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# UNIVERSE CATHOLIC WEEKLY

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# 1-in-7 Christians face persecution

Over 360 million now persecuted for their faith, but world's media accused of ignoring their plight

New data on persecution around the world has revealed that once again, Nigeria is the deadliest nation in which to be a Christian - but North Korea is the country that is most closed to the faith.

The survey also revealed the scale of the problem: a sickening one-in-seven Christians faced challenges in following their faith, with the report's authors stating that 360 million of the estimated 2.6 billion Christians globally experience "high levels of persecution and discrimination daily."

The data was compiled by Aid to the Church in Need, and its director of communication in the USA, Joop Koopman, said "It is important to ... remember persecuted Christians in many countries around the world. Their suffering gets no coverage at all by major media," said

Africa and Asia are the worst continents for persecution. One-in-five African Christians and one-in-two in Asia say that their faith opens them up to persecution, while the number of countries where Christians suffer high and extreme levels of persecution has almost doubled to 76.

This can include attacks ranging from those on their life and property, imprisonment, state-sanctioned



Christians chant slogans as they hold placards during a protest in Karachi, Pakistan, in August to condemn attacks on churches and houses in Jaranwala. A Muslim crowd vandalised churches and torched homes after two Christians were accused of blasphemy. Photo: Akhtar Soomro, Reuters

torture and sexual violence against women, through to simply facing barriers to following their faith, such as educational and employment discrimination, legal restrictions and denial of access to Bibles and scripture.

The nonprofit NGO International Christian Concern and Open Doors, which provides Bibles for Christians around the world, rank North Korea, Nigeria, India, Iran, China, Pa-

kistan, Eritrea and Algeria as top countries for Christian persecution.

But a host of other nations cause concern, including China and Cuba, Iran, Indonesia, India and Pakistan.

North Korea is labelled as the nation most "closed to Christianity and the outside world," according to Christian Concern. Under the totalitarian regime of Kim Jong Un the country's estimated 200,000 to 400,000 Christians must practice

their faith in secret amid fear of imprisonment or worse.

5,600 Christians were killed as a direct consequence of their faith in 2023 - up 80% from five years ago.

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## AI concerns to lead pope's 2024 World Day of Peace

Andy Drozdziak

Pope Francis has designated Artificial Intelligence and Peace as the theme for the World Day of Peace in 2024, with Pax Christi saying it is 'a highly relevant theme.'

UK hosted the first AI Safety Summit in November 2023 and has subsequently launched the AI Safety Institute, which plans to work with the biggest industry firms to test and evaluate new AI models before they are released to the public.

Prior to the summit, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak warned: "Get this wrong, and AI could make it easier to build chemical or biological weapons."

In the most extreme case, he said, there is a risk that humanity might lose control of AI completely. Experts warned that 'mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war'.

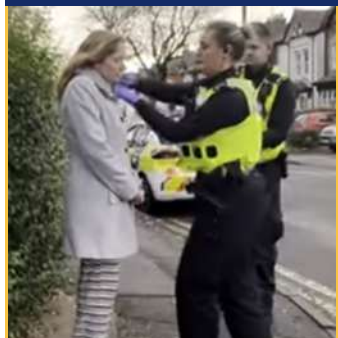
Pope Francis has spoken about the risks in the development of AI technology in his encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Laudato Deum*. He will return to the theme on World Communications Day 2024, when he will consider 'Artificial Intelligence and wisdom of the heart for a fully human communication'.

Each year, Pax Christi provides resources for churches and groups to mark Peace Sunday, which this year falls on Sunday, 14th January. The group has produced a liturgy booklet, an alternative homily, resources specifically aimed at children, and a Just Peace poster.

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, national president of Pax Christi England and Wales, said in a letter to parishes that the pope had chosen "a highly relevant theme" for the World Day of Peace.

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# 1-in-7 Christians face persecution

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But the number of deaths is inflated by the situation in Nigeria, where ongoing fighting between Islamic Fulani herdsmen and Christians has seen over 7,000 Nigerian Christians killed in the last two years alone.

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has presented a new challenge to Christians, the report said, while the deterioration of relations between the Catholic Church and the dictator Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua has seen oppression ratcheted up in recent months: “Ortega ... is determined to continue to oppress the church, effectively silencing it,” said Koopman. “Ortega sees the Church as a threat to the regime, because of its powerful witness and sympathy for the opposition, which has practically disappeared.”

He was also highly critical of the situation in China, where the much vaunted Sino-Vatican deal on governing the Church is failing to offer any protection to Catholics. “It is unclear what good the Sino-Vatican agreement is doing,” said Koopman. “The regime has appointed bishops without any input from Rome,” while worryingly, some imprisoned bishops and clergy “have been disappeared and not been heard from in a long time.”

The tiny Christian community in Pakistan continues to be a country of concern. It suffers “severe discrimination” and multiple accusations under the nation’s blasphemy laws, said Koopman. In August, a rumoured desecration of the Quran by two brothers led to one of the country’s worst outbreaks of persecution in a generation, with thousands of armed Muslims setting fire to at least 19 churches and looted and destroyed hundreds of Christian homes in Jaranwala.

“People are still fearful, and no-



Protesters display signs and carry flags during a protest in Detroit, calling on the US to intervene in the persecution of Christians in the Middle East.

body knows what happens next and when will it happen again. Nothing is safe ... their lives, properties and their churches,” Kiran Afzaal, a Catholic lawyer from Lahore, told UCA News.

The detailed look at Christian persecution was related shortly before the Vatican-based news agency, Fides, revealed that 20 official Church workers were killed in 2023: one bishop, eight priests, two religious brothers, one seminarian, one novice and seven laypeople.

The list includes the Irish-born Auxiliary Bishop David G. O’Connell, who was murdered in his Los Angeles home in February. The man accused of his murder, Carlos Medina, returns to court on 10th January for a further remand hearing.

It also includes Fr Stephen J. Gutsell, 65, who died after being stabbed in the rectory of his parish in Nebraska, USA, last month.

The highest number of Church staffers whose deaths were linked to their Catholic faith was in Africa, where nine died: five priests, two religious brothers, one seminarian and one novice.

Six missionaries were murdered in the Americas: one bishop, three priests and two laywomen. Four lay men and women died violently in Asia, including a Palestinian mother and daughter who were shot by an Israeli army sniper in Gaza on 16th December while sheltering in a church compound.

Only one Catholic official was murdered in Europe: Diego Valencia, 65, a sacristan in southern Spain, who was stabbed to death on 25th January. The accused attacker is a Moroccan national who, before attacking Valencia, attacked and wounded 74-year-old Salesian Father Antonio Rodríguez with a machete as he celebrated Mass in a nearby church.

## AI concerns to lead pope’s 2024 World Day of Peace

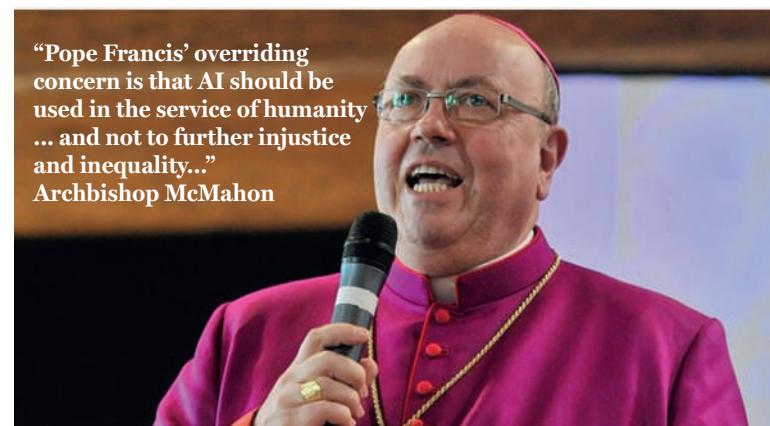
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Archbishop McMahon added: “Governments across the world, including our own, are wrestling with the ethics and consequences of AI. This is a significant and potentially dangerous development in technology.”

“Pope Francis’ overriding concern is that artificial intelligence should be used in the service of humanity and the protection of our common home and not to further injustice and inequality or to fuel division and violent conflict.”

Archbishop McMahon ended his message for Peace Sunday by saying that it is “an important opportuni-

ty for Pax Christi to raise funds” and encouraged parishioners to “take this opportunity to support us this year.”



ty for Pax Christi to raise funds” and encouraged parishioners to “take this opportunity to support us this year.”

To access the resources for World Day of Peace, visit [www.cbcew.org.uk/peace-sunday-2024/](http://www.cbcew.org.uk/peace-sunday-2024/)

# New data shows fall in priests but permanent deacons on up

A new digital resource, aiming to uncover continuity, change, and diversity within Catholicism in the 20th and 21st centuries, has revealed new statistics that say a lot about the current state of the Church.

The Catholic Record Society launched 'Catholicism in Numbers' with the aim of it becoming a hub of statistical information that illuminates the lives of Catholics in England and Wales, Scotland and, where possible, Ireland.

The first output has been produced by Tim Kinnear, a PhD student at St Mary's University, Twickenham, and takes data from Catholic Directory publications in England and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, and from other sources to draw out statistics on a range of topics relating to Catholicism.

The topics are: Baptisms, Catholic population. Conversions, Marriages, Mass attendance, Ordinations, Places of worship, Priests, Religious congregations and Schools and pupils.

Its first tranche of information is illuminating. As many would have guessed, priest ordinations have declined substantially (just 32 in 2019) and there are fewer sisters in religious orders).

However, a positive is found in the growth of the permanent diaconate. There are now far more Permanent Deacons in our parishes, highlighting that the calling to minister to the faithful is still strong – though it is reflected in a different way to in the 1950s and 60s, when many of our current crop of priests were ordained.

The statistics also indicate that the size of the UK's Catholic population remains static, though fewer

are regular Massgoers.

However, the contribution of Catholic schools continues to be far greater than would be expected.

Most data in this project relate to the 20th century, with some for the 21st and a small number of figures for the 19th century.

Tim Kinnear said: "Pastoral statistics track participation in public expressions of religion such as sacraments and document some other ways in which religion engages with society, such as through education. Statistics for Catholicism are particularly useful since much participation in Catholic religion is corporate, expressed through the life of the parish.

"The numbers presented here tentatively reflect some of the Church's growth and change from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to today. They suggest some continuity, change, and diversity within and between nations, indicating some of the wider context in which local church life takes place."

Mr Kinnear said that many of the statistics are taken from Catholic Directories, while others are taken from "existing published datasets, and government and education source publications."

The Catholic Record Society aims to continue to develop the resource, hopeful that other scholars and academics with their own datasets will add to the project.

Catholicism in Numbers is the first of several digital projects the society are supporting in the build up to the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Catholic emancipation in 2029.

**Catholicism in Numbers can be accessed here: [www.crs.org.uk/catholicism-in-numbers](http://www.crs.org.uk/catholicism-in-numbers)**

## Slain Good Samaritan hailed as man loved by the community

A 'Good Samaritan' who was killed while helping an injured woman has been hailed as 'a loved and valued part of our community' by the church to which he belonged.

Father-of-two Chris Marriott, 46, died after he went to the aid of a woman unconscious in the street after a disturbance in the Burngreave area of Sheffield.

City Church Sheffield said it was "deeply saddened by the tragic death of Chris Marriott, one of the members of our church. He has

been a loved and valued part of our community for a long time."

A GoFundMe appeal, launched on Friday to financially support Mr Marriott's family, has smashed its £5,000 target, raising over £40,000. Family members said they were "overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and support being shown for Chris."

Hassan Jhangur, 23, will go on trial later this year after he was charged with the murder of Mr Marriott.

# Archbishop backs pope on blessing same-sex couples

Archbishop of Cardiff Mark O'Toole has backed *Fiducia Supplicans*, the Vatican document for enabling pastors to 'take a sensitive pastoral approach'.

The document has divided opinion. As reported in last week's *Universe*, a group representing about 500 British Catholic priests rejected the document outright, saying that blessings for same-sex couples "are pastorally and practically inadmissible."

However, Archbishop Mark O'Toole has taken a different view and welcomed the document and its conclusion.

"I warmly welcome the desire and intention of the Holy Father to encourage and challenge us to be close to all people irrespective of their personal circumstances," he said. "At the heart of the declaration is a call for those of us who are pastors to take a sensitive pastoral approach in being available and willing to draw close to people whatever their situation."

Archbishop O'Toole stressed that the "traditional doctrine of the Church about marriage" remains unchanged, and that same-sex marriage is impossible in the Church.

He said: "The declaration is clear



about this, highlighting that in order "to avoid any form of confusion or scandal, when the prayer of blessing is requested by a couple in an irregular situation, even though it is expressed outside the rites prescribed by the liturgical books, this blessing should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them."

He confirmed that "The declaration indicates that it is now permissible for ordained ministers to 'join in the prayer of those persons who, although in a union that cannot be compared in any way to a marriage, desire to entrust themselves to the Lord and his mercy, to invoke his help, and to be guided to a greater understanding of his plan of love and of truth.'"

Addressing his archdiocese in Cardiff and Diocese of Menevia, of

which he is leader, he encouraged all to "read and reflect on *Fiducia Supplicans* carefully".

He said: "Indeed, through these blessings that are given not through the ritual forms proper to the liturgy but as an expression of the Church's maternal heart-similar to those that emanate from the core of popular piety – there is no intention to legitimise anything, but rather to open one's life to God, to ask for his help to live better, and also to invoke the Holy Spirit so that the values of the Gospel may be lived with greater faithfulness."

"I pray that this declaration will encourage all of us to show ever more clearly that the Church is a loving mother, who desires to bring the closeness and compassion of God to all His children."

**• Teaching on marriage 'remains unchanged' - see pg 15**

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## In Brief

### MP makes spring election claim

Preparations for a May general election are “the worst kept secret in Parliament”, said Emily Thornberry. The shadow attorney general told Sky News that Jeremy Hunt’s decision to hold the Budget at the beginning of March “seems to confirm” a Spring poll.

However, *The Telegraph* said the senior Tories are urging Rishi Sunak to delay any election until voters have benefited from the tax cuts expected in the Budget and a 2p National Insurance cut.

### Starmer warns against apathy

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has warned “disillusioned stay at home voters” that apathy could keep the Conservatives in power.

In his new year’s message Starmer promised a “year of change” for the British public but says only “if people vote for it”.

His call comes as the latest opinion polls continue to give Labour a substantial lead, but there are fears that Starmer himself remains an aloof character whom the public is still failing to warm to.

### Police failures revealed

More than 50 per cent of police forces are failing to investigate crime properly, according to inspectors. Of the 43 forces in England and Wales, 22 were deemed to be ‘inadequate’ or ‘requiring improvement’ in investigating crime – the two worst performance ratings.

Data from the Home Office showed that just one in 18 offences reported to police led to a suspect being charged in the year to June 2023, compared with one in six a decade ago.

# Bishops’ concern as MSP claims assisted suicide support is rising

**Andy Drozdziak**

The Bishops’ Conference of Scotland has warned that “the slippery slope is real and dangerous” after an MSP shared that there could now be sufficient support for assisted suicide to pass its critical first vote at Holyrood.

Liberal Democrat Liam McArthur, whose Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill is expected to be introduced to the Scottish Parliament in the “early part” of 2024, said: “I think there is now a sense when I speak to colleagues, those who are still undecided do now appear to be looking for reasons to support rather than reasons to oppose, which was very much the feeling last time round.”

The proposals would give mentally competent adults with a terminal diagnosis the right to end their life if requested. However, the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland hit back at Mr McArthur’s proposals, insisting



Liam McArthur

that laws would quickly be expanded, as has been seen in Canada after assisted suicide or euthanasia was legalised in 2016.

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

impossible for any government to draft assisted suicide laws which include legal protection from future expansion of those laws.”

Assisted suicide has been put at the heart of the news agenda after calls for a change in the law from high profile celebrities such as Esther Rantzen and Prue Leith. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has also shared his support for assisted suicide, saying he was open to holding a free vote on the issue in Parliament.

Liam McArthur claimed “overwhelming public support” for his bill, which the bishops called “intolerable and utterly wrong” because it will put pressure on “frail, elderly and disabled Scots.”

The Bishops said: “Apart from the fact that assisted suicide undermines efforts to prevent suicide and sends a message that suicide is sometimes appropriate it sends a clear message to frail, elderly and

disabled Scots about the value that society places on them and puts pressure on them to end their lives for fear of being a financial, emotional or care burden on others. This is intolerable and utterly wrong.”

Mr McArthur argued that terminally-ill Britons travelling to clinics such as Dignitas in Switzerland means governments here “out-source” the issue of assisted suicide, but said this meant those who could not afford to travel could be left with no option but to “take matters into their own hands”.

In response, the bishops said MSPs’ focus should be on the prevention of suicide rather than on helping people to take their own lives.

They said: “MSPs should be preventing suicide, not assisting it by introducing a dangerous law with deadly and irreparable consequences.”

## Plummeting UK birth rate is worry - SPUC

Pro-life group SPUC has backed Pope Francis’ “great concern” over falling birth rates as live births continue to plummet in the UK.

Half of the neonatal cots in a North London hospital are empty as birth rates continue to plummet, says the NHS, as data released in Scotland reveals a big drop in births, while abortion reaches unprecedented levels around the UK.

The NHS North Central London Integrated Care Board is proposing to close at least one maternity unit because of declining birth rates in the London boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington. A consultation has been launched into the proposed closure.

Dr Jo Sauvage, the chief medical officer on the Board, told the BBC that half of the neonatal cots at the



Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead were empty at any given time.

Births in Scotland fell by 7.5 per cent between 1st July and 30th September 2023 when compared with a five-year average for the same period. Deaths outnumbered births in Scotland in 2022.

Earlier this year, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported the lowest number of births in England and Wales since 2002. There were 20,000 fewer births in 2022, a down three per cent on 2021.

At the same time, there was a 17 per cent increase in abortions in the first six months of 2022 in England and Wales. 86 per cent of the 123,219 unborn babies being killed was by chemical abortions, most of which took place at home. In Scotland, abortion rose by 19% in 2022.

Pope Francis, addressing a conference in Italy earlier this year on the country’s falling birth rate, stated that falling birth rates are a sign of “a great concern for tomorrow.”

The pope said: “If few are born it means there is little hope. It has repercussions from an economic and social point of view, but also undermines confidence in the future.”

SPUC’s Michael Robinson, executive director (public affairs and legal services), said: “As abortion continues to rise exponentially, we can expect

to see the birth rate fall even further, which will itself have dire consequences for the UK.

“Feeding off the fears of mothers and the Government’s disastrous DIY at-home abortion scheme, pro-abortion ideologues have diminished the value of life and replaced it with a world where one-in-four pregnancies now end in abortion – and they call this liberation.”

“But abortion comes at a terrible cost, not only in unborn lives, but also in terms of a loss of perspective, about what really matters, and the wrong direction a society takes when it no longer cherishes life.”

“It is important to note that this situation is not normal, and nations, not only the UK, must wake up to the mortal threat that abortion poses to the wellbeing of society.”

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# Pro-lifer tells state to stop telling her what to think

**Andy Drozdziak**

A leading Catholic pro-life volunteer has told the Government that it is not up to them to “determine my beliefs on abortion.”

Birmingham police arrested Catholic campaigner Isabel Vaughan-Spruce on multiple occasions during 2023 for praying silently outside an abortion clinic, before issuing an apology for doing so.

“In the past 12 months, I’ve been arrested, dragged through the courts, acquitted, re-arrested, vindicated, and threatened with a fine... all for the peaceful, silent, and imperceptible thoughts in the privacy of my own mind,” she said.

“But regardless of why I pray or what I pray about, it is not for the government to determine my beliefs on abortion; neither my beliefs that vulnerable women deserve better support, nor to police the faith that I hold in my own mind.”

Isabel previously blasted “grossly Orwellian” buffer zone laws after footage emerged of her being issued with a fine for standing still and praying silently within a buffer zone in Birmingham on 18th October.

The footage, obtained by legal group ADF UK, shows a West Midlands Police officer asking Catholic pro-life volunteer Isabel: “Are you praying for the lives of unborn children?” The officer also asks whether she is a member of a pro-life or pro-choice organisation.

“To fine somebody simply for their thoughts is grossly Orwellian and an insult to the freedoms that Britain is meant to protect,” Isabel said, referring to George Orwell’s

dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which secret police organisation the ‘Thought Police’ seek to discover and punish thoughtcrime.

Isabel believes that there is an agenda against those who protest abortion which would not apply to other popular issues. “If I had been shouting about climate change on the street where I stood, there would have been no arrest,” she said. “Likewise, if this had informed the content of my silent prayer.

“But in the privacy of my own mind, I held a particular view on abortion, and apparently, that is not approved of by the authorities.”

In spite of the difficulties she experienced in 2023, Isabel encouraged pro-life workers and volunteers to persevere.

“While authorities may want my experience to signal to others that you too could face arrest, interrogation, investigation, and potential prosecution if caught exercising your basic freedom of thought, I want to encourage you to be filled with hope,” she said, adding her thanks to Christian legal group ADF UK.

“Because of ADF UK’s support, the world has watched the prosecution of ‘thought crimes’ in the UK,” she said. “This hasn’t just impacted me but has serious consequences for the fundamental freedoms of every person in Britain.

“It is clear that the aim of this process is to be the punishment, acting as a deterrent force. But thanks to ADF UK and the support of many, I know I’m not alone in seeking to protect the freedom to think and pray.”

# Downing St Protest over Israel’s ‘slaughter of the Gaza innocents’

**Andy Drozdziak**

Two Christian protesters were arrested at Downing Street after pouring fake blood and putting bloody handprints on gates.

Virginia Moffat, 58, and Chris Cole, 60, from Dorset said that the Government had “blood on its hands” after refusing to demand Israel end its bombing of Gaza, calling it “a massacre of biblical proportions”.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the war will continue for “many more months” as its operations against Hamas continue. Israeli strikes in central Gaza killed at least 35 people last Sunday.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said that Israel had “every right” to fight back. “Israel has every right to defend itself, to ensure its security, make sure that nothing like that ever happens again to its citizens. We would do exactly the same,” he said.

However, the couple rejected Mr Sunak’s rationale. In a statement distributed at the protest, the married couple said: “Britain’s and Israel’s justification for this slaughter is that Israel is acting in ‘self-defence’; that the deaths of innocents are to



Virginia and Chris daub red paint on the Downing Street gates

be regretted, but Israel must be allowed to act in its own defence. This is nonsense. International lawyers have clearly stated that ‘self-defence’ cannot justify the slaughter of so-many innocent Palestinians.”

The protest took place on 29th December – the day after the Feast of the Holy Innocents, recalling the murder by King Herod’s soldiers of babies in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus and his escape to Egypt.

The couple referenced the feast, adding: “We cannot help being reminded of the Massacre of the Innocents in the Gospels. King Herod, seeking to secure power, ordered

the deaths of all the infants in and around Bethlehem. For many years, this occasion has been chosen by Christians involved in work for peace and justice to draw attention to the suffering and deaths of innocent people as a result of war and injustice.”

The couple also accused the Government of being “complicit with this slaughter” for refusing to back a ceasefire.

“We cannot help but act. By refusing to back a ceasefire, and continuing to supply arms to Israel, our government is complicit with this slaughter,” they said.



Three police officers converge on Isabel during one of her arrests in 2023. Photo courtesy of ADF UK

**UNIVERSE**  
CATHOLIC WEEKLY

## COMMENT

### Make Russia pay for aggression

Latest estimates show that since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, some £60 billion has been committed in aid and military equipment to the defenders. Western leaders have assured Kyiv that it will be supported for however long it takes to push back the aggressor. Yet almost two years into the war, that resolve seems to be weakening as domestic political realities and the Middle East make demands on the West's resources, especially American.

Recently we've seen an effective Republican veto over further help for Ukraine. The White House has just released further US military aid from Pentagon stocks worth some £200 million. But without the fresh approval of Congress, that is the final tranche from the Americans, while aid from Europe is slowing. A £40 billion EU package was blocked by Hungary earlier this month.

This comes at a time when Ukraine is beginning to run out of equipment and Russia rearms ahead of launching an expected counter-offensive in the spring.

There is an obvious alternative source of funds: the \$300 billion of Russian assets frozen when the invasion started. Confiscating these, which include central bank funds, would be a huge step to take and has so far been resisted by democratic leaders.

It also risks playing into Russia's and China's hands, as under international law, such a move needs a vote in the UN Security Council, a judgment by the International Court of Justice, or a post-war settlement. Each of those would require Russia's agreement and Moscow would almost certainly retaliate by confiscating any foreign assets.

President Biden has proposed establishing three working groups to see if a way through can be found because if the West is no longer prepared to bankroll Ukraine's defence, what is the alternative beyond managing its inevitable defeat?

Confiscation is undoubtedly a minefield but Western taxpayers may find it increasingly hard to accept an open-ended call on their cash while so much of the aggressor's money lies dormant.

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# Cameron's legacy over China presents a problem for his boss

POLITICS

**Timothy Oliver**

Almost immediately after being appointed as Foreign Secretary, David Cameron's ties with China generated difficult headlines for Rishi Sunak's government.

Cameron's warmth towards China during his own time as Prime Minister prompted Luke de Pulford, the director of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, to argue that Sunak had scored an own goal in appointing him.

