day only within a eucharistic celebration in which that person participates.”

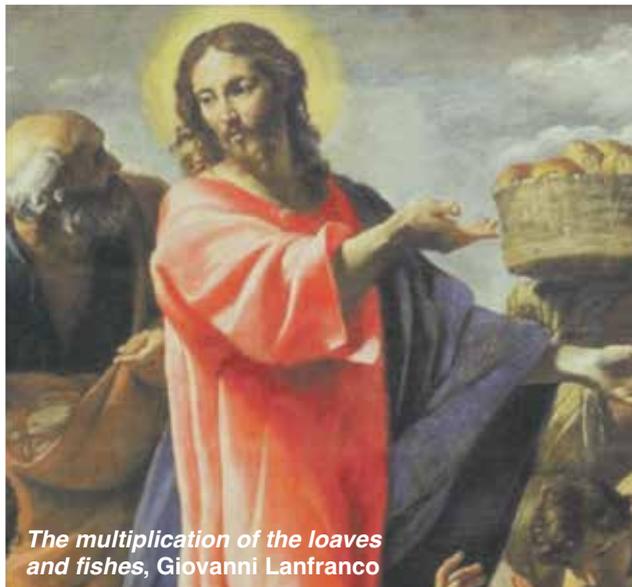
To give a practical example of how this might play out in real life, a Catholic who received holy Communion in something like a ‘word and communion’ service could receive holy Communion a second time during the course of the liturgy if they had a chance to go to an actual Mass later that day. But the reverse would not be true. That is, a Catholic who received holy Communion at Mass in the morning could not receive a second time that day at a non-Mass Communion service.

Or, to suggest another scenario, a Catholic could go to a regular daily Mass, then attend an additional Mass for a wedding or funeral and receive Communion at both Masses. This is allowed because the second reception of Communion took place as part of a Eucharistic liturgy.

However, it's important to note that there is one exception which allows a Catholic to licitly receive holy Communion up to three times in one day: danger of death. Canon 921 says: “Christ's faithful who are in danger of death, from whatever cause, are to be strengthened by holy communion as *Viaticum* [...] Even if they have already received holy communion that same day, it is nevertheless strongly suggested that in danger of death they should communicate again.”

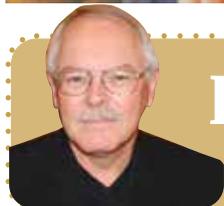
So, even if a Catholic already had attended two Masses and received holy Communion at both, if they were in a serious accident or fell deathly ill later that day, they could still receive Communion once again. And reception of holy Communion as *Viaticum* would typically take place outside of Mass, due to the nature of the circumstances.

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.



The multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Giovanni Lanfranco

Jesus and the poor



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

I grew up a second-generation immigrant in the outback of the Western Canadian prairies. Our family was poor economically, subsistence farmers, with the necessities but seldom with much more. My father and mother were charitable to a fault and tried to instil that in us. However, given our own poverty, understandably we did not have much of a vision in terms of social justice. We were the poor.

Growing up in this way can deeply ingrain certain instincts and attitudes inside you, some good, some bad. Positively, you grow to believe that you need to work hard, that nothing is given to you free, that you need to take care of yourself, and everyone else should do the same. Ironically, that very ethos can blind you to some major truths regarding the poor.

I can testify to this. It took me many years, work that took me over many borders,

some firsthand encounters with people who didn't have the basic necessities of life, and countless hours in theology classrooms before I even became aware of some of the basic biblical and Christian truths regarding the poor.

“The quality of your faith will be judged by the quality of justice in the land

Now I am struggling to live them, but at least I accept that they are non-negotiable for a Christian, irrespective of denomination or political persuasion. In brief, as a Christian, we are given a non-negotiable mandate to reach out to the poor in compassion and justice. Moreover, this mandate is just as non-negotiable as keeping the commandments, as is clear most everywhere in Scripture.

Here is the essence of that mandate...

• The great Jewish prophets coined this mantra: The quality of your faith will be judged by the quality of justice in the land; and the quality of justice in the land will always be judged by how “widows, orphans, and strangers” (biblical code for the weakest and most vulnerable groups in a society) are doing while you are alive.

• Jesus not only ratifies this; he deepens it, identifying his very person with the poor. (“Whatever you do to the least of my people, you do to me.”) He tells us that we will be judged for eternal life based on how we treated the poor.

• Moreover, in both Testaments in the Bible, this is particularly true regarding how we treat foreigners, strangers, and immigrants. How we treat them is how we are in fact treating Jesus.

• Note that Jesus defines his mission with these words: “I

have come to bring good news to the poor.” Hence, any teaching, preaching, or government policy that in not good news for the poor may not cloak itself with either Jesus or the Gospel.

“God intended the Earth and everything in it for the sake of all human beings. Thus, created goods should flow fairly to all”

As well, most of us have been raised to believe that we have the right to possess whatever comes to us honestly, either through our own work or through legitimate inheritance. No matter how large that wealth might be, it's ours if we didn't cheat anyone along the way. By and large,

this belief has been enshrined in the laws of democratic countries, and we generally believe that it is morally sanctioned by the Christianity. It is not, as we can see from these truths in Scripture:

• God loves everyone. There are no favourite ones or privileged ones in God's eyes, and God intended the Earth and everything in it for the sake of all human beings. Thus, created goods should flow fairly to all.

• Wealth and possessions must be understood as ours to steward rather than to possess absolutely.

• No person or nation may have a surplus if others do not have the basic necessities.

• All people are obliged to come to the relief of the poor.

• The condemnation of injustice is a non-negotiable aspect of our discipleship.

• In all situations where there is injustice, unfairness, oppression, grinding poverty, God is not neutral. Rather God wants action against every-

thing and everyone who deals in injustice and death.

These principles are strong, so strong in fact that it is easy to believe that Jesus can't really be asking this of us. Indeed, if taken seriously, these principles would radically disrupt our lives and the social order. It would no longer be business as usual.

To take just one example: there are nearly forty-five million refugees in our world today, most of them looking to cross a border into a new country. Is it realistic for any country today, in biblical terms, “to welcome the stranger”, to simply open its borders and welcome anyone who wants to cross? That's simply not realist or socially expedient regarding what it would mean practically in terms of our comfort and security.

