

A reflection on
true courage – p23

£3.50 – discounts available for subscribers

Friday, 23rd February 2024

UNIVERSE CATHOLIC WEEKLY

Keeping your faith in the news

www.universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Subscribe
today
Click here
and pay just
£20
for 13 weeks



Two years on from the invasion that ripped Ukraine apart...

We still need your prayers

The shattered remains
of a church in
Shevchuk, Ukraine.

Bishop Nowakowski thanks thousands for welcoming refugees into their homes

Andy Drozdziak

Ukrainian Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski is calling for Catholics to pray for families which have been “torn apart” by the war as its second anniversary nears.

Saturday, 24th February marks two years since the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski, Bishop of the Eparchy, or diocese, of the Holy Family of London, has underlined the importance of being peacemakers in society today.

Bishop Kenneth, who looks after the UK's Ukrainian Catholic Community, has also called for prayer for those suffering because of the conflict in Gaza.

He said: “Pray for those who are suffering – especially for those who are suffering separation. We think of the families that have been torn apart because of the war in Ukraine, the tens of thousands of women who have fled to the UK with their children while their husbands have had to remain behind to defend Ukraine.”

Bishop Kenneth paid tribute to

those British families who welcomed Ukrainian refugees, or helped them settle in their new home.

He said: “We also want to reflect on and remember all of the people from Ukraine that have fled harm's way and have found their way here to Great Britain. Over 260,000 people have been welcomed by ordinary British people into their homes under the ‘Homes for Ukraine’ scheme.”

Writing at the start of Lent, Bishop Kenneth called people to “abstain from quick judgments” with regard to war and to instead engage in prayer and fasting.

“We can pray for them. We can abstain or fast, not just from chocolate or certain types of foods, but we can abstain from quick judgments,” he said.

“We can be charitable. We can give to organisations helping our brothers and sisters here in the UK, and, to organisations that are working in Ukraine or in the Middle East, or wherever the need is the greatest.”

As other conflicts have taken precedence on the news agenda as the war has progressed, Bishop Kenneth encouraged the faithful to pray for “peace throughout the world.”

Continued on page 3



Metropolitan Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy has warned that if his homeland does not keep fighting Russia, “it will not just be Ukraine that pays the price.” Putin was “targeting democracy, he wants you to doubt the truth, to believe in nothing. And this is diabolical.” Full interview - pg 18

UKRAINE, TWO YEARS ON

Kyiv needs a radical rethink - see pg 10
‘This is a genocide’, says archbishop - pg 18

INSIDE



World must not ignore Sudan conflict

– pg 4

By-election woes could get worse for Tories

– pg 6

Vatican calls for action over Nigerian attacks

– pg 16

Schönborn in schism warning to Germany

– pg 17

Retirement living plans



COMPANION

UNIVERSE CATHOLIC WEEKLY

Keeping your faith in the news

www.universecatholicweekly.co.ukAvailable
every week
in **Print**
or **Digital**
format

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!



Your
personal
printed copy
delivered to your
door, from just
£2.69
a week

The Universe Catholic Weekly

The **ONLY CATHOLIC WEEKLY
NEWSPAPER** in the UK

Available in **PRINT** and **DIGITAL**

Always up to date with a **CATHOLIC**
perspective on **FAITH, HOME** and **WORLD** news

GET IN TOUCH today to
secure your copy.

To **subscribe** or for further
information, please call

Michelle Jones on
07436 617650

or email her at
michelle.jones@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

or see

www.universecatholicweekly.co.uk



PRINT SUBSCRIPTION RATES

(all inclusive of delivery to your home)

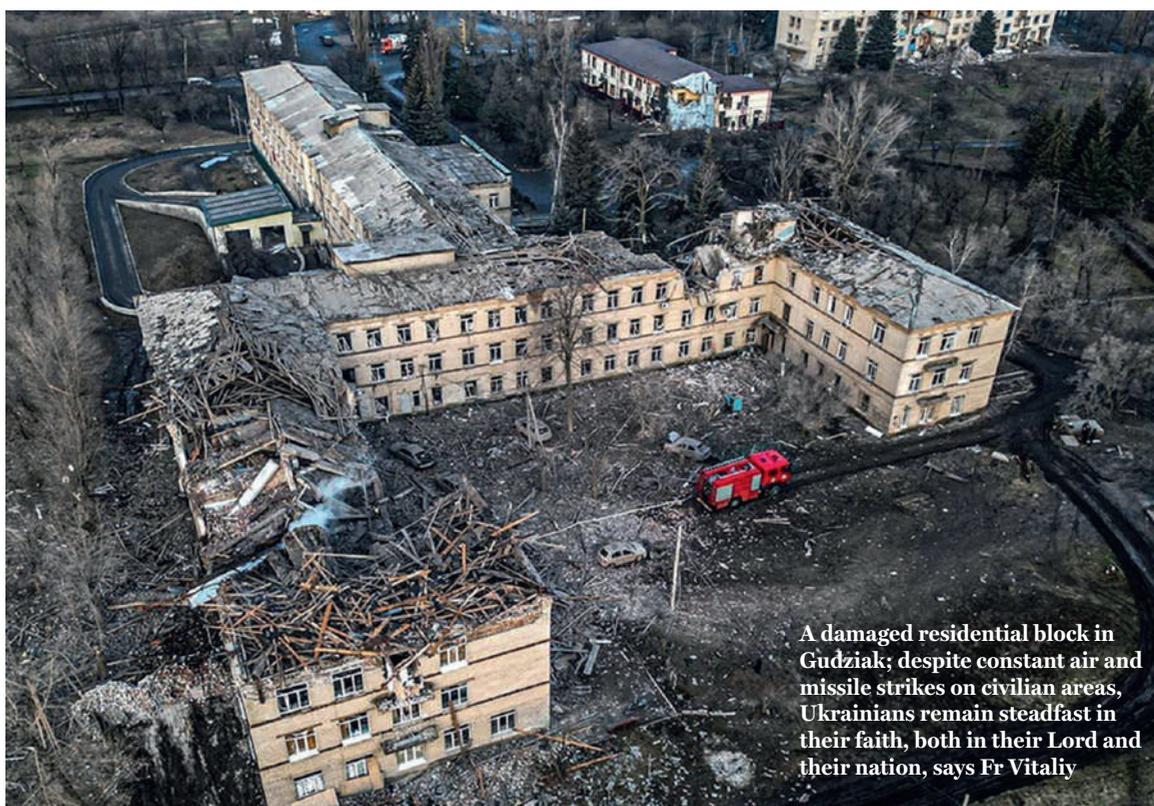
- Cover price for a single copy – **£3.50**
- 3-month subscription (13 weekly copies) – **£42 (£3.23 per copy)**
- 6-month subscription (26 weekly copies) – **£75 (£2.88 per copy)**
- **ANNUAL RATE** (52 weekly copies) – **£140 (£2.69 per copy)**

DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

(a link is sent direct to you every Friday)

- Cover Price for single copy – **£1.54**
- 3 months subscription (13 weekly links) – **£20.00**
- 6 months subscription (26 weekly links) – **£40.00**
- **ANNUAL RATE** (52 weekly links) – **£75.00**

UKRAINE, TWO YEARS ON



A damaged residential block in Gudziak; despite constant air and missile strikes on civilian areas, Ukrainians remain steadfast in their faith, both in their Lord and their nation, says Fr Vitaliy

Priest sees hope flicker in resilient Ukraine

Andy Drozdziak

A Ukrainian priest is calling on UK Catholics to not forget about the people of Ukraine while saying he sees signs of hope for his homeland.

Reflecting on the second anniversary of the start of the war, Fr Vitaliy Novak CM, CEO of DePaul International, told the *Universe*: “The signs of hope are that we are still here after two years of brutal aggression. We can stand against the brutal evil of the war.

“Evil is not bigger than our resilience and our wish to have our freedom and to protect our values, and families and life.

“This is the hope because at the beginning nobody believed that we could survive even two or three weeks as a country and as a nation. Now we are still here and we know that, in the solidarity and in the unity, we can protect (against) this aggression and invasion for our country.”

Fr Vitaliy’s words came as the Government announced that it will close the Ukraine family scheme on Monday. The decision to close the Ukraine family scheme, which allowed applicants to join family members or extend their stay in the UK, was announced among a series of changes to immigration rules set out in a policy document.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has this week expressed frustration at the slowness of promised aid deliveries, especially since signs of war fatigue have emerged. “They (the Russians) are taking advantage of delays in aid to Ukraine,” he said after visiting the command post in the area of Kupiansk, in the



Fr Vitaliy

they are ready to stand and fight in spiritual ways, spending time in 24/7 prayer. Wives, daughters say they are holding the spiritual front line for our husbands and our brothers,” he said.

“Victoria, our neighbour, she gets up at 2am for prayer. Now it is at 4am too.”

He also shared how a parishioner avoided death even though five grenades went off around him, who was unable to explain how he survived.

When asked how UK Catholics can support Ukraine, he pointed to the fact that all are connected in the Church.

“If you are very strong in your faith, then you know what to do to help us. If you can pray, you pray. If you can donate, you will donate. If you can influence the political decisions, then you are going to do that,” he said.

“If you care in a healthy way, you know how to act.”

He shared how DePaul has created a mobile team of professionals who are helping people to deal with the trauma of war and its effects.

“Our mobile team goes from village to village to talk with people, to help them to accept this new reality. We have centres for children, for refugees and displaced people. If we lose this generation because of trauma, then we lose our future as well,” he said.

northeastern Kharkiv region.

Fr Vitaliy also shared how bombing continues in Kharkiv, making people feel vulnerable and insecure. He said: “Even now in Kharkiv, our parish, we see the artillery and shelling coming.

“In our parish, a bomb destroyed the main door in our parish house. In Kharkiv, they are thinking of packing suitcases. In the last few days, we lost another city, Avdiivka.

“There are over 100,000 Russian troops pushing and pushing-thousands of army and weapons on our border and frontline to see if it will be broken, so people do not feel secure at all. We see missiles and bombing all around Ukraine.”

Fr Vitaliy sees signs of hope in the incessant prayer-especially from women. “People from the parish say

“Evil is not bigger than our resilience and our wish to have our freedom and to protect our values, and families and life.”

UKRAINE, TWO YEARS ON

Keep your resolve as strong as ours

Andy Drozdziak

Resolve is still strong among Ukrainians despite emerging problems of homelessness, mental illness, and human trafficking after two years of war, according to Catholic aid agency CAFOD.

CAFOD has helped over 140,000 vulnerable women, men and children across Ukraine to access vital aid including food, water, shelter, child-friendly spaces and counselling support.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has left 3.6 million people internally displaced and over six million seeking refuge outside the country. Shelling, airstrikes and other destruction from the war has left thousands of people living in damaged buildings or left homeless, often with disrupted access to electricity and heating.

Amidst the daily reality of life in a warzone, Ukrainians have faced two winters of freezing temperatures and power cuts, as well as over 24 months of food shortages, homelessness and mental trauma.

But in spite of these problems, CAFOD's emergency programme officer Henry Wilson-Smith high-



A local woman receives a food parcel from CAFOD's partner Depaul Ukraine at their Humanitarian Centre for people who have lost their homes in Odesa. Photo: Maciek Musialek/DEC

lighted the 'astonishing' response of the Ukrainian people.

"I met elderly couples whose family homes were destroyed by shelling but were determined to rebuild it, brick by brick. One family got halfway through when another shell wrecked their work. We have also seen local people reconnecting electricity themselves, digging wells and cleaning the streets. In homeless shelters, veterans are planting gardens to grow food and build more wings for new clients. People's resolve is astonishing," Mr Wil-

son-Smith told the *Universe*.

Since the full-scale invasion, at least one quarter of the population has been displaced, some as many as four times. For those living in Donetsk and Luhansk, where the separatist conflict has raged since 2014, this number is even higher.

Local organisations working with CAFOD in Ukraine also speak of a worrying rise in social problems – an increase in conflict-related trauma and mental health problems and a rise in human trafficking.

Thanks to generous support for



A Depaul Ukraine worker prepares food packages for distribution at one of its warehouses in Odesa

CAFOD's Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal, and the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), of which CAFOD is a member, the charity has helped over 140,000 vulnerable women, men and children access vital aid by working through local Ukrainian partner organisations.

However, the daily threat from shelling and airstrikes continues and the conflict has also brought longer-term problems to the surface.

Henry Wilson-Smith shared CAFOD's thanks with *Universe* readers, also urging them to continue to

"pray, give and stand by us" as the mission to help Ukraine goes on.

He said: "Thank you to everyone who has supported CAFOD and the DEC's Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal and the work of our local partners across Ukraine.

"It would not have been possible to help so many people without this incredible generosity. Please continue to pray, give and stand by us as we prepare for the year ahead."

For more details of CAFOD's work, visit cafod.org.uk/Ukraine



Bishop Kenneth sees signs of hope

We still need your prayers – bishop

Continued from page 1

"In Lent, or as we call it in the Eastern Church, the Great Fast, it's a time for us to pray more for peace in Ukraine, but also for peace throughout the world," he said.

"We see the horrific news coming out of the Holy Land, the suffering that's happening there, both for the Israelis and Palestinians. We see the suffering of the Ukrainian people."

"We think of the families that have been torn apart because of the war in Ukraine, the tens of thousands of young women who have fled to the United Kingdom with their children while their husbands have had to remain behind to defend Ukraine."

Bishop Kenneth ended by underlining the hope he has encountered

in the lives of suffering Ukrainians, and the importance of being "signs of hope."

"When I was visiting Ukraine shortly after the invasion, and I met with people who suffered so much and listened to them and asked them what they would like us in the West to do, their comments were, 'Don't forget about us. Please pray for us. When we know that you remember us, we have hope,' he said.

"And so I think that we are meant, as Christians, to be those signs of hope for those who feel they have no hope. When we are journeying towards the Resurrection, to Jesus who is the light Himself, we are also meant to be those candles, or at least reflect that eternal flame that gives us all hope."

Leave a gift in your Will?

You can.



Want to... make a lasting difference in the world?

Ensure your faith and values live on?

Keep supporting the Catholic causes you love?

You can.

Because leaving a gift in your Will is something you can do.

Gifts in Wills aren't always million-pound donations made by very wealthy people.

Please, could you consider leaving a gift in your Will to Catholic causes? **Because you can.**

Visit yourcatholiclegacy.org.uk or contact Lily by calling 020 7095 5370 or emailing info@yourcatholiclegacy.org.uk to find out more.

You can have a lasting, positive impact on the future with a gift in your Will of any size.

Leaving a gift in your Will is something almost everyone can do – and it's easy. Your Catholic Legacy can help you choose the Catholic causes you wish to remember, and support you with your Will.



In Brief

British nuke misfires and crashes into sea

A Trident nuclear missile misfired and crashed into the ocean near the submarine that launched it during a test last month, it has been reported.

It is the second misfire in a row, with a test launch of a Trident missile by the Royal Navy off the coast of the US in June 2016 also reported to have been a failure.

The missile's first stage boosters did not ignite during a test launch by HMS Vanguard on 30th January, and it fell into the ocean and sank.

Lyle's attacked over syrup logo change

Church of England members have attacked Lyle's Golden Syrup over a rebrand that "eradicates" the Christian messaging in its logo.

The company has replaced the image of a dead lion being swarmed by bees with a modern depiction of the animal's face and a single bee, in its first rebrand in almost 150 years.

The product's dark green tin and golden lion packaging is a reference to the story of Samson killing a lion, and the original logo includes the biblical quotation: 'Out of the strong came forth sweetness.'

Tories back Penny to beat Starmer

Conservative voters believe that only Penny Mordaunt could beat Sir Keir Starmer at the next election, a new poll suggests.

Ms Mordaunt was the only candidate backed by 2019 Tory voters to give the party a chance of winning a fifth term if she replaced Rishi Sunak.

Former Home Secretary Suella Braverman was favourite among Tories who planned to vote for Reform UK.

Bishop says the world at risk of overlooking horrific Sudan war

Bishop of Lancaster Paul Swarbrick, Lead Bishop for Africa at the Bishops Conference of England and Wales, has spoken out over what he sees as global indifference to the current conflict in Sudan.

The civil war in Sudan has resulted in 12,000 casualties, an estimated nine million displaced, and 25 million in need of aid – statistics in an increasingly futile and destructive conflict.

Bishop Paul called for an immediate ceasefire in the conflict, which began on 15th April last year and is being waged between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF): "The cessation of violence is so important so that they can look at the damage that has been done, and take a step back from it, rather than using it as an opportunity to rearm and rebuild their aggression.

"There is going to be no winner if they carry on like this."



He accepted that peace would be hard-won. "It seems particularly difficult to get the sides to sit down together and discuss terms on which the future might be built for the country. It's just a desperately bad situation that seems to be getting worse."

Bishop Swarbrick expressed his

concern that Sudan may be forgotten as higher-profile conflicts, such as those currently underway in Gaza and Ukraine, continue elsewhere.

"Rather than focusing on crises like Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan individually, it is better to look at it as a family. It is not just one child who is sick, there are a number of children who are sick and you need to be aware of them at the same time," he said.

"There are conflicts erupting everywhere and they are so contagious."

Since the outbreak of the war, the bishops of Sudan and South Sudan have consistently called for more action from the international community.

Bishop Paul said that Catholics had a vital part to play in bringing about peace, including prayer, charitable works, and doing the utmost to be peacemakers in personal relationships.

He said: "We have to believe in the power of prayer and the bishops of Sudan and South Sudan have also called for it. I encourage people to enter more deeply into prayer and see what the fruit of that is – not as escapism, but as a way to fortify ourselves."

"It is also worthwhile to raise issues of political engagement and support through our own government and the role we can play internationally.

"That's something we can take up with MPs, and potential MPs, as they begin campaigning. Don't let the domestic scene crowd out the international scene. What happens abroad does affect us here in the UK.

"Also look at the way you deal with conflicts with people. Don't let things flare up into irreconcilable problems. Practice healing, practice reconciliation, because it matters for everyone."



Civilians who fled war-torn Sudan following the outbreak of fighting between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces are seen at a transit centre operated by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Renk, South Sudan. Over nine million people have been displaced by the civil war, with 25 million more in need of aid
Photo: Jok Solomun, Reuters

UNIVERSE CONTACTS

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

General enquiries: t: 0743 6617650
e: Info@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Editorial enquiries: t: 0743 6617604
e: news@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Executive Chairman
Clive W. Leach, KSG, CBE
e: clive.leach@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Managing Editorial Director: Michael Winterbottom
e: michael.winterbottom@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
t: 0743 6617650

News: Andy Drozdziak
e: andy.drozdziak@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
t: 07527 237293

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

Circulation Sales Manager:
Michelle Jones
e: michelle.jones@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
e: sales@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
t: 0743 6617650

Finance & Operations Director:
Mary Concannon
e: mary.concannon@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
e: accounts@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
t: 0743 6617605
www.universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of material in this publication, the publishers cannot accept any responsibility for the veracity of claims made by contributors in either advertising or editorial content. Views expressed may not be those of the publishers.

Doctor warns Esther campaign could increase discrimination against elderly

Andy Drozdziak

A campaigner against assisted suicide has said it is disappointing that Dame Esther Rantzen is campaigning for a parliamentary debate and free vote among MPs to legalise assisted suicide, with “built-in precautions to protect the interests of the person”.

Former journalist and television presenter Dame Esther, who has terminal cancer, wants people to have what she says is an “individual choice” regarding their time of death.

“As I have terminal cancer, it is a possibility that my life will become too painful, that my suffering will be too great,” she said.

“What we need is for people to have individual choice, at that moment, which is literally life and death.

However, Dr Gordon Macdonald, chief executive officer of the campaign group Care Not Killing, responded by saying: “This campaign is disappointing at a time when we have seen widespread discrimination against the elderly and disabled people.

“Changing the law to legalise assisted suicide in the UK would represent a dramatic change in how doctors and nurses treat and care for people.”

Dame Esther, the *Daily Express* and the campaign group Dignity in Dying launched a petition demanding a parliamentary vote on the subject, which has so far amassed 120,000 signatures. But Dr Gordon Macdonald argued that introducing assisted suicide would place “huge pressure” on sick people, and called for greater investment in palliative care to be the focus of campaigning instead.

Introducing assisted suicide “would place huge pressure, real or perceived on terminally ill and disabled people to end their lives exactly as we see in the handful of places that have legalised assisted suicide or euthanasia,” he said.

“Along with a crisis in the NHS, the care system and with hospices across the UK facing a £50 million shortfall that we continue to ignore, the more important debate is how to extend high-quality palliative care to all those who need it.”

Dr Macdonald’s words come after Bishop John Sherrington’s editorial in last week’s *Universe*, in which he urged Catholics to reject the “irresponsible threat” represented by Dame Esther Rantzen’s support for assisted suicide and to get involved with promoting a

better vision for end-of-life care.

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

He added: “Dying should not be hastened by the intentional killing of any person because that would mean rejecting God’s created life which is intrinsically valuable. We need to accompany people and do so with care and genuine compassion. In this way, we can uphold their dignity by embracing them as they are with all the difficulties they face in their last days whilst doing all we can to alleviate their suffering and pain.”

Performance poet John Cooper Clarke also expressed his opposition to assisted suicide. He said: “Just because someone is feeling a bit hopeless that’s no reason to kill them or help them to kill themselves. I’m totally against assisted dying.”

Right, assisted suicide supporter Esther Rantzen, who has cancer, is leading the campaign for MPs to have a free vote on the issue



SNP criticised for its flawed gender ID plan

A senior lawyer has raised concerns about potential state overreach related to the SNP’s proposed ban on so-called “conversion practices” in Scotland.

The legislation aims to criminalise efforts to “change or suppress” an individual’s gender identity, with penalties of up to seven years in jail for parents who refuse to allow their children to change their gender.

Critics argue the law could unjustly target pastors, parents, and counsellors, particularly those accused of not adopting an affirmative approach towards gender identity changes.

The Scottish Government is currently consulting on the proposals, which are under scrutiny until 2nd April.

But Aidan O’Neill KC, in a legal opinion for The Christian Institute, criticised the bill as “ill-thought out,” describing it as “jellyfish legislation” for its vague definitions and severe penalties.

He also suggested it would scare individuals from discussing gender identity issues due to fear of legal repercussions.

He said: “The concepts it uses are impossible to grasp; its limits are wholly undefined; it contains a sting in the tail in the form of criminal sanction of up to seven years and unlimited fines; and thus it will

have an undoubted and intended effect of dissuading persons from ever even entering the now murky waters of what may or may not constitute unlawful ‘conversion practices’.

“The proposals which the Scottish Government has consulted on would, if passed into law, effect radical changes in the current law. They will also involve a marked intrusion and expansion in the powers of the State into the private realm of families, and over the expression of orthodox religious teaching by faith groups.”

Simon Calvert, deputy director of The Christian Institute, branded the potential criminalisation of pastors and parents as “outrageous” and indicated that the organisation would challenge the legislation up to the Supreme Court if necessary.

“This is another example of the Scottish Government asking Holyrood to exceed its powers and impose draconian legislation on the people.

If this deeply flawed law is passed it will be challenged all the way to the Supreme Court if necessary,” he said.

“They’ve spent over two years drafting this. It’s time to admit that no-one can define what conversion therapy is, let alone how to criminalise it.”

JRS UNITED KINGDOM
JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE

Will you help refugees facing destitution this Lent?

Donate to the JRS UK Lent Appeal
www.jrsuk.net/universe

UNIVERSE
CATHOLIC WEEKLY

COMMENT

Police seem confused over its priorities

A mob recently demonstrated outside the home of a Conservative MP in a Dorset village, waving pro-Palestinian flags and placards and hurling abuse aimed at Tobias Ellwood, a former defence minister, over his perceived support for Israel's invasion of Gaza. Meanwhile, in London, a Christian preacher in a shopping centre quoting from the Bible apparently offended a passer-by who alleges homophobia.

In both instances, the police became involved. In Dorset, they spoke to the demonstrators and advised them how to stage a lawful protest, even though they were clearly being intimidatory.

In London, the preacher was threatened with arrest.

What is going on here? The law is supposed to apply equally to all and yet latitude on the grounds of free speech is given to a group of around 80 demonstrators apparently intent on browbeating an elected MP, while a preacher can be threatened with arrest, even though the police officer hadn't heard a word that was said.

The confusion exhibited by officers in these circumstances is nothing new and framing guidance in a world where anyone taking offence can seek police intervention is difficult. The police need a greater sense of proportion and much greater clarity is required about when and how their powers are exercised.

The failure to disperse the crowd outside Mr Ellwood's home for hours is an especially worrying development. The MP and his children were in the house and the demonstration could clearly have been perceived as menacing.

