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It's our prayer: stay out

**Catholic Union reflects
growing anger as new
law could make our
private prayers illegal
in some settings**

The Catholic Union is urging the Government to acknowledge that private prayer should never be seen as unlawful, as part of a Home Office consultation on the introduction of buffer zones around abortion clinics.

The Public Order Act 2023 includes the new offence of 'interference with access to or provision of abortion services.'

The measure was introduced by backbench MPs in the House of Commons and mandates the creation of 'safe access zones' around abortion facilities. These zones would prohibit 'influencing' within 150m of abortion facilities, but the Catholic Union and others have shared concerns about the kinds of activity that may be regarded as influencing.

Catholic Union Director Nigel Parker condemned the act. "The introduction of this new law is extremely regrettable. The Catholic Union argued at the time that it was

not necessary and risked infringing fundamental human rights around freedom of thought and religion.

"While this new guidance is not statutory, it will be used by the police and others in determining what counts as criminal behaviour," he added.

The Home Office is now consulting on guidance for the police and other authorities on the practical implication of this new law and its limits.

Responding to the consultation, which closed this week, the Catholic Union said that any new guidance must make it clear that "individual, private prayer should never be considered an offence in and of itself".

It warned that the situation could get even worse with the introduction of mandatory 'safe access zones' around abortion clinics in England and Wales, and has called for the guidance to be tightened before it is published later this year.

Mr Parker warned of the dire consequences of criminalising private prayer, adding that "the guidance needs to make it abundantly clear that individual, private prayer should never be considered an offence in and of itself."

Continued on page 2



Dr Hannah Thomas, special collections manager at the Bar Convent, holds Mary Ward's personal 17th century crucifix in front of a portrait of her, as a global campaign is launched to have Mary Ward declared a saint. Mary Ward strived for the equality of women

and paved the way for the first schools for girls in the country to offer an education equal to that of boys.

She is the foundress of the Congregation of Jesus who reside at the Bar Convent York, the oldest living convent in the UK.

INSIDE



18

Beware a 'Faustian pact' over Rwanda – Alton

– pg 3

This year is the key to beating climate change

– pg 8

Bianca Jagger is fighting for Nicaragua's Church

– pg 18

America won't stop making the pro-life case

– pg 20-21

Bee happy with honey in your diet

COMPANION



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SPUC shocked by 'no tell' abortion guidance

Andy Drozdziak

Pro-life group SPUC has blasted “shocking” guidance by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) to its members, stating that they should not report illegal late-term abortions to the police.

Doctors are required to ask for consent before sharing confidential medical information, but medics can share information if it is in the public interest and ‘if failure to do so may expose others to a risk of death or serious harm’, according to the medical regulator, the General Medical Council.

But in its new guidance, RCOG told medics it is ‘never in the public interest’ to share information about suspected illegal abortions. Dr Raneer Thakar, President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said: “We firmly believe it is never in the public interest to investigate and prosecute women who have sought to end their own pregnancy.”

SPUC told the *Universe* that the guidance threatened to undermine the integrity of medicine. SPUC said: “This shocking decree has exposed the RCOG to be an organisation that has contempt for life and the law, as well as women’s health. By discouraging healthcare workers from reporting violations, the RCOG risks compromising the integrity of the medical profession



Bethany Cox was accused of using poison for an at-home abortion in 2020.
Photo: Owen Humphreys

and weakening the mechanisms in place to ensure the highest standards of patient care.

“By advising against reporting to the police, the RCOG risks undermining the public’s trust in the medical profession and the legal system itself.”

RCOG said it is concerned at the “increasing number of police investigations following later gestation abortion and pregnancy loss and the impact this can have on women, who may be especially vulnerable and have suffered the distress of a later stage loss”.

The new guidance comes after

high-profile prosecutions, including that of Bethany Cox, from Eaglescliffe, Stockton-on-Tees, who was accused of using poison for an at-home abortion in 2020.

Ms Cox was taken to court, but prosecutors dropped the charges against her earlier this year.

The increased accessibility to abortion at any stage of pregnancy has been exacerbated by the availability of so-called ‘DIY’ abortion pills, which were originally introduced temporarily for the Covid lockdown in March 2020 and later made permanently in August 2022. Carla Foster was jailed last year for illegally obtaining abortion tablets to end her pregnancy. Her sentence was reduced on appeal.

SPUC has accused the RCOG of ‘normalis(ing)’ late term abortion and mourned the loss of life.

“The RCOG’s guidance appears to be an attempt to normalise late term abortion and pave the way for abortion on demand during any stage of pregnancy – something which the British public have no appetite for,” SPUC said.

“Unborn children, lost to late-term abortions, are not mere statistics but fully formed lives deserving of recognition.”

A Government spokesman said: “We understand this is an extremely sensitive issue and we recognise the strongly held views on all sides of the discussion.”

Catholic Union criticises law that makes private prayers illegal



Pro-life activist Isabel Vaughan-Spruce was grilled by police about the nature of her silent thoughts in an abortion facility “buffer zone”.

Continued from page 1

Mr Parker added: “If we lose the right to pray, then we lose the right to conscience. If we lose the right to conscience, then we lose the right to thought... and if we lose that, then we lose everything,” he said.

There have already been cases of people questioned and arrested near abortion clinics in which the main offence has been silent prayer. These incidents have happened where Public Space Protection Orders have been used by local authorities under existing legislation.

The latest call comes as new footage emerged of Catholic pro-life volunteer Isabel Vaughan-Spruce again being grilled by police about the nature of her silent thoughts in an abortion facility “buffer zone”.

A West Midlands Police officer asked Vaughan-Spruce if she was “praying for the lives of unborn children.” Vaughan-Spruce explained that she was “just simply thinking, silently in my head.”

Isabel, who has prayed silently

regularly outside abortion facilities for many years, has been arrested twice on the basis of her silent thoughts, but was fully vindicated last March when Birmingham Magistrates’ Court returned a not guilty verdict.

She also received an apology from the police in September.

Isabel believes there is an “urgent need” for common sense to prevail.

“I’ve been arrested twice and fully vindicated by a court verdict that upheld my freedom of thought, and yet even still, officers continue to interrogate me for the simple act of thinking prayerful thoughts on a public street,” she said.

“Ahead of the new ‘buffer zones’ law being implemented, there is an urgent need for clarity as to everybody’s right to freedom of thought, as is protected in international human rights law.”

The Government has previously said it hopes to introduce buffer zones around abortion clinics in spring 2024.

Police link with Medaille to tackle slavery

Merseyside's Police and Crime Commissioner has joined forces with other groups, including the Medaille Trust, to tackle modern slavery.

A launch event at the International Museum of Slavery in Liverpool, brought together charities, agencies and other community organisations to discuss the new action plan, to run until 2028.

'County Lines Exploitation' was a big focus of the event, with organisations hearing from an anonymous 21-year-old survivor from Merseyside who spoke about his grooming and exploitation at the hands of a Merseyside drugs gang.

Medaille Trust's Marcus Dawson led a presentation on its work to support victims of modern slavery.

Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner Emily Spurrell said: "As Police Commissioner, my priority is to Support Victims and Build Safer Communities for everyone.

"That's why it was great to have so much collective input from our partners. It's clear there a genuine commitment from all the agencies to stop those who seek to exploit and manipulate the vulnerable."

Alton warns peers to throw out controversial Rwanda plans

Backing this Bill would be a Faustian pact, says Lord

Andy Drozdziak

Lord Alton has warned that allowing the Government's controversial Rwanda Bill to pass would be akin to making "a Faustian pact."

The bill, aimed at preventing legal challenges to the Government's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, was approved last week in the Commons by a vote of 320 to 276.

However, the scheme suffered its first defeat in the House of Lords when peers backed by a majority of 43 an unprecedented move seeking to delay a treaty with the east African nation that is intended to make the policy legally watertight.

In November 2023, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Mr Sunak's Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill was unlawful and that Rwanda is 'unable to fulfil its assurances to the UK govern-



Lord Alton

ment.' The five justices cited concerns that Rwanda could send genuine refugees back to the countries from which they had fled.

Speaking as a member of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Lord Alton challenged the policy's compliance with International Law. He said: "We should think very

carefully before stampeding through treaties, agreements or, indeed, next week, new legislation.

"It would clearly allay many public concerns if we were more efficient in dealing with applications more swiftly and sorting out the genuine from the false, but instead of this we are told we must make a Faustian pact and trade our commitment to international law and the safety of asylum seekers in return for measures that even their supporters say will not work."

Meanwhile, Catholic justice charity JRS UK accused the Government of playing "fast and loose with both domestic and international law" following its response to the Supreme Court's decision.

JRS UK said: "Confronted with the court's finding, based on detailed consideration of evidence, that Rwanda is not safe for refugees, the government's response is to pursue a law stating that it is - to craft a legal fiction.

"The disregard for evidence - indeed, for sheer reality - in the mak-

ing of policy could hardly be starker. This Bill plays fast and loose with both domestic and international law."

Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron is urging his fellow peers to get behind the Rwanda asylum, while Prime Minister Rishi Sunak urged the House of Lords not to block the "will of the people".

However, with Labour also reportedly considering the outsourcing of migrants overseas as an alternative to the Government's Rwanda proposals, JRS UK warned that such ideas could become 'normalised'.

"It should be unthinkable. Yet there is a risk that ideas like this become normalised, as the opposition begins to talk about outsourcing asylum processing as an 'alternative' to the Rwanda plan.

"If we let it, this could become the mainstream of our political discourse. We must not let this happen," JRS UK said.

Rule 39 and Sunak's dilemma: see page 6

Young porn addiction proves need for action

CARE is urging immediate political action after new research suggested that shocking numbers of young people are addicted to internet porn.

Mental health and addiction clinic Paracelsus Recovery reports a 150 per cent increase in people being treated for porn addiction between 2019-23.

Its chief executive Jan Gerber said that "porn addiction is significantly more common than official numbers suggest."

"We estimate that one-in-two males suffer from problematic porn consumption that would meet the diagnostic criteria for addiction, and one-in-four females. Among under-18s, the levels are higher still, at around 60 per cent", he said.

Louise Davies MBE, director of advocacy and policy at CARE, underlined the impact of the figures.

"This research illustrates the astonishing scope of porn consumption and addiction in society, including among children. The impact porn has on young people is greatly concerning.

"Polling commissioned by CARE found that 8-in-10 UK adults want age checks on porn sites, and 6-in-10 fear porn is inspiring sexual violence," Ms Davies said.

In a high-profile case, Sarah Everard was kidnapped, raped and murdered by serving Met officer Wayne Couzens in 2021. It was revealed that Couzens had a history of

viewing violent pornography, a point which Ms Davies highlighted.

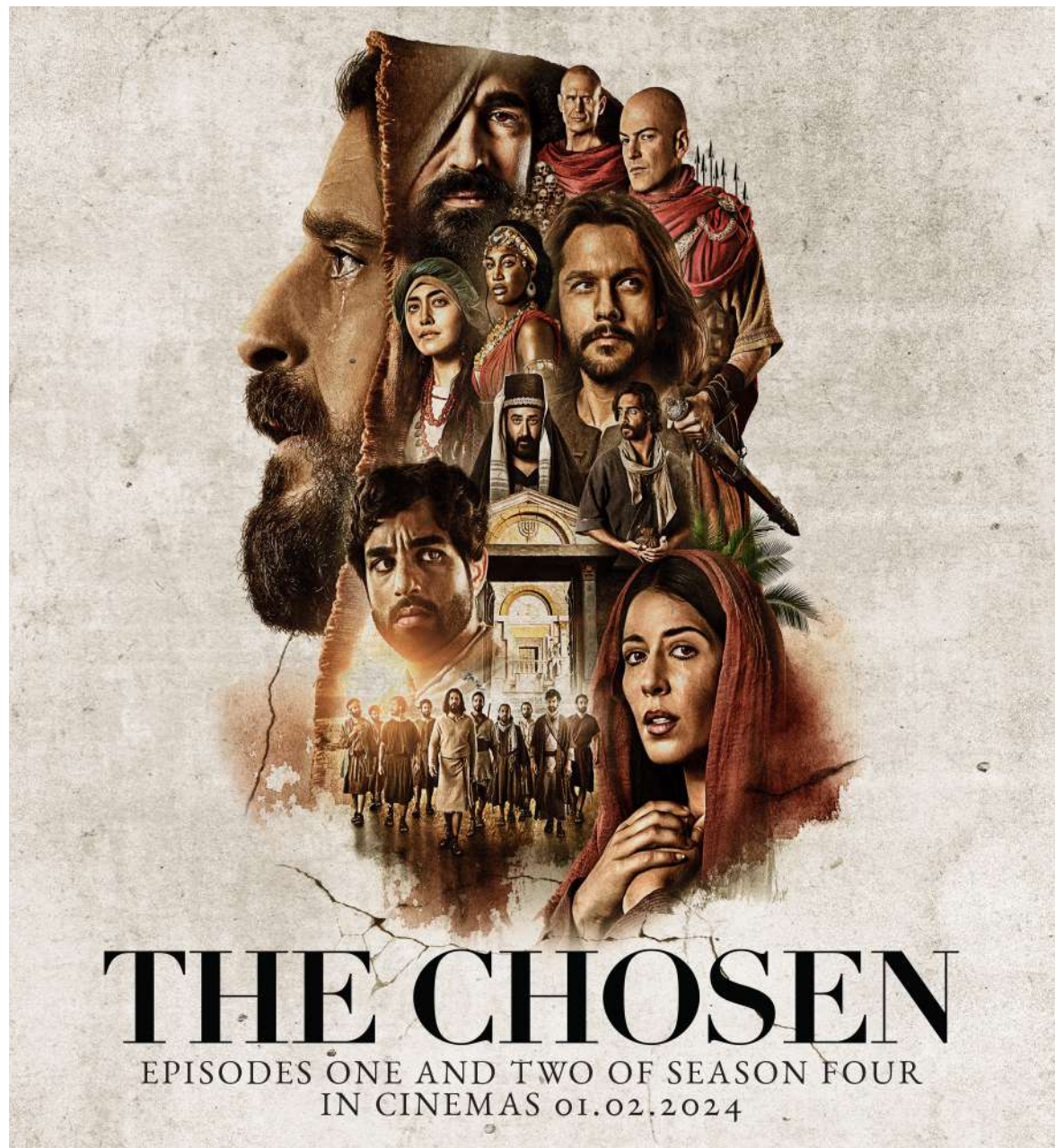
"Fears about the links between violent pornography and sexual crime have spiked in recent years in the wake of tragic cases like that of Sarah Everard, whose killer was obsessed with 'rape porn'. Front line workers helping victims of sexual crime also highlight the link between extreme pornography and sexual crime," she said.

Ms Davies added: "The govern-



ment has committed to reviewing gaps in the law and this is welcome. We do not have parity in offline and online regulation. At present, mainstream porn sites can host material that would be illegal in the offline world. There are no rules requiring participants' age and consent to be verified. And there is no mechanism for individuals who have had content shared illegally to get it taken down.

"The pornography industry cannot be allowed to act with impunity anymore. There is a moral obligation for action that leads to vulnerable groups being protected."



In Brief

Chess prodigy in plane trial

A young British chess champion who caused fighter jets to be scrambled by writing that he was a member of the Taliban and intended to “blow up a plane” has gone on trial in Spain for a public order offence. Aditya Verma, 20, insisted he was only joking when he sent the message before boarding a flight for a post-exams holiday to Menorca in 2022. Spanish prosecutors want him to pay £81,000 towards the cost of scrambling the jets plus a £22,500 fine. He denies the charge.

Council bailiff use rises

Referrals to bailiffs in England and Wales to recover unpaid council debts have risen by nearly 20 per cent. Birmingham's 500 per cent rise in referrals between 2022 and 2023 topped the list of 280 councils that the broadcaster analysed. One bailiff said he was “incentivised to use underhand tactics”, despite industry claims that it has “cleaned up its act”. The trend suggests more people are “struggling to pay essential living expenses”, it added.

High streets lose 5,000 outlets

The nation's “ghost town” high streets lost nearly 5,000 shops, pubs and restaurants last year. Some 4,415 retail businesses and 555 accommodation and food firms disappeared from the high street in the first nine months of last year, according to records, a “continuation of a trend” that began in 2022. Business minister Kevin Hollinrake insisted last year that the British high street was not “dead” but “reshaping itself”.

MSP latest Scottish politician to reject assisted suicide plans

Andy Drozdziak

A Conservative MSP is the latest politician to join Scotland's bishops and many euthanasia opponents in stating her opposition to the legalisation of assisted suicide in Scotland.

Sue Webber, MSP for Lothian and Convenor of Holyrood's Education, Children and Young People Committee, told *The Herald* that she had changed her mind about assisted suicide after she became an MSP.

“I was pro-assisted [suicide] until I got in here. It's the reality of the fact that my vote actually makes a difference now. When I was out I could have an opinion, but there was actually no consequence to that opinion,” she said. “But I'm in here now. And being in that role of legislating I don't think I would feel comfortable knowing that one person has died because of a decision I've taken”.

Sue Webber's about-turn has come just a week after Emma Roddick, Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees, said that she would not support Liam McArthur's bill either. First Minister, Humza Yousaf, and Health Secretary, Michael Matheson, have also confirmed their opposition to introduc-

ing assisted suicide.

Assisted suicide is currently banned in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. If convicted, people can face up to 14 years in jail. Although it is not a criminal offence



Sue Webber admits to having changed her view on assisted suicide since she became as MSP

in Scotland, helping someone to die can leave a person open to a murder charge or other prosecution.

Liberal Democrat Liam McArthur has proposed the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scot-



Baroness Grey-Thompson with Trevor Phillips on SKY News

SUNDAY MORNING A CHANGE IN LAW ON RIGHT TO DIE?

land) Bill, which is expected to be introduced to the Scottish Parliament in the “early part” of 2024. The proposals would give mentally competent adults with a terminal diagnosis the right to end their life if requested, but the Bishops' Conference of Scotland have expressed their opposition to the proposals, which they condemned as ‘utterly wrong.’

The bishops told the *Universe*: “Apart from the fact that assisted suicide undermines efforts to prevent suicide and sends a message that suicide is sometimes appropriate it sends a clear message to frail, elderly and disabled Scots about the value that society places on them and puts pressure on them to end

their lives for fear of being a financial, emotional or care burden on others. This is intolerable and utterly wrong.”

Meanwhile, former Paralympian Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, a member of the House of Lords, has raised significant concerns regarding proposed changes to the UK's assisted dying laws.

Speaking on Sky's *Sunday Morning* with Trevor Phillips, Baroness Grey-Thompson shared her opposition to any change in the law, and argued that nobody needs to die a “terrible death” if they have access to specialist palliative care.

“There are really big consequences if you change the law and the relationship between an individual and society fundamentally changes,” she said.

“I'm really worried that disabled people, because of the cost of health and social care, because that's being removed, that choice is then taken away so the only choice they have is to end their lives.”

The comments come after recent calls for a change in the assisted suicide law from high profile celebrities such as Esther Rantzen and Prue Leith. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has also said he supports assisted suicide.

Stella Maris to spearhead ports' bid to beat modern slavery

Greg Watts

Stella Maris has launched a ground-breaking initiative aimed at helping to tackle modern slavery in UK ports and the UK maritime sector.

A series of workshops in six ports (Belfast, Bristol, Glasgow, Hull, Liverpool and Portsmouth) have highlighted the issue and brought together stakeholders from ports, shipping, law enforcement agencies, anti-trafficking bodies, and other

welfare agencies to offer views on tackling the issue.

“The workshops were essential for those wishing to better understand the risks and issues caused by modern slavery,” said participant James Riddick, Group Head of Supply Chain at Peel Ports.

Stella Maris CEO/National Director Tim Hill MBE said that Stella Maris is in a prime position to tackle modern slavery.

“Our port chaplains and volunteer ship visitors are often first responders in cases of modern slavery within the port setting, and this puts us in a perfect position to be a galvanising force in tackling this issue,” Mr Hill said.

“We have set up a ‘Cross Port Anti-Slavery Steering Group’ to increase joined-up working across ports and boost collaboration among the various maritime bodies

and organisations to address and root-out modern slavery.

“Stella Maris' excellent ongoing partnerships helps us to provide appropriate, timely and effective intervention and support to fishers and seafarers affected by modern slavery.

“Ultimately this is all about working together and drawing upon our respective strengths and expertise to support those in need.”

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Bishop prison visit highlights inmates' challenges and fears

Pact welcomed the Bishop of Leeds, Marcus Stock, on a visit to the women's prison HMP New Hall last week.

Pact – the national Catholic charity providing support to people in prison and their children and families – works in more than 60 prisons including New Hall in the West Yorkshire countryside, in the diocese of Leeds.

In the Family and Visitor Centre, where visitors can receive refreshments and rest after often long journeys to see inmates, Pact CEO Andy Keen-Downs introduced Bishop Marcus to the regional staff team who explained what they do.

Mr Keen-Downs said: "I was especially pleased to introduce Bishop Marcus to Catherine, the newest member of the Pact team.

"Catherine is one of two new family resettlement workers for the prison. Her role is part of a pilot project across nine women's prisons, for which Pact was awarded funding from HM Prisons and Probation Service."

Inside the prison, Bishop Marcus was shown the Visits Hall where



Bishop Marcus with Andy Keen-Downs and some of the Pact volunteers and staff at the prison

families were gathered around small tables, chatting and eating snacks, overseen by prison officers.

Many children were present, perhaps in the care of grandparents or siblings, while visiting their mothers.

In the chapel, Bishop Marcus also met with RC Chaplain Eileen Shea and a group of women who were inmates in the prison. The group spoke highly of Eileen and were so grateful for her work supporting

and nurturing them in their faith. One said: "The quiet prayer and meditation just helps me to cope. It helps to calm me down."

The group was joined in the chapel by senior prison staff, leading to a valuable dialogue. Bishop Marcus talked about his experiences of visiting other prisons in the Leeds diocese. The women shared some of their painful stories, and Mr Keen-Downs encouraged the women to speak to Pact staff about their needs.

Several women expressed their concern about leaving prison and finding a Catholic community where they can continue to feel that they belong. This was a theme which struck Bishop Marcus particularly. He offered to have a follow up meeting with Pact to explore what more the Church and Pact can do to provide a place of welcome for women leaving the prison.

After the visit, Mr Keen-Downs said: "As I waited outside the prison for my cab back to the station – an expensive journey that many visiting families must make – the temperature dropped to below zero. I thought about those women leaving the warmth of the prison chapel or the visits room and going back to their cells. I thought about them leaving the prison, and their fear not only of the cold weather and of a life on the streets, but of the cold hearts of a world that has rejected them time and time again."

For more information, visit the Pact website: You can access it by clicking here

Big wine glass ban proposed

Removing the largest glass of wine from sale cuts the total amount people drink by 7.6 per cent, according to a four-week trial in pubs, bars and restaurants. The findings by a team at Cambridge University suggested that "when people are unable to buy large glasses of wine, they do not compensate by buying more small glasses."

The researchers said that banning pubs from serving large glasses would therefore be effective "at a population level".

Johnson backs Trump to lead US

Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson has given his backing Donald Trump's re-election campaign and claimed that the "global wokerati" is "trembling violently" at the thought of a second term.

Writing in the *Daily Mail*, the former PM said that "in the senior common rooms of our universities, in the synod of the Church of England, in the Orwellian corridors of the BBC" and "among much of the UK establishment" there has been a "caterwauling orgy of nose-holding abhorrence" over such a prospect

Bishop tells of sorrow over abuse failings

Andy Drozdziak

The current Bishop of Nottingham has shared his "deep sorrow" that historic child sexual abuse took place within Catholic organisations in his diocese in the 1970s.

But Bishop Patrick McKinney underlined the "robust safeguarding practices" that now exist within the diocese.

The bishop's comments came as former housemaster and Scout leader Steven McNally was jailed for 26 years after a jury found him guilty of historic sexual abuse at a Catholic children's home in Nottingham.

McNally, now 67, abused five children between 1974 and 1979 when he worked at Nazareth House Chil-

Bishop McKinney: 'I am deeply sorry that this abuse happened in Catholic institutions'



dren's Home in Lenton, and as a Scout leader for the Bishop's Own Troop, also in Nottingham.

Reacting to the news, Bishop McKinney said: "My prayers and thoughts are with the victims of the horrific crimes of Steven McNally. I am saddened and deeply sorry that this child sexual abuse occurred within Catholic organisations resid-

ing and operating within the Diocese of Nottingham in the 1970s."

Bishop McKinney highlighted the "courage, resilience and determination" of McNally's victims who exposed him.

"No sentence given today can ever remedy the life sentence given to McNally's victims," Bishop McKinney said. "I admire and applaud their courage, resilience and determination in bringing McNally to justice today.

"I thank them for their bravery and assure them of my prayerful support."

Four of the five victims resided at Nazareth House, while a fifth victim was sexually abused after joining a scout group run by the serial abuser.

The crimes went undetected until 2016, when the first victim came forward after watching a child sexual abuse storyline unfold on the ITV soap *Emmerdale*. The other victims then gradually came forward.