While that may be granted, what may not be granted is that our (seemingly) necessary social and political pragmatism in dealing with “the widow, the orphan, and the immigrant” may cloak itself with Jesus and the Bible. It may not. This is antithetical to Jesus. Whether or not this upsets our security and comfort, God is always on the underside of history, on the side of the poor.

“There are nearly forty-five million refugees in our world today, most of them looking to cross a border into a new country. Is it realistic for any country today, in biblical terms, ‘to welcome the stranger’”

Catechism of the Catholic Church



By Renata Milan Morales

The fall: Essential truth of the Faith

Where does evil come from? The revelation of divine love in Christ manifested at the same time the extent of evil and the superabundance of grace. We must approach the question of the origin of evil by fixing the eyes of our faith on Him.

Without the knowledge Revelation gives of God we cannot recognise sin clearly and are tempted to explain it as merely a developmental flaw, a psychological weakness, a mistake, or the necessary consequence of an inadequate social structure.

With the progress of Revelation, the reality of sin is also illuminated. Although to some extent the People of God in the Old Testament had tried to understand the pathos of the human condition in the light of the history of the fall narrated in Genesis, they could not grasp this story's ultimate mean-

ing, which is revealed only in the light of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The reality of Sin

This ‘fall’ consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who radically and irrevocably rejected God and his reign. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolically evokes the limits that man must freely recognise and respect with trust. Man is dependent on his Creator, and subject to the laws of creation and to the moral norms that govern the use of freedom.

Created in a state of holiness, man was destined to be fully “divinised” by God in glory. Seduced by the devil, he wanted to ‘be like God’, but ‘without God, before God, and not in accordance with God’. Adam and Eve immediately lose the grace of original holiness.

Harmony with creation is broken. Finally, the consequence explicitly foretold for this disobedience will come true: man will “return to the ground”, for out of it he was taken. Death makes its entrance into human history.

Consequences for humanity

What Revelation makes known to us is confirmed by our own experience. For when man looks into his own heart, he finds that he is drawn towards what is wrong and sunk in many evils which cannot come from his good creator.

Because of this certainty of faith, the Church baptises for the remission of sins even tiny infants who have not committed personal sin. By this ‘unity of the human race’ all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice.

Original sin is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted. The doctrine of original sin, closely connected with that of redemption by Christ, provides discernment of man's situation and activity in the world – education, politics, social action and morals. Man must struggle to do what is right, and it is at great cost to himself, and aided by God's grace, that he succeeds in achieving his own inner integrity. After his fall, man was not abandoned by God.

Why did God not prevent the first man from sinning? St Leo the Great responds, “Christ's inexpressible grace gave us blessings better than those the demon's envy had taken away.” and St Thomas Aquinas wrote, “God permits evil in order to draw forth some greater good.”

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 385-421

His modern-day disciples

Jer 17:5-8
Ps 1:1-2, 3, 4 & 6
1 Cor 15:12, 16-20
Lk 6:17, 20-26

The Sunday Gospel

Deacon Greg Kandra



If anyone was expecting Jesus to deliver this sermon from a mountain, they got a shock. The first thing we notice in this Sunday's reading from Luke is this detail: "Jesus came down with the Twelve and stood on a stretch of level ground..."

This isn't the Sermon on the Mount - though it certainly sounds a lot like it and echoes many of its themes. What we have here is what scholars commonly call 'The Sermon on the Plain' - Jesus speaking to his followers on their own terms, on their own level. Here, he was able to look them in the eye and, quite literally, not talk down to them.

After giving us the setting for this sermon, Luke adds one other detail that should make all of us sit up and pay attention. He spoke to "a great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon. And raising his eyes toward his disciples he said..."

Call

There was quite a crowd, a diverse bunch of people. But what Jesus had to say at this moment was directed to a very specific audience: his disciples, those who had cho-

sen to follow him. It wasn't directed to just anyone.

Two thousand years ago, he spoke to those who were seeking to change their lives and who had elected to follow this itinerant preacher from a forgotten town. Today, he's speaking directly to us. We are his modern-day disciples. For the next few weeks, until the start of Lent, we will hear from this sermon in detail.

“His words undoubtedly stunned his first followers”

Maybe we've heard these teachings so often, they don't shock us or sound remotely radical. But listen closely. Imagine hearing them for the first time.

"Blessed are you who are poor," he begins, "for the kingdom of God is yours." From there, he goes on to speak to us directly - saying "you" again and again - to bless the hungry, the weeping, the hated. He goes on to express "woe" for the rich, the "filled," the laughing, those who are praised.

His words undoubtedly stunned his first followers. But what about us?

“Maybe we've heard these teachings so often, they don't shock us or sound remotely radical. But listen closely. Imagine hearing them for the first time”



Sorrowful Mother Shrine Chapel (Bellevue, Ohio) - stained glass, Jesus Zealous for Souls.

What do we hear when Christ turns our expectations upside down and gives us a new way of thinking about what it means to be 'blessed'? Do we realise what he is saying, what he is asking us to do?

Provocation

The Gospel readings from The Sermon on the Plain are provocative and potent - calling on us to think differently about love, about mercy, about God's expectations and our own. We are exhorted to love those who hate us, to turn the other cheek, to give to everyone and to hold nothing back.

It's worth remembering in

this moment, Jesus doesn't speak simply as a teacher to his students, offering lessons from on high.

“Many who heard these words found them hard to take and difficult to absorb”

He's speaking as one of us, at eye level. His teachings are, in a literal sense, grounded. He speaks as someone who understands deeply what it is to love, to give, to hunger, to weep. To quote a popular ad-

“In this moment, Jesus doesn't speak simply as a teacher to his students, offering lessons from on high”

campaign, he is telling his followers that "he gets us."

And the question we need to ask ourselves across the next three weeks is: do we get him? Are we truly listening to what he has to say?

In these passages from Luke's Gospel, we hear once again not only the depth and breadth of Christ's compassion, but also the bracing reality that what he had to say - then and now - is boldly countercultural. It's not sur-

prising that many who heard these words found them hard to take and difficult to absorb.

Maybe we've heard them so often, we take them for granted. We shouldn't. These readings, together, form a powerful final lesson before Lent, words to carry with us into the desert and into life.