Cameron's time in office has been described as a "golden era" for UK-China relations. But now, in a very different political climate, de Pulford has accused the new Foreign Secretary of "shilling for the UK's biggest security threat". Catherine West, Labour's shadow minister for Asia and the Pacific, has also said Cameron has questions to answer over what role he has played since leaving office in a Chinese infrastructure project in Sri Lanka.

Cameron's position on China during his tenure as prime minister evolved from ambivalence to active embrace. Looking back, 2015-16 in particular was an active period in UK-China relations. A state visit by President Xi Jinping in 2015 not only provided Cameron with a chance to take him to his local pub but gave a clear signal of just how valued China was as a partner for the UK.

The implications of this for the UK now, in an era of considerably cooled relations, will be complex for the government and others to navigate. As Foreign Secretary, Cameron is in a position of considerable formal power when it comes to foreign policy, yet his party takes a very different view on China than it did during his time in office.

Sunak has leant into that position, for example, by removing China's role in the Sizewell C nuclear power station, which is to be constructed in Suffolk.

### The ups and downs of UK-China relations

When the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition came to power in 2010, its opening offer on foreign policy, the strategic defence and security review, and national security strategy, did not spend all that much time dwelling on China. The policies merely noted China's continuing economic rise and argued that the UK should engage



David Cameron with Chinese President Xi Jinping at The Plough Inn at Cadsden in Princes Risborough, near to Cameron's country retreat at Chequers, in 2015

with it to resolve common problems.

China was bundled into a broad, rather vague category of "rising powers" that the UK would aim to engage with more closely. It was important, but not so important as to warrant its own category.

This "bundling in" may also go some way to explain the first seminal moment of Cameron's relationship with China – his 2012 meeting with the Dalai Lama in London.

By hosting the Tibetan leader, Cameron triggered great upset in Beijing, which placed relations with the UK in a "deep freeze" for nearly 18 months. Cameron would ultimately relent, shifting his position on Tibet to more closely align with Beijing's. He publicly rejected the idea of Tibetan independence and acknowledged China's sovereignty.

### Warming up

By November 2013, relations between China and the UK had opened up again and a rapid convergence between the two countries was in evidence. This peaked in the autumn of 2015 when Xi made his state visit to the UK.

At a joint press conference, Cameron declared that China and the UK shared strong economic, diplomatic, and "people-to-people" links. He advocated for deeper co-operation on areas such as health, climate change and extremism and opened formal ties with China on infrastructure spending. He declared that the UK and China "share an interest in a stable and ordered rule" in international affairs.

Within a month, Cameron had published an updated strategic

defence review, which was much more expansive than the 2010 document had been on UK-China relations. It declared that it was the government's "ambition for the UK to be China's leading partner in the West".

This would be achieved through a close economic relationship in particular, but also deeper diplomatic and security ties between the two countries.

### Cooling down

Ultimately, this developing relationship would be derailed by the EU referendum of June 2016, and Cameron's exit from office. Subsequent governments led by Theresa May and Boris Johnson were focused on handling Brexit, but were also seemingly more sceptical of relations with China than Cameron had been.

Several issues, including the question of democracy in Hong Kong, human rights abuses in Xinjiang, and Chinese espionage activity in the UK, have caused Conservative MPs to increasingly embrace a hawkish perspective on China. While Liz Truss was more clearly China-sceptic than Sunak, none of the prime ministers who have followed Cameron in office have been close to his level of dovishness on the topic.

The risks to the UK government, then, are twofold. Cameron's ties with China have the potential to aggravate tensions with backbench MPs who are already restive. His party is currently divided over any number of other issues and primed to fall out over any number of others. The possibility of a dispute over the new Foreign Secretary's position on China adding further inflaming tensions in the

Conservative party are high.

Meanwhile, a noticeable gap in intentions between senior members of the Government risks sending confusing signals to China. This is a problem for slower burning issues such as the debt burden being incurred by countries that have accepted Chinese investment via the 'Belt and Road' initiative.

Cameron's own advocacy for projects in countries like Sri Lanka, now dealing with the legacy of the initiative, may muddle messages. There is also the possibility of confusing messaging if a major crisis erupts – over the upcoming Taiwanese election, for example.

Beijing may now expect a softer approach, and Cameron may offer a less assertive response to a crisis where it was not intended. Miscalculation is always a risk in international crises and if Beijing perceives its western backers as internally divided, it may seek to capitalise for geopolitical gain.

Together, then, the legacy of Cameron's relationship with China in office poses significant risks for both the Conservative Party, and for UK-China relations. Navigating these risks will be a challenge for all concerned.

For his part, greater clarity from Cameron on what he thinks UK-China relations should look like may provide some breathing space – but that may also simply serve to highlight these divisions. Ultimately, it will be up to Cameron's current boss, Rishi Sunak, to try and resolve these tensions – ideally, before a major crisis breaks.

**Timothy Oliver is a Lecturer in British Politics and Public Policy, University of Manchester**

# School devastated as former pupil murdered in NYE attack

**Andy Drozdziak**

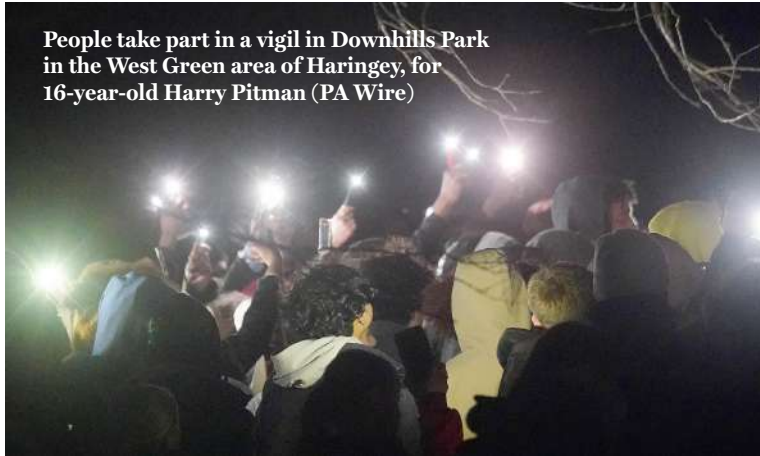
A Catholic school in North London has responded with “heavy hearts” to the “devastating news” that former pupil Harry Pitman was stabbed to death on New Year’s Eve.

Harry, 16, was attacked as he waited to watch fireworks with friends near a Primrose Hill viewing platform in Camden after an “altercation”, the Metropolitan Police said.

Witnesses said large crowds, including families with children, had gathered to watch the fireworks when the “senseless” violence broke out.

Alex Rosen, head of school at St Thomas More Catholic School, Wood Green, paid tribute to the former pupil, describing Harry as “a bright and promising young soul.”

Mr Rosen said: “It is with heavy hearts that we share the devastating news of the tragic passing of our beloved former pupil, Harry Pitman. Our entire school community mourns the loss of a bright and promising young soul.



People take part in a vigil in Downhills Park in the West Green area of Haringey, for 16-year-old Harry Pitman (PA Wire)

“Harry touched the lives of many with his infectious laughter and enthusiasm for life.”

Detective Chief Inspector Geoff Grogan said Harry was with a group of friends when he became involved in an “altercation with devastating consequences”, describing the attack as a “senseless act of violence”.

On Tuesday, another 16-year-old boy, arrested on suspicion of murder at the scene, was released from custody under investigation.

Mr Rosen said Harry would “be remembered for his many qualities, particularly his resilience and the positive impact he had on those around him.”

Harry, a Catholic, received the sacrament of confirmation at St John Vianney Church, Haringey, last Easter. Mr Rosen vowed to “come together as a Catholic community to offer support and comfort to one another as we navigate this profound loss.”

He said that resources and counselling services would be provided for those who needed them, and encouraged people to share memories of Harry, “celebrating the joy and warmth he brought into our lives.”

He concluded: “Our thoughts and prayers are with Harry’s family during this heartbreaking time. May he rest in peace.”

Around a hundred people – including Harry’s mother, brother, and sister – gathered on 2nd January at Downhills Park, Haringey, to pay their respects to the teenager, with many carrying flowers and balloons.

Harry’s older brother, Patrick, 18, said his brother was a huge Tottenham Hotspur fan and had gone to Primrose Hill with seven of his friends.

He said: “We are all distraught, it just doesn’t seem real.”

Harry’s grandfather, Phillip Pitman, told ITV the boy had his “whole life ahead of him”, and that he was “just finding his way”.

Mr Pitman described his grand-



Harry ‘was just finding his way’  
Photo: Metropolitan Police/PA

son as a “lovely boy” who was good with people and said that he had just started his first job, adding: “This is just such a terrible loss.”

Police have appealed for witnesses to come forward.

## CES vows to make Catholic view clear on trans guidance

**Andy Drozdziak**

The Catholic Education Service has pledged to give the Government its views on gender issues after draft guidance was published for schools on handling trans-pupils.

Before Christmas, the Government published updated draft trans guidance for schools in England. A public consultation is now running until 12th March, and the Catholic Education Service vowed to respond, using its experience in dealing with the issue over many years.

Paul Barber, Catholic Education Service director, said: “We will be participating in the consultation in due course. While some clarity from the government is welcome, Catholic schools have been responding to pupils over this issue for many years, on a case-by-case basis, with sensitivity and understanding that each individual’s needs vary.”

The aim of the guidance is to help teachers find the best ways of supporting pupils who are questioning their gender in schools.

Paul Barber outlined the approach of the Catholic Education Service, saying that “Catholic education focuses on the God-given dignity of each individual, regardless of what gender they are.”

The latest draft guidance states

that schools and colleges do not have to accept and indeed, should not accept, all requests for social transition.

Schools should ensure competitive sport is fair. This will almost always mean separate sports for boys and girls. Safety and wellbeing should be prioritised in making decisions on sport.

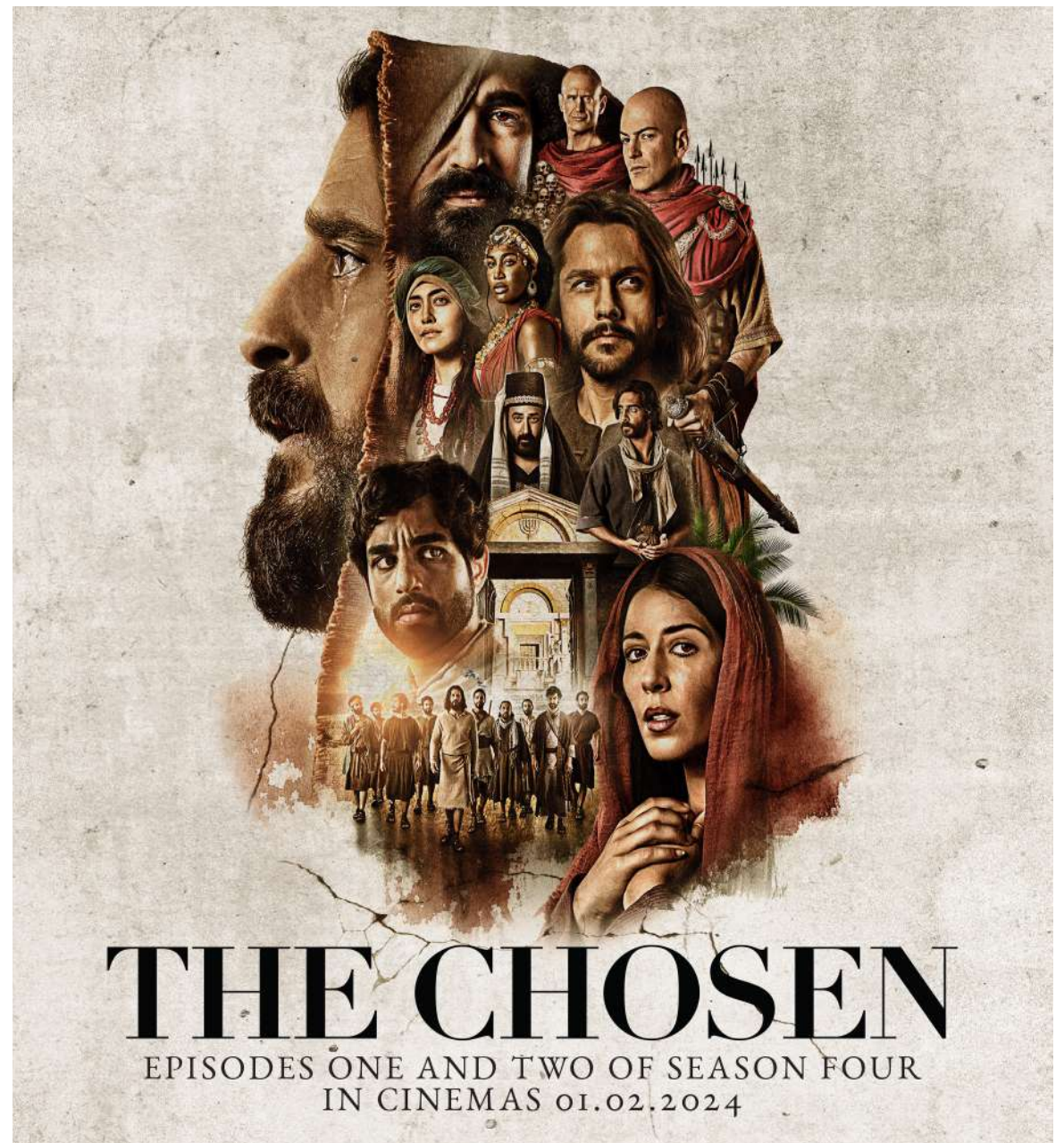
In addition, schools must provide sex-separated toilets for pupils aged 8 or over. Suitable changing accommodation and showers for pupils aged 11 or older must also be provided.

Single-sex schools, under the Equality Act, can refuse to admit pupils of other biological sex, regardless of whether the child is questioning their gender.

However, a school cannot refuse to admit a child of the same biological sex on the basis they are questioning their gender.

In an early indication of unease on the right-wing of the Conservative Party about the measures, former prime minister Liz Truss said the current guidance “does not go far enough” and needs to be tightened.

Some Conservative MPs and campaigners have called for an outright ban on social transitioning by children in schools.



## 2024: The year of elections

Sir John Battle



In *Rerum Novarum* (1891) Pope Leo spelt out an ethics of politics as vocation: “It will always be necessary to find people who will devote themselves to public affairs, make the laws, dispense justice and by their counsel and authority administer affairs of state and the conduct of war. Such people have a leading part to play and ought to be accorded pre-eminence in every state. Anyone can see their labours make an immediate and invaluable contribution to the common good” (para 27).

This year, there will be national elections in some 40 countries, including Russia, India, USA, the EU, Sweden, Kenya and – most probably – the UK. An estimated two billion people will have a vote though not all in open democratic election practices.

This could be the year of the people’s democratic voice. Yet an overwhelming pessimism hangs over the process. Fear driven divisiveness and echo chamber tribalism has led to a breakdown of political respect, notably in the USA as former President Trump ramps up the destructive rhetoric against institutions and the “enemies” he must “eliminate”.

Short-term performance has replaced policies and principles in a media in which an “image of competence from day to day” has become the reality, with a focus on retaining or gaining power. Fear of the other has displaced vision and a deep fatalism is replacing any political hope that things can be different and better. Raising the tone and language of the antagonistic political debate to a respectable level is becoming a challenge to enable real political and economic differences and choices to be reasonably discussed.

But perhaps the new factor in the 2024 elections worldwide is the role of social media and its fast developing capacity to disinform through “deep fake technologies”. The recent Slovakian election, won by President Putin’s favoured candidate, was deluged by misinformation including forged fake incriminating recordings of the opposition leader two days before the vote. Closer to home a totally fake video of Sir Keir Starmer swearing at staff appeared on social media just before the Labour Party conference which got millions of hits. Many of these deep fakes are created outside the UK in Russia, Iran and China to destabilise our democratic processes with lies and disinformation.

The response of the social media giants who carry them has been weak. Social media companies have power and responsibility.

# My day in court feels like another David v Goliath case

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Caroline Farrow



This column comes to you hot off the heels of yet another courtroom drama, as just this morning I was in Guildford magistrates, waiting anxiously for my case to be heard.

Fear not, dear reader, I was not due in the dock accused of yet more wrong think after imbibing too much Christmas spirit, rather I was attempting to hold Surrey Police to account and recover the costs of defending myself against an order they tried to bring against me and subsequently dropped when it became clear that they had grasped the wrong end of the stick.

Sadly, there is no exciting news to report. Surrey Police not only did not bother to submit any reasons why I should not be awarded costs, they also didn’t send any legal representatives to defend themselves. Despite this, the magistrates decided that they did not have enough time to consider my case, it had only been listed for three minutes, that it was anyway better suited to a district judge and adjourned the whole thing until the next possible date, which turns out to be June.

It is incredibly frustrating. Justice delayed is justice denied, and few people are in the position to be able to shell out thousands of pounds in legal costs. Today’s outing requiring the use of counsel, and so racked up yet further fees

which will also now need to be added to the overall bill.

It’s easy to see why so many victims of injustice give up, lacking both the funds and the emotional energy, but for me it’s not simply about recovering the costs that were unnecessarily spent, but also about holding the police to account for their behaviour, which is why I also intend to pursue them for wrongful arrest.

I’ll never forget the words of the burly male police officer as he was taking an iPad out of the hands of my autistic ten year-old, before bundling me off to languish in a jail cell for hours, that “what we are doing is not disproportionate at all. An allegation has been made and we have to investigate it.”

The allegation, of course, being that I had used incorrect pronouns and generally upset the feelings of a controversial and notorious transgender activist on the internet.

Even if you do agree that my actions did constitute a criminal offence (the Crown Prosecution Service did not), there surely needs to be more proportionate ways of dealing with it than dragging a woman off to jail in front of her children. Taking the police to court is not about revenge, or exacting damages (which are unlikely to be very much), but ensuring that there are sufficient consequences for the police to think twice before doing this to any other innocent citizen. It is also closure for me, especially given that I enjoy a public profile and platform and official recognition that this should never have happened.

Art mirrors life...

In an ironic twist of timing, I’ve been watching ITV drama *Mr Bates v the Post Office*, about what surely counts as the most widespread miscarriage of justice in UK history. Hundreds of innocent postmasters and mistresses were accused and charged of theft, fraud and false accounting thanks to a faulty IT system operated by the software firm Fujitsu.

In the latest instalment we learned that workers at Fujitsu were able to alter the financial figures inputted by the subpostmasters without anyone knowing. As one victim said “that means they can sneak in behind your backs, change your figures and disappear without a trace”. The entire basis of the prosecutions brought by the Post Office hinged on the allegation that nobody could access the tills without the subpostmasters’ knowledge. It took a former engineer to blow the whistle and reveal that there was a team of 30 engineers who could access the tills remotely without anyone’s knowledge.

Between 2000 and 2014 an average of one Post Office worker a week was prosecuted for theft, false accounting and other charges. Many were jailed and suffered bankruptcy along with a host of physical and emotional problems brought on by the appalling stress of the situation, as well as the public shame. The drama portrayed the real life circumstances of one woman, who emptied her savings account and maxed her credit cards in an attempt to make up for the

discrepancies reported by the Post Office, only telling her husband when they were faced with losing the house. Another man was banned from his own shop and his children were subjected to cruel taunting and bullying at school that their father was a thief.

Shockingly, victims were harried into pleading guilty to offences that they were innocent of and were told that if they attempted to appeal, the Post Office was such a bureaucratic giant, that they would simply carry on appealing until the victims ran out of money.

The scandal put me very much in mind of the various cases of sick children who are denied treatment by the NHS, because when this all began, the Post Office was state owned and as such the individuals were dealing with an all-powerful institution which had unlimited legal funds at its disposal with public opinion on its side.

Most people tend to believe in the old adage of ‘no smoke without fire’; surely people wouldn’t be prosecuted if there was no evidence of wrongdoing, and anyway, they had pleaded guilty. To make matters even worse, the relentless Chief Prosecutor was a Church of England vicar, who has now stepped aside from ministry.

The managers at the Post Office displayed the same remorseless and at times heartless mindset as hospital managers in the NHS who decide that it’s better to spend hundreds of thousands in legal fees preventing parents from taking their sick children abroad for treatment to prolong their lives rather than simply admitting that they don’t have the resources.

In a similar way to how clergy were once perceived, Britain’s postmasters and mistresses were thought of as pillars of the community; decent people who performed a valuable service. For one to be prosecuted for cooking the books would have seemed shocking and perhaps improbable, but this happened to 736 people and yet not at any point, did anyone in the police, Government or justice system, stop and ask what on earth was going on.

Having been subject to a similar, albeit less serious ordeal, including being an alleged pillar of the community by virtue of being married to a priest, which if anything counted against me as far as the police were concerned, the TV drama resonated.

Which is why, when I saw several defendants looking distressed outside the courts, my heart went out to them, because, after all, it is a miscarriage of justice that lies at the heart of our salvation.





# Fr Frank ‘humbled’ after being asked to be Bishop of Galloway

Catholics in Galloway have begun the New Year in high spirits after it was announced that Pope Francis had appointed a new bishop to the diocese.

Pope Francis nominated Fr. Frank Dougan as the new bishop on 22nd December. He succeeds Archbishop William Nolan, who was Bishop of Galloway from 2014 to 2022, before he became Archbishop of Glasgow.

It has since been administered by Fr. William McFadden.

Reacting to his appointment, Fr. Frank said: “I am humbled and more than a little bit nervous that Pope Francis has asked me to take on this office.

“I feel confident however that I will not be alone in spreading the joy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“I will be joining with every single person in Galloway diocese all of whom have a role to play, my role

being just one of them.”

He added: “With God’s grace and the deep faith of the Church in Galloway we can continue to build on the solid foundations left by those who have come before us, stretching back to St. Ninian who first planted the seeds of the Christian faith in Scotland here in Galloway.”

Responding to the news, diocesan administrator Fr. William McFadden said: “On behalf of the community in the diocese of Galloway, I am delighted to warmly welcome Fr Dougan as our new bishop.

“I can assure him of an enthusiastic welcome as he comes among us bringing his unique pastoral leadership and skills. I look forward to working with him, and in continuing the implementation in the diocese of the pastoral and prophetic vision offered by Pope Francis for the Church today.”



Reacting to the announcement, Bishop Joseph Toal, the Bishop of Motherwell, said: “I am very happy to hear that Fr Dougan has been chosen by the Holy Father as the new Bishop of Galloway. My thoughts and prayers are very much with him at this time.

*“I am humbled and more than a little bit nervous that Pope Francis has asked me to take on this office. I feel confident however that I will not be alone in spreading the joy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ...”*  
**Bishop-elect Frank Dougan**

“We will miss Fr Frank in Motherwell as his ministry extended beyond the Parish to Our Lady and St Bride’s Secondary School and Hairmyres Hospital, along with his Canon Law responsibilities in the Diocese and with the Interdiocesan Tribunal.

“I am sure the wide pastoral experience gained here will be of great benefit in his episcopal ministry.”

## School protest left Ahern shocked by state of relations

A loyalist protest at a Catholic girls school in north Belfast in 2001 was a sign of a “deeper malaise” in Northern Ireland, new archives show.

For months in 2001, locals at Holy Cross primary school in Belfast stood outside the school as girls and parents entered.

The protest began following a clash in June 2001 as a man collected his child.

“He was, according to nationalists, attacked by loyalists when he objected to them putting up paramilitary flags on the Ardoyne Road,” a briefing note stated.

The then Irish leader Bertie Ahern said it was indicative of the state of relations in the troubled province.

Loyalists said the protests were a response to attacks by the larger Catholic population, and were demanding better protection.

But Ahern was upset by the “hate-filled aggression” of the loyalist protesters, adding that it was “symptom of a deeper malaise within Northern Ireland”.

## Podcast to explore Church views on society’s key issues

A podcast on how to return Church thought to public debate is now available, with episodes featuring contributions from a former government minister, Catholic university leaders and internationally distinguished academics.

*Beyond The Dark Clouds* is hosted by Leeds Trinity University, one of four Catholic universities in England, and is centred around justice in contested issues such as law enforcement, economics, spirituality, the arts and more.

Episodes include former Labour government Trade and Industry, and Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs minister, and Universe columnist, Sir John Battle, discussing the relevance of a Catholic university in the secular world. Leadership and the future of Catholic higher education is considered by Anthony McClaran, Vice-Chancellor at St Mary’s University.

Professor Nicolas Vergier of the Institut Catholique de Paris and International Federation of Catholic Universities addresses the purpose of Catholic universities, while justice in policing is the theme undertaken by Professor Tobias Winright of St Patrick’s Pontifical University, in Maynooth, Ireland.

Dr Ann Marie Mealey, director of Catholic Mission at Leeds Trinity, addresses the relevance of Catholic social teaching for debate in the public square and higher education sector. She explains that education for hope is the key theme for the series, in seeking to demonstrate how Catholic education and Catholic intellectual tradition can offer hope to a fractured world.

Other subjects for discussion include universities renewing a sense of purpose in students; faith and conversion in the works of Virginia Woolf; spirituality and art, as well as the need for a new narrative of faith in society.

A lecture on spiritual friendship in relation



**Anthony McClaran, Vice-Chancellor at St Mary’s University, is one of those taking part in the podcast.**

to the recent Synod, given by internationally respected scholar and author on Christian education, Professor John Sullivan, can help listeners to consider the route to dialogue in a period of listening in the Church.

