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Huge petition calls for change to abortion law

Over 100,000 demand time limit to be reduced from 24 to 22 weeks

Parents of babies born at 22 weeks and thriving back Right To Life call

Andy Drozdziak

Pro-lifers say there is now “overwhelming” support for a reduction in the abortion time limit after a petition, signed by 102,573 people, was delivered to the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street.

The petition calls on MPs to support an amendment, led by Caroline Ansell MP, and tabled by a cross-party group of over 30 MPs, to reduce the abortion time limit from 24 to 22 weeks.

The petition comes in the wake of an open letter, signed by over 750 medics, calling for a similar reduction.

The petition, which was delivered to No. 10 on Monday, calls on Rishi Sunak “to do everything in [his] power to ensure that our abortion law is urgently updated to reduce the abortion time limit”. It was delivered by parents of children who were born at 22 and 23 weeks gestation, and a group of MPs.

Speaking about the amendment, Caroline Ansell MP explained that foetuses at 22 weeks were essentially people. “These babies are unquestionably human: according to the NHS website, at 12 weeks, the unborn baby is ‘fully formed’; by 18

weeks, babies can begin to respond to loud noises from the outside world,” she said.

“By 22 weeks, they enter a pattern of sleeping and waking, and by 23 weeks they are practising breathing movements to prepare for life outside the womb.

“And yet in 2021, the most recent year for which we have full records, 755 abortions of babies at 22 or 23 weeks’ gestation were performed.”

Before handing in the petition, the families told MPs at an event in Parliament about their own stories and why they want to see the abortion time limit reduced to 22 weeks.

Jade Crane, mother to twins Harry and Harley who were born at 22 weeks and five days, said: “Ever since Harry and Harley were born, we’ve been determined to show that babies born at 22 weeks can survive, because here they are, our little warriors, thriving at home.

“It’s crazy to think that there are babies being aborted at 24 weeks when our twins were born at 22. It doesn’t make any sense.

“It’s time the law reflects this reality and the abortion limit is reduced to 22 weeks”.

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HONK THAT HOOTER: Pope Francis shares a playful moment with a child during a meeting with staff and patients from the Vatican-owned Bambino Gesù paediatric hospital in the Vatican’s Paul VI Audience Hall. During the visit the pope insisted that cutting-edge science and medical research cannot benefit only

the privileged few but must be placed “at the service of those most in need.”

His comments reflected growing concern that too many people from poorer nations and communities are being priced out of modern healthcare.

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(Nearly) Everyone’s favourite panda is back
COMPANION

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Cardinal pushes UN for a global strategy to beat the traffickers

Cardinal Vincent Nichols led the Santa Marta Group to the United Nations, with British campaigners demanding comprehensive international strategies to make traffickers pay for their crimes while not stigmatising their impoverished and vulnerable victims.

Representatives of the Santa Marta Group, an alliance launched in 2014 and named after the Santa Marta residence of Pope Francis, called for a “holistic approach” with common international policing standards on 14th March, and spoke of the urgent need to deprive trafficking of the invisibility that allows it to flourish as a criminal enterprise.

Speakers were addressing the plight of an estimated 50 million people, about half of whom are women and children, who set out to flee poverty, crime and political violence only to find themselves trapped into low-wage factory and agricultural work, sexual slavery and online exploitation.

Cardinal Nichols, the President of Santa Marta, spoke of an anguished conversation he had with a trafficked woman in the north of England.

“Our job is to be a catalyst – to bring together actors in this important battle,” he said. This means “police agencies, social service agencies and Church organisations.

He added: “This is such a mul-



ti-faceted challenge and a problem.”

Kevin Hyland, a former head of the human trafficking unit of Scotland Yard and now a strategy officer for the Santa Marta Group, said governments, including and especially prosperous ones, need to treat trafficking as “a serious crime with a strong plan of prevention.”

He also spoke of the need for “allowing survivors to become members of society without stigma.”

Improving prosecution rates and responses to calls for help is crucial, Hyland added, but it “must be con-

nected to systemic change.”

He said: “The state and its agencies have to implement strategies to make it nigh impossible to be able to traffick people – and that criminal prosecution will be inevitable.”

Additionally, Hyland said, “a shift in the regulation of the internet is overdue and badly needed,” referring to the ease with which paedophiles exploit children.

He also recommended that Western armed forces, when deployed overseas, be trained to recognise human trafficking.

The Santa Marta Group’s work in New York came at a side event to the UN’s 68th Commission on the Status of Women. Although intended to focus on women and girls, speakers cited all kinds of exploitation of men, women and children.

Traffickers lure them with false promises of money, education, better jobs and sometimes the dowries that would enable them to be married.

“The Catholic Church is increasingly on the front line of what Pope Francis called (in 2022) ‘an open wound in the body of Christ,’” said Mercy Sister Deirdre Mullan, a member of the board of trustees of London-based Arise Foundation.

Sr Deirdre called for “education and employment and community mobilisation” to help vulnerable populations resist the false lures of traffickers.

Warning that Catholic views could fall foul of ‘extremist’ definition

The Government’s “over-broad” new extremism definition could unfairly catch Christian organisations, CARE has warned.

CARE’s CEO Ross Hendry claimed that groups making “countercultural statements” could be blacklisted by officials who have a political agenda.

The Government’s revised definition of extremism, announced by Communities Secretary Michael Gove last week, says extremism involves:

“...the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, that aims to:

1. *negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; or*

2. *undermine, overturn or replace the UK’s system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or*

3. *intentionally create a permis-*

sive environment for others to achieve the results in (1) or (2)”

But Ross Hendry, CEO of CARE, accepted that there was a need for a crackdown on extremist views, this definition appeared too loose and open to interpretation. He said: “Extremism is a real threat to our society. The values of militant Islamists and far right groups are completely contrary to our democratic system and the Christian worldview. It is absolutely right that the spreading of lies, and racial and religious hatred is confronted.

“But at the same time, the Government’s new extremism definition must be closely scrutinised. Policies of this kind are notoriously fraught. There is always a danger that in trying to catch genuinely harmful behaviour, wider civil liberties are disproportionately undermined.

“The definition in question is over-broad, in my view. It uses the

terms ‘hatred’ and ‘intolerance’, which could be interpreted very widely.

“There is some concern that mainstream Christian groups could be caught if they make countercultural statements on issues such as abortion, sexuality, and trans ideology.

“While the new definition will not have statutory force, the Government will punish groups and publish a blacklist for all to see. There is a risk that campaigning individuals within Government could unfairly seek to have certain groups proscribed for holding ‘the wrong beliefs’.

“The Government’s intentions are good, but its approach is problematic. There are good mechanisms in place to deal with dangerous groups and individuals. The police need to apply existing laws effectively, and consistently. We’d urge the Government to focus on this key issue.”



Continued from page 1

Spokesperson for Right To Life UK Catherine Robinson, who organised the petition, welcomed what she described as “one of the largest petitions delivered to the Prime Minister over the last year.”

“It’s fantastic to see that an amazing 102,573 people have joined parents of children born at 22 and 23

weeks along with over 750 medical professionals to call for a reduction to our abortion time limit,” she said.

“This demonstrates once again the overwhelming support from the general public for Caroline Ansell’s amendment to lower the abortion time limit from 24 to 22 weeks in line with advances in medical science.”

Meanwhile, Right To Life UK has slammed BPAS for hijacking mother’s day by thanking abortion providers.

Abortion providers BPAS, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, posted a message on Mother’s Day, saying ‘some heroes wear scrubs’ beneath the words ‘Abortion providers appreciation day’ and adding

‘We want to celebrate all the amazing people providing safe abortions every single day.’

Catherine Robinson said: “It should be no surprise that such a sordid organisation would do something so twisted as to celebrate those who end the lives of unborn babies.

“It is made even worse by their doing so on Mother’s Day”.

Austin and Chidera win Columban schools competition

The UK winners have been announced in a media competition for young people on the subject ‘Biodiversity Matters,’ run by the Columban Missionary Society in Britain and Ireland.

Young people 13-18 years were asked to produce a piece of writing or image that demonstrates an awareness and understanding of the issue of biodiversity and highlight people, communities and/or organisations trying to build a sustainable future.

The competition attracted entries from across Britain and Ireland.

The winning article came from Austin Beenham of Holy Cross Catholic High School in Chorley, Lancashire. It was described by one judge as ‘an outstanding piece which incorporates calls to action, strong arguments and personal experience along with knowledge and accurate citation of Catholic social thought.’

Second and third places went to Anna Cookson of Notre Dame Sixth Form College in Leeds and Sarah Ashcroft of Loreto Grammar School in Altrincham.

The winning image was supplied by Chidera Anyakora, also from Loreto in Altrincham.

• The Universe will publish the winning entries in future issues

Betting firms’ ‘sneaky ads’ target children

Campaigners have claimed betting firms are increasingly using “sneaky” adverts on social media to promote their offers.

A report by Bristol University noted a rise in gambling promotions that merge betting company ads with cultural references, making them hard to distinguish as advertising, especially by children.

This could potentially lead children to follow these companies on social media, increasing the likelihood of them signing up for gambling services once they reach the legal age.

Dr. Raffaello Rossi, a marketing lecturer at Bristol University and co-author of the report, noted the difficulty all ages, but particularly young people, have in recognising this as advertising.

He said: “It’s a sneaky way to get people engaged and create a positive perception towards gambling.”

Rossi says that social media postings like this are in breach of advertising rules that stipulate that marketing communications “must be obviously identifiable as such”.

Recent findings revealed that ma-

ajor UK betting operators posted over 19,100 times on X within eight months, underlining the ease with which age restrictions on social media can be bypassed.

Further research involving over 650 participants aged 11 to 78 found that young people could only identify 43 per cent of content marketing as advertising, in contrast to 65 per cent of adults.

Catholic MP Sir Iain Duncan Smith, vice-chair of the parliamentary group for gambling-related harm, emphasised the importance of addressing the growing trend of content marketing “to ensure children, who spend significant amounts of time online, are being protected.”

In response, a spokesperson for the Betting and Gaming Council (BGC) highlighted their commitment to strict advertising guidelines and safer gambling messages.

They confirmed that their members have “introduced new age-gating rules for advertising on social media platforms. BGC members take a zero-tolerance approach to betting by children.”

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In Brief

Children change gender without parents' consent

Schools are allowing children to change gender without telling their parents in Wales, *The Telegraph* revealed this week.

Parents raised the alarm about the "shocking" approach being taken to children who question their gender in schools in Wales, saying it's taking place behind their backs.

The Welsh Labour Government has promised to publish draft guidance for schools on how to respond to gender-questioning children in the spring, months after the first guidance of its kind was published in England that told schools to presume that a child cannot change gender.

But Merched Cymru, which describes itself as a grassroots group of ordinary women from across Wales, warned that children's safety was being put at risk by an absence of guidance for schools on trans pupils.

Dad watching on as Eton player dies

An Eton College schoolboy collapsed and died during a match at the school as his father was cheering from the sidelines.

The last words Raphaël Pryor heard from his father Michael during the Field Game match on Saturday were his shouts of "Well played Raphy", his parents said in a statement.

The 17-year-old, who was in Year 13, was pronounced dead on the same day despite the efforts of medics.

His parents, Michael Pryor and Sabine Vandembroucke, said their only child had died "doing what he loved", adding "we are devastated by the tragic death of our beautiful son and only child."

Clifton to welcome new bishop as Declan Lang retires

The Bishop of Clifton, Declan Lang, has announced his retirement after his resignation was accepted by the pope. He will be replaced by Rev. Canon Bosco MacDonald.

Bishop Declan was ordained the ninth Bishop of Clifton on 28th March 2001 and has served the diocese for 23 years as its bishop.

Rev. Canon Bosco MacDonald, a priest of the diocese of Clifton, has been until now Dean of the Cathedral Church of St Peter and St Paul, Bristol. He will be the tenth Bishop of Clifton.

Bishop-elect Bosco MacDonald said, on hearing the news of his appointment: "I am humbled that His Holiness Pope Francis has called me to become the 10th Bishop of the Diocese of Clifton, following the retirement of Bishop Declan Lang.

"Bishop Lang has served us so



Bishop Declan Lang

lovingly and faithfully for 23 years, giving his life completely to the joys and hopes as well as the challenges of our Catholic communities here in



Bishop-elect Bosco MacDonald

the West of England. I am sure all will join me in thanking him for his service.

"As I embark on this new journey,

I am filled with gratitude for the prayers and affection of so many wonderful priests and people, family and friends far and wide.

Bishop Declan Lang congratulated Canon Bosco MacDonald on his appointment, saying: "He has many years of pastoral experience having worked in a number of parishes both as an assistant priest, parish priest and Dean of Clifton Cathedral.

"He brings much experience to his new ministry within the diocese which he will carry out with dedication and faithfulness."

Bishop Declan also called for prayers for Canon Bosco, whose Episcopal Ordination will take place in the Cathedral Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Clifton, Bristol. The date will be announced in due course.

Row over new mums sentencing plans

Andy Drozdziak

Catholic prison charity Pact has welcomed new guidelines which will enable courts to consider reduced prison time for pregnant women and new mothers, but Ann Widdecombe has criticised the move.

The Sentencing Council has introduced new guidance for sentencing pregnant offenders, citing 'Pregnancy, childbirth and post-natal care' as mitigating factors.

Pact – the national Catholic charity supporting people in prison and their children and families – backed the move, with CEO Andy Keen-Downs saying: "We are delighted that the Sentencing Council has introduced new guidance which, if properly followed by the courts, should significantly reduce the imprisonment of pregnant women and



Andy Keen-Downs: 'This should reduce the number of mums having babies in prison'

new mums."

The existing reference to pregnancy in the 'Sole or primary carer' factor will be replaced by a dedicated factor for pregnancy, childbirth and post-natal care.

The guidelines were introduced after stories emerged, such as that of Louise Powell, 33, who gave birth to stillborn baby Brooke in a prison toilet in June 2020 at HMP Styal.

Ms Powell welcomed the changes, and warned that sending more

pregnant women to prison means they will pay the 'ultimate price.'

She said: "I am very pleased that the system is being changed so that no other mother has to lose their baby in prison. I hope that the changes to guidance mean fewer pregnant women are sent to prison.

"If not, there is a real risk that women in labour will be left begging for help the way I was and will pay the ultimate price.

"If my daughter Brooke had been born in the community, she would be here today. No woman should have to give birth behind bars."

Andy Keen-Downs believes the new guidelines are "good news for many vulnerable women and their babies."

However, Catholic former prison minister Ann Widdecombe believes the changes will affect how preg-



Ann Widdecombe: 'Some women will think I can shoplift as I won't go to prison'

nant women view crime.

She said: "If a woman thinks 'I can shoplift' because I'm not going to go to prison because I'm pregnant, then the deterrent value has disappeared, whereas if she thinks she might go to prison, most pregnant women would not relish that prospect."

The changes, which will apply in "the majority of offence-specific sentencing guidelines", will come into effect on 1st April in England

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Archbishop uses St Patrick's Day message to call on Ireland to welcome migrants

Andy Drozdziak

Archbishop Eamon Martin used his St Patrick's Day address last weekend to urge Irish people to not tolerate hatred or racism in ongoing debates about migration.

The Primate of All Ireland referred to St Patrick as the “patron saint of migrants” who had his own struggles in being accepted, linking the saint with the migrant issues today.

“An Ireland worthy of Saint Patrick is an Ireland of welcomes which does not tolerate hatred or racism, and which embraces both its returning citizens and its newcomers,” Archbishop Martin said.

“Ireland – north and south – needs an honest and open conversation about migration, both outward and inward.

“How can we truly become an island of belonging and hope where our own young people, health workers and teachers want to stay, and where others want to come and live among us?”

The archbishop's comments come as Ireland is still dealing with the aftermath of riots linked to migra-



Bishop Paul McAleenan

tion in Dublin last November.

A stabbing attack outside a Dublin school, which left a five-year-old girl gravely injured and two other children and a creche worker also hurt, quickly escalated into a major confrontation between local residents and police.

This disturbance led to further unrest in Dublin.

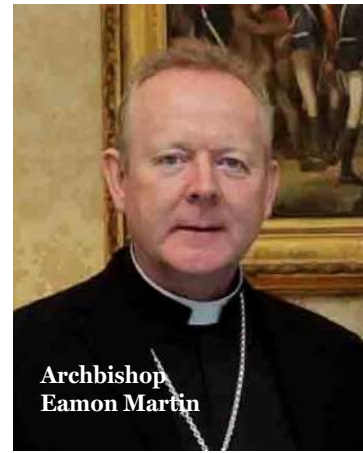
Asylum seekers without shelter living on the streets of Dublin have also said they fear for their lives.

Last December, the Government

announced a lack of accommodation for those seeking refugee status.

The archbishop pointed to Pope Francis' approach to migrants and refugees, which he has summarised under the headings ‘welcoming’, ‘protecting’, ‘promoting’ and ‘integrating’.

He urged Ireland to follow this approach, saying: “These are the very hallmarks of the kind of society that we would want for our own young people and families who travel to other countries – either will-



Archbishop Eamon Martin

ingly, or out of necessity.”

He concluded by urging the Irish people to follow the example of St Patrick in ‘welcoming the stranger.’

“When Saint Patrick walked among us, he brought the Good News of a merciful and compassionate God, who accompanies all of our comings and goings; God who wants us to welcome the stranger, to reach out to the margins and hear the cry of the poor,” he said.

Meanwhile, Bishop Paul McAleenan from the Catholic Bish-

ops' Conference of England and Wales, who was born in Belfast and trained for the priesthood at St Patrick's College in Thurles, Republic of Ireland, sent MPs a message celebrating St Patrick and the Irish Catholic contribution to the Church in England and Wales.

In his message, Bishop McAleenan underlined the “tremendous” contribution of the Irish Catholic to British life.

“Since the large-scale immigration of Irish people to Great Britain in the 19th century, Catholic churches and communities throughout England and Wales have benefited hugely from the contributions of numerous Irish clergy, religious and laity,” he said.

“As our public and political debate around issues like immigration and integration so often descends into a zero-sum game of fear, suspicion and prejudice, now is surely a good opportunity to celebrate the remarkable contribution of the Irish diaspora to British life and society as an example not least of the achievements of immigration and integration.”

Tory Catholic MP criticises pope over Ukraine comments

Andy Drozdziak

Catholic Tory MP Sir Iain Duncan Smith has urged Pope Francis to “put his white flag away” as the war in Ukraine continues.

His comments came after Pope Francis was asked in an interview whether Ukraine should surrender and if doing so would legitimise the actions of the stronger power.

He replied: “The strongest one is the one who looks at the situation, thinks about the people and has the courage of the white flag, and negotiates.”

Writing in the *Telegraph* last week, Sir Iain said he was “surprised and saddened” by the pope's words.

“The Vatican needs a new strategy for dealing with dictators,” he said. “The Pope's suggestion that Ukraine ought to ‘raise the white flag’ was utterly inexplicable,” he said.

“The freedom of the West is tied up with Ukraine's survival. The Holy Father needs to throw his white flag away and instead, hear Ukraine's simple cry, “help us, don't abandon us”.

He also urged the pope to show more support for prominent Hong Kong Catholic, philanthropist and media mogul Jimmy Lai. Mr Lai,

76, is the founder of the Apple Daily newspaper, which was shut down in 2021, and has been a campaigner for freedom of the press and freedom of expression in the Chinese Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong for decades.

Lai, who has donated millions to Catholic causes, was arrested in August 2020 and charged with sedition and collusion with foreign powers under the National Security Law.

An international coalition of Christian leaders have called for Lai's release, and the UK Government has expressed “deep concern at the continued attacks on freedom of the press in Hong Kong, including the prolonged prosecution of Jimmy Lai.” However, few words have been heard from the Vatican on the issue.

Sir Iain said: “It would have been good to hear reassuring words from the Pope for Jimmy Lai, now facing a show trial to lock him away for life.

“Jimmy is an avowed and devout Catholic – a man who bravely chose to stay in Hong Kong and sacrifice his freedom to give heart to all those now locked away in Hong Kong by President Xi's brutal regime.”

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UNIVERSE Comment

LTNs are running out of road

The Government is proposing that councils in England must consider the views of local residents before introducing new road schemes such as low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) and 20mph speed limits.

That it is even necessary to release such guidance to town halls is emblematic of the gulf between those who make these decisions and those whose lives are affected by them.

It is hardly a revolutionary concept to take account of community opinion if significant changes are to be made that will inconvenience and potentially penalise road users. Yet critics are attacking the plan which they say is “dictating to local communities how they use their streets”.

The dictating, surely, is being done by councils often conducting meetings in secret with local people unaware of what is being planned until it is too late. The decline of regional newspapers, which in the past would alert readers to such decisions and lead campaigns against them, has tipped the balance of power away from voters.

LTNs have sprung up around the country with barely any debate. The same goes for 20mph zones which are routinely introduced on main roads that can be monitored yet are not enforced in residential streets where such a limit is justified, but where there are no cameras.

The draft statutory guidance issued by the Department for Transport says councils should be confident such a scheme has the support of most of the community.

It recommends councils carry out leaflet drops, run online surveys and hold in-person meetings when considering introducing LTNs.

How is this a controversial idea? The reason the councils do not like it is that they know local residents will probably oppose them. Such schemes cause traffic congestion and are a tick-box exercise to meet unrealistic green targets. They are designed to force people from their cars and on to local transport, yet that gets held up as well. One scheme in London has been scrapped after a three-mile bus journey took two hours.

They are, additionally, a great money-spinner for many local authorities. Councils operating LTNs issue an average of 36,459 Penalty Charge Notices per scheme, with one exceeding 170,000 fines.

Supporters say these schemes are beneficial and environmentally friendly. In that case they should make their case to the local people and not foist them on despairing communities.

Tories' Levelling-up promises are failing to deliver any results

Abigail Taylor, Anne Green and Hannes Read

The UK Parliament has heard findings that levelling up – arguably the Conservatives' flagship policy agenda – is beset by critical delays. In a report published on 15th March, the public accounts committee, Parliament's expenditure watchdog, has said that, as of September 2023, local authorities had spent only £1.24 billion of the £10.47 billion the Government promised to tackle regional inequality across the UK.

Crucially, the committee has found that the Government has nothing in place to measure this policy's impact in the long term. In other words, as has been pointed out, there is “no compelling evidence” that levelling up has achieved anything.

The levelling up agenda was launched in the Conservative party's 2019 manifesto to highlight – and overcome – the economic plight of the UK's former industrial heartlands, particularly in the North and the Midlands. The subsequent White Paper published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in 2022 said the economic prize was potentially enormous: “If underperforming places were levelled up towards the UK average, unlocking their potential, this could boost aggregate UK GDP by tens of billions of pounds each year.”

The disconnect between this prosperity-led rhetoric on local authority funding and the reality could not be starker. Since 2010-11, local authorities have experienced a 27 per cent real-terms cut in core spending power due to reduced central government funding. Eight of the 317 English local authorities have effectively declared bankruptcy since 2018.

Our research compares how local authorities in England and other countries are addressing regional socioeconomic inequality. We have found that English councils are struggling to invest for the long term, because of a lack of on going funding and insufficient staff.

Where local government income comes from

Compared to many other countries, local authorities in England have fewer powers to raise revenue. In 2019-20 council tax was the biggest source of local authority income (52 per cent), followed by business rates (27 per cent) and Government grants (22 per cent).

These grants include the £4.8 billion levelling up fund, designed to invest in local infrastructure that has, as the White Paper put it, “a



Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Michael Gove

visible impact on people and their communities and will support economic recovery”.

They also include the UK shared prosperity fund and the towns fund (which consists of town deals and the future high streets fund, and is accessible to local authorities in England only).

A first challenge to note is that since Brexit, local authorities no longer have access to European Union (EU) funds. The central government funding that has replaced it is less generous. Analysis by the Institute for Public Policy Research suggests that the UK Shared Prosperity fund represents a 43 per cent drop in funding compared with EU economic development money for UK nations and regions.

Further, local authorities also now have to compete against each other to access crucial funding. The

“A first challenge to note is that since Brexit, local authorities no longer have access to EU funds. The central government funding that has replaced it is less generous...”

6,000 jobs paid at least at the London living wage.

How political change affects local government funding

In England, local authorities often struggle to deliver their visions for economic development because of the sheer frequency of institutional change at regional level across electoral cycles.

In 2010, the incoming coalition government abolished the regional development agencies Labour had instituted in 1997. In 2011, these were replaced with local enterprise partnerships, which, in turn, were scrapped by Rishi Sunak's government in 2023.

Additionally, the DLUHC has changed the rules midway through the bid process. Thus 55 councils spent an average of £30,000 bidding in round two for funds they could not win because a rule change meant that those which had been successful in round one were no longer eligible to bid again.

Roughly £1.6 million was squandered through this lack of transparency.

We have also found that English councils suffer from a lack of consistent, expert staffing. Compared to the international cities we have studied, they are not able to properly monitor and evaluate their efforts.

