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# No safe haven: refugees face sleeping on streets

**Government's harsh eviction policy risks making tens of thousands of vulnerable people homeless in run-up to Christmas**

**Andy Drozdziak**

Catholic refugee charity JRS UK has blasted the Government policy of 'rapid evictions' amid a shock warning that tens of thousands of refugees could end up having to sleep rough this Christmas.

The Local Government Association (LGA) said councils across England and Wales are facing a "perfect storm" this festive season amid high demand for temporary accommodation.

The warning comes despite charities expressing concern that people who have been granted refugee status are not being given enough notice to find other places to stay when they are asked to move on from asylum accommodation.

Dr Sophie Cartwright, senior policy officer at JRS UK, told the *Universe*: "We are seeing newly recognised refugees forced into homelessness by the deliberate policy of rapid evictions."

"For years, Government policies have forced people seeking safety here into destitution."

Last month, the British Red Cross reported that it was now helping twice as many people who have been granted refugee status but now find themselves destitute than it was in the early summer.

The LGA has delivered a number of requests to the Government over refugees' care, including making

sure they receive the full 28 days' notice they have been promised before they have to leave Home Office accommodation.

The 'rapid evictions' policy has meant that some have been given as little as a week's notice to leave, although immigration minister Robert Jenrick rejected this claim last month, telling Parliament that the Home Office's policy remains 28 days.

Dr Cartwright outlined the stark consequences of the policy. "Many people are sleeping on the streets or riding night buses just to get some warmth and shelter. And this is not occurring in a vacuum," she said.

A key area of JRS UK's work is in advocating for the rights of refugees and for policies that protect refugees and allow them to flourish. Like many other charities, JRS UK, with the help of its supporters, is providing accommodation and other urgent assistance.

Seeking to raise awareness of policy issues that shape refugees' lives and experience, Dr Cartwright believes that fundamental change is required in how the UK treats refugees, and the country needs "a radically reformed asylum system."

"The current crisis must be a wake-up call for systemic change to end destitution," she said.

Continued on page 2

## LIGHT UP TO PROTECT FAITH FREEDOMS



Catholics and other faith groups in the UK marked Red Wednesday by lighting up their buildings in red, in solidarity with those around the world who find themselves persecuted for their faith. Among those taking part was Lambeth Palace, the official residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury (pictured above).  
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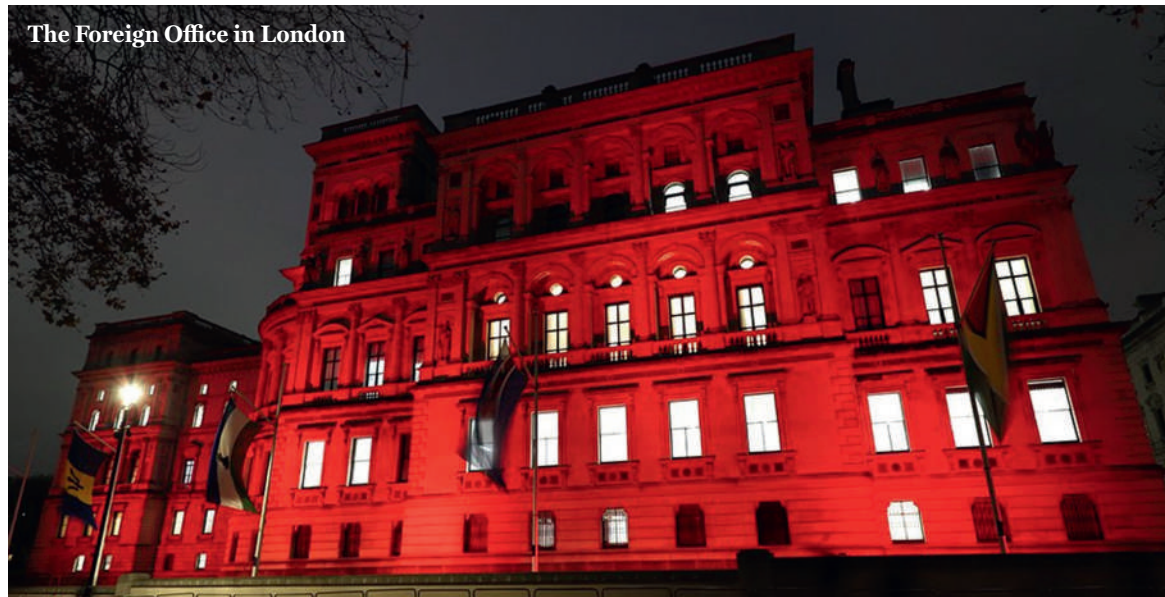
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The Foreign Office in London



## Church will stand with persecuted Christians

**Andy Drozdziak**

Archbishop John Wilson has spoken out against the persecution of Christians, and promised the beleaguered people of the Holy Land that “we will not abandon them.”

He made his comments on Red Wednesday – the day when the Catholic community comes together globally to ‘Break the Silence’ on Christian persecution. When darkness fell, iconic buildings and monuments were lit up red to champion the cause, including Southwark’s St George’s Cathedral, the Foreign Office in London and Stonyhurst College.

Archbishop Wilson of Southwark said that it is important to speak out about Christian persecution. “This is a matter of justice, to speak up for the truth, for an end to persecution. But also as Christians, we form one body in Christ and when one part of the body suffers, the whole body

suffers. This, as well as being about justice, is about solidarity with suffering Christians around the world,” he said.

He told a special Mass in his cathedral in south London to mark Red Wednesday that, “the most

**‘Speaking out about Christian persecution is a matter of justice’, said Archbishop Wilson**



powerful prayer that we can pray is the rosary.”

“It is the prayer that we can do anywhere at any time. It takes us through the mysteries of the life of Christ, His birth, His life, His suffering and His glory.

“And when we unite ourselves to the mystery of Christ in our prayer, we do a powerful act of spiritual solidarity with our brothers and sisters

who are suffering,” he said.

Meanwhile, with recent developments in the Israel/Hamas conflict, including an extended truce, release of hostages and delivery of aid, Archbishop Wilson called for peace in the Holy Land to become permanent.

“War has come to the birthplace of the Prince of Peace. We unite in prayerful yearning that the gift of ‘peace among people of good will’ might overcome the outrage of bloodshed and destruction,” Archbishop Wilson said.

“Pope Francis reminds us ‘to take just one side in this conflict: that of peace. But not in words – in prayer, with total dedication.’”

Archbishop Wilson concluded by saying: “Let the kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace reign.”

• **Peace hopes for Holy Land:** see pg 16

## Politicians vow to keep spotlight on Ukraine

A cross-party group of MPs and peers visited the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral in London this week to see first-hand the support still being provided to people displaced by the war in Ukraine.

The visit was organised by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the Holy See with the support of the Catholic Union.

The cathedral has become a focal point for efforts to support Ukrainians who have come to Britain since the war began in February 2022.

Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski, Eparchial Bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy, showed the group the Welcome Centre which provides help to Ukrainian families, including access to computers, a play area for children, and a place to cook and eat together.

The group, which included the Lord Speaker, Lord McFall, also had a chance to discuss the latest developments in Ukraine with the bishop and find out what more the UK Government can do to help.

Bishop Nowakowski said: “It was a great joy to welcome MPs and peers to the Cathedral. I appreciated the opportunity to pray with them and to thank them for their support. My message is simply – please do not forget Ukraine.”

Catholic Union deputy director, James Somerville-Meikle, said: “We are extremely grateful to Bishop Kenneth and the team at the Cathedral for making this visit possible.

“As this terrible conflict continues, we must not forget the people of Ukraine and those who are helping them.”

Continued from page 1

LGA chairman Shaun Davies said councils are “facing a perfect storm in the run-up to Christmas which could see tens of thousands of refugees having to sleep rough.”

He said: “Pushing tens of thousands of refugees out of Home Office accommodation on to councils will overload the system and mean they simply cannot provide for these vulnerable people’s needs.”

Asylum seekers “need as much notice as possible before they have to leave their accommodation.” Urgent funding is needed, he added, to help councils minimise risks of destitution, overcrowding and street sleeping.

A Government spokesperson said: “Once someone is informed that their asylum claim has been granted, they get at least 28 days’ notice to move on from their asylum accommodation, with support including advice on Universal Credit, the labour market and where to get assistance with housing.”

# COP28 summit has to focus on world's most vulnerable people

Andy Drozdziak

Catholic environmental leaders are hoping that Pope Francis's decision to cancel his proposed trip to Dubai for the COP28 summit on health grounds will not diminish the focus on supporting "the smallest and most vulnerable countries" affected by the climate crisis.

Pope Francis was due to address COP28, which started on Thursday and runs until 12th December, over the weekend, but was forced to cancel after suffering from a respiratory illness.

CAFOD said it knew the pope would still be committed to action on the climate crisis. CAFOD's Director of Advocacy, Neil Thorns, said: "We hope that countries at COP28 will live up to Pope Francis' urgent call for greater ambition on addressing the climate crisis, and for politicians to leave a legacy they can be proud of."

"We hope he recovers soon and will continue to encourage leaders in Dubai from Rome."

CAFOD added: "Global leaders must put the interests of our global family first. COP28 must commit to



Picture: CAFOD

speed up the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy, and provide more support for communities on the frontline of the climate emergency."

Other Catholic voices echoed that call. "Columban missionaries express our solidarity with people who bear the heaviest burden of climate change, and with the Earth itself," said Vicar General Fr Brian Vale. "God has not given up on reminding us of the urgency of respecting creation and so we are urged to do more.

Pope Francis gives us a clear witness that we must persevere."

William Nolan, Archbishop of Glasgow, which hosted COP26 in 2021, has called on the UK Government to support communities already experiencing climate breakdown and to provide loss and damage finance in the form of grants, not loans.

"At COP26 in Glasgow, one of the biggest disappointments was the failure to agree a fund for Loss and

Damages," he said. "Countries which are most vulnerable to climate change and yet the least responsible for it, need financial support from industrialised countries who were, and continue to be, responsible for most emissions."

"Now is the moment for world leaders to take responsibility for the damage caused by climate change especially affecting the smallest and most vulnerable countries.

"COP28 should not be mere talk but take decisive action to create a robust fund to aid those struggling with climate change."

Both Archbishop Nolan and CAFOD referenced Pope Francis' recent document *Laudate Deum*, which underlines the message surrounding loss and damage, urging richer countries to financially support countries who have suffered due to the climate crisis.

CAFOD is organising a march in London on Saturday, 9th December to draw attention to COP28 and show its supporters' solidarity with those on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

## Join the fight against VAWG

Last Saturday marked the UN International Day for Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and the start of 16 days of global activism on this issue – and Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) and the National Board of Catholic Women (NBCW) have reminding Catholics of their responsibility to join this movement and work to root out VAWG.

One in four women are subjected to domestic abuse during their lifetime, and research has shown that women with a religious faith tend to stay longer in abusive marriages.

As Catholics, answering the call to action can be done in many ways, investing not just money, but time, skills and willingness to speak up and raise awareness of this issue.

The Holy Father recently described violence against women as "a poisonous weed that plagues our society and must be pulled up from its roots."

Catholics across England and Wales are encouraged to join the call to action, alongside the National Board of Catholic Women, CSAN, and projects like Caritas Westminster's Bakhita House and Safe in Faith.

**A calendar of actions to take part in can be found at [www.csan.org](http://www.csan.org).**

## Burke to pay the price for criticising Francis

One of Pope Francis's most high-profile critics, Cardinal Raymond Burke, is to have certain privileges removed, Vatican sources say, after continuing to attack Pope Francis's leadership of the Church.

His right to a subsidised Vatican apartment and salary are to be removed after Pope Francis labelled him a source of "disunity" in the Church.

Burke's privileges came as a retired cardinal of senior rank, but now the Holy Father has deemed he is using his position against the current direction of the Church.

Burke, a 75-year-old canon lawyer, has run into trouble before from Francis, who removed him from his position as Vatican's high court justice in 2014. Since then he has become one of the most outspoken critics of the pope, his outreach to LGBTQ+ Catholics and his reform project to make the Church more responsive to the needs of the faithful.

Burke was one of a group of conservative cardinals who issued a list of formal questions earlier this year to the pope – called a 'dubia' – asking him to clarify questions of doctrine, on the position of divorced and civilly remarried Catholics, and whether same-sex couples could receive church blessings.

More recently, timed to coincide with the start of the recent Synod on Synodality, Burke criticised Francis' vision of "synodality" as well as his

overall reform plans.

"It's unfortunately very clear that the invocation of the Holy Spirit by some has the aim of bringing forward an agenda that is more political and human than ecclesial and divine," Burke told the conference titled "The Synodal Babel".

He added that "the sheep depend on the courage of pastors who must

**Pope Benedict XVI made US cleric Raymond Burke a cardinal in 2010.**



protect them from the poison of confusion, error and division."

This is the second time in the past few weeks that the pope has punished clerics who criticise his plans for reform. He removed a Texan bishop, Joseph Strickland, after a Vatican investigation into governance of his diocese.

Strickland said on Tuesday that he was dismayed by reports of the actions taken against Cardinal Burke. "If this is accurate it is an atrocity; if it is false information, it needs to be corrected immediately," Strickland said.

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni didn't deny the reports but referred questions to Burke. "I don't have anything particular to say about that," Bruni told reporters.

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## In Brief

### Gove questions Covid origin

Michael Gove has suggested that Covid-19 may be a man-made virus. Speaking at the the Covid Inquiry, the Tory minister said dealing with such a “novel” virus presented “new challenges” that required new science. He added that there was a “significant body of judgment” that considered the virus to be not natural and “that presents sort of challenges as well”.

Hugo Keith KC cautioned Gove that the issue was “some-what divisive” and not part of the inquiry’s terms of reference.

### OBR questions tax policies

A top official at the Office for Budget Responsibility said that Jeremy Hunt’s tax traps are hurting the economy because they do not make work pay. David Miles, an executive member of the spending watchdog, said the high effective tax rates facing many workers on every pound of extra income were “bad for growth”. He also claimed that levies that “disincentivise work, saving, investment” were holding back the economy. Despite the cut in National Insurance, workers will still be paying more tax in five years time.

### ‘Deaths’ from remote appointments

A new study in the *British Medical Journal* has found that GP appointments over the phone or online risk harming patients. A study of remote NHS doctor consultations between 2020 and 2023 found that ‘deaths and serious harms’ had occurred because of wrong or missed diagnoses and delayed referrals. There was also criticism of distracted receptionists responsible for deaths after they failed to call patients back.

# Pro-lifers urged to get involved in key Holyrood consultation

In a bid to defend the right to peaceful pro-life advocacy in Scotland, pro-life groups are rallying supporters and urging them to participate in the ongoing Scottish Government Consultation on buffer zones.

The Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill, sponsored by Gillian MacKay MSP, seeks to impose exclusion zones, also known as ‘buffer zones’, of at least 200 metres around abortion facilities in Scotland.

Abortion providers would also have the option to request an extension of the buffer zone.

The Scottish buffer zone legislation would criminalise all pro-life activity, including posters in windows inside residential buildings, and subject rule breakers to fines of £10,000 or more.

The Health, Social Care and Sport



Committee in Holyrood is seeking views on Gillian McKay MSP’s Bill, and the committee will then decide whether the Bill should be taken forward or not. The consultation closes on 20th December.

Alithea Williams, SPUC’s public

policy manager, said: “We need as many people to respond to the consultation as possible. We need to make it clear to MSPs how unworkable and unethical it is to ban people from peacefully praying and offering help to women.

“There is still time to stop this in Scotland. Please act now to stop Holyrood criminalising compassion.”

Michael Veitch, Scotland policy officer, CARE for Scotland shared his concerns that the Bill is a distraction from other issues related to abortion. “This Bill is based on an objectively false narrative that access to abortions in Scotland is being impeded,” Mr Veitch said.

“Terminations are occurring at record numbers, and dangerous ‘home abortion’ rules remain in place. The buffer zones debate has diverted public attention away from issues such as disability abortion, advances in technology that improve viability, moves to reduce abortions, and wider discussions about the drivers of abortion in Scotland.”

## Problem gambling ‘far bigger than thought’

A significantly higher rate of problem gambling than previously thought shows the need for reforms to gambling legislation, according to Christian social justice charity CARE.

New data from the Gambling Commission suggests 2.5 per cent of the adult British population could be struggling with a gambling problem.

The organisation, which regulates the betting industry, has previously thought that the number was as low as 0.3 per cent.

The new figure – based on “higher quality” data – would equate to around 1.3 million people in Great Britain.

Tim Cairns, gambling policy expert at CARE, described the figures as “alarming but not surprising to charities working in this area.”

“The sad reality is that big gam-



bling has spent 20 years making their product more addictive, easier to play, and available 24/7 while ignoring pleas from suffering individuals,” he said.

“This has led to endemic levels of problem gambling.”

“The Government has promised changes to gambling legislation. If gamblers are to be kept safe, advertising needs to be cut and the gam-

bling industry needs to be placed under a levy that is sufficient to properly meet the public health crisis it has inspired.

“We think it should be at least five per cent of industry profits.

“Other measures are needed as well – the industry must be reined in to ensure that it is not free to target the vulnerable in years to come.”

Meanwhile, new research has shown that nearly half of all gamblers aged between 18 and 24 have risked more than they can afford to lose.

Of those who had gambled in the last 12 months, 42 per cent said they had taken financial risks, while 36 per cent said they had either borrowed money or sold possessions to fund their bet.

The findings show the impact is not just on financial health, with 39 per cent of young adult gamblers

admitting to experiencing mental health problems, and a majority sharing they felt guilt over their behaviour.

While the Gambling Commission reported in March a decline in the number of young adult gamblers (28.9 per cent compared with 35.8 per cent in 2019), the latest research shows that young people who continue to bet are more of a concern than those in the older age-brackets.

CARE is calling for a change in the law to address problem gambling, including for younger years.

The charity is suggesting that a low maximum stake on online “slot machines”, which currently have no limit, must be introduced.

Affordability checks for vulnerable gamblers is one of the charity’s other proposals it would like to see introduced.

## UNIVERSE CONTACTS

Universe Catholic Weekly, PO Box 585, Sale M33 0JH

General enquiries: t: 0743 6617650  
e: [info@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:info@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)

Editorial enquiries: t: 0743 6617604  
e: [news@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:news@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)

Executive Chairman  
Clive W. Leach, KSG, CBE  
t: [clive.leach@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:clive.leach@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)

Managing Editorial Director: Michael Winterbottom  
e: [michael.winterbottom@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:michael.winterbottom@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)  
t: 07753 987124

News: Andy Drozdziak  
e: [andy.drozdziak@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:andy.drozdziak@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)  
t: 07527 237293

Advertising and Sales  
Director of Sales & Marketing:  
Andrea Black  
e: [andrea.black@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:andrea.black@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)  
e: [advertising@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:advertising@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)  
t: 0791856 0608

Circulation Sales Manager:  
Michelle Jones  
e: [michelle.jones@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:michelle.jones@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)  
e: [sales@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:sales@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)  
t: 0743 6617650

Finance & Operations Director:  
Mary Concannon  
e: [mary.concannon@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:mary.concannon@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)  
e: [accounts@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:accounts@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)  
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# Ava family in warning as knife crime rates on rise

## Mum proud to see her archdiocese distribute vital blood loss kits

Andy Drozdziak

The mother of a Catholic schoolgirl killed in a knife attack has marked the second anniversary of her death by calling for an increase in sentencing guidelines to prevent further attacks.

12-year-old Ava White, a student of Notre Dame Catholic College in Liverpool, was stabbed in the neck in Liverpool city centre on 25th November 2021. A 15-year-old boy was given a life sentence, with a minimum of 13 years, at Liverpool Crown Court for Ava's murder.

But with knife crime rising again, Ava's mother, Leeann White, told the BBC that sentencing guidelines must be increased if the Government wants to send a warning to those using knives.

"Kids are using knives as an accessory. The youngest recorded child carrying a knife in school is eight," she said. "I know they say knife crime is coming down [on] Merseyside, but it has to come down everywhere."

Trauma Surgeon Nikhil Misra founded KnifeSavers in 2019 – a not-for-profit programme in the Major Trauma Centre at Aintree University Hospital which delivers practical education sessions on bleed control.

It has also developed bleed control kits, which have been shared around the city by, among other organisations, the archdiocese of Liverpool.

Offering "thoughts and prayers to

**Ava White was killed by a single knife wound to the neck. Her killer was 15 at the time**



Leeann and her family" on the 2nd anniversary of Ava's death, the archdiocese said: "We are continuing our support for Knifesavers, distributing 170 bleed control kits to parishes."

Since Ava's fatal stabbing, her family has been raising awareness through the Ava White Foundation of the benefits to have the packs in visible locations in public places, as they could potentially save lives if a

person suffers a catastrophic bleed. The packs help limit blood loss in the critical moments before professional medical help arrives.

All parish centre managers will complete training in using the bleed control packs.

Jill Boggan, director of finance at the archdiocese of Liverpool, said: "We were all shocked and devastated at Ava's death, as she was part of our archdiocesan community. We very much support the family in its quest to encourage public venues to have this life-saving equipment.

"Our parish centres are very much embedded in their local communities so they seemed like an ideal location to have the packs installed.

"The operational management team, Brian Lowry and Kim Schofield, delivered the kits and all parish centre managers are very much behind the initiative.

"We want to raise awareness with the local community that they are there in case they ever do need to use them during an emergency."

Leeann White said she was "so proud" to hear of the archdiocese's support in installing the kits in Ava's memory.



## Archdiocese proud of blue chip award for governance

The archdiocese of Liverpool has received a prestigious award from the Chartered Governance Institute of UK and Ireland for Governance Project of the Year. The award is in recognition of its work in transitioning to a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation).

The award recognises governance projects that are of such strategic significance that they could be described as transformational.

The archdiocese was up against Indivior PLC, Platform Housing Group, Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent ICS, and Tesco and EY to win the award.

Among archdiocese figures present to receive the award were COO Martin Miller, solicitor and compli-

ance officer Helen McLoughlin and the directors of education and finance, Joan McCarthy and Jill Boggan, as well as Canon John Poland and trustee Sean Keyes, education office manager Hannah Blabey and chancery administrator Aaron Kiely.

Helen McLoughlin said: "Restructuring the governance of the archdiocese to make it fit for purpose for its mission in the contemporary world has been an enormous undertaking, and to be recognised for our work by the CGIUKI is a huge compliment."

Martin Miller added: "It's fantastic to receive such recognition; a lot of hard work went into the transition. Everybody involved deserves this recognition – we're very proud."

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**COMMENT**

**China needs to come clean**

Reports of a new respiratory illness affecting children in northern China has worrying echoes of the start of the Covid pandemic in 2020. Hospitals in the region are reportedly overcrowded with sick youngsters but the authorities are adamant that there is nothing to worry about.

The problem is that China was so opaque in its early reporting of Covid that we do not know to this day how and where the virus emerged. Early assertions that it was present in a 'wet market' in Wuhan and spread from there were countered by the presence of a virus research facility in the same city. Suggestions that it may have leaked from this laboratory were dismissed as conspiracy theories, and yet some scientists believe this may well have been the source, though no proof has been found.

Furthermore, the World Health Organisation, which is supposed to monitor these outbreaks, was less than robust in holding China to account. The WHO has now urged China to impose social distancing and 'appropriate' mask wearing while it seeks updates and more information. But does anyone trust the Chinese state to provide them?

After all, the police targeted the doctor who first identified Covid and sought to alert the world before he succumbed to the disease himself. Now it is being said that the latest outbreak is the result of lowered immunity after China ended its lengthy and regularly re-imposed lockdowns. The fact that it appears to be most virulent among children, unlike Covid, is a particular worry.

Have we learnt any lessons from how Covid was dealt with in 2020? Should, for instance, flights from China be restricted?

There is a Covid inquiry going on which is tasked with ensuring we are better prepared in the future, and yet it is not asking questions about the origin of the virus nor does it appear very interested in mitigations short of lockdowns.

By the time it reports several years from now, we may already have been through another pandemic.

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# What's ailing the NHS?

**Paresh Wankhade looks at why NHS England is still struggling – despite more staff and money**

Overall public satisfaction with the NHS in England is currently at a 40-year low of 29 per cent, a recent survey by the King's Fund think-tank has found. People are not happy with waiting times for GP and hospital appointments, and over half of those surveyed think the service is beset by staff shortages. A similar percentage think the Government does not spend enough money on the NHS.

This is despite the fact that in 2022-2023 the NHS received £152.6 billion in total budget – an increase (at 2022-2023 prices) of £28.4 billion compared with 2016-2017. The service has 32.4 per cent more full-time staff too. Its workforce hit an all-time high of 1.275 million employees in February 2023 (up from 963,000 in June 2013).

And yet, the figures around productivity show that people's dissatisfaction is not without cause. Over the two years between 2019 and 2020 and 2020 and 2021, productivity in the NHS decreased by 23 per cent. This extraordinary drop followed 14 years of productivity gains.