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

Saint — of the — week

By Renata Milán Morales



Sts Cyril and Methodius

Sts Cyril and Methodius: Symbols of cultural dialogue

Sts Cyril and Methodius were two Byzantine brothers who had an important role in the spread of Christianity and literacy across Eastern Europe during the 9th century. Born in Thessalonica, a major city in the Byzantine Empire, Cyril (born Constantine) and Methodius were known for their missionary work, particularly in the Slavic regions, where they are often called the "Apostles to the Slavs."

Cyril was born in 827 and Methodius in 815. Both were well-educated and originally trained in various academic fields. Cyril entered the clergy and became a scholar at the imperial court in Constantinople, where he gained a deep understanding of

languages and the Christian faith. Methodius, his older brother, was initially involved in civil administration but followed Cyril's path into religious service.

In 863, Cyril and Methodius were commissioned by the Byzantine Emperor, Michael III, to undertake a missionary mission to the Slavic peoples living in the Great Moravian Empire, which covered parts of modern-day Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary. The Slavs at the time had not yet been exposed to Christianity, and their language lacked a written form.

Understanding the importance of communication in religious instruction, Cyril and Methodius set out to translate Christian texts into the local

language. Cyril is credited with creating the 'Glagolitic' alphabet, the first script designed specifically for the Slavic languages. This invention was later adapted into the Cyrillic alphabet, which continues to be used in many Slavic languages, including Russian, Ukrainian, and Serbian.

Their efforts were challenged from local clergy who favoured Latin, but Cyril and Methodius' commitment to the translation of religious texts into the vernacular made Christianity more accessible to the Slavic people. They translated key texts such as the Bible and liturgical works, enabling the Slavs to worship in their own language and develop their own Christian identity.

Despite their success, the brothers faced opposition from Roman missionaries who argued that the use of the Slavic language in church services was inappropriate. After Cyril's death in 869, Methodius continued their mission, eventually becoming the Archbishop of Sirmium. Methodius died in 885.

Cyril and Methodius are recognised as saints in both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. They are patron saints of Europe and are celebrated on February 14. Their contributions to the Christian faith, education, and the development of the Slavic script have left a legacy across Eastern Europe, with their influence still felt today.

A Catholic approach to relationships



Rohith Kinattukara

In today's world of swiping left and right to find 'the one', it's becoming increasingly difficult to find true love - a desire everyone craves but can't quite understand how to achieve. So, how can someone find love in a world dominated by instant gratification and constant change?

February 14 is famously known as Valentine's Day. Some people eagerly anticipate this day, especially couples, while others dread it. Valentine's Day is primarily celebrated by Catholics as the feast day of St Valentine, the Roman Saint who is the patron saint of love, epileptics, and bookkeepers.

Patience

Love is something that requires time and patience. As Catholics, we should ask ourselves: if we are to find our partner, shouldn't they help bring us closer to God? Patience is a virtue. Sometimes things may seem perfect, only for a sudden shift to happen. Take it in good spirits, because something greater might be on the way. We should aim to find someone who aligns with God's will and helps to elevate our spirit.

“Too often, people jump into relationships without taking the time to truly understand the other person's perspective on life”



Photo credit: George Rudy

1 Corinthians 13:4 reminds us that love is patient, and this patience helps relationships grow deeper over time.

Kindness

Kindness is often seen as a sign of weakness today, but in reality, showing kindness is one of the strongest qualities a person can offer. The second part of 1 Corinthians 13:4 states, "Love is kind." Why be with someone who cannot offer this simple but powerful

gesture? You'd be surprised by how many people fail to show even this. A relationship lacking kindness and forgiveness will inevitably struggle. A kind person is also typically a positive one, someone others are drawn to - someone your children might look up to one day. Kindness reflects the love of God, showing His image in the person, lifting spirits along the way. Proverbs 21:21 teaches us that "He who follows after righteous-

ness and kindness finds life, righteousness, and honour."

God first

In any relationship, we must remember that progress is impossible without God. Without God, there is no life. Having God's love at the centre of a relationship is key to a happy and fruitful life. His presence adds a divine element that guides couples towards a healthy relationship and a possible marriage. Through God, couples can lead their future children to faith and spread His word. Mark 12:30 reminds us that loving God is paramount: "You shall love the Lord your

God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Without this love for God, you cannot truly love anyone else. The same goes for your partner - it must be the top priority for a spiritual and peaceful life together.

Priorities

Each person has their own set of priorities in life, and many relationships break down because there's a lack of understanding between partners regarding their goals and values. In a relationship where faith is at the centre, it's no different. Understanding each other's plans, how

important faith is to them, and what values they bring to the relationship are crucial aspects. Too often, people jump into relationships without taking the time to truly understand the other person's perspective on life.

Other important priorities to discuss include how much the person believes in the teachings of the Church and the Bible, their stance on political issues that go against Scripture, and how often they are willing to set aside time for the Church and to pray together.

Conclusion

There are many factors to consider when seeking 'the one'. Nowadays, online dating is becoming a common way of finding love, with apps like Catholic Match helping young people connect with like-minded individuals. A great first date idea could be attending Mass together, enjoying a coffee, or visiting various Catholic churches in the area (nothing quite like the beauty of their architecture). Dating shouldn't be rushed or easy - it should be a process. Don't settle for mediocrity; seek a relationship that is God-fearing, God-centric, and God-loving. With this in mind, I wish everyone a wonderful Valentine's Day. God bless!

Rohith Kinattukara is a Catholic student from Griffith College Dublin studying MSc in Procurement and Supply Chain Management who loves to write and breathes tech.

A sacrament of lasting love

Heidi and Cory Busse

The images of love and marriage that surround us in popular culture reinforce the idea that real love is easy, and experiencing hardship means you've married the wrong person. The reality is, we are all human beings struggling to find our way through relationships. Successful spouses know that putting time and energy into marriage is essential in building the foundation of a lasting love.

The Church teaches that marriage is a sacrament, that is, it is a living and effective sign of God's love. Christian marriage is more than a signed piece of paper and a shared checking account. Sacra-

mental marriage means that the couple shares together in the life of grace by the very fact of being married to one another.

While the priest is an essential witness at a Catholic marriage ceremony, the spouses are the true ministers of the sacrament of matrimony. It signifies and communicates grace. As spouses, we are called to be signs of God's love and presence through our words and actions, by raising our children in the faith, and through the way we show love for one another.

Christian marriage is a holy vocation in which each spouse is called "to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love." Married life gives us a glimpse of the eternal union of God and his Church and calls each

spouse to build the other up for everlasting life in Heaven.

