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# Assisted suicide will never be the Christian answer

**Bishop John Sherrington rallies Catholic faithful to promote 'a better vision of how our society should care at the end of life'**

**Andy Drozdziak**

Bishop John Sherrington is urging Catholics to reject the "irresponsible threat" represented by Dame Esther Rantzen's support for assisted suicide, and to get involved with promoting a better vision for end-of-life care.

The bishop's call, outlined in a full-page editorial on page 6, comes as high-profile celebrities such as Dame Esther Rantzen, who has stage four lung cancer, and TV chef Prue Leith have appealed for a change in the law. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has also shared his support for 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 in Scotland, helping someone to die can leave a person open to a murder charge or other prosecution.

Rejecting the view that assisted suicide is just and compassionate, Bishop Sherrington, the Lead Bishop for Life Issues at the Bishops' Conference, told the *Universe*: "Dying should not be hastened by the intentional killing of any person because that would mean rejecting God's created life which is intrinsically valuable."

Quoting Church teaching, Bishop Sherrington pointed out that the growth of assisted suicide legislation "constitutes a socially irresponsible threat to many people."

The bishop called for greater in-

vestment in palliative care—since this 'help(s) to control pain' – as well as accompanying people 'with care and genuine compassion.'

In England, it is likely there will soon be a parliamentary debate as a result of a petition requesting a vote which has gained over 100,000 signatures, while in Scotland, MSP Liam McArthur's Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill is expected to be introduced to the Scottish Parliament soon.

Bishop John Sherrington called this prospective legislation a "tragedy." He said: "Any cultural environment or legislation that makes people end their own lives because they feel they are a burden on others represents a tragedy for society."

"As Christians, we respond to the vulnerability of those in need with compassion and care: we do not encourage actions that lead people to seek to end their own lives."

On page 6 of this issue, Bishop John warns of how assisted suicide can lead to people feeling like a burden. He lays out extensively how Christians can respond and "promote a better vision of how to care at the end of life," and calls Catholics to prayer and action, to proactively promote a culture of life and to offer a compelling alternative to assisted suicide. "Compassion embraces life as it is, valuable and dignified, and accepts all its frailty and vulnerability," Bishop Sherrington writes.

Continued on page 2

## SAINT BRINGS PAPAL CRITIC TO ROME



## Friends, after all

Pope Francis shares a cheery embrace with Argentina's President Javier Milei when the pair met in St Peter's Basilica last weekend. The politician was at the Vatican to witness the pope canonising his country's first female saint, St.

Maria Antonia de Paz Figuerola. The cheerful greeting was a far cry from relations between the two last year, when Milei described the pope as "an imbecile" during his election campaign. Full story - see page 14

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Lent and Laudato Si'

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# Irish Jesuits admit to feelings of shame over order's abuse failings

**Michael Kelly**

The head of the Jesuits in Ireland has said he is “ashamed” at the order’s failure to confront abuse after the release of a new report revealing 93 complaints of sexual, physical and emotional abuse against a now deceased priest.

The order also revealed the names of two other members of its Irish province against whom it says it has received credible allegations of abuse, and admitted that it was slow to prioritise safeguards even when the Church in Ireland adopted binding norms in 1996.

According to the provincial, Jesuit Fr Shane Daly, the order has received 93 complaints against now-deceased priest and teacher Fr Joseph Marmion, who was named as a child abuser three years ago.

It has so far paid out almost £6 million in compensation and set aside more resources for future claims.

Fr Daly said the narrative was being made public now to demonstrate transparency both to complainants and former students who wished for the truth to be in the open.

“As Jesuits we are ashamed of our own failures – failure to allow the truth to be told, failure to admit to the wrong that had occurred, and failure to create earlier opportunities for you to receive the vindica-



Fr Shane Daly

tion you sought, deserved and needed, as a result of your experiences of Fr Marmion SJ,” he said.

“I apologise for our delay in creating a context in which you could receive the acknowledgment that was justly yours, and the care to which we, as a Christian community aspire in our lives and mission.”

Fr Daly also invited “any person who was harmed by any Jesuit to consider speaking with us. We really

want to hear from you.”

In March 2021, the Society of Jesus invited complainants against Fr Marmion to engage with the order and a restorative justice programme was established.

The congregation published what it described as a narrative record of Fr Marmion’s abuse on 8th February, saying that 45 of the 93 complaints received from 1977 related to child sexual abuse.

# Assisted suicide will never be the Christian answer

**Continued on page 2**

“It does not leave the sick and dying alone but affirms their personhood even amid great suffering.”

Bishop Sherrington’s comments coincide with Pope Francis’ prayer intention for February, which focuses on the care of those who are terminally ill and the importance of presence, care and prayer for those who are dying.

They also come just after the Church marked the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes on 11th February – a day of healing and blessing, inspired by the healings and miracles of Lourdes.

The bishop’s standpoint has been supported by many inside and outside the Church.

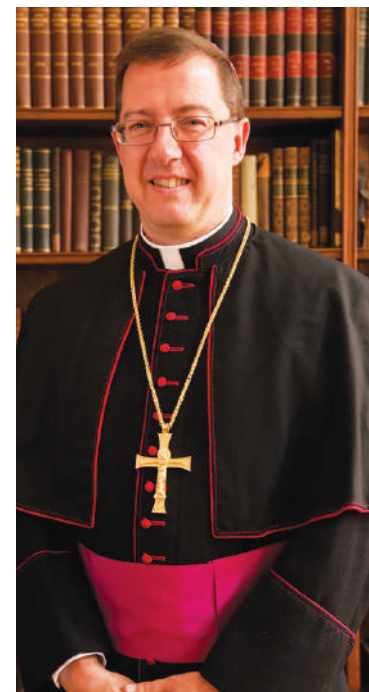
A spokesperson for the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland told the *Universe*: “The slippery slope is real and dangerous. No matter how well

intentioned the safeguards are, it is impossible for any government to draft assisted suicide laws which include legal protection from future expansion of those laws.”

Performance poet John Cooper Clarke said he is “totally against assisted dying.” “I just don’t see how helping people die improves life as we know it,” he added.

*“Dying should not be hastened by the intentional killing of any person because that would mean rejecting God’s created life which is intrinsically valuable”*

**Bishop John Sherrington (right) on Assisting the dying the Christian way: see page 6**



# CAFOD urges PM to demand Israel agrees to Gaza ceasefire

Andy Drozdziak

CAFOD has written to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak urging him to act and demand that Israel immediately stops its offensive into Rafah, and to call for an immediate ceasefire.

Israel has signalled its next ground offensive will target Rafah, where over half of Gaza's population is sheltering. In the letter, signed by CAFOD and 22 other humanitarian agencies, the group shared its disappointment at the lack of activity taken by senior UK politicians in working towards a peace settlement.

'We are extremely dismayed and profoundly alarmed after having met with UK senior officials, including the Foreign Secretary, over the last 128 days, explaining in clear terms the scale of the catastrophe and the consequences of the current UK approach towards Israel,' the letter stated.

'We, as agencies united, attempted to work together with the Government towards leveraging what the UK can do to halt these atrocities. We are losing confidence in Ministers as the UK appears utterly incapable of restraining Israel in its current attempts.'

'Will the UK act now, as red lines are being continuously crossed despite warnings from the UK to Israel on the toll of casualties being "too high"? Or will the UK continue its current path, which each day further is enabling Israel's actions with impunity? Will the UK risk further moral complicity in the ongoing death from Israeli attacks?'

The group then laid out its de-

mands: a call for an immediate ceasefire, including calling off the Rafah offensive; the suspension of all arms export licenses and other military support; finally for the UK to ensure that Israel 'fully implements the International Court of Justice orders.'

CAFOD told the *Universe*: "There is nowhere left for Gazans to go. An assault on Rafah risks mass casualties among 1.3m sheltering there. Rishi Sunak (and) David Cameron must act now to stop the Israeli offensive, end all military support for Israel, and call for an immediate ceasefire."

CAFOD's warning comes after Foreign Secretary Lord David Cameron said many of the people in Rafah had already fled from other areas and that it is "impossible to see how you can fight a war amongst these people, there is nowhere for them to go".

Meanwhile, Cardinal Nichols has called for a special focus of prayer for peace in the Holy Land in his own Diocese of Westminster, where he serves as archbishop.

In his message, marking the beginning of Lent, he wrote: 'As we are all aware, the situation in the Holy Land has not improved, with failed negotiations, increasing humanitarian distress and a rising death toll.'

'As Lent begins, I would like to urge that we continue our efforts, not least in prayer.'

'And so I ask that, on Friday 8th March, there is a special focus of prayer for the Holy Land across the diocese.'



A market trader carries on working in the rubble after Israeli attacks  
Photo: Ibraheem Abu Mustafa, Reuters

# Catholic Union takes 'scrap the cap' call to No 10 education team

The Catholic Union was back in No 10 Downing Street this week to talk about the future of Catholic schools.

Deputy director, James Somerville-Meikle, together with Paul Barber, director of the Catholic Education Service, met the Prime Minister's education adviser to discuss the faith-based admissions cap on new free schools.

Last year, the Catholic Union launched a campaign to 'Scrap the Cap' and allow Catholic free schools to open. Over 1,000 people signed an open letter to the Education Secretary, Gillian Keegan, asking her to finally lift the cap.

It was supported by Bishop Marcus Stock, the Chairman of the Catholic Education Service, who said at the time: "The cap has made it impossible for new Catholic free schools to open as the policy is incompatible with Church law."

"The Catholic Education Service, the Catholic Union, and all those who benefit from the diversity provided by our Catholic school sector, regard it as vital that the admissions cap is lifted."

The meeting in No 10 is the latest stage in the campaign and builds on previous meetings with officials and Special Advisers and a meeting with



Deputy director James Somerville-Meikle pictured outside No 10 Downing Street

the Education Secretary at the end of last year.

During the meeting, James and Paul highlighted the benefits of lifting the cap, which would allow the Catholic Church to take part in the free school programme which was launched in 2010. Lifting the cap

would not just allow new schools to be built, but permit existing schools to convert to academies.

They stressed that Catholic schools are already some of the most diverse in the country, with nearly half of pupils from an ethnic minority background.

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## In Brief

### Jews 'hounded out' of comedy show

A Jewish audience member has said he felt 'hounded out' of a West End comedy show after a row over the Palestinian flag.

Soho Theatre is investigating an alleged incident during comedian Paul Currie's stand-up gig at the London venue. The comedian is said to have orchestrated his own standing ovation for the flag during the show, with the theatre then erupting into chants of "free Palestine".

Showgoer Liahav Eitan said he felt intimidated and left.

### Locals hand tippers over to the police

Fly-tippers caught red-handed dumping piles of rubbish on a country lane in Warwickshire were blocked in by locals who then held them until the police arrived.

Two men were forced to load the rubbish back into their vans by officers, who said it was "some of the worst fly-tipping" they had seen.

Photographs show swathes of black bin bags and industrial materials lying at the side of a country lane on the edge of the village of Meriden.

### Stewart tipped for Oxford University

Former Conservative minister Rory Stewart is a contender to be Oxford's next chancellor, with voting for the role to be held online for the first time.

Lord Patten of Barnes, the former Conservative party chairman, is retiring at the end of the academic year.

The chancellor is the largely ceremonial head of the university, who is usually an eminent public figure elected for life and presides over all major ceremonies.

# Church labels buffer zone bill a threat to Scotland's civil liberty

**Andy Drozdziak**

The Scottish Catholic Church is warning that Scotland's proposed Buffer Zone Bill will take "a sledgehammer to civil liberties".

Their claim comes as Scottish tabloid the *Daily Record* ran a front page headlined 'Abortion extremists' last stand', outlining how pro-life campaigners were seeking to continue protesting outside abortion facilities.

The Bill, proposed by Green MSP Gillian MacKay, would criminalise any action aimed at persuading someone not to access abortion or to consider an alternative, within 200 metres of premises carrying out abortions. It would become illegal to act in a way designed to influence decisions, hand out leaflets, hold up banners or placards or pray—either audibly or silently— with unlimited fines for serious breaches.

Responding to the proposals, Peter Kearney, director of the Scottish Catholic Media Office, said: "The Bill takes a sledgehammer to free speech and demolishes many other civil liberties, including freedom of expression, assembly, thought, con-



Scottish Green MSP  
Gillian Mackay

science and religion. It could create for the first time in Scottish legal history, a thought crime. You would just need to think negatively about the actions of others to fall foul of the law."

Mr Kearney pointed out that no arrests have been made outside abortion clinics and mentioned a quote from Police Scotland, which stated that "existing powers and of-

fences are sufficient to address any unlawful behaviour which may arise in the vicinity of a health care premises as a result of such protest. Our engagement with participants..... has not resulted in any criminality being identified."

On Ash Wednesday, pro-life group 40 Days for Life started a 40-day long period of demonstrations outside abortion clinics, which Gillian Mackay described as "utterly shameful." However, Peter Kearney argued that no crime is being committed when such protests are taking place.

"A group of pensioners saying prayers on the pavement isn't exactly threatening," he said.

"No crimes are being committed and no new laws are needed. The Bill looks a lot like a sledgehammer being wielded against an invisible nut."

Peter Kearney also pointed out that the proposed Bill is "frightening" because it challenges the right to freedom of speech and freedom of thought.

He said: "Peaceful protest used to be a cornerstone of our democracy.

Silent vigils have always been seen as harmless and unthreatening. If we crush that concept now, where will it end?

"Silent Peace vigils outside the Trident nuclear base at Faslane have been a fixture for decades, they explicitly attempt to influence those who witness them, but no Scots politician has ever said we should ban them.

"That's because for generations we've respected freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of thought conscience and religion as the hard-won human rights they are and wouldn't dream of erasing them."

"The proposed "Buffer Zone" law would at a stroke undo almost a century of settled international human rights law, leaving our courts to determine whether an individual's thoughts were permissible or not. Such a threat to universal and fundamental rights is genuinely frightening."

MSPs on Holyrood's Health Committee will start hearing evidence on Gillian MacKay's proposals later this month.

## Living Faith reaches out to young Catholics

A Catholic media company is hoping to inspire people through its latest course.

Called to More is a hugely popular Catholic media apostolate. This faith inspired initiative has released a new free resource called *Living Faith* – a five-week video and discussion series for those who want to move from the crowds to truly be disciples of Jesus.

Presented by Fr Columba Jordan CFR, each week focuses on an "essential aspect of the faith": prayer, sacraments, formation, community

and apostolate.

Katie Ascough, founder of Called to More, said: "*Living Faith* is the perfect resource for a university chaplaincy, a group in a parish or even a bunch of friends.

"The idea was born from conversations we had with priests and bishops who were looking for more resources, particularly for their young adults' groups.

"We had already been talking about filming a series in this space, and these conversations were the final prompting. We started fund-

raising and writing, and a few months later filmed the five-part series with Fr Columba.

"We hope this free resource will fill Catholics with a renewed sense of purpose and excitement in living their faith, and encourage them to get out there and share the Gospel."

Fr Columba said: "This five-week series is about helping young people to move from the crowds to truly being a disciple of Jesus."

The *Living Faith* videos are accompanied by guides to help any group pick this up and run it them-

selves. The guides include a step-by-step breakdown of how to run the series with a group, recommended questions to ask for the discussions, and some suggested goals for each participant to choose from.

To derive the full benefit from the videos, participants are encouraged to share a meal as part of each hour-long session, and engage in discussion and set goals to encourage growth in one's spiritual life.

**Look out for a feature in next week's Universe on Living Faith**

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# Jagger tells inquiry that Nicaragua is perpetrating crimes against humanity

Andy Drozdziak

Catholic peer Lord Alton has convened an inquiry into the suppression of religious freedom, media freedom and opposition voices in Nicaragua, with Bianca Jagger providing its opening testimony.

Lord Alton said: “This impressive panel of expert parliamentarians will look into the credible reports of human rights violations in Nicaragua, particularly human rights violations that may meet the legal definition of crimes against humanity.”

President Daniel Ortega’s regime has persecuted the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, targeting its leaders when they criticise his Government. Prominent victims have included Bishop Rolando Álvarez, who was sentenced last year to 26 years in prison after he refused to be deported to the US. Pope Francis publicly denounced Bishop Álvarez’s sentence, which was commuted to living in exile last month. Álvarez is now believed to be in Rome under the protection of the Vatican.

Three All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) in Westminster



Lord Alton (second from right) stands next to Bianca Jagger, who provided the first evidence to the committee

will now consider the situation in Nicaragua and the ever-growing suppression of religious rights, the media and the opposition. It will then identify steps the UK Government, and other states, can take to address this.

Its first witness was former ac-

tress Bianca Jagger, the first wife of Rolling Stones singer Mick Jagger, who described how “the Ortega-Murillo regime has been perpetrating crimes against humanity.”

She dubbed Nicaragua as “probably one of the worst dictatorships in the world today”, explained how the

persecution of bishops, priests, nuns, and seminarians is because “the Catholic Church is the last bastion of opposition left in Nicaragua.”

Former congressman and prolific Commissioner with the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USIRF),

Frank Wolf, also addressed the inquiry. He described the “purging” of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, and highlighted USIRF’s designation of Nicaragua as “a country of particular concern because of the dire legacy on the right to freedom of religion or belief in the country.”

The APPGs involved include those which look after Central America, International Freedom of Religion and Belief, and International Law, Justice, and Accountability. The APPGs are made up of cross-party parliamentarians, including from the government and opposition parties.

Among those sitting alongside Lord Alton are Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws KC, Baroness Hooper, Mark Menzies MP, Brendan O’Hara MP and Bishop Philip Mounstephe of Winchester. Fiona Bruce MP, the Prime Minister’s Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief is also involved.

The group will collect evidence until 10th March, leading to the launch of a report in April 2024 about the Inquiry’s findings.

## Medaille’s CEO moves to the Salvation Army

The Medaille Trust has announced that its CEO Garry Smith will be leaving in April after six years, to take up a role as Director of Mission with Salvation Army Trading Company Ltd (SATCoL).

Garry said his time at Medaille “has been a wonderful journey.”

“The organisation has grown in that time – our annual income has doubled during this period – but more importantly our impact on the fight against human trafficking and modern slavery has grown with the expansion of our residential services, our Moving On Project, the implementation of the Victims’ Voices programme and the expansion of our prevention work in Albania, among other things.

Medaille Trust’s Chair of Trus-

tees, Sr Jane Maltby, thanked Garry Smith for his service. “Garry will be a hard act to follow,” Sr Jane said.

“During his time as CEO he has demonstrated tremendous vision and passion.

“In developing and strengthening the work of the Trust, he has been instrumental in raising awareness of trafficking in this country. Garry has always networked with commitment, with other anti-slavery groups, and is held in great respect in the field.

“He has indeed raised the profile of Medaille in this way, and we are all beneficiaries of this. Staff across the organisation have had personal experience of how he has been closely involved in the work of each of the safe houses, and has energetically led the development of the Moving On Project, and latterly, the Albania Project.

“We are all going to miss his fine leadership, his gift for management and his personal qualities of compassion and friendship.”

Mr Smith said “to me, it has always been the team that is most important, and I hope my legacy will be one where everyone who works or volunteers for us feels not only proud to do so because they make a difference to the lives of some of society’s most vulnerable people, but also that they are really valued as a team member.”



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## UNIVERSE CATHOLIC WEEKLY

### COMMENT

## Fly-tipping blight needs challenging

Fly-tipping is a blight on our countryside, and is now becoming prevalent even in some towns and cities where dumping rubbish is more likely to be spotted or caught on CCTV. By the very nature of what it entails, arresting the culprits is not easy; so when offenders are caught red-handed there is cause for rejoicing.

Two men who discarded piles of industrial material on to a country lane near Meriden in Warwickshire reckoned without the determination of local people to end this practice. They blocked in the vans to prevent their escape and called the police who, commendably, arrived shortly afterwards and made the men clear up the mess as well as impounding their vehicles.

But that is just one success story in a picture that grows increasingly grim. There are an estimated 3,000 incidents across England every day, costing up to £58 million each year to clear up. In many rural areas, fly tipping is a real blight, and what makes it worse are the rules surrounding it. The Environmental Protection Act forces private landowners who have rubbish illegally dumped on their land to clean it up themselves or risk prosecution. This feels unfair.

Rather, offenders need to be dealt with firmly if others are to be deterred. The system of fines needs reforming, too; these can be lower than the cost of legitimate disposal, and prosecutions are rare.

Without excusing such vile anti-social behaviour, part of the problem is a dearth of legitimate waste centres. Many are now for recycling only and councils are closing dumps. This just encourages the less scrupulous to fly-tip and costs more in the long run than keeping a centre open.

Some boroughs have accessible 'mega-skips' into which materials can be discarded without charge, a practice that should be emulated, while the closure of household waste centres should stop.

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CATHOLIC COMMENT

### Bishop John Sherrington



Discussions on assisted suicide have been gaining momentum once again in Parliament. It is likely that there will be some form of parliamentary debate as a result of a petition requesting a vote which gained over 100,000 signatures.

This petition, in turn, resulted from the media flurry after Dame Esther Rantzen announced, with much fanfare, her support for assisted suicide. Having revealed that she is considering ending her life in Switzerland, the former broadcaster called for the legalisation of assisted suicide in the UK to allow people to choose 'how' and 'when they want to go'. Her campaign was followed by a number of high-profile figures.

Proponents of such views insist that having this choice enables people to have a 'dignified death' and describe assisted suicide as 'assisted dying'. They believe that assisted suicide is both just and compassionate.

The Christian view is different. Church teaching tells us to protect life from its beginning to natural death and be close to and support the dying on their journey to the hope of eternal life. While recognising that dying is a natural process that is part of life, dignity is intrinsic to every life. Dying should not be hastened by the intentional killing of any person because that would mean rejecting God's created life which is intrinsically valuable. We need to accompany people and do so with care and genuine compassion. In this way, we can uphold their dignity by embracing them as they are with all the difficulties they face in their last days whilst doing all we can to alleviate their suffering and pain.

Great advances in palliative care help to control pain; pastoral and spiritual care can console those who are suffering. However, some people do not find peace and pain can seem endless and unbearable. Some might feel hopeless, tired, and desperate, and fail to see the point of living such a life. But exceptional situations do not create good laws.

Crucially, however, very many people near the end of their lives feel especially vulnerable. They may be unable to provide for themselves or for their loved ones so that they feel a burden. This human reality, of which anybody who has cared for those in the later stages of life is aware, means that many will avail themselves of assisted dying because they believe they are making the lives of others easier.

Data from the American state of Oregon, often used as an exemplar by proponents of assisted suicide, show that nearly 50 per cent of people who "choose" assisted dying do so because they feel a burden.

Is this really the sort of society we want?



# Assisting the dying the Christian way

The Church has commented in the document *Samaritanus Bonus*, that the growth of assisted suicide legislation 'constitutes a socially irresponsible threat to many people, including a growing number of vulnerable persons who needed only to be better cared for and comforted but are instead being led to choose euthanasia and suicide.' This is surely correct.

Any cultural environment or legislation that makes people end their own lives because they feel they are a burden on others represents a tragedy for society. Once again, quoting Church teaching: 'We depend on material goods and on the mutual support of other persons, and also on our original, deep connection with God. Our vulnerability forms the basis for an ethics of care.'