There are five primary reasons why the service is struggling to cope. These are: staff wellbeing, underfunded social care, an inadequate workforce plan, lack of access to emergency care and on going industrial action.

**Continuing burnout and work pressures**

In 2022, 23,838 doctors joined the profession but 11,319 left – an attrition rate 20 per cent higher than in 2021, when 9,825 doctors left. The doctors' union, the BMA, has highlighted concerns about doctors' wellbeing.

In a survey of over 4,000 doctors in 2022, the General Medical Council (GMC) found that 50 per cent were satisfied with their job, down from 70 per cent in 2021. More worked beyond their rostered hours on a weekly basis (70 per cent, up from 59 per cent in 2021).

Almost the same percentage said they are often unable to take breaks (68 per cent, up from 49 per cent in 2021). Many feel unable to cope with their workload each week (42 per cent, up from 30 per cent in 2021). One-in-four of doctors were at high risk of burn-out, up from 17 per cent in 2021.

The Care Quality Commission said staff were overworked, stressed and exhausted to the point of becoming ill, injured or leaving their job altogether.



**Continuing lack of access to adult social care**

Despite the Government's stated commitment to addressing the long-term challenges facing the social care sector, the National Audit Office has painted a bleak picture of the state of reforms.

In its latest report, entitled *Reforming Adult Social Care in England*, the NAO highlights long waiting lists (over 434,000 people waiting assessment or review by March 2023) and workforce shortages (over 150,000 vacancies in England). The report also notes pressures on local authority finances, which are compounded by a lack of coherent planning to bring sustainable change. This lack of continuity of care is leading to unmet demands and delays in discharging patients.

**An inadequate workforce plan**

The UK Government's long-term workforce plan, published in June 2023, was widely welcomed as the first comprehensive long-term strategy for the NHS workforce. However, as the GMC pointed out, doubling the number of medical places from 2025 will only reap benefits by 2030, when these new cohorts complete their education.

The latest report of the cross-party Public Accounts Committee has criticised the plan's lack of meaningful details and clarity on several areas of expenditure, including salaries, estates and infrastructure. Also, other than confirming £2.4 billion in funding

*'One-in-four of doctors were at high risk of burn-out, up from 17 per cent in 2021'*

to cover the costs of training in the first five years, it fails to promise sufficient funding in the medium and long-term. This risks putting NHS under untenable financial pressure.

Further, the plan proposes annual staff productivity gains of 1.5 per cent to 2 per cent, but does not detail how this will be achieved. It is similarly weak on retention measures, failing to address measures to retain staff, or to improve the culture and working environment that contributes to high attrition rates.

**Lack of access to urgent and emergency care**

Latest data from the NAO reveals that key targets for unplanned or urgent care are not being met. In March 2023, the proportions of A&E patients being admitted, transferred or discharged within four hours of arrival varied from 53.3 per cent in the Midlands to 62.1 per cent in the South East – against the target of 95 per cent.

Ambulance average response times for category-1 incidents (life-threatening incidents) was eight minutes and 49 seconds in March 2023, against the average standard of seven minutes.

Ambulance average performance for category-2 incidents (urgent but not life threatening) was over 39 minutes in March 2023, against the average standard of 18 minutes.

This reveals considerable variation in service performance and access, both between regions and between different providers.

I have long highlighted the challenges facing the emergency services. These include: staff wellbeing, performance being prioritised over people, leaders deeming response time targets to

be the barometer of good organisational performance, hospital handover delays and the 999-call triage system.

**Continued industrial action**

The unprecedented situation of strikes by junior doctors and consultants, since September 2023, is proving damaging. NHS England estimates the financial costs of over 40 days of industrial action to be around £1 billion.

Over 880,000 operations have been cancelled or outpatient appointments rescheduled. It has added 210,000 people to already pressurised waiting lists.

Cutting down waiting lists was one of the five pledges Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced in January 2023. Achieving that now seems highly unlikely.

Despite the challenges it faces, public support for the core principles of the NHS remains overwhelmingly strong. Yet, repeated attempts by the Government to reform and reorganise the service have failed to 'fix' the problems it faces. Recent evidence highlights significant challenges regarding governance, accountability and decision-making arrangements within the NHS.

The NHS, like many other health systems, is still dealing with the effects of Covid-19 but the challenges it faces long predate the pandemic. Instead of more structural reforms, what the NHS really needs is support and the adequate, long-term, reliable funding required to address the toll a decade of austerity cuts has taken on the nation.

**Paresh Wankhade is a Professor of Leadership and Management, Edge Hill University**

# URGENT

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## Caring for our vulnerable common home

Sir John Battle



Our 'common home' has just experienced its hottest year ever on record, with planetary temperatures well above average.

This has presented itself in unseasonable floods, heatwaves, droughts and ocean storms, and caused devastating damage to settlements, homes, crops and agricultural production.

The best of our world's scientists studying the climate generally agree that global warming (a rise of 1.4C) is driven by human practices, especially in the richer countries and by the wealthier. The UN has warned that the world is heading for a 'hellish' 3C temperature rise of global heating.

There has been a rapid increase in the development and use of renewable energy, but these have been mere baby steps in reducing the use of fossil fuels, according to the UN Climate Change secretary. Moreover, oil and gas exploitation is continuing, and causing conflicts of interests – not least for the coming COP 28 summit hosted by oil producer United Arab Emirates. In other words, the green transition is not happening fast enough.

And for those countries suffering the worst effects of climate change, the rescue fund proposed at the last COP summit for damage and loss has yet to materialise before some island countries go under. That issue of financial support for poorer countries will feature large in the coming Doha COP, starting this weekend.

Closer to home, increasing economic pressures, such as the rising cost of living, which is notably hitting the poorest hardest, are leading to the postponement of actions to enhance a green transition. Claims of protecting the poor is pushing the structural changes need to protect the planet, and our own climate back. Society is sadly now split over the climate crisis and the urgency of the need for action by governments, communities and individuals.

Encouragingly, Pope Francis has continued to keep the pressure up on this issue, on behalf of the Church. His constant insistence that "care for the earth" and "care for the poor" have to go hand in hand needs to be listened to.

Already he has provided us with two handbooks to guide us: *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti* ("on social friendship").

We need to hold them together, read and apply their wisdom.

# In the shadows: why honour-based killings have increased in the UK

SOCIAL COMMENT

Sadiq Bhanbhro

Cases of so-called honour-based abuse (HBA) are on the rise in England and Wales.

Home Office figures show 2,905 HBA offences in 2022-23 – an increase of 1 per cent in the year ending March 2023 from the year before. This is a rise of 10 per cent since 2020-21.

It has been mandatory for police in England and Wales to record crimes often referred to as "honour-based" since 2019. Between 2016 and 2020, the number recorded rose by 81 per cent.

This mandatory reporting may be behind some of the increase in offences. But the pandemic lockdowns also provided abusers with greater opportunity to offend. What's more, there may be many cases of HBA that go unreported.

There are a variety of harmful practices categorised as HBA. These include forced marriages, sexual, psychological and economic abuse, female genital mutilation, and honour killings. These crimes are committed by people seeking to defend or restore the honour of a person or social group, such as a

family, clan, caste, kin group or community.

**A global issue**

It is a global issue happening across different cultures and communities, although some areas are considered more affected, such as the Middle East and south Asia.

While such crimes can affect anyone, women and girls are more likely to be targeted. In the UK, it is particularly prevalent among young girls. In 2022, the Forced Marriage Unit handled 302 cases: 78 per cent of the victims were female, while 22 per cent were male. Over half of the victims were 21 or younger.

My research with communities in the UK and abroad indicates that the ideology that triggers this harmful behaviour towards family members is that women and girls are considered carriers of family honour, and a precious social resource.

Given the social, cultural and economic value of family honour that lies with women and girls, social groups have rules and practices to protect the value they have placed in honour.

For example, if a young woman marries without her family or parents' consent, this act would be considered dishonourable for the family. This young woman's behaviour can trigger gossip about her family's reputation, showing that the family is exposed to

dishonour and shame in its concerned social group. As a result, the family, particularly the male members, will attempt to restore the family honour.

The actions and behaviour taken to protect or restore family honour in this way are context-specific. The action could range from a harsh warning to murder, and any harmful behaviour in between, such as threatening, stalking, harassing or forcing her to leave her husband.

**Impact of lockdown**

However, this type of crime is often not reported to authorities because victims hesitate to come forward. HBA thrives in secrecy and fear. The COVID-19 lockdowns and associated restrictions created an environment which made it easier for perpetrators to commit offences and more difficult for survivors to seek help.

The national helpline for HBA saw a significant decline in calls about forced marriage following the government's order to stay home on March 23 2020. The helpline saw a peak in contacts in May 2020, following the easing of some restrictions – and another rise when schools reopened in September 2020.

The number of reported cases has also increased because of the



implementation of official recording methods, which has slightly improved its visibility. The murder of Banaz Mahmod in 2006 drew attention to honour crimes in the UK, and there has been a gradual increase in the awareness of these offences.

But political cultural sensitivities may be getting in the way of tackling HBA. For example, it has been alleged that the Crown Prosecution Service may have avoided tackling such crimes for fear of creating "unrest" in communities.

Similarly, police may have been nervous about investigating sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities for fear of being labelled racist.

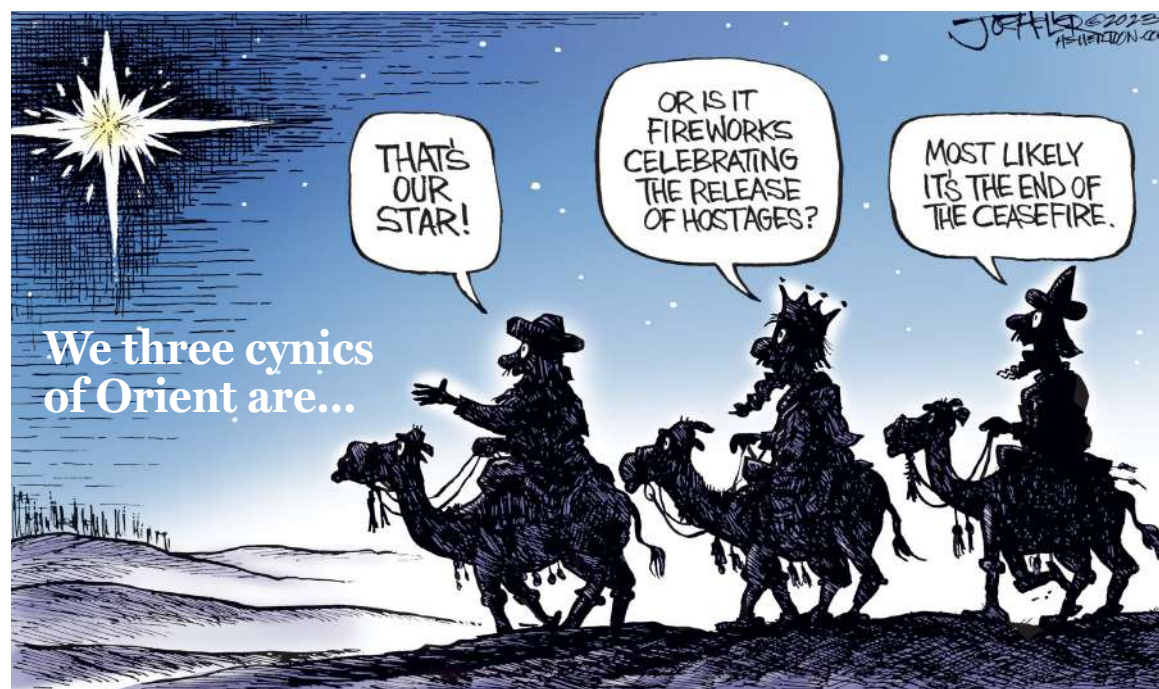
The UK Parliament's Women and Equalities Committee recently carried out an inquiry into so-called honour-based abuse, reviewing evidence submitted by several witnesses and experts, including myself. The committee called for the creation of a legal definition of HBA.

A shared, statutory definition would increase awareness and also reduce the hypersensitivity attached to HBA that frames it as a cultural problem of certain communities, which often prevents state agencies from acting and prosecuting such violent crimes.

Additionally, a legal definition for HBA would contribute to social and professional understanding, help to improve data collection and ultimately assist in bringing more perpetrators to justice.

The government has rejected the committee's recommendation for a statutory definition of HBA, however. This is a missed opportunity to take a decisive step forward in the fight against this kind of crime.

Sadiq Bhanbhro is a Senior Research Fellow on Public Health and Gender-Based Violence, Sheffield Hallam University





# Baroness breaks new ground as Union's first female president

The Catholic Union has announced the “very exciting appointment” of Baroness Hollins as the organisation's new president.

The crossbench peer and professional psychiatrist was approved by members of the Catholic Union at their AGM on 28th November. She takes up the role with immediate effect.

Baroness Hollins is the first woman to hold the office of President in the Catholic Union's 150-year history, and takes over from Conservative MP, Sir Edward Leigh, who had served as President since 2014.

Cardinal Nichols congratulated the Baroness on her new role: “I offer my warmest congratulations to Baroness Hollins on her appointment, and I look forward to seeing the Catholic Union continue its important mission under her leadership”.

He also paid tribute to outgoing president Sir Edward for his many years of service to the Catholic Union. “He has been steadfast in his defence of the Church and in making sure that a Catholic viewpoint is heard in Parliament.

“The Catholic community in this country owes him a huge debt of gratitude. I assure Sir Edward and his family of my prayers.”

Baroness Hollins was appointed to the House of Lords in 2010 as a crossbench peer. She is Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry at St George's, University of London, and is a past President of the British Medical Association.

Until earlier this year, Baroness Hollins served on Pope Francis's Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, which was set up in 2014 to improve safeguarding in the Church. Baroness Hollins had previously served as a Vice President of the Catholic Union.

The appointment comes as the Catholic Union's latest Annual Report revealed that this has been its “busiest ever year” – something Baroness Hollins was keen to continue.

“Over the past few years, the



Catholic Union has shown once again what can be achieved by lay Catholics getting involved in politics and public life,” she said.

“It is a great honour to be taking over from Sir Edward, who has done so much to support Catholic causes in Parliament and beyond.

“There are so many opportunities in the Church and in the country for lay men and women to get involved and make a difference. I'm looking forward to working with Catholic Union members and supporters across the country to help all Catholics play their part in public life.”

The acting chairman of the Catholic Union, Richard Collyer-Hamlin, welcomed what he hailed as a “very exciting appointment.”

“Baroness Hollins is a hugely respected medical professional and parliamentarian. Her expertise and professionalism have been called upon time and again by Church leaders in this country, and in the Vatican. We are extremely fortunate to have her as our new President,” Mr Collyer-Hamlin said, adding his thanks to former president Sir Edward Leigh “for many years of faithful service.”

Mr Collyer-Hamlin called the Catholic Union “the beating heart of lay Catholic participation in public life” and encouraged “every Catholic in this country to join us on this journey.”

# Ofsted report issues improvement warning over quality of RE teaching

Andy Drozdzia

A Catholic teacher is calling for greater Government investment in RE after an Ofsted report found “extensive weaknesses” in the teaching of the subject nationally.

Ofsted reported that in “too many primary and secondary schools”, the teaching of RE was of “a poor quality and not fit for purpose”, adding this was leaving pupils “ill-equipped for some of the complexities of contemporary society”.

While not a judgement or reflection of RE within Catholic schools, many RE teachers in Catholic schools believe more needs to be done to support the subject.

The inspectorate also said a “lack of clarity and support from Government” was making it harder for schools to teach the subject. RE teacher Andy Lewis, Deputy Head at St Bonaventure's Secondary School in East London, said there was a need for greater support from the Government.

“We need to recognise the primary and secondary benefits of RE - and campaign to ensure all students get their entitlement to this,” Mr Lewis told the *Universe*. “The solution clearly lies in part, with DfE



funding – RE needs bursaries to attract teachers to the, and funding for training to ensure non-specialists are able to deliver high-quality RE.”

Mr Lewis praised the teaching of RE in Catholic schools. “I think RE in Catholic schools has a clear and documented purpose and systems of support via dioceses, the Catholic Education Service (CES) and resource publishers, but the wider RE system that Ofsted is criticising remains fragmented with competing purposes and ideas of what good RE looks like,” he said.

The CES sees RE as ‘the core of the core curriculum’ and Catholic

schools dedicate at least 10 per cent of the timetable to the subject. Yet it is not given as high a priority in non-Catholic schools, and is often taught by non-RE specialists. Ofsted reported that pupils are “rarely taught enough substance to prepare them to engage in a complex, multi-religious and multi-secular society”.

“It is unsurprising that Ofsted have found it variable,” Andy Lewis said; “sometimes it is on the curriculum to simply ensure legal compliance, or as a vehicle for other parts of the curriculum such as PHSE, RSE or citizenship,” Mr Lewis said. “It is increasingly taught by non-specialists due to a lack of RE teachers, and often doesn't receive the same funding and support as other subjects. It's unsurprising that this has been devastating for the subject. Where support is given, RE is well-liked, with high status and is extremely effective.”

The CES said it was committed to working with the Government in support of Catholic education and ensuring high-quality RE remains on the curriculum. It said it was also happy to share “our Catholic approach to ensuring high quality RE teaching as a whole.”





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## Jenrick ‘rogue’ on migration

Robert Jenrick has “gone rogue” on migration, the *i* news site has claimed, after the immigration minister appeared to breach collective Cabinet responsibility on the issue.

Jenrick said the public are “sick of talk” on cutting immigration and called for a “serious package of fundamental reform”, saying he would have done this “before last Christmas if I could have done”.

The minister's status as a close ally of Sunak is being questioned, said the outlet, as his comments appeared to align him with former home secretary Suella Braverman.

## In Brief

### Paralympian freed after 10 years in jail

Double-amputee Olympic runner Oscar Pistorius has been granted parole 10 years after shooting his girlfriend through a toilet door at his home in South Africa in a killing that shocked the world.

Department of Corrections spokesperson Singabakho Nxumalo said Pistorius would be released from prison on 5th January. Pistorius, 37, has been in jail since late 2014 for the Valentine's Day 2013 killing of model Reeva Steenkamp in Pretoria. He was ultimately convicted of murder and sentenced to 13 years and five months in prison.

Pistorius was one of the world's most admired athletes when he killed Ms Steenkamp.

### Lineker leads tributes to 'El Tel'

Former England striker Gary Lineker has led tributes to Terry Venables after his death was announced at the age of 80.

Venables was, the *Match of the Day* host said, "innovative and brilliant", adding "the tactics in some of the matches during the Euros were thoughtful and imaginative."

"They were incredibly unlucky not to win the semi-final and I'm sure they'd have won the final," Lineker added.

Other tributes were paid by former clubs Tottenham and Barcelona, where he won the league title and narrowly lost a European Cup final.

### Healthcare waits linked to deaths

Around 8,000 people were harmed and 112 died in 2022 after having long waits for an ambulance or surgery, *The Guardian* has found.

471 patients waiting for adult mental health care suffered harm as a result of delays in 2022, while one man died of a cardiac arrest after waiting 18 minutes to get through to the emergency services. By the time the crew arrived, he had died.

### Rude use of AI on the rise

Children are creating indecent images of their peers with artificial intelligence (AI) software, the UK Safer Internet Centre claims. The child protection group pointed out that such images, which amount to child sexual abuse material, could harm children. The group said that, while numbers are small, "we need steps to be taken now, before the problem grows."

# Far right out of the wilderness as it makes gains across Europe

## Geert Wilders' victory in the Netherlands fits into a wider picture of European radical-right populism, says Catherine de Vries

The results of the Dutch election, in which Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom emerged as victors, have sent shockwaves through the political establishment across Europe.

For the first time in Dutch history, a party of the extreme right is the largest in the national parliament. Wilders is an eccentric politician known for his inflammatory rhetoric. He advocates the Netherlands leaving the European Union and has called Islam a "fascist" religion. In a 2016 trial, he was found guilty of inciting discrimination (but received no penalty for the crime). His comments even led to him being banned from visiting the UK.

While polling leading up to the election had suggested that Party for Freedom could become the largest party, it had appeared to be running practically neck and neck with the parties of the mainstream left and right. But the polls were wide of the mark and Wilders ended up taking the most seats by a comfortable margin, even if he will need to seek coalition partners to form a government.

Right-wing newcomers the New Social Contract also did very well. Like Party for Freedom, this party sees immigration as one of the reasons for problems such as the Netherlands' congested public services and lack of affordable housing. However, Pieter Omtzigt, the New Social Contract's leader (and a former member of parliament for the more centre-right Christian Democratic Party), is critical of some of Wilders' more inflammatory rhetoric.

Omtzigt would nevertheless seem the most likely candidate to form a coalition with Wilders, together with the more mainstream right-wing former party of the now-departed prime minister, Mark Rutte. But it will be some time before it's clear if such a partnership is achievable. Coalition in the Netherlands is the work of months rather than weeks.

These talks will be all the more complex thanks to Wilders' personal profile. He may hold the greatest number of seats, but the controversy that has surrounded him for so many years may yet rule him out of the role of prime minister, even were he to be part of a governing coalition.



All smiles for Geert Wilders

Should a coalition be formed, questions about the Netherlands' place in the EU will inevitably come to the fore. Wilders wants a Brexit-style referendum and, even if this doesn't materialise, we can expect him to bring a more Eurosceptic stance to any government in which he participates.

This could have considerable consequences for the EU. Even when extreme-right parties in Europe differ on the question of exit, they agree on transforming the EU into a more intergovernmental body, taking power away from Brussels.

### An example from Italy

Wilders will be conscious of how the Italian elections played out last year for Italy's prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, with whom he shares a certain ideological affinity. Meloni's radical-right Brothers of

Italy emerged as the strongest force in the 2022 vote and formed a coalition with other parties of the right and hard right.

Like Wilders, Meloni was seen as a political outsider and has long put immigration at the heart of political debate. But since coming to power, her strong anti-immigration rhetoric has had to be simmered down. She was quickly confronted with calls from the business community to address Italy's labour shortage, which meant granting permits for migrant workers.

In my book *Political Entrepreneurs*, co-authored with Sara Hobolt from the London School of Economics, we show that governing changes political parties. It is relatively easy to gripe from the sidelines but in government, parties bear responsibility for policy. They have to make

decisions, weigh up interests – and can only spend money once. Meloni, like the leaders of so many other populist parties, quickly lost her sharp edge once she became the person in charge.

Most notably for Wilders, the Brothers of Italy had also campaigned with a Eurosceptic tone during the election, but can now be found walking in lockstep with Brussels even on matters relating to immigration. Meloni has even made a show of her closeness with European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen.

That said, the Italian experience also offers another example that Wilders may find appealing. In our research, we've found that parties that have become popular by opposing existing politics sometimes prefer to keep one foot in Government and one foot out. This is certainly the case for Matteo Salvini, leader of the Lega party and a junior coalition partner to Meloni.

Salvini never misses an opportunity to boost his own profile, even if it causes his own Government difficulty. Only a junior coalition partner can get away with such antics, since a prime minister faces far more pressure. Wilders may therefore find it most convenient to follow Salvini's path rather than Meloni's.

Whichever route he takes, if Wilders becomes part of a government, the results of these elections are certain to have consequences for Dutch relations with the rest of Europe.



Giorgia Meloni has toned-down her rhetoric since taking over as Italy's Prime Minister... including taking a softer approach to relations with the EU

Catherine de Vries is a Professor of Political Science, Fellow and member of the Management Council of the Institute for European Policymaking, Bocconi University

# Faith discrimination rife in UK workplaces, new survey reveals

## Andy Drozdziak

The Catholic Union says that religious discrimination in the workplace “should not be tolerated” after a major new report revealed worrying evidence of employees being marginalised over their faith.

The report, conducted by business psychology consultants Pearn Kandola, examined the experiences of more than 6,000 Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh employees. It illustrated just how widespread religious discrimination is across workplaces.

In the report, nearly a third (32 per cent) of those who expressed their religious identity had a negative experience which included mockery, exclusion, mistreatment, isolation and more.

James Somerville-Meikle, Deputy Director of the Catholic Union of Great Britain, told the *Universe* that the results “are painfully familiar,” echoing the Catholic Union’s own research.

“This kind of behaviour would not be tolerated on the basis of sex or age, or any other characteristic



Professor Binna  
Kandola MBE

protected by law, and it should not be tolerated by people of faith,” Mr Somerville-Meikle said.

“The results and testimonials are painfully familiar. A Catholic Union survey earlier this year found that one-in-three people had faced disadvantage at work because of their faith, while half of responders said they did not feel able to talk openly about their faith with colleagues.”

As part of their research, Pearn Kandola also polled a nationally representative sample of 2,000 British people to understand perceptions around religion, society, and work.

