

THE SCOTTISH CATHOLIC

SCOTLAND'S CATHOLIC MAGAZINE

Catholics and Covid

Priests and people tell their stories

- ✦ Papal visit to Glasgow
- ✦ Converting during Covid
- ✦ St Columba – A child's tale
- ✦ Who will come back to Church?



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The founders discuss the Scottish Catholic

We've all lost a lot in the last year.

Now that we're coming out of the pandemic it's time to take stock and see what we need to recover.

One of the things we lost was a national Catholic publication for Scotland.

That's a big loss. Because our community needs a voice, a voice that will tell the stories of our lives.

A voice, so we speak to one another help us understand what we as Catholics are living through and support each other.

And a voice that will speak clearly out into the world, this is who we are and what we believe.

The Scottish Catholic will be that voice. The three founders, Ian Dunn, Mary McGinty and Dan McGinty have a combined four decades of experience in Catholic media. Throughout our careers we've broke stories, ran papers and stood up for what we believe.

We believe in the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church. And we believe in journalism. That there are stories to be told that have to be uncovered.

That is why we believe passionately that Catholics in Scotland need a title that covers the whole country, that talks to every corner of the Church and does it in a fresh and exciting way.

We have no illusions about how big a task we've set ourselves.

Launching a new publication at any time is a challenge. Launching a Catholic one in the aftermath of a global pandemic when churches have been shut for most of a year is a huge one.

We know that we will only succeed with your help.

This is a sample edition that we've produced to as a demonstration. We need your feedback to make the first edition this autumn as strong as it can possibly be.

Please read carefully and tell us what you think. We think you'll be impressed but don't hold back.

With your help, this will be the start of something very special.

God bless,

Ian Dunn

Mary McGinty

Dan McGinty

Don't miss an issue
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Where were you when you felt closest to God?



A remarkable picture of the moment a rosary made from balloons was taken to heaven after the wire it was attached to snapped during a live broadcast with the Pope at Carfin Grotto.

Hundreds of worshippers looked on as the display - made from 70 connected helium balloons - rose into the sky just before they received their final blessings.

The balloon beads were meant to be floating above the event and be taken down after, but the wind unexpectedly snapped the wire attached to the 70ft-long chain and a blow-up crucifix and swept it out of sight.

Father Jim Grant said: "At the end of the prayers, just before the final blessing we released the balloons.

"It was at the end of the rosary, just before the conclusion. We had intended to have the display tethered but a gust of wind blew it into a direction and the wire snapped. It was just nature. If there had been divine intervention I would have loved it to be floating all over Scotland spreading the message of the rosary. It was only by accident that they were let loose. It was a dramatic end to the rosary."

More coverage of this remarkable event at Carfin on Page 22.

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ANTI-CATHOLICISM RECOGNITION

Campaigners have praised Scotland's politicians for calling out shocking anti-Catholic behaviour in Glasgow this spring.

BY IAN DUNN

A change in approach from politicians as identifying explicitly anti-Catholic behaviour rather than the catch all sectarianism.

On May 12th supporters of Rangers Football Club gathered in large numbers in George Square and engaging in a range of illegal behaviours, including attacking the police and anti-Catholic chanting. "People across the country still living under the most difficult restrictions - not able to see family or attend weddings and funerals - are rightly furious at the irresponsible actions of a thuggish minority who seem to care little for the risks they pose to other people," First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said.

Humza Yousaf, Scotland's Justice Secretary, said he was "beyond angry and beyond frustrated" by what happened on Saturday.

"What I saw [on Saturday], as I would describe it, was anti-Catholic. It was anti-Catholic prejudice. It was anti-Catholic hatred," he told Radio Clyde.

"It's depressing on our streets in 2021. How must our Catholic community feel? How would I feel as a person who is a Muslim, if there were groups of people singing Islamophobic chants or songs? I wouldn't feel safe," he said.

A spokesperson for the Scottish Church said their had to be consequences for anti-Catholic behaviour.

At a hustings before the recent election, representatives of all the many parties committed to calling out anti-Catholic prejudice. ■

Assisted suicide threat

Actress and disability rights campaigner *Liz Carr* has spoken out against the latest effort to legalise assisted suicide in Scotland.

By IAN DUNN

In a letter to the Sunday Times, Carr, (right) who starred in the BBC crime thriller series *Silent Witness*, urged MPs to reject assisted suicide following the introduction of Baroness Meacher's Assisted Dying Bill in the House of Lords.

A similar bill is expected to be introduced in the Scottish Parliament later this year.

Carr also argued that disability groups are still opposed to assisted suicide and that for her, and others with degenerative conditions, the idea of an assisted law is terrifying.

The Scottish Parliament has twice rejected attempted to legalise assisted suicide. In 2010 the Assistance in Dying Bill in 2010 was rejected by 85 votes to 16. The revised Assisted Suicide Scotland Bill in 2015 was also rejected by 82 votes to 36. ■



Actress Liz Carr



New fund to protect churches

A new fund has been launched by the Scottish Government that will pay for Catholic parishes to install CCTV and other security measures.

By IAN DUNN

The Hate Crime Security Fund has been developed by the Scottish government in partnership with Police Scotland and faith communities can apply for grants of up to £20,000.

Police Scotland Assistant Chief Constable Gary Ritchie said: "Faith leaders and their congregations should be able to attend worship without fear of crime or persecution.

"Targeting people, places or communities because of their religious affiliation is unacceptable and Police Scotland works alongside our religious communities to safeguard against crime of any nature, and in particular hate crime. Officers regularly liaise with community and faith leaders and monitor issues and tensions across Scotland.

"We thoroughly investigate every hate crime incident. We are also aware hate crime is significantly under-reported, and we always encourage anyone who witnesses an incident, be they victim or bystander, to make us aware and allow us to determine whether an offence has been committed."

Individual grants will be available for a maximum of three security measures to mitigate the risk from hate crime, such as CCTV, security doors, alarms, fencing, video intercoms and improved lighting. ■



Papal VISIT TO GLASGOW

Hopes are rising that Pope Francis may visit Glasgow this November.

By IAN DUNN

Although no official confirmation has been given, there are increasing signs from the Vatican that the Pope is keen to visit the Dear Green Place for the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP 26.

At a press conference in late May Cardinal Turkson, a senior Vatican official, said he could not confirm that he would join a Vatican delegation at COP 26, but that 'the request has been made and addressed to him'. He added there have been discussions of Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of Eastern Orthodox Christians known as the "Green Patriarch," attending the climate summit together.

The conference will be a key point in the battle with climate change, with the governments of the world seeking a deal that will move our civilisation onto a greener footing and prevent devastating temperature rises.

Earlier in the month the US climate envoy John Kerry privately spoke with the Pope on Saturday while on a tour through Europe, and told the press he believes Pope Francis "intends to come".

But on a video documenting the meeting the former secretary of state can be heard going further and being more definitive about the Pope's intentions. As he tells members of his staff that Pope Francis will be there on the first day of the talks, "with other heads of state".

"We've been hearing that, so it's nice to have confirmation," one of the staff members replies.

"It will be amazing, I'm telling you it will have a profound impact," Kerry says.

The British Government is very keen for the Pope to attend, with it's designated COP President Alok Sharma travelling to Vatican city in early May to lobby for the Holy Father's attendance.

The Scottish Catholic understands that any visit by the Pope, would be brief and likely only last one day. Although it would focus on the Conference site at the SECC a visit to the wider city is not impossible.

The Pope's attendance at the conference would not be surprising given his commitment to the environment.

Ahead of the potential visit the Scottish Bishops have established a "Care of Creation Office" to help make the Church here more environmentally friendly.

Bishop Nolan of Galloway announced the move saying "The Office's aim will be to give practical advice and guidance: helping dioceses and parishes assess their carbon footprint and discern how to work towards carbon neutrality, it will be headed by Fr Gerard H Maguinness the General Secretary of the Bishops' Conference. God has honoured us by giving humanity the task of being a co-operator in the work of creation, we hope our lives enhance and build-up that creation and pray that the meeting of world leaders in Glasgow later this year bear fruit for our planet." ■

AROUND THE DIOCESES

Iona

Fr Jim Walls, the Spiritual Director at Scots College, Rome, is walking from Iona to Lindisfarne this summer in solidarity with all those refugees who are seeking sanctuary. Fr Jim's pilgrimage will take 20 days, supplying in local parishes and offering Mass along the way for the spiritual support of the refugees, and raising sponsorship for the Catholic Workers House in Calais. The house is an informal meeting place and a community for people from Calais with a heart for refugees, volunteers, people from the parishes and refugees themselves.