The police now trigger Operation Bridger to protect the security of MPs. But earlier this month, Tory justice minister Mike Freer said he was stepping down after "a constant string of incidents" including death threats, abuse and narrow escapes.

The danger is that allowing mobs to besiege the homes of MPs will simply encourage the more deranged in society to take more direct and potentially harmful action.

Police chiefs need to sort out how these protests are dealt with.

www.universecatholicweekly.co.uk

By-election woes have never been this bad - and could get much worse for the Tories

Jonathan Tonge

Writing about Conservative by-election calamities has become something of a standard Friday practice for me. But the party's defeat in Wellingborough in Northamptonshire, which came on the same night as it lost in Kingswood, was particularly brutal.

The Tory vote share was a mere 25 per cent and the Conservative-to-Labour swing of 28.5 per cent was the second biggest in modern electoral history. Only Dudley West in 1994, with a 29.1 per cent swing, was bigger. That result was the clearest first demonstration that Labour would oust the Tories by a huge majority at the 1997 General Election. Politics is on repeat.

The loss of Kingswood in South Gloucestershire was on a smaller swing (a 'mere' 16.4 per cent), but is equally ominous for Rishi Sunak. Apart from in 1992, whichever party Kingswood chose over the half-century of its existence (it is about to be split into other constituencies) also formed the Government.

An unprecedented year of by elections

The Conservatives have an increasingly unhappy knack of creating unnecessary and unwelcome (for them) contests. Since 2022, the Conservatives have now lost six by-elections to Labour, on an average swing of 21 per cent.

By-elections used to be prompted mainly by deaths. During this parliamentary term, however, nine contests in Conservative-held seats have been products of resignations, sometimes after behaviour by the resigning MP that could most generously be described as "controversial". Another was forced by a recall petition and three necessitated by deaths. Eight of the nine by elections following resignations were lost, as was the recall petition contest and one of the three caused by death.

The Kingswood contest was at least precipitated by a resignation on principle. Chris Skidmore resigned as an MP, angered by his Government's issuing of more oil and gas exploration licences.

Wellingborough's by-election was caused by the recall petition lodged against Peter Bone under the Recall of MPs Act 2015. Bone, who was found to have bullied and exposed himself to a member of his staff, was suspended from the House of Commons for six weeks, triggering a petition signed by 13 per cent of electors (10 per cent is the threshold needed to hold a by-election).



Labour candidate Damien Egan, second right, with fellow candidates as he is declared MP for Kingswood,

Electors disillusioned by the Conservatives have had unprecedented opportunities to vent their displeasure. The net effect has been the biggest loss of seats during a parliamentary term since the 1960s.

Looking towards a general election

Is there any brighter news for the Conservatives? Amid the wreckage, the party could point to modest turnouts in both by-elections, 38 per cent in Wellingborough and 37 per cent in Kingswood. But low by-election turnout is common. And the results are more a consequence of the Conservative vote dropping; Labour is not piling on the votes.

It is a huge leap of faith to assume the stay-at-homes were all Conservative-leaning who will show up at the General Election. Conservative optimists could point to their Kingswood vote share

being above that obtained in the constituency at General Elections during the party's wilderness years of 1997, 2001 and 2005. But the opposite was true with Thursday's pitiful performance in Wellingborough.

The lingering Brexit bonus for the Conservatives may be neutered by the entry of Reform UK. Richard's Tice's outfit is no Ukip in its heyday or the Brexit Party, both of which offered a clear and popular core aim.

Nonetheless, Reform winning 13 per cent of the vote in Wellingborough and 10 per cent in Kingswood is an achievement worth noting, if unlikely to be replicated come General Election day. The Tories won three-quarters of the Brexit Leave vote in 2019. Reform UK will act as a repository for disaffected Brexiteer Tories in particular.

No party has ever won an election when trailing its main rival on the economy. Even without Thursday's news that the UK fell

into a recession in 2023, the Conservatives are well behind Labour on economic stewardship.

It has been 45 years since the less popular leader of the 'big two' won the election (Margaret Thatcher trailed James Callaghan in 1979) and Sunak trails Keir Starmer, albeit not as badly as his party lags behind Labour.

For the Conservatives, the one constant is that further trouble may be imminent. The party has removed the whip from Blackpool South MP, Scott Benton, who is appealing his 35-day suspension from the Commons over a lobbying scandal.

If Benton loses his appeal, a recall petition will follow, possibly triggering a by-election in a seat classed as marginal, which on all current evidence would be a seaside stroll for Labour.

After an exceptional Brexit election in 2019 – no election in the past century has ever been dominated by a single issue to that extent – the 2024 general election will be decided by the economy, cost of living, perceptions of competence and leadership. Normal politics in other words. And on all the dials, Labour appears way ahead.

Jonathan Tonge is a Professor of Politics, University of Liverpool

The Conservatives have an increasingly unhappy knack of creating unnecessary contests. By-elections used to be prompted mainly by deaths. During this parliamentary term, however, nine in Conservative-held seats have been products of resignations, sometimes after behaviour by the resigning MP that could most generously be described as "controversial".

Bishop Paul urges faithful to support our refugee friends

A leading bishop is encouraging the work of Jesuit Refugee Service UK as it launches its Lent Appeal for refugees who are facing destitution.

Bishop Paul McAleenan, the Lead Catholic Bishop for Migrants and Refugees in England and Wales, has welcomed the friendship extended by the Jesuit Refugee Service UK (JRS UK) to refugees facing destitution. He was speaking during a visit to meet refugee friends, volunteers, and staff at the JRS UK centre in East London.

Bishop Paul joined volunteers at the 'JRS Shop', which provides free food, clothing, and toiletries for refugees who are facing destitution. Items like nappies are also available for those with young families, as well as winter accessories which are vital for refugee friends at risk of homelessness.

He also met with staff responsible for JRS UK's accommodation work, which provided more than 3,000 nights of safe and secure accommo-

modation last year, before dropping into one of the English language classes that JRS UK runs regularly at the centre. Last year more than 50 free classes were provided, supporting almost 100 refugee friends to improve their English.

The Bishop said: "People who come here are known as 'refugee friends' – it's a beautiful expression and those I have met today truly experience friendship."

His visit comes as JRS UK launches its Lent Appeal (www.jrsuk.net/lent-appeal-2024) to support refugees facing destitution.

Many people served by JRS UK experience homelessness, food insecurity, and years trapped in a hostile system. JRS UK offers food, accommodation and hardship grants, as well as casework and legal advice to help people find a long-term resolution to their situation.

Shawn is a refugee friend accompanied by JRS UK. He fled his homeland 13 years ago and during

Bishop Paul chats to refugee friends at the JRS Shop in East London



this time has spent periods living on the streets, riding night buses to stay warm.

Addressing JRS UK supporters as the Lent Appeal was launched, he said: "One day, when I'm finally out of this situation, I want to help other people going through this. For now, I hope you will keep standing alongside me and other refugee friends."

"I'm so thankful for people like you, who choose to accompany refugees. Please pray for me, for peace and wellbeing this Lent."



Pro-life students hit back at misogyny claims

Andy Drozdziak

Pro-life male students at Manchester university have hit back at accusations of misogyny and control by saying that they will continue to promote a culture of life on campus.

An all-male committee, including art student George Vincent and medical student Jacob Karinatan, set up the Manchester Pro-Life society in January, which was approved by the Student Union.

However, a petition protesting the society's existence was started anonymously, alleging "potential harm that could be caused by our university's Pro-Life Society."

Some women then shared that they feared for their safety and criticised the group as 'blatant misogyny,' with some calling for the men to be expelled.

However, student executive officers confirmed the new society's right to exist, stating that that it was 'officially affiliated as a society on 11th January 2024 in accordance with our society registration processes.' They reminded protestors that, "From a legal standpoint, it's not possible to stop a society from affiliating for their legal views that are contrary to the views of other students."

Their message concluded with a reminder that action would be taken against any society engaged in 'hate speech, unwanted attention, (and) harassment.' No action has been

taken against the Manchester Pro-Life society.

Co-founder George Vincent underlined his determination to share the pro-life message. "We will continue to promote a culture of life on campus, through discussion and lecture events, charity fundraising and signposting" he told the *Universe*.

He refuted claims that men should not be involved in pro-life issues, saying: "These issues are relevant to people of either gender, they affect everyone. The right to life is not a gender-specific issue."

He added that the group also dealt with other issues, "including assisted suicide, the death penalty, deaths occurring through poverty and poor living standards, structural issues in critical infrastructure such as the NHS, and climate change."

He also pointed out that two female students, Inge-Maria and Lajoie, had recently joined the group's leadership.

Director of the Alliance of Pro-Life Students Madeleine Page said it was important the Student Union upholds the right of free speech on campus. "The Student Union has been very clear that they are there to uphold student safety and student wellbeing, but also they do have duty to uphold free speech. Stating your pro-life beliefs is something that is protected by law," she told the *Universe*.



**Beggars for Heaven:
The Inheritance of Jacques
& Raïssa Maritain**

13 March 2024 09:00 - 18:00 GMT
Jesus Lane, Cambridge UK

Margaret Beaufort Institute You can join us in person or by zoom!

**DISCOVERING JESUS
THROUGH THOMAS AQUINAS**

Every Tuesday
23 April - 11 June 2024
4.30 pm - 6 pm
In person and Online



Study Day



The Eucharistic Prayer

Saturday, 4th May 2024

9.30 am - 4.00 pm

Jesus Lane, Cambridge

Led by Dr Peter Coughlan

Margaret Beaufort
Institute
info@mbit.cam.ac.uk
01223 741039

Poverty: Our Lenten priority

Sir John Battle



The day before Ash Wednesday saw the launch and presentation of a carefully prepared parish and school workbook by the Church's Caritas Social Action Network, *Do Justice: A Vision for Spiritual and Civic Renewal in England and Wales*. It is not a poverty report, though it cites the work of the Joseph Rowntree Trust latest poverty report, nor is it a check list of a particular policy and economic demands ahead of a forthcoming election.

Rather it is a foundational document rooted in scripture and the Gospels, suffused with the Church's tradition of Catholic social teaching. It is a resetting of a narrative that has been lost in short-term political survival tactics that seem to have abandoned any sense of hopeful vision. *Do Justice* is an aid to a deeper resetting of our approach and priorities.

Pope Francis has suggested that today's Church is to be compared to a mobile field hospital on a battlefield, whose primary task is to heal the wound. St Oscar Romero, martyred in the battlefield context of El Salvador, said the Church's task is to "accompany the people and to tell the truth about reality". That is as necessary now in our context as his.

Do Justice cites the Rowntree *UK Poverty 2023 Report* which sets out that there are 13.4 million people living in poverty, 7.9 million of whom are working adults, 3.9 million are children and 1.7 million are pensioners. Moreover the National Institute for Economic and Social Research recently spelt out that Britain's poorest households have suffered a £4,500 cut to their finances since the start of Covid. Those on the lowest incomes have been the hardest hit by rising food, energy and housing costs.

A central section of *Do Justice* reminds us that we share a common parent – Our Father – and are called to become brothers and sisters. Politics and economics should therefore be taken personally.

As *Do Justice* concludes: "The Catechism tells us that it is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens and intermediate bodies. That is why Catholics should be politically engaged; in other words, engaged in ensuring the political community upholds the responsibility for the common good... this does not mean that we want to run the country but rather to seek to influence and persuade, to bring about systemic changes".

Get a taste for the electoral process - even if some of the options seem unpalatable

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Caroline Farrow



I read with interest last week's appeal from the Catholic Union for Catholics to get involved and have our say at what matters most at the next election. I urge every single reader to go to the Catholic Union website and do just that.

The election will be our only chance to have our say regarding the types of policies and legislation we want to see enacted over the next four to five years, so engagement with the process is crucial.

The political landscape is, at the moment, undoubtedly depressing and I'm sure I cannot be alone in terms of struggling to find a party for whom to cast my vote. While it is true that the country is sick of the insipid leadership of the Conservative party, the alternatives are equally dire. It really is a case of which party is going to be the lesser evil, as opposed to which party is going to stand up for the values that ought to really matter.

While many Catholics have traditionally voted for the Labour party, believing them to be the party of solidarity with the poor, from a personal perspective, I cannot bring myself to vote for a party whose members are agitating for the decriminalisation of abortion which would allow for babies to be aborted for any reason at all, right up until the moment of birth. Neither can I support a party whose leader famously does not appear to know what a woman is and who have hounded and de-selected one of its most brilliant MPs, Rosie Duffield, because she has campaigned for single-sex female facilities and for transgender identified men, to be kept out of women's prisons.

Neither can I vote for a party who have a spiteful attitude towards private education and whose policies regarding placing VAT on school fees, would likely see the closure of many Catholic independent schools, resulting in losses of jobs and heartbreak for students, or any of the economically left-leaning parties, such as the Greens or Liberal Democrats who also push the abortion, euthanasia and sexually progressive agenda.

The country is absolutely desperate for a new political



settlement and for a new party to emerge whose members will do their best to support and uphold Catholic teaching. Of course, Catholics are not a hive mind and there is scope for people to take different approaches when it comes to policies regarding fiscal management and immigration, but life issues have to be non-negotiable.

I was frustrated this week when I reached out to Richard Tice, the leader of the Reform party which performed extremely well at the local elections and who many political pundits are lauding as possible kingmakers at the next election, given their ability to split the vote. While I applaud some of their policies, especially those to do with protections of civil liberties and freedoms of speech and their promise of reform of public services in the health and education sectors, there is absolutely nothing on their website regarding where they stand on life issues.

I asked Richard where the Reform party stood on life issues: would they campaign for or against them, or allow their elected representatives a free vote. Richard's response was that this is one of a number of issues where they feel that it would be a matter of

personal conscience and not for the party to have a position on. "We rather like direct democracy, referendums, and this is one such area that would be most suitable". So in other words, voters will need to drill down on where a particular candidate would stand in this area.

It's slightly better than the Labour party who tend to whip their MPs on these votes, but still less than satisfactory and a similar position to that of the Conservatives.

It's almost as though these right of centre parties don't want to be subject to fervent criticism in the press or yelled at in the street for standing up for unborn lives, or those of the sick, disabled, elderly and frail, but would rather give the British people the choice of who should live and who should die.

It's easy to fall into despondency and not vote at all, but refusing to vote invalidates the right to complain when the ruling party does inevitably behave badly, and the problem with voter apathy is that it then justifies any future authoritarian moves to remove or restrict voting rights. Universal suffrage is a keystone of democracy, and while democracy is not always ideal, the truth is not always decided by majority opinion, it is

the best that we have.

Either we can accept that elections are simply about fiscal and foreign policy with Catholic values completely absent from the ballot paper, do our best to accept the situation as it is and vote accordingly, or we can become more engaged in the process and show parties and candidates that our votes are dependent on their stance, as well as their own Parliamentary voting record.

I'm not going to lie, getting politicians to legislate in a way that protects our values is not going to be a short-term process and we likely won't see the fruit of it at the next election. But we should definitely get involved and encourage others to do the same, which is why that it is so important that Catholics engage with the Catholic Union so that politicians can at least recognise that the Catholic vote can make a huge difference, especially in constituencies where only a slight swing is in play, and that they had better start listening, if they want to achieve, or remain, in the House of Commons.

And in case you are wondering why I am so adamant about this, it's because I believe it's an extremely sad state of affairs if Catholics are prepared to continually turn a blind eye at every election to governments who want to not only remove the right to life of everyone, but also prosecute and silence those who stand up for the vulnerable.

"It's easy to fall into despondency and not vote at all, but refusing to vote invalidates the right to complain when the ruling party does inevitably behave badly, and voter apathy then justifies authoritarian moves to remove or restrict voting rights..."

Christians' marathon vigil makes the case for dropping fossil fuels

Ellen Teague

A Christian 'No Faith in Fossil Fuels' 24-hour vigil opened outside Parliament on Ash Wednesday, and will continue until Saturday, 24th February – a marathon 240-hour protest against UK plans to invest further in the deadly fuels.

It has been organised by Christian Climate Action (CCA), with other agencies involved including CAFOD, Christian Aid, Green Christian and Operation Noah.

The campaigners said climate change is "putting all of God's creation at risk and all our children's futures at risk".

The vigil is based in front of Carriage Gates at Westminster and campaigners are on a rota to ensure a round-the-clock presence. They have called for "bold climate action" by the Government, including moving away from the use of oil and gas, reparation payments for damage caused by climate change in the Global South, and investment in green policies.

As part of the vigil the Catholic CCA group is leading a daily Novena to Our Lady Help of Christians for Climate Justice. The Rosary is



Eleanor Orr from Green Christians; Andy Atkins from A Rocha; Ben Niblett from Tearfund; Simeon Mitchell from JPIT; Patrick Watt from Christian Aid; Christine Allen from



Ellen Teague (left) at the Climate Vigil. Photo: Columbans

being said at noon every day. Columban Sr Kate Midgley led many of these from 5pm to 11pm on Wednesday, 21st February.

Before the vigil, more than 200 climate campaigners attended a packed ecumenical service at St John's, Waterloo, where a prayer for courage said: "We bear witness to our faith this day and for 40 days,

sharing in wilderness days and wilderness witness, knowing that we are called to live lives of courage, lives of love, lives of reconciliation."

Hannah Lonergan, a Faith in Action volunteer with the Columbans, read Psalm 42. She was joined by a Columban group including Fr Kevin McDonagh and Sr Kat Midgley.

Jane Lavery said afterwards: "We

gathered together at St John's Church, Waterloo, to reflect under the themes of lament, longing and love; this was then followed by receiving ashes, and then moving together to Parliament Square to begin the vigil. It was very moving to come together on Ash Wednesday, as a community of Christians, to reflect, pray, and call for action."

When participants left the service, heading to Parliament Square, the lead banner read: 'Vigil for Climate Justice – No Faith in Fossil Fuels.'

In Parliament Square on Ash Wednesday, Melanie Nazareth, a Catholic member of CCA, was interviewed by Jacob Rees-Mogg for *GB News*. "The time has come to move away from fossil fuels and to move away rapidly" she said. She felt the vigil "offered the hand of friendship" to climate vulnerable countries."

Rees-Mogg, whose view is that fossil fuels are essential, said afterwards: "I admire them even if I disagree with them."

Heads of supporting agencies have dropped in to join the vigil, including Christine Allen, Director of CAFOD.

New video series

redemptorist publications

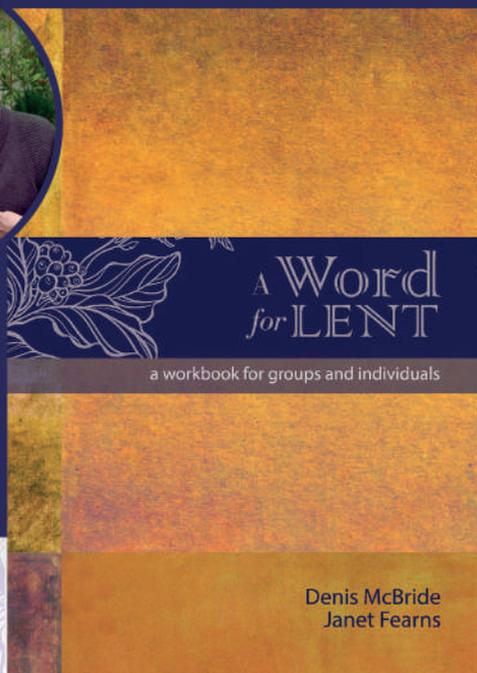
Lent Retreat 2024 A Word for Lent

A workbook for groups and individuals

Join Fr Denis McBride & Sr Janet Fearn this Lent as they invite you on a journey, a journey with Jesus. Pause for reflection and deeper personal prayer travelling through the Lenten Sunday Gospel with *A Word for Lent*.

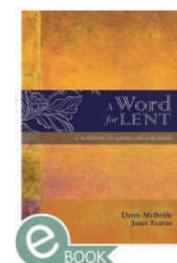
A new video series has been created to accompany their best-selling book. Purchase both the book and video to join them on the journey.

A Word for Lent - Video Series - one film containing six episodes
Code: 1662 Price: £5.00



Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R. and Sr Janet Fearn

Also available as an eBook



Whether alone or in a group, these Lenten Sunday Gospel reflections provide stimulating insights and ways into deepening personal prayer and commitment to Jesus.

Book code: 1863 ISBN: 9780852315682 Price: £4.95

Also available as an eBook
eBook Code: 1928 ISBN: 9780852315798 Price: £4.50

In Brief

Cleverly sacks border chief who criticised security

James Cleverly has sacked the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration after he spoke out about alleged immigration security failings at airports.

The Home Secretary ended the contract of David Neal for “breaching the terms of his appointment” by disclosing “unauthorised” information on border security to the media.

A Home Office spokesman said Mr Neal had “lost the confidence” of Mr Cleverly.

Sex offenders can't change their names

Police will be given new powers to block sex offenders from changing their names under plans announced by the Government.

Officers will be able to issue a notice to registered sex offenders, if they are judged to remain a risk, barring them from making such a change, or attempting to do so, on official documents such as passports and driving licences.

Those who fail to comply will face prosecution with a maximum penalty of up to five years in prison.

The move aims to close a loophole which allows people on the sex offenders' register to change their name via deed poll in as little as 15 minutes and assume a new identity.

Excess deaths lower than expected

Excess deaths in Britain last year were two-thirds lower than previous estimates, new modelling from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) suggests.

The ONS announced on Tuesday that it was updating its figures to account for the growth and ageing of the population.

Originally, the statistics body calculated that there were 31,442 excess deaths in Britain in 2023. But it has now revised the figure down significantly to 10,994 – a drop of 65 per cent.

Post Office boss told to stall on finances

The former chairman of the Post Office was told by a top civil servant to “hobble into the election” and not to “rip the band-aid off” in terms of finances, an alleged unearthed memo shows.

Sarah Munby told Henry Staunton that “politicians do not necessarily like to confront reality”.

Ukraine war: Why Kyiv needs a total rethink of its strategy

Stefan Wolff and Tetyana Malyarenko

The replacement of Valeriy Zaluzhnyi as commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces may have put a temporary end to the increasingly public disagreements between the very popular “iron general” and the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky. But it has not answered the fundamental question of what a winning – or even surviving – strategy in the war with Russia could look like as it moves into its third year.

Several dynamics have come together that are deeper and more complex than just a major reshuffle of the military leadership. The bigger picture that will shape the future of the war – and with it the future of Ukraine and the European and international security order – comprises four main factors. These need to be analysed together to understand the present, and – most importantly – the future predicaments of Ukraine and its western partners.

First, the failure of the Ukrainian counter-offensive in 2023 and the increasing pressure that Russia has put on Ukraine's frontlines and hinterland put into serious question the ability of Kyiv to win. This is especially the case if victory for Ukraine means forcing Russia's complete withdrawal from all territory occupied since 2014.

The impending fall of Avdiivka, a town about 20kms to the west of Donetsk in the east of Ukraine, suggests that Kyiv ultimately has a weaker hand to play in a battle of attrition when confronted by a ruthless adversary with greater resources.

Much like the loss of Bakhmut in May 2023, or Soledar in January 2023, this was a symbolic rather than strategic defeat for Ukraine. It also represents, at best, pyrrhic victories for Russia – as in the case of Bakhmut.

But taken together, and seen in the context of the failed 2023 counter-offensive, these were not just symbolic defeats. They marked a real and extremely wasteful loss of financial resources, manpower and military equipment.

Zelensky's dismissal of Zaluzhnyi puts the blame for last year's disappointed hopes clearly on the latter. It also indicates, more worryingly, a lack of learning the lessons of these setbacks on the part of the Ukrainian president. The fact that the new commander-in-chief, Oleksandr Syrskyi, is associated with several of these costly defeats – notably Bakhmut – does not bode well for the



“The failure of the Ukrainian counter-offensive in 2023 put into serious question the ability of Kyiv to win this war...”

necessary change in Ukrainian strategy.

To his credit, Syrskyi also masterminded the defence of Kyiv in the early days of the war in 2022 and the successful counter-offensive the following summer which saw Ukraine recapture significant territory, first around Kharkiv in the north and then Kherson in the south.

Notably, these successes happened before Russia embarked on the first of several mobilisations and shifted its economy to a war footing.

Faltering international support

The second key factor to keep in mind is that Ukraine's battlefield successes in 2022 occurred at a time when western support for Ukraine was in full swing. Those days are long gone. This has been evident in the protracted battles in the US congress over sending more military aid to Ukraine.

The comments by former president – and 2024 Republic nominee-apparent – Donald Trump on his lack of commitment to Nato should he be re elected in November are equally worrisome.

