

The Catholic universe



FREE inside - Catholic TIMES

Fr Gerard Quirke raises the chalice at Mass Rock overlooking Keem Bay on Ireland's Achill Island, after deciding to celebrate Mass there, given the current legal ban on Masses in Ireland. Photo: Seán Molloy, courtesy Irish Catholic



Asylum policy lacks a human touch, says McAleenan

Bishop warns new measures will damage migrants' welfare and deepen hostility towards them

Nick Benson

"Refugees are not a political problem to be solved, but people with dignity who deserve our respect and protection," the Bishop for Migrants and Refugees has said, as he joined others in calling for a radically new 'human-centred' approach to be taken to the issue of asylum.

Bishop Paul McAleenan insisted that "justice cannot be compromised" and "people's welfare must be prioritised" as he welcomed a report by the Jesuit Refugee Service UK warning that the UK asylum system is failing to respond to people seeking sanctuary as human persons in need.

Titled *Being Human in the Asylum System*, the report draws on principles of Catholic Social Teaching and concludes that new government proposals to reform the asylum system will 'deepen hostility to refugees' and 'threaten the fabric of society'.

The report argues that a radically new 'human-centred' approach to asylum is needed, with the purpose of protection enshrined at the heart of the asylum system and greater transparency for people who must navigate it.

"*Being Human in the Asylum System* is a timely reminder that refugees are not a political problem to be solved, but people with dignity who deserve our respect and protection," said Bishop McAleenan.

"This report is not only rooted in Catholic Social Teaching but was informed by truly listening to the voices of refugees about their unique experiences, something that we all need to do much more.

"Engaged in daily encounters with refugees, the Jesuit Refugee Service speaks from a position of knowledge and authority. Driven by the principle that 'we are not being called to share

magnanimously what is ours, but to share what belongs in justice, for our common dignity' the report is uncompromising. Justice cannot be compromised, people's welfare must be prioritised.

"Therefore, I hope that this report will be seriously considered by policy makers and will contribute towards building an asylum system that puts people at the centre."

The report comes as the government opened consultation on its 'New Plan for Immigration', which includes proposals to deny people recognised as needing protection the chance to settle in the UK unless they adhere to the proper channels.

The consultation, which closes on 6th May, includes proposals to house asylum seekers in 'reception centres' - likely to resemble the highly controversial and ghettoised accommodation at Napier and Penally barracks.

They follow widespread condemnation of the way the government created a 'hostile environment' and 'culture of disbelief' to all migrants - ideas that destroyed the lives of numerous 'Windrush' citizens.

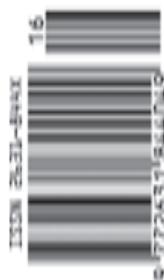
Continued on page 2

Ireland raises stakes as Mass ban continues

The Primate of All-Ireland has angrily denounced Irish government moves to criminalise attendance at Mass as part of Covid-19 regulations, saying they constitute a "potential infringement of religious freedom and of constitutional rights". He labelled the plans "draconian" and demanded their suspension pending legal challenges. The news of the law change comes as Ireland's bishops continue to fight to reopen their churches, which have remained closed since 26th December. Full story: See page 3

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Petition asks for guarantees to end campus censorship

Thousands of people have urged the government to ensure that free speech is protected on university campuses after a petition was handed in to No. 10 Downing Street amid growing evidence of censorship at educational institutions across the country.

Polling has revealed that more than a third of UK students feel their careers would be adversely affected if they express views on some issues important to them, while a quarter hide their opinions for fear that they clash with those promoted by universities.

Catholic students and pro-life groups have been among those denied platforms on which to air their views in recent years.

Significant steps have been taken to give more robust protection for students with minority views, and the government is considering withholding taxpayer funding to universities which fail to protect free speech.

The Department for Education's recent report into the issue has also suggested the Office for Students will monitor freedom of speech on university campuses, provide direct support to students who have had their right to freedom of speech denied, and produce an annual report regarding such activity.

"These announcements are timely and come as positive developments – but more must be done, particularly to ensure that university staff receive the training that they need to recognise and uphold the free speech of students and foster an inclusive and diverse learning environment," Elizabeth Francis, legal officer for ADF UK, said in response to the proposals.

"While we welcome the proposals, we will continue to advocate for these better protections to be put into practice."

Those backing the campaign hope to see more progress on key outstanding issues, including the need for clear guidance on freedom of speech on campus, and that university staff and student representatives receive comprehensive training on their responsibilities to uphold and protect freedom of speech on campuses as part of their basic induction.

Johnson attacked for failing to back Israel war crime inquiry

Nick Benson

Leading UK aid agencies have condemned Prime Minister Boris Johnson's opposition to an International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation into alleged war crimes in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt).

In a letter to the Conservative Friends of Israel lobby group in the UK, Mr Johnson described the UK as a 'strong supporter of the ICC' but strongly opposed the inquiry.

'We oppose the ICC's investigation into war crimes in Palestine,' he wrote, adding: 'we do not accept that the ICC has jurisdiction in this instance, given that Israel is not a party to the Statute of Rome and Palestine is not a sovereign state'.

'This investigation gives the impression of being a partial and prejudicial attack on a friend and ally of the UK's,' he added.

However, a coalition of leading UK aid agencies, including CAFOD, Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights and Medical Aid for Palestinians, condemned his statement, saying the investigation is 'bringing victims, survivors and their families one step closer to justice – but political interference by states, such as the UK, risks pushing



Israeli soldiers detain a Palestinian during clashes near a new Jewish settlement in the West Bank
Photo: Mohamad Torokman, Reuters

that out of reach'.

'The investigation is the first genuine hope that alleged perpetrators of the most serious crimes will be held to account for their actions,' the agencies say. 'The ICC is committed to undertaking an investigation that is "conducted independently, impartially and

objectively, without fear or favour".'

'Providing impartial justice and ending decades of impunity would bring the prospect of lasting peace closer and would signal an end to the suffering endured by generations across the region.'

The agencies said that while the

UK Government could be a 'bastion of international law and human rights', it is instead 'undermining international criminal proceedings and standing in the way of justice'.

'No longer can the UK Government genuinely assert that "Promoting international criminal justice and the rule of law are fundamental elements of its foreign policy".'

'Rather, the Prime Minister's statement sets a dangerous precedent, that may impact victims of grave crimes and threatens the viability, objectives, and the future of the court itself.'

The agencies urge the international community to 'be consistent in its support for accountability and the rule of law, regardless of the context'.

'The UK Government should respect the impartiality and independence of the court, and should support – rather than substantially undermine – international legal frameworks and judicial mechanisms,' they add.

Signatories also include Council for Arab-British Understanding (CAABU); Action around Bethlehem Children with Disability (ABCD Bethlehem); Friends of Birzeit University; Embrace the Middle East; War on Want; Amos Trust; and Christian Aid.

Asylum policy lacks a human touch, says Bishop McAleenan

Continued from page 2

Being Human in the Asylum System instead calls for a system that protects human life and dignity and welcomes refugees and asylum seekers.

It makes recommendations aimed at enshrining dignity and protection within the asylum system, including calls for the government to abandon the current 'hostile environment' policy, ensure that asylum claimants have safe and dignified accommodation in the community, and ensure that people recognised as refugees can settle in the UK.

Sarah Teather, director of JRS UK said: "It is possible to make the asylum

system work. But we have to be prepared to really listen to people who are asking for sanctuary. That begins with dropping our sense of suspicion and letting go of the false assumption that everyone in need is trying to steal something that is 'ours'.

"An asylum system that enshrines protection and transparency at its heart and enables those seeking asylum to flourish would foster such values for everyone.

"We need to stop treating this as a zero-sum game and recognise that everyone benefits from a culture that values human dignity and promotes welcome with genuine openness."

Bishop Paul McAleenan pictured at a plaque commemorating refugees who lost their lives trying to reach the UK
Photo: Mazur/cbcew.org.uk.





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Archbishop slams 'breach of trust' over church closure

Michael Kelly

The Primate of All-Ireland has attacked Irish government moves to criminalise attendance at Mass as part of Covid-19 regulations, calling it a "potential infringement of religious freedom and of constitutional rights".

"The precise provisions are unclear and at first reading appear to be draconian, going further than the restrictions we have been co-operating with throughout the pandemic to date," said the Archbishop of Armagh, Eamon Martin. "We shall be seeking legal counsel concerning the extent of the statutory instrument."

He also said the bishops were seeking "an immediate meeting" with the government "and we request the suspension of this harsh and unclear statutory instrument".

Churches in the Irish Republic have been closed for public worship since 26th December, but the government

has claimed that this was just a matter of regulation rather than law.

Taoiseach Micheál Martin met with Christian Church Leaders on the island on 15th April and recognised the importance of faith to the spiritual and mental well-being of many people and communities. He also said he looked forward to the time when church services and other in-person activities can resume.

However, on 16th April, Health Minister Stephen Donnelly signed a new law – known as a statutory instrument – making doing so a criminal offence.

"We consider the publication of this statutory instrument, together with associated penal provisions, to be provocative and formally enacting a potential infringement of religious freedom and of constitutional rights," Archbishop Martin said.

"Together with other churches and faith communities, we have been co-



Catholics stand outside Ss Anne and Mary Cathedral in Cork, Ireland, praying that it would be open. Photo: Cillian Kelly

operating fully with public health messages for more than a year now. At the same time, we have consistently impressed on (the) government that people of faith value highly their spiritual well-being and consider the public practice of their faith as essential – something which has not been sufficiently recognised in statute.

"It is highly disappointing then that, despite the reassurances of the Taoiseach to Church leaders only two

days ago that he understood the importance of faith and worship to the people of Ireland, this statutory in-

Archbishop Martin accused the Irish government of a breach of trust



strument was introduced in a clandestine manner and without notice or consultation.

"We consider this to be a breach of trust," Archbishop Martin said.

His Archdiocese of Armagh straddles the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic; churches in north reopened last month.

Meanwhile, a case before the High Court challenging the ban on public worship is due to be heard on 27th April. Similar bans in nearby jurisdictions, including Scotland, have been found to be unlawful.

Sisters call on UK to reverse 'illegal' nuclear weapons plan

An international congregation of Catholic Sisters and Associates in the UK and the US have urged the UK to reverse its 'immoral' nuclear expansion plan.

The Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph of Peace told Prime Minister Boris Johnson that the decision to increase the UK's number of nuclear warheads by 40 per cent is 'illegal, a waste of funds and a threat to what nuclear stability exists'.

The Sisters pointed out that the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force on 22nd January, 'making it illegal under international law to develop, test, produce, acquire, possess, stockpile, use or threaten to use nuclear weapons'.

'Rather than increase the threat of conflict, the funding to pay for the increased number of warheads could better be used to support efforts more



likely to lead to a healthier and more peaceful world order: by funding the NHS or restoring the foreign aid that is being cut from the budget,' they said.

The Sisters also warned that the decision to increase the number of warheads violates the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), to which the UK is a signatory. "This will further destabilise the global nuclear situation making it more difficult for negotiators to renew the NPT during talks at the UN later this year.

'Furthermore, the increase in the number of warheads by the UK undermines the NPT as a rationale for denying nuclear capability to Iran.'

The Sisters also recalled how in November 2017, Pope Francis declared that possession of nuclear weapons, even for the purpose of deterrence, is no longer moral, calling them "incompatible with peace and international stability."

'Our already fragile planet and its environment is threatened by any use of nuclear weapons, intentional or accidental,' they said. 'We dare not ever use them, or the "security" they provide could create an environmental, and humanitarian disaster of untold proportions.'

The sisters added: 'We urge all people of good will to contact their MPs in the hope of reversing this misguided policy.'

Barracks criticised as unsafe for migrants

Refugee groups have renewed calls for an end to the use of army barracks as asylum accommodation.

The calls come as asylum seekers are continuing to be moved into Napier barracks in Folkestone despite Public Health England warning that the accommodation is unsuitable. There was a major outbreak of Covid-19 at Napier in January, after which people

accommodated there were gradually moved out. However, others are now being moved in.

Social distancing in the barracks is said to be impossible, and access to washing facilities is inadequate.

"It is vitally important that people seeking asylum should be able to live in safe and dignified accommodation within British communities," said

Naomi Blackwell, JRS UK's detention outreach manager.

Care4Calais branded the government's refusal to stop using Napier to house asylum seekers as "both frustrating and disappointing".

"Our volunteers will remain on the ground and provide direct support to the residents. We will continue to #StandWithNapier."

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Alton demands dressing down for law-breaking Chinese

Lord David Alton of Liverpool has asked the Minister of State for the Commonwealth, the UN and South Asia to call out the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over its "lawbreaking and treaty-breaking" at the next UN Human Rights Council.

The Catholic peer, who was among a number of UK individuals to recently

have sanctions imposed on them by the CCP, said Hong Kong pro-democracy campaigners, such as barrister Martin Lee, lawyer Margaret Ng and Catholic media tycoon Jimmy Lai, "deserve better than a medieval star chamber and a Stalinist show trial".

Mr Lai was sentenced to 12 months in jail after being found guilty of unau-

thorised assembly. Ms Ng and Mr Lee received suspended sentences.

"Is the debasement of law by puppets and quislings not best met by calling out the Chinese Communist Party at the next meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council, focusing on the CCP's lawbreaking and treaty-breaking, and its sentencing,

imprisonment and detention in psychiatric institutions of women and men whose values we share?" Lord Alton added.

Responding, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon agreed and pledged to continue campaigning on the issue.

Pictured right, Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai Chee-ying



MSPs warned over assisted suicide plans

Campaigners have released a video warning Scotland's MSPs of the dangers of changing the law to permit assisted suicide.

Care Not Killing Scotland is also urging Scots to sign a petition calling for proper funding of palliative care for at the end of their lives.

"If the Covid pandemic has shown us one thing, it is that every human being is of equal value and should receive the best possible care when facing illness, old age or disability," the group says. However, it warns that campaigners for assisted suicide are using the pandemic to call for a change in the law to allow assisted suicide in Scotland, citing examples of other countries where it has been legalised.

In the video, Care Not Killing Scotland expresses concern that "fear of being a burden is involved in 59 per cent of assisted suicides".

It also warns that state-assisted suicide is a slippery slope that could lead to safeguards being removed; health-care workers seeing their conscientious objection rights erode; a rise in elder abuse; and the right to life being undermined by a 'right to die'.

To sign the petition, see: <https://carenokilling.scot>

Lords hammer Westminster for power grab over abortion

The House of Lords Secondary Legislation Committee has blasted the Government over a move to directly commission abortion services in Northern Ireland, calling it action 'poor practice' and inappropriate.

The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) described the decision as an "illegitimate power grab" and is asking its supporters to urge MPs to vote against the measure.

