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Cover image: Bishop William Shomali from Bethlehem, auxiliary bishop of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem greets Mass-goers outside Dublin's St Mary's Cathedral. Bishop Shomali was in Ireland as the guest of Aid to the Church in Need. Photo: Chai Brady

INTRODUCTION

St Oliver's Enduring Legacy

MICHAEL KELLY, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS



Dear Friends,

I'm old enough to remember the days before the M1 motorway that connected



the north to Dublin. At that time, a trip from Omagh to Dublin necessitated passing through all the towns on the way – as a family, we always stopped in Drogheda to venerate the relics of the martyred Archbishop of Armagh, **St Oliver Plunkett**.

In the turbulent 17th century, when being Catholic in Ireland or England could cost a man his life, Oliver Plunkett stood as a beacon of quiet courage. Born on November 1, 1625 in Loughcrew, Co. Meath, to a noble Hiberno-Norman family, Oliver was educated locally before fleeing to Rome amid the chaos of the Irish Confederate Wars and Cromwell's brutal conquest.

Ordained a priest in 1654, he taught theology at the Irish College while the Penal Laws crushed Catholic practice at home. In 1669, **Pope Clement IX** appointed him Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All-Ireland. Returning in 1670, Archbishop Plunkett found a Church in ruins: priests in hiding, seminaries closed, faithful scattered. Yet for eleven years he rebuilt with tireless resolve — ordaining clergy,

confirming nearly 48,000 Catholics, and founding a Jesuit college in Drogheda that welcomed Protestant pupils alike.

He travelled in disguise, often one step ahead of pursuers, refusing exile even as a price was placed on his head. The storm broke in 1678 with **Titus Oates's** fabricated Popish Plot, a conspiracy theory that whipped England into anti-Catholic frenzy. The archbishop was arrested in Dublin, tried first in Dundalk where the case collapsed, then shipped to London.

At Westminster Hall, denied proper defence or witnesses, he faced perjured testimony alleging he plotted a French invasion and rebellion. The all-Protestant jury convicted him of high treason for the sole crime of *'promoting the Roman faith.'*

On July 1, 1681, at Tyburn, he was hanged, drawn and quartered — the last Catholic martyr executed there. To the end he forgave his accusers, prayed for his executioners, and declared his only *'treason'* was fidelity to the Church.

His head, preserved as a relic, now rests in St Peter's Church, Drogheda; his body lies at Downside Abbey. Beatified in 1920 and canonised by **Pope St Paul VI** in 1975

— the first new Irish saint in nearly 700 years, St Oliver became patron of peace and reconciliation in Ireland.

His legacy endures because it transcends politics or nationalism. In an age of sectarian violence, he modelled Christian charity: he worked for unity across divides, reformed lax clergy with the words, *“Remove this defect from an Irish priest, and he will be a saint,”* and faced death with serene dignity.

Generations of Irish Catholics drew strength from him during centuries of suppression; today his story speaks to anyone who has suffered for conscience, especially those we serve in ACN.

He reminds us that faith is not abstract belief but costly witness — staying with the flock when flight would have been safer. Oliver’s unjust trial and execution highlight a timeless truth: religious freedom is fragile. When governments or mobs weaponise fear against believers, justice collapses.

The Popish Plot was built on lies, yet it destroyed lives because society had already accepted that Catholic loyalty was inherently treasonous. Four centuries later, the same dynamic persists. Nearly 70% of the world’s population lives in countries where religious freedom is restricted, and half face outright persecution.

From Nigeria to Pakistan, from the Middle East to parts of Asia, Christians are driven

from homes, churches burned, and priests targeted simply for preaching the Gospel.

Thanks to your support, ACN carries forward St Oliver’s spirit of steadfast presence. Just as the archbishop refused to abandon Ireland’s faithful, ACN supports priests, sisters, seminarians and the lay faithful where the Church is under siege — providing Mass stipends, emergency aid, training, and infrastructure so that the Faith survives and consoles the suffering.

To me, St Oliver stands as an antidote to discouragement showing us that we must promote the Faith in good times and bad, and to intercede for those still paying the price of fidelity.

St Oliver Plunkett’s life challenges us to keep fighting for religious freedom — not as a vague ideal, but as the bedrock of human dignity. His canonisation in 1975, amid the civil conflict in the north, was no coincidence; it proclaimed that reconciliation flows from justice and truth.

In an era when intolerance masquerades as progress or security, we must remember: when one believer is silenced, all consciences are threatened. Faithfulness, not fear, is the ultimate victory.



MICHAEL KELLY

Director of Public Affairs, ACN Ireland



FEATURE

Blessed Days Praying for Holy Land Christians

MICHAEL KELLY



“**W**hat a blessed few days,” – this was the expression of **Bishop William Shomali** as we dropped him to the airport following the annual ACN national pilgrimage to Knock Shrine on May 16 last.