In South Yorkshire, for example, although stakeholders recognise the importance of monitoring and evaluation, short-term and insufficient funding has meant mechanisms to do so have not been built in from the start of levelling up projects.

In January 2024, the DLUHC began a pilot programme to test how the Government could distribute funding to local authorities in a simplified, streamlined way, in order to give them greater spending flexibility.

Establishing a single funding pot across Government departments for local authorities would indeed enable them to better respond to local needs, in the long term.

Councils know the strengths their local areas have and the challenges they face. They need the financial and organisational resources to meet them.

Abigail Taylor is a Research Fellow, City-Region Economic Development Institute (City-REDI), University of Birmingham.

Anne Green is a Professor of Regional Economic Development, University of Birmingham.

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levelling up fund might be delivered at a local level but funding is not guaranteed.

Councils have to bid to competitive funding pots. Only a handful of bids are successful, when scored against nationally designed success criteria.

What's more, this competitive model is predicated on short-term, project-based funding pots. Our research shows, however, that for local authorities to best respond to the needs of their constituents, they need long-term funding. We found that in the US, Cleveland's flagship city project is based on a 20 to 30-year timetable. Leipzig, meanwhile, has benefited from consistent long-term funding from the German government and the EU. It took 15 years of high levels of funding for unemployment to start declining in Leipzig, and a further 15 years to reduce it further closer to the national average. Leipzig's council's long-term approach to planning and designing housing stock and shopping areas has improved local retail options and access to jobs for residents.

By contrast, challenges created by the impact of inflation and rising interest rates have forced Enfield council, in England, to scale back its 20-year, £6 billion regeneration project, Meridian Water. This is despite the project's aim to create 10,000 homes and



**DECRIMINALISATION = BABIES LIKE ME
CAN BE ABORTED UNTIL BIRTH**

**CONTACT YOUR MP:
TELL THEM TO OPPOSE DECRIMINALISATION**

spuc.org.uk/abortionamendments

IMAGE: BABY GIRL BORN AT 6TH MONTH OF PREGNANCY



Society for the Protection
of Unborn Children

Suffering politics

Sir John Battle



That life and its challenges are far from easy is exemplified in the witness of St Joseph, whose scarce appearances in the Gospels present him as a gracious man accepting the mysteries of the challenge facing him when he learns Mary is pregnant.

On his feast day we pray that 'the Church may constantly watch over the unfolding of the mysteries of human salvation whose beginnings you entrusted to his faithful care'.

At the present time the daily sufferings and deaths of people, not least those under violent conflicts, are our daily media diet, from Ukraine to Gaza and Sudan and now Haiti. Increasingly democratic politics seems to be collapsing into autocracy and the plutocratic rule by the rich.

The courage of the opposition witnesses turning up at voting stations in Russia to challenge Putin's election and risking repression was outstanding. Our Foreign Secretary declared "Putin removes his political opponents, controls the media and then crowns himself the winner. This is not democracy".

Elections themselves have never been a sufficient guarantee of democracy. But nor is the dream of simply finding and electing perfect incorruptible politicians as public servants. Moreover, the complex challenges facing political governance can often involve extremely difficult choices between competing 'goods' and in a context of unsustainable resources.

In other words, tragedy taints politics and many people suffer and die unnecessarily.

The courageous Russian poet Anna Akhmatova from Stalin's time of terror queued daily for 17 months outside the Leningrad prison where her son was incarcerated, with other mothers in line, begging to be allowed to send in bread. Her son Lev died.

A poet of sorrow and suffering she wrote in her great poem *Requiem*: "Over there how many innocent lives are ending now?" and '...one hundred million voices shout through her tortured mouth'.

Her poems of remembering suffering were, of course, censored and banned by the regime at the time.

But her *Requiem* remains a fittingly prescient Good Friday poem, reminding us that we can only get to mystery Resurrection through the mystery of the Cross.

Princess media storm is proof that gossip is a destructive vice

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Caroline Farrow



Reading the wild and outrageous gossip regarding the Prince and Princess of Wales on social media this week brought to mind the famous story of a penance imposed upon a woman for spreading gossip by St Philip Neri.

The 16th-century saint instructed the woman to take a pillow to the top of the church bell tower, rip it open and let all of the feathers blow away. Once she descended, he gave her the second part of the penance - to collect all of the feathers scattered all over the town.

Of course, the poor woman couldn't complete the task, as St Philip knew, but the point was to highlight the destructive nature of gossip. When we engage in the sin of detraction and tearing down another's character, we cannot take our words back, and malicious rumours can continue to do damage for years as salacious details linger in people's minds before being passed from one storyteller to the next.

Probably all of us have been at the sharp end of malicious and untrue rumours at some point in our lives and know first-hand that these types of psychological wounds can take a long time to heal and reveal to us who our real friends are. As we approach Holy Week, the Passion is a good reminder that we are certainly not the first to suffer public humiliation and injustice and that, even though the world can sometimes feel cruel and as though the enemy has the upper hand, Jesus is always there with us. We can be sure that our stories will have a happy ending.

The rumours about Kate and William have been so outrageous, so awful, and so damaging that they simply don't bear repeating. They are a good reminder to exercise critical judgment and custody of the eyes when consuming news. I cannot outline the details of many of the more outlandish stories doing the rounds, but what has struck me is that because people have been telling their tales with such conviction, it has convinced others that they must be true and thus, like the feathers of the pillowcase, these rumours have been spread far and wide across the globe.

While I cannot give away my sources, I can confidently spread a little rectifying 'gossip' of my own and inform any concerned readers that, according to one of the employees I spoke to this week,



their Windsor office is a supportive workplace. The mood there is described as relaxed and buoyant, 'business as usual', and staff are excitedly planning for the rest of the year.

That is clearly not commensurate with the atmosphere of panic and deception which various commentators are attempting to convey.

I feel incredibly sorry for Catherine, Princess of Wales, who is entitled to privacy regarding her health, especially as it seems she has been through a gruelling ordeal. As I said, I don't intend to speculate on the nature of the problem, but one of my close family members has also been experiencing an abdominal issue, which may also need to be addressed by a major operation. My relative is not a public or public-facing figure and has still asked that their condition is not discussed on social media and does not want to make a huge fuss about what they are going through, even though it involved a number of invasive and uncomfortable procedures.

Partly, I think this is because they are a very private person, and partly because they don't actually want to have to be constantly reminded of their condition at what is a time of deep anxiety. They also

have children at school that they don't wish to worry.

Not everyone likes to make a drama out of a crisis.

It has been shocking to see the vitriol and unkind rumours heaped upon a woman simply because she has chosen to keep her personal health journey to herself and defy the current zeitgeist, which encourages public emotional diarrhoea and to let it all hang out so that your public dissect and pore over every intimate detail of your life.

Her only 'crime' was the misstep of releasing a poorly edited family photo, which has allowed the vultures to descend and justified all kinds of horrible conspiracy theories.

Mea culpa; when I first saw the photo, I was dismayed that the Palace coms team had allowed such an obviously photoshopped and unprofessional image to be released precisely because it would invite criticism and conspiracy. Sadly, it has validated those who would like to believe that there is some sinister plot or that we are being played for fools by the Royal Family or those who are just sadly, embittered by jealousy and resentment.

The moral of the story, as far as the Royals are concerned, is that they need to remember that we live

in a digital information age where lies and manipulation can easily be uncovered and distorted into unhelpful narratives. Swapping and merging images is a common feature of family photography; we once asked a professional photographer to swap an image of a baby's head with one that was taken 30 seconds previously so that everyone looked as though they were facing the camera and smiling simultaneously. It's not a lie; we were all in that studio at the same time but wanted a photo that we could frame and send out to relatives that looked its best and didn't subject any of the children to lifelong teasing.

I didn't imagine for one moment that a minor piece of editing would lead to rumours about my marriage or even whether I was still alive, and the same would be true of the Princess of Wales. As I said above, I cannot state who my palace source is, so you can either believe my word or not, but I am told that she is well, as the recent video footage of her proves.

Still, at the end of the day, it's no more reliable than the Chinese whispers of people looking for attention and drama on social media, and who forget that though the Royal family may be immensely privileged and do have an obligation to be seen by the public, they are also human beings, as are their young children, who also deserve shielding from such ugly speculation.

I wish the Princess of Wales well in her recovery and look forward to seeing her back in her public-facing role after Easter.

"The Royal family may be immensely privileged and have an obligation to be seen by the public, but they are also human beings too, as are their young children, and deserve shielding from such ugly speculation"

Eamonn proud to be asked back as High Sheriff

Andy Drozdziak

The Diocese of Salford is celebrating after King Charles appointed one of its trustees as the next High Sheriff of Greater Manchester.

The appointment of popular BBC broadcaster Eamonn O'Neal was formally announced by Buckingham Palace on 13th March and he will take up his ceremonial role in April.

Welcoming the appointment, Eamonn O'Neal highlighted the role of the diocese of Salford in supporting those on the margins of society.

"The diocese of Salford is at the forefront of propagating the faith, educating our children and looking after the most vulnerable in our society, those experiencing poverty, disadvantage, discrimination and homelessness," he said.

"I hope that my year as High Sheriff will help focus attention on the needs of those who need our help the most and help them to live their lives with dignity and upon the foundation of faith."

It will be the second time the father-of-three, from Sale, has been installed as High Sheriff, after previously holding the position in 2020.

He will be installed as High Sheriff at Wardley Hall in April, succeeding Mary Elizabeth Walker whose term of office ends at that point. Eamonn, who will have the role for 12 months, will also appoint Salford diocesan clergy to serve as his chaplain.

Eamonn O'Neal is a prominent broadcaster and journalist in the North West, having been head of regional programmes at Granada Television, managing editor of the *Manchester Evening News* and a



presenter with BBC Radio Manchester.

He also serves as chair for several charities including Prevent Breast Cancer and The Dianne Oxberry Trust, and a trustee of Caritas, Francis House Children's Hospice and Once Upon a Smile.

He spoke of the honour of being appointed to the role for a second time by two different monarchs, after being appointed by Queen Elizabeth in 2020. "It's a huge honour and quite humbling to be chosen as High Sheriff of Greater Manchester again," he said.

"I'm grateful to have the chance to connect and engage with the charitable, voluntary, faith, ethnic, cultural and business communities across the county."

The Office of High Sheriff is the oldest secular title in British history, dating back more than 1,300 years. In former times, the Sheriff represented the monarch, collecting taxes and raising armies.

Although Eamonn will not be collecting taxes, he said that he will be "proud to represent the King as the ceremonial head of the judiciary in the county."

NHS mums who miscarry up to 24 weeks to receive paid leave

Women working for NHS England who suffer miscarriages within the first 24 weeks of pregnancy are now entitled to 10 days paid leave.

Parents in England may also apply for a baby loss certificate to recognise miscarriages under 24 weeks, which was welcomed by Bishop John Sherrington, who spoke of the support the Church offers to "parents in grief" over the loss of their unborn child.

"We surround grieving parents with our prayers," he said, adding that "I welcome the introduction of the option for parents to be given baby loss certificates."

Welcoming the measures, pro-life group SPUC called for further rec-

ognition that unborn children are "people and not a clump of cells", and pointed out the contradiction in the news.

"While recognising pregnancy loss it is a step in the right direction, society must take the extra step in understanding that such grief exists exactly because unborn children are people and not merely a clump of cells," SPUC said. "There is an inherent contradiction in a system that grants the premise that the deaths of unborn children under 24 weeks gestation matter enough to issue bereavement leave and certificates to parents while also aborting hundreds of thousands of similarly aged babies every year."

School in shock after latest theft of religious statue

Andy Drozdziak

A Catholic headteacher has shared her "great sadness" after a large crucifix was cut down and stolen, and two religious statues toppled.

Vandals struck in the early hours of Monday, 18th March at St Mary's RC Primary and Nursery School in Langley, Greater Manchester. Images showed that the school's large Calvary statue had been cut down.

St Mary's headteacher Sarah Bolado told parents of the "deeply upsetting" events. "There is great sadness in our school community following on from the desecration of our Calvary statue," she said. "This is deeply upsetting as the crucifix and statues have stood proudly outside St Mary's School for decades.

"The school has reported this crime to police and we appeal to anyone with any information to please come forward.

"I would like to personally thank all the parents and parishioners who have been in contact to offer us their support and assistance. It is a very sad day for us all, but this will only bring our community closer as we stand together."

A GoFundMe page was almost immediately created by local resident Danny Goodier, entitled 'Replace the crucifix statue at St Mary's.'

Mr Goodier said: "I know as a



Left, before the theft and above, the scene now
Pictures: Manchester Evening News

member of the community how good we all are at coming together when the community needs too. I know you will never be able to replace the original given that it has been stood for so long, but let's try and replace it with a new one so the school can be whole again."

As the *Universe* went to press, £1,605 had been raised towards a new crucifix.

Local residents took to social media to share their dismay at the news. Posting on Facebook, Jayne Holland wrote: 'What on earth. This is a disgrace,' while Ann Rodgers, called it 'disgusting'.

The latest statue theft comes after statues in front of St Luke's church, Irlams o'th' Height, Salford, were stolen in January, suggesting that professional groups are targeting, planning and carrying out the thefts in the Manchester region.

On that occasion, thieves escaped with statues of Jesus on a crucifix, with the crucifix sawn at the base, a kneeling figure of St Bernadette and a kneeling angel. It was described by communication officer Paul Ashton as 'a planned and professional theft.'

CLICK HERE to access the school's Go Fund Me page.



Why do we take Holy Communion?

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

If they asked, could you answer questions such as:

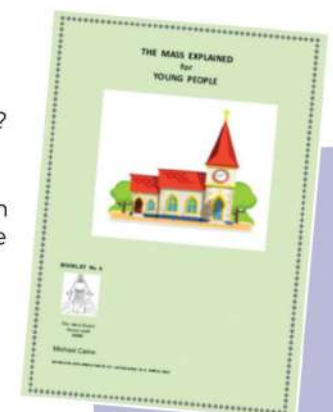
- Why do we bless ourselves?
- Why do we say Amen?
- What's God's Grace?
- Why do we go to Confession – and Mass?
- What's Communion about?

and many, many more...

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

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

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



In Brief

Staff ‘tried to access medical notes’ of Princess of Wales

The hospital where the Princess of Wales underwent surgery is investigating claims staff tried to access her medical notes.

The alleged privacy breach relates to claims at least one member of staff unrelated to her treatment had tried to view her records, the *Daily Mirror* said.

The Princess is said to have been made aware of the breach.

Kensington Palace said: “It is a matter for the London Clinic.” The Princess and the King were treated at the hospital at the same time in January.

A spokesman for Buckingham Palace declined to comment.

Tories back Sunak for election – just

Rishi Sunak is narrowly backed by Conservative voters to lead the party into the next general election, a new poll reveals.

Just 45 per cent of Tory voters agree that Mr Sunak should be Conservative leader for the election, with 37 per cent wanting someone else. The rest did not express a view.

The narrow margin of support comes as the Prime Minister is dogged by speculation that some Tory MPs on the Right want him to be replaced, possibly with Penny Mordaunt or Tom Tugendhat.

Cambridge college scraps church choir

A Cambridge college is embroiled in a row over plans to scrap an Anglican choir to make way for more diverse musical genres.

St John’s College announced that it would strip funding from church choir St John’s Voices as it planned to fund a “broader” range of music instead.

The mixed male and female choir will disband at the end of the current term.

The college will also cut down on the number of chapel services held at St John’s to use the space for “civic engagement”.

Members of the choir, which has made several recordings of sacred music, are understood to be dismayed by the news and are set to launch a petition to demand it is spared.

Keeping your faith in the news

www.universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Putin’s ‘landslide’ is his way of keeping Russia’s public on side

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Natasha Lindstaedt



Russian election: despite fixing the opposition, Vladimir Putin wanted lots of people to vote for him

Vladimir Putin won a landslide victory in Russia’s presidential vote this week as thousands in the country and around the world protested against his deepening dictatorship, the war in Ukraine and a stage-managed election that could have only ever had one winner.

In a vote denounced by, among others, the United States as “obviously not free nor fair”, Putin won 87.2 per cent of the vote. In a speech at his campaign headquarters on Sunday evening, Putin brushed off western criticism of the elections, telling his supporters it was “expected”. He has now won another six-year term making him the longest-serving leader since Joseph Stalin.

Despite the clear path to victory for Putin, the Kremlin reportedly spent more than €1 billion (£850 million) on propaganda in the lead up to the elections. Much of this budget was allocated to infotainment to promote nationalism, unity and traditional values.

But why would a regime in the midst of a war, that has cost Russia more than US\$200 billion (£156 billion), feel the need to put so much effort into a sham election?

Putin may be trying to avoid the same pitfalls of other dictatorships such as Iran which saw record low turnout of 41 per cent in its recent parliamentary elections, the lowest since its 1979 revolution, reflecting widespread disillusionment with the Islamic regime.

The same could be said for Venezuela, which registered a turnout of 31 per cent for its 2020 parliamentary elections. Putin is certainly trying to avoid any perceptions of illegitimacy, or a large protest vote in the wake of the death of his biggest opponent, Alexei Navalny.

Yet why bother to hold elections at all? Research has shown that while elections can pose some risk to dictatorships in the short term, they can also help prolong autocracies. Despite all the questions over their validity, they are often presented in such as way



as to lend the winner a degree of legitimacy – both at home and internationally – and it also helps the regime gather intelligence on its popularity.

But Putin seems to be going beyond the usual autocratic project of trying to project the popularity of his regime. Over the 24 years of his rule, elections have become an opportunity for Russians to demonstrate their loyalty to the regime. They are a spectacle, similar to a military parade, and indicative of Putin’s new totalitarian hold on Russia.

Though authoritarianism is on the rise, only a very few regimes are considered totalitarian today. Among those that are, North Korea stands out, with its one-party state run by the Kim family dynasty. Maintaining totalitarian rule requires a great deal of effort by the state to mobilise the public to be fervent supporters of the regime. Most totalitarian regimes also consume large amounts of resources to constantly spy on their people.

Authoritarian regimes may use propaganda and some degree of surveillance and repression but, for the most part, autocracies are

“Russia used to tolerate a moderate degree of dissent, but this is no longer the case. And the punishments have also changed... ‘offenders’ now attract prison time”

willing to accept an apathetic and complacent public that is unwilling to rock the boat.

How Putin deals with dissenting ‘scum’

But things have changed in Russia, since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Within a month of launching the invasion, Putin was issuing warnings against those who didn’t support his war aims.

“Any people, and especially the Russian people, will always be able to distinguish the true patriots from the scum and the traitors, and just to spit them out like a midge that accidentally flew into their mouths,” Putin said.

As the war moves into a third year, Putin knows he may need to call on more Russians to fight. As a result, propaganda has been intensified throughout Russian society to reinforce parallels with the ‘Great Patriotic War’ (as the Second World War is known in Russia) which, for the country, was an existential crisis, and which every school pupil discovers was also its finest hour.

Patriotic education is also designed to instil contempt for Ukrainian statehood and students and teachers have been encouraged to denounce any opposition to the war.

Public employees who depend on the state, have been asked to take part in anti-Ukrainian rallies. Citizens have also been encouraged to inform on neighbours who oppose the war.

Russia used to tolerate a moderate degree of dissent, but this is no longer the case. And the punishments have also changed.

Rather than face a fine for protesting or speaking critically of the regime, these ‘offenders’ now attract prison time.

After Russian human rights activist Oleg Orlov claimed that Russia had become totalitarian in February, he was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison. Prison sentences have not just become more common, they are longer, too. Activist and journalist Vladimir Kara-Murza was sentenced to 25 years in prison for denouncing the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Police raids have also become more common. In the past, it was only notable critics of the regime who could face arrest. Today, any citizen who expresses dissent can face retribution.

Weeks after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, its parliament, the Duma, passed legislation to make it a crime to refer to the war in Ukraine as anything other than a “special operation” – with a 15-year prison sentence levied at those convicted.

Undoubtedly, since the invasion, Russia has demanded active support from its citizens, not just acquiescence. During an election, abstaining and being uninterested in politics is no longer tolerated. Even the occupied parts of Ukraine were strongly encouraged (by armed men) to vote.

Putin wanted to win in a landslide, and this election was designed to be a co-ordinated and absurd display of his “popularity”.

Natasha Lindstaedt is a Professor, Department of Government, University of Essex

Dad reaches milestone in daughter's memory

Andy Drozdziak

A former Catenians Grand President has announced the “bittersweet” landmark of raising £500,000 in memory of his daughter who died from a brain tumour.

In Sue's Name was set up to honour Sue Blasotta, a daughter, sister and mum of two, by her father David Taylor in 2014, with an ambition to raise £1 million to fund vital research. The charity is based in the Catholic parish of St Monica's, Palmers Green, London.

With the funds reaching halfway to the target, David said: “On the day that we should have been celebrating Sue's 56th birthday (15th March), it was bittersweet to be announcing that her legacy has now



Sue with her children
Photos: Brain Tumour Research

Dr Myrianni Constantinou

raised an incredible half a million pounds.”

Sue, from Palmers Green, was diagnosed with ‘lesions on the brain’ in November 2010 after being handed a cup of tea which she was inexplicably unable to grasp so it went straight through her hand.

She underwent surgery on what turned out to be a glioblastoma (GBM), the most common, aggressive type of brain tumour among adults, and was given a survival prognosis of just six months to a year. Sadly, Sue died just six weeks later.

David, who served as the 79th Grand President of the Catenians, said: “When Sue was in hospital, there were two other brain tumour patients from the Catholic parish of St Monica's in Palmers Green also being treated. Both later died.”

David set up In Sue's Name to make a difference and bring hope to future families with loved ones affected by brain tumours.

The charity sponsored a PhD researcher, Myrianni Constantinou, at the Brain Tumour Research Centre of Excellence at Queen Mary University of London, working in a team investigating more effective ways to treat patients diagnosed with a GBM brain tumour.

Myrianni successfully completed

her PhD thesis and is continuing her research to improve the understanding of genetic variations in glioblastoma. In Sue's Name is continuing to sponsor her postdoctoral research.

Myrianni said: “Not only am I profoundly grateful to In Sue's Name for sponsoring my research, but their support also gives my work perspective and a deeper purpose, knowing that I'm working on glioblastoma, the very disease that tragically took Sue's life.”

“My goal is that we can one day change the narrative for glioblastoma patients with such poor prognosis, and bring an end to people being told they probably only have months, rather than years, to live.”

We're backing CAFOD through our pain says this remarkable duo

Andy Drozdziak

A retired priest with arthritis and a motivational speaker with dodgy knees are getting fit to raise funds for CAFOD.

Motivational Catholic speaker and CAFOD supporter David Wells will run the London Marathon on 21st April – despite some knee struggles.

David said: “I have always loved running but, with 61 years behind me, two dodgy knees and a calf with more knots than a sailor's dingy, I'm aware that my chance of doing a marathon is the only thing getting slimmer.”

David Wells, who is the author of popular books *The Reluctant Disciple* and *The Grateful Disciple*, is excited to take on the challenge of running a marathon and raising funds for CAFOD.

“CAFOD and me are about the

same age,” David said. “We both matured with time, but CAFOD has got stronger. In 2005 I saw at first hand what CAFOD is doing to improve the lives of people. CAFOD will continue to inspire me through the streets on April 21st. Most of us never get to see the good we do, but it was never about that anyway.”

David added: “CAFOD does amazing work to improve the lives of the world's poorest people. Their projects encourage self sufficiency and sustainable skills. They do not discriminate. They simply go where the need is.”

Meanwhile, Monsignor Canon Vincent Harvey, 75, from Fareham, who struggles with arthritis, hip and knee pain, has been undertaking CAFOD's Big Lent Walk.

CAFOD has been encouraging thousands of walkers from schools and parishes in England, Wales, Scotland and beyond, to walk 200km this Lent to help tackle global poverty.

Monsignor Harvey told the *Daily Echo*: “I am low in kilometres but high in donations! I am walking, honest, just the knees and hip have been causing me gyp...So, each step is an effort, and the rain doesn't help but I keep on going!!”

Having travelled over 60km around Itchen Valley, Fareham, and Portchester, he has raised £787 in the first 20 days of his 40-day campaign.

The funds raised will help CAFOD tackle poverty globally in countries like Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan.

Neil Roper, fundraising events manager at CAFOD, shared his thanks with Monsignor Harvey, adding that “every pound raised makes a huge difference.”

Left, David Wells (CAFOD)



Littleway is a Catholic Charity which recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. Our Mission is for Evangelising through Healing and our Mission Statement is 'Freedom through Jesus'. We run Healing of Memory Foundation Courses in the UK, Ireland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

In addition, we organise Parish Healing Missions, Weekends of Healing and Outreach Days and we welcome invitations to come to your Parish. We also host regular Zoom Outreach evenings.