Despite some detractors, the EU remains committed to support for Ukraine. This became clear following the recent agreement on a new €50 billion (£42.7 billion) funding package for Ukraine through 2027. But this will barely cover Ukraine's budget deficit, let

alone make up for a potentially significant drop in US military aid. Combined with Ukraine's own shrinking domestic capabilities to mobilise further resources, the war will have to be fought in far more difficult conditions than in the first two years.

War fatigue

Meanwhile, Ukrainian society is increasingly suffering from war fatigue. Military setbacks, economic decline, deteriorating living conditions, corruption and the scale of the loss of lives – among troops and civilians alike – makes sustaining the war effort at present levels more difficult as well. Especially if the goal remains retaking all the land that Russia has occupied since 2014.

The amended law on mobilisation, intended to underpin this strategy, was adopted in the Ukrainian parliament on 6th February. Its provisions, including lowering the conscription age from 27 to 25 years, mandatory digital certificates and electronic prescription notifications and stricter penalties for evading military service, are further evidence of the waning enthusiasm in Ukrainian society for the war effort.

Together with yet another 90-day extension of martial law and several financial measures designed to tighten the Government's control over the economy, the more draconian provisions in the new mobilisation law also heighten the sense of uncertainty over Ukraine's political direction.

Zelensky's presidential term comes to an end in May 2024 and new parliamentary elections would normally be due in the autumn. While it is generally agreed that elections are close to impossible at present, both the president's and

parliament's legitimacy after the expiry of their constitutional terms will be open to question.

This will ultimately be an issue for the constitutional court to resolve. But it has not stopped political forces within Ukraine opposed to Zelensky and his Servant of the People political party to pile pressure on the president to agree to a Government of national unity.

Given the lack of popularity of this opposition, associated primarily with former president Petro Poroshenko – who Zelensky defeated in a landslide election in 2019 – this is hardly driven by popular demand. But it nonetheless signals further political turmoil at a time when Ukraine needs unity.

It is not clear whether Zelensky's dismissal of Zaluzhnyi will strengthen or weaken any political opposition. In the short term, it is likely to benefit Zelensky whose popularity still dwarfs that of Poroshenko. Yet, because replacing Zaluzhnyi has not come with a signal that Ukraine's war strategy will fundamentally change, this is a very risky move on the part of Zelensky.

Maintaining the current direction asks Ukrainians for yet more sacrifices. What Zelensky is offering in return depends on a range of at best highly uncertain returns that depend on many factors beyond the Ukrainian president's control.

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

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

Belfast byelaws prompt pro-lifers to launch free speech campaign

Andy Drozdziak

Northern Irish pro-life group Precious Life have announced that it will be running a 'Protect Free Speech' Campaign over the next few weeks, in response to new byelaws proposed by Belfast City Council.

The proposed laws include a series of draconian measures that could drastically reduce protest groups' scope for action, including imposing fees on groups seeking to set up stalls, hand out leaflets or speak in a public place; issuing permits only to council-approved groups before they can protest; enforcing compliance with council "conditions" for permit holders; and issuing fines of £500 for anyone setting up an Information Stall or using amplification equipment without a permit.

Director of Precious Life Bernadette Smyth believes the new proposals are an attack on street evangelists and pro-life groups. "We launched our 'Protect Free Speech' Campaign to oppose this blatant attack on freedom of speech," she told the *Universe*. "While the council is deviously claiming the new bye-



laws are to tackle a so-called noise nuisance, they will specifically target Christian street evangelists and pro-life groups," she said.

"Given that members of Belfast City Council have openly stated their opposition to pro-life stalls and street preachers, it can only be

presumed these activities will not be 'approved' and no permits issued. This will effectively ban street preachers and pro-life stalls from the city centre."

"These oppressive bye-law proposals are supported by anti-Christian and pro-abortion parties in the

Council - the Alliance Party, Green Party, People Before Profit, SDLP, and Sinn Féin. If these laws are passed by Belfast City Council, it will set a dangerous precedent, encouraging other public authorities to ban free speech from other towns and cities across Northern Ireland."



Bernadette Smyth

Mrs Smyth pointed out that the new byelaws will contradict human rights laws. "Legislation already exists - the Public Order Act - that can be used to address any alleged 'nuisance' issues. The council's proposed byelaws are in direct conflict with the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. These are fundamental human rights - both protected under Articles 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act," she said.

Belfast Council is asking the public for their views on the proposed byelaws. The Public Consultation ends on 4th March 2024.

Bernadette Smyth said: "We call on the City Council to immediately stop their plans to ban free speech. Speech is a right not a privilege granted by Belfast City Council."

Further information can be found on the campaign, at <https://www.preciouslife.com>

Alarm as Irish abortions hit record 10,000 a year

Pro-life groups have called news that 2023 saw a new record number of abortions in Ireland 'deeply sad' and 'alarming.'

The latest figures, released by the Health Service Executive (HSE) to Independent TD Carol Nolan, showed that between January and November 2023, GPs in Ireland made claims for reimbursements for 9,218 abortions.

Irish pro-life group Pro-Life Campaign highlighted that this figure does not include any abortions that were carried out in hospitals, so the total number of abortions in Ireland in 2023 could exceed 10,000.

Spokesperson for Right To Life UK, Catherine Robinson, said: "Ireland's continued increase in abortions is deeply sad. Less than a decade ago, unborn babies' lives were protected by law. Now, according to the latest data, they are being ended at a rate of over 10,000 per year".

The new figures are a significant increase on 2022 when there were 8,876 abortions.

Eilís Mulroy from Irish pro-life group Pro-Life Campaign said: "We are now seeing an alarming trend where the annual abortion rate has risen dramatically since 2019, but most especially in the last two years. Proactive steps which the government can take to reduce the abortion rate must be discussed openly in the national media.

"The impact of telemedicine has

likely had a major impact in increasing the abortion rate. Despite this radical change in abortion policy, not a single vote has ever been cast for or against this radical departure from the original abortion law which the then Minister for Health Simon Harris assured the public would not be operated through telemedicine.

"The Government cannot continue to bury its head in the sand and refuse to listen to the voices of those who have well-grounded and practical suggestions on how to reduce the soaring abortion rate."

A controversial review of Ireland's abortion law last year recommended physicians who perform abortions be immune from prosecution if they perform an abortion at any stage of pregnancy. The review also recommended the scrapping of the three-day waiting period before an abortion can happen.

Deputy Carol Nolan criticised the "over promotion of abortion" as an "an epidemic of loss."

"Thousands of women are being betrayed by the over promotion of abortion as the only possible response to pregnancy in certain circumstances and the cruel under promotion of life affirming alternatives. I will continue to shine a light on this issue so that women and families are fully supported to choose a different path beyond that of abortion."

Catholic Agency for Overseas Development **CAFOD**

James risks LOSING EVERYTHING to feed his family

Help hardworking people like James the fisherman get home safely and feed their families for good.

Donate today
 Give online at cafod.org.uk
 or call **0303 303 3030**
 or send a cheque to:
 Freepost CAFOD
 (no address or stamp needed)

LENT APPEAL

Letters to the Editor

The Universe Catholic Weekly welcomes letters from our readers. Send your thoughts to Michael Winterbottom, at michael.winterbottom@universecatholicweekly.co.uk. Please endeavour to keep your letter short and provide a name and address with all letters, though we are happy to anonymise your thoughts in print.

Jewish snub has worrying echoes of the Holocaust

When first learning about the Holocaust at school, many pupils find it unsettling and hard to believe that so many ordinary German people took part in such horrendous activities.

Most sane people are naturally certain that 'people like us' could never play a role in such events, or in any process that would lead to such outcomes.

The hounding of a Jewish couple from a Soho theatre (last week's *Universe*) gives an insight into how attitudes can be gradually brought into line. I wonder if any of the audience felt any discomfort at the time or afterwards on reflection?

Jonathan Beauchamp
Manchester.

Younger families flock to enjoy Traditional Mass

In your recent *Credo* article, Fr Duffy referred to Pope Francis critique of "backward looking" practices, such as the use of the Latin Mass (which I guess means the Old Rite).

As a priest who does not say the Latin Mass, I have nevertheless observed that the older, traditional services are attracting more young peoples with large families than anywhere else. They seem devout,

faithful and joyful, compared to the average British congregation of elderly Irish.

Why don't we come clean and admit that the post Vatican II (a wonderful Council) period has been a catastrophe for the Church as clergy have abandoned beautiful and inspiring liturgy for 'Val Doonigan' on the altar.

Fr Clive Dytor
Chipping Norton

Here's a tip - make rubbish disposal easier

I noted with interest the small news item in last week's *Universe* about fly tipping.

After recently clearing out my garden shed, I had two modestly sized bags of rubbish, which included old roof felt, pieces of board, wood and plywood, and chicken wire.

I went to the tip, where I was told that my rubbish was "building material" and the charge was £5. I had left my wallet at home but did have some coins in the car for parking, so went to the site office to pay. There I was told it was card only.

I had to return home with my rubbish but it did cross my mind to dump it on the verge!

Frederick Thayer
Leeds.

Hospital chaplaincy team's service rewarded with Croydon honour

The chaplaincy team at Croydon University Hospital has been awarded a Certificate of Recognition by Croydon Council for their service to the public and staff.

The award recognises the dedication of the multi-faith team for providing round-the-clock spiritual and pastoral care for approximately 550 inpatients and their relatives, 4,500 staff and 200 volunteers a year.

In Croydon, at the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, a Multi-Faith Rededication Service was held in the hospital chapel, attended by Bishop Philip Moger, Bishop Christopher Chessun, the Anglican Bishop of Southwark, Canon Gerard Bradley, the Civic Mayor of Croydon, and the hospital chaplaincy team.

The team consists of Rev. Andy Dovey, the Rev. Lynbert Douglas, the Rev. Deborah Premraj and Sr

Sheila Moloney DMJ, who is a volunteer.

They were collectively awarded a Certificate of Recognition for Service by Croydon Council, acknowledging the spiritual, pastoral and religious care provided to the hospital community. At the same time, many of the chaplaincy's 80 volunteers received a Certificate for Long Service.

The team was particularly praised for the way it supported patients and families throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and been on hand at other challenging times, such as providing care to the victims of the 2016 Croydon tram crash.

Speaking of the award, Deacon Alfred Banya, the advisor for health-care chaplaincy in the Archdiocese of Southwark, said: "I am really delighted that Croydon Council has recognised the excellent service that the chaplaincy team at Croydon

Hospital offers to all patients, relatives and staff, irrespective of faith or belief.

"The award is particularly welcome at this time when chaplaincy services are under immense pressure."

Croydon Deanery contains a team of priests from three parishes who are on-call throughout the week. They are supported by a further team of trained volunteers who also visit on weekdays, and by a group of Eucharistic Ministers who visit every Sunday morning. Some hospitals in the Diocese have a full-time Catholic chaplain.

The Archdiocese of Southwark said: "It is a great privilege to be with patients in hospital, to be a listening ear, and above all, to be able to pray with those who are sick, whilst the hard-working staff are always happy to be supported in their roles."



Bishop Philip Moger is pictured with other senior clergy from the Croydon area at the hospital's Multi-Faith Rededication Service

I've always kept my family's faith says star Alfie

Andy Drozdziak

Famous tenor Alfie Boe has spoken out about his Catholic faith and the importance of Lourdes in his life.

Widely regarded as one of Britain's best tenors, Boe is a West End star, having starred in *Les Misérables*, *Finding Neverland* and Baz Luhrmann's *La Bohème* on Broadway. He has also sold over two million albums and performed with superstars like Michael Ball in Las Vegas.

However, he has never lost touch with his Fleetwood roots where he grew up in an Irish Catholic family. Speaking to *The Times* he said: "My first trip abroad was rather unusual – a pilgrimage to Lourdes in France with my mum, who was an Irish Catholic."

"I was only 11, but it solidified my beliefs at the time, and even now I still have faith."

The youngest of nine children, Alfie Boe, 50, attended St Wulstan's and St Edmund's Primary School and Cardinal Allen Catholic High School in Fleetwood.

It's not the first time he has spoken publicly about his Catholic



faith. Last year, he told the *Financial Times* of his belief in an after-life. "I grew up in a strong Irish Catholic faith," he said. "I've lost friends, I've lost family members – my own father – and I believe they haven't gone, they've just moved to a different room. There's going to be a moment when we all meet again."

Boe's latest album, *Open Arms: The Symphonic Songbook*, which feature a selection of rock classics, was released last year. He will be touring the UK at the end of May and in June.

Southwark prayer campaign takes digital world by storm

Andy Drozdziak

A Catholic multimedia prayer campaign has gone viral in its first week.

The Archdiocese of Southwark's 'Give Prayer a Go' campaign was launched on social media platforms on Ash Wednesday, 14th February, and has already been viewed over 1.5 million people on Facebook.

The campaign aims to help people connect with Christ through prayer by providing content which enables them to do that in their everyday life.

Archbishop John Wilson shared his 'delight' at the numbers-and believes it reveals a deeper desire.

"The extraordinary reach of this simple prayer campaign underlines how much people do desire a relationship with Christ, but sometimes just need a little support in lifting their hearts and minds to Him. Prayer is a precious gift and I am delighted people are embracing it this Lent," Archbishop Wilson said.

Prayers released so far include the Act of Contrition, a prayer used in the sacrament of confession, and the Nicene Creed.

The reach of the videos released on Facebook so far includes:

- The Nicene Creed: Viewed by 510,000 people

- Trust & confidence by St Padre Pio: 491,000 people

- Stillness of my soul by St John of the Cross: 322,363,000 people

- Fatima prayer: 146,000 people

- Act of Contrition: 105,000 people.

Even more astonishing is that the archdiocese spent no money advertising the campaign on the social media platform.

Archbishop Wilson explained how the campaign can help people. "Prayer is a gift from God. It's his way of revealing his desire to have a meaningful and lasting relationship with each of us. Too often people find it hard to take a moment to lift their hearts and mind to God."

"I want people to rejoice in the wonder of prayer and that is why I'm encouraging people to give prayer a go."

The prayer campaign will continue throughout Lent and will finish on Easter Sunday, with prayers from the Catholic liturgy and those written by saints. All will look to connect with Christ in their prayers.

The campaign can be seen across the archdiocese's social media channels, including Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, and via: www.rcaos.org.uk

Beautiful faith-filled Rosaries

from The Universe Catholic Weekly

To buy any of these products, just click on the Buy Me button by your choice



Black wood bead St Benedict Rosary Beads

Metal St. Benedict Centre piece
Made by hand in Italy. Strong Wire
St Benedict Crucifix
St Benedict Pater beads
Very tactile with smooth beads
Supplied in organza bag
Ref R5 RRP £28.95



Brown wood carved bead rosary

Traditional 'Trefoil' enamelled brown crucifix
Made by hand in Italy
Strong wire
Very tactile with smooth beads
Supplied in organza bag
Ref R9 RRP £29.95

Sapphire blue carved glass rosary beads

Made by hand with extra strong wire
Traditional crucifix
Colour Miraculous Medal on all Paters and centre piece
Supplied in organza bag
Ref R11 RRP £38.95



Brown wood bead St Benedict rosary beads

Metal St. Benedict centre piece
Made by hand in Italy. Strong wire
St Benedict crucifix
St Benedict Pater beads
Very tactile with smooth beads
Supplied in organza bag
Ref R13 RRP £28.95



Red carved glass rosary beads

Made by hand with extra strong wire
Traditional crucifix
Colour Divine Mercy medal on all Paters and centre piece
Supplied in organza bag
Ref R12 RRP £38.95

Maroon red rosary beads

Cream colour pater beads
Traditional crucifix
Made by hand in Italy. Strong wire
Very tactile with smooth beads
Supplied in organza bag
Ref R15 RRP £26.75



Sapphire blue rosary beads

Traditional crucifix
Made by hand in Italy. Strong wire
Very tactile with smooth beads
Supplied in organza bag
Ref R18 RRP £28.95



Universe subscribers get a 10% discount on all products!

Buy now – Contact Michelle Jones
t: 07436 617650
E: michelle.jones@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
or see universecatholicweekly.co.uk/shop/

More rosaries and other faith-filled products and gifts, including for Confirmation and Christenings, available at universecatholicweekly.co.uk/shop/



It looks great
- but prayer
must always
be church's
priority

Cindy Wooden

Spain's top tourist attraction, the Sagrada Família basilica in Barcelona, must give priority to ensuring it is a place where people are inspired to pray, Pope Francis said.

The architectural and artistic masterpiece of Antoni Gaudí, which is still under construction and has been so for nearly 150 years, attracts close to four million visitors a year.

"Like the spires and bell towers, may the gazes of pilgrims be lifted, and their voices proclaim with the angels, 'Holy Immortal God,'" the pope said during a meeting with members of the 'junta constructora,' the foundation that is responsible for the construction and upkeep of the basilica.

Work on the church began in 1882 and is expected to be completed in 2026. In November, the newly finished towers of the four evange-

lists – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – were blessed.

The first of three facades on the basilica to be completed was that of the Nativity, and Pope Francis focused on the facade's doors in his remarks to the foundation members.

"Every portico has a theme, illustrated by passages from the Scriptures and framed by a prayer," he said. "Thus, the first door, that of faith, behind the image of Jesus who preaches to the doctors, shows us the holy Trisagion," the words of the prayer, "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us."

"Preached faith must become prayer. Always," the pope said.

"The central door of charity, whose main figure is precisely that of the Holy Family, invites us to raise our eyes to the mystery of the Incarnation," he said, "and from

there, to pray the beads of the rosary that descend along the stained-glass windows, framing the star of Bethlehem, almost as if to say, 'Here is our light.'"

"In adoration, in the contemplative prayer of the mysteries" of Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection, he said, "we open ourselves to that light like the great stained-glass window of your temple."

Especially this year, which is dedicated to prayer in preparation for the Holy Year 2025, Pope Francis asked foundation members to "welcome in the basilica the pilgrims who approach" and help them prayerfully contemplate Gaudí's design.

"It is important that the climate of prayer is not lost in temples; it must be a priority for those who, like you, have received the responsibility for the care of temples," the pope told them.

Second synod session set for October, with deacons a focus

Requests for shorter session by some clergy ignored as plans are for a month in Rome

Cindy Wooden

The second assembly of the Synod of Bishops on synodality will meet from 2nd-27th October and will be preceded by several formal studies co-ordinated by the synod general secretariat working with various offices of the Roman Curia.

The session will open with a retreat from 30th September, too, suggesting the Vatican has ignored the desire of some synod members to spend less time in Rome this time, after a full month in autumn 2023.

And in response to a formal call by members of the first assembly of the synod, Pope Francis has agreed to the establishment of "study groups that will initiate, with a synodal method, the in-depth study of some of the themes that emerged."

A chirograph, or brief papal document, released on 17th February said that the study groups "are to be established by mutual agreement between the competent dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the General Secretariat of the Synod, which is entrusted with coordination."

However, the papal note did not list the topics to be studied nor the members of the groups. The synod office said it hoped the approved groups and their members could be announced by mid-March.

Pope Francis' note focused on the obligation of the offices of the Roman Curia to work with the synod since both bodies, though distinct, are established "to promote in a synodal spirit the mutual relations of the bishops and of the particular Churches over which they preside, among themselves and in communion with the Bishop of Rome."

In their report at the end of the first synod assembly, members voted to ask Pope Francis for several studies before the 2024 assembly, including on "the terminological and conceptual understanding of the notion and practice of synodality" itself; and another study on "the canonical implications of synodality," conducted by "an intercontinental special commission of theological and canonical experts."

Synod members also called for further theological study on the permanent diaconate and said, "theological and pastoral research on the access of women to the diaconate



should be continued."

After a request of the women's International Union of Superiors General, Pope Francis established a commission to study the historic identity and role of women deacons. The commission worked from 2016 to 2019, and the pope gave a report on it to the superiors general, but it was not made public.

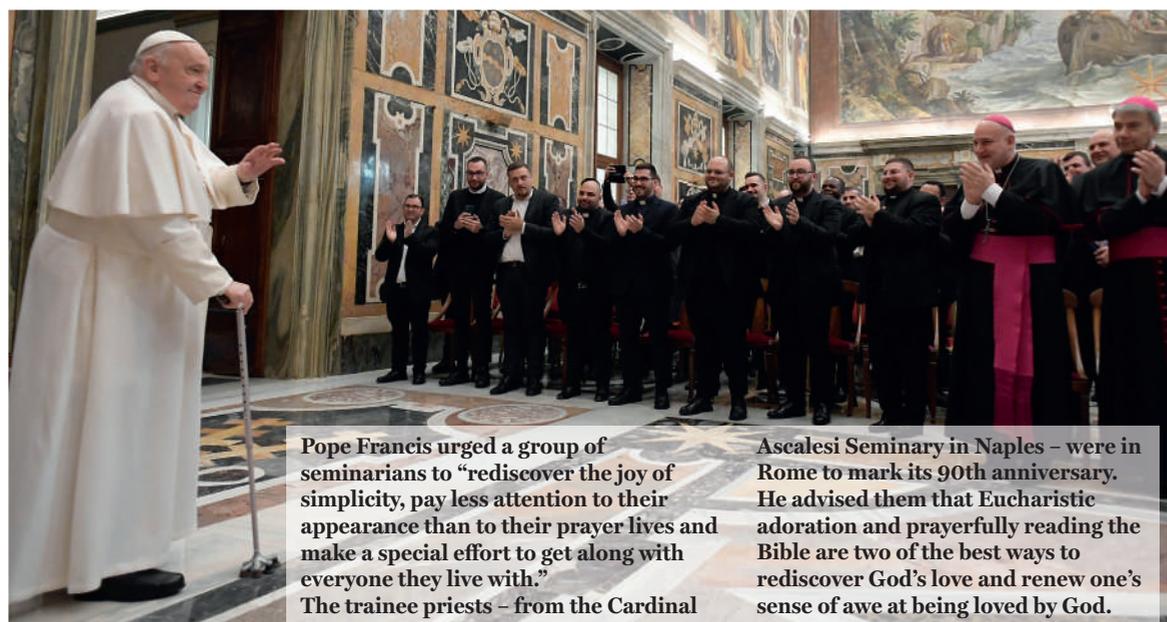
He set up a second commission in 2020 after the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon; its results have not been published either.

The assembly of the synod on synodality also said, "We believe the time has come for a revision of the 1978 document *Mutuae Relationes*,' regarding the relationships between bishops and religious in the Church. We propose that this revision be completed in a synodal manner, consulting all involved."

On several occasions after his election in 2013, Pope Francis said he had asked the dicastery for religious to revise *Mutuae Relationes*, a set of directives issued jointly with the then-Congregation for Bishops in 1978 to provide guidance to bishops and religious in their relationship. Pope Francis has said the norms need revision to ensure religious are not treated simply as employees or extra resources for a diocese, and to ensure that the orders' autonomy does not lead them to activities in conflict with a local church.

The synod assembly also called for "a thorough review of formation for ordained ministry in view of the missionary and synodal dimensions of the Church." Assembly members said that involves "reviewing the *Ratio Fundamentalis*' that determines how formation is structured."

The *Ratio Fundamentalis* was last updated in late 2016 and provides guidelines for preparing men for the Latin-rite priesthood and ensuring their continuing education, training and support.



Pope Francis urged a group of seminarians to "rediscover the joy of simplicity, pay less attention to their appearance than to their prayer lives and make a special effort to get along with everyone they live with."
The trainee priests – from the Cardinal

Ascalesi Seminary in Naples – were in Rome to mark its 90th anniversary. He advised them that Eucharistic adoration and prayerfully reading the Bible are two of the best ways to rediscover God's love and renew one's sense of awe at being loved by God.

Pope issues a plea for peace as he highlights Sudan conflict

War will never solve problems, Pope Francis said, appealing for prayers that God inspire people to concrete work for peace.

“Ten months have passed now since the outbreak of the armed conflict in Sudan, which has caused a very grave humanitarian situation,” the pope said after praying the Angelus with visitors in St. Peter’s Square.

“I once again ask the conflicting sides to stop this war, which inflicts a great deal of harm on the people and the future of the country. Let us pray that paths of peace can be found soon, to build the future of dear Sudan,” he said.

He also lamented intensified violence in Cabo Delgado Province in northern Mozambique where terrorists have been attacking military and government buildings, civilian infrastructure and villages in an ongoing armed conflict.

“The violence against defenceless populations, the destruction of infrastructure and insecurity are again rampant in the province of Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, where the Catholic mission of Our Lady of Africa in Mazeze was also set on fire in recent days,” the pope said. “Let us pray for peace to return to that tormented region.”

Aid to the Church in Need report-

ed that an attack on 9th February forced hundreds of people to flee, including priests, religious sisters and other church workers after terrorists burned churches and homes as well as killed and kidnapped an unknown number of people during raids on three communities in Cabo Delgado.