Aberdeen

Blairs Museum in Aberdeen has reopened after an extended period of closure during the Covid pandemic. Blairs Museum offers a unique insight into Scotland's Catholic history and heritage with spectacular collections spanning more than 500 years. It is located on South Deeside Road, Blairs, Aberdeen, housed in part of the former national junior seminary. Museum Curator Elinor Vickers said: "We look forward to welcoming visitors back to the museum this year and hope that they find our new exhibition, on the artist Capparoni, is of interest. It is exciting to be developing our new website which should let everyone enjoy the museum and its collections."



Edinburgh

For the first time in nearly two decades, students will again stalk the halls of the Gillis Centre in Edinburgh. As a seminary, it closed its doors in 1993 but thanks to a new partnership between the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh and St Mary's University, Twickenham will start teaching its Masters courses in Theology and Catholic Education this Autumn at the Gillis Centre in Edinburgh, following a delay caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Archbishop Leo Cushley said: "St Mary's is the UK's leading Catholic university, so we're delighted it has agreed to offer courses here. It's an ideal location and is consistent with our Archdiocesan aim for the advancement of Catholic education. It will help support the Roman Catholic community and give people the opportunity to study a fascinating range of subjects."

Kilmarnock

This Spring three Sisters from the Religious Institute of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of Christ, Nigeria joined the parish communities St Joseph's, St Matthew's and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Kilmarnock. Sister Mary Rose Confidence Maduka, Sister Mary Mabel Chukwu and Sister Marilyn Juliet are the second community of their order in Scotland, joining the community in Dundee.

Glasgow

Celtic Football Club has honoured the late Archbishop Philip Tartaglia of Glasgow a lifelong fan, with a unique memorial plaque added to the base of the iconic statue at Parkhead of the club's founder Brother Walfrid. The tribute reads: 'The Most Reverend Philip Tartaglia, Archbishop of Glasgow, Always a Celtic fan, Always walked in hope. Died on the feast of St Mungo 13/01/21. Pray for him.' Peter Lawell, the club's chief executive, said: "The Archbishop was a true Celtic fan and like so many others everyone at the club was shocked and saddened by his death. We felt he deserved to be recognised in a way he would have appreciated and so from now on there will be a part of him forever at Celtic Park which will be seen for all time by fans from all over the world."

Scottish Government Mass shutdown illegal

The Scottish Government has been ordered to contribute to the legal costs of the priest who brought a successful legal challenge to their blanket ban of public worship during the Covid lockdowns.

By IAN DUNN

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon's administration has also not lodged an appeal against the decision by Judge Lord Braid that its restrictions on public worship were unlawful, in response to a challenge by 27 faith leaders, alongside Glasgow Catholic priest Canon Tom White.

His ruling came a day after the Scottish Government announced that public worship could resume from March 26 with a cap of 50 people and he later ordered the government to pay 50% of plaintiff's legal costs.

Canon White, parish priest in the east end of Glasgow, brought the case and was delighted at the result.

"I'm overjoyed to hear that the court has understood the essential need to protect not only the physical and material health of our society but also its spiritual needs and therefore overturned the disproportionate, unnecessary and unlawful blanket ban on public worship," he said.

"This decision highlights the significance of the Church's role in society. Now, we can trust that our fragile and damaged communities will never again be left without the Church as a source of hope, comfort, and vital spiritual nourishment in times of crisis. I'm grateful to all across Scotland and beyond who have offered their financial support for my case, and who have faithfully prayed with me for church doors to be reopened. Thanks be to God for this wonderful news!"

Lord Braid, at the Edinburgh Court of Session, ruled that: "In all the circumstances, having regard to the increased responsibility undertaken by the solicitor in relation to the heads identified above, I have determined that an appropriate percentage increase is one of 50 per cent and I will so order."

Public worship was first suspended in Scotland on March 19, 2020. Masses with congregations were permitted again from July 15, but subject to a 50-person limit.

The Scottish Government suspended public worship again on January 4 this year.

White's legal challenge was presented by Aidan O'Neill, QC. The human rights advocate called the ban "an extraordinary abuse of the state's power".

"[The blanket ban] has a fundamental chilling impact on worship and belief. It requires people in good conscience to choose between God and Caesar," O'Neill said.

Ryan Christopher, director of the Christian legal group ADF UK, which backed the case, said: "We celebrate this decision with Canon Tom White, because the court has recognized that which the Government did not -- that freedom of religion and belief is a human right to be afforded the highest protection."

"In declaring the ban to be 'unlawful,' the court helps ensure that people of faith will not again have their rights erased in this way. We congratulate the Canon and the other faith leaders involved for having the courage to take this necessary challenge forward, and securing protection for churches across Scotland for the future."

The ruling would bind the Scottish Government's ability to restrict Mass attendance and other public worship should their be any future Covid lockdowns. ■



▲ Canon Tom White

“
This decision highlights the significance of the Church's role in society

QA

QUESTIONS • ANSWERS

THE Q AND A

You've got questions, the Church has answers.

Q Can Catholics take the Covid-19 Vaccines?

A Yes.

Q Is there anything unethical how they were made?

A It's a good question. The Scottish Bishops have said "We reassure our Catholic population that, in accordance with longstanding guidance from the Pontifical Academy for Life, it is ethical to take any of the C19 vaccines purchased by the UK at the present time, either because foetal cell lines have not been used in their development or because their sourcing is sufficiently remote. While we affirm the ethical acceptability of taking these vaccines, we do not support biotechnological processes that develop products from abortion or research using these celllines."

Q What if a new vaccine was made with foetal cell tissues?

A The bishops say "objections to such vaccines can be respected and offered alternatives, and we call upon companies to use only ethically sourced material. We encourage wider debate in society on progressively eradicating the misuse of human products in bio-technologies in the future."

Q Are the vaccines safe to take?

A Millions of people have so far taken covid 19 vaccines with very limited ill affects, which suggests they are safe.

Caritas Awards continue despite Covid, young Catholics service recognised

Due to ongoing Covid restrictions, the annual Caritas Awards at the Clyde Auditorium did not take place – but the hundreds of Catholic school pupils who took part were still celebrated.

By IAN DUNN

A statement from the Scottish Catholic Education Service said ‘We may not be able to have our ceremony today to tell you how proud we, your schools, your parishes and your Bishops are of you, but we congratulate you for all your hard work and dedication over this most difficult of years. Remember: “Love - Caritas - is an extraordinary force.

Young people from all over Scotland took part in the awards, which were introduced in 2011, as part of a legacy of the UK visit of Pope Benedict XVI in September 2010, and asks young people to use their Faith as a starting point for reflection, leading to actions which show witness. Participants in the Caritas Award are supported in deciding how they can develop and use their gifts in a way that witnesses to God’s love (“Caritas”) in their communities.



Notre Dame pupils

At Notre Dame High School 52 pupils received the Pope Benedict XVI Caritas Award.

“You put your Faith into Action in what was a very tough year for many. Collectively, you spent 1560 hours volunteering in school, our local parishes and community, “ the school said in a statement. “You helped 114 first years receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in St. Laurence’s, St. Patrick’s and St. Mary’s. You walked 1000 Steps for St. Margaret’s Children and Family Care Society. You helped package over 40 food parcels for those in need at Christmas time with SSVDP. You organised a reverse advent calendar for Inverclyde Foodbank. You helped record socially distanced Masses and our virtual Rosary and you did so much more too. In the midst of a global pandemic you showed love, charity and compassion in our school and parishes. In the midst of a global pandemic, above all, you showed Caritas.” ■



Bishop Stephen Robson with Fiona McLaggan and her husband Ian, Mgr Ken McCaffrey and Canon Tom Shields

Dundee teacher pioneer praised

By IAN DUNN

Teachers from across the Dunkeld diocese paid tribute to the great service of Mrs Fiona McLaggan, who retired this Summer as Headteacher at St John’s High School, Dundee, at their annual Mass on June 3rd.

Starting out as a PE teacher she was the first female Principal Teacher of PE in Dundee and was promoted to Assistant Head Teacher and Depute Head Teacher during her time at Lawside Academy. She then moved to the new St Paul’s Academy as Deputy Head Teacher.

When she joined Lawside Academy, Fiona was a member of the Church of Scotland but during her time in Lawside, she fully embraced Catholicism and she made the decision to convert. She was received into the Church at SS Peter and Paul at the Easter Vigil on 31st March 2002.

In December 2010, Mrs McLaggan was appointed Head Teacher of St John’s RC High School. Over the years, as the Marist Brothers moved on from St John’s, the school’s Marist identity had been lost. When Fiona took up her post, she was determined to rectify this. Fiona’s vision was to re-establish St John’s Marist identity and re-connect The Family of St John’s with the Marist community. With the help of Brother Douglas and Brother Brendan, she re-established links with Marists across West Central Europe and worldwide.