Detective Constable Helen Sanders, who led the investigation, called McNally "a manipulative sex offender" who 'abused a sacred position of trust...in the most appalling way imaginable."

Bishop McKinney said he committed to "protecting the most vulnerable in our communities" by having sound safeguarding procedures.



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COMMENT

Time to act on
Iran's malign
influence in UK

The recent British and American strikes on Houthis targets in Yemen are attempting to reduce the rebel group's ability to target shipping in the Red Sea. The latest round of attacks are also part of a wider diplomatic push to bring about peace in Yemen, a land whose people have suffered from civil war for years.

The Houthis say that they have fired missiles in solidarity with the Palestinians of Gaza but this is a spurious justification for a flagrant breach of international law. Trading routes must be kept open and the only surprise is that more countries, especially France and Germany, let alone major exporters like China and Japan, are not taking a more prominent role in the action.

One reason is that the current upheaval in the Middle East and the Gulf has a common factor: Iran. The ayatollahs sponsor both Hamas and the Houthis and are engaged in a proxy war with their enemies, Israel and the West, through them. They would do the same with Hezbollah in Lebanon had not the militia's hand been stayed by threats of American intervention.

Fellow travellers, useful idiots and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) are spreading Iran's malign influence. Rishi Sunak in the Commons this week said the possible proscription of the Iranian group as a terrorist organisation was still under consideration but no ban was announced.

Videos have emerged recently of anti-Semitic speeches by IRGC generals given to students in London. One speaker has since boasted of his role in training Hamas before the 7th October attacks in Israel. The organisation has been linked to kidnap and assassination plots in Britain. Proscribing it would mean it would become a criminal offence in Britain to belong to the group, attending its meetings or carry its logo in public, what is the Government waiting for?

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Sunak should pause before he ignores court's Rule 39

POLITICS

**Kanstantsin
Dzehtsiarou**


The UK Government is once again navigating legal and political hurdles over its plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda. The latest debate is over the emergency bill that legally declares Rwanda a safe place to send refugees (despite the Supreme Court ruling the opposite).

The Government has now told civil servants that, if a minister tells them to, they must ignore Rule 39 orders from the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

The court enforces the European convention on human rights, to which the UK and 45 other European countries are party. Rule 39 allows the court to issue interim measures to stop any of these Governments from taking action that could or would violate someone's human rights.

When is Rule 39 used?

The court uses Rule 39 only in urgent, exceptional cases where the person at the heart of the case faces real and irreparable harm to their life and health.

Usually, this is when facing extradition or deportation to a country where they may be tortured or killed. Rule 39 measures are sometimes called 'pyjama injunctions' because of the late-night nature of some rulings.

The court has been using this power for many years, and states usually comply. The court has only issued a handful of rule 39 orders to the UK. In some years it hasn't issued any. In 2021 and 2022 it issued five per year. For comparison, in 2022 the court used these measures against Greece 101 times, Poland 64 times and Russia 59 times.

These measures are temporary. They simply stay the execution of extradition or deportation orders so the court can review the case. This is what happened in June 2022 to stop the first planned deportation flight to Rwanda from taking off.

The court has also used an interim measure to secure Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny's transfer to Germany for treatment after being poisoned by a nerve agent. In another case, the court prevented the closure of an opposition television station in Georgia, which could have violated freedom of speech protections.

Can rule 39 injunctions be overruled or ignored?

Because these measures are temporary, rare and often made as



Rishi Sunak has a big decision to make over how the Government responds to European Court of Human Rights' rulings

a last resort, the court does not have time to present its reasons in detail for granting them. There is also technically no way to formally appeal against them, but the court will lift them if the relevant parties can show the measures are no longer necessary. More often, the measures are lifted when the court delivers its final judgment on the case.

In response to criticism, largely from the UK, the court has recently acted to make the process more transparent, deciding that the identity of the judge who issues the measures should be publicised, and the formal judicial decision sent to the parties. These are welcome developments, but may mean slower decision-making, which could be disastrous for human rights in some cases.

The court is clearly open to improving its practices, but such reforms need to be done in a spirit of collaboration, rather than an outright rejection.

The UK has already been

condemned once for failing to respect a Rule 39 order. The court prevented British forces from transferring two suspected terrorists over to Iraqi authorities in 2010, as there was a risk they could be sentenced to death. The UK ignored this measure, and the court found that by doing this the UK government violated the European Convention on Human Rights – a significant condemnation in its own right.

Persistent violation of Rule 39 measures would be more problematic. Even countries with much worse record of compliance with the court's orders than the UK have never legally declared that interim measures can be ignored by its ministers. States cannot use domestic law to ignore their obligations under international law.

In extreme cases, persistent violation of human rights can mean that a state is expelled from the Council of Europe, the body that oversees the convention. This happened to Russia in 2022.

The UK and human rights law

It is difficult to overstate the role the UK played in the creation and functioning of the Council of Europe and the European convention on human rights. The statute of the Council of Europe was signed in London in 1949, and the UK is a founding member.

The prime minister, Rishi Sunak, has vowed not to let 'foreign' courts stop the UK from sending asylum seekers to Rwanda. A policy of ignoring Rule 39 measures does not mean leaving the European convention on human rights immediately, but it doesn't look good.

The UK should not be able to pick and choose which decisions of the court to follow, because everyone else could feel enabled to do the same. Similarly, calls from some Conservative politicians to withdraw from the convention altogether arguably undermine the system that great British experts and diplomats helped to build, by implying it is not fit for purpose.

Withdrawing would ultimately leave people in the UK without a robust instrument or framework for challenging violations of their human rights.

The Government must make a sober calculation: is ignoring around five interim measures per year worth undermining the most effective international system of human rights protection in the world? I would very much hope not.

Kanstantsin Dzehtsiarou is a Professor in Human Rights Law, University of Liverpool



A group of people thought to be migrants are brought in to Dover, Kent last week

London beats LA when it comes to a warm welcome, says The Chosen team

Red carpet at Leicester Square for cult classic retelling of Jesus's life

Andy Drozdziak

Jonathan Roumie and fellow cast members received a warmer welcome in London than Los Angeles as hit TV series *The Chosen* launched its latest season in Leicester Square.

That was the view of Catholic leader Mary Madziva, a leader of the popular Flame conferences for young people, who was invited to attend *The Chosen's* Season 4 premiere on 22nd January with other members of the Flame team.

Mary told the *Universe*: "It was really good to see on the big screen and they'd given the Flame team invites to the after party to meet the cast too – the cast said they had a warmer welcome than LA."

"Being invited to attend *The Chosen's* premiere with members of the Flame team was just the most amazing opportunity."

Directed by Dallas Jenkins, *The*



Left, Mary with Jonathan Roumie (centre), who plays Jesus in *The Chosen*;

and above, with Elizabeth Tabish, who plays Mary Magdalene

Chosen's depiction of the life of Jesus has become something of a cult classic, accumulating more than 600 million views in more than 140 countries and viewed in 56 languages,

making it one of the most popular shows in the world.

Mary Madziva shared her belief that the show is an "epic retelling" of the story of Jesus.

"I love the show," she said. "It's such a good production – the way they have delved into the emotions and stories of the disciples and their families is so beautifully considered

and interwoven into the epic retelling of Jesus as a revolutionary but also a friend, teacher and person."

"Meeting some of the cast afterwards was brilliant. It was also great to hear them talk about the impact being in the show has had on them."

Season 4 is believed to deal with considerably darker themes and the darkness found in the story of Jesus.

Director Dallas Jenkins said: "We really lean into that this season—the darkness and the light, the bitter and the sweet. Fans have to brace themselves for the bitter, even though there is going to be sweet."

Jonathan Roumie, who plays Jesus in *The Chosen*, added: "We're asking a lot of people in this season, but I know it will be worth it."

Episodes 1 and 2 of Season 4 will show in cinemas across the UK and Ireland from Friday, 2nd February.

The Chosen is available to view on Amazon Prime, Netflix, Peacock and on *The Chosen* mobile and TV app.

For more information, visit www.thechosentv.co.uk

Mayor calls for total ban on all danger knife sales

Andy Drozdziak

Mayor of London Sadiq Khan has said that machetes and zombie knives should be completely banned in the UK.

Current plans are for machetes with no practical use and certain types of zombie knives to be made illegal, with a maximum penalty for their possession and sale increased to two years.

The London Mayor said: "It's more difficult for a teenager to buy a lottery ticket than to buy online a machete or a zombie knife."

"There can be no reason why anybody would have a machete in this country. We haven't got forests like South America; there's no justification for zombie knives."

The call comes after shocking recent incidents involving knives, including the murder of 15-year-old Christian schoolgirl Elianne Andam in Croydon, while Catholic schoolboy Harry Pitman was stabbed to

death with a hunting knife on New Year's Eve.

This led actor Idris Elba to launch the Don't Stop Your Future campaign, calling for an immediate ban on these knives, which has been backed by Catholic peace campaigner Barry Mizen MBE.

According to the *Telegraph*, the Home Secretary is looking to fast-track plans to toughen up knife laws in response.

Mr Khan said: "The Government's current plans are to only ban zombie knives if they're bigger than eight inches, if they are serrated, or they have more than one hole, or they have more than one spike."

"Well, that will encourage manufacturers to make knives that aren't caught by the ban."

"So what I'm saying to the Government is, firstly speed up this legislation and actually ban the sale and possession of all machetes and zombie knives."



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'I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' (Matthew 25)

Local democracy

Sir John Battle



This year, the focus for democracy will naturally be on national governments as they go to the polls.

But there is a risk that local council elections will be ignored by the media or swept up in same day balloting. If our General Election is declared by the Prime Minister on the same day as the council elections, currently booked for the first Thursday in May, there is a real chance they will just be devalued. And yet the Church's teaching, buttressing the concept of the 'common good', with the twin pillars of 'solidarity' ('leave no person out') and 'subsidiarity' ('every person matters and can contribute') urges us to take local democratic governance seriously.

Pope St John XXIII and Pope Benedict XVI were both keen to emphasise the importance of engagement at the local level and developing local economies and communities.

Presently in our society there is a neglected crisis in resources for local governments, reflected in this week's appeal by MPs from all parties to urgently address the issue of underfunding and the risk of bankruptcies facing local councils. Several have had to issue section 114 notices, effectively declaring themselves bankrupt and freezing all non statutory spending. Many others are in severe distress.

Councils are legally required to provide children's and adult social care, provide temporary accommodation and homeless support as well as empty the bins. They also provide local planning, street cleansing and maintenance. Parks, sports and leisure services such as libraries and museums are officially optional extras.

The problem is that central government funding support has fallen in real terms by over 40 per cent since 2010. Yet at the same time the demand for care of children and of the elderly has grown exponentially. In other words, it is the basic care services that are greatly overstretched.

Nor is the problem 'out-of-their-depth councillors wasting money'. Good local councillors of all parties are generally doing their best to be of local service. In 2010, Tory Secretary of State Eric Pickles encouraged councils to make up the financial shortfall by "creative use of reserves". Some invested in property, banks, solar farms and developments which were risky and costly. Nor can they raise local council taxes or collect business rates to make up for losses.

Now is the time for real subsidiarity to address the crisis by shifting budgets and powers from national level to local government, turning our democracy the right way up.

'It's not game over – it's game on': why 2024 is key to climate crisis

THE ENVIRONMENT

Wesley Morgan

In 2024, global climate trends are cause for both deep alarm and cautious optimism. Last year was the hottest on record by a huge margin and this year will likely be hotter still. The annual global average temperature may, for the first time, exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels – a threshold crucial for stabilising the Earth's climate.

Without immediate action, we are at grave risk of crossing irreversible tipping points in the Earth's climate system. Yet there are reasons for hope.

Global greenhouse gas emissions may peak this year and start falling. This would be an historic turning point, heralding the end of the fossil fuel era as coal, oil and gas are increasingly displaced by clean energy technologies.

But we must do more than take our foot off the warming accelerator – we must slam on the brakes. To avoid the worst of the climate crisis, global emissions must roughly halve by 2030. The task is monumental but possible, and could not be more urgent. It's not game over – it's game on.

Our planet in peril

Last year, Earth was the hottest it's been since records began. The onset of El Niño conditions in the Pacific Ocean helped drive global temperatures to new heights. The European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service found 2023 was 1.48°C warmer than the pre-industrial average.

Warmer global temperatures in 2023 brought extreme events and disasters worldwide. They included deadly heatwaves in the northern hemisphere summer, devastating wildfires in Canada and Hawaii, and record-breaking rains in many places including Korea, South Africa and China.

It was also the warmest on record for the world's oceans. More than 90 per cent of heat from global warming is stored in the world's oceans. Ocean temperatures are a clear indicator of our warming planet, revealing a year-on-year increase and an acceleration in the rate of warming.

The warming oceans meant for parts of 2023, the extent of sea ice in the Earth's polar regions was the lowest on record. During the southern hemisphere winter, sea ice in Antarctica was more than

Forest fire in Uruguay January 2023



one million square kilometres below the previous record low – an area of ice more than 15 times the size of Tasmania.

This year may be hotter still. There is a reasonable chance 2024 will end with an average global temperature more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Governments have agreed, through the Paris Agreement, to work together to limit global warming to 1.5°C, because warming beyond this threshold poses enormous dangers for humanity.

The agreement refers to long-term trends in temperature, not a single year. So breaching 1.5°C in 2024 would not mean the world has failed to meet the Paris target. However, on long-term trends we are on track to cross the 1.5°C limit in the early 2030s.

As the planet warms, we are now at grave risk of crossing irreversible "tipping points" in Earth's climate system – including the loss of polar ice sheets and associated sea-level rise, and the collapse of major ocean currents. These tipping points represent thresholds which, when crossed, will trigger abrupt and self-perpetuating changes to the world's climate and oceans. They are threats of a magnitude never before faced by humanity – one-way doors we do not want to go through.

But in 2024 there are also many reasons for hope. At the COP28 United Nations climate talks in December 2023, Governments from nearly 200 countries agreed to accelerate the transition away

from fossil fuels in this crucial decade. The burning of fossil fuels is the primary cause of the climate crisis.

We have the technology needed to replace fossil fuels across our economy: in electricity generation, transport, heating, cooking and industrial processes. In fact, surging market demand for clean energy technologies – wind, solar, batteries and electric cars – is now displacing polluting technologies, such as coal-fired power and combustion engine vehicles, on a global scale.

The world added 510 billion watts of renewable energy capacity in 2023, 50 per cent more than in 2022 and equivalent to the entire power capacity of Germany, France and Spain combined. The next five years are expected to see even faster growth in renewables.

Sales of electric vehicles are also booming – growing by 31 per cent in 2023 and representing around 18 per cent of all new vehicles sold worldwide. In Australia, sales of electric vehicles doubled last year and are expected to continue to grow strongly.

Toward a peak in global emissions

The accelerating shift toward clean energy technologies means global greenhouse gas emissions may fall in 2024. Recent analysis from the International Energy Agency (IEA), based on the stated policies of Governments, suggests emissions may in fact have peaked last year. The finding is supported

by analysis from Climate Analytics, which found a 70 per cent chance of emissions falling from 2024 if current growth in clean technologies continues.

A growing number of major economies have passed their emissions peaks, including the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom and Japan.

China is currently the world's biggest emitter, contributing 31 per cent of the global total last year. But explosive growth in clean energy investments mean China's emissions are set not only to fall in 2024, but to go into structural decline.

What's more, China is currently undergoing a boom in clean energy manufacturing and a historic expansion of renewables – especially solar. Similarly explosive growth is expected for batteries and electric vehicles.

A peak in global emissions is cause for optimism – but it won't be nearly enough. Greenhouse gas emissions will still accumulate in the atmosphere and drive catastrophic warming, until we bring them as close to zero as possible.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns global emissions must roughly halve by 2030 to keep the 1.5°C goal within reach. The task is monumental, but possible.

Wesley Morgan is a Research Fellow, Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University, Australia.

Bishops mark Holocaust Day with call to end antisemitism

Andy Drozdziak

Catholic leaders have called for people to stand against antisemitism in the build up to Holocaust Memorial Day on 27th January.

The call comes as new figures reveal that antisemitic hate crimes recorded by the Metropolitan Police in the wake of Hamas's October attack on Israel were more than 13 times the number for the same period in 2022.

A total of 679 antisemitic offences were recorded by the Met Police from 7th October to 7th November 2023 inclusive, compared with 50 in the equivalent period the previous year and 81 in 2021.

Members of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales have spoken out against these antisemitic incidents. Cardinal Nichols said: "I appeal for restraint and the total avoidance of hateful language and action, as the impact of this conflict is felt in communities here."

The rise in antisemitic offences was not confined to London, with increases also seen in West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and West Midlands.

Data obtained from smaller forces, or those covering areas with few towns or cities, typically showed low



Bishop Declan Lang at Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre in Jerusalem

numbers of offences, often in single figures, meaning a clear trend was harder to determine.

This year, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust is inviting people to join commemorations by lighting a candle in their windows that evening, as part of its 'Light the Darkness' campaign. This will also see landmarks across the UK illuminated in purple.

Bishop Declan Lang, Chair of the Bishops' International Affairs department, said: "We commit ourselves to stand against antisemi-

tism, injustice and prejudice wherever it might be found. Together we remember the Holocaust and pray that love will triumph over evil."

Bishop John Sherrington recently went on a pilgrimage to Poland during a study week organised by the Council for Christians and Jews with a focus on the Holocaust. He visited Warsaw, Łódź, and Krakow, where he met members of Jewish communities and followed the paths of some of the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust.



Holocaust Survivor Joan Salter MBE

"The experiences of that week provide a deeper understanding and greater poignancy as we approach Holocaust Memorial Day on 27th January," Bishop Sherrington said. "Over the week, I learnt again and again that, 'man is redeemed by love' (Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi 26). Such love is human and fragile, yet it is a fragile love that brings hope and is a precious gift."

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust chairwoman Laura Marks said this year's Holocaust Memorial Day theme was The Fragility of Freedom.

"The theme presents us all with an opportunity to reflect on the delicate nature of freedom. It also challenges us to defend our freedoms at every opportunity," she said.

Bishop voices concern over medical ethics

An Irish bishop has joined doctors in blasting new medical ethical guidance for appearing to condone euthanasia.

The Irish Medical Council 9th edition of its Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics contains "numerous defects" – especially references to the deletion of sections on Assisted Human Reproduction (47) and Abortion (48), said Bishop Kevin Doran.

Previously the guidelines said: 'You must not take part in the deliberate killing of a patient', but this has been removed from the latest edition.

Bishop Kevin asked: "Is this an oversight, or is it the case that the Medical Council has now decided that it is acceptable for doctors to take part in the deliberate killing of a patient?"

"Even if assisted suicide were to be legalised, for example, that of itself would never make the killing of patients ethical."

He also noted that guidelines protecting staff from being compelled to perform abortions against their conscience had been watered down, so they now have to help make alternative arrangements.

"It does not make sense ethically to require a doctor to assist a patient to access a procedure which the doctor regards as unethical."

Cardinal, SCIAF in new calls for ceasefire in Holy land conflict

The UK Catholic community has continued to call for a ceasefire, and humanitarian aid for the most vulnerable, as the conflict in the Holy Land continues to wreak devastation.

Cardinal Nichols said: "In the last few days I have heard directly, via Zoom, from the parish priest of the Church of the Holy Family in Gaza City and from the CEO of the Latin Patriarchate. The situation they face is grave.

"There are 600 people sheltering and being cared for in the parish compound, together with over 50 seriously disabled and vulnerable children. Water and food can be bought in the local markets at inflated prices. With the damage inflicted on this site, cooking hot meals is only possible three times a week. The parish is also providing for 200 people in the Orthodox property as well as for local Muslim neighbours.

"The situation in the West Bank is grave, with more than 100,000 families losing income as well as the absence of all visitors and pilgrims."

Israeli forces are battling Palestinian militants near the main hospital in Gaza's second-largest city of Khan Younis, where medics said hundreds of patients and thousands of displaced people are unable to leave because of the fighting.

With the conflict in its fourth month, the death toll in Gaza has reached more than 25,000, 70% of whom are thought to be women and children.

In all, some 1.7 million people have been displaced within Gaza, according to the UN refugee agency.

Scottish Catholic aid agency SCIAF has also called for an end to the violence.

SCIAF said: "We call for an immediate ceasefire – an end to all violence by all parties. We call for all hostages



to be released immediately. We demand that the Geneva Conventions and International Humanitarian law be respected and adhered to.

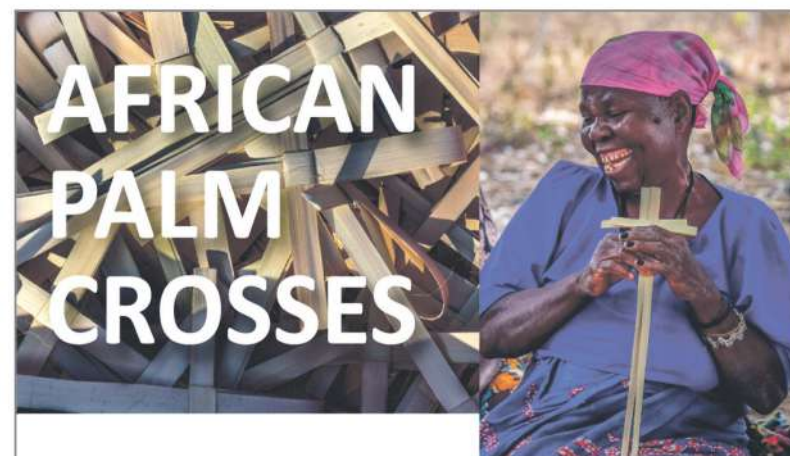
"We urgently support unimpeded safe humanitarian access to and across all of Gaza. We recognise that the roots of this crisis lie in the past and for all parties to look to and work for a future grounded in a just and lasting peace.

"We pray for politicians to pursue a path to durable peace for all people in the Holy Land to live harmoniously together."

SCIAF Chief Executive Lorraine Currie said: "The situation is dire. Humanitarian needs are intense. Health, and emergency services are degraded to the point of nothing. Designated 'safe' areas have been attacked. This must stop; we cannot stand by and allow this to continue.

"Please join us in praying for the immense suffering to come to an end."

Netanyahu risks regional and global peace: see pg 17



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In Brief

Chancellor offers tax cut hint

The Chancellor has made “strong hints” that he wants to cut taxes in the spring budget, said the BBC. Speaking to the broadcaster, Jeremy Hunt said that nations with lower taxes have more “dynamic, faster growing economies”. He said the “direction of travel” on fiscal policy was towards lower taxes, following on from the cut to the main rate of national insurance for employees and tax relief for businesses unveiled in the autumn statement last year.

‘No-go’ zones for teachers

Behaviour in some schools has become so bad that there are “no-go” areas for staff, and teachers lock themselves in classrooms for safety at lunchtime, said the new head of Oftsed. Sir Martyn Oliver said he was aware of broken schools where “students were stopping staff saying, this is a no-go corridor, it belongs to the children”.

The paper noted that his arrival in the job coincided with “the most turbulent period the inspectorate has faced after the suicide of a head teacher”.

New post scandal brewing

Ministers have told the Post Office to investigate claims that a second IT system was faulty and may have led to the wrongful convictions of sub-postmasters. It is feared that Capture, a piece of accounting software rolled out in Post Office branches in the 1990s, was “prone to errors” and “caused financial shortfalls” in “the same way as the faulty Horizon system”.

The Department for Business and Trade said it has ordered the Post Office to look into the claims.

Government blamed for dental ‘crisis’

More than 100,000 children were taken to hospital with rotten teeth over five years, according to research by *The Daily Mirror*.

In 2022, 116 children needed extractions every day, as 40 per cent of children now no longer have regular NHS check-ups.

Dental bosses blame government cuts for the crisis, which is preventing children getting vital checks to identify early signs of tooth decay. “This is the result of political choices, said British Dental Association chair Eddie Crouch.

Concern rises over Ukraine’s ability to resist Russia in spring

Stefan Wolff & Tetyana Malyarenko

Analysis suggests that Russia may be in the early stages of a new offensive in Ukraine. On the ground, Moscow’s forces have intensified their attacks along major sections of the frontline, and made small territorial gains over the past few weeks. Its troops have taken new territory or reclaimed territory liberated by Kyiv’s forces during Ukraine’s much-vaunted counteroffensive last year.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian troops have switched to “active defence”, according to the commander of the country’s ground forces, Colonel-General Oleksandr Syrskyi.

Does this imply that Ukrainian efforts to resist and ultimately defeat Russia’s aggression are in serious peril should the offensive begin? This will depend on an assessment of both Russian and Ukrainian capabilities and political will. Regarding the latter, neither side shows any signs of backing down.

Russian president, Vladimir Putin, was unequivocal at a forum with local government leaders on 16th January that he was unwilling to enter into any negotiations with Ukraine. Instead he predicted “a very serious blow” to Ukrainian statehood as a result of the war.

His Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelensky, meanwhile, speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos a week later, left little doubt about his determination to continue fighting for the complete liberation of all of Ukraine’s currently Russian-occupied territories.