Islamist militants have been intensifying attacks in northern Mozambique since early 2024 as part of an ongoing insurgency that began in 2017, and which has killed more than 5,000 people and displaced more than 1 million people – three per cent of the total population, the aid group said.

After the Angelus, the pope asked people to not forget the many other conflicts “that stain the African continent and many parts of the world with blood: also Europe, Palestine, Ukraine.”

“Wherever there is warfare, the populations are exhausted, they are tired of war, which is always pointless and inconclusive, and brings only death, only destruction, and will never lead to the solution to problems,” he said.

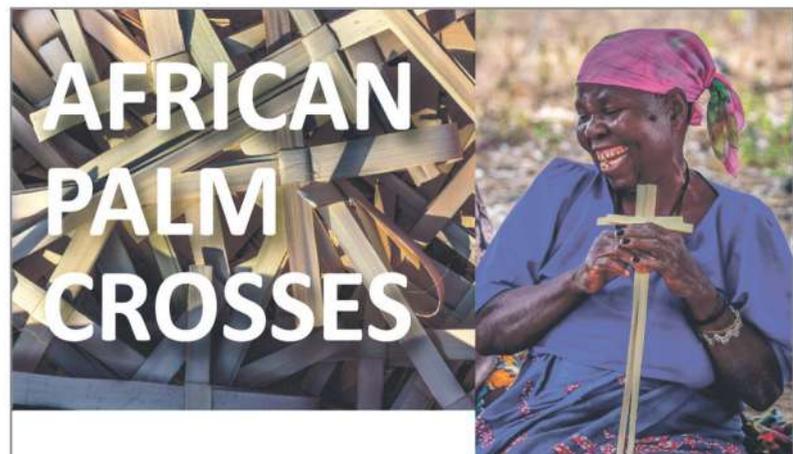
“Instead, let us pray tirelessly, because prayer is effective, and let us ask the Lord for the gift of minds and hearts that dedicate themselves to peace in a concrete way,” he said.



Farmers brought a cow, named Ercolina II, to St. Peter’s Square for the recitation of the Angelus prayer at the Vatican last Sunday, as part of ongoing protests by farmers across Italy. The man above is holding up a sign of a black and white image of the first Ercolina, who was the mascot of dairy farmers who protested against limits imposed by the European Union on milk production in 1997.

Pope Francis greeted the Italian agricultural and livestock farmers, who had come to the square seeking his blessing as they joined farmers across Europe demonstrating about rising costs, falling incomes and the impact of European Union regulations aimed at mitigating climate change.

Cardinal issues new schism warning over Germany’s laity plans – pg 17



The palm crosses are made in a very poor area of Africa.

Making the crosses for our use here enables people there to earn some extra money each year.

£9.30 for 50
£18.60 per 100

(this includes VAT and postage)

46 Brandon Street,
London SE17 1NL

email: enquiries@africanpalms.co.uk
web: www.africanpalms.co.uk
phone: 020 7703 0719

Vices are ‘beasts’ of the soul to tame

Carol Glatz

Vices, such as vanity and greed, are like “wild beasts” of the soul that risk tearing people apart, Pope Francis said.

Vices “must be tamed and fought, otherwise they will devour our freedom,” he said before reciting the Angelus prayer with about 15,000 visitors in St. Peter’s Square.

Lent, he added, helps Christians create moments of silence, prayer and reflection in order to correct those vices and perceive the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

On the first Sunday of Lent, the pope focused his main Angelus address on Jesus in the desert or “the wilderness.” He remained there for 40 days, “tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.

“We too, during Lent, are invited to ‘enter the wilderness,’ that is, silence, the inner world, listening to the heart, in contact with the truth,”



15,000 visitors attended Angelus in St. Peter’s Square.

the pope said. By entering into one’s inner world, he said, “we encounter wild beasts and angels there.”

The “beasts” of the soul, he said, are “the disordered passions that divide the heart, trying to take possession of it. They entice us, they seem seductive, but if we are not careful, we risk being torn apart by them.”

They include various vices, he said, such as coveting wealth, “the vanity of pleasure, which condemns us to restlessness and solitude, and the craving for fame, which gives rise to insecurity and a continuous need for confirmation and prominence.”

However, the pope said, angels

were also in the desert with Jesus.

“These are God’s messengers, who help us, who do us good: indeed, their characteristic, according to the Gospel, is service,” he said. “While temptations tear us apart, the good divine inspirations unify us and let us enter into harmony: they quench the heart, infuse the taste of Christ, ‘the flavour of Heaven.’”

“In order to grasp the inspiration of God, one must enter into silence and prayer. And Lent is the time to do this,” the pope said, encouraging Christians to dedicate the time and space needed for such reflection each day.

In Brief

Haitian bishop injured in bomb attack on house

Bishop Pierre-André Dumas, vice president of the Haitian Bishops' Conference, was reported to be in a 'serious but stable' condition after being injured in an explosion in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince on Sunday evening.

Dumas was caught in an explosion at the house where he was staying while visiting the capital, Port-au-Prince.

This is the latest incident to hit the Catholic community in the Caribbean island, which has been rocked by gang violence, murder, and political instability.

Nearly a month ago, six Haitian religious sisters of the St. Anne Congregation were abducted in Port-au-Prince, before being released after a week in captivity.

Dumas has been vocal in denouncing the widespread violence and "the formalisation of banditry in the country," warning that without concrete action the situation could deteriorate into civil war.

The acting prime minister, Ariel Henry, took office on 20th July, 2021, following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse three weeks earlier.

Henry was told to stand down by 7th February but so far has refused to call elections, citing security concerns.

In another twist to the story, a judge investigating the murder of Moïse has arrested his widow, Martine Moïse, ex-prime minister Claude Joseph, and the former chief of Haiti's National Police, Léon Charles, among others.

Prison bosses hit after Navalny death

The UK has frozen the assets of six Russian prison bosses in charge of the Arctic penal colony where opposition leader Alexei Navalny died.

The sanctioned individuals will also be banned from travelling to the UK.

Western leaders say the blame for Navalny's death lies with the Russian authorities, including President Putin.

"Those responsible for Navalny's brutal treatment should be under no illusion - we will hold them accountable," Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron said.

Western leaders have led a chorus of condemnation over Navalny's suspicious death, with President Biden saying he was "not surprised and outraged."

• **Russia's Catholics mourn dissident's death - pg 19**

Trump favours 16-week limit on abortion over outright ban

Kate Scanlon

Former President Donald Trump has told allies that he would support abortion with a 16-week limit and exceptions in cases of rape or incest, or a maternal mortality risk.

The *New York Times* reported that Trump likes the "even" number of the proposal. "It's four months," he reportedly told allies.

Trump, who appears poised to secure the Republican nomination for president in 2024, has a chequered history with abortion. Many credit him with reversing *Roe v. Wade* through his appointments of conservative justices to the Supreme Court, but he expressed pro-abortion views before becoming president.

The report also claimed Trump refused to talk with potential running mates who do not hold 'moderate' views on abortion, instantly dismissing anyone who doesn't support 'the three exceptions' above.

If the rumours turn into policy, a federal 16-week ban would prohibit relatively few abortions in the USA; it is believed just 4.3 per cent of abortions would be affected, without taking into account exceptions.

Data from 2020 found that 93.1 per cent of abortions were at fewer than 13 weeks gestation.

Polling has shown that Americans are unwilling to ban abortion during this first trimester of pregnancy, but a majority of Americans would ban abortion in the second trimester and beyond - suggesting that Trump's 16-week time limit is close to public opinion.

Karoline Leavitt, a spokeswoman



for Trump, refused to confirm the comments but said "As President, he would sit down with both sides and negotiate a deal that everyone will be happy with."

Leavitt added Trump "appointed strong Constitutionalist federal judges and Supreme Court justices who overturned *Roe v. Wade* and sent the decision back to the states, which others have tried to do for over 50 years."

The Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America group said it would ask Republican presidential candidates to sign a pledge stating that they will back federal legislation banning abortion at a minimum of 15 weeks of pregnancy.

But the group nevertheless praised the report Trump has ex-

pressed support for a 16-week ban.

SBA Pro-Life America President Marjorie Dannenfelser said in a statement, "We strongly agree with President Trump on protecting babies from abortion violence at 16 weeks when they feel pain."

"A majority of Americans support this compassionate position," Dannenfelser said.

After the Supreme Court's 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* decision, which overturned the high court's prior precedent establishing abortion as a constitutional right, voters in California, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, Vermont, Kansas, and Ohio either rejected new limitations on abortion or expanded legal protections for it.

Some Republicans, including

Trump, have sought to blame the issue of abortion for the party's subsequent underperformance in the 2022 midterm election cycle.

Trump accused pro-life voters of disloyalty to him by not showing up to vote in the midterm elections, saying they "just plain disappeared, not to be seen again" after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe*.

But some election analysts argued that while the issue of abortion energised Democratic voters, issues with many of Trump's handpicked Republican candidates or their campaigns, as well as Trump's unfounded and oft-repeated claims that the 2020 election was stolen from him, hurt Republicans with voters at the ballot box.

After *Dobbs*, several states also passed legislation limiting abortion, including Nebraska and North Carolina, which both limited the procedure after 12 weeks. Other states, including South Carolina, did so after six weeks.

While most Americans describe themselves as 'pro-choice', a majority also would support strict limits on abortion and conscience protections for health care workers. Polling has shown for over a decade that Americans broadly support some limits to abortion, even where they would keep the practice generally available.

The US Church continues to support an outright ban on abortion, as well as policies and actions to support women and families facing unplanned pregnancies based on that position.

Vatican demands action as Nigerians admit 'the ship of our country is sinking'

Carol Glatz

Nigeria's government must urgently address the "evil of kidnapping" and the "looming crisis" in the country, two Vatican officials said.

"In addition to putting measures on (the) ground to secure lives and properties, the state, with the support of the Church, should seek ways of repositioning the nation on the path of economic growth, political stability and religious cohesion," said a letter from the leaders of the Dicastery for Evangelization's Section for the First Evangelization and New Particular Churches.

Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, pro-prefect of the dicastery, and Nigerian Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, secretary of the section, sent the letter to Archbishop Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji of Owerri, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria.

Fides, the news agency of the di-



Cardinal Tagle

castery, had seen the letter. In it the Dicastery for Evangelization "offers its deepest and heartfelt solidarity to the Nigerian people, who are grappling with a crisis that is expanding in scope and intensifying in proportion," the officials said.

"Nothing can justify the evil of kidnapping," they wrote, noting that "among those tragically caught in the crossfire of these reprehensible acts are members of the clergy, religious and lay faithful."

"The physical violence and ac-

companying mental torture that go with kidnapping undermine the pillars of civil and social harmony, as they traumatize the individuals involved, their families and the society in general," the cardinal and archbishop wrote.

"We call on the government of Nigeria to act swiftly in addressing this menace and halting the looming crisis," they wrote, adding, "Our hope is that this Lent will prove spiritually fruitful for each believer and every ecclesial community in Nigeria."

A total of 3,964 people have been kidnapped in Nigeria since May 2023, according to SBM Intelligence, a risk management consulting firm, Fides reported.

Meanwhile, the Catholic bishops of southwestern Nigeria said, "Our dear country Nigeria is fast becoming a hostile killing field."

"The ship of the nation is found-

ering under the weight of pervasive insecurity, economic hardship due to hyperinflation and the collapse of the naira, cybercrime, high cost of food, lackadaisical governance and widespread corruption," they said.

The bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Ibadan said daily life "is fast becoming an ordeal for millions of Nigerians because pervasive poverty, driven by the harsh environment, has driven many to desperation and even suicide."

It would be "hypocritical," they said, to blame "all the misery being suffered by Nigerians today" on just a changing world economy.

"The truth is that often, Nigerians are simply left to their own devices and left at the mercy of the most cruel and aggressive criminals by inept and selfish political and civil leaders," it said. "We plead for urgent action from all our leaders to save the Nigeria ship from sinking."

Cardinal in new warning to Germany's Church: your reform plans risk schism

KNA and OSV News

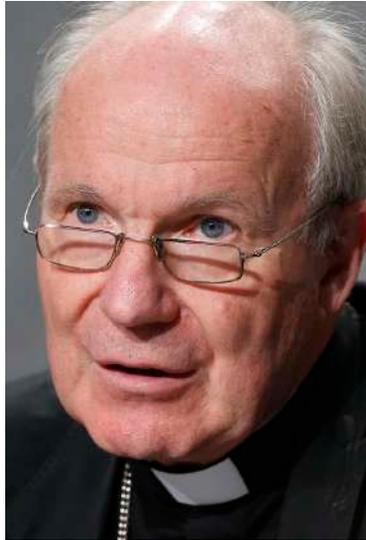
Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna has issued an urgent warning that the German Church is at risk of schism after its bishops indicated that they wanted to keep to their course of a radical reform of who runs the Church, despite Rome telling them to halt its work.

Our work will proceed “in dialogue with Rome,” the president of the German bishops’ conference, Bishop Georg Batzing of Limburg, said, but he said a co-ordination of fundamental Church reforms with the Vatican “a matter of course.”

“Out of respect for those responsible in Rome,” he said, he had removed “a controversial vote from the agenda of this week’s bishops’ meeting in Augsburg, at which the establishment of a Synodal Committee for Germany was to be decided. “We do not want to and cannot ignore the Roman objection. But we have to talk,” said Bishop Batzing.

The German bishops were “eagerly” awaiting concrete talks with Vatican officials, he said, over Church reform. Three further meetings have currently been “announced” although the bishop stressed it may take up to six months for the Vatican to set the concrete date.

Bishop Batzing emphasised that, in his view, the Synodal Path in Ger-



many and the worldwide Synod on Synodality were heading in the same direction.

The row began when a letter from the Vatican surfaced over the weekend, in which Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, and Cardinal Robert Prevost, prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, called on the German bishops to suspend a planned vote on the creation of a mixed decision-making body for the Church in Germany, saying such a body would violate canon law.

The letter was approved by the pope.

Bishop Batzing said he was willing and able to refute the Vatican’s concerns expressed in the letter, adding that German plans for said a joint body of bishops and laity would not weaken the authority of the bishops, but rather strengthen it.

Lay German Catholics involved in the pope’s Synodal Path have called on their bishops to defy Rome and stick to the reform course. The planned Synodal Committee was to prepare a Synodal Council in which bishops and laity would make all decisions jointly.

The Central Committee of German Catholics, the highest representative body of the laity, which had participated in the Synodal Path, along with its president Irme Stetter-Karp, called on the bishops to continue the reform project despite the signals from Rome to halt it: “The Catholic Church in Germany will not have a second chance if it stops the Synodal Path now.”

The lay committee’s deputy president, Thomas Soding, called it a contradiction when the Holy Father promotes synodal processes for his Synod on Synodality but then “puts a stop sign on German reform plans.”

Soding called the letter from

Rome “not a ban, but a step on the brakes.” At the same time, he warned against playing for time, because “frustration will grow [among German Catholics] if the reforms are put on the back burner again.”

The ‘We are Church’ initiative also called on the bishops “not to be fooled” by “misleading messages” from Rome. The bishops, the initiative said, should insist that lay people are involved in any talks in Rome.

Soding told KNA that the bishops “should hold talks with Rome as quickly as possible.” He added, however, that he’s “not sure whether Rome has the courage to open up.”

Cardinal Schönborn has, however, made an unusually clear statement on the debate about the Church’s path to reform in Germany. He told the theological website *Communio* that he agreed with the Roman criticism of German reforms. The envisioned involvement of laypeople in fundamental decisions contradicts the constitution of the Church, the Austrian cardinal said.

He told German bishops not to make any decisions that could lead to a schism. They should “seriously ask themselves whether they really want to leave the communion with and under the pope or rather accept it loyally.

“Refusing to give in would be ‘obstinatio’ (obstinacy) – a clear sign of a schism that nobody can want.” In his view, ignoring the warnings from Rome would be negligent.

Schönborn pointed out that the Vatican had already stated several times that the Church in Germany was not authorised to establish a joint governing body of lay and clerical people.

“I am impressed by the patience with which the pope is trying to remain in dialogue with the German bishops and maintain unity and communion,” the cardinal said.

The current conflict is not about “questions of power” or disciplinary issues, Cardinal Schönborn added. “Rather, Pope Francis is fulfilling his core task of maintaining unity in the faith” because it is about the “basic understanding of the Church.”

A bishop cannot delegate personal responsibility for important decisions and the transmission of faith to committees, the cardinal said. “Therefore, the idea of bishops voluntarily binding themselves to the decisions of synodal councils is not compatible with the core of the episcopal mission.”

This week German bishops are meeting in Augsburg, with the topic of the Synodal Committee and Synodal Council likely to dominate.

Canadian arsonists hit church in Regina

A Canadian church has been vandalised in an arson attack – the latest in a long list of such attacks on churches in the past few years, since concern was raised over the Church’s treatment of indigenous Canadian peoples in the 1900s.

The most recent attack was at Blessed Sacrament Church in downtown Regina. Security cameras caught the culprit in the act in the early hours of the day, but the perpetrator has yet to be apprehended.

Fr James Hentges, pastor of Blessed Sacrament, told local media he was not in the church at the time, but modern technology alerted him to the fire. “The alarm went off immediately when it detected smoke,” said Fr Hentges. “My Apple iPods picked up the alarm and alerted me that there was an alarm going off.”

The 48-second video the priest posted to his personal Instagram account, jameshentges, shows a masked perpetrator pouring contents from a fuel container near the front entrance of the church rectory and the parish office. After several failed attempts, the suspect ignited the contents of the can. The

entranceway quickly became shrouded in flames.

The Regina Police Service said officers were dispatched around 3.40 am to respond to the blaze after receiving a tip from a passerby. Firefighters were already on site when police arrived.

The outer portion of the church’s door was charred and there was some smoke damage in the rectory, but the church itself escaped harm.

“A thorough investigation” determined “it was an intentionally set fire,” the deputy fire chief said.



Do you want there to be a strong Catholic voice in our society?



The Catholic Union is the voice of the laity in society. For over 150 years, we have educated and informed Parliament, the Government, the Media and the Public about the Catholic viewpoint on the issues of the day.

We need your help so please join the Catholic Union today!

As a Member you can

- participate in our work
- attend talks and other social events
- receive regular news and events briefings

For details about how to join (free for students and Under 25s) please click on our website:

www.catholicunion.org.uk



Public Engagement by Catholics for the Common Good

‘We’ll be killed’: Ukrainian Catholic Church faces ‘eradication’ if Russia wins, archbishop warns

The shattered remains of a church in Shevchuk, Ukraine.



As Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine reaches the two-year mark on 24th February, Catholic news agency OSV News’ reporter Gina Christian sat down with Metropolitan Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, to here his thoughts on the conflict having recently returned from Ukraine. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Gina Christian (GC): After two years of full-scale invasion and 10 years of aggression by Russia, how would you describe the overall outlook of the Ukrainian people?

Archbishop Gudziak (AG): It’s really quite amazing, because there’s so much devastation, there’s so much death, displacement, and yet the people are pretty clear in their resolve. There are principles we have to defend, and we really don’t have any choice, because wherever there is Russian occupation, there is genocide. So, if we don’t defend ourselves, we’ll be killed.

We know we have to get the job done. We need help to get that job done, but we know nobody is going to send troops to help Ukraine.

We gave up our nuclear arsenal unilaterally in 1994 (under the

Budapest Memorandum), receiving security pledges and guarantees from the United States, Great Britain and Russia, who (promised) not only to not invade or demonstrate aggression, but to not even use economic power to shake the sovereignty or independence of Ukraine. You had the global community applauding the first nuclear disarmament.

(But now) Ukraine’s territorial integrity, its sovereignty has been violated brutally. Ukrainians realise they have to defend themselves and they will do so.

GC: Western support has begun to lag over the last year, with some lawmakers in the US and Europe actively opposing aid to Ukraine. How would you respond to those calls?

AG: It’s so important to understand what the consequences of further Russian occupation may be. Approximately 17 per cent of Ukrainian territory is under occupation. That has led to eight million people crossing the border (with two million since returning). If, let’s say, even half of Ukraine came under a Russian occupation, you will have at least 10 more million refugees.

And the displacement of people, but also the (disruption) of global

“Ukraine’s territorial integrity, its sovereignty has been violated brutally. Ukrainians realise they have to defend themselves and they will continue to do so...”

political, diplomatic, economic, food (and ecological) systems ... has led to a hit on all of us.

Your pocketbook has been hit by the Russian invasion. Oil prices, food prices went up because of the Russian invasion. Hungry people are starving in Africa or the Middle East because of the Russian invasion.

If there’s another Russian advance, it’s going to hit you in your pocket. It’s going to further affect and destabilise global security. But more importantly, it will empower all the ruffians of the world, whether it’s North Korea, Iran or people who are not yet showing that kind of aggression, but (are) just waiting for a signal that nobody’s watching anyway.

I appeal to Catholics who are concerned about subjectivism, who understand what Pope Benedict was saying when (as then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) he observed that

we’re moving into a period of the dictatorship of relativism. This is what Putin wants. He’s not aiming to convince you of Russian righteousness. He just wants you to doubt democracy. He wants you to doubt the truth, to believe in nothing. And this is diabolical.

Putin has killed for almost a quarter-century. Look at the list: the vicious bombing of Grozny, the capital of Chechnya (in February 2000); the death of journalists and political opposition figures that have happened under his rule, including now Navalny; the attack, invasion and annexation of part of Georgia in 2008. In 2024, this war (in Ukraine) is not two years old. It’s 10 years old since he annexed Crimea.

We cannot be naive about this. Dear fellow Catholics, your fellow Catholics, your fellow Christians, Protestants and others will not be able to pray freely. Their churches will be closed (and) taken over by the Russian Orthodox Church, as it did with Ukrainian Catholic churches after the liquidation of (its) visible structures.

The Church can never be liquidated because it’s the Body of Christ. But the persecution of the church is something that follows us since the time of Christ, since the time of the Apostles.

I don’t know if people realise that many of the popes in the first four centuries of the Church were martyrs. It’s not impossible that this godless brutality can move into the Western European continent. It’s not impossible that a godless rule, an atheist, aggressive, anti-democratic rule could be in Rome and the bishops of Rome could again become martyrs.

There is no freedom of religion in Russia. Even the Russian Orthodox Church is fully shackled. And the head of the church, Patriarch Kirill, uses the language of Islamic militants – of jihad – to encourage participation in the war.

There’s not a single Ukrainian Catholic parish registered in Russia. Certain (faith) confessions are already illegal.

GC: Two joint reports from the New Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg Center for Human Rights have concluded that Russia has breached the Genocide Convention. Yet the 153 nations party to the convention have been slow to take action. Why?

AG: People don’t understand because they use their own categories. They judge or perceive on the basis of their own experience. There has not been an occupation in the United States,



really. We haven't had bombs falling on the US, except for 9/11, for example, or isolated acts, which really traumatise us.

There are bombs falling on civilian structures throughout Ukraine every single day – bombs, rockets, drones. And this is something the USA cannot relate to. If there's a bomb or a mass shooting with 20 people killed, it is a great tragedy. And it happens at home, it's close. But there are probably between 300 and 400 people killed in Ukraine every day. That includes the soldiers on both sides.

A lot of people in the US say, "We don't want to go into those long-term wars." And they compare. But Iraq and Afghanistan are not Ukraine and Russia – it's a bad comparison. Ukrainians are not giving up to the Taliban. They're not running away. The president is there. The people are there. The government is there. The parliament is there. A million Ukrainians volunteered, joined the armed forces in the last two years. One million people are putting their lives at risk.

GC: How does the current war fit into the long record of Russian aggression against Ukraine and in particular the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church?

AG: It's the present image of what happened in Bucha, Irpin, Borodyanka, Mariupol (sites of recent Russian mass atrocities in Ukraine). But it's also the history. There were ... millions killed by wars, genocide and genocidal policies like the Holodomor or the Holocaust.

All of this at the hands, in one form or another, of totalitarian powers, or wars that were generated by empires.

Putin has said there is no such thing really as Ukraine, there isn't a separate independent Ukrainian people, (and) the Ukrainian language is just a dialect. All of that

"The Ukrainian Catholic Church gets eradicated every time there's a Russian occupation. It happened in the 18th century. It happened in the 19th century ... the Tsarists came to Lviv (and) arrested and deported the head of the Church... the Soviets did it in the 20th century. And now we see it (happening) in the occupied territories."

will be erased, and it's not a question of hypothesis.

The Ukrainian Catholic Church gets eradicated as a legal, visible entity every time there's a Russian occupation. It happened in the 18th century. It happened a few times in the 19th century as the Russian Empire grew or consolidated its hold on territory after the partitions of Poland. The Tsarists ... came to Lviv (and) arrested and deported the head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church to Russia. The Soviets did it in the 20th century.