Prayer Requests can be submitted through our website, alternatively you can call us for prayer on:

+44 (0) 7936 269 143

All information on our events and our Zoom links are on our website:

www.littlewayhealingministries.com

Our Healing of Memories Course schedule for 2024 is as follows:

Mon 8th – Sun 14th April at Mullaghmore, Ireland (now full)

Mon 14th – Sun 20th October at Oblate Centre, Crewe

Mon 28th Oct – Sun 3rd Nov at Mullaghmore, Ireland

Our courses provide foundation training for Healing of Memories Prayer and are intended for those who either already pray with others or are prepared to learn how to pray.

Each person will have the opportunity to receive Healing of Memories Prayer led by an experienced team member. Courses start at 5pm on a Monday and end after lunch on the following Sunday.

You will need to be able to attend the whole of the course.

For more information before booking, please call us on: **+44 (0) 7936 269 143**



Teenage crooner reaching for the stars

Catholic student and Britain's Got Talent sensation Malakai M Bayoh tells Suresh Abboodass of his delight at meeting and singing in front of movie stars Bradley Cooper and Cary Mulligan.

The Archdiocese of Southwark must be very proud of its teenage-crooner son Malakai who, through his talent for singing, has reached all the way to Hollywood and royalty, brushing shoulders with stars such as Bradley Cooper and Carey Mulligan and singing in front of King Charles.

Malakai M Bayoh, 14, who came fourth in last year's *British Got Talent (BGT)* TV show, has just returned from singing in the world-famous Lincoln Centre in Manhattan, New York, last month in front of a stellar audience which included those Hollywood stars Cooper and Mulligan.

"I am very proud to have sung in the Lincoln Centre," Malakai said with humble pride. It was my first time in New York, and a new experience to sing before Bradley Cooper and Cary Mulligan. It was great to win their appreciation and have them tell me that they were 'very happy to have you here'."

Speaking exclusively to the *Universe Catholic Weekly*, Malakai said that he was invited to sing in New York for a live performance of the soundtrack from the film *Maestro*, which is the life story of composer Leonard Bernstein and in which Bradley Cooper and Carey Mulligan play the leads. Malakai sang two songs for the film. "I sang *Chichester Psalms*' and *Mass*," he said. "It was very cool."

Young Malakai has been a consort in the St. George's Cathedral choir for nearly seven years. He found fame after his stellar performance in *BGT* last year, in which his rendition of *Pie Jesu* – which means 'loving Jesus' – caught the judges' attention. It was composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber.

How does he feel about his experience in *BGT* and his

new-found stardom?

"I was really shocked when I came fourth. I didn't expect to get that far. It was all surreal. My friends and my family were all excited and proud of my performance. I felt a bit nervous, standing on the stage and singing before those judges. But I was not disappointed," he said.

And how did he get to enter *BGT* in the first place?

"It was my school music teacher Scott Price who encouraged me to take part in *BGT*. He is my motivator. He always encourages me. It was through him I got invited to sing in the film *Maestro*' as well as to sing in Lincoln Centre," he said.

Malakai is a fun-loving, happy-go-lucky young man. Living under the spotlight is a remarkable achievement indeed for a young person from a middleclass-colour background.

Malakai, whose parents hail from Sierra Leone, was born in England.

He is very humble and playful, not at all conscious about his status as a star singer and media celebrity. During the interview, he was constantly playing with his mobile.

Did his participation in the cathedral choir have a hand in his meteoric rise in the field of music?

"Yes, of course," he said. "I'm a religious person, I sing in the choir and I say my prayers regularly. Being in the choir was very helpful."

Having shot to fame through his performance in *BGT*, Malakai has had opportunities knocking at his doorstep. He along with his mum appeared on the ITV *Morning* show. "My mum is my rock," he said. "She was with me even when I went to New York recently," he says with pride.

Malakai also sang before HM King Charles during the Remembrance Day performance at the Royal Albert Hall last year. What was it like performing before the King himself?

"It was really exciting to sing



Malakai and his mum with Bradley Cooper

before the King and also in the majestic Royal Albert Hall. At first, I did not know he (the King) was there. But later when I realised the King was there, I felt very happy and excited. It was a memorable moment in my life," he said.

"Again, I have Mr Price to thank for organising the chance to sing in the Royal Albert Hall and I must also thank my managers Katheryn Nash and Steve Abbott for giving me all the support they do."

Malakai, who is in Year 10 at Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School in London, is a boy soprano – a Treble – as far as his choir is concerned. Apart from singing, he is also learning the piano (Grade 3) and the saxophone. In his leisure time, he plays basketball and is also a good swimmer.

Malakai, whose favourite band is the Beatles, dreams of becoming a professional singer one day. "I want to perform and to create albums and to be a professional singer," he said.

However, he has already made and released an album called *Golden*, which features seven songs

and was produced by the Decca record label. The album consists of music from different composers, including one from Andrew Lloyd Webber.

"This is my first album and it came out last July. It has been received well," he said. All this happened after his performance in *BGT*.

What is his advice to budding singers like him?

"Do it, just do it," he replied. "Sing or simply compete."

Malakai is also learning classical music to further develop his singing talent. "I have completed Grade 5 in classical music, and I want to reach till Grade 8," he said.

The offers to perform are coming thick and fast now he has become more famous. He recently gave a performance at a show organised by Specsavers in Birmingham, and also fondly remembers singing *Somewhere* from *Westside Story* at the Big Bash in Wembley to herald the New Year.

Simple, humble and not at all arrogant, young Malakai has a bright future indeed.



Malakai pictured during his performance in New York

Letters to the Editor

The Universe Catholic Weekly welcomes letters from our readers. Send your thoughts to Michael Winterbottom, at michael.winterbottom@universecatholicweekly.co.uk. Please endeavour to keep your letter short and provide a name and address with all letters, though we are happy to anonymise your thoughts in print. We reserve the right to edit all correspondence for length when space is at a premium.

Catholic manifesto on its way

In your Letters page of *The Catholic Universe* of 8th March, Mr Davies of Stockport wrote that Catholics need a collective response to the election.

It is clear that we need to be heard. The Catholic Union, dedicated to the defence of Catholic values in Parliament and public life, and the promotion of the common good, is seeking to provide a collective response.

Our first step has been to conduct a survey urging Catholics across the country to have their say on what matters most to them ahead of the General Election.

The survey also explores the extent to which Catholics are engaged in politics and how they plan on participating in the election.

I hope that Mr Davies will be pleased to hear that the next phase is to publish a Catholic Manifesto which will be sent out to candidates ahead of polling day. We look forward to sharing the Catholic Manifesto with readers of the *Universe Catholic Weekly* before the election, and hope that it will be a useful tool in conversation with their candidates.

Nigel Parker
Director, Catholic Union

Mind your language: literally

Well done for the censorship of the abusive words on placards held by pro-abortion demonstrators as they attacked a pro-life student meeting (*Universe*, pg 1, 8th March)

Either deliberate or missed, however, I noticed you didn't correct their spelling!

One placard-holder had forgotten to pop the apostrophe into You're (giving us the dreadful word 'Youre', whatever that means) while the other added an extra 's' into disappointed.

No doubt the only people really disappointed by this display were their English teachers.

I will stand up for students' right to have appalling political views, as that is democracy, but can they at least try to spell their hate-filled placards correctly?

Denise Taylor
Bramley

Well done to the students

While the abuse they are receiving is horrible, well done to the pro-life student group in Manchester. It's good to know some of the youth take pro-life issues as seriously as us old' uns.

Terry Charles
Newport

Special gifts for celebrating Easter

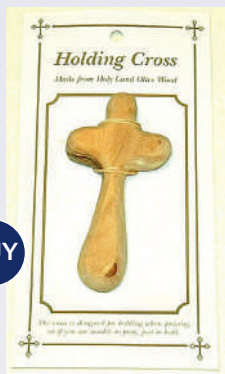


Greek wooden carved icon crucifix
16 x 23 cm
Orthodox Icon Crucifix, with carved frame. Lithographic image of crucifixion on sturdy composite wood, with hand-painted detail, frame gilded with imitation gold-leaf with antiqued effect, with hook for wall hanging. Handmade in Greece, with certificate of authenticity on back.
Size 16 x 23 cm (6.25 x 9 inches).
Ref: I0328 Price: £39.95

BUY

Holy Land Olive Wood Holding Cross

3.5 inches – with prayer card
Holding cross made from Holy Land olive wood, unvarnished.
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Supplied with prayer card.
Ref: S0325 Price: £10.25



BUY



BUY

Easter Card pack – Floral (pack of 12 small cards)

Packet of 12 small Easter Cards with Gold Foil, 3.5" x 5.5" (9 x 14 cm). Featuring floral design with ecclesiastical background, and Easter Blessings/Easter Prayer.
Inside text: 'To wish you peace and happiness at Easter'.
Ref: E0149 Price: £5.75

Perpetual Help Candle

Tall pillar candle in heat-resistant holder, with removable wind-proof top. 6.5" x 2.5" (16 x 7 cm), with Our Lady of Perpetual Help (Our Lady of Perpetual Succour) Image and prayer. Using world famous religious images from The Bonella & Cromo art libraries in Milan, Italy. Burning time: approx 68 hours.
Ref: C0285 Price: £4.50



BUY

Easter Card pack – Easter Blessings

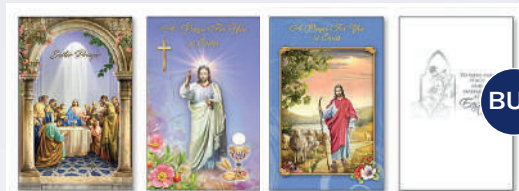
Pack of 6 Easter Cards
Gold Foil, Embossed, featuring 2 designs: Christ the Good Shepherd and Christ Knocking with Blessing Prayer.
Inside text: Design 1: 'To wish you peace and happiness at Easter'. Design 2: 'Wishing you every happiness at Easter'.
Ref: E0147 Price: £6.95



BUY

Easter Card pack – Last Supper (Pack of 12 small cards)

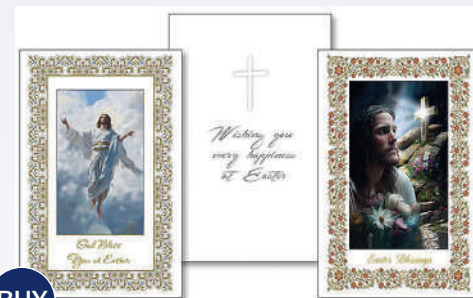
Packet of 12 small Easter Cards with Gold Foil, 3.5" x 5.5" (9 x 14 cm). Featuring Christ the Good Shepherd, Risen Christ and Last Supper designs.
Inside text: 'To wish you peace and happiness at Easter'.
Ref: E0150 Price: £5.75



BUY

Easter Card pack – Risen Christ (Pack of 6)

Pack of 6 Easter Cards, Gold Foil, Embossed, 4.5 x 6.75 inches (11.5 x 17 cm). Featuring 2 Designs: Risen Christ Ascended and Risen Christ with cross background.
Inside text: Design 1: 'To wish you peace and happiness at Easter'. Design 2: 'Wishing you every happiness at Easter'.
Ref: E0154 Price: £6.95



BUY

Our Lady Untier of Knots Candle

Tall pillar candle in heat-resistant holder, with removable wind-proof top. 6.5" x 2.5" (16 x 7 cm), with Our Lady Untier of Knots/Pope Francis image and prayer.
Burning time: approx 68 hours.
Ref: C0250 Price: £4.50



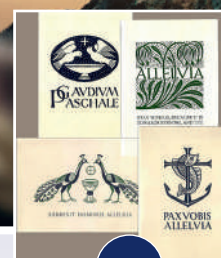
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BUY



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Easter Card pack – Floral (Pack of 6)

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ROME

Editorial: Andy Drozdziak – news@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Clergy look to prayer to defeat abortion

US Catholic bishops have issued a nationwide call to prayer to end abortion and protect women and unborn children. The invitation was issued as the Supreme Court prepares to take up two cases on access to abortion pills.

The prayer campaign, which seeks the intercession of St. Joseph as the Defender of Life, begins on 25th March, the day before the Supreme Court hears oral arguments regarding lawsuits on the drug mifepristone and its widespread availability.

Mifepristone has a two-decade history of use for early abortions when used with misoprostol, but the same drug combination in recent years has been prescribed for early miscarriage care.

The daily prayer for the bishops' campaign is available at respectlife.org/prayer-to-st-joseph. "We ask Catholics to offer this prayer daily, from March 25 through June, when a decision is expected," bishops said.

Devout girl heads towards sainthood

The Vatican has moved the cause for canonisation forward of Niña Ruiz-Abad, a devout 13-year-old girl who died in 1993 in the Philippines.

Ruiz-Abad is now considered a 'Servant of God,' the first step to sainthood. If she is declared a saint, she will be one of the youngest ever.

Fr Danny Pajarillaga met Ruiz-Abad in 1993, and he recalls how immediately he noticed her great love for the Eucharist and that she prayed a lot. "She was a walking testimony of piety and religion.

"She was always dressed in white and with a rosary around her neck," he said.

Ruiz-Abad was diagnosed with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy at the age of 10 and died aged 13 after suffering a cardiac arrest at school.



Pope Francis with members of the dicastery

Family, community, are keys to overcoming the secular agenda

Faced with decades of rising secularism, the Catholic Church must invest in families and in strengthening other forms of community to transmit the faith, Pope Francis said.

"The big issue before us is to understand how to overcome the rupture that has been established in the transmission of faith," the pope told members of the Dicastery for Evangelization's section for new evangelization. "To that end there is an urgent need to recover an effective relationship with families and formation centers."

Developing faith in Christ "requires a meaningful experience lived in the family and in the Christian community as a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ in order to be transmitted," he wrote in his message to members of the dicastery during their plenary assembly. "Without this real and existen-

tial encounter, one will always be subject to the temptation to make faith a theory and not a testimony of life."

As he has done at several meetings in past weeks, the pope had an aide, Msgr. Filippo Ciamanelli, read his speech to the group.

In his message, the pope wrote that the secularism of recent decades "has created enormous difficulties" for the Church, "from the loss of a sense of belonging to the Christian community to the indifference regarding the faith and its contents."

As a result, he wrote, it is time for the Church to "understand what effective response we are called to give to young generations so that they may recover the meaning of life."

He noted that lure of personal autonomy, "promoted as one of the pretenses of secularism, cannot be

thought of as independence from God, because it is God himself who grants the personal freedom to act."

And while technological advances offer many ways for humanity to progress, including through developments in medicine and methods of protecting the environment, they also can create a "problematic" vision of humanity that fails to satisfy "the need for truth that dwells in every person," he wrote.

Pope Francis urged members of the dicastery to develop a "spirituality of mercy" as the foundation of their work in evangelisation. People are more receptive to evangelisation when done with a "style of mercy," he wrote. By communicating mercy, he added, "the heart opens more readily to conversion."

The pope thanked the dicastery for its work in developing resources for catechists, referencing the latest *Directory for Catechesis* published

by the dicastery in 2020, and praised the support they have given to those who serve as catechists.

"I hope that bishops will know how to nurture and accompany vocations to this ministry especially among young people," he said, "so that the gap between generations and may be reduced and the transmission of the faith may not appear to be a task entrusted only to older people."

The pope also discussed plans for the Holy Year 2025, which he has asked the dicastery to organise. The theme for the holy year is 'Pilgrims of Hope.'

"This theological virtue has been seen poetically as the 'little sister' of the other two, faith and charity, but without it these two do not move forward, they do not express the best of themselves," he wrote. "The holy people of God has such a great need" for hope.

Papal envoy asks prayers for peace, solidarity with victims of war

Cindy Wooden

Pope Francis' envoy for peace in Ukraine asked his fellow bishops and all Catholics in Italy to continue their prayers for peace in Ukraine and in the Holy Land, but also to make those prayers concrete through acts of solidarity.

For example, Italian dioceses should expand summer camp programs to welcome Ukrainian children "who are orphans or victims – and they all are – of the catastrophe that is war," said Cardinal Matteo Zuppi.

Addressing the conference's permanent council, the cardinal also encouraged the bishops to promote the full participation of their dioceses in the annual Good Friday collection for Christians in the Holy Land.

And, he said, the late May

plenary assembly of the Italian bishops' conference will include a day of prayer, fasting and solidarity for peace in the world.

"Can we still accept that war is the only solution to conflicts?" Cardinal Zuppi asked his fellow bishops. "In this time of conflicts, divisions, nationalist sentiment, hatred and opposition," he said, the Catholic Church's work for unity "shines as a light of hope."

The commitment of each bishop and every Catholic community, the cardinal said, must be to be "artisans of peace, weavers of unity in every context, peaceful in words and behavior."

Cardinal Zuppi said he knows many people view Pope Francis as naïve in his constant pleas to stop sending weapons to war-torn regions and in urging negotiations

even when, like in Ukraine, the identity of the aggressor is clear.

"The Holy Father's words on peace are anything but naïveté," the cardinal said. Rather, the pope is trying to share "a pain that we will never be able to measure."

"We are living through a very long Good Friday when darkness covered the whole earth, and darkness erases life and all light, and sometimes, it seems, even hope and consciences themselves," he said. "The church is always Mary at the foot of the cross of her children; she cannot get used to the darkness and believes in light even when there is only darkness."

"The Church is a mother and experiences war as a mother for whom the value of life is superior to reasoning or alliances," Cardinal Zuppi said.

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Pope calls for release of religious brothers kidnapped in Haiti

Justin McLellan

Pope Francis called for the release of two religious brothers, members of the Congregation of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, who are still being held hostage in Haiti.

“I have learned with relief that in Haiti, a teacher and four of the six religious brothers of the Frères du Sacré-Cœur Institute, kidnapped last February 23rd, have been freed,” the pope said after praying the Angelus in St. Peter’s Square. “I ask for the release as soon as possible of the other two brothers and all those people still being held hostage in that beloved country, so fraught with violence.”

The kidnappings took place as Catholic religious have become targets for ransom in Haiti by armed gangs. In January, a group of six re-

ligious sisters were freed less than a week after being kidnapped by armed assailants. The United Nations said that more than 1,100 people had been killed, injured or kidnapped by gangs in January 2024 alone.

“I invite all the political and social actors to abandon any personal interest and to engage in a spirit of solidarity in the pursuit of the common good, supporting a peaceful transition to a country that, with the help of the international community, may be equipped with solid institutions capable of restoring order and tranquility among its citizens,” the pope said about the crisis in Haiti.

Bishops urge global action to save Haiti - pg 17



Lawlessness and gang violence now dominate Haiti's streets.

Respect life by opposing war, Vatican says in Ramadan message

The respect religions have for the dignity and value of human life should help them convince their followers that “war must be rejected and peace cherished,” leaders of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue said in a message to Muslims around the world.

“Dear Muslim brothers and sisters, let us join in extinguishing the fires of hatred, violence and war, and instead light the gentle candle of peace, drawing upon resources for peace that are present in our rich human and religious traditions,” said the message for the month of Ramadan.

Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso, dicastery prefect, and Mgr Indunil Janakarathne Kankanamalage, secretary, did not mention specific conflicts in their letter, which was released on 15th March, although Muslim communities in Gaza, Sudan, Yemen, Ukraine and other places are fasting for the month under the shadow of violence.

“The growing number of conflicts in these days has become truly alarming,” the Vatican wrote.

The causes of the conflicts vary, they said, but while “part of our human family suffers grievously from the devastating effects of the use of these arms in warfare, others cynically rejoice in the great economic profit deriving from this immoral commerce,” they wrote. “Pope Francis has described this as dipping a morsel of bread in the blood of our brother.”

But people have resources to promote peace and religious faith builds on that, they said.

“The desire for peace and security is profoundly rooted in the soul of every person of good will, since no one can fail to see the tragic effects of war in the loss of human lives, the toll of serious injury and the throngs of orphans and widows,” the message said. “The destruction of infrastructure and property makes life hopelessly difficult, if not impossible. Sometimes hundreds of thousands of people are displaced in their own country or forced to flee to other countries as refugees.”

Building on their teachings about human dignity, the Vatican officials said, religious leaders need to form consciences “to respect the absolute value of the life of each person and his or her right to physical integrity, security and a dignified life.” Doing so, they said, will “contribute to the condemnation and rejection of war, any war and all wars.”

All people of good will and, especially all believers, must condemn and reject war, they said. “Every war is fratricide, useless, senseless and dark. In war, everyone loses. In the words of Pope Francis: ‘No war is holy, only peace is holy.’”

World’s poor need access to medical advances too, pope says in visit to Bambino Gesù

Cutting-edge science and medical research cannot benefit only the privileged few but must be placed at the service of those most in need, Pope Francis said.

Meeting with the staff and patients from the Vatican-owned Bambino Gesù pediatric hospital in Rome, the pope stressed the importance of “excellence in biomedical research,” but said it must be done “with special attention to the most fragile, such as patients with serious, rare or ultra-rare diseases.”

“So that science and expertise do not remain the privilege of the few, I urge you to continue to make the fruits of your research available to all, especially where they are most needed,” he said, praising the hospital’s training programmes with doctors and nurses from Africa and Asia.

The pope was greeted with applause and cheers from the many children present as he entered the Paul VI Audience Hall using a wheelchair. Approximately 200 children and parents present were from countries at war, such as Ukraine and Gaza, who are receiving treatment at Bambino Gesù that they were unable to get in their home countries.

Some adults in the crowd were dressed as clowns with red noses and wearing lab coats; Pope Francis was given his own red nose while greeting the crowd after his speech.

The pope told them that due to persistent cold symptoms, an aide – Msgr. Filippo Ciampanelli – would read his speech.

Pope Francis said that when he visits the Bambino Gesù hospital he feels the contrasting sensations of pain and hope.



“I feel pain for the suffering of the sick children and of their parents, but at the same time I feel a great hope seeing all that is done there to cure them,” he wrote.

Consistently ranked among the best paediatric hospitals in Europe, the Bambino Gesù is the largest paediatric hospital and research center in Europe. The Vatican signed an agreement last month to move the Vatican-owned hospital to the site of a now-closed Italian hospital by 2030. The new location would give the hospital at least four times as much space for patient

rooms, clinics, offices and research labs.

Working at Bambino Gesù “is not work like any other: it is a mission that each one exercises in a different way,” the pope wrote.

“For some, it entails the dedication of a lifetime,” he said. “For others, the offering of their time in volunteer work; for others still, the gift of their blood, their milk – for hospitalised infants whose mothers cannot provide it – up to the gift of organs, cells and tissues.”

Pope Francis praised the “kindness and closeness” hospital staff

offer to families accompanying their children through illness and stressed the need to continue receiving families of sick children in facilities linked to the hospital. “There is no care without relationship, closeness and tenderness, at all levels,” he said.

He also recalled the hospital’s origins as a gift. Founded in 1869 by Duchess Arabella Salviati, the hospital was donated to Pope Pius XI in 1924, and the pope encouraged the hospital staff to make the same spirit of giving “an indispensable element of your being and acting.”

In Brief

Bishops attack euthanasia plans

The French bishops' conference has rebuffed President Macron after he labelled euthanasia as a "law of fraternity." "It's a deception," Archbishop Éric de Moulins-Beaufort of Reims said.

It's the latest political row between Macron and the Church after he forced abortion into the country's constitution as an unconditional right.

Macron wants to pass a law before summer that would open up the possibility of requesting an "aid in dying" under "strict conditions," before the summer.

On March 10, the French president unveiled the content of the bill in a lengthy interview, given simultaneously to the left-wing daily *Libération* and to the Catholic daily newspaper *La Croix*. Macron made it clear that he did not wish to use the terms "assisted suicide" or "euthanasia," but rather "assisted dying," calling it a "law of fraternity."

La Croix published a strong reaction from bishops, with Archbishop de Moulins-Beaufort denouncing the "rhetoric" of Macron's remarks. "Calling a text that opens up both assisted suicide and euthanasia a 'law of fraternity' is a deception," he said. Such a law will move the country's health care system "towards death as a solution, ... so much easier and less costly than everything else," the archbishop said.

The president of the French bishops' conference also strongly deplored the fact that palliative care became "secondary" in Macron's bill.

Panama bans health aid for migrants

Church groups in Panama have criticised their Government after it banned Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) from offering medical help to migrants crossing the country on their way to the USA.

Latin American Church groups urged Panama's Government to reconsider its decision to suspend MSF and look for ways in which migrants can be better assisted after they make the gruelling trek across the Darien Gap, a dense and roadless rainforest that separates South America from Central America.

"As Christians we are obliged to stand with the most vulnerable, protecting them and helping to preserve the dignity of those who have been historically marginalised" the bishops said.

Panama ordered Doctors Without Borders to suspend its operations at two migrant camps on the northern edge of the Darién jungle where it had been treating around 5,000 people each month.

UN warns Gaza plight is world's worst ever for food insecurity

The UN has warned that all of Gaza's two million people are experiencing "severe levels of acute food insecurity" – the first time a nation's entire population had been so classified.

Israel must prioritise providing immediate humanitarian aid for those in need, a spokesman said.