As Christians, we respond to the vulnerability of those in need with compassion and care: we do not encourage actions that lead people to seek to end their own lives. Love, care and true compassion involve sharing the pain and alleviating suffering rather than trying to escape from it. Prayer and the sacraments are a solace for followers of Christ.

Compassion embraces life as it is, valuable and dignified, and accepts

*"Dying should not be hastened by the intentional killing of any person because that would mean rejecting God's created life which is intrinsically valuable"*

all its frailty and vulnerability. It does not leave the sick and dying alone but affirms their personhood even amid great suffering. It accompanies and endures with them in their last steps of life and provides kindly care and affection. This is the real meaning of providing assistance in dying and this is the form of assistance provided by hospices, social care workers, relatives, neighbours and friends each and every day.

Perhaps we underestimate the importance of our vocation to provide the compassion that the vulnerable need at the end of life and to uphold the dignity of patients in their last months of life and in the hour of death. But it is their work that can lead to the alleviation of pain while respecting the dignity and autonomy of all persons until their last breath when they go to meet God.

Given the direction in which this debate is moving, I hope that Catholics will respond and promote a better vision of how to care at the end of life. How can we oppose assisted suicide and better assist the dying? First of all, when the issue is salient or at election time, we can make our voice heard by contacting our local MPs. There are several campaign organisations, which can help you to contact your local MP, such as Right to Life UK and Living and Dying Well. Their websites are also useful if you want to keep updated and spread the word about the dangers of assisted suicide.

Additionally, a summary of the submission to the Health and Social Care Select Committee by the Catholic Bishop's Conference of England and Wales in 2023 provides a comprehensive overview

*Given the direction, I hope that Catholics will respond and promote a better vision of how to care at the end of life. How can we oppose assisted suicide and better assist the dying?*

of the Church's stance on assisted suicide.

Secondly, you can speak to your parish priest and parishioners and discuss how to best raise awareness of the issue of death and dying within your parish community. Organising informal sessions on the topic, distributing resources and supporting local hospices can be fruitful ways of fostering a deeper understanding of what good care at the end of life means, as can praying collectively.

Finally, always remember the sick and dying in your prayers. This is what Our Lady did at the foot of the cross. She shared her son's pain and refused to leave him even when all seemed lost. She affirmed his dignity. For long before his death, she had known her heart was going to be 'pierced by a sword', yet she did not try to stop Jesus from accepting suffering. Instead, she suffered with him. This is the true meaning of compassion – to suffer with. And her compassion brought him comfort in his last moments. It is that same compassion that we offer when assisting the dying in an authentically Christian way on the final pilgrimage of earthly life. **Bishop John Sherrington is the lead bishop for life issues, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales**

# ‘Explosion in hatred’ as big rise in attacks on UK Jews



Jewish gravestones daubed with swastikas

**Andy Drozdziak**

More than 4,000 antisemitic incidents were recorded in the UK by a Jewish charity in 2023, with the all-time high being put down to the “sheer volume” which took place following the Hamas attacks of 7th October.

The Community Security Trust (CST), which monitors antisemitism and provides security for the Jewish community in Britain, said there were a total of 4,103 antisemitic incidents in the UK in 2023, up from the previous annual record of 2,261 incidents in 2021.

Its chief executive described the “explosion in hatred” against the Jewish community as “an absolute disgrace”.

Incidents recorded by the CST included ‘Free Palestine’ graffiti being sprayed on a bridge in Golders Green, which is home to one of London’s largest Jewish communities;



**James Cleverly called the rise in antisemitic attacks ‘utterly deplorable’**

the defacing with swastikas of a poster in London of a baby kidnapped by Hamas; and a visibly Jewish man being verbally abused and threatened by people who were attending a pro-Palestinian demonstration.

Catholic leaders have repeatedly called for people to stand against antisemitism since the start of the Israeli/Gaza war last October. Cardinal Nichols said at the time of the Hamas attacks on Israel: “At home, I appeal for restraint and the total

avoidance of hateful language and action, as the impact of this conflict is felt in communities here.”

Bishop Declan Lang, chair of the Bishops’ International Affairs department, said: “We commit ourselves to stand against antisemitism, injustice and prejudice wherever it might be found.”

Home Secretary James Cleverly MP described the rise in antisemitism in recent months as “utterly deplorable” and said he “will do everything in my power” to ensure the Jewish community is safe and feels safe.

Labour’s Yvette Cooper, shadow home secretary, said the rise was “appalling and intolerable” and a “stain on our society”.

The release of the figures coincide with the Labour party facing criticism around its handling of antisemitism allegations after a second parliamentary candidate was suspended over remarks about Israel.

The party has insisted there are “strong checks” on would-be MPs, after parliamentary candidate Graham Jones was suspended on Tuesday, only a day after Labour was forced to suspend and withdraw its backing for Rochdale by-election candidate Azhar Ali.

Fr Jan Nowotnik, secretary of the Committee for Catholic-Jewish Relations in the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, told the *Universe*: “Antisemitism has absolutely no place in our society. I strongly speak out against hostility and prejudice towards Jews and stand in solidarity with our Jewish brothers and sisters in England and Wales.

“I also condemn any hate crime perpetrated on the grounds of faith.”

# Sunak accused of sidelining the fight against human trafficking

Eleanor Lyons, the newly appointed anti-slavery commissioner, has accused Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of diminishing attempts to combat modern slavery in comparison with previous administrations.

Lyons filled the position recently after it was left vacant for 18 months, and recently disclosed that her budget has been reduced from £605,000 to £500,000.

She said: “As I’m coming into the role halfway through the year, a lot of my budget has been reallocated so as of April next year, my budget for that year will be £500,000.

“I am absolutely pushing for more resource and budget because I think it’s important but I have been told by the Home Office that my budget will be cut every year that I am in role – by five per cent every year.”

Lyons said there was growing alarm over the constant underreporting of modern slavery and human trafficking in the UK, estimating there to be around 130,000 victims.

She also criticised low prosecution rates for offences and advocated for recognising “cuckooing” — drug dealers exploiting vulnerable individuals’ homes — as a form of

modern slavery.

Recent research by the International Organisation for Migration revealed delays in the modern slavery referral scheme, particularly affecting foreign nationals’ access to support.

This underscores concerns about the government’s prioritisation of modern slavery issues, the implica-



**Eleanor Lyons faces steep budget cuts despite increases in trafficking cases**

tions for victims, and the challenges faced by the commissioner in advocating for more substantial resources and support.

Despite these challenges, the Home Office said it remained committed to combating modern slavery, referencing ongoing support for Lyons and funding for victim services.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, President of the Santa Marta Group, which works to eradicate human trafficking and modern-day slavery, last week described human trafficking as “a wound in the flesh of hu-

manity.” Speaking on the feast of St Josephine Bakhita and World Day of Prayer and Awareness for the Victims of Human Trafficking, he underlined the importance of addressing the problem.

“Around 50 million people globally are enslaved at this moment. This is a battle far from being won. As vulnerability around the world increases with conflict, hunger, and the mobility of people, the risks of human trafficking rise,” he said.

He highlighted the impact of Bakhita House in Westminster, which provides safe accommodation and support for women escaping human trafficking, sexual exploitation and slavery.

He said: “Over the past eight years, it has welcomed and helped nearly 200 women recovering from that trauma. They’ve come from 49 countries. 14 babies have been born there. It is a family that constantly extends its love and compassion.

“As a result of those who have come through Bakhita House, prison sentences of 188 years have been imposed on traffickers. The work of the house is sustained by many volunteers – 2,000 hours of volunteers’ help in 2023 alone.”

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## The shuttles of life

Sir John Battle



The Old Testament reading from the Book of Job at Mass a couple of weeks ago was a good warm up for Lent, not least the warning 'Swifter than a weaver's shuttle my days have passed'. In Leeds and Bradford there are industrial museums in some of the old mills in which working weaving machines are still operated to demonstrate the 19th and early 20th century production processes and factory conditions. The machinery was at the heart of the industrial revolution and the wooden shuttle that darted back and forth doing the weaving is the iconic weaving shed symbol.

How fast the shuttles moved in the cottage home industry of Job's day is a biblical historical project in the waiting, but the analogy stands the test of time. Our lives rush quickly to their end with periodic breakdowns.

Now, according to the latest evidence from the Institute of Public Policy Research, only 9 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women born today can expect to get to retirement age in good health. Moreover, the poor not only die sooner but also spend more of their lives with a long term condition or disability. At present 2.8 million people of working age are, according to the Office of National Statistics, classified as unable to work because of health problems, up from the pre Covid-19 figures of 2.1 million. They have fallen out of the labour market before the official retirement age.

In April 2026 the pension age rises to 67; when Prime Minister, Liz Truss had proposed raising it to 68, now it is suggested people should wait until they are 71 before they retire. But the point is too many, through ill health, do not make it to that age, and there is a great division between the older fit and the unwell and incapacitated. For those who are in low paid work, putting the retirement age up means more years struggling on topped-up working age benefits rather than the more generous state retirement pension.

Living longer does not mean being able to live better with more disposable resources. Often it means using up savings to help with medical or care costs.

In other words the reminder of the Psalm 89 to know the "shortness of our life that we may gain wisdom of heart" may imply looking first to the health needs of people and working conditions before retirement, as the factory reformers realised.

# Where Beckett's blood was once spilt, we've now got rum and coke

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Caroline Farrow



I was shocked last week when Facebook's algorithm recommended a post from an old friend featuring themselves among a crowd of ravers waving fluorescent glow sticks in Canterbury Cathedral.

My friend, who hails from the Kent area, had obviously decided to avail themselves of the opportunity to attend what has been dubbed 'the rave in the nave', and although I had seen various headlines about the silent disco taking place in one of the Church of England's most important and historic cathedrals, had I not caught a glimpse of the photo, the jarring reality would not have been brought home.

I'm obviously getting old because prior to this kerfuffle, I'd never heard of a silent disco, where people dance to music blasted through wireless headphones. It's admittedly a brilliant and ingenious idea that was developed by festival organisers in order to get around noise restrictions designed to protect local residents, but clearly the concept is far better suited to some muddy field in Essex than a historic Christian cathedral.

The disco was billed as a chance for people to 'have fun' in 'special places', but seems to have had scant regard as to why the cathedral may be deemed a 'special place' beyond the building's historical significance. Although the music may not have been reverberating around the cathedral's walls, the building, which is a regular place of worship, was still nevertheless being used in a way that was wholly disrespectful and very far removed from its original purpose.

The attendees were not listening to music designed to exalt the Lord or to praise and worship Him, but rather engaged in an exercise of indulgence and self-pleasure, bopping along to contemporary artists of the '90s such as Eminem, Britney Spears, Elton John and the Spice Girls. Although no music was played, clips on YouTube show that the event was very far from silent, with partygoers chanting out lyrics and snatches of instrumental riffs in unison, while brandishing their glowsticks while pop-up bars sold alcoholic drinks and cocktails.

There's no doubt that the cathedral would have provided an incredible and atmospheric backdrop for a '90s nostalgia party and I'm not going to lie, in that the event did look as though it was an



Ravers and glowsticks in the hallowed sanctuary of Canterbury Cathedral

awful lot of fun, but that does not detract from the fact that it was an act of sacrilege and whichever cleric or group of clerics gave the go ahead for this profanity to take place, ought to be immediately sacked.

This is precisely the type of abuse that Christ himself would have railed against, and one can only imagine his reaction if he had entered his father's house, a place of prayer and spiritual communion with God, only to find a bunch of pleasure seekers, indulgently quaffing alcoholic drinks while dancing and chanting lyrics glorifying and encouraging the pleasures of the flesh.

As one of the protestors pointed out, Canterbury Cathedral is the site of the massacre of St Thomas Beckett, and in the same place where this martyr's brains were dashed out, someone would have likely spilled a rum and coke or beer on the floor. People were – literally – being invited to go and dance upon others' graves.

*"The building, which is a regular place of worship, was still nevertheless being used in a way that was wholly disrespectful and very far removed from its original purpose..."*

The Dean of Canterbury Cathedral, Rev David Monteith issued a disingenuous statement that cathedrals "have always been part of community life" and that "it's always joys to see (people) discover this incredible place anew on their own terms". He also cited the Bible, 2 Samuel 5, when Scripture speaks of King David dancing before the Lord, stating that "there are many different views on the secular and sacred."

This doesn't wash, because when David danced before the Lord, it was not in an act of mindless self-indulgence, but in genuine joyful praise and worship. There is absolutely no suggestion that this was the motivation of those attending the rave, especially as the music and messaging of the disco had no religious character. While it is always encouraging to see people discover the beauty and glory of Christian buildings, appreciation of churches and cathedrals is never on the visitor's own terms, for example, they are encouraged to be quiet not to drop litter, swear, shout and often prohibited from using flash photography in order to respect the religious nature of the building, remembering that it is a place of prayer and contemplation and certainly in the case of Catholic churches, a place where Jesus resides in the sanctuary.

There is absolutely no suggestion from the disco's promoters that clubbers are entering the Cathedral in order to find God or deepen their relationship with Him. Indeed the disco is promoted as a way of

contributing towards the upkeep of the building.

It is profoundly sad and depressing that the Church of England has sought to ignore the chorus of criticisms, which is coming not just from devout Christians, but also some atheists, as to the way in which they are allowing hallowed places of worship to be devalued.

Disturbingly, Canterbury Cathedral's silent disco is not a one-off event either, as there are similar discos planned across 12 other cathedrals between now and the end of May. It is as though, the Church of England has decided to diversify into the nightclub business.

Even though the contagion is unlikely to spread to the Catholic Church, where the Real Presence of Christ will never permit such an outrage, we should still pray and make acts of reparation in these places where God is still present, albeit in a different way, and many of which were once Catholic.

When I expressed my discomfort about the disco to the Catholic presenter Eammon Holmes on his breakfast show this morning, his reaction was one of surprise – he believed that these discos were an entirely harmless affair.

It's a sign of where we are as a society that few people seem to know exactly what a church is for and see nothing wrong in a place of prayer and worship, being subsumed into corporate centres of profit, entertainment and pleasure-seeking.



# Children concerned over parents in jail offered new hope by Pact teaching pack

**Andy Drozdziak**

Catholic prison charity Pact has produced a new toolkit for teachers in Wales who have children in their classes with a parent in prison.

It provides advice and support for educators as it seeks to foster understanding about the issue in schools and to ensure that young people affected by imprisonment know that help is available.

Pact is the national Catholic charity providing support to people in prison and their children and families.

Aimee Hutchinson, Children and Young People Lead at Pact, explained the purpose of the new toolkit. “The imprisonment of a father or mother can have a devastating impact on children and young people,” she said.

“With the right support, children with a parent in prison will go on to lead happy and fulfilling lives. However, it’s a sad fact that they face more challenges than many other children and that there remains a real stigma around having a family member in prison.

“We hope this new guidance will



**Aimee Hutchinson,  
Children and Young  
People Lead at Pact**

support teachers to have an open and constructive discussion about these issues that affect many thousands of children and young people every year.”

It is estimated that more than 5,000 children in Wales currently have a father or mother in prison.

The problem for children can be

particularly acute when mothers are sent to prison, as they are typically the primary carers – 95 per cent of children have to leave home when their mother goes to prison. There are no women’s prisons in Wales, so women are generally sent to HMP Eastwood Park in Gloucestershire and HMP Styal in Cheshire.

The new toolkit provides teachers with a range of resources to support children affected by imprisonment. It seeks to give teachers the confidence to create a space for the whole class to discuss the issue and allows fellow students to empathise with children who are affected and find ways to support them.

Thanking Pact for producing the toolkit, Jeremy Miles, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language, said: “The toolkit will help school staff and other learners understand how these children and young people feel.

“This understanding will help school staff support children and young people, help them overcome negative feelings and understand that they can get support from others.”

Rocio Cifuentes, the Children’s Commissioner for Wales welcomed the toolkit to challenge the ‘stigma’ of family members being in prison.

“I welcome this new resource for schools, which can help to start conversations with children and help to break down the stigma associated with familial imprisonment,” she said.

Jacque O’Toole, Assistant Head at Gwersyllt CP Primary School, helped with the creation of the toolkit. She underlined its importance for teachers, saying that it will be useful in “providing teachers with more information and guidance about how to deal with this.”

## Peer in warning over rise in deepfake porn

**Andy Drozdziak**

Britain’s youngest life peer is backing a call for a ban on deepfake nudyfy apps.

Although women and girls will have more protection from ‘deepfake’ sexually explicit online content after the passing of the Online Safety Act, Charlotte Owen, who sits in the House of Lords as Baroness Owen of Alderly Edge, warned ministers that deepfake porn “represents a very real threat to women.”

The warning comes after social media platform X blocked searches linked to Taylor Swift after fake, AI-generated explicit images of the pop star were posted to the site. There has been a huge increase in people using so-called nudyfy apps.

The apps allow users to create fake nude images or videos of other people through generative artificial intelligence, known as deepfakes.

Louise Davies MBE, CARE’s director of advocacy and policy, called for a ban of nudyfy apps. “Deepfake images cause serious mental and physical distress to victims,” Louise said. “They dehumanise their victims. It is clear that swift action to ban these apps would make a difference. There can be no reasonable argument against banning them.”

Although the Online Safety Act has made it illegal to share deepfakes without consent, Baroness Owen agrees that ministers need to



**Baroness  
Owen**

take further steps to address the creation of the apps.

She told peers: “There has been a huge increase in the use of nudyfy apps and the creation of deepfake porn since the Law Commission stated that they were less sure that the level of harm caused by the making of these images and videos was serious enough to criminalise.

“Does the minister agree with me that the making of these images and videos without a person’s consent does in fact cause serious harm, regardless of whether a person is aware, and if allowed to continue represents a very real threat to all women?”

Science and technology minister Viscount Camrose called the creation of deepfakes “deeply distressing to anyone concerned, and really very disturbing to all of us.” He promised to monitor them.



## Will you help refugees access food this Lent?



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## In Brief

### King 'hopeful' over Australia trip

King Charles says he is hopeful that he will be able to visit Australia later this year with Queen Camilla, despite his recent diagnosis of cancer.

A Palace source told *The Telegraph* that the monarch still hopes to keep to the visit, which is scheduled around the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Samoa and was only confirmed by Anthony Albanese, the Australian prime minister, in early January.

The source said: "We continue planning, but we're not at any stage to confirm timing or dates because it's the first week of the King's treatment. It certainly remains the case that he's hopeful it will go ahead."

### Emergency services pay the ferryman

A Dorset-based ferry operator has been criticised for charging ambulance and fire crews to use its services.

Sandbanks Ferry, which carries cars and passengers across Poole Harbour and between the peninsula and Studland, took £20,000 in fees from emergency services since 2022, data shows.

The short crossing cuts down journey times to the Isle of Purbeck by around 45 minutes.

The nearest hospital to Swanage, the largest town on Purbeck, is 20 miles away in Poole.

However, by using the ferry, the journey is 12 miles, making this service indispensable for many in case of emergencies.

Police do not have to pay because of an obscure law dating back to 1923, the operators of the ferry said.

### Falcon egg stealers caught by DNA

A father and son who illegally raided falcon nests to sell valuable chicks to the Middle East were caught after DNA tests on the eggs.

Prosecutors were able to prove that birds of prey in the home of Timothy and Lewis Hall had been bred in the wild by examining genetic information from chicks and eggs.

The pair could have "wiped out the peregrine population in the south of Scotland" had they not been caught, the police officer who led the investigation said.

Between 2019 and 2020, they were involved in the sale of 15 peregrine falcon chicks for which they were paid more than £41,000.

# Tucker Carlson gives Putin a platform – and helps Trump's election cause into the bargain

POLITICS

## Inderjeet Parmar



Former prime time Fox News host Tucker Carlson – long known as a public cheerleader for Donald Trump – conducted a wide-ranging two-hour interview with the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, last week.

Carlson, who has consistently argued Russia's case for its invasion of Ukraine, posted his interview on both his own site and on Elon Musk's X (formerly Twitter). There – according to Kremlin mouthpiece *Pravda* – it chalked up more than 90 million views within hours of being posted.

As the pair faced each other in a large, virtually empty Kremlin office, Putin immediately put Carlson on the defensive, demanding: "Are we having a talk show or serious conversation?" He then gave his interlocutor a 25-minute history lesson – a mix of mythical and actual history going back over a millennium – to show both how Ukrainians and Russians were not really separate peoples.

He also took pains to assert from the start who was running the interview early on. It was a classic Putin powerplay. After that, it was plain sailing for Putin.

The interview was wide-ranging: Ukraine, China, multi-polarity, Putin's opinion of several former US presidents as well as his predecessors Lenin, Stalin and Yeltsin. Discussing US politics, Putin touched on Elon Musk, Donald Trump and what he called the warlike "mindsets" of US foreign policy elites.

### Nato slammed, Maga boosted

When it came to the war in Ukraine, predictably the Russia president blamed what he identified as Nato expansionism and threats to his country's security. He recounted how he had offered a hand of friendship to the US: "Please don't [expand Nato eastward]. We are as bourgeois now as you are. We are a market economy, and there is no Communist party power. Let's negotiate." But his overtures were spurned by the US elites, he said.

Also predictably, both interviewer and interviewee took the opportunity to boost Donald Trump and his Make America Great Again (Maga) voter base.



Tucker Carlson chats to Putin

Trump has already said he would end US military aid to Ukraine "very quickly" by withdrawing US aid, something that Putin stressed in the interview: "If you really want to stop fighting, you need to stop supplying weapons. It will be over within a few weeks."

But Putin chose not to dwell at length on what a Trump presidency could do for him. Instead he took a shot at US policy on Ukraine as a distraction from America's domestic woes, zeroing in on what is a sore point for many swing voters – immigration.

"You have issues on the border, issues with migration, issues with the national debt," he told Carlson. "You have nothing better to do, so you should fight in Ukraine? Wouldn't it be better to negotiate with Russia?"

The Russian president floated the idea that US foreign policy decisions had been captured by what he called "elites' mindsets" and that while Trump may well change US policy towards Russia, it would only happen if the "elites change" too.

Carlson filled in the gap, echoing another of Trump's key themes – the power of the "deep state": "So, twice you've described US presidents making decisions and then being undercut by their agency heads. So, it sounds like you're describing a system that is not run by the people who are elected, in your telling."

### Talking to an America in turmoil

The controversial interview comes at a time of great turmoil, in

the US and internationally. Trump – for whom Carlson campaigned in the 2020 election campaign – faces a string of court cases, including some that could – if he's convicted – see him imprisoned before the November 2024 presidential elections.

The US Supreme Court will also rule on whether Trump should be removed from the ballot altogether due to charges of insurrectionary conduct on January 6 2021. Congress also remains at loggerheads over providing further financial support to Ukraine.

Although he is likely to win the Republican presidential nomination, Trump faces a primary challenge from Nikki Haley, who now represents an important focal point of opposition to Trump the personality rather than to Trumpism the idea. Haley, former governor of South Carolina and Trump's ambassador to the UN, is also a champion of US support for Ukraine's resistance to Russia's military might – as is Joe Biden.