She said that ‘the real successes during my career, which have given me the most personal pride, have been those children whose educational and life journeys have seen them overcome significant personal challenges to develop’.



Fiona McLaggan

Our Lady and St Patrick's High School

Our Lady and St Patrick's High School in Dumbarton has been shortlisted for the Secondary School of the Year award in the prestigious TES awards.

By IAN DUNN

The educational awards celebrates the extraordinary commitment, quality and innovation shown by teachers and school staff across the UK. Only the most outstanding individuals and institutions that the education sector has to offer are recognised in the shortlist.

Previously recognised as a School of Ambition, the school was shortlisted for its outstanding academic results with many pupils going on to university. The school also had the highest number of pupils in Scotland who used the Skills Development Scotland's 'My World of Work' website to gain an insight into academic abilities, practical

skills, interests and careers.

Staff at the school are committed to closing the attainment gap and breaking down any barriers to learning. Staff were also recognised for their proactive, innovative and creative learning strategies to engage young people, including pupils' mental health and wellbeing during the Covid pandemic.

TES editor Jon Severs said: "It is more important this year than ever before to celebrate the fantastic work schools do, because in the past 12 months they have gone above and beyond to ensure pupils were able to be educated and be kept safe in extraordinary circumstances. We were inundated with entries



that demonstrated just how hard the pandemic made the work of schools, and just how amazing the response from staff has been. We are looking forward to showcasing, as we do every year, just how vital our education professionals are to every facet of this country."

Councillor Karen Conaghan, Convener of Educational Services, said: "I am delighted to see the great work of both pupils and the whole school community being recognised in these awards. Our schools have faced one of the most challenging academic years ever, so to make this shortlist in these exceptional circum-

stances is even more special. I eagerly await the announcement later next month and I wish Mr Smith and all his staff the very best of luck."

Councillor Ian Dickson, Vice Convener of Educational Services, said: "This is a fantastic achievement for both our pupils and staff to be shortlisted as I'm sure the standard would have been very high in these awards. This demonstrates the commitment from Mr Smith and all his staff in ensuring every pupil, regardless of their background, achieves their best and go on to a positive destination when they leave school. I wish them good luck for the final." ■

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JAMES BUNDY

OUR GOVERNMENTS DON'T GET RELIGION — AND THE PANDEMIC PROVED IT

The pandemic has shown our governments do not understand the importance of religion for those of us who centre their life around Faith.

In March 2020 all across the United Kingdom places of worship were shut without consultation and with little regard for the spiritual impact.

The pandemic has shown our Governments do not understand the importance of religion for those of us who centre their life around Faith.

I do not believe the decision to close places of worship came from malice. The motivation behind it was good - the protection of public health - but the consequences of the decision were not considered because they were not understood by governments in Edinburgh or London.

In November 2020, the former Prime Minister, Theresa May, made a vital intervention in the House of Commons. In reference to the second closure of places of worship in England, she said:

“My concern is that the government today making it illegal to conduct an act of public worship, for the best of intentions, sets a precedent that could be misused by a Government in future with the worst of intentions, and that has unintended consequences”.

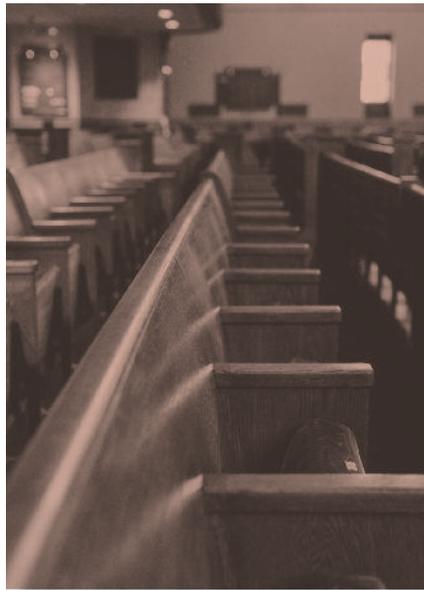
Our leaders were acting with the best of intentions, but a lack of understanding about the vitality of Faith meant they made decisions which ill formed and unwise.

Frustration at these errors propelled me towards a great change in my own life, switching jobs, to become the Director of Operations for a recently launched charity, Freedom Declared Foundation.

A charity founded on the principle of not being biased to anyone faith or belief.

As a result I have had the opportunity to meet wonderful people from many of the varied faith and belief groups that can be found on these islands. All have shared their concerns and frustrations about how the pandemic has impacted their faith or belief, citing a lack of appreciation and understanding from governments about religion and belief for the decisions that have been made.

In January 2021, for example, the Huffington Post reported that “NHS workers who grew beards for religious reasons were sacked after refusing to shave them off so



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One of the few benefits of the pandemic has been the highlighting of religious illiteracy at the top of Governments

PPE could be fitted”, predominantly impacting Muslim, Sikh, and Jewish medics working on the front line of the NHS during the pandemic.

In September 2020, Humanists UK noted their disapproval at religious and civil marriages being permitted 15 to attend under coronavirus guidelines, but only six being permitted for Humanist weddings.

In March 2021, Scotland’s highest court found that the Scottish Government’s decision to close places of worship was unlawful and unconstitutional. In his judgement, Lord Baird said: “They have admittedly paid lip service to article nine (freedom of religion or belief) by referring to it, but there is no evidence that they have accorded it the im-

portance which such a fundamental right deserves.”

These examples, and there are more, show that religion or belief is not truly understood by the Scottish or UK Government. All faiths or beliefs have suffered at some point during the pandemic because of this. Rather than simply complaining about this fact, however, we have a responsibility to increase this religious literacy in society. There are numerous ways we can do this.

First, talk openly about the importance of your Faith to your friends and family. Living your Faith openly and joyfully is a proven way to attract people towards the Faith. If people start to ask you about your Faith, it means that they are willing to listen. It is in these moments that you can highlight the importance of Faith in your life.

Second, reach out to other faith and belief groups in your community. Whilst there will be some theological differences, we all have the common cause of promoting the role of religion in our common life. A collective voice makes it harder for governments to ignore.

Lastly, get involved in public life. This can be as simple as writing to your local MP/MSP, or can be as far as standing for election yourself. Engaging with those in public life will result in their having to listen to the concerns of faith groups, which over time will result in an increase in religious literacy.

One of the few benefits of the pandemic has been the highlighting of religious illiteracy at the top of Governments. It is a benefit because it means that this awareness, felt by us all due to the closure of places of worship, can result in a new surge of energy to promote religious literacy in society. There is no magic wand we can wave which will result in religion being truly understood; neither is there one single answer. For religion and belief to be truly appreciated, it will take years of engagement by people from all faiths at all levels of society. Why not start now?

James Bundy is a writer, political commentator and the Director of Operations at the Freedom Declared Foundation.



SALLY FRASER

ONE FAMILY'S PANDEMIC YEAR.

Finding ways to mark the feasts of our faith during lockdown required inventions and humility.

In retrospect, we could have saved the BBQ for Pentecost. That would have made sense. But we went with BBQ for the Ascension, which felt right at the time. As the smoke rose up to the sky and all that. Then there was a slight sense of not knowing where to go next for Pentecost, until we settled on a water fight.

As it happened, the Pentecost water fight was perfect. I don't normally join in when my children have water fights but on this occasion I was determined to, and something about being completely soaked through to my skin in cold water spoke of new beginnings, of exhilaration, of surprising joy. A bit like Pentecost, then. It worked well.

The water fight and the BBQ were just two of the events with which we made sense of our liturgical year in 2020 as a family, and we have continued this year, as Lent began in the way it started last time, in full lockdown. I found myself researching how to make ashes at home. Not easy.

I settled on onion skins, charred and then pounded in a pestle and mortar, the resulting dense dark grey powder making a very effective black cross when mixed with a little water.

My husband and I sat and watched a live-streamed Mass where our DIY ashes could be blessed remotely, and then marked each other's heads. The gesture was incredibly moving, as it had been when we washed each other's feet the year before. Domesticated and made more intimate, these rituals took on new power, and perhaps a connection to the past, when Christians made do with what they had, has they have always done from time to time.

The peculiarities of lockdown have meant finding new ways of retelling old stories for our children too. In our isolated island home we became their ministers as well as their parents. Tombs and Easter gardens were made out of biscuit, stones rolled away before eating. My son made a biscuit angel for the garden, reminding me to familiarise myself with Matthew's account instead of the one I usually read at Easter.



