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Catholic groups in plea for ceasefire

Gaza on edge of humanitarian catastrophe: ‘pauses’ in conflict no longer enough say CAFOD, CSAN and Scottish Bishops’ Conference

Andy Drozdziak

CAFOD and CSAN have joined Scotland’s Catholic Bishops in urging the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak to support an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, saying that “a humanitarian pause does not go far enough.”

Neil Thorns, director of Advocacy at CAFOD said: “We need an immediate ceasefire and the Prime Minister needs to be pushing for it. A humanitarian pause does not go far enough. Only a ceasefire can put an end to the killing of civilians, ensure hostages are freed and allow enough aid to meet the huge humanitarian need.

“Our partners have told us of the unspeakable realities of life in Gaza, where people are living without enough fuel, electricity, water or food.”

The call comes as the UN warns that a total collapse of public services is likely soon, and a humanitarian catastrophe will follow. The water

supply system has been smashed, leaving the taps dry and raw sewage entering the streets, rubbish is piling up and basic food stuffs such as bread are now scarce.

A spokesman for the UN told the Universe: “We are struggling to provide even the most basic of services to more than 600,000 people sheltering in schools and other facilities in the south. Aid cannot get to us as there is no fuel for the trucks carrying it.”

Stories have also emerged of bodies being buried in a mass grave in Gaza City’s largest hospital, Al-Shifa, following the failure of vital hospital equipment caused by power cuts.

Ahead of the potential vote on the motion calling for a ceasefire in the Gaza/Israeli conflict, Mr Thorns highlighted the bloodshed which has led to CAFOD losing “quite a few staff and partners” in Gaza.

Continued on page 2

Holy Father’s lasting tribute to the Queen

King Charles III is pictured with Cardinal Nichols and Archbishop Buendía, the Apostolic Nuncio, in the grounds of Windsor Castle after the formal handover of a Cedar of Lebanon tree, a gift to the late Queen from Pope Francis in 2022. Full story: see pg 7

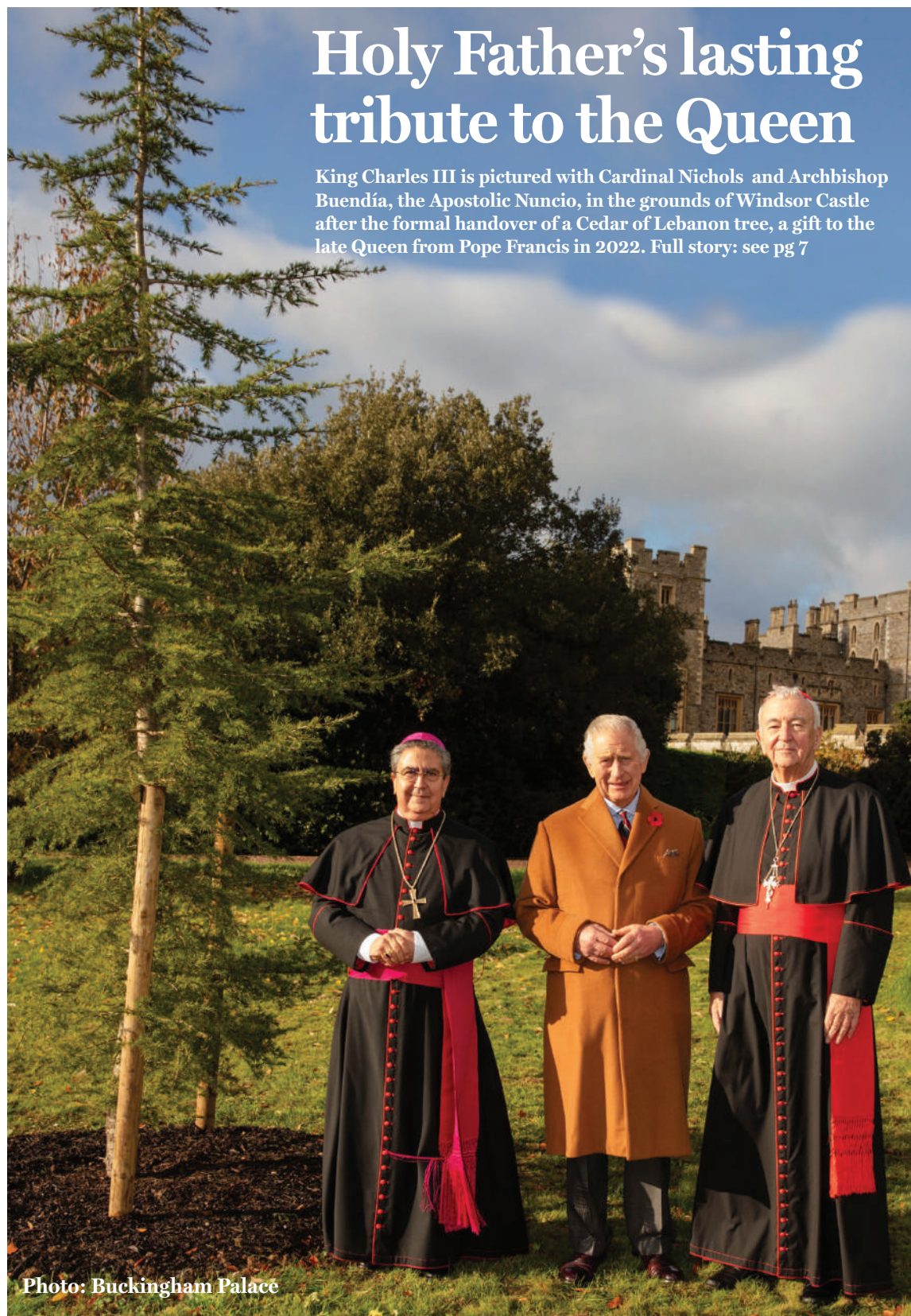


Photo: Buckingham Palace

INSIDE



18

Rwanda ruling welcomed by refugee advocates

– pg 3

MP threatens to axe all rules on abortion

– pg 4

Parents know best, pope tells educators

– pg 14

Argentina begs for a papal homecoming

– pg 18



The seeds of a great idea

COMPANION

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A woman holds the body of a Palestinian child killed in Israeli airstrikes in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip. Over 12,000 people on both sides have now been confirmed as killed in the six-week-old conflict
Photo: Ibraheem Abu Mustafa, Reuters

Catholic groups in new call for Gaza ceasefire

Continued from page 1

“How have we got to this point? For six weeks we have seen bloodshed upon bloodshed – over 12,000 Israeli and Palestinian civilians have been killed, including several staff from our partner organisations and their families. Politicians from every political party must call for a ceasefire, now – not next week, or next month,” he said.

The Catholic Bishops of Scotland has also urged all UK political leaders to unite and call for an immediate ceasefire, while supporting humanitarian aid into Gaza. “We share the hope of Pope Francis, that all avenues will be pursued so that an escalation of the conflict can be absolutely avoided, that the wounded can be rescued and that the hostages can be freed immediately,” the bishops said.

CSAN focused on the “suffering of civilians” caused by the war, sparked

“How have we got to this? For six weeks we have seen bloodshed – over 12,000 Israeli and Palestinian civilians killed. Politicians from every political party must call for a ceasefire, now – not next week, or next month.”

by the attack by Hamas on 7th October.

“We deplore the atrocities carried out by Hamas,” CSAN said. “But we also agree with our sister Caritas agency CAFOD, that ‘responding to the atrocities committed by Hamas with what amounts to a collective punishment of civilians in the occu-

pied Palestinian territory is leading to unimaginable levels of death and suffering.”

“We urge the Catholic community in England and Wales to pray for peace and reconciliation. We urge Catholics to raise the voice of peace and justice in their communities with their elected representatives.”

CSAN also demanded an end to antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crimes which have recently grown in the UK, particularly in London. The Metropolitan Police has reported significant increases in numbers of such attacks since the start of the war in October.

CSAN said: “We urge all Catholics to take a stand against antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crimes in their own communities. We share the concern of Cardinal Vincent Nichols, who has appealed for ‘restraint and the total avoidance of hateful language and action.’”

Activists demand end to fossil fuels

Climate activists made their feelings known after they disrupted an energy conference in London in protest against the Government granting licences to exploit the Rosebank oil field.

Fossil Free London members interrupted the Gas, LNG and the Future of Energy conference at the Hilton Hotel in Tower Bridge on Tuesday with chants of ‘Stop Rosebank’ before they were removed by security.

Many Catholics recently joined over 400 UK Christian leaders in calling on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to cancel Rosebank.

Christian charity and Church leaders said the development “will not provide energy security, uphold our obligations to care for our global neighbours or create sustainable

jobs fit for the green energy future.”

“As Christian leaders we do not take a partisan view on Rosebank, we take a moral view. It’s time to show international and moral leadership – and stop Rosebank.”

Rosebank would produce 69,000 barrels of oil per day, but its critics – including Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf – have said the development will damage net zero plans.

Among the signatories were 20 Catholic and Anglican bishops, including the Archbishop of Glasgow William Nolan, the leader of the Catholic Church in Scotland, and former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rt Revd Rowan Williams.

Meanwhile, the ecumenical Just-Money Movement dismissed last week’s King’s Speech as a “missed opportunity” to effectively address

the climate and nature crises.

“Campaigners and experts agree that the announced new gas and oil licensing system won’t help energy security but will damage the climate further and hand over more money to the fossil fuel companies,” executive director Sarah Edwards said.

Three Christian Climate Action protesters were arrested in London on 8th November for participating in slow marches. They said that it is impossible for the UK to develop new oil and gas projects, without compromising its commitment to climate responsibility.

Revd Sue Parfitt, 81, said: “After the King’s Speech moving us even further away from ending our addiction to fossil fuels, we must make our opposition clear by taking to the roads again and saying ‘no new oil!’”

Listen to the parents: Let Indi be last case - bishops

Andy Drozdziak

The Catholic bishops of England and Wales called for greater weight to be given to the parental voice after the death of baby Indi Gregory, whose parents battled in court to have her life support extended.

Bishop of Nottingham Patrick McKinney, and Bishop John Sherrington, Lead Bishop for Life Issues, said in a statement: “The legal battle between the NHS Trust and her parents shows again the need for greater weight to be given to the parental voice in these complex and sensitive cases.”

Indi's father, Dean Gregory, said he and his partner, Claire, “are angry, heartbroken and ashamed. The NHS and the courts not only took away her chance to live a longer life, but they also took away Indi's dignity to pass away in the family home where she belonged.”

Eight-month-old Indi Gregory suffered from mitochondrial disease, and doctors at Nottingham's Queen's Medical Centre (QMC) said there is nothing more they can do to treat her. On 2nd November, Mr Justice Robert Peel ruled that it was in Indi's “best interests” to die in the UK.

Her parents took Indi's case to the Court of Appeal but judges Lady Justice

Eleanor King and Lord Justice Peter Jackson dismissed it without a hearing.

Treatment was then offered by the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital in Rome, but another court ruled that not only could Indi not travel to Italy but that life-sustaining treatment must be withdrawn, and the final withdrawal of treatment and end-of-life care could not occur at the family home. Extubation took place in a hospice on 12th November.

Jacopo Coghe, spokesman for Italian pro-life foundation Pro Vita Famiglia, said his organisation was dismayed by the little girl's fate. The foundation shared Dean Gregory's words via social media: “They did succeed in taking Indi's body and dignity, but they can never take her soul. They tried to get rid of Indi without anybody knowing, but we made sure she would be remembered forever.”

Mr Gregory added that his partner “held her for her final breaths.”

Recalling the cases of several other children in similar circumstances in recent years, including Alfie Evans and Charlie Gard, the bishops said the Church would continue to speak out for the ill and the vulnerable. “We will continue to contribute to wider discussions on ques-

tions of when treatment becomes disproportionate to any possible benefit and the duty of the continuation of basic care, including assisted nutrition and hydration, to protect the good of every child,” they said.

The bishops recommended amending the Health and Care Act 2022 by reintroducing Baroness Iora Finlay's amendment on ‘Dispute resolution in children's palliative care’ formulated after the death of Charlie Gard.”

Professor David Albert Jones from Ancombe Bioethics Centre described the amendment as “a modest change, informed by a palliative care perspective, that sought only to prevent Trusts from going to court without having explored less burdensome options.”

Professor Jones repeated the bishops' call for a “much-needed amendment to the law,” adding that for people outside the UK, it seems scandalous that parents are prevented from taking their child to a recognised hospital within the EU.”

“Nevertheless, the situation could be improved significantly if the Health and Care Act 2022 were simply amended to reintroduce the amendment proposed by Baroness Iora Finlay.”



Indi Gregory: Her death is another example of parents' views not being taken fully into account, says the Catholic Bishops' Conference.
Photo: Family handout/PA Wire

Bishop relieved as court sees sense on Rwanda

Andy Drozdziak

Catholic bishops and justice groups JRS UK and CAFOD have welcomed the Supreme Court ruling that Government plans to transfer people seeking asylum to Rwanda are unlawful. They have now urged the Government to scrap the plans completely.

Bishop Paul McAleenan, Lead Bishop for Migrants and Refugees for the Bishops' Conference, says he welcomes the ruling: “I am greatly relieved... this was a policy that ignored the innate human dignity of those seeking sanctuary.”

He added: “The Bishops' Conference will continue to advocate for an immigration system that places the human person at its centre. Refugees are human beings made in the image and likeness of God, not a political problem to be solved.”

“We will continue to pray for those who are on the move, as well as for the Government, that it will respect this ruling and respond to the needs of migrants and asylum seekers in a way that fully upholds their human dignity.”

Sarah Teather, director of JRS UK, told the *Universe*: “We have consistently opposed this cruel and unworkable policy. Forcibly removing people to Rwanda would achieve nothing except to violate their basic rights, trash the UK's reputation on the international stage, and exacer-

bate fear and uncertainty among those seeking sanctuary here.”

Supreme Court President Lord Reed said in its ruling that judges believed there would be a risk of genuine asylum seekers being returned by Rwanda to the home country from where they fled.

Aisha Dodwell, CAFOD's head of campaigns, also condemned the Rwanda plan as cruel, and called for a new approach to “transform the way migrants are treated.”

“The Rwanda plan was a cruel attempt to turn away people who are seeking protection,” she said. “We need to transform the way migrants are treated. In the absence of safe and legal routes, thousands of people die each year as they are forced on dangerous journeys to reach safety.”

“As Pope Francis tells us, we must welcome people without prejudice, and build bridges, not walls.”

Other campaigners who welcomed the verdict included Freedom from Torture, which hailed it as “a victory for reason and compassion”, while Steve Smith, the chief executive of the Care4Calais refugee charity, dubbed it “a victory for humanity,” adding that “his grubby, cash-for-people deal was always cruel and immoral and unlawful.”

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the ruling “was not the outcome we wanted” but added that “we remain committed to stopping the boats.”

St Mary's Cathedral, Aberdeen, is seeking a Youth and Children's Ministry Co-ordinator

St Mary's Cathedral, Aberdeen, is seeking a full-time Youth and Children's Ministry Co-ordinator to bring their passion, vision, and energy to the Parish, assisting young people in seeking a personal encounter with Jesus in their lives, growing in the life of the Spirit and nurturing Christian values.

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In Brief

Heat pump noise problem

Ministers have been told that heat pumps are too loud to be installed in millions of homes under the Government's noise guidelines. Although the Government hopes to install 600,000 heat pumps annually by 2028 to hit net zero targets, a report by sound specialists forecast a "likely significant reduction" in "uptake" across England and Wales. A Department for Energy Security and Net Zero spokesman said these claims "fail to recognise that heat pumps have got significantly quieter over the past decade".

Farage appears down under

Brexit politician Nigel Farage has confirmed he will be taking part in this year's *'I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!'* series.

The former UKIP leader was photographed arriving on Sunday at Brisbane Airport – around 100 miles from the jungle campsite where the reality show is made.

Farage has been offered £1.5m to appear, according to the *Daily Mail*.

Squalid homes warning

A leading doctor has warned that thousands of babies and toddlers are being admitted to hospital in England each year with lung conditions "linked to damp and mould-ridden homes", *The Guardian* reported.

Squalid housing is having a "profoundly negative impact on the nation's health" and worsening the crisis in the health service, said Dr Andy Knox, an associate medical director for the NHS.

MP vows to use King's Speech to axe all curbs on abortion

Pro-life group Right To Life UK has spoken out against the possibility of abortion up to birth being introduced in the UK after a leading pro-abortion MP signalled her intention to hijack Government legislation to do so.

Following the State Opening of Parliament last week, Labour MP for Walthamstow Stella Creasy announced that she intends to amend legislation set out in the King's Speech to decriminalise abortion, which would introduce abortion up to birth.

She said via social media platform X: 'Government told us decriminalising abortion requires backbench amendments to test the will of the house. The King's Speech contains legislation that will allow us to do just that.'

In July this year, pro-abortion MP, Maria Miller, introduced the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 (Sentencing Guidelines) Bill to

Parliament, positioning it in her speech as a proposal that would prevent jail sentences for women, like Carla Foster, who procure their own late-term abortions.

In a surprise development, Stella Creasy MP, who generally leads pro-abortion campaigning in Parliament, gave a speech making it clear that she and the abortion lobby were opposing the Bill. She stated that Maria Miller's Bill would not deliver on the abortion lobby's larger goal, which is to make the Abortion Act redundant by repealing underlying criminal legislation, stating "looking at sentencing directly contradicts the call for decriminalisation".

Abortion advocates are campaigning for abortion to be fully 'decriminalised'. In England and Wales, this would involve repealing sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act along with the Infant Life Preservation Act.



As the Abortion Act 1967 was passed to create exemptions to 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act along with the Infant Life Preservation Act, repealing this legislation would make the Abortion Act 1967 redundant in England and Wales.

This change in law would scrap

the current 24-week time limit for abortion, and abortion would be available on demand, for any reason, up to birth. The upper time limit would be completely abolished.

Abortion provider BPAS, which has been campaigning for this law change, has made it explicit that it is campaigning to remove all gestational time limits for abortion.

Right to Life UK spokesperson Catherine Robinson said: "Decriminalisation' means making abortion legal up to birth and its supporters are perfectly clear about this. A civilised society does not set mothers against their own children, especially moments before their children are born. There is no real difference between a baby a month before birth and a month after birth."

"Abortion up to birth is barbarous and we should do all we can to make sure our MPs know that we do not want such legislation."

Gambling is never safe says CARE as betting firms shift blame for problems on to punters

Andy Drozdziak

Christian justice charity CARE has blasted 'Safer Gambling Week' as a "cynical stunt" and "emblematic of all that is wrong with the gambling industry in the UK."

Initiated by the gambling industry, Safer Gambling Week, which has been taking place between 13th -19th November, is described as 'a cross-industry initiative to promote safer gambling in the UK and Ireland.' However, CARE says that the week simply shifts the blame for problem gambling onto punters.

CARE is campaigning for tougher regulation of the gambling industry and legislative change, and its gambling policy expert, Tim Cairns,

said: "Safer Gambling Week is emblematic of all that is wrong with the gambling industry in the UK."

"This cynical stunt is less about safety and more about big gambling pretending it has a heart. It doesn't."

"Safer Gambling Week shifts the blame for harms associated with gambling to people experiencing addiction – it encourages people to 'be safer'. The gambling industry would have us believe that gamblers don't act in a safe and responsible way, so their suffering is on them."

Gambling addiction has been much in the news recently, with Newcastle Utd player Sandro Tonali recently being handed a ten-month ban due to gambling offences com-

mitted in Italy prior to his time on Tyneside.

Crystal Palace manager Roy Hodgson recently told *The Times* that he believes that "football has a gambling problem."

Tim Cairns called on the Government to bring in reform urgently. "Gambling needs to be treated in the same way as tobacco. Only the Government can bring in reform. It's time for Ministers to show that they will no longer listen to heartless big gambling industry, and instead pay heed to the people suffering because of its actions."

"It's time for change," he said.

Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer said in October that she envisions a

one per cent levy on online gambling operators' profits, and 0.4 per cent on profits from betting shops and casinos.

However, CARE believes that only a five per cent levy will match the scale of gambling harms.

"If gamblers are to be kept safe, ministers need to do for gambling what past governments did for tobacco," Mr Cairns said.

"Advertising needs to be cut and the gambling industry placed under a levy that is sufficient to properly meet the public health crisis it has inspired. At least five per cent of industry profits. The industry must be reined in to ensure that it is not free to target the vulnerable."

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Church praised for ‘key role’ in securing star’s father’s release

Andy Drozdziak

UK Catholic aid agency CAFOD has welcomed the release of the father of Liverpool player Luis Díaz and hailed the “key role” played by the Catholic Church and one of its partners in the situation.

Luis Manuel Díaz, an amateur football coach, was released on 9th November to a delegation of the UN and the Catholic Church. He had been kidnapped by the National Liberation Army (ELN).

Ulrike Beck, CAFOD’s Colombia programme officer, said: “We are delighted to see the safe release of Liverpool FC’s Luis Díaz’s father in Colombia. Luis Manuel Díaz was handed over to UN and Catholic Church officials, which included CAFOD’s long-standing partner, Monsignor Héctor Fabio Henao.”

The Liverpool striker’s parents, Luis Manuel Díaz and Cilenis Marulanda, were abducted on 28th October in Barrancas, Colombia. Marulanda was soon released but the fate of his father hung in the balance for over a week while negotiations took place for his release.

When Díaz scored for Liverpool against Luton, he raised his shirt to reveal the slogan in Spanish ‘Freedom for papa’ on a t-shirt.

Ulrike Beck explained the role the Catholic Church played in Luis Manuel Díaz’s release. “The Church has played a key role in peace negotiations in Colombia and is one of the four stakeholders of the current ceasefire between the ELN armed group and the Government which has been in place since August,” he said.



“We are proud to support Monsignor Héctor Fabio Henao, who is respected and renowned in Colombia and around the world. He has worked for decades on promoting peace, human rights and an end to the armed conflict. In December 2003, he led talks resulting in the release of British hostage Mark Henderson and six other foreign tourists held by ELN guerrillas.”

Several of Díaz’s Liverpool colleagues said they had been praying for the situation to end, including

Alisson Becker and Cody Gakpo.

Luis Manuel Díaz, 58, revealed details of his ordeal after being freed by the Colombian guerrillas. He told a news conference that the ordeal had been “very difficult”.

“I would not want anyone to be in that mountain in the situation I was in,” he said in an emotional interview.

Responding to Mr Díaz’s release, Liverpool FC said: “We are delighted by the news of Luis Díaz’s father’s safe return and we thank all those involved in securing his release.”

Housing market picks up

The housing market will perform better this year than many analysts had predicted, according to online estates agent Rightmove. A number of data points suggest this year so far has “been better than many predicted following the turbulent end to 2022”, said the property search website.

The average asking price of a home has declined only three per cent from the “unsustainably frothy heights” that prices peaked at in May, while the number of agreed sales is down only 10 per cent on 2019, the last time the market was regarded as “normal”.

Benefit cuts planned in welfare shake-up

Ministers are planning major benefit cuts for people who are unable to work due to health conditions, the BBC reported. The alleged proposals would see many more people forced to find work despite suffering from a range of physical and mental health conditions. The plans would affect “hundreds of thousands of people” from 2025 and save £4bn from the welfare budget. A Department for Work and Pensions spokesperson said the story was “speculation”.

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**UNIVERSE
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COMMENT

During the pandemic, virtually every GP surgery in the land closed its doors and no longer allowed people in as they were told to stay away from the NHS.

The reason was to stop the transmission of Covid-19 to healthcare professionals, but it effectively put the entire system out of reach for those who did not have Covid or a condition requiring emergency treatment.

The impact on the waiting lists in the NHS were immediate and continue to this day.

One thing that could naturally have been expected after the pandemic was that GP surgeries would again allow patients to drop in and wait to be seen rather than endure the lottery of making an appointment by phone. But this week a study of more than 6,000 GP practices by the University of Manchester was published showing that this is hardly happening anywhere.