North Gaza will face famine by May without a pause in the fighting and a surge in aid, he added.

Israeli negotiators began talks in Qatar on Tuesday in a fresh attempt to agree a deal with Hamas to halt the fighting, get humanitarian aid in, and Israeli hostages out.

But despite pressure from all sides, including their main ally the USA, Israel is standing firm and demanding all hostages are released as a precursor to the start of any meaningful negotiations. It is believed around 100 hostages remain unaccounted for.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken agreed with the UN assessment on Gaza's food crisis. "According to the most respected measure of these things, 100% of the population in Gaza is at severe levels of acute food insecurity," he said. "That's the first time an entire population has been so classified."

Mr Blinken added: "We also see again, according to in this case the United Nations, 100% – the totality of the population – is in need of humanitarian assistance," he added.

"Compare that to Sudan, about 80% of the population there is in need of humanitarian assistance; Afghanistan, about 70%. So, again, this only underscores both the urgency, the imperative, of making this the priority."

He called on Hamas to lay down arms but said it was incumbent on Israel to make it a priority to pro-



Displaced Palestinian children wait to receive food in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip. The situation around food supplies is critical, says the UN

Photo: Mohammed Salem, Reuters

vide for those who desperately needed humanitarian assistance.

A UN human rights chief has criticised Israel for its role in the situation in Gaza, describing it as a crisis that was "human-made and... entirely preventable".

Volker Türk put the blame firmly on what he called Israel's "extensive restrictions on the entry and distribution of humanitarian aid and commercial goods, displacement of most of the population, as well as the destruction of crucial civilian infrastructure".

The restrictions, he warned, "may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war, which is a war crime".

Israel's diplomatic mission to the UN in Geneva said Mr Türk was seeking to blame it for the situation in Gaza and "completely absolve the

responsibility of the UN and Hamas".

"Israel is doing everything it can to flood Gaza with aid, including by land, air and sea," it insisted.

Aid workers reject this, saying that much of the problem in the northern Gaza is due to a collapse in security around aid convoys, after Israel targeted police who were escorting them.

Israel's bombardment of Gaza, in response to the Hamas attacks of 7th October, has destroyed food infrastructure and farmland. Aid agencies say enhanced Israeli security checks on delivery trucks have created bottlenecks around aid reaching the population.

The global body responsible for declaring famine, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), reported that 1.1 million peo-

ple – virtually half the population of Gaza – was already starving and the rest of the people there could be in a famine by July.

As talks continue the USA is pushing for the Palestinian Authority to run Gaza, but the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected that idea, one of many critical points of dispute over any so-called "day after plan" for Gaza.

Netanyahu has again said Israel will strike at Rafah, the only major population centre so far not invaded by its troops. However, it is now home to over a million displaced people from north Gaza, and any attack would lead to horrific bloodshed.

On Monday US President Joe Biden told Mr Netanyahu that his plan to push on with an offensive in Rafah would be a "mistake".

Coptics shock as three monks murdered

Fredrick Nzwilli

Three Egyptian Coptic monks of the Coptic Orthodox Archdiocese of South Africa were brutally murdered last week in their monastery in Cullinan, a small town in Gauteng province, about 18 miles east of the capital, Pretoria.

One of the three slain was named as Father Takla Moussa, assistant bishop and abbot of St. Mark and St. Samuel the Confessor Monastery.

The other two were identified as Fathers Minahava Marcus and Youstosava Marcus.

In what the church described as a criminal attack, an unknown assailant pounced on the monks in the early hours of 12th March, killing the three, all of whom were found with stab wounds. A fourth monk

was left with injuries.

"The Church expresses its deep anguish over the occurrence of such a tragic incident, extends its sincere condolences to the families of the three monks," Coptic Orthodox Church said in a statement.

"Our pain and sadness, no amount (of) words can express, but we know that they rejoice in paradise."

The motive of the attack is not clear, but it further underlined the current challenge in the country, which has one of the highest rates of violence in the world.

Recently, the country has grappled with sporadic and lethal xenophobic attacks against African and Asian foreign nationals living in the country, including refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants.



Bishops beg world to act and save Haiti

GazaAs violence and instability ravage Haiti, two bishops have demanded that the global community acts urgently to assist Haitians in restoring peace.

“We’re at a critical junction,” Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami said. “It’s a time in which we hope that the Haitian people will be able to resolve some of their differences, and start building back a society that is peaceful and that promotes justice for all citizens.”

“I urge our government and the international community actively to continue to seek ways to address the long-term challenges the country is facing,” said Bishop A. Elias Zaidan of the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon.

“This is an unliveable situation, where families are unable to provide basic necessities for their loved ones.”

An estimated 80 per cent of Haiti’s capital, Port-au-Prince, is currently under the control of armed gangs, a number of which recently began targeting state institutions, including prisons, police stations and the main international airport.

The attacks were originally aimed at ousting Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who had travelled to Guyana and then Kenya, with troops from the latter nation set to be deployed as part of a now-paused United Nations peacekeeping mission.

At least 4,000 inmates were freed by gangs, while scores have been re-



ported killed and some 15,000 left homeless.

But despite Henry announcing his resigning, the violence has continued. Leaders from the Caribbean nation trade bloc Caricom met in Jamaica last week to try to create a transitional presidential council, but plans have failed so far.

In February, Haitian Bishop Pierre-André Dumas of Anse-à-Veau and Miragoane sustained severe burns over most of his body in what may have been a deliberately set explosion. The injured bishop is now receiving treatment in the US.

Amid the violence, four million in Haiti are facing “acute food insecurity,” warned UN World Food Program director Jean-Martin Bauer.

Bishop Zaidan commended “the heroic efforts of Haitian and international aid workers, including our own Catholic Relief Services, who are working tirelessly to provide vitally necessary assistance to the people of Haiti.” He also expressed his “steadfast solidarity” with his “brother bishops and Haiti’s people.”

The US has pledged to provide \$300 million toward the UN-backed Kenyan peacekeeping force. However, Republicans have since blocked the funding.

Archbishop Wenski criticised the Republican politicians and Florida’s

Governor and one-time presidential hopeful Ron DeSantis after he announced plans to toughen security to “deal with an expected influx of Haitian migrants.”

“Haitians are not some type of an invasive species,” the archbishop said. “Right now, to deport people back to Haiti ... is just like putting people back into a burning building.”

That tactic also risks violating the fundamental principle of non-refoulement, which under international human rights law provides that refugees cannot be expelled to territories where substantial threats to life or freedom exist.

Haitians gather water rations after the supply in the capital Port-au-Prince was damaged in the current chaos

“That’s been happening quite regularly for decades to Haitians,” said Archbishop Wenski. “Interdiction (of Haitians) on the high seas began in the 1970s and continues now.”

He added that at present, “The numbers coming by sea have not been as significant as the numbers across the Texas border.”

Noting that Haiti’s gangs “come from the poorest neighborhoods” and “don’t really have the resources or the means to be as well-armed as they are,” Archbishop Wenski cited the strong possibility that foreign influence – particularly by transnational criminal gangs – could be actively working to destabilise Haiti.

“Some of that gang support could also be coming from these international drug cartels that are wreaking havoc in Mexico, Venezuela, Ecuador,” said the archbishop. “If you draw a straight line from Colombia to Florida, that straight line passes through Haiti. ... It’s a natural transshipment point for cocaine and other types of drugs coming out of there.”

Haiti has been plagued by multiple, sustained crises for decades, including political instability, natural disasters, foreign intervention and massive international debt.

In July 2021, Haitian President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated; in April 2023, the head of the UN office in Haiti warned the nation was sliding into “a catastrophic spiral of violence.”

Women persecuted more for their faith

Women and men experience gender-specific forms of religious persecution in violent, insecure nations – and such persecution as a whole occurs amid a matrix of risk factors, according to newly published research.

In its annual Gender Report, the nonprofit Open Doors International – which aids persecuted Christians in more than 70 countries – found that “in contexts where violence is high, faith-related sexual violence for women and physical violence for men, including lethal violence, are more common.”

More than 365 million Christians face significant levels of religious persecution and discrimination – one-in-seven worldwide, one-in-five in Africa, and two-in-five in Asia, according to Open Doors.

The organization’s gender-specific report determined that in already violent, insecure nations, men and boys are more likely to be attacked in “focused, visible and severe” ways for their faith. Along with physical harm, persecuted males are subjected to state, economic and psychological pressures, said the report.

However, religious persecution for women in such environments is

“complex, hidden and violent ... characterised by sexual violence and forced marriage, as well as by insidious, invisible violence behind closed doors.”

The data, which builds on “seven years of gender-specific religious persecution research findings,” also shows that “religious persecution is rarely experienced as a single, isolated pressure point.”

Clergy members are routinely harassed and threatened with violence as part of such persecution, with the report citing the example of Bishop Rubén Darío Jaramillo Montoya of the Diocese of Buenaventura in Colombia, who since 2021 has been “threatened by armed groups with the use of explosives for denouncing violence and drug trafficking in the region.”

Women and girls tend to experience persecution “within the private sphere, often behind closed doors or perpetrated by those already known to them within their existing communities and relationships,” said Open Doors.

The top pressure points for females are forced marriage, sexual violence, physical violence, psychological violence and abduction.

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Public Engagement by Catholics for the Common Good

Burkina Faso Catholics miss Mass after latest Islamist terror attack on church

Tonny Onyulo

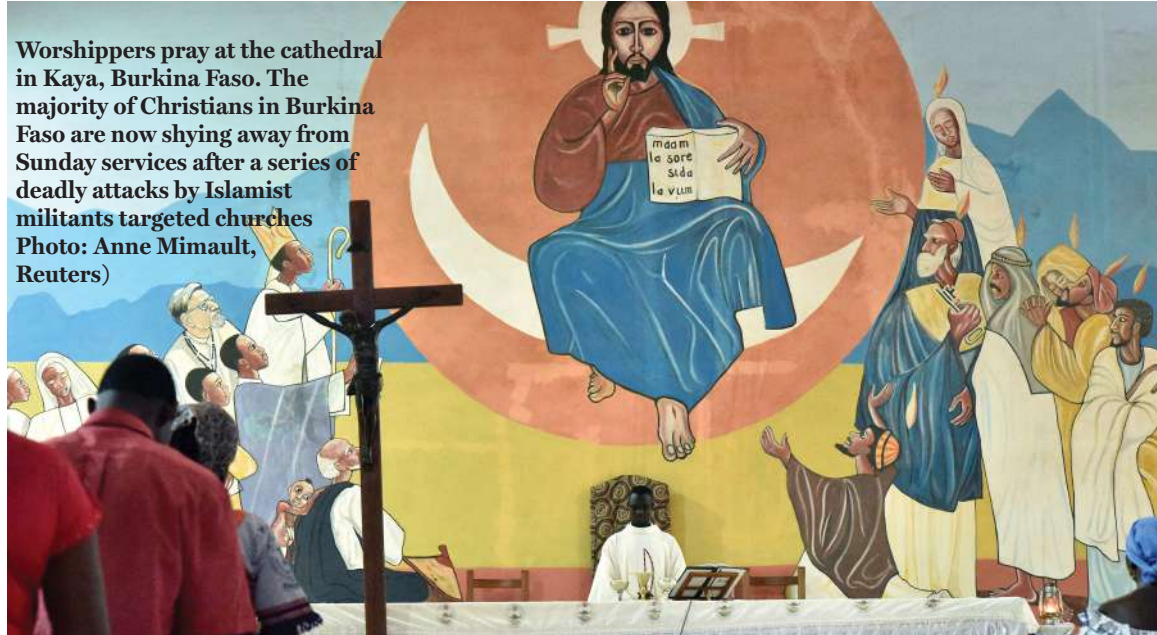
Christians in Burkina Faso are now shying away from Sunday services and instead praying at home after a series of deadly attacks by Islamist militants targeted churches and killed scores of worshippers.

The latest attack by insurgents came on a Catholic church in the northeast of the country and left at least 15 people dead. Local Church officials said that gunmen on motorcycles said to be Islamists raided a church in Essakane village during Mass, indiscriminately shooting at worshippers, including little children on their parents' laps.

"People are devastated and are avoiding Sunday Mass for fear of further attacks," said Fr Jean-Pierre Sawadogo, vicar general where the attack took place. "The Church is under attack, and we ask for your prayers during this difficult time and for those who died and were wounded," he added.

The vicar general noted that most Christians in his diocese are "shaken" by the recent terrorist attack on a Catholic church. "It's a sad situation, and it's going to affect our pastoral activities as people continue to stay away from places of worship," he said.

The West African nation of 21 million people has experienced civil war between the Government and Islamist rebels since 2015. The recent report by Human Rights Watch underlined that non-state



Worshippers pray at the cathedral in Kaya, Burkina Faso. The majority of Christians in Burkina Faso are now shying away from Sunday services after a series of deadly attacks by Islamist militants targeted churches
Photo: Anne Mimault, Reuters)

armed groups control up to half of the country's territory, and the conflict has led to the death of thousands of people and displaced over two million people.

"Conflict-related violence resulted in the deaths of nearly 7,600 people in over 2,000 incidents in 2023 alone," it said.

Since 2021, jihadists have increasingly targeted Christians in villages, churches and workplaces – with a target of killing them. Islamist militants also destroyed churches and warned Christians not to publicly worship. In 2024, Open Doors ranked Burkina Faso

as the 20th worst country to live in as a Christian. The country is 25% Christian and 60% Muslim.

"Christians have been impacted by the growing insurgency in the north, with churches and Christian communities singled out in attacks. Muslims who do not side with the Islamic extremists have also suffered greatly," Jo Newhouse, Open Doors spokesperson for sub-Saharan Africa, said. "Burkina Faso has been known for religious tolerance and social cohesion, however the growing Islamic insurgency threatens this peaceful co-existence," he explained.

Members of the Burkina Faso and Niger bishops' conference said that at least 30 parishes have closed and most pastoral activities stopped because of the ongoing insecurity, especially in the country's north and east.

Martin Ouedraogo, a former catechist in the diocese of Dori, said thousands of Christians were troubled and afraid of attending Mass for fear of attacks.

The continuous attacks by jihadist groups affiliated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State on Christians, he said, has instilled fear to express their faith in public.

Those from Muslim backgrounds experience more violence and rejection from their families and communities.

"It's a crime to introduce yourself as a Christian in this country, and as a result, people are now afraid to attend Mass," Ouedraogo said. "We are discouraging congregants in most rural areas from attending Sunday worship services for safety reasons. But we urge all Catholics to pray from home and pray the rosary for an end to the terror attacks targeting Christians and places of worship."

Ouedraogo said that hundreds of Church leaders and their families have been kidnapped and remained in captivity for years since the insurgency began in the landlocked country, which is ruled by a military dictatorship.

"Majority of Christians here are living in camps because they have been displaced from their homes due to their faith," he said, urging support for suffering Burkina Faso Christians with food donations and other basic needs. "Families have lost their loved ones, their homes, their properties, and their children have been pushed out of school and wandering in various displaced camps."

Meanwhile, Ouedraogo and other religious leaders urged the Government to provide security to the Christian population and ensure freedom of worship.

Clergy urge attention to problems as violence grips Argentina

David Agren

Catholic leaders in the city of Rosario, Argentina, comforted a terrorised population after a spate of random killings shocked the country and prompted promises of a heavy-handed security response.

Archbishop Eduardo Martín of Rosario led Catholics in praying the rosary and celebrated a Mass for peace in Argentina's third-largest city. He also called for prudence in the federal response as President Javier Milei proposed changing laws to permit soldiers to assist with public security tasks.

"This almost diabolical violence, I would say, wants to paralyse us, wants to make us stop, wants to spread terror not only in the city, to spread that terror in each resident of Rosario. But we have to find in Jesus the strength to move forward with certainty, that evil will not win, that evil does not have the final word," Archbishop Martín said in his homily.

"There is a lot of work to do to sow peace. That is not weakness, it is the strength to say, 'Evil will not convince me, it cannot tempt me in

the same way.'"

The random slayings of four innocent people, including two taxi drivers, a bus driver and a gas jockey over a 48-hour period provoked fear in Rosario, where residents stayed out of sight to avoid danger.

Video of the murder of Bruno Bussanich, 25, who was shot in the chest as he worked by a young assailant walking casually to the

crime scene, went viral.

"I know there are no words to lessen so much pain, but know that this government is not going to stop until there is justice," President Javier Milei said on X, following Bruno's murder. "As long as I am President, we are not going to stop persecuting them. We are not going to stop requisitioning the prisons. We will not hesitate when the life of an innocent person is at stake."



President Milei wants a stronger military presence in internal security

Milei said that he would present modifications to the interior security law to allow the armed forces further participation in public security matters. Andrei Serbin Pont, director of the Argentine think-tank Regional Coordinator of Economic and Social Research, known by its Spanish initials as CRIES, said that current rules "do not permit the involvement of the armed forces in internal security," while mostly limiting soldiers' participation to logistical activities.

Observers attribute the recent violence to gangs rebelling against crackdowns inside prisons. "We're going to kill more innocent people. ... We want our rights," read a note left by Bussanich's killer.

Residents and observers describe Rosario as a city of contrasts. Vast quantities of grains and soybeans – an important source of income for Argentina's struggling economy – move through Rosario's port on the Paraná River, generating wealth reflected in gleaming towers and luxury homes.

But the city is marred by shanties

and slums, where poverty, violence and drug use are rife. Drug cartels move illegal merchandise through the port – often with the complicity of corrupted police and public officials, according to observers – while gangs battle over drug-dealing turfs.

"Rosario is key in an infrastructure of international drug trafficking," Serbin Pont said.

Fr Fabián Belay, co-ordinator of the drug addictions ministry for the Archdiocese of Rosario, attributed the difficulties in the city to the combination of "a weak state plus the vulnerability experienced in the neighbourhoods, without infrastructure, without urban development"

He said a security response was "necessary to stop the crisis of violence" in Rosario.

But he urged public policies to address the problem of drug addiction and marginalisation, saying those vices were producing young people who don't attend school and couldn't find work, "who end up ... falling into the narco's world."

Archbishop will need a steady hand on the tiller as Poland's Church hits rocky waters

New president of Poland's bishops' conference takes up tasks in rough waters for Polish church. Pauline Guzik reports

The newly elected president of the Polish bishops' conference, Archbishop Tadeusz Wojda of Gdansk, the port city famous for being the birthplace of Solidarity, is taking up his tasks in challenging times for the Church in his country.

He will need to steer the boat of the Church through the rough waters of the abuse crisis, the secularisation of Europe's biggest Catholic nation and plummeting rates of trust in the Church in recent years due to lack of accountability.

Archbishop Wojda, whose episcopal motto is *Oportet praedicari evangelium* in Latin, meaning 'That the Gospel may be proclaimed,' spent years in the Vatican serving in what was then the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, known as Propaganda Fide, starting in early 1990s under St. John Paul II. Pope Benedict XVI appointed then-Father Wojda as the congregation's undersecretary in 2012. In early 2022, the congregation became part of the new Dicastery for Evangelization in Pope Francis' reform of the Roman Curia.

In 2017, Pope Francis named him Archbishop of Bialystok in the Poland's picturesque northeastern region of Podlasie. It's there where Archbishop Wojda protested against the LGTBQ march in July 2019, where "religious symbols were desecrated," he said, stressing at the time that insulting Catholics and religious figures at the pride parade "mocks the faith and depraves the youngest."

In March 2021, he was appointed Archbishop of Gdansk. He took over one of the most prestigious archdioceses in the country after Pope Francis sanctioned the previous metropolitan, Archbishop Slawoj Leszek Glódz, for negligence in handling clergy sexual abuse cases.

"Paedophilia is a denial of what love and faith in God is. ... I will confront this problem, taking all possible steps to solve these issues, to remove this evil from the church, because it is an unacceptable thing," Archbishop Wojda said in an interview with the Polish Press Agency, or PAP, when he became the Archbishop of Gdansk.

The sex abuse scandal is going to be an important part of Archbishop



Archbishop Tadeusz Wojda of Gdansk, Poland, speaks during a news conference in Warsaw after being elected the new president of the Polish bishops' conference
Photo: Polish bishops' conference

Wojda's task to lead the Church in Poland, five years after the avalanche of abuse allegations against Polish clergy emerged in the documentary *Tell No One*.

Aired in May 2019. The production marked the Polish Spotlight moment, reminiscent of the 2002 investigation of the Spotlight team of the *Boston Globe* in the Archdiocese of Boston, which was subsequently made into an award-winning film.

A year ago, on 14th March, 2023, the bishops of Poland announced

were accused of sexual abuse, with one found guilty and two cleared of any allegations.

The church in Poland, five years into the crisis, has taken upon many reforms, including initiating the St. Joseph Foundation in 2019, financing therapy and other needs of abuse survivors, as well as setting up the Office of Delegate of Child Protection of the Polish bishops' conference – for which Archbishop Wojciech Polak of Gniezno was re-elected March 14. The Polish bishops also chose Archbishop

church," Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki of Poznan, who is leaving the post of president of Polish bishops' conference after 10 years, told Polish Television on 11th March.

"The most important thing is faith. Paedophilia stems from unbelief. It is born out of all this," he said. His comments immediately sparked a vigorous response on social media.

"It's not the lack of faith, it's a crime," retorted Blazej Kmiecik on X, formerly Twitter. Kmiecik is Catholic and member of the state-run Commission on Paedophilia that is studying the crime of child abuse in Polish society and working on prevention measures.

Asked about the way to get out of the crisis, the new president of Polish bishops said the key is "co-operation." "Everyone needs to feel responsible for the Church," he stressed.

"The most important thing is to listen now," Archbishop Wojda said in one of the first media interviews after his election. "I am trying to do it in my archdiocese," he added. "I listen to understand what the world is living today."

"The Gospel today seems unattractive, therefore we have to follow what Pope Francis said in *'Evangelii Gaudium'* – to be the Gospel, to live the Gospel, and therefore be trustworthy in what we do."

"We have to do what Jesus did, that's authentic," Archbishop Wojda

"Asked about the way to get out of the crisis, the archbishop said the key is co-operation. 'Everyone needs to feel responsible for the Church ... the most important thing is to listen now...'"

they would create a commission of experts to investigate cases of abuse of minors by clergy from the past in the country. To date there is no word on what the commission would look like, who would lead it and what methodology it would apply to the investigation of cases.

Poland has become a testing ground for the newest Vatican's abuse regulations, with 15 bishops under investigation for a cover-up, of whom two were cleared of allegations and 13 were found guilty of a cover-up. Three other bishops, including one cardinal,

Józef Kupny of Wroclaw as conference vice president.

In 2022, the St. Joseph Foundation had a budget of less than a million pounds, spending half of it on various grants to abuse survivors and legal entities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, according to an IBRIIS polling institute survey from April 2023, 75 per cent of respondents consider the Church's current efforts to help victims insufficient, *Rzeczpospolita Polish* daily reported.

"I don't think paedophilia is the most important issue in the

said.

Asked about the challenges of the Church in Poland today, he said, "I do ask myself a question why people are leaving the Church – maybe our language is not proper, maybe there are problems piling up, maybe the Church's authority declined, maybe our behavior as bishops is not right."

"I believe we'll overcome it," he said. "We can't abandon faith in all that, we need to turn to God."

"We are the mission of the Church as Pope Francis said," Archbishop Wojda emphasised. "We need to live that mission."

Hopes were high among Catholics in Poland that a bishop committed to resolving the crisis of abuse would be elected.

For lay Catholics, a strong, outspoken leader was needed, as Archbishop Polak's name made headlines days before the elections as the possible president.

There is more than a suggestion that for lay people, Wojda is not the answer to the Church's problems.

"The election of Archbishop Wojda ... is a choice to wait for anything that needs change and reform in the Polish church. There will be no change," Bartosz Bartosik, editor in chief of the online Catholic magazine *Wież.pl*, wrote on X, stressing that what will remain in the bishops' body in Poland is "episcopal loyalty."

The new president also will have to face a strong opponent – the new Polish government, installed on 13th December, which, among other points on the agenda, promises to liberalise abortion law in the country. It also may set up its own commission to study sexual abuse in the Church and promised to reduce Catholic religion classes in Polish public schools. It has also reduced funding to the Church as well as instigated investigations into how the previous administration funded its projects. A media outlet run by the Church has also been shut down.

"It seems to me that the greatest challenge that faces every president (of the bishops' conference) is to keep the faith, because all others are secondary," Archbishop Gadecki told Polish Television. "All other issues are secondary. Preserving the faith and believing and affirming the faith of the Polish people is something that ... is first and foremost (the task) of the president."

Church urged to embrace Irish arts and culture to fuel a Catholic renewal

Kevin J. Jones reports from the USA where, in the wake of St Patrick's Day, there are hopes that Ireland can be a new catalyst for renewing the Church

The arrival of St. Patrick's Day always spotlights Irish culture, music, dance and language. Catholics, too, are involved in Irish cultural efforts on both sides of the Atlantic, and some say Irish culture continues to be a foundation for Catholic evangelisation amid the trappings of secular celebration.