“

We are called to be a people who witness to the reality of the Resurrection

Food has been a big part of our family liturgies. Special cakes to eat outside, homemade bread for Corpus Christi. I hope that we will have laid down memories in taste and smell that our children will draw on in years to come, the spicy fug of hot-cross buns, the gently burning citrus of Christingle oranges flickering away on the mantelpiece. But its more than that. In our simplified rituals I feel like we have understood more of what we are doing and why, and we have found meaningful ways to celebrate God's relationship with us.

Ash Wednesday was not just language of penitence that the children struggled to understand. We gathered as a family round the table and lit five candles in a huge candelabra. We had a bowl of water, scraps of paper and felt tip pens. We each had to write on the paper something we were sorry for, or something we were going to do differently this Lent and then burned them.

I can honestly say that the pledge I scrawled and burnt that day meant more to me than any other Lenten sacrifice I have made in the past, and deepened my relationship with God in a way that forty days without caffeine or cheese ever did. I read once that the subconscious doesn't know the difference between a ritual and a real thing, and certainly the comfort and closeness with God our homemade rituals brought about seem to echo that.

There was also an element of witness. The large brick cross my husband made in the garden on Good Friday was a sign in our community, all be it a quiet one. The foot soak I made to deliver to a friend on Holy Thursday was an introduction to the story of Jesus' foot-washing she had been unfamiliar with before. And our Easter fire, much as it slightly messed up our 'neighbours washing' hanging on their lines, was a conversation starter and a sign that we are a people who observe certain things that matter to us.

And while some might call my lockdown liturgies irreverent, I believe that the creativity with which we responded as a family to the trials of the last year was a blessing and a witness. We are called to be a people who witness to the reality of the Resurrection. Who show the world, by our lives, that we are nourished and comforted in ways we don't completely understand. Our thirst is quenched by water which never runs dry, we are given the peace which the world cannot give. Over the past year, the very act of just living, just finding joy and peace and ways to cope, has felt like a testimony to that.

Sally Fraser is a writer who lives in Leith.

Serving in Sickness

Covid-19 has challenged us all. But Fr Michael Kane of St Augustine's Coatbridge reveals what it was like being a priest during the pandemic.

By IAN DUNN

The plague came early to St Augustine's Parish in Coatbridge. "We were the first church in the country to shut," parish priest Fr Micheal Kane recalls. "It was last February before the news out of Italy turned so bad and then it just seemed so unusual. The boy who tested positive had been at a Confirmation with the bishop in a packed Church so we didn't know if it was going to spread all through the parish. It was frightening."

As it happened the boy was fine, but worse was to come.

"The biggest thing was closing the Church, now we do it at drop of the hat, but then it was a huge thing. I couldn't believe I had to cancel a Mass, it felt apocalyptic."

The impact of that loss was quickly apparent as lockdown deepened.

"I was really worried about people, those that were so anchored to the parish routine of Mass and all the other things, who go to Mass and then come for a coffee. And we had the parish open all day until 7pm for Perpetual Adoration, so to lose that was the big thing, a spiritual blow."

He quickly became aware, as lockdown deepened, just how many people were feeling isolated.

"It was a simple idea really, we wanted to keep people spiritually connected so we got the Mass up and streaming so they could watch it and we set up a Phone A Friend service that people could call."

But they quickly realised that many physical needs were also not being met.

"Back then when people were shielding, there was a government food pack but it was a bit of a disaster. So we set up a food line, if you need a food parcel call, no questions asked, we'll get it to you for nothing. There was a lot of need out there but the way people rallied was remarkable."

The project grew arms and legs, delivering food, prescriptions, walking dogs, helping families get laptops so kids could get attend school.

"At one point we were feeding 1000 families a week. It was a massive thing. We think we handed out 1.4 million items of food."



Fr Michael Kane

“
People are desperate to get back to Mass, and despite everything, we've continued the mission of the Church

"The response was remarkable, the priest says I think there is something special about Coatbridge. If you ask people face to face, I've always had a good response. And they rose to the moment."

One pre-pandemic project that paid off in spades was Being Catholic TV, an online TV channel showing Mass from St Augustine's as well as some other programming.

"I was very surprised at the uptake of course, we were worried that people would become disconnected from the Church so online stuff is a really good way to make people realise the Church is still there. And people responded, the numbers watching now are higher than ever 55,000 during the week and hundreds of thousands at the weekend."

Despite these successes, the challenges were enormous.

"The worst thing was visiting people who were very sick but who weren't allowed loved ones", he remembered. "And their husbands and wives would say 'tell them such and such'. People dying alone and aware it would happen. The funerals were every bit as tough."

"You see all the debates about having sport back for crowds, but even now families can't meet for a proper funeral," he said. "And at the height of it, just eight people straight to the grave. And it was crushing for some families. Because they felt they failed the person they'd lost because they hadn't been able to carry out their wishes."

"And when you met up with them later, you expect people to start to move through phases of grief, but some people are static in their grief. They haven't been able to move on."

Their sheer volume of death at times seemed overwhelming.

"We've got a lot of care homes in the parish and it went through them like wildfire, he continued. There was a time when I was out night, after night after night. It gets difficult on a human level, just the sheer tiredness, but you always have to take it back to the person, the individual, see the person, not the task."

"And after the event, you have to talk." I go to a priest and talk about it, but, I cannot imagine how anyone would cope in this sort of scenario without Faith. It's the light in the darkness."

And in tune with that, he is optimistic for the future:

"People are desperate to get back to Mass, and despite everything, we've continued the mission of the Church." ■





Coping with Covid

On the third night the boiler died.
A foot of snow outside the house and Covid inside it.

By IAN DUNN

It was at that point, sick myself and sharing a house with my sick wife, sick mother in law, and two boisterously unaffected toddlers that my prayers moved from the ‘help us get through this’ to ‘why has thou forsaken me’ territory.

Thank God we are all since recovered. And I would take this opportunity to say – Don’t get it! If you can possibly avoid it, don’t get it. I’ve been sicker but I’ve rarely been more tired. My wife had it worse, more feverish, and seeing someone you love with a high fever, I also strongly recommend avoiding.

But at that moment, stuck in the depths of a Scottish Winter, no heating, not able to go out, no one able to go in, things were bleak. The gas engineers said they couldn’t come out under any circumstances. We were on our own under our self isolation period finished.

Usually being sick has a clear trajectory. You feel worse for a while and then gradually a bit better. For the ten days I had this I woke up not knowing what the day would bring, would I be just shattered, or nauseous, or coughing my lungs up?

My wife couldn’t do much more

than sleep. Her mother, who in a grim irony had been shielding with us, was the same.

So I battled through with the kids keeping them feed and watered. The snow was a blessing, I could let them run about daft in the back garden and tire themselves out, with the occasionally weak telling off when their snowball fights turned a bit violent.

Still my concentration was shot, and scrolling through my phone was about all I could manage. Someone I know a little has a popular twitter account and posts anonymous prayer requests – I messaged him saying “My wife and I both have Covid, we have two small children, there’s a foot of snow outside and the boiler has died. If anyone wanted to offer a prayer would really appreciate it.”

The response was astonishing. Hundreds and hundreds of people offering prayers, advice and even offering to send food.

Similarly when the boiler went down we had to turn heaters away the next morning as people were bringing round so many.

Even feeling rotten, it was sustaining.

Then my wife got a bit worse. Fever of over 40 degrees that wouldn’t shift.

“

**I’ve been sicker
but I’ve rarely
been more tired.**

They wanted her in the hospital but an ambulance would be hours way. We got the kids done and I was just about up to driving so I took her in. Of course I couldn’t leave the car as I was still infectious. I waited in the car park, ten o’clock on a Friday night and thought dark thoughts.

They did a lot of tests, decided to keep her in and I went home. Slept badly.

Tried not to think. Tried to distract the kids the next morning. I’ve rarely felt better than when she called me to tell me she’s got the all clear and was coming home.

That felt like we were through the worst of it. But the next morning I awoke to find breathing deeper than a sip hurt. A lot.

Of course I turned to my phone and quickly read an article that said this was because my lungs were battered and scarred by the virus and had begun to fill with pus.

At which point I lost it and had a cry in the middle of the kitchen.

“What’s wrong with Daddy?” asked the four year old?

The two year old just tucked into my toast. But by tea time, I was much improved. The day after snow melted away and my wife was much better.

Still a bit slower. Not running any marathons any time soon, not that was before to be fair.

The grimness of that week has melted away by the snow. But I remember the prayers, the kindness.

And you’ll need to shoot me to stop me getting that vaccine. ■

What was it like to become a Catholic during a Pandemic?

Corrie Young tells all

Just after Easter, I became a Catholic. My family were and are extremely happy for me, even if they remain a bit surprised by this turn of events.

By CORRIE YOUNG

My background is Protestant, but in heritage only. I had little religious education and I didn't really think about religion for the first sixteen years of my life. Looking back the draw to towards belief existed, but it took me years to work out what that belief ought to be.