The trend towards remote primary care was apparent before Covid but has been accelerating ever since. Research by campaigners has found that GPs are becoming an “elusive species”, with eight-in-10 elderly patients saying they have been forced into phone triage when they wanted a face-to-face appointment. Nearly one-in-five pensioners said they had ended up going to A&E because they could not get a GP appointment, even though the situation was found to be urgent.

To say this is not good enough would be an understatement. The doctors’ representatives have sought to play down anecdotal evidence of surgeries that are effectively out of bounds, while ministers insist that they are getting the NHS back onto an even keel.

But this is not true. Just a few years ago older patients were promised a named family doctor who they could get to see whenever they wanted. What happened to that?

Instead of pretending that the system is getting better, the GPs and the Government need to get together and fix it.

“Research has found that GPs are becoming an elusive species.. a phone triage call is the best the public will receive...”

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Constitutional issues surround greatest Cam-back in politics

POLITICS

Thomas Caygill

In a surprise move, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has appointed former Prime Minister David Cameron as Foreign Secretary. Cameron, who resigned immediately after losing the 2016 Brexit referendum, has been almost entirely absent from the political scene ever since.

It’s rare these days for a Prime Minister to appoint someone who is not a sitting member of the House of Commons as a cabinet level minister in their Government, but Sunak certainly can do it. The Prime Minister has what we call the power of patronage.

What we mean by this is that there are a number of public roles for which the PM gets to decide who gets the job. Those powers of patronage include appointing members of the cabinet as well as other junior ministers to serve in government.

It is only a constitutional convention, rather than a rule, that Government ministers be a member of either house of parliament. However, it is a convention that has been strongly abided by.

This convention revolves around the constitutional principle of responsible government where the executive is accountable to parliament. That’s why Cameron has been granted a life peerage to sit in the House of Lords, the upper house of parliament.

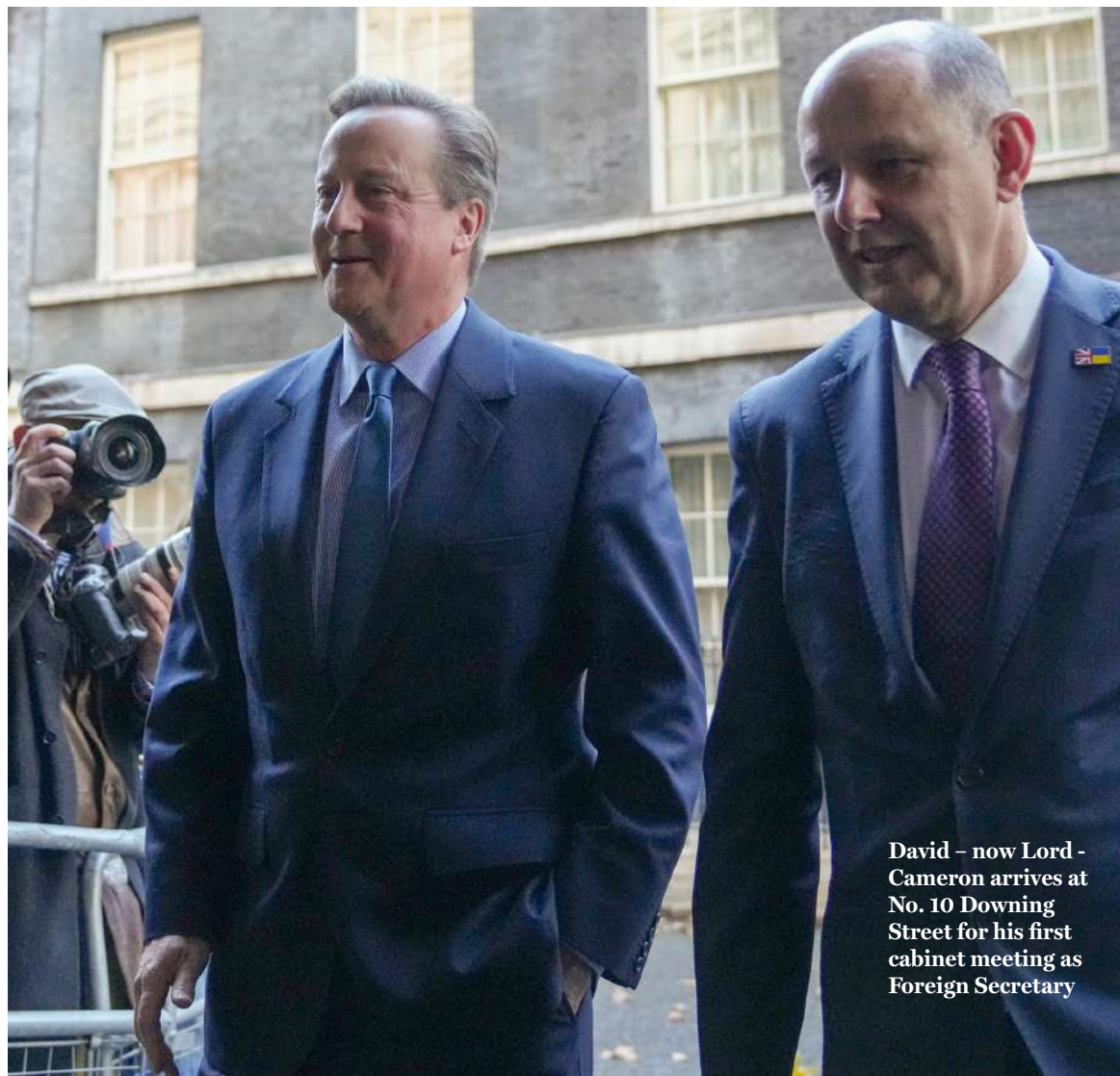
Making Lord Cameron the new Foreign Secretary is, from a historical and constitutional position, not unusual or forbidden. Under the Government of Gordon Brown, both Lord Mandelson and Lord Adonis served in the cabinet, for example.

How quickly does this all happen?

While there are often set times when Prime Ministers appoint peers to the House of Lords, such as resignation honours, they can appoint anyone at any time. That means Cameron is now already a peer.

He will sit on the Conservative benches in the House of Lords for life – regardless of how long he spends in the role as Foreign Secretary.

This conferring of a peerage does mean he will need to be formally introduced into the House of Lords but this doesn’t take long to arrange. There is nothing to prevent Cameron from taking up his new role immediately, which



David – now Lord – Cameron arrives at No. 10 Downing Street for his first cabinet meeting as Foreign Secretary

explains why he has already been photographed at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Is it OK to appoint a minister in this way?

There isn’t a problem with Cameron’s appointment from the perspective of the constitution. It is all above board.

However, some people will (legitimately) question whether the British Government should be continuing to appoint peers to cabinet level jobs in the 21st century, given that debates around its democratic legitimacy, as an appointed rather than elected chamber, have been going on for decades already.

It’s worth noting that Cameron had a preference for appointing his cabinet ministers from the House of Commons when he was in charge.

And while the Government is accountable to Parliament as a whole, generally speaking we are talking about being accountable to the House of Commons, which is the elected house. MPs are likely to be annoyed that a senior member of the cabinet is not a member of their house.

Lindsay Hoyle, the Speaker of the

House of Commons, has already expressed concern about how the Foreign Secretary will be held to account by the House of Commons. While there are mechanisms available to hold him to account, MPs are likely to need pacifying.

As a member of the House of Lords, Cameron will not be able to take part in the monthly Foreign Office questions in the House of Commons. He will not be able to answer urgent questions in the House of Commons or take part in their debates either.

Nor will he be able to deliver major foreign policy statements in the House of Commons. Junior ministers in the department will have to face MPs instead.

He can answer questions and take part in debates in the House of Lords and will be held to account by his fellow peers but it is a different political arena to the House of Commons.

There is precedence for cabinet-level ministers in the House of Lords to appear there regularly. In 2009, House of Lords procedures were changed to allow cabinet ministers to answer questions on their departmental brief once a month for 20 minutes, and I am sure Lord Cameron will deliver

statements on foreign affairs.

But, again, MPs cannot take part in this scrutiny. This is likely to annoy many, given the major foreign policy issues the country is facing at the moment.

When was the last time a great office of state was held by a peer?

While the appointment of cabinet ministers from the House of Lords is not unusual in post-war history, it has been some time since such a senior member of the government (a holder of one of the great offices of state) has come from the House of Lords.

The last member of the House of Lords to serve in one of the great offices of state was Lord Carrington, who was Margaret Thatcher’s Foreign Secretary between 1979 and 1982.

It also isn’t unheard of for former Prime Ministers to return to cabinet. Alex Douglas Home, who was until recently the shortest serving prime minister in post-war history, was appointed as Foreign Secretary by Prime Minister Ted Heath, serving from 1970 to 1974.

Thomas Caygill is a Senior Lecturer in Politics, Nottingham Trent University

Blessings for pope's final gift to the Queen

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, and Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendía, the Apostolic Nuncio, have formally handed over a Cedar of Lebanon tree, a gift from Pope Francis to the late Queen Elizabeth II, to King Charles. The tree now stands in the grounds of Windsor Castle.

When originally sending the Queen his gift, in March 2022, the Holy Father wrote: 'May this tree, which in the Bible symbolises the flourishing of fortitude, justice and prosperity, be a pledge of abundant divine blessings on your realm.'

The Nuncio conveyed the greetings of the Holy Father to The King, and Cardinal Nichols offered a prayer of blessing before the tree was sprinkled with holy water. His Majesty expressed his deep appreciation, and the Cardinal assured the King of the prayers of the Catholic community.

Cardinal Nichols said the handover had been "a wonderful moment." "The young tree is in a beautiful position, looking across open grass-

land in Windsor Great Park. Blessing the tree was a wonderful moment remembering, with His Majesty, our beloved Queen Elizabeth II, and reflecting on the warmth of the greeting from Pope Francis," he said.

The tree is the latest gift offered to the Royal Family by Pope Francis. During his coronation in May, the King walked behind a processional cross containing a relic of Christ's cross given by Pope Francis. That gift was described by Chris Trott, the British Ambassador to the Holy See, as a symbol of the strength of the relationship between the Vatican and Great Britain, a "relationship that developed over the course of the reign of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth, who met five popes."

"I think everyone was deeply moved and grateful to Pope Francis for it," Chris Trott added.

Pictured right, the Apostolic Nuncio reads the Pope's words to the late Queen, in the company of King Charles and Cardinal Nichols.



Photo: Buckingham Palace

Cinema treat awaits *Chosen* fans

Andy Drozdziak

Fans of *The Chosen* will have the chance to watch Season 4 of the series in cinemas across the UK and Ireland from 1st February – the first time that a full season of a streaming-TV show will be released exclusively in cinemas.

Speaking to the *Universe*, creator and director Dallas Jenkins shared his hopes for the new season to enable fans to go deeper into Christ's story.

"We have seen over and over that *The Chosen* has been used for discipleship. It has allowed people to go deeper and (be) a connection point to understanding scripture more," Dallas Jenkins said.

"I'm not God and Jonathan Roumie is not Jesus, *The Chosen* isn't the Bible. We want you, after viewing it, to love Jesus more. What happens after that is not up to me. My job is to get accurate the interpretation of Jesus in the Gospels."

The first three seasons of *The Chosen* have become

something of a cult classic, accumulating more than 450 million views in more than 140 countries and viewed in 56 languages, making it one of the most popular shows in the world. Its much anticipated fourth season has as its key theme the difficulties and struggles of keeping faith.

"After seeing the Season 4 episodes, we knew we'd be doing our fans a disservice if we denied them the chance to see them all on a big screen with others they can laugh and cry with," Dallas Jenkins said.

The Chosen has proved very popular among Catholics. Catholic actor Jonathan Roumie, who plays Jesus, and Dallas Jenkins met Pope Francis at the Vatican in August 2021.

The Chosen became the No. 1 crowdfunded media project in history in 2019 when £10 million was given by 19,000 people. It is available to view on Amazon Prime, Netflix, Peacock and on *The Chosen* mobile and TV apps.



The *Chosen* has become something of a cult classic, accumulating more than 450 million views in more than 140 countries and viewed in 56 languages, making it one of the most popular shows in the world.



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Shopping needs personal touch

Sir John Battle



The news that Booths supermarkets have stepped back from self-checkout tills and reinstated shop assistants was broadly welcomed. Nor did the company's justify the decision by people half checking their goods and walking out with some unpaid for. Rather, it was a desire to return the personal touch to its stores.

Buying newspapers at self checkouts is something I always find most frustrating. Not needing a bag but failing to get the bagging area to register – papers too light! – followed by the added frustration of needing the machine to be rest before being invited to donate to charity.

I have to summon an assistant; it's quicker to queue for a till! But the experience also closes with a better feeling, if only with a friendly word of 'thanks', a touch of personal contact and a smile.

The Social Return on Investment report *The Value of Giving Back; The Social Return of Charity Shops* has spelt out the real social value of charity shops in our town centres, and the positive benefits they bring to customers, staff, volunteers and donors. The report puts a figure on this social value of £75.3bn in 2022, which is broken down as 49 per cent 'giving back to others or the planet (recycling)' and 29 per cent contributing to 'a sense of community and being met with friendliness and compassion'. In other words, as well as recycling, being good shopping value and raising funds for the charity, the shops themselves provide a space of welcome and community service and personal interaction. St Vincent de Paul charity shops are a very good example.

At the Second Vatican Council the key word 'dialogue' entered the mission of the Church and is repeated in practically every papal letter and encyclical since. Nor can it be reduced to President Putin positioning himself at the end of a long table with an interlocutor at the far end. Pope Benedict drew out its real connections to the primary virtue of charity; love. Pope Francis nudges us further into a mode of encounter as a basic human task, essentially having a keenness to meet with others and not just a close circle.

The recent Synod focused our attention on the need for a deeper listening – and in St Benedict's proposal "with the ear of our hearts). Valuable personal face-to-face conversations are perhaps making a comeback.

In the words of poet William Empson, "perhaps one of the most important tasks in life is just to make warm human noises".

Sorry, but count me out of the media pilloring of the Ramseys just because of their ages

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Caroline Farrow



I was astonished to receive an invitation to appear on television in order to discuss whether or not chef Gordon Ramsay was "selfish" following the announcement this week that his wife, Tana, has given birth to their sixth child, a son named Jesse.

According to the producer, who was clearly keen to secure what she thought would be a feisty Catholic motormouth take, "they've obviously used IVF, Ramsay is 57, so he's going to be a much older dad than everyone else in the playground, he'll be in his seventies when the baby is a teenager and it's just really unfair on the child."

Whoa, stop right there, I said, "what do you mean, they've obviously used IVF?", before then declining the gig. Tana Ramsay is 49, so at an age when natural conception is highly unusual, but it is not absolutely impossible. One of my friends had the shock of her life when she conceived a surprise baby aged 48, and when I raised the subject on my social media, a number of people responded with stories of women they knew who had babies at a similar age, including one woman whose friend conceived a baby aged 52!

How the Ramsays manage to conceive is frankly none of anyone's business. While I am obviously not an advocate of IVF, I'd only feel the need to raise a note of caution if the couple were using their celebrity status to advocate IVF to other couples of a similar age, not least because IVF is more likely than not to be unsuccessful once you're over the age of 45. My inclination is to believe that the Ramsays conceived naturally, because it's the most charitable thing to do.

It seems more than likely that Mrs Ramsay enjoys fecundity, given that she managed to conceive in 2016 at the age of 42 (the pregnancy sadly ended in a late miscarriage) and that she had her fourth child, in 2019, at the age of 45.

There is no shame or stigma about using IVF, therefore it doesn't make sense for the Ramsays to have kept it quiet if they were using this method, especially as the rambunctious chef hasn't held back when it comes to discussing other details of their intimate life. It is a



Gordon and Tana Ramsay have just welcomed their sixth child together, at the ages of 57 and 49 respectively

"Whatever you may think of Gordon Ramsay's personality, here we have a celebrity couple who have been married for over 25 years, are still clearly devoted to each other and as such have welcomed another little baby into their lives."

sad reflection on where we are as a society that it is automatically assumed that an older couple who have managed to have a baby together, must have used an ethically problematic means of conception and instead of receiving congratulations, they receive criticism. Whatever you may think of Gordon Ramsay's personality, here we have a celebrity couple who have been married for over 25 years, are still clearly devoted to each other and as such have welcomed another little baby into their lives.

One of the reasons I declined the interview was because I wasn't prepared to start intruding on the couple's private lives and hinging my response on whether or not they had used IVF. Even though I endorse the Catholic view of IVF, once a baby has been born, it is curmudgeonly, churlish and antithetical to evangelisation to start criticising the parents for making use of IVF. No parent is ever going to regret that they went to extraordinary measures to bring

about the birth of their child and while what you are saying is perfectly valid, what the parent will hear is that you are saying that their child should not exist.

We may strongly disagree with people's personal or moral choices but that doesn't give us the right to go around indiscriminately attacking people for making them.

While those who know me may well raise an eyebrow at that statement, I do make a point not to go after private individuals, but only weigh in when celebrities attempt to use their status or personal situations to persuade us all that we have a moral imperative to advocate for their position.

My criticisms of IVF are reserved for cases such as a 55 year-old grandmother who sold her story to the press after taking out thousands of pounds in loans so that she could conceive a baby with another woman's eggs, after having been turned down for the treatment by the NHS. As far as I am concerned the upper age limit for having babies is when ovulation has ceased and menopause has begun, which will vary from woman to woman.

When it comes to whether or not Gordon Ramsay is selfish for having a baby three years shy of his 60th birthday - let's turn the question on its head. Once they discovered a baby was on the way, was it really so selfish to decide not to have an abortion? Sadly, it's the same twisted mindset that was used in the case of little Indi Gregory who died at the weekend, as the UK NHS and judiciary cruelly put their foot down and refused to allow her access to life-saving treatment. Somewhere,

somehow, an ideology has been allowed to take hold that says if your life circumstances are less than ideal then it would be better if you have not been born in the first place. Or in the case of Indi Gregory, her quality of life would be better if she were dead.

It also actually made me rather mad that with so many other important cultural issues on the agenda, including the death of little Indi, whose circumstances are so outrageous, they ought to be headline news, that a news station decided that they were going to round on a family celebrating a new baby, simply because his dad might be a bit older than some of his peers.

Chances are that after five children, the Ramsays will not only be highly experienced parents but they are also at a stage in their careers where they have more time to enjoy parenthood. If only more couples were as lucky.

And perhaps the TV producers need to get back to their Bibles ... they've obviously never heard of Sarah!

RIP, Indi Gregory



Community fridge helps beat poverty – and eradicate waste

Andy Drozdziak

St George's Cathedral in Southwark has teamed up with the Oasis Community charity to establish a community fridge to help save thousands of tonnes of London food which goes to waste each year.

The project was launched last Friday by Archbishop Wilson and Reverend Steve Chalke, the founder of Oasis, at Amigo Hall, St. George's Cathedral.

Archbishop of Southwark John Wilson said: "As Christians, we are challenged to not only have faith but also to put our faith into action through good works."

"Times are hard for many right now and now, more than ever, our community needs us to step up and put our faith into action."

"That is why I am delighted to support the Community Fridge at our cathedral and provide a vital lifeline for those who need it most."

St George's Cathedral said that the aim of the community fridge is to help the local community cope with the cost-of-living crisis, while at the same time preventing tonnes of good food going to waste.

It came about after Archbishop John asked those in Southwark "to take up a new outreach to people who face poverty, homelessness, isolation, and rejection." It currently feeds around 2,000 people every month.

Rev Steve Chalke said: "Too many families across London are struggling to put food on the table because of the cost-of-living crisis. Yet at a time when some parents are having to skip meals, and huge numbers of children are going to school hungry, tonnes of excess food are being wasted by the food industry in London every year."

"I'm proud that Oasis is working in partnership with St. George's Cathedral to open a



Archbishop Wilson and Reverend Steve Chalke, the founder of Oasis. Photo by David Clegg

Community Fridge to tackle the scandal of excess food, reduce our environmental footprint and, at the same time, provide food to families in Lambeth and Southwark who are struggling with food poverty."

The excess food saved from waste is sourced from the Borough Market. Di Blackler from the Oasis Community told the *Universe* that they were looking for support to run the community fridge, including volunteers to clean, help with IT and cook and serve food.

"There are lots of way to get involved. We need foot soldiers who can pick up supplies daily from several local business in Lambeth," she added.

"We have an e-bike and trailer, and we need bikers for this to pick up from Borough Market. We also need help on delivery days to help bring in the hundreds of kilos of food."

Private members' pro-life bills to go before the Lords

Three pro-life Private Members' Bills will be introduced to the House of Lords after they were drawn in a ballot.

Baroness O'Loan's Abortion (Gestational Time Limit Reduction) Bill 2023 was drawn at number 24 and will receive a First Reading on Thursday, 7th December.

Baroness Eaton's At Home Early Medical Abortion (Review) Bill was drawn at number 13 and will receive a First Reading on Wednesday 29th November.

Lord Moylan's Foetal Sentience Committee Bill was drawn at number nine and will receive a First Reading on Monday 27th November.

No pro-abortion or pro-assisted suicide bills were drawn in the ballot.

Catherine Robinson, spokesperson for Right To Life UK, welcomed the news. "It's fantastic to see that three Peers will be introducing pro-life bills to the House of Lords."

"While it is rare for Lords Private Members' Bills to become law, these three bills will ensure that pro-life issues are put firmly on the radar and debated extensively in Parliament, the media and wider society."

"This will help raise the profile of these issues and build further momentum for changes to our abortion legislation," she said.

"These bills provide an opportunity to proactively put the pro-life perspective on the agenda along with putting the abortion lobby on the back foot."

Ms Robinson added: "It's also great to see that neither pro-abortion nor pro-assisted suicide bills were drawn in the ballot."

"While this is a positive development, we are still expecting pro-abortion MPs, backed by BPAS, to try and hijack a Government Bill during this parliamentary session and force through a major change to our abortion laws that would allow abortion up to birth."

• See pg 4: MP threatens to axe all abortion rules



Rap return? God wanted me to

Rapper Sean 'Diddy' Combs has told BBC host Graham Norton that God told him to get back to music.

The 54-year-old, formerly known as Puff Daddy and P Diddy, was a guest on last week's *The Graham Norton Show* on BBC1..

Promoting his new album *The Love Album: Off the Grid* – his fifth album and first in 13 years – he said: "I went through a healing journey. I stopped making music and stopped being creative."

"I was on a low frequency and there was one thing that was missing – R and B music. Then one day God told me it was time, and I started making music again."

Although he was raised Catholic, Combs does not currently belong to any denomination.

The rapper also revealed that he had changed his name to 'Love' as part of a new dramatic persona. "We live in a toxic world, and it's love v versus hate. I choose love."

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In Brief

Whitty warns of age crisis

England's Chief Medical Officer has warned that the UK faces an ageing crisis. In his annual report, Prof Sir Chris Whitty, said people are living longer but some spend many of their later years in bad health. He called for a cultural shift in medicine away from maximising lifespan and towards improving quality of life in old age, arguing that sometimes this means "less medicine, not more".

Royal Mail fined for missing targets

Royal Mail has been fined £5.6m for missing targets covering both first and second-class deliveries. The industry regulator, Ofcom, said that during the 2022-23 financial year Royal Mail only delivered 73.7 per cent of first-class mail on time. Just 90.7 per cent of second-class mail was received on time.

Each year, Royal Mail is required to deliver 93 per cent of first class mail within one working day and 98.5 per cent of second class items within three working days. During the period in question, Royal Mail was hit by 18 days of strikes by frontline workers.