Biden – and Trump, as a matter of fact – campaigned on the idea of ending America's "forever wars". Yet the US is now embroiled in a series of conflicts in a global arc from Ukraine, through the Middle East, all the way to simmering tensions over Taiwan. All sorts of people are lining up to warn that the danger of another massive global conflict appears to be increasing.

There is no shortage of influential Americans on both sides of the political aisle who are saying the same thing. A survey conducted

by the American Psychological Association soon after Russia invaded Ukraine last year found that nearly seven in ten Americans feared "that we are at the beginning stages of World War III".

So while Carlson and Trump are partisan Republicans, their stances on Russia, Putin and the Ukraine war reflect a broader mood among much of the US public.

Some members of Trump's 2017-2021 administration wanted to get closer to Russia to counter the rise of China – in a sort of 'carrots-to-Russia and sticks-towards-China' approach.

There is also a growing bipartisan voice in Washington. This is reflected in the emergence of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a thinktank funded by billionaire conservative Charles Koch and billionaire liberal internationalist George Soros, which is championing a retreat from interventionism, or 'restraint', by the US.

Carlson's interview with Putin will not change the minds of committed partisans on either side. But for those who for the first time heard an extended argument in the Russian leader's own words, the interview, while long and sometimes rambling, probably humanised Putin. He came over as historically knowledgeable, articulate, serious and sober.

And very determined in the rightness of his cause.

**Inderjeet Parmar is a Professor in International Politics, City, University of London**

# Ballers in God scores again as Birmingham City star is baptised

A Christian ministry for football players has revealed that a Birmingham City star has been baptised.

Ballers In God, a ministry which supports Christian football players, said that Birmingham defender Rico Browne, 20, was baptised at the Junction Church in Loughborough. He was baptised by Notts County midfielder John Bostock, who founded Ballers in God in 2015.

Ballers In God is aimed at athletes who have a full-time career based in the world of football. The group describes itself as 'a group of players, coaches and other profes-

sionals who are committed to developing our faith and bringing about change. We support, encourage and challenge one another to be more than we were yesterday.'

Rico Browne's baptism was announced on Instagram. The post said: "It's beautiful to see young Birmingham City Baller in God @ricobrowne follow Jesus's example and command to be baptised."

The post then quoted the New Testament passage below from Acts 2:38 about baptism: 'And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptised every one of you"'

John Bostock said Ballers In God had "changed my life".

"I've seen players rekindle their fire for God, I've seen growth in the lives of men who had given up on faith and ultimately I've seen the foundations of an intimate community of Christian Players take root," John Bostock said.

"It's great that in Ballers In God, I have a group of brothers who are willing to support me and go through life's up and down with me. That's a game changer."



# 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](mailto:michael.winterbottom@universecatholicweekly.co.uk). Please endeavour to keep your letter short and provide a name and address with all letters, though we are happy to anonymise your thoughts in print.

## Hybrid services could be answer

Replying to Anonymous of Sussex (*Universe Letters*, 9th February 'We still need our local church services', on the issue of priest shortages and the reform of parishes in Arundel & Brighton), I have long wondered, ever since lockdown, why the Church is not utilising the God-given opportunity of online Masses to solve the 'problem' of a lack of priests.

Anonymous admits 'assuming we can find the finances to maintain its upkeep, we can keep the church open for community events and to maintain a presence in the village'; well I believe this could be a golden opportunity!

A large screen could be erected in the church and every Sunday (or even every day if there was enough call for it) Mass could be screened from either the Cathedral or another church at a set time.

The congregation would gather together as they do at present. They could start and end with their usual choice of hymns. Eucharistic ministers could distribute Communion, the collection could be taken at the Offertory, and if there is usually a children's Liturgy and tea and coffee after Mass, that could continue too. Representatives of the Parish Council or church meeters and greeters could give out the notices and arrange any activities/ services/ prayer groups / Sacramental preparation etc, which go on during the week.

Notification would be given when a priest would be available for what could become eagerly anticipated occasional live Masses and sacraments.

This scenario would not only keep the community

together and even help it grow, but also encourage the laity to take responsibility and develop an enormous appreciation of the priests we do have, and the Holy Mass.

In many mission countries this model of Catholic communities is normal in rural areas (though perhaps they are not yet all lucky enough to have the internet) and incidentally, it is mostly in these countries that the Church is on the rise despite in some areas a priest only being available four or five times a year!

I do not understand why in all dioceses in the Western world, where there is a shortage of priests, that this model of a hybrid online/in person Mass is not adopted more often.

I seem to remember that the Pope – or someone else in the Vatican – said some years ago, "The problem is NOT that we have too few priests... but TOO MANY!" 'Surfeiting the appetite sickens and so dies.' (Shakespeare)

Claire Riche, Bournemouth

## Get out and evangelise

Re the reforms of parishes taking place in Arundel and Brighton, while it is harsh on the Church communities concerned if closure is planned, we have to accept that if a local church is not attracting worshippers, it is not viable. Rather than complain, perhaps more evangelising could be the answer, particularly to migrant groups who tend to come from more religious nations than the secular UK?

Eddie Towning, Pontefract

New video series

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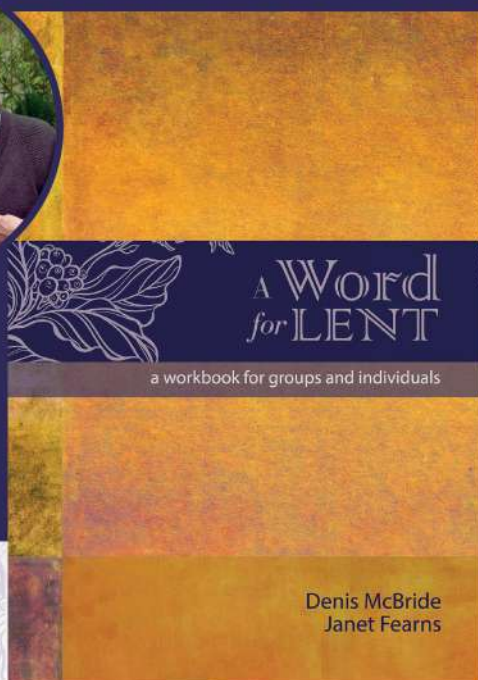
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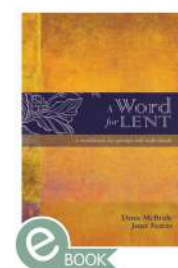
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# Pop stars in tune with SCIAF Lent appeal

**Andy Drozdziak**

*Deacon Blue* stars Ricky Ross and Lorraine McIntosh took to the streets of Glasgow to encourage Scots to “share the love” and support a Catholic charity campaign in Lent to help the world’s poorest.

The couple helped The Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF) launch its annual WEE BOX, BIG CHANGE appeal, which raises vital funds for its work in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

This year, SCIAF’s appeal will focus on raising funds for people in Rwanda. It is 30 years since a genocide took place in Rwanda, leaving around one million people dead.

The annual Lenten campaign encourages Scots to give up a favourite treat like coffee, chocolate, wine or crisps over Lent, and then put the money saved into a SCIAF Wee Box.

The money is then donated to the charity at Easter, and is used to help those struggling to survive due to hunger, poverty and a changing climate.

Ricky Ross, who has previously worked with SCIAF when he and Lorraine McIntosh travelled to the

Democratic Republic of Congo, said: “Having seen first-hand some of the programmes that SCIAF are involved in made us realise how important it is to support the ongoing work of SCIAF.

“Floods, droughts and storms are wreaking havoc with their lives. For so many of our poorest sisters and brothers, hunger is the beginning of a tragic downward spiral. But it doesn’t have to be.

“We are continually amazed at the difference that the WEE BOX makes—even tiny amounts make a huge change.”

Lorraine Currie, SCIAF’s chief executive, explained the importance of this year’s appeal – and how the money raised will make an impact in Rwanda.

“Our work across Rwanda, driven by donations from Scotland, focuses on supporting women and girls who have suffered abuse and discrimination.

“By working through local Rwandan organisations, SCIAF is supporting projects which help women and girls rebuild their lives, change social attitudes, and build a better



Lorraine McIntosh and Ricky Ross (left) help SCIAF launch this year’s Lent appeal  
Photo: SCIAF

future for themselves and their families,” she said.

“Our Lent appeal this year is so important. There are so many wars and tragic things happening all over

our world, which we witness every day on our television screens. But there are also ongoing struggles and injustices in countries across the world that we don’t hear much

about, like in Rwanda.

“Please give what you can to the SCIAF appeal this year. Even a small donation makes a huge difference.”

## Catholic singer hails ‘incredible journey’ as debut album launched

**Andy Drozdziak**

A Catholic singer-songwriter from Belfast who only started singing publicly in 2021 is hoping to win fans and heal hearts through her debut album.

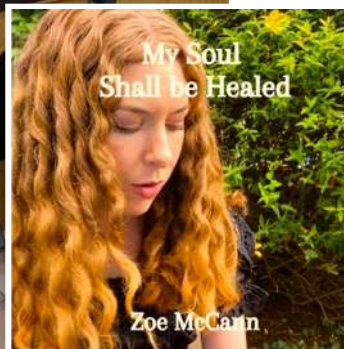
“I’ve been writing songs since I was 12,” Zoe McCann, 38, told the *Universe*.

“But it was always something I did in private. I never thought I’d have the confidence to get up and perform.”

Belfast-born support worker Zoe now sings at church services throughout the city and she has released her debut album of songs inspired by her Catholic faith called *My Soul Shall Be Healed*. Zoe described her transformation as “an incredible journey”, since she never dreamed she would sing professionally.

In 2021, Zoe started singing at St Matthew’s parish in Short Strand, where she shared her songs – and immediately received rave reviews. “People responded really well to the songs and started asking me where they could get a recording of them, which is how the album came about,” she said.

With a unique voice, and produced by Broughshane-based sound engineer Andrew Dougherty, the album contains prayerful and contemplative tracks like *Handmaid of the Lord* and *Arise*. Fans of St Thérèse of Lisieux will also appreciate the significance of the album’s opening track, *Little Flower*.



*My Soul Shall Be Healed* also includes the track *Two Mothers*, which has become a regular request at funerals. Zoe explained the reason for the song’s popularity.

“I wrote *Two Mothers* as a tribute to Our Lady and to earthly mothers everywhere,” she said.

“I think the reason it’s touched

hearts is that people can relate to it. We all love our mums and it’s a way of thanking God for the gift of motherly love and honouring those mothers who are no longer with us.”

**Zoe’s album can be downloaded from Spotify and copies of her CD can be ordered via her website: [zoemccannmusic.com](http://zoemccannmusic.com).**

## Let’s bring forgiveness back says Catholic funny man Frank

**Andy Drozdziak**

Comedian Frank Skinner has opened up about his Catholic faith and said that it’s time to “bring forgiveness back.”

Skinner left the Catholic Church at the age of 17 but returned about 12 years later, after struggling with alcoholism.

In a wide-ranging interview with *The Times*, reformed alcoholic Skinner, 67, said that he sympathised with “people with a good heart.”

“If I do get to Heaven, I’ve often wondered what job I’d get. I’d like to be a defence lawyer for borderline cases: people with a good heart who’ve made a few poor decisions,” he said.

“We used to call it forgiveness and it used to be quite popular, but the world isn’t so keen on it these days. Maybe it’s time to bring it back.”

Skinner also shared how his Catholic faith guides him. He said: “People make a big thing about me being Catholic. To me it’s like CCTV, keeping a benevolent eye on you, making sure what you’re doing is right.”

Skinner has previously addressed his faith in a lighthearted manner in his 2021 book, *A Comedian’s Prayer Book*, which contained Skinner’s reflections on ‘hell,



judgement, atheism, money, faith and the X-Men.’ He described the book as “a bit like reading the Bible, except you only get one side of the conversation and all the jokes are left in.”

Following performances at the Edinburgh Fringe and seven nights at the Lyric Theatre, Frank Skinner is about to kick off his new tour of the UK and Ireland entitled 30 Years of Dirt, starting on 12th March. It has been praised as “a beautifully confessional new show” by Stephen Armstrong in *The Sunday Times* and “a delight” by Paul Fleckney in *The Guardian*.

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St Peter's looked stunning for the canonisation of St Maria Antonia (painting pictured left)



# Pope's joy as he canonises his homeland's first female saint

## Carol Glatz

St. Maria Antonia de Paz Figueroa, known as Mama Antula, devoted herself completely to helping others experience God's closeness and compassion, Pope Francis said after he declared the 18th-century consecrated laywoman a saint.

By letting her heart and life be "touched" and "healed" by Christ, he said, "she proclaimed him tirelessly her whole life long, for she was convinced, as she loved to repeat: 'Patience is good, but perseverance is better.'"

"May her example and her intercession help us to grow according to the heart of God, in charity," the pope said in his homily after proclaiming her a saint during Mass in St. Peter's Basilica.

It was a particularly special occasion for the Holy father as he was canonising a woman who was very dear to his heart: St. Maria Antonia de Paz Figueroa is Argentina's first female saint. She was closely tied to the Jesuits and continued to lead Ignatian spiritual exercises in Argentina after the expulsion of the order.

Argentine President Javier Milei was present at the Mass and held a private meeting on Monday. At the end of the Mass, the two shook hands, spoke briefly, smiled and laughed. The president, who has made disparaging remarks about the pope in the past, leaned down and gave a big hug to the pope, who was seated in his wheelchair.

Their greeting seemed miles away from comments made when Milei was campaigning when he slammed



Pope Francis receives from Argentine President Javier Milei a framed photo with the commemorative postcard of St. Maria Antonia de Paz Figueroa, distributed by the Argentine post office to mark her beatification in 2017. Also on the table, dulce de leche alfajores and lemon cookies.

the pope as a socialist troublemaker.

Claudio Perusini, whose unexpected recovery from a severe stroke became the second miracle attributed to the new saint, also was present. He has known the pope since he was 17 and he, his wife and two adult children took offertory gifts to the pope during the Mass.

Sickness and healing were the key themes in Pope Francis' homily during the Mass, which was celebrated on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and the World Day of the Sick.

Reflecting on the day's readings, which included St. Mark's account of Jesus' "cleansing of a leper," the pope spoke about other forms of 'leprosy' that lead some people, even Christians, to ostracise and scorn others.

and then be discarded like refuse," he said.

Many people suffering today also are scorned and discarded because of so many "fears, prejudices and inconsistencies even among those who are believers and call themselves Christians," he said.

The way to tear down those barriers and cure new forms of 'leprosy,' he said, is in the style of Jesus, which is to draw near to those who are shunned to touch and heal them.

Christians must reflect whether they, like Jesus, are able to draw near and be a gift to others, the pope said. The faithful should ask if they "withdraw from others and think only of ourselves" or believe "the problem is always and only other people."

This "leprosy of the soul," he said, is "a sickness that blinds us to love and compassion, one that destroys us by the 'cankers' of selfishness,

prejudice, indifference and intolerance."

"Once we let ourselves be touched by Jesus, we start to heal within, in our hearts. If we let ourselves be touched by him in prayer and adoration, if we permit him to act in us through his word and his sacraments, that contact truly changes us," he said.

He added: "We cannot be silent about the fact that there are so many people today who are denied the right to care, and, therefore, the right to life!" he said.

In those places where people live in extreme poverty or war zones, he said, "fundamental human rights are violated there every day! It is intolerable."

"Let us pray for the tormented Ukraine and its people, for Palestine and Israel, let us pray for Myanmar and for all war-torn peoples around the world."

## From barbs to favourite sweets: Milei mollifies

Months after throwing verbal jabs at Pope Francis along the campaign trail, Argentine President Javier Milei was all smiles and gifts of cookies when the pair met at the Vatican on Monday.

The 60 minutes they spent speaking privately was significantly longer than usual for a meeting between the pope and a head of state, especially considering that no translator was needed. Such meetings usually last 30 minutes.

Vatican videos showed the pope and president having a friendly conversation and laughing. Milei gave the pope a gift of traditional Argentine sweets, dulce de leche alfajores, and the pope's favorite brand of lemon cookies. He also gave the

pope a postcard of St. Maria Antonia de Paz Figueroa – canonised by Pope Francis the previous day – distributed by the Argentine post office for her beatification in 2017.

During campaigning for the Argentinian presidency last year Milei dubbed Pope Francis an "imbecile," a supporter of "communist killers" and other derogatory terms involving expletives.

Asked about the comments, the pope said in December that "it is important to distinguish between what a politician says on the campaign trail and what he or she will actually do afterward," adding that he was "not bothered" by hearing hostile remarks about him.

# Church told to speak the language of its faithful when discussing reform

Cindy Wooden

Pope Francis told members of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments that it was imperative the Church retained its passion for spiritual growth, but it must also “always try to speak in a way that is understandable to the men and women of its time.”

“Without a renewed encounter with Christ, there is no reform of the Church,” the pope said. That is why the bishops gathered at the Second Vatican Council in 1962-65 “knew they had to place the liturgy at the centre, because it is the place par excellence for encountering the living Christ.”

The more Catholics are educated about the liturgy and by the liturgy, he said, the more the liturgy will be that place of encounter.

Liturgical formation, he said, is not something for “a few experts” but should be a goal for all Catholics.

“Naturally that does not exclude that there will be a priority in the formation of those who, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, are called to be mystagogues, that is, to take the faithful by the hand and ac-



company them in learning about the holy mysteries,” Pope Francis said.

Pastors, he said, must “know how to lead the people to the good pasture of the liturgical celebration, where the proclamation of Christ who died and rose again becomes a concrete experience of his life-transforming presence.”

“Begin with the assemblies that gather on the Lord’s Day and on the feasts of the liturgical year,” he said. The Mass itself is the primary op-

portunity for liturgical formation.

When liturgies are “prepared with pastoral care,” he said, “they become favorable occasions for people to rediscover and deepen the meaning of celebrating the mystery of salvation today.”

He also stressed that the role of women in the Church could not just be reduced to purely that of ‘ministry’. Mentioning the Church as the bride of Christ, the pope said: “I want to say one thing about women’s ministry. The Church is woman,

the Church is mother, the Church has its figure in Mary, and the Church-woman, whose figure is Mary, is greater than Peter; that is, it is something else.”

“One cannot reduce everything to ministry,” he said. “The woman in herself has a very great significance in the Church-as-woman, without reducing it to ministry. This is why I said that every instance of reform in the church is always a question of spousal fidelity, because it (the Church) is woman.”

## Humble priests are ones to get balance right

Clerical abuse begins when a priest thinks he is better than others and somehow over them, Pope Francis told priests gathered in Rome for a conference on their continuing education and formation.

“We can live our priestly ministry well only when immersed in the priestly people from whom we come,” he added. “Do not ever let us feel separate from the journey of the holy, faithful people of God.”

Meeting participants in the Vatican audience hall, Pope Francis said the keys to a happy and healthy priesthood are holding fast to the joy of the Gospel, belonging to a people and experiencing “the generativity of service.”

“I want to express my gratitude for what you do in your dioceses and for the service you carry out,” the pope said.

Echoing a call from the October assembly of the synod on synodality, which requested that “seminaries remain connected to the daily life of the community,” Pope Francis said the education of priests “should not be conceived as somehow ‘set apart.’

Rather, “it should draw upon the contribution of all the people of God: priests are called to exercise a spirit of synodality,” walking with their people, the pope said.

## Not fighting trafficking is being complicit in it, warns pope

The fight against human trafficking can be won, but it requires eliminating the root causes of the problem, Pope Francis said.

Calling for action, the pope appealed for the mobilisation of “all our resources in combating trafficking and restoring full dignity to those who have been its victims,” in a written message for International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking.

“If we close our eyes and ears, if we do nothing, we will be guilty of complicity,” he wrote.

The day of prayer is held on the feast of St. Josephine Bakhita, who was kidnapped by slave traders in Sudan in the late 1870s and sold into slavery before she eventually secured her freedom and became a religious sister in Italy.

“Let us remember the wrong she endured, her suffering but at the same time her strength and her journey of liberation and rebirth to a new life,” the pope wrote.

“St. Bakhita encourages us to open our eyes and ears to see those who go unseen and to hear those who have no voice, to acknowledge the dignity of each person and to fight trafficking and all forms of exploitation,” the pope wrote.

While trafficking often goes unseen, he thanked courageous reporters “who have brought to light modern forms of slavery.”

“We know that the fight against

trafficking can be won, but it is necessary to get to the root of the problem and eliminate its causes,” he wrote.

St. Bakhita “stands for all those men and women who, despite their enslavement, can still attain freedom. It is a call to take action, to mobilise all our resources,” he wrote.

Pope Francis praised the enthusiasm, commitment and efforts of young people. He called on individuals, families, parishes, religious communities, associations and movements to pray and promote concrete action in defence of human dignity on all levels – political and social.

“Let us help one another to be more responsive, to open our lives and hearts to our sisters and brothers who even now are being bought and sold as slaves,” he wrote. “It is never too late to take action.”

Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, was among the guests contributing to a special online resource organised for the day by the International Union of Superiors General and the Union of Superiors General.

Despite human trafficking being so widespread, he said in his recorded message, “this outrageous plague tends to remain in the shadows; it is largely invisible, like its fragile and vulnerable victims.”

**Trafficking special: see pg 20-21**



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# US politicians agree huge aid package for Ukraine, Israel

**Kate Scanlon**

Politicians in the US have agreed an aid package worth \$95 billion aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, following months of a stalemate amid growing divisions within Republicans over the role of the United States on the global stage.

But the legislation isn't guaranteed to deliver all the money as Congress eyes the presidential election in November, amid fears that Ukraine will run out of ammunition without US resupply.

At the same time Catholic agencies are reporting persecution in parts of Ukraine under Russian occupation.

The Senate vote approved both military and humanitarian aid for civilians in areas of conflict facing allied nations.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat, had appealed to the Senate to support the bill, saying: "It's been years, perhaps decades, since the Senate has passed a bill that so greatly impacts not just our national security, not just the security of our allies, but the security of western democracy."

"If we want the world to remain a safe place for freedom, for democratic principles, for our future prosperity, then America must lead the way."

His opposing leader, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, had also called for support, saying: "Our adversaries want America to decide that reinforcing allies and partners is not in our interest. They want us to take hard-earned credibility and light it on fire," McConnell said. "But today the Senate has re-



A destroyed church in eastern Ukraine

sponded by reaffirming a commitment to rebuild and modernise our military, restore our credibility, and give the current Commander-in-Chief, as well as the next, more tools to secure our interests."

Catholic Relief Services, the international relief and development agency of the Catholic Church in the US, applauded the inclusion of humanitarian aid in the bill.

"Humanitarian assistance is needed now," Bill O'Keefe, CRS executive vice president said. "The inclusion of \$9 billion in humanitarian aid is a positive step. But more work will need to be done to ensure the House retains this life-saving aid in any package it moves."

The Senate bill comes at a critical point for Ukraine as Russian forces have been able to advance on Ukraine's fortress city of Avdiivka, a consequence of Ukraine's need to

ration severely its remaining ammunition after the Pentagon ran out of authorised military aid for Ukraine in December. Avdiivka is considered key for Russia to seize Ukraine's entire Donbas region.