After following that urge down some blind alleys, one Sunday I ended up at a parish Mass in Edinburgh. I had been once before with a friend who was dating a Catholic, and had felt something then that later called me to go alone. I walked in, a shy and awkward student, without a clue what to do. Parishioners and the priest greeted me with warm smiles. It took a while, but I settled in as a regular and felt I was in the right place.

The priest recommended that I wait a year to convert and prepare. I was still new. Things can change a lot within a year.

Eventually when I began RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) last Spring I was certain of my path forward; just at the moment the pandemic was making the wider world seem completely uncertain.

Just at the moment I was embarking on this incredible journey, I was confined to my room.

My experience of the pandemic was much better than for others: there was no real danger of me losing my housing, or worse yet, my life. For a while, my days consisted of walks and spending time with my girlfriend, life could have been worse.

Regardless, I had lost a lot of the best things about being a student. I missed my friends. I missed my mum and dad. I missed going somewhere that was not my flat and conversation that was not Covid. I forgot to pray, and my progress started to regress.

My mornings, afternoons, and evenings blended into days that passed quickly.

But out of the drudgery of lockdown salvation emerged in the form of speaking to others, like me, in the same boat.

The RCIA meetings brought together a cast of people: from former Anglicans to young adults getting their first taste of religious education. It was run by the faithful women who organised each week and Fr Patrick – both delivered lessons on the Church and sassy quips toward one another in kind.

I had never met most of these people 'in real life', not even my Confirmation sponsor until the big day. Almost everyone that has been so integral to this process I had seen from the screen of my laptop.

Yet in these connections, these people felt very real to me.

I think by providence I began to read St Augustine's Confessions,



very slowly, so as not to miss anything. The decision came after praying to him for guidance.

He was a convert and a writer, living at the end of the (Roman) world. His father was a soldier, and he loved his mother very much. He was self-critical, an attribute I sorely needed. He wrote about the importance of friendship.

Originally, I had been drawn to the image of St Michael defeating Satan during the War in Heaven or St George slaying the dragon, but Augustine and I were much more of a match.

Half of the book, one-hundred-and-fifty pages, took me to my Confirmation day. This was also the point in the book where Augustine experienced his own conversion.

In a passage he described sitting in a garden feeling great distress at his distance from God, before stating:

"But to reach that destination one does not use ships or chariots or feet. It was not even necessary to go the distance I had come from the house to where we were sitting. The one necessary condition, which meant not only going but at once arriving there, was to have the will to go."

I felt I had stumbled into something essential: Though there was no Mass and no Eucharist in my home, there was prayer, and there were no restrictions keeping me from that. From then on, prayer came more easily to me and I was more at peace.

Still, I was increasingly aware Catholicism is about the Real Presence, it is about God becoming Man amongst men. "For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them."

So much of what we did during the pandemic felt more artificial than real.

“

Just at the moment I was embarking on this incredible journey, I was confined to my room

Who will return to Church after the Pandemic?

For the last 18 months our Churches have been at best, a quarter full, with tremendous limits placed on who can attend.

By IAN DUNN

As the Scottish bishops consider reimposing the obligation to attend Sunday Mass exactly who will return, once it is safe to do so, remains a mystery. In the past when Catholics stop attending Mass, for whatever reason, they rarely return. Yet there are reasons to think the enforced restrictions of Covid may make this effect less pronounced.

Just 4% of people interviewed in a study, conducted last summer, said they would abandon going to church when restrictions are finally lifted.

The findings of the poll of 2,500 people by Catholic Voices, a group set up in 2010 to improve communications between the Church and the media, contradict the predictions that the Covid crisis would irrevocably accelerate the decline of collective worship among the faithful.

Of those polled 93% accessed Church services online during Covid. This high figure naturally reflects the fact that this was an online survey circulated directly by Bishops, clergy, religious orders, lay and diocesan networks.

While there was a high level of engagement and appreciation of online worship (66%), the results suggest that there is little danger of a mass exodus to the virtual world, with only 4% thinking they would worship mainly or entirely online in the future.

Many Catholics polled (63%) had had some contact with clergy or a lay representative during lockdown ranging from pastoral support, practical help, prayer, church admin, or just checking up. Brenden Thompson, CEO of Catholic Voices, said he was “pleasantly surprised by many of the findings.”

“Catholics miss their parishes and church buildings and seem eager to return, not just content with ‘virtual Church,’” he said. “Many, it seems, by and large, have backed the bishops, been grateful for the efforts of clergy to livestream, and many have even felt at times closer to God and been more prayerful than usual.”

However Stephen Bullivant, professor of theology and the sociology of religion at St. Mary’s University, Twickenham, in the UK has suggested that it will greatly accelerate long term downward trends which have seen increasing numbers of empty pews.

“At least in terms of church attendance, we’re almost certain to see a ‘jump forward’ along the long-set downward trend,” he said. “Lots of dioceses have done forecasts in previous years along the lines of ‘if present trends continue, we’ll have X number of active priests for Y number of Massgoers by 2040,’ or whatever. Well, they’re going to have to bring those forward.”

However, he warned that ‘we’re unlikely to know exactly what the “new normal” will look like in terms of sacramental practice, community activity, Mass-going rates, conversions, vocations, or charitable giving—all of which will have further knock-on effects for pastoral planning—for some years’.

“What is certain, however, is that the Church must not simply see itself as a passive recipient of whatever status quo will eventually emerge. Rather, we must, right now, see ourselves as being in the business of shaping it.” ■



Corrie and parents just after he was received into the Church.

We could speak to our loved ones, but our brains registered a screen, not a person. It is not the same.

And yet so much of my journey to the Church was behind those screens. I could not describe it as anything else other than ‘real’.

It was the way it had to be, and I am proud of the way the Church responded – by reaching out further regardless. I am proud of the way the group stuck together and consistently spent its Tuesday evenings discussing the Old Testament and why Christ died on the Cross.

I have met people I may know my whole life, some who I may never meet again, yet we were bound together by our nine-month journey.

In the silence after the calls at night, I found a friendship in Augustine, whose writings and prayer guided me side-by-side with these wonderful strangers within RCIA. Neither I had seen, face-to-face.

If the pandemic has taught me anything, it has been the real presence of God and the saints in silence; it has been the beauty of being physically present at the liturgy; it has been the way in which people, who have no need to, will go out of their way to help a fellow traveller.

The culmination of it all on the day, during the Mass, was potent. My bottom lip trembled as my Baptism approached. Father Patrick stood in front, my sponsor behind, my soon-to-be brothers and sisters in Christ beside me.

I was confirmed into the Church as Augustine, ‘with the saint on my mind and my sponsor’s hand on my shoulder.’

Like Augustine himself said, one does not need to tread a single step to find the Kingdom of God, but if one is going to, it would be better to do it together. ■



4%

Would abandon going to church when restrictions are finally lifted

93%

Accessed Church services online during Covid

4%

Thinking they would worship mainly or entirely online in the future

Ordinary Catholics Extraordinary Lives



**SADIE
SCULLION**

Sadie Scullion recently retired as a Programme Officer at SCIAF, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund. It was the final part of a truly remarkable career, which saw her leave school at 15 without qualifications before becoming a nurse and then helping people in some of the most dangerous places in the world. Here she tells her story.

GROWING UP

When I was a child I had no idea what I might do. My parents didn't expect too much. I was from Port Glasgow, an industrial town, and after school you just went and worked in the factory. So I left school at 15. With no A levels, I think maybe just one GCSE. And I was very fortunate that later in life I did a university degree and then later a Masters as well. Just because you leave school with no qualifications, it doesn't mean you will stop progressing, you can still take the opportunity to become the owner of your own development.

SOMETHING BETTER

But back then I was working in the factory, and I hated it, so I decided I was going to go and become a nurse. When I told my parents that said 'Why are you leaving?', because they thought the factory was a perfect place for women to work. I said I was looking for something better, more rewarding and that was the best decision I've ever made in my life. It opened up so many opportunities for me.

NURSING

I was a district nurse in East End of London for about 10 years or so in the 80s and that's when HIV AIDS started to become known to the general public. It was as frightening as Covid is now, nobody could see what it was. Charities were the ones who were at the forefront of providing care for people with AIDS. And I was with a Christian hospice, the first hospice in Europe, to care for people with AIDS, because it cared for people that other health care providers wouldn't. It was an eye opening experience moving from being a district nurse working. I learned a great deal there. But the lasting memories are about the love and the kindness and moments of deepest sadness, you know, for the families to see their distress, not only to be near loved ones at the end of life, but also for those families who find out that their

children had a hidden life that they had never envisaged. At the same time it was some of the happiest days of my life. It was such a privilege to be there and help those people.