Seeking to understand the experience of people from different religious faiths at work, research revealed the five most common forms of discrimination witnessed in the workplace:

1. Jokes because of their religion – 31 per cent
2. Isolated or excluded from activities – 23 per cent
3. Denied religious festivals as annual leave – 22 per cent
4. Told not to wear religious clothing at work – 22 per cent
5. Mocked for the food they eat – 20 per cent.

Mr Somerville-Meikle said: “In some cases what we are seeing is a lack of understanding, but in other cases it is simple prejudice.”

He echoed the belief of Professor Binna Kandola MBE, diversity and inclusion specialist from Pearn Kandola, that the findings will



James Somerville-Meikle

prove a catalyst for companies to take steps to improve the experience for people of faith.

“The Catholic Union is working hard to raise awareness of these concerns. A number of businesses and other employers are realising the benefits – as well as the duty – to make their workplaces welcoming to people of faith,” Mr Somerville-Meikle said.

He added that a summit on ‘Faith at Work’, supported by Catholic Union, is due to take place in London next year.

## Conservation expert to oversee cathedral repairs

Suzi Pendlebury has been appointed as cathedral architect for St George’s Catholic Cathedral in Southwark to oversee repairs and conservation.

One of the country’s leading conservation architects, Suzi has been involved in many high-profile conservation and restoration projects, including at St Paul’s Cathedral, where she served in the office of the surveyor.

Canon Michael Branch, Dean of St George’s, said: “We are delighted to have Suzi working on our wonderful building at St George’s Cathedral. Our Cathedral means a great deal to so many people and has been a fundamental part of South London for 175 years.”

Suzi, a director of the conservation practice Thomas Ford & Partners, is also the cathedral architect to the Catholic Cathedral of St John in Norwich, and Westminster Cathedral.

Suzi Pendlebury said: “I am greatly looking forward to this new role at St George’s and to build upon the success of recent initiatives overseen by Jonathan Louth, including the two beautiful altars recently conserved and installed”

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Pope Francis welcomed Celtic manager Brendan Rogers and his team at a private audience in the Vatican on Wednesday. Speaking after Celtic's 2-0 Champions League defeat against Lazio in Rome on Tuesday, they discussed Celtic's Catholic roots. The Pope said: "I pray that you will continue to remember and bear witness to everything that makes sport genuinely good and noble. May Almighty God bless each of you and your families. I wish you a safe journey home to Scotland."

# Hunt misses chance to take positive steps for families

Andy Drozdziak

The Catholic Union has criticised the Chancellor's Autumn Statement for failing to support families and warned that "time is running out" for the Government to start supporting family life.

In the statement, the National Living Wage was raised and National Insurance payments reduced, but "penalties" faced by many families were not removed.

Catholic Union Director, Nigel Parker, said: "The penalties faced by many families, such as a two-child cap on Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits, remain in place despite our best efforts to highlight the impact they are having on families."

"The Chancellor has once again missed the opportunity for fundamental reform of the tax and benefit system to help families struggling with the cost of living. The lack of references to family and the common good is also deeply troubling," Mr Parker added.

CSAN and SVP both welcomed Jeremy Hunt's decision to increase Universal Credit and other working-age benefits in England and Wales by 6.7 per cent from April, as well as the increase in the national living wage from £10.42 to £11.44 per hour from April 2024. However, CSAN shared concern about the new policy that those who claim benefits in England and Wales who refuse to look for work would lose their benefits.

CSAN said: "CSAN is very concerned about the introduction of tougher measures for benefit eligi-



bility. It is imperative that these measures do not inadvertently exclude individuals, pushing them to the margins of society. CSAN advocates for a compassionate and inclusive welfare system that safeguards the vulnerable, ensuring that no one is left without the essential support they require."

Jeremy Hunt also introduced a policy whereby claimants who been unable to find work after 18 months would be placed on mandatory work placements. If they fail to do so, after a further six months, their benefits will cease. The SVP said it is worried that the new policy will "leave many at risk of falling into debt and destitution."

"A welfare system increasingly reliant on sanctions will leave already vulnerable households at risk of falling into poverty. We are concerned about today's announcement to reform the work capability assessment and changes to sanctions for people with the 'no work search' requirements," the SVP said.

## Abortion providers challenged for admitting to fewer complications

A Government review has revealed that abortion complication rates are likely to be much higher than has been previously reported in the annual health statistics.

A change in the way the statistics are analysed has revealed that on average, complications occur in 4.06 abortions per 1,000 – far higher than the previously thought level of 1.52 per 1,000. When the Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data also includes incomplete abortions, the complication rate is 18.16 per 1,000 abortions.

That is over 11 times higher than the official statistics, which are derived from data published by the abortion providers themselves.

The most common complications reported were haemorrhage (65.8 per cent), sepsis (11.4 per cent) and cervical tear (11.1 per cent).

The review found that abortion providers were not recording complications that happened after dis-

charge or after the form that they are recorded on was sent to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). Abortion providers are required to submit a HSA4 form which contains any complications as a result of an abortion, but only up to the point of discharge.

However, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), which looks into post-operative health, among other things, found "no evidence" that abortion providers were informing the DHSC about complications that occur later.

The review also noted that complications may be less likely to be recorded for terminations where either both or one of the abortion medications is administered at home, because it is unlikely that the person filling in the HSA4 form will know if the woman experienced a complication following an abortion.

This underreporting is a likely explanation for why there was a re-

duction in reported complication rates in 2020, when at-home abortion was introduced – a reduction referred to by Diana Johnson MP in a speech to Parliament, in which she praised how effective the introduction of at-home abortions had been.

Right To Life UK spokesperson Catherine Robinson urged the Government "to ensure that abortion complications data is accurately collected and reliably reported on."

She also emphasised the "urgent need for the Government to heed calls to reinstate in-person appointments before all abortions take place, to ensure that the gestation of babies can accurately be assessed.

"This is doubly important when you consider that one abortion provider, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, sent out abortion pills to a woman whose baby, Lily, was at least 32 weeks gestation, and given the fact that this does not appear to be an isolated case."

## Archbishop backs call for action on Scottish child poverty

Archbishop of Glasgow William Nolan has joined more than 150 charities, faith groups, trade unions and community organisations from across Scotland in urging First Minister Humza Yousaf to use the upcoming Scottish Budget to drive down child poverty.

They have signed an open letter asking the SNP leader to make good on his leadership campaign commitment to raise the Scottish Child Payment from £25 to £30 a week "as a first step" to meet child poverty targets.

The letter highlights the payment has not been increased for 16 months despite hard-pressed families facing inflation rates that have not been experienced for decades, with low-income households being the worst affected.



Other signatories to the letter include the Children's Commissioner, the general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), and the heads of children's charities and anti-poverty groups.

The coalition believes the First Minister must also prioritise child poverty investment across early learning and childcare, employability, fair work, family support and housing.

They say tens of thousands of children across Scotland are currently locked in poverty and the looming budget is a "critical test" of the Scottish Government's willingness to match its stated ambition of shifting the dial on the problem.

John Dickie, director of the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland, said: "The letter to the First Minister shows a coalition of support for a further increase to the Scottish Child Payment, and a prioritising of ending child poverty.

"The First Minister himself has said his defining mission is to shift the dial on child poverty and that he wants to see the child payment increased to £30. It's now critical for Scotland's children that his tax and spending plans deliver on those commitments."

Dr Mairi Stark, Scotland Officer of The

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), said: "As paediatricians we are well aware of the health impacts of growing up in poverty. The consequences of which will follow children across their life course, taking away opportunities and stop them reaching their full potential.

"The current cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated these already deeply embedded issues and allowed health inequalities to rise dramatically.

To truly improve health outcomes for children and young people, we must first address the effects poverty has on education, housing and social environment.

"We are once again urging the Scottish Government to make the vital increase in the Scottish Child Payment from £25 to £30 to help families in need."

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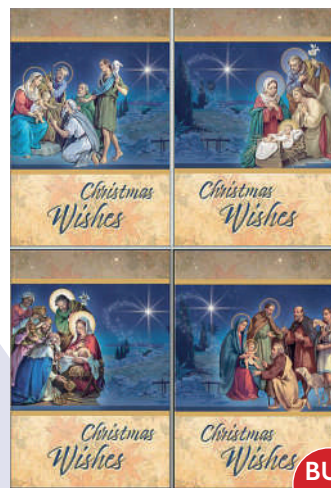
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Pack of 12 Religious Christmas Cards 4.5” x 6.5” (11 x 16 cm) in 4 designs, embossed and gold foil stamped. Four inset nativity designs with holly border, and the words Silent Night, Holy Night, all is Calm, all is Bright below. Inside text: To wish you the Peace of that First Silent Night and the Joy of the First Christmas Day. Ref: X0874 Price: £6.50 + P&P

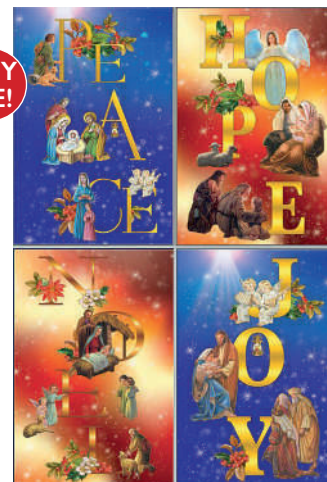


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## Christmas schedule announced

The Vatican has revealed Pope Francis' Christmas liturgy schedule. It includes:

**Christmas Eve:** At 7:30 pm, the pope will celebrate the Mass of the Nativity of the Lord in St. Peter's Basilica.

While the Mass is commonly referred to as 'Midnight Mass', the Vatican celebration has been earlier for more than a decade, to allow the congregation to use public transport to get home.

**Christmas Day:** At noon, Pope Francis gives his message and blessing 'Urbi et orbi' (to the city and the world) from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica.

**New Year's Eve:** At 5pm in St. Peter's Basilica, the pope presides over evening prayer and the chanting of the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving to God for the year that is ending.

**New Year's Day:** At 10 am in the basilica, the pope celebrates Mass for the feast of Mary, Mother of God, and World Peace Day.

**6th January:** At 10 am in St. Peter's, Pope Francis celebrates Mass for the feast of the Epiphany.

**7th January:** At 9:30am in the Sistine Chapel, the pope presides over a Mass for the feast of the Baptism of the Lord and baptises several infants.

## Chaplains praised

University chaplains have been told to continue helping students to dream big and cultivate their gifts by the Holy Father.

"Education is a true mission in which individuals are accepted with a kind of 'parental' love," the pope said.

"This facilitates in a unique way the growth of those seeds that God has sown within each person," he told an audience of university chaplains at the Vatican.

# New illness forces pope to pull out of visit to COP28 summit

Pope Francis has cancelled his planned trip to Dubai this weekend for the UN climate conference on doctors' orders, even though he is recovering from the flu and lung inflammation, the Vatican said.

The announcement marked the second time the pope's sometimes frail health has forced the cancellation of a foreign trip.

He had to postpone a planned trip to Congo and South Sudan in 2022 because of knee inflammation, though he was able to make the trip earlier this year.

Francis revealed on Sunday to Catholic faithful gathered in St Peter's Square for the Angelus prayer that he had a respiratory illness, but at that stage still planned to go to Dubai to address the COP28 climate change conference.

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said Francis's health was improving, but added that "the doctors have asked the pope not to make the trip planned for the coming days to Dubai. Pope Francis accepted the doctors' request with great regret and the trip is therefore cancelled."

Francis, who turns 87 next month, had part of one lung removed as a young man.

Last Sunday he celebrated the Angelus via video link, leading the prayer sat at a desk in his accommodation next to his aide, Mgr Paolo Braida.

The previous day the Vatican had released a statement saying the pope 'underwent a CT scan at Gemelli Isola Hospital in Rome to rule out the risk of pulmonary complications. The test yielded negative results.' However, he cancelled a number of appointments 'due to a slight flu-like condition.'

In his broadcast to the square, the 86-year-old pope told the thou-



The pope prays the Angelus via videolink to crowds in St Peter's after being laid low by a flu-like illness. Below, he keeps track of where Msgr. Paolo Braida is in reading the text of the pope's greetings

sands gathered there that "today I cannot come to the window because I have this inflammation problem in my lungs."

Pope Francis coughed several times during the broadcast and had what appeared to be an IV port covered with a bandage on his right hand. But he recited the Angelus and took the microphone back from Mgr Braida to wish everyone viewing a happy Sunday and a good lunch, and to ask for their prayers.

Pope Francis will be disappointed not to travel to Dubai, where he had a number of meetings planned with politicians and faith leaders, and was also due to address the conference as a whole. He would have been the first pontiff to speak at a UN COP summit.

The climate change issue is clearly something he remains passionate about: in his address on Sunday he referred to it again, saying that it "endangers life on Earth, especially future generations. And this is contrary to the plan of God, who created everything for life." He would



pray for all "committed to safeguarding our common home."

The text also drew people's attention to the previous day's commemoration in Ukraine of "the Holodomor, the genocide perpetrated by the Soviet regime which, 90 years ago, starved millions of people to death."

"That excruciating wound, instead of healing, is made even more painful by the atrocities of the war that continues to make that dear

people suffer," the text said.

The pope also gave God thanks for the temporary truce between Israel and Hamas, and the release of some of the hostages held by Hamas in Gaza. "Let us pray that all of them will be (released) as soon as possible – think about their families! – and that more humanitarian aid enters Gaza."

"For all peoples torn apart by conflict, let us continue to pray without tiring for their salvation."



A nun takes a photo of the Vatican Christmas tree after it was erected this week in St Peter's Square.

The tree, which will be officially unveiled on 9th December, is a fine 82 feet tall White Spruce tree and comes from the Italian Alps region close to the French border. It will be decorated, not with traditional ornaments, but with white edelweiss flowers, found in the Alps region and higher altitudes.

## Governments must not rule roughshod over the law - pope

If upholding a nation's laws is dependent on the politics of those in power or their opinions about who is and is not deserving of protection, then democracy and justice are threatened, Pope Francis said.

"Only the law can constitute the indispensable prerequisite for the exercise of any power, and this means that responsible governments must ensure respect for the rule of law, regardless of political interests," Pope Francis told the International Development Law Organization.

The organisation trains and networks lawyers, jurists and government officials around the world.

Pope Francis said that "when the law is based on universal values, such as respect for humans and the protection of the common good, the

rule of law is strong, people have access to justice, and societies are more stable and prosperous."

But without justice and peace, stability, freedom, human dignity and the Earth itself are threatened.

"In the challenging environment in which we live, marred by severe inter-connected crises, the rise of violent confrontations, the impact of climate change, corruption and inequalities are painfully evident," the pope wrote. "It is therefore more urgent than ever to advocate for people-centred justice to strengthen peaceful, just and inclusive societies."

At a time when people question the legitimacy of governments, he said, restoring trust will require upholding the rule of law and the equality of all citizens before it.

# Migrant weeps as he hears of pope's prayers for dead family

**Cindy Wooden**

When Mbengue Nyimbilo Crepin told Pope Francis of his harrowing journey to Italy and about the deaths of his wife and six-year-old daughter in the desert along the border between Libya and Tunisia, the pope told him he had been praying for them since July.

Nyimbilo, known as 'Pato', sobbed as he shared the story of his family being forced to leave Tunisia, crossing the desert to Libya on foot. He collapsed but urged his wife and daughter to continue.

He eventually made it to Libya, but then he saw photos on social media of his wife and child dead in the desert. Libyan border guards said they found a dozen migrants dead in the desert after Tunisia expelled them.

Meeting Pato and a group of 25 people from *Mediterranea Saving*

Humans, an organisation that networks to operate rescue boats and assist newcomers to Italy, Pope Francis said he had read Pato's story in the Italian Catholic newspaper, *Avvenire*, in July and had seen the photo.

"He said he had been praying for them since July," Father Mattia Ferrari, the organisation's chaplain, said after the meeting.

The group, which was accompanied by Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, spent about an hour with the pope at his residence, the Domus Sanctae Marthae. Several of the migrants were able to share their stories with the pope, Fr Ferrari said.

While those who assist them are volunteers, the priest said it is more accurate to call them 'activists', since their involvement goes well beyond



Pope Francis with the migrants at the Vatican

a few hours a week and includes calling attention to the harsh treatment of migrants in northern Africa and the perils they face as they attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

The meeting was the pope's idea, Fr Ferrari said. He wanted to meet Pato, who originally is from Cameroon. "Moved by his story, Pope Francis listened to his words of gratitude for the meeting and as well as painful stories about the thousands of people who suffer in the attempt

to reach Europe," the Vatican said in a statement.

Another of the migrants was David, from South Sudan, who worked alongside prisoners in detention camps in North Africa. He thanked the pope for his constant encouragement and interventions in favour of migrants," the Vatican said.

"You don't just give us a dream, you welcome us," he is said to have told the pope.

Pope Francis also thanked the activists for their commitment and

reminded them of "the privilege of being born in places where one can study and work," the statement said.

"Privilege is a debt," the pope told them; "what you do is not something extra, it is a duty."

Before saying goodbye to the group "Pope Francis prayed for those present, asking the Lord to watch over those who 'work for others,' those who could not come, those in detention camps and 'the many, many who suffer,'" the Vatican said.

# Standing with the poor is the Gospel way, conference told

An effective proclamation of the Gospel must speak with hope to the real-life problems of the poor, to the need to protect the Earth and to the ability of people of good will to change the social and financial systems that harm the poor and the environment, Pope Francis said at a conference organised by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development to mark 10 years since the publication of *Evangelii Gaudium*, the pope's landmark encyclical outlining his pontificate.

Being a "missionary disciple," he said, means working for the kingdom of God by struggling for justice, providing food to the hungry and working for a fair distribution of goods.

Putting the poor at the centre of one's concern, the pope wrote, "is not politics, is not sociology, is not ideology – it is purely and simply the requirement of the Gospel." The practical implications of that re-

quirement could vary "but what no one can evade or excuse themselves from is the debt of love that every Christian owes to the poor."

Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the dicastery, told participants, that the "joy of the Gospel" comes "from the encounter with the Risen Lord who, passing through the humiliation of the cross, takes upon himself the sin, weakness, miseries and poverty of the human race, so that all might share in his victory over death."

The joy of the Gospel, the cardinal said, gives Christians and the whole church the grace, motivation and strength "to go beyond referring to its own self and move toward the margins, in order to look right at that suffering humanity often considered as mere 'waste,' as inevitable and acceptable 'collateral damage,' as 'necessary sacrifice,' as an 'offering' owed to the idols of consumption."



Pope Francis has asked Italy's Catholic media to steer clear of "superficial and sensationalist" news gathering, at a meeting in the Vatican (left). He also asked them to protect people's privacy and stand with the most vulnerable members of society – "you can be the Davids to the Goliaths, and stand up for society's smallest voices."



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## WORLD

Editorial: Andy Drozdziak – [news@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:news@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)

## Civilians killed in al-Qaida raid

At least 40 civilians were killed last weekend by al-Qaida-linked rebels trying to take control of a besieged town in Burkina Faso's northern region, in an attack the United Nations' rights office called a war crime.

In one of the largest clashes in recent years in the West African nation under threat from fighters linked to al-Qaida and the so-called Islamic State group, a large number of fighters tried to take control of Djibo near Mali's border.

The town, located 130 miles from the capital, Ouagadougou, has been under blockade by rebels for more than a year, often struggling to provide essential services.

The militants in the latest attack, which happened on Sunday, also wounded 42 people and set fire to three camps for internally displaced people, UN Human Rights Office spokesperson Seif Magango said in a statement on Tuesday that blamed the attack on JNIM, an umbrella coalition of armed groups aligned with al-Qaida.

"Deliberately targeting civilians or individuals not taking direct part in hostilities constitutes a war crime," the UN department said, citing reports from its workers on the ground.

State-run RTB Television ran images that showed large groups of people riding motorcycles as they appeared to flee aerial bombardment. "Attacks on civilians are inexcusable and must stop, and those responsible must be held to account following thorough, independent investigations by the authorities," the UN added.

## Outsider Milei asks inside man to run Argentina's finance

Argentina's president-elect Javier Milei has announced Luis Caputo, a former finance minister and Central Bank chief known as an expert in markets, to lead the economy ministry when the right-wing leader takes office on December 10.

The choice confirms that Mr Milei, a libertarian outsider, is building a more orthodox team to manage Argentina's economy, which is suffering from red-hot inflation running at an annual rate of 143%.

As the first finance minister in former conservative president Mauricio Macri's government, Mr Caputo was in charge of a debt restructuring and later became Central Bank chief.

Mr Milei has said he wants to get rid of the Central Bank.

The market has welcomed signs of Mr Milei's more orthodox choices for key cabinet positions.

Argentine stocks and bonds have increased while the local currency, the peso, has appreciated slightly in financial markets since he won the election.

# Israel welcomes hostages home as world pushes for ceasefire

The Vatican has urged international mediators to work to extend the truce in Gaza, in the hope that the territory's Hamas rulers will keep freeing hostages in return for the release of Palestinian prisoners and further respite from Israel's air and ground offensive.

The ceasefire was extended several times during the week, as more hostages were returned to Israel.

But Israel's other major goal – the annihilation of the armed group that has ruled Gaza for 16 years – could be slipping out of reach.

Weeks of heavy aerial bombardment and a ground invasion have demolished vast swathes of northern Gaza and killed thousands of Palestinians.

But it seems to have had little effect on Hamas's rule, evidenced by its ability to conduct complex negotiations, enforce the ceasefire among other armed groups, and orchestrate the smooth release of hostages.

Hamas's leader in Gaza, Yehya Sinwar, and other commanders have likely relocated to the south, along with hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians who have packed into overflowing shelters.

An Israeli ground invasion of the south could eventually ferret out Hamas' leaders and demolish the rest of its militant infrastructure, including miles of tunnels, but at a cost of more Palestinian lives and destruction – something that the United States, Israel's main ally, seems unwilling to bear.



Released Palestinian prisoner Khalil Zamareh embraces his mother as he is received by his family outside his house near Hebron in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Photo Mussa Qwamassa

The Biden administration has told Israel that if it resumes the offensive it must operate with far greater precision, especially in the south.

That approach is unlikely to bring Hamas to its knees any time soon, and international pressure for a lasting ceasefire is already mounting.

Martin Indyk, a former US ambassador to Israel, wrote on X: "How far both sides will be prepared to go in trading hostages and prisoners for the pause is about to be tested, but the pressures and incentives for both to stick with it are at the moment stronger than the incentives to go back to war."

CIA director William Burns and David Barnea, who heads Israel's Mossad spy agency, were in Qatar

on Tuesday to discuss extending the ceasefire and releasing more hostages. Qatar has played a key role in mediating with Hamas, hosted the talks, which also included Egyptian mediators.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit the region this week, and is also expected to push for a longer truce.

A joint statement from foreign ministers of the G7 group of wealthy democracies called for the "further extension of the pause" and for "protecting civilians and compliance with international law".

It is believed that more than 13,500 Palestinians have been killed, roughly two-thirds of them women and minors, according to the health ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza, which does not differentiate

between civilians and combatants.

Officials in Israel said 77 of its soldiers have been killed in the ground offensive, and it claims to have killed thousands of militants, without providing evidence.

The plight of the captives, and the lingering shock from the 7th October attack on its soil by Hamas, has galvanised Israeli support for the war. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also under intense pressure to bring the hostages home, and could find it difficult to resume the offensive if there is a prospect for more releases.

As of Thursday Hamas is still believed to be holding around 150 hostages – enough to extend the ceasefire for another two weeks under the current arrangement of releasing 10 each day.

But it is expected to drive a harder bargain for the release of Israeli soldiers, likely demanding the release of Palestinian prisoners convicted of deadly attacks.

The latest swaps saw nine women and a teenager, as well as two Thai nationals, freed. A total of 60 Israelis have been freed as part of the deal, most of whom appear physically well but shaken.

Another 21 hostages – 19 Thais, one Filipino and one Russian-Israeli – have been released in separate negotiations since the truce began. Before the truce, Hamas released four hostages, and the Israeli army rescued one other.

Two other hostages were found dead in Gaza.

## Pro-democracy activists face jail as Hong Kong court hears final arguments

A Hong Kong court has started hearing the final arguments of some of the city's best-known pro-democracy activists being tried under a law imposed by China's ruling Communist Party to crush dissent.

The activists' subversion trial is the biggest prosecution yet under the law. They could face life in prison if convicted.

The defendants are among 47 activists arrested in 2021 under the sweeping national security law imposed following massive anti-government protests four years ago.

They were charged in connection with an informal 2020 primary election to choose candidates who could win control of the territory's Legislative Council.

Prosecutors accuse the activists of trying to paralyse Hong Kong's government and topple the city's leader by securing a majority to veto budgets.

In court, prosecutor Jonathan Man argued that unlawful means to

subvert state power did not necessarily imply the use of force or physical violence.

He said: "(In) the 21st century, social media, communications to the public is much easier and convenient," adding that it was easy to "manipulate" those channels for some "to endanger national security".