Pope Francis in his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (on fraternity and social friendship) refers to “dark clouds over a closed world”, which inspired the podcast’s title.

*Beyond The Dark Clouds* is hosted and produced by Dr Ann Marie Mealey, with help from the university’s senior lecturer in journalism, Darren Harper.

• **Beyond The Dark Clouds is available on Spotify and other platforms.**



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## In Brief

### Britain to face surge in cancer

One person a minute in Britain will be diagnosed with cancer within a generation, warned Cancer Research UK, saying that the country could lose its status as a research “superpower” on the disease.

The charity said that even as the burden of cancer is increasing, investment in the battle against it is failing to keep pace. “Now is the time to act to retain a globally leading position over the future decades”, it said.

### Relief as Bank set to cut interest rates

The Bank of England will cut interest rates at least twice this year, according to economists quizzed by *The Times*. As inflation drops to within “touching distance” of the official 2 per cent target and as economic growth “stalls”, 45 per cent of the experts predicted that the Bank would lower rates three times or more in the coming year, while two cuts was the most common forecast.

### Ofsted to show more empathy

Ofsted must listen to the criticism it has received following the suicide of head teacher Ruth Perry, said its new boss. Sir Martyn Oliver said that although the school inspections body had to ensure high standards in schools, it could also be “far more empathetic”.

Last year, a coroner ruled that a critical report by the organisation contributed to Perry’s suicide.

### ‘Interminably slow’ construction

A small railway footbridge is taking longer to build than Empire State Building, rail passenger groups have said.

Passengers using Theale Station near Reading say work on the bridge is proceeding at an “interminably slow pace of work” which has left them “fuming”.

Work on the bridge was already 10 years overdue when it began in January 2023, and it is not expected to open until spring 2024.

The famous New York skyscraper took just one year and 45 days to complete.

# Tide has turned on fossil fuels as 2023 hits a renewable landmark

## Britain likely to generate more electricity from wind, solar and hydro than fossil fuels for the first year ever in 2023

Grant Wilson, Joseph Day and Katatine Pegg

There are many milestones to pass in the transition from a high to low-carbon sustainable energy system. There is the first hour without coal, or oil, or gas generation (or all of them together) and the point when the last coal, oil or gas power plant (or all of them together) are finally retired.

Another milestone that feels important is the first year when renewables generate more electricity than fossil fuels. For the past three months we have been tracking the data for Great Britain (not Northern Ireland, which shares an electricity grid with the Republic of Ireland) and we believe it is on track to, if not pass this milestone in 2023, be very close to doing so.

Using the broadest definition, renewables actually first overtook fossil fuels in the odd, COVID-affected year of 2020 (although not in the subsequent years of 2021 and 2022). However, that includes 5% or so of Britain’s electricity that is generated through “biomass” plants (which burn wood pellets, often imported from forests in America).

Trees can, of course, be regrown, so biomass counts as renewable. But the industry has its critics and it’s not globally scalable in the same way as the ‘weather-dependent’ renewables: wind, solar and to a certain degree, hydro power.

When we use this narrower, weather-dependent definition that is more appropriate for a global transition, then there is a very good chance these renewables will overtake fossil fuels for the first time ever in 2023. Once this milestone has been passed, we also think it is unlikely (though not impossible) that gas and coal will ever again generate more of Britain’s electricity than wind, solar and hydro over a full year.

Whether Britain passes the milestone in 2023 will come down to the final few days of the year (from here on we’ll use ‘renewables’ to refer to the tighter, biomass-excluding definition).

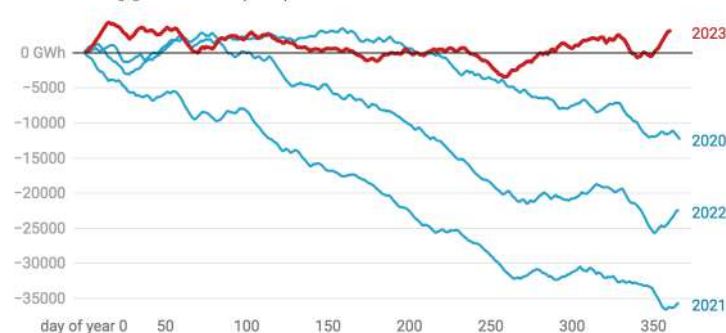
The **chart in graph 1** can be used to track progress and will update with the latest data each day. The lines show the running total of the difference between how much electricity has been generated by renewables and fossil fuels.

When the line is increasing, this shows more renewables than fossil fuels for that period. The horizontal axis shows the day of the year, so, if at any point the line is above the zero axis, that indicates that the year so far has had more renewable



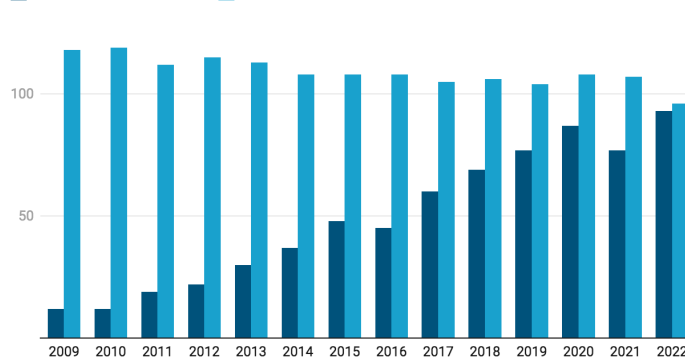
**Graph 1: Renewable v fossil fuel energy generation**

Running total of difference between wind+solar+hydro and fossil fuelled generation measured in gigawatt hours (GWh).



**Bar Chart 1: Renewable generation v Domestic electricity consumption**

■ Renewable Generation (TWh) ■ Domestic Electricity Consumption (TWh)



than fossil fuel generation. If the red line ends the year above zero, then Britain will have achieved the milestone.

One caveat is that we know from the official statistics published later that there are some differences from “missing” and estimates for embedded generation; this typically only accounts for around 1%-2% of the final total.

### It depends on the weather

As we write this, with a few days of data left in 2023, renewables are very slightly ahead (by just over 1,000 GWh - about the same level as a peak day of electrical demand). However, if they are to stay ahead it

will depend on the weather – especially the wind.

The reasoning here is that Britain uses less electricity over the holiday period due to less industrial and commercial demand. As wind power is clean and has become cheaper, it tends to be used first, meaning when demand is low or it is sufficiently windy there is less need to generate electricity with fossil fuels.

There are nuances around this such as where the generation is located, and the amount of electricity imported from other countries, but the general principle of renewables taking market share away from fossil fuels is a factor of

Britain’s electrical market.

An important area to also highlight is the continued drop in electrical demand. 2023 is on track to have a lower demand than 2022, which itself was lower than the COVID-impacted year of 2020 (against our predictions) due to record prices. The drop in electrical demand means that additional generation was not needed, much of it inevitably from fossil fuels.

### Additional milestone also likely to be passed

However, 2023 could be the first year where renewable generation exceeds domestic electricity demand (homes comprise 36 per cent of total electrical demand). This means the annual electricity generated by Britain’s wind turbines, solar panels and hydro resource will now be greater than that consumed over the year by its 29 million households.

The **bar chart 2** demonstrates the trend towards this point since 2009. In the first half of 2023, renewable output was less than domestic electrical demand by 1.5 TWh (1500 GWh), but strong renewable performance since then means it is likely to end the year with total generation in excess of household demand.

If either of the milestones described here do not happen for 2023, then they will almost certainly occur in 2024, during which another 1.7 GW of offshore wind capacity will begin generating and Britain’s last coal-fired power station is scheduled to cease producing electricity altogether. **Grant Wilson is an Associate Professor, University of Birmingham** **Joseph Day is a Postdoctoral Research Assistant, University of Birmingham** **Katatine Pegg is a PhD Student, University of Birmingham**

# Cardinal uses new year's message to remember our greatest gift - the gospel



## Andy Drozdziak

Cardinal Vincent Nichols urged listeners to not forget God's "greatest gift" in the new year in a special message recorded for the BBC.

Speaking on Radio 4's *Prayer For The Day*, Cardinal Nichols said: "As the new year unfolds, we sincerely wish each other happiness and prosperity, not forgetting the greatest gift of all: that God is with us, year in and year out, ready to guide our steps into the way of peace."

He outlined the content of the 'good news' of the Gospel – and how many had given their lives. "Over the centuries countless people have died for the good news of this Gospel and its central proclamation that God is a God of mercy and compassion, born Emmanuel, God-

with us," he said.

"To him alone do we bend our knee and profess him to be our saviour and most precious gift. He alone can cure our ills and refresh our spirit. To him be glory and thanksgiving."

Speaking on the feast day of St Thomas Becket, who was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170, the Cardinal commended Thomas for "wanting to protect space for the Church."

"His death was brought about by a sort of clash of the Titans: the King, Henry, wanting to assert his authority, and Thomas, the Archbishop, wanting to protect space for the Church. The knights who carried out the killing may well have misunderstood the King's inten-

tions for he immediately repented and Thomas was quickly declared a hero of the faith," he said.

"From birth in a stable to murder in a cathedral: this is a tale worth telling."

He ended by praying a prayer for the new year. He said: "Father in heaven, help us to choose peace over violence, harmony over discord, both now and in the year to come."

• The Archbishop of Canterbury called on people to respond to the call of Jesus and "stand with those suffering because of war and to seek to make peace" in his New Year message.

The Most Rev Justin Welby said "wars seem everywhere at the moment" as he delivered his annual

start-of-the-year address, which was broadcast on BBC1 and iPlayer on Monday 1st January.

Speaking from RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire, he said: "Jesus Christ tells us to stand with those suffering because of war, and to seek to make peace."

"In Ukraine I went to Bucha where evidence of atrocities was found, I've met refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, and in Jerusalem, last October, I sat and listened to some of those traumatised by war, Palestinian and Israeli. We need them all to end."

The Most Rev Justin Welby



## Boy charged after fire at famous Catholic school

A 16-year-old boy has been charged with arson after a fire at a prestigious 160-year-old Catholic school in west London.

Ten fire engines and about 70 firefighters were called to the Laondon Oratory School, which admits boys aged seven to 18 and girls aged 16 to 18, in Fulham at around 10am on 27th December.

The fire was brought under control and no injuries have been reported, but part of an atrium in the four-storey building was damaged by fire, the Fire Brigade said.

The school's alumni include actor Simon Callow, trade unionist Mick Whelan, as well as the children of the former prime minister Sir Tony Blair, Harriet Harman and former deputy prime minister, Sir Nick Clegg.

The alleged arsonist was arrested on Wednesday. A nearby shopping centre and some residential addresses were evacuated as a precaution, and residents were urged to keep their windows closed.

London Ambulance Service said they did not treat any patients at the scene.

A 16-year-old boy arrested has denied setting the fire.

The defendant, who cannot be named because of his age, is accused of arson with intent to endanger life for allegedly setting the fire.

He also pleaded not guilty to as-

saulting a police officer and having a fake ID.

On 29th December, Highbury Corner Youth Court heard that police received a call just before 10am alerting them to a potential fire in a school.

On arriving at the school in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, officers reportedly found smoke and orange flames in the atrium and a "major fire incident" was declared.

The court heard that a swimming pool was under construction at the scene, which prompted an evacuation of the building and residents in the surrounding area.

The defendant, from the London Borough of Wandsworth, was reportedly identified at around 11.30am in the street and taken to a police station, where he allegedly assaulted a police officer.

On searching his home, officers allegedly found a fraudulent ID card.

The young man, who attended court with his parents and siblings, was bailed to the family home and ordered not to leave the house without being accompanied by one of his immediate family members.

He was also banned from entering Hammersmith and Fulham.

The defendant will next appear at Wimbledon Youth Court on 23rd January.



Fire tenders and police were called to the fire from across London



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## Arrest data suggests police are turning a blind eye to those who pay for sex

CARE says it is 'acutely concerned' after data revealed that just one person has been convicted under purchase of sex legislation in Northern Ireland since 2018, prompting fears that authorities are taking a "soft touch" approach to the crime.

Christian social justice charity CARE sought information on police enforcement of purchase of sex legislation via a freedom of information request. This revealed that 75 arrests took place for 'Paying for Sexual Services' between 2018 and 2023 – but only one led to a conviction. 24 other offenders received a caution, while another four led to community resolutions.

For the outcomes not provided, the PSNI said persons "may have been dealt with by other methods without having been arrested", and that not all community resolutions are recorded.

But Dr Rebecca Stevenson, policy officer at CARE for Northern Ireland, said the figures suggest a 'soft touch approach' on the part of PSNI officers.

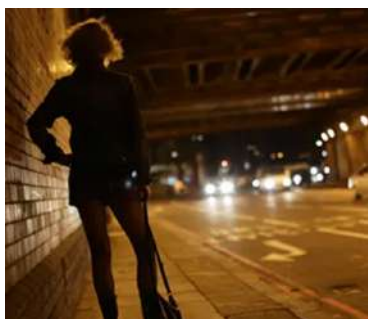
"Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK to have criminalised the purchase of sex under landmark modern slavery provisions enacted in 2015," she said. "This law is rooted in an understanding that targeting sex buyers is crucial in driving down demand for sexual exploitation – a crime frequently linked to trafficking and modern slavery," she said.

"We are acutely concerned that by failing to properly enforce NI's purchase of sex law, authorities are undermining its core purpose.

"Men seeking to pay for sex with vulnerable, exploited women have faced no real disincentive, despite their actions being explicitly outlawed for several years. These figures suggest a 'soft touch' approach.

"Police and prosecutors must explain why purchase of sex laws are not being used effectively. Other countries such as Sweden show that convictions are obtainable through routine evidence-gathering techniques.

"Recent cases such as the major criminal operation in Belfast involving trafficked women underline the need for immediate action."



# Archbishop evokes Mandela in new year message for peace

Andy Drozdziak

Primate of All Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin has joined Irish Church leaders in calling upon the ethos and language of Nelson Mandela to work towards a 'Long Walk to Peace' in Ireland.

The leaders, from the Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church and Irish Council of Churches, said in their new year message: 'In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, the late Nelson Mandela wrote: "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

'If we, as Church Leaders in Ireland, along with our predecessors, were to write a book, it might have a title similar to the one referenced above. We would though probably change the word 'Freedom' to 'Peace'. It has been a 'Long Walk to Peace' in this island and between its peoples.'

The leaders acknowledged that healing is not a quick process, and called for children to be taught 'to love', in the spirit of Nelson Mandela's journey in bringing reconciliation in South Africa in the 20th century.

They said: 'Nelson Mandela was right in his observation that people are not born hating others, it is something which they learn. We



Church leaders (from left): Rt Rev Andrew Forster, Irish Council of Churches; Most Rev John McDowell, Church of Ireland; Archbishop of Armagh & Primate of All Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin; Rt Rev Dr Sam Mawhinney, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and Rev David Turtle, Methodist Church in Ireland.

need therefore to ensure that we teach our children to love, respect and care for one another so that they learn that love is stronger than hate, good overcomes evil and light scatters the darkness.'

2023 marked 25 years since the signing of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement, and the leaders shared their determination to steer clear of past troubles and violence in the future. "Since the signing of the Agreement in 1998, a whole generation has now come and gone and much has changed in our world on a global scale as well as at a local level, but very few people living in these

*"No-one is born hating ... people must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love..."*

Nelson Mandela

islands would want to return to the past," the leaders said, acknowledging that 'there is still some distance to go in our journey to peace and much work remains to be done.'

Referencing the conflicts around the world, particularly in Gaza and

Ukraine, the leaders prayed that countries at war would follow the path of reconciliation. They said: "With our experiences here in this land, may we encourage and support others to take those first steps down the road to peace, to walk in the way of reconciliation, to seek to heal and not hurt."

"Let us, therefore, continue to build relationships, break down barriers, and work for a sustainable and lasting peace and, as ambassadors of Christ's message of reconciliation, may we model a better way of living and loving now and in the years to come."

## CAFOD ready to take big steps forward as it makes ambitious plans for 2024

Andy Drozdziak

Catholic charity CAFOD has thanked its supporters for their backing in 2023 – and its staff have encouraged them to take big steps to 'realise major change in 2024'.

"Your kindness and compassion helped people to build real and lasting change in their own lives," CAFOD said, acknowledging that support.

In last week's *Universe*, Director Christine Allen thanked Catholic schools in England and Wales for raising £610,000 for CAFOD in 2023, as well as over 3,000 CAFOD campaigners who wrote to MPs to share Pope Francis' message to world leaders at COP28.

The charity said: "Despite the vast challenges at home and around the world – families struggling to get enough food; communities doing their best to adapt to climate change; more women, men and

children being forced from their homes because of conflict – you reached out with love."

Now CAFOD is suggesting practical New Year's resolutions for 2024, to help supporters 'live out their faith and realise change in 2024.' Events lead Neil Roper is looking for CAFOD's popular Big Lent Walk to raise money to fight global poverty.

"We want to offer our thanks to

the 250,000 children from over 600 schools who participated in the Big Lent Walk and fundraised last year," Mr Roper said, "and do it again in 2024."

"Walk when and where you choose, alone or with friends – or get your school involved and join the 600 schools and 250,000 children who walked last year."

Catherine Gorman, who writes many CAFOD prayers, encouraged

supporters to "make more time for prayer." She said: "Making more time for prayer is something that many of us try to do as part of our new year's resolution. If it's one of yours this year, why not sign up to our weekly emails? These short reflections on the Sunday gospel encourage us to take a moment and make space for prayer in our busy lives."

Advocacy lead Ciara Biswas-Graham invited supporters to send a message to Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, telling him that 'we care about the climate and we want him to play his part in the fight to care for our common home.'

Fundraising manager Hannah Patterson encouraged people to support CAFOD financially.

Left, CAFOD's popular Big Lent Walk will raise money to fight global poverty.



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The scene in St Peter's Basilica as Mass for the feast of Mary, Mother of God, and World Peace Day on New Year's Day is celebrated



New Year's Day in St Peter's Square

## Pope calls on Church to embrace diversity of faith without fear

Different ways of living out the Catholic faith, including different liturgical rites, should not be seen as threats to the unity of the Catholic Church but embraced as expressions of the body of Christ, Pope Francis said.

"You don't have to be afraid of the diversity of charisms in the Church," the pope said on 2nd January while sharing his prayer intention for the month: "For the gift of diversity in the Church."

"We are not all the same," he said, and Catholics should "rejoice in living this diversity."

Pope Francis recalled how in the first Christian communities, "diversity and unity were very present and in a tension that had to be resolved at a higher level."

The pope also noted that "to move forward on the path of faith we also need ecumenical dialogue with brothers and sisters from other confessions and Christian communities."

Dialogue, he said, is not "something that confuses or bothers, but a

gift God gives to the Christian community so that it may grow as one body, the body of Christ."

Pope Francis pointed to Eastern Catholic Churches, who, he said, "have their own traditions (and) some characteristic liturgical rites but maintain the unity of the faith. They reinforce it, they do not divide it."

The two-minute video shows several scenes from Eastern Catholic liturgical celebrations, such as using a spoon to distribute Communion and giving a blessing with large liturgical candlesticks.

Although they have their own liturgical and legal system, each Eastern church is considered fully equal in dignity to the Latin tradition within the Catholic Church.

The pope added that if the Church lets itself be guided by the Holy Spirit, "richness, variety, diversity never provoke conflicts."

The Holy Spirit, he said, "reminds us that before all we are children of God, all the same in the love of God."

## New Year's message is to follow Mary's lead

On New Year's Eve, believers and non-believers alike give thanks for all they have received in the last 12 months and express their hopes for the coming year, but Christians are called to cultivate their gratitude and hope following the example of Mary, Pope Francis said.

"Faith enables us to live this hour in a way different than that of a worldly mindset," the pope said during an evening prayer service in St. Peter's Basilica. "Faith in Jesus Christ, the incarnated God, born of the Virgin Mary, gives a new way of feeling time and life."

Pope Francis said that while many people express thanks and hope on New Year's Eve, in reality, they often "lack the essential dimension which is that of relationship with the Other and with others, with God and with brothers and sisters."

With a worldly mentality, gratitude and hope are "flattened onto the self, onto one's interests," he said. "They don't go beyond satisfaction and optimism."

Pope Francis encouraged Christians to look to the example of Mary who, after giving birth to Jesus, had a mother's gratitude in her heart for bearing the child of God.

"Mystery makes room for gratitude, which surfaces in the contemplation of gift, in gratuitousness, while it suffocates in the anxiety of having and appearing," the pope said. "The Church learns gratitude from the Virgin Mary."

The pope also said that the hope of Mary and the Church "is not optimism, it is something else: it is faith in a God faithful to his promises."

"This faith takes the form of hope in the dimension of time," he said. "Christians, like Mary, are pilgrims of hope."

Near the basilica's main altar was an icon of the *Madonna Lactans*, or Nursing Madonna, from the Benedictine Abbey of Montevirgine. The icon, in late Byzantine style, shows Mary nursing the infant Jesus. The pope prayed silently before the image before leaving the basilica.

The service culminated with the choir and the 6,500 people present in the basilica singing the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for the blessings of the past year.

In his homily, Pope Francis noted that the coming year would involve intense preparation for the Holy Year 2025. Yet more than worrying about organising logistics and events, the pope asked people to be witnesses to "ethical and spiritual quality of coexistence."

Pope Francis noted that a pilgrimage "requires good preparation," and recalled that 2024 would be dedicated to prayer before the Holy Year.

"And what better teacher could we have than our holy Mother?" the pope asked. "Let us learn from her to live every day, every moment, every occupation with our inner gaze turned to Jesus."

After the prayer service, the pope greeted people lined along the basilica's central nave before riding outside to greet wellwishers.

## Pope meets with US Cardinal Burke amid claims of row over money



Cardinal Raymond L. Burke, a former top Vatican official, had a private meeting with Pope Francis on 29th December, a month after news leaked of a major row over the controversial American's salary and grace and favour apartment in Rome.

Allegedly, Pope Francis told a meeting of the Curia that he wanted to stop Burke's monthly salary and would ask him to pay the market rate for his Vatican apartment.

Pope Francis "didn't see why he should continue to subsidise Burke attacking him and the Church," reports said.

The pope also thought that "he seemed to have plenty of money

from America," a person who spoke to Pope Francis told Catholic News Service.

Cardinal Burke, 75, is the former head of the Apostolic Signatura, the Church's highest court. Before Pope Benedict XVI appointed him to that role, he had served as Archbishop of St. Louis.

In 2016, Cardinal Burke and three other cardinals publicly released a critical set of questions, known as a *'dubia'*, that they had sent to Pope Francis about his teaching on the family. They published the questions after waiting in vain for two months for a response from the pope.

A few days before the Synod of

Bishops on synodality opened in October, Cardinal Burke and four other cardinals released another set of *'dubia'* that they had sent the pope seeking clarification on doctrinal and pastoral questions expected to be raised at the synod.

They did not release the pope's responses to them, but the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith did later.

The Vatican refused to reveal details of the recent meeting, saying only that "His Eminence wishes to give no comment at this time."

Cardinal Burke is expected to find his own apartment in Rome and move out of the Vatican accommodation by the end of February.

# Cardinal rejects claims Church preparing to back same-sex marriage

Cindy Wooden

The Vatican's affirmation that a priest can give an informal blessing to a gay couple who asks for one is not a first step toward the Catholic Church recognising same-sex marriages, said Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

"Those who say so either have not read the text or have 'bad blood,' if you will pardon the expression. The statement clearly states that these blessings are non-ritualised so that they are not interpreted as a marriage," the cardinal told the Spanish newspaper *ABC*.

*Fiducia Supplicans* (*Supplicating Trust*), which was approved by Pope Francis before Christmas, said that while the Church "remains firm" in teaching that marriage 'is only a life-long union between a man and a woman', in certain circumstances priests can give non-sacramental, non-liturgical blessings to 'couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church's

perennial teaching on marriage.' Several bishops' conferences in Africa and elsewhere reacted strongly against the document, which was published on 18th December, and issued statements forbidding their priests from offering such blessings.

While Cardinal Fernandez insisted the document "upholds with great clarity and simplicity the Catholic teaching on marriage and sexuality," he said bishops have a right and duty to advise their priests on the possible use of such blessings.

"What they (African bishops) raise is the inappropriateness of performing blessings that could easily be confused with a legitimisation of an irregular union in their regional contexts," he said.

In addition, he said, several African nations have laws that "penalise with imprisonment the mere fact of declaring oneself gay," so it would be difficult to imagine a priest in such a country giving a gay couple a blessing.

"In reality," the cardinal said, "it is up to each local bishop to make this

discernment in his diocese or in any case to give further guidance."

In other situations, Cardinal Fernandez said, people reacting negatively to the document simply did not read it.

"The central theme of the document is the value of 'non-liturgical,' 'non-ritualised' blessings, which are not a marriage, they are not an 'approval' or a ratification of anything," he said.

"They are simply the response of a pastor to two people who ask for God's help. And, in this case, the pastor does not set any conditions."

Blessing two people who ask for God's help is not accepting their relationship as a marriage, "nor is it a ratification of the life they lead, nor is it an absolution," the cardinal said.

"It is a simple gesture of pastoral closeness that does not have the same demands that a sacrament has."

"If a priest gives this kind of simple blessing, he is not a heretic, he is not ratifying anything, nor is he denying the Catholic doctrine on marriage," Cardinal Fernandez said.