Net Zero pushing up prices – claim

A leading Bank of England policymaker has claimed that the rush to implement net zero policies is pushing up inflation and harming economic growth. Catherine Mann, a member of the interest rate-setting Monetary Policy Committee, said policies such as carbon taxes and emissions trading schemes risk raising costs for families as companies pass the extra costs on to their consumers. The claim comes as the economy flatlines amid on-going high inflation.

Two million switch off fridges

Around two million households in the UK have been forced to turn off their fridge or freezer because of a "frightening" level of hardship, according to a charity. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation said that millions of families were resorting to desperate measures to cope with rising bills, with four out of five households on Universal Credit going without food, turning off the heating and not replacing worn-out clothing. Charities have told the Government not to reduce financial help for low income families in the autumn statement, amid rumours it will.

UK households left short as the cost-of-living crisis bites deeper

How much income is needed to live well in the UK in 2023? At least £29,500 – much more than many households bring in, say two academic researchers

Matt Padley and Abigail Davis

You don't have to look very hard at the moment to find evidence of the immense financial pressure on UK households. New figures from the Trussell Trust show that 1.5 million emergency food parcels were provided to people between April and September 2023.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's latest report on destitution in the UK shows that around 3.8 million people in 2022 were not able to meet their basic physical needs – staying warm, dry, clean and fed – more than double the amount in 2017.

And the UN's special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter, has accused the UK government of failing to provide a welfare system that ensures an adequate standard of living for everyone.

But what does it mean to have an adequate standard of living?

For the last 15 years, we have been researching this exact topic, trying to identify what kind of living standards we as a society agree everyone should be able to achieve. We call this the Minimum Income Standard (MIS).

Unlike poverty measures, which focus on what people lack, either in terms of income or material goods, MIS establishes what is needed to reach a defined living standard, and how these needs can be met.

A minimum standard of living

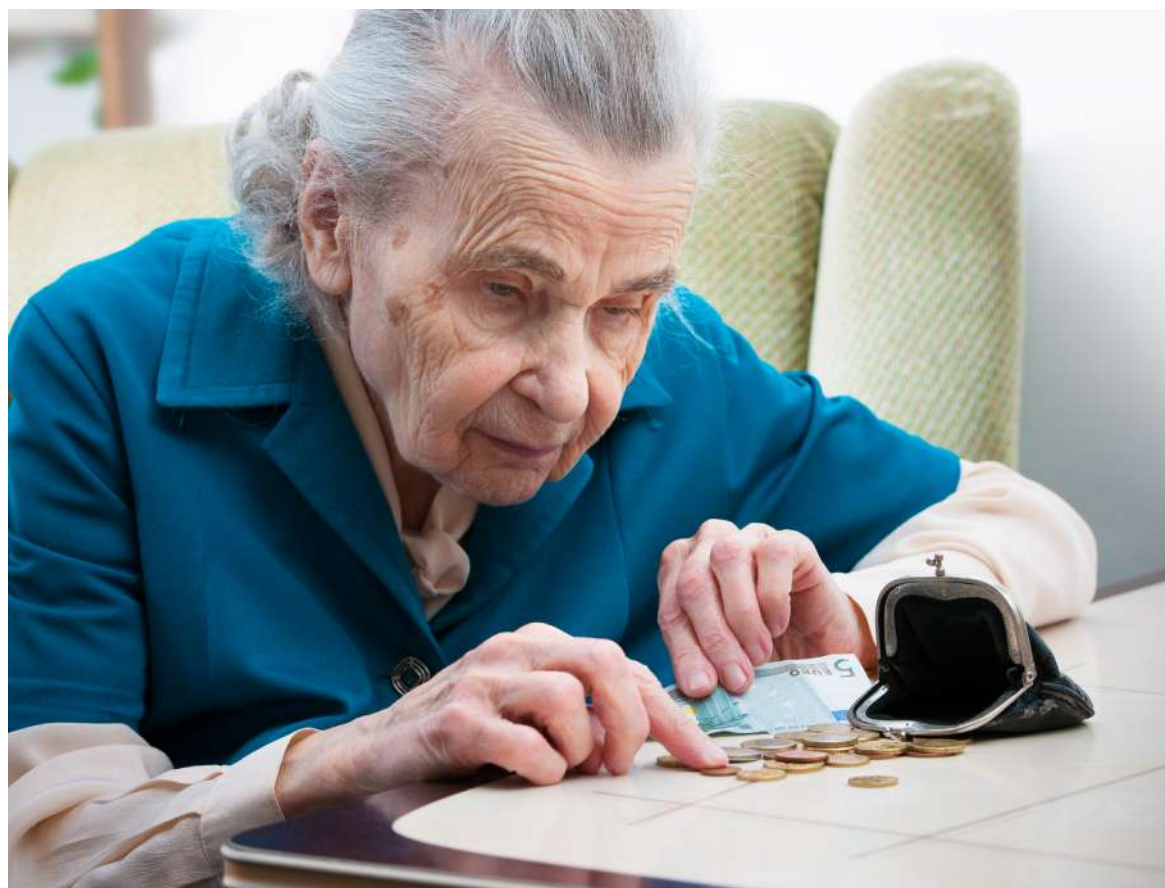
We've talked to hundreds of groups of people from different backgrounds and types of households, to determine a minimum standard of living that includes more than just food, clothes and shelter.

This minimum is about having what you need in order to have the opportunities and choices necessary to participate in society. As a participant early in our research said: "Food, clothes and shelter keep you alive, but that's not living".

Living with dignity is about more than just survival, it's about being able to participate in the world around you. MIS describes in detail what households require to meet material and non-material needs, establishing baskets of goods and services that combine to provide an adequate living standard.

From these baskets, we calculate how much different households need to spend to reach this level, and the income required to enable this spending.

In 2023, we have calculated that



a single person needs to earn £29,500 to have an acceptable standard of living, up from £25,000 in 2022. A couple with two children need to earn £50,000, compared to £44,500 in 2022.

Our latest analysis shows that 19.2 million people (29 per cent of the population) in the UK are living in households bringing in below the minimum standard, and don't have the income they need.

This is the result of the significant pressures on household incomes and inflation, particularly for food and domestic fuel.

And while costs have increased rapidly, people's incomes, both in and out of work, have not kept up. A single person, out of work, receives only 30 per cent of what they need to reach MIS.

Even working full-time at the national living wage they only have 73 per cent of what they need, falling well short of an adequate

living standard. As of April 2023, the total annual salary for working full-time (37.5 hours a week) at the national living wage is £20,375.

A couple with two children, receiving out-of-work benefits, have half of what they need, and with both working full-time at the national living wage, they still fall short of MIS, having 95 per cent of what they need to have an acceptable standard of living.

What the Government should do to fix it

The Government's recently announced legislative plans provided very little, if any, support for those most at risk of living below – and far below – a minimum adequate standard of living. Addressing this substantial challenge is critical to the nation's economy and health, as well as people's dignity and human rights.

Over the last ten years, benefits have been increased inconsistently, and overall have not kept pace with the rising cost of living. With the upcoming autumn statement, the Government has a chance to commit to uprating benefits in line with inflation. This would remove uncertainty for people who receive benefits, and improve the state safety net.

The Government must also remove the two-child limit, which stops families from receiving additional support for their third or subsequent children. In April 2023,

1.5 million children lived in families affected by this limit, missing out on up to £3,235 each year.

Child Poverty Action Group estimates that removing this limit would lift around a quarter of a million children out of poverty. Neither the current government or the opposition have outlined plans to do this.

We also need longer-term thinking and bolder ambition, focused on creating a society in which fewer people fall below the MIS. We need a social security system that doesn't depend on food banks and charities to catch those falling through the growing holes in our safety net, and a benefits system that guarantees a minimum income for all – rooted in robust research and evidence.

We need proper, long-term investment in housing, and we need to find ways of reducing the cost – and improving the quality – of key services like transport and childcare. Until we do this, many people will continue to exist on incomes that don't meet their minimum needs.

Matt Padley is a Professor and Co-Director, Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University
Abigail Davis is a Professor and Co-Director, Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University

"The Government's recent legislative plans provided very little, if any, support for those most at risk of living below – and far below – a minimum adequate standard of living..."

It's Caritas Salford MBE as it's rewarded by King

Andy Drozdziak

Bishop John Arnold has hailed the "great achievement" of Caritas Salford winning a prestigious award in the first King's Awards to be presented since his accession to the throne.

The King's Award for Voluntary Service is the highest award a local voluntary group can receive in the UK, and equivalent to an MBE.

Bishop of Salford John Arnold, the chair of Caritas Salford, said: "This is a great achievement and an honour, and I am most grateful for the recognition of the excellent work done by our volunteers.

"The work of our volunteers is a clear demonstration of care and compassion in action and has a very practical impact on the lives of people in need. What an important example they give in caring for our brothers and sisters and our common home."

Created in 2002 to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee, the King's Award is presented to charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups across the UK, as a reminder of the effective ways volunteers contribute.

Patrick O'Dowd, director of Car-



Caritas Salford projects include an allotment for growing produce for local people

tas Salford, said: "It's an incredible honour for our amazing volunteers to be recognised by King Charles in this way.

"To have this wonderful recognition from the King is unbelievable."

Volunteers from Caritas Salford will receive the award crystal and certificate, and two members of the group will attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace next summer.

Meanwhile, Caritas Salford has launched a special appeal encouraging people to support those in need in Greater Manchester and Lanca-

shire this Christmas. The appeal launched with a specially created animation, including voices of local children, which can be viewed at www.caritassalford.org.uk/beethere

It shows how everyone deserves a chance at fulfilling their dreams and encourages people to pledge to make a small change this Christmas that could make a big difference.

For more information on Caritas Salford and the Advent appeal, visit www.caritassalford.org.uk/beethere

Global PR award win amplifies need for Mercy Ships' work

The pressing need for vastly improved access to surgical care across Africa has been amplified after an international health charity campaign picked up a global PR award.

The Mercy Ships campaign, supported by APO Group, was celebrated for its creativity and strategic success on a global scale by the PRO-voke Media SABRE Awards.

Its African Celebration campaign spotlighted the critical need for action to provide increased access to healthcare across Africa, judges said.

Mercy Ships is an international Christian charity that operates hospital ships to deliver surgical care and medical training.

By providing free, world-class surgical, obstetric, and anaesthetic care, the organisation brings hope and healing to those who need it most. It also delivers training to local medical professionals.

Jitze Kramer, VP Global Brand for Mercy Ships, said: "We are grateful for this recognition. The collaboration with the APO team has led to outstanding communications and, more importantly, aware-

ness for the need to increase access to surgical care in Africa."

The coverage reinforced Mercy Ships' relationship with governments and stakeholders in Africa and ultimately led to increasing the quality and capacity of its surgical interventions.

The campaign also highlighted the Dakar Declaration, which saw African Heads of State committing to accelerate access to surgical care and surgical education by 2030. This declaration was endorsed on board international health charity Mercy Ship's newest hospital ship, the *Global Mercy*, as it docked in Dakar in May 2022.

Mercy Ships International Chief Medical Officer Dr. Mark Shrime urged that progress made, highlighted by the award, needs continued action.

"The Dakar Declaration calls for the scaling up of surgical services, infrastructure and health personnel across the continent of Africa. Mercy Ships stands solidly behind this call, recognising that one person dies of a surgically treatable disease every two seconds."

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In Brief

GPs becoming 'elusive' for elderly

GPs have been accused of being an "elusive species", according to *The Telegraph*, with eight in 10 elderly patients saying they had to accept phone appointments when they wanted to see a family doctor face-to-face.

In findings described by campaigners as "appalling", almost one-in-five pensioners said they had ended up going to A&E because they could not get a GP appointment even though their situation was urgent, and one-in-six said their practice would not even accept telephone calls to make an appointment, instead insisting that online questionnaires were completed.

• Universe Comment - pg 6

Pothole complaints up again says RAC

The RAC said that vehicle breakdowns caused by Britain's pothole-ridden roads reached record levels this year. The motoring group said it received almost 6,000 calls for pothole-related incidents from July to September – its highest total for the period since records began. The lack of road maintenance was "causing a world of pain for drivers", it added.

Catholic girls' delight as they land starring roles in top musical



Two Catholic youngsters from the same family of schools are set to light up the big stage after landing roles in a production of *Nativity the Musical*.

Nine-year-old Emmy Hill and Isla Hood, aged 11, has been gracing the stage at Newcastle's Tyne Theatre this week in a show that has put audiences in a festive mood.

Isla, a Year 6 pupil at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School in Shotton Colliery, has a starring role in the musical alongside Emmy, a Year 5 pupil at St Bede's Catholic Primary School, South Shields.

Isla said she is "so excited" about appearing in the show, describing it as "a very special moment."

Nativity the Musical, presented by Starlight Theatre Productions, is a fun-filled family favourite bringing hilarity and a good dose of Christmas cheer. Following in the footsteps of the hit film, starring Martin Freeman, Marc Wootton, Ashley Jensen, Jason Watkins, Alan Carr, Pam Ferris and Ricky Tomlinson, *Nativity* tells the story of primary school pupils, their teacher

Isla Hood and Emmy Hill, who are both appearing in *Nativity the Musical* at the Tyne Theatre

and their off-the-wall teaching assistant Mr Poppy, as they try to find a way to make everyone's Christmas wishes come true, and bring Hollywood to their nativity play. The show features all sing-along favourites from the film as well as a host of new songs.

Emmy said: "I'm so excited that I get to perform on such a big stage. Normally I watch my friends, but this time they're watching me."

Staff from both schools said everyone is incredibly proud of Emmy and Isla's achievements. Isla's headteacher Lisa Ashton said: "Isla is very talented and we are delighted to hear of her success. She has certainly let her light shine and we look forward to seeing her perform."

Of Emmy, headteacher Carol Devine added: "Emmy is a star performer and extremely talented. We are all very proud of her achievements and I am sure she is destined for future stardom."

Emmy also has roles coming up in *Jack and the Beanstalk* and in *Beauty and the Beast* the musical, while Isla will appear in *Les Misérables* in Hartlepool next year.

Nativity the Musical will run at Newcastle's Tyne Theatre until Saturday 18th November.

Memorable sight as officers process into cathedral for Mass

Paul Connolly, Interim Chair, The Catholic Police Guild, reports on a historic 100th National Police Requiem Mass

On a crisp but thankfully dry November afternoon, Tuesday 7th November, Westminster Cathedral saw serving and retired police officers and staff gather from around the country to celebrate the 100th National Police Requiem Mass.

Organised each year by The Catholic Police Guild, its intention is to pray for both Guild members and all who have served and passed away. The annual Mass has taken place at Westminster Cathedral since the Guild was formed in 1914.

To mark the milestone of the centenary Requiem, the Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Vincent Nichols, assisted by Bishop Alan Williams – the Guild's link with the Bishops' Conference – and Bishop Tom Williams, his predecessor in the role. Concelebrating were National Chaplain Fr Barry Lomax, Fr Liam Bradley from Dyfed-Powys Police, Fr Paul Fox and Deacons Tony Hunt and Gary May from Cheshire and Hampshire Police respectively.

The clergy procession followed serving officers and staff who had, prior to the Mass, marched onto



Cardinal Nichols pictured with clergy and some of the attendees at the Mass

the Cathedral Piazza and formed up in ranks under the direction of The Metropolitan Polices' Sovereigns Colour Unit. Led by the Union Flag and standards from many Forces from around the country, scores of serving officers filed into the Cathedral in what was a truly memorable sight, and one which will be repeated going forward.

The fine voices of The Metropolitan Police Choir led the congregation and performed, as ever, some fine choral pieces, including Faure's *Kyrie* and Rachmaninov's *Ave Maria*.

At the conclusion of the Mass, as is customary, the names of those who have died in service since the last Requiem were read out. This

year, the Guild National Chaplain Fr Barry Lomax read out the following:

Police Community Support Officer Daniel William Gower Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary.
Police Sergeant Steven Creal Sussex Police.
Police Constable Richard James

Joseph Kemp Lancashire Constabulary.
Police Constable Bruce Lister Hertfordshire Constabulary.
Police Constable Neil Pattinson Northumbria Police.
Police Constable Andrew Boardman West Mercia Police.
Police Inspector Gareth Earp Dyfed-Powys Police.
Police Sergeant Graham Saville Nottinghamshire Police.

This was followed by the Last Post, two minutes silence and Reveille, this year played by a bugler from The Irish Guards, with the haunting sound resounding from the highest point of the cathedral.

The Mass is undoubtedly the highlight in the Guilds' calendar, as it allows all present to celebrate the Requiem Mass in remembrance of all who have gone before. It is also a chance to catch up socially afterwards.

This year's centenary Mass will be remembered for the sight of numerous uniformed police officers and staff marching alongside the cathedral, and then leading the procession down the centre aisle prior to the commencement of Mass.

Next year, the National Police Requiem, the 101st, will take place on Thursday, 7th November 2024 at Westminster Cathedral.

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Religious advent calendar with envelope. 14.5" x 10.5" (36.5 x 26 cm). Featuring busy Bethlehem scene. Each opening window has a motif or scene from the Christmas story, and pictures are translucent when held to light.

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Box of 18 Religious Christmas Cards 4.5" x 6.5" (11 x 16 cm), with litho gold highlights, presented in cardboard box. Four nativity scenes within Gothic Stained Glass window border, with the words Christmas Blessings below. Inside text: May the Blessings of Christmas be with you today and always.

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

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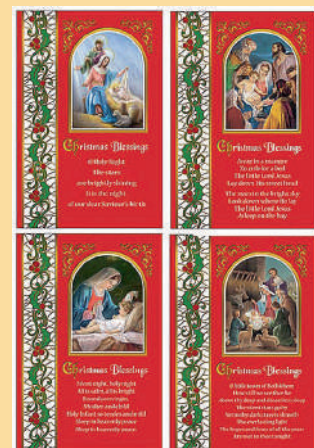
Ref: X0839 Price: £8.79 + P&P

Deluxe Christmas Card Pack – Christmas Peace

Pack of 12
Pack of 12 Religious Christmas Cards 4.5" x 6.5" (11 x 16 cm) in 4 designs, embossed and gold foil stamped, featuring Nativity image enclosed in gold-embossed wreath and wording: Christmas Peace.

Inside Text: Wishing you a very Happy Christmas and Peaceful New Year.

Ref: X0497 Price £6.50 + P&P



Deluxe Christmas Card Pack – Holy Night

Pack of 12
Pack of 12 Religious Christmas Cards 4.5" x 6.5" (11 x 16 cm) in 4 designs, embossed and gold foil stamped. Four inset nativity designs with holly border, and the words Blessings below, together with the first verse of a favourite Christmas carol. Inside text: May the Blessings of Christmas be with you today and always.

Ref: X0865 Price: £6.50 + P&P

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Pope Francis blesses an icon of Mary holding the city of Jerusalem in her lap during a meeting with members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican. At the right is Cardinal Fernando Filoni, grand master of the order.

Francis set to address Dubai's COP28 summit

Pope Francis will travel to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates from 1st-3rd December to address the U.N. Climate Conference – COP 28 – and to help inaugurate the Faith Pavilion where religious leaders and organisations will meet to share information and strategies for convincing governments to take real steps to protect the environment.

COP28, “can represent a change of direction, showing that everything done since 1992 (with the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) was worth the effort, or else it will be a great disappointment and jeopardise whatever good has been achieved thus far,” the pope wrote in *Laudate Deum (Praise God)*, a follow-up document to his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home*.

Releasing the schedule for the pope's trip, the Vatican said he would address the conference on 2nd December – the closing day of the World Climate Action Summit – and spend the rest of the day in private meetings, although the Vatican provided no indication of which religious or government leaders he would be meeting.

The schedule did not indicate that the pope would visit St. Mary's Church, the only Catholic parish in Dubai.

True poverty anchors sisters' religious life

True poverty safeguards consecrated life and is what allows religious to go throughout the world recognising people in need and making Christ visible through their response, Pope Francis told the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

Meeting members of the order's general chapter, the pope said he really liked the passage in their constitution which says their founder, Blessed Theresa Gerhardinger, “grounded the congregation in the Eucharist, anchored it in poverty and dedicated it to Mary.”

“I like this: anchored in poverty,” the pope said. “Without true poverty, there is no religious life. Poverty is what guards the consecrated life. And not only is it a virtue, no, it is the guardian. Don't forget this.”

“This firm foundation has enabled the School Sisters of Notre Dame to go all over the world and witness to the Gospel, making Christ visible through your presence, full of faith, hope and charity,” the pope told them.

After offering his heartfelt blessing “to all your sisters throughout the world,” Pope Francis asked how many sisters there are.

When told there are 1,900. “Greet all of them,” he said.

No surprise – but parents best placed to teach children values

Cindy Wooden

The only way for parents to teach their children the beauty and importance of marriage and of accepting children as a gift from God is through their example, Pope Francis told a group that represents parents' views.

Children “are immersed” in a media and cultural environment extolling virtues and practices that are “at odds with what, until a few decades ago, was considered ‘normal’ but is no longer the case,” the pope told members of the European Parents' Association.

“Parents thus find themselves constantly having to show their children the goodness and reasonableness of choices and values that can no longer be taken for granted, such as the importance of marriage

and the family, or the decision to accept children as a gift from God,” the pope told the group.

Pope Francis reiterated the Church's strong support for the right of parents “to raise and educate their children in freedom, without finding themselves constrained in any sphere, particularly in that of schooling, to accept educational programmes contrary to their beliefs and values.”

While the culture and its values change, “the needs of the human heart remain the same,” the pope said, and that is the place where parents must start in educating children to be good Christians and responsible citizens.

“God himself has planted in our nature an irrepressible need for love, truth and beauty, an openness

to others in healthy relationships and an openness to himself as our creator,” he said. “These yearnings of the human heart are powerful allies of every educator.”

Parents must help their children recognise “the beauty of life in this world and grow confident and enthused about the prospect of embarking on the adventure of life, convinced that they too have a mission to carry out, a mission which will bring them great fulfillment and happiness,” Pope Francis said.

To instill that in children, he said, they must know that God loves them.

“When we realise that at the root of our being is the love of God our father, then we see clearly that life is good, that being born is good and that loving is good,” the pope said.

Christians told to put screens down, look into their hearts

Like replenishing the oil that fuels a lamp, Christians must nourish their interior lives by paying attention to the movements of their hearts, Pope Francis said.

“Many times, we are careful about our appearance,” he told 20,000 people gathered to pray the Angelus in St. Peter's Square. “But Jesus says that the wisdom of life lies elsewhere: in taking care of what cannot be seen, but which is more important, taking care of the heart, nurturing the inner life.”

“This means knowing how to stop and listen to one's heart, to keep

watch over one's own thoughts and feelings,” he said. “Wisdom means knowing how to make room for silence, so as to be capable of listening to ourselves and others.”

“It means knowing how to give up some of the time passed in front of the telephone or the mobile phone screen to look at the light in the eyes of others, in one's own heart, in God's gaze upon us.”

Reflecting on the day's Gospel reading from St. Matthew, in which Jesus shares the parable of 10 virgins awaiting a bridegroom – five who brought extra oil for their lamps

and five who did not – the pope said that the difference between the two groups in the parable was in the preparation of the “conspicuous” oil, without which their lamps have no light.

Pope Francis said the Gospel “gives us the right advice for not neglecting the oil of inner life,” or the “oil of the soul,” which requires one to be prepared.

“The inner life cannot be improvised,” he said. “It is not a matter of a moment, of once in a while, of once and for all; the inner life must be prepared by dedicating a little time

every day, with constancy, as one does for every important thing.”

The pope urged Christians to reflect on what they are preparing for at this moment in their lives.

“Perhaps I am trying to put aside some savings, I am thinking about a house or a new car, concrete plans,” he said.

“They are good things. But am I also thinking about dedicating time to the care of the heart, to prayer, to service to others, to the Lord who is life's destination?” he asked.

“In short, how is the oil of my soul?”