Think of the shape of an hourglass. Wide at the top, continually tapering, tight at the middle and flaring out again to its widest point on the other side. That's the shape of a marriage. At times we're far apart, at other times we're as close as we could be. The only thing constant in marriage is change.

In most marriages, there are four main seasons: the honeymoon, young parenthood, middle age and empty nesting, and the later years. Each season or cycle has unique joys and challenges.

A friend of ours who was married for more than 40 years says that the secret to a lasting marriage is "to periodically learn something new about your spouse."

Sacramental marriages work through the tough times. When marital conflicts arise, it is helpful to remember there are no "winners" because you are always on the same team. Being "right" is not so much the goal as being heard and understood. And listening is just as important as talking.

Nourishing your faith life together is essential to a lasting union. It is a great gift to journey through life together as a married couple. There will be "ups and downs," and as you move through the many phases of married life, it is most important to remember that you're not alone. The Church is there for your marriage long after the flowers have faded, and the dress no longer fits. Count your blessings and they will flow.

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



The battle against the oblivion of Faith

I always love hearing about green shoots when it comes to religion, and especially in relation to young people.

On **The Hard Shoulder** (Newstalk, Wednesday) there was a discussion on the matter with Wendy Grace of Spirit Radio and singer-songwriter Ciara Lawless. This was on foot or a survey from the UK that showed Gen Z likely to be the more spiritual generation - these are people born in the late 90's and early 2000's. Presenter Kieran Cuddihy raised an issue at the start about the difference between religion and spirituality and then parked it, which created a problem as there weren't clear definitions and some of the discussion was at cross purposes.

Ciara Lawless was brought up Catholic and was deeply interested in religion since the age of 6 when she regarded the saving of her life after an accident as a miracle - her grandad prayed for strength and then lifted a heavy gate off her single-handedly. From her early twenties she seemed to get more into a vague spirituality - she described spirituality as 'whatever it wants to be to anybody'. She had an emphasis on mindfulness and self-acceptance, still with a belief in God but embracing concepts like 'higher power'



Irish singer-songwriter Ciara Lawless.

or 'source'. Whatever the case, she felt she was being guided and looked after. She found younger people more interested in this approach which, she said, was more individual in nature.

By contrast Wendy Grace saw the downside of "rampant individualism" and seemed to pursue a more orthodox Catholic route - she had come back to the faith of her childhood in college, drawn initially by an intellectual approach - e.g. reading the work of religious scien-

tists. She finds that modern people of Faith propose Faith rather than imposing it. She also reckons that the renewed interest in spirituality is due to a hollowness in modern life - where people were never more connected (digitally I presume) but were still lonely. Now there was a search for authenticity, while being Christian now was rebellious and counter-cultural. She referenced World Youth Days, with millions of young people gathering, but no trouble or anti-social

behaviour.

Much was made of the desire and search for happiness - fair enough, but wouldn't goodness and doing the right thing be more important? Maybe you can only be happy if you're good and do the right thing.

Religion and society featured in President Donald Trump's address to the National Capitol Prayer Breakfast (**Sky News**, Thursday). Though there was the usual rambling and hyperbole, he was more measured and reflective than usual (low bar!). He called for greater unity in the USA, though often he creates disunity. He reckoned Democrats and Republicans can now, as they could in the past, sit down to dinner together. He understood how Covid lockdowns had a bad effect on religious practice, but stressed he wasn't blaming anyone (definitely a first!). He said we need more God and religion in our lives. He realised, he said, how difficult it could be to achieve compromise on controversial matters and spoke of meeting someone who had strongly disagreed with the ban he signed the previous day preventing transgender athletes from performing in woman's sports. How do you get compromise there, he wondered? They either were allowed, or

PICK OF THE WEEK

JUBILEE AUDIENCE WITH POPE FRANCIS

EWTN Saturday February 15, 8am

Live from St Peter's Square, the Jubilee Audience of Pope Francis.

JUST MERCY

BBC One Saturday February 15, 11.53pm

In 1988, attorney Bryan Stevenson courageously chooses to fight injustice, armed with nothing but a Harvard law degree and the resolve to help people whose lives are literally on the line.

SUNDAY SEQUENCE

BBC Radio Ulster Sunday February 16, 8.30am

Topical religious affairs with a Northern Ireland flavour.

they weren't.

Trump has been dominating news and current affairs since inauguration, especially with a flurry of executive orders. It was described as a "whirlwind" on **Sunday Sequence** (BBC Radio Ulster) when the implications of Trump's presidency for what presenter Audrey Carville referred to as "rules-based democracy centred on human rights". It was a spirited discussion with a variety of viewpoints, though it was largely a case of two to one against Trump's approaches. Former Irish ambassador Bobby McDonagh referenced gospel values like a spirit of decency, morality and good human values and obviously found these lacking in

Trump's actions, while journalist Karl Dieter was more positive towards Trump, wanting us to take the "oral diarrhoea" with a grain of salt and focus on what actually got done. He saw Trump's plans for Gaza being in the tradition of the US building up countries like Germany and Japan after previous wars. Human rights lawyer Caoilfhionn Gallagher was mostly critical, fearing Trump's actions could embolden autocratic regimes, but she did admire the work of the first Trump administration, continued under Biden, in getting US hostages released around the world.

She believed European countries could learn from this.

Music

Pat O'Kelly



Ireland witnesses a magnificent display of talent

The 11th Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition took place at the National Concert Hall at the end of last month following auditions held in several European centres as well as in New York.

The triennial competition, set up by the redoubtable Ronnie, who died in 2021 and to whom there was a repeated and fitting tribute in the 2025 programme booklet by one of her distinguished pupils, Tara Erraught, had seventy participants. This number was whittled down to six - five women and one man - heard in three operatic arias in the final round with the NSO under sympathetic conductor Wyn Davies.

I felt was a little disappointing until the perfor-

mances of the fifth and sixth singers - US mezzo Anna Kelly and soprano Julia Muzychenko-Greenhalgh, who has Ukrainian-Russian parents and is married to US baritone Tobias Greenhalgh.

In the heel of the hunt the jury decided, fittingly I thought (I often find myself at odds with jury decisions), to award the €10,000 first prize to Julia Muzychenko-Greenhalgh, a graduate of the St Petersburg Conservatoire and the Hans Eisler Music School in Berlin.