Among the prominent activists on trial are legal scholar Benny Tai, former student leader Joshua Wong and former opposition party leaders Wu Chi-wai and Alvin Yeung.

Most of the 47 activists have been detained without bail for more than two years. Others were granted bail based on strict conditions.

Thirty-one, including Tai, Wong, Wu and Yeung, entered guilty pleas in court, while 16 others pleaded not guilty in February.

One of the defence lawyers, Randy Shek, representing activists Gordon Ng and Winnie Yu, insisted in Wednesday's hearing that his clients were simply seeking to hold those in

power to account, and that "could be not subversion".

Outside the court building, pro-democracy activist Alexandra Wong, popularly known as Grandma Wong, held a placard that read 'Free 47, Free All' and waved a British flag to show her support for those who went on trial.

The trial is widely considered as part of Beijing's crackdown on the former British colony's once-vibrant pro-democracy movement.

After the introduction of the law – which critics say is eroding the autonomy promised when Hong Kong returned to China in 1997 – many pro-democracy politicians and activists were jailed, went into self-exile, or disappeared from the city's political scene.

A large number of young professionals and middle-class families also emigrated due to the erosion of Western-style civil liberties with the Chinese government's crackdown on the territory.



Students at the University of Hong Kong 'Pillar of Shame' during pro-democracy demonstrations in 2019. Photo: Lam Yik



# Kyiv cathedral damaged as Russia launches biggest drone attack yet

Lilia Kovalyk-Vasiuta & Gina Christian

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ was left badly damaged after being struck during Russia's biggest drone attack on Kyiv since the start of the conflict.

Russia launched close to 75 Iranian-made Shahed drones at Ukraine's capital, as Ukrainians marked Holodomor Remembrance Day, which commemorates the seven-10 million victims of an artificial famine created by Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin from 1932-1933 against Ukrainians.

No fatalities were reported, but five individuals were injured.

Ukraine's forces said 74 of the drones had been successfully eliminated but not before they had left a trail of devastation across the city. Kyiv remained under an air raid alert lasting more than six hours.

One Shahed drone was shot down in the Dniprovskiy district of Kyiv, beside the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ and the residence of Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church,



The drone attack wreaked extensive damage to the cathedral

or UGCC.

The debris impacted doors and shattered windows within the cathedral. A nearby multistory building sustained even greater destruction.

The UGCC reported that "six windows in the basement of the Patriarchal Cathedral were damaged," as "the blast wave shattered the glass panes.

"The hardware on four cathedral doors was damaged, and door locks were torn off," said Vasyl Bukatyuk, director of the Construction Direc-

torate at the UGCC Patriarchate.

Bukatyuk said that Major Archbishop Shevchuk's residence also suffered damage. "The hardware on three doors was affected at both the Patriarchal residence and the Patriarchal curia," he said.

Slight damage to the cathedral facade also was documented, and fragments of varying sizes from the drone were gathered on its grounds.

"In return for gifts from St. Nicholas, we'll be receiving unique souvenirs," said Major Archbishop Shevchuk.

According to the Ukrainian Institute for Religious Freedom, around 500 religious sites in Ukraine have been "wholly destroyed, damaged, or looted by the Russian military" between the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022 and January 2023. That number has only increased since then, but evidence has been increasingly difficult to obtain.

The worst hit is Odesa's Ukrainian Orthodox Holy Transfiguration Cathedral, which was hit by a missile and extensively damaged.

It is estimated that Russia has killed more than 10,000 Ukrainian civilians (including 510 children) and injured some 18,500, while committing close to 113,525 documented war crimes.

At least 2.5 million Ukrainians have been forcibly taken to the Russian Federation, and close to 19,600 children are being held in Russian "re-education" camps, with the actual number for the latter feared to be much higher.

An estimated 5.1 million individuals have been internally displaced within Ukraine, and 6.2 million Ukrainians have sought safety abroad since 2022.

## Mali rebels free German priest

A German priest who was abducted by al Qaida-linked rebels in Mali's capital in November 2022 has been released by his captors.

Church members in Bamako said they were delighted to hear of Rev Hans-Joachim Lohre's release late on Sunday, which was announced by his former colleague, Dia Monique Pare.

"Yesterday, while we were at Mass, a member of priest Hans-Joachim Lohre's family told us that they had good news about him," Pare told The Associated Press.

The German Foreign Office confirmed Mr Lohre's release and said he had arrived in Germany. It is not known if a ransom was paid.

Mr Lohre was abducted by al Qaida-linked rebels in Bamako.

It was the first time rebels had seized a foreigner in the Mali capital since their insurgency began a decade ago. Other foreign religious have been abducted, but in more remote parts of the country.

Mr Lohre has been in Mali for more than 30 years and teaches at the Institute of Islamic-Christian Training.

The military government of the West African nation has been struggling to end armed rebellion in parts of the country, with both al Qaida and so-called Islamic State active.

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# US cleric attacks synod for pushing science over faith in sexual issues

**Maria Wiering**

One of the USA's most high-profile Catholics has strongly criticised a report from the recent Synod on Synodality in which it was suggested that scientific advances could prompt a change to the Church's teaching on sexual morality.

Bishop Robert E. Barron said he is in "frank disagreement" with the idea in an essay titled *'My Experience of the Synod'* published on the website of Word on Fire, a media apostolate Bishop Barron founded and leads.

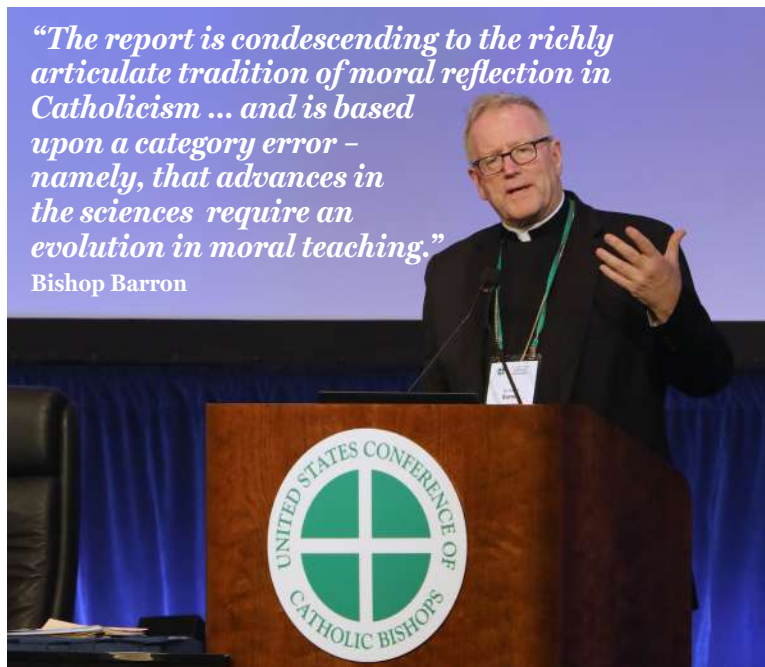
In it he wrote: "The suggestion is made that advances in our scientific understanding will require a rethinking of our sexual teaching, whose categories are, apparently, inadequate to describe the complexities of human sexuality.

His remarks respond to a point in the synthesis report from the synod's first meeting which states: 'Certain issues, such as those relating to matters of identity and sexuality, the end of life, complicated marital situations, and ethical issues related to artificial intelligence, are controversial not only in society, but also in the Church, because they raise new questions. Sometimes the anthropological categories we have developed are not able to grasp the complexity of the elements emerging from experience or knowledge in the sciences and require greater precision and further study.'

It continues: 'Church teaching already provides a sense of direction on many of these matters, but this teaching evidently still

*"The report is condescending to the richly articulate tradition of moral reflection in Catholicism ... and is based upon a category error – namely, that advances in the sciences require an evolution in moral teaching."*

Bishop Barron



requires translation into pastoral practice. Even where further clarification is required, Jesus' actions, assimilated in prayer and conversion of heart, show us the way forward.'

Bishop Barron, who leads the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, said he had two issues with the report's language: first, 'that it is so condescending to the richly articulate tradition of moral reflection in Catholicism, a prime example of which is the theology of the body developed by Pope St. John Paul II.'

'To say that this multi-layered, philosophically informed, theologically dense system is incapable of handling the subtleties of human sexuality is just absurd,'

he wrote.

Additionally, 'the deeper problem I have is that this manner of argumentation is based upon a category error – namely, that advances in the sciences, as such, require an evolution in moral teaching.'

Bishop Barron was among 14 bishops from the United States who attended the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which for the first time included voting lay members among its 363 delegates. The complementarity of faith and science has been a particular area of emphasis for the bishop and Word on Fire, and in February the organisation launched a five-episode series on their intersection called 'Wonder: The

Harmony of Faith and Science.'

Using the example of same-sex attraction, Bishop Barron wrote, 'Evolutionary biology, anthropology, and chemistry might give us fresh insight into the etiology and physical dimension of same-sex attraction, but they will not tell us a thing about whether homosexual behaviour is right or wrong. The entertaining of that question belongs to another mode of discourse.'

He said it is 'troubling to see that some of the members of the German bishops' conference are already using the language of the synod report to justify major reformulations of the Church's sexual teaching.'

'This, it seems to me, must be resisted,' he said.

Bishop Barron said he also questioned whether the synod was too focused on the Church's internal workings instead of its outward mission, whether it seemed to falsely articulate a tension between love and truth, and whether the term "mission" was used too ambiguously, with an emphasis on the church's temporal social responsibilities over its commission to preach the Gospel.

'The primary mission of the Church is to declare the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and to invite people to place themselves under his Lordship,' Bishop Barron wrote. 'This discipleship, to be sure, has implications for the way we live in the world, and it certainly should lead us to work for justice, but we must keep our priorities straight. The supernatural should never be

reduced to the natural; rather, the natural order should be transfigured by its relationship to the supernatural order.'

Bishop Barron praised the synod for its emphasis on broad listening within the Church, addressing Catholics who feel excluded and highlighting the contribution of the laity.

'The very best part of the synod was, of course, coming into close contact with Catholic leaders from all over the world, he wrote. 'In my various small groups – and during the very lively coffee breaks – I met bishops and laity from the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Lithuania, Hong Kong, Germany, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Austria, Australia, and on and on. The four weeks in Rome was a uniquely privileged opportunity to sense the catholicity of Christ's Church – and like it or not, this kind of encounter changes you, compelling you to see that your vision of things is one perspective among many.'

Themed 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission', the synod included a two-year preparation phase to gather input and insights from the global Church. It was organised in two parts, with a second and final gathering of synod delegates scheduled for October 2024.

Bishop Barron noted that 'all of these ideas and experiences from the synod will continue to percolate in the mind of the Church, in preparation for next October,' and asked for prayers 'for the work that we synod members must do both in

## Germans remain calm but focused after Parolin rebuke

Tensions between Rome and the majority of German bishops have increased after Cardinal Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, informing them in an official note that the ordination of only men to the priesthood and the Church's teaching on homosexuality are non-negotiable.

Cardinal Parolin drew "red lines" around the issues, a spokesman for the German bishops said, emphasising that the Vatican did not consider it possible to negotiate on the Church's teaching on homosexuality or the 1994 document *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, in which St. John Paul II reaffirmed the exclusion of women from ordination to the priesthood.

According to German newspaper *Die Tagespost*, the heads of a number of Vatican dicasteries want to meet German bishops in 2024 to discuss what is unchangeable in the Church's doctrine and discipline,

and what can be altered.

The latest letter from Rome also pointed out that a synodal process was currently underway at a global level, and 'it is therefore necessary to respect this path of the Universal Church and to avoid the impression that parallel initiatives are underway that are indifferent to the

ssendeavor to journey together.'

The Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) took the news of the latest rebuke in its stride, with its president, Irme Stetter-Karp, saying that there had been movement on reform in the Vatican – within the curia and also between the curia and the pope.

She said that even before the Synod on Synodality, Cardinal Parolin had said it was impossible to give women voting rights in the synod because that would contradict canon law. "And what did our pope do? Suddenly it was legal and was put into practise at the synod," Stetter-Karp told KNA.

Thomas Soeding, a member of the ZdK's presidium, said there were repeated attempts to "pass off partial truths taken out of context as definitive statements by Rome." The ZdK would not let itself be intimidated by this, he said.

On the contrary, it was positive "that there is and should be a dialogue process between Germany and Rome."

As reported in last week's Universe, Pope Francis recently expressed his concern about initiatives individual dioceses and the broader Church in Germany are taking, including the establishment of a synodal council, which, he said, threaten to steer it away from the Universal Church.

He said in a letter to four German laywomen who had expressed their "doubts and fears" about the outcomes of the Synodal Path in Germany that he feared a break from Rome.

## Bishops' conferences clash over letter to pope

**A row has broken out between the Bishops' Conference of Germany and Poland after a leading Polish cleric told the Vatican to reject German plans for major Church reform.**

**Archbishop Gadecki made his comments in a letter to the pope, but in response, his counterpart in Germany, Bishop Batzing accused him of making "false claims" to the pope and showing "unbrotherly behaviour."**

**Tomasz Krzyzak, a Polish journalist who broke the news about the letter, said the Polish bishops had a right to write to the pope setting out their views, "but it was surprising that they made it public."**

**Archbishop Gadecki also said several German resolutions of the Synodal Path were "extremely unacceptable and un-Catholic." The German Church was, he said, intent on a revolution that**

**was inspired by left-liberal ideologies rather than the Gospel.**

**Bishop Batzing retorted that Archbishop Gadecki had "overstepped his authority" and made clear his dislike for "the tone of your letter and the way in which facts are presented."**

**The Poles "had no right to dismiss ideas coming from another Church region," Batzing concluded.**

# Services mark Holodomor but remember current victims

**Jonathan Luxmoore**

Ukrainian Church leaders led anniversary commemorations of the 1932-1933 Holodomor, or Great Famine, in which millions died in a disaster deliberately engineered by Soviet Union rulers.

“Ninety years ago, Ukrainians were killed in cold blood under the direct order of Stalin’s totalitarian communist regime, which aimed to destroy our people and their identity, forever ending their hopes of freedom,” said the country’s Greek Catholic bishops.

“The genocide of Ukrainians was not an accidental deviation from Moscow’s historical tradition – on the contrary, it was the bloodiest embodiment of a centuries-old ideology of Russian imperialism, which eternally burns with hatred for Ukraine, despises neighbouring nations and greedily encroaches on the world’s space.”

The declaration said “killing by starvation” had been chosen as a “weapon of mass destruction” to ensure long-term domination, while erasing Ukraine’s “language, culture and memory” and “sinking its people and land into the abyss.”

Meanwhile, Ukraine’s Roman Catholic bishops described the Holodomor as the Ukrainian people’s “great historical tragedy,” adding that it had inflicted a “slow and terrible death on millions of innocent people” in one of the world’s richest territories.

“Recognising the horrors of the ‘harvest of death’ that claimed the lives of millions, we, as the Church and people, have become stronger and better understand the dimensions of the evil we can face.

“The current war for the independence of our Motherland is a continuation of that ancient struggle. The Russian authorities

employ the same forms of intimidation and destruction against Ukraine,” the bishops said.

“May this National Day of Remembrance serve all of us in uniting against all forms of visible and invisible evil. Let us pray for those who today suffer from hunger – our defenders on the front line, internally displaced persons affected by the war, and those enduring years within it,” Catholic bishops wrote.

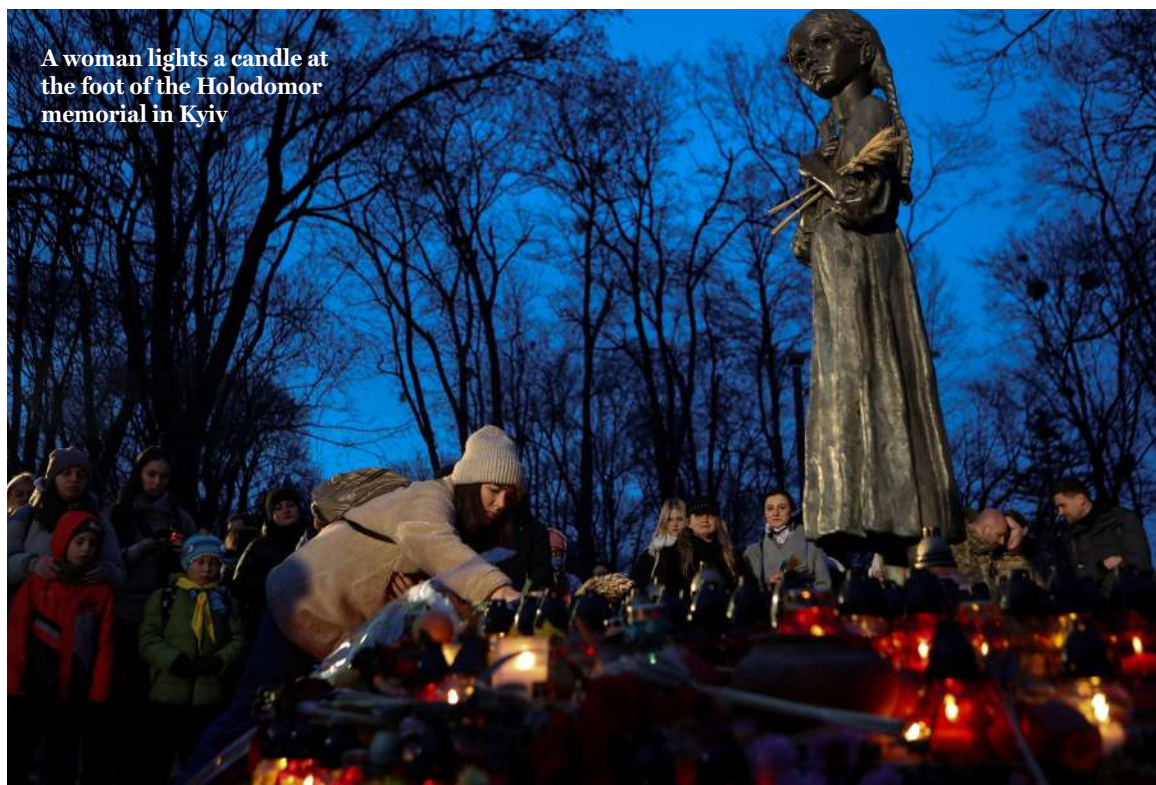
Around four million people perished, according to official Ukrainian data, in the 22-month Holodomor, which followed the Soviet Union’s confiscation of crops and blocking of humanitarian aid to areas resisting agricultural collectivisation, all the while exporting Ukrainian grain overseas.

The outrage, acknowledged by Moscow only in 1990, was accompanied by the closure of most Ukrainian churches, and has been recognised as genocide so far by over 30 countries, including the United States and Holy See.

The pope said after his Angelus prayer last weekend that the “genocide perpetrated by the Soviet regime” had inflicted a “lacerating wound,” which had been made “even more painful due to the cruelty of the war.”

The Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, told a memorial service in Rome’s Sant’Andrea della Valle Basilica that memory of the Holodomor was matched by sympathy for the countless people who had died in the “merciless ongoing war” facing Ukraine, adding that the “seeds of death” were always sown when “a person claims to be master of history and tries to take the place of God.”

The anniversary was marked in by Masses and liturgies, and by an



A woman lights a candle at the foot of the Holodomor memorial in Kyiv

ecumenical service in Kyiv’s historic Pechersk-Lavra Monastery, attended by President Zelensky and other foreign politicians.

Zelensky said Soviet rulers had not bothered to count starvation victims, later suppressing knowledge of the Holodomor.

The current war had shown “in real time what Russia is capable of,” the president added, as Moscow’s forces again inflicted “famine, cold and terror” by targeting Ukraine’s civilian infrastructure and grain exports.

The commemorations were marred by mass Russian drone

attacks on Kyiv, which damaged the capital’s Greek Catholic patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection and adjoining buildings.

“We ask for a more active dissemination of truth about the war in Ukraine, so the enemy’s false propaganda does not find a place in people’s hearts,” the Greek Catholic bishops said. “The empire failed to kill Ukraine 90 years ago. But the descendants of the killers, driven by evil and hatred, have decided to complete what their predecessors failed to do. Russia’s unprovoked, genocidal war against Ukraine has the same goal that the Kremlin set

during the Holodomor: liquidation of the Ukrainian people and destruction of their freedom and future,” they emphasised.

A resolution marking the Holodomor anniversary, signed by 55 UN members, including the US, UK and EU, also paid tribute to “millions of people of other nationalities who died of starvation and repression in other parts of the Soviet Union,” and called for efforts “to prevent the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, in particular by disrupting production and supply chains that increases global food insecurity.”



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Public Engagement by Catholics for the Common Good



The Sagrada Família is a majestic sight: “Gaudi’s evangelical and evangelising approach can only come from someone who is very united to God and exudes holiness”

# Devout Gaudi’s majestic Barcelona masterpiece moves closer to completion as the Tower of Evangelists is blessed

**Begola Aragonese**

It seemed like one of Antonio Gaudi’s dreams come true.

On 12th November the papal nuncio to Spain, Archbishop Bernardito Auza, blessed the towers of the Evangelists of the famous Sagrada Família basilica in Barcelona. Gaudi, a legendary Catalan architect, started working on the now-iconic basilica 140 years ago, and was working on it up to his death in an accident in 1926. Five generations now have watched the temple’s progress.

Gaudi was a man of prayer. The anecdote goes that when he was entrusted with the restoration of the cathedral on the Spanish island of Mallorca in 1903, 20 years into his work on the Sagrada Família, he spent a full year going to the temple in the mornings to absorb it. Only then, when he had observed, felt, touched and prayed over the place,

he presented his project to the bishop.

The Barcelona basilica’s rector, Mgr. Josep Maria Turull, told the Spanish Catholic weekly *Alfa y Omega* that, if Gaudi were alive, he would be “very happy,” without caring about the extra century of work, because, as he used to say, the “master is in no hurry.”

“This spectacular thing,” added the rector in reference to the work of the Catalan architect, “is not the result of a dream on a summer night, but of a lot of time of meditation, work, and prayer.” Every day when he finished

*“This spectacular thing is not the result of a dream on a summer night, but of a lot of time of meditation, work, and prayer. ...every day when he finished working, Gaudi went to the basilica where, always on the same bench, he sat to pray...”*

working, the architect went to the basilica where, always on the same bench, he sat to pray. He also regularly travelled to the Oratory of St. Philip Neri for confession and spiritual accompaniment, “so that what he built was coherent theologically and liturgically,” Mgr. Turull said.

“Gaudi’s evangelical and evangelising approach can only come from someone who is very united to God and exudes holiness,” the priest added.

The architect’s idea, Mgr Turull pointed out, was that from the street the eyes should rise upward:

The first thing you see are the 12 towers of the Apostles. If you continue, you reach the towers of the Evangelists, which “lead us to raise our gaze a little higher,” toward the tower of Jesus Christ, which is scheduled for completion in 2026.

“Beauty is capable of opening the mouth of admiration and heart to God,” said Mgr Turull, which is what happens to people when they go to the Sagrada Família. Gaudi manages to provoke amazement, he added, that which Pope Francis speaks of as a fundamental element of the liturgy and that opens up to God. In the celebrations in the temple, “everything, the space, the light, the music, leads us to live the mystery and, as Gaudi wanted, in each Eucharist we participate in the heavenly Jerusalem and in the maximum communion with God.”

Archbishop Auza said during his

homily that the towers “push us to be witnesses of the Lord in the middle of the world,” like the Evangelists, “that in unison evoke the presence of Christ.” He also indicated how these new elements “move us all to look where Gaudi truly looked, to the incarnate word of God in Mary.”

Concelebrating alongside the nuncio were Cardinal Juan Jose Omella of Barcelona, Cardinal Lluís Martínez Sistach, the retired archbishop of Barcelona, and Auxiliary Bishop David Abadías of Barcelona. Regional politicians were present among the 2,000 people gathered for the event.

After the Mass, the four newly opened towers were blessed. “The blessing is a way of putting them in God’s hands and asking them to be an instrument so that his good reaches more people,” Archbishop Auza said. Thus, just as Mary’s



Above, the Tower of the Evangelists lit up on completion. Now just one tower remains - the Tower of Jesus Christ, which is expected to be completed in 2026

tower “lit the star of hope in so many hearts,” in this case the towers “would like to invite us to rediscover the four Gospels in order, through them, to know Jesus Christ better, to love him more and to follow him more intensely,” the nuncio said.