Bishop Shomali had travelled from Jerusalem to speak about the challenges facing the Christian community in the Holy Land, but also to offer a message of hope.

It was the bishop's first visit to Knock, and he was very moved to venerate Our Lady at the place where Heaven touched earth, and she comforted the Irish people in difficult times.

In his address at Knock highlighting the importance of the Christian presence in the

Holy Land, Bishop Shomali told us: *“Despite the current crisis, the call of the Holy Land has not ceased. Christians around the world still long to walk where Jesus walked. And when pilgrims come – when they return, as we pray they soon will – they bring not only economic support but spiritual solidarity.”*

“Second, there is a vibrant Christian community. Today, we represent only 2% of the population of the Holy Land. Some speak of disappearance, but such a conclusion is too quick – and, in a sense, contrary to faith.”

“Third, there are good people on both sides who work for peace with small gestures. They are numerous – Palestinians and Israelis who risk their security and their reputation to build bridges. In both camps, there are those who sincerely desire peace.”

They may not make the headlines, but they are the salt of the earth,” he said.

Asked about the huge numbers of Christians who are migrating from the Holy Land to flee the conflict, the bishop said he is trying to do everything to help them have a viable future there. *“Christians have a vocation to remain in the Holy Land and to be a factor of peace and reconciliation.”*

“Living in the Holy Land is not an accident. It is a calling. To be here, where Christ lived, is to be called to witness to the Gospel in the very place where it took flesh.”

“The temptations to leave are real. Emigration has drained more than one and a half million Palestinian Christians into the

diaspora, and few will return. Many young people consider leaving, lacking prospects.”

“This haemorrhage weakens the Christian presence and poses an existential question: who will remain to bear witness?”

“But the answer must be: we will remain. Because our presence is not a political statement – it is an act of faith. It says that God has not abandoned this land,” he said.

While in Ireland, Bishop Shomali was also able to go to the Dáil, where he met with **John Lahart, TD, Chairman of the Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs.** That same day, he went to Iveagh House to meet with **Minister for Foreign Affairs, Helen McEntee, TD.**



ACN’s Brandon Scott, Michael Kelly, Harry Casey, Fr Timothy Bartlett with Bishop William Shomali, along with ACN’s Davide Barbieri, Anne Hughes and Claire O’Reilly at the annual ACN Knock Shrine Pilgrimage.

Bishop Shomali said: *“We must name what is happening clearly. There is a war of disinformation, hatred, and violence.”*

“On one side, Hamas – a terrorist organisation that does not speak for all Palestinians but that has sown destruction and used human suffering as a political tool. Their attack on October 7 was not resistance; it was atrocity. When Hamas teaches that death in battle is immediate martyrdom and entrance to paradise, they encourage violence even unto death.”

“On the other side, extremist settlers – not all settlers, but a violent fringe – who attack Palestinian villages, destroy olive trees that have belonged to families for generations, and speak of Palestinians as obstacles to be removed rather than neighbours to be loved.”

“Both sides have their extremists. Both sides have their propaganda. Both sides have learned to dehumanise the other,” Bishop Shomali said.



As he took leave of us in Ireland, Bishop Shomali appealed for prayers for peace and thanked the benefactors of ACN for their huge generosity to the Christians of the Holy Land.

“The way of the cross teaches us that redemption comes through sacrifice. The sacrifice demanded today is not of blood, but of pride – of historical narratives, of the idolatry of land and security at the expense of the commandment to love our neighbour.”

“God weeps in the Holy Land. But God also waits. He waits for us to weep with Him. He waits for us to act with Him. He waits for us to become, like His Son, instruments of peace,” he said.

The bishop was clear: *“Prayer is essential. To pray is to engage in the spiritual battle against hatred and despair. We pray for wisdom to illuminate political leaders.”*

“We pray for divine intervention to soften hardened hearts, to open eyes blinded by ideology, to create opportunities for dialogue where none seem to exist. We pray for the victims, the traumatised, the bereaved, the hostages.”

“And we pray for the peacemakers on the ground – Israeli and Palestinian – who risk their safety and their reputation to build bridges. They are numerous. May God protect them and multiply their efforts,” he said.



FEATURE

Speaking up for Those who Cannot Speak

BRANDON SCOTT

ACN Ireland at a recent meeting in the Department of Foreign Affairs (l-r) Brandon Scott, Advocacy and Communications Officer, Michael Kelly, Director of Public Affairs, Auxiliary Bishop of Jerusalem William Shomali, Minister for Foreign Affairs Helen McEntee, TD and ACN Ireland National Director Harry Casey.

© ACN

As well as support for the 6,000 or so vulnerable Christian communities that – thanks to your wonderful generosity – ACN is able to help every year, an important part of our work is advocacy.

When Jesus was ascending to the Father, he promised the apostles that he would send them an ‘advocate’ to reassure them – and us – that we will never be left alone or defenceless.