The pope welcomes band members to the Vatican

## Church music is a double joy

Song and music are gifts capable of touching the hearts of young people, drawing them out of spirals of anxiety and bringing them closer to God, Pope Francis told the International Foundation of Pueri Cantores – an organisation which promotes sacred music and the formation of children in choirs for liturgical singing.

The pope praised the young vocalists for helping others pray and open their hearts to God, which is "fundamental for the life of the Church."

Today, he said, "there is much need for joy in the world," and music can provide that.

"So many people, also young

people, are prisoners of their anxiety or of boredom; song and music can touch hearts, give beauty, restore a taste and hope for life," he said.

But the pope also insisted that choir members are not "just any kind of artists, you don't put on a show." Rather, their role is to help others pray through their own sung prayer.

For that reason, Pope Francis said it is important for the children to "keep your heart close to Jesus not only when you sing, but always, and this is done through prayer each day."

The pope cited the well-known saying by St. Augustine: "One who sings prays twice."

## Pope leads applause for Benedict

Pope Francis led tens of thousands of people in St. Peter's Square in applause for Pope Benedict XVI, on the first anniversary of his death.

Francis praised his predecessor's faith and wisdom, adding "We feel so much affection, gratitude and admiration for him," the pope said.

"From heaven, he blesses and accompanies us."

Before the Angelus, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, Pope Benedict's former personal secretary, presided over a memorial Mass at the Altar of the Chair in St. Peter's Basilica. German Cardinal Gerhard Müller and Swiss Cardinal Kurt Koch, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, concelebrated the liturgy.



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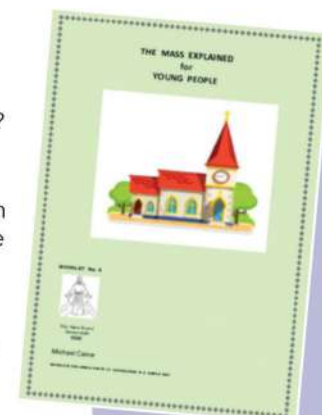
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Smoke rises over a residential building after a Russian missile and drone strike on Kyiv  
Photo: Danylo Pavlov, Reuters

## Pope has new talks with Zelensky but no end in sight for war

Pope Francis has held his fourth phone conversation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky since his country was invaded by Russia nearly two years ago.

In his daily video report posted on X, Zelenskyy said, “I just had a call with Pope Francis.”

“I expressed my gratitude to His Holiness for his Christmas greetings to Ukraine and Ukrainians, as well as his wishes for a just peace for all of us,” the president said. “We discussed our joint work to put Ukraine’s Peace Formula into action. Over 80 countries are already involved in this process at the level of their representatives. And there will be more of them.”

The “peace formula” is a set of conditions Zelenskyy has insisted are key to ending the war; they include the release of prisoners and the return of children forcibly taken to Russia; the withdrawal of Russian troops and restoration of Ukraine’s territorial integrity; food security; the prosecution of war crimes; and the remediation of ecological damage.

“I am grateful to the Holy See for supporting our efforts,” Zelenskyy added.

## More pain as air attack hits Kyiv

Ukrainian Catholic and other Ukrainian clergy have called for prayers and more international support after Russia unleashed its deadliest air assault on Kyiv since the start of the war.

More than 40 were killed and 160 wounded after Russia unleashed a wave of close to 160 drones and missiles on civilian targets, including Kyiv and Lviv.

Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv-Galicia, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, extended his “heartfelt condolences to all those who are burying their relatives who were killed by the Russian criminal hand.”

“We send our love and deep concern to all the wounded, all those who have lost their homes,

Pope Francis has prayed for peace and urged others to do so in almost every public address he has made since the Russian aggression began.

In his address Christmas Day, he said: “Contemplating the baby Jesus, I implore peace for Ukraine. Let us renew our spiritual and human closeness to its embattled people, so that through the support of each of us, they may feel the concrete reality of God’s love.”

Two days after the Russian invasion, Pope Francis and President Zelenskyy spoke on the phone, held a second conversation a month later, and again in August 2022.

The pope and president met in person at the Vatican in May, and a week later the Vatican confirmed that Pope Francis had appointed Italian Cardinal Matteo Zuppi of Bologna as his envoy “to help ease tensions in the conflict in Ukraine.”

From June to September, the cardinal visited Moscow, Kyiv, Washington and Beijing trying to promote peace, ensure the safety of grain exports from Ukraine and pressure Russia to return the thousands of children Ukraine and human rights organisations have said have been taken to Russia.

and who are grieving and crying,” he said. “Lord, take the innocent victims into your hands and heal the wounds of Ukraine! Wipe away the tears of Ukraine!”

The Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations condemned the attacks, and upon “all states of the world that declare respect for the value of human life and international law to condemn the actions of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, recognize Russia as a terrorist state, and provide Ukraine with the necessary means to protect life, including additional air defense equipment, aircraft, and all that is necessary for the defense and restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine.”

# US demands release of imprisoned clergy as it talks tough to Nicaragua

The US Department of State has demanded the release of Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa and other imprisoned Nicaraguan religious leaders following a wave of detentions targeting Catholic clergy over the Christmas season.

The statement described Bishop Álvarez and the other religious leaders – including Bishop Isidoro Mora of Siuna – as “unjustly detained” and deplored the conditions in which they were being held. Bishop Álvarez has been held for more than 500 days after refusing an offer of exile.

“Nicaraguan authorities have kept Bishop Álvarez in isolation, blocked independent evaluation of the conditions of his imprisonment, and released staged videos and photographs that only increase concerns about his well-being,” read the statement, signed by State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller.

The regime of President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, “continues to impose severe restrictions on religious communities and deny Nicaraguan citizens the ability to freely practice their religions and express their beliefs. We once again call on the Nicaraguan government to release Bishop Rolando Álvarez immediately and without conditions.”

In a separate post Miller called Bishop Álvarez’s detention “unconscionable,” adding, “Freedom of belief is a human right.”

At least 13 priests – mostly in the Archdiocese of Managua – were detained between Dec. 26 and Dec. 31, according to exiled Nicaraguan lawyer Martha Molina, who has tracked attacks on the Catholic Church in Nicaragua. Many were taken from their parish residences by police and paramilitaries.

Pope Francis expressed concern for Nicaragua and the captive priests Jan. 1 at his New Year’s Angelus prayer.

“I have been following with deep concern what is happening in Nicaragua, where bishops and priests have been deprived of their freedom.”

The pontiff expressed his “closeness in prayer” to the detained priests and their families, “and to the entire church in the country.”

“I hope that we will always seek the path of dialogue to overcome difficulties. Let us pray for Nicaragua today.”

Dialogue has proved difficult in Nicaragua, despite Church efforts to assume a mediating role after protests erupted in 2018 – with demonstrators demanding the ousting of President Daniel Ortega and his



Nicaraguan Cardinal Leopoldo José Brenes Solórzano and Auxiliary Bishop Silvio José Báez at anti-government protests in Diriamba, 2018. Bishop Báez, currently exiled in Miami, issued an urgent plea for solidarity after a dozen priests in Nicaragua were detained following Christmas.  
Photo: Oswaldo Rivas, Reuters

wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo. Priests provided shelter for protests and later accompanied the families of political prisoners, even as their parishes were besieged by pro-regime police and paramilitaries.

The calls for action on Bishop Álvarez and the detained clergy come as the regime crushes even the most minimal dissent in the country – which analysts have described as turning increasingly tyrannical and totalitarian.

Clergy are often spied upon and paid visits by police and paramilitaries in acts of intimidation and to deliver orders – such as the suspension of acts of popular piety and public processions on feast days.

Offering prayers for the imprisoned can land clergy in trouble. Bishop Isidoro Mora was detained before Christmas following a Mass in Matagalpa during which he offered spiritual support for Bishop Álvarez.

On New Year’s Eve, Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes of Managua urged prayer for the “families and communities that at this moment feel the absence of their priests or are experiencing other types of pain.”

Molina has counted more than 770 attacks on the Catholic Church



The US has demanded that Bishop Álvarez be released

in Nicaragua since 2018 – with 2023 registering the most incidents. Previously detained priests have routinely been sent into exile – spare Bishop Álvarez, who has refused to abandon Nicaragua, despite imprisonment.

Motives for the mass detentions of priests remain unknown. Murillo, the government spokeswoman, did not respond to a request for comment.

Exiled Nicaraguan journalist Emiliano Chamorro posited on X that the regime could be pushing for a change in Church leadership through the appointment of bishops it considers friendlier.

Molina didn’t discard the theory, but said, “I don’t see any priests in the Catholic Church who are complicit with the regime and could be elevated to bishops.”

Molina added: “The dictatorship may be preparing a massive exile to achieve its proposed objective, which is to eradicate the Catholic Church from Nicaragua. ... (Priests) speak the truth and they don’t want to hear it.”

Papal biographer Austen Ivereigh wrote on X that “A dictatorship suppressing the Church causes the Church to grow stronger and hastens the end of the dictatorship.”

He added: “It’s the iron law of history every Latin American dictator chooses to forget.”



# 160 die as Christians targeted in Nigeria

Filipe d'Avillez  
and John Pontifex  
Aid to the Church in Need

Church leaders have confirmed the killing of more than 160 people in Nigeria's Middle Belt over Christmas, attacks which they say saw the "deliberate targeting" of Christians.

The killing spree began on 23rd December and went on for four days, with 26 villages in Plateau State coming under fire.

Speaking to Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), the Catholic charity for persecuted and other suffering Christians, Fr Andrew Dewan, director of communications of Pankshin diocese where the attacks took place, described how "people were summarily shot and killed", with churches, clinics and grain stores torched.

Describing the scene in Tudun Mazat, which he had visited only that morning for Christmas Mass, Fr Dewan said: "The attackers stormed the community in the evening, just about the time most people were eating their dinner..."

"Before people could raise the alarm, the bandits were already upon them.

"People were summarily shot and killed, houses and corn that had been harvested were set ablaze, churches and clinics were also set on fire."

He said that very night 20 other communities were attacked in what bore all the signs of co-ordinated attacks.

Confirming reports that Fulani militia or mercenaries were to blame, he said that survivors and eyewitnesses reported that in mixed Fulani/Christian communities "not one Fulani was affected and no Fulani houses were burned".

Fr Dewan said: "The unprovoked attacks were well-coordinated and



Christians in Abuja protest against faith-related violence

deliberate, targeting communities that were Christians specifically.

"I live in this same community and can confirm that in the areas where these attacks took place the victims were 100 per cent Christians, except for a few. But even at that, the non-Christians were isolated."

He added: "For those who believe that this conflict is not religious, this latest attack proves that it is clearly a religious conflict."

"The fact that it took place at Christmas, and the deliberate targeting of Christians in a mixed community where Muslims are not attacked, clearly bears all the hallmarks of a religious conflict."

Fr Dewan said that up to 167 fatalities had been confirmed in attacks on villages centred on Bokkos, but also involving Barkin Ladi and Mangu.

He said the total dead "is definitely going to rise because there are still many people in hospitals, with varying degrees of injuries and wounds."

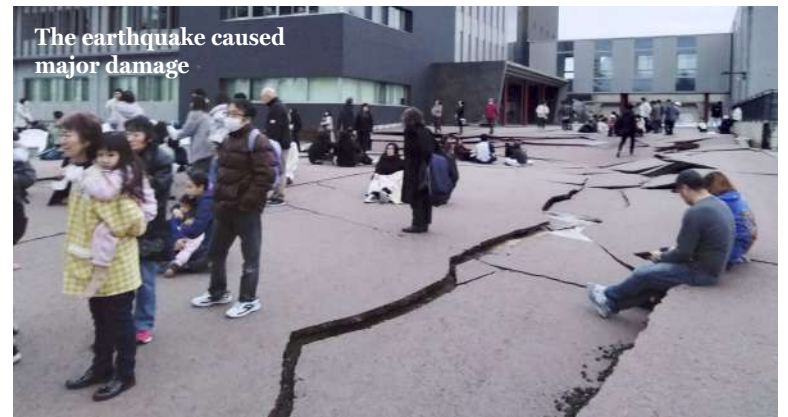
Condemning the "senseless killing", Regina Lynch, ACN International executive president, said:

"Our Christian brothers and sisters killed in Nigeria, and in other countries of the world, are the 'Holy Innocents' of the 21st century.

"The bloodshed as followers of Jesus will, we are sure, be the seed of new Christians."

She added: "We call on the government to finally confront this problem and provide safety to its citizens and urge our friends and benefactors to keep praying for Nigeria, just as we pledge to continue helping in whatever way we can."

• **With thanks to Maria Lozan**  
**Persecuted Christians plight ignore - see pg 18**



## Pope's prayers after 'quake rocks Japan

Pope Francis prayed for all those affected by last week's devastating earthquake in Japan, offering encouragement to emergency crews who were assisting victims and searching for survivors under the rubble.

As the official death toll from the quake reached 48 people, the pope prayed for the people of Japan's Ishikawa prefecture, expressing his sadness and "blessings of consolation and strength" in a telegram sent by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state.

"He assures everyone affected by this disaster of his heartfelt solidarity and spiritual closeness, and prays especially for the dead, those who mourn their loss and for the rescue of any persons still missing," the telegram said.

"The Holy Father offers encour-

agement to the civil authorities and emergency personnel as they assist the victims of this tragedy," it said.

Officials said at least 48 people were killed after an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.6 struck Japan's western coast near the Noto Peninsula on New Year's Day around 4pm. Dozens of aftershocks continued to be reported the day after.

Rescue workers searched for survivors under collapsed and burnt buildings all week. Many roads were severely damaged or obstructed by landslides, affecting rescue, aid and evacuation efforts.

A second tragedy hit the nation on 2nd January when a plane carrying five coastguard personnel were killed when it collided with a Japan Airlines passenger jet at Tokyo's Haneda airport. All 379 people on board the jet survived.

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### Red Sea prices warning

Attacks on shipping in the Red Sea are set to drive up the price of a number of commodities in the UK, including tea, wine, meat and fish. It is estimated that 300 cargo ships have been forced to travel 3,500 extra nautical miles at an estimated additional cost of \$2m (£1.6m) in fuel and transit costs per trip to avoid the dangerous straits, which are being targeted by Islamic militants. The British Retail Consortium said higher costs could have a knock-on effect on food prices.

### South Korean politician knifed

South Korea's opposition leader has been stabbed at a news conference in the southern port city of Busan. Lee Jae-myung, who narrowly lost the presidential elections in 2022, was stabbed on the left side of his neck, suffering a small laceration. His injury is not life-threatening and the attacker was arrested at the scene, said police.

### 'New phase' in Gaza war

Israel's military said it would begin to withdraw thousands of soldiers from Gaza ahead of a new stage in the war, which is expected to last all year. The announcement "shows signs of Israel's gradual shift to a lower-intensity phase of war", said CNN. At least 21,978 people have been killed and 57,697 injured in Israeli attacks on Gaza since 7th October, when Hamas terrorists invaded Israel.

# New report reveals world's Christians are facing rising levels of persecution

**Nigeria tops the table for the most Christians murdered for their faith; North Korea dubbed most closed nation to Christianity**

**Gina Christian**

New data shows that Christian persecution is on the rise globally -- but that repression remains largely overlooked in the news cycle, one expert has said.

"It is important to remember persecuted Christians in many countries around the world. Their suffering gets no coverage at all by major media," said Joop Koopman, director of communications for Aid to the Church in Need in the USA

ACN is dedicated to the service of Christians around the world, wherever they are persecuted or oppressed or suffering material need.

The nonprofit ACN provides pastoral and humanitarian assistance to the persecuted Church in more than 145 countries, working under the guidance of the pope.

More than 360 million of the world's estimated 2.6 billion Christians – one-in-seven – currently experience "high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith," according to Open Doors, an advocacy group that supports persecuted Christians in more than 70 countries.

One-in-five Christians in Africa and two-in-five in Asia experience persecution, according to Open Doors, which notes that over the last three decades, the number of countries where Christians suffer high and extreme levels of persecution has almost doubled to 76.

Direct forms of persecution include attacks on life and property, assassinations, imprisonment, torture, restricted access to churches and Bibles, forced conversions, and violence against women, while indirect attacks take the form of educational and employment discrimination, legal restrictions and denial of rights, according to the nonprofit International Christian Concern.

Both Christian Concern and Open Doors rank North Korea, Nigeria, India, Iran, China, Pakistan, Eritrea and Algeria as top countries for Christian persecution, with North Korea taking the No. 1 spot in Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List.

In its 2023 report, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended that the State Department redesignate 12 nations as countries of particular concern -- Burma, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea, Pakistan,



Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

In addition, the USCIRF added five names to that list: Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, Syria and Vietnam. It also has a special 'watch list' of nations which includes Algeria, the Central African Republic, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Uzbekistan.

Christian Concern cited Marxism, radical Islam, social and cultural discrimination and supernatural evil as the key sources of Christian persecution.

North Korea is perhaps the nation most "closed to Christianity and the outside world," according to Christian Concern. Under the totalitarian regime of Kim Jong Un the country's estimated 200,000 to 400,000 Christians must practice in secret amid imprisonment, torture, rape and extrajudicial killing.

Owning a Bible or quoting scripture can easily lead to death, according to Christian Concern's *Persecutors of the Year 2023* report, which noted that "Kim is just the latest in a dynastic line that has oppressed North Korea for decades, driving not just the economy into the ground but human rights and religious expression as well."

**Gaza Strip**

In recent weeks, embattled Christians in the Gaza Strip – particularly the hundreds sheltering at Holy Family Church, Gaza's only Catholic parish – have received international attention due to media coverage of the Israel-Hamas war. Koopman said

the Church in Iraq is fearful that "the war in Gaza might spread in the region, creating conditions that will prompt Iraqi Christians to leave their country (and) further shrinking the Christian population."

**Nigeria tops table**

Concurrently, said Koopman, "in terms of numbers, more Nigerian Christians (have) died" in recent months, "several thousand, at least, most of them in Benue State and in the Diocese of Makurdi in particular."

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

Koopman said ACN's latest annual report noted that more than 7,600 Nigerian Christians were killed between January 2021 and June 2022.

On Christmas Eve, at least 140 Nigerians were slain across some 15 central villages by rampaging herders wielding guns and machetes, the worst such attack in the region since 2018 (see pg 17).

The area has for several years been prone to clashes between Muslim Fulani herdsmen and mainly Christian farmers.

Koopman said "radicalised Muslim Fulani herdsmen" have "continued their killing spree, and no one is brought to justice."

"There was some hope that the fact that the new Nigerian president (Bola Ahmed Tinubu) is married to a practising Christian would translate into government action against the Fulanis, but nothing has been done," he said.

To the east of Nigeria, Islamist militia have terrorised Christians in Burkina Faso, singling them out and "forcing them to adopt Muslim dress and customs," said Koopman, noting that Burkina Faso "has fallen victim to a terrorist takeover of the Sahel region," the 10 African nations between the Sahara Desert and the continent's tropical south.

**Ukraine**

As they face the third year of a full-scale invasion by Russia – which continues attacks launched in 2014 – Ukrainians, most of whom identify as Christian, "are feeling very, very tired. People are exhausted, because there is no sign that the conflict is coming to an end..." Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the worldwide Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, said.

He added: "The population is terribly traumatised by the war. Some are physically injured, but above all they are wounded in their souls."

Russia's invasion, declared a genocide in two joint reports from New Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg Center for Human Rights, has seen Russian troops arrest and kill clergy; destroy Catholic, Christian and other houses of worship; and outlaw the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and several other faith confessions in at least one occupied territory. Two Redemptorist priests, Fr Ivan Levitsky and Fr Bohdan Heleta, remain unaccounted for after being detained in November 2022 and reportedly tortured since their arrest.

**Nicaragua**

In Nicaragua, "the regime of (President) Ortega is determined to continue to oppress the Church," said Koopman. "Ortega sees the Church as a threat to the regime, because of its powerful witness and sympathy for the opposition, which has practically disappeared."

Under the Ortega regime, clergy, religious and laypeople have been harassed, detained, imprisoned and expelled – most notably Bishop Rolando Alvarez of Matagalpa, stripped of his citizenship and now serving a 26-year sentence for refusing to be exiled. Charges against the bishop, an outspoken critic of Ortega, included treason, undermining national integrity and spreading false news.

The crackdown continued when, shortly before Christmas, Bishop Isidoro Mora was arrested, with some reports indicating the bishop had briefly asked for prayers for Bishop Alvarez and his diocese in a homily.

On 28th December Nicaraguan lawyer Martha Molina reported that Mgr Carlos Avilas had also been abducted by state officials.

The pro-Ortega congress has closed 3,500 nongovernmental organizations and expelled priests and women religious, including the Missionaries of Charity. Auxiliary Bishop Silvio Joe Baez of Managua has lived in exile since 2019 and ministers to a growing Nicaraguan diaspora in Miami.

**Pakistan**

Pakistan "continues to be a country of concern," where a "tiny Christian minority suffers severe discrimination" and multiple accusations under the nation's blasphemy laws, said Koopman. In August, a rumoured desecration of a copy of the Koran by two brothers led to mob rampage that destroyed hundreds of homes and several churches in the industrial district of Faisalabad.

**China**

In China, "believers are monitored and harassed for attending Mass," said Koopman, with the Government "pushing churches to take on a Chinese communist identity. He also questioned the efficacy of the Vatican's "provisional agreement" with the Chinese government, by which the two entities co-ordinate on the appointment of bishops.

"It is unclear what good the Sino-Vatican agreement is doing. The regime has appointed bishops without any input from Rome," said Koopman, noting that some imprisoned bishops and clergy "have been disappeared and not heard from in a long time."

# Pact offers a helping hand and a caring heart to prisoners and their families

## Theresa Alessandro

This year has seen the numbers of people in prison continuing to rise, so much so that police cells had to be repurposed to provide overspill spaces and special Rapid Deployment Cells were installed in the grounds of some prisons to increase capacity quickly.

Pact broadly welcomed the King's Speech, with CEO Andy Keen-Downs saying it "contains a number of sensible measures that will support efforts to deliver safer prisons and reduce reoffending. In particular, a reduction in short-term sentences and the early release scheme are welcome developments."

As the number of people in prison rises, so does the number of children and family members affected. Across England and Wales, we estimate that a record 100,000 children will go to bed tonight knowing that their mum or dad is in prison. Supporting the families of people in prison has always been a key pillar of Pact's work. This year marked our 125th anniversary and was bookended by two new Pact reports drawing on the expertise of families.

In February, Nobody's Listening presented families' insight into the impact of the criminal justice system on health and wellbeing. The report highlighted the role that families play in supporting people in prison who have mental health and physical health needs and identified developments that would unlock the potential of family support.

In *Serving a Hidden Sentence*, Pact's survey of prisoners' families revealed that many families, already on low incomes and affected by the rising cost of living, are being hit by additional costs and are struggling to cover the basics for themselves and their children. The survey reported that families suffer from a widespread social stigma associated with imprisonment and that their mental and physical health suffer as a result.

83 per cent of people with a loved one in prison reported struggling with their mental health. 50 per cent said they could not afford basics like food and heating. 70 per cent had been ostracised by wider family of friends, in spite of not having committed any crime themselves. Many parents reported being unable to afford gifts for their children this Christmas.

Pact's Faith in Action team raises awareness of what life is like for people in prison and their children and families. We launched two new dedicated @PactFaithAction social media channels this year, sharing the work of Pact using the language



Bishop Richard Moth with Pact team members and supporters

of our Catholic and Christian heritage. We aim to reach Catholic people with an alternative narrative to 'being tough on crime'; a narrative that articulates the God-given dignity of men and women in prison and highlights the isolation and stigma as well as sometimes material hardship suffered by families. We recognise that families affected by imprisonment are part of our communities.

## Pact roadshow

The team reached six dioceses with a Pact Roadshow this year, connecting local Pact Services staff and volunteers, prison chaplains, parishioners and clergy, the Welcome Directory and other partners and friends working in the area. In small groups, we reflected on Catholic Social Teaching through the lens of imprisonment

at 11 Just People workshops.

In a wonderful 'first,' we held a Pact Supporters' Mass in the chapel at HMP Wormwood Scrubs, celebrated by Bishop Paul McAleenan.

With the support of the Bishops' Conference, Prisoners' Sunday on the second Sunday in October was marked in eight Cathedrals across England and Wales with a dedicated Mass.

Many Pact parish reps and members of staff spoke in parish churches so that prisoners and their families were brought before the Lord in prayer, the work of Pact was highlighted, and Catholic communities were invited to put faith into action and support our work.

## Sir Harold Hood Memorial Lecture

This year's Sir Harold Hood Memorial Lecture was given by Dr

Chijioke Nwalozie, speaking on prison reform and the role of the Catholic Church. He challenged us all with these words: "When prisoners are poorly treated, the Church must act as a critical stakeholder and vanguard of prison reform."

It has been incredibly valuable for Pact to continue to work closely with Bishop Richard Moth, Liaison Bishop for Prisons on behalf of the Bishops' Conference.

We were delighted to accept an invitation to speak to all our bishops at their Autumn plenary meeting. Their interest and concern for people in prison and their children and families gave us encouragement.

We have provided a regular monthly update on Radio Maria England sharing prayer and action ideas with listeners and even reviewing the BBC series 'Time,' set in a women's prison.

Although this year has been a difficult one in the criminal justice system, our partnership with the Catholic Women's League has been a source of joy and hope. Members have prepared more than 350 backpacks of essential items for people leaving prison. Pact staff are distributing these to men and women on release.