The influential Lords Committee, which considers the policy effects of

statutory instruments and other types of secondary legislation, was highly critical of the Government's use of statutory instruments in Northern Ireland, which gave the Secretary of State powers to commission abortion services in the province.

The committee said: "We regard it as poor practice to bring new policy into effect when the House is not sitting, and using a procedure which prevents discussion before the legislation takes effect.

"It is particularly inappropriate

when that policy is likely to be controversial, and the House may wish to ask the Minister to explain it."

The highly controversial move by Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis came into force on 31st March, while the House of Commons was in Easter recess. It has not yet been debated in Parliament.

Michael Robinson, director of Campaigns for Northern Ireland for the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, said: "We certainly hope that MPs will ask Mr Lewis to explain

what he is doing. Interfering in a devolved matter, especially one as highly sensitive as abortion, is bad enough, but to sneak it through with no scrutiny is outrageous.

"This was an illegitimate power grab, which undermines the democratic viability of the NI Executive.

"The people and politicians of Northern Ireland have demonstrated again and again that they do not support the extreme abortion regime mandated by the Westminster Government. But not content at trying to railroad it through while the Assembly was not sitting, Mr Lewis is now claiming dictatorial powers to force the democratically elected representatives of the Province to speed up the killing of unborn children."

The Lords Committee was also critical that the Government halved the time for the instrument to come into effect. 'Contrary to the convention of allowing at least 21 days between laying an instrument and bringing it into effect, the 2021 Regulations came into effect eight days after laying,' which further reduced the time for scrutiny.

The report also raised the question of whether compelling Northern Ireland ministers to commission abortion services would impinge on the conscientious objection protection in last year's regulations.

Mr Robinson concluded: "We are calling on MPs to vote down these regulations when they are finally brought before the House."



Catholic shift from Labour – but stayed loyal to EU

Labour's Catholic vote has collapsed and the Conservatives are increasingly the party of choice for Christians, according to a new study by two leading politics lecturers.

Academics at Brunel and Exeter universities found that in the past few decades Catholic support for the Conservative Party grew from a position that was 17 points lower than that of the wider electorate in 1979 to two points higher than it in 2019.

Meanwhile, Catholic support for the Labour Party was around 13 points higher than in the wider electorate in the 1980s.

However, by the time of the General Election in 2019, Catholics were no

more likely to vote Labour than non-Catholics, the academics found.

The findings come as part of a new book, *Religion and Euroscepticism in Brexit Britain*, by lecturers in British Politics, Stuart Fox, of Brunel University London and Ekaterina Kolpinskaya, of the University of Exeter.

The study also found that Anglicans played a key role in delivering Brexit, with 55 per cent of Church of England followers voting Leave in the 2016 referendum, while 61 per cent of Catholics backed Remain.

The huge disparity is explained by Anglicans having 'an attachment to the English heritage and national identity', the academics said.

Media told to do better at understanding faith

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Religion in the Media has called for a more religiously literate media environment.

In *Learning to Listen*, the Group says this is needed in order to counter the misrepresentation of religious people and beliefs that has become widespread across the British media.

The Group say journalists must be able to question freely and criticise religious beliefs but stress that everyone deserves a media which recognises the importance of religious belief and has the confidence to report on, interrogate, question and discuss it.

Co-chairs Yasmin Qureshi MP and Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss called

for a media that is "diverse, curious and sensitive to the enormous variety of beliefs in the UK today can play a key role in fostering that society."

They also called for journalists to be trained to understand faith issues, and stronger rights of reply for members of the public when their faith is criticised.



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Make that hard call – it makes such a difference to victims

Nick Benson

Prominent Catholic peace campaigner Barry Mizen has spoken of the “great responsibility” witnesses to crimes have in making a “difference”.

Mr Mizen’s comments came as the Met Police and Crimestoppers launched the Hard Calls Save Lives campaign, which encourages people to provide information about crimes.

Mr Mizen, of The Mizen Foundation, recalled the major impact witness statements had in the murder case of his son, Jimmy.

“From my own experience following the Jimmy’s death, many people came forward as witnesses. Some 140 people provided a statement and at the trial of my son’s killer 14 gave evidence,”

HARD CALLS SAVE LIVES

he told *The Catholic Universe*.

“In our case the jury returned a unanimous verdict of murder, and after the trial the senior investigating officer said it was the witnesses that made the difference.”

However, Mr Mizen acknowledged that not all people are prepared to be witnesses or offer information for a number of reasons, including fear of reprisals or a false sense of how they should act with such knowledge.

“There is this thought process that we ‘don’t grass, we don’t tell’. It is hard

to argue against that in many situations, however when it comes to a loss, or potential loss, of life, a different response is possible,” he said.

He pointed out that many victims and their families do not get an outcome that helps them to manage a new reality in their lives, and witness information could be the difference in how they cope.

“The outcome of someone facing consequences of their actions will not undo what has happened but it does enable people to cope and recover in more incidences,” he said.

His comments came as Hard Calls Save Lives campaign told the stories of five mothers, all of whom have lost sons to knife crime. In an emotive

video each mother recalled the phonecalls they made to relatives to inform them of their son’s death.

The campaign acknowledges how people find it hard to call and report information on crime but noted that these mothers had to make much harder calls. It also reveals the complete anonymity Crimestoppers callers receive.

Mr Mizen said the campaign could be successful if the message gets to those who can make a difference.

“There is also, of course, the responsibility on ourselves, to be people that will make a difference. Not with a mind that people will be prosecuted, but that sufferers of crime have some respite,” he said.



Prominent Catholic peace campaigners, Barry and Margaret Mizen, of The Mizen Foundation.

Fans make their views clear outside Elland Road ahead of Liverpool’s game with Leeds United.



Catholic chaplain gives failed ‘Super League’ plan the red card

Nick Benson

A European Super League would have been a “disaster” for football, the Westminster Chaplain for Sport has said, after controversial plans fell through this week.

Premier League clubs Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur – dubbed the ‘Big Six’ or the ‘self-proclaimed Super Six’ – had been among 12 clubs who agreed to join the proposed European Super League (ESL), alongside European giants AC Milan, Atletico Madrid, Barcelona, Inter Milan, Juventus and Real Madrid.

The ESL said the founders had agreed to establish a ‘new midweek competition’ with teams continuing to ‘compete in their respective national leagues’. The founding clubs would also receive €3.5 billion to ‘support their infrastructure investment plans and to offset the impact of the Covid pandemic’.

However, the plans were met with unified condemnation, with many accusing the clubs of greed and a lack of integrity and the backlash led to all six English clubs backing out just days after the initial announcement.

Chaplain for Sport Mgr Vladimir Felzmann joined in with the criticism, accusing clubs of putting money on a pedestal, prioritising it over football itself.

“Crises and crossroads reveal priorities,” he told *The Catholic Universe*. “Alas, as happens so often, money trumps other considerations.”

“A Super League might be great for generating wealth but it would be a disaster for the whole organic financial structure of the beautiful game.

“Were the FA to organise a national referendum, the ‘Super Six’ might see they do not have a democratic mandate for independence.”

Football authorities, fans, players and even Prince William and politicians, including Prime Minister Boris Johnson, hit out at the proposed ESL, saying it was driven purely by greed, would destroy domestic leagues and was against the integrity of the sport.

Unlike the Champions League, which requires all teams to qualify, the ESL would have been made up of 20 teams, including the same 15 teams each year, with the remaining five qualifying annually.

The announcement led to dedicated fans and players – both former and current – criticising their clubs for their role in the ESL.

Uefa, Fifa, the FA and the Premier League had warned that clubs joining the ESL ‘will be banned from playing in any other competition at domestic, European or world level, and their players could be denied the opportunity to represent their national teams’.

SAGE to consider vaccine rules for care home staff

Staff in care homes with older adult residents in England may be required to have a Covid-19 vaccine to protect residents from the virus.

A five-week consultation has been launched looking at requiring care home providers, caring for older adults, to deploy only those workers who have received their Covid-19 vaccination to further

protect residents and staff.

Experts advise that 80 per cent of staff and 90 per cent of residents need to be vaccinated to provide a minimum level of protection against outbreaks of Covid-19.

Only 53 per cent of older adult homes in England are currently meeting this threshold.

Health and Social Care Secretary

Matt Hancock said: “Older people living in care homes are most at risk of suffering serious consequences of Covid-19 and we have seen the grave effects the virus has had on this group.

“We have a duty of care to those most vulnerable to Covid-19, so it is right we consider all options to keep people safe.”

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With a sense of *déjà vu*, a word not heard for some time in the House of Commons has reared its head once more in recent days: sleaze.

It's a good word for the opposition to have in their armoury, and it has quite naturally been deployed by Sir Keir Starmer, the Labour leader, in connection with allegations surrounding the lobbying activities of David Cameron.

The former prime minister's association with the financier Lex Greensill is to be the subject of an independent inquiry. But already the affair is widening into areas of governance that are unlikely to be addressed. One disclosure is that a senior civil servant was seconded to advise Greensill while still working as the government's chief commercial officer.

Boris Johnson is right to say that it is useful in principle for officials to have good contacts with private companies. Indeed, it would be absurd if they didn't. But equally, the rules for doing so must be crystal clear. As the Prime Minister observed, it is not apparent that in this instance, "those boundaries have been properly understood".

Labour claims the Boardman investigation has been set up to deflect questions until the current froth has died down and is too constrained in what it can look at. The terms of reference focus on "decisions taken around the development and use of supply chain finance in government, especially the role of Lex Greensill and Greensill Capital". But Boardman has not been asked to look at lobbying itself, although in examining Greensill the inquiry will consider Mr Cameron's role in allowing the finance company access to No. 10.

Tough laws on lobbying were introduced by the Cameron government but when allegations of sleaze abound, Mr Johnson must ensure that nothing whatsoever is either hidden or perceived to be hidden from view.

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Modi risks losing support as India sees Covid cases soar

Sujeet Kumar

India is witnessing a sharp spike in Covid-19 cases after months of declining numbers had given the country hope it had made it through the worst of the pandemic relatively unscathed.

On 1st March, India recorded just 12,286 new cases, but since early April this figure has skyrocketed to over 100,000 every day. Earlier this week, it hit a record of 168,912 cases in a day – the highest in the world.

As the health crisis escalates, the poor are once again fearing a return to lockdown and economic hardship. Migrants have started fleeing from cities to their home villages in order to avoid the pain and trauma they went through a year ago when Prime Minister Narendra Modi enacted a nationwide lockdown. Many cities, including Mumbai and Delhi, have announced nightly curfews.

For now, the Indian government has just asked the states to focus on "stringent containment and public health measures", including testing, tracing and inoculations. Modi has also appealed to people to get vaccinated during a four-day 'Tika Utsav' (special vaccination drive) which ran this week.

However, the situation remains grim. Even though India is one of the world's biggest coronavirus vaccine manufacturers, some states are experiencing vaccine shortages. At the same time, experts fear a lack of social distancing and new variants of the virus are causing infections to potentially spiral out of control.

When Covid-19 first appeared in India, the Modi government was quick to bring the country together.

In a speech to the nation last March he announced a 21-day nationwide lockdown of 1.3 billion people with only four hours' notice. All means of transportation were suspended. The rich and affluent started hoarding food and medicines, while the poor worried about their livelihoods.

A mass migration ensued as hundreds of millions of migrant workers headed from the major cities back to their home villages on foot. This was the most visible face of the humanitarian crisis. Others, however, suffered out of the public eye, such as the street vendors, domestic maids and shopkeepers in slums, who were all forced to stop working.

As part of a study last year, I helped conduct a series of telephone surveys in 20 slums in the city of Patna, the capital of the north eastern Bihar state.

Nearly all slum residents we spoke



Devotees take holy dips in the Ganges during the Hindu festival of Kumbh Mela. Few used masks or followed social distancing, raising fears that the occasion would fuel a new spurt of Covid cases

with – except the rare few with protected formal sector jobs – were cut off suddenly from their sources of income after the lockdown was announced. And more than 80 per cent of slum households in Patna lost their entire primary source of income.

Economic recovery since the lockdown has also been slow. By mid-November, one-third of respondents had still not fully recovered their pre-pandemic incomes. Many had been hired back at their old jobs on a part-time basis or at a fraction of their former pay. Many jobs simply disappeared.

The poor survived by cutting back on their food, borrowing money and helping each other.

Given these struggles, there is now a sense of anxiety in these slum communities and a mistrust of the government, especially Modi. Says Ajay, 35, a street vendor who lives in the Kankarbagh slum, "The government finds it is easy to lock us down but not to provide financial and livelihood support. PM is busy campaigning for an election where thousands of people come without masks and are violating social distancing norms."

Undoubtedly, Modi still remains popular among most ordinary people. When he says something, India listens carefully. It worked well last year, and his appeal compelled people to wear masks and maintain social distancing, helping to flatten the curve and limit the loss of lives.

However, making public speeches will not be enough during this second wave. The prime minister needs to be seen adhering to these prac-

tices in his own daily life, but this is not happening on the ground.

In the ongoing elections in West Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, as well as the election in Bihar last year, Modi and other party leaders have addressed several rallies without paying much attention to Covid restrictions. Modi himself has addressed rallies attended by thousands of unmasked people.

When leaders are seen addressing mass gathering without masks and social distancing, the public will not only assume everything is normal, they will lose their fear of Covid.

Modi has also insisted he would not politicise the pandemic, but he has done exactly that. In states like Maharashtra, Punjab and Chhattisgarh, which are facing a spike in cases, Modi's party is pointing the finger at the state leaders, who come from opposing parties. The states, meanwhile, are blaming Modi's government for failed leadership.

Another concern is the Modi government's decision to allow a major festival, Kumbh Mela, to take place in Uttarakhand state, which is ruled by his party, the BJP. Several million people gathered at the Ganges River for an auspicious bathing day this week, flouting social distancing practices.

Uttarakhand's chief minister said the "faith of devotees will overcome the fear of Covid-19", at a time when infections are skyrocketing.

As the numbers of cases are rising every day, the fear of a return to lockdown is ever-present, haunting the poor. Many have yet to recover from their previous debts, and

Covid-19 is now threatening their livelihoods again.

Last year, several not-for-profit, grassroots organisations came forward to help the migrants and urban poor dwellers, but this is going to be more challenging this year.

Not only have their funds been depleted, but recent changes brought by the government have stopped the flow of foreign aid money to many organisations. Amnesty International announced in September it would halt its operations in India after its bank accounts had been frozen.

One NGO volunteer, Prabhakar, who works with slum dwellers in Patna, told us "if the government is going to announce the complete lockdown like last year, many people will run out of food, as parent NGOs have stopped sponsoring the small organisations which work with the slum dwellers."

This is the time for Modi to show decisive leadership in not only controlling the surge of the virus, but also providing financial assistance to millions of urban poor and helping them reach their home villages with their dignity intact. This is what is needed to instill trust in the prime minister again.

