



## Family Links

*Glory to God Alone in Jesus Christ, through Mary and Saint Joseph*

February 2018

Volume 4 Issue 2

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Gathering at St. Paul's Church, Dublin, on 8 February, feast of St. Bakhita

### Editorial

In Ireland, 1 February is traditionally the first day of spring. Spring still conjures up images of snowdrops and daffodils and promises of warm weather to come even when, as this year, we are bracing ourselves to endure sub-zero temperatures at the end of the month. But, it is also the feast of St. Brigid, patron saint of Kildare and secondary patron of Ireland, and a cause of rejoicing regardless of weather.



Brigid was the name of a pre-Christian goddess of love, poetry and justice. It is said a sacred fire burned in Kildare in those times and that priestesses used to gather on the hill of Kildare to tend the ritual fire, while invoking the goddess to protect their herds and to provide a fruitful harvest.

When St. Brigid built her monastery and church in Kildare she continued the custom of keeping the fire alight. For her and her nuns, the fire represented the new light of Christianity which reached Irish shores early in the fifth century. Though attempts were made to extinguish it, it is thought the fire may have survived up to the suppression of the monasteries in the sixteenth century.

The sacred flame was re-lit in 1993 in the Market Square, Kildare, at the opening of a justice and peace conference, entitled "Brigid: Prophetess, Earthwoman, Peacemaker", organised by Afri, (Action from Ireland). Now, there is a permanent flame in the town square in Kildare.

Brigid's legacy has endured and her life still speaks to us in the 21st century. She is known as a woman of the land and of hospitality, a friend of the poor and a peacemaker. She is especially a **model of equality**. Brigid held a unique position in the early Irish Church. She presided over the local church in Kildare and was head of a double monastery of men and women.

Her challenge to the Church today is to make it a place where men and women are equally respected.

## Leader's Message

### CHOICE FOR LIFE

I recently received an email from Uplift asking me to fill in a questionnaire on my views on abortion in the lead up to the referendum in Ireland this year. I was about to delete the email when I paused and asked myself why I was reluctant to put my views on abortion in writing. It is often difficult to speak out publicly against abortion. The chances are people will say: "What has it to do with you; you have never had a decision like that to make. What can you as a celibate, contribute to the debate?"

We religious people, can be seen as closed and rigid and intolerant of other people's views. We can even be openly mocked and despised for holding a life-affirming ethic. In other words, we may feel intimidated and silenced. Also, we may feel reluctant to be associated with some groups who use questionable means to spread the pro-life message, including displaying graphic pictures that shock and horrify.

Pope Francis speaks of the "culture of life versus the culture of death". The culture of death is everywhere around us. The memory of the two great world wars is still with us – wars where tens of millions lost their lives. We remember the savagery of the holocaust. And in our living rooms, on our television screens, we see the bitter conflicts, genocides and massacres that are taking place daily around the globe.

And what can we say about the deaths of those who have not had a chance to taste life? Over 186,000 abortions were carried out in the UK last year and the numbers are still climbing. According to statistics, almost 4 in 10 terminations are now carried out on women who have undergone the procedure before.

And figures revealed that 50 women had each had eight terminations. (The Guardian 20 December 2017). According to the Irish Family Planning Association between 1980 and 2016, based on the UK Dept of Health statistics, at least **168,703** women and girls who accessed UK abortion services provided Irish addresses. Abortion is already normalized.

What value is placed on human life? What value has the life developing in the womb? Are the old, disabled, no longer human because they are no longer productive? Should life be ended in such cases? Euthanasia and assisted suicide—and sometimes both—have been legalized in a number of European countries. In all countries, laws and safeguards have been put in place to prevent abuse of these practices. These safeguards include explicit consent by the person requesting euthanasia, mandatory reporting of all cases, administration only by physicians (with the exception of Switzerland), and consultation by a second physician. However, research carried out by Professor J Pereira from the University of Ottawa provides evidence that these laws and safeguards are regularly ignored and that transgression is not prosecuted. (Cf. J Pereira: *"Legalizing Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide"*. Current Oncology 2011. Pp. 38-45).