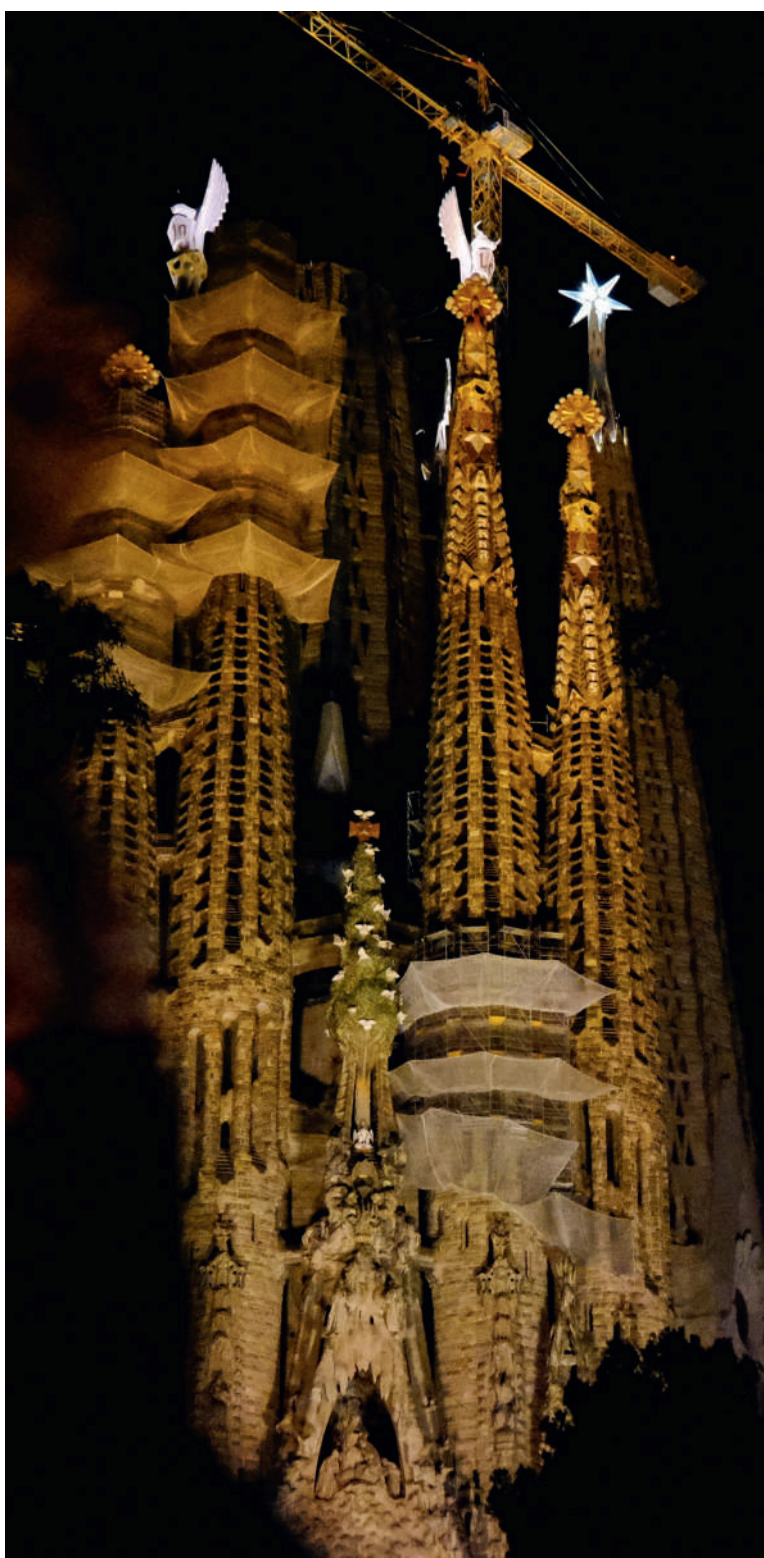
Construction work on the towers of the Evangelists began in 2016. They surround the future tower of Jesus Christ and measure 442 feet high. First were those of Luke and Mark, finished in 2022 with the placement of the figures with which they are identified: the ox in the first case, and the lion in the second. Since the end of September 2023 one could see the completed one of Matthew, with the human figure, and John, with the eagle.

The sculptures are the work of Xavier Medina-Campeny, a Spanish sculptor.

Of the six towers designed by Gaudi for the Sagrada Família, the one of Mary was inaugurated for the feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8th December, 2021. It is crowned by a 12-pointed star 24 feet in diameter.

The first thing the people of the neighborhood do in the morning, Mgr Turull observed, “is to look at Mary’s star, and the last thing at night is to entrust themselves to Mary before going to sleep.” A star that “fills many sick people and older people with hope.”

With the completion of the Jesus Christ tower scheduled for 2026, the construction work on the entire Sagrada Família is expected to be completed. The final tower will reach a height of 565 feet, making it the tallest in the Sagrada Família, the tallest building in Barcelona and the tallest church tower in the world.



## Inspiration for Victor Hugo’s kindly bishop moves closer to beatification

**Caroline de Sury**

If classical literature characters could become saints, France has a perfect example. The real bishop behind Victor Hugo’s famous *Les Misérables* character is likely to be beatified after the French bishops, while meeting in Lourdes for their plenary assembly, voted in favour of opening the diocesan process for his beatification.

The cleric in question is Bishop Bienvenu de Miollis (1753-1843) who was the Bishop of Digne from 1805 to 1838 and an inspiration for Victor Hugo’s character Bishop Myriel in the novel *Les Misérables*, published in 1862.

In the novel – which is possibly more famous as a stage play and a film in modern times – Bishop Myriel was close to the poor and lived a sober life. He took in the main character, Jean Valjean, who had just been released from the penal colony. The next day, Valjean was recaptured by the police for stealing Bishop Myriel’s silverware. But the prelate pretended it was a gift, and doing so, he saved Valjean from re-arrest. This gesture of mercy marked the beginning of a profound transformation of Valjean, which continued throughout the book. He remained attached to the memory of the bishop all his life.

The current Bishop of Digne, Emmanuel Gobillard, who took on the role 217 years after Bishop de Miollis, says that “many elements of the novel are based on real events.” He pointed out, while sat in his picturesque diocese in southern France, not far from Marseille and the border with Italy, “that the true story of Miollis is quite similar to what Victor Hugo recounted.”

Ordained a priest in 1777, he was Bishop of Digne for 33 years, in the troubled times that followed the French Revolution and in the era of Emperor Napoleon. He was particularly concerned about catechising in rural areas and with educating the poorest.

“He was poor, wrote nothing, had no mystical experience, but he spent his time on the road, visiting the parishes of his diocese,” Bishop Gobillard said. “The faithful of the diocese said he was a saint, already at that time.”

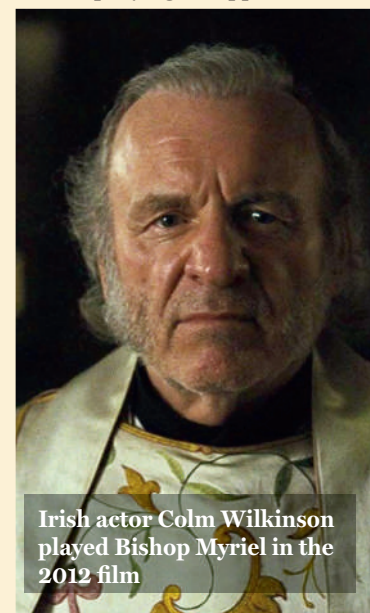
Renowned for his kindness, Bishop de Miollis was very attentive to the poor and beggars, whom he gathered together at the

Hospice of Charity, and lived very modestly himself. In 1806, Bishop de Miollis took in a freed convict by the name of Pierre Maurin, whom no-one wanted to shelter, and looked for ways to help him regain his dignity – a story that closely resembles the treatment of Valjean, and which inspired the author of *Les Misérables*.

After retiring for health reasons, the bishop moved to his sister’s home. The sister of the fictional Bishop Myriel also appeared as a character in Hugo’s novel.

When Bishop de Miollis died in 1843, aged 90, a “crowd of common people came to his funeral,” Bishop Gobillard said. He was buried in the Cathedral of Saint Jérôme in Digne-les-Bains. “There was real popular jubilation for him,” Bishop Gobillard said.

The current bishop of Digne said that in the mission statement accompanying his appointment in



Irish actor Colm Wilkinson played Bishop Myriel in the 2012 film

2022, Pope Francis encouraged him to “follow the example of Mgr de Miollis,” particularly by making pastoral visits to his diocese.

“That is what I am trying to do,” he said. “I am on the road all year round, visiting parishes.”

He prefers not to use his car for his pastoral visits. When ever possible, he uses the French online car-sharing for people wishing to travel together and share the cost of the journey.

“It is an opportunity to meet people, especially young people,” Bishop Gobillard said. “Most of them have never heard of Christ. But when I read them a page of the Gospel – I witness real interest and wonder!”

# Delicious refugee recipes and Thanksgiving Mass mark JRS Founder's Day celebrations

**Eileen Cole shares about this month's celebration of the founding of JRS, and underlines how Jesus Christ is at the heart of their mission to make refugees' voices heard and of denouncing the injustices they suffer.**

14th November is kept every year as Founder's Day by all involved in the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) around the world, with benefactors, partners and friends.

That's what refugees are called at JRS – friends.

Fr Michael Holman SJ, Chair of the Management Committee of JRS UK, celebrated a Thanksgiving Mass at St Patrick's Church Wapping, which was followed, and enjoyed, by a delicious shared lunch prepared by refugee friends of JRS at the nearby Hurtado Jesuit Centre.

Ali, one of the volunteer cooks, commented: "We started very early in the morning as there were a lot of people to cook for. I'm so happy to volunteer. I like making curries, but I'm also very happy to do the washing up – I'm happy to do anything. Helping others makes me feel very good."

Fr Michael recalled how, on this day in 1980, Pedro Arrupe, then the Superior General of the Jesuits, signed a letter to the whole society announcing the creation of this new ministry and apostolate. "St Ignatius called us to go anywhere where we are most needed for the greater glory of God", Fr Arrupe said in a speech at the time. "The spiritual as well as the material need of more than 16 million refugees throughout the world [at that time] could scarcely be greater. God is calling us through these helpless people."

## The Mission of JRS

JRS was to be Fr Arrupe's last initiative as Superior General, his "swansong to the society". The following year Arrupe visited the Far East, a trip which included a meeting in Bangkok with Jesuits involved with refugee camps for boat people from Vietnam. On his return to Rome on 7th August, Fr Arrupe suffered a stroke at Fiumicino Airport. He was to be incapacitated for the remaining 10 years of his life.

That letter to the society, 43 years ago, set out the vision, mission and methodology of JRS which remain largely unchanged today.

The mission of JRS is to be present among refugees: to accompany them in their trials, to share in their joys and sorrows, to help them as far as possible to improve their situation and to keep alive the hope of their future. As such, JRS is not only a work of charity but one of justice – a way of making refugees' voices heard, of making known their needs and their rights, of denouncing the injustices they suffer. JRS is also a work of evangelisation: bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to those who do not know him; of strengthening the faith of those who already possess it, and encouraging the growth of the Church that is truly universal, open to all cultures, all races and people.

The British Jesuit and former provincial, Fr Michael Campbell



"It was wonderful to see so many friends together again, like it was before Covid. It's so important to see people's faces and share food together. I met so many friends – and the food was abundant and delicious."

Johnson, 'CJ' to his friends, who died just six weeks ago, worked with Fr Arrupe as his secretary for justice, and was involved in setting up JRS. He wrote that Arrupe was a prayerful man, a holy man, continually looking for what more he could do, never resting, not complacent but desiring the more of the Kingdom of God. CJ recalled that, as Arrupe and his general council discussed the plight of the Vietnamese boat people, his reaction was: "What would St Ignatius have done if he were here today?" Like Ignatius, Fr Arrupe was deeply attached to the person of Jesus, a companion of Jesus, alongside the suffering Jesus and alongside those who suffered with Jesus.

## 'For me, Jesus Christ is everything'

During one interview on Italian TV, Fr Arrupe was unexpectedly

asked: "Fr Arrupe, who is Jesus Christ for you?"

"For me", he replied, "Jesus Christ is everything. Take Jesus from my life, and it would be like taking away my head, my heart, and all my bones. For me, Jesus Christ is everything."

Referring to this, Fr Michael said: "As I see it, JRS was born out of Fr Arrupe's strong attachment to Jesus – the Jesus who, as we read in the Gospels, chose to become poor, associated with the poor, preached the good news to and among the poor, denounced those who oppressed the poor and preached that the last would be first in the Kingdom of God."

In his homily, Fr Michael said: "Today, we have much to be grateful for: for Fr Arrupe, for all working in JRS, for the many men and women in the UK and around the world whom we are fortunate to count among our co-workers and our collaborators."

## Praying for JRS

Today, we pray for those in JRS working in the most dangerous

parts of the world: that they be kept safe and that their work may prosper.

"We should pray as well for a conversion of heart: for a greater understanding of and sympathy for the situation of our refugee friends, for reconciliation and that more in this country will reach out the hand of friendship to them."

After the event, Sr Rose Mary Harbinson, a volunteer and supporter of JRS, said: "It was wonderful to see so many friends together again, like it was before Covid. It's so important to see people's faces and share food together. I met so many friends – and the food was abundant and delicious."

Refugee friend Josephine's face lit up when she spoke about the day: "A fantastic day! It made me very happy to be with so many different people, praying, chatting, eating lovely food... I felt so different after."

"It is very important to bring people together. I really like the people here at JRS, their support and friendship."



Left, Founder's Day staff and friends. Below, Fr Michael Holman SJ and Sr Rose Mary Harbinson



## A VIEW FROM THE PEWS



MICHAEL CAINE  
ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, LYMM, CHESHIRE

# God gave us free will to fail - but prayed we would not

I often think about God and especially why he revealed himself to us. We simple human beings can only guess why he did so, because we don't have the phenomenal knowledge and wisdom of God.

When I first started thinking about this years ago, I asked myself: Why does God want us to know him?

I was sure that he has everything he would ever want, and if not, He could create anything. It was this that prompted me to ask: "If a phenomenal intelligence such as God wanted us to know him, could it be because He wanted something challenging and new?"

If it was, then where can we find any evidence? I wasn't surprised to realise it was all in that wonderful book we call the Bible, which was written by God's prophets and the

disciples of Jesus, His Son. It tells us how God first revealed himself to humans, and made covenants with them to test their love of and obedience to their creator.

Using his son, our Lord Jesus Christ, his final covenant was to ask us to love of him and our neighbours. To make sure that the human side of this covenant made sense, he granted human beings two extra-special things: *free will; and an eternal spiritual soul.*

Free will allowed human beings to obey, or not, God's demands about love, with no direct interference from anyone, including God himself. The reward for obeying God's demands about love was that the eternal spiritual soul of every human would live with Him in Heaven for all eternity when their human bodies died. If



'Satan is the fallen angel of God, who desires the souls of all human beings to go to Hell for all eternity when they die.'  
*Get Thee Behind Me, Satan* by Ilya Repin, 1895

they did not obey, then their soul would perish in Hell for all eternity.

This all sounded simple, but there were two things that could be used to make sure people did not obey God's covenant: they were *desire*, and *Satan*.

Desire is the human emotion

which urges people to do specific things. When used in moderation it is not a problem but when used by human beings in excess, it can cause such things as wars, genocide, hatreds, jealousies, and others. They result in human beings not obeying God's covenant.

We call this sinning, a great way to lose one's soul to Hell.

Satan is the fallen angel of God, who desires the souls of all human beings to go to Hell for all eternity when they die. He uses very effective and relentless temptations to get humans to disobey God's covenant, thus losing their souls.

All this is explained in the Bible. In it, and to prove God's never-ending love for us, His son, Jesus Christ tells, shows, and explains lots of ways of obeying God's covenant. If you do not have a Bible, you're missing a phenomenal source of inspiration for all Catholics.

We only know of all this because God not only revealed himself to us, but he had his ancient prophets and Christ's disciples record everything, so that all peoples and

## JOURNEY IN FAITH

## The coming of the Christ Child

This Sunday, 3rd December, is the first Sunday of the season of Advent, the first Sunday of the yearly liturgical cycle of prayer that tells the story of our Redemption.

It is a brief period of four weeks, a pathway that leads us to the feast of the Nativity. Leaving the month of November behind, the Northern hemisphere enters the chill of winter as we welcome the last calendar month of the year, December.

This year, we greet the Lord in times of turbulence and war. For weeks we have watched explosive dust clouds hover over the city of Gaza, heard of the daily loss of life, seen images of wrecked buildings and burnt-out cars. Indeed, a high price is being paid for the vicious attack by Hamas on Israel.

Churches, hospitals and schools have all suffered under the relentless firing of the guns as countless families seek safety and shelter in Gaza City and others take the road south towards the border crossing with Egypt, carrying hastily gathered bundles.

Yet still in our churches, Advent wreaths, green holly and ivy are being laid in our sanctuaries, with four purple candles in a ring round the central white candle, four Sundays on a journey that leads to Bethlehem.

It was on a journey to Bethlehem, a small town in Judea, that Joseph and Mary set out. And so we retell the story of Advent again this year, knowing that our journey leads us once more to a child in a stable born to a family on the move.

The poem below, *Advent*

*Calendar*, was written by former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and published in his first poetry collection, *After Silent Centuries*, in 1994.

*Advent Calendar* was set to music by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies as one of the 44 Anthems in the *Choir book for the Queen* which was launched at Southwark Cathedral in November 2011.

### Advent Calendar

*He will come like last leaf's fall.  
One night when the November wind  
has flayed the trees to the bone,  
and earth  
wakes choking on the mould,  
the soft shroud's folding.*

*He will come like frost.  
One morning when the shrinking earth  
opens on mist, to find itself  
arrested in the net  
of alien, sword-set beauty.*

*He will come like dark.  
One evening when the bursting red  
December sun draws up the sheet  
and penny-masks its eye to yield  
the star-snowed fields of sky.*

*He will come, will come,  
will come like crying in the night,  
like blood, like breaking,  
as the earth writhes to toss him  
free.  
He will come like child.*



### CONGREGATION OF OUR LADY OF FIDELITY



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#### Contact details:

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Congregation of Our Lady of Fidelity  
Off Hermitage Road, SE19 3FA  
Email: sr\_bernadette\_vfcss@hotmail.com

# Don't hide your talents, they are a gift from God

There are talents, and there are talents. To use what God has given you for a good cause must surely rank as the greatest of talents.

Life is God's gift, and He wants us to use it well. Not only is God our Creator, He endows us with talents which He wants us to use responsibly. Never dim your talent, no matter how small. Bring it to light so you and others can benefit from it.

The parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30) tells the story of the master (who represents God) who gives five talents, two talents, and one talent to three different people to be used responsibly.

The two who received five and two talents doubled their value. But the one who received one talent played it safe, and buried his talent in the ground.

When the day of reckoning came round, the master praised the first two for doubling their talents but had harsh words for the one who produced nothing from what he was given. That is why the Lord says, "For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (Matthew 25:29).

If you don't use it you lose it, is a wise maxim. Every talent, no matter how small, has a purpose. Arthur F. Miller has written a powerful book on 'The Power of Uniqueness' which challenges everyone to discover their own

talents because everybody is gifted in some way. The important thing is to discover your talent, to delight in it and to develop it. Whatever your talent is, it should not be hoarded or hidden. You must let it shine. "You are the light of the world," says the Lord, and your "light should not be hidden under a bushel basket, but placed where everyone can see it" (Matthew 5:14–1).

The parable of the talents teaches us that we are put on earth for a purpose, to use what we have to make the world a better place. The Lord does not want us to hide our talents, to sit back and wait for something to happen. We are asked to use our talents to the best of our ability. Had the third servant, who received just one talent, made the most of what he received, he could have doubled it like the others. Our job is not to compare our talents to those of others, but to make the most of what the Lord has given us.

The problem with the person who received just one talent, was that he was afraid to develop it according to his capacity and share it. So, he kept it hidden. Holding out or playing it safe may seem like the best approach in today's terrifying world. We've all been the third servant at some point in our lives. How often have you failed to speak up for someone who is falsely accused? Have you spared yourself the effort of standing up for the gospel truth when it was easier to go along with falsehood? Have you



failed to come to the aid of someone in need? You don't have to look far to do this. How do you treat those near and close to you? Do you take them for granted, or do you try to raise their spirits when they are down? The list goes on. Sometimes it feels like you can get away with such behaviour, but

isn't that exactly what the third servant thought? The message of the parable is that you will be held accountable for your actions or lack thereof, for your sins of commission or omission.

Your talents are not for you alone. They are given for the benefit of others. God blessed you

with your talent or talents for the joy you may give in return. Even the smallest thing can make a big difference. Whatever your talent is, no matter how small or large, you are responsible for developing it, sharing it, and passing it along.

This is how your talent increases and multiplies.

## We don't need a fanfare to give generously

**"Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."**

Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6:3

The above scripture verse from the Gospel of Matthew is a proverbial expression that indicates the importance of anonymity when it comes to almsgiving or helping the needy.

In Hebrew literature, it was customary to attribute to members of the body; such as the hand, the eye, or the ear, actions which properly belonged to the person.

Thus the performance of acts of charity was attributed to the hand which should operate in secret; so secret, in fact, that the left hand would not be aware of what the right hand was doing. In many cases, almsgiving to the poor was perceived as 'lent to the Lord' (Proverbs 19:17), and would be repaid in the next life, and also in this life.

The importance of anonymity in almsgiving runs counter to the culture in which we live. Some time ago, I was approached by members of a business in town who offered to donate food to our food bank. Naturally, I was delighted

with this offer, and I explained to the donors the days and times we distributed food to the needy.

When the donated food was eventually delivered to our food bank, I observed that several people were also distributing advertising materials for their business. I put a stop to this practice, and elaborated on the scriptural verse that the left hand should not let the right hand know what it is doing. Those present listened to me politely, but never donated any more food to our food bank after that. They wanted a *quid pro quo*.

The Lord teaches us that whenever we

give alms, we must do so from a spiritual motive to please God, not to be rewarded by men. Those who seek the plaudits of men when they give alms have already received their own reward (Matthew 6:2).

When you take least notice of your good deeds, God takes most notice of them. So, when you are giving, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

And, don't let anyone else know either, unless it is for the benefit of all. Unless you are trying to change people's incentives, you do the most good when your good deeds are kept quiet.



## LITURGICAL MUSIC

Paul Ashton



In this month's look at liturgical music, we are really getting into Christmas music – both music to play, and music to listen to. My criteria to be included here is that any collection or album had to include an element of sacred music.

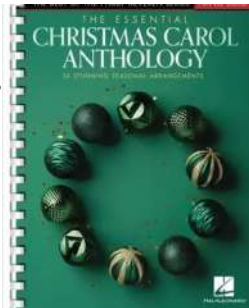
## Christmas sheet music collections

A round-up of new publications for the organ and piano

### The Essential Christmas Carol Anthology (Piano)

Arranged by Phillip Keveren, this book brings together 36 piano solos and includes seven seasonal medleys perfect for recitals, church performances, or personal enjoyment.

The book is comb-bound which we musicians love - the pages will always stay open. Songs include: *Angel Suite Medley (Angels We Have Heard on High, Angels from the Realm of Glory, etc)*, *Deck the Hall, Go, Tell It on the Mountain, The Holly and the Ivy, Joy to the World* and more. Hal Leonard £28.33.



### The Oxford Book Of Christmas Music For Organ, Bk 2

This compilation features 37 outstanding selections ideal for carol services and concerts. Among them are new compositions by notable composers such as Andrew Carter, Gerre Hancock, and David Willcocks. Oxford University Press £23.50

### Christmas Organ Favourites 21 Festive Pieces for Organ

Published in 2022 but worth mentioning now. A nice selection of pieces arranged for intermediate level including bass pedals. There are a number of pieces by Noel Rawsthorne and what looks to be a quite playable *Noël Étranger* - Louis D'Aquin (Daquin).

Publisher: Kevin Mayhew £19.99



This year, I have seen a big increase in self-published books and, in fact, Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing is a way to enable composers and arrangers to do this easily. These are printed on demand and arrive within a couple of days of you placing your order on the Amazon website. With Christmas music, in general, people want to hear the stuff they all know and love and so the publishing market, as with the books already mentioned above, is very much about new arrangements of those well-known carols and songs.

### The Giant Book of Christmas Sheet Music For Piano

One such arranger is Henry White, who has self-published three books of Christmas music this year through Amazon. I like his approach, making it easy for beginners and pianists of all ages. His own write-up of each book oozes with enthusiasm, for the fun and spirit of Christmas of these 'timeless classics'.

These are books of music to be enjoyed at home with friends and family - all very reasonably priced at about £12 each.

Search for 'Henry White' on Amazon.

### Christmas Collection II - 10 Pieces for Pipe Organ (Paul Fey)

Another enthusiastic self-publisher is organist Paul Fey from Leipzig. He publishes his own arrangements in a very traditional style and are certainly for the more accomplished organist, although they are described as all skill levels. These are available on his website

<https://www.paulfeyorganist.com>

Titles include: *Fanfare on 'Joy to the World'*, *Meditation on 'In the Bleak Midwinter'*, *Carol of the Bells (Arr. for Organ)*, *Meditation on 'O Holy Night'*, *Meditation on 'The First Noel'*, *Toccata on 'Adeste Fideles'*. Paul Fey demonstrates many pieces on his videos so you know what you are buying.