Men and materiel

But do Russia and Ukraine have the military capabilities to match their leaders’ rhetoric? This is an issue of both equipment and manpower. As is obvious from the repeated and increasingly successful Russian airstrikes against a wide range of targets across Ukraine, including Kyiv and the country’s second-largest city, Kharkiv, Russia has the arms and ammunition to continue its air campaign while Ukraine still lacks adequate air defence capabilities.

Similarly, Ukrainian ground efforts are hampered by increasingly serious ammunition shortages. Summarising several press reports, non-profit policy organisation the Institute for the Study of War reported on 8th January 2024, that Ukrainian troops “are struggling to completely compensate for artillery ammunition shortages” while their

Moscow can rely on a steady stream of some 30,000 volunteers a month.



use of small drones for combat purposes was hampered by “insufficient electronic warfare capabilities”.

When it comes to manpower, both sides are struggling. In his year-end press conference Putin ruled out any further mobilisation. And, according to Vadym Skibitskyi, the deputy head of Ukraine’s military intelligence, Moscow can rely on a steady stream of some 30,000 volunteers a month. As a consequence, however, the question facing the Kremlin is how the Russian economy will deal with manpower shortages as workers are diverted to the frontlines.

The planned mobilisation of around 500,000 additional troops in Ukraine is also likely to be difficult and divisive for very similar reasons.

Friends and partners

Russia has benefited enormously from Iranian and North Korean military supplies. As is obvious from the recent visit of the North Korean foreign minister, Choe Son-hui, to Moscow, these links are likely to grow and further boost Russia’s war effort against Ukraine.

Ukraine is, in many ways, even more dependent on foreign aid to sustain its defence against Russia’s aggression – yet this aid has become much more precarious.

With no clear pathway to unlocking further US military aid and uncertainty over future EU financial commitments, Ukraine has become dependent on a small number of donors, including Germany and the UK.

Ukraine’s predicament is exacerbated by the fact that its own defence sector is not yet fully on a

war footing, which is partly why it has struggled to manufacture sufficient ammunition for its troops in the field. Even if this were to change soon, including with the help of western investment, Ukraine’s lack of strategic depth would remain an impediment. Russian drones and missiles have the capability to reach military production facilities anywhere in Ukraine. Ukraine, for now, lacks the air defence systems to effectively counter such attacks.

Security guarantees

This leaves the question of deterrence as potentially the last obstacle in the path of a Russian counteroffensive that could deliver Putin’s threatened serious blow to Ukraine’s statehood. First raised in a G7 joint declaration of support for Ukraine in July 2023, bilateral agreements between Ukraine and several of its western allies to strengthen defence and security co-operation are now beginning to take more concrete shape.

The UK-Ukraine agreement on security co-operation was signed on 12th January 2024. French president, Emmanuel Macron, has announced that a similar deal between France and Ukraine will be finalised in February.

The UK-Ukraine agreement provides for ‘comprehensive assistance to Ukraine for the protection and the restoration of its territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders’. It pledges ‘prevention and active deterrence of, and counter-measures against, any military escalation and/or a new aggression by the Russian Federation’. It also promises ‘support for Ukraine’s

future integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions’.

Considered side-by-side, enthusiasm in the west for supporting a Ukrainian victory on the battlefield and for Nato membership is, at best, lukewarm. However, if this is a model for similar deals in the future, if the US and other key Nato members reach similar agreements with Ukraine, and if these – as yet untested – commitments are followed through and don’t suffer the fate of the Budapest memorandum (a 1994 document that Ukraine agreed to remove all of its nuclear weapons in return for recognition from Russia and others of its statehood) whose security assurances proved useless, this would indicate a clear western determination to prevent a major Russian counteroffensive resulting in yet another illegal Russian land grab.

There are many and significant “ifs” in all this, however, and Nato’s goal of preventing Ukraine’s defeat is far more modest than Zelensky’s war aims.

Yet, precisely because they are more modest, and therefore more credible, they could prevent a much more dangerous broader escalation between Russia and west without condemning Ukraine to a permanent defeat.

Stefan Wolff is a Professor of International Security, University of Birmingham

Tetyana Malyarenko is a Professor of International Relations, Jean Monnet Professor of European Security, National University Odesa Law Academy

Let's save our churches says Python star

Andy Drozdziak

Monty Python star Sir Michael Palin is backing a new plan to tackle the UK's "single biggest heritage challenge" – saving its beloved churches.

With over 3,500 churches having closed since 2013, and many more facing closure, the National Churches Trust has launched a manifesto, 'Every Church Counts', to save the UK's church buildings – and Sir Michael is calling for urgent action "to prevent the loss of tremendously important local heritage."

"Churches are a vital and much-loved part of the UK's history and we need to act now to prevent the loss of tremendously important local heritage," Sir Michael, vice-president of the National Churches Trust, said.

"If you care as much about the future of these much-loved buildings as I do, you'll find that the National Churches Trust's 'Every Church Counts' offers a way forward for these wonderful buildings."

Around 38,500 churches, chapels and meeting houses are open for worship in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with many offering community services such as food banks to warm spaces. However, the future of many of them is under threat.

'Every Church Counts' proposes the following six key actions to save UK church buildings:

- creating a network of professional support officers to help those who look after church buildings;
- creating more community support services in church buildings;
- additional public funding of £50 million and a national matched funding scheme;
- a strategy to increase tourism to historic churches;
- regular opening of churches beyond worship times;
- and the development of a national plan.

Sir Michael Palin underlined the importance of the plan. "Right now, many church buildings are in danger of closure. 'Every

"Churches are a vital and much-loved part of the UK's history and we need to act now to prevent the loss of this important local heritage," said Sir Michael Palin



Church Counts' proposes a range of ways in which the future of the UK's churches, chapels and meeting houses can be secured," he said.

The yearly social and economic value provided to the UK by its church buildings is at least £55 billion a year, whilst church buildings are often also key parts of local cultural life.

Claire Walker, CEO of the National Churches Trust, said: "Every Church Counts' offers a blueprint of how churches can be saved for the future. We are calling on Government, heritage organisations and Christian denominations to work together to tackle what is the UK's single biggest heritage challenge."

Sir Philip Rutnam, Chair of the National Churches Trust, said that the ideas in 'Every Church Counts' are designed "to lead thinking and stimulate debate."

'Every Church Counts' was launched at a reception in the Attlee Room in the House of Lords hosted by Lord Cormack and attended by MPs, Peers and church and heritage leaders, on Wednesday 24th January, 2024.

The plan has been backed by senior MPs and peers as well as the main Christian denominations of the UK.



Fundraisers wanted as more families fall into the poverty trap

Andy Drozdziak

Caritas Salford is urging supporters to put their running shoes on to make a difference.

The social action charity has seen a significant increase in demand for its services in recent months and is appealing for support from runners who want to take on a challenge in 2024.

Patrick O'Dowd, director of Caritas Salford, told the *Universe*: "Our teams are working hard to support as many people as possible, but the fundraising landscape is difficult as budget cuts mean many sources of funding are being reduced or simply aren't available.

"We are working really hard to generate funds and work as efficiently as possible while also continuing to meet the urgent needs of local people.

"That's why we're putting out this appeal for people who might be willing to take on the Great Manchester Run or another challenge – whether physical, mental or both – in aid of Caritas Salford this year."

The call comes as a Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) report said that six million people were in 'very deep poverty' – in households below 40 per cent of the median income after housing costs – in 2021/22, 1.5 million more than 20 years ago.

Consumer champion Martin Lewis said the report must prompt policymakers and regulators to "sit up (and) take note".

"The stark reality is, 100,000s of people in the UK are 'deficit budgeting' – their income is less than their minimum necessary expenditure," Mr Lewis said. "That's a clear indication the problem is getting worse."

Patrick O'Dowd added: "There are many people locally who are experiencing acute crisis and simply aren't able to afford things that all of us should have access to," he said.

"Whether that's a safe, secure place to call home, three meals a day, or simply knowing they're able to keep their children warm at night, hardworking individuals and families in Greater Manchester and Lancashire are finding themselves in unthinkable situations they never thought would happen."

• **Places are available for runners in various running events across the region, such as the Manchester Half Marathon and the Great Manchester Run. To find out more, visit www.caritassalford.org.uk/EveryStep**

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Father Hudson's Care is a Catholic charity serving the needs of vulnerable people, without discrimination, within the Archdiocese of Birmingham. It is motivated by Gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching, and takes Christ's command to "Love one another" as its inspiration.

Father Hudson's Society today delivers a diverse range of services to older people, adults with disabilities, children and families, refugees and people experiencing homelessness, from purpose designed care homes, parish and community buildings, schools and a modern efficient office. Employing over 325 employees, its services are currently spread across Warwickshire, Oxfordshire, Staffordshire and West Midlands.

Due to the present incumbent retiring, the Board of Trustees is now seeking to appoint a practising Catholic as Chief Executive Officer. Under the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 there is a Genuine

Occupational Requirement (GOR) for the successful candidate to be a practising Catholic.

Throughout its history the organisation has continually changed in response to new challenges and areas of need, and trustees will expect the new CEO to play a full part in shaping and delivering future developments. The successful applicant will also have the proven ability to provide strategic direction, lead and develop teams, act as an ambassador with external stakeholders, drive excellence and maintain and grow a sustainable organisation. A degree and/or relevant professional qualification in social work, health, education, community work, finance or business management together with evidence of post-qualification training in relation to the Senior Management task is essential.

The successful candidate will require an enhanced disclosure from the Disclosure and Barring Service (funded by FHC).

Closing date: 12pm Friday 9th February 2024; Interview date: Tuesday 27th February
CVs not accepted - only application forms (see below).

Previous applicants need not apply. No agencies.

We do reserve the right to close this advertisement early if we receive sufficient suitable applications.
If you would like to have an informal conversation about the role with the current Chief Executive Officer, Andy Quinn, please ring 07966 935533.

For further details and an application pack, please see
<https://www.fatherhudsons.org.uk/vacancies/chief-executive-officer/399.htm>
or email: recruitment@fatherhudsons.org.uk quoting post reference P1732

Keep faith in our schools

James Somerville-Meikle
Deputy Director, the Catholic Union of Great Britain

'You can't divide children by race and religion was the quote on the front page of this Monday's *London Evening Standard*. The words were superimposed on a photograph of the woman who said them: Katharine Birbalsingh, headteacher of the Michaela Community School in Wembley.

Ms Birbalsingh, described by the press as 'Britain's Strictest Headteacher', has found herself in the spotlight after a decision to ban Muslim prayers at school ended up in the High Court.

Michaela School, founded by Ms Birbalsingh in 2014, prides itself on being secular and a place where children from all faiths and backgrounds are welcome. It was for this reason that the school decided not to allow Muslim pupils to use prayer mats at lunchtimes.

The decision was challenged by one of the pupils and the dispute has ended up in the High Court, in a case which Ms Birbalsingh says she is "nervous but hopeful" about.

The case has opened a broader debate about the role of religion in schools, and led some to call for all prayers to be banned in schools.

Voices calling for a complete separation between religion and education are not new. Despite the fact that the Catholic Church can proudly claim to be the oldest provider of schools and universities as we know them today, there are those who see a contradiction between faith and learning.

Today's Catholic schools are some of the most diverse in the country. Nearly half of pupils are from an ethnic minority background, compared to a third in the state sector. Catholic schools also educate more pupils from the most deprived backgrounds.

This has not prevented Catholic schools, and faith schools in general, from getting caught in the crossfire in the fall out from the Michaela School court case. 'Wouldn't it better if we banished faith in schools altogether?' asked one *Sunday Times* columnist.

Such an approach might be credible if Britain was a country entirely devoid of faith, but the most recent census found that over 60 per cent of people said they belonged to one religion or another. It should also be noted that faith schools, and Catholic ones in particular, remain hugely popular.

The solution surely is to give parents the choice, and to respect the values and ethos of individual schools within the law. It is not a question of "dividing" children, but in recognising that different views exist. Pretending otherwise does nobody, especially children, any good.

Parish gardeners hope to land King's Award

Volunteers at a parish community project are hoping for a royal seal of approval after being nominated for another prestigious award.

The Bee Together Community Centre and Garden, based at the Parish of The Nativity in Failsworth and Limeside, Oldham has recently been nominated for The King's Award for Voluntary Service (KAWS). Created in 2002 to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee, and previously known as The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS), the King's Award has been shining a light on voluntary groups from around the UK for many years.

The KAWS is the equivalent to an MBE, and the highest award given to local voluntary groups in the UK.

No stranger to awards and accolades, the Bee Together project already has a number of RHS Awards under its belt, thanks to its vibrant community garden.

This latest nomination pays tribute to the tireless efforts of all the volunteers who bring the community centre and garden to life.

Pauline Riley, parishioner and parish co-ordinator, said: "To say we're excited is an understatement – it's such a huge honour to get this far."



The parish volunteers on the Bee Together Community Centre and Garden are hoping to win a King's Award after being nominated

The nomination was made by the headteacher of Holy Family RC Primary School, which was bolstered by additional letters of support from people familiar with the project.

Following the nomination, volunteers were invited to attend a meeting with Vice Lord-Lieutenant of Greater Manchester, Sharman Birtles, who heard more about the extraordinary work of the volunteers and the impact it is making in the local community.

Pauline said: "The meeting was very inspiring. I received feedback from everyone involved who said it had made them feel valued and very special. We all had a really great

morning it was very positive. It gave us all the incentive to continue doing our voluntary work.

"Whatever happens next is out of our hands, but it's a real honour to have got this far."

After reviewing the notes and testimonies from the meeting – along with additional documents – the Vice Lord Lieutenant compiled a citation and assessment that has been presented to a panel for further consideration.

A decision will soon be made on whether or not to progress the nomination, with the outcome then announced to mark the King's birthday in November.

Kerry humbled by honour

St Gemma's Hospice chief executive, Kerry Jackson, was delighted to receive an OBE in the King's New Year Honours list for services to palliative and end of life care.

St Gemma's in Leeds, of which Bishop of Leeds Marcus Stock is a Patron, is recognised locally, nationally and internationally for its pioneering approach.

Under Kerry Jackson's leadership, the hospice has flourished achieving an outstanding CQC rating twice, and becoming the world's first University Teaching Hospice.

Sr Anne Hammersley of the Sisters of the Cross and Passion, and a Trustee of St Gemma's Hospice, said: "Kerry has been an integral part of St Gemma's Hospice since 2010, leading the organisation with an unwavering commitment to delivering the highest quality palliative and end of life care, education and research.

"I was delighted to hear that Kerry had been awarded this special honour. Her dedication to the Hospice and wider palliative care movement has been outstanding and we are so pleased that her efforts have been recognised."

Kerry said she was "humbled and honoured" to receive the OBE, and that it was "a privilege to lead this incredible hospice and its team of staff and volunteers."



Letters to the Editor

The Universe Catholic Weekly welcomes letters from our readers. Send your thoughts to Michael Winterbottom, at michael.winterbottom@universecatholicweekly.co.uk.

Please endeavour to keep your letter short, and we reserve the right to edit all correspondence for space and legal reasons. Please provide a name and address with all letters, but we are happy to anonymise your thoughts in print.

Priests must stay celibate

Thank you for your article 19th January, on priestly celibacy. In my opinion, it is not the actual celibacy or non-celibacy which is the problem, but the question is how can the Church ensure that a priest or aspiring priest will find a woman who shares his vocation, and what extra problems arise if he does not?

A celibate priesthood is a bulwark against the sexualised society we now have, the idea no one can live without sex. The presence of a celibate priesthood gives confidence to the countless unmarried who choose to be celibate because they believe that is what God wants of them. It also gives confidence to the countless (but hidden) marriages in which one partner is incapable of sexual relationships and all the stresses and strains this brings, but their partner does not give up on them.

Finally the term 'Father' would need to be dropped. A father, like a good shepherd, will drop everything if one of his flock is in need. If a priest has a biological child whom has to be cared for, do they take precedence over an 'adopted' parishioner?

As a priest friend of mine told me once, "My sister dearly wanted to get married. She lived her life praying, even after menopause, that she

would meet someone. She never did.

"I too would have liked an intimate friendship but I had the grace of the sacrament of Ordination to see me through.

"She had nothing except the thought that if her brother and other priests could cope, then she must and would."

Sincerely in Christ
Claire Riche

Celibacy must be questioned

The question of a celibate clergy remains with us in spite of present circumstance. How often do our bishops face the unenviable task of replacing a priest who through age or infirmity can no longer continue with his duties, or one who has fallen in love and is unable to sustain his vocation?

What is the bishop to do? Amalgamate parishes is one option but often only serves to double the load of an already aged priest. Alternatively, he leaves the parishioners to fend for themselves with the occasional help from priests in surrounding parishes.

Something is fundamentally wrong with our perception of the word 'vocation'. That the community should recognise the need for a pastor and nominate him to the bishop would

be a good starting point.

Then look at the seminary experience. All very well for those entering a monastic vocation but for those whose life will centre on the parish where he will have to invigorate Christian family life, one could question its appropriateness.

I recently addressed this issue in my weekly column in the *Universe*. For those considering ordination they have also to consider a vocation to celibacy and furthermore consider it often in their late teens when they will have had limited mature experience of sexual attraction.

That this issue did not receive greater discussion time at the recent synod is to be regretted. The availability of the Eucharist is of far greater importance than the marital status of the priest

One man, two vocations is perfectly possible if everyone concerned is aware of what is involved.

I will no doubt return to this topic in the near future, for these are but scattered fragments of the celibacy issue which deserves criticism at a greater length than, perhaps, the *Universe* letters page allows.

Chris McDonnell,
Retired secretary,
Movement for Married Clergy

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St Peter's Basilica set for the Sunday of the Word of God

Wine is a gift from the Lord

The skills of winegrowers – respect, perseverance and knowing how to prune to produce fruit – are also valuable messages for the soul, Pope Francis said. “Wine, the land, farming skills and entrepreneurial activity are gifts from God,” the pope told winegrowers, winemakers and others taking part in an event organised by Vinitaly – an international wine and spirits exhibition held in Verona. The event was dedicated to Italian wine and ‘the economy of Francesco,’ an economy inspired by St. Francis of Assisi that respects the earth and promotes peace and justice.

“It is good that you find yourselves reflecting together on the ethical aspects and moral responsibilities involved in wine production and that you draw inspiration from Assisi,” he told the group during an audience at the Vatican.

Respect and kindness are important in treating the earth, workers and consumers, he said. “Indeed, ‘genuine care for our lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others,’” he said, quoting from his encyclical, *Laudato Si*. The pope thanked the group for striving to follow St. Francis of Assisi’s example and knowing the importance of harmony, helping the least and respecting creation.

Life’s simple if you listen to God

Pope Francis has a straightforward message as he marks Sunday of Word of God

Justin McLellan

God’s word cuts through the sea of chatter spoken aloud and uttered online to touch the hearts of Christians and inspire them to share the Gospel, Pope Francis said.

“While society and social media reflect the violence of words, let us draw closer to and cultivate the quiet word that brings salvation, that is meek, that doesn’t make noise, that enters into the heart,” the pope said during his homily at Mass for the celebration of Sunday of the Word of God in St. Peter’s Basilica.

Although Christians today are “barraged by words about the Church,” he encouraged them to “re-discover the word of life that re-

sounds in the Church.”

“If not, we end up talking more about ourselves” than about Jesus, “and concentrate on our own thoughts and problems rather than on Christ and his word,” the pope told the approximately 5,000 people gathered for Mass.

In 2019, the pope decreed that the third Sunday of Ordinary Time be devoted to the “celebration, study and dissemination of the word of God,” and celebrated Mass to mark the first Sunday of the Word of God in January 2020.

During Mass, Pope Francis installed two women to the ministry of lector, a ministry he formally opened to women in 2021, and nine men and women to the ministry of catechist.

“All the baptised who participate in the mission of the Christ (as) priest, prophet and king, have an active part in the life and action of

the Church,” he told the catechists, adding that they are called to “live more intensely the apostolic spirit, in the example of those men and women who helped Paul and the apostles in spreading the Gospel.”

The pope gave a Bible to each of the lectors and a silver crucifix to each of the catechists.

In his homily, the pope recalled the many saints who were deeply touched by the word of God – St. Anthony, St. Theresese of Lisieux, St. Francis of Assisi – and who were moved to lead lives of holiness.

“Their lives were changed by the word of life, but I ask, how is it that for many of us the same thing does not happen?” Pope Francis asked. “So often we listen to God’s word (and) it goes in one ear and out the other.”

“We need to stop being ‘deaf’ to God’s word,” he said. “This is a risk for all of us: overwhelmed by a bar-

rage of words, we let the word of God glide by us. We hear it, yet we fail to listen to it; we listen to it, yet we don’t keep it; we keep it, yet we don’t let it provoke us to change.”

In his homily, the pope reflected on the day’s Gospel reading from St. Mark in which Jesus calls out to Simon and Andrew who were fishing and immediately “left their nets and followed him.”

Like the apostles, Christians today also are called to become “God’s messengers and witnesses to a world drowning in words, yet thirsting for the very word it so often ignores.”

“How often we struggle to leave behind our security, our routine, because these entangle us like fish in a net,” the pope said. “Yet those who respond to the word experience healing from the snares of the past, because the living word gives new meaning to their lives.”

Pornography destroys the gift of love and sex in relationships

Pornography and lust undermine and rob people from experiencing God’s gift of love, Pope Francis said.

“Sexual pleasure, which is a gift from God, is undermined by pornography: satisfaction without relationship that can generate forms of addiction,” the pope said at his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall.

“We must defend love, love of the

heart, mind and body, loving by giving oneself to another – this is the beauty of a sexual relationship.”

He reflected on the vice or “demon” of lust, which is “a kind of voracity” with regard to another person, that is, the poisoned bond, especially in the sphere of sexuality.

“Please note,” the pope said, “in Christianity, there is no condemnation of the sexual instinct.”

The Song of Songs in the Bible, “is a wonderful poem of love between two lovers,” he said, and the human experience of falling in love is “one of the purest feelings” and “most astonishing realities of existence.”

“However, this beautiful dimension of our humanity, the sexual dimension, the dimension of love, is not without its dangers,” the pope said.

The “garden” of love “is defiled by the demon of lust,” which destroys relationships and can become “a chain that deprives human beings of freedom,” he said.

“To love is to respect the other, to seek his or her happiness, to cultivate empathy for his or her feelings,” Pope Francis said.

Lust, on the other hand, poisons relationships.

Good example is best form of evangelisation

Thanking members of the Catholic charismatic renewal for helping people learn to pray, Pope Francis asked them to focus on adoration as well as their usual prayers of praise.

People need to learn “an adoration in which silence is predominant, in which the Word of God prevails over our words; in short, an adoration in which at the centre there is truly him, the Lord, and not ourselves,” Pope Francis told leaders of Italy’s charismatic movement.

He also asked them to continue their focus on evangelisation, but to remember that the most effective way to share the Gospel is by example, especially an example of charity.

Evangelisation is part of “the DNA of the charismatic movement,” he said. “The Holy Spirit, welcomed in the heart and in life, cannot but open us, move us, make us go out. The Spirit always urges us to communicate the Gospel, to go out, and he does so with his inexhaustible imagination.”

When the apostles set out after

Pentecost to preach the Gospel, “they did not have a manual for how to proceed; it was the Spirit that moved them, and they did many great things,” the pope said.

“Always remember that the first proclamation is made through the witness of life,” he said. “What use are long prayers and beautiful hymns, if then I do not know how to be patient with my neighbour, if I do not know how to be close to my mother who is alone?”

Charity, the pope said, “is always the verification of our proclamation. Words, gestures and songs without the substance of charity will not do.”

The charismatic renewal movement should also promote communion, “first and foremost with your bishops.”

As one of many Church movements, he said, members of the renewal “must be at the service of the entire diocesan community, the entire parish community, in accordance with the bishop’s pastoral indications.”



Leaders of Italy’s charismatic movement greet the Holy Father

Vatican journalists told to focus on truth – not salacious gossip

A journalist’s reporting about the Catholic Church should not aim to polarise people or push certain positions, but to seek and share the truth, Pope Francis said.

Journalists have an obligation to ground their work “on the solid rock of responsibility in truth, not on the fragile sands of gossip and ideological readings,” the pope told some 150 journalists accredited to the Vatican during a meeting.

In his speech, the pope told journalists not to “hide reality, even its miseries,” in their reporting, and said that while they should not play down tensions in the Church, they also should not make “unnecessary clamour.”

“To be a journalist is a vocation, a bit like that of a doctor, who chooses to love humanity by curing its illnesses,” he said. In the same way, a journalist “chooses to touch with their hand the wounds of society and the world” in order to bring them to light.

Speaking off the cuff, Pope Francis praised the “delicacy” with which journalists report on “scandals” in the Church: “They exist, and often I have seen in you a great sensitivity, a respect, an almost – I would say – ‘embarrassed’ silence” when handling scandals, he said.