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Binod Kumar, a senior project officer in the Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India, contributed to this article.

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The Church leaders pictured at their recent meeting in Saint Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral, Armagh. From left: Archbishop John McDowell; the Revd Tom McKnight; the Revd Dr David Bruce; the Very Revd Dr Ivan Patterson; and Archbishop Eamon Martin.

Church leaders in Northern Ireland have called for a unified political response to address violence and community tensions in the country.

The call comes following recent disturbances and outbreaks of violence in Northern Ireland, including some of the worst rioting seen in recent years and the use of petrol bombs, fireworks and stones in attacks on police officers.

Those arrested for disorder have included people as young as 13.

The Church Leaders Group (Ireland) has written an open letter to political leaders in Northern Ireland, the Governments of the United Kingdom and Ireland and the European Union.

In the letter, the Church leaders echo the appeal from local faith and community leaders for political leaders to treat Northern Ireland's fragile peace with care.

They also emphasise the importance of the three strands of the Good Friday Agreement and the consequent

Have faith in peace, say Church leaders

responsibility to respect all identities and foster good relations within Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland and between the UK and Ireland.

They also call on the Northern Ireland Executive to make a joint approach to the UK Government and the European Union in relation to the challenges posed by the Northern Ireland/Ireland Protocol; and express their support for the PSNI and underline the importance of ensuring that any concerns about policing are addressed in a way that supports and strengthens democratic institutions

and processes.

'Leaders, organisations and communities make mistakes,' the leaders say in the letter.

'As Christian leaders we are conscious of the need to acknowledge the failings of leadership from the churches in our ministry to divided communities. In such circumstances there is nothing ignoble in showing genuine sorrow.

'It is hardly surprising, given the complexities of our relationships at home and abroad, that politicians, political parties and others in leader-

ship make miscalculations. Learning from the consequences of miscalculations is much better than an endless scramble to paper over the cracks.

'Churches, together with other civic leaders, are keen to play our part in addressing the root causes of violence and working to ensure all communities here can enjoy the benefits of peace into the future,' they add.

The letter is signed by, among others, the Catholic Primate of All-Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh, Eamon Martin, and the Church of Ireland's Archbishop John McDowell.

Actor relieved as Troubles victims finally set to receive compensation

Actor James Nesbitt and former Northern Ireland Secretary Lord Hain have welcomed the Northern Ireland Executive's commitment to fund the payment scheme for those severely injured through no fault of their own during the Troubles.

Confirmation that the scheme will be funded and those qualifying will be paid came in the form of a letter to the High Court last week.

It gave a clear commitment from the Department of Finance that the necessary funds will be made available when required.

"This is wonderful news even if it is long overdue," said Nesbitt, a long time patron of the WAVE Trauma Centre. "I've known the members of the WAVE Injured Group whose tenacious campaigning made this possible; you could not meet a more courageous and indomitable group of men and women."

He said despite their "horrendous life changing injuries" they "don't look for sympathy, let alone pity".

"They fought for recognition for those like themselves whose lives were catastrophically changed in an instant.

"They were never in the wrong place at the wrong time. They were at work, enjoying a coffee in the city centre, at home with their family, returning from a day out or an evening at the cinema.

"Making this payment scheme a reality is an extraordinary achievement and I salute them."

It was an amendment to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill laid by Lord Hain in July 2019 that ensured the payment scheme would pass into legislation.

Lord Hain said: "It was a privilege to argue that case in the Lords and the fact that it was supported right across the House tells its own story.

"It is deeply regrettable that it has taken action in the courts more than once to bring us to this point and my thoughts are with the family of Paddy and Patricia Cassidy both of whom died in the past year.

"I sincerely hope that the path will now be clear for those injured through no fault of their own to see that which the WAVE Injured Group have fought so bravely for become a tangible reality."



Actor James Nesbitt is supporter of the WAVE Trauma Centre

Anger as waiting lists soar while abortions soak up health cash

Pro-lifers in Northern Ireland have called on pro-abortion politicians to resign as they accused them of pushing abortions as the country's hospital patients face 10-year waiting lists.

Northern Ireland has the worst waiting times of any UK region, the BBC said, with more than 300,000 people waiting for a first consultant appointment.

Health Minister Robin Swann told Stormont that too many people are waiting "too long for treatment", while the Department of Health estimated that it could take up to 10 years to tackle current waiting lists.

But Precious Life pointed out that abortions cost approximately between £500 and £1,500 depending on the age of the baby. "Yet Sinn Fein, SDLP and Alliance have demanded that the NI Department of Health pay for even more abortions," said Precious Life.

"With our health service strapped for cash, they want vital funds to be used for killing more unborn babies.

"These pro-abortion politicians must resign immediately. They don't care about the 1,345 babies killed so why would they care about people on hospital waiting lists."

Bishop demands action as plan to rehouse refugees delayed again

A plan to rehouse in Ireland refugee children from Syria and Iraq who had been left stranded in Moria, Greece, has been delayed yet again, prompting criticism and calls for urgent action by the Bishop of Ferns.

Bishop Denis Brennan, chair of the Irish Bishops' Council for Immigrants, said he felt "deep sadness" after hearing that the rehousing plans, which were originally due to take place in September 2020 before being pushed back to April, had been delayed again.

"These children have already experienced immense hardship to reach camps like the one in Moria," he said.

"Following the devastating fire last September, which exacerbated the already cramped, unhygienic, and inhumane conditions in the camp, the commitment made by the Irish Government to relocate 28 children from the Moria camp to Ireland was, in the circumstances, good news.

"However, it represented the bare minimum support and refuge that we should be offering, particularly to unaccompanied children who have suffered so much trauma in even their earliest years," he added.

Bishop Brennan also strongly criti-



cised the fact that this had not yet happened after seven months, branding the lack of progress by the government "appalling".

"For anyone, and especially for a child on their own, another day, another month living in fear in dire conditions in a refugee camp is another day of suffering and trauma that no one should have to endure," he said.

"We know too how vulnerable unaccompanied minors are to the traps of those who deal in despicable acts like human trafficking.

"On such an issue we cannot act swiftly enough.

"I call on Government to act as quickly and decisively as possible in this case to bring these children to safety and shelter here in Ireland and to look at any way in which we can seek to accommodate more than a mere 28 unaccompanied minors.

"In our own country, where so many have emigrated seeking welcome on other shores, let us be generous in responding when we are asked to do the same for others."

Our pandemic saints

John Battle



Of the 10,000 officially nominated saints, not a few are acknowledged not for being martyred in the traditional way, murdered for their faith, but for having died as a result of their commitment to serving people in the height of pandemics or deadly infectious diseases.

An example of such saints is St Salvius of Albi in sixth century France. He started life as a lawyer from a wealthy family before taking vows as a monk, becoming the monastery abbot and later a bishop. He died while caring for the sick during an epidemic.

St Damian was a missionary priest who volunteered to serve a leper colony on the isolation island of Molokai in Hawaii, spending years of battling with the authorities over the lack of proper support because their priorities were not those of social justice. Inevitably he too contracted leprosy and became one with the lepers, dying at the age of 45 in 1889.

St Catherine of Siena (whose feast day falls on 29th April) went out as a young woman onto the streets to serve plague victims in the 14th century. St Francis himself notably publicly embraced a leper.

Perhaps what these witnesses to the Gospel are telling us is not to be negligently reckless in the face of a deadly pandemic but to be altruistically dedicated to the common good by putting others as our first priority.

The arguments over whether vaccinations should be made compulsory or not, should start out from the altruistic premise of the common good rather than the assertion of the individual's right to refuse. The challenge of a new virulent virus to medical science and practitioners as well as public authorities is inevitable provisional as they feel a way out to the best of their abilities. There are no quick and easy solutions or certainties, and mistakes will be made, some which will have been unavoidable. Nevertheless, insisting on my unique individual right to resist the best advice available can undermine the common good and in reality, condemn others to illness and possible early death.

Commitment to the common good, in other words, implies setting aside my preferences or limited understanding and submitting to an altruism that always puts others first.

That's why heroes take great personal risks to save the lives of others from dangers such as fire and drowning. We take the vaccine not to save ourselves but to protect all those around us from potential danger.

Those pandemic saints encourage us to retain our faith in the practice of the common good.

Post-Covid recovery plans must centre around care

Valerie Bryson



The pandemic has highlighted just how vital care workers are to society. But the people who work in this sector have been neglected for too long. It is time politicians realised that care and care work must be central to post-pandemic recovery plans. Not just because it is the caring thing to do – but because it makes economic sense too.

Data from the Women's Budget Group (WBG) supports a care-led recovery. The WBG is an independent, not-for-profit membership network consisting of women's voluntary organisations, academics and policy experts campaigning for a gender equal economy. Its data shows that investment in a Scandinavian-style care system (which invests far more public money in the sector) would create more than two million jobs – 2.7 times as many jobs as an equivalent investment in construction.

The understanding of the importance of care has become central to the work of many feminists and it is a key aspect of my own research. Yet it still seems alien to most mainstream, non-feminist economic and political thinking, which cannot seem to see beyond the economic boosts promised by so-called 'shovel-ready' construction projects. Indeed, the government's 'Build Back Better' plan for growth talks about infrastructure – mentioning broadband, roads, railways and cities – but does not mention care anywhere.

This is despite the fact there are around 716,000 childcare workers and 1.6m social care workers in England alone. That is compared to the 1.28m construction workers in Great Britain as a whole.

But there are signs of change. The 'American Rescue Plan' announced recently by the US president, Joe Biden, both defines care as part of the country's infrastructure and promises major investments in the sector.

The experience of lockdown in the UK has increased public awareness of the importance of care work. But this type of work is still disproportionately provided by women, either in the home without pay or as a form of precarious and badly paid employment such as social care work.

During lockdown, people saw that many employees couldn't go to work when childcare suddenly became unavailable. Many parents who had to work from home realised that looking after children involved hard



work which is both time-consuming and energy-sapping. And many who clapped for the carers risking their lives felt that this should have led to a pay rise.

But amid this new recognition, there is a crisis in care provision. This predates the pandemic and affects both unpaid and paid care work. Unpaid care is in crisis because people can't do two things at once and unpaid care is economically invisible. This means that someone who works hard to raise a family or care for vulnerable adults is often deemed 'economically inactive' and available for employment.

Conditions of employment, particularly the long-hours working culture which involves British employees working on average 10 hours more than their contracted work times, often make it difficult to combine a job with domestic responsibilities. Although there has been some limited progress towards more family-friendly conditions, such as maternity and paternity leave and the right to request flexible working, a successful career still requires long hours in the workplace and many workers are juggling several badly paid, precarious, part-time jobs.

The result, particularly for employed mothers of young children, is acute 'time poverty', stress and guilt. The time-is-money, efficiency-maximising calculations of the workplace clash with the intangible values of patience, compassion and love that good care requires.

Paid care in the UK is also in crisis

because the need for it greatly outstrips supply and because good-quality care (by people who are properly trained, treated and paid) cannot be both affordable and profitable. Without adequate public funding, many providers are going out of business, others are delivering sub-standard services and care needs are increasingly unmet.

Low pay, low status and often difficult working conditions mean that there are many unfilled job vacancies and even highly dedicated and experienced workers are finding the strain too much to bear.

These interconnected care crises are not insoluble but they require some radical rethinking, based on the experiences of those involved. Unpaid carers need practical support, such as Sure Start children's centres, which provide help and advice for parents of young children, or respite care.

Meanwhile, the benefits system should stop penalising carers for the essential, time-consuming work they do by, for example, cutting payments to lone parents who miss a job interview because they have no childcare.

Many family carers also want paid work and employment conditions to be reformed to recognise that "normal" workers have responsibilities outside the workplace and that they shouldn't have to sacrifice their career to meet these.

Reforms could include a much shorter standard working week, more flexible working hours, better

rights for part-time workers, opportunities to work from home and extensive family/parental leave provision that both men and women are encouraged to use.

Pay and conditions in the sector also need to be reformed to recognise the importance of care work, the skills required of it, the time it takes to provide it well and the need to make it an attractive career for men as well as women. For this to happen, access to good-quality care should – like healthcare – be seen as a collective responsibility and a right, not primarily as a source of profit. As such, it requires a major increase in public investment.

Care is also a very green form of employment that meets essential human needs without generating lots of pollution. Good childcare also involves caring about the future of the planet and teaching children the need to care for the environment.

Feminists today are not entirely outside the decision-making processes, and ideas that were widely opposed a generation ago – such as state support for childcare expenses – are now mainstream.

It may be that the time has finally come for a 'care-led recovery'. Building a stronger economy and solving the care crisis can – and should – go hand in hand.

Valerie Bryson
Emerita Professor of
Politics, University of Huddersfield

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IN BRIEF

Ireland plans move to Living Wage

Ireland's Low Pay Commission has begun work on examining how to move the country towards a living wage.

It comes following a request from the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Leo Varadkar.

Mr Varadkar said the Covid-19 pandemic had redefined frontline workers and their work. Frontline workers were traditionally thought of as the emergency services "in well-paid public service jobs", he said. However, the crisis has highlighted the essential work carried out by retail workers, drivers, security guards, transport workers and cleaners. "One of the legacies of the pandemic must be a more inclusive society that rewards work better," he said. "That means better terms and conditions for lower paid workers. Moving to a living wage is an important part of this."

Call to restart care services for disabled

Disabled people are more likely to say they feel like a burden on others, are lonely, and that Covid-19 has made their mental health worse, new figures suggest.

Some 65 per cent of disabled people said the pandemic was affecting their wellbeing. Of these, a quarter said they feel like a burden on others, about half were lonely, and 67 per cent said they are stressed and anxious.

This compares with 10 per cent of non-disabled respondents feeling like a burden, 37 per cent feeling lonely and 54 per cent feeling stressed and anxious.

Edel Harris, chief executive of learning disability charity Mencap, said the findings highlighted the need to restore urgently all care services that were reduced or closed during the pandemic.

DNR concerns show gaps in care services

A Tory MP has called for "a moral framework that honours the dignity of sick, disabled, elderly or dying people".

Danny Kruger, MP for Devizes, said while concerns over the use of blanket 'Do not resuscitate (DNR)' orders during the pandemic had been rejected, it was worrying that over 500 DNRs had been placed on patients without first discussing the plan with the patient, their families or carers.

Mr Kruger said: "I do not believe that providers have been applying blanket policies, but there is the potential for such a thing," he said. "Not all healthcare providers are properly applying best interest considerations in advance care planning for the very ill." Mr Kruger insisted that all patients must be treated as individuals and proper investment in staff training was needed to ensure better treatment of very sick patients.

Let's make pro-life the hot topic at the polls this May

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Caroline Farrow



On May 6th, much of the nation will go to the polls to vote for either local councillors, regional Mayors or, in the case of Scotland and Wales, for representatives in the regional parliament.