Pope sacks bishop who accused him of an ‘attack on the sacred’

Pope Francis has ‘relieved’ a controversial American bishop of his duties after the cleric launched a series of outspoken attacks on the Holy Father right to lead the Church.

Bishop Joseph E. Strickland of the Diocese of Tyler, Texas, was told last week he had to step down, amid a huge outcry over his repeated criticism of the pope.

In May he took to social media to accuse the pontiff of “undermining the deposit of faith,” and at the end of October he followed this up with an address in Rome, where he read from a lengthy letter, attributed to a “dear friend,” that accused Pope Francis (among other things) of being a “usurper of Peter’s chair.”

Later, the bishop opined himself that Pope Francis was supporting an “attack on the sacred” coming out of the Vatican.

The US Bishops’ Conference informed the local diocese that after an investigation via an apostolic visitation, “the continuation in office of Bishop Strickland was not feasible.”

Bishop Strickland had himself indicated previously that he would not resign willingly from office. In a blog on his personal website, he addressed rumours of an impending resignation, saying to resign “would be me abandoning the flock that I was given charge of by Pope Benedict XVI.”

However, he said that he would respect Pope Francis’ authority if the pontiff removed him from the diocese.

The bishop himself likened the apostolic visitation to “being called to the principal’s office.” In July, he said on his weekly radio show, ‘The Bishop Strickland Hour,’ that he believed the apostolic visitation was initiated “because I’ve been bold enough, I love the Lord enough and



his Church to simply keep preaching the truth.”

Bishop Strickland’s public opposition to Pope Francis seemed to increase substantially as the Synod of Bishops began last month. He criticised the synod, saying it would “lead to further confusion and division in the Church.”

Then Bishop Strickland published seven pastoral letters on various topics, including the nature of the church and of humanity, the Eucharist, matrimony and holy orders, human love in the divine plan and the error of universalism.

In his final pastoral letter, he urged the faithful to “lift high the Cross.”

This criticism culminated in his address to the Rome Life Forum, sponsored by LifeSiteNews, at the end of October. The forum was highly critical of the synod, saying it

threatened “to formalise heretical teachings on the family.”

Bishop Strickland gave a 46-minute public address, which included him reading at length from a letter he said was written to him by an unnamed “dear friend.” This letter accused Pope Francis of being “an expert at producing cowards by

preaching dialogue and openness in a welcoming spirit and by highlighting always his own authority.”

The letter outright attacked Pope Francis’ validity as the successor of St. Peter, claiming he had ousted his predecessor, the late-Benedict XVI (who denied such allegations): “Would you now allow this one, who has pushed aside the true pope and has attempted to sit on a chair that is not his, define what the Church is to be?”

Bishop Strickland said the letter’s words were “challenging” but did not dispute the allegations.

Bishop Strickland himself said in his address that “one of the most frustrating things coming out of the Vatican, and it’s supported at least by Pope Francis, is the attack on the sacred.”

A deeply frustrated Pope Francis asked for his resignation in the wake of his comments, before finally removing him on 11th November.

Bishop Strickland did not mention his removal when posting to social media, but the same day posted a message on X urging followers to “rejoice always that...no matter what the day brings Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, yesterday, today and forever.”

Vatican clinic extends hours to mark World Day of the Poor

Dr. Massimo Ralli, the doctor who runs the Vatican’s ‘Madre di Misericordia’ (Mother of Mercy) clinic for street sleepers, has announced it will increase its opening hours as the Holy See marks the World Day of the Poor on 19th November.

Ralli, director of the clinic established by Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, at the behest of Pope Francis, said the number of poor seeking assistance each month has increased continuously since it was opened in 2016.

“We’re seeing about 1,500 people a month now. A year ago, it was 700 patients,” he said. Sixty physicians volunteer their services at the clinic each month, along with dozens of nurses and lab technicians.

Now the clinic is extending its hours and the number of specialists who offer help for rough sleepers. Most of the patients have problems related to sleeping on the street, Ralli said, such as colds, pneumonia, joint pain and toothaches. But its GP’s station also reveals heart problems, diabetes and tumours, and prescribes vaccines and medicine for common illnesses.



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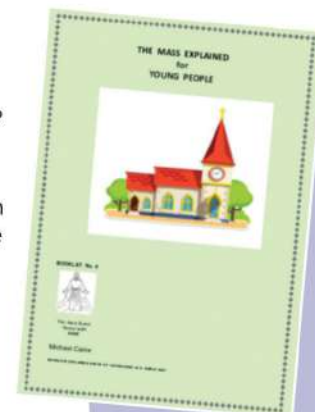
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- Why do we say Amen?
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In Brief

Scott drops out of US race

Senator Tim Scott has dropped out of the race to become the Republican's presidential candidate in the United States.

He has struggled to gain traction in polls or stand out on a debate stage since the primary season opened. He admitted to Fox News: "I think the voters have been really clear that they're telling me: not now."

Scott, who is the lone Black Republican in the US Senate, launched his bid earlier this year and sought to cast himself as an optimist, and a new path forward for the GOP.

But Robert Schmuhl, professor emeritus of American studies at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, said that Scott's "campaign message never resonated with the Republican electorate."

Stop the threats, North Korea told

Senior defence officials from South Korea, the United States and other nations warned North Korea on Tuesday over its nuclear ambitions and repeated threats to strike its southern neighbour, vowing an unspecified collective response to any war-like aggression towards its rival.

Their joint statement from the US-led United Nations Command, which provided combat or medical forces in support of the South during the 1950-53 Korean War, came a day after Mr Austin and Mr Shin held annual defence talks.

The UN Command's member states strongly condemned North Korea's "unlawful" nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, which violate multiple UN Security Council resolutions, and called for Pyongyang to recommit to diplomacy aimed at defusing the nuclear stand-off.

EU admits to failing Ukraine pledges

EU nations have acknowledged they will fail to fulfill their promise to provide Ukraine with the ammunition it needs to stave off Russia's invasion and to win back occupied territory.

EU leaders promised to provide one million rounds of ammunition to Ukraine's front line by spring 2024. But the 27-nation bloc is finding it tough to come up with the goods. "The one million will not be reached, you have to assume that," German defence minister Boris Pistorius admitted.



A puppeteer manoeuvres Little Amal, a 12-foot-tall puppet of a Syrian refugee girl, next to the US-Mexico border wall, in Tijuana, Mexico. Little Amal has finished a nearly two-month tour across the US to raise awareness of the plight of refugees and was just beginning a tour of Mexico. The puppet toured Europe and the UK extensively in 2022, raising similar awareness of the migrant crisis

Photo: David Maung

Gaza left on edge of collapse as thousands more flee the north

The United Nations has said all public services in Gaza are on the edge of collapse after another 200,000 people fled the north of the state to avoid Israeli ground forces battling Palestinian militants.

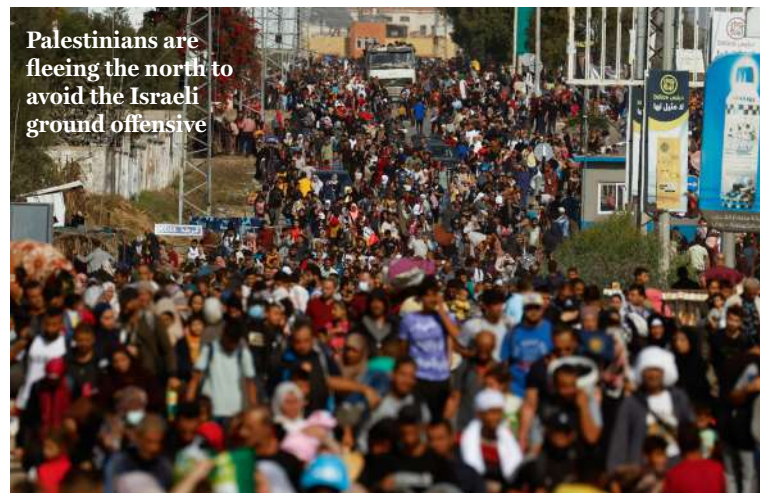
Much of the fighting is now centred around hospitals where patients, newborn babies and medics are stranded with no electricity and dwindling supplies. The humanitarian office, known as Ocha, said only one hospital in the north is receiving patients. All the others are no longer able to function and mostly serve as shelters from the fighting, including Gaza's largest, Shifa, which is surrounded by Israeli troops.

The war, now in its sixth week, was triggered by Hamas's surprise 7th October attack on Israel, in which militants massacred hundreds of civilians and dragged some 240 hostages back to Gaza.

Israel retaliated with heavy air strikes for nearly three weeks before sending troops and tanks into the north.

World leaders must ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the people affected by the ongoing wars in Gaza and Sudan, Pope Francis said.

"In Gaza, let the wounded be rescued immediately, let civilians be protected, let far more aid be allowed to reach that stricken population," he said after praying the Angelus in St. Peter's Square. "May the hostages be freed, including the elderly and children."



The war has killed thousands of Palestinian civilians and wreaked widespread destruction on the impoverished coastal enclave.

UN-run shelters in the south are severely overcrowded, with an average of one toilet for 160 people. In all, some 1.5 million Palestinians – more than two-thirds of Gaza's population – have fled their homes.

People stand in line for hours for

scarce bread and brackish water. Rubbish is piling up, sewage is flooding the streets and taps run dry. The UN is struggling to provide basic services to more than 600,000 people sheltering in schools and other facilities in the south. It said it is unable to continue importing limited supplies of food and medicine through Egypt's Rafah crossing, Gaza's only link to the outside

world because of a lack of fuel.

With Israeli forces fighting Palestinian militants in the centre of Gaza City, the territory's main city, both sides have seized on the plight of hospitals. Images of doctors trying to keep newborn babies warm at Shifa have been widely circulated.

Israel accuses Hamas of using hospitals as cover for its fighters, alleging that its main command centre are in and beneath Shifa, without providing visual evidence. Both Hamas and Shifa Hospital staff deny the Israeli allegations, but on Tuesday the US State Department said it had intelligence that proved some hospitals were being used to shelter Hamas fighters.

On Monday, the military released footage of a children's hospital that its forces entered over the weekend, showing weapons it said it found inside, as well as rooms in the basement where it believes the militants were holding hostages.

"Hamas uses hospitals as an instrument of war," said Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari.

Pope begs world leaders, get aid into Palestine, Sudan

Hamas militants still holds over 200 Israeli hostages in Gaza. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that a ceasefire in Gaza would be possible only after a release of all the hostages.

Yet the next day the pope publicly asked that "the weapons be stopped."

"They will never lead to peace," he said. "And may the conflict not widen. Enough! Enough, brothers!"

"Every human being – Christian, Jewish, Muslim – of any people or religion, every human being is sacred, is precious in the eyes of God and has the right to live in peace," the pope added, asking people to "pray and work tirelessly so that the sense of humanity may prevail over hardness of heart."

He also appealed to leaders to support access to humanitarian aid in Sudan, where a civil conflict that

began in April has led to the deaths of more than 9,000 people and displaced 5.6 million. The pope asked Sudanese leaders to "work in search of peaceful solutions" with the help of the international community.

"I am close to the sufferings of those dear populations of Sudan," he said.

"Let us not forget these brothers and sisters of ours who are in distress."

World not on track to stop climate change, says report

The world is off track in its efforts to curb global warming in 41 of 42 important measurements and is even heading in the wrong direction in six crucial ways, a new international report calculates.

The only bright spot is that global sales of electric vehicles are now on track to match what is needed – along with many other changes – to limit future warming to just another couple of tenths of a degree, according to the State of Climate Action report released by the World Resources Institute, Climate Action Tracker, the Bezos Earth Fund and others.

Public money spent to create more fossil fuel use is going in the wrong direction and faster than it has in the past, said study co-author Kelly Levin, science and data director at the Bezos Earth Fund.

“This is not the time for tinkering around the edges, but it’s instead the time for radical decarbonisation of all sectors of the economy,” Ms Levin said. “We are woefully off track and we are seeing the impact of inaction unfold around the world, from extensive wildfire fires in Canada, heat-related deaths across the Mediterranean, record high temperatures in South Asia and so on,” she said.

Later this month, crucial interna-



tional climate negotiations starting in Dubai will include the first time world negotiators have carried out a global stocktake on how close society is to meeting its 2015 Paris Agreement climate goals.

In advance of the United Nations Cop28 summit, numerous reports from experts are assessing Earth’s progress, or mostly the lack of it. Tuesday’s 42 indicators offer one of the grimmest report cards, detailing multiple failures of society.

The report looks at what is needed in several sectors of the global economy – power, transportation, buildings, industry, finance and forestry – to fit in a world that limits warming to 1.5C over pre-industrial

times, the goal the world adopted in Paris in 2015. The globe has already warmed about 1.2C since the mid-19th century.

Six categories – the carbon intensity of global steel production, how many miles passenger cars drive, electric buses sold, loss of mangrove forests, amount of food waste, and public financing of fossil fuel use – are going in the wrong direction, the report said.

Report co-author Joe Thwaites, of the Natural Resources Defence Council environmental group, said: “Fossil fuel consumption subsidies reached an all-time high last year – over a trillion dollars – driven by the war in Ukraine and the resulting

energy price spikes.”

Another six categories were considered “off track” but going in the right direction, which is the closest to being on track and better than the 24 measurements that are “well off track”.

Those merely off track include zero-carbon electricity generation, electric vehicles as percentage of the fleet, two- and three-wheel electric vehicle sales, grazing animal meat production, reforestation and share of greenhouse gas emissions with mandatory corporate climate risk reporting requirements.

People should be worried that this report is one of “too little, too late”, said climate scientist Katharine Jacobs. “I am not shocked that at a global scale we are not meeting expectations for reducing emissions,” she said. “We cannot ignore the fact that global commitments to (greenhouse gas) reductions are essentially unenforceable and that a number of major setbacks have taken a toll on our progress.”

Another climate scientist, Justin Mankin, said society must make bigger efforts to start with “low-hanging fruit, ie the sectors of the economy that are easiest to transition.” However, the report shows “we’re even struggling to pick the low-hanging fruit”.

Russian jailed for murdering journalist freed after fighting in Ukraine conflict

A man convicted of killing Russian investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya in 2006 has received a presidential pardon after he was released to fight in Ukraine.

Sergei Khadzhiburbanov was sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2014 for his role as an accomplice in the killing of Ms Politkovskaya. She worked for the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* and wrote stories critical of Kremlin policies during the early years of President Putin’s rule, the war in Chechnya and human rights.

Ms Politkovskaya’s murder triggering outrage at home and in the West, and emphasising the dangers faced by independent journalists in Russia. Her death on 7th October, Mr Putin’s birthday, led to suggestions the shooting was done to curry favour with him.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, prisoners, even murderers, have been offered their freedom in exchange for fighting in the war.

Khadzhiburbanov was released last year to fight in Ukraine. He was offered a command position because he was former ‘special forces’ in the late 1990s and was ‘a decorated veteran’, sources claimed. Dmitry Muratov, editor-in-chief of *Novaya Gazeta*, and Politkovskaya’s children, Vera and Ilya, condemned Khadzhiburbanov’s release and state pardon.

Listen, don’t fight, no war is worth a life

Cindy Wooden

While nations have a right to defend themselves and a responsibility to protect their citizens, “no war is worth the loss of the life of even one human person, a sacred being created in the image and likeness of the Creator,” said a papal message to the Paris Peace Forum.

“No war is worth the tears of a mother who has seen her child mutilated or killed,” the message said. “No war is worth the poisoning of our common home.”

Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the apostolic nuncio to France, read the message, the first day of the two-day forum of government, business and civic leaders discussing the theme, ‘Seeking Common Ground in a World of Rivalry.’

“At a time when we are helplessly witnessing the multiplication of armed conflicts, with their attendant suffering, injustice and sometimes irreversible damage to our common home, the pope wishes for this forum to be a sign of hope,” said the message, which was signed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, the message noted, but “we must admit that for millions of people on every continent, the persistent gap between the solemn commitments made on 10th December, 1948, and reality has yet to be bridged.”

“How many people, including children, are deprived of their fundamental and primary right to life and to physical and mental integrity as a result of hostilities between different groups or different countries?” the message asked.

“How many people in the world today are deprived as a result of conflict of the most elementary rights, such as the right to drinking water and healthy food, but also the right to freedom of religion, to health, to decent housing, to a quality education, to a dignified job?”

“Peace is not built with weapons, but through patient listening, dialogue and cooperation, which remain the only means worthy of the human person for resolving differences,” the message said.

Cardinal Parolin told participants that Pope Francis wanted “to reiterate the Holy See’s unceasing call for arms to be silenced, for these instruments of death to be rethought.”

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‘Come, Francis, your community awaits’: Argentina still prays for papal homecoming

One of the biggest puzzles of Pope Francis’s papacy has been the absence of a visit to his homeland of Argentina. Previously he has cited a reluctance to visit and be used as a political ‘football’ by the different parties vying for control, but as David Agren discovered, this argument is leaving many of the faithful frustrated as they long for a visit home by their pope

Almost immediately after Pope Francis was elected in March 2013, Argentines expected him to visit. A flood of young Argentines travelled to neighbouring Brazil that July for World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro – the new pope’s first foreign trip. Surely a visit to his homeland would be next on the agenda?

But 10 years after becoming pontiff, the pope still hasn’t visited his native country. And as if to add insult to injury, he has made other trips to the region: papal visits have seen him reach Paraguay and Bolivia in 2015, and he even flew over Argentina in 2018 for his trip to Chile.

But that overflight is the closest the faithful of Argentina have come to welcoming ‘their’ pope home.

It’s an issue that has prompted a fair few questions from journalists and while he has never ruled out a papal homecoming, Francis has clearly been reluctant to put Buenos Aires down on his overseas schedule.

But now some Catholics in Argentina believe a visit is too long overdue and have started a campaign to convince the pope to return and reunite with Argentines, even amid domestic political divisions and economic difficulties.

“He has to come because the people, the community want to gather with the pope, regardless of who governs,” said Father Jose Maria di Paola, known as ‘Padre Pepe,’ a prominent ‘cura villero’ – as the priests who live and work in the shantytowns of Buenos Aires are known.

“As Argentines, we need for the pope to be among us,” said Maria Elena Acosta, a member of the national Caritas chapter. “It’s time to sit together and sip *mate* and tell him all about this path we’re taking,” she said, mentioning the pope’s favourite tea beverage, an Argentinian traditional drink.

Familia Grande Hogar de Cristo, a ministry for supporting addiction recovery founded by the curas villeros and supported by the then-Archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires – who used to wash the feet of the ministry’s participants – has launched a campaign to urge the pope to visit Argentina, saying it would promote unity at a time of deep divisions.

A Mass celebrated by the curas villeros in a Buenos Aires shantytown on 10th November is meant to urge that a papal visit happen, with the call: ‘Come, Francis, your community awaits.’



“His words, his gestures, his presence will do us good because we desire a country full of love and social justice,” Mass organisers said in a statement. “Just as he taught us, the challenge is to receive life as it comes with an eye toward those on the side of the road.”

The pope’s absence has long confounded Argentines, who expressed pride after the election of a spiritual leader for the Catholic Church who arrived from “the end of the world,” in his own words.

But it also reflects the pope’s somewhat ambiguous status in Argentina. It’s the product, according to priests, of the deep divisions in the country. Argentines often speak of a ‘grieta’ or ‘crack’ splitting society – with politicians and partisans often pulling Pope Francis into political spats or portraying him as a supporter or opponent.

“We pulled him into the ‘grieta’ and we all lost,” Fr Marcelo De Benedictis, spokesman for the Archdiocese of Mendoza, said. “The pope lost, and we also lost because we’re missing out on teachings from Bergoglio, from the Bishop of Rome, teachings which would do

us a lot of good as a society and as a Church, too.”

Tensions are currently running high in Argentina, which holds run-off elections on Sunday (19th November) for its presidency. Sergio Massa of the ruling Peronist coalition surprised many when he won the most votes in the first round but he now faces libertarian challenger Javier Milei – a maverick cut from the President Trump / Bolsonaro mode, who has proposed slashing the state and swapping the Argentine peso for the US dollar in a country with triple-digit inflation.

He has also made plain his contempt for the pope, verbally assailed Pope Francis as a “filthy leftist” and a “malignant presence on this earth.” A prominent supporter urged severing relations with the Vatican at Milei’s closing rally – a call the candidate rejected.

Pope Francis has said he would like to visit Argentina in 2024. But he also said in an interview with Buenos Aires newspaper *La Nacion*, “Don’t link me to Argentine politics, please.”

Priests and political analysts speculate that the pope’s preference

to avoid politics explains his absence from Argentina.

“One thing is Bergoglio and the other is Francis,” Fortunato Mallimaci, an Argentine sociologist who studies religion, commented. He explained that many Argentines continue seeing Pope Francis as Archbishop Bergoglio rather than the leader of the Universal Church. “As the archbishop we can relate to Josef; as pope, many Argentinians simply cannot.”

But some Catholics believe the divisions are precisely a reason for Pope Francis to visit.

“A visit from the pope always does good,” said Fr Lorenzo De Vedia, known as ‘Toto,’ another cura villero in Buenos Aires. He recalled how St. John Paul II visited Argentina at difficult times in 1982 – with the pope calling for an end to the Falklands War over the British-controlled islands that Argentina considers an integral part of its territory and refers to as the ‘Islas Malvinas’ – and later in 1987.

“I believe that the pope’s visit would do a lot of good for our country due to the crisis that is being experienced and because of

the differences that exist in the different sectors of Argentines,” Fr De Vedia said.

Pope Francis’s preference to not visit Argentina draws comparison with St. John Paul, who returned to his native Poland shortly after his 1978 election.

Fr De Vedia recalled the “excitement” of that visit “not only in Poland, but the entire world.”

He lamented that the current pope had not done the same. “If he had come here soon after his election to the papacy, there would have been a wave of goodwill and support for him, from everyone.

“Now that chance has been missed and he’s fearful of the politics.”

Depending on the result of this weekend’s election, there is a chance that any hopes of Francis visiting his homeland will be dashed once and for all.

“If Milei wins, it seems improbable that the pope will ever be invited home,” De Vedia pointed out.

“And as a spokesman for the Vatican said recently, why would the pope go anywhere he has not been invited?”

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WORLD SPOTLIGHT

Migration is one of the world's hottest topics at the moment, as many nations in the West look to build walls and deter others from crossing their borders in search of sanctuary and a place to start life again in safety. These two articles supplied by contributors from the United States look at the situation from an American standpoint and ask, how can a nation built on migrants now be putting up walls to prevent others from following in their ancestors' footsteps? While the points raised are for an American audience, they can easily be transposed and placed over the current debate around migration into the UK

Call to action for migrant families as Biden promotes his immigrant roots

Anna Maria Callagher

I am a first-generation American; my parents arrived from Ireland in the 1950s with nothing but letters of support from aunts or uncles already in the United States. They then met, married and raised numerous children in a home that then became a launching pad, a safe place, for others of our immigrant family members. Until my teenage years, we always had an aunt, uncle or cousin living with us, sometimes sharing my room.

My family had just enough resources to get by, but my parents taught us to share what we had with open hands. Family was everything – the bedrock of my faith formation, with whispered prayers and blessings from aunts and uncles always following us out the door; the springboard of prosperity and stability, with all of us relying on one another to start businesses or get an education; the source of my awareness that it is through compassionate concern for others that we build a meaningful life.

Our very identity as a family was wrapped up in caring for others, because others had cared for us.

The families entering the United States today are no different, but they face far greater barriers to immigrating safely and keeping their families together. Just as my parents fled severe economic hardship in Ireland, as others had fled famine, these families leave



Migrants from Central America pictured making their way through Mexico towards the United States in the hope of gaining asylum

their homelands out of grave necessity, not preference. They traverse perilous terrain, such as the Darien Gap, with children on their backs, to find safety.