Pope Francis greets the Vatican accredited journalists

He encouraged them to look beyond the “appearance” of events in the Church and focus instead on “substance that does not seek to conform to the superficiality of stereotypes and ready-made formulas of information (as) entertainment.”

Reporting truthfully on the Church is a service to “the people of God, to the simplest people, to the Church herself, which still has some way to go to communicate better with witness even before words,” he said.

The pope recalled that St. Paul VI told journalists during the Second Vatican Council that their reporting on the Church must not be guided by “profane and political categories,” but rather the religious and moral purpose that informs the life of the Church.

Pope Francis also apologised for when his meetings and overseas events took the journalists away from their families: “I must apologise for the times you have been taken from your families, from playing with your children,” he said. “This is very important.”

The pope met each journalist individually at the end of the session. One offered him a piece of a canoe retrieved from the Canary Islands, which had been used by migrants travelling from West Africa.

“What is happening there is terrible,” the pope responded.



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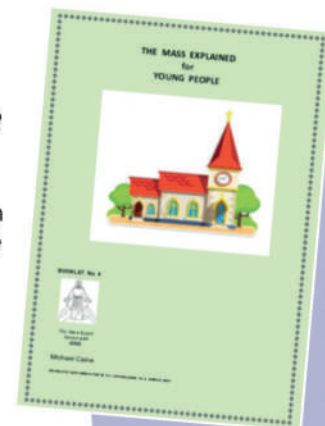
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In Brief

Major landslide kills 31 in China

Thirty-one people have died and dozens remain missing after a massive landslide in Liangshui, in China's south west.

More than 1,000 rescuers worked amid freezing temperatures and falling snow to rescue dozens trapped by the slip.

A preliminary investigation suggested the landslide was triggered by the collapse of a steep cliff-top area, sending an area of land 100 metres wide, 60 metres in height, and six metres thick plunging down the mountainside. It did not elaborate on what had caused the initial collapse.

Aerial photos showed the side of a heavily terraced mountain had spilled over several village homes.

Liangshui lies about 1,400 miles (2,250km) southwest of Beijing, with altitudes ranging as high as 2,400 metres (7,900 feet).

50 year sentence for insulting Thai king

An appeal court in Thailand has extended a man's prison sentence to a record 50 years for insulting the monarchy.

Mongkol Thirakhot, 30, an online clothes vendor and political activist, was originally sentenced to 28 years in prison for social media posts deemed damaging to the king.

The extension marks what is believed to be the toughest penalty ever imposed under Thailand's draconian *lese majeste* law.

War with Russia 'in next 20 years'

The public must prepare for all-out war with Russia in the next 20 years, a Nato chief has warned.

Admiral Rob Bauer said that private citizens need to be ready for a conflict that would require wholesale change in their lives.

Speaking to reporters after a Nato meeting in Brussels, he said large numbers of civilians will need to be mobilised in case of the outbreak of war and governments should put in place systems to manage the process. "Not everything is going to be hunky dory in the next 20 years," he said.

Drone attack shuts down oil terminal

Russian energy firm Novatek has suspended operations at its giant Ust-Luga Baltic Sea fuel export terminal after it was damaged in an apparent Ukrainian drone attack. Novatek ships oil and gas products to international buyers from the complex on the Gulf of Finland. The company did not say how long the terminal would be out of commission or how many tankers would be stuck waiting for it to reopen.

Cardinal demands doctrinal head resigns over blessings row

The Vatican head of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez, is facing increasing calls to resign from national Churches and clerics after he authored the decision to allow same-sex couples to be blessed.

The latest backlash came from the former bishop of Hong Kong, Cardinal Joseph Zen, who said that Cardinal Fernandez has attributed an "intrinsic goodness" to what is "a grave sin", going as far as saying he had committed "heresy." He added his name to those who wanted the cardinal to resign.

His dicastery's letter, *Fiducia Supplicans* ('*Supplicating Trust*'), says a Catholic priest can bless a same-sex or other unmarried couple as long as it is not a formal liturgical blessing and does not give the impression that the Catholic Church is blessing the union as if it were a marriage. Church doctrine on marriage and sexuality is not to be



Cardinal Zen

changed, the declaration emphasized.

But Cardinal Zen said this indicated that "there is something good in these relationships... according to the objective truth, this behaviour is a grave sin and can never be good."

Cardinal Zen had previously accused Pope Francis of unsettling the faithful with unclear answers on

questions of sexual morality. *Fiducia Supplicans* was approved by Pope Francis.

The reaction to the declaration by several bishops' conferences around the world prompted the dicastery to issue a clarification signed by Cardinal Fernandez and Msgr. Armando Matteo, secretary of the dicastery's doctrinal section.

Calling the negative response by some bishops' conferences as "understandable," the dicastery said the statements "cannot be interpreted as doctrinal opposition, because the document is clear and definitive" on the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality.

The dicastery also said that cultural considerations must be made when applying the declaration's proposal, especially in Africa.

In his statement, Cardinal Zen warned that the blessings would cause confusion among the faithful. In this context, he called on the Vat-



Cardinal Fernandez

ican also to urge German priests to follow certain rules.

Since 2022, several priests in Germany have been officially offering blessings for homosexual couples. The ceremonies violate current Vatican regulations as the priests give the blessing in church services. However, sanctions are not imposed in many places.

Pope prays for kidnapped nuns as Haiti edges closer to anarchy

Six nuns from the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Anne in Haiti have been kidnapped while travelling on a bus in the country's capital, Port-au-Prince.

Other passengers on the bus also were taken in the abduction.

"These many kidnappings fill the consecrated people of Haiti with sadness and fear," said P. Morachel Bonhomme, president of the Haitian Bishops' Conference.

Pope Francis appealed for the release of all the hostages, while praying for "social harmony" in the country. In remarks after the Angelus last weekend, he said he had "learned with sorrow the news of the kidnapping" of the sisters and the others. "I call on everyone to stop the violence."

Bonhomme prayed that "the spirit of strength be given" to the sisters "to find a way out of this terrible situation." "May the solidarity of the consecrated people of Haiti and the world help them overcome this difficult ordeal," he added.

Bishop Pierre-André Dumas of Anse-à-Veau et Miragoâne prayed "to help us put an end to this bitter nightmare and this tragic ordeal of our people which has lasted too long." He also offered himself in exchange for the hostages, while denouncing "this ultimate odious and barbaric act which does not even respect the dignity of these consecrated women."

"Let us call for the release of these nuns as well as their driver and the other passengers," the bishop said.



An injured man is rushed to hospital after gang violence broke out in Port-au-Prince, Haiti

"We also ask that these abject and criminal practices be stopped on the sacred land of Haiti since they degrade the dignity of the human being ... by plunging us into the inhuman abyss of nothingness."

The nuns are managed from a Sisters of St. Anne office in Canada.

The religious order, founded in the 1850s, started working in Haiti in 1944. The Sisters of St. Anne focus on educational projects in Haiti and have 40 sisters in the country, according to its website.

Kidnappings have plagued Haiti in recent years – with religious and missionaries falling victim. Five priests, two nuns and two other victims were freed in 2021 after being held for nearly three weeks. They were kidnapped as they travelled east of the capital.

The country is the poorest in the

hemisphere and also convulsed with gang violence, which has intensified since the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

Haiti's Catholic leaders issued a statement after the assassination warning that the country confronted a "descent into hell."

The latest outrage has shaken confidence further in the country's security systems. "The public authorities who are doing nothing to resolve this crisis (of kidnapping) are not immune from suspicion. We denounce complacency and complicity wherever it comes from," said the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince.

By some estimates, gangs have taken over about 80 per cent of the Port-au-Prince area, controlling major roads and extorting revenue from customs, water and electricity distribution systems, and bus services.

Fake pastor to face murder charges after mass suicide

Paul Mackenzie, the self-proclaimed Kenyan pastor who shocked the country and the world after he drove his followers into mass "starvation suicide" event last year, has been charged with murder and terrorism.

Mackenzie, the founder of the Good News International Church, and 30 of 94 of the co-accused were arraigned in the High Court in the coastal city of Malindi. He faces charges of the murder of 429 people – most of them children – whose bodies were found buried in shallow graves in a remote forest-ranch in the coastal county of Kilifi.

Bishop Willybard Kitogho Lagho of Malindi said the charging was "a wake-up call for the citizens, state and faith leaders to guard innocent Kenya from cartels using religion to achieve or cover economic and political ambitions."

The emergence of the deaths in April shocked the bishops and prompted a strong condemnation of cultic preachers who had been gaining supporters across rural areas of the country in recent years.

Director of Public Prosecutions Renson Ingonga said there was enough evidence to prosecute all the suspects held in connection with the deaths, with among the suspects including murder, manslaughter, assault, causing bodily harm, radicalisation, terrorism, child cruelty and torture.

UN warns global peace at risk as Netanyahu talks tough on Gaza

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's aggressive rejection of a two-state solution risks prolonging a war threatening global peace and emboldening extremists everywhere, the United Nations' chief has said.

In his toughest language yet on the Israeli-Hamas conflict, secretary-general Antonio Guterres told the UN Security Council that "the right of the Palestinian people to build their own fully independent state must be recognised by all, and a refusal to accept the two-state solution by any party must be firmly rejected".

A one-state solution "with such a large number of Palestinians inside without any real sense of freedom, rights and dignity ... will be inconceivable", he said.

Mr Guterres also said the risks of regional escalation of the conflict "are now becoming a reality", pointing to Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Pakistan.

He urged all parties "to step back from the brink and to consider the horrendous costs" of a wider war.

Mr Netanyahu's rejection of a Palestinian state in any post-war scenario opened a wide rift with Israel's closest ally, the United States, which says the war must lead to negotiations for a two-state solution where



Israeli troops enter a shattered Palestinian community as their attack on Hamas continues

Israel and the Palestinians can live side-by-side in peace.

That goal is backed by countries around the world, ministers and ambassadors reiterated at the UN.

Guterres also repeated his call for a humanitarian ceasefire. But it was rejected by Israel's UN ambassador Gilad Erdan, saying Hamas, which carried out a brutal attack on southern Israel on 7th October, is committed to attacking again and destroying Israel, and a halt to fighting would only allow the militants "to regroup and rearm".

He urged the Security Council to

"eliminate the root" of the conflict, which he said was Iran.

Mr Erdan strongly criticised the presence of Iran's foreign minister at the council meeting, saying the country provides weapons to Hamas, to Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon and Houthi militants in Yemen, "and soon these acts will be carried out under a nuclear umbrella".

Iran has long denied seeking nuclear weapons and insists its nuclear programme is entirely for peaceful purposes.

But the UN nuclear watchdog has said Iran has enough enriched ura-

nium for nuclear bombs if it chose to build them.

Riyad al Maliki, the Palestinian foreign minister, said Israel is carrying out "the most savage bombing campaign" since the Second World War, which is leading to famine and the massive displacement of civilians. "This is an assault of atrocities," which has destroyed countless innocent lives, he said.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza says more than 25,000 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war, which has caused widespread destruction, displaced an estimated 85% of Gaza's 2.3 million people and left a quarter facing starvation.

Mr al Maliki said Israel does not see the Palestinians as a people and a "political reality to co-exist with, but as a demographic threat to get rid of through death, displacement or subjugation".

He said those are the choices Israel has offered Palestinians, calling them tantamount to "genocide, ethnic cleansing or apartheid".

Mr al Maliki said there are only two future paths; one starts with Palestinian freedom and leads to Middle East peace and security, and the other denies freedom and "dooms our region to further bloodshed and endless conflict".

Israel pays the price as key city encircled

Twenty-one soldiers have been killed in the Gaza Strip in the deadliest attack on Israel's forces since the Hamas raid that triggered the war, the military has said.

Hours later, the military announced that ground forces had encircled the southern city of Khan Younis, Gaza's second largest, where dozens of Palestinians have been killed and wounded in heavy fighting in recent days.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu mourned the soldiers but vowed to press ahead with the offensive until "absolute victory" over Hamas was achieved.

He has also promised to return over 100 hostages held captive in Gaza. But Israelis are increasingly divided on the question of whether it is possible to do either, and large numbers of Israeli casualties have pressured Israel's government to halt past military operations.

The attack is a major setback that could add to mounting calls for a ceasefire.

UK Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron has called for a new humanitarian pause in the fighting, as the aid situation in Gaza became more intense.

During a trip to Israel this week he asked Israel to open more crossing points for longer to allow aid deliveries in to Gaza, and for water, electricity and fuel supplies to be restored.

US bishops in call for arms cuts as big shell deal signed

A group of Catholic bishops have backed a call by Pax Christi USA for the US government to cut military spending and fund human need instead, particularly poverty relief, education and healthcare.

"The Church recognises the legitimate need for the adequate defence of nations," the bishops said, "but our reliance on unfettered military spending is rooted in a mistaken notion of peace." They added: "Our focus should be on helping all, not on death."

The letter was part of the Bread Not Stones campaign sponsored by Pax Christi US.

The call came as Nato signed a \$1.2 billion contract to make tens of thousands of artillery rounds to replenish the dwindling stocks of its member countries as they supply ammunition to Ukraine to help it defeat Russia's invasion.

The contract will allow for the purchase of 220,000 rounds of 155mm ammunition, the most widely sought-after artillery shell.

It will allow allies to backfill their arsenals and provide Ukraine with more ammunition.

"This is important to defend our own territory, to build up our own stocks, but also to continue to sup-

port Ukraine," Nato secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg told reporters.

"We cannot allow President (Vladimir) Putin to win in Ukraine," he added. "That would be a tragedy for the Ukrainians and dangerous for all of us."

Ukraine was firing around 4,000 to 7,000 artillery shells each day last summer, while Russia was launching more than 20,000 shells daily in its neighbour's territory.

Russia's arms industry far outweighs Ukraine's and Kyiv needs help to match Moscow's firepower.

But the shells will not arrive quickly — delivery on orders takes anywhere from 24 to 36 months, the Nato agency said.

The European Union plans to produce one million artillery rounds for Ukraine have fallen short, with only about a third of the target met.

Senior EU officials have said that they now expect the European defence industry to be producing around one million shells annually by the end of this year.

A spokesman for Pax Christi US pointed out that the money pledged for the artillery shells would "take poverty out of the equation for thousands of families across the United States."

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Public Engagement by Catholics for the Common Good

Nicaragua left with spiritual vacuum, says Jagger as witch hunt continues

Simon Caldwell

Human rights defender Bianca Jagger has accused the Nicaraguan dictatorship of creating a spiritual vacuum in the country by its purge of Catholic clergy.

Jagger said the most recent expulsion of two bishops, 15 priests and two seminarians to the Vatican was part of a campaign by President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, to crush all political resistance in the country.

In a telephone interview with Catholic news agency OSV News, Jagger said a total of 203 priests and seminarians have been exiled since mass protests against the Government began in April 2018.

The expulsions included eight clergy in a group of 222 prisoners of conscience released and forcibly exiled to the United States in February 2023.

“I was informed that a plane had left Nicaragua with members of the clergy who had been abducted and were on the flight to Rome,” she said of the recent release of Bishop Rolando Alvarez of Matagalpa (*as reported in last week’s Universe*).

“I was holding my breath. I had contradictory feelings. On the one hand I was overjoyed that [Alvarez] was out of the jaws of the Ortega-Murillo criminal regime because I was so deeply concerned for his life, but I was also saddened by his departure,” she said.

She emphasised that “a vacuum has been left in Nicaragua, if you think about the numbers of bishops, priests, seminarians and sisters who have been expelled, exiled, stripped of their nationality or not allowed back into the country.”

“The witch hunt continues unabated in Nicaragua,” she continued, adding that she feared the strategy of the regime was to get rid of all critical voices in the church until there was no opposition and no one to champion the victims of oppression.

Only a day after Jagger’s conversation with OSV News, Martha Molina, human rights activist and Nicaraguan lawyer said in a post on social media that three more priests were exiled by the regime. Molina said that since 14th January they were threatened by the police “when they were returning from celebrating Holy Mass in the St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Corinto.”

Fr Ezequiel Buenfil and Fr Erick Figueroa were exiled along with Father David Perez. All three were from the Most Holy Savior religious order of the Diocese of Leon.

In October, a further 12 priests were flown into exile to the Vatican and 85 nuns and religious sisters,



Ms Jagger holds a copy of her study, *Nicaragua: A Persecuted Church?*

including those of the Missionaries of Charity, funded by Mother Teresa of Kolkata, were expelled and banished from Nicaragua following the dictatorship’s closure of their congregations and the confiscation of their properties. Of those, seven were forced into exile when they were prevented from reentering the country, Nicaraguan independent media Confidential reported.

Jagger stressed that “Ortega also closed and confiscated universities and Catholic education institutions.”

“The state took over 27 universities between December 2021 and August 2023, which include the John Paul II Catholic University and the Christian Autonomous University of Nicaragua,” she said. “The devastating consequences of the Ortega-Murillo regime’s closure

and confiscation of Nicaraguan universities, schools and educational centers administered by the Catholic Church is that thousands of children and young people are now denied access to an education and a professional career.”

Jagger, 78, is the founder and chair of the Bianca Jagger Human Rights Foundation, a former actress and the first wife of Rolling Stones rock star Mick Jagger. The couple married in Saint-Tropez, France, in a Catholic ceremony in 1971 but divorced in 1978.

Jagger visited her native Nicaragua last time in 2018, when the anti-Government protests swept through the country.

“My last visit to Nicaragua was in 2018, when I joined the largest demonstration in the history of Managua,” she told Spanish

newspaper *El Pais* in November 2023. “The snipers suddenly opened fire on the people, not only to make us disperse, but in a deliberate act of killing, of continuing Ortega’s shoot-to-kill policy. I have been under crossfire more times before, in the war in the former Yugoslavia and in Central America, but the panic emanating from the participants of that peaceful demonstration was horrible. They killed 19 people and injured 185,” she said.

The Catholic Church has been a consistent target of hard-left President Ortega because of its sympathy for the mass protests of 2018, which he has described as an attempted coup. The president accused the Church of supporting the protests and waged a campaign against the clergy along with political dissidents and opponents and the free press. Since 2018 the Nicaraguan regime has launched more than 770 attacks against the Catholic Church.

Those included arrests, expropriations, and harassment, “impediments to processions, prayers, masses in cemeteries,” as well as hate messages, according to Molina, who is also author of the study *Nicaragua: A Persecuted Church?*

Over 3,500 nongovernmental organisations have been dissolved by the Government in Managua since 2018.

Throughout decades of her advocacy for human rights, Jagger fought for the victims of the Bosnia war massacre, abolition of the death penalty and for the closure of the U.S.-run Guantanamo military prison. Recently she advocated for

Israeli hostages to be released from Hamas hands and to protect innocent civilians, who have been dying in the Gaza Strip in the thousands since the start of the Israel-Hamas war on 7th October last year.

But in talking about her native Nicaragua, she is clear. “Anyone who opposes the Ortega-Murillo regime is either killed or imprisoned or must leave the country or is arbitrarily deported or deprived of their citizenship,” she said.

On 16th January the Nicaraguan Government cancelled the legal status of 16 NGOs, 10 of which are Catholic or evangelical, Vatican News reported. The movable and immovable property of the NGOs will be transferred to the state, it said.

Pope Francis and the Vatican hosted the 19 bishops, priests and seminarians recently released by the regime. On Jan. 20, Bishop Silvio Jose Baez, who was exiled to the US. as early as in 2019, said on social media that “Pope Francis invited me to visit him and received me today at the Vatican. I appreciate his brotherly affection and his wise words.”

Bishop Baez, who lives in Miami, was confirmed as auxiliary bishop of Managua by the Holy Father and said that the pope “expressed to me his interest and love for Nicaragua.”

“We have decided to meet several more times this year,” Bishop Baez, who was stripped of his citizenship along with 93 other people in February 2023 by Nicaragua’s government added.

Jagger made a fervent appeal for the international community to impose sanctions on the regime.

“I make an appeal to the international community who have in many ways failed the people of Nicaragua by failing to introduce immediate, effective and decisive sanctions,” Jagger said. “If you were able to impose sanctions on (Russian President Vladimir) Putin, why not Daniel Ortega?”

“He has committed crimes against humanity,” Jagger said. “He is continuing to commit crimes against humanity. He is a geopolitical threat to the region.”

Bianca Jagger, centre, at a march in 2017, to protest against the construction of the Interoceanic Grand Canal at La Fonseca in southern Nicaragua. In 2013, President Ortega granted a Chinese consortium the rights to build the canal over the protests of local farmers, who said it would harm the environment and take their land. The project has yet to be completed.

Photo: Oswaldo Rivas, Reuters



Canadian church vandalism and arson linked to rumours of unmarked graves

Quinton Amundson

According to the Catholic Civil Rights League's database, at least 85 Catholic churches have been set ablaze or vandalised since the discovery in 2021, of 215 suspected unmarked graves near the former Kamloops Indian Residential School.

Police are investigating the latest house of worship to be attacked, St. Gabriel Catholic Mission Church in Janvier, Alberta, which was destroyed by fire shortly before Christmas. The church was not in use at the time.

The Kamloops school opened in the late 19th century and was run by the Catholic Church until the federal government took it over in the late 1960s, operating it into the late 1970s. Certain declarations were made during 2021 tying the Church to the reported discovery of graves at the residential school, but the credibility of these declarations is apparently not holding up.

Over two years later, Philip Horgan, the Catholic Civil Rights League's president and general counsel, suggested that ill-advised comments by public officials, particularly Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and speculation-driven narratives have created an environment where crimes against Catholics are societally tolerated and justified.

"It is sad," Horgan told *The Catholic Register*, a weekly newspaper based in Toronto. "If I could paraphrase the prime minister, I think he suggested that some of the frustration by the folks giving rise to these attacks was, quote, 'understandable'."

"The reality is when we have a continued assertion of false claims of mass graves and missing children or speculation in the absence of better evidence or any proof, much of this criminal activity is likely to continue."

On July 2, 2021, PM Trudeau stated, "I understand the anger that's out there against the federal government, against institutions like the Catholic Church. It is real and it's fully understandable, given the shameful history that we are all becoming more and more aware of. We need to do better as Canadians."

But Trudeau also condemned vandalism and other attacks, saying, "It is unacceptable and wrong that acts of vandalism and arson are being seen across the country, including against Catholic churches."

But the fact remains that since the discovery of what may have been unmarked graves at a number of sites with Church links, a crime wave has been ignited across Canada. 68 Christian churches were burned or defaced in June



St. Gabriel Catholic Mission Church in Janvier, Alberta, burns after an arson attack before Christmas

and July 2021 alone, with the torching of Sacred Heart Mission Church in Penticton, British Columbia, and St. Gregory Mission Church, near Osoyoos, 40 minutes away, the first of many.

Three days later Cowessess First Nation reported 751 'unmarked graves' near the Marieval Indian Residential School, and the Lower Kootenay Band claimed on 30th June that ground-penetrating radar identified '182 sets of human remains in unmarked graves' outside St. Eugene's Mission School.

Fury and judgment against the Canadian Catholic community

increasingly smoldered as story after each story was released, with seemingly damning revelations published each time. Each received intense mainstream media coverage. Angry graffiti messages were smeared on the outside of churches: 'Colonizers,' 'Killers,' 'If you hurt and/or kill kids, (you) should be burned alive.' A slew of F-word epithets were among the many scrawled derogatory missives.

But the true story was less dramatic than some clearly wanted it to be. "We have now had at least three actual excavations," said Horgan. "Pine Creek residential

school, which is the Minegoziibe Anishinabe First Nation, where there was alleged to be 14 (unmarked gravesites) at the former Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Catholic Church, which was no longer a church in use. It is used as a community centre. They did an excavation with the knowledge of the RCMP (Canadian Police), and as I recall from the press conference in late August, the Chief (Derek Nepinak) was disappointed that they didn't find any bodies."

Multiple publications reported Nepinak acknowledging the results "will feed into a denialist narrative of what happened at residential schools" and urged people to keep seeking the truth – despite there being no evidence on any bodies or the area having any secret graves.

Horgan also cited that in 2021 Nova Scotia excavators looked, but did not find, the remains of 16 young people who attended the Shubenacadie Residential School, who it had been claimed lay beneath the surface. He added that 34 excavations on the Charles Camsell Hospital grounds in Alberta also uncovered no bodies after a media storm that many lay hidden there.

As yet no excavations have been sanctioned by the government or the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation at the alleged unmarked

grave sites near Kamloops Indian Residential School where all the fury began.

Sceptics of the May 2021 claim that as many as 215 Indigenous children were buried there attempted a dig last July, to prove the story one way or another. Kimberly Murray, the special interlocutor for missing children and unmarked graves and burial sites, condemned the people doing so as "denialists." "Denialism is violence. Denialism is calculated. Denialism is harmful. Denialism is hate," she said.

Horgan expressed concern over Murray, the former executive director of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, who has called previously for "legal mechanisms to address denialism, including the implementation of both civil and criminal sanctions". Some members of the government have expressed their support for her views.

"We're looking at people saying 'let's suppress the historical record and investigations to discover the truth,'" said Horgan. "This is of great concern. It's not as if the Catholic Church has done nothing to address the hurt and pain. The pope came to Canada in 2022, as you know, specifically to address these stories, and the Church continues to engage to try and address these things."