And now we see it (happening) in the occupied territories.

GC: What can Catholics do to support Ukraine at this moment?

AG: First of all, we should pray.

The Lord is the Lord of history. And I've seen too many miracles. Our church was illegal for 45 years ... it was decimated. Today, 35 years later, there are 3,000 priests again, and we have the youngest episcopacy and clergy in the world.

Second, be informed. Be careful of the Tucker Carlsons of the world.

Ukrainians are very grateful to all who pray, who advocate and who help. There's a special respect for America.

Ukrainians are going to fight and defend God-given principles, God-given dignity, so that our children and grandchildren don't have to suffer. ... We have to stop Russia's aggression, no matter what the cost.



A firefighter works at the site of a residential building in Selydove, in Ukraine's Donetsk region, that was destroyed in a Russian missile attack on 14th February. Photo: National Police handout via Reuters



Rome saw a number of moving tributes to Navalny

Russia's Catholics mourn death of leading Putin critic

Jonathan Luxmoore

A senior Russian Catholic has urged Church leaders abroad to commemorate the opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, as armed police dispersed citizens mourning his death at age 47 in a remote prison camp.

"When I heard he was dead, I recalled the words of St. Luke's Gospel, 'Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace' – he did everything he could for his country, and I thank God such people still exist," said the Moscow-based lay Catholic.

"The Church in Russia doesn't speak out on sensitive issues – though we've been here for centuries, we still feel like we're in a ghetto, keeping quiet so no one will notice us. But I really hope memorial services will be held in other countries – that even the pope might join prayers in his memory."

The Catholic, who asked not to be named, spoke as Navalny's family requested handover of his body, amid international revulsion at the veteran dissident's suspicious death.

She said fellow Catholics in Russia had long feared Navalny's end was being "brought closer" by his harsh detention conditions, which included 27 punitive spells in solitary confinement over three years. She added that some church members had defied police pressure and requested prayers in his memory, while grieving his death as "a pain and tragedy, and a loss of hope."

"Although not all Catholics agreed with everything he said and did during his short life, no one would deny his courage," said the Catholic, a university lecturer who also works with Caritas.

"Sadly, however, I can't believe Navalny's death will mark a turning point by provoking mass protests and changing things. Many others have died under the current regime, and their names are already barely remembered by young Russians, while hundreds of detainees still suffer in prisons and labour camps."

Navalny's death at the strict-regime IK-3 arctic Siberian penal colony in Russia's Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region, where he was serving a 19-year sentence, was reported on 16th February by the Tass Russian news agency, which said the Federal Penitentiary Service had attributed it to 'sudden death syndrome.'

A Kremlin spokesman dismissed claims the dissident was poisoned with the Novichok nerve agent, and criticised "arrogant" and "unacceptable" condemnations by Western leaders.

US President Joe Biden led Western condemnation, saying he was both "not surprised" and "outraged" by Navalny's death.

"He was so many things that Putin was not. He was brave. He was principled ... dedicated to building a Russia where a rule of law existed and was applied everywhere, and to an evolving belief that Russia, as he knew it, was a cause worth fighting for, and obviously even dying for."

At least 400 Russians were reported to have been arrested while commemorating Navalny across the country, as police removed flowers and candles in his memory.

The Vatican's Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin said news of Navalny's death has caused "sadness" and surprised the Holy See, adding that he had personally hoped the opposition leader's plight could be "resolved differently."

The chairman of the German bishops' conference, Bishop Georg Bätzing, said the "shocking" death showed "human lives don't seem to count" for Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, whose "inhumane system" allowed human rights to be "trampled underfoot in a supposedly constitutional state."

In Bosnia, women religious take the lead in interfaith dialogue

Chris Herlinger

With its towering minaret and stately white exterior, the Esme Sultanija Mosque in the centre of Jajce, Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a sacred edifice venerated by people of all faiths.

But the building's significance also has to do with healing, not just beauty. The original structure was destroyed in 1992 during the Bosnian war and its painstaking reconstruction, though largely finished by 2010, was not fully completed until last year.

"Sadly, in war, sacred objects should be exempt from destruction," Ramiz Kahric, the mosque's imam said recently as he gave a tour to a group of Christian visitors. "But that's not the case."

The mosque is named after the wife of Bosnian Gov. Mehmed Pasha Muhsinovic, who ruled in the late 18th century, the time the original mosque was constructed. The structure is the only mosque in Bosnia and Herzegovina named after a woman.

The new structure is reason for rejoicing – a symbol that the war of three decades ago is largely, though perhaps not fully, behind Bosnia. "It's become a source of joy for everyone," he said.

One of those rejoicing is Sr Iva Klaric, 51, a Croatian teacher of religion and a member of the Bosnian-Croatian province of the School Franciscan Sisters of Christ the King, who has resided in Jajce, located in central Bosnia and Herzegovina, for 15 years.

She has worked with the Muslim community to promote dialogue and co-operation between Christians and Muslims in the small, picturesque city of about 26,000 – about half Croat Catholic and half Muslim.

Though Sr Iva's work and the efforts of other sisters in Bosnia are small in scale, and often involve those the sisters have befriended, they are helping mend wounds in a country where war fueled ethnic and religious animosity.

The war of the 1990s altered demographics dramatically. Before the war, the inner city was twice its current size and had a sizable Serb Orthodox community.

But the ravages of war changed that. Though alliances shifted, at the beginning of the war, Muslims and Croats were allied against forces of the Yugoslav army, which were predominantly Serb. Shelling from that army was responsible for the destruction of the mosque, as well as a neighbouring Catholic church and much of the city centre.

"The city changed, and the war was the cause of that change," said Sr Iva, who studied theology in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and



Herzegovina, and taught for nearly 20 years in communities near Jajce.

In the wake of what she calls "a complicated history," it has been important, Sr Iva said from her congregational convent, for all peoples to come together – whether that means visiting each other's place of worship or being involved in community and social events for everyone. "We are living this dialogue here," she said.

Her congregational house, adjoining one of the city's Catholic churches, "is open to all religions and nationalities," she said. It also is the site for gatherings of people of all faiths – such as social events, poetry readings, prayer meetings or sessions of a local council for interreligious dialogue, for which Sr Iva serves as president.

All of these gatherings are of interest to the public, she says, noting that Jajce residents "express the need for such meetings."

Sr Iva acknowledges that interfaith co-operation is an abiding passion for a number of factors – a basic one being that Jajce is a community with a mixed

religious population. And that being in dialogue with neighbours is a Christian mandate, she said. "The Church calls us to be in dialogue with everyone."

But in the small village where Sister Iva grew up – Gornji Beopelj, not far from Jajce – "Catholics and Muslims weren't strangers to each other," she recalled. "We had good communication then."

Given that background, when Sr Iva arrived in Jajce for ministry in 2009, "I felt there was something for me to work on," she said. "I felt interreligious dialogue is the mission (through which) I should live my Christian call and Franciscan charism."

She was particularly inspired by the story of the 1219 encounter of St. Francis of Assisi with the sultan of Egypt in a peacemaking effort during the Crusades.

Something similar animates the ministry of Sr Blanka Jelacic, 55, a Croatian-Slavonian music teacher and member of the Sisters of Mercy of St. Vincent de Paul. Her ministry included a year, 1994-95, during the height of the siege of Sarajevo.

Sr Iva Klaric enjoys a cup of tea with Muslim primary school teacher Almina Sulejmanovic. The women religious lead interfaith dialogue in a region that once was riven with fighting

partly because of her visibility in raising money for small-scale projects to help those needing assistance, like a Muslim resident whose family needed a washing machine.

The successful fundraiser for that project united Sr Blanka with an important ally – a teacher who works in a Muslim school and is the mother of an 8-year-old daughter. Pejla Mujic Kevric, 35, praises her Catholic sister colleague for her outgoing optimism and enthusiasm, calling Sr Blanka "a member of my family now."

Over the past six years, the two womens' work has focused on youth and women, two groups that are open to a spirit of co-operation between those of different faiths, which in Livno includes not only the Catholic majority but the Muslim minority and an even smaller group of Orthodox Serbs.

While pleased with progress they've made, both women don't want to paint a portrait of a society fully healed from the wars of three decades ago.

"There are still some suspicions," Kevric said of relations between people. "It's not a utopia. There are sometimes tensions though they're often not visible. But we're here to break those tensions."

Residents in Jajce express similar sentiments, saying that not all divisions have healed, and that tensions can be exploited for political purposes by political figures. In that regard, the shadows of war are perhaps not fully behind Bosnians.

Sr Blanka noted that her work with her Muslim friend, particularly in helping the poor in Livno, "fits completely" with her congregation's charism.

"Christ said to take care of your closest like you care of yourself because the hearts are broken, the bodies are injured, the souls are hurt," Sr Blanka said.

"As a Catholic and as a sister, the only thing that is certain (to me) is Christ's love."

Asked if females make better peacemakers than men, both women smiled and Sr Blanka winked at her friend. "Yes," Kevric said, but with both adding that, in their Bosnian experience, women are often better acquainted with the immediate needs of their families and neighbours.

Certainly no one doubts the commitment of Catholic sisters as peacemakers. "Our source, the Bible, and our Franciscan charism should inspire us to be open to difference, to be there for everyone, to be a sister to everyone and to all of God's creatures, as St. Francis teaches us," Sr Iva said. "Never be afraid of the other."

She recalls a shared sense of suffering and solidarity across ethnic and religious lines. "We were sheltered in a basement, Serbs, Muslims and Croats all," Sister Blanka said, recalling the siege. "We shared things."

The dangers were real. "Every day you were under pressure," she said. "It was a miracle when you weren't killed."

She said a kitten saved her life. Out in a public space, she bowed down to the animal, telling it to "go away, go away." As she did that, a sniper's bullet passed over her head.

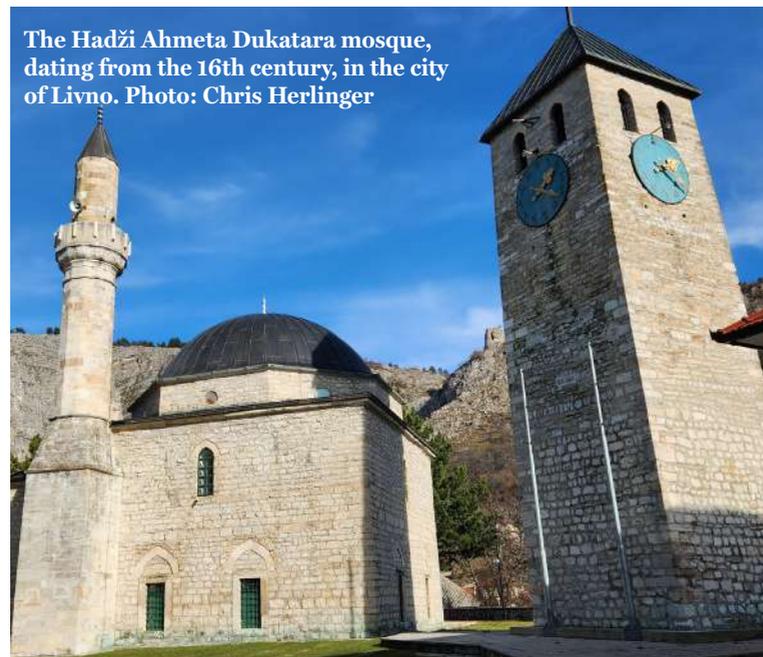
"It was an experience," she recalled. "Every day you were alive in Sarajevo was like a gift you received. It was like winning the lottery – you had another day."

Now Sr Blanka ministers in the city of Livno, home to about 32,000 residents – predominately Croatian with a small Muslim minority. Formerly the provincial superior for her congregation, Sr Blanka has now returned to teaching Church music for Catholic youths and families at a Livno parish. But assisting with interfaith dialogue and co-operation is an animating passion, given her experience in the war and living and working among people of all faiths.

Sr Blanka was asked last year by a priest to serve on an informal city interfaith council of about 27 members, a position she accepted. "It's not strange to me," Sister Blanka said. "It's natural for me. I see God's creation in each person. If someone needs help, I will help them. It doesn't matter what faith tradition a person belongs to."

The council meets regularly to foster dialogue but also conducts joint projects, such as actions to raise awareness about violence against women and children. "It's important to send a message about that," she said, calling it a serious problem in the country.

She was chosen for the role



The Hadzi Ahmeta Dukatar mosque, dating from the 16th century, in the city of Livno. Photo: Chris Herlinger

One year on, California Catholics still mourn ‘Bishop Dave’ as alleged killer awaits trial

Kevin J. Jones

The first anniversary of the shocking killing of Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David G. O’Connell prompted reflections from Catholic leaders about the bishop’s joy and love of Jesus Christ. The anniversary comes as his alleged killer is expected to face trial later this year.

Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles commemorated Bishop O’Connell in opening remarks at the Religious Education Congress held at the Anaheim Convention Center.

“As we begin our Religious Education Congress, we are feeling the loss of our beloved Bishop David O’Connell, who died last year. I still miss him every day. I know many of you miss him too,” the archbishop said. “He was a beautiful man, with a shepherd’s heart. He loved Jesus Christ and he was always a joyful presence.”

“Bishop Dave always had a warm, friendly smile. And I know he is looking down on us this weekend from Heaven, and he is smiling,” Archbishop Gomez said. “I know he is praying for all of us and the work we do to share the love of Jesus in our world today.”

Bishop O’Connell was Irish, originally from Brooklodge, Glanmire in County Cork. He studied for the priesthood at the former All Hallows College in Dublin and was ordained a priest to serve in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 1979.

He became known as ‘the Peacemaker’ for his work to prevent gang violence and to help immigrants. One of his toughest assignments was in 1992 when he



helped make peace in the wake of the Los Angeles riots. Pope Francis named him an auxiliary bishop for the Los Angeles Archdiocese’s San Gabriel Pastoral Region in 2015.

Bishop O’Connell was found shot and killed at home in Hacienda Heights, a Los Angeles suburb, on 18th February last year. Police believe the bishop was asleep in bed when he was shot.

Two days after the shooting, Los Angeles County Sheriff Deputies detained Carlos Medina as the prime suspect. Medina, now 62, was a handyman whose wife was a housekeeper for the 69-year-old bishop.

Los Angeles County District Attorney George Gascon said Medina admitted the killing to investigators. However, he then pleaded not guilty to murder at his arraignment trial.

Pedro Cortes, the deputy public defender representing Medina,

“Bishop Dave had a way of making every person he met feel as though he knew them intimately and understood exactly what they were going through.”

presumption of innocence.”

Medina faces two charges of felony murder and using a firearm while committing a crime. He could face a 35-year prison sentence if convicted.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for 13th March but a trial date has not been set, but is expected to be later this year.

Kathleen Domingo, executive director of the California Catholic Conference, mourned the death of the bishop and praised his life.

“The loss of Bishop Dave O’Connell was a tremendous loss to the Church in California,” Domingo said. “He truly was the best of us.”

“Bishop Dave had a way of making every person he met feel as though he knew them intimately and understood exactly what they were going through. Because of this, he was able to walk into meetings with civic leaders and

elected officials and share the Gospel without scorn,” she added.

“He was friends with every type of person from every background and point of view. More than anything, Bishop Dave loved Jesus and wanted to share the love of Jesus with everyone he met,”

Domingo said. “As we mark one year since his tragic murder, we recognise that we have been made better humans for having known and been loved by Bishop Dave. He is our patron saint in California!”

Bishop O’Connell is the second Catholic bishop in U.S. history known to have been a victim of homicide within the United States or its territories. The first was Archbishop Charles John Seghers, a Belgian missionary known as the “apostle to Alaska,” who was killed in 1886, near Nulato, in the then-US territory of Alaska, by his guide who went insane.

A Mass commemorating the first anniversary of Bishop O’Connell’s death is set for Saturday, 24th February, 10 am local time, at the San Gabriel Mission in San Gabriel, California. The Mass will be livestreamed on the Los Angeles archdiocese YouTube channel.

said: “Our hearts go out to everyone affected by this tragedy,” Cortes said. “Myself as well as Mr. Medina’s defence team look forward to fully investigating all aspects of this case.”

“We are working tirelessly to fully understand the events of 18th February, 2023,” he added. “We remain committed to ensuring that all of Mr Medina’s constitutional rights are upheld, including his



Why do we take Holy Communion?

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

If they asked, could you answer questions such as:

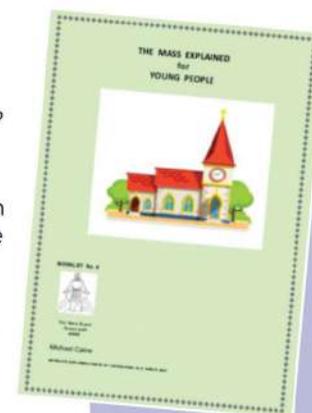
- Why do we bless ourselves?
- Why do we say Amen?
- What’s God’s Grace?
- Why do we go to Confession – and Mass?
- What’s Communion about?

and many, many more...

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

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

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



CATHOLIC POLICE GUILD OF ENGLAND AND WALES Est. 1914

Join police officers and staff living their faith in pursuit of peace, truth & justice

Help build strong relationships between Catholic communities and the Police

Membership open to all those serving within a recognised police force in England & Wales



Affiliates welcome

JOIN NOW



www.CatholicPoliceGuild.co.uk



Harnessing the power of communities to put God's love into action

Jessica Faulkner, head of media and content at Mary's Meals, recently travelled to Zambia, where she experienced the strength of communities who are given hope by the kindness of the charity's supporters.

Community is at the heart of the work of Mary's Meals, the charity named after Mary, Our Lady. Not only do we receive the prayers and generosity of the most incredible community of supporters here in the UK, but our programmes are owned and run by the communities where our meals are served every day.

Through the goodness of God, Mary's Meals provides a daily school meal for more than 2.4 million children in 18 of the world's poorest countries and in thousands of communities like Tafika.

When I visited Tafika Primary School recently, in Zambia's rural Mambwe District, I discovered a community which is determined to improve life for its children. Joyce never had the chance to finish school but she is eager to change that story for her young granddaughter, Anastasia (8), who has sickle cell disease. Anastasia's father never took responsibility for her, and her mother remarried and moved away, so Joyce cares for her granddaughter alone.

Because of her illness, Anastasia has a difficulty walking, so Joyce carries the child on her back to school every day. Joyce explains that it has been difficult to afford the medication that Anastasia needs. She requires a lot of vitamins to strengthen her body. "It is a challenge for me to afford the nutrition that she needs," she says. But since Anastasia started eating Mary's Meals, her health has improved. "Her health has improved a lot. The issues with her arm and leg are less frequent. I can see that she is stronger," she says.

Hopes for the future

Margaret Banda is a volunteer cook here, as well as a parent to two children who attend the school. Despite the grinding poverty in this area of Zambia, Margaret is one of many women who volunteer to prepare, cook and serve the meals at the school each day. She explained to me why the feeding programme matters, saying: "The pressure is removed from parents. The children do not stress the parents over food."

Margaret attended school herself until Grade 5, but at that time there were no school meals. When she was 17, she dropped out of school because she was tempted away by the offer of food from a man. She fell pregnant and her education came to an end. She says: "If there was a feeding programme then, I would have had no reason to go away from school. I would have finished my education."



As for her children, she hopes they will finish their education and she is proud of her eldest, who already has done so. She says: "They will make wise decisions if they finish their education. I want them to have a better life than mine."

God's love in action

Chima Sula Banda is a pillar of his local community. He's a village elder and he heads up the Parent and Teacher Association, which is responsible for the proper running of the school feeding programme.

Once the food is delivered by Mary's Meals, the community must ensure that the programme runs smoothly, that food is stored securely and prepared hygienically. His pride in the programme was clear when he spoke to me. "Parents and the wider community are happy to volunteer on a daily basis. It is a gift for their children," he said.

At Mary's Meals, we constantly see the power of community. This community spirit is evident in Tafika, where volunteer cooks

come to prepare the porridge for the children and where family members will literally go the extra mile to ensure a young girl can learn.

But it is also clear to see here in the UK, where classes of children raise money to support their peers in schools overseas, and where church groups come together to bake, craft or spread the word about Mary's Meals.

Our work simply would not be possible without the spirit of community which crosses continents to help those in need. This is God's love in action – we are compelled by the example given to us to take small steps to make a huge difference. Join the Mary's Meals community and make a difference for people like those in Tafika.

Above, Margaret Banda volunteer cook at Tafika Primary School
Right, Anastasia and Joyce at Tafika Primary School
Photos: Chris Watt for Mary's Meals



A VIEW FROM THE PEWS



MICHAEL CAINE
ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, LYMM, CHESHIRE

Our special prayers are a one-way conversation

Praying is having a special conversation with God. It's special because it's always one way. It's we who do the talking, believing that God will listen and hopefully react as we want.

The one satisfying thing about praying earnestly is that God may or may not do as we ask, but whatever he does, we can always be sure that it's in our best interest.

We can also pray in the same way to a holy person such as Our Lady or a saint, usually asking for them to intercede with God on our behalf or to help us in any way.

When I'm praying, I sometimes find myself stuck for words. It's then that I tend to use some of the wonderful prayers created by Our Lord Jesus Christ, Our Lady, the apostles, saints, and other holy people. The words they select and how they use them are always

better than the ones I would have used. I never tire of them.

As an example, a friend recently gave me the following short prayer, which I'd never seen before, and when I was looking at a large crucifix in church, I started to think about what it all meant to me.

THE PRAYER

Dear Father in Heaven, here is your beloved Son offering himself as a sacrifice for me and for the whole world. I wish to join in that offering, and I ask you to accept him as my sacrifice for my sins and the sins of the whole world. Look on your well-beloved Son And for his sake forgive us all our sins and bring grace and life to me and to all men, especially all those I love and give rest and peace to all the faithful departed.

Through him and with him and in him, I offer myself with all my anxieties, worries, temptations and failings and everything that I am. Amen.

What it all meant to me

Whenever I look at a crucifix, they all seem to be the same, yet I know that they are all slightly different because of the different artists who created them. The one thing that is always the same is the sense of suffering I see.

Being nailed hands and feet to a cross, and having a Roman soldier's spear thrust into one's side must be intensely painful. On top of this, the terrible pain from a crown of thorns pressed on one's head can only be imagined, and as I think of these things, I remember the passion of Jesus the Son of God, and the painful whipping before it all.

This is how the prayer starts, with me telling God that Jesus his Son died this extremely painful way, offering himself as a sacrifice not just for me, but for the whole world. How selfless.

The prayer continues by saying I want to join in that offering by asking God to accept it from me for my sins and those of the world.

I then ask God to look upon his Son and all that pain he's gone through on our behalf, to accept this offering and forgive us our sins, bringing me and everyone His grace and forgiveness and in particular the ones I love, plus giving rest and peace to all who have died – very simple but moving and effective words.

I end it all by saying part of the Doxology used at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass by offering myself with all my faults:

- through him,
- with him and in him

This short prayer says so much in a simple way about using the sacrifice Our Lord Jesus Christ made for us. We are reminded of it during the Mass. Immediately after the consecration, the priest offers up the bread and wine which has become the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus to the Father as a sacrifice, and we in turn offer ourselves to the Father with Jesus and then the Father gives us back the gift of his Son in Holy Communion.

All this makes the above an ideal private prayer to say immediately after the consecration. I keep repeating it, knowing I could never have thought of the words to create such a prayer. Is it one you could use?

There are many prayers like this available to us. Use them, making sure you are never stuck for words

JOURNEY IN FAITH

CHRIS MCDONNELL



Courage rang from his lips

Alexi Navalny is dead. After many years of being the significant voice leading political opposition to Vladimir Putin, the state finally took its revenge. It was reported a few days ago that Navalny collapsed and was confirmed dead during a walk at a remote prison above the Arctic Circle. As of Sunday, his family has not yet even been allowed to see his body.

Although to date there has been no comment from the Kremlin there was a widespread view that the blame for his death lay directly with Putin.

That was the view both inside Russia and abroad. World leaders queued up to say as much. "Make no mistake: Putin is responsible for Navalny's death. Putin is responsible," said the US president, Joe Biden.

Putin sees little relevance in the opinions of western leaders. With the death of Navalny, he has taken out a significant opposition voice within his own country. How that opposition regroups and who becomes a significant voice remains to be seen. His widow has urged Russian citizens to continue her husband's struggle.

In the long term, the West has to face the possibility of a second Donald Trump presidency. He has yet to comment on Navalny's death. But given his recent invitation to Russia to invade those NATO countries who haven't spent enough on their defence contribution, he remains an uncertain oddball. The Crow is



circling over the Hill. It just our unfortunate lot to have the two of them coincident in leadership.