Receiving these essential items of underwear, a woolly hat and a message of support, can make all the difference to someone who steps out of the prison gate desperately hoping to turn their life around but with no one there to meet them and no stable accommodation.

As one man told us on receiving a backpack: "It means so much to know somebody cares."

In addition, Catholic Women's League members have demonstrated care by stitching many hundreds of Cross in My Pocket items which are being distributed via our prison chaplaincy friends, and by raising money to support the work of Pact.

We ended the year with two well-supported Carol Services, in London and in Birmingham, held in solidarity with people affected by imprisonment.

It is fitting to give the last word to Dawn who spoke at our London Carol Service about her experience of being a mother whose son is in prison. She reported that, after struggling to come to terms with this horrible situation, she feels a sense of empowerment in working with Pact's new Listen to Families team.

She said: "When I found Pact, I knew I had found my tribe."

Thank you to everyone who has supported prisoners and their families and the work of Pact this year. We now work in 68 prisons across England and Wales, and support more people than ever before, and so we continue to depend on the generosity of our Catholic community.

We wish you all a Happy New Year.

• Sign up to receive our Fresh Start magazine to keep in touch with Pact: <https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/fresh-start>



Backpacks for prisoners on release, prepared by members of the Catholic Women's League

# JRS is proud to accompany refugees on their journeys to a safe haven in the UK

## Eileen Cole looks back at the Jesuit Refugee Service's (JRS) work in 2023

Looking back over the last year, it's striking to reflect on just how much has happened. And how much good work is being undertaken during these troubling times.

One hugely significant moment for JRS UK was the publication of our report into Napier Barracks. It shone a light on the horrifying experiences of people held at the prison-like site in Kent. The report's launch in neighbouring Folkestone was very well attended and kept the public focus on this important issue.

It was just one of many advocacy initiatives we've undertaken, to challenge the increasingly hostile environment facing people seeking sanctuary in the UK.

Towards the end of this year we also launched a new partnership with the food charity Sustain highlighting the enormous challenges that many asylum seekers face when it comes to getting regular meals.

Of course, all of this is only possible with the help of our amazing supporters from the Catholic community and beyond. Back in April we lined the streets of London to cheer on an enthusiastic group running the marathon for JRS UK and raising vital funds to help us accompany, serve and advocate for refugees.

June brought Refugee Week and JRS UK's refugee friends publicly performed creative poetry as part of the project 'You can see me but I don't exist'. This was the fruit of two years of workshops and collaboration with Stratford Library and the Photographer's Gallery, highlighting the experience of people living in limbo amid the painfully slow and complex asylum system. The performances were joyful and affirming, despite the difficult subject matter.

Finding hosts for our At Home accommodation project is always a crucial area of work, and this summer JRS UK's Accommodation Team were thrilled to be gifted a house which will provide a home for male refugee friends. Amani House will give people longer-term and more stable housing, supporting them to improve their physical and mental health and putting them in a better position to resolve their asylum cases.

This follows the opening of Emilie House, for female refugees, and represents a further growth in our support for people who would otherwise be homeless.

In response to a social media request earlier this year, Sarah, a textile designer who'd been collaborating with interior designers, film costume designers and the furnishing textile industry on various projects for over 35 years, volunteered to lead a textile group for refugee friends. She reflected: "I have learnt so much and met a group of amazing individuals who I would never encounter in regular life. By being reliable, supplying materials, trying to remember requested materials or solving problems each week, I hoped to build up trust, a sense of belonging, of achievement from learning new skills and finishing a project, enjoy comradery working as a group and to add a little bit of enjoyable structure to people's lives."

Our community kitchen has continued to cook for the whole JRS UK family at our regular social drop-ins and other special events. For the King's Coronation, we joined our neighbours for a special meal on Wapping Green, and towards the end of the year hosted a Christmas meal for dozens of refugee friends.



Accommodation Officer Laurence meets prospective hosts

### Legal project

As the Government continued to introduce more draconian legislation targeting refugees, the JRS UK Legal Project ran information sessions to help people learn more about their legal rights, dealing with solicitors and applications to the Home Office. More than 100 people have benefited from this vital service so far.

Our legal team directly helped a number of people secure refugee status, discretionary leave to remain, or humanitarian protection and supported two children to register as UK citizens. The team also ran asylum appeals, maintaining their 100% success rate. In June, we were delighted to be joined by refugee friends, volunteers and supporters on the London Legal Walk to raise funds for this work.

Of course, not everything at JRS



An evening of poetry & performance at the Photographer's Gallery

UK has been good news. We are working in a context where hostility towards refugees has continued to grow, and summer saw the passage of the Illegal Migration Act, a deeply cruel piece of legislation all but extinguishing the right to claim asylum in the UK.

The report of the inquiry into abuse at Brook House revealed the true horror of immigration detention, and its deep systemic roots, as the government persists in pursuing its inhuman and unworkable plan to expand detention and force people seeking sanctuary here on planes to Rwanda.

### Detention outreach

Countering this hostility has not only been at the forefront of our advocacy work, but also our service and accompaniment. The JRS UK detention outreach team has continued to support more people in detention, where much of their work is focused on securing access to justice. This year we have also been blessed with new volunteers to visit people in detention, with

one reflecting: "I've discovered friendship, resilience, good humour and triumph over adversity". It is beautiful to see how friendships grow through this work.

Meanwhile, our destitution team continues to accompany refugees who have been hit disproportionately hard by the cost-of-living crisis. Refugee friends like Omer volunteered as part of the team while unable to work due to the Government's ban on asylum seekers finding employment.

He explained: "Volunteering has taught me patience despite the obstacles we face. At JRS UK I meet people who have suffered a lot. Volunteering is an opportunity to help others and offer them a safe space; working with others, my suffering becomes as nothing."

All the joy, hope, and human connection at JRS UK throughout 2023 has been happening against a backdrop of mounting hostility. It's a space of countercultural resistance, and we're so grateful to every supporter walking with us on this journey.



JRS marked the King's coronation with a celebration on Wapping Green

# 2023: The year of the border

## Immigration, boats and the Catholic Church, by Joshua Nichol

Borders have come to define many of the political talking points of the last year, so much so that the Prime Minister has frequently been seen standing behind a podium with the phrase ‘Stop the Boats’ emblazoned across the front.

Some political commentators have even suggested the Prime Minister has bet his entire political future on the success of his immigration policy.

The UK had two Home Secretaries in 2023: Suella Braverman and James Cleverly. Both clearly defined immigration as their *raison d'être*.

While both have pledged to lower the net migration number, the Office for National Statistics revealed this year that they recorded higher net migration figures in 2022 (745,000) than in 2019 (184,000).

Pope Francis has maintained the Church’s position on the matter of immigration: the right to migrate is a “fundamental human right”.

Another figure the Government have tried to bring down is the amount spent on housing asylum seekers while their claims are progressed.

Former Home Secretary Braverman procured barges that would be docked in ports for asylum seekers to live in while their asylum claims were scrutinised. The *Bibby Stockholm* barge in Dorset has been the flagship barge for the Government.

Entry to the *Bibby Stockholm* was delayed at the end of July because of security concerns. On 11th August, every resident was evacuated from the barge after *Legionella* was discovered in the water supply – they would not move back in until 19th October.

The policy was widely criticised by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) who labelled the barge “cruel and dangerous” and a “quasi-detention” setting. In an interview with LBC, Braverman said that the Government had “done well” to stand up the barge.

Sadly, on 12th December, a resident of the *Bibby Stockholm* died in a reported suicide while awaiting a decision on their asylum application. Following this news, the JRS repeated its call for the barge to close.

In a document published in early 2023, the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales set out 24 guiding principles for responding to the global refugee crisis.

Principle 12 sets out that the that the Church in England and Wales



Former Home Secretary Braverman procured barges that would be docked in ports for asylum seekers to live in while their asylum claims were scrutinised. The *Bibby Stockholm* barge in Dorset (left) is the flagship for the policy

will ‘defend the fundamental human dignity of all migrants and refugees, regardless of their legal status, including through policies providing access to decent accommodation’ while principle 14 calls on the Government to ‘avoid the use of immigration detention’ and ‘other practices which violate human dignity’.

The Government’s relationship with immigration culminated in early December with a vote on a Bill which would disapply sections of the Human Rights Act for asylum seekers and declare Rwanda as a legally safe country that asylum seekers can be removed to.

For right-wing members of the Conservative party, this was not strong enough to stop the boats and the threat of the first Government defeat at a second

reading of a Bill since 1986 loomed over Rishi Sunak. But the Prime Minister lived to fight another day after abstentions from rebels allowed the Bill to pass.

Perhaps symbolically, the Government had to call their climate minister back from COP28 in the United Arab Emirates to vote for the Rwanda Bill. The conference, which aimed to get in

*Pope Francis has maintained the Church’s position on immigration, saying that the right to migrate is a “fundamental human right”.*

writing a commitment to phasing out fossil fuels, concluded without the UK climate minister present.

It is somewhat ironic that immigration policy has stemmed the UK’s contribution to global climate change discussions. The Migration Policy Institute’s Lawrence Huang has said that impacts of rising temperatures has “amplified” motivations for rural Hondurans and Guatemalans to move the USA.

Pope Francis suggested that many people will be forced to move their homes because of a rise in sea-levels, and wrote in his exhortation *Laudate Deum*: ‘It is indubitable that the impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and families of many persons. We will feel its effects in the areas of healthcare, sources of employment, access to

resources, housing, forced migrations, etc.’

CAFOD has said that more than 3,000 of their campaigners wrote to their MPs to call for action at COP28 in the UAE and hundreds of Catholics marched through streets with the message that they had ‘No faith in fossil fuels’.

Francis also declared that he believed the response from world leaders to the climate crisis since COP21 in 2016 has “not been adequate”.

The Church’s response to the crises at the borders of countries worldwide seems to be at loggerheads with the UK Government’s approach.

Given the Tories’ focus on immigration, it is likely a topic that will continue to dominate headlines as we approach a likely general election next year.



Napier Barracks in Kent continues to house migrants

Catholic singer-songwriting duo Hal St John and Cherrie Anderson of Ooberfuse reflect on their exciting 2023, which saw them open with shows for the Christian community in Iraq and close with a pope-backed single for peace in the Holy Land

# Let the world hear our song for peace

Our year 2023 began in Iraq with a series of shows and concerts. We joined Christian communities from Duhok to Qaraqosh in their joyful festive Christmas celebrations.

After the ISIS incursions of 2014, which pushed many Christian families from their homes to the plains of Nineveh, it was a profound experience to pray and sing with them years after this collective trauma. The experience made us vividly aware of the Mesopotamian roots of our faith.

Without the introduction of sin into the human condition in the garden of Eden, located today somewhere between Babylon and Baghdad (where we landed to get our visas and near where the rivers Tigris and Euphrates converge), there would have been none of the subsequent religious interventions to remove the stain of sin. The unexcavated archeological mounds scattered across the landscape, hold secrets of past civilizations to which we owe so much. When the world's lust for oil one day subsides, these tells will be mined for the cultural treasures and the secrets they hold.

After the exertions of a busy and intense tour, we were glad to switch direction back to the creative process itself in March. We were given the opportunity to work with legendary songwriter Judd Friedman (Whitney Houston, *I Will Run To You*) in a three-day song writing camp nestled in the hills of Southern Spain. The spectacular landscape was the perfect backdrop to what proved to be a highly stimulating series of encounters. Sitting in a room working on a brief from Judd with two other creatives, who we had never before met, produced some interesting collaborations.

Inspired by the workshop, we wrote a new song called *Show Me Love* in collaboration with Assyrian folk singer Newroz. The song explored the emotional landscape of someone who has had to flee everything in order simply to survive. Letting go of the world that nurtured you and leaving loved ones behind is one thing. But being in limbo in a suspended state of animation, often for several years until accepted in a new world, is quite another. Yet this is the reality faced by millions of displaced refugees who are fleeing terrible violence and abuse in their homelands – yet awaiting the outcomes of their often protracted asylum seeker applications.

It was a highlight of the year recording Nevroz's soul-wrenching traditional Kurdish yodel at London's iconic Abbey Road studios. And, yes, we did the obligatory walk across the zebra crossing as featured on the Beatles' classic album cover!



Hal and Cherrie being interviewed at World Youth Day

We were back touring again in May. This time a week of gigs and concerts in some of Japan's lesser-known fashionable districts. We shared the line-up with our long-standing chip-tune and straight-edge brother in arms Hibari, along with an eclectic range of up-and-coming Japanese talent. These occasional forays to the Far East are important to us as a band, as they refresh our music vision - to bring Eastern musical traditions into conversation with Western in pursuit of a genre defying new fusion – hence the name Ooberfuse.

Back in the UK in June, we led a songwriting workshop with refugees awaiting the outcomes of their various asylum applications. With performances of *Show Me Love* outside the Home Office, and

at various Migrant Day events, we were happy to add emotional colour to the sometimes grey debates around legislation and human rights. It's all well and good compiling statistics on migrants to the UK in a way that engages with the audience. Our musical explorations gave listeners insights into what it feels like to be someone displaced and in search of a safe sanctuary – moving the debate from the head to the heart.

Also in June, we were back in the studio working on new material. Only this time it was a studio in Bethlehem. John Handal, producer and studio owner, introduced us to an up-and-coming singer presently studying at Bethlehem's University. The encounter was enervating – singing in unfamiliar key ranges

and hitting notes that in the West we did not know existed. Out of the creative flux emerged what became our Christmas song, *Hear Angels Cry*. We planned to premiere the song at the annual tree lighting ceremony in Manger Square in Bethlehem in the first week of December, but as with any best laid plan, it had to be revised in response to unfolding events on the geo-political stage.

We were back performing again in July with a mini tour of Portugal. This ended up the following month with Ooberfuse being a warm up act on the big stage as part of World Youth Day Portugal. It is hard to imagine nearly two million people from all over the world gathering in one place to share with an intoxicating exuberance the wonders of an ancient faith. But that is exactly what happened at World Youth Day Lisbon. We played on a number of stages to euphoric crowds from various countries, all united in faith.

In September, we returned to Bethlehem to put the final touches to *Hear Angels Cry*. When we were not in the studio we were jamming with local musicians – most notably Charlie, an accomplished instrumentalist who learnt to play the guitar upside down and who gave up trying to teach me to play his main instrument, the Middle Eastern Oud. In our down time, we did a couple of music worship sessions in two schools in Bethlehem, teaching teenagers how to master the art of rapping.

In October, we were invited to explore the theme of homelessness through the lens of a central London homeless initiative yards away from bustling Oxford Street. Farm Street parish priest Fr Dominic Robinson runs a restaurant for rough sleepers which, unlike a soup kitchen, allows people to sit down at a table to be waited upon by an army of volunteers. The food is prepared in the kitchens of the chic Connaught Hotel and in the fryers of the Mayfair Chippy. It is a truly wonderful social initiative, redistributing the food usually reserved for the rich and privileged to the most needy on London's Street.

While there we met a homeless musician in the restaurant and, after a few jamming sessions, the single *Hard Times* – featuring rap royalty Snoop Dogg – was born.

**Hear Ooberfuse's latest singles here:**

**Hear Angels Cry** - <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/pope-prays-bethlehem-song-can-inspire-solidarity-reconciliation-and-peace-in-the-holy-land-this-christmas>

**Hard Times ft. Snoop Dogg** - <https://earmilk.com/2023/12/05/ooberfuse-joins-forces-with-snoop-dogg-to-deliver-hard-times/>



Ooberfuse with Snoop Dogg



## A VIEW FROM THE PEWS

MICHAEL CAINE  
ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, LYMM, CHESHIRE

# Love and laughter keep us together

Every human being is gifted with two of the most wonderful human emotions that anyone can experience: Love; and a sense of humour.

The problem here is that many do not use them. I noticed in a recent newspaper article that couples are falling out and destroying their relationships because one accuses the other of not doing enough to help with the household chores, and it suggested that in these situations people should use therapists.

What I found strange was that the article never mentioned the above two human emotions. They were never mentioned once, and I wondered if in such marriages, was there any real love.

All married couples have their ups and downs, and some hard ones, but loving one another, plus a good sense of humour are great emotions that can help overcome their downs, in many cases without any need for counsellors or therapists.

Could it be that such professionals are only needed when couples have no real love between them, and lack a sense of humour?

A married colleague of mine with two children told me that his father had given him one piece of advice on his wedding day. He said that



life is full of ups and downs. The ups are great but where the downs are concerned, beware of pride.

He said that some pride, such as in our cleanliness are no problem, but when pride causes people to make excuses by saying 'I have my pride' beware: such pride has been known to cause the break-up of friendships and even marriages.

My colleague then said he was reminded of all this many years

later, again when talking to his dad. He explained that his boss was continually picking on him for no reason and that he had his pride and was going to give his notice the following morning.

He said he's always remembered the look on his dad's face who simply asked him if pride could feed his children, clothe them, or look after them. He told him to forget his pride, find a new job first,

then give in his notice, and finally reminded him of that famous saying – pride comes before a fall.

Love and humour are emotions we should explain to our children, as well as that problem called pride. Laughing makes you feel great, that's why good comedians always attract large audiences, and it's a great feeling when used with love.

Our Lord Jesus Christ often referred to love, telling us that the

only way our spiritual soul can get to Heaven when we die is if we truly love God and our neighbour.

St. Paul also spoke about love; it being a true healer, and that it is patient, kind, doesn't envy, or boast and isn't proud. It always protects, trusts, hopes, preserves, endures, and never fails.

Love shouldn't stop between members of a family, because it can be used to help others so long as it's done without any thought of recompense.

If people truly loved their partners and others, where is the necessity for pride? They would always be trying to help them and because of the love they have for each other, they wouldn't even think about checking if their other half was doing their fair share of work. Where there is truly shared love there are no real personal problems.

God uses his ultimate wisdom to tell us the importance of love. Love him and our neighbours, but it is selfish pride and being avaricious that cause people to neglect his advice. They do so at their peril, which is life in hell for all eternity for their spiritual souls when they die.

So... **never underestimate the wonder and power of love and a good laugh.**

## JOURNEY IN FAITH

CHRIS MCDONNELL



## Sir Tim Brighouse: A great educator

A great educator died in the days before Christmas, Sir Tim Brighouse. He was 83.

Born in the early months of the Second World War, he was to spend his life in the field of education, a voice that put children first.

Sir Tim took his PGCE at the Oxford University Department of Education in 1961. He began his career as a schoolteacher, becoming a deputy head in a South Wales secondary modern school in 1966. In the 70s he worked for the Buckinghamshire County Council and in the Eighties was CEO in Oxfordshire and Birmingham authorities.

He was appointed Professor of Education at Keele University in 1989 where he remained for the next four years.

By then he had established himself as a strong creative thinker in education, a thorn in the side of accepted political opinion, always willing to argue his case on behalf

of children and their schools. Never one to be over-considerate of his appearance, he went on to become the schools commissioner for London and received a knighthood in 2009 for his services to education.

His sense of humour and charismatic style of teaching won him many friends in the field of education. He was a valued and dedicated colleague.

Children are at the centre of any thriving community and should be the concern of all of us. It was in seeking a child that three kings set out on a journey following a star that told of his presence.

We remember his birth and their journey each year when we set out the figures of our candle-lit cribs in homes, churches and public places.

This year many of the cribs in Palestine are different. Instead of being neatly arranged, they are rock and rubble strewn. The Infant shawl of white has been replaced by

the black and white keffiyeh scarf. A small token of support for the plight of the Palestinian people in their present grief and anguish.

### No room at the inn

*Then  
plenty of straw. And contented stock.  
A woman in blue a man leaning  
on a staff,  
well-lit, neat and tidy  
with a baby wrapped in white.  
Star-lit  
Familiar.*

*Now  
Scattered rocks, twisted iron  
A man in a sweatshirt and  
A woman in a shawl watch over  
an infant  
Wrapped in a keffiyeh amid dust  
of plaster  
And hanging drapes, the  
aftermath of attack  
This troubled, turbulent year.*



Sir Tim Brighouse

# Celebrate this ‘little Christmas’ by welcoming God into your life

## Epiphany: a time of wonder as the world welcomes its new king

Christian imagination has been captured by the Magi from the time Matthew first told the story. Who were they? Where in the east did they come from? Were they kings?

In the world into which Jesus was born, the word, Magi, could mean various things: wise men, members of Persia's priestly caste, possessors of occult knowledge, astronomers. Whatever the truth of the matter, one thing is obvious: Matthew tells a gripping story.

The story of the Magi in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 2 is a story about wise men who were open to God's intervention in time. They came to see the Saviour, were guided by the light of faith and, when they found him, they brought him gifts.

Even though they were pagans and did not possess the word of God in scripture like Herod, who plotted to kill the Saviour, they were led by the gift of faith.

Matthew portrays Jesus in this story as being accepted by the Gentiles (the three wise men from the east) while being rejected by his own people.

This theme is not new in the New Testament. St Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, speaks about the universality of Jesus's message in Ephesians, chapter 3 that welcomes everyone into Christ's kingdom. Matthew, however, gives it an interesting twist. He contrasts the likes of Herod, who was gifted with God's word in scripture, with the pagan Magi from the East who followed their inner voice, their star, and were led to Jesus.

In a strange twist also, it is Herod and the Scribes who directed the Magi to Bethlehem where they found their Saviour. God works in strange ways! He can even use unwitting enemies to accomplish his will.

On this feast of the Epiphany we recall that, like the Magi, we are children of the light, recipients of the gifts of faith, hope, and love which we are called upon to share. We are given a wonderful opportunity to celebrate what the Lord has given us. Now, right now, is the time to wake up to this reality, to understand that time passes without permission but not without purpose. We can make plans for the future or recall memories of the good old days, but the only time we have is the



The Adoration of the Magi by Matthias Stom (c. 1600 – after 1652)

moment at hand. Like the Magi, we are partners with God in the totally unpredictable present moment.

Think about it! The only time that is truly yours and mine is this time which we are in right now. As a nation, we are good at preparing for the future: a new invention, a career, a degree, but always with emphasis on the future.

But what about the art of living, the art of becoming wise in the daily conduct of our lives that improves the quality of our day by bringing to the fore the transforming power of Christ's love? This is what we need to focus on today. Our lives are too precious to ignore the grace of the present moment, to find God in the ordinary as well as the extraordinary, in the little things of life, in the unexpected.

The word Epiphany comes from

the Greek and it means manifestation or appearance. Our faith must be alive and open to on-going manifestations or little revelations of the fruits of faith, hope and love in our lives.

Christian tradition insightfully refers to the Epiphany as 'little Christmas' because it represents our humble way of accepting the new life of Jesus into our lives.

*“Christian tradition insightfully refers to the Epiphany as ‘little Christmas’ because it represents our humble way of accepting the new life of Jesus into our lives...”*

Faith is not a static possession and neither are hope and love. They are not gifts to be hidden away but must shine through the lives we lead. They must grow and develop and touch those around us in as many ways as possible.

Some people, like Herod in today's Epiphany story, choose the path of death. Others, like the Magi, choose the path of life. Today, we are called to recommit ourselves to the cause of new life through faith that gives meaning to our lives, through hope that gives purpose to our lives, and through love that enables us to love the way Christ loves us. Make time for your friends, to visit them, and to help them in their time of need. And, be a friend to anyone who has no friends, especially the least of those among you. Time spent like this is never a waste of time. It is of the essence.

I'm reminded of a story about a Mother and daughter who were leaving Church. The little girl had an Epiphany and turning to her Mother, asked: "Is it true what the priest said in Church that God is love?"

Her mother replied: "Yes, darling. It is true that God is love." The little girl continued: "Is it true also that God is within you, like the priest said?" "Yes", replied mum; "the Kingdom of God is within you." Looking up at her mother, with wonder in her eyes, the little girl responded: "If God is love, and if God is within you, then He has to shine through you."

May the Lord surprise you with His joy as you experience His awesome presence in the present moment.

Have a happy and joy-filled Epiphany.