No doubt, the turnout is going to be dire, partly because of the pandemic and partly because local elections can often seem lacklustre and pointless.

The overall apathy isn't helped by a media which is predominantly focused around the politics of the Westminster bubble, but if we want democracy to thrive then it's important that we continue to engage, even if only once every few years, in politics at a local level.

There's no point complaining about the useless council who seem to be cutting every useful service down to the bone while at the same time wasting thousands of pounds plastering various symbols signalling their commitment to diversity, if we couldn't even be bothered to toddle off to the nearest voting station on polling day.

Subsidiarity – the principle that various functions of government should be performed at the lowest level possible, as long as they can be performed adequately – is a key part of Catholic Social teaching. National or even international governance should only take place when a local body is not fit for the task. This principle of subsidiarity goes hand in hand with the other right belonging to every citizen, that of participation – that every single person has the right to participate in the economic, political and cultural life of society and in the decisions that affect their community.

As local councillors or representatives do not have any kind of legislative power, it's easy to overlook them as irrelevant or unimportant, especially when a lot of the time their hands are tied by budget constraints. That said, local councils do have more power than one might imagine.

Taking just one example close to my heart, the illiberal ban forbidding anyone from even silently praying within a certain radius near abortion centres in London was not a diktat imposed by Westminster, but by the local councils involved. Another council, run by the Conservatives in Warwickshire, was responsible for the introduction of sexually graphic RSE curriculum into primary schools which taught six years how to touch themselves to achieve

Peaceful demonstrations outside abortion clinics have now been banned by some local councils



sexual pleasure. In my old stomping ground of Brighton and Hove, the council has, over the years spent money on introducing 'transgender toolkits' into schools as well as ensuring that all council policies and paperwork reflected 'gender inclusive' pronouns, while children were subjected to a lottery system for secondary school, meaning that they could end up travelling for miles, instead of being able to attend the school in their local catchment area.

Life, family and freedom issues can often seem irrelevant on a local level, but nonetheless it is very much worth canvassing the local candidates who are desperate for your vote, on where they stand on these sorts of topics. Pro-life candidates are going to be far less likely to vote in favour of banning pro-life vigils and so too are candidates who are passionate about civil liberties and personal freedoms.

A candidate who is on side over

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The illiberal ban forbidding anyone from even silently praying within a certain radius of abortion centres in London was not a diktat imposed by Westminster, but by local councils

family issues or who is concerned about the sexualisation of children, or who is sceptical about gender ideology is, again, more likely to veto moves to make the council more progressive or madneses such as making public facilities 'gender neutral'.

A local election is also not one where you should simply put a cross in the box for the candidates from the political party with which you feel most closely aligned. One example being the Labour Party who have tossed their traditional support of women and children under the bus in terms of embracing transgender ideology, or the Tory party, which is happily chipping away at freedoms under cover of the coronavirus panic. Let's not forget that same-sex marriage and the removal of the parental veto over sex education in schools both happened under a Conservative administration.

Finding out where a local candidate lies on things such as life, family and religious freedom; whether or not for example they supported bans on worship during lockdown, or prioritised the opening of churches, is a good marker as to whether or not they will be a trustworthy representative over the next few years. Someone who is sympathetic to Catholic Christian hot button issues is likely to be a far more reliable ally than, for example, a candidate who is solely focussed on green issues or local transport.

One initiative that Right to Life is running, is the Both Lives Pledge. This asks candidates for the Welsh and Scottish Assemblies to signal their support and commitment

towards legislation which increases protection for unborn babies (especially girls) in the womb, for pregnant women and to stop DIY abortion.

If you live in Scotland or Wales, it is definitely worth asking the candidates to sign this pledge, so they can understand the strength of public feeling on this issue and, if they do sign, you know that it is well worth giving them your vote.

Even though local councils and Mayoral candidates won't be able to vote on such legislation, it's still worth showing them the pledge and asking their thoughts as a way in to a conversation on a whole range of topics. Many candidates do, after all, have one eye on a future career as an MP and see local politics as a useful stepping stone.

For those thinking that this might sound rather narrow-minded, if someone can't be trusted with the life of the most vulnerable, then why on earth can they be trusted with any other issue of importance?

As the turbulence of the past year begins to subside and we attempt to get back to normal, if we want to prevent excessive state intervention it is more important than ever, that we play an active role in the shaping of our local communities, especially if we are looking to reflect and encourage the values of the Gospel.

Please do your research, ask questions and don't forget to get out there and vote.

Caroline Farrow is a Catholic journalist and UK campaign director and media commentator for Citizens Go

Jamie pays tribute to beloved sister 'who taught me how to live'

Oscar and Grammy Award-winning actor Jamie Foxx has paid tribute to his late sister, DeOndra Dixon, describing her as 'my angel'.

Dixon, 36, died on 19th October 2021. She had Down's syndrome and served as the 2011 ambassador for the Global Down Syndrome Foundation.

In a recent Instagram post featuring an image of Dixon, Foxx, a Christian, wrote: 'My heart...my breath...my soul...I hear your laughter in the house...I hear you sliding down the stairs...my heart...my breath...my soul... I love u [sic] DeOndra my angel'.

Following her death last year, which Foxx said 'left a hole in my heart', the actor asked his fans to keep his family in their prayers.

'My heart is shattered into a million pieces,' he wrote at the time in an Instagram post featuring a photo of the siblings. 'My beautiful loving sister DeOndra has transitioned...I say transitioned because she will always be alive...anyone who knew my sis...knew that she was a bright light.'

'I can't tell you how many times we have had parties at the house where she has got on the dance floor and stolen the show. I know she is in heaven now dancing with her wings on.'

'Tho [sic] my pain is unbelievable I smile when I think of all of the great memories that she left me...my family...and her friends.'

Foxx added: 'DeOndra you have left



a hole in my heart...but I will fill it with all of the memories that you gave me...I love you with every ounce of me.'

The 53-year-old actor also told fans that his family was 'shattered' following Dixon's death but would 'put the pieces back together' with her love.

Following his younger sister's death, Foxx created The DeOndra Dixon Fund, in partnership with the Global Down Syndrome Foundation's

founder, Michelle Sie Whitten.

In 2018 Foxx said Dixon had taught him to focus on what really matters in life. "I learned how to live," he said at the time.

"Sometimes we get caught up in our world on the extras of everything - 'Ah, the Mercedes is not the right colour!' And then you see this girl over here, 'I just want to live. I want to dance. I want to love.' So she brings you back down to what life is."

Mum pleads with parents not to be scared by a Down's diagnosis

Nick Benson

The mother of *Line of Duty* star Tommy Jessop said she is "thankful" that she was never offered a pre-natal test, as she voiced her fear that people with Down's syndrome, like her son, could soon be eliminated from society.

Jane Jessop admitted that she was "very worried" about Tommy's diagnosis when she was told by doctors in 1985 that her newborn son had Down's.

She said her first instinct "was to wonder why God had sent this baby to us. What was God's purpose, what did he want me to do?"

"But maybe it was more about God's plan for Tommy," she added.

Jane said her son has brought so much joy, warmth and love to her life and has "enriched us enormously".

"I'm delighted with the young man he's turned out to be," she said.

She recalled how "Tommy's prognosis was very poor" in his first year. However, she urged other parents not to "believe all those pessimistic fore-



Tommy and Jane: Mum is so thankful she was never offered a pre-natal test. Photo thanks to Jane Jessop

ferred a test, because that is a horrible decision for parents to take," Jane said. "It's ironic", she added, "that now people with Down's syndrome finally have the chance to learn and show us who they really are, society and scientists are trying to deprive them of the chance to live".

Actor Tommy, 36, portrays murder suspect Terry Boyle in the popular BBC police drama *Line of Duty*. He made his TV debut in *Holby City* and became the first actor with Down's syndrome to play a leading role in a primetime TV drama when he was cast in the BAFTA-nominated *Coming Down The Mountain* opposite Nicholas Hoult.

He has also appeared in *Casualty* and *Doctors* and is the first professional actor with Down's syndrome to play Hamlet.

casts". "When Tommy turned one, he kind of woke up," she said. "It was as though the sun came out; he became smiley and started learning. He reacted to everything, whereas he hadn't in his first year. When we came into the room, he would bounce up and down. He attracted love."

Jane expressed her fears that those with Down's syndrome might be eliminated from society due to prenatal tests for the condition. Around 90 per cent of women have an abortion when they receive a positive diagnosis, according to latest data.

"I'm really thankful I was never of-

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Your opinions: Letters to the Editor

We want to hear your views on the big Catholic issues.

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Please keep letters concise; we reserve the right to edit.

Information needed on ethical vaccines

Re.: "Catholic bishops confirm we should all get vaccinated" (*Universe 9th April*), readers may recall that the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life released a document in 2005 called 'Moral Reflections about Vaccines Prepared from Cells of Aborted Human Foetuses', and published further clarification in its note on Italian vaccines in Rome, 31 July).

At that time the issue was regarding vaccines for childhood diseases such as rubella and measles.

During the present pandemic, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales have rightly reiterated that 'clinically recommended vaccinations can be used with a clear conscience and that the use of such vaccines does not signify some sort of cooperation with voluntary abortion'.

However, what appears to be missing from their statements is the guidance that therefore (and only) in the absence of alternatives, Catholics could in good conscience receive vaccines made using historical human foetal cell lines – but should share a commitment to developing vaccines without a connection to abortion.

Therefore, would the bishops please be kind enough to share some information regarding what commitment is being shown to developing vaccines which have no connection to abortion?

Any enlightenment regarding the matter would be much appreciated.

Diolch yn fawr.
Anne C. Uruska.
Via e-mail

Parents know best for their children

In his recent Letter to the Editor, John Irwin wrote about the state assuming parents' roles. I agree with his every word, but I would change the word 'assuming' to 'demanding'.

Over 40 years ago a teacher in a state school (non-Catholic) was teaching about the feeding of infants. She was wrong, and I would have been annoyed if my children had been so misinformed. I ended up demonstrating to the young people how to feed a child as nature intended.

I taught my children about the Catholic faith, family matters, first aid, reading, all age appropriate, before they went to school, as I wanted to get 'my word in first' before the authorities messed them up in some way.

I did not send my children to nurseries; they bonded with each other and were excited over each imminent sibling. We had play

dates, of course, where they socialised with others.

Today children are parted from their mothers too early, and it is proven that some children have high stress levels in nurseries. All children are different, one size doesn't fit all and governments should take this into consideration if they are going to at least pretend they care about families!

Schools' 'wrap around care' means even less time for family life and parents and children are too exhausted to bond. Parental control is overridden by governments, I do not approve.

I am so glad I got my words into my children before they started school. I suppose it was easy for me in a way because they all liked books, particularly easy reading Bible stories and children's books.

My children 'knew it all from me'. I did not want to educate them so young in this way but I had to, to protect them from erroneous teachings from the government. I hope I did not do my children an injustice. I do not think so. I had the usual teenage rebellion, which is normal, but my children have grown and flown.

Elsewhere in *The Universe* was the story on banning prayers outside abortion clinics. I doubt it is legal. Perhaps we should try to get round 'prayers'; all hold hands to form a chain, or light candles outside. I have thrown holy water over the walls of abortion clinics, to try and help. The victims and the abortionists need our compassion, but most of all do the aborted babies; in time the error of their ways will become apparent to them, and they will suffer terribly.
Catherine Venture
Address supplied

Council accused of vandalising nature

Re: *The Catholic Universe Article (Friday 9th April)* on following the message of Pope Francis to address climate change.

I shudder and despair at the hypocrisy of human beings in relation to climate change. Climate change is real and it is local, so why do we continue to discuss it and do so little to change it?

Take my Local Authority, the London Borough of Hounslow,

which in the last few weeks cut down 180 perfectly healthy established trees in our local Boston Manor Park. In addition to this devastation they have removed hedgerows, shrubbery and are going to 'clean' the pond regardless of it being the nesting season.

This vandalism is, in my opinion, made considerably worse by the hypocrisy and justification surrounding it. The LBH claims it wants to improve the park by creating a diverse community-based hub for everyone to enjoy and a biodiverse planting programme to encourage wildlife – something which we had an abundance of until its homes were destroyed.

Boston Manor Park is situated under the M4 motorway. A few years ago it was deemed the most polluted park in London so we seriously needed all those beautiful trees.

Unfortunately, Boston Manor Park was not a showcase deserving plaudits for LBH's amazing designs, however, in the not too distant future it will be. We have been told of all the wonderful opportunities this development will bring into our lives; craft and art markets, new pathways exposing the canal, restaurant/cafés, which we already had.

I deeply mourn the loss of our rabbit colony, our great variety of magnificent trees, fascinating insects, the abundance of birds and water fowl. I presume the hedgehogs have been shredded while hibernating, and possibly the bats, too.

There is a European law against cutting down trees between March and September but I understand local authorities are exempt from this law.

I would find it difficult to explain to a child the difference between the Amazon Rainforest and Boston Manor Park, and why someone cannot stop it happening. I guess my answer would be "we prefer talking about these matters especially when they extend beyond our nations borders" and "if the local authority carry out these appalling acts nobody can do anything about it".

It appears to me that we have become a nation of plaudit and merit-seeking human beings.
Ann McGinn, by email



Boston Manor Park in Hounslow sits under the M4

Queen's Boer War treat discovered in Oxburgh Hall

Nick Benson

Chocolate commissioned by Queen Victoria in 190 and still in its original wrapper and tin, has been discovered in a Boer War helmet case in the attic of Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk.

It comes just months after a secret collection of Catholic documents were uncovered during a project to reroof the National Trust stately home.

The Bedingfield family at Oxburgh Hall were once rising stars of the Tudor Royal Court but Sir Henry Bedingfield refused to sign the Act of Uniformity in 1559 – which outlawed Catholic Mass. The devout Catholic family stayed true to their faith over centuries despite being ostracised and persecuted and even had a secret priest hole at Oxburgh to shelter Catholic clergy.

The recently discovered chocolate and helmet belonged to the 8th Baronet, Sir Henry Edward Paston-Bedingfield, who fought in the Second Boer War (1899-1902).

The discovery was made among the belongings of his daughter, Frances, which are being catalogued following her death in 2020.

Further research and recent conversations with the family have shed more light on the discovery.

The chocolate was part of a batch commissioned by Queen Victoria, which was issued to troops in South Africa in 1900 to boost morale. It was intended that every soldier and officer would receive a box with the inscription 'South Africa 1900' and 'I wish you a happy New Year' in the Queen's handwriting.



Katherine Bridges, Senior House & Collections Officer reveals what's inside the tin. Photo: Victoria McKeown, National Trust

Queen Victoria commissioned the country's three principal chocolate manufacturers, Cadbury, Fry and Rowntree, to undertake the order.