Legalizing euthanasia and assisted suicide therefore places many people at risk, does not provide controls and safeguards and affects the values of society over time. What does it say of a society which legalizes the elimination of its "non-productive" citizens? What have we

learned from the mass murder of Jews and others "unworthy of life" during the



Sr. Gemma,  
Apostolic Sisters

Second World War? Historians state that the tragic drama which ended in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Belsen and Treblinka had far more humble beginnings - in nursing homes, geriatric hospitals and psychiatric institutions all over Germany.

In Belgium, the pro-euthanasia ideology is turning a civilized country into a "terrifying dystopia in which doctors have become killers and many Belgian nurses who specialise in treating dying patients are quitting their jobs because palliative care units are being turned into houses of euthanasia". (Catholic Herald, Jan. 2018.)

What should be our response in the upcoming referendum in Ireland? Obviously a first response should be one of compassion for those who feel compelled to seek the "solution" of abortion in the face of an unwanted pregnancy. I believe using the language of "sin" is not helpful in that it denotes condemnation. And who are we to condemn?

Second our society needs to be able to offer immediate practical support in terms of housing, financial help and counselling for those facing an agonizing decision. A pro-life stance should mean we are concerned with the promotion of life at every level.

Joan Chittister makes this point: *"I do not believe that just because you're opposed to abortion, that that makes you pro-life. In fact, I think in many cases, our morality is deeply lacking if all we are concerned about is a child born but not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed....."* This comment was made in the context of cuts to child care and support for families in the US budget

and did not imply, as some have suggested, that those in the pro – life movement are accused of being concerned about the abortion issue only and not about the on-going welfare of mothers and children.

We, who vow to promote life in all its forms believe that every life is precious, a child in the mother's womb, a child born disabled, an elderly person suffering from

dementia, a frightened immigrant alone in a foreign land, all are precious in God's eyes.

Pope Benedict says: "The fundamental human right, the presupposition of every other right, is the right to life itself. This is true of life from the moment of conception until its natural end. Abortion, therefore cannot be a human right – it is the very opposite"

### **A Celebration of New Life**

Gather 'round and celebrate the joy that has been given.  
A gift of love - of flesh and blood, a tiny bit of heaven.

See the wonder of it all, and marvel at the sight,  
Share the happiness we know, celebrate the life.

Make memories of the times to come, of hours and days and years.  
Mark down each step, each task, each word - the laughter and the tears.

For a celebration of life is such, that one must never be  
In too big a hurry to stop and smell... to feel... to touch... to see.

Yes, gather 'round and celebrate the life that has been given,  
A gift of love - of hope eternal, our tiny bit of heaven.

*Author: unknown*



## OUR *HOLY FAMILY* STORY TODAY

For two weeks in January, at the request of our Leadership Team, I participated in a Session for Accompaniers in Martillac.

The aim of this session was to deepen our understanding of religious life in the light of the New Story of the Universe and offer opportunities to reflect on the way the new emerging consciousness affects the process of Initial Formation and Accompaniment. In her opening address Anna Maria encouraged us to enter the process “as disciples, with our minds, hearts and wills open to new approaches, intuitions and questions”.

Underpinning all our reflections and discussions was a call to Contemplative Listening, to a new contemplative way of being, a new consciousness a new way of seeing God in everything and everyone, a call to *see with the eyes of the heart*. Our call to love, seek, desire God alone in all things is a path to this contemplative way of living.



During the session we reconnected many times with the Big Creation Story remembering that from all eternity all that exists has been held in the loving embrace of our God. We reflected on our *Holy Family* story, realising that all stories are embedded in the Great Story of the Universe. Our *Holy Family* story is a Love Story - a chapter in the amazing story of God's love for all - a story which is still being written and told.

Much has changed in the 200 years - new needs, new insights, a world we now know is in a process of evolution, still be-coming an unfinished world. We

recalled the words of Pope Francis in 2015, “we are not living an era of change, but a change of era”. He called on Catholics to be “a free Church that is open to the challenge of the present, never on the defensive for fear of losing something”. This led us into reflecting on the following questions:



### Where are we today in our *Holy Family* Story?

*How much of our early pioneer spirit and passion for the mission of Christ still remains with us?*

*How open are we and how willing are we to seek new responses in this new era?*

*What are some of the seeds emerging in us, and among us for a new way of living our *Holy Family* vocation to day?*

We are the Body of Christ in our world, in our time, in our particular locality and historical circumstances. The Life of the Vine circulates through us, the branches. The Mission of Jesus is not complete. Jesus said, “*As the Father sent me so I send you. The works I have done you also shall do and greater works than these will you do, because I go to the Father*”.