With arias by Puccini, Massenet and Verdi, she was also the recipient of the BVOP prize, which offers a professional engagement with the Blackwater Valley Opera Festival through either a recital or principal role. Anna Kelly, who chose music by Mozart,



Conductor Lina González-Granados.

Massenet and Richard Strauss, received the €5,000 second prize.

The competition offered a number of other awards among them the William and Alison Young prize for the best oratorio aria in the semi-final round. This went

to bass-baritone Hanseong Yun for his *Es ist genug* from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.

Soprano Nikolett Mráz took the Joan Sutherland/Richard Bonyngue prize for the best Mozart aria from any round with the Dermot Troy prize for the highest-placed

Irish competitor given to Dublin tenor Cathal McCabe who also won the Jane Carty prize for the most promising competitor aged 25 or under.

The jury, with renowned baritone Sir Thomas Allen in the chair, included Jonathan Friend of the Metropolitan Opera in New York and Irish National Opera, Tobias Hasan, artistic director of the State Opera in Berlin, David Lomeli, chief artistic officer of the Santa Fe Opera and consultant to the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, Christina Scheppelmann, general director of the Seattle Opera, our own soprano Suzanne Murphy, former pupil and abiding friend to Ronnie, and the Italian conductor Carlo Rizzi.

Columbian-born conductor Lina González-Granados was also on the NSO's rostrum

recently in music by Debussy, Rakhmaninov and Irish-born Welsh-reared Stephen McNeff whose song-cycle *The Celestial Stranger* brought tenor (formerly baritone) Gavan Ring back to the NCH as soloist.

The cycle, that includes settings of Thomas Traherne and Dylan Thomas among others, uses the orchestra in a richly romantic vein and in the programme booklet Gavan Ring, who gave the work's first performance in Cardiff last year, praised the composer's 'instinct for text selection and setting, coupled with his quite brilliant, mercurial musical imagination'. All very well, but in the NCH, I grasped few of the words although McNeff's orchestration never sounded exaggerated.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Two views of Pope Francis, in his own words

Hope: the Autobiography
by Pope Francis, with Carlo Musso, translated by Richard Owen
(Penguin / Viking, £18.99 / €23.00)
I want You to Be Happy,
by Pope Francis
(Hodder & Stoughton,
£16.99 / €20.50)

Peter Costello

Pope Francis, it must be always kept in mind, even by his critics, is a unique figure.

For the reference books he is the first Jesuit to be elected to the Papacy, the first Pope from the Americas, and from the Southern Hemisphere ('the South' of those who labour for social justice), and the first Pope to be born and grow up outside of Europe since the 8th century. That is quite a catalogue, one which overwhelms one with considerations.

And yet, I think, the key to the identity and character of Pope Francis is to be found in the fact that he is above all else an Argentinian of Italian descent.

North Americans, and even some Europeans, often take a dim view of 'Latin Americans' - it is this attitude that lies behind much of the blustering of the present administration in Washington, DC.

Characterisation

But the Argentinians defy that easy characterisation of sombrero wearing layabouts who drink too much and are often of "the wrong religion", from the point of view of some North American evangelicals.

An indefinable part of Argentina's population, for instance, is not of Spanish origin, as would be the case in Peru or Columbia, but of Italian descent. Pope Francis's father was an accountant from the Piedmont region - where the notion of a united Italy was born. Just as many Italians left for the Americas when the Kingdom of Italy was beaten together and the Papal States abolished in the nineteenth century, so in the interwar years of the last century many Italians left for the Argentine to escape the advent of Mussolini. The Pope's father was one. He was



no poor, ragged peasant, but a middle class professional man.

“The mind set and outlook of Argentinians always had this distinct European aspect to it - think of J L Borges”

This link with Europe was an important factor. Back in the 1920s North American influence on Argentina was also nonexistent (only some 6000 North Americans were recorded in the contemporary census). The links, personal, familial and intellectual were with Italy, France, and Spain to some extent, Germany and the United Kingdom (due to the large scale investments by the British in the Argentine). The mind set and outlook of Argentinians always had this distinct European aspect to it - think of J L Borges. It was a factor in the difficulties that North Americans have in understanding the Pope.

This is illustrated in this interesting autobiography, which was intended *ab initio* to appear posthumously; but has been brought forward, to provide a reflective and detailed account of his life

and thought as the Pope sees it, appearing in time for the Church's Jubilee Year of Hope.

Though naturally enough much of the book, and much of the curiosity of potential readers, will focus on what he has to say about current matters, we have to remember that the Pope is a man of many years. When he was 75 he offered his resignation as a bishop to the Pope; instead he was himself appointed a cardinal, and thus, late in life, became personally involved with the workings of the Vatican, and was in the position himself as member of the College of Cardinals to be elected Pope.

Outlook

But by this time his outlook and character was, as I say, fully formed. He brought to Rome the habits and ideas of a lifetime, a lack of ritualism and formality for the sake of formality, a sense of what it means to be a human being, moulded by the fact that he also came late to a vocation, having tried other jobs first. This is important as many in the Curia have little idea about how real people live and often die. They are detached from parish and diocesan life in a way that Jorge Mario Bergoglio never was in Buenos Aires.

When he became a Jesuit

Ireland, studying at Milltown Park. Yet strangely when Francis was elected Pope, no one in Jesuit circles in Ireland was able to recall anything about his time in Ireland. It may seem curious that an encounter with such a personality could slip the collective memory in Dublin; but there you are, it appears to have done.

“One of the charms of Hope is the Pope's own description of his earliest years, which accounts for a lot in his life”

The international publishers that have brought out *Hope: The Autobiography* claim that it is the first autobiography to be written by a reigning Pope. Given the continuous hyperbole that surrounds all kinds of publishing today, readers will not be surprised to learn that this is essentially untrue.

This claim disregards the memoirs of Enea Silvio Piccolomini, otherwise Pope Pius II, whose "commentaries" were, so it was believed at the time, written during the sleepless midnight hours which everyone suffers from at times, even Popes.

Piccolomini was Pope from 1458-1464. His memoirs are well known to Renaissance historians, and copies of the popular translation that appeared in 1960 are readily available. But perhaps a "Renaissance connoisseur and practising man of letters" (according to the *Oxford Dictionary of Popes*) does not count as a published author for a modern day publicity agent.