Connie Marshner, president of the Front Royal, Virginia-based Saints and Scholars Foundation, objected that some American presentations of St. Patrick's Day focus on "the green beer and plastic leprechaun kind of Irish, which is total commercial nonsense."

"Remember that it's a religious feast, not just an excuse to go out and have a party and drink too much," Marshner said. Her organisation aims to foster American support for classical Catholic education models in Ireland, with theology, philosophy and Latin taught alongside Irish language, culture, history and sports.

She is far from the only Irish-American Catholic involved in promoting Irish culture.

There also are the volunteers who run the Trenton, New Jersey-area Gael Scoil. The two-day annual programme, now in its 17th year, provides Irish culture lessons to children ages 6 to 17. The school aims to show that Ireland is "more than parades and leprechauns," according to its website. Lesson topics include Irish history, language, music, dance and sports, taught by local historians, musicians, dancers, athletes and other experts.

The Gael Scoil's YouTube videos discuss the life of St. Patrick. The fifth-century Briton was enslaved and held captive in Ireland, only to escape and return as its most famous Christian missionary – one who would completely identify with the Irish people he came to evangelise.

The most recent Gael Scoil, held at Notre Dame High School in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, drew scores of participants. The programme is sponsored by the Ancient Order of Hibernians Division 10 in Mercer County. The AOH, a national organisation for Irish-American Catholic men, has tens of thousands of members around the country. The national AOH leadership seeks to promote a starter version of the programme so that local divisions may adopt it for their communities.

Sean Pender, AOH national vice president, said the organisation is the largest Irishone outside of Ireland and has members in all 50 US states. It was founded in 1836 'to help protect the Catholic Church and Irish immigrants,' Pender said. Its purposes today include promoting the Catholic faith as well as Irish heritage, history and traditions. "In order to accomplish this, we need to make sure that we tell the story of the Irish people to our children," Pender said, praising "the gift of Irish heritage."

"It's so important to understand and appreciate where you came from," he said. "This gift gives you the knowledge of those that came before you, the pride in the accomplishments and sacrifices of those same people."

A view from Ireland

While Irish-America intentionally seeks out Irish heritage, the context can be different in Ireland.

"It's possible that Irish-American Catholics, based on my little experience, appreciate the distinctive nature of Irish language and culture more profoundly than Catholics in Ireland do," says Father Conor McDonough, a 37-year-old Dominican priest based in Dublin. "Perhaps we take this for granted. It's the diaspora that sometimes reminds us of the beauty of our culture."

In 19th-century Ireland, he noted, Irish culture again became seen as worthy, valuable and noble. This coincided with Catholic emancipation and became closely intertwined with it. There was "shedding of a certain shame" surrounding Irish Catholic identity and broader Catholic identity.

"It showed to Irish people that their own culture produced



"American presentations of St. Patrick's Day focus too much on the green beer and plastic leprechaun kind of Irish, which is total nonsense"

artifacts of culture that were extraordinary," he said, citing works like the Book of Kells and the Ardagh Chalice.

Fr McDonough is responsible for the online preaching of the Irish Dominicans. Their YouTube channel includes the initial episodes of *Treasure Ireland*, a planned series about Ireland's Christian heritage from ancient to modern times, drawing on stories from each of the island's 32 counties.

"I'm very passionate about the whole story of Ireland, especially

Irish Christianity," the priest said. In his view, Irish history and culture has "great potential" for evangelisation and re-evangelisation.

"What we hope to do in our video series is to show people that the Irish story is woven through with Catholic faith," he said. "Even for Irish people who are not Catholic believers, this is something that they can come to appreciate, and maybe then reevaluate the Catholic faith on the basis that it is so intertwined with their identity and their story."

"I'm not claiming that the whole story of Ireland is thoroughly Christian – the 'Island of Saints and Scholars' and all that can be exaggerated," Fr McDonough added. "But it's possible, in a nuanced and truthful way, to tell the history, to tell the story, to appreciate all the elements of our culture in a way that allows the Gospel to be the luminous heart of all of this culture, which is what it was for so long."

What went wrong with Irish Christianity?

Marshner, the head of the Saints and Scholars Foundation, is hardly uncritical of Irish Catholicism and how it has developed over the centuries.



"In 19th-century Ireland, Irish culture became worthy, valuable and noble. There was shedding of a certain shame surrounding Irish Catholic identity, showing to the Irish that their own culture produced artefacts of culture that were extraordinary, like the Book of Kells and the Ardagh Chalice."

As she reads Irish history, Ireland's early Christianity had a "deeply personal nature." Evangelising and re-evangelising through Ireland's gifts involves reconnecting with – and drawing from – Ireland's ancient Christian taproot.

"The Gaelic emphasis is 'the High King of Heaven wants me to join him,'" she said. "It's an aspiration and it's intimacy – with him – and the desire to please him and to follow him and to avoid sin."

At the same time, Marshner said the recovery of historic Irish Catholicism would depart from the "very legalistic" views of more recent centuries. The removal of legal penalties against Irish Catholicism in the early 19th century, in her view, did not lead to a revival of Ireland's old Catholicism but rather joined Catholic doctrine to a "desiccated post-Puritan Victorian spirituality" under British, anglicising influence.

Marshner holds a master's in Gaelic literature from Ireland's University College Cork, earned online during the pandemic. She is working to achieve fluency in the Irish language and has a particular interest in early Egyptian Christianity's influence on Ireland.

In recent decades, she noted, Irish Catholicism has suffered "horrendous scandals" of clergy abuse and institutional misconduct in many ways worse than those seen in the US. Despite this, there are still relatively high levels of Catholic self-identification. About 69 per cent of residents of the Republic of Ireland identify as Catholic, according to the 2022 census overseen by Ireland's Central Statistics Office.

"The faith is not dead. It's just hiding," Marshner said. "It's just waiting for a new infusion of young blood that will understand the faith and be able to defend it, motivated not by fear of the priest, but by the love of Jesus Christ."

In her view, Catholic education in 19th- and 20th-century Ireland suffered from "a dearth of Catholic intellectualism." Catholic instruction often stopped with catechism in elementary school and lacked the resources of the US, where Catholic high schools and colleges taught theology and philosophy to a broader section of students.

Catholic classical education comes to Ireland

Marshner's Saints and Scholars Foundation aims to aid classical academy models and classical home-schooling programmes in an Irish context. Though such programmes have seen decades of growth in the US, they are new in Ireland.

The foundation's major project at present is support for Mater Dei Academy, a lay Catholic-run secondary school based in Cork. The school, founded in 2020, now has over 40 students, and its course offerings include an Irish language curriculum alongside Latin, liberal



"What we hope to do is show people that the Irish story is woven through with Catholic faith ... even for Irish who are not Catholics, this is something that they can appreciate"

arts, and science.

Students are taught not only Catholic doctrine, said Marshner. "They're invited to experience Christ deeply. Every day begins with sung morning prayer, and every school day ends with a restored version of vespers," she said.

Combined with weekly Mass, Marshner added, the school has "an atmosphere of deep personal Catholicism and a classical curriculum." It aims for a deeper education that inspires students to learn more. Mater Dei is not just for the wealthy and does not charge tuition beyond what parents can pay. It has no state support but relies on benefactors.

Several other schools in Ireland have launched an elementary-level program modeled on Mater Dei Academy. Mater Dei also has a home-school programme, which Marshner says is the only home-school programme that offers Irish history, language and culture.

"For any expatriate who has a heart for Ireland, you could really make a difference and help restore the faith," she said, appealing for more support. She noted the legacy of Irish Americans' financial and other support for efforts to revive the Irish language and support for Irish independence efforts in the 1910s and 1920s.

A broad, multifaceted context

For his part, Father McDonough warned against any tendency to think of Ireland as 'Catholic Ireland' in a way that excludes

Protestants' "immense contributions." There were many Protestant leaders and participants in the so-called Celtic Revival movement of the 19th century, he noted.

Irish and Catholic identity are complicated in the six counties of Northern Ireland, where sectarian and political tensions with Protestants loyal to the United Kingdom have lessened but not disappeared.

"The sectarian context in Northern Ireland has tended to exacerbate a sense of cultural ownership among Catholics, while Protestants reject everything Irish and Gaelic," McDonough summarised.

However, attitudes are changing. Fr McDonough pointed to the unprecedented visit to a Gaelic athletic club by Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly, a member of the historically Protestant Democratic Unionist Party. She practised scoring in camogie, the women's equivalent of hurling, an ancient Gaelic outdoor game played by men.

Fr McDonough said this is "symbolically a very significant thing." In heavily Protestant East Belfast, he noted, some movements are now seeking to reappropriate Irish language and Gaelic games.

"Those movements can be immensely healing," he said.

He offered some advice for Catholic advocates of Irish culture: They should base themselves on good scholarship and "not be too romantic or doe-eyed about the past." They should not "tell too simple a story about Ireland's past," he added, but "recognise glory where there is glory, and shame where there is shame; and be responsible in the history that we recount."

"But it's just as important also to take great joy in the music, the song, the poetry," Fr McDonough said. Irish culture has a "personal impact," he said, and it is "a gift" to "simply enjoy these elements of Irish culture rather than as a means to evangelise or a means to politically reconcile."

Pope's plans for synod will get the Church's best plans for growth in play

Synodality is a key theme of Pope Francis' pontificate and its importance to the Church's mission can be seen in the response to policy issues he has led on, including migration and the environment, experts in a panel discussion marking the pontiff's 11th anniversary said.

The panel examined Pope Francis' call for synodality and its impact on social justice issues.

Synodality is a key element of bringing the Catholic Church's teachings and mission to 21st-century circumstances, panelists said, praising Pope Francis' focus on greater inclusivity and participatory decision-making.

Panelists lauded the efforts made to take a more inclusive approach and listen to the voices of people who are poor or marginalised in society, including migrants and those on death row.

Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Texas, who co-ordinates the US bishops' synod process, jokingly rejected his introduction as "head" of that effort. He said that "you kind of want to encourage people to kind of work creatively in their own local communities."

Bishop Flores said, it has been "moving" for him to watch the Catholic community in his home state respond to the needs of migrants "when they started seeing families lined up at bus stations with little children, to get on a bus; and (they) just simply stopped and asked, 'How can I help you?' Which to me is kind of the spontaneous response of a Christian people."

That service, he said, has been "instructive to me about what synodality can be," because "the best ideas don't always come from the chancery."

"The best chancery is the one that listens to what the best ideas are among the people of God," he said.

The Church's response to the global issue of migration is "a responsiveness to a need, a great need of mothers and children and families that are in great distress,"

he added.

Growing controversy over world immigration policies have placed pressure on the Catholic Church's service to migrants.

Catholic Charities USA, which represents a network of Catholic humanitarian organisations in the US – revealed that last year it had received "disturbing" and violent threats from a social media influencer suggesting Catholic Charities' workers and volunteers should be shot for sheltering migrants.

"Yes, there are challenges," Bishop Flores said. "But the witness of consistency in helping the distressed is a witness ... to a love for Christ in the person."

Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, executive director of the Catholic Mobilising Network, a group that seeks to abolish capital punishment around the world in line with Catholic teaching, said, "Synodality, I think, is us coming to the fore and saying, 'We want to walk our talk; we want to practice what we preach.'"

"We are a people who believe in the common good ... we believe in protecting and defending life from the unborn to the person on death row to the person who's suffering at the end of their life," Vaillancourt Murphy said.

"We believe in standing with immigrants, with people who are fleeing from war-torn areas from violence, in Syria, in Gaza, in Ukraine; we believe in caring for creation."

Launched by Pope Francis in October 2021, the first session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, organized on the theme 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission,' took place in October last year, in Rome.

The synod, also known as the 'Synod on Synodality,' had its first session summarised in a 41-page report intended to allow the global church to reflect on and give feedback on its contents ahead of the synod's final session scheduled for October of this year.



Migrants wade through water as they continue their trek toward the Darién Gap in Acandí, Colombia. The way the global Church is responding to the issue of migration is an example of the Pope's call for an inclusive Church

JOURNEY IN FAITH

CHRIS MCDONNELL



So it is time to say our prayers

I wonder how many books have been written about prayer? Books telling us what words to use, where to be, sharing experiences, techniques, all sorts of ways of managing times of prayer.

In the end there is a danger that we try to learn complicated recipes for something that is essentially a simple act of being. The very phrase we often use with children follows us into adulthood – say your prayers! I would suggest that ‘saying your prayers’ is not the same as ‘being at prayer’.

Above all, prayer is about openness, being present to the life and love of God throughout the day. Think for a moment of the monastic day, with its endless cycle of activity, of meals, of reading and times of community gathering for Liturgy. After the sleep and rest of night, it starts all over again, a cycle of life imbued with our prayerful presence in the love of God.

During the course of any day there are occasions when prayer is heightened, when we meet someone who might benefit from our time, from our listening. At other times our experience slips and other demands take precedence.

So in the flow of the day, hour by hour, there are threads we follow, highlights that mark one moment from another till the time comes for sleep when we join in the words of Night Prayer, ‘*Save us Lord, while we are awake, protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with*



Christ and rest with him in peace'

Above all, prayer is about presence, an awareness of who we are and of the Lord who sustains our life.

The experience of the presence of God is often given the title ‘Christian Meditation’. Meditation is not of course restricted to those of us who profess the Christian commitment to the Gospel of Jesus.

Others seeking fulfilment adopt patterns of meditation that many Christian saints have recognised.

Such meditative practices have commonalities, one being stillness. It is hard to listen, to reflect on and absorb the gift of being if you are constantly distracted. Sitting still is not something we are very good at in this turbulent society. There is always something to do. So if we

are to have time that is open to the shared gift of God, we need to be still, be still by choice and design.

Where do we find such a place? Maybe in some part of our home, where we will not be disturbed, some still point in our turning world. To help our focus, an icon, a cross, a candle may help to gather our thoughts. After a stillness is achieved, our eyes may close as we slip into a deeper solitude with the Lord. And we reach a time of listening, a quiet and deep awareness. It may be brief, it may come and go without warning, not something we manufacture in a contrived manner but a gift offered to us, ours to recognise and assume.

So times of prayer go beyond the formulae of learnt words, helpful for vocal prayer when we are gathered with others, but even silence can be shared.

Many years ago I spent the weekend at La Sainte Union college in Southampton at a gathering of people interested in the writings and teaching of Thomas Merton. Also attending the meeting was a Buddhist monk. We went into the chapel together, about eighty of us and after a few moments, a silence began. When after about an hour we came to leave, the chapel door was found to be locked. When the caretaker arrived, his excuse was simple. “I couldn’t hear anything, so I just locked up.”

A Japanese proverb tells us “I may be silent but don’t mistake me

for a wall”. A shared silence can be a powerful support.

It can help our frailty when distraction comes to repeat a single word or phrase, maybe from a Psalm, slowly and deliberately, till we can resume our stillness.

Prayer is not about technique or tricks or cosy thoughts. It is about an open heart, asking for little, offering everything. Our being available to the presence of God is with us step by step, day by day, whatever the joys and difficulties we might encounter.

We should find the time to pull back from the busyness that is our lot, time to stop, time to reflect, time to be still. Just as a head of hair thins with age so often the events of each day thin out and there is greater time for reflection. Maybe that is why so many communities worldwide show respect for the views and advice of elders. And those who are old have a responsibility to share their journey with children and grandchildren, provided that is, we genuinely seek to share and not impose.

“We should find the time to pull back from the busyness that is our lot, time to stop, time to reflect, time to be still”

Five ways to make Holy Week more holy

Gretchen R. Crowe

As we prepare to enter into the most sacred days of the liturgical year, we have a prime opportunity to make up for any shortcomings that may have been part of our Lent this year. Blessedly, Holy Week offers us the chance to refocus, reflect and renew as we wind down our Lenten journeys and look ahead to the promise of Easter.

Alternatively, we might have had a splendid Lent and are looking for some ways to “level up” during these final few days for a strong finish.

Either way, here are five ideas of how we can better emphasise the “holy” in our Holy Weeks this year.

Find one hour this Holy Week to dedicate to prayer

“Could you not keep watch for one hour?” (Mk 14:37). Breaking from his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night he was to be handed over, Jesus asks his ever-napping disciples why they can’t manage to do as he asks for one hour. “Are you still

sleeping and taking your rest?” he questions them again (Mk 14:41). Can we spend one hour fully “awake” with the Lord? It could be in front of the Blessed Sacrament. It could be going for a walk outside. It could be reading the Bible in a quiet spot in your home. Whatever it is, whenever it is, make it one solid, uninterrupted hour dedicated to prayer.

Keep your phone in a drawer for the Triduum

We all know that far too much of our time can be consumed with mindless scrolling. For me, it’s news, quilting blogs or Instagram stories of mums who are way more organised than I could ever hope to be. Holy Week contains the holiest days of the year, and the minutes (hours?) devoted to scrolling could be much better spent curled up with a spiritual book, working in the garden or simply giving your family undivided attention.

Make peace with your neighbour

As we prepare to enter the glorious

season of Easter, now is the time to smooth over any troubles in family relationships or friendships by offering an olive branch, either in the form of an “I’m sorry,” or an “I forgive you.” Our time is too short in this life, and the beckoning of heaven is too strong, to waste time in quarrels. Forgiveness is key to the Christian life, and Jesus will help us take the first step, if we but ask.

Make one significant act of almsgiving

Lent is not over yet, and there’s still time to engage in this important pillar of the season. It could be as simple as cleaning out your pantry and donating the findings to a parish food drive; making an offering to your diocesan appeal; or tithing part of that week’s earnings to a charity of choice (reminder: the annual Good Friday collection goes to help Christians in the Holy Land).

There are plenty of people in need, and sacrificing a bit of your own comfort for their good is what it means to live the Christian life well.

Go to confession

No Holy Week is complete without the graces that come from the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Don’t worry if it’s been a while; the priest is not there to judge, he is there to welcome you and relieve you of the burdens of your sin.

Pope Francis has called the sacrament an “encounter of love,” and so it is. Most parishes offer confessions at various times throughout the Triduum, so check your bulletin and find a time that suits your schedule.

Or you can always make an appointment. Taking time to reflect upon our sins and to confess them with a contrite heart is the perfect preparation for Easter.

So there you have it: Five ways to enter into Holy Week with more intentionality and to leave, hopefully, with more reward. If you have other suggestions, I’d love to hear them (you can find me on social media pretty much anywhere).

Wishing you your best Holy Week yet.

A VIEW FROM THE PEWS

MICHAEL CAINE

ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, LYMM, CHESHIRE



The Stations of the Cross

Ever since the start of Christianity just over 2,000 years ago, people have travelled to the Holy Land to walk along the route taken by Our Lord Jesus Christ on the last day of his passion. It continues to this day, but some of us never get the opportunity.

To help us overcome this problem, any Catholic Church anywhere in the world contains 14 depictions of Our Lord's final hours on this earth. These are what we call, the Stations of the Cross, or sometimes the Way of the Cross.

These are used in a special service to give us a very close feeling of what it's like to be in the Holy Land on such a pilgrimage, but how many know what's involved, and when and where we can participate?

Although it can be done by anyone, even in our home, it is usually conducted by a priest in his church, and a favourite time is Easter Week, especially Good Friday, but what is it all about?

The 14 stations

The 14 stations depict scenes from his condemnation through to his death on the cross. They were approved by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 for meditation and public celebration and are as follows:

1. Jesus is condemned to death
2. Jesus takes up his Cross
3. Jesus falls for the first time
4. Jesus meets his Mother
5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the Cross
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
7. Jesus falls for the second time



Image : 4th Station of the Cross, Jesus meets his Mother. Church of the Holy Trinity in Gemunden in Main, Bavaria, Germany

8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus falls for the third time
10. Jesus is stripped of his garments
11. Jesus is nailed to the Cross
12. Jesus dies on the Cross
13. Jesus is taken down from the Cross
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb

In a Catholic Church, the service may be conducted by the congregation, going from one station to another saying prayers. It can also be done by the priest or

deacon, who moves from station to station while the congregation make any responses.

There are various ways of taking part in the Stations of the Cross, but the following is a simple one.

You are going to imagine 14 different parts of Christ's passion. You may have your own way of doing this, but there is one way of going through them while praying and that is to try and imagine the great sorrow Our Lady was going through as she witnessed what happened to Jesus in each of these parts.

You can find good examples of what can be said during each station in the St Paul Missal, provided by many churches in the UK for use by parishioners, but the following is a basic structure that can be used to create your own Stations of The Cross.

Your own Stations of the Cross

An opening prayer could be:
 Priest: *Holy and merciful Father, grant that we may follow the way of the Cross In faith and love, so that we may share in Christ's passion and together with him reach the*

glory of your kingdom.

We ask you this through your Son Jesus Christ.

We then start each station with:
 Priest: *We adore you O Christ and we bless you,*

People: *Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Priest: *Relates this part of Christ's passion.*

Priest: *Says a prayer about this station.*

We then all say the OUR FATHER prayer, and close each station with:

ALL: *Holy Mother pierce me through: in my heart, each wound renew
 Of my Saviour crucified.*

A final prayer after the 14 Station could be:

ALL: *While my body here decays, may my soul your goodness praise
 Safe in Paradise with you. Amen*

Priest: *He descended into hell, on the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God The Father almighty: from there he will come again to judge the living and the dead.*

ALL: *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.. AMEN*

The whole service takes less than an hour, yet the feeling one gets from taking part and realising what Jesus and his mother went through on our behalf makes us feel humble and how truly blessed we are.

Year of Mercy was instructive; the Year of Prayer may be immersive

St. Philip Neri once had a penitent confess to indulging in gossip. He advised the contrite soul to bring him a chicken, and to pluck its feathers as he walked the streets of Rome. When the man showed up with the chicken, his penance fulfilled, the great saint told him, "Now, brother, gather up all the feathers you've strewn about the city."

The man's face fell. "It's impossible," he protested, "they're everywhere..." "Yes," Philip nodded, "as is gossip, once it is strewn about ..."

During the Year of Mercy, which concluded in November 2016, I benefited from weekly meditations on what mercy looked like, what it did not look like and how the actual practice of mercy in our lives – be it the simple act of holding one's tongue or something more – was both easier and harder than we believed.

The mercy of showing forgiveness to another, for instance – certainly difficult, when the hurt is huge – can truly set us free, especially when our forgiveness is unconditional. I learned that on a very deep and personal level, back then, when someone who had spread a terrible lie about me came to admit it and sought my forgiveness.

Part of me wanted more – wanted this person to endure further humiliations by telephoning everyone to whom she'd lied about me, admitting what she'd done.

But I quickly saw that such a requirement would be more vindictive than merciful and that a sincere expression of remorse – while making imperfect amends to the truth, or to the reality of my larger world – was still evidence of a heartfelt regret deserving my respectful response. Recalling Philip Neri's lesson to the gossipy

penitent, I suddenly understood that there was nothing this woman could ever do to fully repair my reputation among those who now believed a lie, because in the depths of our hearts we all believe what we really want to believe about others, whether for evil or for good.

So those people who had always rejected her story believed better of me. Those who accepted the lie believed worse and that, I suddenly knew, was on me. Something existed within my character that made some people willing to believe an untrue thing about me.

Realising that among some the shards of my broken reputation could never be gathered up, and that the situation could never be wholly repaired, I felt something like peace well up inside of me. That a small number of people would continue thinking ill of me might not be "fair," but I'd already

learned that in life "fairness" is an illusion – something complex and subjective on too many levels to count. I had no doubt that over the course of my life I'd done plenty to deserve a measure of justified enmity, and decided it didn't matter whether the contempt stemmed from a lie or not. Therefore, I was able to say the words "I forgive you" – and really mean them.

That whole episode has been a valuable gift to me. The woman, by her lie and then her contrition, had administered to me a dose of much-needed self-awareness – given me interior food to chew on for the rest of my life as I contemplate all the ways I hurt others, then help others, and then fail again.

There were plenty of lessons to be learned in that Year of Mercy now we are in a Year of Prayer – so designated by Pope Francis in anticipation of the 2025 Jubilee

Year. I'd been castigating myself for getting off to a slow start, but a recent, serious bout of pneumonia gave me opportunities to make offerings of my illness and discomforts – to practise a form of prayer that we don't much talk about in the church, but which takes a direct line through the apostle Paul's example: "I am rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church" (Col 1:24).

It is a good and intimate prayer to whisper one's agonies into the ear of the suffering, unjustly crucified rabbi-God and ask to be admitted, in the smallest way, into his unfathomable salvific act.

It is a strange privilege to look out from the cross with him and view the terrible beauty, and nearness, of paradise.

SUNDAY WORSHIP

ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS



Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph, aware of the fate that is awaiting him

24th March 2024 – Palm Sunday, (Passion Sunday) Years A, B, C
Procession of Palms: Mark 11:1-10

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’”

They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Isaiah 50:4-7

Words of the Suffering Servant: “I know I shall not be put to shame!”