Unlike the early 20th-century immigration experience, it takes many families years if not decades to be able to immigrate together as family units because of backlogs and breakdowns in our family immigration system. We are not just speaking of aunts, uncles and cousins, but of parents, siblings, husbands and wives who are cruelly separated by our system. Today, there are about four million people

with approved petitions waiting abroad until a visa becomes available through our outdated system.

We know that family unity is key to flourishing – to financial and social stability, of course, but also to the transmission of values and of faith. The Catholic Church's social teaching advocates most strongly for the promotion of family unity for these reasons. As an attorney who has worked with countless immigrant clients, I have seen how family separation through inability to immigrate together can have devastating effects on family

members for generations.

President Joe Biden's Irish great-great-grandparents immigrated together with their eight children in 1851. They settled in Scranton, an Irish enclave, undoubtedly supported by family connections, and slowly built a stable life. The ripple effects of their ability to migrate together as family have surely contributed to the trajectory of President Biden's own life. In 2015 he remarked, "I was raised by a tough, compassionate Irish lady and a father who lived his motto that family was the beginning, the

middle, and the end."

These are words that resonate with me as the daughter of immigrants.

Before election season heats up, the president has a small window of opportunity to protect migrant family unity. First, his administration can use its authority to 'issue' immigrant visas lost to delays and processing issues over the years.

Second, he can grant humanitarian parole – a temporary legal status – to family members awaiting visas so they can reunite with family in the United States during processing.

In November the Church celebrates the feast of Mother Frances Cabrini, a naturalised US citizen, the first canonized US citizen and the patron saint of immigrants. She reminds me of the church's – and my family's – commitment to promoting the dignity of immigrants.

I pray President Biden will draw on these deep-seated values to take constructive action for immigrant families like his own today.

Anna Marie Gallagher, executive director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), has practised immigration and refugee law for more than three decades, working in the United States, Central America, and Europe.

Undocumented migration in the US: beneficial or harmful?

Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio

Many would say undocumented migration is harmful to the country. I would say that undocumented migration is more harmful to the migrants.

However, what is the reason why we seem to have tolerated it in our country for the past 40 years? Those who seem to oppose immigration cite the rule of law whereby illegal migration, by definition, is presumed to be harmful. On the other hand, we see a labour market, especially in the agricultural and other sectors, that rely heavily on undocumented migration.

In the USA's Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, we saw the overturning of racial quota systems replaced by an emphasis on family

reunification and labour market needs. Since this legislation has not been updated to meet our present needs, however, we find ourselves with a structural bias that favours undocumented migration.

Undocumented workers benefit the agricultural sector and the service sector, which need entry-level people who will work difficult jobs at minimal pay. In the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, there was a provision for employer sanctions on those who hired undocumented labourers. However, this provision of the law has hardly been enforced, except in very specific areas, due to the lack of funding for personnel and a general lack of political will. Why undermine the supply of cheap, pliable labor for important

industries?

Contrary to popular belief, many undocumented people do pay into the Social Security system, which is matched by their employers. This, however, is not a universal phenomenon, as we see many industries benefiting from what might be called 'cheap labour' in an unregulated market. This is not good for the workers nor for the integrity of our nation.

The toleration of a parallel labour market largely unregulated, lacking protections and bereft of normal social benefits such as healthcare certainly is not good for the undocumented. Since they have little opportunity to leave the labour market dependent on them, these workers are trapped and are subject to low pay and inhumane

working conditions. Our nation is certainly overdue for a legalisation of the undocumented population, estimated at least between 10 to 11 million.

In the past, our immigration laws recognised that there would be undocumented people in the country and, normally after a 5- to 10-year period, a type of statute of limitations – known in immigration parlance as a registry – would take effect. If the migrants had no criminal record and were self-sufficient, they could be regularised. Unfortunately, the last time this provision of the law was updated was in 1976. If only we updated the registry date to somewhere in the 2020s, most of the undocumented population, who are already integrated in the

labour market and in our society, would have legal status.

Without the legalisation of those in an undocumented status, it is like performing an operation on a cancer patient and leaving some of the cancer behind.

Unless legal status is given to the undocumented, labour market controls are put in place, and immigrant workers are able to assert their rights in the workplace, we will continue to lament the unlawful passage of immigrants over porous borders.

Until we recognise what is good for our nation and good for the migrants, we will not resolve this social justice problem.

Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio is the retired bishop of the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York.

Happy, smiling Cardinal Bustillo of Corsica proclaims ‘the Church is not dead – she can still provide life and hope’

Caroline de Sury

When Cardinal Francois-Xavier Bustillo walked across St. Peter's Square on 30th September, happy Corsicans cheered the tallest and probably most smiling cardinal on the day of the latest Vatican consistory. He had also just made it to the cover of the top French magazine, *Paris Match*, that introduced him as “the French cardinal the whole world talks about.”

“Cardinal Francois Bustillo is a happy man; that is his first quality” – this is how Luc Bronzini has spoken of the Bishop of Ajaccio, whose diocese covers the Mediterranean island of Corsica. Corsica has belonged to France since 1768, although its inhabitants claim a degree of autonomy, for which French President Macron recently expressed his support.

Bronzini works closely with young people in the Church and often sees the 55-year-old cardinal. “When he was appointed cardinal, Msgr. Bustillo immediately associated the Corsicans with his joy,” Bronzini said. “He told them that a bishop alone is a sad bishop, and that he was happy if they were happy!”

“What draws people to him is that he radiates joy of living,” Laetitia Pietri, journalist and manager of the Christian radio station RCF Corsica, added. “He conveys his enthusiasm for being in the church. Eight hundred people accompanied him to Rome when he became a cardinal! I will never forget the popular jubilation we experienced there with him.”

“It was a bit like a football stadium,” Bronzini added. “But when he celebrated Mass the day after, the atmosphere changed. His message was clear: ‘My job is to pray and proclaim the Gospel!’”

It's easy to spot the cardinal in a crowd, as he is almost 6 feet high. His gray Franciscan habit is very simple, and he greets everyone with a warm smile. “You feel important and valued when he talks to you,” Pietri said.

Cardinal Bustillo speaks French with a unique accent, which tells his personal story: Born in Pamplona, Spain, he studied in France before joining the Conventual Franciscans in Padua, Italy, at the age of 17. After his ordination to the priesthood in 1994, he returned to the south of France, first to Toulouse to study theology, then to Narbonne, where he founded a Franciscan monastery, and finally to the Marian city of Lourdes.



“I have always been fascinated by secularised France,” Cardinal Bustillo told US Catholic news agency OSV News in a recent interview. “In such an ecosystem, you have to be an authentic Christian, without any artifice. There may be indifference or hostility, but actually there is often expectation.”

“Difficulties stimulate,” he added. “Young people know nothing about the Gospel today in France. But we are not going to lament like Calimero. It is a wonderful challenge!”

Appointed in Corsica as a bishop in 2021, Cardinal Bustillo rediscovered an atmosphere of religious culture. Whether believers or nonbelievers, Corsicans go to church on their village's patronal feast day. “He is very much at ease on these occasions,” Aline Castellani, mayor of the picturesque village of Piana, told OSV News. “He talks to everyone without barriers. People find him extremely likable.”

“He also plays an important role in soothing people's pain, after a bereavement or a tragic event,” Castellani added. “He tries to bring down tensions, and helps people get along.”

Tensions were high in March 2022, a year after a Corsican nationalist, convicted of murdering a prefect of Corsica, Claude

“Cardinal Bustillo is a great opportunity for Corsica ... he has set the bar very high over the last two years. Now that he is a cardinal, he can be a great opportunity for the Universal Church too”

Erignac, in 1998, was killed in prison by a fellow inmate and jihadist. “Many people, especially the young, saw it as an attack by the French State on Corsica,” Pietri explained.

Then-bishop Bustillo published a letter written in Corsican: ‘Dear young people of Corsica, repair trust, create a tsunami of hope, imagine a liberated, pacified and reconciled society!’

“He played a real calming role at the time,” Pietri said. “People were invited into the churches to light a candle. He did not want them to stifle their anger, but to express it in a different way.”

“There is a lot of violence in the world today, in wars, but also on social networks, and in families,” Cardinal Bustillo said at the time. “Death is everywhere, and the driving force behind actions is often fear. We tend to develop a tribal logic of distrust, which

consists in protecting our own, even if it means attacking others. But our driving force, as Christians, is the Gospel, which tells us about God's love as the power of life, able to overcome fear. This is a powerful message that we must give to our contemporaries.”

For Cardinal Bustillo, fear must first be banished inside the Church. “Many Catholics are afraid right now,” he said. “Afraid of growing secularism, afraid when the pope calls for greater responsibility in front of the tragedies of migrants, afraid that he will upset the church when he convenes a synod on its future,” he said.

“But let's look at the Acts of the Apostles; when there were difficulties, the apostles talked together. It is healthy to talk! So let's not be afraid and listen to the pope's entire message when he speaks, without paying attention only to what is frightening. The pope also celebrates Masses, talks about the Gospel, and invites us to ‘greatly rejoice’ in God's love!” he said.

“We are in ‘hope and love deficit’ inside the Church at the moment,” Cardinal Bustillo continued. “We divide ourselves instead of supporting one another.”

“Some are attached to the traditional liturgy, others are more charismatic. Ecclesial maturity is about everyone being what helps

him become better. Some need the beauty of the liturgy – let them continue. Others need to reach out to the world – let them. Differences are beautiful and should not lead to division,” he said.

Cardinal Bustillo does not shy away from difficulties, admitting that the Church had a hard time coping with her responsibility regarding the sexual abuse crisis. “A process of purification was necessary,” he said. “Innocent people have been desecrated. We cannot preach morality if we ourselves have done evil.”

“But we dared to cleanse the house,” the cardinal added. “We did not remain passive. In France, the Church took concrete action. We have to work now to write luminous pages, after these dark pages.”

Looking on the decline in the number of priests in the Western world, Cardinal Bustillo brushed pessimism aside. “There have always been lean times in the Church,” he said. “I am confident! The Church is not dead! She can provide abundant values of life and joy in a society bathed in vagueness.”

“Cardinal Bustillo is a great opportunity for Corsica,” Bronzini concluded. “He has set the bar very high over the last two years. Now that he is a cardinal, he can be a great opportunity for the Universal Church, as well.”

Macron criticised as he plans to guarantee access to abortion as French constitutional right

Caroline de Sury

Gathered at their plenary assembly in Lourdes from 3rd-8th November, the French bishops discussed abortion, migration and mission – the latter received with a sigh of relief after years of focusing the plenary assemblies on abuse.

But as one crisis moved out of focus so another came into sharper view: the Church's constant fight against the establishment of abortion as a 'right' in France. The latest stage in this battle comes as President Macron announced he intends to make "freedom to have an abortion" a constitutional right – something the bishops were quick to criticise strongly.

In an online post at the end of October Macron said that "in 2024, the right of women to choose abortion will become irreversible."

The announcement follows a promise Macron made on 8th March 8, International Women's Day, which was seen as a response to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the US Supreme Court last year.

So far, the French Senate and the National Assembly have not reached agreement on the bill, which is aimed to be voted on in a referendum. A November 2022 opinion poll found that 89 per cent of respondents were in favour of making a right to abortion constitutional. The other option is that it would be approved by the Parliament, without any referendum.

The bishops, tiptoeing away from an outright fight with the president in outlook, expressed their "concern" in Lourdes. "We reaffirm that all life is a gift to this world, a fragile and precious gift, infinitely worthy, to be welcomed and served from its beginning to its natural end," they wrote.

For the bishops, "the biblical commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' inscribed in all consciences, beyond those of believers alone, means that every human being is entrusted to the solicitude of all others."

"In a way, we are all responsible for these unborn children," the bishops wrote. "Real progress lies in mobilising everyone, believers and nonbelievers alike, so that the welcoming of life is given greater help and support," they added.

The bishops also insisted that women's rights, such as "real wage equality" and "social support for their role in bringing up children," must be "further promoted and guaranteed." But for the bishops, it is not legitimate to "put abortion on the same level as these fundamental rights."



"To include it among the fundamental rights would be to damage the whole balance of these," they said.

Since 1975 women have had a legal right to terminate their pregnancy in France. The late Simone Veil, who served as France's health minister in several governments and is considered a godmother of French abortion rights called the Veil Law Act, always claimed that "no woman resorts to an abortion with a light heart," and that it is "always a tragedy." Since 2012, abortion procedures have been fully reimbursed by social security.

In 2022, there were over 234,000 abortions in France, compared with just 723,000 live births. It marks the highest number of abortions since 1990, and means that a quarter of all pregnancies end in a medical termination. It is also the highest number of abortions among European Union countries – a "sad record," wrote the bishops. "This dramatic reality goes beyond the mere question of a right for women" and "is not progress." "Our society should see it above all as a sign of its failure to educate, accompany and provide social, economic and human support to those who need it," they added. "It should be foreseen about its future, given the foreseeable decline in its population."

The bishops' assembly was not mainly focused on abortion, however. After four years of

assemblies dominated by the sexual abuse crisis, this one focused on mission. "We were all very happy to talk about the mission because it touched the heart of our vocation," Bishop Alexandre Joly of Troyes told journalists.

"This assembly marked a real turning point, a change of atmosphere," Bishop Francois Jacolin of Luçon told reporters. "We now feel a real new breath of hope."

For Bishop Jacolin, the first sign of hope is the notable growth in the number of adults requesting baptism in France. In 2023, 5,463 adults were baptised at Easter, that is 1,000 more than in 2022. According to the bishops, there will be even more of them in 2024.

This hope is also due to the strong commitment of many French lay Catholics, deeply involved in the life of the Church. "In the past, new communities had appeared in France on the initiative of laypeople," Bishop Jacolin said.

"They contributed much to the Church, despite some negative points and abuses that have come to light in recent years," he said. "But the difference today is that lay initiatives are done much more in collaboration with parish priests and bishops. There is a lot more trust on both sides. This is extremely encouraging for everyone."

In January, an independent report published by L'Arche found after a two-year investigation that

at least 25 women were abused over nearly seven decades by Jean Vanier, the lay Canadian co-founder of the global organisation for the intellectually disabled. The case sent shockwaves not only through France but throughout the world.

The 'Mission Congress', born in 2015 from a partnership of several missionary movements, is an example of a "new opening" in French lay-led movements. It has in recent years been organising weeks of conferences, workshops, Masses and prayer times to help Christians live as such in today's world.

Initially set up in Paris, the project was successfully extended to a dozen major French cities.

Another example is the 'Kerygma' gathering in Lourdes. Launched by the bishops' conference in September 2022, the project brought together more than 2,500 people in Lourdes in October this year, mostly lay members of the Church.

"We had been very concerned in recent years with managing the lack of priests," Bishop Jacolin admitted. "Today, there is still a lot to do, but we see things differently. The purification forced on us by the sexual abuse crisis is freeing us for evangelisation."

The French bishops did not, however, neglect the issue of abuse, this time listening to the testimony of a person who was a victim as an adult.

Countdown starts here

Advent marks the beginning of the Church's liturgical year, starting four Sundays before Christmas. The name 'Advent' hints at its meaning: It comes from the Latin word 'advenire,' which translates as 'to come to' or 'to arrive.' The season begins 3rd December this year.

While Advent is sometimes called "a little Lent," Catholic experts observe that there are important similarities and differences between the two, both of which lead up to major feast days and liturgical seasons: Christmas and Easter, respectively. Advent, they agree, is a season of preparation.

As one catechist pointed out, "Lent has that penitential character where we are trying to focus on being penitent. I think that the character of Advent is intended to be a little different than that – that it is really, actually, a waiting for a birth. Advent is predominantly about preparation, and Lent is penance."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church uses similar wording in describing Advent. "When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming," it says.

In contrast, the catechism calls Lent one of the "intense moments of the Church's penitential practice."

Fr Agustino Torres, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal and author of the new book *Prepare Your Hearts: A Guided Advent Journal for Prayer and Meditation*, tied the penitential and preparation aspects together.

"Although it's not widely thought of as such, Advent is a time when we can offer up penance to prepare the way for the coming Christ Child," he said. "It is not penitential in the same way Lent is, but there has been a long-held tradition in the church to offer up prayer vigils, fasts and offerings during Advent."

Much of the Church's year has historically been penitential, he points out. "Advent takes on a penitential spirit inspired by the three-fold advent of Jesus Christ," he said. "The Christ who comes at the end of time, who will judge the world. The Christ who comes into the heart of every believer longing for his presence. The Christ who comes as the newborn babe."

So, as we look to Advent 2023, how are you preparing?

In new musical film ‘Journey To Bethlehem’ the nativity story and its background is uniquely presented as a musical. Director Adam Anders told Andy Drozdziak about his goals for the film, including inspiring children to ask questions about their faith

‘Hollywood needs to finally understand the truth about Christians’

Adam Anders is on a mission to change the way Hollywood views Christians with his latest musical film, *Journey To Bethlehem*.

Swedish film, television and music producer Anders, a Christian, has sold more than 100 million albums and, in recent years, has become one of the most in-demand executive producers for music-driven film and television. He is best known for his work on *Glee* and *High School Musical*, and working alongside some of the biggest names in the music industry, such as Jonas Brothers, Miley Cyrus, The Backstreet Boys.

His latest film, *Journey To Bethlehem* is a musical retelling of the Nativity story, co-written by Peter Barsocchini and Anders, and starring Fiona Palomo, Milo Manheim, American rapper Lecrae and Antonio Banderas.

Anders underlined the importance of his faith in what he refers to as the ‘lion’s den’ of Hollywood in a wide-ranging interview with the *Universe*.

“I want Christians to be known for their love and, in a town like this, that’s what everyone is looking for,” he said.

“Christians too often are known for what they don’t like rather than what they love. Working out here in Hollywood, it was always my faith that sustained me. I want to be someone who breaks down stereotypes of how Hollywood views Christians.

“This (*Journey To Bethlehem*) is my story which gives me hope. I want to get this story out everywhere so everyone can digest this story and listen.”

The plot roughly sticks to the biblical story, with some dramatic licence. The Kings/wise men bring a light-hearted tone, with Balthazar, played by Omid Djalili,

stealing the show with his sharp wit and comic timing. The humour was a deliberate feature of the film, which is aimed at families – particularly children.

“I want to ensure there is enough humour in there to keep kids engaged,” Anders said. “If a movie is sad and downtrodden, they’re not going to want to watch it. People know early on that you can laugh but then I let you know I can get reverent and serious when I need to. That’s a balance I had to reach.”

He also pointed out that, traditionally, nativity art has never been strictly accurate – but it has been used powerfully.

“It’s always hard to keep everyone happy. If I had to make it for everyone, I would have made it for nobody. It’s the most personal thing I have ever done in my career,” he said.

“God is the ultimate creator. If you look at art throughout history,



Adam Anders on his latest film, Journey to Bethlehem: “This is not to meant to replace the Gospel – it’s meant to start a conversation. It’s meant to be something that parents, grandparents and kids can watch together in a fun way and be reminded why they celebrate Christmas – and then go to Mass”

painters have depicted the nativity scene-it’s not necessarily accurate. The Wise Men weren’t there when Jesus was born. But we’ve accepted it because it’s symbolic, it’s beautiful, it’s done with so much excellence.”

Anders wants the film to encourage children to ask questions “about their faith” and think about it in a new way-through music.

“Music has a way of softening the heart in a way that other things can’t,” he said.

“This is a musical, it’s not a documentary-it’s inspired by a true story. It’s important to say that I think it’s true, inspired by God’s word and hopefully will inspire kids to ask questions about their

faith-possibly for the first time.”

One of the film’s real highlights is Antonio Banderas as Herod – who he intentionally plays like a rock star. “I bet you the truth was that he (Herod) was a horrible narcissist and the most famous person in the kingdom – he was a rock star,” Anders said.

“The inspiration was the villains in Disney movies with kids in mind – what Johnny Depp is to pirates, Herod is to kings. Antonio did a phenomenal job in towing that line – this is really an animation come to life.”

Anders’ ambition for the film is for it to appeal to not just Christians but also a “tool for non-believers.” The scene in which

Jesus is born is particularly engaging, with the humanity of Mary and Joseph, played by Fiona Palomo and Milo Manheim, shining through.

Anders revealed that Jewish and atheist cast and crew members were in tears during this scene.

“I want it to be a tool to show to non-believers. It’s hard to invite people to go to Mass – but it’s not hard to say to people: ‘let’s go to the cinema! And then when they’ve seen it, maybe they’ll say: ‘We’ll come to Mass with you’”, he said.

“They’re not going to help but be moved by the nativity scene – they’re going to feel it. It’s what it signifies. Jewish people, atheists, they were crying – it’s the greatest story ever told.”

“There are so many great Christmas singalong movies, but none of them talk about Christ. I need one of those *Elf/Santa* movies that is actually about Christmas for parents to put their kids in front of. Love it or hate it, I followed the vision that God gave me.”

The acclaimed director hopes that the film will “wake the faith” in people, but that it will point to something deeper-an authentic faith experience.

“This is not to meant to replace the Gospel – it’s meant to start a conversation. It’s meant to be something that parents, grandparents and kids can watch together in a fun way and be reminded why they celebrate Christmas – and then go to Mass,” he said.

After seeing the film, it will not be a surprise if many come away with their faith invigorated and a smile on their face.

Journey to Bethlehem will be in cinemas all across the UK and Ireland from 17th November



Antonio Banderas (left) makes a suitably villainous Herod, a pantomime bad guy threatened by a seemingly harmless baby

A VIEW FROM THE PEWS



MICHAEL CAINE
ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, LYMM, CHESHIRE

The books that sit at the heart of Mass

I find taking part in the Mass an extraordinary experience. During it, as I say and listen to the readings and prayers used, I wonder at the strategies used to create such wonderful writings.

When trying to explain it to my grandchildren I found myself mentioning the names of the books and equipment used during Mass, and had to explain to them what these were and why they are used.

I then wondered how many ordinary lay Catholics have heard of them. The following is a simple explanation of some of these things:

Manuals used

During the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, two manuals are used. These contain all the prayers and readings used during a Mass. There is a third, but this is not always used. These manuals are called:

- Roman Missal.
- Lectionary.
- Book of the Gospel.

The Roman Missal or Sacramental

This is a large book containing all the words and prayers used by a priest during the celebration of the Mass, but not the readings.

Lectionary

This is also a large book. It contains a three year cycle of readings, psalms and Gospels from the Bible to be used during the



Mass. These three years are called A, B and C. This year of 2023 is Year A. 2024 is Year B, 2025 is Year C and then 2026 is back to Year A.

• **Note: In 2024, a new lectionary is being introduced.**

Book of the Gospel

This Book contains readings from all four gospels that a deacon or priest read at Mass in the course of the liturgical year. However, the use of this book is not obligatory as the gospel readings are also included in the standard Lectionary.

Being heavy, the Roman Missal and Lectionary need places upon which they can be put while being read from. Three of these are the

Ambo and altar for the Roman Missal; the lecturn for the Lectionary

Ambo and altar

The ambo is the stand used to hold the Roman Missal during Mass. As the congregation faces the sanctuary, it is on the left of the altar.

Priests use the altar during the Liturgy of the Eucharist, so the Roman Missal is transferred there from the ambo after the Liturgy of the Word.

Lecturn

This is the stand used to hold the lectionary containing the readings, psalms and Gospel and bidding prayers read out during Mass. As

the congregation faces the sanctuary, it is to the right of the altar.

Obviously, the contents of a Mass change due to differences in their meanings such things as the time of the year, weddings, funerals, and types of feast days. Priests needs guidance about what is to be used during these differences in the Mass, and this is provided by what is called an ordo.

Ordo

The Holy See maintains a liturgical calendar of all the feast days of saints, martyrs and special days throughout the year.

Each country has its own special saints, martyrs and days, and therefore produces from this Liturgical Calendar of the Holy See a national calendar called an ordo.