One of the charms of *Hope* is the Pope's own description of his earliest years, which accounts for a lot in his life. His passion for soccer, for instance, about which he writes with great insight at the end of chapter seven. Equally moving is the account of the illness that cost him a lung as a seminarian - which was raised by his rivals later, to prevent him advancing to the papal throne.

Travelling

But, all in all, one has to warm to this man who enjoyed travelling round Buenos Aires by tube, and who confesses that one of the things he misses in his present situation, is being able to go out somewhere to enjoy a pizza. He has no mobile phone, does not use a computer, and does not watch television: verily a great human being, perhaps even a saint in the making.

the book boring. But at least it is the Pope's own book. It has not been moulded by a ghost writer. He has however been assisted for many years by an editorial assistant Carlo Muss, beginning with *The Name of God Is Mercy*. But there is also evidence of the activities of an American copy editor who provides references for the quotations, but not to the editions which Pope Francis would have used. This though may be the work of translator Richard Dixon, for there is a preference for the most recent version of J L Borges for instance, from the same publishers, which are simply not as good as the earlier ones (at least to my taste), as they are translated into American.

“All of us, in our different ways, have an investment in happiness, and would be content to follow the Pope's thought on how it may be achieved, lived and preserved”

The second book listed above is very different, but equally revealing over all, of how the Pope sees the world.

If one wants to have a Pope Francis book to take up and read from time to time this would be it. In many ways it might be found more interesting than the autobiography. It consists of homilies composed over many years on the general theme of happiness; divided into some eight sections (they cannot be called chapters).

These short pieces are very revealing of the inner thoughts and feelings of the Pope, and will delight many different kinds of readers. All of us, in our different ways, have an investment in happiness, and would be content to follow the Pope's thought on how it may be achieved, lived and preserved.

Perhaps given a choice, I would suggest the readers begin with *I Want You to Be Happy*, and then read the autobiography to learn exactly the nature of the life he lived that gave rise to them.

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.

February is 'Black History Month' in the USA, a time then for President Trump to recall who really built the Panama Canal?

Journey Without Maps, a travel book by Graham Greene (Vintage Classics. £14.99)

Peter Costello

At the end of January President Trump issued a proclamation on Black History Month promoting to all officials and members of the public that it might concern, naming as he did so a short roster of notable Black Americans.

But it is noticeable that the author of the proclamation, hardly Mr Trump himself, cannot bring himself to write 'Black American', writing instead black American, with small 'b'. This is the same kind of insensitivity that uses a small 'j' when using the word 'Jew'. It is a dead give away of prejudice and lack of real respect.

In the United States many government departments seem to be engaged in obliterating Black History Month as part of the new administration's campaign against 'DEI', that is to say "diversity, equity and inclusion".

President Trump is determined to fold back and make unseen the achievements of many decades of effort to see all Americans for what they really are. The ideal American is now a white male, of Northern European, perhaps even Irish, extraction, living in a suburban quarter far removed from inner city poverty.

But at the same time President Trump is planning an invasion of Panama, so it would seem, to seize the Panama Canal, which he says "We built", meaning these fine upstanding white American males, destined to run the world.

Claims

These claims hardly agree with the actual history of the Panama Canal as the history

books and accounts of the day reveal it to have been. One such book, easily accessible online, by bestselling British author David Howarth, provides an independent source of information.

The Canal was initially the idea of the French engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps, creator of the Suez Canal, and was originally begun by a French company. However, technical difficulties and devious dealings of all kinds, led to the collapse of the French enterprise in a political and social scandal that rocked France, indeed the world.

The enterprise was later renewed by the North Americans, who carried it through in a decade or so, with one notable achievement, the overcoming of the malaria which was spread in the tropical region through which the canal passed. It had been discovered by the British in Africa that the carrier of the disease was the mosquito, the destruction of which in the swampy regions of the world has become a crusade.

“Liberia is in essence an American colonial enterprise, a carved-out region to which liberated slaves during the post Civil War Reconstruction would be shipped as colonists”

But who actually built it. Here (see illustration) is a photograph of some of those who did the actual digging. They were Blacks, the descendants of American Blacks who are not themselves American. They were citizens rather



Building the Panama Canal

than the Republic of Liberia, a nation state in West Africa, which was a colony of American foundation, intended to move the Blacks out of the US to their "real country". This history of Liberia strangely enough seems of little interest to American Blacks. They are rightly concerned more with slavery and the origins of Black America. But Liberia is a different matter.

Liberia is in essence an American colonial enterprise, a carved-out region to which liberated slaves during the post Civil War Reconstruction would be shipped as colonists. Once in Africa, with some American resources behind

them, they became the rulers of the actual local Africans.

Classes

To this day in Monroeville - named for James Monroe the creator of the 'Monroe Doctrine' in 1823 rejecting any new European colonies in the Americas - there are two classes of people: the American derived elite, and the lower classes of native Africans.

It was from Liberia that the American entrepreneurs creating the Panama Canal derived the labourers to do the actual digging. To some it might recall what many think the Bible says about the Hebrews being forced to build the pyramids: a "fact of history" which seems to be untrue by the way - the pyramids archaeologists now think, were built by free Egyptians, ancestors of today's Christian Copts, out of pure religious devotion.

So the Panama Canal was built, not by "Us" in Trump's sense: but by Liberian Blacks in virtual American servitude.

The sons and grandsons of the liberated American slaves were effectively re-enslaved for use in Panama. The Panama Canal was finally opened with great American rejoicing in 1914. It meant that ships no longer had to pass through the dangerous seas around Cape Horn at the southern tail end of South American.

“Anyone wishing to have a view of 'colonial Liberia' from an acute and committed Catholic point of view should read Graham Greene's *Journey Without Maps*”

But there was a cost: some 40,000 labourers were utilised, and officially, far more according to some historians. These numbers also included other Blacks - but still with background in slavery - from the

various West Indian islands.

If he were truly interested in Panama, truly interested in 'Black History Month' and the Panama Canal, President Trump might be keen to mention some of these facts.

Anyone wishing to have a view of "colonial Liberia" from an acute and committed Catholic point of view should read Graham Greene's *Journey Without Maps*, a travel book first published in 1936, which is among his finest non-fiction books.

Also of relevance about the Panama Canal saga is *The Golden Isthmus* by David Howarth (London: William Collins, 1966), widely available online.