Price €34,95

### Reflections for Christmas - Piano Solos (Mark Heyes)

The website declares: "Ten of the most popular and beloved contemporary Christmas songs are arranged here for solo piano." I have to say I didn't know all these titles. However, I did enjoy all the pieces and the arrangements. I like Hope Publishing's way of including videos for each of their titles. I recommend this book.

Online download. \$23.95

Hope Publishing <https://www.hopepublishing.com>

## A Prayer for Deliverance

Last month I went to see *Tenebrae* at the Bridgewater Hall. The Bridgewater has a great acoustic for such small choral ensembles and leads to a great atmosphere - usually.

Just as the concert was about to start, an announcement was made that the audience should not applaud except for the end of the first half and at the final of the second. Well, OK. There were no introductions at any time during the whole concert. The choir sang, of course, beautifully. And then the music stopped. Awkward silence. Then coughing. This repeated six times as each piece in the first half finished. The embarrassed silence, coughing instead of applause and, in fact, tension was building. The same happened in the 2nd half. Yes, perhaps the intention was to create a mood and an atmosphere, but this was not achieved as intended.

The singing was amazing, totally polished, but then lacking in personality. The highlight of the evening was Joel Thompson's *A Prayer For Deliverance*. Joel Thompson was in the audience and, thankfully, as this was the end of the first half, he was able to receive the thunderous applause his composition and the performance deserved. *Tenebrae's* recordings are amazing. Do listen to them on CD or Spotify.



Andrea Bocelli: A Family Christmas is a must-buy for fans of the Italian tenor



## CD reviews: what's new, or just great for Christmas

Again, as with the books, we have a mix of sacred and secular. These are all available as CDs and on Spotify and other streaming services. All of these are going to be part of my Christmas playlist.

Starting off with my popular music selections.

### David Foster and Katharine McPhee: The Greatest Christmas Hits

I have to say, unusual - definitely worth a listen

### Andrea Bocelli: A Family Christmas

This is definitely a family sing-a-long (that's his family, I mean!)

### Gregory Porter: Christmas Wish

Perhaps the most tenuous inclusion on this list. I can listen to Gregory Porter anytime of year.

Finally, one on the Motown Gospel label: **LaTocha, This Christmas**

### Now to the artists of a more classic nature.

### Pentatonix: The Greatest Christmas Hits

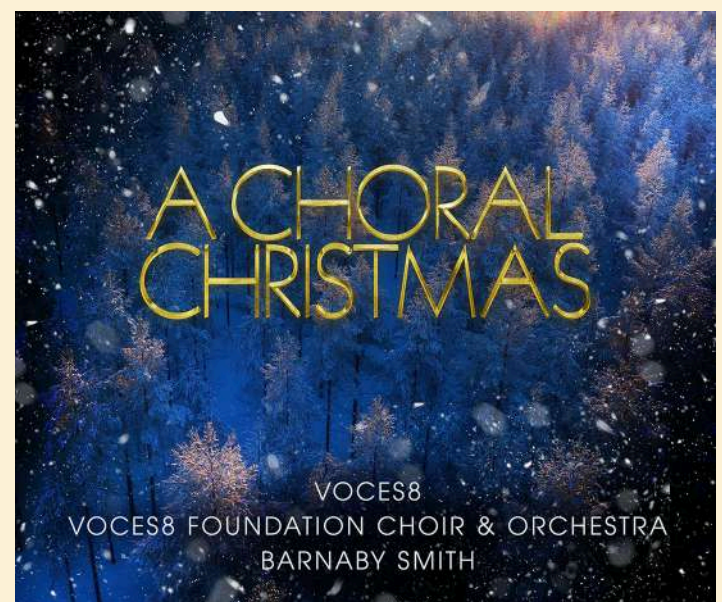
This is a new compilation of their a cappella songs but includes many tracks you will already know.

### Lise Davidsen: Christmas from Norway

Norway's opera singer gives us a selection of wonderful music.

### VOCES8: A Choral Christmas

1 hour and 9 minutes of outstanding choir and orchestra. This is my personal favourite.



A personal favourite

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS...

JENNA MARIE COOPER



# Too early... or too late – just when should I put my Christmas tree up?

**Q: When I was a child, we put up the Christmas tree on Christmas Eve and took it down a day or two after Christmas. As an adult, I put the tree up a day around the end of November and left it up until January 2nd. Now as a Catholic, what is the best way for me to handle the Christmas tree? When does it go up and when does it come down?**

**A:** Unlike certain other kinds of holiday decorations, such as an Advent wreath, a Christmas tree is neither a sacramental nor part of a liturgy. Because of this, there are no strict right or wrong answers as to when a Catholic should put up or take down a Christmas tree. Yet depending on your family's own particular holiday traditions and spiritual needs, there are some dates that might be especially appropriate in your own household.

In terms of when to put up a Christmas tree, there is nothing to prevent a Catholic from setting up a Christmas tree around the end of November if they so choose. But for other families, waiting until Christmas Eve to set up a tree could be a helpful way of respecting the season of Advent as a time of quiet and even penitential preparation for the coming of Christ. In contrast to the secular emphasis on pre-Christmas celebrations, waiting until Christmas to set up a tree makes it clear that Advent is not Christmas, but rather its own important season of waiting.

Of course, it's always possible to find a middle ground. For example, perhaps a family could set up a Christmas tree earlier on during Advent, but only start decorating it closer to Christmas.

Or, you could take some cues from our liturgy as for when to set up your Christmas tree. One option would be to wait until Gaudete Sunday – the “pink” Sunday of the third week of Advent – when the Church's prayers specifically tell us to rejoice at the closeness of Jesus' upcoming birthday.

Another liturgically fitting day to set up a Christmas tree would be 17th December, one week before Christmas Eve. This is the day when the Church starts praying the *O antiphons* (antiphons which are most popularly well-known as the inspiration for the Advent hymn *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*) before the Gospel at daily Mass and before

the Magnificat prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours. The beginning of the *O antiphons* marks a shift in the Church's liturgy, where Christmas is anticipated with a more immediate sense of urgency.

You can use a similar sense of liturgically informed prudential decision-making when deciding when to take down your Christmas tree. In my own opinion, it's good to keep in mind that, for Catholics, Christmas Day is just the very beginning of a whole Christmas season.

The Church celebrates the ‘octave,’ or the eight days following Christmas, almost as though it were Christmas day itself. So, on 2nd January, the day after the octave concludes, could be a good day to take down a Christmas tree. Still, you would be more than justified in keeping your tree up even longer.

6th January is the traditional date of the feast of the Epiphany or ‘Three Kings’ Day,’ a feast which marks the last day of the 12 days of Christmas. But officially, the Christmas season doesn't end until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, which the Church celebrates on the Sunday after 6th January.

Finally, even if late January is technically considered Ordinary Time, the latest feast in our celebration of the Incarnation is actually the feast of the Presentation of the Lord on 2nd February. This is the last day that the Vatican keeps up its Christmas tree and crèche in St. Peter's square in Rome, so a Catholic who follows suit can hardly be criticised for keeping up their Christmas decorations until this point!

**Q: My parish recently returned to communion under the second species. A Eucharistic Minister holds one cup and one cloth and wipes once after each serve. Most people still do not receive for fear of Covid or other illness. Why can't the church simply use disposable plastic cups with the wine already in it? The priest could say the same blessing and still distribute but holding a tray instead of a cup. The empty cup could be disposed of with the passing of germs reduced to almost nothing.**

**A:** What you describe – with the elements of communion pre-portioned in individual disposable packaging – is not uncommon in many non-Catholic Christian communities. However, there are several reasons why this would be inappropriate for Catholic worship.

For context, we need to recall that the Catholic theology of the eucharist is radically different from the vast majority of Protestant understandings of holy communion. Many Protestant communities occasionally distribute bread and wine as a way of simply recalling and remembering Jesus' last meal with his disciples.

In contrast, a core central teaching of the Catholic faith is the doctrine of the ‘real presence,’ meaning that bread and wine *literally* become the body and blood of Christ at Mass when the priest prays the prayer of consecration. This is called transubstantiation, and because of it the prayer of consecration is much more radical and impactful than a simple blessing would be.

Because we believe that Jesus is physically, bodily present in the ‘sacred species’ (our term for the bread and wine which have been turned into the body and blood of Christ), we have several laws and customs pertaining to the Eucharist which ensure a sufficient degree of protection and reverence for Jesus' presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

For instance, it is required that the vessels used during such as the ciborium, paten, and chalice (the ‘plates’ and cup) be made from worthy and suitable materials. As paragraph 328 of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal tells us: ‘Sacred vessels should be made from precious metal. If they are made from metal that rusts or from a metal less precious than gold, they should generally be gilded on the inside.’ Clearly, this directive is incompatible with the use of disposable communion cups.

Additionally, during the Mass, the priest must take care that every particle of the host and every last drop of the Precious Blood are reverently consumed. This is why, at the end of communion, the priest ‘purifies’ the chalice, rinsing it with water that he then drinks himself. Even if disposable materials were allowed, there



A Christmas tree stands in Manger Square outside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, West Bank

would be no way to be sure that absolutely all Precious Blood was actually consumed. As a result, it would be impossible not to have some of the Precious Blood wind up in the bin. This would be at least *de facto* sacrilege.

It is certainly understandable that some Catholics might long for the fuller sign value of receiving communion under both kinds, while still having legitimate concerns about germs and the spread of illness. Still, it's good to keep in mind that few things worth doing are ever one hundred per cent risk-free. Most things in this life involve some sort of trade-off of risks versus benefits. Catholics who piously desire to receive the Precious Blood should prayerfully consider whether, in light of their own personal health status and spiritual needs, it might make sense for them in their own circumstances to brave the possibility of catching a bug in order to receive from the chalice.

In any case, we should always remember that, in receiving the Eucharist under only one species, bread or wine, we nevertheless receive the entirety of Christ.

**Q: I know many Christians wear a cross necklace, but why do Catholics wear a crucifix?**

**Displaying Jesus hanging from a cross, as jewellery, seems both cruel and a bit dark, even bizarre.**

**A:** My thought is that our Catholic cultural emphasis on crucifixion imagery comes from Catholicism's focus on the saving power of Christ's passion. The imagery helps keep this central facet of our faith readily before our eyes.

Crucifixion imagery also reminds us that Christ freely took on our human nature and had a human body that was subject to suffering and death, just as we are. When we are in pain, a crucifix can help us remember that God himself knows and understands what we are going through. It can also remind us of the possibility of uniting our sufferings to those of Christ, filling us with the hope that our suffering in this life might also bear fruit for the salvation of souls.

Yes, a crucifix can be a jarring image. More ‘graphic’ crucifixes, where the intention of the artist is to show Jesus in agony, didn't become typical until the Counter Reformation era in the 16th century.

**Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist. Send your questions to [CatholicQA@osv.com](mailto:CatholicQA@osv.com).**

## Mike Aquilina asks whether the things that inspired St John Henry Newman can similarly inspire Catholics today

At the heart of St John Henry Newman's conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism was his study of the early Christians, the Fathers of the Church.

As an Anglican clergyman, he believed that they held the answer to what he saw as his denomination's perennial problem, a fragmentation in doctrinal and practical matters. He sought a purer reflection upon scripture in the writings of the fathers, an interpretation untainted by modern politics and controversies.

Newman, whose feast day the Church celebrates on 9th October, read the Fathers deeply and not merely to extract theoretical propositions. He wanted to enter their world, to 'see' divine worship as they saw it, to experience the prayers as they prayed them, to insert himself into the drama of the ancient arguments.

He immersed himself in the works of the Fathers so that he could recount their stories in his brief *'Historical Sketches'*, in his book-length studies and later, in one of his novels. After decades of such labours, he concluded that "of all existing systems, the present communion of Rome is the nearest approximation in fact to the Church of the Fathers. ... Did St Athanasius or St Ambrose come suddenly to life, it cannot be doubted what communion he would take to be his own."

An interesting thing had happened. Newman's study of the Fathers of the Church had caused him to desire 'The Church of the Fathers' (yet another of his book titles). He wanted to place himself in real communion with the ancients, with Athanasius and Ambrose. A notional or theoretical connection wasn't enough, and could never be. He wanted to move out of the shadows of hypothetical churches, based on a selective reading of the Church Fathers, and into the reality of the Fathers' Church.

In declaring Cardinal Newman a saint in 2019, Pope Francis has held up his life as worthy of imitation and in the matter of encountering the Fathers, it should hardly be a burden.

Like Newman and his contemporaries, so many people today hold a lively curiosity about Christian origins. Many ordinary Christians would like to move beyond the rather petty pre-occupations of today's tenure-track historians and documentarians (gender and conflict, conflict and gender). They would like to find their own imaginative entry into the world of the Church fathers.

Cardinal Newman's bust in Trinity College Garden Quad, Oxford.

*"Newman wanted to place himself in real communion with the ancients, with Athanasius and Ambrose. A notional or theoretical connection wasn't enough, and could never be. He wanted to move out of the shadows of hypothetical churches, based on a selective reading of the Church Fathers, and into the reality of the Fathers' Church."*

# Newman's search for answers took him to Church Fathers

They would like their own 'Historical Sketches' that were vivid enough to see with an attentive mind's eye.

And what would we see in the works of the Fathers? What would we see as we gazed through the window provided by archaeology of early Christian sites? We would see many familiar sights and sounds, fragrances and gestures:

### • A Church gathered around the Eucharist

This emerges most vividly, not only in the scriptures, but in the generation immediately after that of the apostles, the generation of the so-called apostolic fathers.

The document called *The Didache* (circa AD 48) includes the earliest Eucharistic prayers. Clement of Rome (circa AD 67) sets out the different roles of clergy and laity as they come together for Mass. Ignatius of Antioch (circa AD 107) describes the Eucharist as "the flesh of Christ" and treats the sacrament as the principle of the church's unity. By the time we get to Justin Martyr (circa AD 155), we find a full description of the Roman Mass that's recognisable enough to be reproduced verbatim in the Church's catechism today.

### A Church that practices sacramental confession

The Fathers argued among themselves about whether the Church should be strict or lenient in dispensing penance but none of them denied that this was the right and role of the Church and her clergy. The Fathers heard confessions. They pronounced absolution.

### A Church whose members make the sign of the cross

At the end of the second century, Tertullian spoke of the sign as if it were the hallmark of ordinary, everyday Christian living. Among his wife's beautiful qualities he mentioned the way she made the sign of the Cross at night.

### A church whose members bless themselves with holy water

The 'prayer book' of St Serapion of Egypt (fourth century) includes a blessing for holy water. Eusebius (late third century) describes the familiar font at the entrance to a church.

### A church with an established, sacramental hierarchy

St Ignatius of Antioch shows us that, as the first century turned over to the second, the order of the Church was already well established everywhere. As he wrote letters to various Churches,

he assumed that each Church was governed by bishops, presbyters and deacons. He didn't explain this. He didn't argue for it. He just assumed it. At the turn of the next century, Clement of Alexandria also presented this order as traditional, an imitation of the hierarchy of angels in Heaven.

### A Church that venerates the saints.

This shows up in the graffiti on the walls of the Roman catacombs. It shows up in the art of the cemeteries of the Fayoum in Egypt. It shows up in many lamps and medals and signet rings. St John Chrysostom and St. Augustine wrote numerous homilies on the lives of the saints. The most ancient liturgies invoke their intercession. This is especially true of the Virgin Mary, whose prayers are included in canonical collections by the early third century.

### A Church that prays for the dead.

In the 100s, devotional literature describes votive Masses celebrated at gravesides. The earliest tombstones in Christian Rome ask prayers for the deceased. The prison diary of St Perpetua (North Africa, early third century) includes a vision of purgatory – whose existence is explained theologically

by Origen (Egypt, third century). At the end of the 100s, Tertullian describes prayer for the dead as already an ancient practice.

That's just a glimpse of the early Church but it's enough to make it recognisable as Catholic. Nor did the Fathers see their life as in any way opposed to scripture. Scripture and tradition co-existed in harmony because they had been received from the same apostles. The New Testament shows us the apostles writing letters, yes, but also observing rites, customs and disciplines.

Moreover, the Church of the apostles pre-existed the New Testament and shows us that authority, for Christians, does not rest simply in the Scriptures.

St John Henry Newman knew that, standing apart from the Catholic Church, he was standing not with the Church of the Fathers but rather with the heretics.

So he came home and his way, the way of the Fathers has been traversed by many non-Catholics since then.

**Mike Aquilina is executive vice-president of the St Paul Center for Biblical Theology and the author of more than 70 books.**



# AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION

The Universe Catholic Weekly's guide  
to Catholic life in your neighbourhood



## St Bridget's run out winners as Pope's Charity Cup makes a welcome return

After a year's hiatus, the Pope's Charity Cup in Glasgow made a welcome return for 2023 – and it is a familiar name that is once again etched on the trophy.

The popular football tournament – held in partnership with Missio Scotland and the Glasgow Catholic Schools FA – takes place on an annual basis during Mission Month (October), with the final taking place either at the end of the month or at the start of November.

This year's cup final was a derby as St Bridget's Primary School in Baillieston took on their town counterparts, St Francis of Assisi Primary School, with St Bridget's emerging 3-1 victors after a pulsating, end-to-end match at Toryglen Regional Sports Centre in Glasgow.

A healthy crowd cheered on the players, with Archbishop William Nolan of Glasgow, Missio

Scotland's national director, Fr Vincent Lockhart and Baillieston parish priest, Fr Thomas Devlin among the supporters.

Star man for St Bridget's was Oliver Ferrie, who scored a hat-trick and proved the difference between two evenly matched sides.

Frs Lockhart and Devlin handed out the medals and a Mission Rosary to the players on each team before Archbishop Nolan presented the Pope's Charity Cup to the St Bridget's captain, sparking scenes of celebration among the players and in the stands.

Archbishop Nolan, for whom this was his first Pope's Charity Cup Final, praised the match and thanked the joint organisers.

"It was an excellent game and I was very impressed," he said. "The game was played with great sportsmanship and both sides were determined to get their hands on



Archbishop William Nolan presents the winning team with the Pope's Charity Cup

the cup."

He added: "Missio Scotland is such a wonderful organisation. It connects us with the Church throughout the world and does so much good work. This tournament helps bring Missio Scotland into focus and highlight the work it does also, and in turn, helps to highlight the work of the Church too."

Winning head coach, John McManus, was also fulsome in his praise of both sets of players and the tournament itself.

"I thought it was an absolute fantastic match played in a great spirit," John said. "It was a derby so

obviously that's one everybody wants to win. Fortunately, we did win, but it was a really tight game. St Francis played brilliant football, and I thought both goalkeepers were out of this world and saved their teams a number of times.

John added: "I need to say a word of thanks, too, to Missio Scotland. It's an incredible tournament and the kids are so excited the minute it kicks off at the start of August."

For his part, Fr Lockhart was delighted to see the Pope's Charity Cup make its return, and explained how the tournament epitomises

community, a core value of Missio Scotland and the Pontifical Mission Societies worldwide.

"The game today was absolutely fantastic," Fr Vincent said. "Mission Month is about being a community as Church and that isn't just about saying prayers. It's also about enjoying ourselves and the boys and girls who take part in the Pope's Charity Cup, I think they see that it's not just something in their school or their parish, but it's also about the rest of life as well, and Missio Scotland is able to join with them and help them to enjoy themselves."

## Rejoice as a new Mass setting is played for first time

A multi-academy trust (MAT) with 30 schools across the North East premiered its own Catholic Mass Setting on Friday, 10th November. Gaudete, which means rejoice, was unveiled for the first time at the Catholic Leaders and Clergy Conference at Newcastle Cathedral.

The Mass Setting is the culmination of more than a year's work with acclaimed composer Will Todd and Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust (BCCET), which has 25 primary schools and five secondaries across East Durham, South Tyneside and Sunderland.

Pupils from the Trust's five secondary schools sang in the choir: St Aidan's Catholic Academy, Sunderland; St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy, Sunderland; St Bede's Catholic School & Byron Sixth Form College, Peterlee; St Joseph's Catholic Academy,



Hebburn; and St Wilfrid's RC College, South Shields,

BCCET lead chaplain Liz Boylan said: "Over the past year, we have been on a fantastic journey, working with our schools and local communities to write a Mass Setting inspired by them. It's something that can be used by both

schools and our parishes.

"The Celebration of Mass is source of our faith. We wanted to create a Mass Setting that pupils and our communities could contribute to so that it was both inclusive and familiar.

"We worked with acclaimed composer Will Todd and have the

approval of the National Liturgy Office. All our schools and parishes have free access to the finished score and can use any versions or parts they wish in their Mass Setting."

Composer Will Todd, who has worked with pupils from across the Trust's schools and wrote the music for the Gaudete Mass, said: "It's

been an amazing project to be part of. I started off by listening to the children's ideas, inspired by religious texts, artwork, poems, music and stained glass that they designed. They were really inspiring.

"Then I held workshops in the five secondary schools in the Trust and we wrote the music together.

"Every school created a different piece of music, which was another layer of inspiration for me. I was particularly pleased that one of the pieces of music that we created ended up being used in the final Mass Setting.

"Finally, I listened to a lot of songs that the children said made them rejoice, because Gaudete means rejoice. It was very upbeat and positive music, and that's what I tried to do with the Gaudete. Hopefully, people will sing it for a long time."

# Pact is a Godsend for prisoners and their families at Christmas

**Theresa Alessandro**

I am working my way through the new document, *A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report*, produced from the recent ‘conversations in the Spirit’ that took place in Rome.

For those of us engaging in social justice work, these words resonate: ‘Either we see God’s Reign in the things of this world, or we will never see it.’

Pact is the national Catholic charity supporting people in prison, and their children and families. What are the ‘things of this world’ in relation to our criminal justice system? This weekend we begin Advent, a time of waiting in hope. While there is so much to feel unsettled about in our world, where are signs of hope that can point us towards ‘seeing God’s Reign’?

Close to record numbers of people will spend Christmas inside this year – and a record 100,000 children across England & Wales will spend Christmas without mum or dad because they are in prison. There are a variety of reasons why Christmas is a tough, perhaps hopeless, time for some of us. For families affected by imprisonment and for their loved ones locked up on Christmas Day, it can be especially hard to look forward with hope.

Last year, Pact helped ‘Kelly’ send small Christmas gifts to her three daughters at very short notice after she had been unexpectedly transferred from one prison to another in the middle of December. Kelly had been distraught lest her children think she had forgotten them. She told the Pact member of staff: “You’re a Godsend. Thank you.”

While politicians strive to outdo



A Pact Family Visit Day at Christmas, at a prison in Arundel and Brighton diocese. These are special visits where children can play with their mum or dad... they can eat together, like families do at Christmas, or work on Christmas craft projects and have fun. “Just for a little while, I forgot I was in prison,” said one inmate.

each other in being ‘tough on crime,’ Pact aims to accompany our brothers and sisters in prison and their families. Pact staff and volunteers, alongside prison staff, chaplains, and family members themselves, make huge efforts to try to ensure that people in prison, and their children and loved ones, can share in the hope and joy of Christmas somehow.

The synodal document says that people in prison ‘need to experience the merciful love of the Lord and to not feel isolated from the community.’

There is hope in knowing that, supporting the year-round work of prison chaplains, many of our bishops will quietly visit prisons over Christmas to celebrate Mass with men and women inside.

Pact organises Christmas

Family Visit days in over 60 prisons where we provide ‘Family Services’. These are special visits where children can play with their mum or dad – instead of remaining seated across the table from them in the prison’s Visits Hall. They can eat together, like families do at Christmas. They can work on

Christmas craft projects and have fun. One dad reported after a Pact Family Day: “Just for a little while, I forgot I was in prison.”

The synodal document reminds us that ‘in the simplest gestures by which we open ourselves to one another, the breath of the Spirit genuinely breathes.’ Can this be



Prisoners • Families • Communities  
A Fresh Start Together

what Pact volunteers mean when they report getting ‘more back than I give’?

Pact’s work supporting the children and families of those in prison promotes the common good. When family ties are strengthened and supported where appropriate, the chance of someone returning to crime on release from prison is reduced by 39 per cent. Pact’s work shares hope and it makes communities safer.

Stand in solidarity with prisoners and their families, alongside Pact staff and volunteers, at a Pact Carol Service - in London and Birmingham. Let us ‘see God’s Reign in the things of this world.’

Visit the Pact website here:  
[www.prisonadvice.org.uk](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk)



Why do we take Holy Communion?

## ANSWERING QUESTIONS BY YOUNGSTERS ABOUT CATHOLICISM CAN BE DAUNTING...

If they asked, could you answer questions such as:

- Why do we bless ourselves?
- Why do we say Amen?
- What’s God’s Grace?
- Why do we go to Confession – and Mass?
- What’s Communion about?

and many, many more...