This has to be easily accessible by priests, and in many churches can be found in the Sacristy. It provides them with all the information about what is required at Mass for each day of the year, such as:

- Is the day a feast, memorial or solemnity?
- What colour vestments to wear.
- Name of the Saints feast day.
- What special prayers to say.

It provides information showing how the Catholic Church remembers its saints, martyrs and special days of remembrance. These days are identified as:

- Feasts - identified with an F.

Memorials - identified with an M.
Solemnities - identified with an S.

Memorials

These are known as the lowest ranked of all celebration days and are used to celebrate many saints.

The Gloria is not said during Mass on these days.

Feasts

These refer to specific saints or feasts of archangels and some of the apostles.

The Gloria is said on these days during Mass, but not the Creed.

Solemnity

These are highest ranked celebration days. They cover such remembrances as Easter, All Saints Day, Corpus Christi, the Ascension, events in the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ and specific Saints.

The Creed and Gloria are said on these days.

All these are just a few of the things that the Catholic Church uses to help us all know what's going on during Mass.

Over the years, the Mass and other services have evolved into the magnificent ones we know today, and the internet is full of wonderful explanations of them, plus other things relating to Catholicism.

Never be stuck for answers about your religion, its clergy and services!



CHRIS MCDONNELL

JOURNEY IN FAITH

Days of Remembrance

“Those who defend war have invented a pleasant-sounding vocabulary of abstractions in which to describe the process of mass murder.”

— Aldous Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza*

The past few days have seen much turmoil, not a little argument and continuing conflict.

The early days of November take us through a time of memorial, an occasion of memorial for those men and women lost in the wars and conflicts of the 20th Century, with the echo of those haunting words “We will remember them”

This year was different for while the ceremony and pageant were marked in the usual manner, the conflict in the Ukraine continued and is largely forgotten. The war in Gaza reached new depths of depravity, with the safety of hospitals no longer guaranteed. Their function already limited through lack of fuel, the explosive war came ever nearer. Medics who had stayed to care for the sick



and the elderly, the injured and the new-born found themselves in tears, unable to tend to their patients.

The material wreckage and the human cost increases by the day.

And the protest grows. Last weekend an estimated crowd of 300,000 men, women and children took to the streets of central London in support of a ceasefire declaration

in Gaza. This, in spite of continued attempts at political interference by former Home Secretary Braverman to have the march called off. She paid the price of her temerity with her job, the Prime Minister finally dismissing her early on Monday morning.

To raise your voice for peace on Armistice Day seems to me a worthy initiative. I wrote these few words during these recent days.

Ceasefire on Armistice Day

Each year we pause to remember that distant day when the fighting failed, and silence filled the plains of Europe and the bleeding stopped.

Each year, in ceremonial dress, militia march the streets of London to the sombre beat of drums and flags are dipped in tribute.

Unsmiling men in dark black coats lay wreaths flecked with black-spotted poppies at the foot of a stone pillar as slowly its steps are lost in red.

Anthems are reverently sung while thousands walk to the dull beat of field guns recoiling under a grey sky

-only this year is different.

This year on our Armistice Day smoke rises over Gaza City

as war is fought in full fury with loss of life in shattered homes and littered streets.

We only dare to ask for ceasefire on Armistice Day we walk for present peace this November when year on year we marched in memory.

Huxley's words from a different context ring true in our present circumstances as we continue our prayer for peace in this troubled world.

Help the vulnerable, say your prayers and live a good life to be on God's right

Have you ever asked yourself: what do you need to do to be saved?

This question could elicit a great variety of answers. Have faith; attend church; keep the commandments or say your prayers every day.

You could also add in live a good life, or read the scriptures.

Let's face it, all of these answers are indeed good, but do they really tell you, specifically, what Jesus requires of you to be saved?

In chapter 25 of Matthew's Gospel, the Lord spells out, specifically, and in great detail what you need to do to be saved. The parable of the final judgment (Matthew 25: 3 - 46) states that the Lord will separate us into two groups on the day of judgment just as a Shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:32).

The faithful will be at His right, the unfaithful at His left, and to the faithful He will say: "Come and possess the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world: I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me to drink, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; in prison and you visited me." (Matthew 5:34-37).

These works of love are called the corporal works of mercy and, in this parable of the final judgment, the Lord presents them, specifically, as essential for salvation, and as the ultimate standards by which we will be judged on the last day. Thus He concludes: "Whatsoever you did for the least of my people, you did it for me."

To reach out and help the most vulnerable members of society who are hungry, thirsty, homeless, naked, sick or in prison is to embrace and love Christ Himself. These Christ-like actions will



Stefan Lochner
Last Judgement (circa 1435)

'In the parable of the final judgment, the Lord explains very clearly what we must do to enter into the kingdom that was prepared for us "from the foundation of the world." There are no ifs, ands, or buts about what this entails in the parable of the final judgment. It is simply this: Whatsoever you do for the least among you, you do it to Christ.'

"God says: 'Whatsoever you did for the least of my people, you did it for me...' to reach out and help the most vulnerable in society is to embrace and love Christ himself..."

guarantee our entry into the kingdom the Lord has prepared for us from the foundation of the world.

There's a story about a man who, in an extraordinary act of kindness, decided to hand his business over to his workers. To achieve this, every worker had to sign the agreement. All did, except one man who would not sign his name to an agreement that would benefit him and his family for the rest of their lives. The owner, in frustration, called the man into his office. He placed the agreement on the desk, gave the man a pen, and said: "Sign or you're fired." The man immediately signed the agreement. "That was easy" said the owner, "how come you gave in so easily?"

"Well, said the man, "this is the first time it was explained to me so clearly."

In the parable of the final judgment, the Lord explains very clearly what we must do to enter into the kingdom that was prepared for us "from the foundation of the world." There are no ifs, ands, or buts about what this entails in the parable of the final judgment. It is simply this: Whatsoever you do for the least among you, you do it to Christ.

How could Christians have been so blind as to miss this simple message of Christ? How could they

have persecuted each other in the name of Christ when Christ condemned those who persecute one another or those who live by the sword rather than love?

There has been and there still exists a real contradiction between what Christ says, and what His followers do. Do you ever wonder why? We need to have the courage to do what he says rather than what man does. In the parable of the final judgment, he explicitly says: "Whatsoever you do to the least of my people, you do to me."

We will all be judged by this at the final judgment.

It's important to lead others to God's Kingdom

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him."
Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25:31

In today's scripture we meet a king with no earthly match. This king is a shepherd for us and, like the good shepherd; he

does not push or herd the sheep from behind but walks ahead of them and leads them into fine pastures. This king seeks us out when we're lost, empowers us when helpless, and rescues us when we're trapped.

The king who comes in judgment in today's Gospel (Matthew 25/31-46) comes into our lives, not with punishment and condemnation but with sympathy and reconciliation.

Jesus comes to lift up sinners. He wills not the loss of any member of the flock,

but only that each member recognise him. Jesus says that he is to be recognised in all those in need.

Judgment in his kingdom is to be levied according to whether we have recognised him in our neighbours in need by feeding, clothing, housing, refreshing and consoling them. Thus Jesus insists: "I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me."

Remember that those who are condemned in today's Gospel were cast out of the kingdom not just for what they

failed to do but for what never occurred to them to do. We must, therefore, choose to do well and to do it in the ways that Jesus tells us; The Gospel reminds us that it is the little things that count. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, healing and visiting the sick, giving shelter to the homeless and visiting those in prison.

It is the little steps that we take in all these areas that build up God's kingdom. So, put one foot in front of the other and commit yourself to helping others.

SUNDAY WORSHIP

ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS



We all have talents: they please the Lord

19th November – 33rd Sunday,
Today's gospel focuses on the
kind of behaviour that will be
tested in Final Judgment. We are
here and now writing the book of
evidence for that judgement on
the value of lives. A key element
is the use of the talents and
opportunities God has given us

Proverbs (31:10-13, etc
The ideally virtuous and
industrious wife an Israelite
husband hoped to find

A capable wife? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from far away. She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and tasks for her servant girls. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength, and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid for her household when it snows, for all her household are clothed in crimson. She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the city gates, taking his seat among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them; she supplies the merchant with sashes. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom and kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and call her happy; her husband too, and he praises her: "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all." Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Give her a share in the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the city gates.

Responsorial: Psalm 127:1-5

R./: Happy are those who fear the Lord

*O blessed are those who fear the Lord
and walk in his ways!
By the labour of your hands you
shall eat.
You will be happy and prosper (R./)*



*Your wife like a fruitful vine
in the heart of your house;
your children like shoots of the olive,
around your table. (R./)*

*Indeed thus shall be blessed
the man who fears the Lord.
May the Lord bless you from Zion
in a happy Jerusalem
all the days of your life. (R./)*

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
Paul admits that he does not
know when the second coming
will take place. But be vigilant!

Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!

But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30
The parable of the Talents is a
challenge to use our gifts to
achieve what God expects from us

Jesus told this parable to his disciples: "The kingdom of Heaven is like a man who, before going on a

journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

"After a long time the master came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering

where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'

But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.' So he took the talent from him, and gave it to the one with the ten talents.

For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Use them or lose them

At first sight, today's parable seems to suggest that the third servant took a prudent course of action – "I heard you were a hard man, reaping where you have not sown." The scribes and Pharisees, towards whom it was directed, would argue: God demands perfection; the Law expresses his will; only a scrupulous observance of the Law can give us security. But God's way is different: He wants an abundant harvest. Jesus wants us to know that salvation come to those who are prepared to risk their all for him. A talent is given to bear fruit, not to lie there unused. It may

seem prudent not to risk, but in the end it is not what God expects of us.

Talented but..

The basic message of today's Gospel is that we all have talents. Maybe not spectacular or dramatic, just ordinary, but nevertheless important. Experts say that the average person uses only a fraction of their talents. Here are three statements to think about:

1. "I weep that there are so many missed opportunities for comforting, so many smiles withheld, hands untouched, kind words unspoken." (from Sheila Cassidy's *Sharing the Darkness*)

2. "They also serve who only stand and wait." (John Milton: *On His Blindness*)

3. "Take the talent from him and give it to the one with five." In other words "use it or lose it." (Jesus)

One of the main reasons why people do not use their talents is because they have been belittled in the past. To belittle is to put someone down, to make them feel small, lessen their sense of self worth. There are many ways of demeaning another person: cynicism, sarcasm, non-appreciation, taking for granted. The antidote to belittle is to lift people up, to encourage them to value themselves. (homily notes from Mgr. John O'Connell)

On His Blindness

*When I consider how my light is spent
E're half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which 'tis death to hide,
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, least he returning chide,
"Doth God exact day-labour, light deny'd?"
I fondly ask. But patience to prevent
that murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best
bear his mild yoke, they serve him best, his State
is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
and post o'er Land and Ocean without rest.
They also serve who only stand and wait."*

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS...

JENNA MARIE COOPER



Demons and the Church: they do exist

Q: In watching TV series *The Chosen*, I noted a couple of demoniac episodes were included, as are in fact depicted in scripture. No CGI effects were done to show the demons either going in or coming out of the victims, making the healed person seem to simply be someone with personality disorders.

What does the Church say today about demons? Are they real or were they more likely ancient superstitions and misidentifications of what would today be called 'mental health issues'?

A: The Church teaches that demonic possession, while rare, is certainly something that can happen. In 1999, the Rite of Exorcism was the last liturgical ritual to be revised after Vatican II, but it's worth noting that this ritual is for what we call 'major exorcisms,' or exorcisms intended to release the afflicted from actual demonic possession (ie, more or less along the lines of the exorcisms we see portrayed in the movies).

But in the Catholic Church we also have 'minor exorcisms,' such as the prayers prayed over soon-to-be baptised infants and adult catechumens preparing to enter the Church. Minor exorcisms are meant to strengthen the one seeking baptism against the very real powers of evil, with no presumption that the one receiving the minor exorcism is actually possessed.

Because of the reality of the demonic, today every diocese is supposed to have a specially trained priest, appointed by the diocesan bishop, who serves as the diocesan exorcist.

That being said, it requires careful discernment on the part of the exorcist-priest to determine whether or not a true demonic possession is actually the source of a particular individual's suffering. One Bishops' Conference website's page on exorcism notes: "The exorcist is instructed to employ the utmost circumspection and prudence before proceeding to the rite. Throughout his ministry, an exorcist must establish a balance within his own mind between not believing too easily that the devil is responsible for what is manifesting, and attributing all possible manifestations solely to a natural, organic source."

To that end, most dioceses have protocols which require an individual to have medical and psychiatric evaluations, to rule out potential natural causes, before they can receive a major exorcism.

Finding a medical or mental health condition that could mimic demonic possession is one way to



A painting of St. Maria Goretti hangs at the shrine where she is buried in Nettuno, Italy. The 11-year-old was stabbed to death in 1902 by a young man after refusing his sexual advances. 'Pious and prayerful from a young age, Maria died whilst forgiving her attacker. After her death, she appeared to her attacker in prison, inspiring his sincere repentance and conversion.' Photo: Catholic Press Photo

gain clarity that a person's suffering is not caused by the direct malevolence of a supernatural entity. On the other hand, introduction to the rite of exorcism lists some medically-unexplainable, positive 'signs and symptoms' of demonic possession, such as: the afflicted person speaking and understanding foreign languages they never studied; revealing hidden knowledge or information they would have had no way of knowing; and demonstrating physical strength beyond what would be normal for their size and general condition.

True victims of possession will typically also have a history of dabbling in the occult, such as through fortune-telling, visiting psychic mediums, playing with Ouija boards, or participating in 'New Age' activities.

If we turn to the Gospels, there are some instances where Jesus cast out demons in a way that might perhaps be interpreted as the curing of a mental illness, such as when he frees a mute man to speak. (See Matt. 9:32) But there are also

attempted rape, a married woman is obligated to resist to the point of death or else be guilty of breaking her marriage vows of forsaking all others. A married woman who (in the hopes of surviving the ordeal) takes a passive approach to being violated would be guilty of grave sin, this person claims. Is this true? St. Maria Goretti was held up as the model for rape victims.

A: That person is clearly wrong: it is never a sin to be a victim of rape, regardless of how actively one tries to resist. Sin requires knowledge of an action's sinfulness and a free choice to engage in the act. Rape, by definition, involves a lack of knowledge, consent, or both.

It is a horrifically grave sin to force sexual activity upon someone who does not consent to it. But the sinfulness of the one committing rape does not in any way impact the moral or spiritual status of the one who suffers from this kind of violence.

It is also wrong to say the Church has ever viewed this situation any differently: despite what some individual Catholics may have said or thought over the years, the Church has *never* taught that rape victims are in any way guilty for what has happened to them.

In the fourth century, St. Augustine, who lived at a time of great civil instability, when foreign invaders would often abuse women during their plundering of Roman cities, taught that, in many cases, a victim of rape should still be considered a virgin. In Book I, chapter 18 of his massive work "The City of God," he writes: "The sanctity of the soul remains even when the body is violated."

Therefore, the Church does not teach that anyone is required to resist an attacker to the point of death. In terms of the Church's teachings on martyrdom in general, there is certainly a good argument that we should prefer death to denying Christ. Even so, being in a position where we must choose between martyrdom or actively committing a sin ourselves is very different from the situation of anyone, male or female, who is the sinned-against victim of an attacker.

But then what should we make of the story of St. Maria Goretti, and the many other virgin martyrs?

First, in terms of St. Maria Goretti in particular, it's good to keep in mind that there is much more to her story than resisting her would-be rapist. There are many reasons why she was named a saint – most importantly, for her demonstration of heroic mercy. Pious and prayerful from a young

age, she died while forgiving her attacker. After her death, she appeared to her attacker in prison, inspiring his sincere repentance and conversion.

In my own opinion, I think we can regard it as praiseworthy to resist an attacker to the point of death, even while fully understanding that a lack of resistance would NOT be a sin. 'Martyrs of purity' did not die to avoid sinning (because being the victim of an assault was never a sin in the first place); they died to bear an exceptional, above-and-beyond witness to the sanctity of the human body.

We might look at these saints as being somewhat like those martyrs who died in order to prevent the profanation of the Eucharist, like St. Tarcisius. That is, a Catholic is not guilty of sacrilege if someone else profanes the consecrated host, but some saints have been called to take the extra, non-required step of preventing the destruction of the Eucharist even at the cost of their lives.

Q: Is it always wrong in every case to lie? What about the so-called "little white lie?" I'm thinking of situations where you tell a person something you know is false to spare their feelings, when they're likely never going to know the truth anyway.

A: Our Catholic faith teaches us that lying is an offence against the eighth commandment and is always wrong. However, there are some nuances to consider. For one thing, a lie might be mortally or venially sinful depending on the objective importance of the truth being obscured and on the seriousness of the potential harms that might come about because of the lie. A quick fib about eating the last piece of cake is obviously not on the same level as a lie in a business transaction that causes a family to lose their entire savings.

With "little white lies," I think a lot depends on the specific context, and whether the "white lie" involves stating a literal untruth. Refraining from telling a sick person that they look terrible is not a lie, because staying silent in a scenario where you had no need or obligation to comment is not inherently untruthful. Personally, I'm against telling white lies that are clear-cut falsehoods, even if they only concern trivial matters. Beyond the question of whether this is a sin, telling even small lies can cause people to lose their trust in us over time.

Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and canonist.

Q: As a cradle Catholic, I was taught that the denial of Christ is gravely wrong, that Christians must be prepared to die rather than apostatise. Someone claiming to be Catholic recently asserted that, in cases of

LITURGICAL MUSIC

Universe columnist Paul Ashton catches up with the latest news from Radio Maria



Left, Anna F, one of Radio Maria's volunteer presenters, broadcasting from the capital. As more volunteers get involved in London, increasingly guests can hop on the 24 bus up to leafy Camden to get the full radio experience, sitting in a studio with its broadcasters.

Far left, Fr Toby is Radio Maria's priest director, a role essential to each Radio Maria station. He is to the Radio Maria community what a parish priest is to his parish

Broadcasting the faith – and a lot more besides

Some years I used to work in Italy and when driving to and from the office I would find my radio tuned to Radio Maria. I have to own up, this was because the radio frequency was shared with different radio stations depending on the time of the day and so was shared with another radio station which was my favourite.

My knowledge of Italian is simply 'practical' and sadly the content of Radio Maria in Italian was very much lost on me at the time.

When I first stumbled across Radio Maria via its UK website (<https://www.radiomariaengland.uk>), I recognised the name again but did not realise that this was the same family, part of a global network of 79 stations.

I have been interviewed on the radio countless times over the years. Now was the time to turn the tables and I decided it would be a good time for me to interview a radio station! After an email introduction and a phone call I was

soon speaking with Tim Hutchinson from Radio Maria's editorial team. Maybe not entirely an interview - I asked questions and we chatted about liturgical music and discussed more than was strictly necessary for the interview.

Radio Maria is far more than music. It would be fair to say that the content is largely prayer in its many forms, with some liturgical music programmes interspersed.

I was interested to know who Radio Maria reaches and was surprised to learn that the English broadcast reaches not only UK listeners but also listeners in other parts of the world choosing to listen to the English station.

The programmes are broadcast live but some content is available later as podcasts so I caught up on a few episodes of *The Liturgical Looking Glass*, a format of conversation and liturgical music with each programme having a slightly different theme. I heard everything from Gregorian Chant to

Choral works, Pavarotti to Hillbilly gospel (fine country harmonies and not a banjo in sight). I made some discoveries too in the contemporary Christian music genre and will definitely be looking more at the Franciscan Friars of Renewal and Brother Isaiah.

I asked Tim about how content is chosen and he told me that in addition to published recordings there are also independent recordings, the live Masses also include sung liturgy and hymns. There are also live concerts and on Rosary days where each decade of the Rosary is followed by a motet - all live. Every morning at 7pm you can follow the Breviary with the Dominican Friars and join in singing. While writing this, I listened to the world news presented from the Vatican followed by Vespers sung (and said) by the Dominican Friars of St. Michael The Archangel, Cambridge.

We talked about choral hymns and contemporary Christian music.

I suggested that Catholic sources of music must push that music further up to the playlist. Tim answered: "We do play music from other Christian traditions but occasionally find something that doesn't correspond to the Ecumenical charism. Also anything with the Liturgical Tetragrammaton is not used. While we want to choose what the listener would enjoy, Catholics need to rediscover what the richness there is within the Catholic tradition. Look elsewhere but recognise the uniqueness of what we have."

I asked about content for younger audiences. I had already noted resources for Children's liturgy on the website. Tim said that Radio Maria's listeners are generally older. "We serve those who can't get to Masses, the housebound," but there are children's programmes in the morning and a teaching programme at 4pm. There is also *Bedtime Blessings*, *Children Rosary*

and *Children's Songs*.

There are many ways to listen to Radio Maria: DAB Radio in some parts of the country, via the website or simply tell Alexa to "Play Radio Maria England".

Podcasts can be played by Spotify (search Radio Maria England) and there is also a YouTube channel.

While older audiences are most likely to listen live, younger people listen via podcasts.

Radio Maria, as a charity, is funded entirely by donations and the station is currently running a fundraising campaign.

Broadcasting fees are a large part of the running costs. The radio station is commercial free so that it can be faithful to the interests of the Catholic Church.

Radio Maria England celebrated its 4th Birthday last week and of course needs to ensure that its mission can continue.

Find out more at <https://www.radiomariaengland.uk>.



As well as recorded music, the broadcasts include live music recorded at special events organised by the radio station

A hymn for peace

I would like to end with a prayer in music. We are heartbroken by what we see happening in the Middle East and whilst we may feel helpless to influence the politicians and their decisions, we can pray:

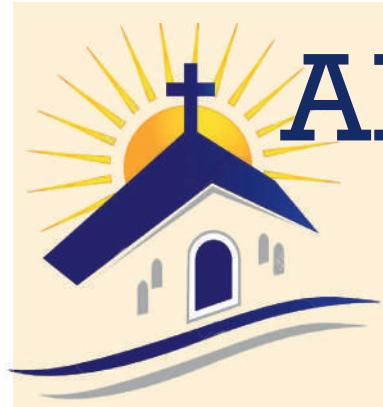
HYMN TO MARY, QUEEN OF PEACE
Sung to the tune of Amazing Grace

*Most gracious Mary, Queen of Peace
Embrace us with your love;
May our desires sincerely be
To praise our God above.*

*Implore for us the Spirit's gifts
To follow in your way;
Let wisdom and humility
Guide all we do and say.*

*In confidence we witness Christ
Whose truth has set us free
May we pursue what leads to peace
For all humanity.*

*Acknowledgements to The World Union
of Catholic Women's Organisations
(WUCWO)*



AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION

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



Left, children from St Oswald's with one of the 'big' Shauns on the Art Trail.

Right, with the model to be designed in the St Oswald's style, and above, the pupils' own designed Shaun



Shaun makes his way home to St Oswald's after art trail

A much-loved wandering sheep has finally returned to the fold at a Gosforth Catholic school.

The Shaun the Sheep sculpture was designed and decorated by the children at St Oswald's Catholic Primary School, and had been part of the Shaun on the Tyne Art Trail.

The project, which ran from July to September, saw a flock of 115 individually designed and painted

sheep on display throughout Newcastle, and was held in support of St Oswald's Hospice.

It was the second time St Oswald's Primary, a member of the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust, had taken part in the trail event. "Our school had previously taken part in its Elmer trail completed a mini Elmer sculpture," explained Gemma Summersby,

Year 1 teacher and the school's special educational needs and/or disabilities co-ordinator.

"We designed our own mini Shaun the Sheep sculpture, which was part of the trail, and was displayed in Fenwicks. We were also invited to the launch event at Newcastle Civic Centre where two of our Year 1 children unveiled the first sculpture.

"They (also) got to meet the creator of Shaun the Sheep from Aardman, and to see one of the original models."

The school's design featured the fingerprints of each pupil and staff member, and was chosen through an in-school competition.

Mrs Summersby said: "The idea was chosen from a mix of designs that the children entered into a

competition. Those who wanted to enter paid a small donation as part of our fundraising for St Oswald's Hospice."