"But when it comes to the actual underlying story, we're still met with 'most Indigenous kids were forced into [Church]residential schools,'" he continued. "No. It's not true. Of the 150,000 recognised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission who attended these schools, it is roughly 30 or 32 per cent of indigenous children over a 100-year span. A slightly higher number actually went to day schools either on the reserve or in a community and the others didn't go to school. It is not as if the RCMP was picking kids up and taking them to schools. Parents were signing their children up."

Horgan wants to be clear that he is not calling to suppress other historical wrongs or to "overlook some elements of grave concern, which most Canadians have, as Canadians are fair-minded people."

"But this effort to portray these instances of missing children as an effort of cultural or other form of genocide I think is a huge overreach and is a slur against a lot of very good people who did incredible work over the past century," said Horgan.

"While we may have the franchise on turning the other cheek, I think on the other side we also have to try and ensure there is a better telling of the actual facts."



Pope Francis meets leaders from the Métis and Inuit communities at Maskwacis, Alberta, during his Canadian trip in 2022.

We'll stop when you stop, is March for Life's defiant cry to US abortion industry

'Pro-lifers will march until abortion is unthinkable,' the head of the USA's March for Life tells Kate Scanlon

Thousands of pro-life advocates descended upon the USA's capital for the 51st annual March for Life on Friday 19th January, undeterred by several inches of snow that accumulated in Washington leading up to – and during – the event, and near record freezing temperatures.

The 2024 march was just the second to take place since the US Supreme Court reversed its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that initially prompted the annual pro-life demonstration.

"We will keep marching every year at the national level, as well as in our states, until our nation's laws reflect the basic truth that all human life is created equal and is worthy of protection," Jeanne Mancini, president of March for Life Education and Defense Fund, told rallygoers.

Mancini said the group plans to hold marches not only in the District of Columbia but in all 50 states in the coming years.

"We will march until abortion is unthinkable," she added.

The March for Life rally took place on the National Mall by the Smithsonian Castle, between the Washington Monument and the US Capitol. Afterward, the march headed up Constitution Avenue to the Supreme Court.

House Speaker Mike Johnson,



Tens of thousands braved sub-zero temperatures to join the March for Life in Washington DC

R-La., who spoke at the rally, told attendees that the notion that all people are created equal is a bedrock principle of America, written into the nation's founding documents.

"Every single person has

inestimable dignity and value," Johnson said. "Your value is not related in any way to the colour of your skin, or what ZIP code you live in, how good you were in sports, where you went to high school, it's irrelevant, your value is inherent

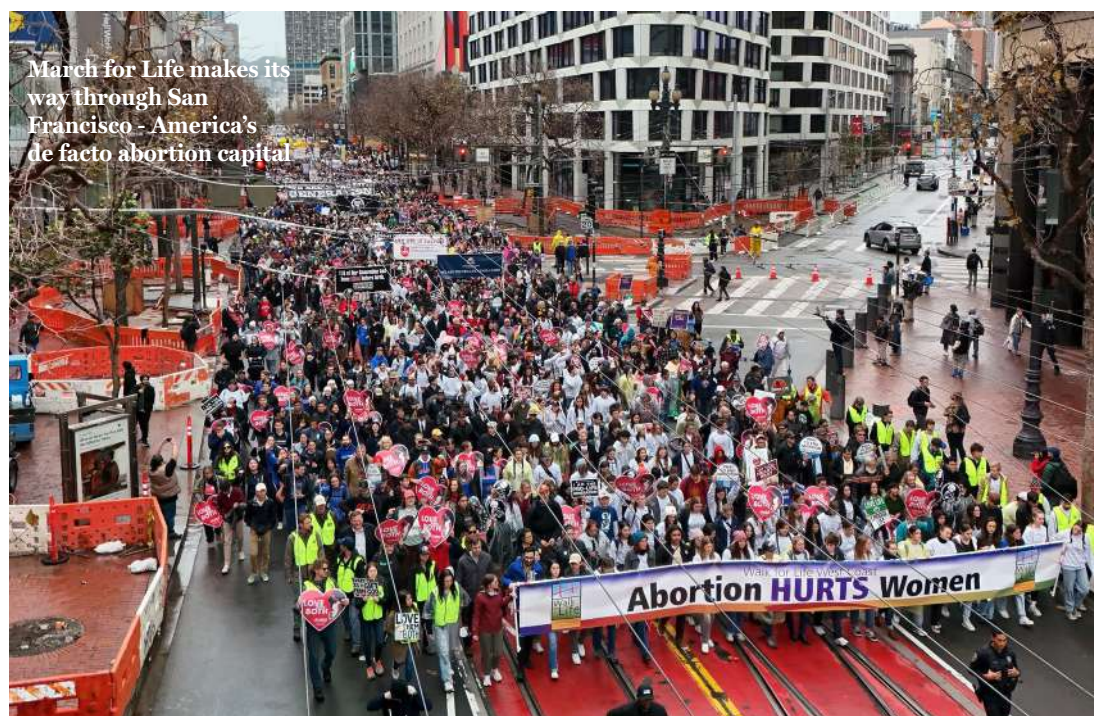
because it is given to you by your creator."

Johnson was himself the "product of an unplanned pregnancy," he said.

"My parents, who were just teenagers at the time, chose life.

And I am very profoundly grateful that they did," he said.

Johnson said after the reversal of *Roe*, it is a "critical time" to "build a culture that encourages and assists more and more people to make that same decision."



Governor's grim state ruling dims California's sunny outlook

Undaunted by rain and the dismal political outlook in California, tens of thousands of pro-life supporters turned out for the 20th annual Walk for Life West Coast in one of the most pro-abortion cities in the country, San Francisco.

"We stand because we know that life is greater than death. And human life is the future, pro-life is the future," Live Action founder Lila Rose, a Californian, told the crowd at San Francisco's Civic Center Plaza. "You are shining lights in a dark city. California, our beautiful state is not the sum of ... the evil we have permitted here. There is so much good here and every single one of you are living proof of that."

In 2022, California approved

Proposition One, which enshrined abortion as a right up until the moment of birth. The state governor, Gavin Newsom, has been promoting California as an abortion destination.

"The situation we face has much darkness," admitted Rose, "and it can be tempting to think that change is not coming, and is not possible. But we would be wrong to think that."

"Today proves there are thousands of pro-life families in California, and millions of pro-life people in California," said Rose, adding that the decision to over-rule *Roe v Wade* had saved "more than 32,000 children from abortion."

"So don't let anyone tell you that darkness is winning. 32,000 boys and girls have a future."



“Every single person has inestimable dignity and value ... your value is not related in any way to the colour of your skin, the ZIP code you live in, how good you were in sports, where you went to high school, it’s irrelevant, your value is inherent because it is given to you by your creator.”

House Speaker Mike Johnson,

He argued the movement should learn from crucial figures in American history such as “Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony.”

“They challenged the prevailing narratives of their day, and they succeeded,” Johnson said, adding, “Their success was grounded in our nation’s creed that we just spoke about. And they reminded their fellow Americans about our founding principles. And as Lincoln said, in his famous first inaugural, the better angels of our nature. We should do the same thing today.”

The 2024 event’s theme was ‘With Every Woman, For Every Child’ and sought to highlight the work of pregnancy care centres and maternity homes. Jean Marie Davis, executive director of Branches Pregnancy Resource Center in Brattleboro, Vermont, said that she herself was helped by a pregnancy resource centre after she was a victim of human trafficking.

Davis said, “I’m doing something to give back to the community and fighting for something not just for my son’s sake, because this is a personal thing, but also for other women to know, I have a voice and I can actually stand up and say something.”

Davis said she decided to become more vocal in favour of the pro-life cause after legislation in Vermont passed in which the state can fine pregnancy centres if it determines its services are “misleading,” something Davis said hers does not do.

“The government has no right of steering women from life-affirming health,” Davis said. “And so it became a very personal thing because if it wasn’t for the pregnancy centre, I would have been a dead woman.”

Republican congressman Chris Smith, a Catholic and longtime lawmaker, said at the rally, “There are more than 2,700 pregnancy resource centres throughout the United States.”

“Each and every one of them is an oasis of love, compassion, empathy, respect, and care for both mothers and their children,” Smith said.

Smith said work remains to be done at the federal level, including blocking passage of the Women’s Health Protection Act, legislation supported by the White House, which would prohibit restrictions on abortion prior to viability, setting a national standard critics say goes beyond the *Roe* standard.

“Yeah, we’ll have a setback here and there. Every human rights trouble does. But we are undeterred. We will not give up,” he said.

The rally opened with a prayer from Bishop John Abdalah of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, who was joined onstage by Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, vice president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and former chair of the USCCB pro-life committee, and Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia, who is the current chairman of the US bishops’ pro-life committee.

Benjamin Watson, a former NFL tight end, and Michigan football coach Jim Harbaugh also spoke at the rally, with the latter celebrating that day’s “football weather.”

Harbaugh also praised rallygoers for demonstrating “bold conviction with kindness.”

Watson said pro-lifers must embark on “a new fight for life,” and see it through to the end. “*Roe* is done, but we still live in a culture that knows not how to care for life,” Watson said.

Cardinal warns that assisted suicide will be next key pro-life battle

The pro-life cause will confront new challenges in the coming decades, with assisted suicide in particular emerging as a growing threat to human life, Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley of Boston told attendees of the 25th annual Cardinal O’Connor Conference on Life.

The annual conference, which is organised by students of Georgetown University in Washington DC, USA, and is typically held the day before or after the annual March for Life in Washington. It was first held in 2000 and later named in honor of the late Cardinal John J. O’Connor, who was archbishop of New York, a Georgetown University alumnus and founder of the Sisters for Life.

Cardinal O’Connor was known for his pro-life activism on abortion, but also on other life issues, including his opposition to the death penalty and his support for social safety net programmes.

Cardinal O’Malley, who is the president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, a member of the Council of Cardinal Advisors and a former chairman of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities, said in his address to the conference that “the Gospel of life is the centerpiece of the Church’s social teaching.”

“When the value of life is compromised or diminished, all life is at risk,” he said.

“The culture of death,” he said,

“A society that allows parents to kill their children will eventually, logically, allow children to kill their parents...”

“will be overcome by the witness of a community where people are welcomed, forgiven, celebrated and cared for.”

The conference marked its 25th event by focusing on what the next 25 years look like for the pro-life cause. Cardinal O’Malley said that “there’s no doubt that the next major assaults in the next 25 years are going to come from those pushing physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia.”

“A society that allows parents to kill their children will eventually allow children to kill their parents,” Cardinal O’Malley said.

“The situation in Canada is alarming. There are proposals to promote euthanasia for the mentally ill. Once human life is no longer sacred, and the government can continuously move the goalposts, more and more people are in danger.”

Cardinal O’Malley said he wasn’t making a slippery slope argument, and the practice of physician-assisted suicide in some places in Europe also is cause for alarm.

On abortion, Cardinal O’Malley argued the Church must respond to societal ills such as poverty and racism, which he called dehumanising and factors that drive women to abortion.

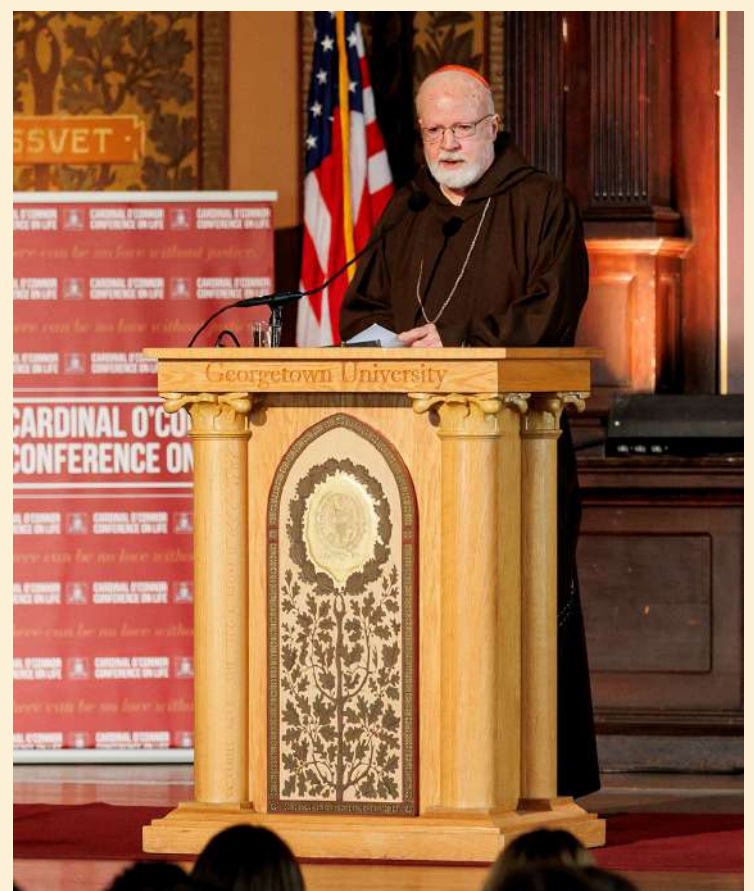
Amid post-*Roe* partisanship on abortion, he added, “we must never tire of clarifying misunderstandings, shedding light where there is myth and confusion, and demonstrating empathy and compassion.”

“In the history of our country, people of faith have worked together to overcome racism and injustice,” Cardinal O’Malley said. “Now, we have to come together in defence of the human person, where the innocent unborn and the vulnerable elderly and all of those whose right to life is threatened.”

Other speakers at the conference included Emily Geiger, the director of Education & Outreach at the Equal Rights Institute; Sister Mariae Agnus Dei of the Sisters of Life; and Kristen Day, executive director of Democrats for Life of America.

“The situation in Canada is alarming. There are proposals to promote euthanasia for the mentally ill. Once human life is no longer sacred, and the government can continuously move the goalposts, more and more people are in danger.”

Cardinal O’Connor



Theologian attacks cardinal's early book as a 'naive and dangerous' work

Gina Christian

A recently resurfaced book by the Vatican's doctrinal head – and the man who led moves to bless same-sex couples – is “deeply flawed” in its portrayal of mystical union with God, a theological expert told OSV News.

“*La pasión Mística: espiritualidad y sensualidad*” (Mystical Passion: Spirituality and Sensuality – written in 1998 by then-Father and now Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez, head of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith – bills itself as “an invitation to the world of passionate love that hides in the depths of our being.”

Published while then-Father Fernandez was an “expert” of the Argentine bishops’ faith and culture commission, the 94-page volume explores what the author calls “the sublime paths of mystical union, until reaching a point in which we seem to touch the impossible.”

Three of the book’s chapters explicitly discuss orgasms, with the final chapter titled *God and the couple’s orgasm*. Another passage recounts a 16-year-old girl’s “passionate encounter with Jesus” that includes caressing him on the beach and kissing his mouth.

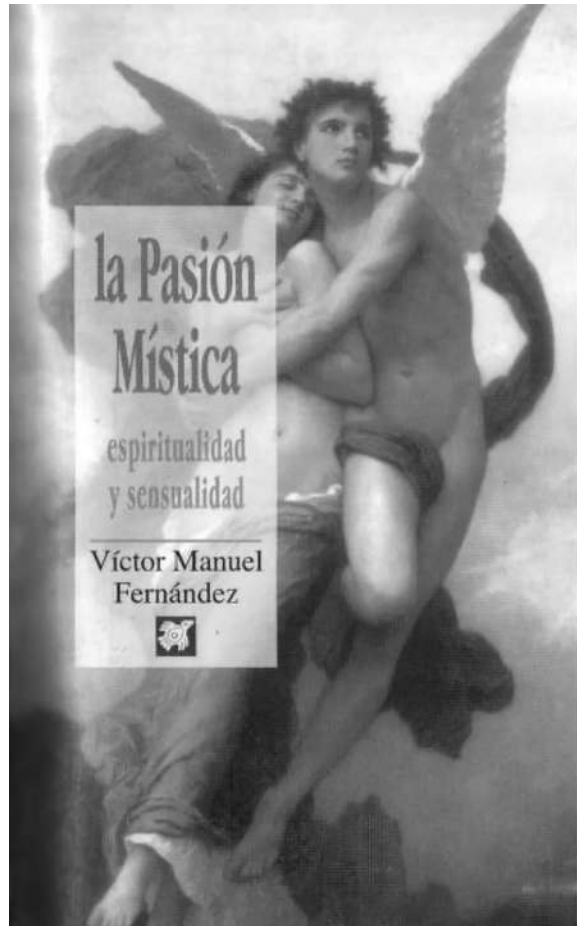
A fortnight ago, the cardinal was forced to confront his literary past when challenged by journalists who had discovered the book, and another, written in 1995 and called *Heal Me with Your Mouth: The Art of Kissing*. He dismissed *La pasión Mística* as a naive effort “that I certainly would not write now,” and said the book was no longer available in print, having been cancelled shortly after publication, and refused to comment on the earlier work.

But the work, which can still be found in part and in whole online, still “poses a real danger to read,” said Dominican Father Jaroslav Kupczak, a theologian and director of the Center for Research on the Thought of John Paul II at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow.

While the human-divine relationship has long been likened in many respects to that between lovers, Fr Kupczak said that *La Pasión Mística* is “filled with serious theological and anthropological mistakes.”

For starters, the book muddles the true meaning of Christ’s incarnate nature and its implications for humanity, he said.

“The authentic encounter with Jesus – both during the time when he was alive and met with the Apostles and other people during his life in Israel 2,000 years ago,



Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez has been forced to defend his earlier literary efforts, admitting that his work was naive

but also now after his resurrection, when we encounter Jesus in faith – it’s always a sacramental encounter,” said Fr Kupczak. “In this sacramental encounter, the visible is only an entrance to the invisible.”

As a result, “the bodily dimension of Jesus opens to us what is really important here: the divinity of the Savior and of God, the redeemer who saves us,” Fr Kupczak said.

He said that the ‘pseudo-mystical’ experience of the unnamed 16-year-old girl cited in the book – who was “basically engaging in an erotic encounter with the masculinity of Jesus” – represents something “totally strange to Christian tradition.”

The book offers “a very naive, superficial understanding both of pleasure and of love,” he said.

Pleasure in the text is “understood primarily as bodily pleasure or even sexual pleasure, sensual pleasure,” said Fr Kupczak.

In contrast, *Love and Responsibility*, written by Karol Wojtyla well before he became St. John Paul II, displays a more profound grasp of pleasure as “an analogical notion,” Fr Kupczak said.

“We have in our lives a multiplicity of pleasures, lower and higher,” he explained. “We have bodily pleasures, but here we have psychological pleasures, we have esthetical pleasures (such as) listening to music, and we have spiritual pleasures. Concentrating in our encounter with Jesus, with

God on the sensual pleasure of orgasm is (self-)absorbed.”

Fr Kupczak noted that “the higher examples of pleasures ... sometimes require us to renounce the lower pleasure,” as seen when humans forego “the pleasure of food, the pleasure of sleep, the pleasure of sex” for a “higher pleasure.”

“*La Pasión Mística* also falls short in its definition of love, which in the book is “almost totally identified with erotic love,” he said, to the neglect of love in its aspects of friendship (‘philos’) and faithful, selfless service (‘agape’).

That reduction to a “very superficial” view of love as largely eros risks “a very dangerous understanding of our road to unification with God,” said Fr Kupczak.

In Christian thought, “love has always been seen as the highest stage of long roads – of growing in faith, of receiving a certain maturity of personality, of overcoming our own weaknesses, of overcoming our own sins,” he said.

Ancient Christian tradition “portrayed Christian growth as a three-stage story,” marked by purification, illumination and then union, said Fr Kupczak.

In the purification phase, “we understand that we are sinners” who reckon with a “fundamental division in the human heart,” he said.

That division centers on a “disordered desire,” or

concupiscence, “that is present in all of our desires – bodily, psychological and spiritual, but mostly, and in the most forceful way, in the sexual desire,” he said, noting that St. John Paul had extensively analysed this issue in his theology of the body, his teaching series on love and marriage given at general audiences between September 1979 and November 1984.

Fr Kupczak said that those who excuse the writing of now-Cardinal Fernandez with the fact that Cardinal Wojtyla wrote *Love and Responsibility*, published in Polish in 1960, are “deeply mistaken.” Even though the future pope wrote about the sexual act and used the word ‘orgasm’ several times, the context and reasons for it were fundamentally different, and discerned around the marital sexual act in theology of the body, he said.

“The primary role of the theologian is not to get into the physiology of sex; those specialisations are for lay professionals. Though they shouldn’t be of course totally ignorant of human sexuality, priests should not become couples’ sexual counselors,” Fr Kupczak said.

In the second stage of Christian development, that of illumination, the individual gradually grows “in the school of faith,” said Father Kupczak. “It takes time to learn God’s things, to discover his mysterious ways.”

Only after those two stages is a person prepared for the third stage of unification with God, he said.

Father Kupczak also said he was “deeply disturbed” by a passage in the book that states: “Let us remember that the grace of God can co-exist with weaknesses and also with sins, when there is a very strong conditioning. In those cases, the person can do things that are objectively sin, but not be guilty, and not lose the grace of God nor the experience of his love.”

Although Church teaching allows that in some cases “the culpability of the sinning person may be diminished by a lack of knowledge, by weakness, by lack of proper education, by certain external difficult situations,” said Fr Kupczak, “still, a person who does objectively sinful things should first of all be formed, taught and corrected.”

“We do not say lightly, ‘That’s OK,’” he said. “It’s much more complicated.”

The unnamed teen girl cited in the book “should have been corrected” and properly educated by its author when she shared her experience about Christ, he added.

“I am sorry for readers who, for lack of knowledge or lack of instruction in the Catholic and Christian tradition, could really take this book as an introduction to the proper way of approaching God, because it is not,” he said. “It’s a book of very dangerous simplifications.”

A VIEW FROM THE PEWS



MICHAEL CAINE
ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, LYMM, CHESHIRE

Repent, for judgement could be 'close at hand'

At Mass, during an Advent reading of the gospel, the following words are said by St John the Baptist: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is close at hand". They are taken from the Bible (Matthew 3:1). Similar ones are used in (Matthew 4:17) and (Mark 1:15), but this time they are spoken by Our Lord Jesus Christ; but what do they mean?

Is the clue in the first word: **Repent**, because in simple terms, this means being sincerely sorry for sinning against God and desiring to refrain from sin?

Being human, we are all susceptible to wrong desires and Satan's temptations causing us to sin regularly, and we know that our spiritual soul will end up in hell if we die with mortal sins on our soul.

Does the above statement intend to make us aware of the danger our



soul is in? If so, what does **close at hand** mean?

Could it somehow have to do with time? When we think of our lifespan, say 100 years, we look at

this and think it's a very long time, but when we compare it with the lifespan of the universe (billions of years), it's just a spec in time. When we compare the lifespan of the universe with eternity, it's not even a spec in time, making our human lifespan very small. So when the phrase 'is close at hand' is used, does this refer to how long we humans live? If it does, then what happens to our immortal soul must be carefully always considered.

It could also mean that there are times when we have no idea when we will die. It could be by some sort of accident, poisoning, or illness something that is deadly but which we were not aware of. Most people know of someone who has died unexpectedly. The question has to be, **were they prepared for God's judgement?**

John the Baptist and Our Lord Jesus Christ knew what they were saying. 'Repent' means always being aware of one's sinfulness and asking God for forgiveness.

This is where the beauty and convenience of the Sacrament of Forgiveness can be of assistance. What a superb gift from Jesus Christ.

The phrase 'Is close at hand' means that we should always be aware that our human lives are so short that we should continually make sure that our immortal spiritual souls are free from mortal sins and ready for God's judgement, but with our lives being inundated continually with social media, people tend to find it difficult to think about repenting.

We know that 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is close at hand' is

vitaly important because both St John the Baptist and Our Lord Jesus Christ said so.

Don't let your human desires and Satan stop you from repenting. Use the superb strategies provided by Jesus and the Catholic Church to help you, such as:

- Praying.
- The Mass.
- The Sacraments, especially: Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sacrament of Eucharist.

There are many other strategies; just remember they are all there to help us repent.

Most of us don't know when we will die and the statement by St John the Baptist is a very important one, reminding us to make sure that our immortal soul is forever in a state that is acceptable to God.

JOURNEY IN FAITH

CHRIS MCDONNELL



1984 is a classic tale that still resonates with us today

There are certain books, read in our younger years, that remain with us.

I first came across one such book in my mid-teens. Its author George Orwell, its title *1984*. This year, 2024, is 40 years on from that title year, hence these few words.

Written in 1948, it presents a bleak view of future years, where there is central control of society under the ever-present poster of Big Brother accompanied by the strap line *Big Brother Is Watching You*. It opens with the flat statement "it was a bright cold day in April and the clocks were striking 13". So much is contradiction, history is under the control of the Ministry of Truth and facts are altered to meet current need. In *1984*, there is a perpetual war between Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, the superstates that emerged from the global atomic war. And so on.