Jesus invites us into his consciousness so that we can think and feel and see the world as he does. As we become transformed into Jesus consciousness, we are expected and empowered to pass it on.

*“Freely you have received, freely give.”*

As the days progressed, we were led in our reflections by a series of “*WHAT IF*” questions. I will pose just a couple of these questions here.

**WHAT IF** we recognize that today, nearly 200 years after our foundation, we have moved into an age where the pioneer spirit that was present at our beginnings is needed once again to re-ignite our charism ?

**WHAT IF** we understood that we are called to initiate a pioneer community model that focuses on the web of relationships:

- where the very core of consecrated life is a new interrelatedness between community life and ministry;
- where contemplative imagination and storytelling foster communal discernment;
- where collaboration among all who have a passion and commitment for the charism becomes our new norm?



St. André Cathedral Bordeaux

As we ponder these questions how do we understand our Founder's invitation to GO FORWARD into this "new era"?

We also had rich input on the Three Principles of the Universe; the Powers of the Universe; the Dynamics of Change; Discernment; Eucharist.

As always, at an international meeting, it was lovely getting to know Sisters from other parts of our Holy Family world. There was a real feeling of belonging and being part of a much bigger picture. Martillac is such a special place for all of our Family and, despite the particularly inclement weather, for most of our two weeks stay, as always, the sense of "being at

home" blessed and enriched us all. Thankfully the sun shone brightly for our free day in Bordeaux, walking in the footsteps of our Founder and, of course, doing some shopping in Rue St. Catherine.

In her closing remarks Anna Maria encouraged us to be like the sower in scripture who erred on the side of generosity when scattering the seed. Some people may have seen this action as wasteful and perhaps a little careless. But the sower knew the task was to scatter abundantly and to believe in the mystery of life in each seed. Our task, too, is to scatter seed generously and dare to dream in the mystery of life unfolding.

Kate Cuskelly, Sonas Chriost



Participants, Facilitators - Martillac Session, January 2018

## TELLING INCONVENIENT TRUTHS

The Bradford Community, Maria, Nasreen and Teresa, together with our guest, have just come back from watching the film that Gemma wrote about so inspiringly in the November Newsletter, *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power*, by Al Gore. Some years ago we had seen his first film on Climate Change called, *An Inconvenient Truth*.

I'm sure many of you have seen these films, but if you haven't, I can strongly recommend them. You'll never forget them. As he said, he's a man with a mission trying to open the eyes of all of us, and especially world leaders, to recognise the climate crisis that is happening in our own day. The call is clear; in order to reduce global warming we humans have to stop investing in and using fossil fuels - oil, gas and coal- wherever it is possible and, instead, to invest in and use renewable energy sources such as solar power, wind power, and electric cars wherever possible.

So, I can't help asking the question: "What are we Holy Family Sisters doing in this area?"

In our Province I'm only aware of two communities, Bradford and Selby Road, who have Solar Panels on

their roofs. What about other provinces who have more visible sunshine than we do? As we prepare for our Bicentenary Celebration as an Institute wouldn't this be a powerful action to take?



Our Founder was always drawn to the poor. Surely he would want us to do all we can today to protect them. Millions of migrants are leaving their countries because of poverty and environmental disasters due to climate change.

In the November Newsletter Gemma wrote about the 2 films made by Al Gore. I quote some of her reflections: "Climate Change is THE issue of our time and it is probably the greatest threat and greatest challenge for humankind in the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

"Al Gore said the following words after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize

t...: 'We face a true planetary emergency. The climate crisis is not a political issue; it is a moral and spiritual challenge to all of humanity.'"

And last but not least, Pope Francis in "*Laudato si*" #25 "Climate change...represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades."

Teresa Edwards, Bradford

You can view a trailer of the film by clicking here:

**An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power**

or [here](#)





## *SET MY PEOPLE FREE*

This was the theme of the Inter-Church Service which took place at St. Paul's Church, Arran Quay, Dublin, on the evening of 8 February, the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking, and the feast day of St. Bakhita, the Patroness of Human Trafficking victims. "Slaves no More" and "Breaking the Chains that Bind us," were also themes central to the service which was attended by more than 100 people.