After his killing, many fear for what is to come. We are familiar with a democratic exchange of power after election. It is different in Russia. Opponents are killed before election takes place.

We are entering a very uncertain period in East – West relationships,

The presidential election this November is not just a matter of concern for US voters; the ripple effects will spread far and wide. I wrote these few words a couple of days ago. May he rest in peace.

**Alexi Navalny
June 76 -February 24**
*Alexi Navalny,
he spoke out.*

*They said "no".
So they killed him.*

*They gathered
protesting loss
of his freedom
so he speaks no more.*

*Courage rang
out from his
lips, example
spoke in his actions.*

*Gathered by
microphones
World leaders spoke
in serious, sombre tones,*

*laying the blame
at one man's door
to await response,
as a Crow circles the Hill.*

CONGREGATION OF
OUR LADY OF FIDELITY



*GOD IS CALLING!
ARE YOU LISTENING?*

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

**COME & SEE
ON A SATURDAY**
By arrangement only

Please phone to arrange a date
Mob: 07760297001

Contact details:

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



In the kingdom of Heaven we find the fulfillment of God's will on earth

The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God are two phrases used in the gospels to describe the same thing: the fulfilment of God's will on earth.

The phrase 'Kingdom of God' occurs 68 times in 10 New Testament books. The 'Kingdom of Heaven' occurs 32 times, and only in the gospel of Matthew.

Jesus, however, uses both phrases interchangeably when speaking to the rich young man (Matthew 19: 23), making no distinction between them.

Jesus offers several parables dealing with different aspects of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. He offers images of pearls and hidden treasures to stress the importance of his Kingdom. In the parable of the fisherman's net, the catch of fish is not perfect, so we learn the lesson that His Kingdom on Earth is a mixed bag, and that we all have to work to root out those things in our lives that hinder us from



following His message. The parable of the rich man dressed in "purple garments and fine linen" (Luke 16:19) points to the unimportance of wealth and possessions when it comes to loving God and our neighbour. This parable highlights the crucial importance of living an

authentic life based on the love of God and our fellow man. Jesus talks about the sower of seeds in the ground when he wants to describe the effects of the Word of God in people's lives. He talks about the mustard seed and the yeast when he wants to illustrate

the growth of His Kingdom both in terms of numbers and quality.

These parables are stories, but they are stories about the reign of God in our lives. They are for people of good will who yearn for God's spiritual kingdom in their lives, and how to enter into it. They are for those who suddenly come upon the kingdom, recognise it, and are welcomed into it. They are for those who have abandoned His kingdom through human weakness but, like the prodigal son, are welcomed back into it, and are forgiven unconditionally.

This kingdom, Jesus explains, is within you. It begins with an inner change of attitude by putting on the eight Beatitudes which backtrack to the condition of the human heart.

This kingdom also manifests itself openly in the things we do to help one another. The parable of the final judgement spells out in graphic detail the things we need to

"The parable of the final judgement spells out in graphic detail the things we need to do to be part of His Kingdom..."

do to be part of His Kingdom. We need to do unto others what we would wish them to do unto us, such as feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, taking care of the sick, providing shelter to the homeless, and clothing the naked. These are all visible signs of the Kingdom of Heaven among us.

The ending is what really counts and it's up to each one of us to provide it. We do this when we take the message of each parable to heart and put it into practice. This is how the kingdom of heaven comes down to earth. This is how we fulfil God's will on earth.

Forgiveness is an attitude that embodies Christianity

Perhaps the greatest hallmark of a Christian or anyone else for that matter is the ability to forgive. Letting go of an offence can be hard but holding on to it creates far worse problems.

Bitterness can wreak havoc within the soul. It can tear you up inside like a cancer if you don't know how to get rid of it.

Forgiveness starts with being honest with yourself. That is a good attitude to have and since you're not perfect, why judge others? You have no right to. Only the one without sin, scripture tells us, can cast stones (John 8 : 7).

Perhaps, you've believed a lie about what's bothering you, about what someone did to you, and have magnified it over time, making it bigger than what it is. Best to drop it, get over it, and move on.

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

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



anyone else. Next to our families are our neighbours, and after our neighbours are our fellow workers. Not only are we prone to hurt them, they in turn are prone to hurt us. A hurt coming from someone close destroys confidence and trust. That's why forgiveness is so difficult, that's why it is the greatest of challenges, that's why it is a mark of

strength. Only the strong can forgive for it takes strength to overcome negative feelings that inhibit growth. It takes courage to recognize you need to forgive the sins of others if you want to be free of your own.

There is an interesting expression: "Nursing a grudge." Think of what it means, A grudge is

a negative emotion that is about to die but you will not let it. By nursing a grudge, you become a prisoner to your own hurt : protecting it, holding on to it, and feeding it every bad medicine to keep it alive. Common sense tells us this is only a waste of time and energy. It does you no earthly good to nurse a grudge, so let it go and

"Abraham Lincoln got it right when he said, "I conquered my enemies by making them my friends."

set yourself free.

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

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

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

SUNDAY WORSHIP

ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS



God gave Abraham the ultimate test - one that the Lord himself would also take

25th February – Lent, 2nd Sunday, Year B
 Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18
 The “Binding of Isaac” shows Abraham’s complete obedience to God

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.”

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, “By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Responsorial: from Psalm 116

R./: I will walk in the presence of the Lord, in the land of the living

I trusted, even when I said: ‘I am sorely afflicted.’

O precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful. (R./)

Your servant, Lord, your servant am I;

you have loosened my bonds.

A thanksgiving sacrifice I make: I will call on the Lord’s name. (R./)

My vows to the Lord I will fulfil before all his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem (R./)



Romans 8:31-34

The Father’s love for us is shown by letting his Son die for our sake

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Gospel: Mark 9:2-10

The apostles glimpse Christ’s glory, to sustain them through his imminent passion

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were

terrified.

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

What must be cast aside?

“If your eye should cause you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better to enter into life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be thrown into the hell of fire!” (Matthew 18:9).

This condemnation of anything which may prove a moral stumbling-block for us was deliberately extreme to make it stick in people’s minds, and it does. But ‘hell fire’ is not precisely what Matthew wrote, but rather the ‘fiery Gehenna.’ The Hebrew word Gehenna meant the ‘Valley of Hinnom,’ a gorge just south of the Jerusalem temple. It was a place under a curse, for it was there that

the pagan Canaanites used to sacrifice children to their god Moloch, by throwing them into a fire.

Some breakaway Jews followed that savage custom until the idol of Moloch was finally destroyed in the 7th century BC. The horror of the place survived, and it became the refuse dump of Jerusalem, a place of continual smoke from burning rubbish. In the public mind it became synonymous with hell, a visible image of what that place must be.

But there was no place for child-sacrifice in true worship of God, and devout Jews would claim there never was. They saw the confirmation of this in the actions of Abraham, their father in faith, how God stayed his hand as he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac.

The story of Abraham and Isaac is full of high drama. The demand that Isaac be sacrificed seemed to utterly contradict God’s promise that the boy would pass on Abraham’s line into the distant future. It was a radical trial of faith, and no greater test of obedience could be set. Abraham’s heart was pierced by the boy’s innocent question, “Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Finding it

impossible to tell his son that he was the intended victim, Abraham stammered, “God will provide.” St. John may well have this episode in mind when he wrote, “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son” (3:16).

This story raises several acute questions. Why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son? Why did Abraham intend to obey? Indeed why did God allow his own divine Son to be sacrificed? The connection between Isaac and Jesus is obvious. Isaac prefigured Our Lord in that he was to be sacrificed on a hill, and he carried on his shoulder the wood for the intended sacrifice. But there the likeness ends. Isaac was the least notable of the patriarchs, a bridge of transition between Abraham and Jacob. In contrast, Jesus at the Transfiguration was shown to his three Apostles, as a figure of miraculous glory, truly God’s Son and messenger to the world. Despite their enthusiasm, the Apostles’ faith would be tested later on, as Abraham’s was. The shining revelation of the divine person of Christ was in sharp contrast to watching him in Gethsemane sweating blood before his Passion. The God who spared the son of Abraham and showered him with blessings, did not spare his own Son, but left him in the hands of his enemies for our redemption.

Unlike Isaac, Jesus was aware of what lay ahead. “The Son of Man must suffer,” he had said. Shortly before the Transfiguration, when he first told the disciples what he was to suffer, Peter prayed that God would not allow such a thing to happen. The Lord’s response was instant and severe, “Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as humans do” (Mk 8:33).

In dealing with God we must have faith and trust. On the cellar wall of a bombed-out house in Cologne an unknown fugitive, obviously Jewish, left a testimony of trust that only came to light when the rubble was being cleared away after World War II.

It read: “I believe in the sun even when it is not shining. I believe in love even when I do not feel it. I believe in God even when he is silent.” That is the faith of Abraham, and is the kind of faith we should seek as well.

Published by kind permission of the Association of Catholic Priests. See www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie

Lent is a chance to say thanks to God, so stick to your penance throughout

Q. My mother was very religious and she always told us that during Lent, whatever you gave up, eg ice cream, sweets, alcohol etc you could have on Sundays. Is that true? Do Sundays count as part of Lent?

A. I'll answer your second question first, because that's the easier one: 'Do Sundays count as part of Lent?' The clear answer is "Yes." In the liturgical books of the Church, the season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends just before the Mass of the Lord's Supper on the evening of Holy Thursday.

Now, for the more complicated part: If you're fasting on sweets for Lent, may you eat it on Sundays? The answer is: It's your own call. Each of us is required in a general way to do penance, but the particular manner is a personal choice. There's no law involved or question of sinfulness – you're just doing something nice for God, in return for the sacrifice Jesus made for us.

Now it's true that the Church has always viewed Sunday as a day of celebration in remembrance of the Resurrection, a kind of "little Easter," and has never required fasting on Sundays, so I suppose there's some warrant, when you've adopted a Lenten penance, for 'taking Sundays off'.

But I think it's probably better to continue the practice throughout the whole Lenten season, Sundays included. If I gave up sweets for Lent but ate it on each of the six Sundays, that doesn't seem like much of a sacrifice.

This reminds me of a school Mass on Ash Wednesday. When I asked the children what they were giving up for Lent, one little boy raised his hand and said: "Hitting my sister." I hope that he didn't take Sundays off!

Q. What do persons who don't normally eat meat do about the Church's rules on abstinence, such as on the Fridays during Lent? Nowadays, many Catholics are mainly fish eaters anyway, or they are vegans or vegetarians. What can they do to participate in the discipline of the Church?

A. Your question prompts a question in my own mind: What's the difference between a vegan and a vegetarian?

On the off chance that any of our readers – like myself – might not have known this, here it is: Vegans eat no animal products at all, while vegetarians don't eat animals but



may eat products that come from them such as dairy and eggs.

And yes, there are many of each, so your question does have relevance, and the answer is simple: Pick your own penance.

Vegans and vegetarians should choose their own sacrifice on the Fridays of Lent. How about refraining from your favourite meatless meal? And it doesn't even have to be food-related. Since Fridays are set aside for grateful remembrance of the sacrifice of Jesus, how about taking an extra five minutes of prayer on Lenten Fridays to thank Jesus for dying on the cross?

Q. I have attended a Catholic church with my husband for 15 years. I am not a Catholic, but I am Christian. We have raised our children as Catholic, and we all attend Mass each week. When I go up in the Communion line with my family, I cross my arms and receive a blessing. Now I have been asked to be a cantor at Mass. Am I allowed to?

"There's some warrant, with Lent, for 'taking Sundays off.' But I think it's better to continue the practice throughout the whole Lenten season, Sundays included. If I gave up sweets for Lent but ate it on each of the six Sundays, that doesn't seem like much of a sacrifice..."

A. I wish that every Catholic were as helpful to the church as you have been. I believe that you can be a cantor, and in our own parish I would welcome you as one.

The technical answer to your question involves the sort of pedantic parsing for which I have little patience. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, known as the GIRM, which is the most authoritative 'guidebook' on the liturgy, says in No. 107 that 'liturgical functions that are not proper to the priest or deacon' may be entrusted to 'suitable laypersons chosen by the pastor.'

So what are 'laypersons'? Are they necessarily Catholics or simply any person who is not a member of the ordained clergy? I would opt for the latter.

Some might take the opposite view, based on a document released in 1993 by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (*Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*). It says in No. 133 that 'the reading of Scripture during a

eucharistic celebration in the Catholic Church is to be done by members of that church' or, by way of exception and with the permission of a bishop, by a member of another church.

Since the cantor leads the psalm response, (which is taken from Scripture), they might argue, he or she must be a Catholic. But I would contend that the GIRM, issued in 2011, supersedes that 1993 document and is more authoritative; had the GIRM wanted to limit cantoring to Catholics, it easily could have said so plainly, and it did not.

The role of the cantor, according to the GIRM, is 'to direct and support the people's singing' (No. 104). If you can do that well, in my view you deserve to be a cantor.

Q. Catholics are blessed to have the sacrament of reconciliation. But what about other faiths? How do non-Catholics have their sins forgiven?

A. The Catholic Church has a long history of the confession of sins. In the earliest centuries, confession was actually done in public, the thinking being that, when we sin, we damage not only our own friendship with God but our relationships within the community of faith; but around the sixth century Irish monks began hearing confessions one on one,

A woman goes to confession in a makeshift confessional. 'Around the sixth century Irish monks began hearing confessions one on one, and that practice spread to the church universal.'

Photo: Lola Gomez

and that practice spread to the Church universal.

Although most Catholics may not know this, there are types of individual confession in other religious groups as well. Eastern Orthodox priests, for example, hear confessions not in a confessional but in the main part of the church, before a Gospel book and an icon of Jesus Christ. This serves as a reminder to the penitent that the confession is really made not to another human being but to God himself.

Lutherans have a form of confession known as 'Holy Absolution,' that is done privately to a cleric upon request. After the penitent has confessed his or her sins, the minister declares: "In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

In the Anglican tradition, confession and absolution is usually done by an entire congregation as part of a eucharistic service, but certain Anglicans, particularly Anglo-Catholics, do practice private auricular confession.

The Catholic Church teaches that lesser sins can be forgiven by prayer and acts of charity, but it requires individual confession at least annually for grave (mortal) sins and encourages penitents to confess lesser (venial) sins also, as a way to grow in holiness.

It's noteworthy to mention that, during the pandemic, in March 2020, the Apostolic Penitentiary (the Vatican tribunal that deals with matters of conscience) urged Catholic priests to remind the faithful that, when they find themselves with "the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution," they can make an act of contrition directly to God in prayer.

If they are sincere and promise to go to confession as soon as possible, said the Vatican tribunal, they "obtain the forgiveness of sins, even mortal sins."

Unfortunately, this column cannot accept questions from readers

PRAYER AND EVANGELISATION

New video series takes the faith to our youth

Called To More's new series is hoping to form Catholics and build joyful Christian communities, as managing director Katie Ascough told Andy Drozdzia.



A Catholic media company is hoping to inspire Catholics to be better evangelists through its latest course.

Launched three years ago, Called to More is a popular Catholic media apostolate coming out of Ireland and seeking to change minds and hearts in the UK and beyond. This faith-inspired initiative has released a new free resource, 'Living Faith', which managing director Katie Ascough hopes will help build active, friendly and welcoming Christian communities.

A key part of 'Living Faith' is community, as Katie told the *Universe*. "It can be so lonely to do this on your own. Do people at Mass know the names of people who attend? We recommend meeting for lunch or coffee after Mass. Start small but go on from there."

Katie, who has a background in journalism, explained how Called To More uses high-quality video to

reach young people and to carry out its goals. "Videos are definitely our main form of content. Most of our engagement is online. We have three pillars to channel our content through – to help people know their faith better, to go deeper with God and to be equipped and confident in sharing faith," she said.

"Our main goal is to form Catholics to go into the world and be more effective as evangelists. We have also seen lots of people coming to faith through our content. It's exciting to see people on those journeys. The primary goal is to form Catholics."

High quality content

Inspired by videos produced by such groups as Ascension Presents and Bishop Robert Barron's Word On Fire apostolate, Katie believed that there was a definite lack of content in Europe and wanted to redress the balance – especially for young people. Working alongside



Fr Columba Jordan

Fr Columba Jordan of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, the group set out to form young Catholics effectively.

"Because our target audience is younger making content high quality is so important," she said.

"Young people expect a certain standard of content. If we are presenting the most important thing, our Catholic faith, then surely we should also be producing a high standard. We wanted to show that the faith is alive on this side of the pond."

Katie described Fr Columba, who has presented over 150 episodes of 'Little By Little', as 'a real inspiration.' "Fr Columba has been a real inspiration to my faith—a good witness to the faith, especially for young people.

"It has been such a joy to work with him over 155 episodes of 'little by little'."

She is also complimentary about

the bishops of Ireland who have supported Called To More.

"Most of the bishops in Ireland have been very encouraging. A good number have helped to fund our projects – they supported us when it was just a blueprint. The Living Faith series was inspired by conversation with our donor priest and bishops across Ireland who were saying: 'We need something more for our young people.' Many have supported us financially and spiritually."

With the launch of new series *Living Faith*, Called To More is contacting bishops and university chaplains and others in youth ministry and the response has been "really positive."

"This is exciting for us – the first time we have produced a formal formation programme," Katie said.

"Now we have a resource for groups. It's a five-week series ideally run in a university

chaplainship or youth group, even a group of friends – it is designed for a youth audience but any age group can run it. It focuses on five key aspects of the faith – starts with prayer, then Mass and confession, formation, Catholic community and personal apostolate.

"Each week we keep core content to an hour – a video is broken up into two parts and a discussion between each and then at the end we have a section for 'actions' which we're really excited about. It makes it practical and more hands on.

"We recommend a meal at the beginning and a hangout at the end."

Becoming a disciple of Jesus

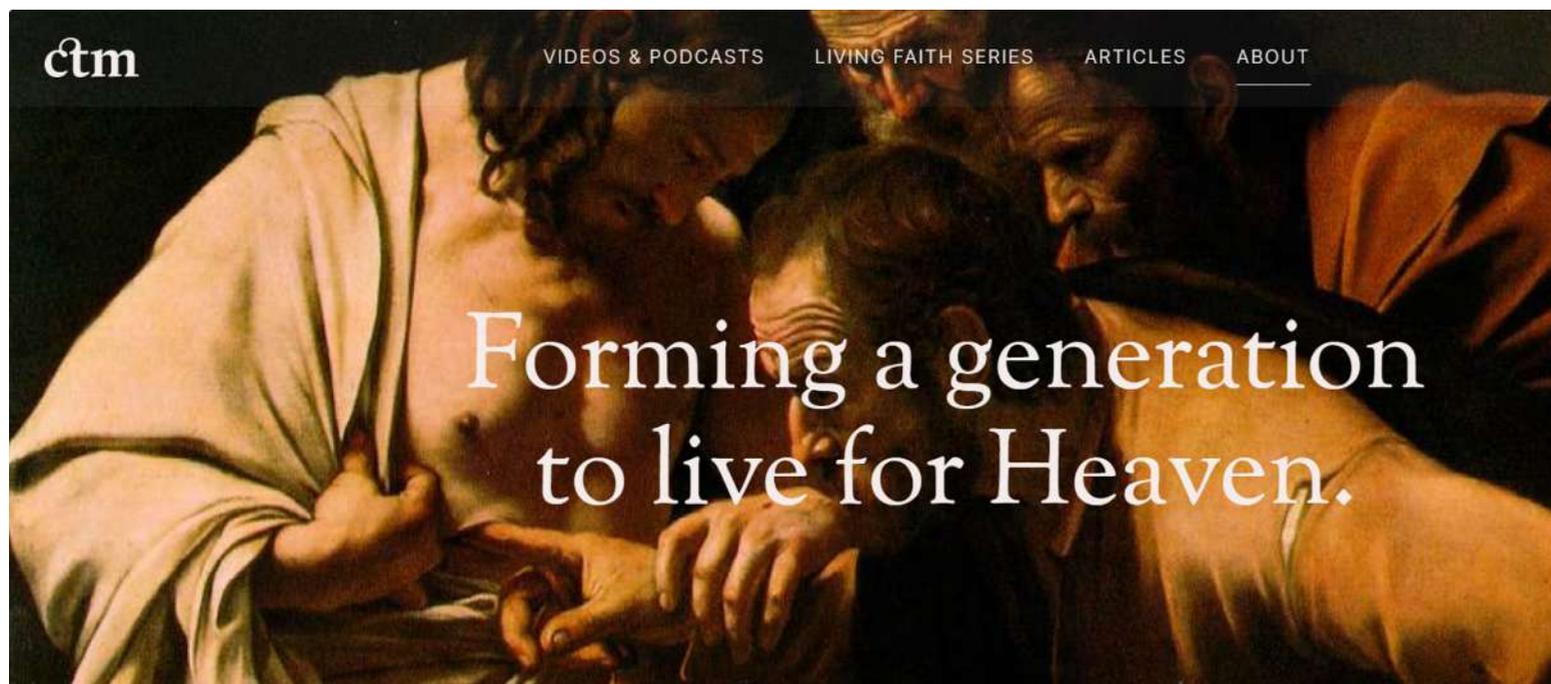
Fr Columba, presenter of *Living Faith*, spoke of the purpose of the course. "This five-week series is about helping young people to move from the crowds to truly being a disciple of Jesus," he said.

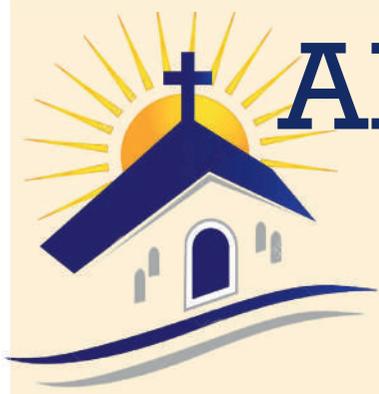
The *Living Faith* videos are accompanied by guides to help any group run it themselves. The guides include a step-by-step breakdown of how to run the series with a group, recommended questions to ask for the discussions, and some suggested goals for each participant to choose from.

In line with Called To More's vision of keeping its content free, Katie shared her hopes for the series. She said: "We hope this free resource will fill Catholics with a renewed sense of purpose and excitement in living their faith, and encourage them to get out there and share the Gospel."

Watch a trailer for the new series on YouTube.

For further information, visit www.calledtomore.org/living-faith





AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION

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



School bids farewell to much-loved Br John



St Mary's High School in Astley has said a fond farewell to Brother John Dawson at a celebration Mass after over 30 years of service to the school, working as school chaplain and assistant chaplain.

Monsignor Des Seddon celebrated the Mass, assisted by clergy from

the school's local parishes, and Brother John's community, the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram.

Mass was attended by staff at the school and many guests who had worked alongside Br John over the years, all of whom were eager to ensure that he knew how valued he

is by all in the school community.

Br John has been an example of gentle and faithful service at St Mary's and is known for his slogan: 'Smile and remember God loves you'. He is well-loved by staff and pupils alike.

Headteacher Denise Brahm

said: "Brother John is a shining example of all that is best in a life of vocation and faith. He is a model of humility, obedience, kindness, love and joy and our young people have been blessed by his presence."

"We will miss Br. John and wish him well for his retirement."

Tell your story to the Universe Catholic Weekly!

Let's see your parish and school news in the Universe Catholic Weekly

Submit your stories to Andy Drozdziak

andy.drozdziak@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

And we love great photos – so send them, too!

Hot chocolate sales warm the heart of SVP

David Fraser of St Mary Magdalens and St Teresa's SVP Conference accompanied Jen Murphy of the Metanoia Project on a visit to All Hallows Catholic Secondary School, Penwortham.

David and another conference

member, Tim McKeogh, recently joined the Metanoia Project, helping the conference reach the most vulnerable in the local community. One of the project's ministries is the Diakonos Service Ministry, a weekly drop-in for

anyone in need in Preston. The pupils forming the St Vincent de Paul Conference at the school have been selling hot chocolate at lunchtimes to raise funds to help the homeless.

They presented Jen with a

cheque for £100, plus bags of clothes, toiletries, and cakes.

Jen explained to the pupils that Metanoia means a total change of heart, a 'spiritual conversion', and that Diakonos means 'service', in this case reaching out to those in need.

The pupils learned how homeless people are invited into the church to receive items they need, but in doing so they receive an experience of Jesus. Jen said: "We can give out items, but we must also give out Jesus".

Throughout the evening there was a chance for prayer, and every session ended with a group prayer.

Jen expressed her thanks to the children and staff. "We praise God for this group from All Hallows for selling hot chocolate for us and wanting to serve Jesus so beautifully," she said. "Your enthusiasm and desire to continue to help those in need is really encouraging. We look forward to hearing about your next venture and visiting you again soon. Thank you."