The term ‘advocate’ serves as a deeply personal and practical promise of guidance, divine support, and spiritual empowerment for believers – the Greek word literally means “one called alongside to help.”

This is at the heart of our work of advocacy on behalf of suffering and persecuted Christians – those it is our privilege to serve.

It is a huge challenge, but one we embrace with enthusiasm, conscious that it is our calling to speak up for the 413 million Christians who live in countries where religious freedom is severely violated – that’s 18% or about one in five Christians. Of these, approximately 220 million live in countries where they are directly exposed to persecution - that’s 10%, or one in ten of all Christians.

Over the last year, I have led advocacy efforts in Ireland making both members of the *Oireachtas* and the northern Assembly aware of both our *Persecuted and Forgotten? Report* and our *Religious Freedom in the World Report*.

It is not always easy – there can sometimes be a blindspot when it comes to religious freedom. Politicians and policymakers who are very invested in protecting and defending human rights,

often don't see the importance of the fundamental right to religious freedom.

In recent weeks, we have accompanied Auxiliary Bishop of **Jerusalem Bishop William Shomali** to meet with **Minister for Foreign Affairs, Helen McEntee, TD**. We were able to brief the minister on the unique challenges facing the Christian community in the Holy Land.

We also met with **John Lahart, TD, Chairman of the Oireachtas Committee** on Foreign Affairs on challenges in the Holy Land and the wider issues of religious freedom in the Middle East, and more globally.

Earlier this year, we had a productive meeting with the **Opposition spokesman on Foreign Affairs, Sinn Féin's Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire, TD**.

Over the coming months, we expect to be able to appear before the *Oireachtas* Committee on Foreign Affairs to highlight the suffering and persecuted Church and to urge the Irish Government to ensure that religious freedom is a top priority in our human rights agenda.

Separately, former **European Union Commissioner Mairead McGuinness** was recently appointed as **Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)** outside the EU. We hope to have fruitful engagements with Ms McGuinness in the coming weeks.

Which leads me to an appeal to you, our kind benefactors, please continue your prayer and support for the suffering Church. But, please also give some thought to contacting your local TD, Senator or Assembly Member and ask them to keep the plight of persecuted Christians on the agenda.

In recent months, **Senator Rónán Mullen** in the *Seanad* and **Deputies Carol Nolan and Peadar Tóibín** in the *Dáil* have raised the concerns of Aid to the Church in Need. This has led **Minister of State Neale Richmond** to promise that the Government will give time in the Oireachtas to discuss the persecution of Christians. Advocacy really works – so, please do join us in this important aspect of our mission.



In Leinster House with (l-r) Bishop William Shomali, John Lahart, TD, Michael Kelly and Brandon Scott.



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Equipping Catholics for Mission



VENEZUELA

We frequently receive requests from **Venezuela** for Bibles for the work of evangelisation in the parishes. For example, in the Diocese of El Tigre in the northeast of Venezuela, thanks to your generous support we were able to provide 5,500 Bibles at a cost of €32,590. This was in response to an initiative aimed at equipping the Catholic faithful to consciously dedicate their lives to Christ and so themselves become missionaries to others.

This was done by forming evangelisation groups, led by specially trained leaders and based on the most fundamental resource for deepening the Faith, namely the Sacred Scriptures. For these are by no means mere social gatherings, as **Fr Enrique Villalba Vallez**, who runs the campaign, emphasises. Instead, he explains, *“Every meeting starts from the Word of God, which enlightens our lives and guarantees the correctness of our faith and spirituality.”*

“It is not about promoting our own ideas, but about revealed truth. Our evangelisation groups must be genuine places of encounter with Christ,” he insists.

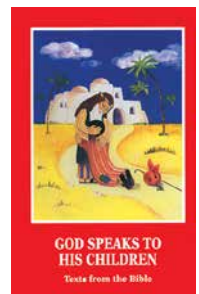
Similar programmes are being organised in other dioceses. This work

is also important because of the spread of the Protestant sects in Venezuela. It enables the Catholic faithful to be in a position to know their own faith and courageously and correctly explain it. *“The faithful Catholic no longer has any reservations about opening his Bible and explaining his faith,”* Fr Enrique explains.

The aim of the programme is to encourage a missionary commitment in the parishes and strengthen the unity among the Catholic faithful, so that other initiatives, such as works of charity for example, can also follow.

Again and again, we hear the appeal: *“Please send us Bibles!”* For in the poorest communities, the sprawling suburban slums and the impoverished rural areas, the parishes cannot afford to provide the Bibles needed, and the people are also too poor.

Will you help us, so that the Word of God can find a home deep in the hearts and lives of the people?



SUCCESS STORY!