Photographic images of the Black labourers from Liberia and the West Indies on the Panama Canal can be found on the US National Archives website, using the identifier '535444' and '535446'; but visit soon as they might well be removed in line with the current outlook in Washington.

Last week President Trump fired the director of the National Archives in Washington.

“If he were truly interested in Panama, truly interested in 'Black History Month' and the Panama Canal, President Trump might be keen to mention some of these facts”

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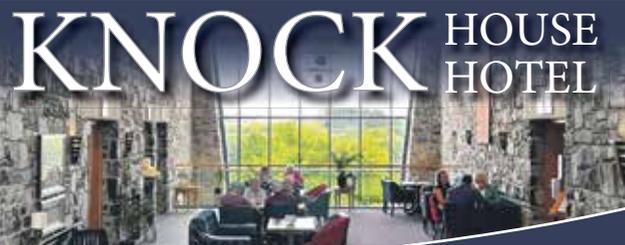
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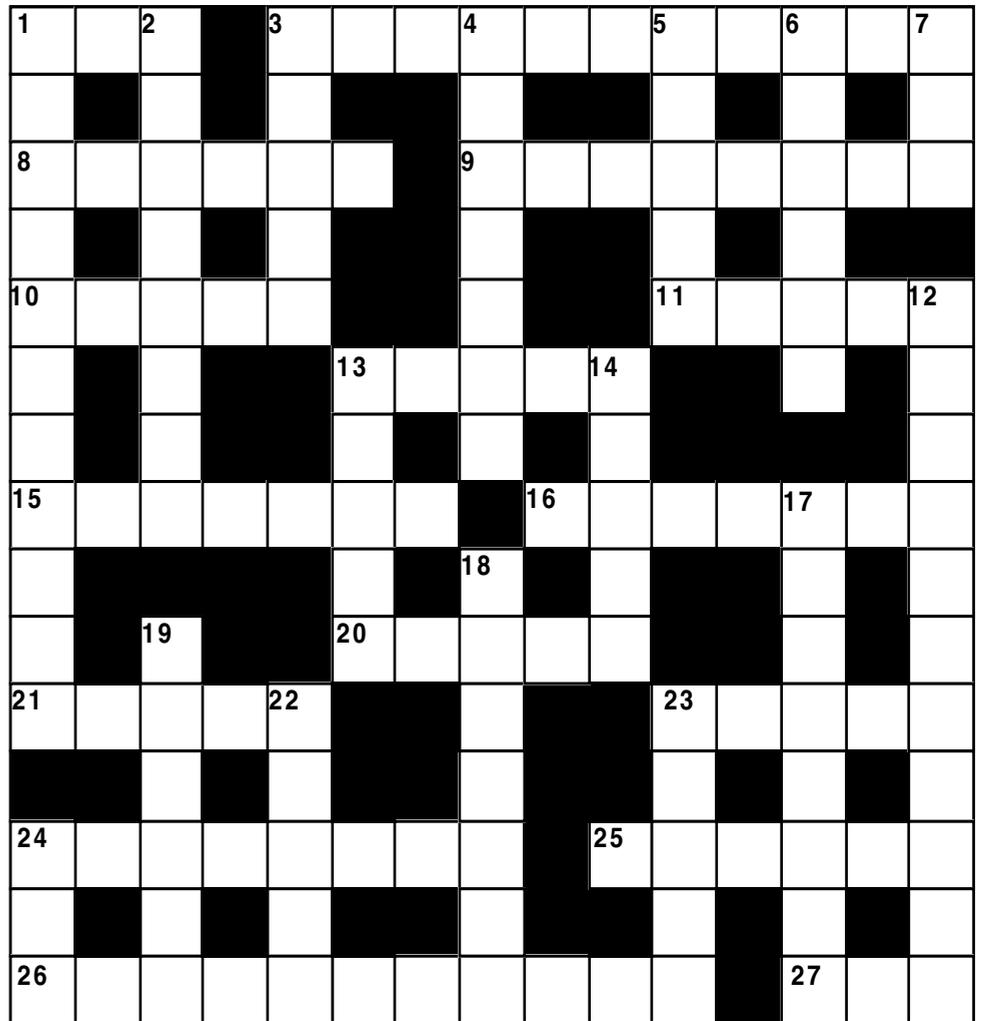
Gordius 702

Across

- 1 Twenty hundredweight (3)
- 3 Structures built of glass (11)
- 8 Delicacy of sturgeons' eggs (6)
- 9 Hot drink (8)
- 10 Sudden thrust (5)
- 11 Concerning (5)
- 13 Principally located; founded (5)
- 15 Colourful seabirds (7)
- 16 He wrote Madama Butterfly (7)
- 20 Three-toed creature, or a deadly sin (5)
- 21 Romantic poet (5)
- 23 Stringed instrument (5)
- 24 Found alternative accommodation for someone (8)
- 25 Eastern temple (6)
- 26 Type of rugby foul (7,4)
- 27 But, however (3)

Down

- 1 Highly pleased (7,4)
- 2 & 3 Special period of devotion (6,2,5)
- 4 Consulate (7)
- 5 The last letter of the Greek alphabet (5)
- 6 Part of the year (6)
- 7 Take legal action (3)



12 Dismantling (6,5)

13 Curves (5)

14 Work this when baking bread (5)

17 A system of doctrine

or belief (8)

18 Cowboy operation prior to a cattle drive, etc (7)

19 Small metal ring (6)

22 Steam-bath (5)

23 Small glass containers (5)

24 Match official (abbreviated) (3)

SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 6

GORDIUS No. 701

Across

- 1 University 6 Wait 10 Ditty 11 Espionage 12 Beatles 15 Dunce 17 Crow 18 Tray 19 Acrid 21 Coroner 23 Laser 24 Epee 25 Yell 26 Caves 28 Smother 33 Sacrament 34 Meets 35 Sale 36. Bluebottle

Down

- 1 Undo 2 In the wars 3 Egypt 4 Swede 5 Type 7 Again 8 The Dead Sea Scrolls 9 Cold War 13 Logo 16. At all costs 20 Represent 21 Crystal 22 Ebro 27 Vocal 29 Mitre 30 Tempo 31 Teal 32 Isle

Sudoku Corner 570

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 569

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

Last week's Hard 569

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

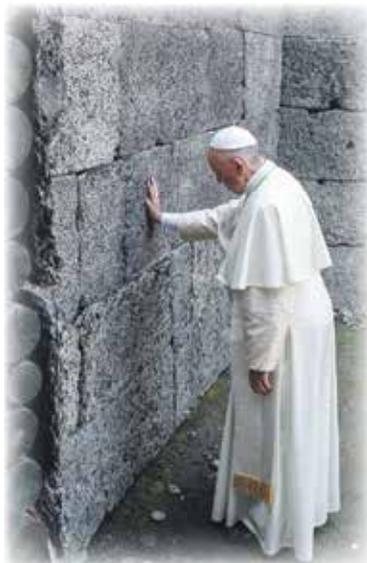
Notebook

Fr Billy Swan



Remembering the Holocaust and asking – Why?