Could you answer them in an easy, effective way that a child can understand? Our website provides the information for you to be able to do this with confidence. Find out more at

[www.catholicismrefreshnotes.co.uk](http://www.catholicismrefreshnotes.co.uk)

Once there you can print off a copy of this FREE booklet (right), *The Mass Explained for Young People*. It has clear, concise answers to all the questions above - and many more

Try it; it costs you nothing except a bit of your time.



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# Students' faith uplifted on pilgrimage to Medjugorje

A group of students from Saint Paul's Catholic High School in Wythenshawe have been warmly praised after taking in an uplifting pilgrimage to Medjugorje.

Medjugorje, in Bosnia Herzegovina, is an inspirational place of pilgrimage where the Virgin Mary has been appearing since 1981.

The students left feeling encouraged by the Gospel message of love, peace and hope that pervades the rural town.

The students took part in a number of Masses, services and spiritual events, including walking up Apparition Hill, holding a Candle Light Vigil and attending Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at St James' church. The students also enjoyed a visit to the city of Mostar and Karvice Waterfalls.

Fr Owen Gallagher, who accompanied the group, said: "I cannot laud the students enough. They were an amazing part of the pilgrimage and helped the other pilgrims to find grace and solace. They were of the highest impeccable manners and a truest reflection of the standards and mission of Saint Paul's Catholic High School."

The group of 10 students read at the international English Mass, to a congregation of 3,000, with another 4,000 watching online, and their performance was commended by other worshippers from Australia, New Zealand, and the United States (to name but a few).

Fr Owen said "You, as a school and their families should be very,



very proud of those ten young people."

He added: "My hope and my prayer is that this pilgrimage has allowed them to grow even further into the person that they have been created to be by the Lord.

"And when I think of each of them I am reminded of an old Irish saying, 'Mo/ an Gige agus tíoefaidh sí' - (Praise/ foster youth and she will grow great)."

Explaining how the pilgrimage came about, deputy headteacher Mr Chris Fannon, who went on the pilgrimage, told the Universe: "It was presented at Church as the Pilgrimage for the Year, given the apparitions of Our Lady.

"It is the school's local parish of which I am a member and, between myself and Fr Owen, we agreed that school should try to be represented with a group of students attending."

Mr Fannon added: "Since June 1981, when the Virgin Mary

appeared as a vision to several schoolchildren in Medjugorje, Catholics worldwide have made the pilgrimage to the site for its unique atmosphere of prayer and serenity as well as miraculous happenings.

"Everyone in the group returned home, after this journey into grace and peace, a little bit changed for the better and we would recommend it to all.

"The students were incredible ambassadors for the school and were a credit to Saint Paul's."

Headteacher Mike Whiteside said: "The pilgrimage was a fantastic opportunity for the students to join international visitors from all around the world in Medjugorje.

"In a place with such a wonderful, peaceful atmosphere, they were able to gain some extremely valuable experiences, engage in meaningful conversations and absorb the devotion and faith found in Medjugorje."



**'The students took part in Mass, walked up Apparition Hill, joined a Candle Light Vigil and attending Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at St James' church. They also enjoyed a visit to the city of Mostar and Karvice Waterfalls.'**

## Moving Mass remembers archdiocese's departed faithful

There was a great attendance at the annual Olton Friary 'Celebration of Life' Mass on 11th November.

The Mass was offered for all those in the parish who departed this life in the previous 12 months. The families and friends of those who died were invited to this special celebration as they mourn their passing and grieve their loss.

Archbishop Bernard Longley was the main celebrant, along with Fr Biju and Fr Austin, supported by Brothers Gerard and Liam of the Sacred Heart Community.

During the Mass, the names were read out of the 49 people who had died in the parish in the past 12 months. Two family representatives lit a candle on the altar as each of their loved one's names were called out.

Archbishop Bernard lit a candle of remembrance for all those who had died in previous years, and for all the loved ones and friends of all present. Deceased clergy from the



Archdiocese of Birmingham and members of the Sacred Heart Family were also remembered, as

well as those who had died because of natural disasters, violence, warfare – especially in the Holy

Land, Russia and Ukraine – and poverty, persecution, and famine throughout the world.

Members of the deceased's families read the Prayers of the Faithful and brought the offertory gifts to the altar. After Communion, Archbishop Bernard incensed all the candles as the choir sang *May the Choirs of Angels*. The Remembrance Candle was then processed to St Francis' Altar as the reflection *'They have gone'* was read out.

Archbishop Bernard thanked all who helped organise the Mass, parish office secretaries, sacristans, the parish choir who contributed so much to the Mass, and all the families present.

Before the final prayer Fr Biju called the names of all those in the parish bereavement group to come forward and receive a special blessing from Archbishop Bernard (pictured).

As the congregation exited the church the choir sang the recessional hymn *How great thou art*.

# Durham's distance learning course widens pathways to Catholic theology

The Centre for Catholic Studies in Durham University has gone from strength to strength since its founding in 2007.

Its latest initiative, the launch of a suite of Distance Learning postgraduate programmes in Catholic theology, is a way of making the strength and riches of the Centre available to a wider audience.

The desire to study theology is often something people come to a little later in life, when they are already busy with family, work and other obligations, not able to upend life and move to a new place to study. It's with this in mind that the new certificate, diploma and MA programmes have been set up, designed to be rigorous but flexible, intellectually challenging and supportive at the same time.

The first cohort of students are varied in age (from their 20s to their 70s) and in their occupations. Some have studied theology before, but others come with a first degree in subjects such as history, medicine, English, linguistics or philosophy. They have different working situations – in ministry, working in hospitals or NGOs or for other institutions, looking after families, or they are retired.

The courses have been designed to fit round all these situations and more, with students finding their



own working rhythms during the week and across the months of study.

Distance Learning can sometimes be associated with a less academically rigorous forms of study, but Durham's Centre for Catholic Studies is committed to making these programmes every bit as challenging and intellectually rich as a Durham residential programme. A Distance Learning MA can be a means for personal enrichment and development, but it can also be the launch point for a student wanting to go on to a PhD.

Professor Karen Kilby is the programme director. She sees the new distance learning programmes as an extension of something which has always been vitally important to the Centre for Catholic Studies: an orientation towards outreach. "You can see this in all kinds of ways in the CCS," she says. "One of my colleagues, Anna Rowlands, has been at the heart of the Synod in

Rome; another, Paul Murray, has been deeply involved in ecumenical work at a global level; a third, Carmody Grey, is a regular participant in BBC2's *The Moral Maze*, among other things.

"Carmody, Anna and Paul are all teaching on the new Distance Learning programme, and so each continues to expand the ways they reach out to as broad an audience as possible."

Kilby herself, as part of her role in the Bede Chair in Catholic Theology, gives 20 per cent of her time to outreach in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.

All students on the new programmes begin with a module called 'Catholic Theology: A Preliminary Tour'. They then make a choice among a rich range of possibilities: one module on the theology of St Thomas Aquinas, another on High Medieval Franciscan Theology; others on Faith and Reason, Catholic Social



Thought and Practice, Twentieth Century Catholic Theology and Conceiving Change in the Catholic Church. Those doing the full MA finish the course with a dissertation on some topic in Catholic Theology of their choice.

**You can find out more about the MA in Catholic Theology and other courses by searching 'MA in Catholic Theology (Distance Learning) - Durham University', or see the university website, at <https://tinyurl.com/259z5uvr>**

## Students remember persecuted Christians at RedWednesday

Hundreds of students from schools in the archdiocese of Birmingham gathered together in prayer at St Chad's Cathedral to mark #RedWednesday.

The Red Wednesday Mass was held the day before the #RedWednesday campaign day, organised by the charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).

Students from a number of Catholic schools in the Birmingham archdiocese attended, including: St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School; St Paul's Catholic Primary School; St John Fisher Catholic Primary School; and St Benedict's Catholic School, Alcester, along with pupils from St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School, Hednesford; Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School, Coventry; Bishop Challoner Catholic School, Birmingham; St John Fisher Catholic School, Newcastle under Lyme; Archbishop Ilsley, Acocks Green and St Thomas More Catholic Academy & Sixth Form College, Nuneaton.

ACN hosted three key events in the archdiocese to mark #RedWednesday, and Archbishop Bernard Longley also recorded a



special video message for the occasion. Schools joined a live stream in collaboration with the Mark 10 Mission and St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School.

The Mass was celebrated by Monsignor Timothy Menezes, Dean of St Chad's Cathedral.

During his homily, he said: "If you can have some share in the sufferings of Christ, be glad. Does

that line from St Paul that we heard in our reading just now sound a bit strange to you? Be glad of suffering in your life.

"But you can find such 'strange' contradictions throughout the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels: 'Blessed are you when people persecute you and speak ill of you: Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven!'

'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain.

'But if it dies, it yields a rich harvest.'

"So as we approach the subject of persecution Christians today, we understand and accept that just as suffering is not something to be avoided if it comes our way, so persecution can be an experience

which we can encounter in solidarity with Jesus himself.

"The reason for the charity Aid to the Church in Need is that the persecution of Christians generally happens without the world knowing about it."

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**Above, students at the Red Mass, with Mgr Timothy Menezes**



The Universe Catholic Weekly's guide to the more leisurely side of life

FOOD

## Roots: so right for winter eating!

Carrots, radishes, turnips, rutabagas, parsnips, celeriac, onions, beets, salsify ... the list goes on. Technically the foods we call roots are not all roots. Carrots, beets, turnips, and parsnips are roots, but potatoes are tubers (thickened underground stems), and onions are bulbs — a botanical distinction, though not one that we think about when eating a soul-nourishing winter stew.

All of these food crops are storage units for the nutrients that give the plant the energy it needs to grow and produce seeds. Because roots absorb the soil's nutrients, they offer considerable health benefits. They are laden with vitamins and fibre, antioxidants and essential minerals.

Roasted roots are a delicious complement to any winter meal. Farmers' markets are loaded with root options when the weather gets cool. Pick some up and try one or more of these simple preparation methods. Next year, you'll be tempted to grow your own.

### Here's some cooking ideas

- Peel and trim a variety of root vegetables, and toss them with olive oil in a large baking dish. Season with salt and pepper, and herbs of your choosing, and bake in a 400° oven for about 45 minutes.

- Sauté an onion and a couple of celery stalks in butter until tender. Add two or three garlic cloves and cook for a minute or two more, then add peeled and cubed root vegetables (such as turnips, celeriac, carrots, and parsnip) and cover with water. Simmer until the roots are tender, and puree to make a creamy soup. Add liquid to thin if necessary, and season with herbs, salt and pepper, and lemon juice.

- Slice peeled parsnips (or carrots, or rutabagas) into thin pieces and sauté in butter or oil until they begin to brown. Season with salt and pepper and toss with parsley.

- Grate beets coarsely, then toss them in melted butter with salt and pepper to taste. Add a small amount of water (just enough to add steam), and cover the pan. Cook for about five minutes until tender, and season with fresh herbs and balsamic vinegar.

### Top tips for winter gardening

**Take advantage of microclimates.** Some areas around your property may stay warmer or are sheltered from the wind or frost. For example, gardens at the top of a slope often avoid an early frost as cold air settles in lower areas. Use these protected sites to grow vegetables later in the season.

**Protect from early frost.** Cover late season plantings with floating row covers, mini greenhouses made from clear plastic, or even old window sashes set on hay bales. Vent the covers on warm days to prevent excessive heat buildup. Modern floating row covers spread on top of your growing beds can protect crops from early frost by maintaining a temperature about 4°F higher than the air temperature. You can also try a black plastic mulch to retain extra heat.



Fresh veg. Not all 'roots' are root vegetables: carrots and turnips are proper roots, but potatoes are tubers... and onions are bulbs

Photo: David Davies/PA

Cover the edges of the plastic with soil to anchor it in place.

**Choose hardy crops.** End the gardening season with cold-hardy vegetables that can actually tolerate frost, such as peas, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, broccoli, broccoli raab, kale, beets, leeks, carrots, turnips, radicchio, escarole, scallions, and spinach. Some vegetables also have particular varieties better suited to grow in

cold, short-day climates. Read seed packets and catalogue descriptions to find vegetables that are described as cold tolerant.

**Invest in a cold frame.** A cold frame can extend your garden season no matter what part of the country you live in. You will find that you can have ample greens for good salads throughout much of the winter in all but the coldest climates by using a cold frame.



Cold frames are basically little houses where plants can have a head start in spring and extra growing time in autumn and early winter. You can purchase a cold frame or make your own. If you have an old storm window and some planks or scrap lumber, you can put together an easy cold frame. Nail the wood together to fit under the storm window. Instead of cutting the sides on a slant, just build the frame as a box and simply top it with the storm window. Skip the hinges. On hot days, slide the window to the side to let heat out; on cold nights, put the window squarely over the top of the frame and cover it with an old blanket.

Cold frames are great for extending the growing season of all cool season leafy crops. Keep a thermometer to help monitor temperatures. Vent the frame when daytime temperatures go above 10C for cool season crops; close it back up when temperatures drop below 7C.

Mulch root crops for an extended harvest in cold winter areas. If your ground freezes hard, you'll need to insulate the soil around your veggies' roots so they don't freeze. Put a 10-12-inch layer of mulch over the rows, extending out 18 inches on each side. This will keep the soil around the roots at an even 35- 40 degrees—the ideal storage temperature.

Once the mulch is down, you can go out anytime, move it aside and dig up some fresh roots. You can even dig carrots, leeks, beets, and parsnips out from under two feet of snow! Vegetables stored in the ground won't keep well once you dig them, so plan to use within a few days.

[homegardenseedassociation.com](http://homegardenseedassociation.com)



## HEALTH

# Breast cancer prevention drug approved for post-menopausal women in the UK

Despite huge improvements in detection rates, breast cancer still contributes more deaths for women than any other cancer. That's why the UK's decision to licence a new drug that tackles the development of tumours is to be welcomed, says **Sarah Allinson**

UK's biggest A drug that can halve the risk of developing breast cancer in post-menopausal women has been approved for use in the UK.

This drug, called anastrozole, could benefit an estimated 289,000 women in the UK who are at increased risk of breast cancer.

Anastrozole was already approved for use in the UK as a breast cancer treatment. It belongs to a group of drugs called aromatase inhibitors that were first developed to treat breast cancer in women who had undergone menopause.

The key to anastrozole's success, both in treating and preventing breast cancer, is due to its effects on the body's oestrogen levels.

Up to 80 per cent of all breast cancers produce a protein called the oestrogen receptor, which binds to the hormone oestrogen. When it binds, this protein tells breast cancer cells to divide. This overrides the normal controls that prevent cells from dividing too much – causing a tumour to grow.

The more oestrogen circulating around the body, the more likely it is that tumour growth will be stimulated.

But anastrozole reduces oestrogen levels, preventing breast cancer cells from dividing. It does this by targeting a specific enzyme in the body.

Before the menopause, most of the body's oestrogen is produced in the ovaries. But after the menopause, oestrogen is instead produced by an enzyme called aromatase. This oestrogen is typically made in our fat tissue. Aromatase produces oestrogen by converting other hormones – such as testosterone and androstenedione.

Anastrozole and similar drugs, such as letrozole and exemestane – stop aromatase from working and drastically reduce the amount of oestrogen in the body. This means that in post-menopausal breast cancer patients, the drug is very effective at stopping cancers which produce the oestrogen receptor from recurring after surgery or chemotherapy.

Anastrozole could benefit an estimated 289,000 women in the UK, research has found



The reason anastrozole also works to prevent breast cancer is because often the earliest stages of normal breast tissue becoming cancerous depend on oestrogen. Indeed, many of the known risk factors for developing breast cancer – such as late menopause and obesity are associated with increased oestrogen levels.

But using anastrozole to reduce oestrogen levels can stop breast cancer before it even starts in at-risk post-menopausal women.

#### Preventative drug

Thanks to the new licence, post-menopausal women in the UK who are at moderate to high risk of developing breast cancer will now be offered the chance to take anastrozole to protect themselves. Women who have a family history of the disease should talk to their doctor about their risk and whether they could benefit from taking anastrozole.

It's worth noting, however, that the drastic reductions in oestrogen levels caused by an aromatase inhibitor such as anastrozole are not

"In post-menopausal breast cancer patients, the drug is very effective at stopping cancers which produce the oestrogen receptor from recurring after surgery or chemotherapy..."

without their drawbacks. Not only may it worsen menopause symptoms, it may also cause other side-effects – such as a decrease in bone density and increased risk of fractures. These side-effects can become more serious the longer the drug is taken. This is why it's currently recommended that anastrozole is only taken for prevention for five years.

Women who are at increased risk of breast cancer and are considering using anastrozole need to be supported in making an informed decision that's right for them. Women with osteoporosis or serious kidney or liver disease

are particularly advised to discuss this decision with their doctor first.

In the UK, there are almost 56,000 new diagnoses of breast cancer annually. The NHS estimates that if just 25 per cent of eligible patients opt to take anastrozole, then 2,000 breast cancer cases could be prevented each year in the UK.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the world. An estimated 2.3 million people – mainly women – will develop the disease each year. Preventing even a fraction of these cancers has the potential to save many lives and reduce suffering.

Although anastrozole is prescribed off-label to prevent breast cancer in other countries, the UK is the first to licence it for this specific use. Given the burden of breast cancer, it's hoped that other countries will follow suit.

**Sarah Allinson is a Professor, Department of Biomedical and Life Sciences, Lancaster University**



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## HOME &amp; LIFESTYLE

# Love using candles? Eight safety tips to help you 'candle with confidence'

If you enjoy candles, you probably love the way their flames illuminate a darkened room, set a certain mood or bring a sense of fun, romance or wonder to your life. Scented candles at a spa or near a bubble bath can also help you to relax and unwind.

As daylight shortens during the autumn and winter months, this is the perfect time to 'candle with confidence.'

Here are tips to help everyone use candles safely:

## 1. Follow basic candle safety practices.

Never leave a burning candle unattended, and make sure candles are not lit on or near anything that might catch fire. Always keep candles out of the reach of children and pets.

## 2. Prevent candle smoking.

Before lighting your candle, trim the wick to 1/4 inch before every use, and be sure to place candles away from drafts, vents or air currents. If a candle continually flickers or smokes, it is not burning properly and should be extinguished. Allow the candle to cool, trim the wick, make sure the area is draft free, then re-light.

## 3. Beware of 'make-your-own' candleholders.

Not all glass is the same, so it's best to avoid burning candles in glass containers that are not specifically designed for candles. Glass candleholders are specifically manufactured to withstand the temperature changes that occur when burning a candle.

Everyday glassware is not designed for burning candles.

## 4. Make votive cleaning easier.

Add a few drops of water to the glass of votive holders before inserting the candle to make them easier to clean. Caution: Don't add more than a few drops of water, and don't add water unless you intend to burn the candle immediately afterward. Over time, a candle wick could absorb the water and won't burn properly. Also, never use water to extinguish a candle.

## 5. Prevent candle fading.

Avoid placing candles where they will be directly exposed to sunlight or harsh indoor lighting, as candles may fade if they are left in bright light for an extended period of time.

## 6. Store candles carefully.

Keep your candles in a cool, dark and dry place. Tapers or dinner candles should be stored flat to preventing warping.

## 7. Keep candles clean.

You can remove dust and fingerprints from a candle by gently rubbing the surface with a piece of nylon or a soft cloth that is dry or slightly dampened with water.

## 8. Care for your candleholders.

Remove wax drippings from candleholders by running hot water over them. Alternatively, some home care experts prefer removing wax by first placing the candleholder in the freezer for an hour or so. This allows the wax to shrink and easily pop out when the candleholder is removed from the freezer.



## Christmas giving can instill the right values in our children

It's the time of year to cherish moments with loved ones and reflect on all of life's positive aspects. While it's common for families to focus on feasts and treats this time of year, there's a deeper layer that is often overlooked – the opportunity to instill meaningful values in children. Christmas is the perfect time to nurture your little one's empathy, generosity, compassion and gratitude.

Here are four ways, suggested by child care expert Joy Turner, for parents to instill meaningful values in children.

### Discuss the reason for the season

Amid the hustle and bustle of holiday preparations, it's easy to forget the true meaning behind the celebration of Christmas. Take some time this year to discuss what really makes this season special, including quality time with loved ones and meaningful traditions.

Consider traditions you loved as a child and how you can share them with your own family. Maybe there's a special recipe, craft or family outing that you always looked forward to. You can also use the occasion to create new traditions – this is a great opportunity to connect your children to their culture, faith and family.

Conversations and traditions can help children understand the historical, cultural and familial significance of holidays while creating cherished memories and an appreciation for the season.



### Encourage acts of kindness

Encouraging children to perform acts of kindness is a great way to teach compassion and empathy.

Try striking up a family conversation about different ways you can show thoughtfulness to others, and invite your children to be active participants. After discussing, challenge them to put their ideas into action – it can be as simple as sharing their toys with siblings or friends or making homemade cards for a local nursing

"Encouraging children to perform acts of kindness is a great way to teach compassion and empathy."

home. Including little ones in the planning process and acting on their ideas ignites a desire to help others and provides a great way to unite and make a difference as a family.

Alternately, reach out to organisations or charities which need extra help during this season and ask how your young child can support their cause. Mary's Meals and CAFOD are two examples of organisations to get involved with.

Fostering these practices of kindness builds children's self-esteem and instills values that will be long lasting.

### Redefine gift giving

Inspire your children to actively participate in the gift-giving process – which doesn't always have to include a physical object such as a toy or a gift.

Giving can also involve discovering methods to bring joy to others through acts of kindness. For example, teach your children that they can display generosity by helping someone build

their block tower or soothing a friend who's sad.

Inviting your child to participate in these types of kind gestures will instill empathy and emphasise the significance and impact that performing acts of kindness can have on others.

### Practice gratitude

Conversations of gratitude – try to make it a daily activity. Use this time to kick off a family thankfulness practice. One simple way to do this is by making gratitude jars with your little ones:

- Collect empty jars or containers around your home and decorate them with any craft items you can find: stickers, tissue paper, magazine clippings, popsicle sticks, buttons or even photos. Don't forget to include a lid with an opening.

- Next, cut paper slips that fold small enough to fit through the opening.

- Once your container is complete, set your gratitude process – try keeping the jar on your children's bedside tables to develop an easy pre-bedtime activity.

- Encourage your children to write down one thing they are thankful for each day and add it to their jar.

This custom helps children develop an 'attitude for gratitude' and appreciation for all that they have in life. Over time, the practice will become a valuable habit that will continue to serve your children long into the future.

## FILMS

# If you hunger for more from Panem, here's the next slice of the action

The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes (Lionsgate)

As its long title presages, this latest in the Hunger Games saga offers the opportunity for an extended (two-and-a-half hour plus) return visit to Panem, the dystopian setting of Suzanne Collins' bestselling series of young adult novels, and the blockbuster films developed from them.

As fans will already know, this fictional nation's history was dominated by a disastrous civil war pitting the downtrodden inhabitants of 13 outlying districts against the affluent residents of Panem's seat of power, the Capitol.

Having prevailed in this conflict, the citizens of the Capitol established the fatal tournament of the title.

According to the rules of this annual gladiatorial contest, two children are selected from each district – one male, one female – and compelled to fight one another to the death until only a single survivor remains.

Much dialogue in this iteration of the saga is devoted to the waxing or waning popularity of this competition as well as to the message it's ultimately intended to send.

Although the mayhem in this prequel to the previous movies is kept free of gore, it still manages to be disturbing at times. So, while the film is probably acceptable for older teens, it's safest for grown-ups.

In his fourth adaptation of Collins' work, returning director Francis Lawrence chronicles the teen years of Coriolanus 'Coryo' Snow (Tom Blyth), Panem's future president. The result is a character study that's more interesting morally than dramatically.

As the scion of a cash-strapped but elite family, Coryo aspires to become part of Panem's establishment. Thus, as the action opens, he's in the running for a prestigious scholarship.

It's suddenly announced, however, that the qualifications for this prize have been changed and that they now include serving as a mentor for one of the participants in the Hunger Games. So Coryo finds himself assigned to train Lucy Gray, a feisty folk singer from a band of



Tom Blyth and Rachel Zegler star in *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*. Photo: Murray Close, Lionsgate

Roma-like wanderers.

Not only does this experience inspire him to recognise Lucy's basic humanity, it's not long before the two have fallen in love. Taken together with Coryo's deepening friendship with his compassionate classmate Sejanus Plinth (Josh Andrés Rivera) – an outright opponent of the games – his bond with Lucy inclines Coryo to rebellion, though he remains torn.

Snow's origin story provokes thought but mostly lacks emotional engagement. Still, the

humane values upheld in screenwriters Michael Lesslie and Michael Arndt script will be appreciated for its biblical morality.

The film contains much bloodless but sometimes harsh violence, drug use and a couple of crass terms.

Snow was originally performed by seasoned actor Donald Sutherland in the original Hunger Games film. As he told *The Times*, Tom Blyth was keen to study Sutherland's portrayal of Snow, but maintain his own original voice.