Russian occupation already is unleashing persecution of the Catholic Church not seen since the days of the Soviet Union. Since 2022, Russian authorities have banned the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and other Catholic ministries in occupied areas of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region, including the Knights of Columbus and Caritas.

However, Republicans had demanded any aid package be linked to toughening up security on the USA's border with Mexico: House Speaker Mike Johnson said that "national security begins at our own border."

Catholic immigration advocates

also criticised the border provisions in that bill but for different reasons, as it had tightened up asylum options.

The newly passed Senate bill faces steep odds in the House, where a razor-thin Republican majority appears opposed to it.

President Joe Biden said the legislation is "critical to advancing America's national security interests."

"It will allow the United States to continue our vital work, together with our allies, to stand up for Ukraine's freedom and support its ability to defend itself against Russia's aggression," Biden said.

Biden added the bill would also help Israel "with what it needs to protect its people against Hamas terrorists" and also "will provide life-saving humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people."

## UN agency puts Ukraine repair bill at £7bn for culture alone

Ukraine will need over nine billion dollars (£7.1 billion) over the next decade in order to rebuild its cultural sites and tourism industry following Russia's invasion and war, the United Nations' cultural agency has said.

Unesco estimated that the country's interlinked culture and tourism sector have lost over £15 billion in revenue during the war, which has now being going on for two years.

Fighting has damaged 341 cultural sites across Ukraine at a cost of £3.7 billion, with the capital Kyiv, Lviv and Odesa the worst affected.

"The cathedral of Odesa is one example of a site that was gravely damaged," said Chiara Dezzi Bardeschi, who heads the Unesco office in Ukraine. "It's a symbol of all the community... with deep spiritual and historical meaning."

In July 2023, Unesco strongly condemned a "brazen attack carried out by the Russian forces" against historic buildings in the centre of Odesa, an endangered world heritage site.

The attack claimed at least two lives and damaged several sites, including the 18th century Transfiguration Cathedral, the main Orthodox church in Odesa.

Unesco said the intentional destruction of cultural heritage sites, including religious buildings and artifacts, may amount to a war crime.

The International Criminal Court first brought war crimes charges involving purposeful attacks on historic religious monuments and buildings in a case involving Mali in 2015.

## Caritas leads response as Chile recovers from wildfires

Catholic aid bodies and the Church are leading the fight to aid people hit by devastating wildfires in Chile's Valparaiso region, after it was badly affected by a series of blazes running out of control at the start of February.

Lorenzo Figueroa, director of Caritas Chile, said the world had ignored "a tremendous catastrophe," saying that in addition to at least 131 lives lost, the number of those missing and the extent of the damage has yet to be determined. "There is talk of up to 20,000 houses affected," said Figueroa, who added that the psychological damage left by the fires was also a concern.

Figueroa highlighted the Church's participation in the recovery efforts amid this natural and human tragedy. "Its knowledge, experience... Church people know their territory and are active," he said. After the emergency aid bodies leave "the community is no longer the same because they remain organised" to face emergencies, he added.

For Figueroa, the support of other organisations is fundamental, not only financially but also in terms of experience, training and human resources, which add up when it comes to providing the necessary support to the victims. "The action of Caritas all over the world is an expression of humanitarian action in which we express ourselves as a family and the help of CRS and USAID allows us to take care of our common home, our people and those most in need," Figueroa said.



## Milei backs down on abortion axe

Argentina's President Javier Milei has rejected a proposal from his own party to scrap a 2020 law decriminalising abortion.

Journalists were told "it was not part of the president's agenda" and did not enjoy his support.

Argentina decriminalised abortion three years ago, allowing the terminations up to the 14th week free of charge, in the face of protests from the Catholic Church.

Milei's La Libertad Avanza party said it would re-criminalise abortion, with prison sentences of up to four years for procuring one.

But Milei's rejection suggests abortion will stay in Argentina.

Milei expressed a pro-life position during his 2023 presidential campaign, even though he professes libertarian proclivities.

He told *The Economist*, "For me, abortion is qualified murder aggravated by the bond.



# Priest asks why world stays silent as terrorists look to 'Islamise' Nigeria

**Ngala Chimton and Rob Beswick**

A leading Nigerian Catholic priest and an NGO have demanded the world turn the spotlight on the persecution of Christians in Nigeria, claiming the country's Government is looking to 'Islamise' the nation and that a genocide of Christians is taking place.

Fr Moses Iorapuu, director of social communications for the diocese of Makurdi, said there is a "complicit silence" in the international community over what is happening in Nigeria.

"The world spends months holding special sessions on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, especially after the massacre of Israelis by Hamas, but the genocide going on in Nigeria does not attract as much as 10 minutes of (their attention)," he said. "One has to ask, why?"

Fr Iorapuu said the Government has continued to frame the violence in Nigeria as a 'farmers' conflict,' noting that "as long as those providing information are Government-backed, nothing will ever be revealed contrary to their narrative."

The area has seen clashes between Muslim Fulani herdsman and mainly Christian farmers for many years.

His comments come after the latest sickening attack on Christians saw a school bus carrying more than a dozen schoolchildren under the age of 10 abducted by Islamists at the end of January, with two priests of Nigeria's Diocese of Pankshin kidnapped three days later.

Six kidnapped pupils and three teachers from a primary school in Ekiti, in southwest Nigeria, were released after a week, but the bus driver was killed. The abducted priests, Fr Kenneth Kanwa and Fr Jude Nwachukwu, were released on Saturday.

The attacks come a handful of weeks after Nigeria was left reeling by a savage attack on Christmas Eve in which 140 Christians were slain across 15 central villages by rampaging Islamist herders wielding



A woman reacts during a protest against violence in Abuja. Photo: Afolabi Sotunde, Reuters)

guns and machetes. It was the worst such attack in the region since 2018, with police saying it had the hallmarks of a co-ordinated assault.

Christian Concern and Open Doors, organisations that track global Christian persecution, reported that 90 per cent of the more than 5,600 Christians killed for their faith last year were from Nigeria, with the total number of Christians killed in 2023 up 80 per cent from five years ago.

A staggering 7,600 Nigerian Christians were killed between January 2021 and June '22 because of their faith, with Nigeria ranked the second worst nation for persecuting Christians, after North Korea.

The Intersociety advocacy group in Nigeria has said over 100,000 defenceless citizens have died directly or indirectly outside the law in the hands of security forces in the past eight years, between August 2014 and December 2023.

"About 70 per cent of the direct dead, tortured, abducted and disappeared victims are Christians and non-Muslim others," it said.

The director of Intersociety, Eme-ka Umeagbalasi, said the killings are part of a government agenda to 'Islamise Nigeria.'

"It's genocide," Umeagbalasi said unequivocally. "There is a silent genocide going on in Nigeria – a genocide of Christians," he said, all because "the leaders have refused to govern the country multiculturally and multireligiously."

But Christians remain steadfast and the faith would continue to grow even in an environment as hostile as Nigeria, Fr Iorapuu said. "This is the mystery of our faith: The blood of the martyrs remains the seed of Christianity."

He identified several factors for this, explaining that the Church offers several services in areas where "the government has failed," he said.

"Christians are still largely responsible for education, health care, provision of social amenities, and priests remain agents of change in a manner that the average politician is no match," Fr Iorapuu said. "The access the people have to priests gives them the kind of hope the pol-

iticians do not represent. The people are emboldened to believe that things will change for the better thanks to the priests," he added.

"This is because the faith planted in Nigeria was not limited to Church and spirituality. It was all embracing and holistic."

"Our impact is felt even among

A new study suggests Nigeria has one of the best Mass attendance rates in the world, with 94 per cent of self-identified Nigerian Catholics attending weekly or daily Mass. This in a country ranked second for the persecution of Christians, behind North Korea.

non-Christians," he added.

The priest said that Nigeria has always been a deeply religious country, where "you can find 10 churches on one street."

"The Catholic faith is generally very strong in the country and I think it is the prayer of the faithful that has not wiped out Christianity in Nigeria," Fr Iorapuu added.

Fr Iorapuu regretted that at the same time, those persecuting Christians in Nigeria have paradoxically benefited from Christian services.

"Some of those who persecute us today have attended our schools or their children have, or are attending. This is why their acts are senseless and inhumane" he said.

The priest praised Christian leaders for enduring the suffering, noting that "if the leaders of the church had encouraged revenge, Nigeria would have gone up in flames."



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## World-famous Vatican hospital to move location

The Vatican and Italy have signed a formal "declaration of intent" to move the Vatican-owned Bambino Gesù pediatric hospital in Rome to the campus of a now-closed Italian hospital by 2030.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, and Alfredo Mantovano, secretary of the Italian prime minister's Council of Ministers, signed the declaration on 8th February, reports say.

The hospital, currently on Rome's Janiculum Hill next to the Pontifical North American College, would move several miles away to the site

of the former Carlo Forlanini Hospital, which closed in 2015.

Like the hospital at the current location, the new location would be given the status of 'extraterritorial' Vatican property so would still fall under the auspices of the Holy See.

Mantovano told reporters that after construction and remodelling, the new location would give the hospital at least four times as much space for patient rooms, clinics, offices and research labs.

While moving the hospital involves solving some complex legal and economic issues, the Vatican

and Italy share a desire to provide the best facilities "for children with serious illnesses, their families and the doctors who want to care for them and for research," Montovano said.

The hospital has gained a reputation as a world leader in the care of extremely poorly children, and has sometimes offered hope to a number of UK-based parents in recent years when the NHS has told them that their young ones can no longer receive treatment as doctors believe it is unlikely to produce a positive outcome.

# Columbans conference hears plea for world to act over Myanmar's torment

Below is a reflection on Matthew 5:1-12 by a Filipino Columban priest based in Myanmar. It was delivered at an online event for Columban missionaries called 'Prayer for Myanmar'.

Held on 2nd February – the third anniversary of the country's military coup which has sent the country 'into conflict and darkness' – attendees at the event drawn from over 40 countries heard how

the situation in Myanmar is now beyond desperate.

Those gathered heard reports of more than 11,000 lives lost, and millions of families torn apart by a conflict that has been raging for three years. Homes, medical centres, churches and temples are being bombed and burned down, with Christian areas of Kachin, Kayah, Chin and Karen states targeted for bombing. As a result a

serious humanitarian crisis is emerging.

People left in conflict hotspots are praying under trees and at least one bishop is living in the jungle. Millions of children are not in schools, many of which are either destroyed or closed. Inflation is rampant and unemployment high, with millions trapped in a cycle of poverty and despair.

People can be arrested at any

time and phones checked, said one witness speaking from Myanmar, "and we can be in jail for three years if they find something." She added: "Most painful for us is the silence: Nobody speaks for the people of Myanmar. We are dying, we are suffering."

Yet despite that, there is hope: "People are very resilient. They are amazing. We ask God for strength – and we have it, we are still

surviving. The strength of our spirit cannot be extinguished. We want to rebuild our nation from the ashes."

Prayers were said for those in refugee camps, as well as for justice and peace in Myanmar, and all around the world, and for the people who are sacrificing and working for the good of Myanmar.

Finally, there was a call that the situation in Myanmar cannot be forgotten.

## Myanmar reflection: 'I have found my map'

Fr Kurt Zion Pala

When I first arrive at a new place or city, the first thing I try to find is a map. I want to know where places are, interesting places to see and find. Later I would look for another kind of map, a map that would show me where people are, different people live, interesting people to meet.

Arriving in Myitkyina, Kachin State, in 2017 I did not have a map to follow. I did not have a guide or template to work out what to do in Myanmar. One day, Fr Neil Magill asked me to write up something of what I thought I would be doing as a ministry. I wrote about many things, not knowing actually where to begin or what to do. I went out to find that map wherever I could and met people – especially Buddhists, Muslims, Baptists and young people.

Our gospel today is on the Beatitudes, part of what is considered to be the greatest sermon of all time. It includes the Lord's Prayer and the commandment on loving your enemy. During the time of Jesus, it would be a radical invitation for all his listeners. Jesus was preaching about the Kingdom of God. But during those days they were all under the Roman Empire. Israel was held captive by the Romans. Their land was taken from them. They were heavily taxed and their women abused.

When Jesus started speaking about the Kingdom of God, the people must have been excited. They have been waiting for a Messiah, a saviour to save them from the oppression of the Romans. Jesus brought them to the mountain side. It probably made many think that Jesus was going to start a revolution. And so they waited for Jesus to speak.

Then Jesus said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted because of righteousness." It must have been a shock for many of his listeners. Jesus seems to be blessing the wrong people. Jesus seems to have read from a wrong list. Jesus should be calling out and blessing warriors, war planners, and vengeance filled men and women to fight



for the people.

Recently we remembered the third anniversary of the Myanmar coup. If Jesus spoke today about the Beatitudes, he could have blessed these people:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, the young people who have stopped dreaming; for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, the mothers and fathers who lost their children, and children orphaned by the war; for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the people and creatures displaced by the war, mining and the destruction of the forest, for they will inherit the Earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the many political prisoners and young people who have died courageously protesting in the streets, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the peacemakers, peoples of different faiths and cultures who work for peace, for they will be called children of God.

The Beatitudes were not a condition set by Jesus so that only those he mentioned shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven. They are not commandments that we must obey to enter God's Kingdom. But they were an assurance for those who are oppressed and weak, that they have a place in God's Kingdom.

I have been following *The Chosen* on TV. One of the scenes explores Jesus speaking about the Beatitudes. I believe this scene happened before Jesus spoke to the big crowd. In the scene, Jesus woke up Matthew and said to him: "I got it. I got the map... directions, where people should look to find me." Jesus stood up and Matthew followed. Now they are standing on top of a hill overlooking the camp where they prepared and waiting for the people to come and gather. After a while Jesus spoke and said to Matthew, "Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Jesus continued until he finished this passage. Matthew listened but did not completely understand. Matthew told Jesus, "Yes, but how is it a map?" Jesus replied, "If someone wants to find me,



Maryknoll Father John Barth, a US missionary, talks with Pah Kler, a Burmese Catholic catechist who supervises the movement of food and other humanitarian supplies to internally displaced families hiding in the forests of Myanmar, loads food on a boat in Mae Sam Laep, a Thai village on the Salween River, which marks the border between Thailand and Myanmar. Photo: Paul Jeffrey

those are the groups they should look for." Matthew continued and said, "and then?" Jesus ended the conversation and told Matthew, "You are the salt of the Earth."

We have organised Catholic students from different state schools. We started a movement closely influenced by the Student Catholic Action of the Philippines. After Covid and the coup, it was getting more and more difficult to visit students in universities. We also saw the need for skills and work preparation seminars to give young people a chance to work and study abroad or locally. We hope to form young Christians to be 'Salt of the Earth'.

On 15th August 2021, we opened a student centre as an alternative educational centre. It is run by young people, for young people and with young people. We hope to form life-ready and work-ready young people. We provide the Positive Youth Development Program which includes English skills, computer work skills, life and works skills, accounting, and also mental health awareness. We are already accepting new students for the third batch or group. Besides this programme we also provide general English classes and basic computer classes. One of the many

consequences of the political crisis is the growing educational crisis in the country. Education is an important part of Columban mission here in Myanmar.

I also work with young people of other religions through our mental health advocacy activities, promote inter-religious dialogue and animate the Laudato Si' movement at parish and national levels.

In the beginning, I did not quite know what I would be doing or how I would spend my time here in Myanmar or in Myitkyina. But now I have found my way. I have found my map. Jesus in *The Chosen* told Matthew that in order to find him, we must follow the Beatitudes like a map. There are many times I felt helpless and alone but the people I work with continue to give me purpose and joy, sustaining me in my ministries and mission. They are my map.

Have you found your map?

Please do not forget to pray for the young people of Myanmar. Please continue to pray for the people of Myanmar. Please continue to speak for us.

May the Lord continue to bless us, the people that support us, and the people that we work with. Amen.

# Polish Church ministry for victims of abuse under political scrutiny

**Paulina Guzik**

The Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus congregation has found itself in the middle of political storm in Poland after the country's new liberal Government questioned funding it received which was intended to support victims of abuse.

Accused of having “no experience” in the field, the new Government stopped the last tranche of funding – around £7million – despite the congregation saying the money was “indispensable to start helping those abused both in society and in the Church.”

Led by Sacred Heart Father Michal Olszewski, the Archipelago – Islands Free from Violence project was to be a safe haven for victims of abuse; those abused in families, civic institutions and in the Church.

Fr Olszewski and the Sacred Heart priests' foundation, Profeto, applied for funding from the state-run Justice Fund in 2020 to build a place in Warsaw's Wilanów district where “all the victims, no matter their background, no matter whether they're Catholic or not, no matter who they voted for, will find refuge,” Fr Olszewski said. It was delighted to have its proposals backed, and was offered just under £10million to fund the work.

The Justice Fund was established in 1997, but in 2017 its tasks were expanded by Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro of the Law and Justice Party's Government, which lost power in October 2023 to the liberal Civic Coalition.

The fund's aim is to assist people victimised by crime and those closest to them.

However, immediately on entering office, Prime Minister Donald Tusk questioned the way Ziobro granted the funds and asked for checks on whether the money was handled legitimately.

Prosecutors will now check “what were these foundations” that got the funds, “when were they established, how did they work,” Przemyslaw Nowak, spokesman for the National Prosecutor's Office, told the 19:30 newscast of Polish public television TVP.

It has been noted that the new Polish government is especially keen to run its eye over all funding to Christian and pro-life projects, amid allegations that Justice Fund donations had gone missing.

However, Fr Olszewski said the donation received by Archipelago precisely followed the mission of the fund, with his congregation wanting to use the money to build a safe haven for victims of abuse.

The construction of the building is advanced, with the outside almost complete and ready for



The Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus invested over £2 million of its own money to build the abuse victims support centre, on the proviso that it received money from the state-run Justice Fund. Now the centre's future is in doubt after the new Government blocked the funding

work on the inside of the building to start. The Profeto foundation also put \$2.5 million of its own money into the project by buying the land prior to making a bid for the Justice Fund money.

As the largest Church beneficiary of the fund, it is now under intense scrutiny, with suggestions that some critics are simply targeting Fr Olszewski's centre simply because it is a high-profile Church project.

“This level of social debate frightens me,” he admitted, “but we have nothing to do with this storm and nothing to fear. We will help everyone in need, and political affiliations are out of our interest.” Bishop Artur Wazny, head of the New Evangelization Team of the Polish bishops' conference, said that “these attacks not only grossly misjudge their activities, without really delving into the essence of the work they have undertaken, but also exacerbate the suffering of those who are waiting for support and hope.”

One of the controversies is that the Profeto foundation's donation from the Justice Fund was increased to almost £22 million, including an agreement signed after the PiS Government lost the election in October.

But the priest explained that the project was first planned before the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. “Everyone knows that with galloping inflation, it is impossible to build under prices given before the pandemic and the war, which affected the price of wood and other materials,” he said.

He rejected claims that his foundation had no experience in the field of helping victims of abuse; that is a “completely unfounded allegation,” he said.

“The Priests of Sacred Heart have been running initiatives for children from poor neighborhoods for years,” the priest said. “We helped victims of the war in Ukraine and many anonymous victims of abuse in the Church, but we didn't run around in the media to say, ‘Look, these are the victims we helped,’ because this is simply

not the model for how it should be done in this area.”

He also rebuffed the allegation that what Profeto is building in Warsaw is not a place for victims but a new home for a radio station.

“There are wild rumours around. We already have modern studios in Warsaw, we don't need new ones,” Fr Olszewski said.

“The modern rooms in the new centre are for music therapy and a theatrical stage to help young people in their trauma therapy,” he explained. “The problem is the media is tracking everything we do and expecting us to do it without funding.”

Bishop Wazny said the Archipelago “is intended to be a place that gives a sense of security and support to those affected by violence and crimes,” and allowing them, “after undergoing adequate therapies and workshops, to start an independent and creative life again,” he wrote.

“It is a centre that is thoughtfully modern and innovative, unique and original on a national scale,” the bishop added.

Fr Olszewski's biggest supporter in building the project is Ewelina Zamojska, a lay Catholic journalist, who revealed that she is “fighting hard for Archipelago,” as she is a survivor herself.

“I am a victim of abuse,” she told Polish TV show *Balans Bieli* (“The White Balance”). “I am a victim of abuse in the Church,” Zamojska said. “But because I am a victim of abuse in the Church I can also say loudly that in the Church, I also found rescue.”

“What was so badly broken and robbed (from me) was also taken care of in my case.” If others are to receive similar support, Zamojska said, “this project must be completed as it is badly needed.”

Fr Olszewski agreed, adding “we know it from experience and we hope that the project will not be further blocked.”

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A poster greets Pope Francis during a visit to Malta. The island is a regular port of call for migrants looking to enter Europe

# Look out for trafficking victims, ‘hidden in plain sight’ in our communities

## Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio

Catholics around the world mark January as National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month, leading up to the 8th February feastday of St. Josephine Bakhita.

St. Josephine Bakhita was a young southern Sudanese girl who was kidnapped and sold into slavery. She eventually was bought by an Italian diplomat and taken to Venice, where she encountered the Catholic faith (*see facing page*).

Her story is an interesting one, since escaping from slavery was not an easy task even in Italy during the 19th century, yet Josephine persevered and became a Canossian sister. She was canonised by St. John Paul II, who in his homily said, “We find a shining advocate of genuine emancipation.”

Josephine has become the patron saint of those enslaved and trafficked, as well as one venerated by black and African Catholics around the world. She is also the patron saint of Sudan.

Human trafficking, often referred to as a modern form of slavery, involves using force, fraud or coercion to make someone provide labor or engage in sexual activities

against their will. Migrants are particularly vulnerable to trafficking because, in their desperation, they may resort to paying a smuggler to arrange transportation to their destination.

Exploiting this vulnerability, smugglers may then traffic migrants for labour or sex. The hazards migrants encounter during their difficult journeys can expose them to trafficking, regardless of whether they have used a smuggler before.

Even though those who are smuggled might initially consent and pay a fee for transportation to their desired country, some soon find themselves recruited or lured into situations of sexual exploitation, forced labour or indentured servitude – whether it

happens before, during or after their migration journey.

Trafficked individuals are frequently deceived with promises of a good job and a better life or, like St. Bakhita, are simply kidnapped.

Awareness of the problem is a critical tool to combat the crime of human trafficking, which is a worldwide problem. Due to the underreported nature of the crime, it is difficult to gather accurate statistics of those trafficked and exploited. Nevertheless, the Global Slavery Index reports that at any given moment there are nearly 50 million people living in a situation of modern slavery. Astonishingly, estimates show there are about one million people living in situations of slavery in the United States.

The bimonthly newsletter put out by the anti-trafficking office of the US bishops’ conference titled *Hidden in Plain Sight*, highlights how often we fail to see trafficking situations in our own communities. Hidden in plain sight is the best way to describe this reality, as they are sometimes hidden in nail salons, massage parlours or in sectors of the entertainment industry. In the UK, slavery victims can be found washing cars or working on farms - anywhere where itinerant labour is required, and people stay for short periods of time so as not to arise suspicion.