Speaking frankly, they were all brilliant

The question of ‘Do we live in a civilised society?’ was one of the topics up for debate at the Catenian Public Speaking event, on Sunday, 4th February.

The event, held at the Manchester Conference Centre, involved students from Greater Manchester and the north Cheshire area.

Holly Reeve, representing Holy Cross College, Bury, impressed the adjudicators with her impassioned speech about a civilised society. The second placed contestant was Dara Salami from St. Bede’s College, Manchester, speaking about her biggest concern for the future, while Jeffrey Sefa-Sarpong from Xaverian College in Manchester came third with his speech on emotional wellbeing.

The other finalists were: Liaba Mohammad from Xaverian College, Manchester; Ben Naughton from Thornleigh Salesian College, Bolton; Omotayo Julia Olajolo from Loreto Grammar School, Altrincham; William Clayton from All Hallows College, Macclesfield; Sebastian Freeman from Blessed Thomas Holford College, Altrincham; Lauren Cuthbertson from Loreto Grammar School, Bowdon; Oluwateniola Olaloko from St Ambrose College, Hale Barns; Joshua Cook from St



Overall winner Holly Reeve holds her winning shield, flanked by runners-up Dara Salami and Jeffrey Sefa-Sarpong

Ambrose College, Hale Barns; and Saint Adams from Holy Cross College, Bury. Topics included ‘Are we too late to save the planet?’

‘Success covers a multitude of blunders’ and the issue of whether our current society really could be described as civilised.

The overall standard was excellent, with thanks due to the tutors at the schools and colleges for encouraging their students to

develop their public speaking skills.

All the contestants gave the adjudicators a challenging task and, as was stated several times, all the participants were winners.

The adjudicators for the event were: James Power, the editor of *Catena*, the Catenian Association’s magazine who is an experienced writer and public speaking coach; Mrs Nicki Alderson, an experienced teacher and adjudicator; and Mrs Briege Sivills, also an experienced teacher and speaker.

The contest was honoured to have the Catenian GB National President, Mr Mark Conroy, in attendance to present the prizes to all the contestants and who congratulated both the students, their tutors and their parents. He stated it had been a wonderful afternoon listening to the students articulate their thoughts and presenting them with eloquence and conviction.

Phil Brown from the Catenians said: ‘It is wonderful to see the impressive talent of these young people, who can articulate their ideas in speeches which challenged the audience.’

Thanks were also given to the sponsors of the event, The Emerson Group, and the organising committee.

St Chad’s concert marks 30 years of wonderful music

On 1st February, a very special Thursday Live Organ Recital was hosted at St Chad’s Cathedral, Birmingham.

It marked the 30th anniversary of the Walker organ and featured performances by regular organists David Saint, Paul Carr, Nigel Morris and John Pryer. The hugely enjoyable programme they put on included works by Louis Marchand, J.S. Bach, César Franck and Lionel Rogg.

The organ was installed as part of the Cathedral’s 150th anniversary restoration. It is the work of J. W. Walker & Sons, who

were commissioned to build it at the end of 1990. The case and gallery were designed by David Graebe in late medieval style, with decoration by Gordon Foster.

The instrument has featured on recordings by David Saint, Henry Fairs and Paul Carr and has been broadcast on Radio 3.

It has also been used extensively for teaching and masterclasses, and has been a particular inspiration for young organists at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

The organ is considered to be one of the finest modern instruments in the country.



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

Headteacher

Required for September 2024 Contract: Full time/Permanent
Salary: Group 7 (L24 – upwards of £83,081)
A highly competitive salary for a suitably qualified and experienced applicant

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

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

The successful candidate will:

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

In return, we can offer:

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

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

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

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





Ambassadors are setting the right example

St. Paul's Catholic High School's new team of Year 7 Student Ambassadors have been praised for being positive role models for the school community. The role of the Student Ambassadors at St. Paul's, in Wythenshawe, Greater Manchester, is to make the school a better place, through their actions, their words, their encouragement of others – or, when necessary, cautionary words to others.

They also offer feedback and advice to staff on student issues and concerns. St. Paul's sees the role as a significant post of leadership and responsibility for the younger half of the school.

Year 7 Student Ambassador, Josh, said: "I feel proud to be a Student Ambassador; it is nice to know that the teachers and students have the confidence in me to perform such an important role."



East Anglia's SVP chalks up 90 years' service

Jackie Roberts

The St Vincent de Paul Society is marking the 180th anniversary of its founding in London and 90 years of work in East Anglia.

The SVP was founded in Paris by Blessed Frédéric Ozanam and a group of fellow students at the Sorbonne University in Paris in 1833. One of these students was George Wigley, who wrote articles in *The Tablet* to raise awareness.

In January 1844, several Catholics met at the Sabloniere Hotel in Leicester Square, London and agreed to form the first Conference in England. By the end of 1844, four Conferences had been formed in London and they quickly spread, with eight in total started

by the end of the year.

The first conference in East Anglia was set up in 1913 in Cambridge, at the instigation of Bishop Keating of Northampton. Members were recruited from the university and town, and the first president was Baron Anatole von Hugel.

Many members left to serve in the war, but the conference continued its activities, help soldiers in the camps and hospitals, and assisting Belgian refugees.

There is still an active conference in Cambridge and 18 conferences in East Anglia. They are involved in many different activities and projects. The most ambitious and successful was the purchase, over a

number of years, of three houses in North Norfolk which are used to help the homeless.

Nearly all conferences give out food parcels or vouchers to those in need, while help is also given with heating bills, and other needs. White goods and some furniture items, have been bought.

Visiting is a very important part of the SVP work, and visits are made by all conferences to families who are experiencing hardship, as well as to the elderly and lonely in their own homes, or in care homes and hospitals.

Pictured above are some of the East Anglian SVP members at a recent long service award presentation.

St Gregory's has done it again, says the British Council

St Gregory's Catholic College has again been awarded the British Council's prestigious International School Award in recognition of its repeated success to bring the world into the classroom through its links with schools around the globe.

The International School Award recognises the remarkable efforts of the school to carry out exceptional work in international education, enabling young people to gain the cultural understanding and skills they need for life work in today's world.

Scott McDonald, chief executive of the British Council, said: "The school has earned this prestigious award through its inspirational international work and links with schools abroad.

"The International School Award is a chance for schools to be recognised for their important work in bringing the world into their classrooms.

"This is especially commendable when schools have been deeply affected by the global pandemic. The desire to build on their international work shines through and it is with utmost pride that we celebrate their achievements."

Internationalism is embedded throughout St Gregory's, providing opportunities for students to prepare themselves as global citizens, and to become more aware of social, economic and political

issues that affect people worldwide.

The school has well established educational partnerships across many European countries as well as partner schools further afield in countries such as China, India and Japan. Each year, St Gregory's host many visiting students and teachers from schools around the world, offering insights into the English education system and the cultural richness of Bath.

St Gregory's also participates in the British Council's Mandarin Excellence Programme. This intensive language and cultural programme empower students to gain fluency in Mandarin, a key global language. The programme is a popular language pathway for Year 7 students, who can visit China at the end of Year 9.

Headteacher, Melissa George, said she was honoured to collect the award at a special ceremony at the Houses of Parliament in January. She added: "St Gregory's have now held this prestigious award since 2014; a remarkable achievement.

"We are delighted to have strong relationships and global partnerships with schools around the world and we are always seeking ways to provide our students with opportunities and experiences to look outwards and learn about other languages, people and cultures.



Archdiocesan medal is a fitting reward for Moira's hard work

Moira McCrae has been presented with the Archdiocesan Medal by the Archbishop of Edinburgh and St Andrews, Leo Cushley, in recognition of her outstanding service to the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) and its Fife Furniture Project.

Archbishop Cushley visited Dunfermline where he was joined by Fr Syriac Palakudiyil of St Margaret's Parish, Dunfermline and Oakley, and Haydn Carr, Archdiocesan President of the SSVP, along with Moira's husband Ian, family and friends to celebrate the award.

Moira, of Kingseat, leads the Fife Furniture Project with David Hunter, who also received the Archdiocesan Medal recently. She said she was "surprised and delighted" to receive recognition.

Archbishop Cushley said: "So many of us in the archdiocese are aware of the work of Moira and David in leading the brilliant Fife Furniture Project. They have helped a staggering number of people in need over the years, providing furniture and white goods, items which for years she crammed into her garage in Kingseat ahead of distribution by David and fellow volunteers. Congratulations to them both."



Moira with Archbishop Leo

Canon Brian Gowans, who nominated them, said: "David and Moira have helped so many families and I have called upon them often to help families in need."

"I nominated them in my capacity as Archdiocesan Vicar Episcopal for Caritas, Justice and Peace but also in my role as the Archdiocesan Spiritual Director for the SSVP."

"I know how humbled they are in receiving this award and I'm delighted that my nominations were accepted as they both richly deserve the Archdiocesan Medal."

Haydn Carr said: "Moira has given so much of her life to support the poor and is so richly deserving of this special award for all her works on the SSVP Furniture Project. Alongside her sidekick David, they have developed and grown the project and assisted many thousands of people in need."

Moira said: "We need more young people to rally and come forward to help with the Fife Furniture Project. There's a great camaraderie in working together to help others. It can really move mountains."

Archbishop's new book helps to clear Vatican II mystery

The Second Vatican Council – otherwise known as Vatican II – was a landmark event for the Catholic Church shaping its relationship with the world.

Held from 1962 to 1965, its impact continues to be a hot topic within the Catholic Church and while many have heard of the council, few understand what actually happened and its consequences for the Church.

To help people engage with the legacy of Vatican II and what it means for Catholic faith and life, as well as the Church's relationship with the wider world, Archbishop of Southwark, John Wilson, has written a short introduction covering the key themes.

The book, *Pondering and Praying Vatican II*, has been written for easy access, meaning it is perfect for those who want to understand more about this crucial moment in the Catholic Church's history, but are unsure where to start.

The book offers an introduction to the four key constitutions of Vatican II, providing an overview of their themes helping the readers to grasp the Council's key developments.

Archbishop Wilson said: "Vatican II was a ground-breaking event in our Church's history and in many ways transformed the way it interacts with the wider world."

"But beyond the headlines, few have actually read or considered the documents produced, let alone the important themes of the Council. But the documents and the themes are a rich treasure, and can teach us much about our faith in Christ and the Church's place and mission in our contemporary world."

"I hope this little book will help people engage more fully with Vatican II, assisting readers to ask themselves what the teaching of Vatican II might mean for them and how they might pray in light of it."

Archbishop John Wilson is a passionate communicator of the Catholic faith and was part of the representation from England and Wales which attended the recent Synod on Synodality in Rome, convened by Pope Francis, which once again considered the Catholic Church's place in the modern world. **The book is available to purchase now via <https://www.paulineuk.org>**

New book challenges evil through prayer

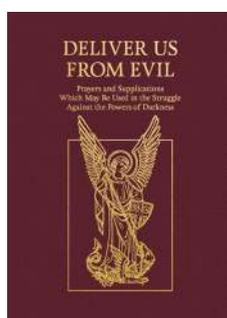
A new booklet has been released to help Catholics in times of fear, distress or temptation.

Deliver Us From Evil, published by The Catholic Truth Society (CTS) and written by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, does not provide a formula of words to be prayed over others. Rather it is a set of useful prayers and supplications, humble requests for the Lord's help, that can be used by Catholics in times of fear, distress or temptation.

Fr Robert Taylerson, a member of the Spirituality Committee for the Bishops' Conference and Spiritual Director at Oscott College, explained that while it is important to acknowledge the forces of evil in the world, Catholics must also maintain a sense of hope.

"We are not centrally a people who are overawed by evil. We are centrally a eucharistic people of thanksgiving," he said. "The evil which we see, which distresses us, prompts us to renew our efforts and our journey of prayer."

Therefore, Fr Taylerson said, evil must be viewed in the light of Christ's death and resurrection so it is not overwhelming.



"The sense of thanksgiving is great and necessary to put the whole thing in context because we see the continued presence of evil in the light of the power of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, which we celebrate as the source and summit of our Christian life in the Masses we celebrate," he said.

The booklet includes prayers of protection, prayers of thanksgiving, and prayers of faith and confidence. Fr Taylerson explained that prayer is something that always leads to an increase in faith.

"Prayer of its essence always renews hope," he said. "The ideal prayer is also to have one's heart in union with that of Christ. And that's something that both unites God's people as the body of Christ and enables the full power of God's spirit to work through us, who are the body of Christ, and to see it all as a great privilege."

The presence of evil in the world can also be understood as the denial of good, he added. "One of the good ways to approach evil is to see it as the corruption of something that is good. That's most easily seen in things like virtue," he said.

The Catholic Independent Schools' Conference (CISC) require for 1 May 2024, or as soon as possible thereafter, a:

General Secretary



Closing date for applications is Thursday 22 February 2024 at 4.00pm

Interviews will be held on Thursday 7 March 2024

The Catholic Independent Schools' Conference (CISC) represents a growing community of Catholic Independent Schools in the UK and beyond, working together to promote and celebrate the global project of Catholic education.

Supporting and representing all of the UK's Independent Schools, and a number of Associate schools in Ireland and further afield, the General Secretary's role is a stimulating and multi-faceted job which has an increasingly high public profile while retaining its traditional member-focused perspective.

The successful candidate will be an accomplished and inspirational leader with a compelling vision for Catholic education and a passion for improving the lives of our future generations. We are seeking an outstanding ambassador for the charity and, as such, the successful candidate will need to be an excellent communicator, relationship builder and facilitator - someone with a strong track record in senior leadership within Catholic education.

Applicants will need to demonstrate a strategic mind-set with a clear understanding of how best to support Catholic independent school heads in their role. The post-holder will be a practising Catholic with the vision, determination and faith to move CISC forward to the next stages of its development.

For informal discussions, please email Antony Hudson, CISC Chair, at AHudson@stgeorgesweybridge.com.

An application pack and further details can be found at www.catholicindependentschools.com.



www.catholicindependentschools.com

CISC is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and applicants must be willing to undergo screening appropriate to the post, including checks with past employers and the Disclosure and Barring Service.



The Universe Catholic Weekly's guide to the more leisurely side of life

LIFE IN LATER YEARS

Living in retirement: could an exclusive village be your cup of tea?

Things to consider if you are looking to move into a retirement village

The idea of independent living in an upscale development with lots of fun facilities, people of a similar age to socialise with, and access to support if you need it, has strong appeal for many people as they retire.

However, before you opt for retirement village living, it's vital to weigh up the pros and cons.

What is a retirement village?

A retirement village is a housing development with a difference – it's built specifically for older buyers, generally all aged 55 and over and often comes with a range of luxury facilities for residents such as swimming pools, hair salons, gyms, libraries and restaurants.

Plus, there's on-site care support provided – think sheltered accommodation meets country club.

Although retirement villages are a relatively new concept in the UK, the industry is growing rapidly as more and more well-heeled retirees are choosing to enjoy their golden years living independently in bespoke, stylish surroundings.

Who might decide to live in a retirement village?

If you're still hale and hearty and you've got the cash – bear in mind that this style of living doesn't come cheap – and want to enjoy a luxury lifestyle in later life, with the reassurance that support is available as your care needs grow, then a retirement village may be just the ticket.

The good news is that you can say goodbye to things such as house maintenance or keeping the garden in order – that's all taken care of – and instead focus on meeting new people in your age group for lunch, a swim, a Zumba class or a wine-tasting evening (Maybe you might also consider investing in wine?).

Adding to the appeal, older buyers tend to feel safer living in a retirement complex than they would living alone.

There's no doubt that retirement villages have a lot of advantages – but they come at a cost. Make sure you (and your solicitor) read all the small print thoroughly and get answers to some key questions before you sign up.

The pros and cons of retirement villages

Retirement villages are designed for older people to enable them to be independent for as long as they're able to. However, be aware that although 24-hour onsite support is available,



care packages aren't included and you'll have to pay extra if you need them.

And, while having luxury facilities on your doorstep is a treat for many, some people may find it hard to adjust to living in a small apartment – and bristle at the whole concept of cheek by jowl community living.

Others may not relish the thought of being surrounded solely by other silver foxes, preferring to have a more diverse mix of friends and acquaintances.

What's more, if you buy a property in a retirement village, it's likely to be leasehold, with all the possible associated complications and, no matter what the glossy brochure says, it's important to do the same due diligence as you would for any other home purchase, for example, asking your solicitor to do local searches.

You don't want to move in and find the countryside view that clinched the deal is about to become phase two of the development.

If your top priority for moving to a retirement village is a hassle-free home that you don't mind paying a premium for, then a retirement village may be the perfect solution but always bear in mind that if you are living in a retirement



village with lots of fancy facilities, these are paid for by residents in the form of service charges, which can swiftly stack up and eat into your retirement income.

What's more, these charges may still be payable by your family after you die until the property is sold.

What are the typical costs of a retirement village?

Prices vary depending on size, location and facilities. However, because of the luxury lifestyle they offer, they're usually sold at a premium and will cost you more than a standard property of a comparable size.



Retirement village properties are typically sold as leaseholds. This means you only own the building, not the land it's on, for a set number of years. According to Age UK, most leasehold retirement properties now come with 999-year leases, which removes some of the worry about having to arrange costly lease extensions. However, you'll have to pay ground rent and management fees to cover the upkeep of and utility bills for communal areas, the services of a house manager or caretaker, cleaning costs, building maintenance and repairs.

How do I choose the right retirement village?

When weighing up potential places, think about what you really need from a retirement home and the things that are most important to you. Talk to your relatives about whether they think it is an environment in which you'll thrive in your later years.

When you've narrowed down your options, it may help to write out a list of questions to ask when you visit so you don't get swayed by slick sales patter.

What are the alternatives to a retirement village?

You can stay in your current home and introduce adaptations as and when you need them, such as stair lifts, handrails and walk-in baths. Or you could downsize into a more manageable property and use the extra cash to hire a gardener, cleaner and handy person to help with the upkeep.

If you need assistance with personal care, social services will provide you with a care package, or advise you about moving into sheltered housing – typically a group of self-contained flats or bungalows that you can buy or rent, with a warden onsite. If you require long-term care, you could move into a residential care home where all your care needs will be met by trained care assistants.

It's a very good idea to talk to your financial adviser well in advance of making any decisions like these, so you can explore the costs and benefits with the help of an independent expert. Your IFA can also help you in many other areas of retirement planning.



In next week's Universe Health pages...

read how salt substitutes can be lifesaving when it comes to controlling your blood pressure....

FOOD

Tasty and healthy: Why lean beef can be the secret to a happy heart

When you think about eating a heart-healthy diet, do you picture beef? Beef may not be a food that immediately comes to mind when you think heart health. However, lean beef is a nutrient-rich and flavourful food that supports a heart-healthy diet and lifestyle.

Numerous research studies have shown that incorporating lean beef into a heart-healthy diet pattern can help maintain healthy cholesterol and blood pressure levels.

In fact, research from Penn State University in the USA found that people who participated in the Beef in an Optimal Lean Diet (BOLD) Study – who ate 4 to 5 ounces of lean beef each day as a part of a heart-healthy diet including vegetables, fruits, whole grains and low and non-fat dairy – maintained healthy blood cholesterol levels.

People are more likely to maintain a healthy diet if it is satisfying and enjoyable, says Shalene H. McNeill, Ph.D., RDN, executive director of Nutrition Science, Health and Wellness at National Cattlemen's Beef Association. "The good news is you don't have to give up your favourite foods like beef. Keeping healthy is, as all know, all about balance."

McNeill has offered her top three tips and recipes for incorporating beef into your diet so you can support your heart health—and your taste buds, too.



1. Choose lean cuts

When shopping for beef, opt for the leanest cuts available. A good rule of thumb is to look for "round" or "loin," like sirloin, tenderloin or eye round roast. These cuts typically have a lower fat content, making them heart-friendlier

options that are equally tasty.

2. Employ heart-healthy cooking methods

The way we prepare our meals can significantly impact its nutritional value. Before cooking beef, trim any visible fat which also

"The good news is you don't have to give up your favourite foods like beef. Keeping healthy is, as all know, all about balance."

helps cut calories. Cooking techniques such as broiling, roasting or grilling are considered lower fat cooking methods because they don't require added fat for flavour.

3. Pair beef with fibre-rich sides

What you eat with beef is just as important as how you choose and prepare. Pair your main beef dish with other healthy foods like fibre-rich vegetables, fruits and whole grains for a well-rounded, tasty meal.

For example, toss a salad of spinach or your favourite crunchy greens or roasted colourful vegetables as a side for your sirloin steak. Or, slow roast an eye of round with peppers and carrots.

Need inspiration? Check out the beef recipe below.

SPICY KOREAN BEEF CUCUMBER APPETISERS

Enjoy the spicy taste of Korean red chili sauce, savoury herbed cream cheese and a delicious strip steak. Top with cucumber slices for a refreshing taste and satisfying crunch. Slices of cucumber are topped with beef strip steak, herbed cream cheese and a spicy Asian sauce (pictured right).

INGREDIENTS:

2 beef Strip Steaks Boneless, 1 inch thick
1/2 cup reduced-fat cream cheese, softened
1/4 cup sliced green onions
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves
1 teaspoon reduced-sodium soy sauce
1 seedless cucumber, sliced 1/8 inch thick (18 to 24 slices)
1/4 cup Korean red chili sauce (Gochujang)
1/4 cup unseasoned rice vinegar
1 tablespoon honey
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
Micro greens, chopped kimchi, chopped roasted peanuts, toasted sesame seeds, shredded carrots, chopped cilantro, sliced shallots.

COOKING

- Combine cream cheese, green onion, cilantro and soy sauce in small bowl. Cover and refrigerate.
- Combine gochujang, vinegar, honey and garlic powder in medium bowl; set aside.
- Place steak on grill. Cook over medium heat on preheated grill, for 11 to 15 minutes, turning occasionally, until done to your satisfaction. Remove steaks; keep warm.
- To assemble, top each cucumber slice with 1 teaspoon cream cheese mixture. Dice steak into bite-size pieces; toss in gochujang mixture. Top cream cheese mixture with steak.
- Garnish with micro greens, kimchi, peanuts, sesame seeds, cilantro and scallions, if desired.



COOKING

- Preheat oven to 425°F. Place Italian dressing, tomatoes and water in blender or food processor container. Cover; process until smooth. Divide mixture evenly into thirds; reserve 2/3 tomato mixture.
- Combine potatoes and peppers and 1/3 tomato mixture in large bowl; toss to coat. Place on rimmed baking sheet lined with parchment. Set aside.
- Spread 1/3 tomato mixture evenly onto all surfaces of beef roast. Place roast on vegetables. Do not add water or cover. Roast in 425°F oven 30 to 40 minutes for medium rare; 40 – 50 minutes for medium doneness.
- Remove roast when instant-read thermometer registers 135° for medium rare; 150° for medium. Transfer roast to carving board; tent loosely with aluminium foil. Let stand 20 – 25 minutes. (Temperature will continue to rise about 10°F to reach 145°F for medium rare; 160°F for medium)
- Meanwhile, increase oven temperature to 475°F. Stir vegetables and return to oven for 15 – 20 minutes or until desired doneness.
- Carve roast across the grain into slices. Serve with vegetables. Coat all with remaining sauce. Sprinkle with parmesan. Sprinkle with parsley, if desired.

ROASTED SUN-DRIED TOMATO BEEF TRI-TIP WITH PEPPERS AND SWEET POTATOES

This beef tri-tip roast is incredibly tender and flavourful on its own, but its taste is further enhanced when covered in a sauce of Italian dressing and sun-dried tomatoes. When you smell it roasting on top of a bed of sweet potatoes and red bell peppers, you'll be counting down the minutes until the dish comes out of the oven. This beef tri-tip roast is served with red peppers and sweet potatoes

INGREDIENTS

1 beef Tri-tip Roast (11/2 – 2 pounds)
1/2 cup Italian dressing
1/4 cup sun-dried tomatoes
1/4 cup water
11/2 pounds sweet potatoes, cut into 2" pieces
2 red bell pepper, cut into 2" pieces
2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
1 teaspoon salt
Optional 1 Tablespoon fresh parsley

"This beef tri-tip roast is incredibly tender and flavourful on its own, but its taste is further enhanced when covered in a sauce of Italian dressing and sun-dried tomatoes."



Order your favourite food online

Get Exclusive Discounts!



Contact-free delivery

Foodhub.com

FILMS

Story gets caught in a web of its own making



Celeste O'Connor, Dakota Johnson, Isabela Merced, and Sydney Sweeney star in a scene from *Madame Web*. Photo: Sony

Kurt Jensen

As origin stories for Marvel Cinematic Universe characters go, *Madame Web* (Sony) is notable for being particularly abrasive, sour and gloomy. That's surprising given that this fourth film in the Spider-Man series is meant to be something of a conversion story.