But all were owned by pacifist Quakers who opposed the war, and refused to accept payment for the order and originally donated the chocolate in unbranded tins.

However, the Queen insisted the troops knew they were getting British chocolate as gift from the state and the firms backed down, marking some bars.

The tins themselves were never branded and it's unclear which of the three manufacturers made the chocolate discovered at Oxburgh.



The Boer War helmet which contained the chocolate box. Inset, 8th Baronet, Sir Henry Edward Paston-Bedingfield

Catholic King's hiding place is ready to reveal secrets of its past again

Nick Benson

As people return to pub gardens, including those of the nearly 500 Royal Oak pubs across England, Boscobel House – the original home of ‘The Royal Oak’ – has re-opened following £950,000 worth of improvements.

A picturesque timber-framed house, Boscobel House, on the Shropshire-Staffordshire border, was a hiding place for persecuted Catholics during the English Civil War.

It is also the house where King Charles II famously spent the night in a priest hole after he took refuge from Cromwell's armies in an oak tree following defeat at the Battle of Worcester in 1651.

The moment continues to be commemorated in today's society, with the Royal Oak standing third in the list of most common pub names in Britain.

Recalling Boscobel's fascinating Catholic story, Cameron Moffett, curator at English Heritage, explained how it played a major role in this highly significant moment in English history.

“Boscobel's history is closely associated with that of nearby 12th century Augustinian monastery, White Ladies Priory,” Ms Moffett told *The Catholic Universe*. “In 1536, White Ladies fell victim to the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the estate was acquired by the Giffard family, wealthy Catholic landowners.”

However, after the failed Gunpowder Plot in 1605 led to the swift introduction of anti-Catholic legislation, Catholics like the Giffards were barred from roles in public life, suffered heavy fines and were unable to practise their religion openly.

“A priest found by the authorities would have been imprisoned, possibly executed, so many Catholic families had ‘priest holes’ in their houses in case they were searched,” Ms Moffett explained.



Boscobel House – King Charles' hiding place after the disastrous Battle of Worcester

The Midlands was a very traditional region, she said, “where recusancy [the state of those who refused to attend Anglican services] was commonplace for many years; the further north from London, the more Catholics there were”.

“For the Giffards, it provided a discrete location in which to build their ‘hunting lodge’ at Boscobel and the presence of its two priest holes gives an indication that it was built with the express intention of providing refuge to persecuted Catholics,” said Ms Moffett.

“When Charles and his party were escaping from the rout of the Battle of Worcester, they knew that Shropshire, with its many Royalist sympathisers, was a good direction in which to head,” she added.

As part of the major re-interpretation project by English Heritage, the 17th century woodland landscape has been replanted using saplings propagated from the original tree Charles II sought refuge in.

The charity has also re-introduced rare breed animals to Boscobel's farm-

yard for the first time in over 100 years.

Liz Page, territory director for the west at English Heritage, described Boscobel as a “unique site” and a “Civil War gem, vividly depicting one of the most iconic stories in English history”.

“However, it later became a working farm after Charles II's escapades and, as such, retains an extraordinary collection of Victorian farm buildings and machinery,” she explained.

“This fantastic investment has enabled us to breathe life into both of these important stages in Boscobel's history, with visitors able to explore the lodge, farmyard and gardens, as well as see a descendant of the Royal Oak in which the future king hid.

“There's lots for families too, with the introduction of farmyard animals, a fun willow tunnel and an exciting new play area before the chance to enjoy refreshments in the refurbished tea room,” she added.

To find out more, see: www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/boscobel-house-and-the-royal-oak/



A furtive-looking King Charles emerges from his hiding place in Boscobel House's priest hole

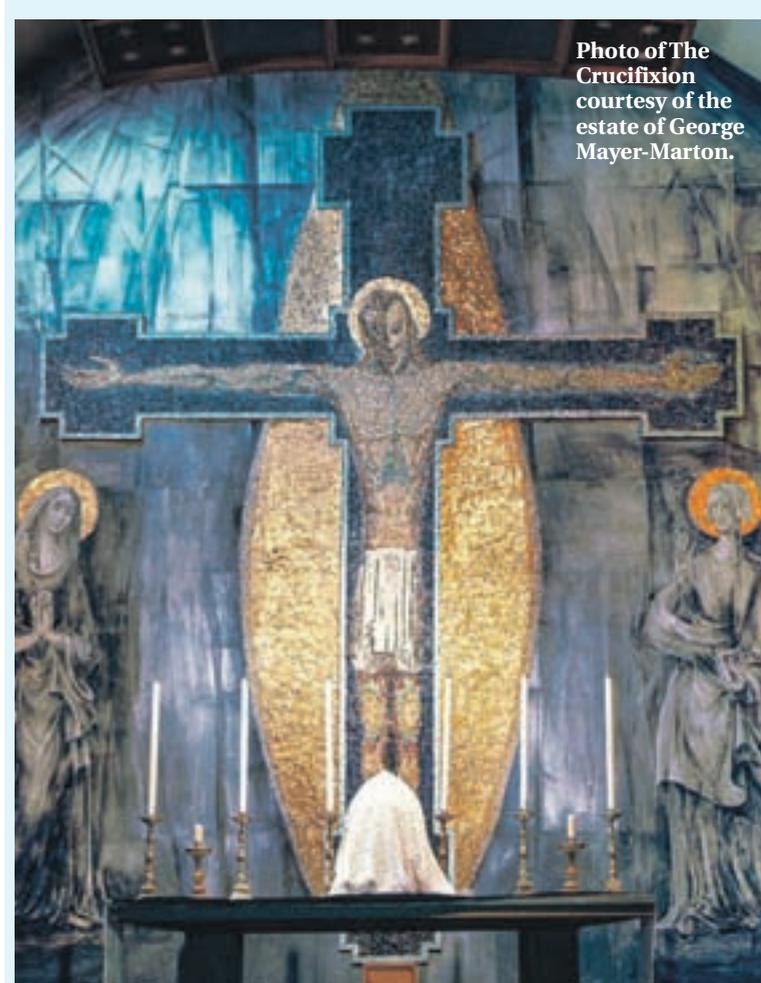


Photo of The Crucifixion courtesy of the estate of George Mayer-Marton.

Book offers new hope Oldham's masterpiece can be saved for nation

Conservationists are hopeful that an endangered masterpiece in a redundant Oldham Catholic church may yet be saved after the publication of a new book about the artist.

Entitled George Mayer-Marton's *Murals & Mosaics* and published by Baquis Press, the publication highlights the life and work of the Hungarian émigré artist Mayer-Marton, including his murals in Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, and St Clare's RC Parish Church, in Manchester.

It is hoped that the book will help spread the story of Mayer-Marton's *The Crucifixion* mural in Oldham's Holy Rosary Church, which is the focus of a current SAVE Britain's Heritage campaign.

The has been redundant for over three years and experts believe the mural is increasingly at risk; SAVE is helping to seek a solution.

Leading museums and galleries, including the renowned V&A Museum in London, have also backed the campaign to save the mural.

Henrietta Billings, director of SAVE Britain's Heritage said: “This little book is a fantastic reference for anyone interested in post war British public art – it shines a light on the important contribution émigré artists made to Britain in the post war period, and most critically it highlights the significance of the Oldham mural and our current campaign to save it.”

The Oldham mural was completed for the Holy Rosary by Mayer-Marton in 1955. The mosaic crucifixion was originally surrounded by wall paintings depicting the figures of Mary and John the Apostle against a background of various shades of blue. Historical photographs show that the wall painting extended over the entire wall, but in the 1980s the fresco element was painted over.

New evidence has concluded that the fresco remains intact under the paint and that it is possible to restore the mural to its original condition.

The significance of the mural has also been highlighted by a number of national experts including the Twentieth Century Society, the Ceramic and Architectural Tiles Association as well as several leading academics and architectural historians.

The 7.5m long mural depicts the figure of Christ in golds and tans against a dark blue cross and gold mandorla. It was commissioned following the Festival of Britain when public art came to be seen as a symbol of civic renewal and social progress.

The Diocese of Salford, which owns the church, has commissioned a conservation options appraisal to examine the best way of preserving the mural.

This study is due to be published imminently.

French court ends charges against cardinal

A French cardinal has been definitively cleared of charges of failing to report sexual abuse by clergy and has been indemnified from further lawsuits.

The Court of Cassation – one of four courts of last resort in France, with jurisdiction over all civil and criminal matters – made the ruling.

Eight victims who had suffered abuse from a former priest had appealed after Cardinal Philippe Barbarin was acquitted for failing to report the abuse.

The Court of Cassation ruled that “a person having knowledge of hardships, mistreatments or sexual assaults inflicted on a minor aged 15, or on a person unable to protect himself by reason of age, illness, infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or pregnancy, commits a crime if they do not inform the judicial or administrative authorities. However, in this case, the bishop was not bound to denounce the aggressions, because the victims, aged 34-36, were integrated into family, social and professional life, without illness or deficiency, and so were in a position to lodge their own complaint.”

It said France’s statute of limitations involved “complex rules” and did not absolve citizens of the duty to report crimes against minors, even if dating back decades, but added that the duty only applied if victims were unable to report such past offences themselves.

Cardinal Barbarin was cleared of failing to report abuse



Several hundred people came to St Peter's Square to listen to the pope's Regina Coeli; the Holy Father said how much he had missed their presence over the past four weeks



It's all smiles as Francis welcomes faithful back to St Peter's Square

Greeting visitors in St Peter's Square after nearly a month of tight restrictions due to the pandemic, Pope Francis said he was happy to see people allowed to gather and be present for Sunday noonday prayer.

“I offer a warm greeting to all of you, people of Rome and pilgrims,” he said, pointing out the many flags he could see being held high.

A few hundred people, all wearing masks and socially distanced, attended the recitation of the Regina Coeli prayer on 18th April after nearly a month of tighter controls on gatherings in an ongoing attempt to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

“Thanks be to God, we can find ourselves again in this square for the Sunday and holiday appointment,”

he said, adding how much he misses greeting people in the square when he must recite the midday prayer inside the apostolic library.

“I am happy, thanks be to God! And thank you for your presence,” he said to applause.

In his main talk, Pope Francis said Jesus is a real living person whose presence always leaves the person encountering him astonished, which “goes beyond enthusiasm, beyond joy; it is another experience” that is profoundly beautiful.

He said the day's Gospel reading of the risen Christ's appearance to the disciples in Jerusalem, “tells us that Jesus is not a ‘ghost,’ but a living person,” who fills people with joy.

“Being Christian is not first of all a

doctrine or a moral ideal; it is a living relationship with him, with the risen Lord: we look at him, we touch him, we are nourished by him and, transformed by his love, we look at, touch and nourish others as brothers and sisters,” he said.

Jesus invites his disciples to truly look at him, which involves “intention, will” and an attitude of loving care and concern, he said.

More than seeing, it is the way parents look at their child, “lovers gaze at each other, a good doctor looks at the patient carefully. ... looking is a first step against indifference, against the temptation to look the other way before the difficulties and sufferings of others,” the pope said.

By inviting the disciples to touch

him, he said, Jesus shows that a relationship with him and with one's brothers and sisters “cannot remain at a distance” but requires a love that looks and comes close, making contact, sharing and “entering into a communion of life, a communion with him.” And the verb, to eat, clearly expresses “our humanity,” he said, and “our need to nourish ourselves in order to live.”

When people come together to eat, it becomes “an expression of love, an expression of communion, of celebration,” which is why “the eucharistic banquet has become the emblematic sign of the Christian community. Eating together the body of Christ: this is the core of Christian life,” the pope said.

Beatified Cistercians an example of faith's meek heroes

The Catholic Church's newest blessed are six “meek disciples of Christ,” who showed heroic courage defending the Eucharist from profanation when French troops sacked their Italian monastery in 1799 and scattered the Blessed Sacrament on the floor while searching for any valuables they could carry away, Pope Francis said.

“May their example spur us to a greater commitment to fidelity to God, one capable also of transforming society and making it more just and fraternal,” the pope said on 18th April,

the day after the Cistercian monks of Casamari Abbey were beatified.

Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, who was named prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes in October, presided over the Mass and beatification at the abbey, about 60 miles southeast of Rome.

The French troops shot Fr Simèon Cardon, who was the prior, and five other Cistercians who scrambled to recover consecrated hosts after the invaders broke open the tabernacle and scattered them on the floor.

“These martyrs were not comic book heroes, but normal people,” Cardinal Semeraro said. “They were fearful men just like all of us.”

But, he said, they also were examples of how perfection in the spiritual life “consists in knowing the infinite love of God and recognising our weakness” and being willing “to engage in a spiritual battle” to overcome sinful inclinations and trust fully in God.

Fr Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, abbot general of the Cistercians, told his confreres that “it is always a great gift

when brothers called to the same vocation as we are not only reach the fullness of their monastic life, but are indicated by the Church as models of holiness.”

The six newly beatified Cistercians, he said, “show us that often before martyrdom, rather than living an extraordinary life, there is a sanctification lived in the shadow of daily fidelity to one's vocation. From our brothers, we do not need to learn to die as martyrs, but to live as faithful witnesses” to the Gospel.

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New politics must be built from the bottom up – pope

Carol Glatz

Politics can be regenerated by recognising the importance of spirituality in people's lives, Pope Francis said.

"That is why it is essential that faith communities meet together and fraternise in order to work 'for and with the people'" and why it is urgent to build the future "from below, from a politics with the people, rooted in the people," he said in a video message.

The pope's message in Spanish was sent to an international conference discussing ways people could answer the pope's call for the Church to embrace 'a politics rooted in the people', with a focus on broad-based grassroots organising and inclusive 'popular movements'.

Titled *A Politics Rooted in the People*, the conference theme was inspired by the pope's book, *Let Us Dream*, and participants included Catholic and Christian workers, community organisers, academics and clergy.

The event was organised by the UK-based Centre for Theology & Community, the US bishops' Catholic Campaign for Human Development and other Catholic organisations and institutions.

With the Catholic Campaign for Human Development celebrating its 50th anniversary, the pope sent members special greetings in his video message, highlighting CCHD's work in "helping the poorest communities in the United States to live with greater dignity, promoting their participation in the decisions that affect them."

The increased poverty and loss of employment that has come with the Covid-19 pandemic have made "all the more urgent and necessary" the work and witness of the groups attending the conference, he said, given that their mission is to "walk with the people in their search for work, wages and housing."

He noted how they have spent many years in "the peripheries," working with the people and their movements,



Pope Francis welcomed representatives of the UN High Commission for Refugees to the Vatican last week. Their discussions centred on creating a safe environment for refugees and migrants, with the focus on the plight of those looking to leave the

Middle East and west Asia and gain access to Europe and from South and Central America and enter the United States. Pope Francis repeated his belief that only by treating refugees well are we really reflecting the teachings of Jesus.

resulting in some people accusing them of being "too political, others of trying to impose religion."