Allowing Priests to bring the Gospel to the Margins

BURKINA FASO

The Diocese of Fada N’Gourma lies in the East of **Burkina Faso**. The pastoral territory itself is vast – with an area of over 18,250 square miles (46,800 km²) – which is about half the size of the island of Ireland.

Yet with just two million inhabitants, it is very sparsely populated. The approximately 100,700 Catholics in the diocese live widely scattered across 16 giant parishes.

Consequently, the priests have to travel long distances in order to minister to the Catholic faithful. Many villages are up to 50, 60 or even 70 km from the parish centre. So, without a suitable means of transport the pastoral ministry is extremely difficult and often quite simply impossible.

A motorcycle is thus an indispensable minimum. It also offers a degree of security for the priest in this dangerous region, beset by a cruel Islamist insurgency in which many Catholics have lost their lives.

And so, their bishop turned to Aid to the Church in Need for help, on behalf of two of his young priests, who after their ordination had spent two full years without any suitable means of transportation – a situation that has severely hampered their pastoral ministry.

Now, thanks to your generosity dear benefactors, we were able to provide the €6,100 required to provide two small motorcycles, one for each of these two zealous priests.

These two motorcycles have made an enormous difference to the priests in their work, and one of them, **Fr Séraphin Kiema**, has written to thank us: *“I recall how I was often forced to ask someone to give me a lift when I had to fulfil my pastoral duties. On one occasion someone came to me on a bicycle and asked me to bring the sacrament of the sick for an ailing relative. Since I had no motorcycle, this person had to go and find someone else with a motorcycle, so that we could drive to visit the family of the sick person.”*

“Now, with the new motorcycle and being unrestricted in my movements, I can

at last joyfully fulfil my pastoral ministry. As Jesus said, ‘whatever you have done for the least of my brethren, you have done for me’” (Matthew 25:40).

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart to all those who have helped me!”

To help others needing transport to support them in their various ministries please donate to
www.acnireland.org/donate

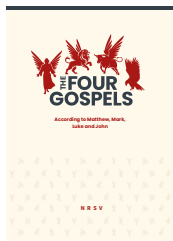


BURKINA FASO: Fr Séraphin Kiema and the two priests pictured with the two new motorcycles.

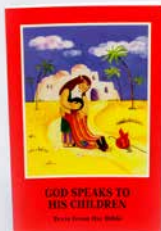


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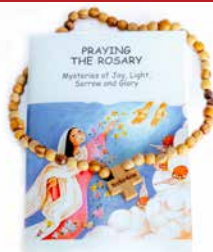
Online Shop



The Four Gospels
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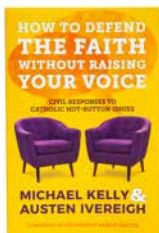
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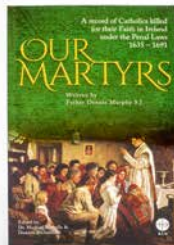
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Bethlehem Rosary Beads**
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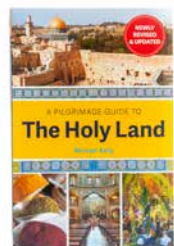
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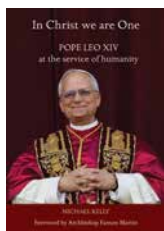
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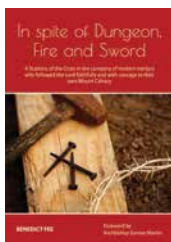
**Olive Wood Crucifix on stand
or Olive Wood Crucifix
for wall** – €20



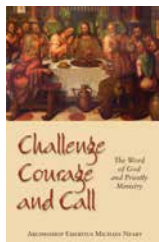
**Olive Wood Jerusalem
Rosary Beads**
– €10



Dilexi te
– €5.99



**In spite of Dungeon,
Fire and Sword**
– €6.99



**Challenge Courage
and Call**
– €9.99



Magnifica humanitas
– €6.99

PROJECT NEWS

Your Mass Intentions are a Vital Lifeline

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

PAPUA NEW GUINEA:

Bishop Justin Ain Soongie and his parishoners in the Wabag Diocese.

It is barely 80 years since the Catholic faith first arrived in the territory of what is now Wabag Diocese. In the past the missionaries struggled against great adversity to bring the Good News of Christ to the people, and their efforts have now borne fruit.

Today there are some 95,000 Catholics in the diocese and the Church is growing dynamically, with more and more homegrown vocations.

Bishop Justin Ain Soongie is himself a native of the diocese. He has a profound concern for his priests, because he sadly does not have the resources to support them in their very difficult ministry.

Most of the Catholic faithful live in the remote and inaccessible mountain regions, in villages at an altitude of between 1,500 and 2,500 metres (5000 to 7000 feet) above sea level (about twice the height of Carrauntoohil, and four times the height of Croagh Patrick).