Awareness, prevention and detection are effective tools to eliminate human trafficking from our midst. How important it is that we keep watch for any signs of

those who may be ill-treated in their workplaces, understand what might constitute a human trafficking situation and then report it to the proper authorities who can then intervene.

It is admirable that many female religious orders have dedicated much of their resources, both personnel and financial, to combating this terrible scourge on our world society.

Most of those trafficked are women, but young and middle-aged men are among those trafficked.

**Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio is the retired bishop of the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York. He writes the column Walking With Migrants for The Tablet**

## A prayer to St Josephine Bakhita

St. Josephine Bakhita, you were sold into slavery as a child and endured untold hardship and suffering.

Once liberated from your physical enslavement, you found proper redemption in your encounter with Christ

and his Church.

O, St. Bakhita, assist all those trapped in a state of slavery; Intercede with God on their behalf so that they will be released from their chains of captivity. Those whom man enslaves, let God set free.

Provide comfort to survivors of slavery and let them look to you as an example of hope and faith. Help all survivors find healing from their wounds. We ask for your prayers and intercessions for those enslaved among us. Amen.

# St Josephine forces us to hear the survivors' stories

**Elizabeth Scalia**

When she was canonised by St. John Paul in 2000, Josephine Bakhita immediately became the patron saint of survivors of human trafficking.

Even a cursory read of her story more than explains why. Kidnapped from the Sudanese village where her father was a chieftain and ironically renamed 'Bakhita' (Arabic for the 'lucky' or 'fortunate' one) by her captors, Josephine endured such sustained trauma that she eventually forgot her own name.

Living in enslavement as both child and adult, Bakhita suffered through unspeakable physical abuses, including a horrific and repeated branding ritual where flour and salt would be rubbed into open wounds created by whips or sharp, thin blades.

In a life of long suffering, she once said these memories were "the most terrifying" to recall.

She was bought and sold five times, the last being to an Italian vice consul, Callisto Legnani, who eschewed corporal punishment and who apparently treated Josephine humanely enough that when he was required to return to Italy, she begged to be taken, too.

In Italy, Legnani gave Bakhita over to the wife of a friend, who assigned her nursemaid duties over a young daughter.

*"Living in enslavement as both child and adult, Bakhita suffered through unspeakable physical abuses, including a horrific and repeated branding ritual where flour and salt would be rubbed into open wounds created by whips or sharp, thin blades..."*

When, after several years, the woman found it necessary to return to Sudan, she put both child and nanny into the care and keeping of the Canossians sisters in Venice, where Bakhita had her first encounter with Christianity.

In Roberto Italo Zanini's book, *Bakhita: From Slave to Saint* (Ignatius Press, 2013), she is quoted as saying that these sisters "instructed me with heroic patience and introduced me to that God who from childhood I had felt in my heart without knowing who he was."

Eventually declared a free woman through a ruling by the Italian court, Bakhita was baptised and confirmed as 'Josephine Margaret' on the very same day. She decided to remain with the Canossian sisters, whose community she eventually joined.

Living mostly at the Canossian convent in Schio, not far from Milan, she worked as a seamstress and doorkeeper, which brought her into close contact with the local villagers.

It was these men and women who, upon her death in 1947, extolled Josephine's sanctity.

Writer Sarah Robsdottir dedicated her recently published young adult novel *Brave Water* (Voyager Comics and Publishing, 2022) to Josephine Bakhita. The story tells the harrowing tale of a

character not unlike the saint, a young female who is kidnapped from her African village while gathering water but manages, with help, to battle her way to freedom.

In an email interview, Robsdottir, who is Catholic, said she first became aware of the evils of human trafficking when a flyer arrived in her mailbox a decade ago. "It described the difficulties teenagers in developing nations face in order to acquire clean drinking water and how young girls between the ages of 12 and 15 are often targeted by human traffickers while on their way to the springs. I locked eyes with the girl on the cover of the flyer, and knew I had to tell her story."

Though the book is not based specifically on Bakhita's story, Robsdottir shared that between her initial ideas for the book and its eventual publication, "I did a lot of research on human trafficking, and I read and reread *From Slave to Saint* and sought St. Josephine Bakhita's intercession over the project."

The author has pledged at least 25 per cent of the proceeds from *Brave Water* to charities that fight human trafficking. "Presently my



**St Josephine Bakhita, patron saint of the victims of slavery/human trafficking**

'go-to' organisation is Cross Catholic Outreach (CCO), which fights human trafficking and also drills wells and cultivates job opportunities for those in need," she said.

Robsdottir's efforts are not merely material, but also spiritual. "I realise how limited I am in

raising awareness about this grave evil through my book and social media, and how little money I actually have to donate," she added, "so I take great comfort in praying the 'Hail, Holy Queen' every day. I trust in the powerful intercession of Our Lord's Mother in the lives of my brothers and sisters in chains."



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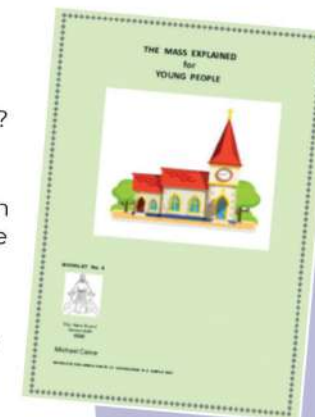
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# Benedict 'brave' to resign says pope in new book on his predecessor

**Magdalena Wolinska-Riedi**

While memories of the shocking moment when Pope Benedict XVI resigned on 11th February, 2013, are still fresh for the German pope's collaborators, it is Pope Francis who reflects on Benedict's historic decision in a newly published book interview.

"He was a man who had the courage to resign and, from that moment on, he continued to accompany the Church and his successor," the pope told Javier Martinez-Brocal, Vatican correspondent of the Spanish newspaper *ABC*.

In *Pope Francis: The Successor. My Memories of Benedict XVI*, set to be published in Spanish in April, the pontiff told Martinez-Brocal what it was like to live for a decade with the first pope emeritus in 600 years.

"Benedict and I had a very deep relationship and I want it to be known, I want it to be known without intermediaries," Pope Francis said.

Pope Francis admits in the book they disagreed at times. "Sometimes I would raise an issue; sometimes Benedict did. 'I am concerned about this problem,' one would say to the other," Pope Francis recalled. "We would talk about everything, very freely," he told Martinez-Brocal.

Italian Dr. Patrizio Polisca, Pope Benedict's personal physician, told OSV News that for him the first sign Benedict would resign was the conversation he had with the German pontiff prior to World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro.

"We were sitting together, just the two of us, talking about the imminent apostolic journey to Brazil for World Youth Day," Polisca said. "I suggested that we should make a video connection from Rome when he's there, because his health did not allow him any more to spend so many hours in flight. But he insisted that the pope must be present because people needed him. And that the pope would be there."

"I didn't understand what he meant," he recalled, "but when he suddenly asked a question: 'Will you take care of me later as well, until the end?' – then I understood."

He remained Pope Benedict's personal physician until the pope's death on 31st December, 2022.

Saverio Petrillo, director of the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo under three popes, said he asked himself on 28th February 2013, the day of Benedict's departure from the Vatican: "Where will he actually live? What will he wear? Will he appear in public any more?" he recalled.



The two popes share a greeting outside Benedict's residence in the Vatican's grounds. "The choice to live just 200 metres (650 feet) from the reigning pope was quite controversial... but Benedict simply wanted to continue serving the Church and his legal successor"

Pope Benedict was not the first pope in history to resign from his ministry. Celestine V abdicated in 1294, and the last pope to resign before Benedict was Gregory XII in 1415. But Joseph Ratzinger was the first who, after resigning, began to use the title of 'Papa Emeritus'.

Canon law mentions the possibility of the pope's resignation, but what happens after that has never been formalised.

"Therefore, we have the only case in the history, that of Benedict XVI, a retired pope, who became a precedent for the future canonical norm, and in fact only in the future will we see whether this example will be accepted as a model for

other popes," Fr Roberto Regoli, a church historian from Pontifical Gregorian University, said.

"The void rang in our ears. I went to work at the Apostolic Palace as I did every day, but there were no audiences, no official visits, the papal apartment was locked," Luciano Firmani, a longtime elevator operator at the Apostolic Palace, recalled about that memorable February. "There was no time of *'sede vacante'* like the one we had lived after the death of John Paul II. Benedict XVI was still alive and he stayed just 40 km (25 miles) away from the Vatican," Firmani recalled.

Castel Gandolfo director Petrillo

remembered March 2013 as a special month of the two popes.

"My driver, employed at the papal residence, had an absolutely unique privilege when he carried two popes in his car from the gardens to the palace here in Castel Gandolfo. They sat in the back seat next to each other. It was absolutely astonishing" he said.

Pope Benedict's decision to settle in a monastery in the Vatican Gardens was another unprecedented step in the history of papacy. For some, however, it was not the best one.

"The choice to live just 200 metres (650 feet) from the reigning pope was quite controversial, because from the very beginning it represented a kind of alternative," explained Gianfranco Svidercoschi, longtime Vatican journalist.

"People who were the opposers of Pope Francis and entered the Vatican in order to meet Pope Benedict were automatically perceived as those who were

building a front opposed to the reigning pope," he said.

Benedict's personal doctor, however, disagreed. "Pope Benedict himself with his discreet presence in the Vatican simply wanted to continue serving the Church and his legal successor," Polisca emphasised, clearly touched with emotions.

This is precisely one of the the German pontiff's virtues that Pope Francis admired, as he admitted in the new book. Pope Benedict "broadened the perspective," Pope Francis said of the relationship of the two popes. "He had that ability to broaden my perspective to help me make a good decision. He never said: 'I don't agree.' On the contrary, he acknowledged that 'this is fine. But we should also consider this other element,' Pope Francis explained to Martinez-Brocal.

"He broadened my perspective, always," Pope Francis said of Pope Benedict.



*"Benedict and I had a very deep relationship... sometimes I would raise an issue; sometimes Benedict did. 'I am concerned about this problem,' one would say to the other... we would talk about everything, very freely..."*

Left, Pope Francis prays with retired Pope Benedict XVI at the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, 23rd March, 2013. Shortly after his election, Pope Francis travelled by helicopter from the Vatican to Castel Gandolfo for a private meeting with the former pontiff.

## A VIEW FROM THE PEWS

# St Margaret, The Pearl of Scotland

I enjoy looking into the lives of saints and recently I was looking at the patron saints of the British Isles. I mentioned this to a friend who then asked me if I knew the patron saint of Scotland. I didn't hesitate and said St. Andrew. He said yes, but then asked if I'd heard of St. Margaret, the Pearl of Scotland. I hadn't and said so, which made me wonder why he'd asked.

This definition of 'Pearl of Scotland' intrigued me, and when I researched it, I found a saint who, around the time of William the Conqueror had lived in various countries. She was born in Hungary in 1045, yet spent most of her life living in and helping Scotland and its people. I found her story so interesting.

Margaret was an English princess, born in Hungary and was raised in a very religious court. Her father was the expatriate English Saxon prince, 'Edward in Exile'.

He was a possible successor to Edward the Confessor who was ill and as a result, the family returned to England, but her father died soon after landing in England. Margaret was still a child but was allowed to live in the English court where her brother Edgar was

considered a possible successor.

In 1066 Edward the Confessor died, but Harold Godwinson was elected king. At that time, William of Normandy also had a claim to the throne and invaded England. He defeated Harold at the Battle of Hastings and marched on London to take the throne. Although Margaret's brother Edgar had been named king he was never crowned, and William became king of all England.

Margaret and the family were some of the last remaining Saxon royals in England, and their position was now precarious. Fearing for their lives they fled north in the opposite direction to the advancing Normans. In 1068, Edgar, Margaret, Cristina and their mother fled to Northumberland, intent on sailing back to the Continent, but their ship was hit by storms, and they came ashore in Fyfe, Scotland. Here, they found a protector in King Malcolm III.

Margaret was a very pious young girl, spending time in prayer, devotional reading, and ecclesiastical embroidery. Malcolm was illiterate and not a religious person but admired her piety. He soon fell in love with her, and they married in 1070.

Margaret became the mother of three kings of Scotland, or four, if Edmund of Scotland (who ruled with his uncle, Donald III) is counted, and of Matilda of Scotland, queen consort of England.

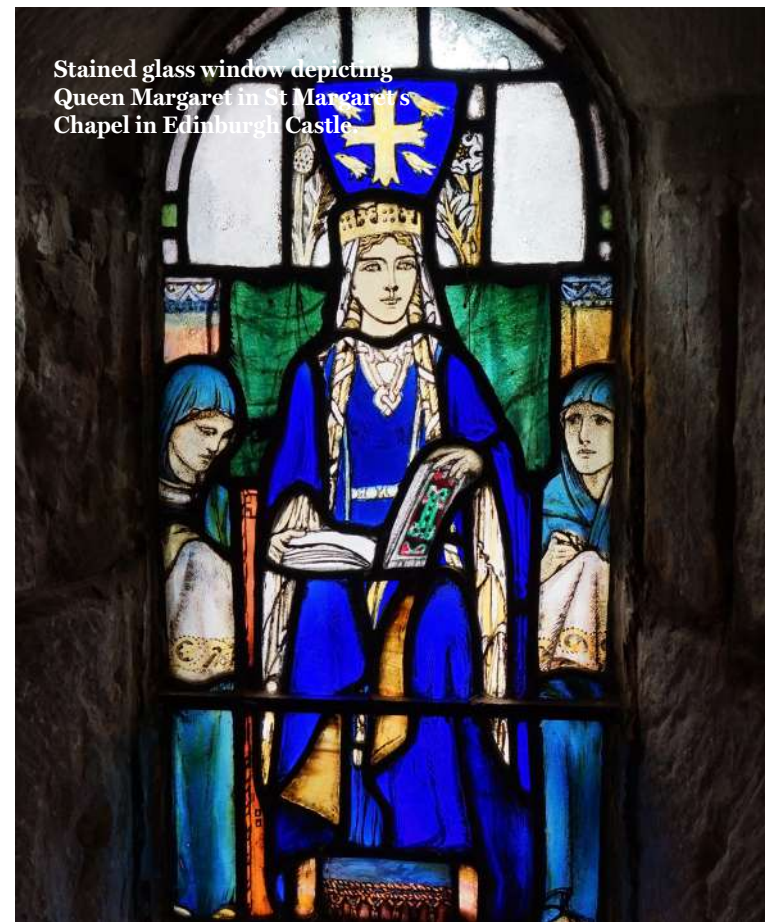
Queen Margaret was a strong, pure, noble character, who had very great influence over her husband, and through him over Scottish history, especially in its ecclesiastical aspects.

She even established a ferry across the Firth of Forth so that pilgrims could get to St. Andrews in Fife, resulting in the names of the two towns, South Queensferry and North Queensferry.

Her charitable works included serving orphans and the poor every day before she ate, and washing the feet of the poor in imitation of Christ. She rose at midnight every night to attend Mass. She used a cave on the banks of the Tower Burn in Dunfermline as a place of devotion and prayer. This became known as St. Margaret's Cave.

Her husband Malcolm III, and their eldest son Edward, were killed in the Battle of Alnwick against the English on 13th November 1093. Her son Edgar told his mother of their deaths. Margaret died three days later on 16th November 1093

MICHAEL CAINE  
ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, LYMM, CHESHIRE



Stained glass window depicting Queen Margaret in St. Margaret's Chapel in Edinburgh Castle

at Edinburgh Castle. The cause of death was reportedly grief.

I found reading about this 'Pearl of Scotland' very moving and how its people benefitted greatly from the many charitable and religious events attributed to her.

She must be one of Scotland's greatest, if not the greatest of its

revered Queens and female Saints.

**St Margaret, Pearl of Scotland**

**Feast day: 16th November, Patron of Scotland.**

**Canonised: by Pope Innocent IV in 1250.**

## JOURNEY IN FAITH

## A place set apart, and a time to listen

Lent has begun and the great Paschal feast approaches. These passing days are spent in different ways by many people. Some give up something, others take on a new challenge, we might try to read a little more or set aside greater time for prayer in a busy world. Yet in the end we prepare ourselves in an individual way, we become for a few weeks a small island of experience.

We move out to the margin and silently watch the surging sea break on the sand edge, smooth stones and shale, rolled and salt washed. We take some time to be alone with the Lord, time maybe to listen. That in itself can be an immense challenge, it takes courage to face squarely who we are. Open grassland, treeless and torn by rage, empty distance beyond the fence, where sea-wail and sky-howl touch the moon-cold night. This can be an awesome place of utter loneliness where words lead back in

loops unless abandonment is complete, this distant, desolate, island home.

By nature we are gregarious, enjoying the company of family and friends, the nights out, holidays, meals, as well as the day to day busyness of life. That gives rise to two different standpoints. Some long for the peace and quiet of solitude, worn to a frazzle by their style of living. Others find the experience threatening and feel uncomfortable without the buzz they have grown used to.

Maybe that is why liturgical action so often involves words and song, readings and sermons. The space between words, the silence of stillness, is lost. We can recapture that in the remoteness of an island when the dissolving darkness at the sky's edge makes way for a thread of orange, a breeze from the ocean. After the storm, the distant tide begins to turn and you can walk the shore again. There you can find a

personal place of solitude where only gulls wheel and screech, hunting for food, a place of isolation, where your voice, calling across the sand, receives no reply.

### A time to listen

In such time, we can find a place of peace. As slowly we walk the stirring sea-edge, expecting nothing, no-one calls our name.

But only a very few of us can manage the time of emptiness that an island offers. Lent has to be lived through within the constraints of a daily pattern that is largely unchanged. The considered time must be found through the familiar patterns of each day. Somewhere (beyond that island) a clock names the hour of early morning prayer. A nearby church or a local abbey gently reminds us of the time. There, only the sea swell moves ever closer. Between sunrise and evening we walk, each listening to the Word, returning to

the point of our departure, between the running water and the rising land.

We live the experience, each speaking the Word, returning to our hermitage. The many silent stones we gathered listen high on the hillside of our Island, await our return.

We have all met the occasional person who manages to live their life at a gentler pace, those who have slowed down and show a greater consideration for others, those whose response to a question or comment is not rushed and ill-thought through but values the quality of the exchange. In one of the Sherlock Holmes stories, Watson is told by his friend that "this is a two-pipe problem". In other words, let me think about that a bit.

Too often we are quick with our answers on matters of faith and morality when really we should look more at the options and

context. We easily forget that black and white are separated by many shades of grey.

Maybe that is what Lent gives us, more time than usual to ask the difficult questions, not of others but of ourselves. And if the answers are not immediate, then we should not worry. Not all questions have answers that are obvious, but the asking of the question at least means we have considered an issue important enough to question. Our waiting patiently is our search for faith.

One of my grandsons often started a discussion with the words "Grandad, I have a question!" Some were easy to answer, others demanded language and ideas that were beyond him at the time. Still others were unanswerable but were important. I had to get across to him that thinking that a question needs an answer didn't always provide one that came gift-wrapped.

CHRIS MCDONNELL



# Why did Jesus pray?

In the Gospel of Mark, we find an instance where Jesus retreats into the desert to pray (Mark 1: 35).

This act is not an isolated one. Throughout the scriptures, Jesus is depicted turning to prayer at pivotal moments – be it when faced with significant decisions such as selecting his apostles or during times of acute crisis, like the harrowing hours in the Garden of Gethsemane. Prayer was the vital conduit through which he sustained a deep and abiding communion with God the Father.

But what does Jesus's intimate relationship with the Father in prayer tell us about prayer's role in our own lives?

The question arises, particularly in an age of rationalism and self-reliance: Why resort to prayer when we possess the cognitive tools to navigate life's challenges? This perspective, however, overlooks the essence of human existence and the multifaceted nature of our being. Life, in its deepest sense, transcends the boundaries of logic and reason.

Author Flannery O'Connor, with her characteristic insight, referred to prayer as a "habit of the heart," a practice that engages with the

profound mysteries of existence that reason alone cannot unravel.

Prayer, then, is an acknowledgment of the limitations of human wisdom and an openness to divine guidance. It engages that part of us that is not satiated by empirical knowledge or logical deduction—the part that seeks connection with the divine in the quiet recesses of our souls. Scripture vividly illustrates that prayer is our lifeline to God, a channel through which we can express our deepest doubts, fears, and aspirations. Even in moments of profound doubt – exemplified by Jesus' poignant cry on the Cross, questioning why God had forsaken Him – there lies an implicit trust in God's will, an ultimate surrender expressed in the words he quotes from Psalm 31: 'Into your hands I commend my spirit.'

Jesus' practice of withdrawing from the world to pray underscores a timeless truth: the necessity of finding balance through solitude and reflection. The value of setting aside moments of quietude each day cannot be overstated. In the relentless pace of modern life, it is imperative to seek moments of contemplation, to immerse

ourselves in the mystery of God's will by meditating on the scriptures. It is in these moments of stillness that prayer takes root in our hearts, much like a seed in fertile soil, eventually bearing the fruits of peace, wisdom, and clarity in our lives.

The life of Jesus offers us a profound understanding of prayer's place within life's journey. Prayer is not an escape from reality but a deeper engagement with it. It enables us to navigate the complexities of life with grace, guided by the wisdom of the Divine.

It reminds us that, amidst the cacophony of our daily existence, the quiet habit of prayer can transform our hearts and minds, guiding us towards a path of peace and fulfilment.

*"Prayer as a 'habit of the heart,' a practice that engages with the profound mysteries of existence that reason alone cannot unravel"*



# Forgiveness is an attitude than can set you free from hurt

Perhaps the greatest hallmark of a Christian or anyone else for that matter is the ability to forgive. Letting go of an offence can be hard but holding on to it creates far worse problems. Bitterness can wreak havoc within the soul. It can tear you up inside like a cancer if you don't know how to get rid of it.

Forgiveness starts with being honest with yourself. That is a good attitude to have and, since you're not perfect, why judge others? You have no right to. Only the one without sin, scripture tells us, can cast stones (John 8: 7). Perhaps, you've believed a lie about what's bothering you, about what someone did to you, and have magnified it over time, making it bigger than what it is. Best to drop it, get over it, and move on.

Feelings, in themselves, are neither right nor wrong. It's what you do with them that matters. Let go of pesky feelings of hurt if you want to set yourself free. Then you can release the offender from his chains, and free yourself from being bound by them. Abraham Lincoln got it right when he said, "I conquered my enemies by making them my friends."

Have you ever noticed that the closer we live to other people, the easier it is to hurt them? We live closer to family members than



anyone else. Next to our families are our neighbours, and after our neighbour's are our fellow workers. Not only are we prone to hurt them, they in turn are prone to hurt us. A hurt coming from someone close destroys confidence and trust. That's why forgiveness is so

difficult, that's why it is the greatest of challenges, that's why it is a mark of strength. Only the strong can forgive for it takes strength to overcome negative feelings that inhibit growth. It takes courage to recognize you need to forgive the sins of others if you want to be free

of your own.

There is an interesting expression: "Nursing a grudge." Think of what it means, a grudge is a negative emotion that is about to die but you will not let it.

By nursing a grudge, you become a prisoner to your own hurt:

protecting it, holding on to it, and feeding it every bad medicine to keep it alive. Common sense tells us this is only a waste of time and energy. It does you no earthly good to nurse a grudge, so let it go and set yourself free.