"But you understand that respect for the people means respect also for their institutions, including their religious ones; and that the role of those institutions is not to impose anything but to walk with the people, reminding them of the face of God who always goes before us," Pope Francis said.

This is why, he said, he wished every diocese in the world consistently would collaborate with grassroots or popular movements.

After all, he said, the Church was born "in the margins of the cross," and the Church's mission is reinvigorated by meeting "the risen, wounded Christ in our poorest communities."

"If the Church disowns the poor,

She ceases to be the Church of Jesus; She falls back on the old temptation to become a moral or intellectual elite," and the same goes for politics, he said.

When political life turns its back on the poor, it "will never be able to promote the common good," and when it ignores the peripheries, it "will never be able to understand the centre and will confuse the future with a self-projection, as if in a mirror."

Engaging and walking with the excluded avoids "political paternalism," he said.

"When people are cast aside, they are denied not just material well-being but the dignity of acting, of being a protagonist of their own destiny and history, of expressing them-

selves with their values and culture, their creativity and fruitfulness," which is why the Church cannot separate its promotion of social justice from recognising the culture, values and spiritual values of the people, he said.

"The contempt for the culture of the people is the beginning of the abuse of power," he said, and "in recognising the importance of spirituality in the lives of the people, we regenerate politics."

Faith communities must come together and work "for and with the people," through dialogue, co-operation, reciprocal understanding and always at the service of the people.

"Now, more than ever, we must build a future from below, from a politics with the people, rooted in the people," he said.

Vatican sends message of hope to mark Ramadan

Cindy Wooden

Christians and Muslims share a conviction that God calls them to be "witnesses, restorers and builders of hope" both in this life and for the life to come, the leaders of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue said in a message wishing Muslims a peaceful and fruitful month as they fast during Ramadan.

The officials focused on the religious value of hope and its importance today amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The message was signed by Cardinal Miguel Angel Ayuso, council president, and Mgr Indunil Janakarathne Kankamalage, council secretary. The Vatican released the message on 16th April, three days after the Ramadan fast began.

For believers, they said, "hope arises from our belief that all our problems and trials have a meaning, a value and a purpose, however difficult or impossible it may be for us to understand the reason for them or to find a way out of them."

In addition, they wrote, "hope also carries with it belief in the goodness present in the heart of every person. Many times, in situations of difficulty and despair, help, and the hope it brings, can come from those whom we least expect."

But hope also "has its enemies: lack of faith in God's love and care; loss of trust in our brothers and sisters; pessimism; despair and its opposite, unfounded presumption; unfair generalisations based on one's own negative experiences, and so forth," the message said.

"These harmful thoughts, attitudes and reactions must be effectively countered so as to strengthen hope in God and trust in all our brothers and sisters."

The suffering and sorrow caused by the pandemic and lockdown precautions to slow its spread, they said, reminded believers of the need both for divine assistance and for "gestures of fraternal solidarity," ranging from a simple telephone call to help buying medicines or food.

All who helped others during the pandemic and responded generously in times of disaster "remind us believers that the spirit of fraternity is universal, and that it transcends all boundaries: ethnic, religious, social and economic," the message said.

"In adopting this spirit, we imitate God, who looks benevolently upon the humanity he created, upon all other creatures and upon the entire universe."

Parolin laments swift loss of solidarity as he calls for fraternity to address key global challenges

Junno Arocho Esteves

Fraternity is more than just a virtuous principle, it is a necessary means to confront the great humanitarian and social challenges facing the world, said Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state.

Addressing a virtual event sponsored by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to UN agencies in Geneva, Cardinal Parolin said that in multilateral diplomatic action, fraternity "translates into the courage and generosity to freely establish common goals and to ensure the fulfillment throughout the world of certain essential norms."

The virtual meeting, known as the

High-Level Event on Fraternity, Multilateralism and Peace, featured panel discussions with representatives of UN organisations and different faiths to reflect on Pope Francis' call for brotherhood in *Fratelli Tutti*.

Cardinal Parolin highlighted several issues facing the world that are a priority for the Vatican, including health care access, refugees, work, international humanitarian law and disarmament.

Reflecting on the Covid-19 pandemic, the cardinal said that at first the health crisis created an "indissoluble bond" brought on by a greater awareness "of being a world community sailing in the same boat."

However, he said, that sentiment gave way to "a race for vaccines and treatments" that revealed a "gap in basic care between developed countries and the rest of the world."

Solidarity formed at the onset of the pandemic soon lapsed, said Cardinal Parolin



"At all times, we must focus on the underlying principle of service to the common good," he said. "With this in mind, the international community has an obligation to ensure that any Covid-19 vaccine and treatment is safe, available, affordable and acces-

sible to all who need it."

Cardinal Parolin also highlighted the increasing number of refugees and displaced persons, insisting that attending to their needs "is not only a testimony of fraternity but a recognition of a concern for the real needs of our sisters and brothers."

"Refugees have always been part of history," he said. "Unfortunately, even today their numbers and their suffering continue to be a wound in the social fabric of the international community."

A spirit of fraternity, he continued, is also necessary in the pursuit of peace, stability and security desired by all men and women.

World News

Restore Earth,
so we can live

**Fr Shay
Cullen**



The younger generation is focused on saving the Earth. They see the environmental destruction in all aspects of our lives – the air we breathe, the forest destruction, the polluted oceans, the climate change that is upon us and the pandemic – all a result of human neglect, greed and power plays for riches and dominance. This young generation wants it to change and are doing much to bring it about by advocating political change to the Green platform for a healthy planet.

They are planning thousands of events to demand that we change our lifestyles and ways of living and working. They are dedicated to change the destructive industry, corrupt political systems and bad environmental conditions.

We all must work to change our lives and restore our Earth because everyone should have an equal opportunity to survive and have healthy life of dignity and equality. Those greater ideals are far away but we can restore the Earth in small ways where we live. Recycle plastic and waste products, never waste food, plant organic vegetables and plant trees.

The most vital need is to have a healthy, clean, pollution-free, smog-free atmosphere and clean air to breathe. The air we breathe affects our lives, our blood, our brains and our ability for clear thinking. It is one of the most important environmental goals we must reach. Our health and that of the world's children depend on it.

But we are allowing industry to make billions of profits by producing electricity from dangerous oil and coal-fired power plants. The politicians and mighty moguls tell us it is for our own good if we want our electric fans, air conditioners, heaters, lights and factories to run. How dull can we be, if we allow this when there are clear sustainable alternatives? The youth that are rallying this Earth Day know it and demand change.

We have to take political action and vote for politicians with green environmental credentials. To restore the Earth we have to change the politicians and bring in ones who will change the source of producing electricity on which the world runs.

This positive action is possible and it is part of the new wave sweeping the globe with the young generation. We can and must change to good clean ways of living so as to undo the damage caused by the past generations and the present one.

Visit www.preda.org, and on Facebook, Preda Foundation.

Brazil's bishops told to stay close to their flock as death toll soars

Pope offers words of comfort as Covid-19 situation in country remains critical

Bishops in Brazil have been told to remain united among themselves and with their people, to overcome "one of the most difficult trials in its history," Pope Francis said.

His message to the general assembly of the Brazilian bishops' conference included an encouragement for bishops to give hope and charity "especially to those most in need so that they may smile again."

"Everyone knows what it takes. It is possible to overcome the pandemic, it is possible to overcome its consequences," he said. "But we can do so only if we are united. The bishops' conference must be one at this time because the suffering people is one."

The pope's message came as the government of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro continued to draw widespread condemnation for its lacklustre response to the pandemic. The country's death toll is fast approaching 400,000, the second highest number of deaths worldwide, with 3,000 deaths being recorded every day. Analysts believe April will see 100,000 deaths alone.

Bolsonaro's reluctance to tackle the virus with measures seen elsewhere have led to Christos Christou, international president of Doctors Without Borders, begging the Brazilian government to adopt "evidence-based public health measures."

In Brazil, "science-based policies are associated with political opinions,



Clinicians in a Rio ICU ward have been left over-stretched by the current wave of Covid cases

rather than the need to protect individuals and their communities from Covid-19," Christou wrote.

The pope told the bishops that he was deeply concerned with the ongoing situation in Brazil, and that they must act as "an instrument of reconciliation, an instrument of unity," and to "put aside divisions and disagreements" the Church has had with Bolsonaro in the past and help control the virus's spread.

"Only in this way will you, as shepherds of the people of God, be able to inspire not only the Catholic faithful but also other Christians and other men and women of good will at all levels of society, including the institutional and governmental levels, to

work together to overcome not only the coronavirus, but also another virus that has long been infecting humanity: the virus of indifference, which is born of selfishness and generates social injustice," the pope said.

Brazil's current plight has been exacerbated by the arrival of the P1 variant from the Amazonas region which clinicians describe as an aggressive strain that appears to be more resistant to vaccines. P1 is now the dominant virus in Brazil, and its impact is being felt across the country. Worryingly, more young people are being badly affected and hospitalised by the virus than has been seen anywhere else in the world, including large numbers of infants and young children.

The deteriorating situation in Brazil is being matched in India, where a wave of new cases have left officials alarmed after the country had initially fared well in its battle against Covid-19. India has been reporting around 200,000 cases daily since 15th April – a figure that is well past its peak last year, when it was averaging around 93,000 cases a day. Deaths too have been rising, with 1,619 on Monday. The capital Delhi ordered a six-day lockdown from Monday with city hospitals reporting shortages of beds, oxygen and key medicine.

The situation led to India being placed on the UK's 'red list' of countries from where international travel requires quarantine on arrival.

Advocates back help to relieve poorest of debts

Recent decisions by leading financial institutions and the world's leading economies to ease the debt burden of the world's poorest nations will help those countries respond to the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the executive director of a leading Catholic charity has said.

The decisions were reached during April meetings of the Group of 20 nations, or G-20, the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund.

"They made some real progress," said Eric LeCompte, who heads an alliance of faith-based development and debt relief advocacy organisations called Jubilee USA and has long called for financial reforms to help the world's 73 poorest nations and dozens of other middle-income countries.

"The steps will allow countries to respond to the pandemic and other needs," LeCompte said.

"At the same time, with how serious the crisis is, we recognise we need to do a lot more and in some ways move quickly."

LeCompte said his organisation is working with the IMF on a process to



A starving child in South Sudan: The G-20 nations have agreed to try to ease the debt burden on the world's poorest countries as they fight Covid

transfer an additional \$400 billion in grants and loans to developing countries, which have seen some of the most serious economic consequences from the spread of Covid-19.

The IMF also cancelled debt service payments for the poorest countries until October.

LeCompte said the meetings also saw support for a minimum corporate tax and digital taxes that will help developing countries raise significant revenues for their pandemic response.

The US support for this initiative was particularly vital because of its influence at the IMF and among the G-20.

Pope Francis also urged action on behalf of poor and developing countries in a message to the World Bank Group and IMF as they met.

He said that despite "our deeply held convictions that all men and women are created equal, many of our brothers and sisters in the human family, especially those at the margins

of society, are effectively excluded from the financial world."

"If we are to come out of this situation as a better, more humane and solidary world, new and creative forms of social, political and economic participation must be devised, sensitive to the voice of the poor and committed to including them in the building of our common future," the pope said.

LeCompte echoed similar concerns, saying that he and others are troubled that "a few wealthy countries are going to have recovery" while "the majority of the world is not going to be having recovery."

"For us, over the next year, our work with the U.S. bishops and the development community, it's going to be imperative we get solutions to all countries of the world, especially the developing middle-income countries that are experiencing the crisis," he said.

LeCompte also called for more equitable distribution of vaccines worldwide through focused and expanded humanitarian aid. "Unless we act quickly, much of the developing world will not see vaccines until 2023."

Church leads protests as Haitian violence continues

A 'Mass for freedom' organised by the Haiti's bishops has ended in chaos after police fired tear gas into a church. Many members of the congregation had to receive medical treatment after the attack, which local bishops have condemned.

The Mass in Pétion-Ville, a suburb of the capital Port-au-Prince, included all 11 of the nation's bishops, while a packed crowd overflowed into the streets. It was part of a national strike in response to recent kidnappings of clergy and religious in Haiti and growing anarchy in the Caribbean nation. The Church and supporters had called for the strike.

"The violence has reached a high point – we see that this is the deepest point ever reached in this country and we cannot go deeper," Fiammetta Cappellini, Haiti-based country representative for the Milan-based Catholic social programme AVSI, told journalists.

Ironically, the global Covid-19 pandemic has not directly impacted Haiti's populations as feared, but a secondary fallout – unemployment – has further strained the local economies at the worst possible time. Unemployment is rampant, particularly among the young.

Cappellini said the country was heading down the road "of Somalia, Venezuela in terms of instability," adding that the country was desperate for "international support."

The Church asked Catholic schools, religious schools, universities and other Catholic institutions to observe an interruption of activities on 15th April. Church bells rang at noon to start the unofficial strike, which was called after the kidnapping of five Catholic priests, two nuns and three laypeople. The kidnapers have demanded a ransom of \$1 million for their release.

Cappellini said that AVSI currently has 15 international staff and 300 local staff working in social programmes across the country, and there



Protests against the government of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse have reached a new level of intensity amid fears the country is sliding into anarchy

Photo: Estailove, Reuters

is heightened concern about their safety. Many work on humanitarian projects in the poorest communities of Port-au-Prince.

"We have ongoing activities that ask us to be there every day; the people are counting on us," Cappellini said. "The dangers are from gangsters – large gangs in the slums are facing off against each other with no concerns about women and children. We are concerned they will be caught in the crossfire," she said.

Frequent political protests have shut down transportation, closed businesses and hospitals and forced children to stay home from school, paralysing the Caribbean nation of 11 million.

Haitian Prime Minister Joseph Joute resigned on 14th April in the wake of crime and social unrest after only one year on the job; he had previously voiced frustration with President Jovenel Moïse's management of the crisis.

In addition to the recent clergy kidnappings, bandits attacked a Port-au-Prince orphanage, assaulting children and killing a guard.

Protesters, including Catholic leaders, have been calling for an end to

corruption and mismanagement and for the removal of Moïse.

The ongoing crisis is a response to political and economic dysfunction, but criminal mobs are taking advantage of the situation, Cappellini said.

AVSI partners with the local Caritas agencies and Jesuit Refugee Service in promoting food security, human rights, women's and children's programming, immigrant rights, conflict resolution and peacemaking outreach to the gangs.

"We work closely with the Church, because in Haiti it has deep and strong relationships with the people and a capacity to reach every community," she said. "Through them we are able to deliver our programmes."

"The Church has a voice in the crisis in Haiti, and we hope it will be heard by the government, although we are not sure they are listening."