The parishes are vast and have numerous outstations, and the roads leading to them are often near impassable. The priests minister to the spiritual needs of the people and bring them the sacraments and the Good News of Christ. And, at the same time they are often the only people in a position to help the local people – and not just the Catholics – in their many different needs. Also, they often have to act as mediators, striving to promote peace amidst the

violent clashes that all too frequently break out between the different tribal groups.

The Mass stipends offered by our generous benefactors have for years been a precious support for these priests in Wabag. They not only help to support the priest themselves in their immediate material needs, enabling them to buy such basic essentials as food, medical supplies and fuel for their pastoral visits to the remote outlying communities. For at the same time their pastoral ministry is strengthened, and the people are blessed with the presence of the priest, and the sacraments they so deeply long for. Your offerings also help to provide the altar hosts, the Mass wine and the candles for the celebration of the Eucharist.

Bishop Justin Ain Soongie has asked us once again this year to help the 29 priests in his Diocese of Wabag. He writes: *“Given the social problems and the tribal conflicts, the priests in this mission territory face numerous problems and challenges. Yet despite all the difficulties, they fulfil their responsibilities and accompany the people on the path of faith. We will gratefully accept whatever you can give us, and we continue to pray for all of you who are helping us to further the mission of Christ.”*

Would you consider making a Mass offering, so that the priests of this diocese can celebrate Mass for your intentions?



PAPUA NEW GUINEA: Mass stipends are a vital lifeline for the priests ACN support.



Aid to the
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ACN IRELAND

VOLUNTEERS WANTED



**Do you feel passionate about the suffering
and persecuted Church?**

**Would you like to help Catholics speak up about the
one in ten Christians persecuted for their Faith in our world?**

Why not volunteer with Aid to the Church in Need Ireland?

Currently we have many more requests from parishes and prayer groups for speakers than we can say 'yes' to. Do you feel drawn to the work and ministry of ACN and would like you to volunteer to speak in parishes or to prayer groups?

Please pray about this, and ask yourself if God might be calling you to this. Don't worry, there is no huge commitment of time – as much or as little as you can manage, and full training will be provided.

**If you would like to discuss this more,
please email **Davide Barbieri** on**

davide@acnireland.org or call **01 837 7516**

PROJECT NEWS

Help to complete the Pastoral Centre of the Franciscan Capuchins in Uzhhorod **UKRAINE**



In the year 2000 the then Bishop of Mukatshevo invited the Capuchin Franciscans to come to Uzhhorod in order to assume the pastoral ministry in a post-Soviet township there with some 15,000 inhabitants.

There was no shortage of problems – unemployment broken families, young people without future prospects and a high crime rate. The Capuchin Fathers rolled up their sleeves and set to work.

Currently there are three Capuchin priests, of the Eastern rite, living in the centre that was funded for them by generous ACN benefactors at the time. This has now become a spiritual centre for many of the people of the township and its surrounding area – an importance that has grown still greater since the arrival of internally displaced people from the war-torn areas of the country, who are now striving to rebuild their lives here.

Uzhhorod is fortunate in being situated in the extreme west of **Ukraine**, in the Carpathian mountains close to the border with Slovakia, where – for now at least – things are still peaceful.

But there is one major problem in that there is nowhere near enough space for the many activities and initiatives the Franciscans have introduced over the course of time – for example the children's and youth work, the prayer groups, the catechetical sessions and the many other activities and Bible groups, etc.

As always, the main focus is on the Christian upbringing of the many children and young people who have not learned this from their own families. And given the growing need for trauma counselling as a result of the war, they are also planning to work together with psychologists to provide support for those suffering grief and trauma. The parents will also be helped and supported by trained specialists. But needless to say, appropriate spaces are needed for all these varied activities.

Thanks to your generous support we have been able to provide €100,000 for the construction of a pastoral centre, and the work is now well advanced. However, they still need another €40,000. **Will you help us so that they can finally complete this vital facility?**

TRAINING OF PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

Our aid has always focused on the theological training and qualification of seminarians. After all, future priests will ultimately be spiritual pillars and safeguard sacramental life.

Therefore, our educational assistance mainly flows into countries where the suitable and continuous training of future priests is endangered or not adequately ensured due to poverty, war, or persecution.

10,991 SEMINARIANS SUPPORTED

One in every ten candidates training for the priesthood was supported by ACN in 2023. Most of these were in Africa (5,793) where priestly vocations are the most numerous, followed by 2,103 in Latin America, 1,996 in Asia and 1,099 in Europe, including over 600 seminarians in Ukraine.

Your support is essential to continue this vital mission. By donating to Aid to the Church in Need, you can help ensure that future priests receive the training they need to become the spiritual leaders their communities desperately need.

Every contribution makes a significant difference. Please consider donating today to support the theological education of seminarians and strengthen the Church's presence in regions affected by poverty, war, and persecution.

Please donate what you can at
acnireland.org/donate

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PAPUA NEW GUINEA
Seminarians from
the Wabag Diocese.