AROUND THE WORLD

But I wanted to have a different life, and still make a difference to people's lives so I volunteered with VSO and started doing emergency work. So I ended up in numerous conflict ravaged countries from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, northern Iraq and Georgia, working mainly with displaced and refugee population.

And it gave me hands on experience of working with people, especially women and children who suffer the most during conflict, and they did suffer terribly, but also the strength those women found to carry on and to protect their children. It's just incredible.

VACCINATING CHILDREN IN A WAR ZONE

I was in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 90s. Both these countries saw the most terrible crimes against humanity during their civil wars. I was working in rural areas to establish clinics to carry out vaccinations for children. It was a fairly dangerous environment. It wasn't a simple exercise, you had to gain permission from the local armed groups to travel out. And you had to organize a cold chain of freezers to get the vaccinations out there. We travelled in convoys. There were lots of road blocks held by child soldiers. And these children were very frightening. Sometimes if you went that way enough that you got some sort of, I wouldn't say friendship, but an understanding between yourself and the kids. We traveled early in the morning, three to four hours to set up the vaccination station and an empty clinic or a building. We vaccinated hundreds of children in a day. The women and children would wait there so patiently and they were so relieved and

joyful that their children were receiving basic health care that it was incredibly rewarding.

NORTH KOREA

I also visited North Korea in 1996. It wasn't a long spell there. But it was long enough. I worked for a conglomerate of American NGOs and they sent a team that was placed in the UN Office in Pyongyang. And we were there to monitor food distributions. It was an amazing place, like stepping back into the 1940s. An old communist bloc, huge paved, almost empty streets and massive statues of the Great Leader everywhere. But surprisingly enough, there was a Japanese supermarket, American TV and American bowling and ice skating. I remember the people were extremely poor, extremely thin. It was all drab. When we left we went through China and I felt the world just exploded with color as soon as we crossed the border.

HEROES OF FAITH

And I spent nearly 15 years with SCIAF working in all sorts of different countries and I met so many incredible people. There was Fr Fraser, a Scottish priest who started up a radio station in Uganda. He built a radio post so that he could broadcast to the child soldiers to let them know that they could come home and that the communities would still welcome them. Sister Rose in Uganda was another. She helped women who'd suffered atrocities, who had been raped and were not welcome in their community and she took them in and set up a residential school and vocational centre, she helped rehabilitate these young women in their own development and for their children. And then back into their community. It was a wonderful program. And those relationships with those partners, all the wonderful partners SCIAF work with, they are the things you really remember, that you carry with you all your life. ■



A Place to Pray

Catholics talk about the places and the times where they've felt closest to God.



◀ Ronnie Convery

nationality who have visited have felt a connection to the beauty of the place.

Who did you travel with?

The person I probably associate most with the Italian Garden would be Archbishop Conti, he was the instigator, the person without whom it would not have happened and it was great to be with him at the tenth anniversary of the opening this Spring.

But the other one would be Rando Bertoia, who was the last survivor of the Andora Star and he was an old man who owned a watch repair shop on Victoria Road, when I first went to see him I was a journalist at The Glaswegian. And in classic journalist style, thought this was a terrible war crime, a scandal that had to be put right.

But when I asked him how he felt about it he just said.

"It was war, these things happen in war." He wasn't interested in politics or revenge he was utterly forgiving. And that was a powerful lesson in reconciliation.

What is your lasting memory of this place?

Because of the nature of it, with the mirrors, and being next to the river every time I go in, as I have done hundred of times, it's different. But perhaps that says something about forgiveness and mercy and how it shifts and moves on as we go through life. ■



This week Ronnie Convery, Director of Communications of Glasgow Archdiocese and Honorary Italian Consul talks about the Italian Garden next to St Andrew's Cathedral, in Glasgow.

Where were you when you felt closest to God?

I couldn't single out a single time but I think in the Italian Cloister Garden next St Andrew's Cathedral. The nature of the place is built for reflection, closed off by the wall and right next to the Cathedral with the Blessed Sacrament just a few meters away. It's a place that's full of personal memories for me, and being there combines a sense of closeness to God one might feel kneeling at the tabernacle with a wider sense of tranquilly and reflection given the Garden's purpose of remembrance and as a mediation on life and death.

It of course remembers the tragedy of the Andora Star, the Ship that was sunk during World War 2 taking Scots Italians to Canada, and it's engraved with phrases about the acceptance of divine will and faith, almost like a physical prayerbook. And the reflective walls bring that sense of memories coming back to us.

Why and when where you there?

I was there when it was a hole in the ground, when it was a wet building site. I was there the night it was blessed and opened and 100 times since. There's one phrase I particularly love in it among the many on its walls.

La Maore l'interpido, which translates 'Love casts out fear'. Love is intrepid. Such a beautiful example of how to translate something meaning rather than words.

How did you get there?

Well I was chairman of the fundraising committee, when it was being planned a decade ago, and the then Archbishop Conti had enough money to extend the sanctuary by 6 feet, or create the Cloister Garden and thankfully he choose the latter. I was involved in the work to raise awareness and funds and so on. And there were many beautiful moments in that process, though the opening night was a special memory. Musicians from La Scala in Milan came over, the First Minister was there, the last surviving victim there, the British ambassador to the Holy See. And it felt like a powerful moment to see this terrible incident commemorated in a way that was about healing memories. And while it's obviously a special place for the Italian community, over the past decade I know that people of every

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It was
war, these
things
happen in
war

ENGLISH CHURCH DEFENDS DECISION TO ALLOW PRIME MINISTER A CATHOLIC WEDDING

English Church authorities said that “all necessary steps were taken, in both Church and civil law,” ahead of twice-divorced Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s wedding at a Catholic Cathedral in London.

BY IAN DUNN

Boris Johnson married Carrie Symonds, the mother of his one-year-old son Wilfred, in a small ceremony at Westminster Cathedral on May 29. A Westminster Cathedral spokesperson told the Sunday Times newspaper: “The bride and groom are both parishioners of the Westminster Cathedral parish and baptised Catholics.”

“All necessary steps were taken, in both Church and civil law, and all formalities completed before the wedding. We wish them every happiness.”

News of the ceremony provoked debate about how the prime minister was eligible to marry at the mother church of Catholicism in England and Wales.

Fr. Mark Drew, a priest serving in the Archdiocese of Liverpool, asked how the wedding would be perceived by Catholics seeking a second marriage in church.

Writing on his Twitter account, he said: “Can anyone explain to me how ‘Boris’ Johnson, who left the Catholic Church while at Eton and is twice divorced, can be married at Westminster Cathedral, while I have to tell practicing Catholics in good faith who want a second marriage in Church that it’s not possible?”

He said he accepted that the marriage was not contrary to Canon Law.

“But in decisions of this kind the need to avoid scandal is paramount in Catholic tradition. In such high-profile cases, rather than showing herself more accommodating, the Church should set the bar higher,” he commented.

He added that he was concerned about the kind of image that the Church was projecting.

“I am seeing so many comments where sincere Catholics are feeling betrayed, and others from people hostile to the Church who are gleefully seizing another chance to bash it -- rightly or wrongly -- for what they see as its partiality to power and wealth,” he said.

Johnson, who has served as prime minister since July 2019, was baptized a Catholic at the behest of his mother, Charlotte Johnson Wahl. But he was confirmed in the Church of England, the mother church of the Anglican Communion, while studying at the prestigious boarding school Eton College.

Carrie Symonds, 33, is a Catholic who has referred to her faith on social media.

Fr Gary Dench, an assistant priest at Brentwood Cathedral, Essex, who is studying Canon Law at Leuven in



Belgium, wrote on social media that Johnson remained a Catholic despite his Anglican confirmation.

“As such, Boris Johnson remained bound by ecclesiastical laws in force and which were binding on him as a Catholic when he contracted his previous marriages,” he said. “These marriages were, therefore, governed by both natural law and Canon Law.”

Neither Johnson’s first wedding, to Allegra Mostyn-Owen, or his second, to Marina Wheeler, took place in a Catholic church.

Dench noted that, according to the Code of Canon Law, if Catholics do not marry before a “lawful ecclesiastical authority,” or receive a dispensation, then their marriages are regarded as invalid.

“These cases do not require a formal annulment procedure. It is a brief documentary process which the Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Westminster would have investigated before the Prime Minister’s wedding could have gone ahead,” he wrote.

Observing that Symonds had never previously married, Dench said: “As such, she has a general right to marry, and a right to receive the Sacraments. If her spouse (the PM) is also not prohibited by law, previous relationships notwithstanding, then [there] can be no question of trying arbitrarily to prevent this.”

He added that the rules applied “equally to all Catholics, whatever their wealth or rank.”