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

Responsorial: from Psalm 22

R./: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me

All who see me scoff at me; they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads: He relied on the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, if he loves him. (R./)
Indeed, many dogs surround me,



a pack of evildoers closes in upon me; they have pierced my hands and my feet; I can count all my bones. (R./)

They divide my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots. But you, O Lord, be not far from me; O my help, hasten to aid me. (R./)

I will proclaim your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise you: You who fear the Lord, praise him; all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to him; revere him, all you descendants of Israel! (R./)

Ph 2:5-11

The self-emptying of God's loving servant, to save his people

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is

above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel: Mark 14:1–15:47
Mark's dark and stark Passion Narrative (or 15:1-39)

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.”

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money

given to the poor.” And they scolded her. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, “Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow

him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.” They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, “Surely, not I?” He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.”



until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”

Peter said to him, “Even though all become deserters, I will not.” Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.”

But he said vehemently, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And all of them said the same.

To Gethsemane

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the

hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then

heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’ But even on this point their testimony did not agree.

Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?” But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus said, “I am; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’”

Then the high priest tore his

Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” All of them deserted him and fled.

A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, “We

clothes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?” All of them condemned him as deserving death. Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophecy!” The guards also took him over and beat him.

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.” But he denied it, saying, “I do not know or understand what you are talking about.” And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.” But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know this man you are talking

Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

about.” At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He answered him, “You say so.” Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, “Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.” But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” For he realised that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” They shouted back, “Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor’s headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him.

The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.” And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!”

In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen, he is calling for Elijah.” And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.” Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid. **Published by kind permission of the Association of Catholic Priests.**

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS...

FR DOYLE

Easter customs explained – and how the Church has shifted away from ‘monsignor’

Q. We used to celebrate Passion Sunday and the statues in church were covered with purple cloths. (As I remember, that symbolised Jesus’ hiding himself from the view of those who would soon crucify him.) Then, a week later, it was Palm Sunday, and we received the blessed palms. The following weekend, we celebrated Easter. But for several years now, our parish has marked Passion Sunday and Palm Sunday on the same day, one week before Easter – and the statues are no longer covered. When did these two Sundays become one, and why?

A. You are correct that, up until 1969, the Church celebrated Passion Sunday two weeks before Easter. A passion narrative was read as the Gospel passage for that day, and the church began to turn its focus to the sufferings of Jesus.

Since 1969, when the Vatican published new liturgical norms and the three-year cycle of readings, this particular Sunday is now called the Fifth Sunday of Lent, and the Gospel readings used in antiquity have been restored.

The purpose of the change, as I understand it, was to be able to devote the first five weeks of Lent, as it was in the Church’s early history, to the preparation of catechumens for entrance into the church at Easter.

One vestige of the former calendar remains: Beginning on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, the practice of covering crosses and images in the church is permitted. (Note that it is ‘permitted,’ not mandated; discretion is given to the local pastor.)

Images (eg, statues of saints) are uncovered after the start of the Easter Vigil; crosses are unveiled on Good Friday, when the faithful are invited to venerate the cross.

I have never heard the explanation you propose for veiling the cross – namely, that Jesus is ‘hiding’ from those who would crucify him. The reason most commonly offered is that the veils represent a sort of fasting from the sacred depiction of what ultimately led to the glory of our salvation.

Q. Could you explain for me the difference (if any) between priest and monsignor? Under what circumstances is a priest given the title of monsignor?

A. Monsignor is a title bestowed on a priest who has distinguished himself by exceptional service to the Church. It is a title granted by the pope – typically, upon the recommendation of the priest’s



A modern baptism picture:

‘I think that it would be safe to assume that Jesus did baptise the Twelve.’

Photo: Gregory A. Shemitz, Long Island Catholic

diocesan bishop. It is a purely honorary title and has no effect on the priest’s duties or ministerial assignment.

About 50 years ago, the Priests’ Senate in my own diocese passed a resolution asking that our bishop no longer name any priests as monsignors. As I recall our discussion, we felt that it was a medieval and inappropriate title (it derives from the Italian words meaning ‘my Lord’) and that its bestowal could cause hard feelings, not so much with priests who were passed over, but among parishioners whose own pastor had not been so honoured.

So it was with some satisfaction that I noticed, in January 2014, that Pope Francis had instructed the bishops of the world that diocesan priests would no longer be awarded the title before reaching the age of 65. No reasons were published for the pope’s decision, but Pope Francis has often cautioned priests against careerism and personal ambition.

He seems to have long felt uncomfortable about ecclesiastical titles; when he was a bishop and later a cardinal in Argentina, Pope Francis always asked people to call him ‘Father’. And notably, while he served as archbishop of Buenos Aires (1998-2013), not once did he petition the Holy See to have one of his priests named a monsignor.

Q. Is there anywhere in the scriptures that mentions when the apostles were baptised?

A. There is nothing in the scriptures that describes the apostles having been baptised by Jesus – but, of course, the Gospels provide only the broad outlines of the public life of Christ and not every detail.

I think that it would be safe to assume that Jesus did baptise the Twelve. Just before his ascension, Jesus makes it clear that baptism is a basic part of becoming his disciple; in the final words of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus commissions the apostles to “go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt.28:19-20).

In John’s Gospel (3:22), we read that, “after this, Jesus and his disciples went into the region of Judea, where he spent some time with them baptising.” So I take it as a logical conclusion that Jesus had first baptised his own apostles.

Q. I have done something terrible. I committed a mortal sin and then I received the Eucharist. Am I going to be condemned? I am very worried. I am 17 years old, and I was baptised just two months ago. If I go to confession, will I be forgiven? I was afraid that my parents would question me if I did not take Communion, so I went up to receive even though I knew it was wrong. Please help me to know what to do.

A. Please be at peace. You are not going to be condemned, and you will surely be forgiven in the sacrament of penance. It strikes me that some of our best-known saints made their way back from moral wrongs to find healing and joy in God’s forgiveness.

I’m thinking of St. Paul, who once persecuted those who believed in Jesus; of St. Peter, who during Christ’s Passion denied that he even knew Christ; of St. Augustine, who had fathered a child out of wedlock. God can forgive anything, and he wants to. His very purpose in creating us was so that we could share eternal happiness in his presence.

Simply go to confession and tell the priest of your sin and the fact that you went to holy Communion despite recognising its gravity. Don’t be afraid; God is kind and merciful, always ready to forgive. And congratulations on your recent baptism. Like most Catholics, I was baptised as an infant, but I often find that those who entered the church later on have a faith that is more reflective and stronger.

Q. During Mass, at the consecration of the wine, the priest says, ‘for the forgiveness of many.’ Why not ‘for the forgiveness of all’?

A. I should start by saying that it is clearly the teaching of the Church that Jesus suffered and died for all men and women. That is attested to in several different scriptural passages (Jn. 11:52; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Ti 2:11; 1 Jn. 2:2).

In the official English-language edition of the Order of the Mass (in use since 1973), the priest, while consecrating the wine, had said: “which will be shed for you and for all.”

But in 2006, in a letter from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, the Vatican explained that a more accurate translation of the Latin words ‘*pro multis*’ would be ‘for many’ and directed that subsequent translations should reflect that newer wording.

So when the current English version of the Roman Missal was published in 2011, that change was made. This language is not meant to denote any narrowing of the saving action of Christ.

Instead, it repeats more faithfully the wording used in the Last Supper narratives in the Gospels of Matthew (26:28) and Mark (14:24) and, as the 2006 Vatican letter explains, reflects the fact that the salvation won by Jesus is not automatically applied to everyone.

As the letter says: “This salvation is not brought about in some mechanistic way, without one’s own willing or participation; rather, the believer is invited to accept in faith the gift that is being offered and to receive the supernatural life that is given to those who participate in this mystery, living it out in their lives as well so as to be numbered in the ‘many’ to whom the text refers.” Unfortunately, this column cannot accept questions from readers

CREDO

FR HUGH DUFFY

Walking in the likeness of Christ

In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares, “Whoever serves me must follow me” (John 12:26). This powerful statement encapsulates what it means to be a Christian. As servants of Christ, we must walk in his footsteps, imitate his example, and live our lives according to his teachings.

The book of Genesis says that God created man “in his own image” (Genesis 1:27). Every other creature was created “according to its kind” — but not human beings. We were made after the image of God. Thus, Jesus as God’s Son calls us to walk in his likeness.

St Paul reminds us that we must “put on the new self, renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Colossians 3:10). This renewal means casting off our old, sinful habits and embracing the beatitudes of Jesus, the prerequisites for following him: humility, meekness, compassion, justice, purity of heart, peacefulness, and endurance in the face of persecution. This is what it means to conform ourselves to his likeness.

This seemingly straightforward path of discipleship, however, is mired in confusion for many believers. Despite the clarity of Jesus’ call, many struggle with what it means to follow him. The challenge lies, not in merely acknowledging Christ’s teachings but in the genuine application of these teachings to daily life.

St Francis of Assisi, some claim, was, apart from Mary, the closest approximation to the likeness of Christ. In the simplest of words, he told his followers: “Preach the



gospel at all times, using words if necessary,” letting “your deeds” be “the sermon.” This simple approach points to the primacy of example over doctrine. It says: don’t tell me, show me.

The inadequacy of merely professing faith without living it was strongly criticised by Christ, particularly in his interactions with the Pharisees. The Pharisees focused more on lip-service to doctrinal matters than helping others in their need. The story of the woman caught in adultery exemplifies Jesus’ radical departure

from the mind set of judging others, excluding them and putting them down. His example of compassion and love for this woman flung open the doors of redemption.

This historical dilemma still continues in the on going confusion over allegiance to doctrine versus the imitation of Christ. Some Christians have become fixated on doctrinal minutiae at the expense of following his example, fuelling division and even hatred within the faith community. This discord underscores a deeper issue: the

resistance to embody change and renewal as preached in the Gospel. According to St Paul, we are called to a rebirth into newness of life through Christ. This capacity for renewal is central to overcoming divisions within the Christian community because it focuses on our shared commitment to Christ and His teachings.

The contemporary Catholic Church mirrors this same tension between traditional doctrines and the need to follow Christ’s example. Pope Francis’ vision of Church highlights the necessity of following

the living example of Christ. This approach, while respecting doctrine, opens a path forward toward unity and understanding among people, centring faith on the following of Christ, forging unbreakable bonds of friendship and understanding.

In embracing the call to walk in the likeness of Christ, we must endeavour always to follow His example.

This journey requires a heart open to change, guided by the Holy Spirit and the timeless example of Jesus Himself.

Sacrifice and love is our gift on Palm Sunday

The Passion of Christ is celebrated every Palm Sunday, and has all the elements of a Greek tragedy, except that it has more.

It begins with Jesus’ joyful entry into Jerusalem as the long awaited Messiah with an enthusiastic crowd throwing palms along his route. Then it switches to tragedy but does not end in tragedy like a Greek drama. It ends in victory. It is recorded in all the gospels and is more than a record of one individual’s suffering. It is a process through which all who call themselves Christians must go through. That is why there is so much we can identify with in this Palm Sunday and Passion account of the life of Christ.

Generally, we tend to see

ourselves in this story only as sympathetic bystanders. But we are more than that. We are the judges, the betrayers, the cowardly disciples and the executioners. How often do we rush to judgment by condemning others or betraying their trust? How quickly are we ready to unleash a bitter tongue, a piercing remark, a snap judgment? How mercilessly do we find ourselves following the crowd, taking the easy way out and shirking our responsibility to follow Christ? We may not like thinking about such things, but we must if we are to enter into the passion of Christ and cast off the old person and rise again to new life.

The sins of the judges, disciples and executioners, for

whom Christ died, were not just the past-sins of those who condemned him over 2,000 years ago. They are present-day sins which people commit daily. They are the sins of omission of those in authority who turn a blind eye to evils in our midst or fail to act in a timely manner to avoid dire disasters for people in their charge. The list is long.

Think of the recent Covid crisis, for example. Think of the useless wars that have ravaged cultures, uprooted innocent people and laid waste to the infrastructures of nations. These are also the sins of disinterested people who daily turn on each other, unleash a bitter tongue and refuse to forgive and see Christ in their neighbour.

We are invited in the passion

story to identify with Christ on the cross. But doing so is not easy, for it means saying ‘yes’ to demanding questions.

Are we willing to be vulnerable, to forgive those who hate us? Can we choose to love rather than seek revenge? Can we strive for unity among Christians rather than division? Can we choose life over death?

To identify with Christ on the cross is to follow him to the cross. It means to say “yes” to all these cross-bearing questions, to renounce the seductions and attachments to sin in our world.

Every year, as we celebrate Palm Sunday and the Passion of Christ we become part of a great drama. We recall how a master became a servant, how he humbled himself and yet was

exalted above every other creature, how death was swallowed up in life, how he gave us his word, his example, and the new Passover of the mass at the last supper.

This story, re-told in all four synoptic gospels, is the story of Christ’s love for us. This love is so great he sacrificed his life on the cross that we might do the same. “Greater love,” he said, “no man has than to lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Many people are doing God’s work by sacrificing their lives to heal the lives of others. Let’s keep them in our prayers and commend them to the loving care of our Heavenly Father. Sacrifice and love, all wrapped up in one, is Christ’s lasting gift of Palm Sunday.



AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION

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



Great start to the day for all at St Joseph's

Free breakfast is being offered to every child at Saint Joseph's Catholic Voluntary Academy in Matlock, thanks to children's charity, Magic Breakfast, which provides a free, healthy breakfast to all pupils.

A range of cereals, bagels, toast and beans are on the menu and children can arrive at school between 8.20am and 8.45am to eat.

Magic Breakfast's aim is to make sure that no child in the UK is too hungry to learn.

Stacey Carr, headteacher at Saint Joseph's, said: "It's great that Magic Breakfast can provide free healthy breakfasts to all our pupils, ensuring they start their day fuelled and ready to learn.

"Research has shown that a healthy breakfast leads to better academic achievement and we are delighted that a large proportion of our children are taking up this opportunity. We're offering a range of delicious food and children also have the added benefit of being able to socialise with friends whilst enjoying their breakfast."

Chorley friends honoured with Benemerenti medals by parish

Mrs Maureen Hoole and Miss Barbara Tyrer have been honoured with Benemerenti Medals, recognising their exceptional contributions to the church community in Chorley, Lancashire.

Bishop Tom Neylon presided over the ceremony at Sacred Heart Parish in the town, where he was joined by parish priest Fr Francis Ball, and family, friends and fellow parishioners.

The post-Mass celebration featured their favourite hymns, a flautist performance, and a poem read by Maureen's great-granddaughter, Florence, followed by light refreshments.

Maureen was brought up in the neighbouring parish of St Joseph's, where she met her husband, Johnny. They moved to Sacred Heart parish shortly after marrying and raised their three children there.

Maureen was the first of two female readers and the first of three Eucharistic ministers in the parish. She sang in the choir and was lead organist for over 40 years. She also took on the role of organising rotas for the readers and special liturgical events.

Maureen was also very active with many of the social clubs and events in the parish, including the Young Wives and the Bowling Team. She also helped with the



famous Donkey Derbies held here – including one where the famous Red Rum made an appearance.

Barbara was born in the parish and attended Bolton Mount St Joseph's school with Maureen. The two travelled together, and Maureen, who was a few years older, helped Barbara settle into the new school.

Barbara had a varied career, studying for a degree in Biological Sciences at Liverpool University

followed by qualifying as a teacher. She taught at several schools, both in the archdiocese and abroad in Sierra Leone.

Upon returning to England, she retrained as a nurse, and was later asked to be a nurse tutor at Manchester University on the first Nursing Degree Programme.

At church Barbara had several roles including sacristan, reader, Eucharistic Minister, flower arranger, and organist. She was also

foundation governor for many years at Sacred Heart Primary School.

Barbara is following in the footsteps of her mother, Mavis, as she also gained the Benemerenti Medal in recognition of her work in the parish. It is quite unusual for members of the same family to receive this award.

Congratulations and blessings to both Maureen and Barbara, and thank you both for your hard work over the years.

Archbishop welcomes Cross of Wales's unifying faith journey

Archbishop Mark O'Toole has praised an ecumenical pilgrimage from the Anglican Llandaff Cathedral, Cardiff, to the Catholic Metropolitan Cathedral of St David.

This included the first time the Cross of Wales, containing shards of the True Cross and gifted to the church in Wales by King Charles, entered the Catholic cathedral.

Speaking after the pilgrimage, Archbishop O'Toole of Cardiff said it promoted unity among the different faith communities present.

He said: "The experience has been one of moving from being strangers to being friends on the journey of life and pilgrimage of life. Very much at the heart of our pilgrimage was the cross of Jesus Christ.



"We were privileged to be able to welcome for the first time into St David's in Cardiff, the Cross of Wales. This is a unique gift of King Charles to the Church."

About the Cross of Wales, he

added: "It's also very precious to us because Pope Francis gifted two relics of the True Cross to this cross, so they are mounted within the Cross of Wales.

"And so it's an important relic for

us and it's an opportunity to deepen our love for Jesus and for our commitment to follow him and to walk in his path. And for this, today we give thanks to God."

The pilgrimage started at Llandaff Cathedral, with a reflection from Bishop Mary Stallard of Llandaff and Archbishop Andrew John, Archbishop of Wales on the pilgrimage's significance.

It finished in the Cardiff Metropolitan Cathedral where the Cross of Wales was presented, before Archbishop O'Toole led a short Liturgy of the Word Service.

Archbishop O'Toole said there were great unitive benefits to the pilgrimage. "It was lovely to be joined by Archbishop Andrew, the Archbishop of Wales, and Bishop Mary, the Bishop of Llandaff,



together with other Christians of various denominations, members of other faiths and local politicians, as well as ordinary brothers and sisters," he said.

"It's been a very beautiful experience to be able to get to know one another."

The pilgrimage was led by Dr Philip McCarthy, the creator of *Hearts in Search of God*, a project promoting walking pilgrimages within the Catholic dioceses of England and Wales.

Obituary

Fr Mark was a kind servant of Christ to the very end

Obituary: Fr Mark Whelehan, CP, 1926 - 2024 RIP

The Passionist priest Fr. Mark Whelehan sadly passed away peacefully on 29th February in the Community Hospital in Stanhope where he had received the Sacrament of the Sick and the Commendation of the dying prayers. He was surrounded in his last hours by his niece and the Passionist Community from Minsteracres.

Mark was born in Ireland on 8th May 1926 in Kilbeggan, County Westmeath, to his parents Thomas and Georgina (formerly Rowan). His father Thomas was a well-known GAA player in Dublin and Westmeath and was an umpire on 'Bloody Sunday' in 1920. Georgina passed away in 1929, leaving Thomas to rear their two sons Mark and Raymond. The loss of their mother gave them enormous respect and gratitude for life and creating meaningful relationships.

Mark, in the later days of the second world war, left Ireland to go to the Junior Seminary, Blythe Hall, in Ormskirk, Lancashire, and



Fr Mark

his journey as a Passionist began. In those days the novitiate house was in Broadway, Worcestershire; Mark says he never found the novitiate year difficult. He said that, because they were in the country, and immediately after the war rationing was taking place, they were never short of food. Having completed his novitiate, he made his Profession (taking the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience,

and a promise to promote knowledge of and devotion to the Passion). This he did in Broadway on 7th November 1947.

Years of study of theology, philosophy and "sacred eloquence" (preaching) followed until he was ordained in Highgate, London on 27th February 1954.

Moving back to Broadway he was appointed vice novice master under Fr. Benignus in November 1955. Mark was appointed Master of Novices in August 1962.

The number of novices declined over the years and Mark became increasingly involved in the work of retreats, primarily at Minsteracres in Northumberland and other Passionist addresses. Mark was always looking for new ways for Minsteracres to stay relevant and partly commercial. His involvement in the shop gave him great pleasure and in his later years allowed him to feel he was contributing to the community.

We will never know all the good he did in that shop. And there is a clue there to the heart of the man: He was a man of prayer. Even in

recent years he was always in the chapel by 7.30 doing his meditation. Again at 12.10 he made his visit to the Blessed Sacrament; and then he was back in the chapel for more meditation at 5.30. It was extremely rare that he did not maintain that schedule; in fact, in recent years, if he was not there, the community would be concerned – it was like the sun not rising.

The death of Fr Mark is not the end. His story will continue and the good and healing work he did will continue to affect the lives of thousands. Mark was able to introduce some of his novices to the postman, whose father had brought the Wellingtonia trees on his bicycle up from Riding Mill Station, two at a time. More than 150 years later the Wellingtonias are standing good and strong. No doubt the memory of Fr. Mark Whelehan in 150 years will be as good and strong.

Universe News Editor Andy Drozdziak met Fr Mark at Minsteracres on many occasions, where Fr Mark always gave him a warm welcome.



Fr Mark in his younger days

Andy said: "I was sad to hear the news about Fr Mark. Whenever I visited Minsteracres, Fr Mark was always there with a warm welcome, a smile and a kind word. He would often be found in the shop, sharing a story or helping visitors on their own faith journey. He was a selfless, kind servant of Christ and he will be missed."

May his soul rest in peace.



Fun day at the zoo

Pupils at St Anne's Catholic Voluntary Academy in Buxton enjoyed an 'incredible' trip to Chester Zoo thanks to community fundraising efforts.

The school signed up for free tickets to the zoo and received enough to take the whole school – over 220 pupils and staff.

But the cost of transporting everyone was over £2,500 so the school launched a fundraising drive to pay for the travel.

Through a series of events, including a 12-hour sponsored walk by staff and some pupils and a Summer Fair/Meet the Teacher event, over £2,700 was raised.

One of the biggest events was a car wash by a family with children at St Anne's. They were supported by local firefighters and raised £575.

Pupil Danny, seven, described the trip to the zoo as 'incredible'. He said: "I've never been to Chester

Zoo before. We saw an anteater, monkeys and lions. The lions were a bit scary but it was great to see them. I also saw a chameleon. I really enjoyed the day."

Pupil Oscar, nine, said it was a brilliant day. He said: "My favourite bit was going into the bat cave. There were lots of bats and they were coming quite close. I also really enjoyed seeing the Komodo dragons and the chameleon."

The school said everyone had had "a fantastic day". "For some of our children it was their first trip to the zoo, and they loved seeing the different animals. It was fun and educational, and something they will remember for a long time."

"We would like to thank Chester Zoo for the tickets and everyone who supported our fundraising, and the Friends of St Anne's who purchased high visibility jackets for every child."

Ursuline Links is seeking a Director

An exciting opportunity has arisen to join Ursuline Links as the Director, to action the strategic direction for the charity's future. The ideal candidate will have a personal faith commitment and previous experience of working to motivate and inspire young people. This role will involve working with the Ursuline schools and other interested groups involved in Catholic youth ministry.

Job details

Hours - 37.5 hours per week

Location – Forest Gate, London (flexibility for home working)

Contract - Permanent

Salary - £38,500 - £45,500 PA

Annual Leave - 33 days holiday (pro rata) per year inclusive of bank holidays.



YOUR MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Develop further an exciting programme of service projects suitable for students aged 9-18+
- Manage existing resources and prepare a budget for new equipment.
- Fundraise for projects as required.
- Co-ordinate participation of UL students at third party events such as Flame.
- Manage the website and social media.
- Keep contacts with past student and arrange reunions.
- The preparation of liturgical services and parent meetings as required.
- Review policies and guidelines, and Charity Commission reports.

WHAT YOU NEED TO HAVE:

- Education to degree level
- Recent experience of working (for at least 2 years) with young people up to the age of 20 either as a teacher, chaplain or within a youth retreat centre, including presenting to large and small groups of adults and young people and delivery of prayer and activity sessions
- Understand safeguarding requirements for working with young people.

HOW TO APPLY:

If you feel you have the relevant skills and experience to fulfil this role successfully, please apply in the first instance with your CV to officemanager@ursulines-ru.uk. All suitable applicants will be sent the full job description and an application form to complete. If you have any further questions, please contact Elizabeth Durrant on 020 3422 0901.

Closing Date 19th April 2024
Interviews w/c 6th May 2024

URSULINE LINKS is a youth volunteer programme sponsored by the Ursuline sisters. For more information visit www.ursulinelinks.org

Cantonese community offers a warm welcome to a returning old friend

Elizabeth Lam and Dominic Chung

The historic Our Lady and the English Martyrs Church in Cambridge hosted a significant event as His Excellency Archbishop Savio Hon SDB, Papal Nuncio to Malta and Libya, conducted a Lunar New Year Thanksgiving Mass, uniting the Hong Kong community in a vibrant celebration of faith and cultural heritage.

As is his practice for at least the past decade, Archbishop Savio visits the Hong Kong communities in some UK cities during the Lunar New Year season. He last visited Cambridge in January 2023. He had carried such fond memories of Cambridge in general, and the liturgical arrangement of OLEM, that he specifically asked the Cantonese community within the diocese of East Anglia to make appropriate arrangements for his pastoral visit once again.