Cappellini added that the international airport in the Haitian capital remains open but that the land border with the Dominican Republic is mostly closed and unsafe.

The security situation in the country is so poor that most foreign nations currently do not advise travel to Haiti for any reason.

New threat in Congo alarms bishops

Fredrick Nzwilli

A new Islamist force called Allied Democratic Forces, originally from western Uganda, has been blamed for an increasing number of attacks on Christians and their properties in eastern Congo.

The group is also said to be behind a campaign of forced Islamisation, where Christians are forced to convert to Islam or risk the consequences.

Congo is currently going through an intense period of instability as different factions compete for mining rights in this mineral-rich nation. The emergence of the Islamic extremists is a worrying development, said the country's Catholic bishops.

Insecurity in eastern Congo "has many actors and so many goals. Islamisation is one of them. Economic interest is another. Islamisation through ADF actions ... is a major

issue of concern for the Catholic Church," Archbishop Marcel Utambi Tapa, president of Congolese bishops' conference, said.

"ADF's strategy is to kidnap and force victims to join the Islamic faith."

The bishops say that, in the region, militia groups are exploiting the weak points of the regular army to achieve their religious and political goals, including Islamisation, occupation of land and the illegal exploitation of natural resources.

The violence has left thousands of people dead, millions of others displaced and the general population in untold misery for more than two decades.

The Catholic Church has been raising its voice against the runaway insecurity, but it is also working to ensure the followers are not victims of the Islamisation, the archbishop said. "We

are inviting Christians to be strong in their faith," said Archbishop Utambi.

His comments followed the findings of a standing committee of the bishops on the insecurity and massacres in eastern Congo. Its report said Islamisation was a profound strategy that would have a negative influence on the the country in the long term.

"The escapees from ADF kidnap claimed to have been forced to convert to Islam," the committee added.

In the past two years, at least 7,500 people have been kidnapped in Congo. Six Catholic priests were among those abducted; their whereabouts were never disclosed after ransom demands were rejected, and they are presumed murdered.

At least three million people in the region have been displaced, with armed groups said to control much of the country.



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NJPN Comment

Slaying dragons of history

Fr Rob Esdaile

It is striking that, over 1,700 centuries after the martyrdom of St. George, whose feast coincides with the publication of this week's *The Catholic Universe*, this slightly obscure Palestinian Roman soldier saint (who might well be denied a visa today by the Home Office if he tried to visit the UK) is still venerated as England's patron saint.

His cult was seemingly popularised by returning Crusaders. Their militaristic cross became his emblem. The medieval legend of him killing a dragon and rescuing of a damsel in distress further added to his allure.

St George then became a symbol of nationhood, most famously on the lips of Shakespeare's Henry V: 'Cry God for Harry, England and St. George.' Note the pecking order: King first, Country second, Saint third. It's hard to stop religious symbols from being co-opted by those in power – even in our secularised culture. Around the world, politicians like to 'wrap themselves in the flag'. And those rallying to their standard are unlikely to register its ambiguities. What we see as a symbol of the Gospel, that blood red cross, is for many Muslims a reminder of past Christian cruelties. The burden of history lies heavily on all of us – even across our best intentions.

Now we witness the danger of the Union Jack becoming unstitched, torn by the centrifugal forces unleashed by Brexit. Will St George's flag one day be left to fly alone? What does his cross say about the English nation – assuming England actually is a nation? (One interpretation of those angry Brexit debates says that the Remain campaign failed because it stressed a shared British identity, while those it needed to convince thought of themselves, first and foremost, as English.)

Whatever our personal take on British history, or our national or regional identities, we need to discover shared values and work together to build a common future, a unity that can embrace diversity. That's less about where we place political borders than about what dragons we choose to slay: perhaps the dragon that dreams lazily of past imperial power, or the dragon who accepts chronic poverty alongside enormous wealth, or the environmental destruction dragon that threatens the future of us all.

Which 'damsels' – the defenceless and vulnerable of our age – need rescuing? We'll need all the courage St George showed both in his obscure history and in later legend. Fr Rob Esdaile is parish priest of Our Lady of Lourdes, Thames Ditton National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN) Conference 23-25 July at www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference/

Afghanistan at risk of civil war, says priest in Kabul

Carol Glatz

Afghanistan is facing the threat of a full-scale civil war as US troops finally make their final withdrawals from the country, an Italian priest in charge of the small Catholic community in Afghanistan has warned.

"Will the Afghan government be able to guarantee security?" asked Barnabite Father Giovanni Scalese, superior of the Kabul-based mission 'sui iuris' of Afghanistan.

Up until now, he said, talks that should have been happening between the government and the Taliban "have never seriously taken off or at least haven't led to any results."

The goal, according to the Doha agreements between the US and the Taliban in 2020, was to build a transitional government of national unity and then hold free elections to determine new government leadership, he said.

"But if the different sides don't talk, how can they form a government together? It's much easier to let weapons talk," he said, which is why "the most serious risk to come out of the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan is that the country could plummet back into civil war."

The priest, who is based out of the



Afghans inspect damage to a mosque in Kabul after an attack by the Taliban

Our Lady of Divine Providence chapel of the Italian Embassy in Kabul, made his comments after US President Joe Biden announced a complete withdrawal of US troops in Afghanistan by 11th Sept – the 20th anniversary of the attacks on US soil co-ordinated by al-Qaida's Osama bin Laden, who received protection from the Taliban.

The UK government has said its own soldiers, based in the country to train Afghan forces, would also leave at the same point.

The US invaded Afghanistan in late

2001 in a bid to dismantle al-Qaida and force the Taliban from power. More than 2,300 U.S. soldiers have died in the 20-year conflict, the longest war in US history, and thousands of Afghan civilians are killed and displaced each year as a result of the conflict, according to the UN Mission in Afghanistan.

Fr Scalese said even if the Taliban, which remains the best organised and financed movement in the country, were to regain control, it is unlikely it could restore the same totalitarian

Islamic emirate it had established in 1996.

Even though the current constitution already upholds Afghanistan as an Islamic republic, the Taliban "could impose a new constitution; however, they could never expect to be able to eliminate freedom or ignore the rights Afghans have gotten used to all these years," he said.

Also, women make up a large and very active segment of the population, he said, and "it would be unthinkable to expect them closed back up inside the home or under a burqa."

Not only are there doubts as to whether the Afghan government could maintain peace and security, he said, it is questionable whether it could keep the country running without major financial assistance from Western nations.

"It's true that everyone swears they will not abandon Afghanistan and they will keep supporting it," but it is one thing to promise co-operation and help, and another to actually subsidize needed institutions, he said.

"It doesn't seem to me that much has been done these past years to boost the Afghan economy," and no country can advance without a functioning economy, Fr Scalese said.

Crisis-hit German archdiocese looks to local synod as solution

Catholic laypeople in the archdiocese of Cologne have called for a local synod to address the ongoing crisis in Germany's most populous diocese.

"We must make every effort to re-establish a genuine dialogue between the cardinal, senior members of the diocesan leadership and the grassroots of the church," said Tim-O. Kurzbach, president of the Cologne archdiocesan council of Catholics.

The archdiocese has been rocked by a series of scandals linked to historic abuse cases in recent months. In March, a report on how clergy sexual abuse was handled in the archdiocese revealed that in 24 of 236 files studied, 75 breaches of duty were found by Church officials, including archbishops, vicars general and personnel managers.

Among those accused of breaches were Hamburg Archbishop Stefan Hesse and Cologne Auxiliary Bishop Dominik Schwaderlapp, as well as two former archbishops of Cologne, now deceased: Cardinals Joachim Meisner and Joseph Höffner.

Pope Francis has granted Archbishop Hesse, former personnel director in Cologne, a leave of absence from his duties as archbishop of Hamburg while Bishop Schwaderlapp has been suspended from his duties until further notice and has offered his resignation to Pope Francis.

Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki was



Cologne Cathedral

not incriminated, but admitted, "It's not just about doing the right thing, it's about doing everything humanly possible. And I didn't do that."

The scandal has led to a collapse in public confidence in the Church, with the archdiocesan council – which represents laypeople – calling for a locally-led synod to improve communication and establish "a new beginning based on sincerity and honesty."

The synod would create "a binding framework for the future and address the systemic causes of sexual abuse," Kurzbach said, and be led jointly by the diocesan leadership and laypeople; everyone involved in the Church should be able to participate.

The council called for a working group to be set up to prepare the syn-

od. This group should be composed of equal numbers of representatives from the archdiocesan leadership and grassroots membership.

A diocesan synod is defined by Church law as an assembly of clergy and laypeople of a diocese convened by a bishop. As a rule, it is usually presided over by the bishop and advises him. The bishop determines the issues to be addressed and decides which resolutions come into force.

KNA reported the only German diocesan synod so far in this century took place in the Diocese of Trier from 2013 to 2016. Some of its resolutions, including the creation of leadership teams for parishes in which clergy and laypeople participate equally in management, were later corrected in response to Vatican directives.

Mystery group brings more terror to Mozambique

Catholic bishops in Mozambique have expressed concerns about ongoing violence in the country and increasing food insecurity – especially in the midst of the pandemic.

In Cabo Delgado, "defenceless people are killed, injured and abused ... they see their possessions plundered, the privacy of their homes violated, their homes destroyed ... they are forced to abandon their land," said the bishops at the end of their plenary meeting in mid-April.

In late March, the Red Cross expressed concern about a new surge of violence in the province. The United Nations said that, in the wake of the violence and devastating cyclones, up to one million people could be displaced by June.

Gillian Triggs, the UN refugee agency's assistant high commissioner for protection, said that it is not clear who the insurgents are or who they support but there have been beheadings, killings, rape and other atrocities. However, media reports link the insurgents to the Islamic State group.

The fact that there is no end in sight to the conflict leads the bishops to believe "there are interests of varying nature and origin, namely of certain groups to seize the nation and its resources."



Cindy Wooden

Expats look for best ways to survive pandemic - p22



Fr Michael Collins

The de' Medici and their papal connections - p24



Fr Francis Marsden

St Catherine of Siena - p28

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A CATHOLIC UNIVERSE SUPPLEMENT

Majority of world's population live in countries that violate religious freedom, report says

Cindy Wooden

The religious persecution exercised by China and North Korea, restrictions on religious freedom in dozens of countries and the continuing threat of violence at the hands of religious fundamentalists belonging to a variety of faiths all have worsened since 2018, said Aid to the Church in Need, a papal foundation and Catholic charity.

The problems "have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. States have used the insecurity to increase control over their citizens, and nonstate actors have taken advantage of the confusion to recruit, expand and provoke wider humanitarian crises," said an analysis published with ACN's annual report, *Religious Freedom in the World*.

The report, released earlier this week, said outright persecution exists in "26 countries which are home to 3.9 billion people or just over half – 51 per cent – of the world's population." In addition to China, North Korea and Saudi Arabia, the list includes a dozen African countries, such as Somalia, Libya, Nigeria, Congo and Mozambique, as well as Myanmar because of its treatment of the Rohingya, a Muslim minority in the predominantly Buddhist nation.

While the charity found the overall situation worsening globally, it did find a glimmer of hope, saying that from 2018 to 2020 there had been "significant progress, especially in interreligious dialogue, as well as the increasingly important role of religious leaders in the mediation and resolution of hostilities and war."

The report praised Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, grand imam of al-Azhar University in Cairo, an authority among Sunni Muslims, for their 2019 document on human fraternity and their efforts to promote dialogue, tolerance and mutual respect. And, in fact, the report found an improving, although still concerning, religious liberty situation in Egypt.

The report raised alarms about



Hong Kong protesters hold East Turkestan Uyghur flags at a rally in support of Xinjiang Uyghurs' human rights, in Hong Kong on 22nd December, 2019. (Catholic News Service photo/Lucy Nicholson, Reuters)

the addition of religion as a factor in increased violence in several sub-Saharan African countries where "populations have historically been divided between farmers and nomadic cattle herders, occasionally experiencing outbreaks of violence resulting from long-simmering ethnic and resource-based conflicts – more recently exacerbated by climate change, growing poverty and attacks by armed criminal gangs."

Sporadic violence, poverty, corruption and poor educational and work opportunities, it said, have "provided fuel for the rise of armed groups including Islamist militants, both local, and more recently foreign – transnational jihadist groups engaged in a targeted, systematic persecution of all those, Muslims and Christians alike, who do not accept the extreme Islamist ideology."

In addition, it said, terrorist groups and Islamist extremists took advantage of "government distraction" in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic "to increase their violent attacks, entrench territorial gains and recruit

new members."

Obviously, the lockdowns and restrictions on public gatherings enacted by national, state or local governments also had an impact on citizens' freedom to worship.

"It is difficult to assess to what extent the right to religious freedom was threatened universally because each country, and in some cases each region, responded differently to the global event," the report noted. And while governments were obliged to act to protect the common good, "it is also clear that there were cases of abuse and attacks on religious freedom, in part by means of disproportionate application of restrictions to religious activities, as compared with commercial activities, but also through aggressive police and military tactics in addressing breaches of restrictions related to religious practices."

As an example, the report cited "examples of disproportionate restrictions on religious practice" in Spain and some US states "where attendance at religious services was

very restricted while places of business or recreation were allowed to welcome customers in greater numbers."

"The Covid-19 pandemic opened an important debate around the world about fundamental rights, including the right to religious freedom, the implications of legislative overreach and whether, in some cases, aggressively secular governments are adequately able to discern the importance of these rights," the report said.

As for China, the charity said state control of anyone identifying with a religion has become "relentless."

"Mass surveillance, including artificial intelligence-refined technology, a social credit system that rewards and punishes individual behaviour, and brutal crackdowns on religious and ethnic groups, enforce the state supremacy," the report said, pointing particularly to the "mass internment and coercive 're-education programmes' affecting more than a million, mostly Muslim, ethnic Uyghurs in Xinjiang province."

Pope chooses theme for first World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly

To express the closeness of God and of the Church to every older person, Pope Francis has chosen *I am with you always* from the Gospel of Matthew as the theme for the first World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.

The theme for the celebration on 25th July is especially appropriate "in these challenging pandemic times," said the announcement from the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life.

"*I am with you always* is also a promise of closeness and hope that young and old can mutually share. Not only are grandchildren and young people called upon to be present in the lives of older people, but older people and grandparents also have a mission of evangelisation, proclamation and prayer, and of encouraging young people in their faith," the statement said.

Pope Francis announced in late January that he was establishing the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, which is to be celebrated each year on the fourth Sunday of July to coincide with the feast of Ss Joachim and Anne, Jesus' grandparents.



Cardinal Kevin J. Farrell, prefect of the dicastery (pictured), had said the annual event would be "a gift to the whole

Church" and one that emphasises the pastoral care of the elderly as "a priority that can no longer be postponed by any Christian community."