On January 27 last, the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz was marked on Holocaust Memorial Day. It is a sombre annual commemoration that recalls one of the darkest periods of human history. Almost every year, the calls of 'Never Again' are made in speeches by political leaders and survivors. However, mature leadership must also ask the reasons why – why did the holocaust happen and what was the thinking behind the Nazi regime that gave us Auschwitz as a permanent reminder of man's inhumanity to man?



Pope Francis touches the death wall at the Auschwitz Nazi death camp in Oswiecim, Poland. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring.

Underpinning Nazi atrocities was an ideology where self-determination is absolute and can justify anything. Nazi ideology is a classic example from history of the human tendency to usurp the place of God as the ultimate arbitrator of what is good and what is right, what is right and what is wrong. For the Nazi mindset, nothing was off limits once it was done in the name of German interest. And all those who resisted their ideology or begged to differ were crushed or eliminated. Might was always right. And once you were powerful enough, you were not accountable to anyone. Human

rights were not acknowledged but conferred by those who had that power. There was no such thing as innate human rights, human dignity or compassion. In Auschwitz, only those who were useful to the Nazis were allowed to live. The sick, the weak, the disabled and millions more were sent to the gas

chambers.

For all this to happen, God and any external moral obligations needed to be eliminated. In the words of GK Chesterton (1874-1936): "Once you abolish God, the government becomes God". Here is the ideology that allowed horrific crimes and human rights abuses to happen in Auschwitz and beyond.

Does this philosophy that underpinned German National Socialism in the 20th century still exist today? Undoubtedly the answer is 'yes'. Does it have the potential to cause harm today as it did over 80 years ago? Absolutely, because any nation that dispenses with accountability and decides for itself what is right and what is wrong, who lives and who dies, who has rights and who doesn't, is a nation that not only poses danger to its own citizens but others as well.

Reflecting on the Communist regime in Russia in the last century, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, famously said: "People have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened" (Templeton Address, 1983).

Ideas have consequences. They lead somewhere and express

themselves in concrete actions, good or bad. The Nazis removed the idea of a Creator God as a preamble to committing the most appalling crimes against humanity. And once God was eliminated, human rights lost their foundation and all was permitted. As we mark the 80th anniversary of the holocaust, let us not confine ourselves to emotional revulsion at what happened at Auschwitz but become less naïve about what happens when human beings remove God and play God instead.

Divine humour

A man with a fondness for the drink found himself with no money and decided to enter a Church to pray in desperation. "Lord," he said, "How much is a thousand Euros in your eyes?" The Lord replied: "Very little. It's like fifty cents." The man thought about this for a while and said: "And how much is a year for you?" The Lord replied: "Very little. It's like five minutes." Then the man decided to be brave in his request: "Lord, can I have fifty cents?" The Lord replied: "Can you wait five minutes?"

Wisdom from Newman

St John Henry Newman left behind a treasure trove of wisdom that just keeps on giving. Recently, I came across a wonderful insight that every priest, teacher and catechist must heed. In *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* he wrote: "If the preacher has never really suffered in his life, he will almost inevitably preach superficial sermons, using the Word of God for his own purposes...But let his heart at length be ploughed by some keen grief or deep anxiety and Scripture is a new book to him." Wise words indeed as we approach the anniversary of his birth (February 21).



EMERGENCY IN SUDAN:

Please help The Little Way Association to ensure that medical help and care reaches thousands of those in need

Some time ago, our Association was pleased to be able to assist Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF) in their vital medical work in many places in Sudan. As Pope Francis has often reminded us, a forgotten tragedy has been unfolding away from the eyes of the public. Civil war has devastated the health care system and left millions of children and adults in desperate need of medical care. Over 4 million children have fled from their homes.

In South Darfur, MSF is seeing one of the worst maternal and child health emergencies in the world. "Thousands of children are on the brink of death and starvation," writes MSF. "Newborn babies, pregnant women, and new mothers are dying in shocking numbers. And so many of these deaths are due to preventable conditions, but almost everything has broken down. The scarcity of functioning health facilities and unaffordable transportation costs mean many women and children arrive at hospital in critical condition. With the conflict now well into its second year, the needs remain enormous."

PLEASE HELP US TO CONTINUE PROVIDING VITAL CARE TOGETHER. WE CANNOT DO IT ALONE.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION to enable MSF to continue to provide life-saving medical care to thousands of malnourished children, pregnant women, new mothers and their babies in South Darfur.

PLEASE BE AS GENEROUS AS YOU CAN, AND PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE OF SUDAN. THE NEEDS ARE IMMENSE.



"Jesus wills that we give alms to Him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight." - St Therese

MISSION CHAPELS

St. Therese, our patroness, wished to spread the Gospel throughout the world "until the end of time". We receive many requests for help from bishops and priests to build, renovate or complete their mission chapels. We are often asked for funds to provide a permanent roof for a chapel. In many places the only roofing chapels have is made of straw or other flimsy material which, as you may imagine, is easily damaged or destroyed in bad weather.

Your donation will help a priest in a mission country to provide a decent chapel for his congregation, a fitting place for the celebration of Holy Mass.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLEWAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

- I enclose €..... to be allocated to:
- €..... **EMERGENCY APPEAL FOR SUDAN**
- €..... **MISSION CHAPELS**
- €..... **WELLS / CLEAN WATER**
- €..... **MASS OFFERINGS** (please state no.)
We ask for a minimum of €7 or more for each Mass
- €..... **LITTLEWAY ADMIN. EXPENSES**

To donate online go to
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DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.

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Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss) (Block letters please)

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