Saints Joachim and Anne: The Holy Grandparents of Jesus

MICHAEL KELLY



In the quiet streets of Nazareth and the sacred precincts of the Jerusalem Temple, two figures whose names never appear in the Gospels nevertheless stand as essential links in the chain of salvation history.

Saints Joachim and Anne, the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary and thus the grandparents of Christ, remind us that God's plan unfolds not only through the dramatic figures of Scripture but also through the faithful, hidden lives of ordinary believers who place their trust entirely in him.

Though historical details about them are sparse, the Church has cherished their memory for nearly 2,000 years through pious tradition, liturgical devotion, and a profound recognition of their role in preparing the way for the Incarnation.

Historically, we know almost nothing definitive about Joachim and Anne from the New Testament. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke trace Jesus' legal ancestry through Joseph, but they remain silent on Mary's parents. All that we possess comes from early Christian writings, above all the *Protoevangelium of James*, an apocryphal infancy gospel composed

around 150 AD. The Church does not regard this text as inspired Scripture, yet it has long been received as a reliable witness to venerable tradition.

Later works, such as the *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*, echo and expand upon its account. These sources portray Joachim as a wealthy, devout man of the tribe of Judah, generous in his Temple offerings — giving double portions for the people and for his own atonement. Anne (Hebrew meaning 'grace') is described as coming from Bethlehem. Together they lived a life of prayer, charity, and marital fidelity in Nazareth.

The heart of their story, as preserved in pious tradition, is one of patient suffering and miraculous trust. For 20 years the couple remained childless, a condition regarded in ancient Israel as a sign of divine disfavour. When Joachim presented his offerings at the Temple, he was publicly rebuked and barred from the altar. Deeply grieved, he withdrew to the wilderness, fasting and praying for 40 days and nights.

At home, Anne likewise mourned her widow-like state and her childlessness. In her garden she beheld nesting birds and wept, promising God that if he granted

her a child, she would dedicate it wholly to his service.

God heard their prayers. An angel appeared separately to each, announcing the same joyous news: Anne would conceive and bear a daughter whose name would be spoken throughout the world. The angel instructed them to meet at the Golden Gate of Jerusalem. There, tradition tells us, the couple embraced in joyful reunion — an image immortalised in countless icons and paintings as the *‘Meeting at the Golden Gate.’* In due time, Mary was born.

Their home became the first school of faith for the Immaculate Virgin, instilling in her the love of Scripture, the spirit of poverty, and complete surrender to the divine will. In raising Mary, they unknowingly shaped the human heart that would one day say *‘Fiat’* to the angel Gabriel and cradle the Redeemer of the world.

Devotion to Saints Joachim and Anne has endured and flourished across two millennia. In the Christian East, veneration of St Anne dates to the fourth century, with churches dedicated to her by the sixth. The *Protoevangelium* was read liturgically in many Eastern rites. In the West, **Pope Constantine** likely introduced St Anne’s cult to Rome in the early eighth century. Her popularity exploded in the Middle Ages; theologians such as **Jean Gerson** praised her, and shrines arose across Europe. Devotion to St Joachim developed

later, but gained momentum in the fifteenth century.

Protestant reformers attacked the cult of the saints, yet post-Reformation Popes vigorously defended and promoted it. **Pope Gregory XIII** fixed their joint feast on July 26 in 1584; in the 1969 revision of the Roman Calendar the two were permanently united on that date. Today their memory continues to inspire. They are patrons of grandparents, married couples, and those longing for children. St Anne is invoked by expectant mothers, seamstresses, miners, and the people of Canada and Brittany. Countless parishes, hospitals, and shrines — from Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré in Quebec to humble chapels worldwide — bear witness to their intercession.

In 2021, **Pope Francis** established the *World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly* on the fourth Sunday of July, deliberately placed near their feast “to remind us of the spiritual and social value of the elderly.”

In an age that often marginalises the old, Joachim and Anne call grandparents to transmit the faith with joy, just as they did for Mary. Their legacy is profoundly human and profoundly divine. In a world that prizes self-fulfillment over self-gift, Saints Joachim and Anne teach that the greatest legacy is a holy family. They remind every parent and grandparent that ordinary fidelity — prayer at the hearth, generosity to the Temple, trust amid sorrow — can prepare the way for extraordinary grace.

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

Our Founding Fathers were Men of Great Faith

BISHOP PAUL DEMPSEY

Padraig Pearse, one of Ireland's founding fathers.



As we look back and remember the leaders of 1916, perhaps there is the danger that we see the statistics and hear the famous heroic names that are etched on the heart of our nation, but we might forget that behind each one is a personal story, a story of family, of love, of faith, of struggle, of commitment and of grief.