It tells the story of continual conflict and control and the deliberate perversion of the truth. It relates the consequences of life in the totalitarian state, be it fascist or communist.

In the 60s and 70s, the year 1984 was in the distant future. Now 40 years on from the book title date and 1984 is behind us, where are we now? What is our future?

War seems to be an ever-present reality as the weapons with which it



is fought become more sophisticated. The tinder box that is the Middle East gets more precarious with each passing day. Judging by the political life of many countries, lies are becoming the staple diet of political exchange. The current disclosures concerning the false prosecution of Post Office employees in the UK is but one example of pernicious malpractice where truth has given way to gross dishonesty.

It is presidential election year in the United States with the choice between candidates looking bleaker by the hour. One, Joe Biden nearly beyond capability of accepting responsibility for another full term in office, the other likely candidate Donald Trump, currently facing 91 charges in the US courts. Some choice for Big Brother!

A functional society is built on values that all citizens respect and all are treated with dignity, not hypocrisy. As Senator Bernie Sanders said recently in an interview quoted in the Huff Post "he was sure Trump would use his office to punish his political enemies, if elected again." The consequences of his re-election would be felt well beyond the borders of the United States. They would be worldwide.

It is also the year when the General Election is likely to be held in the UK, when questions will be asked of our politicians, of their past performance and future plans. Decisions will be made that will have consequences for all of us.

In casting our vote, we have to make a considered choice. No one candidate is a perfect match to our own point of view so electing someone to office is always a matter of compromise. We seek the best possible choice and hope it works out.

CONGREGATION OF OUR LADY OF FIDELITY



GOD IS CALLING!
ARE YOU LISTENING?

As you reflect upon where God is calling you in life, are you willing to leave your boat and follow Him? Join us for a day of prayer and to know more about the religious life.

COME & SEE
ON A SATURDAY

By arrangement only

Please phone to arrange a date
Mob: 07760297001

Contact details:

Rev. Sister Bernadette
Congregation of Our Lady of Fidelity
Off Hermitage Road, SE19 3FA
Email: sr_bernadette_vfcss@hotmail.com



The Lord is on look-out for Christians who are generous in spirit and in heart

The world would certainly be a better place if more people were generous. When you show generosity to others by offering them your time, money, food or any kind of assistance you are fulfilling the golden rule of 'Do unto others what you wish them to do unto you.'

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard challenges us to live generously. God shows no partiality whatsoever, letting the sun shine on the just and the unjust, the rains fall on the good and the bad alike. He showers His generosity on everyone from the smallest to the greatest without exception. This is a difficult concept to grasp from a worldly perspective because it challenges the business model of success which, though not bad in itself, can do great harm to others if it ignores generosity.

In the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, we come face to face with God's generosity, a generosity that has no limits, none whatsoever.

Perhaps, it will help to understand this parable if I offer an example of how a farming community behaves with generosity to all its members.

Growing up in a rural, farming community in Ireland, as I have, has its advantages. When the crop is ready for harvest, the whole family would be out in the field working together. They would not work at the same pace or at the same time. The father and the older brothers would, most likely, be out in the field very early while the younger ones are still asleep. Mum and the younger ones would join Dad and the older ones out in the farm later. At the end of the day all would go home together. As supper is served, no one would suggest that everyone eat only as much as they earned according to the hours they worked. No, not at all. No one would complain, no one would be jealous for everyone had done his



'The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard challenges us to live generously...'

or her part, according to their ability.

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) presents a situation, not unlike that of a family farm. We read of a harvest in which some workers put in more time than others. That's well and good. When pay time comes, they are all treated generously. So far so good. But the early workers, however, begin to complain and grumble, unlike the family members on the farm. Why is this? The answer is clear. The norms of behaviour, of contribution and reward, in the family and in God's kingdom are different to those of society.

The question this parable poses is, do we see ourselves as a

generous people with a common purpose or do we see ourselves as individuals out to grab for ourselves whatever we can get? We may call ourselves brothers and sisters in the Lord, but we often treat one another as rivals and competitors. We are inclined to adopt a strict business model rather than the generous, family model put forth in this parable.

This parable was addressed by Matthew to the Jewish Christians. God called them a long time ago to build the kingdom of God. Now, at an apparently late hour, God was calling the Gentiles also to work with them in the same vineyard of the Lord.

The early-bird Jewish Christians saw themselves as superior to the

Johnny-come-lately Gentiles because they had 'borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat' (Matthew 20:12). The problem with Mathew's Jewish audience was their difficulty in appreciating that God's kingdom is for all peoples, Jews and Gentiles, and that He treats them all with equal generosity whether they be early-comers or latecomers, Jew or Gentile, Greek or Roman, Male or Female (Galatians 3:28).

The kingdom of God is a family affair rather than a social affair. A society like the one we are living in is, regrettably, characterised by competition, rivalry, self interest, and, in its cruelest form, survival of the fittest. A true family, on the other hand, is characterised by a

spirit of generosity rather than competition or rivalry. In this parable, we are called to reject a legalistic notion of the kingdom of God and see it for what it is, a family of equals where everyone is respected from the lowest to the highest. The important thing, whether we enter into the kingdom early or late, is how we respond to the Lord's generosity. Are we generous to all others irrespective of race, sex, religion, colour of skin, education or place of origin? The Lord, however, shows no partiality towards the highest or "the least among us."

This is why Jesus says: "those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last" (Matthew 20:16).

'Anyway': The golden poem whose words inspired Mother Teresa

For many years, the prose poem *'Anyway'* has been put on walls, refrigerator doors, used in speeches and college commencement ceremonies, and shared extensively on the web.

The words of this prose poem were valued so much by Mother Teresa that she put them on the wall of her children's home in Calcutta.

Many thought she was the author of these words, but this is not so. They were written in 1968 by Dr Kent M. Keith as

part of a booklet for his students.

Following is this prose poem, originally called, *The Paradoxical Commandments*.

People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centred.

Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.

Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

Be honest and frank anyway.

The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shut down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds.

Think big anyway.

People favour underdogs but follow only top dogs.

Fight for a few underdogs anyway. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.

Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.

Help people anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.

Give the world the best you have anyway.

SUNDAY WORSHIP

ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS



The Lord's flock needs ever-attentive shepherds to guide us on the right path

28th January – 4th Sunday
(Year B)

Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Moses predicts the coming of a future prophet greater than himself

Moses said to the people: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like you from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: ‘If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.’

Then the Lord replied to me: “They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die.”

Responsorial: from Psalm 94
Resp.: If today, you hear his voice, harden not your hearts

Come, ring out our joy to the Lord; hail the rock who saves us. Let us come before him, giving thanks, with songs let us hail the Lord. (R./)

Come in, let us kneel and bend low. Let us kneel before the God who made us for he is our God and we the people who belong to his pasture, the flock that is led by his hand. (R./)

O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as on that day at Massah in the desert when your fathers put me to the test; when they tried me, though they saw my work.’ (R./)

1 Corinthians 7:32-35
Paul promotes celibacy, to focus one's undivided attention to the Lord

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the



Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

Gospel: Mark 1:21-28
When Jesus heals the man in Capernaum, people recognise the power of his message

Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them

as one having authority and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

By whose authority?

In the not-too-distant past, Catholics felt confident that God's

will for our faith and conduct is infallibly communicated by Pope and bishops, with the teaching authority given them by Christ himself. The doctrine of papal infallibility proclaimed in 1869, stressed the principle of authority so strongly that many felt unfree to make up their own minds on issues of faith or morals.

Whenever controversy arose, we could expect a statement from the Magisterium to put the issue beyond doubt.

Recently, many ordinary Catholics show a much lower respect for Church authority. Some welcome this greater freedom for individual conscience, while others long for a return to the clean-cut edge of dogma, defined and unquestionable. Perhaps we can get some light from today's Gospel, where Jesus “teaches with

‘...Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.’

“The only valid purpose of authority among Christians is to keep the Lord's word alive in the community, to keep us reminded of what Jesus said, and still says, to us his followers...”

authority, and not as their scribes.”

Our knowledge of God comes to us primarily from Jesus, the Word of God, who makes the Father known to us. If we pay attention to his gospel read at Mass, or give time to the private reading of holy scripture, the main lines of Our Lord's teaching will be clear enough.

Apart from reading or hearing the word of the Gospel, we have the prompting and guidance of Christ's Spirit, if we take time to pray, reflect and let our conscience come awake in God's presence.

And finally, to help us apply the message of Jesus to definite areas in our lives, we have the teaching ministry of the Church.

The only valid purpose of authority among Christians is to keep the Lord's word alive in the community, to keep us reminded of what Jesus said, and still says, to us his followers. God knows, we need such a reminder often enough, due to the slump-factor in all of us, tending to lower our ideals, and cool our devotion. We're often like a flock of straying sheep, needing the care of alert shepherds to hold us together, and keep us moving on the upward path. Yet, after listening with respect to what our leaders say — whether it be the Pope and bishops, or more locally the parish clergy — each adult Christian must look into his or her conscience, to blend the official teaching into our personal faith in God.

Under several papacies in the recent past, many worried about an excessive dogmatism, seeking to stretch the boundaries of defined doctrine. Surely it is right to expect our leaders to ground their teaching in the well-springs of the Gospel. Yet somehow, beyond and beneath all authority in the Church, and permeating it with vitality, is the prophetic authority of Christ himself, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Through him, in faith and loyalty, we can know with certainty what God the Father expects of us, and what we must do in order to gain eternal life. Just one thing is needed: to be willing to undertake whatever he shows us, no matter how difficult.

If Christ is God's fullest Word to us, we can have no reserves about doing what he says.

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See www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie

Am I really committing a ‘grave sin’ if I miss Mass from time to time?

Q. What was the meaning of Christ’s words from the cross when he said, “Father, why have you forsaken me?”

A. Both Matthew and Mark indicate in their Gospel accounts that among the last words of Jesus on the cross were the following: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Some readers might find this puzzling and ask: “How can God abandon God?” Actually, though, Jesus was uttering the first words of a familiar psalm, Psalm 22.

That psalm/prayer, as it develops, is really a testament to the enduring love and support of the Lord.

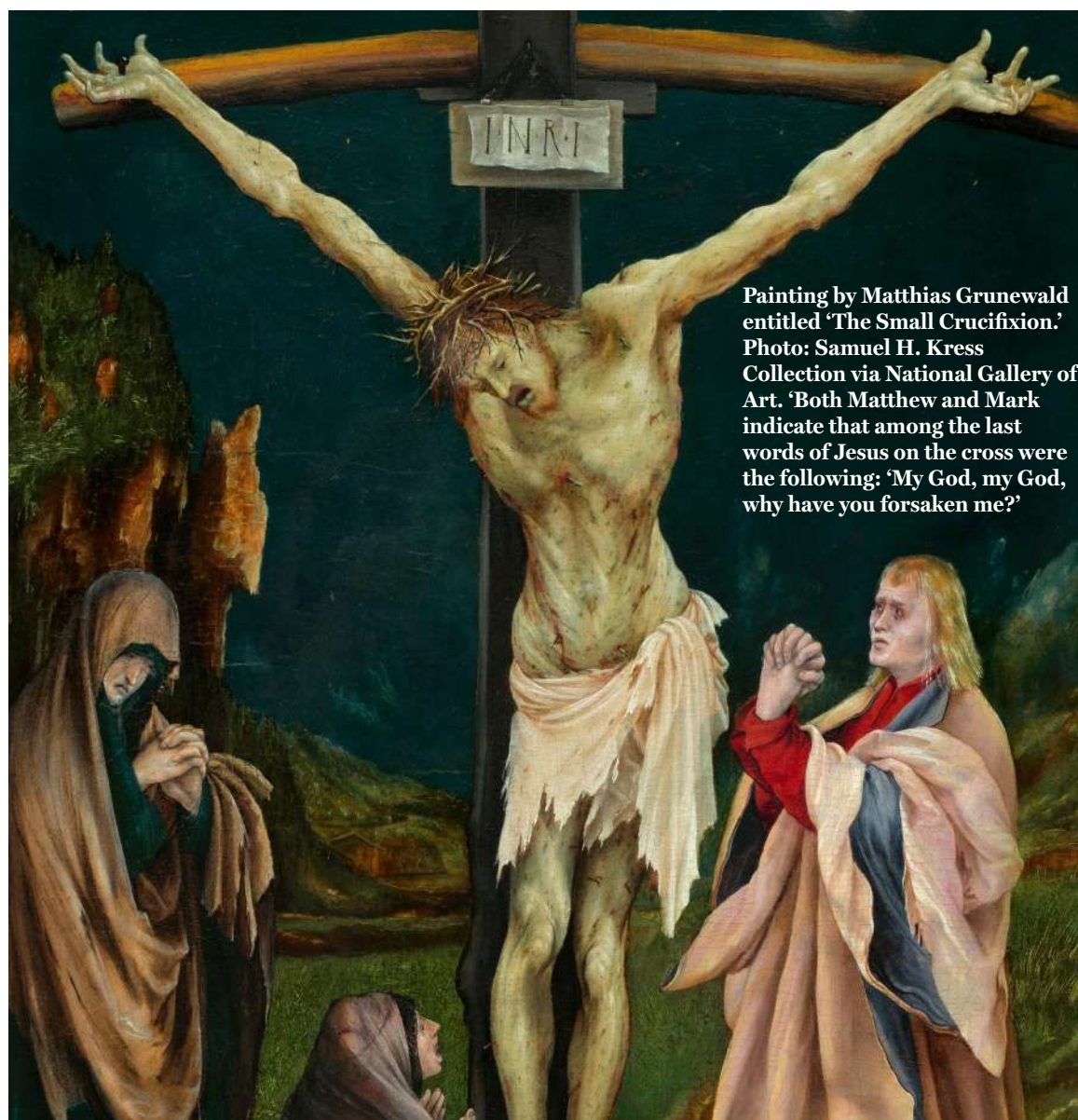
Though it addresses God with the anguished plea, “Do not stay far from me, for trouble is near, and there is no one to help,” the psalm goes on to proclaim the confident assurance of divine support: “For he has not spurned or disdained the misery of this poor wretch, did not turn away from me, but heard me when I cried out.”

And the last line of the psalm lauds God’s triumphal reign: “The generation to come will be told of the Lord, that they may proclaim to a people yet unborn the deliverance you have brought.”

Q. I am a retired Catholic school headteacher and the product of 18 years of Catholic school education. It troubles me greatly that the Church routinely ‘assigns’ sins to people. Missing Mass on Sunday is one example. Catholic teaching says that the subject matter of a mortal sin must be gravely immoral, the individual must agree that the action is gravely immoral and the individual must choose the action with full freedom while agreeing that it is gravely immoral. In my experience, any number of people may not agree that attending Mass on Sunday is a grave matter. In these cases, they cannot be assigned a mortal sin.

A. The Church has spoken clearly on the obligation of a Catholic to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants). ... Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin” (No. 2181).



Painting by Matthias Grunewald entitled ‘The Small Crucifixion.’ Photo: Samuel H. Kress Collection via National Gallery of Art. ‘Both Matthew and Mark indicate that among the last words of Jesus on the cross were the following: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’

I agree with you that gravity of matter is just one of the three necessary conditions for a mortal sin – the others being complete consent of the will and full knowledge of the sinful character of the act or omission.

Where I disagree with you, though, is your apparent belief that an individual can ignore the Church’s teaching and simply decide for himself what is a sin and what isn’t. A Catholic has to be guided by the Church, and the Church has already spoken on the gravity of missing Mass.

Perhaps No. 1859 of the Catechism is relevant here: ‘Mortal sin requires full knowledge and complete consent. It presupposes knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God’s law. It also implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice. Feigned ignorance and hardness of heart do not diminish, but rather increase, the voluntary character of a sin.’

I shudder to think what would happen if your worry about ‘assigning sins’ were applied to such matters as fidelity in marriage. Certain circumstances, of course, can excuse one from attendance at Mass on a particular Sunday.

The recent pandemic is a notable example, and the catechism mentions illness and the care of infants, but others might be unavoidable work obligations, lack of transportation or inclement weather sufficient to put one’s safety at risk.

Q. Our new pastor is a fine and holy man, but his Sunday preaching rarely mentions the day’s scriptures. Instead he does catechetical series on things like understanding Mass parts and the liturgical year. Such topics may interest new Catholics, but they are uninspiring to us who learned basic lessons years ago. I thought a homily was supposed to help us “break open the word

of God.” Did Vatican II ask priests and deacons to preach homilies and not sermons? I try to read a Sunday reflection before Mass, but I feel cheated when beautiful Scriptures are brushed aside in favour of catechism lessons.

A. The reflection known as the homily is so integral to the celebration of the Mass that the Code of Canon Law requires that one be preached on Sundays and holy days of obligation and encourages it at every celebration of the Eucharist (No. 767).

And I agree with you: The homily should regularly be based on the scriptural readings for that day’s Mass. That’s not just my idea, but it accords with the direction in official Church documents.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* – the Church’s ‘guidebook’ on the celebration of the liturgy – says that the homily ‘should be an explanation of some aspect of the readings from sacred

Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or Proper of the Mass of the day and should take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners’ (No. 65).

There might well be other opportunities for a catechetical series – perhaps a classroom setting after Mass – but that sort of ‘instruction’ should not serve as a regular replacement for the homilist’s reflections on the word of God.

Q. I can understand that Jesus died on the cross to reconcile us with the Father, but why do we say that Jesus died to forgive our sins when we have to repent continually for those sins?

A. The Bible does say that Jesus has forgiven our sins. St. Paul tells us in Colossians 2:13 that “he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven all our transgressions.”

But it is perhaps more precise to say that Jesus, by suffering and dying for our redemption, has simply opened for us the possibility of heaven – something we could not have done for ourselves.

The question remains that if pardon for sin comes ultimately from Christ’s work on Calvary, how is it received by individuals? The answer is that Jesus wants us to do our own part in making amends for our sins, so our eternal salvation is not automatic.

Remember that Matthew’s Gospel (25:41) pictures Jesus at the last judgment, saying to some, “Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” If the manner of our life has effectively been a denial of God’s teachings, we will be judged on that.

And if God had already forgiven all of human sin in a single act, it would have made no sense for Christ to bestow on the disciples the power to forgive sins when he told them following the resurrection: “Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (Jn.20:22-23).

Nor would it have made sense for Jesus, when teaching the disciples to pray the Our Father, to explain, “If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions” (Mt. 6:14-15). **Unfortunately, this column cannot accept questions from readers**

THE YEAR OF PRAYER



As an aid to responding to the Holy Father's call for 2024 to be a Year of Prayer, the Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst will offer reflections on many aspects of Christian prayer, from the writings of saints to the different forms of prayer practiced across the Church.

In the lead-up to the Jubilee Year of 2025, Pope Francis has written the following in his call for 2024 to be a Year of Prayer:

'In this time of preparation, I would greatly desire that we devote 2024, the year preceding the Jubilee event, to a great "symphony" of prayer.

'Prayer, above all else, to renew our desire to be in the presence of the Lord, to listen to him and to adore him. Prayer, moreover, to thank God for the many gifts of his love for us and to praise his work in creation, which summons everyone to respect it and to take concrete and responsible steps to protect it. Prayer as the expression of a single "heart and soul" (cf. Acts 4:32), which then translates into solidarity and the sharing of our daily bread. Prayer that makes it possible for every man and woman in this world to turn to the one God and to reveal to him what lies hidden in the depths of their heart. Prayer as the royal road to holiness, which enables us to be contemplative even in the midst of activity.'

Most fundamentally and most simply, prayer – especially when considering the call to "be contemplative even in the midst of activity" – is described in the catechism of the Catholic Church as "the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God." The catechism borrows this definition from the great St John Damascene, building as it does on the Church's tradition and experience to express what is. But behind this simple definition lies an inexhaustible wealth of insights and practices, beginning with the Apostles themselves, that

A journey with the saints and the liturgy for the Year of Prayer

have brought generations of Christians closer to the Lord.

We'll look at varied themes such as Saint Thomas Aquinas on the four parts of prayer, Saint Teresa of Avila on the power and limits of contemplative prayer, Saint Therese of Lisieux and her 'little way', and Saint Bonaventure on the mind's journey to God.

Other concrete aspects of our prayer life will also feature. From the specifics of liturgical prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalms, the Rosary, and the Lord's Prayer, we'll also rediscover the depth of our Church's time-honoured practices of prayer which we share with generations of saints.

Finally turning to the three popes of our century – St John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis – we will close the year by reading their insights on the contemporary and enduring importance of prayer for the Christian life.

These reflections will be published in the *Universe Catholic Weekly*, besides being available both in written form and as podcasts from our website's dedicated Year of Prayer page: www.christianheritagecentre.com/year-of-prayer

We hope you'll join us this year as we strive to raise our hearts and minds to God in preparation for the celebration of the great Jubilee Year.



Photo: Yara Nardi, Reuters

Reflection 1: Saint Thomas Aquinas on 'Oration'

Joey Belleza, PhD (Cantab.)

St Thomas Aquinas OP (1225-1274) is one of the Doctors of the Church. His teaching has been especially promoted by the Church as an exemplar of philosophical clarity and theological orthodoxy.

In his great systematic work called the *Summa Theologica* (a 'summary' or 'manual' of theology), he treats of nearly all aspects of Christian doctrine, from the doctrines of God as Creator, as Triune, and as Incarnate, to rigorous reflections on the sacraments and the so-called Four Last Things (judgment, hell, purgatory, and Heaven).

In the *Summa*, he also considers the nature of prayer, bringing to bear the reflections of Scripture and the saints who came before him. This reflection is the first of four in which we look at St Thomas's treatment of the four parts of prayer, namely: oration, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession. As we progress

through this Year of Prayer, we will return to these basic themes presented by Saint Thomas, showing how his fundamental insights are shared by saints and holy figures from throughout the Church's history.

St Thomas did not invent this fourfold division. Although it was first codified in a systematic way by the monk Saint John Cassian (360-435), the roots of this division comes from Saint Paul himself in 1 Timothy 2:1: "I urge... that petitions, orations, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all people." In this reflection we will consider oration.

Oration is derived from the Latin *oratio*, which can be translated simply into English as 'prayer,' but the theological tradition has given it a more specific meaning. Related to the noun *os* (oris), meaning 'mouth', an oration is something spoken aloud toward someone or something. It pertains to the first part of the definition of prayer given in the Catechism, "the raising of

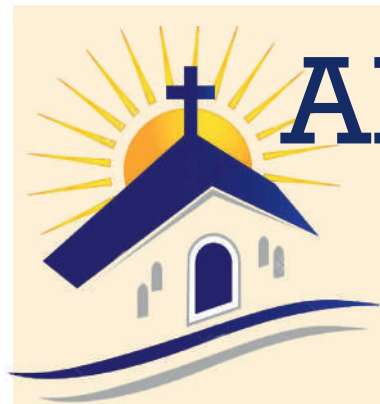
one's heart and mind to God," but this ascent is done by explicitly calling out to God.

But who is the source of this calling out? Does it come merely from ourselves? Or is it already a participation with God's own action? Indeed, we are only able to call out to God because God has called us first. Indeed, as the Creator who is the source of all things, our call to God can only be a response to the one who gives us our being as the very first gift. When we raise our hearts and minds to God and call upon his Name, we are in a sense returning ourselves to the source of our being, acknowledging his greatness and our humility before him. This humility is the basic posture of prayer: we place ourselves before God and call out to the one who made all things visible and invisible. All prayer, all oration, starts from God and returns to him.

In the next instalment, we will consider a second aspect of prayer: thanksgiving.



St. Thomas Aquinas is depicted in a painting at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington.



AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION

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



People-person Rob takes on key role at Walsingham

The Catholic National Shrine and Basilica of Our Lady, Walsingham, has announced the appointment of Rob Whitwood as its new general manager.

This key position marks a significant step in the Shrine's continued mission, guided by the leadership of the Rector, Fr Robert Billing.

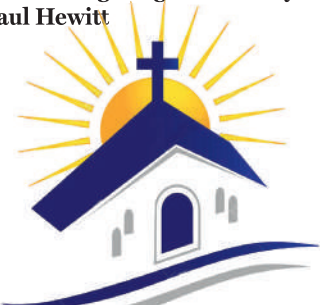
Rob joins the shrine with a strong background in people management and governance, which will be critical to his role in supporting Fr Robert in the shrine's development.

His responsibilities will include the co-ordination and motivation of the shrine's committed staff, ensuring that visiting pilgrims receive exceptional service during their devotions, and while utilising the shrine's accommodation and catering services.

Rob's appointment is also a strategic move towards enhancing the financial performance of the shrine. However, the sacred nature of the shrine as a vital place of pilgrimage and Catholic Marian devotion will always remain at the forefront.

The shrine community expresses deep gratitude to the interim CEO, Paul Hewitt, for his outstanding service and dedication. Paul will continue to lend his expertise and knowledge in his new role as Special Assistant to the Rector.

• Rob Whitwood (left) is pictured above being congratulated by Paul Hewitt



St Bernadette's honoured for focus on its international links

David O'Farrell, Head of St Bernadette's primary school, Harrow

On Monday, 15th January, St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School and Nursery, Harrow, was honoured with the International Award by the British Council.