"Poise, I guess, is a thing they were looking for, and there's a certain physical similarity between me and Donald Sutherland – I think that was important," Blyth said.

"The challenge is knowing where Snow ends up but trying not to foreshadow it too much. I tried to wipe my mind a little bit and treat this as a completely different character. Should I speak like Donald, who has a very distinct voice? We decided that would feel like a copycat performance."

## I Wish... for a few more bright spots to light the gloom

### John Mulderig

This year marks the centenary of the entertainment empire established by cartoonist extraordinaire Walt Disney. To mark the occasion, we're given *'Wish'* (Disney), a paean to the Mouse House's legacy.

Genuinely challenging material is absent from this jaunty animated musical. But a few potentially problematic elements do lurk in its background.

Set in an imaginary kingdom ruled by a sorcerer called Magnifico (voice of Chris Pine), this is the story of one of his younger subjects, 17-year-old Asha (voice of Ariana DeBose). Asha starts out as an admirer of her monarch and aspires to the high honour of serving as his apprentice. But close contact with Magnifico reveals to her that he has his dark side – and may be dangerous.

So Asha sets out to defeat Magnifico's



schemes for gaining greater power. She's aided by an ensemble of youthful friends, led by gifted royal baker Dahlia (voice of Jennifer Kumiyama), as well as by her talking pet goat, Valentino (voice of Alan Tudyk). A voiceless but cuddly-cute star also helps in her struggle.

Chris Pine recently told *screenrant.com* about Magnifico's dark side and how it was a 'fun thing' to portray him.

"Magnifico has a really fun ride. He goes from being the powerful, charming king and the centre of attention and basking in the glow of the adoration of his minions or whatever," Pine said.

"He kind of descends into a bit of loony, madcap, bad guy-ness and then ends up kind of puttering and squealing and mewling at the end. It was a fun thing to play."

Directors Chris Buck and Fawn Veerasunthorn's fantasy adventure has a handsome look, its style reminiscent of delicate and detailed watercolour paintings.

As for Julia Michaels and Benjamin Rice's songs, they're enjoyable without being especially memorable.

Fortunately, this salute to all things Disney avoids the studio's recent tendency to insinuate positive messages about the homosexual lifestyle into films aimed at children. And its

celebration of popular unity in the face of oppression is certainly in keeping with Gospel values. Yet, as scripted by Jennifer Lee and Allison Moore, the picture does raise a few red flags.

Thus, while the screenplay carries a clear warning about black magic, it implies – if only by its silence on the subject – that other forms of it might be acceptable. A mushy mythos also is built up overly exalting the power of wishes.

Additionally, the morally dubious idea is introduced that it's OK to purloin something that doesn't rightfully belong to the person currently in possession of it. Such ingredients are unlikely to prove genuinely harmful to older kids. But they may give the parents of the most impressionable viewers pause for thought.

The film contains characters in peril as well as fleeting scatological and gross-out humour in its jokes.

# The man at the fire: Lifting a lid on the first witness to England's most infamous blaze

HISTORY

**Kate Loveman**

## Great Fire of London: how we uncovered the man who first found the flames

If you had been in London on 2nd September 1666, the chances are you'd remember exactly where you were, and who you were with. For this was the day that the Great Fire began, sweeping across the city for almost five days.

The Museum of London is due to open a new site in 2026 with a feature dedicated to the fire. And in preparation for this, curators of the Great Fire gallery decided to examine the stories of everyday Londoners.

As I'd been working with the museum on a project about teaching the Great Fire in schools, I was asked by Meriel Jeater, curator of the Great Fire displays, if I could help research the lives of these Londoners. Top of our list for investigation were the residents of Thomas Farriner's bakery in Pudding Lane, where the fire began.

There has been lots of excellent work on the Great Fire but, because of ambiguities in the surviving sources, historians have different conclusions about who was in the bakery. Farriner, his wife, children and anonymous servants were among the people mentioned in modern accounts. But it was quickly clear I needed to go back to the manuscript evidence to find answers.

Two types of official investigation into the fire's causes were carried out in 1666: a parliamentary enquiry and the trial of Robert Hubert, a Frenchman who had falsely confessed to starting the blaze. While you might think Londoners would have a keen interest in who was there at the start of the fire, the surviving accounts of exactly who was present are fragmentary.

Full reports from the enquiries were not published. Meanwhile, most writers at the time were, understandably, much more concerned with the fire's destructive power than describing its beginnings.

As a result, the clearest account of events in the bakery is in a letter from an MP, Sir Edward Harley, reporting what he had heard. It's now in the British Library, and was



The Great Fire of London 1666, by Lieve Verschuier 1630 – 1686

written in October 1666, when the two investigations into the fire were underway:

Sir Edward writes:  
*The Baker of Pudding Lane in whose hous ye Fire began, makes it evident that no Fire was left in his Oven ... that his daughter was in ye Bakehous at 12 of ye clock, that between one and two His man was waked with ye choak of ye Smoke, the fire begun remote from ye chimney and Oven, His mayd was burnt in ye Hous not adventuring to Escape as He, his daughter who was much scorched, and his man did out of ye Windore [window] and Gutter.*

### Narrowing down the suspects

Other details in Harley's letter suggested he was reliably reporting what he'd learned. The letter provides a list of bakery residents: Thomas Farriner, his unmarried daughter (Hanna), his 'man' (meaning trained workman, aka journeyman) and his maid, who died. Other reports don't mention the 'man' or maid, but put Farriner's son in the bakery.

A document in the London Metropolitan Archives provided more clues. This records the charges against Robert Hubert and – crucially – the names of seven witnesses against him. At the end were: 'Thomas Farriner senior, Hanna Farriner, Thomas Dagger, Thomas Farriner Junior'.

Given that Thomas Dagger was sandwiched between the Farriners, Jeater and I suspected that he might be an unrecognised member of the household. Testing this theory, I was able to establish that the indictment's list of names began with two men who had heard Hubert's confession and a third who possibly had. The later names, starting with Thomas senior, appeared to be people who could testify to circumstances in the bakery.

This was exciting, because Thomas Dagger looked like a candidate for Farriner's 'man' in Harley's account, potentially putting a name to the first reported witness of the Great Fire.

Searching online archives, I could see there was a baker named Thomas Dagger running a business in Billingsgate after the fire and having many children. But we needed evidence to put Dagger in

Pudding Lane at the time the fire started.

### Sleuthing in the archives

Fortunately, the Bakers' Company records had not gone up in smoke like so many other guild documents did in September 1666. So I went sleuthing at the Guildhall Library, comparing the information on Farriner's workforce to names on the indictment.

After much squinting at microfilms, this produced firm evidence for two young men. Thomas Farriner junior had joined the Bakers' Company in 1669, claiming that right through his father. I was delighted to find Thomas Dagger had indeed worked for Farriner, too. He came from Norton in Wiltshire and had been apprenticed to another baker in 1655 before serving out his apprenticeship at Pudding Lane.

That nine-year apprenticeship

(unusually long), had ended in 1664, so at the time of the fire he'd stayed on, working unofficially as a journeyman. Of all the names on the indictment, Dagger most clearly matched the description of the man who first discovered the fire.

Continuing the 17th-century investigations into the Great Fire was intriguing, but it's how the bakery residents' stories are told that matters. One of the great things about having the life stories of people such as Thomas Dagger is that it will help make the history of London more relevant to young visitors.

For example, if you're a school child from Wiltshire learning about the Great Fire, Thomas Dagger's presence in the bakery suddenly makes that national history part of your local history.

As a low-status journeyman, Dagger's name wasn't memorable to people in 1666 – he's barely mentioned in the sources. But the hope is that he and others like him might become memorable to visitors to the new London Museum.

The new research will enable the displays to better represent the Farriner household and provide a fuller understanding of this pivotal moment in London's history. **Kate Loveman is a Professor of Early Modern Literature and Culture, University of Leicester**

**“Continuing the 17th-century investigations into the Great Fire was intriguing, but it's how the bakery residents' stories are told that matters. One of the great things about having the life stories of people such as Thomas Dagger is that it will help make the history of London more relevant to young visitors...”**

# Teamwork and co-operation – why they will always be sport’s dream ticket

SPORT

## Fr Vlad Felzmann

Though the word ‘collaboration’ was tainted by the Nazis, its synonym, ‘co-operation’ has remained clean. Thank God. It is the expression of our Trinitarian nature – the virtue, the ability, to work together toward a common goal.

As we all know, you cannot tie a bow, put the little backs on your pierced earrings, peel potatoes – or anything – with just one hand. With two, there is no problem.

The slogan Together We Make a Difference – TWMAD – was something I learned as a Clapham College schoolboy. It was one of the best lessons that has helped me achieve so much.

“Loyalty is a cohesive force that forges individuals into a team”, wrote John Robert Wooden (1910–2010), an American basketball player and head coach at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Nicknamed the “Wizard of Westwood,” he won ten NCAA national championships in a 12-year period as head coach at UCLA, including a record seven in a row. No other team has won more than four.

Oxytocin is a chemical in our body which generates and is generated by feelings of love, bonding people together. Any manager that can convince his club to respect and appreciate everyone – from the star striker to the boot-cleaner – will be able to release this oxytocin in his squad and lead a great team.

“You stand up for your teammates. Your loyalty is to them. You protect them through good and bad, because they’d do the same for you,” motivated Lawrence Peter ‘Yogi’ Berra, an American professional baseball catcher, who later took on the roles of manager and coach. He played 19 seasons in Major League Baseball – all but the last for the New York Yankees.

“Individual commitment to a group effort is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilisation work,” declared Vince Lombardi, head coach and general manager of the Green Bay Packers, who led the team to three NFL championships and to victories in Super Bowls I and II (1967 and 1968). Because of his success, he became a national symbol of single-minded determination to win.

Michael Jordan’s biography on



Richie McCaw leads the All Blacks famous Haka challenge to their opponents

the official NBA website states: ‘By acclamation, Michael Jordan is the greatest basketball player of all time.’ He reminds us that ‘talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships.’

To put it another way, “The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team,” said Phil Jackson, an American former professional basketball player, coach, and executive in the National Basketball Association. Jackson played 12 seasons, winning NBA championships with the New York Knicks in 1970 and 1973.

“Collaboration allows teachers to capture each other’s fund of collective intelligence,” Mike Schmoker, a former administrator, English teacher and football coach, said. He has written several bestselling books and dozens of articles for educational journals, newspapers and for *TIME* magazine.

“It takes two flints to make a fire,”

stated Louisa May Alcott, an American whose ‘sport’ was writing novels and short stories, best known as the author of *Little Women* (1868), its sequels *Little Men* (1871) and *Jo’s Boys* (1886). As they say, you cannot tie a bow with just one hand.

“To me, teamwork is the beauty of our sport, where you have five acting as one. You become selfless,” mused Mike Krzyzewski, a college basketball coach. Since 1980, he has served as the head men’s basketball coach at Duke University, where he has led the Blue Devils to five NCAA Championships, 12 Final Fours, 15 ACC Championships, and 12 ACC regular season titles.

“The way a team plays as a whole, determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don’t play together, the club won’t be worth a dime,” warned Babe Ruth, regarded as one of the greatest sports heroes in American

culture and considered by many to be the greatest baseball player of all time. In 1936, Ruth was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame as one of its ‘first five’ inaugural members.

“Being a good teammate isn’t about recognition. I do it because it makes me whole and complete,” stated Dwyane Wade, who, at the 2008 Summer Olympics, led the United States men’s basketball team, commonly known as the ‘Redeem Team’, to capture the gold medal

The legendary All Blacks rugby team remains successful decade after decade by focusing on building a strong unified team consisting of the best people. The New Zealand team considers themselves to be one captain and fifteen leaders. Everyone has a turn to speak, offering an equal voice and equal contribution to the team. The All Blacks trust their members to do what needs to be done, and thus their members become leaders, rising to the occasion and proving they are worthy of that trust.

There are no superstars in the All Blacks. Though there are some players that have led their team to victory more than others, have more seniority, have better skills – at the end of the day they all pitch in to clean up. Even the top players sweep the dressing room after each match, because no one is too big or too important to do the ‘lesser’ tasks.

“Building a baseball team is like building a house. You look for the best architects, the best builders, and then you let them do their jobs,” stated Pat Gillick, who won a national championship in college while pitching for the University of Southern California (USC). Gillick

was inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in 1997, the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 2011, the Ontario Sports Hall of Fame in 2013, and the Phillies Wall of Fame in 2018.

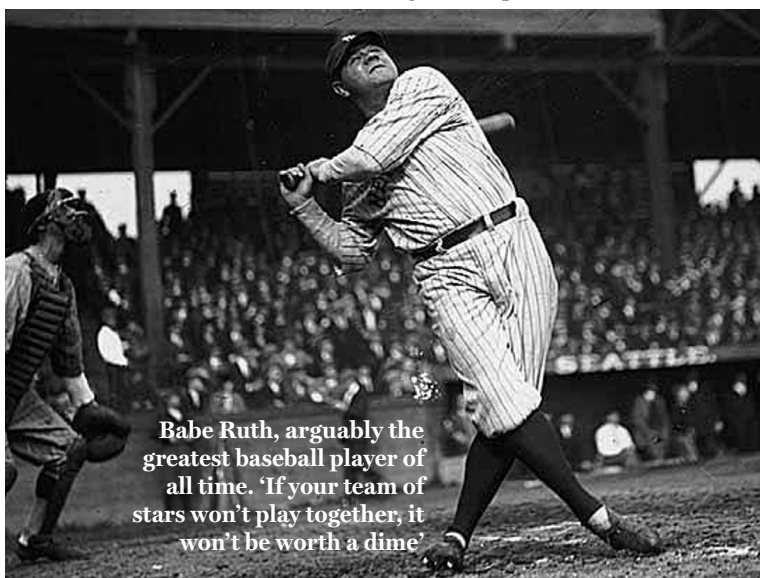
“I don’t believe in team motivation. I believe in getting a team prepared so it knows it will have the necessary confidence when it steps on the field and be prepared to play a good game,” stated Tom Landry, an American professional football player and coach. He was the first head coach of the Dallas Cowboys in the National Football League (NFL), a position he held for 29 seasons.

A wise leader – perhaps just of a family or parish council – surrounds his or her self with people who know more than they do on different dimensions of life. Might there be schoolmates with whom you could reconnect? Have a think. A team of allies-in-life can be marvellously life-enhancing.

“One man can be a crucial ingredient on a team, but one man cannot make a team,” Kareem Abdul-Jabbar reminded us. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was voted by ESPN cable network as the greatest basketball centre of all time. In 2008, they named him the ‘greatest player in college basketball history’, and in 2016, they named him the second-best player in NBA history behind Michael Jordan.

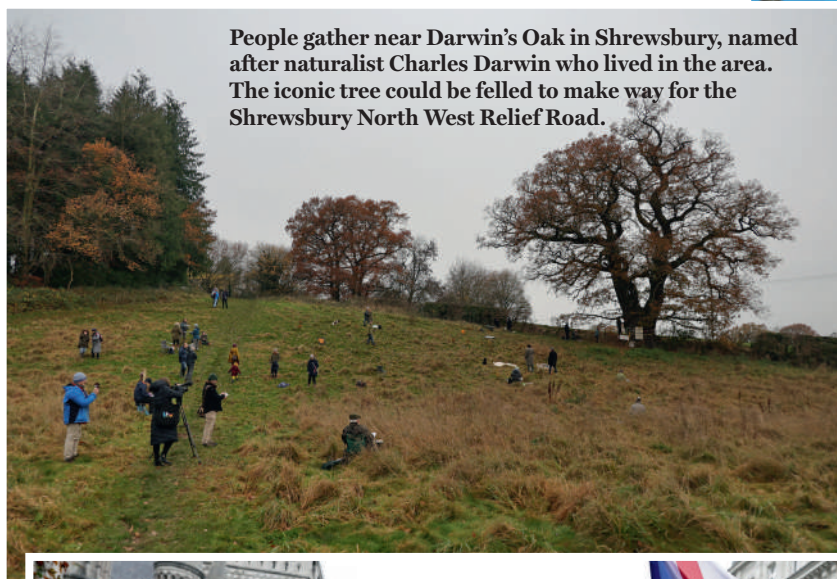
In 2012, Abdul-Jabbar was selected by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to be a US global cultural ambassador. In 2016, President Barack Obama awarded him the Presidential Medal of freedom.

In a couple of weeks, we will focus on Grit – no, not as in ‘sand’ – more as in ‘guts’.



Babe Ruth, arguably the greatest baseball player of all time. ‘If your team of stars won’t play together, it won’t be worth a dime’

# A pictorial round-up of the past seven days



People gather near Darwin's Oak in Shrewsbury, named after naturalist Charles Darwin who lived in the area. The iconic tree could be felled to make way for the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road.



Artist Ails McGee takes a photograph of a chandelier of 'Hope: Shadow and Light' as an image is projected on to the dome of the 18th Century Chapel, at the Bar Convent Heritage Centre in York - the UK's oldest living convent - as part of their 2023 Christmas experience 'Let there be Light!'.



Above, people take part in a march against antisemitism in London, and right in O'Connell Street in Dublin to protest about the violence after rioting in the capital which followed a stabbing attack last week.



Simon Collins captured this picture of a rare halo around the Moon above houses in Reigate, Surrey. The phenomenon is caused by the refraction of moonlight from ice crystals in the upper atmosphere.



A member of staff looks at John Lennon's psychedelic eye mosaic, commissioned for the swimming pool at his home in Kenwood, Surrey, which is on display at Bonhams auction house in King'sbridge, London, ahead of this week's Rock, Pop and Film sale. Consisting of approximately 17,000 tiles, the mosaic was created by Joseph Ritrovato, a master tiler who worked single-handedly on the art project

## LITURGICAL CALENDARS

### Ordinary Form

**Ordinary Form Liturgical Calendar Sunday Year B, Weekday Cycle II**  
**Sunday, December 3: First Sunday of Advent:** Isa. 63:16-17, 64:1,3-8; Ps.80:2-3,15-16,18-19; 1 Cor.1:3-9; Mk. 13:33-37

**Monday, December 4: Weekday of Advent, St John Damascene, Priest, Doctor of the Church**  
 Isa. 2:1-5; Ps. 122:1-2, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9, r. 1; Mt.8:5-11

**Tuesday, December 5:** Isa.11:1-10; Ps.72:1-2,7-8,12-13,17; Lk.10:21-24

**Wednesday, December 6: St Nicholas, Bishop:** Isa.25:6-10; Ps.23; Mt.15:29-37

**Thursday, December 7: St Ambrose, Bishop, Doctor of the Church**  
 Isa.26:1-6; Ps. 118:1,8-9,19-21,25-27; Mt.7:21,24-27

St John Damascene

**Friday, December 8: The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**  
 Gen. 3:9-15, 20; Ps.98:1-4 r.1; Eph. 1:3-6, 11-12; Lk. 1:26-38

**Saturday, December 9: St Juan Diego Cuatlatotzin**  
 Isa. 30:19-21,23-26; Ps.147:1-6; Mt.9:35-10:1,5,6-8



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### PRAYERS/THANKSGIVING

'Grateful thanks to St Jude for favours granted'

MCLBEW



## UNIVERSE CATHOLIC WEEKLY

# Classifieds

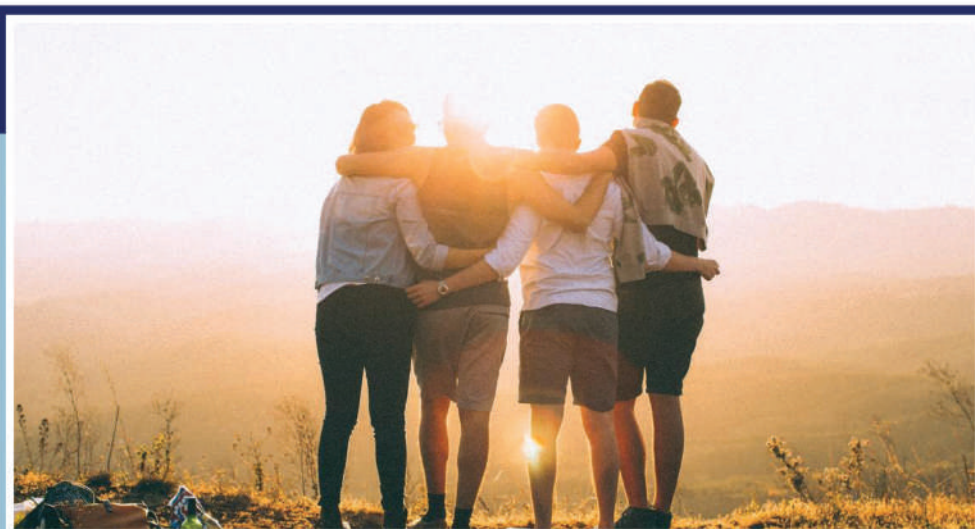
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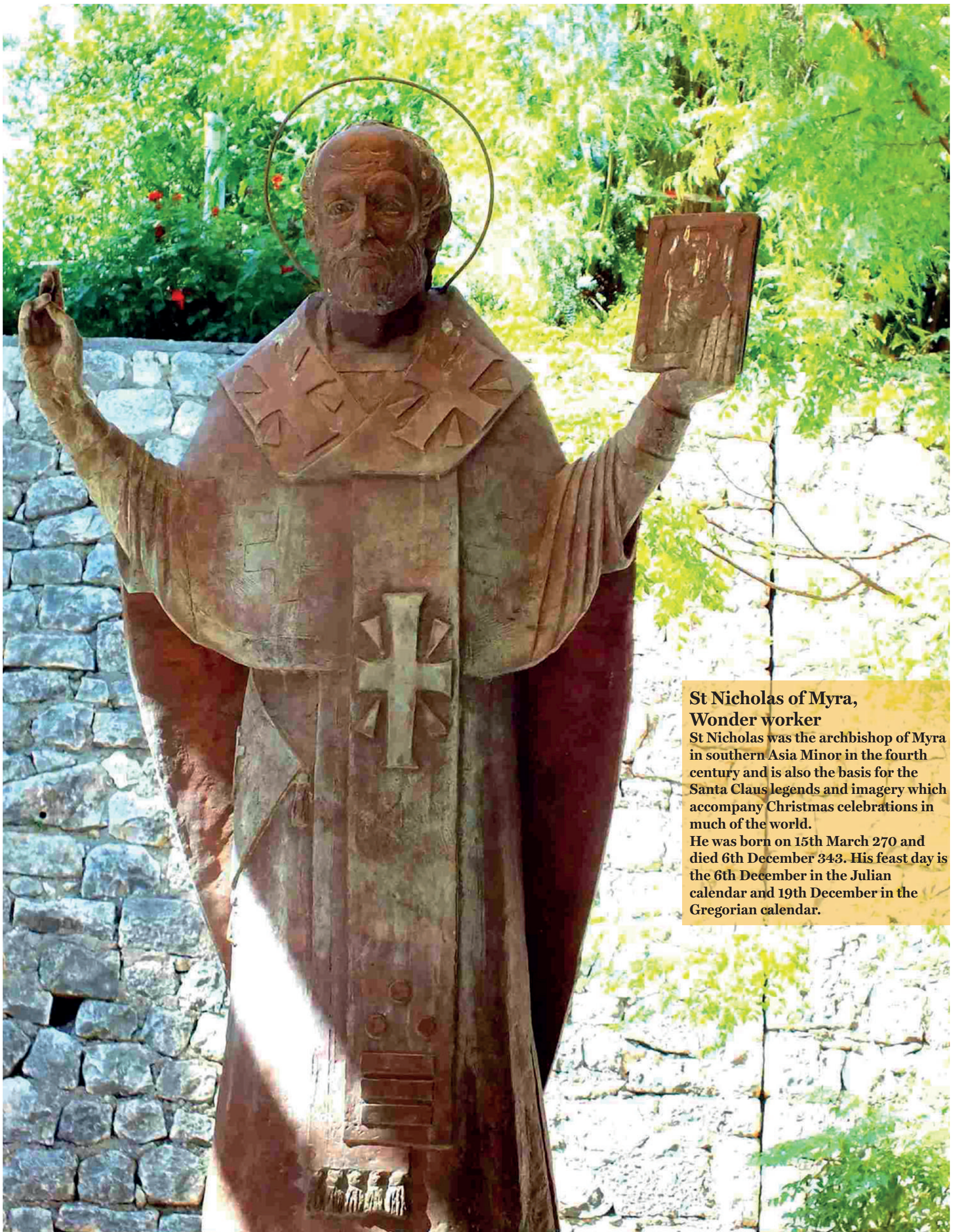


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**St Nicholas of Myra,  
Wonder worker**

St Nicholas was the archbishop of Myra in southern Asia Minor in the fourth century and is also the basis for the Santa Claus legends and imagery which accompany Christmas celebrations in much of the world.

He was born on 15th March 270 and died 6th December 343. His feast day is the 6th December in the Julian calendar and 19th December in the Gregorian calendar.