The couple’s links with Westminster Cathedral, which is near to the Prime Minister’s residence at 10 Downing Street, first became public last year.

The couple’s son, Wilfred Johnson, was baptized at the Cathedral on Sept 12, 2020, in a private ceremony.

Wilfred Lawrie Nicholas Johnson was born on April 29, 2020. Announcing her son’s birth on Instagram, Symonds said that he was named Wilfred after Johnson’s grandfather, Lawrie in honor of her grandfather, and Nicholas after Nick Price and Nick Hart, the physicians who saved the Prime Minister’s life after he was hospitalized with Covid earlier that month.

Johnson, 56, is the first baptised Catholic to become Prime Minister.

Tony Blair regularly attended Mass at Westminster Cathedral while serving as Prime Minister from 1997 to 2007, but was only received into the Catholic Church after he stepped down from office.

After centuries of persecution, the Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829 enabled Catholics to sit in Parliament and hold government office. But the Act said that no Catholic could advise the Crown on the appointment of Church of England bishops. As this is one of the duties of Prime Ministers, it was widely believed that the Act effectively prevented a Catholic from assuming the role.

But commentators argue that if the Prime Minister was a practicing Catholic, then an alternative arrangement for appointments to the established Church would be introduced.

Johnson has said that his faith comes and goes like the signal of the radio station Magic FM in the Chilterns, a rural area northwest of London.

He told the Daily Telegraph newspaper in 2015 that while he thought a lot about religion, he was not a regular churchgoer. He added that it would be “pretentious” to describe him as a “serious, practicing Christian.” ■



POPE KISSES TATTOO OF AUSCHWITZ SURVIVOR

Pope Francis has kissed the tattoo of an Auschwitz survivor during a general audience.

BY IAN DUNN

Lidia Maksymowicz, a Polish citizen who was deported to Auschwitz from her native Belarus by the age of 3, showed the Pope the number tattooed on

her arm by the Nazis, and Francis leaned over and kissed it on Wednesday.

Maksymowicz told Vatican News that she didn't exchange words with the pope.



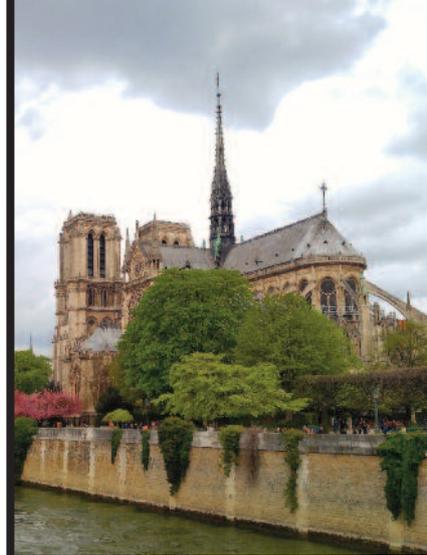
"We understood each other with a glance," she said.

Maksymowicz has participated in events sponsored by Sant'Egidio aimed at educating youth about the Holocaust. She spent three years in the children's area of the camp, and was subjected to experiments by Josef Mengele, known as the "Angel of Death." When the camp was freed, she was taken in by a Polish family.

The pope has paid tribute to Holocaust survivors in the past, including a 2014 visit to Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Israel and a visit in February to the Rome apartment of a survivor, 88-year-old Hungarian-born writer and poet Edith Bruck.

The Vatican said that during the hour-long visit, Francis told her: "I came to thank you for your witness and to pay homage to the people martyred by the craziness of Nazi populism."

"And with sincerity I repeat the words I pronounced from my heart at Yad Vashem, and that I repeat in front of every person who, like you, suffered so much because of this: 'Forgive, Lord, in the name of humanity,'" the Holy Father told Bruck, according to the Vatican's account of the private meeting. ■



ATTACK ON CATHOLIC PROCESSION IN PARIS

The Archbishop of Paris on Sunday lamented an attack on Catholics taking part in a procession commemorating the city's 19th-century martyrs.

BY IAN DUNN

The archbishop of Paris on Sunday lamented an attack on Catholics taking part in a procession commemorating the city's 19th-century martyrs.

Archbishop Michel Aupetit deplored on May 30 the "anger, contempt and violence" directed at the group of around 300 Catholics, including children and elderly people, taking part in the "March of the Martyrs."

"We are troubled that what we preach — a God of love — can arouse so much hatred, so much anger," he said. "Last night, here, there was a demonstration of anger, contempt, and violence."

The archbishop was speaking at a Mass marking the 150th anniversary of the Catholic martyrs of the Paris Commune at the Church of Notre-Dame-des-Otages, built in honor of hostages killed on May 26, 1871.

He said: "The Lord promised us that there would be violence, not because we ourselves are violent beings, but by reminding us of what our brothers here, the hostages in question, have experienced, who, according to the reports we have read, have never shown anger in the face of anger, hatred in the face of hatred, but on the contrary, a peaceful and forgiving heart." ■

RELIGIOUS HAD GREATER EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE DURING COVID, SURVEY FINDS

A new survey indicates people with a strong faith displayed the strongest emotional resilience to the Covid-19 pandemic.

BY IAN DUNN

A new survey indicates people with a strong faith displayed the strongest emotional resilience to the Covid-19 pandemic.

That was part of the findings of a survey conducted late last year of 1,600 adults in the United States. Nearly 40 percent of the respondents identified as Catholic.

Respondents who reported a decline in religiosity since the pandemic had more than twice the odds of feeling isolated and lonely than respondents who did not report such a decline.

"Religiosity seems to be a buffer

against negative stresses," said Brandon Vaidyanathan, chair of the sociology department and an associate professor of sociology.

Fewer than 20 percent of the sample said their mental health had worsened, he added.

The one area where people report a deterioration in their lives was in feelings of isolation, but only "a very small number," Vaidyanathan said, reported their "sense of purpose in life having been weakened."

Reflecting the pessimism before vaccines became widely available earlier this year as well as more than six months of livestreamed services by the time the survey was conduct-

ed, only slightly more than half the respondents said they planned to return only to in-person worship services; 44% said they planned to combine in-person worship with online services. Almost no one said they wanted to participate only in online worship.

"The staggering amount of change" on congregations "has been anxiety-producing ... to a monumental degree," said Scott L. Thumma, a professor of sociology of religion at Hartford Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut. He thought the survey result "speaks highly to the adaptive behavior" of religious communities.

He concluded it was "very clear" that many want the combination of online and in-person worship. "There's a strong push now to not go back to face-to-face. Worshipers won't like it if that goes away. In fact, they may drop back off."

"Let's not take for granted the people who are still experiencing the trauma and the isolation," Vaidyanathan said.

Thumma said he's heard the comment, "I feel that as a Church, we have won the pandemic," and a member of his seminary called it an opportunity to do new things we should have been doing anyway." ■

THE BOOK

LAUGHTER IN THE PEWS

The Comedian's Prayer Book
Frank Skinner

There aren't a lot of Catholics in comedy. Which is always a bit surprising as Catholicism is clearly the funniest religion - as anyone has seen a priest lose control of a thurible and clonk himself in a sensitive area will surely agree.

But there is Frank Skinner. The irrelevant comedian, who rose to fame with the 'laddish' TV show *Fantasy Football* and singing the England football fan favourite *Three Lions*, has matured into a more gentle presence, but retains his ability to surprise. As seen in his latest book, *A Comedian's Prayerbook*. As he notes the very concept is confusing but for all the gags he's serious about his Faith.

"I am a practising Roman Catholic", he writes. "In truth, even other Christians can find us Catholics a bit exotic. I understand that. They lack our continental taste for statue-kissing, entrail-centric saint-depictions and skeletons in bridal veils. Those are the bits I love best. I looked up

the word 'believer' on Thesaurus.com and the offered synonyms were adherent, devotee, disciple, follower, supporter, zealot, convert and freak. I like to think I cover all those bases in my book. Of course, believers are also notoriously puffed, as indeed are atheists, so I may have come up with a formula that alienates and annoys just about everyone. At least no one can accuse me of being too commercial."

As that suggests the gags are good but the prayers are better. In this slim tome, there is not quite a stream of consciousness, but they capture something of the sense of a conversation with God.

Setting the scene for the book, Skinner, explains: "Imagine someone on a pilgrimage, stopping at churches, martyr-related tourist spots and sacred wells, while dressed in a medieval jester outfit. The intention is serious and completely devout, but the pilgrim just feels more at home in the motley than in sackcloth and ashes. He feels jest is an integral part of who he is and it seems wrong to deny that part."

Skinner sees his role as a comic as integral to this Faith, although some 'fellow pilgrims' may be uncomfortable with someone who seems to see humour all around him - and can easily make others laugh.