This award is in recognition of the work that we perform with our international link schools and with HCPT (The Pilgrimage Trust).

Over the past 12 years, we have built up relations with schools in Spain and Poland through the original Comenius programme and, more recently, with a group of schools in Italy. We are linked with Colegio Miramadrid in Madrid, Lokomotywa in Sopot and Carducci Fattori in Rosignano.

The links include working with all year groups throughout the primary ages performing various activities. These include a travelling teddy bear with his diary, pen-pals, newsletters and regular Zoom calls.

Then, in year 6, we welcome 20 children from Madrid to stay with our families and we then take 20 children to Madrid to stay with their families. We are hoping to extend this into our links with our school in Italy, Carducci Fattori.

Eleven years ago, we formed our

own school HCPT group and we travel in pilgrimage to the shrine of St Bernadette in Lourdes. We take a group of seven children and three adults, who all have the opportunity to pray at the grotto where Our Lady appeared to Bernadette.

Recent pilgrim Robbie said: "It was a very spiritual experience that helped me to understand why my school is called St Bernadette's and I am really lucky to be part of it," while Kevin added: "Wow - this is an incredible experience."

The whole community benefits from our international work and the children's minds are opened to the big world that exists beyond their local area. They enjoy learning about other cultures, looking at the differences and similarities that exist around the world. Most importantly, we are all being educated to realise that children are children-regardless of location or language.

We are very proud that we are one of a very small group of primary schools that travels abroad. We believe that this experience is invaluable as we aim to create the young leaders of the future who have an awareness of the wider world and what can be achieved.





Bicentenary of St. Alban's



Centenary of St. Monica's

Archbishop Malcolm helps two parishes celebrate their landmark anniversaries

Two Catholic parishes in the archdiocese of Liverpool have celebrated significant anniversaries. St. Monica's, Bootle, celebrated the church's centenary, while St. Alban's in Warrington celebrated its bicentenary.

Parishioners of St Monica's first parish Church, Bootle, recently marked their centenary with a "glorious" Mass celebrated by Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, followed by a parish party.

The Mass was attended by parishioners of St Monica's, St Francis de Sales, and friends and

clergy from local parishes, as well as staff and pupils from St Monica's Primary School.

Parish priest Fr Ged Callacher said: "It was a wonderful and joyful occasion, a fitting way to celebrate the journey that started so many years ago.

"We gave thanks to God for the past, the present, and the future of the parish, and celebrated the many parishioners, friends, clergy and religious sisters who have come and gone from us over the years.

"We thanked God for what they have contributed to our parish

community of St Monica's Bootle." The Bicentenary of St. Alban's church also proved to be a wonderful and exceptional occasion for all who had gathered. Again, Archbishop Malcolm presided at the Mass, joined by several priests and many parishioners.

During the 200 years in the life of the church, notable people and events have been remembered in various special ways displayed within the church.

This year, to mark the Bicentenary, two Frescoes have been created for the Lady Altar to

replace those which had been damaged some time ago.

Archbishop Malcolm blessed them during the Mass, and parish priest Canon Christopher Cunningham expressed his gratitude to Rose Dring, a parishioner, who used her talents and skills to paint the Frescoes.

In years to come, they will be a reminder of the church of today, identifying the welcome given to members of the congregation who come from many different walks of life.

Tell your story to the Universe Catholic Weekly!

Let's see your parish and school news in the Universe Catholic Weekly

andy.drozdziak@universecatholicweekly.co.uk



It's all good stuff here, say the St Gregory's children

Children and staff "relish" attending St Gregory's Catholic Primary School in South Shields, near Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, according to its recent Ofsted report.

The primary, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, has been rated 'Good' with 'Outstanding' features by Ofsted.

Ofsted lead inspector Mark Dent said: "St Gregory's is a calm and supportive place for pupils to learn. The respect and warmth that pupils and adults show towards each other makes them a happy team.

"The attendance of pupils is very high. They enjoy coming to school

to learn and see their friends. Staff also relish working at the school. They feel that leaders consider their workload and wellbeing and that it is a 'fabulous' school to be part of."

He also praised the Catholic ethos in his report. "The personal development programme for pupils is excellent," he said. "This is aligned with the strong Catholic ethos of the school. Pupils learn to be kind, within school and in the local community.

The school was delighted to be rated 'Outstanding' in both behaviour and attitudes, and in personal development.

THE BIG LENT WALK

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Mass welcomes Emily to new role at Marist School

On 21st January, the induction of Emily Fanzo as Head of School at The Marist Catholic Primary School, West Byfleet, was celebrated in Our Lady Help of Christians Church, West Byfleet.

The Mass was celebrated by Bishop Richard Moth.

Fr Aaron Spinelli and the parish welcomed Emily, who was supported by her family, members of the school community, colleagues from the deanery, Xavier Catholic Education Trust

and the diocesan education service.

Music was provided by the wonderful choir from the school and the parish hall was full afterwards, as the celebrations continued.

Pictured above at the Mass are (from left) Fr Aaron Spinelli; James Kibble, Xavier CEO; Julie Oldroyd, Director; Emily Fanzo, Head of School; Kate Licence, Executive Head; and Bishop Richard Moth.

Clifton brings its schools under Little Way banner

The Diocese of Clifton is celebrating after becoming a part of the Little Way Catholic Educational Trust.

The Little Way Catholic Educational Trust (LWCET) was launched on 1st January 2024 with six founding schools: St Catharine's in Chipping Campden, St Joseph's in Nympsfield, St Thomas More in Cheltenham, St Peter's Primary in Gloucester, The Catholic School of St Gregory the Great, Cheltenham and The Rosary School in Stroud.

The diocese of Clifton said: "8th January 2024 marked a truly special occasion as we became a part of the Little Way Catholic Educational Trust.

"To commemorate this momentous day, we started with a special assembly where we watched a getting-to-know-you video from each of the schools, indulged in delicious cake, made bookmarks for our reading books, and engaged in hand-printing to make a banner for each of our classrooms.



"What made it extra special was that all of the Trust schools were doing the same activities at the same time."

Their patron saint is St Therese of Lisieux who was known for doing little acts of kindness with a lot of love to make a big difference to everyone she met. She was often called 'The Little Flower' because

she brightened the day for many.

In using her as a role model, each child in the Trust brought in a box of cereal (a little act with a lot of love), added it to the domino chain and knocked them down in a huge domino run that stretched across all of the schools (see photo).

As a Trust, over 800 boxes of cereal were collected and given to local foodbanks. Interim CEO Charlotte Blanch said: "As a Trust, together, with all of our little acts, we made a big difference to the communities that we serve".

The Diocese of Clifton said: "The Little Way Catholic Educational Trust has been founded by six Catholic Primary schools in Gloucestershire.

"The vision for Bishop Declan Lang and the Diocese of Clifton is that all of the Catholic schools in Gloucestershire and Swindon will join the Trust over the coming years. This is a very exciting time for Catholic education in the area."

St Anselm's College

Birkenhead, Wirral CH43 1UQ
Part of the Edmund Rice Family

requires a new

Headteacher

Start Date: September 2024 Salary Range: L29-L33 (£94,348 - £102,995)

The Board of Governors of this popular and successful boys Catholic Grammar School seeks to appoint a suitably-experienced, ambitious and exceptional Headteacher with a proven track record of success. We require an outstanding leader capable of inspiring, motivating and supporting our pupils and staff to achieve their full potential. The College is part of the Edmund Rice Schools Network, founded by the Christian Brothers, and will soon enter the Trusteeship of the Gaudete Trust, a joint Trust with five other Religious Orders. The current Headteacher retires in August 2024 after 22 years' service, during which The College and its facilities have been transformed.

The successful applicant will be someone who:

- Is a practising Catholic
- Is committed to and understands Catholic education
- Is an inspirational leader with an understanding of the ethos of the College and a clear vision for its future
- Is committed to improving outcomes for all of our students
- Is able to lead, motivate and inspire students and staff
- Has a proven track record of raising standards in teaching and learning
- Has excellent communication, organisational and inter-personal skills

Prospective candidates are invited to contact the College to arrange a visit.

Please contact Mrs Alison Cook by email: acook@st-anselms.com

Application packs and further details are available via the College website at: www.st-anselms.com

Completed application forms should be returned by post to: Mrs Alison Cook, Clerk to the Governors
Or via email to acook@st-anselms.com

Closing date for applications: Friday 9th February 2024

Shortlisting will take place: Monday 12th February 2024

Interview dates: Tuesday 27th and Wednesday 28th February 2024



Bishop on hand to mark chapel's anniversary

Bishop of Salford John Arnold paid a visit to a Lancashire school this week to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the opening of its chapel.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel RC High School welcomed Bishop John and the parish priest, Fr Francis Wadsworth, as they celebrated Mass with staff, pupils, and governors, as well as invited guests from the Hyndburn Catholic Partnership of primary schools and the diocese of Salford.

During his visit, Bishop John blessed the chapel and the plaque that had been made to mark the occasion, before enjoying a tour of the school and meeting a number of pupils who shared details of some of their current projects and plans.

Headteacher Mr Bowers was delighted to welcome Bishop John and guests and to explain the impact the chapel has had on school life over the past decade.

The chapel is "a quiet, peaceful sanctuary, and a valuable place for prayer and comfort where both pupils and staff can support each other", he said.

The chapel is not only a place to celebrate Mass and prepare the school community for important points in the liturgical calendar, but it also provides a space to meet and train chaplaincy and charity form representatives, as well as enhance and shape the school's Catholic life.

Mr Bowers asked Bishop John to bless the chapel and plaque that had been made to mark this special occasion in the school's history.

Guests were then invited into the school library where there were refreshments and a celebratory cake.

The school pupil ECO representatives were introduced to Bishop John and chatted to him about their current projects and plans.

Pictured above, Bishop John accepts a celebratory cake

Well done all, you've made your school proud

Former students and their families were welcomed back to St. Paul's Catholic High School, Wythenshawe, for a special Certificate and Awards Presentation where they received their exam certificates.

The event is the school's annual celebration of the achievements of its students during the previous academic year, with awards being given to students from last year's Year 11 for both achievement and progress.

There was a host of other awards celebrating success throughout all aspects of life at St. Paul's.

Parents, friends, students and teachers gathered to recognise the achievements of the students and this important milestone in their lives. The event was another proud moment for the school and an opportunity to reflect on the success of the students and the staff who support them.

The school was delighted to welcome to the event Miss Emma Taylor as guest of honour. Emma attended St. Paul's Catholic High School between 2005 – 2010, and

in her final year at school she was Head Girl.

In 2016, Emma became an elected councillor in East Manchester, subsequently councillor, moving to represent the Sharston ward where she was born and raised on Manchester City Council in 2021.

Between 2018 and 2022, Emma was an Assistant Executive Member on the council, a role that saw her support the decision-making executive of the council.

Emma is now a public affairs consultant for a large communications agency. In her role, Emma supports businesses and organisations to engage with politicians and decision makers on the issues that matter to them.

Headteacher Mike Whiteside paid tribute to those who were collecting their certificates. "We are all extremely proud of you," Mr Whiteside he told them. "Your families, friends and teachers are all here to support you and we know that you will be of great value to society in the coming years.

"You have to find out what you are good at and then become the very best you can be. Your commitment and hard work has really paid off, and you are role models to your peers.

"All of you are doing brilliantly well and the future is bright for you all."

He added: "The Presentation Ceremony where ex-students return to school to collect their exam certificates is a high point in the school calendar.

"It's wonderful to see their proud families join us to celebrate their achievements.

"We wish them all every success in the next chapter of their lives and wish to thank parents for all the support they have given them and us over the past few years."

Pictured right, Emma Taylor with (top photo) headteacher Mike Whiteside present two of the certificates to former Saint Paul's pupils.



A prayer for unity

Cardinal Nichols and Archbishop of Canterbury pray at the Shrine of St Edward the Confessor
Photo: mazur.org.uk

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was observed from the 18th-25th January, with the theme: "You shall love the Lord your God... and your neighbour as yourself" (Lk. 10:27).

Cardinal Nichols shared the reflection. "This Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has as its theme 'Love the Lord your God and love your neighbour as yourself'. It's a theme that takes us directly to the heart of our Christian living.

"The first part of the command, 'Love the Lord, your God', calls us to a constant prayer and adoration before the Lord. This is so important because it involves a recognition that, at the end of the day, we are created by God and sustained in being by God. We are created persons.

"And therefore this love and adoration of the Lord saves us from all idolatry.

"Now, idolatry is a heavy word, but basically, it means putting other things in the place of God,

making other things the most important ambition, destination of our lives. And we need to be saved from idolatry, if we are seriously to serve the Lord our God. When we come before him, we know that we are made out of love, and that we are clothed with mercy to enable us to respond to the Lord.

"Love your neighbour" flows directly from this. Because once we see ourselves in this right light, then we see our neighbour in the same light too; and we see in our neighbour the creation beloved of God and clothed in mercy.

So we can say that there can be no true religious experience that is deaf to the cry of the world. And it is this willingness to serve which flows from the adoration of God that is our hope, that this is the source of why we look to the future with a certainty that this is an unfolding of God's purpose in our lives, in our communities, and in our world.

The Catholic Independent Schools' Conference (CISC) require for 1 May 2024, or as soon as possible thereafter, a:

General Secretary



Closing date for applications is Thursday 22 February 2024 at 4.00pm

Interviews will be held on Thursday 7 March 2024

The Catholic Independent Schools' Conference (CISC) represents a growing community of Catholic Independent Schools in the UK and beyond, working together to promote and celebrate the global project of Catholic education.

Supporting and representing all of the UK's Independent Schools, and a number of Associate schools in Ireland and further afield, the General Secretary's role is a stimulating and multi-faceted job which has an increasingly high public profile while retaining its traditional member-focused perspective.

The successful candidate will be an accomplished and inspirational leader with a compelling vision for Catholic education and a passion for improving the lives of our future generations. We are seeking an outstanding ambassador for the charity and, as such, the successful candidate will need to be an excellent communicator, relationship builder and facilitator - someone with a strong track record in senior leadership within Catholic education.

Applicants will need to demonstrate a strategic mind-set with a clear understanding of how best to support Catholic independent school heads in their role. The post-holder will be a practising Catholic with the vision, determination and faith to move CISC forward to the next stages of its development.

For informal discussions, please email Antony Hudson, CISC Chair, at AHudson@stgeorgesweybridge.com.

An application pack and further details can be found at www.catholicindependentschools.com.



CATHOLIC INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS' CONFERENCE

www.catholicindependentschools.com

CISC is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and applicants must be willing to undergo screening appropriate to the post, including checks with past employers and the Disclosure and Barring Service.



Mean Girls are back. pg 35

The Universe Catholic Weekly's guide to the more leisurely side of life

GARDENING

There's a fun habit behind composting that becomes hard to break

Terry Dunelm

As you know by now, I'm a big fan of compost which I believe is the single best soil amendment you can add to any lawn or garden.

What you may not know is that I'm also an efficiency nut. I'm always looking for the most productive way to take on any task. So it's only natural that I find one of the easiest ways to clean up the kitchen is to toss those food scraps from salads, vegetables and fruits right into the compost pile.

So much from the kitchen and even other parts of the house are perfect ingredients for making great compost and make cleaning up so much for productive and fun.

Besides making great soil right at home, I certainly try to do my part to reduce the pressure on our community landfill. In fact, I've indoctrinated everyone I know into this composting-recycling obsessive world in which I live.

But I may have gone a little too far with it. Now I have them afraid to throw anything away. I must admit, my fervor has resulted in a plethora of recyclables at my house. The best part is anything that can be composted is composted.

The home system

As part of our system, we now have a dedicated cabinet in the kitchen that houses two bins. One is for the daily compost and the other for recyclables. I thought it would be a tough sell to get my wife to go along with the ongoing storage of food waste inside the house. As it turns out, the biggest challenge is my remembering to take it out at the end of each day. After all, that was our deal.

"Anything that once came from a living source can be composted... all fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds and filters, banana peels, eggshells and tea bags"



This learning curve and total acceptance by my family to the system has resulted in my having to fish out some pretty crazy items that just didn't work in the compost bin. That's alright though. I'd rather fish them out than have them thrown out. There's no chance to compost then. So just what can and can't go into compost?

What you can use...

From inside the house, just about anything that once came from a living source can be composted. From the kitchen add all fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds and filters, paper towels and the roll, napkins, oatmeal,

banana peels, eggshells and tea bags. You'll find more items.

From around the house, vacuum cleaner bags and contents, dryer lint, cardboard rolls, clean paper (shredded is best), newspaper, cotton and wool rags, hair and fur and house plants.

And what you can't...

As with everything in life, there are exceptions to the rule, including household compost. First, don't add meat products, bones, fats, grease, oils, or dairy products to compost. They create odours that can attract pests such as rodents and flies. And don't compost pet or human

wastes. These can contain parasites, bacteria, germs, pathogens and viruses that are harmful to humans.

I must admit, now that the family is onboard, our household composting machine is running smoothly. It took a little work at first but now it's a healthy habit that I doubt we'll ever break... nor should we.

Besides the good we're doing for the environment and our garden, my children are learning important lessons on stewardship. And when they get to eat fresh vegetables from the garden, nourished by the compost they helped make, it really is an easy sell.



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HEALTH

Frostbite's a killer – and it can start harming you in minutes

What is frostbite, what are the signs and how should we treat it?

Countries across the northern hemisphere have been facing a bitterly cold snap in recent weeks, with even nations used to the bitter cold such as the US, Sweden and Norway struggling to cope. With it comes a serious risk of injury – and even death – from freezing weather.

Thankfully, with the right preventative and protective measures, the human body can survive these icy temperatures.

Here's what you need to know about identifying and treating the most common cold injury: **frostbite**.

What our bodies can cope with

The body runs most optimally at 37°C and has a number of inbuilt mechanisms to adjust to cold or hot changes in environments.

These include changing our breathing rate, adjusting blood supply to various areas of the body or altering our fluid intake to ensure we replenish what we lose through respiration, exertion and urination.

However, despite our bodies' inherent temperature controls, without the right protection, we might still be vulnerable to cold weather injuries.

Frostbite is the result of damage to tissues – usually skin – on exposure to subzero temperatures.

Most commonly damaged areas are ears, fingers, toes, cheeks, lips, nose and other extremities that are exposed. Other areas at risk are those not covered enough, such as the penis in winter sports, or the eyes.

For frostbite to occur, exposed body parts need to be subjected to a temperature that is below minus 0.55°C. At this temperature it will take several hours for exposed skin to become frostbitten.

But length of exposure to the cold is not the sole factor. The further below zero the temperature, the quicker the onset of frostbite.

Windchill has a significant impact on the likelihood of getting frostbite too. For example, temperatures in the –20s can cause frostbite on exposed skin in under 30 minutes.

Wet clothing also increases the risk of developing frostbite: the moisture removes heat away from the body far quicker than air does, reducing the time taken to develop it.

Who does it affect?

Frostbite is seen more commonly in men and is increasingly found in certain occupational groups such as farming and fishing, mountaineers, manual labourers and members of the military. However, with the global population beginning to live in harsher environments and an increase in winter and snow sports, this is likely to increase in the general population.

Those who are diabetic or pre-diabetic are also at increased risk, not because of their inability to metabolise glucose, but because damage to the nervous system means



they are less likely to feel and respond to the cold. Reduced ability to sense the cold also increases the frostbite vulnerability of those who've had a stroke or have peripheral nerve damage.

People with heart conditions are also more at risk because the cold, especially the wind, takes the heat away from the body placing increased strain on the heart, which must work harder to keep warm.

Significant alcohol consumption is a further risk factor for frostbite. Heavy intoxication inhibits the body's protective response to low temperatures and can result in the sufferer not recognising the pain and discomfort as an early warning sign of cold damage.

The consumption of alcohol also reduces blood pressure, which may also reduce the amount of blood pumped to extremities.

Symptoms

Cold weather causes exposed skin temperature to drop, which triggers a response from the body to reduce the blood flow – known as vasoconstriction – to these cold areas to maintain core body temperature. Preserving the core body temperature is key to keeping the brain, heart, kidneys and lungs functioning and preventing hypothermia.

Withdrawing blood from the extremities reduces the risk of ice crystals forming in blood, however, over time with continued exposure to

the cold, the water in the tissues begins to freeze, causing ice crystals to damage the tissues.

This cooling brings about tingling and numbness of the exposed areas, and skin flushes red or white as the body frantically tries to rewarm itself.

This initial stage is known as frostnip, and, although uncomfortable, leaves no permanent damage to tissues. Beyond this stage, tissues begin to freeze.

If only the skin and the underlying connective tissues are frozen, this is termed superficial frostbite. The skin turns pale or even greyish blue because of decreased blood flow, ice crystal formation, limited blood supply – and there's total numbness in the affected areas.

As exposure progresses, the freezing of tissue moves deeper involving muscles and tendons,

blood vessels and even bones. This level of freezing is deep frostbite and is associated with more extreme outcomes, such as amputation.

Treatment and prevention

For frostbite, immediate medical treatment should be sought – sadly the pain of recovery is often far worse than the injury.

Rewarming is the process of bringing the affected parts back to functioning body temperature. However, where ice crystals have damaged tissue, blisters are common and the nerves become hypersensitive, causing excruciating pain.

In severe cases, debridement surgery may be needed to remove dead tissue.

In the most extreme cases, however, there is the possibility that the affected area cannot be saved and requires amputation – if the tissue hasn't already died and fallen off.

During this cold snap, if you have to go out in the cold weather, minimise your time outside.

Ensure that you have multiple layers on, this minimises heat loss. Wearing anything to provide a barrier to your extremities to the cold. Hats, gloves and scarfs can protect the areas most affected by frostbite.

Adam Taylor is a Professor and Director of the Clinical Anatomy Learning Centre, Lancaster University

"For frostbite, immediate medical treatment should be sought – sadly the pain of recovery is often far worse than the injury. Rewarming the affected parts back to functioning body temperature can cause excruciating pain"

FOOD

New year, new you: Make honey part of the equation

Everyone knows that the new year is the most popular time to focus on yourself. It is a time to realign with your wellness goals, career aspirations, social life and more. Many people focus on improving their nutrition and eating habits in the new year, and finding one core ingredient to incorporate into meals is a great solution to achieve that goal.

Whether you add it to a soothing cup of warm tea, or incorporate on a cheese board for that added boost of flavour, honey is that one staple that is both good for you and the ecosystem at large. Honey is also extremely versatile, and the ways one can incorporate it as they whip up a dish in the kitchen are unmatched. It can be a key ingredient in any meal at any point in the day.

The National Honey Board is sharing three easy-to-make recipes for everyone to add to their diets this new year and beyond.

For breakfast: Polenta with Berry Preserves and Honey Toasted Walnuts.

Ingredients (4 servings)

1 cup – corn meal
2 cups – water
2 cups – milk (whole)
1/2 tsp. – salt

2 T – honey
1 tsp. – ground cinnamon
2 T – unsalted butter
4 tsp. – good quality berry preserves

For Honey Toasted Walnuts:

1 cup – raw walnut halves
1 tsp. – ground cinnamon
3 T – honey
1/4 tsp. – kosher salt

Method

In a medium saucepan, bring water, milk and Kosher salt to a low boil over medium heat. Slowly add cornmeal, whisking out lumps. Reduce to low heat, simmer and stir continuously until thickened (about 15–20 minutes).

Stir in honey, butter and cinnamon until butter is melted and ingredients are combined. Divide polenta into 4 small bowls, top with berry preserves, honey toasted walnuts, and drizzle with honey.

For a snack or light lunch: Watermelon Salad with Whipped Feta

Ingredients (4 servings)

For Honey Balsamic Reduction:



1/2 cup – white balsamic vinegar
2 T – honey
1 tsp. – Dijon mustard
zest of 1 orange + 2 T of the juice
1/4 tsp. – kosher salt
For Whipped Feta:
4 oz. – feta cheese, crumbled
1/4 cup – whipped cream cheese
3 T – honey
6 cups – seedless watermelon, cut into 1" cubes
1/2 cup – fresh mint, julienned, reserving a few sprigs for garnish
4 (1") pieces – honeycomb
Freshly ground pepper

Method

Combine the balsamic vinegar and 2 T honey in a small saucepan and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a slow bubble and cook for 8–10 minutes. The syrup will be thickened, remove

from the heat and stir in the Dijon mustard, orange zest, juice and salt, set aside and let cool.

Process the feta cheese, cream cheese and honey in a food processor until smooth, chill.

Combine the watermelon, fresh mint and honey balsamic reduction in a bowl and toss gently. Spoon the watermelon onto 4 plates, drizzling with the remaining balsamic reduction, top with a dollop of whipped feta and garnish with a piece of honeycomb and a sprig of fresh mint and freshly ground pepper, serve immediately.

It is clear that honey is an all-natural sweetener that has many benefits, both for individuals themselves and the greater good. It is also clear that honey can be incorporated into your diet in a multitude of ways.