Forgiveness is called a grace because it is out of this world. It would be foolish to refuse such a life-empowering grace in your life. When the scriptures say you need to forgive "70 times seven times" (Matthew 8 : 22), it means you must forgive all the time, no strings attached because God has forgiven you, no strings attached. This is the grace of forgiveness that comes from the heart.

Some people say, "I will forgive but I cannot forget." If by this is meant carrying resentment in the heart, rather than learning from the experience, it is not true forgiveness. The meaning of resentment is "to feel again." Forgiveness refuses to feel again the hurt, and makes it possible to get over it, forget about it and be renewed.

Learning to forgive is a choice. It is not magic. The residue of hurt may take time to wash off, but it will go away if you set yourself free by forgiving your offender.

Then you can get on with your life.



## SUNDAY WORSHIP

# Fasting and abstinence: It is more than the laws of the Church

**D.D. Emmons**

As the penitential season of Lent has begun we Catholics, as well as Christians everywhere, prepare to commemorate the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just a few weeks ago we celebrated his birth and now the Church begins our preparation to join him on his journey to Calvary. The scene of the Church becomes sombre, more intense, and terms such as contrition, conversion, penance, alms, fasting and abstinence dominate the liturgy.

The Benedictine Dom Prosper Guéranger wrote about Lent in *The Liturgical Year* (1887): ‘Lent, then, is a time consecrated, in a special way, to penance, and this penance is mainly practiced by fasting.’

Of fasting, ‘it is an abstinence that man voluntarily imposes on himself, as atonement for sin, and that, during Lent, is practised in obedience to the general laws of the Church.’

Pope Clement said: “The purpose of our fasting is not to weaken us physically or lose weight, but to create hunger, a spiritual void that only Christ can fill; by fasting from the heart, we express our love for God and recognise our sinfulness. Although unworthy, we pray that our sacrifices would be acceptable to him who suffered and gave his blood for us.”

Every Ash Wednesday we listen to the prophet Joel (2:12-14): ‘But even now – oracle of the Lord – return to me with all your heart, with fasting, crying and lamentation.’ It is not our clothes but our hearts that we must tear to reflect our pain. Our fast is not for man but for God.

Fasting and abstinence are penitential practices imposed by the Church that deny us food and drink during certain seasons and on certain days. These acts of self-denial prepare us to free ourselves from worldly distractions, to express our longing for Jesus, to imitate his suffering in some way.

Abstinence has traditionally meant not eating meat; for centuries, but no longer, that included meat byproducts too. Many will remember the calendar that hung in the kitchen and that included a fish symbol every Friday of the month. Catholics have never been forced to eat fish on days of abstinence but rather to avoid meat. While abstinence refers to the type or quality of food we eat, fasting refers to the volume or quantity of food consumed. It is contrary to the spirit of abstinence and fasting if we avoid steak but fill



our plate with fish.

In the Old Testament, God told Adam and Eve not to eat (abstain) from the Tree of Knowledge (Gen. 2:17). Queen Esther (Esther 4:15), in a successful attempt to save the Jews, ordered a three-day fast for herself and her court.

Jesus gave the example of our fasting when he went into the desert and fasted for 40 days and 40 nights (Mt 4:1-11). His entire life was marked by suffering and self-denial. In Mark 2:19-20, Jesus responds to the Pharisees’ accusation that his disciples do not fast: “Can the bridegroom’s friends fast when the bridegroom is with them? It is natural that they should not fast while they have the bridegroom with them. The time will come when the husband will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.” Once Jesus was not with them, the Apostles fasted and recommended fasting to new Christians, as evidenced in the books of Acts and the Epistles.

In the second century, fasting

was integrated into Christian worship. The Jews had long fasted on Mondays and Thursdays but Christians preferred to fast on Wednesdays, because that was the day of Christ’s betrayal, and on Fridays, the day he was crucified. By the 4th century, Saturday had replaced Wednesday as a fast day, and over the centuries fasting was eliminated from all Saturdays.

Fasting before Easter was practised in those early centuries, but the times and extent varied. Until the 9th century, fasting meant one meal a day and then only enough food to sustain life. Those who fasted often gave the food they did not eat to others in need.

St John wrote in 1 Jn 3:17: ‘If someone lives in abundance, and seeing his brother in need, closes his heart to him, how will the love of God remain in him?’ The philosopher Aristides, around the year 128, explaining how Christians lived, noted: “And if there is a poor or needy man among them... he

fasts two or three days to give the needy the necessary food” (*Apology*, XV).

In the Middle Ages, the number of fasting days during the liturgical year had increased and sometimes reached 70 days. Sundays and solemnities have never been days of fasting. Until the mid-20th century, Catholic missals identified fasting on the weekdays of Lent, ember days, the vigils of Pentecost, All Saints’ Day, the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. Abstinence was required every Friday, Ash Wednesday, the vigils of the Assumption and Christmas. All this would change.

In 1966, Pope Saint Paul VI significantly modified the laws of fasting through his apostolic constitution *Paenitemini*, in which he affirmed some practices and gave some authority to national conferences of bishops around the world. The changes of Saint Paul VI were incorporated into the Code of Canon Law of 1983.

Abstinence and fasting are

required on both Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On those days, a full meal is allowed along with two other smaller meals. Catholics subject to the law of abstinence include all persons over 14 years of age; The law of fasting includes people from the age of 18 to 60.

Canon Law, the Catechism and the precepts of the Church, explain our fasting obligations. Before Lent, almost all Catholic parishes emphasise the rules and rewards of fasting and abstinence. A fast of one hour is always required before receiving Communion.

In addition to Friday abstinence during Lent, every Friday is a day of penance (Canon Law, n. 1250). According to Canon 1253, the conference of bishops of each nation can substitute abstinence and fasting for other forms of penance.

The American bishops have maintained the obligation to fast and abstain on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and to abstain on the Fridays of Lent.

They have granted American Catholics the option of doing another form of penance on Fridays outside of Lent instead of abstaining from eating meat.

The bishops focus us on Friday’s self-denial, along with works of charity and mercy, remembering the passion of Christ.

*Pope Clement said: “The purpose of our fasting is not to weaken us physically or lose weight, but to create hunger, a spiritual void that only Christ can fill; by fasting from the heart, we express our love for God and recognise our sinfulness. Although unworthy, we pray that our sacrifices would be acceptable to him who suffered and gave his blood for us.”*

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS...

JENNA MARIE COOPER



# Counting down the days to Easter

**Q: We are now in the season of Lent. I understand that the 40 days of Lent do not include Sundays, because every Sunday is a 'little Easter' when we remember and celebrate Jesus' resurrection. I hear people say it is 'cheating' if one does not abstain on Sundays from whatever one 'gives up' during Lent, but I wonder why one would fast on the happy day of Sunday?**

**A:** The time of Lent is not meant so much to provide us with a literal 40 days of penance, but rather to recall Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the desert.

Let's look at the numbers: from Ash Wednesday to the Wednesday of Holy Week we have six full weeks plus one day. This adds up to 43 days; if we count the Paschal Triduum - Holy Thursday - Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, as part of Lent rather than as its own mini liturgical season (which is a bit more technically accurate), this adds another three days, bringing our total up to 46.

But if we subtract the six Sundays of Lent from this total, that leaves us at 40 days even. In that sense, Sundays do not numerically count towards the days of penance preceding Easter.

However, Sundays during Lent are still very much a part of this liturgical season. At Mass on Lenten Sundays, the priest is still vested in penitential purple, and the readings each year are specifically chosen to help draw us into the mystery of Christ's saving passion and death.

At the same time, Sundays retain their character as a day of joy and rest in the Lord. As you note, Sunday is a day which has always been set aside each week specifically to recall Easter. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: 'Jesus rose from the dead 'on the first day of the week.' Because it is the 'first day,' the day of Christ's Resurrection recalls the first creation. ...For Christians it has become the first of all days, the first of all feasts, the Lord's Day.'

In our current Code of Canon Law, while canon 1247 reiterates the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays, it also pointedly directs the faithful to 'abstain from those works and affairs which hinder' the 'joy proper to the Lord's day.' And, notably to those of us who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Scripture reading for Sunday Lauds (or Morning Prayer) throughout the Lenten season exhorts us: "Today is holy to the Lord your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep; for today is holy to our Lord. Do not be



A family is pictured in a file photo watching a virtual Mass at their home.

saddened this day, for rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength!" (Nehemiah 8:9, 10)

Practically, should we take a break from our Lenten sacrifices on Sundays? The answer, like so many things related to the spiritual life, is that it depends on our own individual situation and spiritual needs. Aside from the relatively few required days of fasting and abstinence from meat, our personal Lenten sacrifices are not strictly required by the Church's law to begin with.

So, if we prayerfully discern that God is calling us to enter into the joyful spirit of Sunday more fully-or that we will be better able to make our sacrifices with love and devotion if we refresh ourselves with a weekly break-then no, it's not "cheating" to relax our Lenten penances on Sundays. But it's also perfectly reasonable for another person to discern that keeping up their Lenten sacrifices throughout the time of Lent will be more spiritually fruitful for them in their own life.

**Q: In the past few weeks, due to extreme weather, I've missed Mass a couple of times. My parish has a Facebook channel, so I watched the services there instead. I wasn't able to receive Communion. In talking to the priest, though, he said that in such situations, a person can receive invisibly or symbolically, and either way still be fed. Could you comment?**

**A:** Watching a livestream or pre-recorded Mass is not the same

as attending Mass in person and receiving Communion. But given the circumstances you describe, it sounds like watching Mass online was still a good way to be spiritually nourished in that particular instance.

Most Catholics are aware of our 'Sunday obligation,' that is, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and certain major feast days that might fall on other days of the week. As Canon 1247 of the Code of Canon Law states: 'On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass.'

Sometimes 'participate' is translated from the original Latin *participandi* as 'assist at Mass,' which underscores the idea that the lay faithful are meant to have a "fully conscious, and active participation" in liturgical celebrations (See *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, No. 14).

A true, fully conscious and active participation in the Mass is understood to require our literal, physical presence at the liturgy. Because of this, watching Mass on a screen would not fulfill the Sunday obligation.

That being said, the Church intends for all of our obligations to be rooted in common sense, and a foundational principle of the law in general is that nobody can be bound to do what is impossible. Therefore, if you are truly unable to attend Mass in person, whether due to inclement weather, illness, being at a great geographical distance from a Catholic church etc, then you are not bound by the Sunday

obligation as long as these circumstances persist.

Yet even if you are unable, and thus not required, to attend Mass, the commandment to 'keep holy the Sabbath day' still applies, and in that case we should still do what we can to keep Sunday as an especially restful and prayerful day. In fact, Canon 1248, Paragraph 2 tells us: 'If participation in the eucharistic celebration becomes impossible because of the absence of a sacred minister or for another grave cause, it is strongly recommended that the faithful take part in a liturgy of the word...or that they devote themselves to prayer for a suitable time alone, as a family, or, as the occasion permits, in groups of families.'

So my own thought is that attentively watching a broadcast Mass and devoutly following the readings and prayers would be very much in line with the personal prayer time Canon 1248 recommends for circumstances where in-person Mass attendance is not possible.

Similarly, the graces attached to receiving the real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in Holy Communion is not something that can be replaced by an online broadcast. But there are many beautiful prayers in our Catholic tradition for a 'spiritual communion,' where we express our longing to receive Jesus at least spiritually, even if we cannot receive him physically in the Eucharist.

It should also be noted that Catholics are, strictly speaking, only technically required to receive

Holy Communion once per year during the Easter season (See Canon 920). It is perfectly legitimate to attend Mass and refrain from receiving Communion. And there are some circumstances when a Catholic should attend Mass to fulfill the Sunday obligation but not partake in the Eucharist, such as when they have committed a serious sin but have not yet received absolution in the sacrament of penance, or when they have not kept the required one-hour fast before Communion.

**Q: My son is in a relationship with a Protestant girl. If my son married outside of the Catholic Church, is he not permitted to take the Eucharist? I am praying that the girl consents to have a Catholic matrimony, but that is uncertain for now.**

**A:** For the most part, Catholics who do not abide by the Church's marriage laws are not permitted to receive holy Communion. But there are a lot of considerations involved in interfaith marriages, and so the upshot is that your son's life of faith within the Church is certainly not a lost cause due to his current relationship.

In general, Catholics and only Catholics are required by canon law to be married in a Catholic ceremony, what canon lawyers refer to technically as 'marrying according to canonical form'. A person is bound by this uniquely Catholic obligation if they were ever Catholic at any point, since the rule of thumb is "once a Catholic, always a Catholic." So, if a person was baptised Catholic as an infant but later drifted away, and even if they eventually committed to practicing another religion, they would still be considered bound to canonical form.

Canonical form is an important concept to understand and be aware of because if a Catholic does not marry according to canonical form, this marriage would be considered not only illicit, but also invalid.

However, it is possible in some circumstances for a Catholic to receive a "dispensation from canonical form" in some situations. This is a special concession from the local diocesan bishop which allows a Catholic to marry in a non-Catholic ceremony

All of this might sound rather complicated, but typically this can all be discussed and worked out with the Catholic party's parish priest during marriage preparation. Parish priests usually take care of requesting whatever dispensations or permissions might be necessary.

■ SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY

VIRGINIA BELL

# Lent practices of Laudato Si' Animators

The Laudato Si Animators, a group who are trying to implement environmental, sustainable lifestyles, are striving to make a difference in Lent – and change hearts so that love for God's creation is expanded.

Lent began this year on 14th February and will last until 28th March. My daughter, a very orthodox Catholic, and I have a difference of opinion about what are the best kinds of penances in Lent. She agrees with the traditional idea of temporarily giving up something one enjoys.

I feel that this is a wasted opportunity. My daughter argues, as does the Church, that it strengthens one's will power as well as makes an offering to God. My choice is to give up something that one should not be consuming, getting into the habit of doing without it during Lent, then continuing without it after Lent. Or start doing something that you should be doing, and keep on after Lent.

This regular discussion with my daughter came about again this year, and caused me to wonder what were the thoughts of my fellow animators concerning Lent. Did they have views about what people could or should be doing? If penance, what sort of penance? If resolutions, what sort of resolutions? Is it time to bring something new to Lent, or are the traditional actions the best?

**Who are the Laudato Si' Animators?**

The Animators are people, mainly Catholics, who have been trained by the Vatican-backed Laudato Si' Movement to inform and inspire others to engage in dialogue and action on the current environmental crises.

I think my favourite option for living Lent, given the massive over-consumption that the world is drowning under, is to buy nothing at all that isn't essential. And if we carried that on after Lent – what a success.

Having garnered views from the Animators, I find that one of them, Anita, shares my antipathy for over-consumption, and recommends that we don't buy more than we need. She has joined her parish's project of a community garden where they grow food for themselves.

Clare, while appreciating the positive sacrifice of buying nothing, prefers "to do something extra, something which has often become a part of my everyday life". One example she gives is 'Meditation Monday', the aim of which is to manage stress, improve mood and



Menchu's Laudato Si posters in her local church. Photo: Menchu

find peace in one's daily life.

Another extra she does is a Lenten Pilgrimage, "where local people are invited to attend a different denominational church each Sunday afternoon."

John likes to do a variety of positive things, so he joins ecumenical Lent groups and reads daily spiritual writings. To add to the variety, he also gives up alcohol. But he feels that the best thing would be to do practical action and outreach, such as helping refugees.

Geraldine is not so keen on "sudden, major change". She feels that slow, gradual change suits some people better, despite her having successfully given up things permanently after giving them up during Lent - sugar for example. She would encourage both sacrificial penance and doing something extra.

Susan believes that Lent is a good time "to examine our lifestyles and change our hearts so that love for God's creation is expanded". Especially, she says, to consider how ethical the products we buy are.

**Restraint in buying**

The Animators are agreed on restraint in buying being a good commitment for Lent, and Kevin adds that he tries not to buy anything new at all, reminding us that plenty of items, especially clothes, are available 'pre-loved'.



Along with other Animators, he also likes to give something up – Guinness in his case – and to add spiritual activity, like going to Mass as much as possible.

Menchu is all for not buying anything unnecessary in Lent, and also for continuing the habit permanently. The Ignatian Solidarity Network has a Lenten No-Buy Challenge initiative which she joins in with. She previously committed to not eating processed food, and changed to a vegetarian diet, which she continued after Lent.

She was very busy last Lent organising a Laudato Si' Lent Awareness Campaign and a Laudato Si' Lent Day in her parish,

as well as presenting Laudato Si' Stations of the Cross online. She also joined in with several other Lenten activities. She encourages us to make our own poster display for Lent – see photos.

Stephen agrees with the idea of Lent being about doing more. "Giving up our precious time for others can be penitential, but so often brings unexpected spiritual benefits", he pointed out. He sees giving up treats as "an opportunity to give more resources to others", which is making something negative into something positive.

Like Susan, he thinks it's important to find out how ethical are the brands we buy. He subscribes to *Ethical Consumer* magazine, and advises googling the name of a product or company followed by ownership.

I would recommend also, before buying a product, to Google it, adding the words 'ecologically friendly' to find the greenest version.

**Spiritual exercises**

David agrees with Stephen about positive thinking: "thinking in a positive way and creating awareness is the way to go".

He also likes to add a spiritual exercise – in his case, the Stations of the Cross. Another spiritual exercise that he recommends is a nature walk, as a "helpful reflection on creation".

While Sean agrees with the tradition of almsgiving during Lent, and donates to various campaign and charity groups, he thinks Lent is also an opportunity to spend more time in prayer and discernment, such as studying the Mass readings.

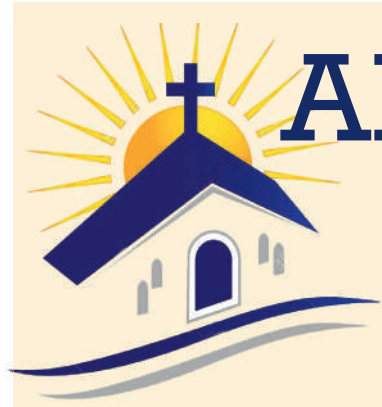
He prefers to think of resolutions as 'objectives', and to be realistic about them by using the SMART technique - Specific, Measurable, Accurate, Realistic, Time Related. He sounds a smart man.

One surprise from this survey is that no-one seems keen on fasting. Not only is fasting traditional in Lent, it can have positive health benefits.

It seems to me that we Animators agree with each other in most ways – buying little, having a positive attitude when giving up things, continuing after Lent if we can, adding a spiritual activity. So, a mixture of the old and the new perhaps.

It's typical of the Animators that the new embraces concern for the natural environment.

**• Virginia Bell is a member of Laudato Si animators, a group who are trying to encourage and implement environmental, sustainable lifestyles in the light of Catholic teaching. The Animators work to bring Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si' to life and care for our common home.**



# AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION

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



## Southwark parish praised as beacon of racial inclusion

St Margaret's of Scotland parish, Carshalton Beeches, in the archdiocese of Southwark, is a trailblazer in promoting racial and cultural inclusion.

The parish has been transformed with images and statues of saints from different cultural backgrounds and races, as well as depictions of the Blessed Virgin Mary with different racial appearance and cultural dress, just as she has appeared across the world.

The parish is led by Fr Anthony Uche, originally from Nigeria, who has overseen the changes together with the racial and cultural inclusion group he established.

Fr Anthony said: "The face of the Church must be seen in all we do."

The impact has been extraordinary, with a previously predominantly white parish becoming much more diverse and welcoming.

One of his parishioners is Anthony, his wife Joy and their six children, who have recently joined the parish and are already fully involved in the local community. Anthony said: "You know how it can feel busy in London, but we always feel at home and okay here. We are welcome to Mass, to the church and the parish."

Joy added: "We have a large family of six, which is an apostolate in itself. So the impact of the parish on them makes a huge difference in the community and we hope that can impact their friends."

The Archdiocese of Southwark is the first Catholic diocese in England and Wales to establish a Commission for Promoting Racial and Cultural Inclusion. Its purpose



Fr Anthony Uche greets a young parishioner

is to support engagement with marginalised communities and promote opportunities for growth in understanding issues of diversity and inclusion.

The archdiocese is encouraging parishes to set up their own cultural and inclusion groups, which St Margaret's of Scotland did with extraordinary success.

Canon Victor Darlington, the chair of the Commission for Promoting Racial and Cultural Inclusion, whose visit to St Margaret's inspired their work, said: "The Catholic Church has a crucial role to play in speaking out against racism and promoting racial inclusion in our communities."

"Racism is a sin and has no place

in our world. As followers of Christ, it is our duty to welcome all people, regardless of race or background, into our Church and show them there is a place for them.

"That's why the work of St Margaret's is so important, because when people go to a parish they should not only see white images but also people who look like them. Jesus loves us all and we in turn must love and welcome all."

A short film on the work of the parish, highlighting their work can be seen on YouTube.

Yasmine, parishioner and member of the racial and cultural diversity group, said: "When I think of racial equality, I think of fairness to everybody regardless of

what race they're from. When you think of what we're meant to be as Christians, we're called to love everybody, regardless of race.

"When Jesus came down, that was his whole message. It wasn't about one particular set of people, it was everyone. If we want to be true followers of Christ, you have to realise every single person is important."

It's making a big difference to the younger members of the parish, too. Cherise, a member of the Youth Choir at St Margaret's, reflecting on the diversity represented in the parish in statutes and pictures said: "To have so many depictions of people we admire in our own light, especially being brown, is so

Yasmine, a member of the racial and cultural inclusion group



wonderful because you can see them as role models but also feel included and accepted. I think that's what is so unique and special about our parish."

Paul Cavadino, co-chair of the Racial and Cultural Inclusion group, emphasised the importance of such a group for promoting racial and cultural diversity. Paul said: "Promoting racial and cultural diversity does not happen by accident, it needs a group which looks systemically at all the worship, the activities, the different ministries in the parish and making sure we're promoting racial and cultural diversity across everything we do."

"God loves everyone equally, from every culture and background around the world. If we're not reflecting that in our activities and in our worship then we are failing."

Andrea Fernandes, co-chair of the group, said that the St Margaret's experience had shown her the need for parishes to take additional measures to promote racial and cultural inclusion. She said: "I've realised that it's important that extra steps are taken so that people do feel included, they do feel represented and they do feel welcomed."

## Diocese receives high praise for safeguarding work

The Diocese of East Anglia has been awarded a judgement of Comprehensive Assurance by the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) in an audit of its safeguarding provision. That is the second highest possible grade.

Christine Quinn, Chair of the Safeguarding Sub-committee of the diocesan trustees, said: "This is one of the first audits the CSSA had carried out since being established and was in fact a pilot, for which the diocese volunteered."

"The auditors gave us an

judgement of Comprehensive Assurance, which is the second highest possible grade they could have awarded. The report is helpful to the diocese, both in giving assurance about what works and giving guidance on how things could be even better.

"The role of the parish safeguarding reps was a major contributor to this remarkable judgement. When the auditors were feeding back to the diocese they informed us that the response rate of surveys returned

by PSRs (70 per cent) was the highest they had seen. This gave them a high level of confidence in the information they gathered from them."