He describes his prayer life as "a telepathic dip into a long, ongoing conversation with thousands of tabs left open and no helpful 'new readers start here' summaries or simplifications for the neutral observer." Like so many his

relationship with the Faith hasn't gone in a straight line.

"When I was 19, I left the Catholic Church, which was a major family turmoil," he said during a recent appearance on BBC's *Songs of Praise*. "I left, not because I stopped believing, but I had doubts about the Catholic Church, about Papal infallibility and about many other doctrines which worried me, so it was sort of a bureaucratic reason for leaving."

He added he read every anti-Catholic book he could find to convince him that he had made the correct decision.

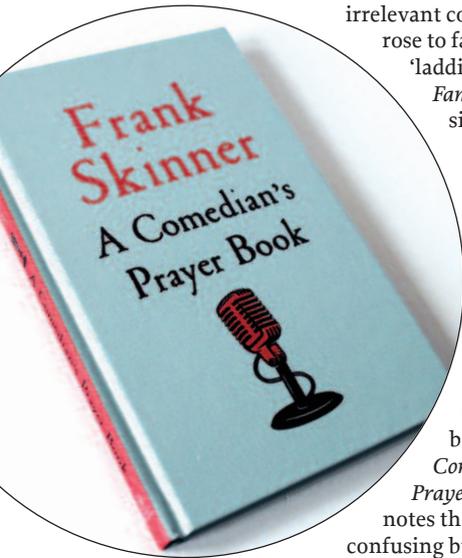
However, 'that didn't work', he admitted.

"Eventually, I went to see this old priest called Fr Stibbles and I told him all this and he suddenly went 'Come back, come on,'" he said, motioning with his hand.

Joking that the priest had carried out "a drive-by confession", the comedian said he returned to Mass the next day and has been a "regular churchgoer ever since". He also noted that "prayer is the only area of my life where I am completely free, honest, there's no act, there's no front. Even with your loved ones there are things where you are sensitive to what you say and what you don't say".

And that is the great gift of this book. When all the jokes are peeled away Skinner is unafraid to speak to God and the reader with total honesty.

He may not be a national treasure, but for that alone he should be a Catholic one. ■



THE TV SHOW

TIME FOR CHANGE?

Time
BBC

There is a moment near the start of Jimmy McGovern's latest BBC drama, *Time*, that rings extremely true.

Mark Cobden (Sean Bean) is arriving for processing at the prison in which he will serve his four-year sentence. Among the questions barked at him - name, age, is he on any medication - is one about his religion. Nervous and disoriented, he mumbles something about not really believing in God. "I'll put you down as

Anglican then," comes the brisk reply. "No, no," Mark responds, kicked into focus. "More ... more lapsed Catholic."

In a pinch the Catholicism always comes out, which will not be a surprise to fans of McGovern's other work, where God is always peeping in. Most clearly in his wonderful series *Broken* which starred Bean as a priest.

Time is every bit as engaging and offers an insight into life in prison that both appals and engages. It also rudely disabuses anyone it has quietly mused so they could probably handle a 'bit of bird'. Cobden's experience is boring, and terrifying. But in many ways less agonising than of prison guard Eric McNally, played by Stephen Graham.

A good screw, honest prison guard and a loving father he slowly becomes comprised by forces beyond his control.

The series asks big questions, chiefly how do we punish those who have committed acts of evil, without becoming caught up in evil ourselves?

A friend who works in prisons confirmed the series was not over egging its depiction of drugs, violence and tedium.

Perhaps the most upsetting element is the depiction of prisoners with severe mental illness being allowed to fester into self destruction. Watching it, it's easy to despair that the whole prison system is beyond saving. But there are fragments of hope.

Mostly provided by Sr Marie Louise, played by Siobhan Finneran, a Catholic sister who works in the chaplaincy and with patience and care moves a few prisoners towards rehabilitation.

God peeping in, once again.
You can watch Time on BBC iplayer. ■



SAINTS FOR TODAY

The Saints remain the great lights of our Faith. Their stories continue to inspire and move young people to move forward. In each edition we will tell the story of a different Saint, often with a connection to Scotland, presented in an accessible way for children, to help them reflect on their own Faith.

THIS WEEK St Columba

St Columba was born in County Donegal in Ireland in the year 521 (about 500 years after Jesus, and 1500 years before today. His mother and father were from the royal family, so he was a very important child. They called their son 'Columba' which means 'dove'.

Columba could have become king in Ireland, but chose instead to give up all his riches and become a priest and a monk. He travelled all over Ireland teaching people about God and building churches.

One day, while he was working in the library making beautiful illuminated manuscripts (books with intricate and colourful designs), he copied someone else's work and pretended it was his own. He lied to cover up what he had done. When he was discovered, he refused to accept that he was wrong, and he gathered a great army together and went into battle against the people who were accusing him. In the end 3,000 people were killed.

Columba realized that he had done a very bad thing, and so he left Ireland in a little boat called a coracle and crossed over to Scotland. He landed on the island of Iona, and there built a new monastery. He promised God that he would tell 3,000 people about Jesus, as a way of saying sorry for all the people who had been killed.

Columba travelled around Scotland teaching people about God, and there are lots of legends about things that he did. In one of the most famous, he defeated the Loch Ness Monster.

Among his many miracles, Columba prophesied regularly and cured the sick, disabled and lame. Once, when he didn't have wine for Mass, he miraculously changed water into wine. The monk also produced water from a rock, calmed storms at sea, conversed liberally with angels, subdued savage beasts (like boars and serpents), provided several fishermen with a huge catch of fish and brought peace to warring tribes. He also multiplied a herd of cattle to the joy of the herd's owner and defected demons without batting an eye. In addition, a divine light seemed to follow him wherever he went.

St Columba worked for thirty years in Scotland, and many people learned about God from him and became Christians. He always returned to the tiny island of Iona when he wanted to rest and to pray, and listen to God. Today the island Iona is a place of pilgrimage to go to rest and be close to God, just like Columba.

One of the reasons that St Columba remains so important today is he shows us that even the holiest Saints didn't always start life as good people.

Columba copied someone's work, lied to cover up what he'd done, and had a really bad temper. But he also knew when he was wrong and tried really hard to say sorry and put things right, and with God's help he was able to become a good man.

His memory gives us hope that even when we fail and do bad things we can make amends and put them right.

ST COLUMBA COLOURING PAGES



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

No. 1

Why did Columba walk away from being a prince?

No. 2

Why did Columba leave Ireland for Scotland?

No. 3

How was his life in Scotland different from his life in Ireland?

No. 4

How will your future be different from your past?

Wish you were here



Congratulations to the parishioners of St Patrick's, Coatbridge who celebrated the 125th anniversary of the opening of their church in early May. Bishop Toal joined Fr Kevin McGoldrick, Deacon Tom Gorman and parishioners for a Mass of Thanksgiving.



Eileen McGuiness of Immaculate Conception Maryhill took this stunning picture of the Statue of Our Lady of the Isles on Barra.



Archbishop Arthur Roche, secretary to the Congregation for Divine Worship celebrated Holy Mass at the Scots College in Rome during which he ordained four seminarians as Deacons. They were Malcolm Hutchison, Diocese of Dunkeld, Joshua Moir, Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh, Kevin Rennie, Diocese of Galloway and Edward Toner, Archdiocese of Glasgow.



Pope Francis concluded the Catholic Church's month-long rosary marathon by joining the largest gathering of Catholics in Scotland since the Pandemic began. Hundreds of Catholics headed to Carfin Grotto to join the Holy Father in praying to Mary, Undoer of Knots, one of his favorite titles for the mother of Jesus.

The Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation, which organised the Rosary marathon, said Pope Francis, who as a student saw the oil painting of Mary untying knots from a ribbon in an Augsburg church, has "a strong devotion to this image" and is largely responsible for spreading the devotion in Argentina. The image was painted by Johann Georg Melchior Schmidtner around the year 1700.

"The choice of this image represents a special prayer that Our Lady would intercede to untie the sufferings that have bound the world in this time of crisis" for people's health, economic survival, psychological state and personal relationships, the Pontifical Council said.

"Pope Francis will entrust to the Blessed Virgin five prayer intentions, five 'knots' to undo," the statement said. The five are: injured relationships; unemployment; violence, especially domestic violence; universal access to health care and vaccines; and the need for renewed pastoral enthusiasm and outreach.

The Rosary in the Vatican Gardens concluded a month of special recitations of the rosary from Marian shrines and parishes around the world, all with the intention of asking Mary's intercession to help end the coronavirus pandemic and to give strength to people working to end it or suffering its effects.

**“Whoever lives and believes
in me will never die.”**

John 11: 26-27



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