## SUNDAY WORSHIP

ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS



# John rejoiced in the baptism of the Lord

7th Jan 2024 – The Baptism of the Lord  
First Reading: Isaiah 55:1-11

Come to the waters, come buy and eat  
Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;  
and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;

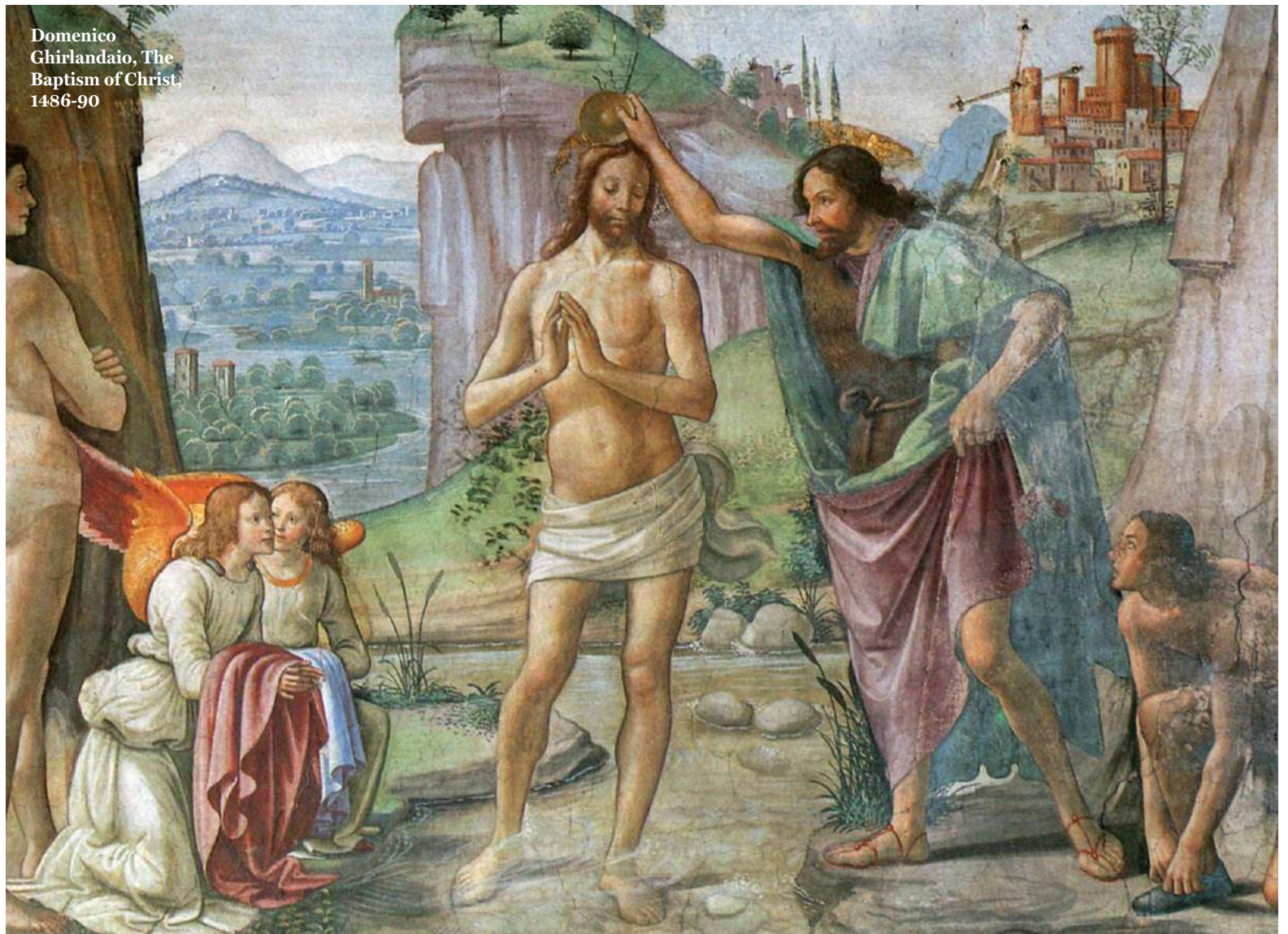
it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I sent it.

**Responsorial: Isaiah 12:2-6**

*You will draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation.*

*Truly, God is my salvation, I trust, I shall not fear.*

Domenico Ghirlandaio, The Baptism of Christ, 1486-90



*For the Lord is my strength, my song,  
he became my saviour.  
With joy you will draw water  
from the wells of salvation. (R./)*

*Give thanks to the Lord, give praise to his name!  
Make his mighty deeds known to the peoples!  
Declare the greatness of his name. (R./)*

*Sing a psalm to the Lord  
for he has done glorious deeds,  
make them known to all the earth!  
People of Zion, sing and shout for joy  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. (R./)*

**Acts of the Apostles (10:34-38)**

Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and went about doing good. Peter addressed Cornelius and his household: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread

throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

**Gospel: Mark 1:7-11**

As Jesus receives baptism a voice says, "You are my Son" and the Spirit rests on him.

John the Baptist proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.

"I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

**A clear purpose in life**

I've had the privilege of leading several pilgrimages to the Holy Land. One of the highlights is a communal immersion up to our knees in the river Jordan, to renew the promises of our baptism. It is a moving experience when one recalls the Spirit descending, and the Father confirming each of us as his son or daughter.

Many of those who experienced it remember that moment with great emotion, and use it to renew their commitment.

The baptism of Jesus is a moment of special grace in our story of salvation. Not only did he join us in our sinful state, but the Father and the Spirit are seen and heard to be there with him. The gospel uses the simple phrase that "the heavens were opened," but it is a powerful statement. Later on, when Jesus completed his life-journey on Calvary, we read how "the veil of the Temple was rent in two." Now at last we were free to enter the Holy of Holies. Today's gospel is the beginning of a journey, which, through our own baptism, each of us is asked to travel. It is a journey full of purpose.

Each of us needs a sense of purpose and pattern to our Christian living. When I set out on a journey I need to have a definite idea of where I intend going, and how to make the journey. Peter summarised the purpose and pattern of Christ's life when he said, "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." We are invited to make his purpose our own.

A man was down the country travelling along by-roads where the signposts were few and far between. After a while, unsure of his directions, he decided to ask the first person he saw. When he came across a farmer driving his cows home for milking he stopped the car and asked if he was on the right road to Mallow. The farmer told him that he certainly was on the Mallow road. The driver thanked him and was about to move forward when the farmer added, in a nonchalant way, "You're on the right road, but you're going in the wrong direction!"

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS...

JENNA MARIE COOPER



# Silent prayers are always heard by God –and why nuns can be considered ‘lay’

**Q: What is the difference between Orders and Vows? Are nuns actually laypersons?**

**A:** Holy Orders is the sacrament through which a baptised man is ordained a deacon, priest or bishop. Men who have received the sacrament of orders are collectively called ‘clergy’.

A vow is considered private if it is made by individuals wholly on their own initiative, and a vow is considered ‘public’ according to canon law if it is formally received by the relevant authority in the name of the Church. One type of public vow is religious profession, where a monk, nun, or religious brother or sister promises to follow the Gospel through a more radical way of life as set out by the rule of their community.

Religious vows are different from orders in a few ways. First, religious profession is not a sacrament. Non-ordained religious are not considered clergy. A monk’s religious vows do not confer any sacramental powers from his religious profession, unless he is also ordained as priest.

The term ‘lay’ or ‘laity’ can have different meanings depending on context. In one use of the term, a layperson is anyone who is not ordained clergy. In this sense, any non-ordained religious, even strictly cloistered nuns, are considered ‘lay’.

But the Church also refers to ‘laity’ in a second and more robust sense to mean any member of the faithful who is neither clergy nor in a recognised state of consecrated life - with ‘consecrated life’ being a broad umbrella category encompassing not only monasteries, and religious brothers and sisters, but also less-familiar vocations such as consecrated virgins and diocesan hermits.

Because nuns are in a public state of consecrated life, they are not considered ‘lay’ in this second, stronger sense of the term.

**Q: Why are so many of the saints, priests and religious? What about married people or laypeople?**

**A:** Technically a saint is any person who is actually in Heaven, whether they are known or unknown to us. By this definition, there are certainly already a great number of lay saints.

On the other hand, ‘canonised’ saints – those whom we refer to with the title ‘saint,’ and who are



Benedictine nuns pray in the chapel of the Abbey of St. Walburga. ‘Because nuns are in a public state of consecrated life, they are not considered “lay”’.

commemorated on the Church’s liturgical calendar – are those whom the Church recognises in an official way as having attained heaven. A formal declaration of sainthood is really for the benefit of those of us still here on earth, as the saints are heavenly intercessors for our prayerful intentions and worthy role models in our journey of faith.

However, canonisation is necessarily a lengthy and often complicated process. Among other things, it involves extremely in-depth biographical studies on the proposed saint-to-be, to ensure the Servant of God truly did live a life of heroic Christian virtue. Following this, the church looks for clear signs, typically one or two verified miracles, that the person in question is indeed enjoying eternal life with God in heaven.

Because canonisation requires a great deal of time, resources, and widespread interest in and popular devotion to the proposed saint, some pious politics can be involved in determining which saints causes progress. For instance, a religious community is often more organised in its efforts to have one of its own members canonised than, say, the friends and neighbours of a holy layperson would be.

Some modern lay saints include

St. Gianna Beretta Molla (wife and medical doctor); Sts. Louis and Zélie Martin (a married couple); and Blessed Carlo Acutis (a teenage computer programmer currently on the path to sainthood).

**Q: I live alone, and every morning and night, I say my prayers out loud, but sometimes I pray silently, just in my head. Are those silent prayers heard?**

**A:** God is everywhere and knows everything, so it is safe to say that

even our purely silent prayers are heard by God.

Additionally, we are told throughout scripture that God knows the secrets and thoughts of our hearts. For example, in the book of Psalms, we pray: ‘LORD, you have probed me, you know me: you know when I sit and stand; you understand my thoughts from afar ... Even before a word is on my tongue, Lord, you know it all.’ (Ps. 139:1-2, 4)

Many of our greatest saints, such

as Sts. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, place special value on ‘mental prayer,’ or a silent, often wordless sharing of our hearts with God. And in the Gospel, Jesus himself tells us: “...when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will repay you.” (Mt. 6:6)

**Q: Can I leave Mass after the blessing, or must I wait for the recessional hymn to be sung?**

**A:** The final blessing is the official conclusion of the Mass, so in that sense, once the final blessing is said, Mass is over and you may leave without technically missing any of the Mass.

However, as the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* says: “The Christian faithful who come together as one in expectation of the Lord’s coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together Psalms, hymns and spiritual canticles (cf. Col 3:16)’ (GIRM 39). And, as the popular expression (attributed to St. Augustine) goes, “he who sings prays twice.”

So, if you’re not in a rush, you might consider staying for the recessional hymn – not out of a sense of obligation, but simply for your own spiritual joy and communal nourishment.



## LITURGICAL .... BAKING!

Paul Ashton



# A celebration cake fit for a King

As organist and music leader we have just had our two busiest times of the year, writes Universe Liturgical music columnist Paul Ashton... so to finish Christmastide and a period of too much eating, well, there is more food on the way!

My passion for music is paired with a love of food including cooking and baking.

So, as we hear the final strains of *We Three Kings* disappearing into the distance, let's look at the culinary celebration of the visit of the three Magi and bake a special treat that is linked to their arrival.

## GALETTES DES ROIS

The *Galette des Rois*, or 'king cake,' is a French recipe associated with the celebration of Epiphany (Twelfth Night). Traditionally, the galette des rois has a fève (bean) hidden inside. The person who finds the fève in their slice of cake is considered the king or queen for the day and is often given a paper crown to wear.

Originally, it was a real bean inside the tart, but today the fève is a tiny porcelain figurine - but the same word meaning 'bean' is still used. Fèves are very collectable in France but not easily available here so in our version of the recipe we will go back to using a real bean.

The tradition of hiding a bean or a small trinket in a cake dates back to Roman times and the tradition continues in Britain with the hiding of a coin in the Christmas Pudding.

This is the French tradition but other countries have epiphany cakes with a hidden figure inside. In Italy it is 'La Befana'; the Spanish have 'Rosca de Reyes' and 'Bolo Rei' in Portugal.

This recipe in France is often made on a flat baking tray. My version of the recipe uses a flan/tart tin so that you are certain to have a galette that is holding together and in good shape.

**PREP TIME 20 minutes**  
**COOK TIME 20 minutes**  
**TOTAL TIME 40 minutes**

## EQUIPMENT

- Flan/tart dish, about 24cm (9.5"), preferably non-stick with removable bottom; or if not removable, serve directly from the flan dish
- Large plate as a cutting guide for dough circle
- Sharp knife or lame
- Rolling pin
- Mixing bowl
- Sieve
- Spatula
- A gold party crown optional - if you have one!

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 sheets ready-rolled puff pastry
- 1 bean (fresh or frozen) optional
- Frangipane
- 75 g unsalted butter at room temperature or softened
- 100 g icing sugar (sieved or whiz up in food processor)
- 140 g ground almond
- 1 tsp almond essence
- 1 egg
- 1 egg white (the egg yolk is saved for the glaze in the next step)

## Glaze

- 1 egg yolk
- 1 tsp water

## INSTRUCTIONS

Heat the oven to 200°C/fan 180°C/gas 6.  
Or if your puff pastry packet says differently then use the temperatures given there

## Making the frangipane

Sieve the icing sugar into the

mixing bowl. Add the almond powder, sugar, eggs and extra egg white, softened butter and the almond essence. (If you've used your food processor to ensure the icing sugar is fine then you can carry on mixing all the ingredients in there)

## Preparing the 'galette'

■ Find a plate about the same width as the puff pastry and cut around it with a sharp knife. If your plate is slightly too small, just use it as a guide and cut wider. It does not have to be perfect.

■ Gently roll the pastry dough to expand equally all around. A couple of gentle rolls in each direction will be enough.

■ Cut the 2nd sheet of puff pastry in the same way - but do not roll it.

■ Place the first (larger) piece of

puff pastry in the tart tin. It should come up along the sides all around the tin. Again, it does not have to be perfectly in line with the top. The pastry just has to be higher than the frangipane when it is filled.

■ Tip the frangipane in to the tart tin and spread evenly with a spatula. Push the bean inside the mixture to hide it.

■ Fold over the edges of the pastry all around. Brush the edges of the dough and then cover with the 2nd sheet of puff pastry, sealing the edges well right round

■ Make designs with a sharp knife (or lame). A curved spoke design is very common

## Glaze and bake

■ Mix the egg yolk with 1 tsp water and brush over the top of the pastry

■ Bake for 20 to 30 min. Check the cooking regularly!

■ Allow to cool, before removing from the tin. Put the party crown on top, if you have one, to bring to the table. The crown is given to the

person who finds the bean and is king for the day.

In France, ready rolled puff pastry is usually circular - perfect for making tarts and flans. If your puff pastry sheets are rectangular, as they usually are in the UK, you will have some off-cuts. Do not throw these away! These can be used to make some tasty snacks

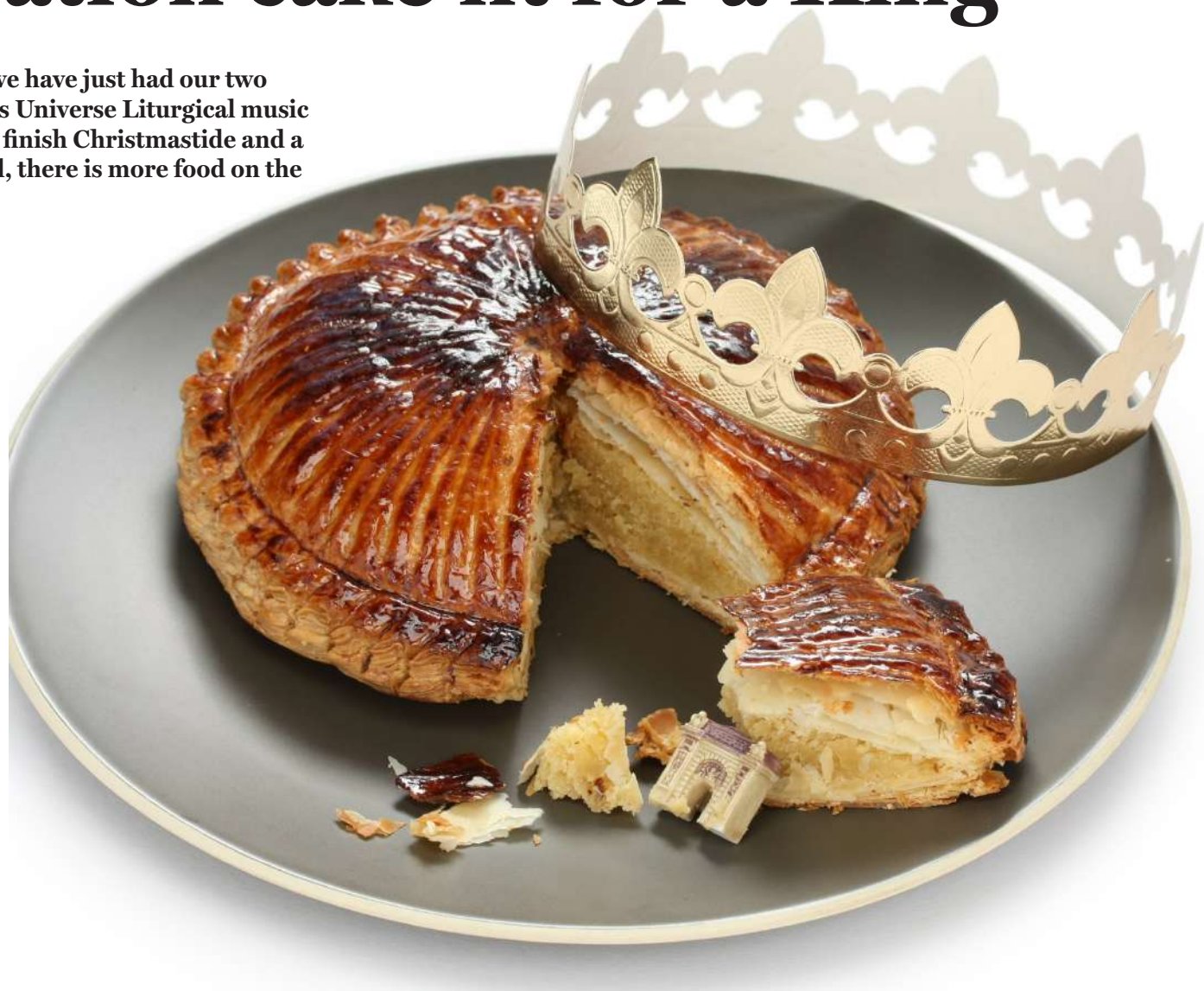
**Mini savoury tarts.** Cut the offcuts into small flat rectangles and top with with pesto, goats cheese or feta and sprinkled with pine nuts; or a 'pizza' topping of passata, mozzarella, olives and herbs.

**Cheese Twists:** I use the leftover rounded pieces by flattening them together, brush with egg (leftover from assembling the galette) and sprinkle with grated parmesan; twist. Bake all your snacks together to save on fuel.

Nothing wasted!

## More recipes

You can find this and other recipes on my food website <https://www.thebakermans.com> which in addition to everyday food includes recipes for other Catholic Feast Days



*The Galette des Rois is a French recipe associated with the celebration of Epiphany... traditionally, the galette des rois has a fève (bean) hidden inside. The person who finds the fève in their slice of cake is considered the king or queen for the day ...*



# AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION

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



## Obituary: Mgr Peter Grant

The Diocese of Leeds has announced the death of Mgr Peter Grant on 26th December 2023. He was 90. He died in St James's Hospital, Leeds, after a short illness.

Mgr Peter was born on 1st November 1933, and studied for the priesthood at the Pontifical Beda College in Rome, where he was ordained on 25th January 1967.

He had the distinction of being ordained in the glorious surroundings of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, by Pope St Paul VI. The ordination had been planned to take place in St Peter's Basilica but when the time came the Pope was unwell and it was decided to use the Sistine Chapel instead as it was deemed to be less draughty!

Fr Grant spent his early years of ministry in the Leeds diocese in Sheffield (then part of the diocese), first at St Marie's in the city centre and then at St Ann's, Deepcar. In 1972 he moved north to Saints Peter and Paul, Yeadon where was assistant priest for three years until he was appointed to St Anthony's, Beeston. In 1981 he moved to the parish of St James, Huddersfield. Fr Grant became a parish priest in 1987 when he was appointed to St Mary's, Bradford.

In 1998 Fr Grant was asked to become the Private Secretary to the then Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain, Archbishop Pablo Puente. He worked at the Nunciature in Wimbledon, London from 1998 until 2003, before returning to the Diocese of Leeds. In the same year he was appointed a Prelate of Honour by Pope St John Paul II, with the title, Monsignor.

On his return to Leeds, Mgr Grant became the parish priest of St Paul's at Alwoodley. He remained there until his retirement from active ministry in 2008, when he took up residence at Hinsley Court in Headingley.

He was living there when he was taken ill a few days before Christmas and admitted to hospital.

The singing of the schools' choirs stole the show at the concert



## Archbishop uses carol concert to make urgent call for peace

### Suresh Abboodass

The Holy Land – the homeland of Jesus – needs a light of peace, said the Most Reverend John Wilson in his Christmas Message, delivered during a sparkling Carol Service held at the packed St. George's Metropolitan Cathedral Southwark London.

In an indirect reference to the gruesome conflict raging in the Middle East, the Archbishop of Southwark made a fervent call for lasting and immediate peace in the Holy Land, which he referred to as 'the homeland of Jesus'.

He also called for peace in other parts of the war-torn world including Ukraine, Sudan and Syria. "There is a desire for peace in Ukraine, an end to violence in Sudan and Syria and in every country that has been dysfunctional by war," he pointed out.

"In these times of grave crisis, we look to the Prince of Peace. We can build peace by loving every person we meet," the archbishop said. "We look for light, of hope, justice and peace. We also look for the light of



love between families and between nations," he said.

Archbishop John Wilson referred to the three great comings of Christ: the triple coming. "The first coming is his being born in Bethlehem; the second coming is when he will return in glory and the third one is the coming of Christ into the present moment of life together. Christ comes now to your heart and that you are loved," he said.

"In a world where people feel

isolated, misunderstood, face challenges, disappointed and fall into lesser or larger darkness, Christ comes with love and hope. God love us so much that He sent His Son as a saviour, brother and as a friend. God is close as your breath. He is here in our presence as a spirit. He is not silent, not hidden. He speaks to us in His words, in His Church and in His saints," he said.

"Our God is patient and forgiving. He wants us to love and

serve Him. We too must proclaim and witness the hope in a darkened world as a member of Christ's body, as friends of the saints," the Archbishop said.

Children from the Southwark Singing Programme comprising of several Catholic schools in the archdiocese came forward to sing a couple of carols that stole the show. They mesmerised the audience when they sang Christina Rossetti's *'In the bleak midwinter...'* and also the carol *'Rise up Shepherd'* by Charlie Perry.

The schools which are part of the Southwark Singing Programme include St. George's Catholic Primary School and English Martyrs Catholic Primary School, Southwark; St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, The Borough; St. Helen's Catholic Primary School, Brixton; La Retraite R.C. Girls' School, St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Eltham; St. Joseph's Primary School, Bromley; St. Francis Catholic Primary School, Peckham; and Our Lady of Grace Catholic Primary School, Charlton.

# Plymouth to welcome new bishop as Christopher Whitehead appointed

Pope Francis has appointed Canon Christopher Whitehead as the Tenth Bishop of the Diocese of Plymouth. He replaces the former Bishop of Plymouth, the Most Reverend Mark O’Toole, who moved to Wales in June 2022 when he was appointed Archbishop of Cardiff and Bishop of Menevia.

On hearing the news of his appointment, Bishop-elect Christopher said: “With complete trust in the gentle, guiding hands of the Lord, I take up the appointment that our Holy Father Pope Francis has entrusted to me. This is not something I could have ever imagined and willingly give myself to where the Lord has called me to serve and with all I have to offer.

“Like my own diocese of Clifton, Plymouth is such a beautiful part of this country and I am truly happy to have the opportunity to make my home among its great people.

“Clifton has been my home for the 54 years of my life, and it is where I learned to walk in the ways of faith and where my priestly vocation was born and nurtured. For that I will be eternally thankful. So too for the teachers and guides who have shown me the way, the priests and religious who have inspired me, and all who have supported me with their love and



Bishop-elect Christopher Whitehead with Pope Francis

prayers. I am where I am because of their love, their witness, their example and their kindness.”

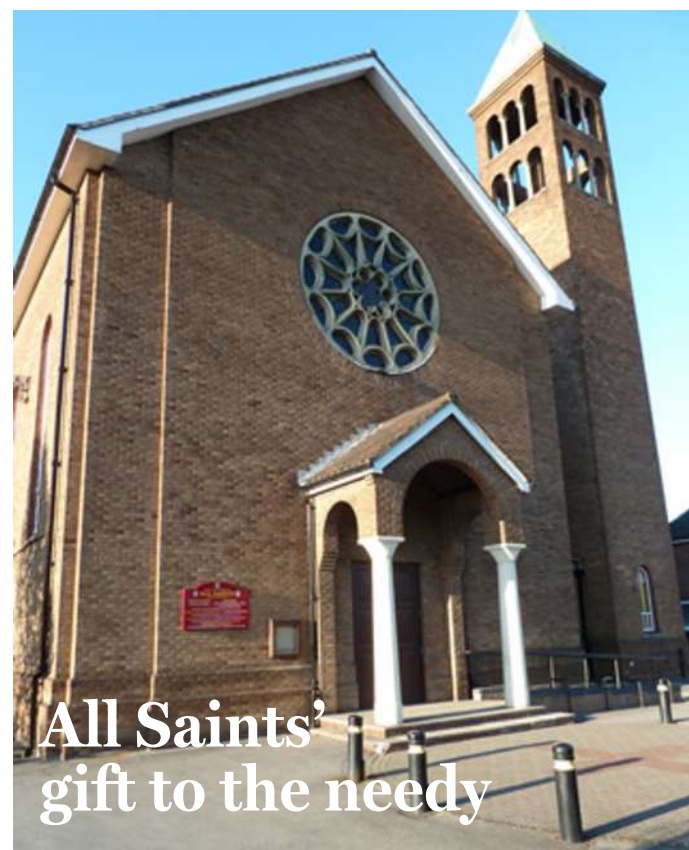
Canon Paul Cummins, who as the diocesan administrator of Plymouth diocese has been looking after the diocese since Archbishop Mark O’Toole’s appointment to Cardiff and Menevia in June 2022, said: “I offer my heartfelt congratulations to Bishop-elect Christopher Whitehead on his appointment. We welcome him with open arms to this beautiful diocese.”