I recently came across a short video clip of an interview with **Tom Clarke's** wife, **Kathleen**. It is a very poignant interview. She shared how she was taken under armed guard to Kilmainham, but no one told her that her husband Tom was going to be executed. She was brought into his cell, where the only light was from a candle in a jar. A soldier stood in the cell with them giving them no privacy. They had

about an hour together, and interestingly she said they didn't talk about anything personal; they talked about the future and the future of the country. Tom shared with her that he believed he and the others who were about to give their lives had "*saved the soul of Ireland.*"

That '*Soul of Ireland*' was outlined in the Proclamation where they envisaged a Republic that "*guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens.*" And it goes on to see it "*cherishing all the children of the nation equally.*" One cannot but see how this vision was inspired by their personal faith and sense of justice. One can sense the importance of their faith in the Proclamation itself, the opening words addressing Irish men and Irish

women and invoking God. It concludes by placing the Irish Republic “*under the protection of the Most High God.*”

The Ireland of today, one hundred and ten years on, is very different. We have advanced in so many ways. In this context some in our society might look back to over a hundred years ago and see the 1916 leaders’ sense and understanding of faith as something out of touch, old fashioned and perhaps naïve. However, when one looks somewhat deeper and reflects upon their vision of a free Ireland, where the rights and equal opportunities for all would be respected, I see something far deeper and profound.

Twenty-five years before the Rising, **Pope Leo XIII** wrote his groundbreaking Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (Of new things). In this he outlined revolutionary change in

the area of workers’ rights and the dignity of human labour. It formed the foundation for Catholic social teaching based on the sacredness and dignity of every human person, and especially the option for the poor and vulnerable so close to the heart of Jesus Christ outlined in the Gospels.

The 1916 leaders believed in the dignity of every human life, they wanted equal opportunities for all, and no one was to be left behind. This is far from naïve or out of touch or old fashioned. On the contrary, their vision is as real and alive and as challenging as ever. They challenge us to look to those in our society who are on the margins, who have no voice, those who are not listened to. They challenge us to reflect upon our own lives and how we promote a sense of justice and fairness so that all can be ‘*cherished equally.*’



The yard in Kilmainham Jail where the leaders of the 1916 rising were executed.

There are some voices today who promote a sense of exclusivity, but this is not in the spirit of the 1916 leaders' vision for the Republic. Their sense of community, belonging, togetherness and their passion for what is possible inspired them to lay down their lives for others.

In the words of the Gospel, the “seed must die to yield a rich harvest.” The 1916 leaders gave their lives, and, through the shedding of their blood, a rich harvest of a free Republic eventually came about. But as we know, we don't live in a perfect society; there are many challenges. As part of a global village, we see how the wars and destruction in so many parts of the world at this time can leave us feeling somewhat despondent. In this context the words of

the late **Séamus Heaney** are apt: “*Even if the hopes you started out with are dashed, hope has to be maintained.*”

The 1916 leaders had many hopes, they may have been ‘dashed’ for a while, but they never gave up on that hope. Tom Clarke and his wife, in his final hours in that cell in Kilmainham, talked about the future. It brings home how the leaders maintained their hope by looking to a brighter tomorrow despite the setbacks. What a powerful witness that is to us right now in this moment! Despite the challenges of today in our world and society, the witness and example of the 1916 leaders remind us of the resolve of the human spirit and encourages us to transcend the prophets of doom and look to what is possible.

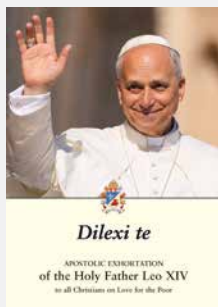
Bishop Paul Dempsey is auxiliary bishop of Dublin. This is an abridged version of a homily he gave at Mass for the annual State commemoration for the 1916 leaders at the Church of the Sacred Heart Arbour Hill, Dublin on May 6, 2026. The full version of the homily is available at www.catholicbishops.ie



The Arbour Hill Cemetery in Dublin, the burial place of the 14 leaders of the 1916 Rising.



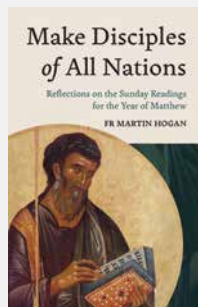
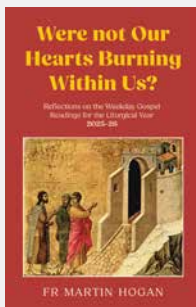
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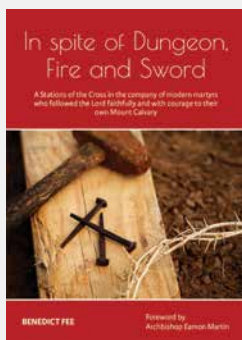
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JULY CROSSWORD