Be sure to check out some more recipes to add to your New Year meal plan at honey.com/recipes.

5 ways to make playing outside more enjoyable this winter

As the cold snap continues, it's worth reminding ourselves about the importance of making the most of the winter weather in a safe way.

Although it may seem normal to want to hunker down indoors when the temperatures start dropping, there's still a lot of fun to be had outdoors, even when it's snowy and a little chilly. The key to having a great time during the colder months of the year is to be prepared, so you and your family can make the most of all the great opportunities winter has to offer.

Here are some tips to make sure everyone has a blast outside this winter, whatever you choose to do.

1. Check the forecast

Before heading outdoors for an excursion or even just a little playtime, ensure that it's safe to do so by checking not just the temperature, but for windchill or icy conditions that might be unsafe. Children can play outside even when it's really cold outside, as long as they come indoors occasionally to warm up, but you should keep an eye on the windchill. If the windchill is below zero, frostbite can occur in a matter of minutes. As long as you dress everyone appropriately, you can enjoy outdoor fun throughout the winter.

2. Dress for warmth

To be able to play happily outdoors in winter weather, you'll want to make sure your child's hands, neck and head are well covered. Gloves or mittens work best when they're waterproof,

and for little ones who enjoy rolling around in the snow, a snowsuit is your best bet. Staying active will also help you feel toasty, so make sure to keep moving.

Cold-weather comfort starts with your feet, and quality footwear is crucial to help keep your feet dry, safe and comfortable while you're outdoors. You should choose durable, quality and durable boots which provide protection from the elements to help your entire family embrace being outdoors in any weather. Kamik.com offers a wide selection of boots for everyone in the family to choose from.



3. Let your imagination be your guide

Sometimes the simplest, tried-and-true activities like going sledging or making snow people or a snow fort in your yard are the most fun for kids of all ages. But you don't have to stop there – you could create an outdoor scavenger hunt, make a target for a snowball throwing contest or bury a few prizes in your snowy garden for children to find.

And even though the days are shorter, you can stay out past sunset and brighten a winter night by enjoying hot cocoa or cider around a fire.

4. Encourage your child's interests

Use your child's fascinations to develop activities that will make being outside even more fun.

For example, if your child loves art, use household containers or moulds to make ice sculptures using water and food colouring, freeze overnight, then decorate the yard with their creations. Is there a budding scientist in your house?

Blow bubbles outside in the cold to see how quickly they freeze, or gather snowflakes on a piece of black construction paper (first put paper in the freezer or outside) to examine each snowflake's unique beauty under a magnifying glass.

5. Play 'winter tourist' in your own hometown

Sometimes you need to be a tourist to find the best events and adventures in a new area, so why not pretend you're a visitor and search for winter activities right where you live?

You may discover all kinds of wonderful things to do not far from home that you didn't even know existed, from sleigh rides, nature walks and zoo events to ice carving or winter lights you can all visit together.

Don't let the cold weather hold you back from enjoying the outdoors this year. By embracing winter and with a good pair of boots on your feet, you can make lasting memories with your family all season long.

FILMS

Gentle sweet bees look like they have one mean keeper....

Cultivating bees may be regarded as a rather peaceful and meditative pursuit. But that doesn't stop the title character of the preposterous action flick *The Beekeeper* (Amazon MGM) from going berserk when provoked.

England's number one movie tough guy Jason Statham plays the honey harvester in question, who goes by the name Adam Clay. Since, however, Adam is – what else? – man ex-elite operative with mad combat skills and a past he's trying to escape, it's a safe bet from the start that we're dealing with an alias.

That makes him a man of mystery as well as the strong silent type. Who'd have guessed? Just about the only person for whom Adam unbuttons his lip, on occasion, is elderly widow Eloise Parker (Phylicia Rashad), the lady from whom he rents the space needed to pursue his avocation. In fact, Eloise is the closest thing to a friend Adam has.

So when computer illiterate Eloise falls victim to online scammers who succeed in emptying not only all her personal accounts but the funds of a charity on whose board she serves, and she commits suicide in despair as a result, Adam is outraged. He's also sufficiently enraged to embark on a mayhem-littered quest for

revenge.

Adam proceeds to mow down anyone who stands between him and those responsible for the crime. The latter include a duo of minions, callous slickster Mickey 'Boyd' Garnett (David Witts) and loopy moron Rico Anzalone (Enzo Cilenti), as well as the big boss, spoiled rich boy Derek Danforth (Josh Hutcherson).

But Adam doesn't confine himself to targeting the security guards and mercenaries these villains employ, in ever increasing numbers, to protect them. He also fells legions of police and whole Army units. Thus Eloise's daughter, Verona (Emmy Raver-Lampman), who just happens to be an FBI agent, finds her loyalties divided as she tracks the unstoppable killer.

As scripted by Kurt Wimmer and directed by David Ayer, Adam's ludicrous rampage shows such utter contempt for reality that it could be taken as an over-the-top joke. But there are moments in the dialogue straight-facedly upholding Adam's crusade and falsely pitting obedience to the law against ultimate justice.

Consequently, serious assessment of the silly story's blatant immorality is required. But that needn't be laboured and can, perhaps, best be summarised by a bit of helpful advice: Viewers should simply shoo this absurd apis



Jason Statham and Jeremy Irons star in a scene from the film *The Beekeeper*. Photo: Daniel Smith, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures

away lest they be stung by it.

Jason Statham called the film 'great' and said he is 'really, really proud of the movie.'

"The whole movie escalates in terms of the action," he told *Variety* magazine. "And it goes through an incredible, great crescendo. The whole world [of the film] has a mythology of the 'beekeeping' world. If we were fortunate enough to make a sequel, we have a whole world that we can dive into."

Far from his tough guy image, Statham had to learn apiary in order to be a credible beekeeper

in the film. The film's director, David Ayer, told *Entertainment Weekly* how Statham 'embraced' the art.

"In the opening scene, we have Jason pulling out the comb, and smoking the hive, and doing all the processes," Ayer said. "That's real. The bees are real. He learned how to do all of that."

"It's an interesting side line to the main story, because we see him as this rough punch-up guy, and yet he got the zen of it – he really embraced the zen of beekeeping he has real inner qualities."

Mean Girls' obsession with modern ideals spoils wry script

John Mulderig

The musical comedy *Mean Girls* (Paramount) comes with a more than two decade-long pedigree through all of which one unifying factor can be identified. The film is adapted by screenwriter Tina Fey from the Broadway theatre version of the eponymous 2004 film, both of which she also penned.

Fey infuses her script – ultimately derived from Rosalind Wiseman's 2002 nonfiction book *Queen Bees and Wannabes* – with some sharply observed humour. This helps to offset the sometimes over-the-top production numbers by which the film's more serious themes are conveyed, with varying effectiveness, under the direction of Samantha Jayne and Arturo Perez Jr.

Although this latest iteration of Fey's tale carries messages that might be valuable for the real-life counterparts of the teen characters who mostly populate it, her dialogue is often unsuitable for them. The production's treatment of the gay lifestyle among adolescents, moreover, requires mature discernment.

Fresh from the African bush, where she was homeschooled by her unnamed scientist mother (Jenna Fischer), aspiring mathematician Cady Heron (Angourie Rice) is thrust into the social maelstrom of a typical public high school. As she tries to blend in, Cady finds that her new peers are largely divided into cliques, ranging from the jocks to the theatre types.



Bebe Wood, Renee Rapp, and Avantika star in *Mean Girls*. Photo: Jojo Whilden, Paramount Pictures

Early on, Cady is befriended by a pair of outcasts, Janis (Auli'i Cravalho) and Damian (Jaquel Spivey). But she later finds herself torn between loyalty to them and the popularity that comes when the student body's reigning – and fiercely intimidating – 'apex predator', Regina (Renee Rapp), takes her up as a protege.

The fact that Cady has instantly fallen for her new patroness' ex-boyfriend, Aaron (Christopher Briney), presents a further complication. Will Cady choose to be Regina's acolyte or will she join Janis and Damian in a conspiracy to knock Regina off her throne?

As Cady wavers, Fey showcases the evils of

backstabbing and the merits of self-assertiveness, especially among young women. Yet, though mostly extraneous to the plot, same-sex coupling is frequently incorporated into the proceedings in a way that presents such pairings as a perfectly valid alternative to heterosexuality.

Grown-ups will be used to the sound of that seemingly inescapable cultural drumbeat. But the youngsters who might particularly benefit from the positive aspects of *Mean Girls* may lack the analytical skills to distinguish it properly from the call of the Gospel.

The actor who played Cady Heron in the original film, Lindsay Lohan, also makes an appearance in the new version as a moderator in a 'Mathlete' competition.

Writer of both versions, Tina Fey, told *Entertainment Weekly* how the new collaboration with Lindsay Lohan came about. "I felt like if I could only get one person as a surprise, the original movie is really Lindsay's movie," she said.

"As great as they all are, she's the heart of that movie. And I thought, well, what could she do? I didn't think [she should] play a teacher. I was trying to think of something that you wouldn't expect. And just to have her do that late in the movie, it also feels like it comes, I hope, at a time where fans weren't expecting one more little surprise. It also lets her be smart, which Cady is."

Oh mummy! Five things science tells us about the legendary Tutankhamun

HISTORY

Jenefer Metcalfe



One hundred years ago, our understanding of ancient Egypt changed forever when the tomb of King Tutankhamun was found on 4th November, 1922 in the Valley of Kings. Born around 1305BC, Tutankhamun only ruled Egypt for about ten years. Yet his tomb was furnished with never-before-seen riches.

Our fascination with mummies is understandable. Gazing on the face of a prehistoric Egyptian king makes these ethereal and majestic rulers seem more real. The discovery of Tutankhamun in his original resting place, complete with all his possessions, makes us feel a connection to a primeval past. It transports us back in time to the funeral of a young king.

Studies of Tutankhamun's life are often overshadowed by the sensational rumours that surround the discovery of his tomb, such as persistent whispers of a curse. But if we allow the gossip to get in the way of seeing Tutankhamun the person, we'll miss out.

1. Tutankhamun's death is still a mystery

It's difficult to find out why someone who lived a long time ago died. Tutankhamun is no exception. People in ancient Egypt lived shorter lives because they didn't have the same healthcare as we do. But Tutankhamun died at around 19 years old, which was young even for ancient Egypt.

Recently, studies using x-rays, CT scans and DNA testing showed Tutankhamun had malaria, along with some other medical conditions such as a cleft palate. He also broke his leg just before he died. This information helps us build a picture of Tutankhamun's health before his death.

It doesn't tell us exactly how he died though, except that there is no sign he was murdered.

2. He was buried with flowers

When Tutankhamun's tomb was opened in 1922, he was wearing a collar made of flowers. They were in good condition because they were sealed inside the coffin with him. Funeral bouquets have been found on other mummies. But this is the only royal burial where all the flowers were found just as the ancient Egyptian mourners left them.

Flowers were important to ancient Egyptians, who painted

"It has been assumed that Tutankhamun was embalmed quickly and poorly because he died suddenly. But the most recent CT scans show this is not true. To make his face more lifelike after mummification his face had been packed out with resin... this would have taken time and skill..."



pictures of flower gardens on the walls of their tombs. Flowers were admired for their beauty, their perfume and for symbolic reasons. Studies of the flowers and fruits used in the collar show that Tutankhamun was buried between mid-March and late-April. Preparing his body for burial would have taken 70 days, which means Tutankhamun most likely died in wintertime.

3. Tutankhamun's appearance was preserved by special techniques

The ancient Egyptians followed a "recipe" when they mummified a person. After removing the brain and internal organs, a salt called natron was used to dry the body out. This produced a mummy that could survive for thousands of years but had a shrunken, gaunt appearance.

Ancient Egyptians believed the soul, or Ka, needed to return to its body to exist in the afterlife but the Ka had to be able to recognise

its body. So, to make his face appear more lifelike, substances such as resin were pushed under the skin of Tutankhamun's face to plump it out.

Until recently it has been assumed that Tutankhamun was embalmed quickly and poorly because he died suddenly. But the most recent CT scans show this is not true. Packing out the face would have taken time and skill.

4. Tutankhamun had company on his journey into the afterlife

It is hard to escape the mental image of Tutankhamun lying in his tomb in splendid isolation. He was not, however, the only person buried in the tomb. Two miniature coffins were found in a wooden box in the tomb's treasury.

A study published in 2011 showed these coffins contained two female fetuses. One was around five-to-six months gestation, the other was around nine months gestation, dying at or around the time of birth. It is most likely these

are the daughters of Tutankhamun and his wife Ankhesenamun, and that they died before their father.

It is rare to find a mummified foetus. The ancient Egyptians did mummify some children but even this was uncommon. The loss of his children was obviously very important to Tutankhamun, so he wanted them with him in the afterlife.

5. Fame has not always been kind to Tutankhamun

As many of our celebrities today will testify, fame isn't always good for you. This is certainly the case for Tutankhamun, whose renown has brought overzealous scientific study and damage to his body.

Tutankhamun is probably the most studied mummy in the world, with the possible exception of Otzi the Iceman. The most recent studies of Tutankhamun using sophisticated CT scans have shown that his body is no longer intact or even complete.

The first study took place in

1925, very soon after he was discovered. In their eagerness to see Tutankhamun himself, the anatomists who studied him forcibly removed him from his coffin as he was stuck to it with resin. The rough handling separated his limbs and head from his torso.

Tutankhamun is the only known royal mummy to remain in his tomb in Egypt. At some point, possibly during the Second World War, his tomb was again entered by an unknown person or people. Some of Tutankhamun's ribs were cut and removed in the search for amulets or jewellery.

Science has helped us understand more about Tutankhamun's health, life and preparation for the afterlife. His legacy is not just a study of his personal life. It is a record of how science fuels our fascination with the boy king.

Jenefer Metcalfe is a Lecturer in Biomedical Egyptology, University of Manchester

Living a life of purpose in God's will

SPORT

Fr Vlad Felzmann

This article is an invitation to you, dear reader, to work out something similar in your life, to that of the headline.

The world is passing through tumultuous times, evolving – I hope and pray not – onto global disasters as just below the surface, there are many festering hatreds leading to inevitable conflicts.

However, whatever the context of my life, whatever job, responsibility and relationships, I have my Christian vocation to live as I journey on to eternity. Everything worthwhile, like climbing a mountain to enjoy the view, requires not just words, but sacrifice.

I know little about the lives of others. However, I am convinced that my spirit is meant to develop until I become, before death, *capax Dei*.

So far, born in 1939, I have been blessed with surviving World War 2 in Czechoslovakia and enjoying life in England - 1946 to 1965; in Rome from 1965-69, Barcelona from 1969-70 and now, since 1970, life back in London.

Within me, there is the ongoing game between the lower against the higher Vlad. Vices have probed – and keep on probing – my commitment to God, there ever since my experience of God's love in 1954 on Eriskay. That experience catapulted my desire to live a virtuous life to the top of my agenda. I decided to get down to becoming a saint. Appointed 'sports chaplain' in 2011 by the Cardinal, that quest was transformed into a foil fencing competition between virtues and vices, a game I called Vifoil.

Wondering which sport to compare with my struggle for morality, I chose the foil, which in fencing is a lighter sword than both the epee and sabre and is the weapon of choice for most beginners. A foil fencer scores only by hitting the opponent's torso with the blade tip. As the foil is lighter and has fewer targets than both épée and sabre, it demands better techniques and strategies. I chose this weapon as it must protect my heart against all the strokes – all the vices – of my opponent, the lower Vlad. Besides, it's fun to be able to say that I aim to foil the attacks of vices by parrying with my virtues' foil.

When the lower Vlad chooses a specific vice for the next bout, I use its opposing virtue – or another vice – to parry the attacks. When a vice does get through, I use my defeat to understand the weaknesses of others and thus my failure makes me more merciful, more Christ-like. The victory of



Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Tom Brady celebrates with the 2021 Vince Lombardi Trophy after Tampa beat the Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl LV

that vice backfires. Seeing my spiritual life like a Vifoil game makes life more entertaining.

St Paul said: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good." (Rm. 12: 21)

Lower Vlad uses not only virtues but also vices like a swordsman, uses all the tricks he can to score by touching the chest of his opponent. Upper Vlad does all he can to parry these attempts. Providentially, the chest padding is tough enough to prevent the enemy's foil becoming lethal.

Underneath anything I am doing, there is a competition, more of a conflict, between the capital virtues and vices. There is Humility v. Pride. Generosity v. Covetousness. Chastity v. Lust. Meekness v. Anger. Temperance v. Gluttony. Friendship v. Envy. And Diligence v. Sloth. The foils of pride and fear have parried all temptations to access any pornography.

Vices, as opponents not competitors, try to trick me by manipulating, seducing – nowadays called grooming – into behaving in destructive rather than creative ways. The trick is to use vices to play other vices – as Churchill, hating Stalin, was happy to team up with him to beat the man he hated even more, Adolf Hitler.

While vanity fights gluttony, pride tends to beat all the other vices. I dare to be different. Lust, sloth, and all the others stand little chance against the proud noblesse oblige of a son of God whose best friend in Yeshua.

There's no glory, no satisfaction in drifting through time. The beauty of life lies in overcoming challenges and realising your own potential in the process. At its deepest level, life is not about competing with others. It's about becoming the best version of yourself: fulfilling your potential. No one can beat you at that.

You have to rely on your work ethic to get ahead in developing your potential across your PIES: the physical, intellectual emotional and spiritual dimensions of your life. It is never about the talent or cognitive skills; it is about the non-cognitive skills such as the virtue of courage, discipline, teamwork, vision, and grit.

When, early in the morning sloth whispers: "You are tired, you need to look after yourself, no need to do those exercises- the 85 push ups or squats," the only answer is to pronounce a word unprintable by a priest, and I get on with them, motivated by remembering obese folk, priests unable to genuflect and men and women bowed over and limping along the street or Victoria Station concourse.

At its core, it seems to me that life is a game, not against any external competitor but the opponents within myself, whose spectator is only God. My aim is to become the best version of myself. If I achieve that, I will be the winner of the Journey to Eternity Cup.

"If you aren't going all the way, why go at all?" asked Joe Namath, American Football quarterback inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1985." If you are going to try, why not give your best? A half-hearted

approach never helps. If you raise your standards, become a stronger and better person in the process. A mediocre goal is boring, dull, and doesn't create any value for anyone."

"There may be people that have more talent than you, but there's no excuse for anyone to work harder than you do," mused Derek Jeter, baseball player who spent his entire 20-year career with the New York Yankees. Working on your relationships, helping your family and friends is always rewarding.

"I don't run away from a challenge because I'm afraid. Instead, I run toward it because the only way to escape fear is to trample it beneath your feet," said Nadia Comaneci (born 1961), five-time Olympic gold medallist Romanian gymnast.

Blaming others for anything wrong in your life is the easiest way never to reach your dreams and goals. Taking 100% responsibility for everything in your life will give you the power to change it.

Caring for a 91-year-old with dementia has presented me with an ongoing fencing academy session in which to develop the virtue of patience. Getting there. Still a long way to go.

Primo primi, instinctive responses, to events, do get through and help foster my humility, and understanding of the mistakes of others.

Never forget you are a relational creature, part of a global whole. As Andre Agassi (born 1970) – resonating with the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 25:40 – put it: "Remember this. Hold on to this. This is the only perfection there is,

the perfection of helping others. This is the only thing we can do that has any lasting meaning. This is why we're here." These are words of a former No 1 tennis star, eight-time Grand Slam champion, 1996 Olympic Gold Medalist, as well as a runner up in seven other Grand Slam tournaments.

The purpose of life is to be of purpose. In the end, the greatest wealth you'll ever have is the impact you had on others. Ask yourself: "How am I changing others' lives for the better?" Daily, I ask myself: "Am I living the virtue of generosity rather than the vice of selfishness?"

"If you want to be the best, you have to do things that others aren't willing to do," challenged the swimmer Michael Phelps, most decorated Olympian of all time, with a total of 28 medals.

Falling down in a game – even losing a fencing bout – is not as important as getting up, learning from my mistakes and preparing for the next one.

Virtues lived, rather than words spoken, are tangible signs of life in the Kingdom of God.

God is not a dictator. I am free to make choices and, thus, be responsible for my results.

Your struggles shape your life. In life, you can be both reactive and proactive. In both these you might fail to achieve your goal. However, as the boxer Muhammad Ali (1942-2016) put it: "He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life."

If you are tempted to give up, remember Tom Brady (born 1977) – a top American football quarterback – and his conviction: "If you don't believe in yourself, why is anyone else going to believe in you?" Tom believes in himself because he had put in the work.

Let me ask you, "are you believing in yourself enough?" If not, is it because you haven't put in the work? Is it because your habits don't align to achieve your desired level of success? Is it due to a lack of Vifoil practice?

As Michael Jordan, who played 15 seasons in the National Basketball Association from 1984 to 2003, winning six NBA championships with the Chicago Bulls, made clear: "Obstacles do not have to stop you. If you run into a wall, do not turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it or work round it."

Seeing my life like a foil fencing game has helped me slow down my inevitable ageing process. It might help you too, dear reader.

A pictorial round-up of the past seven days



Emma Wilkinson, designer at House of Edgar with Peter E MacDonald, Head of Research & Collections at The Scottish Tartans Authority, with what is thought to be the oldest piece of tartan in the world. The Glen Affric Tartan was discovered around 40 years ago in a peat bog and underwent testing by the Scottish Tartans Authority to confirm it is the oldest surviving piece of tartan.



Chris Mitchell and Robbie Laidlaw are pictured during their row across the Atlantic in aid of hospitality workers hit by the Covid crisis. The pair set off on 13th December from the Canary Islands and should cross the finishing line in Antigua this weekend.

Above, Dr Hannah Thomas, Special Collections Manager at the Bar Convent, holds Mary Ward's personal 17th century crucifix in front of a portrait of her, as a global campaign is launched to have Mary Ward declared a Saint.



Right, a view of 49 scarecrows outside the Houses of Parliament in London, as part of Riverford's 'Get Fair About Farming' campaign, calling for the Government to force the leading supermarkets to adopt fairer principles for British farmers.



The arrival of Storms Isha and Jocelyn this week have left huge areas of the UK and Ireland either flooded or assessing damage created by the strong winds and heavy rain. Above, workmen continue to clear up after a number of trees in Northern Ireland made famous by the TV series *Game Of Thrones* were damaged and felled

Right, the centre of York was flooded after the River Ouse broke its banks.



Above right, heavy waves crash against the seafront at Blackpool

LITURGICAL CALENDARS

Ordinary Form

Sunday Year B, Weekday Cycle II
Sunday, January 28: 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time Deut. 18:15-20; Ps. 95:1-2, 6-9 r. 9; 1 Cor. 7:32-35; Mk. 1:21-28

Monday, January 29: 2 Sam.15:13-14,30,16:5-13; Ps.3:2-8; Mk. 5:1-20

Tuesday, January 30: 2 Sam.18:9-10,14,24-25,30-19:3; Ps.86:1-6; Mk.5:21-43

Wednesday, January 31: St. John Bosco, Priest 2 Sam.24: 2,8-17; Ps.32:1-2,5-7; Mk.6:1-6

Thursday, February 1: 1 Kgs.2:1-4,10-12; 1 Chron.29:10-12; Mk.6:7-13

Friday, February 2: The Presentation of the Lord—feast; Mal. 3:1-4; Ps. 24:7-10 r. 8; Heb. 2:14-18; Lk 2:22-40

Saturday, February 3: or St. Blaise, Bishop, Martyr, or St. Ansgar, Bishop 1 Kgs.3:4-13; Ps.119:9-14; Mk.6:30-34



St. John Bosco, Priest

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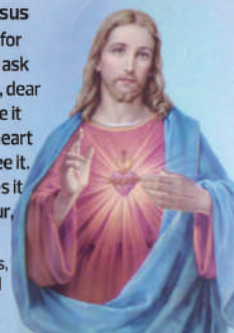
For more details please contact

07867 978558

PRAYERS/THANKSGIVING

Oh, Sacred Heart of Jesus
 In the past I have asked for many favours, this time I ask for this special one. Take it, dear Heart of Jesus, and place it within your own broken heart where your Father will see it. Then, in His merciful eyes it will become your favour, not mine. Amen.

Say prayer for three days, promise publication and favour will be granted. Never known to fail



PRAYERS /THANKSGIVING

Grateful thanks to St Jude for favours granted

MCLBEW



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The Church needs religious sisters **URGENTLY** to bring Christ to others by a life of prayer and service lived in the community of Ignatian spirituality. Daily Mass is the centre of community life. By wearing the religious habit we are witnesses of the consecrated way of life.

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St Timothy or Timothy of Ephesus

St Timothy or Timothy of Ephesus was an early Christian evangelist and the first Christian bishop of Ephesus, who tradition relates died around the year AD 97. Timothy was from the Lycaonian city of Lystra or of Derbe in Asia Minor, born of a Jewish mother who had become a Christian believer, and a Greek father.

Born: Lystra

Died: 97 AD, Ephesus, Türkiye

Place of burial: Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Purification, Termoli, Italy.

His Feast Day is 26th January