An auction at the completion of the Art Trail where the larger Shaun sculptures were sold, raised £195,400 for St Oswald's Hospice. The 'little flock' sheep were then returned to the schools and youth groups who had created them.

Kelechi's essay on Pope St Gregory the Great rewarded at special Mass

Francis Connolly KSG

Kelechi Mwenge of Bishop Challoner School, Basingstoke, was invited with his parents to a special Mass at the Cathedral of the Bishop of the Forces, St Michael and St George in Aldershot. This is the Catholic cathedral for members of the Armed Forces, and this year was chosen for the annual Mass and celebration of the Portsmouth Diocese Association of Papal Knights and Dames.

Kelechi was there to receive his prize as winner in the essay project launched by the association for boys and girls at Catholic secondary schools across the diocese.

Kelechi's essay on Pope St Gregory the Great was judged to be of a high standard and won him first prize, presented by Bishop Paul Mason, Bishop of the Forces.

Nine pupils from various schools gained other prizes in the project and these were sent to their schools for presentation at assemblies. The Catholic cathedral at Aldershot is of special interest as the only Catholic church in Britain to have been inaugurated by Queen Victoria. It was originally built as the Anglican church for the Army and was given to the Catholic church in 1973 to serve all members of the Armed Forces and their families.

Papal knighthoods are awarded to people who have made some special contribution to the work of the Church. Pupils were invited to write about St Gregory or St Sylvester, the two great saints after whom the Papal orders are named.



Outstanding school praised for its focus on Christian ethos

High expectations, a nurturing ethos and a highly-effective curriculum have led to an 'Outstanding' award for a Newcastle Catholic school, with the Ofsted report praising 'the school's Christian values.'

St Mary's Catholic School received the highest Ofsted grading of Outstanding for all five key areas, with a glowing report praising students, leaders, the staff team and the wider school family.

The report said: 'St Mary's is an ambitious and nurturing school where pupils thrive. They are taught how to live out the school's Christian values in everything they do. This includes a continual focus on the importance of positive relationships, gratitude and service of others. Pupils are happy and safe in this exceptionally supportive atmosphere, where leaders ensure that pupils benefit from a high-quality and expansive curriculum.'

Among other areas highlighted by the inspection team were the school's exceptional academic outcomes for all pupils and the excellent behaviour climate and strong attendance and punctuality of students.

"The school's high expectations for pupils' behaviour and attitudes are modelled by all staff in the school. As a result, the school is a nurturing and warm environment," the report said.

A member of the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust, St Mary's has 1,444 pupils aged from 11 to 18.

"This is a tremendous achievement for everyone in our school community and is testament to our incredible students and our very dedicated teaching and support staff team," said headteacher Emma Patterson. It is wonderful to see so much strong practice being recognised, in all areas of the school."



"Most importantly, it was fantastic to see the inspection team clearly recognised the very warm and nurturing ethos in the school, with our Christian values at the heart of this ethos, and the ambition, care and support that we embed for every child in a happy and safe school community."

The inspection team noted that the school ensures pupils are ready for their next steps, and is committed to a strong careers

education. They also highlighted the inclusivity of the school, noting that, "the school ensures pupils engage with a variety of beliefs and ideas that are different from their own. Pupils are considerate when exploring these sensitive issues".

The inspection also noted that pupils have many opportunities in the school's wider curriculum, with an extensive range of clubs, trips and events, including the annual spiritual retreats.

"It was fantastic to see the inspection team clearly recognised the very warm and nurturing ethos in the school, with our Christian values at the heart of this ethos..."

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Conference issues a clarion call to root out racism and promote inclusion

Suresh Abboodass

A clarion call to challenge racism wherever it exists and the Church to be the forefront of racial justice was made by several speakers at a seminar held at St. George's Metropolitan Cathedral Southwark London on Saturday, 28th October.

The one-day seminar, organised by the Archdiocese of Southwark under the stewardship of Most Rev. John Wilson, the Archbishop of Southwark, heard speakers call for churches, parishes and schools to tackle racism and promote racial and cultural inclusion by allotting various roles to people of different ethnic background and colour.

The seminar, the first of its kind to be held in the archdiocese, and titled 'Promoting Racial and Cultural Inclusion in our parishes, schools, and communities' was attended by more than a hundred people from various backgrounds, with more participating through Zoom.

The seminar was conducted by the Commission for Promoting Racial and Cultural Inclusion – formed by Archbishop Wilson after the killing of George Floyd by policemen in the US in 2020.

Canon Victor Darlington, Episcopal Vicar for Education and Chairman of the Commission for Promoting Racial and Cultural Inclusion, issued a clarion call to "challenge racism wherever it exists." "It (racism) is the big elephant in the room and our archbishop has called us to drive this elephant out," he said.

"This is a time for integration, show of oneness and diversity in our community. Soon after the



Canon Victor Darlington, Chairman of the Commission for Racial Diversity

killing of George Floyd, this Commission was formed. The killing sparked worldwide protests. It also brought the 'oneness' in fellow human beings. People of all races called out against this violent and racist attack."

Archbishop Wilson urged participants "to overcome the sin of racism" and "to raise our voices against racism." He also called on them "to stand in solidarity with the community to support a just society with respect and dignity for all."

"There should be no place for racism in our society", the archbishop said. "After the tragic killing of George Floyd I felt compelled to reflect, listen and act. Racism continues to harm our society. The Church should be the forefront of racial justice."

Speaking on the efforts to root out racism in his parish, Fr. Richard Nesbitt – a white priest – revealed that he had "deep experience of racism" in his parish of Our Lady of Fatima Church in White City London and he had to

strain every nerve to root out racism. Following the pulling down of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol, he initiated a conversation in his parish, which he thought would lead his parishioners to share their experiences of racism. But to his dismay this did not happen, he said.

During the church service, "white parishioners were not accepting the 'gesture of peace' with black people", he said. "This affected me and I spoke about this in my homily. I was thinking it was a diverse, multicultural parish, but this was not the case. No one talked about rooting out racism from our parish. Only when I asked people to write anonymously in a book, then I came to know how serious it was," he said.

"This has been published in a report called, Rooting out racism in our parish," he stated.

Elizabeth Uwalaka from the same parish called to "change 'othering' to 'brothering'" and said that "institutional racism is real," quoting an example from her own professional life in which she was a victim of racism in the institution where she worked.

Kamara Katana Atkinson felt that diversity reflected in different races and backgrounds has not been fully embraced in the Catholic Church and that inclusion in the Church must be enforced nationwide.

Speaking on the topic of 'Journeying with young people and families: opportunities, challenges and hopes', Susan Elderfield, advisor for school and college chaplaincies, urged Catholics to

stand together along with those who are marginalised and victimised through racism.

Drawing out personal experiences from young persons like Helen and Tirini, she stressed the need for providing opportunities to all people irrespective of their colour of their skin or ethnic background.

Nana Churcher, author and award-winning talk show host from Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. George's Catholic Church, Enfield, spoke on the significance of "change in this chaotic world". "From little seeds grow mighty trees, so it is the same when we commit ourselves to change," she said.

There was a lot of feedback from group discussions at the end of the seminar. Prominent among them was a consensus to encourage inclusion and representation of all people in church activities, irrespective of age, gender, race and colour.

It was also felt that more effort must be taken to bringing young people to church by giving them opportunities to serve as Eucharistic Ministers and readers. Above all, there was a whole-hearted consensus to be united as Catholics as a way of moving forward in embracing diversity and putting an end to racism in the Church.

Paul Cavadino and Jude Onye were the Masters of Ceremony. Deacon Paul Chigbo Ugwuoke from St. Wilfrid's, Kennington, Ongelo Abraham from Our Lady of Sorrows, Lewisham, Valentine and Patricia spoke on behalf of different groups.



Delegates meet in groups to discuss racial inclusion



Fr. Richard Nesbitt and Elizabeth Uwalaka

Retreat helps Year 7 reflect on lives of saints

Year 7 students from Saint Paul's Catholic High School, Wythenshawe, in Greater Manchester, were invited to step away from their busy start at secondary school and enjoy space for team building, reflection and prayer when they spent a retreat day with the Shrewsbury Youth Mission Team.

The students engaged in group-based activities on a day full of thoughtful activities, including icebreaker games, creating posters and writing prayers.

The Year 7 students were able to reflect on their faith and their relationship with God, as well as with their peers.

The retreat was focused on thinking about saints and completing a saintly challenge in which students were given the opportunity to think about and complete tasks relating to their form saints. These activities were very helpful, fulfilling and enjoyable for the students.

Head of RE Monika Timkovicova said: "The retreat offered many bonding opportunities for the Year 7 students while at the same time providing a time for reflection and



peace. The retreat is seen by the school as an integral part of the life-long faith formation of young people. The students withdraw from the ordinary activities of the school for a period of time to be with God in prayer and reflection."

Year 7 Progress Leader Hannah Chisnall underlined the importance of the students knowing how God "loves us as we are."

"We all need the space and the silence to reflect and pray – it can help us begin to sense a deeper truth about ourselves and God, how

he loves us as we are," she said.

"The retreat gave us the opportunity not only to reflect upon our goals and ambitions and how our faith supports us in achieving these but also a chance to get to know each other better."

Thanking the Shrewsbury Youth Mission Team, headteacher Mike Whiteside said: "The retreat is a spiritual exercise which provides the opportunity for our pupils to deepen their relationship with God, with others and with themselves, through reflection and prayer."

Bee happy – new prize for garden

A parish Laudato Si' project is winning praise from horticultural experts after bagging another prize.

The Bee Together Community Centre and Garden, based at the parish of the Nativity in Failsworth and Limeside, has been awarded the Level 5 Outstanding Garden Award as part of the RHS It's Your Neighbourhood initiative.

Last year the team won the Level 4 Thriving Garden award after three years' hard graft to transform the once overgrown, disused space into a vibrant, colourful hub for the whole community.

Pauline Riley, parishioner and parish co-ordinator, said: "We try to protect and encourage

biodiversity by striving to maintain a natural balance. We grow organically and our bees, under the supervision of Catherine Charnock, help to pollinate the crops.

"We have also been looking at ways to reduce waste, to increase recycling and composting, we reuse rainwater, and have dedicated a corner of our garden to rewilding."

The project began life in 2019 after parish priest Canon Michael Job approached Pauline about taking a practical response to Pope Francis' environmental encyclical Laudato Si'. She then recruited a team of dedicated volunteers to create the beautiful space for the whole community to enjoy.



Pauline Riley holds the Bee Together Community Garden award with two volunteers either side



UNIVERSE
CATHOLIC WEEKLY

Funeral care & life planning

Welcome to the Universe Catholic Weekly and to one of the UK's most desirable audiences. Our readership is largely made up of the affluent over 50s who have the largest purchasing power and highest net worth in the UK.

People in that demographic are more likely to have started thinking about the future and wanting to take care of plans for their own funerals long before their time comes.

Our regular readership surveys show us that always was and still is the case, and in particular that they must be the obvious target market for funeral directors.

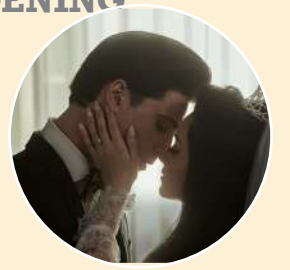
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The Universe Catholic Weekly's guide to the more leisurely side of life

pg 35

GARDENING

The seed of a great idea... and why it's being planted with you right now

Seed catalogues offer the perfect winter diversion

Twas the week after Christmas, and all through the mail, The catalogues started arriving, on schedule, without fail...

Nah...I could go there but I won't. Though I must admit, I am always amazed by how consistent the seed companies are in sending their catalogues out at just the right time. I'd say the day after Christmas is pretty good timing.

Alas, we check the post and find a stack of brand new catalogues from our favourite seeds companies, as well as from some companies we've never heard of before. But no matter, we stop whatever else we were doing, grab a seat in our favourite chair and began to fan the pages and thini to ourselves, 'could I plant those wonderful flowers / bushes/ veg in my garden...?'

Not just another pretty face

Beyond the entertainment value of the alluring photographs and beautiful artwork, there is plenty of useful information for beginners and experts alike. It's one of the main reasons I hang on to them for so long. Here are some examples of the treasures you'll find between the pages.

New varieties

If you're a seasoned gardener or a veteran catalogue shopper, you are likely looking for the newest varieties. Catalogue companies usually feature their latest additions either on the cover or in prominent locations within the pages.

Gardeners are always on the lookout for improved, disease resistant varieties or plants that may exhibit a more compact form. Other high-demand introductions include flowers with improved colours or vegetables that exhibit superior flavour or growth habit or

tougher hardiness.

Better selection

Catalogues offer vastly superior selections of seed varieties from which to choose. Although local garden centres and nurseries usually stock the most popular seeds for their growing region, there is only so much floor space to devote to selling seeds. Consequently, fewer choices are available when shopping in person.

In contrast, catalogue seed companies distinguish themselves partly by offering what you can't get locally. Some offer many choices from annuals and perennials to vegetables.

Specialty seeds

Other companies have carved out a special niche rather than attempting to offer it all. They may focus on a narrow category such as tomatoes, herbs or succulents. Other companies offer only certified organic seeds while others may offer only heirlooms.

Timing

The dead of winter is the perfect time to receive catalogues. Not only is it a good diversion for our minds, it is the ideal opportunity to plan our spring and summer gardens.

With a little down time combined with our desire to get planting again, we attack the pages, making our lists and attaching sticky notes to countless pages.

Convenience

Catalogues (and their websites) offer the most convenient way to shop. In fact, if you're looking for anything outside of the basic vanilla flavour, they're the only way to go.



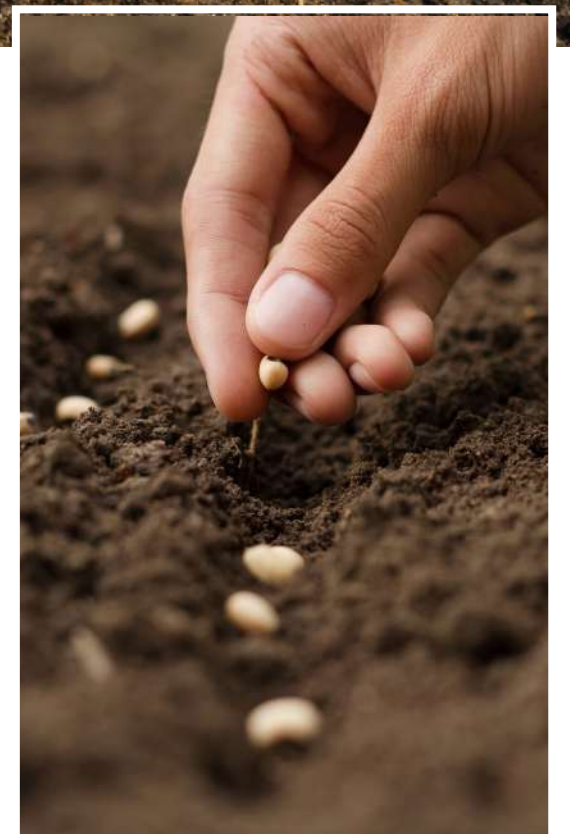
Expert advice

Any quality catalogue company has knowledgeable staff that can answer your questions and provide advice. Many seeds that are available for sale have been trialed in their test gardens for several seasons before being offered.

They have experience and keep detailed information. Someone there should be able to answer your questions.

However, as much as I enjoy the catalogue experience, there are some caveats that you should know about over the next week or two. I will cover a few of the most common mistakes and provide some tips on how to shop wisely in a separate article.

In the mean time, gather up those catalogues, get acquainted and dream about your best garden yet!



'Catalogues offer vastly superior selections of seed varieties from which to choose. Although local garden centres and nurseries usually stock the most popular seeds for their growing region, there is only so much floor space to devote to selling seeds. Consequently, fewer choices are available when shopping in person..'

HEALTH

New research suggests women need to shift the dial on protein as they age

Evangeline Mantzioris

If you are a woman around 50, you might have seen advice on social media or from influencers telling you protein requirements increase dramatically in midlife. Such recommendations suggest a 70 kilogram woman needs around 150 grams of protein each day. That's the equivalent of 25 boiled eggs at 6 grams of protein each.

Can that be right? Firstly, let's have a look at what protein is and where you get it.

Protein is an essential macro-nutrient in our diet. It provides us with energy and is used to repair and make muscle, bones, soft tissues and hormones and enzymes. Mostly we associate animal foods (dairy, meat and eggs) as being rich in protein. Plant foods such as bread, grains and legumes provide valuable sources of protein too.

But what happens to our requirements as we get older?

Ages and stages

Protein requirements change through different life stages. This reflects changes in growth, especially from babies through to young adulthood. The estimated average requirements by age are:

- 1.43g protein per kg of body weight at birth
- 1.6g per kg of body weight at 6–12 months (when protein requirements are at their highest point)

- protein needs decline from 0.92g down to 0.62g per kg of body weight from 6–18 years.

When we reach adulthood, protein requirements differ for men and women, which reflects the higher muscle mass in men compared to women:

- 0.68g per kg of body weight for men
- 0.6g per kg of body weight for women.

Clinicians' recommendations for people over 70 reflect the increased need for tissue repair and muscle maintenance:

- 0.86g per kg of bodyweight for men
- 0.75g per kg of bodyweight for women.

For a 70kg man this is a difference of 12.6g/protein per day. For a 70kg woman this is an increase of 10.5g per day. You can add 10g of protein by consuming an extra 300ml milk, 60g cheese, 35g chicken, 140g lentils, or 3–4 slices of bread.

There is emerging evidence higher intakes for people over 70 (up to 0.94–1.3g per kg of bodyweight per day) might reduce age-related decline in muscle mass (known as sarcopenia). But this must be accompanied with increased resistance-based exercise, such as using weights or stretchy bands. As yet these have

How much protein do I need as I get older? And do I need supplements to get enough?



Protein provides us with energy and is used to repair and make muscle, bones, soft tissues and hormones and enzymes. We associate animal foods (dairy, meat and eggs) as being rich in protein... and plant foods such as bread, grains and legumes provide valuable sources of protein, too.

not been included in any national nutrient guidelines.

But what about in midlife?

So, part of a push for higher protein in midlife might be due to wanting to prevent age-related muscle loss. And it might also be part of a common desire to prevent weight gain that may come with hormonal changes.

There have been relatively few studies specifically looking at protein intake in middle-aged women. One large 2017 observational study (where researchers look for patterns in a population sample) of over 85,000 middle-aged nurses found higher intake of vegetable protein – but not animal protein or total protein – was

linked to a lower incidence of early menopause.

In the same group of women another study found higher intake of vegetable protein was linked to a lower risk of frailty (meaning a lower risk of falls, disability, hospitalisation and death). Higher intake of animal protein was linked to higher risk of frailty, but total intake of protein had no impact.

Another smaller observational study of 103 postmenopausal women found higher lean muscle mass in middle-aged women with higher protein intake. Yet an intervention study (where researchers test out a specific change) showed no effect of higher protein intake on lean body mass in late post-menopausal women.

Some researchers are theorising that higher

dietary protein intake, along with a reduction in kilojoules, could reduce weight gain in menopause. But this has not been tested in clinical trials.

Increasing protein intake, improves satiety (feeling full), which may be responsible for reducing body weight and maintaining muscle mass. The protein intake to improve satiety in studies has been about 1.0–1.6g per kg of bodyweight per day. However such studies have not been specific to middle-aged women, but across all ages and in both men and women.

Evangeline Mantzioris is a Programme Director of Nutrition and Food Sciences, Accredited Practising Dietitian, University of South Australia



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FOOD & LIFESTYLE

Christmas hosting made easy with five fun tips for stress-free festive parties

You may love hosting your friends and family over the Christmas holidays, but the cleaning, food prep and post-party clean-up? Not so much.

Gathering together with your loved ones to enjoy the cheer and fun of the season is great, but don't you wish there were ways to make it easier and less stressful to put on a festive celebration? Luckily, there are. You can have a blast hosting family and friends – and even enjoy the prep and clean-up – by following a few easy principles.

Here are ideas for keeping your next Christmas party merry and bright from start to finish.

1. Create the kind of party you'd want to attend

There's no need to make this year's party identical to those you've held in the past or that your family has always had. Start by asking yourself what makes a party a success. Love getting dressed up and sitting down at a fancy table for a formal dinner? If so, that's the kind of holiday party you should host.

If not, think about what you've enjoyed at memorable celebrations from your past. What made it a hit? Was it a low-key, dress-as-you-are party with cheerful music, kids' crafts and informal games? Was the food simple but still tasty and comforting? Maybe there were party flavours and gifts that were low-cost but silly



'Get the whole family involved in party preparations by assigning tasks to children that are appropriate according to their age range'

helping to create the perfect Christmas playlist or decorating biscuits.

If you have friends who feel just like family, see if they're willing to come early to help with the set up – and make sure to get them an extra-special holiday goody bag to thank them.

4. Designate specific party rooms

Since it may not be possible to make every room in your home 100% clean for the party, make sure the central rooms are in good shape, then mark some rooms "off limits" for partygoers, using festive garlands or funny signs, asking people not to enter.

If your front closet has no room for extra coats and bags, designate a guest room or office as a coat room so guests will know where to put their things when they arrive.

5. Add festive decorations

Create an immersive atmosphere by decorating your entertaining space. Cover the room in festive décor, such as a decorated fireplace mantel, a special wall decked out in holiday lights, children's artwork or a doorway framed in holiday greenery.

The goal is to create a cheerful ambiance that delights your guests at every turn. Hosting doesn't have to be stressful or overwhelming.

Use these tips to help you relax and enjoy the cheer and fun of the season.

and fun.

Make a quick list of the high points from different shindigs you've attended and see if you can include some of them in your party plan. The preparation will go much smoother and will be a whole lot more enjoyable when you're entertaining in a way that you love.

2. Keep it simple – and delicious

You can reduce the stress and time it takes to prepare tasty food and handle post-party clean-up by getting some help from the big

supermarket chains; no-one will know or care if the vol au vents and mini burger bites haven't been created by your own fair loving hands – and they won't care if they are Waitrose, M&S, Aldi or Lidl either. It's about celebrating with your loved ones, not spending a fortune.

3. Make it a family affair

Get the whole family involved in party preparations by assigning tasks to children that are appropriate according to their age range, such as making and putting up decorations,

FILMS

Freelance won't be called back for a second shift after a stumbling performance

Attentive viewers will discern some positive moral values underlying the plot of the action comedy *Freelance* (Relativity). The difficulty is that such audience concentration on this slipshod film will also reveal its sub-par status even as a source of casual entertainment.

John Cena stars as he-man Mason Petits. As explained in an opening voice-over, convinced that he would be bored with family life in the suburbs, youthful law school student Mason suddenly abandoned his studies to become an Army Ranger instead.

The unlikely choice turned out to be a good one since Mason loved being in the army. However, when a mission to overthrow Juan Venegas (Juan Pablo Raba) – the notorious dictator of the fictional South American nation of Paldonia – went horribly awry, Mason was so badly wounded that he had to leave the service and return to the civilian world.

Fast forward to the present, and Mason has acquired a wife, Jenny (Alice Eve), and a daughter, Casey (Molly McCann). But his career is stalled and he's so stultified and restless that it's taking a toll on his marriage. So when his friend and former comrade Sebastian (Christian Slater), who now heads a security outfit, offers him a temporary job, Mason is initially open to the idea.

However, on learning that his task will be to serve as bodyguard to reporter Claire Wellington (Alison Brie) during a journey to Paldonia –



John Cena in *Freelance*

where Venegas has offered the journalist a rare interview – Mason hesitates. When Sebastian throws a large fee into the balance, though, it does the trick and Mason agrees to go.