Bishop of East Anglia Peter Collins said: "I would like to express immense gratitude for the generous and extensive service of all those working within safeguarding in the diocese. This report is a testimony to the fruit of their hard work, and the open co-operation with rigorous scrutiny

shows our willingness to continue improving and strengthening our work of safeguarding.

"I thank the safeguarding co-ordinator, Mick Thurley, and the safeguarding administrator, Rebecca Bretherton, for their exemplary work, not only in facilitating the audit itself, but in all that they do.

"I also thank the many parish safeguarding representatives, without whom none of this would be possible. Their generous efforts to ensure a safe environment in

our worshipping communities is a powerful witness to a life lived in the light of the Gospel, and inspires us all to be more credible witnesses to the kindness and healing our faith can bring.

"We continue to remember in prayer those who bear the wounds of abuse, and renew our commitment to ensuring that we maintain peaceful and loving Christian communities to which everybody, particularly young and vulnerable members, can safely belong."

## Quartet of canons welcomed to new roles

On Tuesday, 6th February, the celebration of the Installation of four Canons took place at the Metropolitan Cathedral of St Chad, Birmingham.

Mgr. Mark Crisp, parish priest of Blessed Carlo Acutis, Wolverhampton and Fr Raymond Corbett, Diocesan Chancellor and Catholic Chaplain to Aston University were installed as Chapter Canons, while Fr Gary Buckby, parish priest of Our Lady & St Rose of Lima, Weoley Castle and St Peter, Bartley Green, Dean of the Cathedral and South Birmingham Deanery and Episcopal Vicar for Religious; and Fr Douglas Lamb, parish priest of St Ambrose, Kidderminster, were installed as Honorary Canons.

Their duties will include advising the archbishop about the life and

mission of the archdiocese as well as helping care for the Cathedral and its liturgical life.

Mass was celebrated by Mgr Canon Tom Farrell, in the presence of Archbishop Bernard Longley.

Mgr Tim Menezes, Cathedral Dean and Secretary of the Chapter, read the nominations for the four Canons who then made the promise of Obedience and the Profession of Faith.

The archbishop presented them with a copy of the Chapter Statutes and formally admitted them to their new roles.

Monsignor Mark Crisp gave an excellent and beautiful homily about St Chad's Cathedral, and on the whole question of the prayerfulness of the temple of God and God's presence with us always.



The four new canons, with Archbishop Longley and Mgr Mark Crisp

## Runcorn school supports local community with superb foodbank donations

St Augustine's Catholic Primary School and Nursery, Runcorn, ran a remarkable foodbank campaign that will help hundreds of local people access essential food parcels.

Staff, pupils, parents, and carers were encouraged to contribute anything they could for the Runcorn and District Foodbank.

In total, the school collected an impressive 185.65kg of food. That means over 530 meals can be



provided to those in need.

With the increasing costs of food, household items, energy and more, many people have unfortunately been impacted by the rising cost of living and now rely on foodbanks.

The Runcorn and District Foodbank has experienced a big rise in demand, so the donation comes at the perfect time.

Mr John Marciniak, interim headteacher of St Augustine's Catholic Primary School and Nursery, said: "We are so proud that our foodbank campaign was such a huge success. Our pupils have really enjoyed getting involved, and we're extremely grateful for the contributions made by our staff, parents, carers and the wider school community."

"Giving back and looking after one another is an important aspect of school life at St Augustine's."



## Coventry school delighted with LiveSimply Award

Jane Lavery

The pupils and staff of St John Fisher Primary School, Coventry, have received CAFOD's LiveSimply Schools Award, having shown that they know how to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the world's poorest communities.

It took them quite a long time, and they had a lot of help from many people, so they decided to invite them into school at a special assembly to say 'Thank you' for all the help they had been given.

Among them was their MP, Colleen Fletcher, who had received many letters from the pupils before

COP 28, asking her to read Pope Francis's letter to the summit, asking for more work to be done to solve the climate emergency.

She replied to them all, promising to read the letter and to write to the Prime Minister about it.

Another important visitor was Catherine Evans, community representative from the Co-op, as the local Co-op branch had worked with the children on litter-picking, providing pickers for them. She also told the children about the benefits of Fairtrade products.

The children also learnt about food poverty in their local area,

with thanks to the the parish SVP, which was represented by John and Mary Davey, the Halo Food Bank represented by Dee Ward, and Miss Kaur from Langar Aid, all of whom thanked the children for their help and support.

Finally, CAFOD volunteer Jane Lavery thanked the children for the money they had raised for CAFOD. She also said how delighted she was to hear that they were going to continue to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor, and presented the school with its GIFT (Grow in Faith Team), along with the LiveSimply plaque.

St Joseph's College, Stoke-on-Trent is looking for a new

## Headteacher

Required for September 2024 Contract: Full time/Permanent

Salary: Group 7 (L24 – upwards of £83,081)

A highly competitive salary for a suitably qualified and experienced applicant



Create a lasting legacy through your positive impact on St Joseph's College, a beacon of excellence with its own distinctive charm!

As we bid farewell to our retiring head at the end of the academic year, we are seeking an exceptional individual to step into this coveted role. Situated in the heart of Stoke on Trent, St Joseph's College is a popular and oversubscribed co-educational Catholic Academy providing places for both Catholic and non-Catholic pupils aged 11-19 and is part of the Edmund Rice family of schools. Our outstanding school is known for its unique character, diversity and commitment to providing an exceptional educational experience. This is your golden opportunity to come and be the guiding force in preserving and enhancing the remarkable spirit of St Joseph's College!

### The successful candidate will:

- Be a practising Catholic with a strong faith commitment, who embraces the development of the Catholic life and mission of the academy.
- Have a proven strategic leadership and management skills and experience at Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher level
- Have the ability to build relationships with staff, pupils, parents, governors and others working in the Laetare Catholic Multi-Academy Trust (CMAT)
- Be able to respond and adapt effectively to changing circumstances, maintaining high levels of performance
- Inspire the whole community, build successful teams and work collaboratively to achieve success.

### In return, we can offer:

- An ethos rooted in social justice, concern for the whole person and striving for excellence
- A highly supportive, effective and ambitious Governing Board
- A school staff of supportive, creative and talented teaching and support staff
- A commitment to evidence-informed practice, subject knowledge development.
- Excellent relationships between staff and our able and well-behaved students
- A flourishing sixth form of 400
- A confidential Employee Assistance Programme which is extended to members of your family.

Visits to St Joseph's College are encouraged and can be arranged by contacting Mrs Fiona Uschmann, HR Manager on 01782 418831 or via email: [fuschmann@stjosephsmail.com](mailto:fuschmann@stjosephsmail.com)

TO APPLY: Please complete the Catholic Education Service application form, which can be downloaded from our website: [www.stjosephstrentvale.com](http://www.stjosephstrentvale.com) and email to Mrs Fiona Uschmann [fuschmann@stjosephsmail.com](mailto:fuschmann@stjosephsmail.com) along with completed consent to references form, disclosure form and recruitment monitoring form.

■ Closing Date: 9am, Monday 26 February 2024 ■ Interviews will be held on 7 March and 13 March 2024

# Celebrating Romero Week 2024

## Clare Dixon offers an update on celebrations to mark St Oscar Romero Week

This year the Archbishop Romero Trust is delighted to welcome Dr Raymond Perrier as our guest speaker at the annual Romero ecumenical service at St Martin in the Fields, Trafalgar Square, London, commemorating the 44th anniversary of Saint Oscar Romero's martyrdom. Dr Raymond is the Director of the Denis Hurley Centre in Durban, South Africa, named in honour of Archbishop Denis Hurley.

The service will take place at 11am on Saturday, 16th March and the title of this year's address is "Prayerful and Prophetic Resilience in the Face of Injustice – Archbishops Oscar Romero and Denis Hurley".

Like St Oscar Romero, Archbishop Hurley was a fearless defender of human rights and social justice in his home country. He was undoubtedly the most significant Catholic leader in South Africa of the 20th century, a courageous and outspoken opponent of its apartheid regime for 50 years. He was once dubbed an "ecclesiastical Che Guevara" by South African politician Alan Paton.

He was a participant in the Second Vatican Council, which he regarded as the highlight of his life, and throughout



his ministry he was a champion of the reforms and spirit of the Council.

Born in Cape Town in 1915 of Irish parents, Denis Hurley became the youngest Catholic bishop in the world in 1947 at just 31, and Archbishop of Durban in 1951. He retired as archbishop in 1992, becoming chancellor of the University of Natal until 1998. He continued to work as parish priest of Durban's Emmanuel Cathedral until well into his 80s and died 20 years ago in February 2004.

In the ten years of its existence, the Denis Hurley Centre in Durban has established a reputation as a place of care, education and community responding to the issues of refugees, drug

addiction and homelessness.

Prior to becoming its director five years ago, Raymond Perrier was head of the Jesuit Institute South Africa, working to bring a faith perspective to debates on social issues.

For six years he was a trainee Jesuit priest and spent two years living and working in a refugee camp in Uganda with the Jesuit Refugee Service. After leaving the Jesuits, Raymond became the head of communities for CAFOD working with Catholic parishes and schools across England and Wales.

Of Indian parents, Raymond was born and educated in the UK. He has extensive professional experience in the private sector, with degrees from Oxford, London and a doctorate from the University of KwaZulu Natal.

Romero events this year will be hosting two speakers. As well as Raymond Perrier, the other is Jan Graffius, Curator of Collections and Historic Libraries at Stonyhurst College and a Trustee of the Romero Trust.

Since 2007, Jan has been involved in a major conservation project in El Salvador working on the Martyr Vestments of St Oscar Romero and items belonging to the Jesuit Martyrs of the University of Central America.

**Clare Dixon is a trustee of the Archbishop Romero Trust**

## ROMERO WEEK 2024 EVENTS:

**FRIDAY, 8TH MARCH: EXETER**  
6.30pm Mass, followed by talk by Raymond Perrier at Blessed Sacrament Parish, 29 Fore Street, Heavitree, Exeter EX1 2QJ

**WEDNESDAY, 13TH MARCH: GLASGOW**  
7pm Gonzaga Lecture at St Aloysius College. Raymond Perrier.

**THURSDAY, 14TH MARCH: LEEDS**  
7pm Leeds Trinity University. Raymond Perrier.

**SATURDAY, 16TH MARCH: LONDON**  
11am at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London. Annual ecumenical service to mark the anniversary of the martyrdom of Archbishop Romero. Speaker: Raymond Perrier.

**WEDNESDAY, 20TH MARCH: LONDON and GLASGOW**  
12.30pm Mass at St George's Cathedral, Southwark with Archbishop John Wilson. Presentation to schools who have achieved the Romero Award. 7pm Gonzaga Lecture at St Aloysius College, Glasgow. Jan Graffius - 'Resilience in the face of injustice: Romero and the Jesuit Martyrs'.

**THURSDAY, 21 MARCH: LIVERPOOL**  
7pm Anniversary Mass, followed by talk by Jan Graffius - 'Drawing us closer to Christ and the saints: Relics and their meaning for us'. St Oswald and St Edmund Arrowsmith, Ashton-in-Makerfield WN4 9NP.

Full details at: <http://www.romerotruster.org.uk/news/romero-week-2024>

## The Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst

# Petition: the third element of prayer

**The Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst is continuing to share its reflections on various aspects of Christian prayer. This week the topic is 'petition.'**

The second part of the Catechism's definition of prayer, "the requesting of good things from God," is exactly what petition means. Indeed, for St Thomas Aquinas, petition is the very essence of prayer. While all four parts of prayer make our address to God whole and complete, petition takes the former two parts (oration and thanksgiving) and makes our cry truly unique and particular by placing a concrete request before God.

For St Thomas, a true prayer "implores a superior" and is directed toward "determinate things," such as "earthly benefits" for oneself and for others. More than just calling out to God and giving thanks for past deeds, a true prayer from the heart looks ahead, confidently trusting that the Lord who provided in the past will continue to provide for present and future needs.

Thus, prayer does not only

involve a general reaching out to God, nor a mere commemoration of past events, but must be embodied in the present moment by asking something of the Lord. Thus, the contingency of our very existence, which is more implicit in oration, is made clear and exact when we formulate a petition. It grounds and radicalises the humility expressed in our first cry to God, for through our petitions, we acknowledge our specific needs in the here and now.

One of the most notable aspects of the liturgical reform after the Second Vatican Council is the reintroduction of collective petitions in the Mass. Such petitions had always been part of Mass, but in the course of history their usage came to be confined to the liturgy of Good Friday.

Now, at each Mass, we bring our concrete needs collectively to God in the form of the Prayers of the Faithful or bidding prayers, asking that the fruits of the Mass might be extended to our families, our communities, to the whole Church, and to the world at large.

Yet, just as petition forms the

essence of prayer in general, it is also central to the Mass itself, our highest prayer. Let us take the Roman Canon, or Eucharistic Prayer 1, as an example.

Before the consecration, the priest says: "Be pleased, O God, we pray, to bless, acknowledge, and approve this offering in every respect; make it spiritual and acceptable, so that it may become for us the Body and Blood of your most beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ."

And again after the consecration: "In humble prayer we ask you, almighty God: command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty, so that all of us, who through this participation at the altar receive the most holy Body and Blood of your Son, may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing." Thus, the very words of Christ which effect his sacramental presence are "clothed," as it were, with our own petitions.

In the next reflection, we shall consider the final part of prayer: intercession.



From a 15th century altarpiece in Ascoli Piceno, Italy, by Carlo Crivelli.

# Medal well deserved, Margot!

Congratulations were given to Margot Donoghue from the archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh, who received the Archdiocesan Medal for outstanding service to the Church at St John the Baptist in Corstorphine on 11th February.

She was nominated for the award by parish priest Fr Jeremy Milne, who described her as “an extraordinary character who has dedicated her life to the church”.

He added: “She is a rare blend of Martha and Mary, being someone who has been incredibly active in many different ways while also deeply prayerful. She really has been a pillar of the parish community for a long time, serving with great dedication for many years in numerous capacities, including the parish council at various times.”

Margot was the Sacristan for many years at the Church and helped organise many aspects of the liturgy. The former teacher has also served as an extraordinary minister, reader and cantor. She would open the church early to get things set up, and has been present to assist at weekday Mass, funerals, baptisms and weddings.

Margot was the one who made sure that the parish was able to keep running, looking after the



Margot with Archbishop Leo and parishioners as she accepts her medal

church hall, co-ordinated church cleaning, supported hall users, set heating times to suit, and cleaned and ironed kitchen linens. She would also take Holy Communion to the sick and housebound.

Fr Jeremy added: “At times when the parish has not had stable or resident clergy, Margot was the one

who made sure that it was able to keep running, including taking cheques to The Gillis Centre to be signed, organising for routine maintenance and repairs to be carried out and generally watching over the parish.”

“It is right and just to signal our appreciation.”

The Archdiocesan Medal for Outstanding Service to the Church was established in 1975 by Cardinal Gordon Joseph Gray, Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh.

Since then, around 100 or so medals have been awarded for “outstanding voluntary service” to the Church.



## Tell your story to the Universe Catholic Weekly!

Submit your parish and school stories to Andy Drozdziak

[andy.drozdziak@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:andy.drozdziak@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)

## Catholic ethos shines through at St Joseph's, says latest CSI report

St Joseph's Catholic Voluntary Academy, Derby, has been graded Outstanding in every area by the Catholic Schools Inspectorate.

The ranking covers the overall quality of Catholic education provided, Catholic life and mission, religious education and collective worship.

Headteacher Tracey Churchill was described an “inspirational leader”, and the key principles of Catholic social teaching were evident across the school.

Pupil enjoyment of RE is marked by a high level of interest, enthusiasm and engagement, and the chaplaincy provision has a significant and profound impact on the spiritual life of the school, inspectors said.

The report said: “Pupils fully embrace the distinctive Catholic identity of their school. They understand that it encourages them to follow the teachings of Jesus, and that their mission statement ‘helps us to work hand in hand with each other’. Pupils exude happiness and confidence and have a well-established sense of belonging to their community. Their behaviour is exemplary.”



It added that “staff members go above and beyond expectations in participating and contributing to the Catholic life and mission, helping to create a very strong sense of family.”

Mrs Churchill said: “It is an absolute pleasure to serve children and a community that have a clear respect for our faith. Our school team work so hard to enable our children to be true witnesses and I am delighted that they have received this outcome.”

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](mailto:AHudson@stgeorgesweybridge.com).

An application pack and further details can be found at [www.catholicindependentschools.com](http://www.catholicindependentschools.com).

 CATHOLIC INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS' CONFERENCE

[www.catholicindependentschools.com](http://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.



HEALTH

## Home adaptations for seniors – an essential guide for independent living

As we move into our senior years, we can become less agile and mobility can become challenging. You or a loved one may be struggling with the stairs or finding it difficult accessing other areas of the home.

Many products and that includes those which focus on home adaptations, such as domestic lifts, now have much more emphasis placed on the way they look so consequently, they feel less like medical equipment and more like something created for use in the home.

This advance in product design, when applied to assisted living, means that many later living solutions now blend in perfectly with our home décor.

### Benefits of home adaptations

Home adaptations can help us to continue enjoying our daily living activities, prevent falls and injuries, improve confidence, self-esteem and overall health and wellbeing. The right home adaptations can also prevent or delay the need for home care or residential care.

Home adaptations are there to help us remain in the home we love, living safely and independently close to our support network.

### Fall prevention

Throughout the pandemic, falls increased at an alarming rate and have only slightly reduced since it ended; they are still the leading cause of emergency hospital admissions for older adults.

But it is not just about the time spent in hospital as a result of a fall which is of concern. It can also have a significant impact on our confidence and long-term health, with a number of us ultimately unable to return home after hospitalisation.

Falls within the home can be largely avoided with the use of appropriate home adaptations.

### Most popular home adaptations

Initially we may only require simple changes such as the fitting of handrails or steps to access the property from outdoors. Another common adaptation involves support with moving



Bathroom adaptations – installing a walk-in shower or bath can remove the stress of slipping or falling in the bathroom, especially on a wet floor.

between floors as stairs can often prove a risk in the home.

Below are some of the most common simple home adaptations which can assist with independent living:

**Handrails** – fitting grab bars and handrails around the home, particularly near the access into the property or in the bathroom, can help to avoid trips falls and injuries.

**Bathroom adaptations** – installing a walk-in shower or bath can remove the stress of slipping or falling in the bathroom, especially on a wet floor.

**Half steps or ramp** – to assist when stepping in and out of a doorway.

“Home adaptations are there to help us remain in the home we love, living safely and independently close to our support network.”

**Improved lighting** – Inadequate lighting around the home can be a hazard. Install brighter lights where needed, particularly in stairways and narrow hallways. Night lights in bedrooms and bathrooms can also be an advantage.

**Motion sensor lights** – these can be used in any room of the house and come on automatically so you won't have to fumble for a light switch in the dark.

### Home lifts

If using the stairs starts to feel unsafe, a home lift can be the ideal solution. A domestic lift can be fitted almost anywhere, without affecting the staircase for others, so moving between floors is stress-free and the risk of a fall is no more.

Today there are modern home lifts available which are more attractive than the old fashioned box-like through floor lifts previously



Bimble is the app for great little places like this

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If using the stairs starts to feel unsafe, a stair lift (far left) or a home lift can be the ideal solution. A domestic lift can be fitted almost anywhere, without affecting the staircase for others ... modern home lifts are more attractive than the old fashioned box-like through floor lifts previously available

available. Some domestic lifts, for example, offer a discreet design with no bulky lift shaft, just two simple self supporting vertical rails and a home lift car that runs off a standard wall socket. Quiet electric motors have replaced noisy hydraulic and lots of safety features provide peace of mind.

Blending with our decor, home lifts can also help us can carry heavy items between floors, such as the washing basket or vacuum cleaner, making sure simple everyday tasks remain possible.

**Ageing in Place**

When planning home adaptations, we should always look to the future. If the desire is to age in place, and remain in our home for the foreseeable future longer-term adaptations can be considered.

One such mid to long-term adaptation item could be installation of a domestic lift. This home lift product can be fitted with an in-car seat and interior grab rails if needed, which will provide increased security for users. Wheelchair-accessible models are also available. In comparison to a stairlift, a home lift provides longevity, whereas a stairlift could be unsuitable and become unusable, if a condition were to progress.

A lift is also far more flexible in terms of where you can position it.

**Adding value to the home**

When planning home adaptations, it is important to choose options which will add value to your home instead of risking a lower resale value. A home lift is one such product that has much greater general appeal to prospective purchasers, Although we may plan to continue

living in our home, there may come a point in the future where it is necessary to sell relatively quickly. Choosing adaptations that add value financially and in terms of perception, is a smart step.

**Further information**

If you need further advice, you can speak with an Occupational Therapist who will be able to carry out an assessment and recommend the right solutions.

You can find an Occupational Therapist on the Royal College of Occupational Therapists.



Fitting grab bars and handrails around the home, particularly in the bathroom, can help to avoid trips falls and injuries.

## HEALTH

# Beating the system as well as bowel disease

Controlling your journey with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) while overcoming inequity in IBD health care

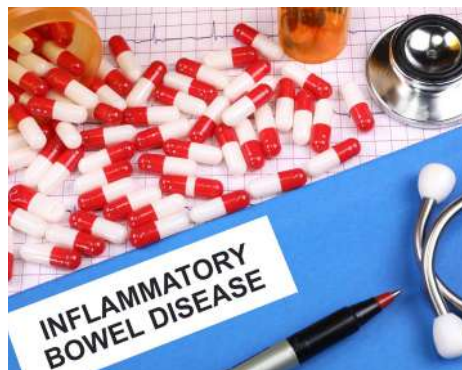
For those living with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) – like Crohn's disease (CD) or ulcerative colitis (UC) – every day can feel like a struggle. From a wide variety of symptoms that can include weight loss and severe abdominal pain to fatigue and persistent diarrhoea, IBD is truly a chronic illness that can impact many aspects of a person's life.

According to the NHS website, 'IBD is different to irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), even though some of the symptoms may be similar.'

This struggle is something that 40-year-old Brooke Abbott can certainly relate to. After having her beautiful baby boy, she developed abscesses and extra-intestinal manifestations like joint pain, uveitis (light sensitivity), and hair loss, which she initially attributed to postpartum before later learning these were all signs of UC.

At her lowest point with the illness, she would experience extreme fatigue, rapid weight loss, urgency every time she ate, and bloody stools.

This all changed in 2012, when she had her colon surgically removed, then had an ostomy bag placed for six months. Now, Brooke lives with a j-pouch (an internal pouch shaped out of the end of her small intestine), which combined with her previous surgery, has allowed her to



live a healthier and happier day-to-day as related to UC symptoms.

The symptoms of her disease were not the only struggles that Brooke endured. Her journey was made even more challenging through disparities in care that are sometimes experienced by patients of colour. She dealt with consistent doubt regarding her symptoms from doctors, some of whom went as far as to accuse her of drug seeking. Others told her she couldn't have IBD if her parents were Black.

To quote Brooke directly, she felt "gaslit," as she was told her symptoms were psychosomatic (or physical symptoms that lack a medical explanation), with doctors not providing her with all treatment options as they thought her case was mild to moderate. Even when preparing for her colon removal, she received misinformation on the process and her fertility.

