

# Government's €1.2m for tree planting in Africa

THE Government is to give €1.2million to a major project named in the Pope's honour which aims to plant a million trees in one of Africa's most parched regions.

The re-greening of a huge swathe of land south of the Sahara, known as the Sahel, is part of the UN initiative that the Society of African Missions (SMA) here is helping with.

Ireland was invited by the UN to take a leadership role in helping deliver the Great Green Wall to combat desertification in the Sahel.

The Laudato Tree Project, run by the SMA, hopes to create a lasting legacy from the Pope's visit to Ireland later this month.

By Michael McHugh

It takes its name from a 2015 papal encyclical by Pope Francis, 'Laudato Si', on caring for the environment.

Don Mullan, of the SMA, confirmed Environment Minister Denis Naughten 'has responded to the invitation' to help and 'will give details at the launch of a major Irish Government commitment of €1.2million to this epic African initiative'.

Mr Mullan said the SMA hopes private donations will help too. He said it is asking for a contribution of €60, or €5 per month, but 'will be happy to accept less or more, based on what people can afford'.

The UN's proposal would also involve schools, parishes and community groups in planting trees in Ireland, increasing biodiversity and contributing to atmospheric improvement.

Each donation will be used to plant a tree in a woodland in Ireland, and five trees on Africa's Great Green Wall, running through northern Ghana and Burkina Faso.

The Green Wall, when completed, will span 13 countries, and measure 8,000km long and 15km wide.

Ireland's tree coverage is currently the lowest in Europe at 11%. The average tree coverage per European Union member state is 37%.

# Dr Mark Dooley



## MORAL MATTERS

# Switch on the light of love... and let it shine

**W**HAT shall we leave behind except the seeds of love that we have planted across the soil of life. For that is our true wealth, the abundance that can never fade with time. All else can be squandered and wasted, but real love lasts forever.

And what does it cost to be kind? What stands in the way of generosity except a proud ego that refuses to yield. The great task of life is to deflate the ego so that kindness can flourish.

Pride: a demon so fierce it can destroy a life. We all possess it to some degree, which is why vigilance is paramount. Defying it demands turning the other cheek.

But who can seriously turn the other cheek? The most selfless can and they often do. These are the people for whom kindness and love are second nature.

We call them saints because they have somehow conquered the ego. They don't live for self but solely for others. Is that possible or is it just another ideal that few can ever reach?

Saints are not special or different or more than human. They are like you and me - ordinary people with all the usual flaws and failings. What makes them saintly is that they use love and goodness to vanquish pride.

Love and pride are like light and darkness. Where there is light there simply can't be darkness. Where there is love - real love - there can't be any pride.

Love implies vulnerability, a complete openness to the other. In love, there is nothing hidden or concealed. What you see is what you get and what you get is all there is to see.

To make love conditional is to lose it. If it is to last, it must come with no strings attached.

It is an offering of self to the other person, a gift that looks for nothing in return.

If we speak of love and sacrifice, it is because the true definition of love is sacrifice. Quite simply, we lay down our lives for one another. We die to ego, pride and selfishness, so that others might live more fully.

It is our greatest blessing, and yet we find it so hard to live a life of true love. It is a daily challenge to let go, to forgive and to travel the extra mile. We desperately cling to

self as a shield against the demands of love.

But then, you see a saint and pride takes a bruising. You see a hard-pressed mother with endless patience and you have a revelation of pure love. For what is love if not patience for those whose needs require constant attention?

You see a carer who is on call 24/7, and you have an example of eternal goodness.

Carers surrender their lives to those in need and do so with almost supernatural diligence.

There is nothing glamorous in it, but there is something much more beautiful: love, patience, kindness and compassion.

**Y**OU see an elderly couple walking hand-in-hand, and you cannot but smile at this tender sight. They have journeyed together down the decades, shared and shouldered their burdens without a thought.

Their love is saintly because it asks nothing of the other except that gentle affection which never dies.

We are surrounded by saints, by those who give without thought of return. What is common to them all is a longing to love unconditionally, a longing to surrender the little they have so that others might have some more.

Of course, they don't think of it in such terms because they are too busy being compassionate, kind and caring.

Our world is so often violent, cruel and unforgiving. People are routinely perceived as objects to be manipulated or burdens to be eliminated. There is no remedy for such darkness except the light of pure love.

That light is inside each one of us, and it can be switched on in a second. One act of kindness or compassion, one act of empathy or affection, can relieve a lifetime of suffering.

More than ever before, people are yearning for that form of love which parks pride and seeks to banish pain.

More than ever, they live in hope that, someday, someone will simply hold their hand. Then, as heart touches heart, something beautiful is born - something that rises like an angel in a starlit sky.

It is the light of lasting love, one that shines in the eyes of every saint who knows the source of true treasure.

—mark.dooley@daily mail.ie—

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