It comprised Readings, Interactive dramas, Taizé music and prayers underpinned by the question,



### *"What did you do once you knew?"*

A guest speaker from RUHAMA added greatly to the poignancy of the Service, speaking to the harsh realities of the lived experiences of the victims of human trafficking and exploitation.

It was fitting that the Service took place as the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Santa Marta Group convened at the Vatican in Rome, to consider progressing the work to eliminate Human Trafficking.

The **Santa Marta Group** is an anti-trafficking initiative organised by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to bring together representatives of bishops' conferences and top national and international law enforcement officials to promote cooperation, particularly in identifying victims of trafficking and caring for them once they are rescued.

British Cardinal Vincent Nichols of Westminster, introducing the group to the pope, described human trafficking as "the darkest face of globalisation."

## Light out of darkness

This was the theme of the 2018 Afri Conference held in Solas Bhríde, Kildare. Joe Murray, Director of Afri wrote in an introduction:

*"In a world marred by war and the woeful destruction of our exquisite planet, Féile Bríde is but one example of the many, many people and groups throughout our world who hope for and work towards a better future, a more just world and for the light to overcome the darkness."*

During the opening ritual St. Brigid's flame was carried into the conference room accompanied by music from a harpist and violinist. The two musicians accompanied the participants throughout the day, because, "where words fail, music speaks".



Topics such as, *Caring for our Global Village*, *Food for Life*, *Peace Meal Change* dealt with comprehensively and convincingly by distinguished academics and activists, gave rise to serious in-depth discussion by a well-informed audience. Throughout the day there were many references to our ancient local Celtic traditions. It is important for us - and indeed for people everywhere - to get in touch again with the wisdom of our indigenous saints, such as Brigid. We were reminded of the equality of women in the Celtic tradition.

However, the part of the programme that best captured the theme, ***Light out of Darkness***, was the inspiring testimony by two former death row survivors, an American woman, Sunny Jacobs and Irishman, Peter Pringle, the last person to have been sentenced to death in Ireland. Both of them were wrongly convicted of murder and spent many years trying to clear their names.

Both of them practised yoga while in prison as a means of sustaining them through their ordeal, out of which they emerged with dignity, courage, compassion and hope. Together, they have established the **Sunny Centre**, a sanctuary where others who have suffered injustice, especially people who are wrongly convicted of crimes they did not commit and have spent time on death row.

It was profoundly moving to hear them speak of the liberating effect of forgiveness in contrast to the destructive power of anger, hatred and vengeance. No homily solely based on theological reasoning or moral principles could ever have the same effect on an audience. Sunny said she was brought up a Jew. Peter said he has no religion (though, being Irish, he was probably baptised in the Catholic Church) but, he is utterly convinced there is a higher Power that works in us, "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine".

TO VIEW A FILM OF THE 2018 AFRI CONFERENCE,

[CLICK HERE](#)

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED



## Priest Associate, Fr. T. E. Thevarajan, returns home

Fr. Rajan, as he is known to most of us, is a Priest of the Jaffna Diocese of Sri Lanka. He was ordained in 1972. He came to the United Kingdom in 1987 for eye treatment which had dragged on for years. He finally ended up with corneal transplants in both his eyes.

During his early years, he began organising Tamil Masses and pilgrimages for the Tamil Community in London and Paris. In 1987, within a few months of his arrival, he initiated the pilgrimage to Our Lady of Walsingham bringing together the Tamils living across London and suburbs to pray for Peace in his Homeland of Sri Lanka. This annual pilgrimage in July each year has been in the calendar as the largest gathering of any ethnic community at the Shrine of Walsingham.

There is a great number of Tamil Catholics living in London who had fled due to escalating tensions and destruction during the civil war in Sri Lanka. Fr Rajan began going around, serving those Tamils by saying Masses and providing them with social care, counselling and helping them to recover from their traumatic experiences

Rt. Rev. Howard Tripp, then the Bishop in charge of Ethnic Communities, was very supportive of his endeavours and appointed Fr. Rajan in 1992 officially as the first Chaplain for the Tamils. This paved the way for regular Sunday Masses in Tamil at various locations in London, continuation of the annual pilgrimage to Our Lady of Walsingham and initiating pilgrimages for Lent on Palm Sunday and organising

the festival of Our Lady of Madhu (Sri Lanka) at the Aylesford Friary

The Chaplaincy had few resources or facilities during its early years but when Fr Rajan welcomed Fr Eugene in 2000 to take over as his successor, the Chaplaincy was well established with

reasonable facilities – these being the fruits of Fr Rajan's hard work and sincere devotion in building up his ministry while attending to his eyes ailments as well.