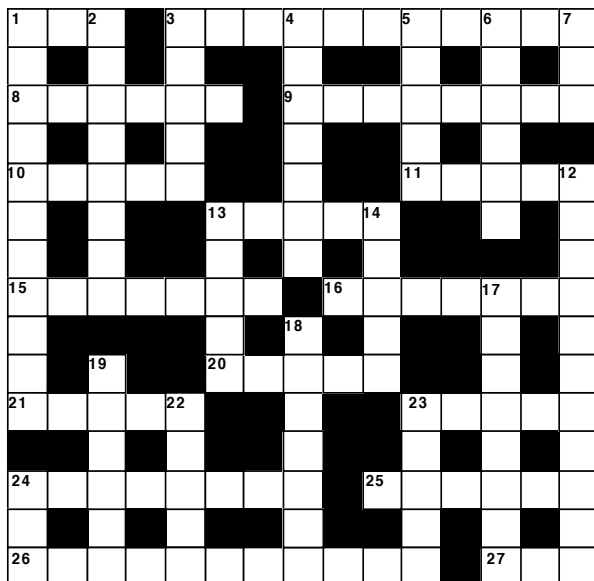
We are pleased to share with you our latest ACN crossword. We will print the answers in next month's edition.

Enjoy!

June Solution

Across 1 Pie, 3 Prehistoric, 8 Ermine, 9 Monument, 10 Owned, 11 Spurn, 13 Clung, 15 Celsius, 16 Corsair, 20 Hangs, 21 Leapt, 23 Crash, 24 Japanese, 25 Bovine, 26 Be Not Afraid, 27 Me.

Down 1 Pterodactyl, 2 Emmental, 3 Pined, 4 Home run, 5 Truss, 6 Rueful, 7 Cat, 12 Nourishment, 13 Couch, 14 Gross, 17 Aquarium, 18 Unclear, 19 Happen, 22 Tenet, 23 Chord, 24 Jab.



ACROSS

- 1 Tot up (3)
- 3 Dark condiment (5,6)
- 8 & 27a
Fox who is the eponymous hero of a Beatrix Potter book (6,3)
- 9 Rival (8)
- 10 Outbreaks of civil disorder (5)
- 11 Performed a role in a play or film (5)
- 13 Great sadness (5)
- 15 Variety of orange (7)
- 16 & 13d
Sporting festival held every four years (7,5)
- 20 Teacake, bun (5)
- 21 Colourful liquid (5)
- 23 In the Bible, Isaac's father's original name (5)
- 24 & 23d
Historic monastic site in Co Kilkenny (8,5)
- 25 Did as one was told (6)
- 26 The study of the ageing process (11)
- 27 See 8 across

DOWN

- 1 Historic sailing competition last held in 2003 (8,3)
- 2 Get off one's horse (8)
- 3 Consecrate (5)
- 4 Style of overcoat (7)
- 5 Deadly type of virus (5)
- 6 More than enough (6)
- 7 Narrow groove or track (3)
- 12 Inconvenienced (11)
- 13 See 16 across
- 14 Not true (5)
- 17 Perhaps Grieg's best known masterpiece (4,4)
- 18 Located near the sea (7)
- 19 Looking-glass (6)
- 22 Pointed part of certain plants (5)
- 23 See 24 across
- 24 Run to keep fit (3)

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

'Lord Hear Our Prayers...'

The *MIRROR* magazine, above all, belongs to the friends and benefactors of Aid to the Church in Need, Ireland. At ACN Ireland, we are a faith-filled and praying community. Every month, we invite you to send your prayers of petition, which will be placed on the altar at ACN and these intentions will be prayed for during that month. We also invite readers, to pray for these intentions.

"For the freedom to be able to forgive, and not live in the past."

"For my family, particularly my sons-in-law, that they will bury the hatchet and bring much-needed peace to our family. Sweet Jesus, have mercy!"

"That God will grant me relief from terrible back pain, and if not, that I will have the strength to face his holy will."

"I pray that God will touch the hearts of the men who are intent on always waging war and show them the ways of peace."

"For an end to all abortion, support for pregnant girls who are struggling and a new culture of life in our nation."

"I pray for peace for my son-in-law and my daughter, and freedom from the curse of gambling."

"That I will find a new home, before I have to leave this one."

"Jesus, please heal me from the fear of dying and help me to trust in you."

"For all the people of the Holy Land, that they can live together in peace and forgiveness."



Please send your intentions, in strictest confidence, to prayers@acnireland.org or write to Castle Building, 426 Clontarf Road, Dollymount, Dublin 3, D03 FP52 marking your envelope '*petitions*'.



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN IRELAND



Prayer to Saints Ann and Joachim (Feastday July 26)



Most Holy Saints Anne and Joachim,
come close to us and guide our hand and
our hearts in the way of virtue.

Help us to parent our children and grandchildren
with a gentle heart as you did.

Show us how to raise our children in faith and
bring our families into the Light of Jesus.

Remain close to us and help us on
our journey to salvation.

AMEN

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