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster and President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, said he was delighted to hear the

news. “I welcome him to the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales and assure him of lasting friendships and support from his fellow bishops, and of my own prayers,” he said.

The Right Reverend Declan Lang, Bishop of Canon Whitehead’s home diocese of Clifton, also offered his congratulations, saying: “Bishop-elect Christopher Whitehead has many talents to offer his new diocese – including his noteworthy singing as well as his cooking!

“Our prayers and thanks go with him as he leaves the diocese of Clifton to commence a new journey in the diocese of Plymouth.”



All Saints’ gift to the needy

All Saints Church in Sale, Greater Manchester rallied round to raise funds and hampers for families in need across the borough of Trafford during its Advent appeal.

Parish priest Father Ned Wall shared his thanks with all who contributed. “Donations continue to come in and the final amount we gave to Sale Hub was £2,150. 26 families across Trafford were given our Christmas hampers, and you can imagine they were absolutely delighted and happy.” He added: “My thanks go to the schools who helped co-ordinate all this, to all our drivers who delivered these gifts, but thanks to all of you who donated towards the Advent Project. Without your generosity this would not have been possible. In total we raised over £4,000. What an amazing response and great to see the Gospel so alive. We certainly do smell the sheep. Thank you to all who made this possible.”



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# A year of faith and joy as Leeds diocese honours its past and plans for its future

Rowan Morton-Gledhill

## Departures and arrivals

A year that began with the sad news of the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Leeds also said farewells to retired priest Fr Gerry Creasey and Deacon Nick Baggio. Fr Gerry had in recent years celebrated his Diamond Jubilee of Ordination to the Priesthood, and Deacon Nick the Silver Jubilee of his Ordination to the Permanent Diaconate, where he ministered at St Joseph's Parish in Bradford.

May they rest in peace, along with all the members of our Diocesan family who died during 2023.

We also saw a number of priests retiring, included Fr David Bulmer, Mgr Keiran Heskin and Canons Kevin Firth, Lawrie Hume, Michael Mahady and John Nunan.

Bishop Marcus Stock appointed several new Canons to the Cathedral Chapter: Dennis Cassidy, Matthew Habron, Gerard Kearney, Martin Kelly and Christopher Willis. Three priests who were originally ordained for the diocese of Leeds are now, respectively, a Cardinal, an Archbishop, and a Bishop: Cardinal Arthur Roche, Archbishop John Wilson, and now Bishop Philip Moger.

Still more joyfully, the Bishop celebrated the ordinations to the priesthood of two young men. Fr Marc Pitson, who discerned his vocation while a student at Leeds Trinity University, is now assistant priest at Our Lady of Kirkstall Parish in Leeds. Fr Paul Moores celebrated his first Mass at his home parish of the Sacred Heart & St William in Uppermill and is now ministering at Leeds Cathedral.

Of the three further Seminarians currently studying at Oscott and the Beda College, the next to be



Left, the Annual Diocesan Mass for Head Teachers was celebrated on 21 September – the Feast of St Matthew the Apostle and Evangelist – by Bishop Marcus, together with the new Episcopal Vicar for Education Mgr Paul Grogan.'

ordained deacon will be Alex Noad.

Bishop Marcus also ordained two more men to the Permanent Diaconate. Deacons Martin Fenlon's and Nicholas Stoddart will serve in their respective parishes of St Wilfrid's in Ripon and St John Mary Vianney in Leeds.

Two new parishes have been formed in the diocese. In the West Leeds Deanery, two parishes have joined to form the new Parish of Christ the King and Holy Family. The parish now includes two Catholic primary schools in the St Gregory the Great Catholic Academy Trust: Christ the King in Bramley and Holy Family in Armley.

What was once the presbytery at Holy Family is now leased by St Monica's Housing Trust, which provides accommodation for

destitute people seeking asylum in the UK.

In the Kirklees Deanery, the new parish of St Mary and St Patrick has been formed from St Patrick's in Birstall and St Mary of the Angels in Batley. The Catholic primary schools in both towns are now part of the Blessed Peter Snow Catholic Academy Trust.

## Walking and Witnessing to the World

St Mary's has been home to the Batley Torchlight Procession since 1961. The procession takes place each year on the first Monday in October, the month of the Rosary. This year, Mgr Paul Grogan led the Procession, as Our Lady's statue, was carried through the streets of Batley, accompanied by hundreds of the faithful carrying torches and

singing Marian hymns.

As usual, the congregation packed the beautiful Grade II listed St Mary's for Solemn Benediction and the evening ended with the traditional pie and peas supper in the Parish Hall.

In July, several hundred young people from our Catholic schools accompanied pilgrims and the sick on the Annual Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes. Many young people were also among the 250 pilgrims who attended the Annual Diocesan Pilgrimage to Walsingham at the end of September which was led this year by Mgr Andrew Summersgill.

For World Youth Day, a group of 30 young people from the diocese travelled to Lisbon, led by Ryan Wilkinson and Jessica Wilkinson from the Diocesan Youth Office, while Fr Marc Homsey acted as the pilgrims' chaplain. Joining thousands of young people from across the globe, one of the Leeds pilgrims at WYD said, "It showed me the strength of faith and it made me realise how many people love Jesus just like me!"

This year, more than 40 pilgrims from parishes across the diocese walked some or all of the route along St Wilfrid's Way, the annual pilgrimage between Leeds Cathedral and St Wilfrid's in Ripon which is walked over the Friday and Saturday closest to St Wilfrid's Feast Day, 12th October.

The pilgrims included the diocese's former chief operating officer, Knaresborough parishioner Ian Burrell, whose five-week solo trek along the coast and through the mountains of the Basque Country and northern Spain on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela

was serialised in the *Universe*.

The St Wilfrid's Way 'Camino' was also the model and inspiration for the 2023 project 'Hearts in Search of God' ([www.pilgrimways.org.uk/](http://www.pilgrimways.org.uk/)) – a new collection of cathedral to local shrine walking pilgrimages in every Catholic diocese in England and Wales.

Pilgrimages and processions are powerful acts of public witness. A new pilgrimage walk is planned for Lent 2024 to mark the 120th anniversary of the first meeting of GK Chesterton with Fr John O'Connor, the Leeds diocesan priest who inspired the *Father Brown* stories and set the famous author (literally!) on the road to Rome. The two men met in Keighley, where O'Connor was curate and set off walking along the Roman road over the moor to visit a Jewish mutual friend who lived in Ilkley. The new pilgrimage will begin at St Anne's Church in Keighley and will retrace their steps, ending with the outdoor Stations of the Cross at Myddelton Grange in the Ilkley Parish of the Sacred Heart.

## Honouring our history and heritage

Priests who have served in the Diocese of Leeds are remembered at the Mass for the Celebration of Priesthood which is held annually at Leeds Cathedral. This year, the bishop dedicated a new memorial in the North Transept recalling the life and ministry of Mgr Canon Peter McGuire (1932–2015) who was the longest serving Dean of the Cathedral. The memorial incorporates alabaster and mosaic elements from the pulpit designed for the first St Anne's Cathedral in 1897 by John Francis Bentley, the Yorkshire-born architect of Westminster Cathedral.

The diocese has a rich architectural heritage. This year, St Robert's, a Grade II Listed Building in Harrogate, celebrated its 150th anniversary. Bishop Marcus visited the parish to lead a Mass of Thanksgiving to mark this milestone in its history. Despite being away in Rome for the Synod, the Bishop had also prepared a letter of warm congratulations for the parishioners at the Church of St Margaret Clitherow in Threshfield near Skipton, on the occasion of this architecturally unique modern



Bishop Marcus also ordained two more men to the Permanent Diaconate. Deacon Martin Fenlon's and Deacon Nicholas Stoddart's ministries will be to serve in their respective Parishes of St Wilfrid's in Ripon and St John Mary Vianney in Leeds.'

Right, while in Rome, the Bishop made time to visit Bishop Emeritus Cardinal Arthur Roche and present him with an icon which had been commissioned last year on the occasion of his having been made a Cardinal.

church's 50th anniversary.

During the year several diocesan churches were awarded grants by various public and charitable bodies. The Yorkshire Historic Churches Trust gave over £26,000 for repair works, which was shared between St Joseph's, and Our Lady of Lourdes and St William's churches in Bradford; St Edward's, Clifford; Our Lady of Lourdes, Leeds; and St Wilfrid's, Ripon.

A project at the Church of the Holy Rosary at Chapelton in Leeds received £28,050 from the Benefact Trust, adding to the £165,000 already raised by the Holy Rosary congregation. Leeds Cathedral was awarded a grant of £99,944 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The grant will help mark the Centenary of the Cathedral's consecration in 2024, by enabling stonework repairs, resources for school visits and guided tours, training opportunities for volunteer stewards and guides, an oral history project, and a feasibility study of how to improve access and toilet facilities at the Cathedral.

### The true treasures of our Church

It is said that St Lawrence incurred martyrdom by his averral that the true 'treasures' of any diocese of the Church are the people, especially those who are sick, vulnerable or in need. When Caritas Leeds was launched in 2017, it was initially an 'umbrella forum' giving a co-ordinated expression to the ministry of charity which was being exercised already by many groups, associations and organisations providing charitable outreach to those in need. Since then, Caritas Leeds has helped many people. In a pastoral letter, Bishop Marcus designated Catholic Care as the corporate agency, 'Caritas Leeds', which from this summer would provide the ongoing direction and co-ordination of the service of charity in the diocese. As an agency with many years of experience and the benefit of professionally



Ian Burrell's five-week solo trek on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela was serialised in the Universe last year



qualified staff, it is in a strong position to undertake the responsibilities of Caritas Leeds.

Bishop Marcus said, "I wish to express my sincere thanks to Rev Dr Joseph Cortis for all the work he has done as the founding co-ordinator for Caritas Leeds. The role will now be incorporated into the work of Catholic Care by its director, Mrs Carol Hill."

### Sacred music

Throughout the year, the Church's treasury of sacred music has continued to provide opportunities for children attending schools in some of the bottom 10 per cent of the UK's areas of deprivation. The Schools Singing Programme and Keyboard Studies Programme, which introduces children to music through whole-class singing and instrumental tuition from the Cathedral's music professionals during the school day, goes from strength to strength. The scheme strengthens the relationship between schools and parishes and brings whole families into church for Mass, concerts, and BBC broadcasts, which this year included Leeds Cathedral Choir's sung Compline on BBC Radio 3. In promoting a National Schools Singing Programme which has now been adopted throughout most UK Catholic dioceses, the Bishop has described the scheme as: '...one of the most effective forms of evangelisation I have seen and experienced.'

### Synodal steps

Bishop Marcus was in Rome in October for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. While in Rome he made time to visit Bishop Emeritus Cardinal Arthur Roche and present him with an icon which had been commissioned last year on the occasion of his having been made a cardinal. The icon depicted St John Fisher, the first of three 'Yorkshire

Cardinals', whose stories were written by Dr James Hagerty and serialised in the *Universe*.

On his return from Rome, Bishop Marcus wrote a Pastoral Letter looking ahead to the Jubilee Year and its preceding Year of Prayer - but very much inspired by Pope Francis' words when addressing members of the Synod on the primacy of loving God and our neighbour.

The Holy Father had said, "We may have plenty of good ideas on how to reform the Church but let us remember: to adore God and to love our brothers and sisters with

*"It provides us, as a Diocesan Family, with a clear focus for our Year of Prayer in preparation for the Jubilee of 2025."*

his love, that is the great and perennial reform.

"To be a worshiping Church and a Church of service, washing the feet of wounded humanity, accompanying those who are frail, weak and cast aside, going out lovingly to encounter the poor."

As the calendar year ends, and the Church's year of 2024 gets underway in the many homes, schools and parishes of the diocese of Leeds, the whole People of God - clergy and lay faithful alike - can walk together in hope on life's pilgrimage with the aim of being more effective in our witness to Christ in today's world; and of loving God through adoration and service in what Bishop Marcus has called a "... simple but profound reminder of what lies at the heart of the teaching of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and provides us, as a Diocesan Family, with a clear focus for our Year of Prayer in preparation for the Jubilee of 2025."



## Coventry pupils give a little back with a party for residents

Pupils at a Coventry Catholic school threw a festive get-together for more than 30 care home residents just a few days before Christmas.

Year 12 pupils at Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School - part of the Romero Catholic Academy - planned, raised money for and hosted the event, which brought together visitors from Anchor Care Home in Wyken Croft and parishioners from St John Fisher and St Patrick's Catholic Church for an afternoon of tea and cakes, bingo and a performance from the school's choir.

The group of 50 students, aged 16 to 17, used bake sales to generate more than £300 in donations from the school community. They split into teams to plan, and then host, the event in the school's chapel.

Festive decorations, tablecloths and cutlery were donated by staff and parents, with Cardinal Wiseman's catering team creating freshly made stollen, fruitcake and macarons which the pupils served to guests.

The project was delivered in collaboration with the St Vincent de Paul Society through its Youth SVP programme. The society supports voluntary action across England and Wales to offer friendship and support to isolated people.

Cardinal Wiseman pupil Tom Stephens said: "We knew we wanted to give back to the community over Christmas so it was brilliant to be able to bring so many people together, especially those who may be isolated from their families at this time of year."

Tom Scott-Machin, Lay Chaplain at Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School, said: "This has been a remarkable student-led project, and their passion for this event has meant they have taken ownership of all aspects of the planning and delivery.

"It's a wonderful thing to do at this time of year and we'll definitely be thinking about how we can host similar events for the community."

Kajeen in Year 12 said: "It's been a great project to be involved in and we've learnt a lot from the process."

Laila in Year 12 said: "We've been planning this since September and it's really nice to see the results."

Over 800 adult SVP groups, 106 Youth SVP groups in secondary schools and colleges and over 400 Mini Vinnie groups in primary schools have helped to create a network that turns concern into action across England and Wales.

Julia Fitzgerald, Youth SVP Manager, said: "The SVP was started nearly 200 years ago by a group of students who saw a need in their community and were moved by their faith to action.

"Cardinal Wiseman Youth SVP is a living expression of that same energy and heart being kept alive through these small moments of significance. We look forward to seeing what the Youth SVP at Cardinal Wiseman do next."



# COMPANION

FOOD | DRINK | MUSIC | FILMS | LIFESTYLE | HEALTH | GARDENING



Wonderful walnuts pg 34

The Universe Catholic Weekly's guide to the more leisurely side of life

## GARDENING

# Take a note... the first step to creating a beautiful garden is picturing it

**The best gardeners learn from their prior success and failures. It's all a learning experience. It's part of gardening. So with that in mind, making notes and taking pictures of your garden as it grows through the season is a key part to ensuring a bountiful and healthy garden in future seasons.**

But what's important to note and where do you begin? Simple.... at the beginning....starting before the first plant goes in the ground. Keeping good records is one of the best habits you can form as a gardener.

I know when I'm starting my garden for the new season, I can't wait until the day the plants are finally ready to go in the ground. It's all I think about! And over the years, I've had some great success, along with a fair amount of challenges. And that's ok because that's what gardening's about right? In fact learning from those 'mistakes' is what makes us all better gardeners.

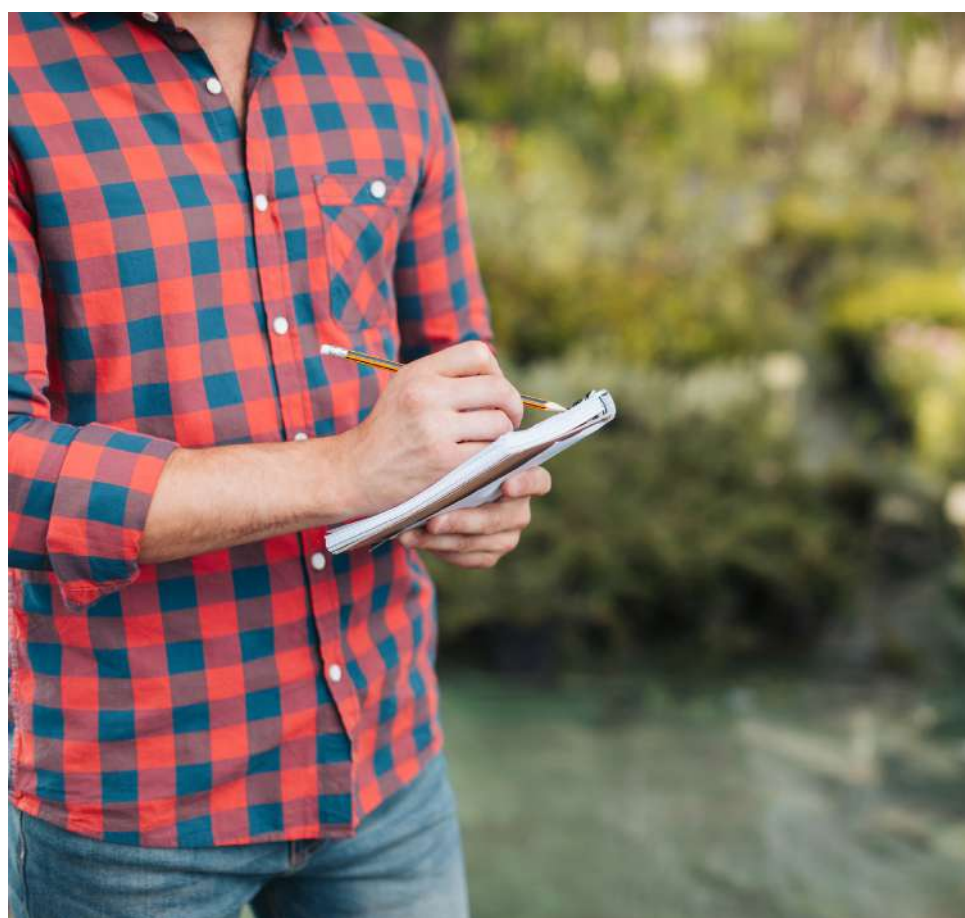
So here's an idea I wish I had put into practice a long time ago. Take notes and pictures of your garden. And start doing that early in the process! I don't know about you, but I can't tell you the number of times I've had a real aha moment and tell myself I need to remember this for next year. HA! It rarely happened!

Or perhaps, you had a perplexing problem with something in your garden. Fill in the blank for any plant...it doesn't matter. All the conditions seemed right but you just couldn't seem to figure out what was causing the problem.

Well, by taking notes and pictures, you can be your own Sherlock Holmes as you compare notes from season to season, or you can use this recorded information to share with others who might be able to help you solve the problem.

And there's no better way to repeat the successes of the past and avoid the same recurring problems, than to make note of them, especially when accompanied by pictures. You might even want to start a blog about your garden. What a fun and easy way to share your garden with others. Or even better? Video!

It's important to note that the more information you provide as you make your observations, the better that information will be as you look back on it later. Things I always list



include, date and weather conditions, with particular attention to moisture and humidity, since so many problems can be tracked back to excessive moisture.

### Here's what I do:

For any plants I start from seed, I make notes on when I sowed them, how long the seeds took to germinate, did they come up easily, how many weeks until they were ready to go in the garden and were there any problems along the way.

Something else I do before any plant goes in the ground, is make a drawing of my garden beds and a plan for what to plant where. This accomplishes several things. First, it keeps me from getting over zealous at the garden centre. Second, it assures that I'm placing my plants in

the appropriate parts of my garden, with the tallest and biggest plants sited so as not to shade out the smaller ones and that I'm rotating my crops so I'm not putting plants from the same family back in the same spot year after year. That helps ensure that my plants stay healthy from season to season.

### And there's no way I can keep up with what went where, year after year without notes or pictures.

Then there's the issue with pests and diseases. As an organic gardener, I try to create the most healthy and diverse environment possible. And I'm always trying new plant combinations for that. I love knowing which plants work best in my garden for attracting certain beneficial insects and pollinators and

potentially repelling other unwanted pests. But again, making note of what works and what doesn't is the only way I know to repeat those successes and avoid those defeats in subsequent years. I also make note of the dates for whatever pests find their way into my garden. That way, I can have a better idea next year on when I might expect to see them again. This is really important because being proactive in your garden is one of the easiest ways to keep pests and diseases in check.

As my garden begins to grow, I make note of the dates I planted what, and then add comments about the weather conditions, namely the water, or lack of it, and temperature. A rain gauge and an outdoor thermometer that records minimum and maximum temperatures are a great resource to your record keeping.

In recent years, I've been taking more pictures than ever. With the ease of digital photography, it's so easy. I take pictures about once a week, making sure I do so from the same perspective. It's really fun at the end of the year to revisit the evolution of your garden. And by the way, you can even buy a camera designed to place and leave in your garden and it will take all the pictures for you. All you do is tell it how often you want those shots recorded. Then, once you're ready to review your shots, simply remove the memory card and download them to your computer. How simple is that?

Something else I use my pictures and notes for, is to track diseases that crop up. Since no two years are the same in any garden, being able to refer back to a similar experience when it happened in your own garden can really help in finding ways to avoid those problems in future years.

Finally, as you record your season, make sure you find a system that works for you and keep it close to the garden. That may sound trivial but trust me, it's really important!

So next winter, when you can't wait to get started again, at least you can relive and plan your next garden, with the notes and pictures from seasons past. So if you haven't already, go out there and get those plants in the ground and chronicle your season in words and pictures. I promise, you'll be glad you did.

Now go get dirty!



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## HEALTH

# Relax – those pounds you piled on over Christmas needn't be permanent

Overeating during the festive season can cause weight gain – but that doesn't necessarily mean you'll be stuck with the extra pounds forever, says Duane Mellor

As we are only too aware, for many people, the Christmas holidays are a time of indulgence, with most celebrations centred on having festive food and drinks. It's no wonder then that most people expect to gain some weight over Christmas.

Indeed, plenty of research suggests that people can gain a couple of kilos over the festive period. But whether this weight gain is only temporary or not depends on many factors.

First, it's important to note that our body weight varies quite a lot from day to day. One study of three European countries suggested that adults tend to be 0.35 per cent heavier on a Monday than they were the previous Friday.

This might be due to people eating differently at weekends. Or it could be down to natural fluctuations in our weight – with one study finding weight can change by an average of 1kg (2.2lb) in a single day thanks to activity levels, fluid retention and food intake.

But when it comes to the Christmas period, weight gain tends to fluctuate more. Research shows that at Christmas, people saw their weight increase by 1.35 per cent on average (about 1.2kg or 3lb).

Research also shows that adults gain around 0.65 per cent body weight over the Christmas period (which falls during their summer). This is particularly interesting, as the study found participants tended to weigh 0.23 per cent less in the summer compared to the winter.

This suggests that Christmas weight gain may be solely down to overeating – not because people are exercising less during the cold winter months.

But is this weight gain actually due to an increase in body fat? Or is it simply because of bloating, fluid retention and having more food in our stomachs?

#### Calorie count

When looking at how much people eat on Christmas day itself, there's little in the way of rigorous research.

But if we look at American Thanksgiving – a holiday similarly characterised by indulgence and overeating – research shows people eat around 3,960 calories at Thanksgiving dinner alone. This translates to an approximately 0.5kg (1.1lb) weight increase at the end of the Thanksgiving period.

That's nearly double the daily recommended calorie requirements for the average adult woman and almost one-and-a-half times the recommended requirements for an adult man.

But just because it's double the amount of calories we need, this doesn't mean we may necessarily gain weight.

For many years, it was previously believed that consuming an additional 3,500 calories or more over a week would result in 0.5kg (1lb) of weight gain. But research now suggests this might not necessarily be true for everyone. Many factors can affect how easily a person gains weight – and how many additional calories per week it takes to do this.

For example, it seems that, in general, men gain weight less easily than women, linked to differences in body composition and where fat tends to be stored. Other factors – including body size and weight as well as how much muscle you have, age and how physically active you are – can also affect how easily you might gain weight.

Additionally, your genes and some health conditions (such as an underactive thyroid) can influence how easy it is to gain weight.

So it's possible that even if different people eat the same number of extra calories over Christmas, one person may gain more weight than the other.

Another consideration is that many of us are eating additional calories on more than just one day over the holidays. For some of us, the holiday indulgence begins in early December, or even late November. This increases the likelihood you'll gain weight over the holidays.

But let's say you're only going to be indulging on Christmas day. It's unlikely you can eat so much in a single day as to lead to significant weight gain. This is partly because of how our metabolism works – which balances itself over several days.

Still, you might feel that single day of overeating for a few days afterwards as a result – meaning you feel "heavier", even if you

haven't actually gained weight. Also, if you do gain a little weight, once you go back to your normal routine your body weight will also go back to normal.

Even if you do gain weight at Christmas, research suggests this weight can also be lost after the holidays and your lifestyle settles down.

But if you do want to be mindful about what you eat during any period, whether it is Christmas, a birthday weekend or over your summer holidays, as a dietitian I would suggest the following things.

Be mindful. Your enjoyment doesn't have to be based on how much you eat – it can be about being in the moment and enjoying the holidays and food more mindfully.

But when you do indulge, try to be mindful of how much you're putting on your plate – don't just snack without thinking.

Eat plenty of veggies, salads and fruit. Save the calorie-rich festive treats as the highlight – rather than the main event of meals.

And try to get a bit of exercise. A bracing walk with family and friends can help to offset some of the calories and may also help with digestion and bloating.