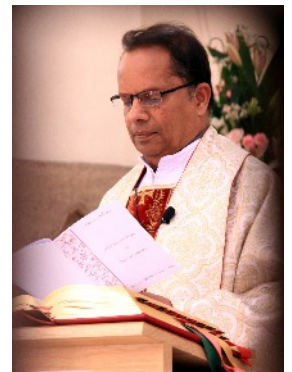
Since leaving the Chaplaincy, his call was to assist in some Parishes in the Diocese of Westminster and, during the last seven years, he served as the Chaplain at the Holy Cross Care Village run by the Sisters of Grace & Compassion Congregation in East Sussex.

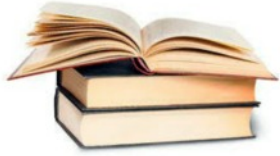
His service to the Tamil Catholics continued, however, irrespective of wherever he was, driving miles and miles making his services available at all times to whoever sought his ministry. As a Priest Associate of the *Holy Family* he was indeed guided by the spirituality of God Alone in the footsteps of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

He has now returned to his homeland to continue serving the Parishes he was in charge of before he left Sri Lanka for the UK in 1987.

We wish Fr. Rajan every blessing in his new venture.

Sr. Sophie, Woodford





## BOOK REVIEWS

### It's Time

Michael Morwood

Available from [Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk)

**M**ichael Morwood, an adult faith educator, brings many years' experience to bear on the crisis of faith confronting Christianity in general and Roman Catholicism in particular.

He highlights the absolute authority and power of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) which leaves no room whatever for discussion about the notion of God that underpins most dogmas and doctrines. He maintains that doctrine is used as a controlling mechanism to safeguard institutional claims of unique access to a heavenly God, and the authority to speak on behalf of that God on important issues.

It is time, he says, to seriously question the basis of many "truths" held by the Catholic Church. These "truths" must be examined and dialogue encouraged if the Catholic Church is to be relevant to the modern world. He insists that we explore the notion of "God" that fits with what we know today about the universe. He reiterates 'the Divine has been, is, and always will be here and everywhere Energizing, Sustaining, Everywhere, Reality creatively present on earth, deep within all of us, seeking the best possible expression that it can attain in human form.' But, 'formal religion', he claims, 'made people think otherwise.

The religion of Jesus, Judaism, sought to give clear expression to the Divine Presence at work in the human community. If we do not place Jesus in this prophetic tradition with Judaism, we will not appreciate the central thrust of his teaching and

ministry or what he was prepared to die for.' Morwood questions Paul's Christology. He argues that even in his own lifetime Paul's visionary ideas created tension and eventually led to the break with Judaism. Separation, not Pentecost Sunday, marked the birth of a new religion and institutional Christian leadership locked itself into a theological worldview that understood that God really lived elsewhere; that God locked others out; that the world was devoid of God's presence.

Many Christians today, however, have a different worldview. And Morwood goes on to describe this in light of the emerging "new story" about our universe. The new story in which we want to understand Jesus, he says, brings a stark choice to Christianity: 'choose this story and articulate your religious beliefs in accord with it or remain in Paul's story which makes no sense to people educated in the new story'.

Morwood goes on to examine *and question* Church teaching around the Baptism of Jesus, Jesus and Powerlessness, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Resurrection and the Cosmic Christ. He offers many fresh insights causing the reader to seriously reflect and question his/her faith.

In the final Chapter of his book Morwood is quite scathing in his comments on the Institutional Church and its leadership and courageously challenges 'The Sleeping Giant' to speak out. But, who is ready to take the risk?

Margaret Bradley (Integrated Spirituality Team)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

March 2018						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2 (Women's) World Day of Prayer	3
4	5	6	7	8 UN International Women's Day	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16 Death of Motheer Trinity Noailles 1850	17 St. Patrick's Day
18	19 Feast of Saint Joseph	20	21	22	23	24
25 Reception of the first Lay Associates Foundation of the Secular Institute 1824	26	27	28	29	30	31