The small planning team could not go public with his intention for some days because protocol and etiquette dictate that Archbishop Savio must first consult with the Diocesan Ordinary, His Grace,



Bishop Peter.

Finally, the day of 24th February dawned, the 15th day of the Lunar New Year – akin to the Octave of Christmas and Easter – and the whole Cantonese community, together with the OLEM family, rejoiced in glorifying and thanking God for the opportunity of celebrating a solemn, New Year Thanksgiving Mass in Cantonese. A young Hong Kong-born organ scholar came up from the London Oratory to accompany the Mass,

thanks to the encouragement of Nigel Kerry, the director of music.

Even though we were in Lent, with dispensation, the liturgical colour was in red which the Archbishop explained that, not only was it on cultural ground, it more importantly symbolised the fire of the Holy Spirit. It also represented the blood shed by martyrs; on his pectoral cross a fragment of a relic of a Martyr of China is embedded.

We chanted the Gloria and the crescendo hit the roof.

During his lively homily, Archbishop Savio reminded us that we are not the only person on earth whom God has made in His image and to be mindful that we are all part of the body of Christ.

He playfully drove home the key point that, when Jesus Christ knocks on the door of our hearts, though we might be tempted to rhetorically ask “who is there?”, we must not however doubt that it is Christ who is knocking. He can and does appear, and appeal to us in

myriad forms. Getting to ‘know thyself’ is important – but getting to know Jesus is crucial. That way, we will never fall prey to the devil.

The archbishop reminded us that, because we are one Body in Christ, we must not be tempted to divide the Church along language or geographic lines. Throughout the celebration, he pointedly used English, Cantonese – the dialect common in Hong Kong – and Mandarin in the Proper part of the Mass.

After the Mass, we retired to the Parish Centre where old friends and new acquaintances wished each other a happy new year of the Dragon over traditional treats and drinks.

We can now safely say that the Cantonese Community have made an “old friend” in His Excellency.

As we parted company with each other and went on our own sweet ways, ringing joyously in our ears was the verse of a song with which the Archbishop ended his homily: “Many things about tomorrow I do not seem to understand. But I know who holds tomorrow and I know who holds my hand!”



Canon James installed

Canon James McAuley was installed as the new Canon of the Chapter in St John's Cathedral, Portsmouth, on 5th March.

The Chapter of Canons exists to care for the cathedral and its liturgy and also to give good advice to the bishop, mainly on liturgical matters and on the devotional and pastoral life of the diocese.

Canon James is one of the Vicars General and also the Moderator of the Curia, as well as an experienced priest of the diocese.

After Formation at the Venerable

English College in Rome, he was ordained in 2010, serving first as an assistant priest in Jersey, then at the cathedral, during which time he was also Bishop's Secretary and University Chaplain.

After five years back in Rome on the staff, he returned to the diocese in 2022.

He is currently the Dean of the Cathedral, with many responsibilities, and so he will be well equipped for the role of canon. Mgr Canon Jeremy Garratt celebrated the Chapter Mass.



Bishop Peter with just some of the students and staff he met during his day at St John Fisher

A rewarding visit for all

Rowena Goodfellow, Lay Chaplain, St John Fisher school Bishop Peter Collins enjoyed a wonderful day at St John Fisher Catholic High School, Peterborough, during which he met many of the students and staff. Accompanied by diocesan schools' service director Dr Andy Stone, the bishop toured the school, followed by Mass in the chapel concelebrated with Fr Karol from St Peter and All Souls.

The school's Chaplaincy Ambassadors, some of its SJF champions and the sixth form leadership students were present and shared their experiences.

Claudia in year 12 said: “The Mass was really beautiful which included readings and singing from

the choir and from everyone involved.” Zina in year 8 added: “Everyone was respectful.” Adam in year 10 said: “The Bishop's homily was particularly impactful as he spoke of the importance of wholeheartedness.”

The Mass was followed by photographs and an ‘Ask the Bishop’ session. Kimora in year 8 said: “The questions were a great opportunity to find out more about what it is like to be a bishop.”

Bishop Peter answered questions about his role, being God's servant, faith and reason, the importance of dialogue with people of faith and our daily journey with God as He accompanies us at all stages.

Ebenzer in year 10 said: “The bishop told us his inspiration ‘was

not fame but serving God whole heartedly’.

And Claudia in year 12 continued: “We learnt many things, including the process of how Bishop Peter got elected, and how it felt to leave his home country, Wales. Overall, it was a great experience, and I was glad to be a part of it.”

The responsibility of being Bishop was also noted: “It was a pleasure to meet the Bishop and hear about all the work he does within our diocese... it was an honour to share Mass with him and have an interesting discussion, asking him all about his roles and duties as bishop,” said Sean from Year 12.

Later, Bishop Peter blessed the Fitness Centre, our newest building.

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The Universe Catholic Weekly's guide to the more leisurely side of life

GARDENING



"You can easily make your own compost for free. All the ingredients you need come from many things you would otherwise throw away from inside and outside your house."

Create 'super soil' – from waste!

Last week we explained how feeding the soil well was at the heart of organic gardening. This week, compost – muck, glorious muck!

Whether you buy your feed or make it, compost is the absolute best way to feed the soil and let the soil feed the plants. I believe it's the single most important ingredient anyone can add to their garden. Beyond adding life and fertility to the soil, it does so much more.

Compost improves soil drainage, yet allows soil to retain sufficient moisture. It helps create the type of soil structure that is critical for nutrients and water to be absorbed, and roots to spread. Compost also helps reduce soil erosion and runoff. It protects plants from certain diseases, moderates pH levels, feeds earthworms and other soil-dwelling creatures, supports beneficial microorganisms, is known to be a growth stimulant, and even buffers toxins in the soil.

And the best part – You can easily make your own compost (nature's superfood) for free. All the ingredients you need come from many things you would otherwise throw away from inside and outside your house.

If you'd rather buy it...

As simple as it is to make, it may make sense for a variety of reasons to buy it instead. There

are many reputable compost suppliers where you can buy it by the bag or in bulk.

If you have a large need, buying in bulk will save you significant money over bags. Anything you don't use can be stored for later use. I never run out of places for using compost.

How much to apply

The goal is to strive for 5 per cent organic matter by weight in your total plantable area. That translates to roughly 30 per cent by volume. As a rule, one-inch worked into the top four-inches of soil will get you close and provide excellent results.

To determine how much compost you'll need to cover an area, use a handy online compost or soil calculator; try searching for "how much soil do I need." All you need to know is the square footage of the area you want to cover and the desired depth in inches.

Non-compost, organic nutrients

When shopping for other organic alternatives to feed your soil, options are often listed primarily by what they are, such as blood or bone meal or rock phosphate. Here is a partial listing of the most commonly available organic nutrients sorted by their role for providing nitrogen, phosphorus, or potassium.

Nitrogen: Dried blood, blood meal, cottonseed meal, fish emulsion, seaweed extract

Phosphorus: Bone meal, rock phosphate

Potassium: Greensand, sulphate of potash



Somewhere on the package of each, you'll find those three important numbers representing their total analysis of nitrogen, phosphorus, or potassium. Understanding these numbers is the key to knowing what role that product will play in your garden.

Start with a soil test

I'd be remiss in concluding this discussion without mentioning the importance of knowing the current state of your existing soil first.

All too often, I believe, we randomly dive into adding inputs in our soil while having no idea whether what we're adding is even necessary. Fortunately, you'd be hard-pressed to cause damage by adding too much organic matter.

The same cannot be said for in-organic, synthetic fertilisers.

However, it should be noted that just because it's organic, doesn't excuse an overuse of certain inputs. For example, chicken manure contains high levels of organic nitrogen. But put too much of it within contact of your plant roots before it's mellowed, and chances are you'll burn up tender plants.

A soil test is an important step in assessing what you have to work with. Tests are available from several sources. You can purchase do-it-yourself kits from a garden centre, online, or through mail order sources. However, DIY kits usually don't compare in quality or accuracy to the results you get through your county extension service or private labs. For my money, the best value and most accurate results come from these experts.

However, most university labs don't routinely provide organic recommendations. If you want a report that provides organic equivalents, inquire if that option is available from your local extension service or its university soil lab, as well as private soil labs that you find online.

One more time: feed the soil, and let the soil feed the plants. Make that part of your new gardening mantra and you'll be well on your way to a safer and more environmentally responsible approach to gardening... and ultimately, a healthier garden overall.

Oh, and that other axiom I live by and encourage other gardeners to do the same is this: put the right plant in the right place. But we'll save that discussion for another day.

HEALTH

Sitting is bad for your health – and even 10,000 steps a day might not save you

Sitting is bad for your health and exercise doesn't seem to offset the harmful effects – that's the results of a major report into modern sedentary lifestyles. UK academic research Daniel Bailey looks at its findings

Advances in technology in recent decades have obviated the need and desire for humans to move. Many of the world's population sit for long periods throughout the day, whether in front of a computer at work or in front of a TV at home.

Given that the human body is made to move, all this sitting is clearly bad for our health.

The bad news is, while we have known this for some time, a new study from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) has confirmed the fact – and then some.

A total of 5,856 female participants aged 63 to 99 years were asked to wear an activity monitor on their hip for seven days at the start of the study. The researchers then followed them for a decade, during which 1,733 participants died.

The researchers used artificial intelligence to work out from the activity monitor how much time the participants were sitting and then linked this to their risk of death. The data showed that participants who sat more than 11 hours a day had a 57 per cent higher risk of dying during the study period than those who sat less than nine and a half hours a day.

But regular exercise will undo the health risks of sitting too much, right? Not according to the UCSD study. The risk of an early death was still there even with higher amounts of moderate-to-vigorous exercise. A 2019 study also found that higher amounts of exercise didn't undo the risk of diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke that come with sitting too much.

However, a study from Australia found that doing between 9,000 and 10,500 steps each day lowered the risk of premature death, even in people who sat a lot.

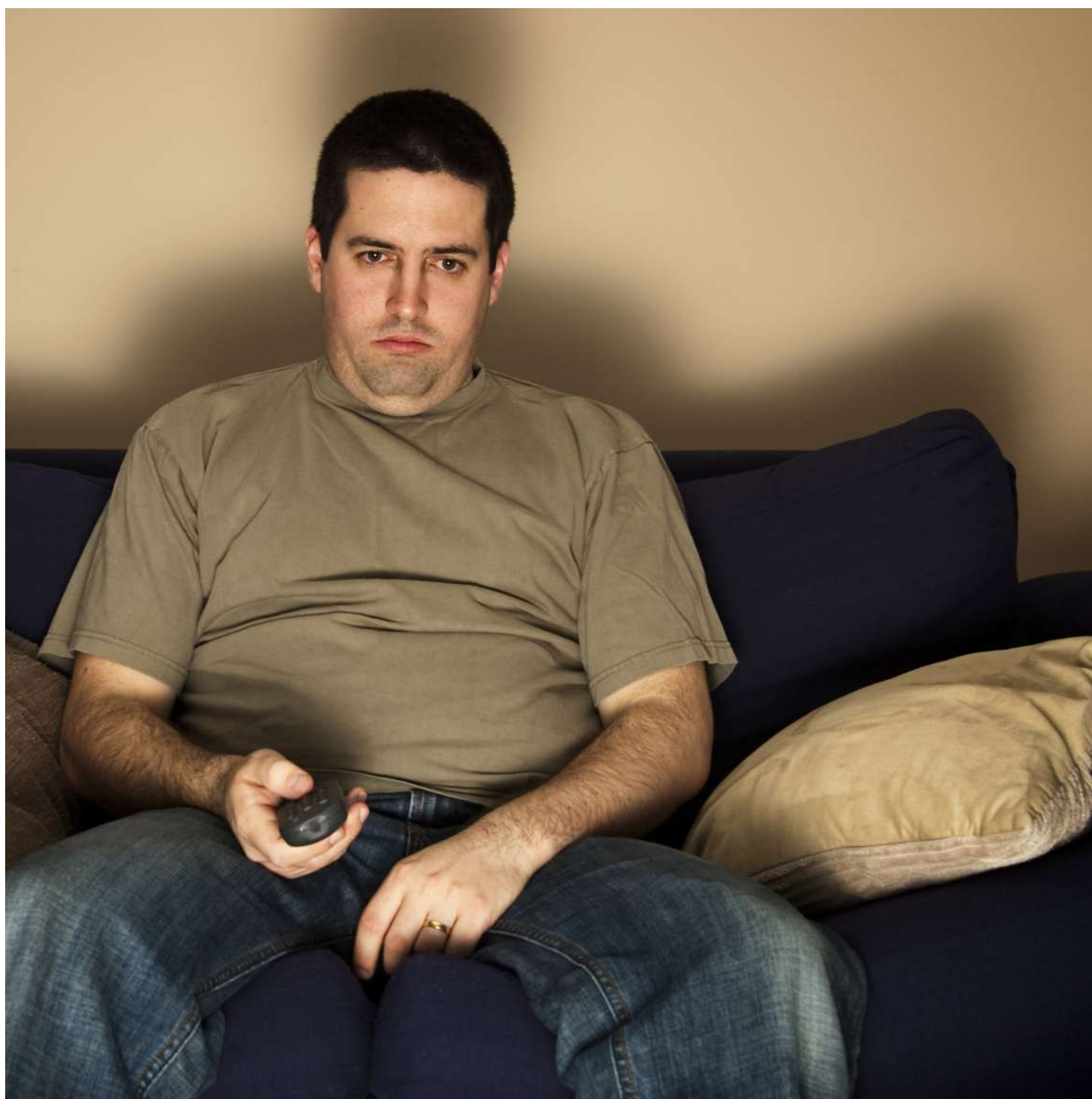
The contradictory findings could be explained by the activity monitors being worn on the hip in the UCSD study and on the wrist in the Australian study, which might lead to different estimates of sitting time.

The Australian study also didn't use any special software in the activity monitor data to work out when participants were sitting or standing, meaning that standing would have been incorrectly picked up as sitting.

For example, if a participant stood still for half an hour, this would be picked up as half an hour of sitting.

This could mean that the Australian study overestimated the time its participants spent sitting.

The evidence from the UCSD study looks to be better, highlighting the need to sit less. Current guidelines from the World Health Organization support this, recommending that



adults should limit the amount of time sitting and break up long periods of sitting.

How much sitting is too much?

So how much sitting is too much? The UCSD study says 11 hours per day. Other research says just seven hours each day could be too much. There is lots of research too, that shows you shouldn't sit for longer than 30 minutes in one go as this can increase your blood sugar levels and blood pressure.

So what can you do to avoid sitting for long periods?

A sit-stand desk could help if you're an office worker. Or you could get up and move around between job tasks or while on a call. At home,

you could stand up during TV ad breaks or while the kettle is boiling. Some smart devices and wearables buzz if you have been sitting for too long as well.

But what if you can't stand or walk? A 2020 study found that small bursts of arm exercise (for example, two minutes every 20 minutes) lowered blood sugar levels in wheelchair users. As long as you are doing something that means you aren't sitting still, there are health benefits to be had.

Daniel Bailey is a Senior Lecturer in Sport, Health and Exercise Sciences, Brunel University London

"So how much sitting is too much? The UCSD study says 11 hours per day. Other research says just seven hours each day could be too much. There is lots of research too, that shows you shouldn't sit for longer than 30 minutes in one go as this can increase your blood sugar levels and blood pressure."

FINANCES

A car as an investment? It can be done

Experts say viewing your car as an investment can improve your finances

In these inflationary times, the cost of owning a car seems to increase on a daily basis. The price of buying a car is growing, and so is the cost of operating one. We all want personal transportation and the joy of car ownership, but the statistics are challenging.

Simply purchasing a car is more costly than ever. The prices of new and used vehicles skyrocketed in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to J.D. Power, new-vehicle transaction prices shot up 13% in 2021 and then surged up another 13% in 2022. The increases moderated a bit last year, but prices have not fallen.

The prices of used vehicles have escalated even more rapidly over the last several years as consumers who couldn't find an affordable new car have turned to the used car market. Again, the prices have moderated in 2023, but used vehicle prices are up at least 20% versus their level in 2021.

At the same time, the cost of maintenance and replacement parts has also zoomed up. Though fuel prices have dropped from their all-time high of a couple of years ago, they are still inflated versus their level when the decade began.

The economic news regarding transportation costs is challenging. Still, the auto experts at Mercury Insurance have a suggestion that could change the way you look at these costs. The suggestion is to treat your vehicle as an investment, not an expense.

"Many personal finance experts define automobiles as expense items," said Justin Yoshizawa, director, Product Management State. "While that is generally true, viewing your vehicle as a long-term asset just might change



the way you purchase and maintain your cars. And it will probably save you money."

Viewing your vehicle as a long-term asset implies that you will purchase it differently, finance it differently and maintain it differently. Rather than seeing your vehicle as a piece of equipment that needs to be replaced frequently, it may be smarter to treat your car as a long-term asset that you can feel comfortable owning and driving for years, which could save you thousands of pounds.

Mercury Insurance offers these suggestions for viewing your car as an investment.

Buy the right car.

Choose a vehicle appropriate for your long-term needs with the expectation that you

will drive it for the next 10 years. With that in mind, the car you purchase should offer a low cost to own based on good dependability and reliability, low maintenance and repair costs, good fuel economy, and low cost to insure. (Mercury Insurance offers advice on the least expensive saloons, trucks and SUVs, and electric vehicles to insure)

Consider a used vehicle.

Smart shoppers will find that two- to three-year-old used cars, trucks, SUVs and vans are much less expensive to purchase than the equivalent new vehicles. Buyers who might be afraid of "getting a lemon" when they buy a used car should consider certified pre-owned (CPO) vehicles. These vehicles are hand-picked

and meticulously inspected prior to being sold, and they are backed with a warranty very similar to a new-car warranty.

Finance responsibly.

The absolute best financing is buying the vehicle with cash. When you do that, you immediately acquire complete ownership of the asset (the car), and you never face financing expenses or monthly car payments. In this era of high interest rates, that is a giant advantage. If you can't purchase an appropriate car with cash and you need a car immediately, then borrow as little money as possible for as short a term as possible. This will save you hundreds of pounds in interest payments versus the typical car loan.

Keep the vehicle.

The key to gaining financial advantage from viewing your car as an asset is owning it for a long period of time.

While the average car on the road today is over 11 years old, typically, cars that age have had several owners. Instead, your goal should be to maintain your vehicle so it is useful to you for at least a decade. This implies preventative maintenance and, yes, some repairs over time. But while repairing a vehicle is more expensive than it used to be, it is still far cheaper than replacing the vehicle with a new car, truck or SUV.

"The days when new vehicles would rust out and wear out in just a few years are over," Yoshizawa said. "Today's new and late-model used vehicles have long, useful lives ahead of them."

"Buying the right vehicle and continuing to maintain and repair it as needed is the best way to assure yourself the lowest personal transportation costs."

LIFESTYLE

Secrets to getting a good night's rest

In a recent survey, nearly half of those surveyed ranked trying to improve their sleep as their number one priority. If getting better sleep is at the top of your list to improve your health, you may want to review habits which could be preventing you from getting a full night of deep, restorative sleep. This is even more crucial when your schedule changes, such as when you have to move clocks forward.

In a sleep survey conducted by One Poll on behalf of Herbalife, over half of respondents (55%) can't remember the last time they had a "perfect night" of sleep, and 78% can't recall when they last had a "perfect week" of sleep.

While "perfect" sleep might be unattainable, less than half (48%) said yes when asked whether they know how to get a good night's sleep – and 66% of respondents admit that within two hours before bed, they watch TV or scroll through their phone for extended periods of time, which are not recommended as activities conducive to good sleep.

"Getting good quality sleep is essential for everyone," said John Heiss, Ph.D., and vice



president of Global Product Innovation, Herbalife. "Sleep supports important functions including metabolism and brain health and can have an impact on conditions including heart disease, obesity and depression."

How to get better sleep every night

To help you sleep longer and more deeply, try incorporating these habits into your daily routine.

Don't overeat near bedtime: Eating lighter, low-fat meals at dinner eases digestion, and healthy carbohydrates (think whole grains,

fruits, vegetables and legumes) help stimulate production of brain chemicals that can help you relax and get to sleep. Experts also advise limiting food intake within three hours of bedtime.

Lessen caffeine and alcohol intake: Both caffeine and alcohol can disrupt your normal sleep patterns. You may be able to fall asleep, but it could be harder to stay asleep, preventing you from reaching the deepest and most restful stage of sleep.

Boost exercise: Evidence suggests getting at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity during each day can help improve your sleep quality.

Keep a regular schedule: Experts also recommend going to sleep and waking the same time each day, even on weekends and holidays. This creates a predictable sleep rhythm your body will begin to anticipate. You can prepare for changes in your routine, including when you must "spring forward" your clock, by gradually adjusting your schedule.

Try stress-reduction techniques: Extensive research on the benefits of relaxation techniques like meditation, breathing exercises and reading show they can all help reduce stress. These practices can help reduce insomnia if you do them regularly, especially before bedtime.

Develop a bedtime routine: To help prepare for sleep, dim house lights in the evening and follow a digital detox rule of no computers or digital devices at least one hour before bedtime – including TV watching.

"Blue light from TVs, phones and other digital devices can impair the quality of your sleep. Even if you can fall asleep, the quality of sleep is reduced, and your brain biology is disrupted," said Heiss.

"Blue light can disrupt your circadian rhythm, which controls mood, organ function and metabolism. Blue light may also be the culprit if you're experiencing food cravings."

Changing your habits during the day, and especially right before bed, could make all the difference when it comes to getting a good night's sleep.

FILMS

Po's back for more harmless kung fu fun

John Mulderig

The non-Judeo-Christian philosophical ideas that weighed down its immediate predecessor have mostly been excised from *Kung Fu Panda 4* (Universal). As a result all but the smallest, most easily frightened moviegoers can patronise director Mike Mitchell's good-hearted, but not especially memorable, production.

One of the film's themes is the need to accept change. So, as the story gets underway, Po (voice of Jack Black), the bear of the title, learns that he's headed for just such an alteration.

His testy longtime mentor, Master Shifu (again voiced by Dustin Hoffman), informs Po that he needs to relinquish his current position as Dragon Warrior, ie, supreme martial artist of the Valley of Peace, in order to take on his new role as the valley's spiritual leader.

Such a promotion, however, has no appeal for Po, who wants to go on battling bad guys indefinitely.

Much to Master Shifu's annoyance, to avoid



Shifu, voiced by Dustin Hoffman, and Po, voiced by Jack Black, in *Kung Fu Panda 4*

his pending advancement, Po embarks on a quest. His goal is to defeat The Chameleon (marvellous voice of Viola Davis), a wicked, shape-shifting lizard sorceress who has a scheme afoot to make the kung fu prowess of an array of deceased masters her own.

Po is aided on his mission by Zhen (voice of Awkwafina), a clever but morally deficient fox. He's also shadowed by his biological father, Li Shan (voice of Bryan Cranston), and his adoptive dad, Mr. Ping (voice of James Hong), both of whom are concerned for his safety.

As Po tries to raise Zhen's ethical standards,

the script, penned by Jonathan Aibel, Glenn Berger and Darren Lemke, highlights the value of self-confidence and of a willingness to forgive. As for the disquieting metaphysical notions that accompanied Po's third outing, they've largely been jettisoned, though brief references to communicating with the universe remain.

Older viewers may find the fight sequences tiresome and over-extended. They may long for more of the tranquil interludes set against pleasing landscapes evocative of China's rich artistic legacy.

But, as Po likes to remind us—using slightly less euphemistic wording—his speciality is putting the boot into the posteriors of his opponents. Watch that lizard leap.

Jack Black shared how he believes that he is very similar to his character, Po.

"I do find similarities with Po. Especially when he meditates and all those thoughts pop around his head, I'm exactly the same. Very difficult to quiet my inner voices, and there are several of me in there. I do relate to his youthful enthusiasm and sense of play and adventure. That's the kind of way I live my life too," he said.

A royal feelgood triumph, if it weren't for the dialogue

The feel-good elements of a sports film and a pet bonding tale are combined in director Simon Cellan Jones' fact-based drama *Arthur the King* (Lionsgate). The result is a mildly diverting film that might have been especially appealing to athletic-minded teenagers if the script had not contained such vulgar dialogue.

Adapted by screenwriter Michael Brandt from Mikael Lindnord's 2016 memoir *Arthur: The Dog Who Crossed the Jungle to Find a Home*, the film showcases adventure racing, a challenging multi-event team competition in which participants take on the rigours of the wilderness. In this instance, the setting is the rugged landscape of the Dominican Republic.

Mark Wahlberg plays Lindnord's stand-in, Michael Light. Though ageing and nearly washed-up, Michael is determined to take his final shot at the championship that has always previously eluded him. So he sets out to find financial backing and assemble a squad he hopes can win the gold.