If you still feel like you might have overindulged over Christmas, I would not recommend rushing into making New Year's resolutions. Instead, I would encourage people to make small changes to their diet and physical activity levels, which are easy to stick to.

**Duane Mellor is Lead for Evidence-Based Medicine and Nutrition, Aston Medical School, Aston University**



"It's unlikely you can eat so much in a single day as to lead to significant weight gain. This is partly because of how our metabolism works – which balances itself over several days..."

## FOOD

# Walnuts: A versatile ingredient that makes entertaining easy

From appetisers to desserts, the flavour and versatility of California walnuts can elevate any dish. Planning a menu for small or large groups can be a lot of work. Depending on the gathering or occasion, you may need to plan snacks, appetisers and a meal that many people will enjoy. Fortunately, you can set the stage for success and satisfy a variety of palates with California walnuts.

## Tips for entertaining with California walnuts

Walnuts are appealing and adaptable, with surprising versatility that makes them the unsung hero of the kitchen. They're well known for the buttery richness and pleasing texture they add to many traditional dishes, baked goods, garnish or topping and as a simple, beloved entertaining snack. This is particularly handy when you're entertaining. This versatile plant food, packed with a powerhouse of important nutrients, is a smart option for you, your friends and family.

Want to up the ante at your next event? Here are some additional ways to use walnuts when entertaining that you may not have thought of before.

**Veggie trays:** Elevate your veggie tray or charcuterie board by making walnut hummus, pesto and Muhammara, a roasted red pepper dip.



**Meat alternatives:** Walnuts can easily be combined in a food processor with your favourite combination of spices to create plant-based walnut meat that tastes great and is satisfying. Walnut meat is a tasty and a filling meat alternative that can be used in tacos, pasta sauces, on pizza, in stuffed peppers and more.

**Delicious snacks:** Sweet and spiced walnuts are a delicious snack or entertaining staple, and

can be easily packaged into a lovely host gift if you're attending a party.

**Dairy-free treats:** Walnuts can be used in new and innovative ways – like Vanilla Walnut Whipped Cream, a dairy-free treat topping for anything from hot chocolate to pies and cakes.

## Recipe: Vanilla walnut whipped cream

This light and airy walnut-based whipped

cream flavoured with honey and vanilla can be served with dessert, over berries and more. Visit [walnuts.org](http://walnuts.org) for flavour variations. Makes 14 servings.

## Ingredients

2 1/2 cups California walnuts, divided  
1 cup water  
3 tablespoons powdered sugar  
1 to 2 teaspoons honey, divided  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
Pinch of salt

## Directions

- Puree 2 cups walnuts and water in a blender for 2 minutes or until very light and fluffy.
- Add powdered sugar, 1 teaspoon honey, vanilla and salt and blend for 30 seconds. Add the remaining teaspoon of honey if you prefer a sweeter taste.
- To achieve a thicker whipped cream, add the remaining 1/2 cup walnuts and puree until light and fluffy.
- Store tightly covered in the refrigerator until ready to use. May be prepared two days ahead.

Being high in omega-3 ALA (2.5 g/oz.), walnuts are a great addition to any snack or meal. **Bonus tip:** Have leftover walnuts? For optimal freshness, keep them cold in the fridge or freezer.

## LIFESTYLE

## New Year, new you – but set realistic goals

To help set yourself up for success now and into the new year, Herbalife Chief Health and Nutrition Officer Dr. Kent Bradley recommends these six attainable resolutions to help people lose holiday weight and achieve better health.

### 1. Be specific

Being too general with a resolution makes it difficult to follow. Rather than saying you'll exercise more or eat better, make your goal to work out three times a week or have a vegetable with every meal. These small, measurable and specific goals set you up for success.

### 2. Find a friend

A support network can be a big help on your health journey. Find a friend or group of like-minded people to support each other and keep everyone accountable. It also adds a social element that is essential for overall well-being.

### 3. Get moving

Physical activity is essential in getting healthy. Research shows that adults need 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity and two days of muscle strengthening activity, each week. It may seem like a lot, but breaking up the physical activity into 30-minute sessions, five days a week, makes it more manageable.

### 4. Add protein

Protein is a nutritional powerhouse that satisfies hunger and builds lean muscle mass. Include protein-rich foods like lean meat, poultry, eggs, legumes and seeds at every meal and snack to fuel your body and satisfy hunger throughout the day.

### 5. Avoid fad diets

It's tempting to jump on the newest trend, but remember: there are no quick fixes for health. Fad diets do not address the core problems that cause people to gain weight and often eliminate foods that are actually healthy, which can result in nutritional deficiencies.

Working out with friends is better than going for a fitter lifestyle alone



### 6. Give yourself grace

Something is always better than nothing. If there isn't time for a 30-minute workout, do 15. If you can't make a home-cooked meal, order out a plant-based option. If you have an off day, don't give up completely. Focus on forward momentum even if you've taken a few steps back.

"Make sure you take the time to plan and prepare for the positive behaviour changes you'd like to make and be kind to yourself in the process," Bradley said.

For more healthy lifestyle tips and information, visit [Herbalife.com](http://Herbalife.com).

"Something is always better than nothing. If there isn't time for a 30-minute workout, do 15. Focus on forward momentum even if you've taken a few steps back."

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## FILMS

# Aquaman 2 makes a splash, not a big wave

**Kurt Jensen**

A menagerie of special effects aimlessly searching for a coherent plot is the most concise way to sum up *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* (Warner Bros.), the sequel to 2018's immensely successful *Aquaman*.

Perhaps the appeal of costumed superheroes has played out for the moment. But some folks may enjoy the spectacle of toothy bug-eyed sea villains interspersed with random explosions, mythological analogies, sibling bickering and dialogue about family values, global warming and world peace.

Director James Wan and screenwriter David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick have created an adventure which stumbles along in predictably noisy ways.

The lost kingdom in this case is Necrus, an underwater city not unlike Atlantis, only more militaristic and long immobilised in ice. David Kane/Black Manta (Yaahya Abdul-Mateen II) has rejuvenated it with the aid of his newly discovered black trident, which gives him both immense evil authority and more powers than his damaged super suit.

Black Manta is out to avenge the death of his father, and wants to destroy Atlantis and kill Arthur Curry/Aquaman (Jason Momoa), his wife Queen Mera (Amber Heard) and his infant son Arthur Jr.

They have a placid family life at a lighthouse, four years after the events of the first film. Byzantine politics in Atlantis bore Aquaman, but he's a temperate ruler.

Manta, to build his arsenal, is stealing vast quantities of orichalcum – a metallic substance, historically, but here, it's something that burns

like coal in furnaces. This creates greenhouse gases, the Antarctic ice sheet is rapidly collapsing, and Arthur's mother, Atlanna (Nicole Kidman) decries "a global climate meltdown."

Manta's existential threat means Aquaman needs extra help, and for that, he has to break his half-brother, Orm Marius (Patrick Wilson), a deposed king of Atlantis, out of prison. Orm has many talents, including the ability to take a punch and valour in battle, but mostly the two of them argue coarsely like adolescents working out old family issues.

Off-colour dialogue, in fact, pushes this into the adult classification category. Mature adolescents, however, may be able to cope with that as well.

The Atlantean council has never wanted to interact with land-dwellers, believing it would lead to their doom. But Aquaman, sizing up an impending apocalypse, says: "Times are changing, and the old ways aren't going to protect us anymore."

The rest leads to a by-rote battle with a few subplots that don't lead anywhere.

The current view is that the Marvel / DC genre has run its course, with a number of super hero films not taking their expected box office figures in recent months. *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* may buck that trend, but it's going to need better scripts if the genre isn't going to run out of steam completely.

**Right, a poster for the film, picturing Aquaman (Jason Momoa) with his half brother, Orm Marius (Patrick Wilson)**



## Migration is a family treat that's easy to love

An endearing piece of entertainment awaits audiences in the animated adventure *Migration* (Universal). Free of objectionable content and weightier, below its cheerful surface, than it might at first appear, the film is a holiday season treat suitable for all but the youngest filmgoers, who might find some scenes too scary.

It involves a close-knit family of ducks called, aptly, the Mallards. Although protective dad Mack (voice of Kumail Nanjiani) is content to keep his clan safe by remaining on the New England pond they have always called home, the visit of a flock of migrating birds stirs the imaginations – and arouses the curiosity – of those around him.

That includes not only sunny, open-to-experience mum Pam (voice of Elizabeth Banks) but self-confident adolescent son Dax (voice of Caspar Jennings) and sweet-natured young daughter Gwen (voice of Tresie Gazal). Predictably, it's not long before they've won Mack over and, with initially reluctant grump Uncle Dan (voice of Danny DeVito) in tow, set off for points south.

On the travels that follow, the Mallards encounter a potentially predatory heron called Erin (voice of Carol Kane), Chump (voice of Awkwafina), a tough, street-smart New York City pigeon, and Delroy (voice of Keegan-Michael Key), a Jamaican-bred parrot. Delroy is being kept in a cage by an evil chef who specialises in serving duck, but the Mallards will risk all to set him free.

Keegan-Michael Key recently told screenrant.com how he approached the role of the parrot.

"I think one way to look at it is to see it from a human perspective," he said. "What would that feel like if that was you, as a human, as opposed to trying to get into the mind of a bird or think about it the way a bird would think. We're doing a cartoon, so we're giving everybody human characteristics, and we're anthropomorphizing everybody. So I tried to think of it that way, which is, what if that had happened to me? And then, conversely, how much joy would someone experience once they were freed?"

Such possibly alarming situations aside, director Benjamin Renner's fun tale is appropriate for the whole family. Beneath the upbeat comedy, moreover, mature viewers will discern a number of substantive themes.

Thus screenwriter Mike White's script explores the proper balance between caution and courage, the need to overcome prejudice, the importance of helping others and even the complementarity that makes for a good marriage. All this, needless to say, is served up with more than a spoonful of sugar and so goes down quite easily.

After several big budget animated movies took wrong steps in trying too hard to be 'on message' with current social trends, this is a welcome return to the traditions of simple, fun family films, and *Migration* could well end up being viewed as a children's classic.

# Going for a walk? You can thank the Victorians for bringing it into fashion

HISTORY

**Lauren  
Nichola Colley**

**Going for a walk wasn't really a thing 300 years ago – it was the Victorians who turned it into a popular pastime**

Going for a walk is always a good idea. Perhaps, if you are lucky enough, this might be a hike along ragged cliffs or trudge along a chilly beach with family. Many of us however, have to take to the pavements of Britain's towns and cities for our post-lunch walks.

As a researcher of pedestrianism, I am fascinated by the changing culture of how, where and why we walk. This includes the tacit pavement etiquette that has both endured through the centuries and changed to reflect the cultural concerns of the age.

You might be surprised to hear that 'going for a walk' wasn't really a thing until the late 1700s.

The term 'pedestrianism' may have Latin roots, but in the 1800s its first association would have been a sporting one. 'Professional pedestrianism' or 'race-walking' as we would know it today, was fiercely competitive by the 1850s.

Tournaments in America took place over six days, with entrants walking the equivalent of 450 miles, taking naps in tents by the track and sipping champagne en route. The stringent 'heel-to-toe rule' still in place states that 'the advancing leg must be straightened from the moment of first contact with the ground.'

Walking as a leisure activity came about around the 1780s. Until this point walking had been an act of necessity, associated with poverty, vagrancy and even criminal intent. Many individuals would live and die never having seen beyond a few square miles of bleak cityscape and only slightly further for those in the country.

Along with the rural appreciation of the Lake poets – including William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge – at the turn of the century, famous walkers such as Charles Dickens brought the pastime of walking into vogue.

## Dirty rotten streets

Much has been written of the religious zeal with which Dickens



took to his daily "walking work". He averaged 12 miles a day and at a remarkable pace of over four miles an hour – sufficient for others to "draw aside as the great writer – who seemed always to be walking a match against thought – strode on."

Walking was an essential cog in Dickens's creative process: a time to absorb, almost by osmosis, the idiosyncrasies of the streets. From forays into the London slums to insomnia-driven marches through the night, his encounters furnished the eccentric brilliance of his characters – the street snapshots retained "in regular order on different shelves of my brain, ready ticketed and labelled to be brought out when I want them".

In the 1800s, when pavements were in their infancy, taking a walk was a whole different experience. An estimated 300,000 horses traversed the London streets, depositing over 1,000 tonnes of manure every day. Worse matter was also regularly tipped into the rat-ridden gutters of the slums – the word 'loo' itself is suggested to be derived from the pre-warning 'gardylloo', or French 'regardez l'eau' (watch out for the

water) heralding the emptying of a chamber pot from an upper storey.

The sorry state of city streets created a demand for all sorts of workers, including 'pure finders' who would have scooped up dog poo and sold it in bulk to local tanneries where it was used in the processing of leather skins). This was just one of the many unappealing occupations that social historian Henry Mayhew referred to as "street cleansers" – a motley crew of crossing sweepers, night soil men and mudlarks (people who sifted anything that they could sell from the banks of the Thames) who made their living from street waste.

Thankfully, social reform and

urban planning has moved on dramatically, and going on an urban walk is a much more pleasant experience now.

## Professional pedestrianism

While the pavements have changed, many of the codes of conduct governing Victorian pedestrian etiquette remain relevant today.

In 1780, an article tucked discretely among the news and advertisements of the popular *London Magazine* outlined 'Rules of behaviour, of general use, though much disregarded in this populous city.' Among its 12 points, pedestrians were advised 'to be cautious of staring in the faces of

those that pass by [...] for an over-bearing look has the air of a bully, and a prying one that of a bailiff.'

So as you take your walks, do as Dickens did, and avoid committing these pedestrian faux pas:

- **Inconsiderate whistling or humming**
- **Walking arm in arm**
- **Loitering in conversation**
- **Hindering all behind with a 'sauntering gait'**

While the bugbears and implicit rules may alter with the ages (distracted phone-users, I'm looking at you), there is much about the pavements that retain their Victorian decorum. They are a place of multiplicity and variety, culture and commerce – a strip of land to be celebrated all year round.

Lauren Nichola Colley is a PhD in English literature, University of Nottingham

*So as you take your walks, do as Dickens did, and avoid committing these pedestrian faux pas such as walking arm in arm, loitering in conversation and hindering all behind with a 'sauntering gait' ... though as bugbears and ialter with the ages, the great writer may well have added distracted phone-users to his list..."*

# Bambisanani reflects spirit of sporting partnership

Following a break of three years due to Covid 19 restrictions, 2023 proved to be a remarkable year of volunteering in South Africa for the Bambisanani Partnership.

41 students, together with 11 members of staff from St Mary's School, Menston, University of Leeds, Leeds Trinity University and Newcastle College spent more than three months in South Africa delivering existing Bambisanani programmes, using sport to promote education, health, global citizenship and leadership in one of the country's most deprived and challenging areas.

In four separate visits, the volunteers worked with 3,631 students from 33 schools, of which 17 were new partner institutions. 3,151 students from primary and secondary schools were involved in sports festivals and coaching activities and 1,135 children experienced Bambisanani Leadership through Sport programmes.

## St Mary's School, Menston

St Mary's School have made two visits to South Africa this year, with 25 students. A group of 15 Year 12 students and four staff, Catherine Chattoe, Charlotte Wood, Matt Harvey and David Farmer, deputy headteacher from St. Joseph's Primary School in Pudsey, made the first visit to rural KwaZulu-Natal. The St Mary's student volunteers were Sean Billington, Joe Brooks, Ruby Grant, Oscar Thorning, Florence Greenhalgh, Lily Durkan, Andrew Diamond, Amy McIlroy, Carys Delahay, Freddie Falkingham, Katie Newman, Tess Yeardeley, Ben Fletcher, Eleanor Rock and Louie Dooling.

The St Mary's students, together with support from students from Eshowe High School, delivered the Bambisanani Sports Leadership Programme to 30 students from Mnyakanya. In between delivering the sports leadership programme the St Mary's students delivered lessons in maths, biology, geography and chemistry.

The work at Mnyakanya High School culminated with students from all three high schools working together to plan, organise and deliver both a sports and a reading festival to students of Ntolwane Primary School. 60 students enjoyed a morning of rounders, tennis and netball led by the Mnyakanya sports leaders.

The team also brought some 'firsts' for the Bambisanani Partnership. The team travelled to rural Nkandla where they organised an athletics festival for 11 local primary schools. The festival was such a success that it will now become an annual event, with primary schools back in Yorkshire also participating in a parallel festival that will connect schools in both countries.

No St Mary's visit to KwaZulu-Natal would be complete without spending some time at the Doremi Daycare Centre, where the student volunteers worked with the kindergarten learners on sports, literacy and singing. A wonderful time was had by all, with the St Mary's students also getting the opportunity to meet the inspirational Mrs Popi Buthelezi who runs the centre.

The second St Mary's volunteer visit to South Africa involved 10 Year 13 students: Rory Southern, Iggy Burrows, Charlotte Rawstron, Anna Ciesluk, Hannah Byrne, Daniel Sykes, Rebecca Shaw, Ruby Adcock, Lucy Charlton and Reya Wilks.

The group began their work at the remarkable **Doremi Daycare Centre** for orphans and vulnerable children. In addition to sports, reading and singing activities the group organised a 'bear hunt' and a teddy bears' picnic.

They went on to spend three days at Mnyakanya High School, training another group of 30 sports leaders. This again culminated in sports and reading festivals for local primary school children. This was a wonderful success with Mnyakanya students being praised for their 'exceptional leadership skills' in delivering the festival. In a celebration event, student leaders from both countries were congratulated on their collaborative work and were encouraged to develop their leadership potential further.

A great highlight was another 'first' for Bambisanani: a visit to the Thembimfundo Special School for children with a wide range of different disabilities. The team ran the school's first ever Sports Day for the children, which included activities such as dancing, high jump and netball.

Mr Dlamini, the principal of Thembimfundo Special School said: "I really couldn't believe what I was seeing. The excitement, the smiling faces and participation of



*all our children with different life challenges in the activities conducted by Bambisanani team was amazing."*

Such was the impact of the visit to Thembimfundo that the Bambisanani Partnership charity will now work hard with the school community to develop a more permanent and sustainable link.

While in South Africa, the St. Mary's team presented a range of Bambisanani Annual Awards at both Mnyakanya High School and Ntolwane Primary School:

Three educators from Mnyakanya School were honoured with The Bambisanani Partnership Award for their Outstanding contribution to the partnership: Mr SV Nugubane, Mrs PK Zondi and Miss Langa.

Speaking about both visits, St Mary's teacher, Matt Harvey said:

*"Yet again we have been blown away by the possibilities that the Bambisanani Partnership offers young people in both countries. They really do have a good understanding of Ubuntu ('I am because you are') which will hopefully serve them well for the rest of their lives."*

## The University of Leeds and Leeds Trinity University

The joint team of staff and students from the University of Leeds and Leeds Trinity University completed a four-week sport and education project. The Gryphons Abroad programme saw staff and students deployed to deliver cycling and sport and leadership in schools in the Nkandla region.

Through a pioneering collaboration between the charity and KZN Cycling, the team successfully engaged over 2,000 young people in a cycling programme aimed at empowering young people. The Bambisanani/KZN Cycling project runs clinics in schools throughout the year via a permanent 'cycling hub' positioned in the heart of the rural communities. The project aims to teach 5,000 young people a year

how to ride and maintain bikes.

Mzamo Khoza, now a cycling development officer for KZN Cycling, is a former pupil of Mnyakanya High School who participated in the first ever cycling course led by University of Leeds staff and students back in 2016.

Mzamo said: "*Working alongside the team was more than amazing because everyone was so focused on the task in hand whilst also having fun together in the process.*"

Four weeks were spent teaching cycling in seven primary and secondary schools, teaching the children basics such as balancing and steering before progressing to pedalling, while more experienced riders worked on their handling and control to prepare them for road cycling and races. Students also taught basic bike maintenance to all pupils.

The final week was spent delivering a sport and leadership festival for four primary schools in the township of Eshowe. The festival, hosted at Gratton College, saw 150 grade 7s from multiple primary schools come together to participate in a range of sessions.

Leeds students delivered leadership sessions culminating in pupils designing and delivering their own games and activities for their peers, a first experience of leadership for many. Alongside this they participated in sports including football, netball and rounders, as well as classroom sessions designed by students and based on their own studies at home.

Key to all Bambisanani Partnership is the commitment creating learning opportunities for all involved; students from both countries. Parallel to the impact on South African children, the project also impacted very positively on Leeds students who had the opportunity to develop their practical skills, broaden their horizons and learn more about different cultures. Students were invited to learn basic Zulu as well as participate in traditional singing and dancing in almost every school

visited on the visit!

The project was led by Sport and Physical Activity staff members Andy Lockwood, Suzzi Garnett and Lauren Havercroft along with Ammarah Pandor from Leeds Trinity. The six students were Connor Bull, Christian Lewis, Lucy Hughes, Rachel Barton, Rhiannah McCourt and Ellen Slack.

Connor Bull, University of Leeds Sport Science student and Gryphons Abroad 2023 team member said: "*The Gryphons Abroad project has been a real highlight of my time at university. The project taught me so much about myself both personally and professionally and allowed me to explore life in a completely different culture. I thoroughly enjoyed every single moment and would strongly recommend the project to anyone ready for a challenge!*"

Andrew Lockwood, Assistant Head of Sport and Bambisanani Trustee, said: "*Our work with KZN Cycling has enabled us to bring the cycling project to more schools and more pupils in the region.*"

David Geldart, CEO and Founder of the Bambisanani Partnership said: "*I have nothing but praise for the remarkable students and staff from St Mary's, Menston, The University of Leeds, Leeds Trinity University and Newcastle College for their outstanding work in not only reintroducing volunteer student visits to South Africa after Covid but also for having such an enormous impact in doing so. Our work puts great store in creating learning opportunities for young people from both countries; Europeans and Africans 'working together and learning together' in a spirit of Ubuntu.*"

**The Bambisanani Partnership was named as International Sport and Physical Education Charity of the Year 2023. Contact David Geldart @ d.geldart@bambisanani partnership.org or see www. bambisananipartnership.org**

# A pictorial round-up of the past seven days



Left, fireworks light up the sky over the London Eye in central London during the New Year celebrations.

Below, performers during the New Year's Day Parade in London.

Below left, men, known as guisers, carry burning whisky barrels through the streets during the Allendale Tar Barrels Parade.

Below far left, people take part in a Loony Dook New Year's Day dip in the Firth of Forth at Kinghorn in Fife.



New Road, home of Worcestershire County Cricket Club, is flooded as heavy rain continues to fall in Worcester.

Inset right, Flood water in York, Yorkshire, after the River Ouse burst its banks.



10-year-old Grace, from Edinburgh, took delivery of a year's supply of Taylor's crisps after writing to the company to ask if it could bring back the popular haggis and black pepper flavour crisps. Grace was rewarded with a taxi full of the snack, delivered by head of marketing, Gregor Smith.

## LITURGICAL CALENDARS

### Ordinary Form

**Sunday Year B, Weekday Cycle II**  
**Sunday, January 7: The Epiphany of the Lord** Isa. 60:1-6; Ps. 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13; Eph. 3:2-3, 5-6; Mt. 2:1-12

**Monday, January 8: Baptism of the Lord**—feast Isa. 55:1-11; Isa. 12:2-6 r. 6; 1 Jn. 5:1-9; Mk. 1:7-11

**Tuesday, January 9:** 1 Sam. 1:9-20; 1 Sam. 2:1, 4-8; Mk. 1:21-28

**Wednesday, January 10:** 1 Sam. 3:1-10, 19-20; Ps. 40:2, 5, 7-10; Mk. 1:29-39

**Thursday, January 11:** 1 Sam. 4:1-11; Ps. 44:10-11, 14-15, 24-25; Mk. 1:40-45

**Friday, January 12:** St Aelred of Rievaulx, Religious (E) 1 Sam. 8:4-7, 10-22; Ps. 89:16-19; Mk. 2:1-12

**Saturday, January 13:** St Hilary, Bishop, Doctor of the Church 1 Sam. 9:1-4, 17-19, 10:1; Ps. 21:2-7; Mk. 2:13-17



St Aelred of Rievaulx

## 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

### SPECIAL OFFER!

This is an opportunity too good to miss. We are not offering a job, career or even a way of life. Instead we offer an invitation to explore if you have been invited by the Lord to follow him in a special way as a priest or religious as an Augustinian Recollect friar.

We offer you the fellowship of our communities... the opportunity to share your prayers and spiritual growth... the challenge to know yourself and your purpose in life... an opportunity to serve God as a missionary in remote parts of the world – or in an inner city parish in London, New York or other major cities around the world.

The need is always there – and so is the invitation.

### INTERESTED?

For more information contact:  
 The Augustinian Friars, St Rita's Centre, Ottery Moor Lane, Honiton, Devon EX1 1AP.  
 Alternatively, call us on **01404 42601**

### PRAYERS/THANKSGIVING

'Grateful thanks to St Jude for favours granted'



MCLBEW

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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
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### Remembering your loved ones...

Personalised memoriam cards, bookmarks and acknowledgements, notelets. All styles. Delivered in just 48 hours **guaranteed!**

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 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



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- Two columns wide.
- Free design service
- Heading of your choice
- £80 per week. Discounts for multiple week bookings

**Best Value, Biggest Impact**



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Three Kings visiting the baby Jesus

Murten (Morat), Fribourg Canton,  
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