In need of attitude adjustment is misanthropic New York City emergency medical technician Cassandra 'Cassie' Webb (Dakota Johnson). She gets her opportunity for uplift when she becomes a reluctant mentor to three teenage girls: Julia (Sydney Sweeney), Mattie (Celeste O'Connor) and Anya (Isabela Merced).

Under her guidance, Cassie's trio of proteges will eventually become the second and third Spider-Woman and Araña, respectively.

Director S.J. Clarkson, who co-wrote the

screenplay with Matt Sazama, Burk Sharpless and Claire Parker, is at great pains to show Cassie as essentially mature and moral. The script also charts Cassie's efforts to cope with the emotional damage caused by the foster-care childhood she was forced to endure after her mother died in childbirth.

Back in 1973, pregnant mother Constance (Kerry Bishé) was exploring the Peruvian jungle for a spider whose venom was thought to have the potential to heal various neuromuscular diseases. No sooner had she captured one, though, than she was shot and killed by fellow explorer Ezekiel Sims (Tahar Rahim).

Sims' motive was his belief that the toxin Constance was after would give him the power for world domination. Sound familiar? Before

dying at Sims' hands, however, Constance was bitten and the poison altered Cassie's DNA.

Some 30 years later, a near-death experience during one of her rescue missions reveals that Cassie has two superpowers. The first is, of course, the beloved ability to shoot out silken threads. The other is the capacity to see into the future, thereby anticipating danger. But this latter gift is limited to just five minutes.

Cassie's clairvoyance ultimately turns out to be nothing short of annoying for viewers as they bounce back and forth between being able to see what she sees and being abruptly returned to current reality.

After the first three instances of such shuttling, the stunt loses all appeal.

Ezekiel, meanwhile, has resurfaced in the

guise of a dark and very evil Spider-Man. He's being tormented by visions of Cassie's young charges who, he's convinced, will somehow be the cause of his death. Using his access to every security camera on the planet, he hunts them down in the hope of slaying them first.

Before settling into its paces as a conventional thriller filled with car crashes and bad decisions by all involved, the movie takes on an ugly foreboding tone. Every small noise is amplified into a portentous creak or explosion. Yet the explanation of their supposed significance never arrives.

As for Cassie's transition from cynic to nurturing role model, it's too hurried to be convincing. Sadly, it ends up a mess, a tangled spider's web of a mess, to be precise.

TRAVEL

Five top tips for planning the perfect holiday in 2024

Research reveals a fascinating truth: The anticipation of a holiday can boost your happiness, perhaps even as much as the holiday itself. Whether you're seeking serenity on sun-kissed beaches or cultural immersion and adventures in exotic locales, planning a stay full of memories is an integral part of the overall experience.

Here are five tips to guide you in planning a holiday in 2024 that turns your travel dreams into a reality.

1. Define your ideal holiday

Start by envisioning what you want from your vacation and stay experience. Is it lounging on a beach with a cocktail in hand, local cultural experiences such as exploring ancient ruins, or indulging in gourmet dining?

Let your passions guide your destination choice. For a hassle-free, elevated experience, consider all-inclusive resorts that cater to a variety of ages and interests, ensuring that every day of your stay is as relaxing or as adventurous as you desire.

2. Choose the right resort

The secret to an extraordinary holiday lies in where you stay, as it can make or break any trip. Families might seek resorts with kids' clubs and activities that can keep little ones engaged and entertained, while couples might prefer quiet pools and intimate dining.

Hilton All-Inclusive Resorts, for example, offer family-friendly properties and adult-only



retreats with unique experiences that align with your vacation goals, such as cultural immersion programs like mezcal tastings and salsa lessons, to wellness options like meditation classes.

3. Consider timing and duration

The timing of your holiday is another key aspect to consider. Off-peak travel can provide more tranquillity and booking options. Equally important is the length of your stay. Opting for a longer stay allows you to fully embrace a resort's offerings, from leisurely enjoying

The secret to an extraordinary holiday lies in where you stay, as it can make or break any trip. Families might seek resorts with kids' clubs and activities that can keep little ones engaged and entertained, while couples might prefer quiet pools and intimate dining.

extensive amenities and activities to exploring the local culture and surroundings without feeling hurried.

But don't overlook the appeal of a quick getaway to an all-inclusive resort, even in off-peak season. These resorts are adept at helping you get the most out of your hard-earned holiday time, regardless of your length of stay.

4. Seek all-in holiday experiences

Nothing says holiday like a stay that offers everything you desire, and all-inclusive resorts provide just that through a seamless and simplified experience.

Hilton's all-inclusive resorts around the globe combine gorgeous accommodations, gourmet meals, unlimited beverages, and a wide array of activities like water sports and premium entertainment.

If taking in all of these experiences isn't enough, by ensuring you're signed up for Hilton's award-winning guest loyalty program, Hilton Honors, you can earn Points for future stays and experiences while going all-in on your current stay.

5. Leave room for spontaneity

While planning is important, flexibility can add a layer of excitement to your holiday. For example, all-inclusive resorts offer a range of activities and excursions available on demand. You could wake up and decide to join a fitness class by the beach, partake in a cooking workshop, or embark on a last-minute snorkelling adventure. This flexibility can add an element of surprise to your vacation, making your stay even more memorable.

Additionally, all-inclusive resorts often boast an array of dining venues, each offering distinct international and gourmet experiences. This variety allows you to be spontaneous with your dining choices, deciding on a whim whether to indulge in Italian delicacies one night or savour local seafood the next.

There is a whole calendar ahead of you, beckoning for new discoveries and moments that turn into cherished memories. Remember, where you stay is just as important as the destination, and with these tips as your guide, go ahead, mark your calendar, and start planning your all-inclusive all-extraordinary getaway at Hilton.com.

Beware the pins: how Britons became obsessed with their fatal properties

HISTORY

Imogen Knox

Why the innocent household pin became closely linked with demonic possession and self-harm

If someone swallows a pin today, it's likely to be interpreted as an unfortunate accident or perhaps, as depicted in the 2019 film *Swallow*, an example of the eating disorder pica, which involves the consumption of non-food items.

Though pin-swallowing is still sometimes identified in individual medical cases as having suicidal intent, this is often not the automatic conclusion.

But in early modern British society, where pins were ubiquitous, there were widespread fears about them being consumed. Though it seems that pins did little harm, the fear of the damage they might cause resulted in their association with and use by women who attempted suicide – and with demonic possession.

The metaphor of the 'crooked pin in the pudding' is suggestive of this worry that pins might end up in places they shouldn't and be ingested by people.

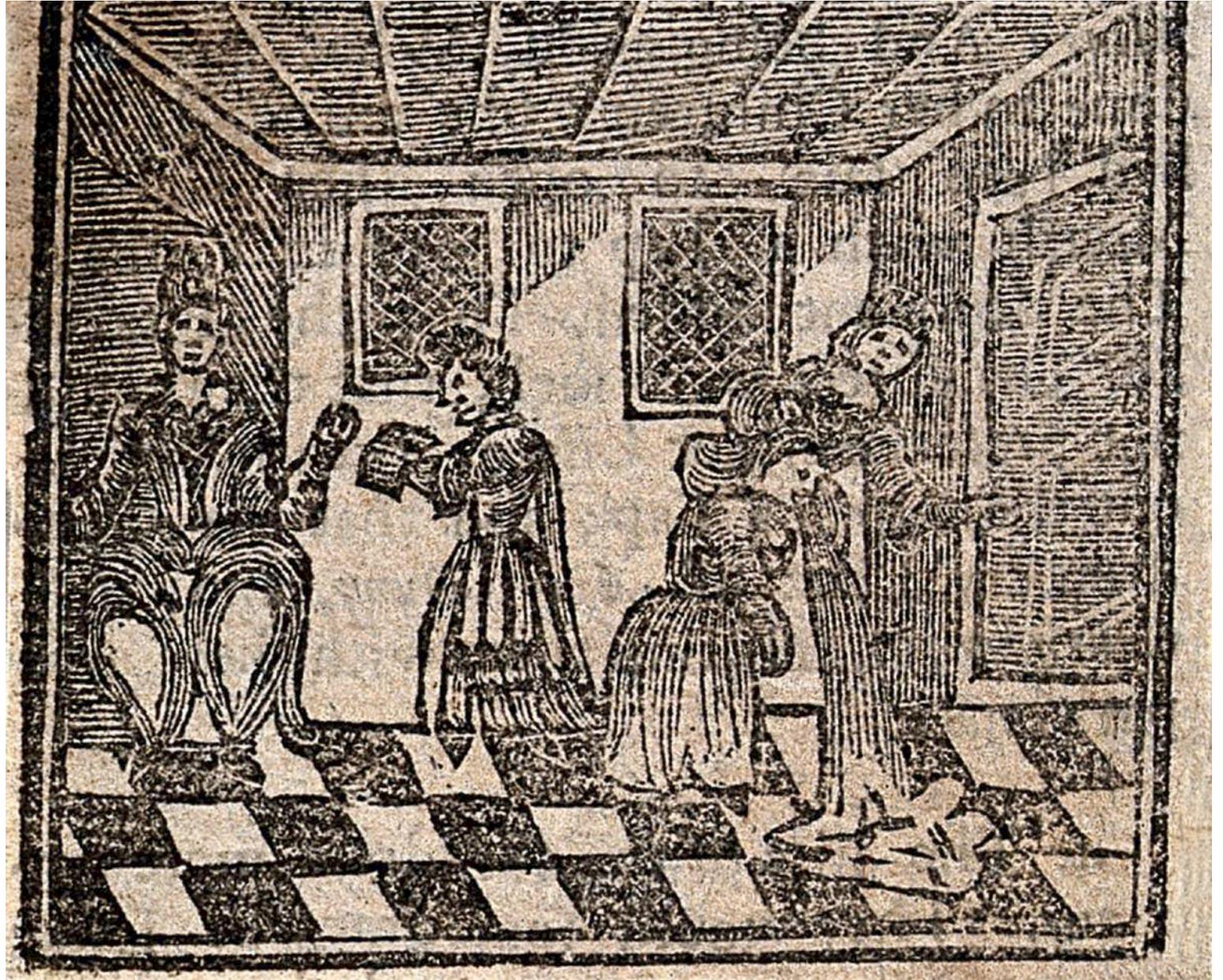
In one incident in 1718, a pin was found in an egg being eaten by one Mr McGill, the minister of Kinross, near Perth, Scotland, which he narrowly avoided consuming.

This fear of swallowing pins was likely influenced by their widespread nature in early modern society. Pins were used to hold together clothing, style hair, organise documents and, of course, for sewing.

The ready availability of pins meant that they were also a potential danger to those who wished to do themselves harm. A young woman named Helen Fairfax was tempted to end her life using a pin at her family home in Yorkshire in 1621.

As Helen explained it, the devil approached her and offered her various means of suicide, including to "take a pin out of her clothes and put it into her mouth". Helen rebuked the devil, and was ultimately able to resist these temptations.

Owing to medical intervention, swallowed pins rarely severely



harm people in the modern day. Similarly, there are no records of 17th-century people who died as a result of swallowing a pin. But this act was believed to be intensely dangerous by them.

Early modern people believed that the devil was constantly looking for ways to tempt them towards sin. Pins crop up regularly in stories of demonic temptation and possession like that of Helen Fairfax, likely because, particularly for women, they were always at hand.

A case reported by physician Joseph Blagrove (1610-1682) speaks to the concerns people had. He described his treatment of a girl in Basingstoke in southern England, who was believed to be demonically possessed. Among her symptoms were repeated attempts to put pins in her mouth.

This behaviour alarmed her parents who feared "she should choke herself with it". The girl tried to swallow the items so often that they had "a box near full" of confiscated pins.

Hysterical women

In the later 18th century, ideas surrounding pin-swallowing began to change. It was increasingly associated with 'hysteria', an historical illness involving anxiety and excess emotion which was commonly associated with women, and the asylum.

By the 19th century, self-injurious behaviours such as swallowing or inserting pins into the body gained an increasingly moral dimension. As the history of medicine academic Sarah Chaney explains, doctors saw these kinds of acts as an indication of self-obsession and of the inability of the individual to contribute towards society.

"Early modern people believed that the devil was constantly looking for ways to tempt them towards sin. Pins crop up regularly in stories of demonic temptation and possession like that of Helen Fairfax, likely because, particularly for women, they were always at hand."

In his 1857 work, *A Collection of Remarkable Cases in Surgery*, the American surgeon Paul F. Eve (1806-1877) detailed a vast number of medical accounts. Among these was an "extraordinary case of pin-swallowing", which, in Eve's words, involved a girl in Vienna with "an aberration of intellect" who "attempted to destroy her life by swallowing a great quantity of pins".

Eve comes across as dismissive of the girl and her experience, an attitude also expressed in his account of another pin-swallowing case, of which he chose to "omit some of the tedious narrative".

Although 17th-century people had been alarmed by pin-

swallowing, their reactions do not suggest the explicit condemnation or shaming of the people that 19th-century medical works, such as Eve's, do.

This is despite the fact that the act of suicide was both a crime and a sin in this period.

In part, 17th-century responses may be influenced by the claims of many pin-swallowers of being demonically possessed, which might serve to exonerate them of blame for their behaviour. Though early modern people were expected to resist the devil's temptation, they were not necessarily held responsible for experiencing it.

It also seems that family members and friends were more concerned about the wellbeing of their loved ones than the potential criminal dimension of their actions.

Imogen Knox is a PhD Candidate in History, University of Warwick

An attitude of gratitude – and giving thanks – does you the world of good

SPORT

Fr Vlad Felzmann

“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others,” stated Marcus Tullius Cicero, (106-43 BC) a Roman statesman, lawyer, scholar, philosopher and writer.

When we are given a wrapped present, we instinctively say: “thank you” or even “many thanks” before opening it. As I have aged, I developed the habit on 31st December to thank God not just for the past year but for the new – as yet by time un-wrapped – year. Is that courtesy? Trust in God? Hope?

When we express gratitude or are thanked, our brain releases dopamine and serotonin, the two crucial neurotransmitters responsible for our emotions that make us feel ‘good’. They enhance our mood immediately, making us feel happy from the inside.

“The joy I get from winning a major championship doesn’t even compare to the feeling I get when a kid writes a letter saying: “Thank you so much. You have changed my life,” wrote Tiger Woods, widely regarded as one of the all-time greatest golfers.

The dictionary defines gratitude as “the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness.” The word originates from the Latin *gratus*, meaning pleasing and thankful.

Kathy A. Feinstein, a sport performance consultant who is based in Florida, writes: “Did you know that practising gratitude can improve athletic performance? Research confirms what the world’s elite sports stars already know – that being kinder to yourself, and to others, and being grateful – is good for your mental health.

“Athletes have talked about how having compassion, gratitude and a sense of perspective enable them to balance the demands of being a full-time athlete with having a family.”

Ben Francia, an internet marketing consultant based in the Philippines, says: “When you start each day with a grateful heart, you are inviting positivity to your day. Gratitude is a simple trait we mustn’t forget to practice. We need to practice it every single day, regardless of the circumstance. We can always find something to be grateful about.

“It can be big moments or small accomplishments. It’s just important to be grateful.”

Gratitude encourages humility.



Tiger Woods: Photo: Mike Segar, Reuters

Appreciating all those who have helped – on and off the pitch, court or pool – encourages the use of “we” rather than just “me”.

Thanking – *eucharistia* [In Greek] – expresses appreciation; itself evidenced in taking care of that gift. I express my gratitude to God for all I still have across my PIES – the Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and Spiritual dimensions of my life – by taking care of them. Hence my 86 pushups on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; and the same number of full-squats on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. (Regular readers will remember the equation: 86 = 84 [my age] + ½ years of breathing + nine months in my mother’s womb, rounded off to the nearest higher integer.)

Grateful athletes recognise people who go unnoticed. They shake the hand of the maintenance worker who helps cut the grassy field that they are about to tear up with their studs, or the caretaker who mops the floor so that their feet won’t slide on the dust.

They offer their athletic trainer a thank you note for taping them up, helping them rehab, or stretching

them out before practice. They give a hug to the die-hard fan that is at every game and cheers for his/her team, regardless of the outcome.

Like the great New Zealand All Blacks who tidy up their dressing room after every game and training session – and believe humility is aligned with greatness – grateful athletes appreciate everyone around them. They appreciate everything they receive – there is no attitude of entitlement.

Grateful athletes appreciate what they have: the opportunity to play a sport they love and all of the benefits that go with that sport – fitness, relationships, life lessons, the joy of winning and learning from losing, as well as the opportunity to challenge and test your abilities.

Being grateful for competitors

Grateful athletes are grateful for competitors – from Latin *com* ‘with, together’ + *petere* ‘to strive’ – mutually helping each other improve. Competitors can bring out the best in you and, without them, you do not have the opportunity to play and test your limits.

In his autobiography, former

Olympic track star Carl Lewis, who won 10 Olympic medals, nine of them gold, admits that he chose to embrace his competitors as essential in his quest for performance excellence, rather than as enemies meant to be beaten down.

Grateful athletes enjoy the pressures that enable them to demonstrate their skills and test their limits. They want to win, but appreciate their process, the competition and the challenge.

“Remember to be grateful for what you have including your opportunity to play your sport. Sport is not something you have to do, but something you get to do!” wrote John Haime, President of New Edge Performance: former professional athlete and current bestselling author of *You are a Contender! Build Emotional Muscle to Perform Better and Achieve More ... in business, sports and life*.

Practising gratitude – saying or writing ‘thank-yous’ – has been shown to increase happiness as well as physical and mental health; shifting away from resentment, jealousy, and other negative

emotions.

Along with a more positive outlook, individuals who regularly practise gratitude often sleep better, express more compassion, report feeling more alive, and have stronger immune systems.

It’s also related to higher levels of optimism, life satisfaction, and well-being, and a greater likelihood of engaging in prosocial behaviour. Gratitude is like a supplement for your brain – reducing the noise and focusing in on what matters.

One study performed at the University of California, Berkeley, asked individuals in states of mental distress to write gratitude-focused letters, which they were not required to send. Results showed that individuals who wrote letters experienced positive mental health beginning four weeks after the study – and those feelings lasted up to 12 weeks after the act of writing.

By monitoring brain activity, researchers were able to note which areas of the brain were active while participants were making their decisions. Those who wrote letters were more likely to be motivated by gratitude than by guilt or obligation.

The differences in brain activity demonstrated that a continued focus on gratitude over time will create physical changes to the prefrontal cortex. You can physically change your brain and train it to be more gratitude-ready.

Giving thanks to God

Beyond the benefits to your outlook, immune system, and sleep schedule, a few studies (and plenty of anecdotes) have documented the positive impact that gratitude can have on an athlete’s performance. If you remember that sport is a metaphor for life you might ask yourself during your night prayers: “How many times did I say ‘thanks’ today – to whom?”

Have a think on what you can do to become a more grateful human being. Perhaps thanking God the Father for the great gift of your life, Jesus Christ for giving that life meaning and the Holy Spirit for God’s love? If, currently you do not, to show gratitude, why not say, even silently, grace before all meals – including breakfast.

I know people who systematically cultivate gratitude, typically by keeping a “gratitude journal” in which they regularly record the things for which they’re grateful. At night, as part of your night prayers, why not think about two things you are grateful for from the day?

Get into the habit of being ever more grateful. It will improve your life.

Your gratitude will give your life wings.

A pictorial round-up of the past seven days



Below, Viking re-enactors during the Jorvik Viking Festival in York. The festival celebrates York's rich Norse heritage with a programme of events, including living history encampments, markets, workshops, talks, tours and dramatic combat performances.



Right, finalists of the Crufts canine hero award, (from left) golden retriever Phoebe with owner Jazz Turner; Australian shepherd, Echo with owners Gemma Harris and Freya; search and rescue dog Vesper, a Belgian malinois with her handler Niamh Darcy; and hearing dog Gordon, with owner Elyana Kuhlemeier and her father Martjn, at a launch event for Crufts 2024 in Green Park, London



LITURGICAL CALENDARS

Ordinary Form

Ordinary Form Liturgical Calendar Sunday Year B, Weekday Cycle II Sunday, February 25: 2nd Sunday of Lent
Gen. 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18; Ps. 116:10, 15-19 r. Ps. 115:9; Rom. 8:31-34; Mk. 9:2-10

Monday, February 26: Dan.9:4-10; Ps.79:8-9,11,13; Lk.6:36-38

Tuesday, February 27: St Gregory of Narek, Abbot, Doctor of the Church Isa.1:10,16-20; Ps.50:8-9,16-17,21,23; Mt.23:1-12

Wednesday, February 28: Jer. 18:18-20; Ps. 31: 5-6,14-16; Mt.20:17-28

Thursday, February 29: Jer.17:5-10; Ps.1:1-4,6; Lk.16:19-31

Friday, March 1: St David, Bishop, Patron of Wales
Phil. 3: 8-14; Ps.1:1-4,6; Mt. 5:13-16

Saturday, March 2: Mic.7:14-15,18-20; Ps.103:1-4,9-12; Lk.15:1-3,11-32



St David

Roman Catholic companion/ carer/driver available

For appointments, shopping, social events, attending Mass etc. Also cooking / meals / preparation. Current DBS and insurance in place.

Reliable, trustworthy and honest; excellent references.

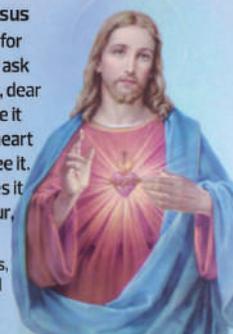
For more details please contact

07867 978558

PRAYERS/THANKSGIVING

Oh, Sacred Heart of Jesus
In the past I have asked for many favours, this time I ask for this special one. Take it, dear Heart of Jesus, and place it within your own broken heart where your Father will see it. Then, in His merciful eyes it will become your favour, not mine. Amen.

Say prayer for three days, promise publication and favour will be granted. Never known to fail



PRAYERS /THANKSGIVING

Grateful thanks to St Jude for favours granted

MCLBEW



Our Lady of Fidelity



The Church needs religious sisters **URGENTLY** to bring Christ to others by a life of prayer and service lived in the community of Ignatian spirituality.

Daily Mass is the centre of community life. By wearing the religious habit we are witnesses of the consecrated way of life.

If you are willing to risk a little love and would like to find out how, contact Sister Bernadette.

Mature vocations considered.

Convent of Our Lady of Fidelity

1 Our Lady's Close, Upper Norwood, London SE19 3FA
Telephone 07760 297001

UNIVERSE CATHOLIC WEEKLY

Classifieds

Linking you to the Catholic community

Booking a Classified advertisement in the Universe Catholic Weekly is as easy as 1, 2, 3 ...

- 1 Choose your style - A, B or C below...
- 2 Compose your wording, obtain photos, etc
- 3 Call us to book your advertisement



CALL Andrea Black on 07918 560608 or email andrea.black@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

We will need your wording, any images, special instructions and dates ad is to run. Payment will be taken over the phone at the time of booking

STYLE A

The best way to remember your loved ones... with personalised memoriam cards, bookmarks and acknowledgements, notelets and other stationery. All styles. Also bespoke funeral Mass cards and Orders of Service, personally designed to reflect your loved one. Contact Kendall Print, on **01234 567890** for free advice on the best style and a free no-obligation quote. Alternatively, call in person for an informal chat at **22 Haig Road, Bolton, Lancs**

- Up to 70 words
- Heading of your choice
- From just £30 per week
- More words can be added, prices on application

STYLE B

Remembering your loved ones...

Personalised memoriam cards, bookmarks and acknowledgements, notelets. All styles. Delivered in just 48 hours **guaranteed!**

Kendall Print, 22 Haig Rd, Bolton
Call us on 01243 624356



- Fully styled classified advert
- Free design service
- Heading of your choice
- Include photos, logos
- From just £45 per week

STYLE C

Remember your loved ones in style...

- Personalised memoriam cards
- Bookmarks
- Acknowledgements and notelets.
- Orders of Service
- Funeral Mass cards



Delivered in just 48 hours guaranteed!

Kendall Print, 22 Haig Rd, Bolton. Call us on 01243 624356

- Two columns wide.
- Free design service
- Heading of your choice
- £80 per week. Discounts for multiple week bookings

Best Value, Biggest Impact

The Martyrdom of Polycarp

Polycarp was a Christian Bishop of Smyrna. According to the Martyrdom of Polycarp, he died a martyr, bound and burned at the stake, then stabbed when the fire failed to consume his body.

Born: 69 AD

Died: 155 AD (age 86 years),

Smyrna, Türkiye

Feast day 23rd February

Interior view of the Church of St Polycarp in Izmir, Turkey, looking towards the High Altar.