No sooner do Mason and Claire land in Paldonia than a coup breaks out and the presidential limo in which they're riding is ambushed. Predictably, Mason succeeds in beating back the onslaught and saving both Claire and Venegas. But this leaves the trio wandering around in the jungle while Mason gets into a gun fight with uniformed extras to no particular purpose.

As scripted by Jacob Lentz and directed by Pierre Morel, *Freelance* eventually pushes back against Mason's cynicism about domestic

tranquility, vindicating the value of marital fidelity and clan reconciliation. But the movie's forays into geopolitics and global economics are naively simplistic, with America depicted as the world's manipulative 'Bad Guy.'

By the time the credits roll, Morel has staged a large-scale climactic showdown that litters the ground with corpses. And the gunplay by which they and their numerous predecessors in earlier scenes are laid low is sometimes quite graphic.

Blending this mayhem with humour drawing on Venegas' suavity and the cross-purposes at which Mason and Claire are constantly working makes for an unstable tone. Seemingly uncertain where it wants to end up, the picture spins its wheels and, in the end, goes nowhere.

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FILMS

'Jazz hands' makes for a perfect family film

Swedish producer Adam Anders has long been associated with such musical fare as the Fox TV series *Glee* and the big-screen comedy *Rock of Ages*.

As he makes his directorial debut with the lively song and dance-filled film *Journey to Bethlehem* (Sony), that legacy is on full display.

Call it the 'jazz-hands Nativity story.' Anders' script, which he co-wrote with Peter Barsocchini, chronicles Mary (Fiona Palomo) and Joseph's (Milo Manheim) effort to add personal commitment to their arranged betrothal.

It also follows a comic version of the Magi (Omid Djalili, Geno Segers and Rizwan Manji) on their long quest to worship the newborn Saviour.

Before they can do so, however, the trio is forced to tangle both with evil King Herod (Antonio Banderas) and with his morally wavering son, Antipater (Joel Smallbone). The latter's spiritual struggle constitutes one of the movie's substantive points. Though more fleeting, Mary's reflections on her future, encapsulated in the song *Mother to a Saviour and a King*, are moving.

"As Adam Anders recently told the *Universe*: "Music has a way of softening the heart in a way that other things can't."

The songs are engaging and upbeat, and will encourage viewers both old and young to think



Fiona Palomo and Milo Manheim star as Mary and Joseph in a modern take on the Bible story

deeper about the story. Antonio Banderas as Herod is a villainous character who is threatened by a seemingly harmless baby and plays this role effectively.

There's an upbeat tone to the production. So what it may lack in solemnity many will feel it makes up for with energy, pizzazz and unmistakable good intentions.

Journey to Bethlehem is perfect fare for a wide range of age groups and the whole family. A zestful new take on the opening chapter of the greatest story ever told, it may be dismissed

by curmudgeons with a curt 'Bah, humbug!' but will likely win far more fans than detractors and bring the greatest story ever told to life in a fresh and engaging way.

Those open to the film's lighthearted spirit will also recognise an inspiring and hopeful message underlying the proceedings.

Namely, that God has a greater destiny in store for each individual than he or she can readily imagine. For this reason, it is a must-see for Christians and all seekers in the build up to Christmas.

"*Journey to Bethlehem* is perfect fare for the whole family. A zestful new take on the opening chapter of the greatest story ever told, it may be dismissed by curmudgeons with a curt 'Bah, humbug!' but will likely win far more fans than detractors..."

Priscilla's time in the spotlight leaves audience uneasy

John Mulderig

Hip-swivelling icon Elvis Presley was a singular figure in many respects. As *Priscilla* (A24), a dramatisation of the courtship that eventually led to his marriage demonstrates, his take on romance was one of them.

Indeed, the relationship that writer-director Sofia Coppola's screen version of Priscilla Presley's 1985 memoir *Elvis and Me* charts is a strange mix of the respectable and the unsavoury. Start with the fact that the star's future wife (Cailee Spaeny) was only 14 when she first met the 24-year-old King of Rock and Roll (Jacob Elordi).

The stepdaughter of a US Air Force officer (Ari Cohen) stationed in Wiesbaden in what was then West Germany, star-struck Priscilla Beaulieu gets to know Elvis during his own overseas service in the military. Once his stint in the Army is over, the two maintain a long-distance relationship until she graduates and moves to Memphis, Tennessee, under his auspices.

Although the pair's deepening bond is a source of understandable concern to both her parents



– Dagmara Dominczyk plays her mother, Ann – Elvis manages to convince them that his intentions are honourable. And, true to his word, he sees to it that the quasi-cohabitation that follows Priscilla's return to America remains chaste until their wedding night.

The screenplay makes clear, however, that this restraint was a source of discontent to Priscilla. Even for viewers committed to the

Jacob Elordi as Elvis and Cailee Spaeny as Priscilla Presley star in a scene from the film *Priscilla*. While the film is at pains to stress how Elvis kept their relationship non-physical before they married, the wealthy and powerful rocker's relationship with his very young wife will still leave many people feeling uneasy
Photo: A24

virtue of chastity in the teeth of contemporary customs, moreover, Elvis' self-control comes across as being at least partly influenced – and, to that extent, tainted – by his desire to control his much-younger partner.

This moral ambiguity typifies the ethical fault line on which the fact-based plot uneasily sits. Contemporary viewers will immediately spot the problematic and unhealthy nature of a world-famous, wildly rich and therefore powerful adult, carrying on an affair – albeit nonphysical – with a teenage schoolgirl.

The film skirts a number of such red lines and takes the audience with it. Thus, Elvis isn't exactly an addict, but he certainly pops a lot of

prescription pills (and experiments, along with Priscilla, with LSD). Nor is he a full-blown abuser, yet his explosive temper – fuelled, perhaps, by all the drugs he's taking – finds vent in a series of ugly moments.

When the time comes for the script to portray Priscilla's decision to seek a divorce, a similar tension prevails. As will by now be obvious, she had much about which to complain.

Still, on a dramatic level, her departure feels abrupt – if only because of the series of consistently swift reconciliations that have preceded it. Additionally, there is an overwhelming temptation to speculate on what might have happened had Priscilla remained and tried to help her spouse break free of his downward cycle.

Overall, though generally low-key in tone, the film is worryingly peculiar in content. Accordingly, even after Priscilla has left the building, moviegoers will still be trying to sort through the ins-and-outs of this eccentric, sometimes uncomfortable, but not, ultimately, unappealing tale.

The King's speech: what is it, why does it matter – and is it outdated?

HISTORY

Sean Lang

Just under two weeks ago, King Charles gave his first speech from the throne as monarch. It wasn't the first time he had delivered the speech to Parliament: he delivered the Queen's speech once as Prince of Wales, deputising in May 2022 for his mother, who could not attend on that occasion.

This was the first speech by a king since 1951, though on that occasion King George VI was too ill to attend and the speech was read out by the Lord Chancellor.

Who writes the king's speech and why does it matter?

The king's speech is the central part of the ceremony marking the state opening of Parliament.

At the start of each parliamentary session, the monarch goes – in a state coach and escorted by the household cavalry – to the House of Lords, accompanied by the crown as a symbol of his royal authority. There, he reads out a speech outlining the Government's plans and priorities for the year ahead.

Although it is known as the King's speech, it is actually written by the Government, for the monarch. In 1964, an irreverent *Private Eye* cover had Queen Elizabeth II reading the speech while saying: "I hope you realise I didn't write this crap."

The speech and the ceremony are a reminder of the constitutional relationship of crown and government. Although political power rests with the Prime Minister and his or her cabinet, there is nevertheless a layer of authority above them.

What happens at the speech?

The tradition of a King's speech has its origins in England's medieval parliaments, but the speech from the throne as we know



it today first evolved in the late 17th century, when Parliament finally established its power over the monarch.

Much of the modern ritual is a Victorian concoction. The monarch sits on the royal throne in the House of Lords – the upper house. Members of Parliament are imperiously summoned by a royal official known as the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod (though the office is currently held by a woman, and so: the Lady Usher of the Black Rod is the correct title). No seats are provided for MPs, so they have to crowd into an inadequate space at the back while the Lords sit before them.

Meanwhile, the door of the Commons is slammed in Black Rod's face as a reminder of the

independence of the Commons. And that, ever since 1642, when Charles I entered the chamber with armed men in a foiled attempt to arrest five MPs, the House of Commons is the one place in the realm where the monarch is not allowed to step.

MPs amble informally down to the upper house to show they are going because they choose to, not because they are summoned, and the speech they are to hear is the work of the government, not the king. It's political theatre.

What if the monarch disagrees with the speech?

Whatever his private feelings, the monarch must not show any overt preference for any political party, so the speech is always read in as

neutral a tone as possible. Sometimes the speech might include current acronyms or technical terms which sit strangely with the glittering jewellery and gold on display, but the monarch must read it all, giving nothing away either by tone of voice or facial expression.

The monarch has the right to advise, warn and encourage the Prime Minister on policy. In return he must always follow the Prime Minister's advice and he must read the Prime Minister's speech.

This means that a monarch might solemnly read out a speech written by one party, and, a year later, if there has been a change of Government, equally solemnly read out a speech outlining a completely different programme and written

by their opponents.

The grand ceremonial of the state opening has sometimes been scaled down, in wartime or if the economic situation suggests tactful restraint. This is something the King himself has to gauge, with advice from the Government.

After the speech, the monarch makes an equally ceremonial departure and MPs shuffle off back to the Commons where they begin a debate, which normally lasts a week. This is called a humble address to the monarch, thanking him for his gracious speech but in reality offering MPs a chance to support or attack the Government for its now-public list of intentions. And so normal politics resumes.

Sean Lang is a Senior Lecturer in History, Anglia Ruskin University

Sunak's message, but was the speech to Charles's taste?

So what was in the King's Speech? Would King Charles III have liked its contents – and did he keep his tone neutral?

Observers thought the King's tone seemed strained during his delivery, suggesting either nerves, which feels unlikely, or perhaps a touch of distaste over the contents, particularly when he got round to announcing how the Government would grant new licences for oil and gas exploration – something it is known the monarch frowns upon.

It certainly did not go down with some

members of the Tory Party, who called it 'lightweight' in anonymous briefings afterwards. "We're sleepwalking to electoral disaster," one backbencher told the BBC, no doubt nervously counting up his majority at the last election and wondering whether he could lose his job in a year's time.

In all, the package featured 20 bills and one draft bill, including some that have been carried over from the last session to complete their passage in the next.

As well as Offshore Petroleum Licensing

Bill, which will mandate licences for oil and gas projects in the North Sea to be awarded annually, the much-heralded deal to sign up to an Indo-Pacific trade bloc of 11 nations will be ratified by Parliament in the Trade (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) Bill. The Automated Vehicles Bill will pave the way for the introduction of self-driving cars and buses on UK roads by putting in place a legal framework centred on safety and user protection, while the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill

aims to make it harder for firms to trap people in unwanted subscription contracts, take action against fake reviews and drip pricing, and increase competition between big tech firms.

There is another big digital bill, the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill, which aims to update the UK's data protection laws post-Brexit and strengthen the regulator.

The Media Bill will repeal a law requiring media outlets to pay all legal costs in libel cases, regardless of who won.

Squash's little brother is making a racket as it aims for parity on the courts

SPORT

Fr Vlad Felzmann

Born out of the game rackets, which was played in London's prisons in the 19th century, squash was invented at Harrow School in England around 1830 when pupils discovered that a punctured ball, which "squashed" on impact with the wall, required a greater variety of shots and skill to hit. Today squash is played by over 20 million people worldwide.

Across the Atlantic, Joe Sobek is credited with inventing the sport of racquetball in the Greenwich, Connecticut, YMCA.

A professional tennis and American handball player, Sobek, frustrated when he was unable to find an indoor racket sport that appealed to him, designed a new racket and adapted the rubber core of a tennis ball on a handball court and initially called it 'Paddle racquets'. He designed the first strung paddle, devised a set of rules, based on those of squash, handball, and paddleball, and named his game 'paddle rackets'.

It was subsequently renamed 'racquetball'.

In February 1952, Sobek founded the National Paddle Rackets Association (NPRA), codified the rules, and had the rules printed as a booklet. The new sport was rapidly adopted and became popular through Sobek's continual promotion of it. He was aided by the existence of some 40,000 handball courts in the country's YMCAs and Jewish community centres, where racquetball could be played.

In 1969, aided by Robert W. Kendler, the president-founder of the US Handball Association (USHA), the International Racquetball Association (IRA) was founded using the name coined by Bob McInerney, a professional tennis player.

Kendler used his publication *ACE* to promote both handball and racquetball. Starting in the 1970s, and aided by the fitness boom of that decade, the sport's popularity increased to an estimated 3.1 million players by 1974.

Consequent to increased demand, racquetball clubs and courts were founded and built, and sporting goods manufacturers began producing racquetball-specific equipment. This growth continued until the early 1980s, and declined in the decade's latter part when racquet clubs converted to physical fitness clubs, in service to a wider clientele, adding aerobics exercise



A Racquetball player in action

classes and physical fitness and bodybuilding machines. Since then, the number of players – an estimated 5.6 million – is growing.

In 1976, Ian Wright, an English squash referee, was officiating and lecturing in Canada and tried racquetball. He brought back a couple of rackets and balls, pierced the balls with a pin to slow them down to reduce their speed, and secured the support of Dunlop to manufacture them.

Wright felt that racketball, as he called it, could encourage more people into using British squash courts, and discourage interest in turning them over to studio, gym or other use. In 2009, Ian Wright suffered a heart attack on court during the Bexley Racketball Tournament on 4th January and died shortly afterwards.

At the first meeting of the British Racketball Association (BRA) formed in 1984, the Rules of the game were approved. In England, national Championships were first held in December 1984, followed by Doubles in 1986. Open events began to be held soon afterwards.

Separately, in 1977, through the efforts of a small number of Victorian squash venue operators, the sport of Australian Racquetball (AR) was conceived to encourage people who found squash challenging.

Racquetball is a fast-paced action sport played with standardised equipment and specific court dimensions worldwide. The sport became extremely popular during the late 1970s and early 1980s because it was fun, easy to learn how to play, and one of the best workouts you can get in a short period of time.

The number of racquetball players worldwide is estimated to be 5.6 million – and that number is growing. Racquetball uses a 'racquet' that can be up to 55.88 cm long with a tear-drop stringed area. Squash uses a 'racket' that is longer (up to 68.6 cm). However, the stringed surface is narrower. Both racquetballs and squash balls are hollow and rubber. Although, racquetballs are larger than squash balls by 42 per cent in diameter and they are bouncier.

Unlike most racquet sports, such as tennis and badminton, there is no net to hit the ball over, and, unlike squash, no tin (out of bounds area at the bottom of front wall) to hit the ball above. Also, the court's walls, floor, and ceiling are legal playing surfaces, with the exception of court-specific designated hindrances being out-of-bounds.

Kendler ruled over professional racquetball throughout its early

stages of growth, but upon his death in 1982 the organisation declared bankruptcy and the professional men's tours fell into disarray. Several professional governing bodies ruled the Men's pro tour throughout the 1980s, and the women broke away and self-organised their own professional tour in the same time period. Eventually, after the tour collapsed in 1988, a new men's tour called the International Racquetball Tour (IRT) was created by Oregon State President and popular tournament promoter Hank Marcus, which remains the primary men's professional sanctioning body to this day.

The women's pro tour has gone by several names in the interim, but is currently known as the Ladies Professional Racquetball tour (LPRT) and has partnerships with the USAR, IRT, and other sanctioning bodies to this day.

The British Racketball Association was formed on 13th February 1984, and confirmed by the English Sports Council as the sport's governing body on 30th October 1984. The first National Racketball Championship was held in London on 1st December 1984. The sport – like squash – is now played in a host of countries, including Australia, Bermuda,

France, Germany, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, Argentina, Ireland and Sweden. Currently, racketball also is played in parts of North America.

In 1988, the British Racketball Association merged with the Squash Rackets Association, and 'England Squash & Racketball' is now recognised by Sport England as the English national governing body for the sports of squash and racketball. There is now a UK Racketball Tournament Series consisting of eight events around the UK, which forms the basis of the national rankings along with the National Racketball championships held annually at The Edgbaston Priory Club.

The sport has a high appeal in the Americas, and because of this racquetball has been included in the Pan American Games in 1995, 1999, 2003, 2011, 2015 and in in Santiago, 2023.

Racquetball differs from other racquet sports as most competitive players wear a glove on their racquet hand for the purpose of getting a better grip on the racquet (similar to golfers using a glove when driving), but gloves are optional equipment.

In 2016, World Squash Federation announced an international 're-branding' of racketball as Squash 57, the 57 referring to the diameter of the ball, in order to emphasise both its membership of the 'squash rackets' family, and its distinctiveness from the US racquetball.

The WSF, in partnership with England Squash, signposted a change of name for the game, which is played with a larger ball and a shorter racket. The new name focuses on the key difference to squash – the larger ball, which has a maximum diameter of 57mm (compared to a squash ball's 40mm).

The rebrand will ensure that the game is seen as part of the squash family, while also eliminating any confusion with the North American version of racquetball game played on much larger courts with no tin and a different type of ball.

Current Squash57 Rules are at <http://www.worldsquash.org>

A quote from Shakespeare "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet" (Romeo and Juliet, Act 2, Scene 2). reminds us that a name is just a label to distinguish one thing from another. After all, I am either 'Prof Msgr Vladimir Felzmann' or 'Father Vlad' – even 'Father V'. For a while, by some sixth formers while I was teaching at The Cardinal Memorial School, London W14 8BZ, I was, 'Norm' – as I looked somewhat like Norman Tebbit, the old Tory politician.

A pictorial round-up of the past seven days

DJ, musician and advocate for ending food poverty Professor Green rallies donations for Lidl's Toy Bank, which supports local families who are facing a difficult Christmas.

Poppy tributes remain at the foot of the Cenotaph in London after Sunday's Act of Remembrance



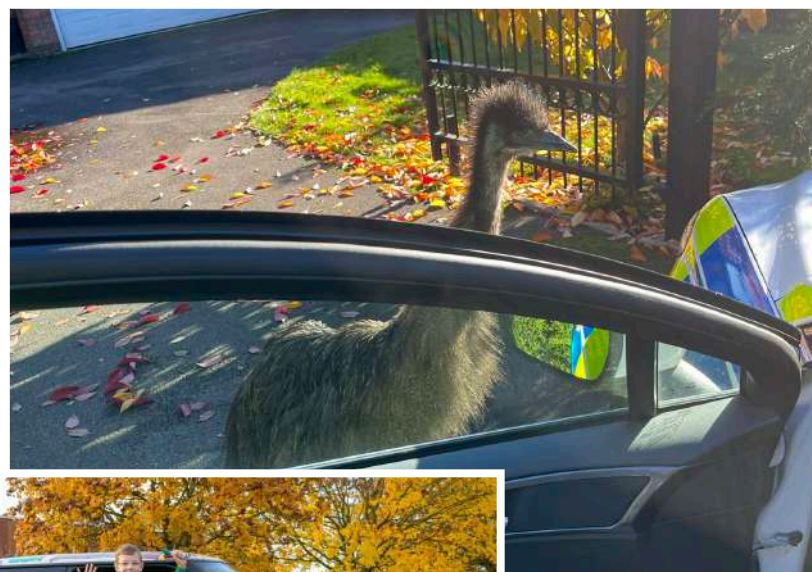
Storm Debi caused widespread disruption across Ireland and the north-west of England at the start of the week, with 70mph gales whipping up unseasonal high tides and waves



King Charles III talking to TV presenter Jay Blades during his 75th birthday party at Highgrove Gardens in Tetbury on the eve of his birthday, with community champions who are also celebrating turning 75 in 2023.



Left, a Kent Police photo of an emu, named Rodney, who was spotted wandering around the Maidstone area of Kent on Saturday. Rodney was subsequently apprehended by fleet-footed officers



Lord Mayor of the City of London Michael Mainelli (left) and the Lady Mayoress Elisabeth Mainelli (right) with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (centre) as they arrive at the annual Lord Mayor's Banquet at the Guildhall in central London.



Left, competition winner, Oliver Gorrod, aged 9 from Didcot, poses with a MINI Electric featuring his 'MINI Minds... with Crayola' winning design as it is unveiled at his school, Sutton Courtenay C of E Primary School in Abingdon.



LITURGICAL CALENDARS

Ordinary Form

Sunday Year A, Weekday Cycle I
Sunday, November 19: 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Prov. 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31; Ps. 128:1-5 r.1; 1 Thess. 5:1-6; Mt. 25:14-30

Monday, November 20: 1 Macc.1:10-15, 41-43, 54-57, 62-64; Ps. 119:53, 61, 134, 150, 155, 158; Lk.18:35-43

Tuesday, November 21: The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary 2 Macc.6:18-31; Ps. 3:2-7; Lk.19:1-10

Wednesday, November 22: St Cecilia, Virgin, Martyr 2 Macc. 7:1, 20-31; Ps. 17:1, 5-6, 8, 15; Lk.19:11-28

Thursday, November 23: St Clement I, Pope, Martyr, or St Columban (pictured), abbot, missionary 1 Macc.2:15-29; Ps. 50:1-2, 5-6, 14-15; Lk.19:41-44

Friday, November 24: Ss Andrew Dūng-Luc, Priest, and Companions, Martyrs 1 Macc.4:36-37, 52-59; 1 Chron.29:10-12; Lk.19:45-48

Saturday, November 25: St Catherine of Alexandria 1 Macc.6:1-13; Ps.9:2-4, 6, 16, 19; Lk.20:27-40



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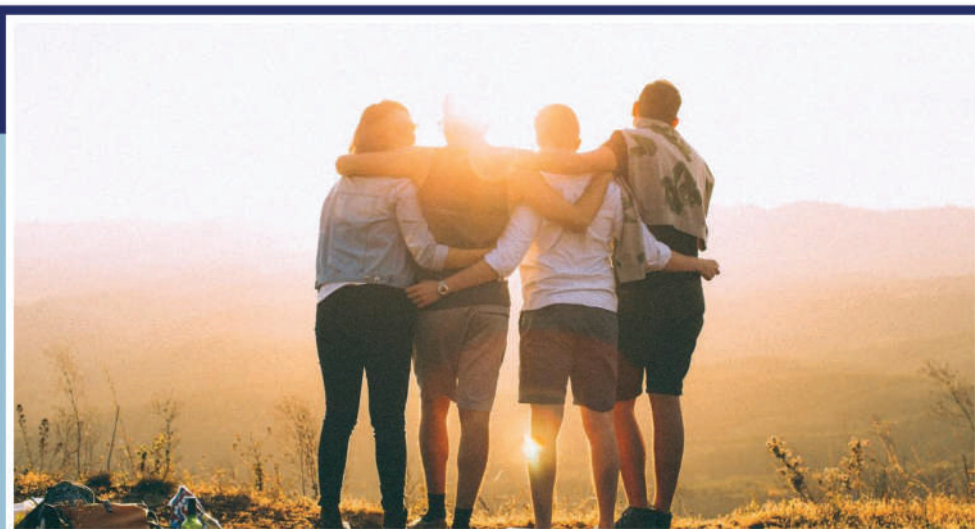
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St Margaret of Scotland: Feastday: 16th November, Patron of Scotland

Margaret was an English princess born in Hungary in 1045. Her father was Prince Edward the Exile. Edward was called back to England as a possible successor to the throne but dies shortly after returning. The family fled north after the Norman invasion. Malcolm Canmore III, king of Scotland, welcomed Margaret and her family and put them under his protection. He soon fell deeply in love with her and Margaret and Malcolm were married in 1070. The family were all devout Christians and Margaret promoted the arts and education in Scotland. She encouraged Church synods and was involved in efforts to correct the religious abuses involving bishops, priests and laypeople. Her impact in Scotland led her to being referred to as, 'The Pearl of Scotland'. She died in 1093 and was Canonised by Pope Innocent IV in 1250.