In her words, all of these struggles led to her feeling like the illness was her own fault. It took her almost 12 years to find a care team that

listened to her fully and addressed her symptoms.

"Dealing with a chronic illness can feel impossible some days, without adding in the layer of inequity, disparity, and racism I found myself combating day-to-day," Brooke reflects. "Although every day was an uphill battle, with each attempt to advocate for my own health, my resolve got stronger and stronger. I learned to be a subject matter expert on myself and be my own biggest advocate."

Unfortunately, Brooke is not alone in her experience. Between 1970 and 2010, IBD incidence rates rose 134 per cent in communities of colour, compared to only 39 per cent in white IBD patients. Despite the disparity in those numbers, inequalities around access and quality of care remain.

Her experience and the experiences of patients like her drove Brooke to become an advocate for equitable health care and addressing unconscious bias. She hopes that greater awareness of issues like these could lead more doctors to reflect on whether they're operating from a position of unconscious bias or if they can do more to address bias within their healthcare systems.

She said: "You are the person who knows you best – and that is the most crucial piece of the puzzle when it comes to managing your own health. Do your research, keep a journal of your symptoms, and never be afraid to advocate for yourself. I promise, there is hope on the other side of every challenging conversation."

What does hope look like for Brooke? Today, she focuses on her physical and mental health,

being a mother, and providing a voice to others – all things that led her to create her own social media platform, The Crazy Creole Mommy, which she uses to further her IBD advocacy. Additionally, she's formed a nonprofit advocacy group to support moms living with or caring for people living with IBD called IBDMoms.\* Through both initiatives, Brooke has been able to encourage, challenge, and support those living with IBD.

For those newly diagnosed with IBD or feeling alone in their IBD journey, Brooke has three key tips for how to feel settled and supported. First, learn as much as possible about the diagnosis, to help feel confident when speaking with healthcare teams. Second, be patient when finding the right treatment plan – the process can take time, but exploration is key in finding what works best. Finally, find community with others who understand and empathise with the IBD journey. Social media and online support groups can be great for creating meaningful connections with other patients.

"Finding your voice is vital when it comes to advocating for your own physical and mental health. By having patience, grace, and strength, I feel in control of my own journey with IBD – and I know others can too."

Those living with CD or UC are encouraged to address all concerns with their doctors and to join Brooke and other IBD advocates through IBD Social Circle, an online community sponsored by Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc., that is dedicated to supporting the IBD community. *Sponsored by Janssen Biotech, Inc.*

## FOOD

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## Irish potato and broccoli soup: a really nutritious vegetable winter warmer

### IRISH POTATO AND BROCCOLI SOUP

With the weather still staying cold, it is surely time to warm up with a reliable, tried and tested and tasty favourite – potato and broccoli soup.

#### INGREDIENTS

2 tbs butter  
2 onions finely chopped  
2 potatoes, peeled and cubed  
1 head broccoli, washed and cut into 1 inch pieces  
1 tbs dried tarragon  
Salt and pepper to taste  
4 pints chicken stock or water  
1 cup finely chopped parsley

#### METHOD

Melt the butter in a heavy bottomed pan and sauté the onions until translucent.

Add the potatoes, broccoli, tarragon, salt, pepper and stock.

Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, cover and



cook for 20 minutes over medium heat.

Blend until smooth – though don't be worried about over leaving some chunky bits; this soup doesn't need over

blending. Season to taste and add the parsley as final decoration

**Serves 6 to 8. Great with buttery warm crusty bread**

 FILMS

# Marley's music stars as film just fails to get to grips with its subject

**John Mulderig**

In 1999, almost two decades after its creator's untimely death at the age of 36, the 1977 reggae LP *Exodus* was named the album of the century by *Time* magazine. The making of that classic record is one of the events chronicled in the competent biographical drama *Bob Marley: One Love* (Paramount).

The film, which stars Kingsley Ben-Adir in the title role, focuses on the aftermath of a 1976 attempt on the singer-songwriter's life in which his wife, Rita (Lashana Lynch), was seriously wounded. The attack was part of the political turmoil engulfing Marley's homeland of Jamaica in the run-up to a general election on the island in December of that year.

After fulfilling his commitment to perform at a concert intended to promote national unity only two days after the assault, Marley flees to London for safety. There he works with celebrated producer Chris Blackwell (James Norton) to craft *Exodus*, the popularity of which would help to elevate him to new heights of worldwide fame.

Yet Marley's burgeoning professional success is eventually overshadowed by a medical problem that poses a grave threat to his future. In the face of it, he and Rita, whose initial romance is seen in flashbacks, overcome temporary tensions in their marriage to form a closer union than ever.

As depicted here, under Rita's influence, her husband had long since become a dedicated Rastafarian. But viewers need not share the basic tenet of that faith – the divinity of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie – to appreciate Marley's gently charismatic personality and artistic gifts.

Not long before his 1981 death, Marley, who, by some accounts, was raised Catholic, was baptised into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. To what degree that reflected a fundamental shift in his beliefs is unclear.

A tumultuous conflict with his manager Don Taylor (Anthony Welsh) shows that Marley was

not without his flaws. Yet that flare-up is counterbalanced by his reaction when one of his assailants tearfully seeks his forgiveness.

More broadly, director and co-writer Reinaldo Marcus Green successfully captures Marley's appealingly modest personality and anti-materialism. The script, penned in collaboration with Terence Winter, Frank E. Flowers and Zach Baylin, also highlights Marley's outsized influence as, on a global level, a voice for the impoverished and, more locally, a peacemaker.

As is well known, the use of marijuana is an integral aspect of Rastafarianism. Although this is treated in an unobtrusive manner, together with the fact that marital fidelity was not part of Marley's lifestyle and the inclusion of some indigenous Jamaican off-colour insults in the dialogue, it represents an appropriate source of concern for parents.

Grown film goers may find that this profile fails to live up to its subject's impressive achievements. But, while the picture may lack heft, it's at least an easy opportunity to discover – or rediscover – Marley's lasting musical legacy.

Happy Valley star James Norton, who plays Chris Blackwell, the founder of Island Records, told *screenrant.com* how Kingsley Ben-Adir "lived and breathed" the role of reggae legend Bob Marley.

Norton said: "Honestly, it was something to behold. The way that guy, the depth of his work and his commitment was insane.

"I met him a couple of times before we got to rehearsals. But then when we were in rehearsals, I remember the first day. And he was kind of speaking to everyone. He's a leader. He's not just a kind of cast member, but the first number one in the call sheet is the head of that department.

"And he really lived and breathed that role, not just in terms of the cast, but in the movie. He fought. And he really believed in a version of this story, which was about the kind of quieter inner journey of this man. And he fought for that, and rightfully so."



Kingsley Ben-Adir stars in *Bob Marley: One Love*. Photo: Chiabella James, Paramount Pictures

## Twists aplenty as spy spoof keeps audience guessing

The fish-out-of-water action comedy *Argylle* (Universal) starts off promisingly and its initial twists and turns sustain audience interest. By multiplying these complications and reversals, however, screenwriter Jason Fuchs eventually reaps diminishing returns.

Still, director Matthew Vaughn's breezy spoof remains, overall, at least modestly entertaining. Despite the intensity of some of its dust-ups, moreover, it's suitable for a broad swath of grown film lovers.

Mild-mannered author Elly Conway (Bryce Dallas Howard) has managed to hit paydirt with a series of popular spy novels featuring the suave, James Bond-like character of the title (played, in her imagination, by Henry Cavill). But when it comes to real life, she seeks nothing more adventurous than a cosy evening at home with her beloved cat, Alfie.

So when Aidan (Sam Rockwell), a stranger she meets on a train, informs her that he's a secret

agent and that all the other passengers aboard their railcar are disguised assassins out to kill her, Elly is more than a little surprised. But the second statement soon proves to be true, forcing Elly to rely on her new acquaintance's protection.

Once they're both safe, Aidan explains that the plots of Elly's books involving a sinister band of rogue operatives have tracked too closely to covert reality. That makes her a target for her fictional organisation's factual counterpart, The Division, and its villainous leader, Ritter (Bryan Cranston).

A globetrotting quest marked by various surprises follows. But by the time the film ends, its tale of hidden identities and shifting loyalties has become intricate to the point of rococo excess.

Henry Cavill, who has been touted to play James Bond for many years, told *screenrant.com* how he played the role of the imaginary Argylle

'very seriously' but kept the light hearted tone of the film in mind.

"He takes himself very seriously because his situation is very much real and heart-attack serious in his head," he said.

"But as far as the tone of the movie is concerned, you're not taking *Argylle* too seriously, and so it's a fine line to tread between the two. Otherwise, if you're playing it too realistic and too naturalistic, then it sort of spoils the joke, so you have to play a very serious but heightened version of that for it to fit in the tone of the movie. That was really my focus."

Right, Sam Rockwell and Bryce Dallas Howard try to make sense of the latest twist in spy spoof *Argylle*. Photo: Peter Mountain, Universal



# What a new plan to save UK's churches says about their purpose in society

HISTORY

## Alanna Cant

The National Churches Trust has launched a campaign to save the UK's historic churches. Backed by the actor Michael Palin, (*as reported in the Universe 26th January edition*) it highlights the need for a national approach to address what the trust has called the "single biggest heritage challenge" in Britain.

Entitled Every Church Counts, the plan covers six crucial points, including comprehensive professional support for the volunteers who keep places of worship open, dedicated public funding and more promotion for tourism to churches and chapels.

Church communities and other heritage organisations have lauded this push to highlight the significance of places of worship within British heritage.

From Saint Martin's Canterbury, probably built during the Roman occupation of Britain sometime before 597, all the way to Liverpool's grade II-listed Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, designed by Edwin Lutyens and Frederick Gibberd, and completed in the 1960s, the UK's urban and rural landscapes are inscribed with 1,500 years of ecclesiastic history. Without a comprehensive national plan to support places of worship, including those of non-Christian religions, my research shows that these physical repositories of British history and identity could be lost.

### The state of the UK's churches

In November, Historic England published its 2023 Heritage at Risk register. It lists 4,871 historic buildings and sites in England at risk from disrepair or inappropriate changes. Although this total represents an overall decrease from 2022, places of worship are noteworthy for being the only category with a net increase since the previous year. The register now counts 943 sites, an increase of 24 from 919 in 2022.

The situation in Wales and Scotland is similarly challenging. Cadw, the Welsh government's historic environment service, reports that 10 per cent of listed places of worship in Wales are vulnerable. Historic Environment Scotland, meanwhile, lists 195 religious buildings on the Scottish Buildings at Risk register.

Many churches are at risk of closure due to structural problems



The ceiling of Carlisle Cathedral. The main timbers of the ceiling date back to the 14th century. But the decorations you see today were created by restoration work carried out in 1853.

far beyond the capacity of local congregations to fix. Unlike some European countries, the UK government does not provide regular funding to churches for repairs. Even the national Christian denominations, such as the Church of England, the Methodist Church in Britain, and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, are not able to keep up with the costs.

There are pots of money available through the National Lottery Heritage Fund and other grant schemes. However, these are highly competitive and the amounts they can offer do not always cover what is needed.

In 2013, the Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark received over £900,000 to restore the Shrine of St Augustine in Ramsgate, Kent. It was designed and built in the 1840s by architect Augustus Pugin, best known for designing the Elizabeth Tower in Westminster, home to Big Ben.

A second phase of repairs to the roof was undertaken in 2023 after a new public grant of £272,000, which also required St Augustine's to raise a further £68,000 from other funding sources and donations.

Between 1995 and 2017, the National Lottery Heritage Fund granted £970 million to places of worship across the UK. It is currently distributing a further

£1.9 million through the National Churches Trust. But this is not nearly enough. The Church of England alone needs £1 billion, over the next five years, just to cover essential repairs.

One of the proposals put forward by the new campaign is to encourage local authorities and public bodies such as the NHS to use places of worship for their activities and events. This could channel other sources of funding into repairing and upgrading church facilities, while also providing much needed community spaces in areas where many have closed due to funding cuts.

Anglican churches regularly open their doors to baby and toddler groups, food banks and even large exhibitions, like Peterborough Cathedral's display of Star Wars memorabilia or artist Luke Jerram's Museum of the Moon travelling show, currently at Winchester Cathedral. Research has shown this can be a way to bring life back to under-used churches, particularly rural ones.

### What is a church for?

However, expanding the use of a church can also be incompatible with the religious beliefs of the faith community to which it belongs. For such groups, the sacred nature of their places of worship must be maintained.

This raises the question of what roles churches play in today's society, a question I have researched in collaboration with the Catholic Bishop's Conference of England and Wales. Under Roman Catholic Canon Law, the entire church building is considered sacred due to the presence of the Blessed Sacrament within it. Activities hosted within churches (but not in auxiliary buildings, like halls) must be consistent with their holy nature.

Catholic churches sometimes struggle when applying for heritage support to meet expectations that their projects should be of value to wider society, which is usually assumed to have more non-religious priorities and needs.

However, everyone can benefit from such reserved places. They can support community mental health and well being by providing quiet spaces for reflection and tranquillity.

Catholic churches, in particular, are typically kept open throughout week days, for all visitors, religious and non-religious alike. In urban areas with high levels of deprivation, they can sometimes be the only such spaces.

Further, historic churches would not exist today without the continuing faith and practice of worshipping communities. Other countries recognise people's rituals,

beliefs and traditions as part of what Unesco defines as "intangible cultural heritage". This refers to the practices, representations, knowledge and skills that provide people with a sense of continuity and cultural identity.

Social anthropologists rightfully question how the idea of intangible cultural heritage can actually oversimplify the complex realities of people's experiences. It can also be used to promote commercialising and exploiting culture at the expense of local people.

However, research also shows that the tangible and intangible qualities of heritage are inherently inseparable. Recognising the value that practices like bellringing and choral singing, say, contribute to the belltowers and abbeys that host these aural traditions, will surely benefit their preservation.

The intangible cultural and religious elements of a place enhance the meaning and value of its built environment and material. Church buildings should be prized – and protected – for the vibrant living traditions of Britain's diverse religious communities, as well as what they tell us about our past.

**Alanna Cant is a Lecturer in Social Anthropology, University of Reading**

# Red, yellow... blue? Why football risks sending itself colour blind

SPORT

## Dr Colm Hickey

Some sports are easy to understand because they are so simple. Perhaps the most obvious example would be athletics. In the 100 metres, eight runners stand at one point and run a straight line to the finish. The fastest is the winner. It is as simple as that.

Other sports are more difficult for a spectator to understand. Who, honestly, has any understanding of what goes on in rucks, scrums, and mauls as we watch the rugby Six Nations? The lbw law in cricket is always debatable, and understanding what constitutes excellent ice skating is never easy.

So, what players and spectators want are rules (or laws in many sports, such as cricket, rugby and football) that are easy to understand and that the referee can communicate to players and fans alike.

However, in an attempt to improve, simplify and clarify the laws of the game, administrators can sometime meddle and make things, arguably, worse not better. Some issues are technical, and some are matters of judgement and this is where the confusion and controversy often begin.

Those of us of more mature years remember with some amusement the antics of 'Superbrat' John McEnroe disputing line calls at Wimbledon. "Chalk dust. The ball was out. You guys are the pits!" he shouted. Yet, he was often right. The ball was out or there was chalk dust. And so, Hawkeye was introduced. Now no one disputes line calls. Similarly, in cricket, the TMO gives the decision regarding close run outs, disputed catches, and lbws.

In rugby, too, we have TMOs who adjudicate whether the ball was grounded or not and if the referee is right in the decision to award a try or not. But here is the rub. Although the TMO ruling is meant to remove human error because humans interpret it, there will always be the possibility of error because they are humans. In last weekend's Scotland v France rugby international, the Scotland team was denied a match winning try by an error made by the TMO.

In the same way, while we have goal line technology in football which tells the referee if the whole of the ball crossed the line which all players accept, VAR, which is meant to remove human error, does not always work as it is interpreted by humans which again means that



A yellow card is flourished by the referee, clearly booking a player. The coloured cards were brought in after England's Jack Charlton did not find out he had actually been cautioned until after a World Cup tie in 1966

there will always be errors.

So technology does not always work. It does not always speed up the game. It does not remove controversy; it sometimes generates it.

What players and managers want is fairness and consistency. Yet, I suggest that this is impossible to achieve precisely because referees are humans and humans make mistakes. What is seen to be fair by one person is seen to be unfair by another. That's life.

Football has long since tried to make the referee's decision clear for players and spectators alike. Before 1966, a referee would caution a player and record his name in his book. However, it was not always clear if he had booked a player.

In the 1966 World Cup match between England and Argentina, the England centre half, Jack Charlton, only found out after the game that he had been booked

during it.

The official in charge of referees at the tournament was Ken Aston, a primary school headteacher. Driving from Wembley Stadium to Lancaster Gate that evening, he had Charlton's confusion in mind. As he stopped at a traffic light at Kensington High Street, he realised that a colour-coding scheme based on the same amber/red (stop if safe to do so, and red – a definite Stop) principle as used on traffic lights would overcome language barriers and clarify to everyone if a player had been cautioned or sent off.

Aston recalled that, upon arriving home, he explained the issue to his wife, Hilda. She went into another room returning a few minutes later with two coloured cards made which cut to fit into his shirt pocket. This system whereby referees show a yellow card for a caution and a red card for a sending off was first used in the

1970 World Cup, and for over 50 years has worked well.

However, there is a feeling within the game that the system is too rigid. A player committing two minor transgressions will be sent off which some think is too harsh, and so FIFA is to trial sin-binning players and issuing blue cards. Sinbins have been used at grassroots level for dissent, but their use could be extended to cynical fouls as part of a trial. A player would spend 10 minutes in the technical area after being given a blue card by a referee.

Sinbins were piloted in 2018-19, with the Football Association reporting a 38 per cent fall in dissent across 31 leagues. They were introduced across all levels of grassroots football from the 2019-20 season to improve levels of respect and fair play.

The proposal has been met with derision by some Premier League managers, however. Tottenham's Ange Postecoglou believes the possible introduction of blue cards and sinbins would 'destroy' the game. "Adding another [card] one. What is that going to do? The remedy is already there," he said. "If it's not being enforced to the level people are satisfied, do that. That's the change. One team being down to 10 men for 10 minutes, you know

what that is going to do to our game? It's going to destroy it. You'll have one team sitting there trying to waste time for 10 minutes waiting for someone to come back on."

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said: "It doesn't sound like a fantastic idea in the first moment. But actually, I can't remember when the last fantastic idea came from these guys [Fabrizio Rongca] - if they ever had one."

Newcastle manager Eddie Howe added: "I'm not a big fan, to be honest. I think that's what yellow cards are for. I think the current system works well... Adding a blue card would just add more confusion, in my opinion. I'm against it. I think [sinbins] would change it a lot, but not in a good way because I think it will make it very bitty, more stop-start."

The use of technology in sport is not the panacea that many advocates claim. Technology has to be used by humans and therein is the flaw in the system. The proposal for a third card will not remove controversy from the game. People will always argue that the referee was too harsh or too lenient in his or her decision-and they will be right, for the simple reason that, as we all know, you cannot please all of the people all of the time.



*"One team being down to 10 men for 10 minutes, you know what that is going to do to our game? It's going to destroy it. You'll have one team sitting there trying to waste time for 10 minutes waiting for someone to come back on."* Ange Postecoglou

# A pictorial round-up of the past seven days



## Meet Fluffy...

An "invasive" alligator snapping turtle named Fluffy has been found near a lake in Cumbria. The animal which could "certainly give you a nasty nip", is native to North America in states such as Florida and Texas, but was brought to Wild Side Vets in Barrow-in-Furness.



Huge waves crash against the sea wall near Whitley Bay.



Performers Manchester's China Town, take part in the Dragon Parade as part of Chinese New Year Celebrations to welcome in the Year of the Dragon.



Arts and Heritage Minister Lord Parkinson, campaigner Tim Bryars, MP Nickie Aiken, actor Simon Callow, Historic England's Duncan Wilson and campaigner Luke Honey with one of four gas lamps along Russell Street in Covent Garden, London that have been given Grade II listing protection by Historic England.

A staff member uses "heads on sticks" to check camera blocking at the Royal Festival Hall, London, ahead of the EE BAFTA Film Awards on Sunday.



A miniature golden dragon created by Willard Wigan as "a symbol of strength" to celebrate the Lunar New Year. The renowned micro-sculptor hand-crafted a red-eyed dragon from a single piece of gold smaller than the head of a matchstick.



## LITURGICAL CALENDARS

### Ordinary Form

Ordinary Form Liturgical Calendar  
 Sunday Year B, Weekday Cycle II  
 Sunday, February 18: 1st Sunday of  
 Lent Gen. 9:8-15; Ps. 25:4-9 r. 10; 1  
 Pet. 3:18-22; Mk. 1:12-15

Monday, February 19: Lev.19:1-2,11-  
 18; Ps.19:8-10,15; Mt. 25:31-46

Tuesday, February 20: Isa.55:10-11;  
 Ps.34:4-7,16-19; Mt.6:7-15

Wednesday, February 21: St Peter  
 Damian, Bishop, Doctor of the  
 Church, Jon. 3:1-10; Ps. 51: 3-4,  
 12-13, 18-19; Lk. 11:29-32

Thursday, February 22: The Chair of  
 St Peter, Apostle-feast 1 Pet. 5:1-4;  
 Ps.23; Mt.16:13-19

Friday, February 23: St Polycarp,  
 Bishop, Martyr Ezek.18:21-28; Ps.  
 130; Mt. 5:20-26

Saturday, February 24: Deut.26:16-  
 19; Ps.119:1-2,4-5,7-8; Mt.5:43-48



St Polycarp

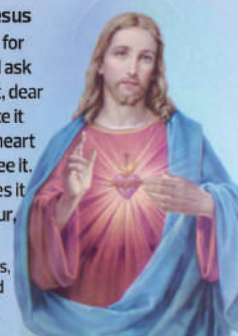
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 Heart of Jesus, and place it  
 within your own broken heart  
 where your Father will see it.  
 Then, in His merciful eyes it  
 will become your favour,  
 not mine. Amen.  
 Say prayer for three days,  
 promise publication and  
 favour will be granted.  
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### Remembering your loved ones...

Personalised memoriam  
 cards, bookmarks and  
 acknowledgements,  
 notelets. All styles.  
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#### STYLE C

### Remember your loved ones in style...

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## The rock of the Church

The Gospels speak of St Peter as the rock upon which Christ built his Church. Peter is considered the foundation of the Christian Church, which is now a symbol that his Chair represents. In honour of his service to the Church, a day of the Feast was celebrated, right from the earliest days of Christianity. Originally, the Feast of the Chair of St Peter was celebrated on 18th January and 22nd February. January 18th was when the Saint gave his first sermon in Rome, whilst February 22nd was when he gave his first sermon in Antioch. Pope John XXIII in 1960 attempted to initiate the celebration of a universal feast date which was met with much disapproval. After much speculation, 22nd February was declared to be the official date of the Feast in 1969 and has been marked in the Roman Calendar since then.