His collaborators include expert mountain climber Olivia (Nathalie Emmanuel) and crack navigator Chik (Ali Suliman). Rounding out the quartet is Leo (Simu Liu), a former teammate-turned-critic of Michael's. Since Leo has a wide following on social media, Michael's potential sponsors insist that he be included, forcing Michael to patch things up with him.

As the team climbs peaks and fords rivers across a trek of hundreds of miles, a wounded stray dog Michael momentarily took pity on and fed during an early rest stop follows them

with uncanny determination. His unrelenting persistence and dignified endurance gradually gain him the group's affection – as well as the royal moniker from which the film takes its title.

Brandt's screenplay has its priorities in order. As early scenes show, the last expedition on which Michael and Leo competed together ended disastrously due to Michael's poor judgment and ego-driven refusal to take advice. Over the course of this outing, by contrast, Michael experiences personal growth and becomes a better leader.

Additionally, the plot's somewhat formula-defying-conclusion finds loyalty and compassion trumping less worthy considerations. Grown viewers will appreciate these underlying aspects of Michael's story. But they'll also note that its macho atmosphere, Olivia's presence notwithstanding, is underlined by numerous salty exchanges and exclamations.

Adapting the screenplay into a film proved a challenge for Michael Brandt, who was determined to tell the 'real story.'

"I've done quite a few of them," he told scriptmag.com. "The first thing you have to do is put the source material away. And it's hard. And you go back to it when you're stuck. Or you go back to it when you need something.

"For me, it was important to make the movie and let the real story be the real story. And let those things intersect in the most interesting places I can find."



Mark Wahlberg and Arthur in a scene from the film

Fascinating exhibition on Roman life sadly misses the chance to be more inclusive

HISTORY

**Anna
Walas**

Legion: Life in the Roman Army exhibition delivers exciting finds but fails to go beyond stories of men and weapons of war enough

The life of a Roman soldier was full of risk, danger and camaraderie, but it could also be beset with loneliness. Many soldiers joined in order to build a better future for themselves. We know this was the case for Claudius Terentianus.

Terentianus was a marine who was later transferred onto a legion, a more prestigious unit consisting of Roman citizens. He went on to serve in Syria and Alexandria before finally retiring in the village of Karanis, Egypt.

Terentianus was one of hundreds of thousand of men who served in Roman armies but we know a lot about his experiences thanks to papyrus letters written early in the second century to his father Claudius Tiberianus. Terentianus's experiences are at the centre of the exhibition **Legion: Life in the Roman Army** at London's British Museum.

The British Museum's first major exhibition devoted to Rome's armies explores the experience of military service, from enlistment to retirement. The exhibition features collections of military equipment, inscriptions on stone and unique finds from across the Roman Empire.

The structure draws on a fairly traditional research approach focused on tracing careers of military men, and on study of military equipment. It was through work on military equipment that stories of individual men started emerging. These stories were told through personalised items, name tags and hand-made repairs. **Legion: Life in the Roman Army** reflects these approaches, if imperfectly.

A 'greatest hits' selection of Roman military finds

The opening panel sets the tone of the exhibition by focusing on the imagery of military might on Trajan's column, a landmark of ancient Rome, and introducing the exhibition's protagonist. The exhibition's prominent theme is the story of Rome's legions as the first professional army and of Rome as a

Main picture: Near-complete Roman segmental armour, Kalkriese, Germany, AD 9. Photo: Museum und Park Kalkriese. Right, tombstone of an imaginifer's daughter, England, AD 100–300.



highly militarised society.

The exhibition's narrative starts with the tale of young men taking risk, pinning hopes of improving their livelihoods and gaining citizenship on military service. The exhibition doesn't shy away from exploring the violence of frontiers, showing from the beginning stories of lives cut short through conflict.

Some highlights of the artefacts on show including items from the museum's own collection, such as a crocodile leather scale armour, a selection of Oxrynhous papyri and an eye catching single red wool sock. It also features loans of some of the most spectacular Roman military finds from Northern England and Scotland, tombstones from Mains and Bonn (Germany)

and military equipment from the battlefield at Kalkriese (Germany).

Most striking, however, due to their totally unique nature and extraordinary preservation are loans of material from Dura Europos, Syria. On loan from Yale University Art Gallery, these include the only surviving example of a painted shield and a full horse armour, among other objects.

Rich in finds, but poor in diversity

The exhibition is rich in finds, but fails in its representation of the social diversity on the frontiers and a distinction between life on campaign and life on a settled frontier.

It would have been good to see

“As an expert in Roman frontiers, it was incredible to see so many world famous artefacts I have researched in real life, but I worry the narrative they have woven includes too many blind spots that perpetuate ideas around the might of Rome's legions.”

concubine, but nothing of the accompanying text puts this in context. Instead, the visitor is shown a birthday invitation from Sulpicia Lepidina, who was a wife of a military commander from Vindolanda, a Roman fort near Hadrian's Wall in Northern England, offering a more comfortable vision of women's lives on frontiers.

As an expert in Roman frontiers, it was incredible to see so many world famous artefacts I have researched in real life, but I worry the narrative they have woven includes too many blind spots that perpetuate ideas around the might of Rome's legions.

It preserves a horrified fascination with the “boy's toys” of warfare, while obscuring the issues of inequality and social and gender diversity.

The Exhibition continues until 23rd June this year.
Anna Walas is an Honorary Research Fellow and Community Archaeology Liaison Officer, University of Nottingham

Throughout the three panels on fort life, women are featured only in relation to the men in their lives. They are deceased daughters of soldiers, wives, or concubines. It would have been interesting to juxtapose these with evidence of economically independent women such as Belica, an innkeeper, or women who asserted their agency, such as Sosia Galla, wife of a legionary legate tried for treason.

Sex work and gender-based violence are not addressed explicitly either. A panel above the fort life section mentions Terentianus' wish to purchase a

Church in dilemma over Rupnik's art

Jonathan Luxmoore, OSV News

As evidence mounts of sexual crimes by Slovene-born Father Marko Rupnik, Church communities are resisting calls for his expensive sacral artworks to be removed from public display.

“Fr Rupnik’s case is still ongoing – we must await a formal ruling by the Holy See, and see how it’s justified,” said Fr Tomasz Szopa, custodian of the Sanctuary of St. John Paul II the Great in Kraków, Poland, whose upper church is dominated by Rupnik’s stone mosaics.

“People worldwide have made donations for these artworks, and it pains them if they were destroyed – quite apart from raising questions as to what could take their place,” the Polish priest said.

He spoke as a final ruling on the ex-Jesuit was awaited from the Vatican.

Father Szopa said his sanctuary’s pastoral team felt “profound solidarity” with anyone harmed by Fr Rupnik and has held regular prayer meetings for local Polish victims of abuse. He added that the meetings were moved to a lower chapel when claims against the priest-artist came to light, but said participants insisted they still felt “prayerful and safe” at the sanctuary, despite the mosaics.

Meanwhile, the display of the priest’s artworks by at least eight churches and chapels in his native Slovenia, where he holds top state honours, was defended by the secretary-general of the country’s bishops’ conference.

“Some parents have complained about their children receiving catechism classes in front of his mosaics – but I haven’t heard any other public objections,” said Salesian Sister Marija Šimenc, whose conference set up three new anti-abuse working groups.

“Once his case is settled, we may hear more about his artwork and what to do with them. But it’s likelier they’d be covered up than removed,” she added.

Born at Zadlog, Fr Rupnik was ordained in 1985 and became famous for his large-scale mosaics, which are displayed at over 200 Catholic centres worldwide, including the Vatican’s Redemptoris Mater Chapel.

In December 2022, Rome’s Jesuit headquarters disclosed it had suspended the Rome-based priest after abuse claims, including rape, but officials said the claims had been dismissed by the Vatican’s doctrinal dicastery because of the Church’s 20-year statute of limitations.

Then in June 2023, the order said it had expelled Rupnik for disobedience after it compiled a 150-page dossier of credible accusations against him, involving between 20 and 40 women.

However, last year the Vicariate of Rome said a canonical visitation,



St. Edith Stein is depicted in a detail from a mosaic by artist Fr Marko Rupnik (inset) in the Redemptoris Mater Chapel at the Vatican

ordered by Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, had praised the “healthy community life” followed at the priest’s Centro Aletti for spiritual arts, where some abuses were reported, and concluded Father Rupnik was a victim of “grossly irregular procedures.”

In October Slovenia’s Koper Diocese confirmed it had readmitted Fr Rupnik for pastoral ministry, and said he would enjoy “all the rights and duties of a diocesan priest” unless “proved guilty according to law.”

However, at the end of that month the pope waived the statute of limitations and instructed the

“Lourdes is a place of consolation, a place where people come to lay down their burdens... how can we remain insensitive to the testimony of people who don’t understand how we can maintain works that evoke the presence of a predator?”

doctrinal dicastery to initiate new investigations, after a Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors had highlighted “serious problems” in handling his case.

Calls for the removal of the priest’s artworks have since come from advocacy groups, including the British-based LOUDFence, which organised an exhibition on behalf of victims from 3rd-6th March.

“People are insisting they haven’t enough funds to replace Rupnik’s mosaics, while efforts are still being made to minimise and trivialise what he did so Church bodies won’t have to pay out,” LOUDFence’s lay Catholic director, Antonia Sobocki, explained. “But whereas money is replaceable, people aren’t – and it would be better to have a blank

wall than leave his rape art in place. It offends the dignity of women and deeply contravenes Catholic teaching,” Sobocki said. “If the Vatican judgment goes against him, and he’s declared guilty of these crimes, there’ll be no question of leaving the mosaics up.”

The monumental Sanctuary of Padre Pio at San Giovanni Rotondo, dedicated in July 2004 as one of Italy’s largest churches, is one of the numerous Catholic sites with Rupnik art. A press office representative said there were no plans to move the “brilliant mosaics” personally installed by Fr Rupnik in the crypt burial place of

St. Padre Pio (1887-1968).

The priest’s “human weaknesses” did not diminish his artistic achievements, the spokeswoman said, dismissing criminal claims against him as “internet rumors.”

Meanwhile, a senior lay Catholic in Portugal said complaints arose when a commemorative Mass for abuse victims was held in front of Fr Rupnik’s giant altar mosaics at Fatima’s Holy Trinity Basilica by Bishop José Ornelas, president of the Portuguese bishops’ conference.

However, he added that most pilgrims to the Marian sanctuary knew nothing about the priest or his artworks, and said shrine administrators had insisted it would be an “impossible task” to remove them.

“We all understand the value of art transcends the artist; it would be very difficult to change what’s undoubtedly the most important art in this new church,” Octávio Carmo, chief editor of the Portuguese church’s Ecclesia information agency, said.

“People are focusing on bigger issues involving the Church’s stance against abuse, with two major reports now being analysed and measures implemented to help victims. These are the questions worrying people in Portugal – not the question of Rupnik,” he said.

The Holy See said that doctrinal dicastery investigators had requested “all available information” on Fr Rupnik, to identify “which procedures can and should be implemented.”

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, which is to report soon on current safeguarding policies and procedures, also has requested testimonies from female victims from the priest’s Loyola community in Slovenia, which the Vatican ordered dissolved in October.

However, Vatican procedures were criticised by two of the commission’s former members. Slovenian-born Mirjam Kovac, a canon law professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University, where Fr Rupnik received his doctorate in missiology, said the number of Loyola women victims totaled “at least 41.”

Antonia Sobocki said pressure was growing to have Rupnik’s mosaics removed from Catholic sites “by people with power” as well as from other victims of clergy crimes and prominent former victims of Fr Rupnik such as the award-winning French mosaic artist, Sister Samuelle Cheron.

“The Vatican is beginning to investigate the effects of clerical abuse on ordinary people who’ve looked to the Church for support and safety, only to have their faith undermined and damaged by discovering it happens here as well,” Sobocki said.

“This kind of abuse affects a huge tranche of the Church – perhaps one in three women, and one in six men – and explains today’s empty pews.”

“I don’t think we can separate the art from the artist, particularly when, by Rupnik’s own admission, it expresses what he did to these people. Keeping the art in place isn’t just a failure – it’s an active glorification of abuse,” she said.

In Krakow, Fr Szopa said pastors at the St. John Paul II sanctuary placed high priority on caring for those suffering harm, but added that disciples of the Polish pope would feel let down if their past donations for the sanctuary’s artworks were disregarded.

“We are all sinners, to a greater or lesser degree, whether privately

or publicly – and we must recognize that even bad people can produce work of great artistic and spiritual value,” said the sanctuary’s custodian, who also sits on the board of Rome’s John Paul II Foundation.

Debates are also on-going in Spain and France, where Rupnik’s work sits at Madrid’s Almudena Cathedral and in Lourdes. A commission established in 2023 by Bishop Jean-Marc Micas of Tarbes and Lourdes is to decide this spring whether Fr Rupnik’s mosaics at the Rosary Chapel in Lourdes, installed in 2008, should be removed.

David Torchala, director of communications at Lourdes, admitted that as the scandal unfolded the sanctuary “has been receiving all kinds of pressure, in opposite directions.”

“We received requests telling us that we should keep these mosaics because they were created by a great contemporary sacred artist.”

Torchala said, “The mosaics, it must be said, are magnificent. They occupy a gigantic area of one of Lourdes’ three basilicas. As I speak, there are people who have not followed the whole affair, and the controversy that goes with it, and who are standing in front of the basilica, having their picture taken because the mosaics are so beautiful. The general public is not aware of everything.”

The mosaics in the Lourdes sanctuary were installed for the 150th anniversary of Lourdes apparitions in 2008.

“At the same time we have been receiving a lot of letters from people who have been victims of Rupnik, or people speaking on their behalf, asking us to destroy these mosaics,” Torchala said. “At first, we might have thought that we had to distinguish between the man and the work, but now, after digging deeper, we realise that we cannot leave it at that,” he said.

While awaiting the decision of the commission, he said he is aware “that other sanctuaries have their eyes fixed on Lourdes.”

“It is a complex decision,” emphasising that the bishop is not going to take it on alone.

“What is certain is that Lourdes is a place of consolation, a place where people come to lay down their burdens, to ask for healing. Today, how can we remain insensitive to the testimony of people who don’t understand how we can maintain works that evoke the presence of a predator?” he continued. “When we look at the Basilica of the Rosary, which has two large arms at its sides, as if to welcome those who come, how can we imagine leaving in the centre of these arms the works of someone who has done so much harm. Is it still possible to distinguish man from artist in this respect? It is a real subject.”

Hope springs eternal – and is what we need to drive us on to success

SPORT

Fr Vlad Felzmann

To negotiate our way through life – and make others feel better – we need to believe and desire positive outcomes. Thanks to the Paschal Mystery, with its Resurrection, this sustains my hope. In sport, as in life, ambitious hearts resonate with these words: “Hope springs eternal in the human breast; Man – and now also woman – never Is, but always to be blest.”

Written in 1734 by Alexander Pope, born 1688 in London; died, 1744 in Twickenham – where there is an avenue, a grotto and a hotel bearing his name.

Bear in mind that hope is a virtue; not the same as optimism, a mental attitude. Trained as a civil engineer before studying theology and being ordained, for me, Hope = faith in God + action. Given our political leaders and economic predicaments, it is not always easy to feel hope. However, as the great Brazilian footballer Pele said: “The more difficult the victory, the greater the happiness in winning.”

Does your Christian life-team include not only friends, allies-in-life but God? When lost in a desert devoid of landmarks – or confusing messages from the government – individuals tend to walk in circles.

Though global news is negative – think climate warming, Middle East, Ukraine and Sudan, as well as so many francophone African countries – what keeps my hope alive and fresh are the many wonderful families I know.

“Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships,” stated Michael Jordan, born 1963, widely considered to be the greatest basketball player in the history of the game. He was known for his all-around ability; including scoring, passing, and defence.

A handy – less mathematical – definition of hope is “faith in action”; consistent action. If you believe something is worthwhile, you will keep working on it no matter what. “Win if you can, lose if you must – but NEVER QUIT!” said Cameron Trammell, a star of American Football.

Hope changes the “If we win” to “When we win”. Hope is a motivational life-skill. As you know, in sport the mind is crucial. Have you seen how, at the weigh in, boxing opponents try to stare each other out and sow a seed of doubt?



Lebron James. ‘Don’t be afraid of failure. This is the way to succeed.’

Photo: Lucy Nicholson, Reuters

“If something stands between you and your success, move it. Never be denied,” stated Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson, an American actor, businessman, and professional wrestler.

LeBron James Sr. an American professional basketball player for the Los Angeles Lakers of the National Basketball Association – and according to Forbes worth one billion US dollars – reminded us: “Don’t be afraid of failure. This is the way to succeed.”

“You dream. You plan. You reach. There will be obstacles. There will be doubters. There will be mistakes. But with hard work, with belief, with confidence and trust in yourself and those around you, there are no limits,” spoke Michael Fred Phelps II, an American former competitive swimmer. He is the most successful and most decorated Olympian of all time with a total of 28 medals.

How about this from Michael Jordan: “I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I’ve been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

In case you wonder who Michael is, he is an American businessman and former professional basketball player. He played fifteen seasons in the National Basketball Association between 1984 and 2003, winning six NBA championships with the Chicago Bulls. Currently, according to Forbes, he is worth 3 billion US dollars.

“The only person who can stop you from reaching your goals is you,” admitted Jackie Joyner-Kersey, born 1962, now a retired American track and field athlete, ranked among the all-time greats in the heptathlon as well as long jump. She won three gold, one silver, and two bronze Olympic medals in those two events at four different Olympic Games.

Hope knows that it’s never too late to win. On 6th February, I read how three goals in extra time fired Leeds United to the fifth round of the Emirates FA Cup with a 4-1 replay win over Plymouth Argyle at Home Park.

So, dear reader, keep on keeping on hope.

If a boxer slips into the ring with just a tiny doubt in his mind, he is as good as beaten before a punch is thrown.

So, keep right on to the end of the road and keep right on to the end. Though the road be long, may your heart be strong. Keep right on round the bend. [After Sir Harry Lauder, 1924. No, Sir Harry was not a sportsperson, However, he had a great take on life: a metaphor for sport].

In the 2019 Champions League semi-finals, Liverpool was trounced 3-0 by Barcelona on the road. They headed home without two of their best players, Mohamed Salah and Roberto Firmino, for a second leg that many thought was just an afterthought. Instead, the Reds stunned Barcelona, winning 4-0 at home and winning the tie.

The Reds were facing AC Milan in the Championship League Final taking place in Istanbul, Turkey. Milan dominated the first half of this 2005 matchup, going up 3-0. Somehow Liverpool regrouped and scored three goals in the second half. Then they took home the title with a victory in the penalty

shootout.

The future will be different, but it’s not over until it’s over. “Push yourself again and again. Don’t give an inch until the final buzzer sounds,” said Larry Bird, widely regarded as one of the greatest basketball players of all time.

Though I will be 85 on my birthday in May this year, I refuse to retire – and start falling apart at speed. As Winston Churchill put it: “I keep bugging on (KBO).”

His view is backed up by Joe Namath, nicknamed ‘Broadway Joe’, an American former professional football player who was a quarterback in the American Football League and National Football League during the 1960s and 1970s: “If you aren’t going all the way, why go at all?”

“Never let your head hang down. Never give up and sit down and grieve. Find another way,” encouraged Satchel Paige, an American Major League Baseball (MLB) pitcher notable for his longevity in the game, and for attracting record crowds wherever he pitched.

Beware of possible dangers to the

health of your hope – across your PIES, of course.

On the Physical: exhaustion – perhaps a lack of sleep? – and choking (doubts numbing instincts). How well I remember Jana Novotna’s heart-rending 1993 meltdown at the Wimbledon final against Steffi Graf.

The Intellectual: taking on board too much negative news, sticking with unrealistic dreams [Like me at 5’ 7” dreaming of being an elite basketball star].

The Emotional: lack of social contact, self-pity, inadequate support.

The Spiritual: neglecting prayer, despair, presumption, sloth.

Hope – in S – improves the nervous system in your P as your breathing slows, muscles relax and your blood pressure drops; in the I, it clears the mind as the limbic, “reptilian” part of your brain, the amygdala, ceases to be in control.

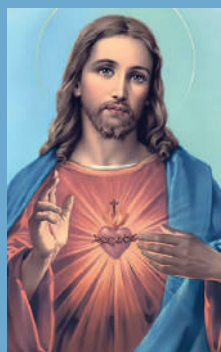
Laughter – a contagious disease – releases tensions, builds community, sustaining hope. So does gratitude. By boosting the E, it improves the I, enabling the P to perform far better.

PRAYERS /THANKSGIVING

POWERFUL NOVENA

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be praised, adored, glorified and loved, today and every day, throughout the whole world, now and forever. Amen.
Say 6 times a day for 9 days.

IMAJ



FAVOURS RECEIVED

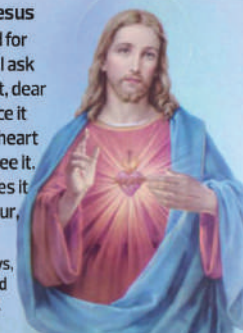


With Grateful Thanks to Our Lady, St Joseph and St Michael.

(CD)

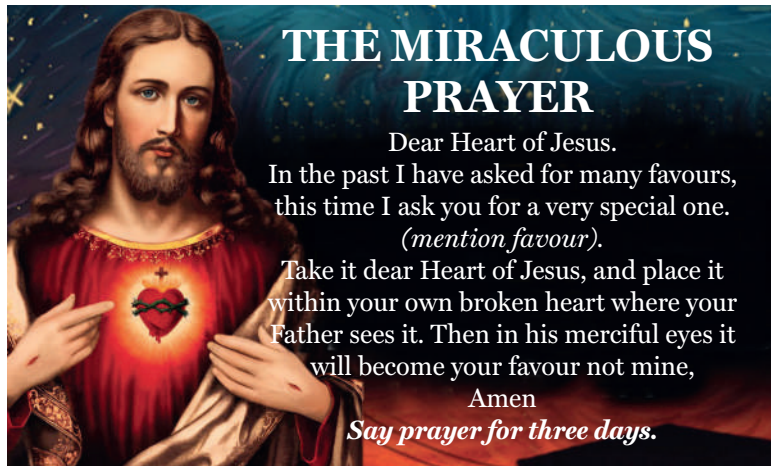
PRAYERS/THANKSGIVING

Oh, Sacred Heart of Jesus
In the past I have asked for many favours, this time I ask for this special one. Take it, dear Heart of Jesus, and place it within your own broken heart where your Father will see it. Then, in His merciful eyes it will become your favour, not mine. Amen.
Say prayer for three days, promise publication and favour will be granted. Never known to fail



THE MIRACULOUS PRAYER

Dear Heart of Jesus.
In the past I have asked for many favours, this time I ask you for a very special one. (mention favour).
Take it dear Heart of Jesus, and place it within your own broken heart where your Father sees it. Then in his merciful eyes it will become your favour not mine, Amen
Say prayer for three days.



PRAYERS /THANKSGIVING

Grateful thanks to St Jude for favours granted

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LITURGICAL CALENDARS

Ordinary Form

Sunday Year B, Weekday Cycle II
Sunday, March 24: Palm Sunday
Procession—Mk. 11:1–10; Isa. 50:4–7; Ps. 22:8–9, 17–20, 23–24 r. 2; Phil. 2:6–11; Mk. 14:1–15:47

Monday, March 25: Monday of Holy Week
Isa.42:1–7; Ps.27:1–3,13–14; Jn. 12:1–11

Tuesday, March 26: Isa.49:1–6; Ps. 71:1–6,15,17; Jn.13:21–33,36–38

Wednesday, March 27: Isa.50:4–9; Ps.69:8–10,21–22,31,33–34; Mt.26:14–25

Thursday, March 28: Maundy Thursday
Ex. 12: 1–8, 11–14; Ps. 116: 12–13, 15–18 r. cf. 1 Cor. 10: 16; 1 Cor. 11: 23–26; Jn. 13: 1–15

Friday, March 29: Good Friday
Isa. 52:13–53: 12; Ps. 31: 2, 6, 12–13, 15–17, 25, r. Lk. 23: 46; Heb. 4:14–16; 5:7–9; Jn. 18:1 – 19:42

Saturday, March 30: Holy Saturday
Reading 1 Gen. 1:1–2:2; Ps. 103: 1–2, 5–6, 10, 12–14, 24.35 r. 30; Reading 2 Gen. 22:1–18; Ps.16: 5, 8–11 r. 1; Reading 3 Ex. 14:15–15:1; Ex. 15: 1–6, 17–18 r. 1; Reading 4 Isa. 54:5–14; Ps. 30: 2, 4–6, 11–13, r.2; Reading 5 Isa.55:1–11; Isa. 12: 2–6 r. 3; Reading 6 Bar. 3:9–15. 32–4:4; Ps. 19: 8–11 r. Jn 6:69; Reading 7 Ezek. 36:16–28; Ps. 42:3, 5; 42:3, 4, r. 41:2; Rom. 6:3–11; Mk. 16: 1–7

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**Palm Sunday
procession, Mexico.**