"In the encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, the Holy Father reminds us that no one is saved alone. With this in mind, we must treasure the spiritual and human wealth that has been handed down from generation to generation," he said.

Pope Francis is expected to mark the day with an evening Mass in St Peter's Basilica.

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In brief

INDIANAPOLIS: Expressing sorrow for the loss of life in yet another mass shooting in the US, this time at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson prayed for the victims and their families. He also prayed that “these senseless acts of violence will stop.

Once again our nation is mourning the loss of lives in a mass shooting and this time it is eight of our own neighbours who were killed at the Indianapolis FedEx Ground center,” Archbishop Thompson said.

“We pray for the victims and loved ones of those who were murdered as well as those who were injured.” The facility is near the Indianapolis International Airport and the shooting took place the night of April 15th. Eight people were killed and several others were wounded by a gunman who killed himself after his shooting spree. The shooter was later identified as 19-year-old Brandon Scott Hole of Indiana, a former employee who last worked for the company in 2020.

BERLIN: Germany’s lower house of Parliament is considering replacing state payments to the nation’s two largest Churches.

The Catholic and Protestant Churches received combined state benefits of more than £465 million in 2020. At a hearing in the interior affairs committee of the Bundestag, or lower house of parliament, they welcomed in principle the intention of legislation by the opposition liberal Free Democratic Party, the Greens and the Left Party and pointed out that it was in line with a constitutional mandate to abolish the payments, which date back to a 19th-century provision. By contrast, a number of legal experts said an alternative bill by the Alternative for Germany party to simply phase out the benefits was unconstitutional, reported the German Catholic news agency KNA.

The bill by the three parties aims to create the necessary framework for agreements between the federal states, which currently make the payments, and the Catholic dioceses and Protestant regional churches.

Most of the state payments date back to 1803, when German imperial princes received expropriated church property as compensation for a loss of territory. In return, the princes paid the churches money on a regular basis. The right of the churches to levy contributions, or a church tax, from their members has nothing to do with these state benefits, KNA reported.

TALKING POINT

Virus pandemic blamed for creating conditions ripe for human trafficking

Tom Tracy

The pandemic-related economic downturn, business closures, increase in global unemployment and reduced incomes have contributed to greater human trafficking of children, women, domestic workers and migrants without legal status.

That is the assessment of a Miami law professor and newly appointed member of Pope Francis’ Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, created in 2016 through the merger of four pontifical councils.

The dicastery is charged with developing and promoting the Church’s teaching in the fields of justice, peace, the safeguarding of creation, as well as issues that concern health and works of charity. It now includes several Covid-19-related working groups.

“There is evidence of an increase in the commercial sexual exploitation of children, child work, girl-child marriages to alleviate families’ hardship, domestic servitude and sexual exploitation of women and children living in internally displaced person (IDP) camps, including camps in Haiti,” said professor Roza Pati, of St Thomas University’s College of Law.

Pati is executive director of the university’s intercultural human rights programme and founding director of the Miami-based John J. Brunetti Human Trafficking Academy.

Citing recent reports from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, the United Nations and Polaris, a

non-governmental organisation that operates the National Human Trafficking Hotline, she noted the pandemic has set the stage for greater illegal activity related to human trafficking.

“There is an increased supply of new criminal recruits in human trafficking organisations, as they adapt their strategies in response to the pandemic, which in turn makes it very difficult for law enforcement and anti-trafficking organisations to identify and rescue victims,” Pati said.

She cited some indications of increased global trafficking activity:

- Global school closures for many children have prevented their access to education, shelter and nourishment, so children are forced to search on the streets for food and income, making them subject to exploitation.

- Cybertrafficking crime syndicates are taking advantage of online teaching and learning, with children constantly online, at times with no controls. This has aggravated the vulnerability of children to online sexual predators, who are themselves confined at home.

- Europol reports an increase in the demand for child pornography and sexual exploitation material.

- The pandemic has disrupted victim assistance and support services, including in-person counselling, representation and legal aid.

“Such services being offered exclusively online has proven to be a barrier for victims – many of whom do not even have access to a computer or internet,” Pati said.

“Victims are forced into isolation, with the chances of them being identified and removed from their exploitative situations drastically reduced.”

Also impacted: victim rescue missions and availability of shelters, despite a reported increase in calls to trafficking hotlines during the pandemic.

In Florida specifically, Pati said, anti-human trafficking organisations report resources being redirected to provide other services to vulnerable populations affected by the pandemic. Many groups also are losing grants and donations as donors and foundations switch priorities to focus on pandemic-related issues.

The pandemic also has impacted the work of law enforcement and the justice system in responding, investigating, prosecuting and convicting perpetrators of human trafficking.

“In many cases, such work has become a lower priority while the law enforcement agencies get mobilised to implement pandemic measures and states of emergency,” Pati said. “And of course, limited judicial services while courthouses were closed and justice for victims got delayed.”

Born in Albania, Pati grew up under a dictatorship and atheist regime. Her Catholic family was part of a 10 per cent minority in an overwhelming Muslim country.

Pati said she was among the last born to have been baptised, shortly before the regime prohibited all religion, closed and destroyed houses of worship, imprisoned and even executed priests and other clerics, and made good on its

threats involving anyone who dared to think about God.

Her work on the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development will mirror her own passions for supporting causes that uphold human dignity, bring about awareness, and seek effective law and policy solutions to abolish all forms of human suffering, including human trafficking.

Addressing human trafficking has been at the top of Pope Francis’ agenda “from day one,” Pati said, and it has been a theme of constant concern since his election in 2013.

“People at the fringes of humanity such as the poor, migrants, refugees, trafficked victims occupy the very core” of his pontificate, she said. “Many say it is his trademark,” she added, noting the pope’s harsh critique of a “culture of indifference.”

In Florida, a variety of ongoing initiatives and public awareness campaigns address human trafficking, including public information posters and signage being displayed in health care facilities, hotels, massage establishments, airports, motorway services and other settings.

A 2019 National Human Trafficking Hotline report on Florida shows that 2,068 contacts with the hotline were made and of 896 human trafficking cases reported, sex trafficking led “the typology,” she said. Labour trafficking involved domestic servitude, followed by agriculture, construction, travelling sales crews and restaurant/food service, Pati noted.

The top venues for sex trafficking were illicit massage and spa businesses, followed by residence-based commercial sex, hotel- and motel-based commercial sex, and pornography.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a watershed crisis of our times and one which has brought to light the inequality in human development, according to Pati.

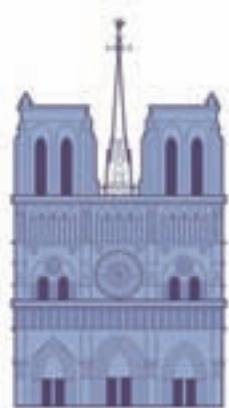
“As Pope Francis has stated, we may come out of it better or worse. Of course, we should commit to overcome it, and come out better and with hope,” she added.

St Thomas University law professor Roza Pati, seen talking with students on the Miami campus last month, has been appointed by Pope Francis to the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. She had previously been appointed by Pope Benedict XVI to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. (Catholic News Service photo/courtesy St Thomas University Miami)



Sponsor a gargoyle: New fundraiser launched for Notre-Dame Cathedral

A novel fundraising approach to restore one of the most iconic monuments in the world, Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, enables donors to have a piece of history. **Deirdre Mays** reports



FRIENDS OF
NOTRE-DAME
DE PARIS

On 15th April, Friends of Notre-Dame de Paris unveiled an interactive website – **restorennotredame.org** – that allows people to donate by adopting or sponsoring pieces of precious art and artefacts that were damaged in a 2019 fire. Donors can engage with the objects of their choosing and select which they'd like to help restore, whether it is a painting or statue. Funds can also go towards the cathedral's restoration as a whole if the person prefers.

The organisation was established in 2017 to help cover the cost of repairing damages caused by time, pollution and the use of inferior stone used in construction of the 12th-century Gothic landmark. The cathedral had not had any major repairs since the mid-1800s, so the group launched an international campaign to raise the £100 million needed for those

essential renovations – augmented by a £32 million budget from the French Government.

On 15th April, 2019, a fire broke out in the attic and completely consumed the timber roof and spire. The burning debris and melted lead from the roof fell on top of a stone vault below. Most sections of the cathedral remained intact due to the rib vaulting, and most of the precious art and religious relics were saved, including what is believed to be Jesus' crown of thorns and a piece of the cross from his crucifixion, the Tunic of St Louis and the 14th-century Virgin of the Pillar statue.

After the fire, the mission of the Friends of Notre-Dame de Paris had an even greater scope – rebuilding from ashes. Since the fire, more than £1 billion from more than 150 countries has been pledged to rebuild the cathedral, said Michel Picaud, president of



Workers are pictured in an undated photo during reconstruction of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris. Two years after a fire destroyed much of the church's wooden structure, a fundraising group is urging people to sponsor a statue or gargoyle to help with reconstruction. (Catholic News Service photo/courtesy Friends of Notre-Dame de Paris)

Friends of Notre-Dame.

Picaud said the item people feel most sentimental about is probably the Virgin of the Pillar, which “attracts the attention of believers because it is the Virgin Mary in all her beauty and significance.”

The May paintings are one of the top features of the restoration effort. They are a series of paintings commissioned in the 17th- and early 18th-century by the goldsmith's guild of Paris to offer to the cathedral in the month of May. They are approximately three by four metres high and

depict scenes from the Gospels. Smaller models of the paintings were also created. The fundraising process has helped reveal the location of some of those that were not in the cathedral collection.

“I was called by an American family that owned the model of the Crucifixion of St Peter. The family told me they were on the brink of auctioning the painting but they gave it to Notre-Dame when they discovered what it was. This is an example of the love for Notre-Dame by the American people,” Picaud said.

The massive project is currently in the safety phase, which should last until the summer of 2022, Picaud said. It includes protecting the vaults from rain with a tarp; lead decontamination; fortifying the north, south and west gables, particularly to protect the three large rose windows; fortifying the most damaged pillars of the nave; reinforcing the flying buttresses; wrapping and protecting the gargoyles and other sculptural elements of the north and south towers; removing burned and melted scaffolding that had previously surrounded the spire.

Notre-Dame Cathedral is a UNESCO World Heritage site and is one of the most recognisable and beloved monuments in the world. More than 12 million people visited every year before the fire. As a result, the outpouring

of support has been at a global level and from people of all belief systems – from the envelope Picaud received that contained a \$10 bill from a woman in the US Midwest to St Patrick's Cathedral in New York launching its own fundraising effort.

Even while the fire was burning, Picaud was being interviewed by media and he met a Moroccan-born man who was a Muslim. The man described Notre-Dame as “our” cathedral.

“I think this is the beauty of Notre-Dame and the church of the Virgin Mary,” Picaud said.

He emphasised that the United States has been the source of some of the largest donors. The Friends of Notre-Dame received two donations totalling \$10 million from two American foundations, he said.

The French Government has set a target date to reopen the cathedral to the public in April 2024, but Picaud said there is no way of knowing the exact time this will happen.

In the future, the cathedral will have a strong security team in place and new measures to protect against fires, such as sprinklers, that it did not have before.

Restoration and rebuilding probably will continue for the next 10 years, Picaud said, and will cost more than £1 billion to complete it.



French President Emmanuel Macron, right, speaks with a worker and General Jean-Louis Georgelin during a visit at the reconstruction site of the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris on 15th April.

(CNS photo/ Ian Langsdon, pool via Reuters)

Cindy Wooden



VATICAN LETTER

Rome or home? Expats look for best way to survive the pandemic

After a year without US pilgrims, tourists and university students, some American expats in Rome have packed up and moved home. But others who teach at study abroad programmes or work with pilgrims have expanded their services to a whole new clientele: people who have never visited the Eternal City and may never have the chance.

Foreign travel to Italy dropped almost 70 per cent in 2020, and while many people hope holiday campaigns will allow some form of recovery by late summer or early autumn, no one is predicting a speedy recovery.

Standing in front of St Peter's Square on 15th April, seeing

police outnumber tourists and seagulls outnumber both, the challenge was clear for US citizens whose work depends on the Vatican but is not paid by the Vatican.

Elizabeth Lev, an art historian, professor and tour guide, may be one of the busiest people in lockdown, but she also has forged deep ties with Italian tour guides who have been without an income for more than a year and have turned to cleaning houses or delivering takeout food.

But, in an industry focused less on pilgrimage and more on tourism with "the faith button turned down low," Lev said she has discovered the deep faith of many of her

colleagues and how, "when chips were down, suddenly it comes up to be a ballast for them."

She and other expert guides founded Masters' Gallery Rome, which offers virtual tours and online lectures about art, architecture and Church history – and often all three in one. They have had to learn the technology and try to figure out pricing, though the Masters' Gallery offers a weekly lecture for free.

"We simply ask for a donation, and we have found that people are very generous," she said.

Still, she said, with the pandemic many people are realising the importance of "real" experiences, face-to-face meetings and actual visits to places. "I think it's something we understand in the Catholic Church in a very special way. After this year of virtual Masses, I think every Catholic who walked back into a church again and received the Eucharist really did understand that matter matters."

Expatriates from the United States are not the only ones who have thought about leaving or have actually done so, Lev said. "There's something of a dramatic shake-up" due to the economic situation, the restrictions and generally how "the beauty of the life here has been obscured for them."

That has not happened for Ashley Noronha and her husband, John. They are founders of the Truth & Beauty Project, which offers visitors to Rome and the Vatican experiences designed to help them "understand the roots of their faith and Christian identity, using art and beauty to teach what it means to live an authentic Christian life."

They came to Rome shortly after their marriage in 2008 to do graduate studies, but, she said, "leaving or staying in Rome is always on the table." It is something they pray about, but they also "cobble together" different jobs to support themselves.

"Living in Rome really helps you realise the beauty of living in providence and relying only on God's grace," she said.

In addition to offering tours, the Noronhas blog and teach courses at Rome's Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, and Ashley is the Vatican correspondent for *Relevant Radio*. Those jobs have



Mountain Butorac, an Atlanta native who founded *The Catholic Traveller* in 2004, is pictured outside the Vatican in Rome on 15th April. The Rome-based tour guide said he has adapted during the pandemic to offer virtual tours and talks that help him reach a larger audience.

(CNS photo/Paul Haring)

continued, in person or online, through the various stages of Italy's lockdowns.

Mountain Butorac, who started *The Catholic Traveller* in 2004, moved to Rome with his wife and children seven years ago. Organising and leading pilgrimages is his job and his vocation, he said.

Before the pandemic was declared in March 2020, he said, he was on track to have his busiest, most successful year ever. Then everything stopped.

"But I adapted. I was able to start sharing the faith more and more on social media, with videos and podcasts, and it's actually been a great year as far as the business goes," he said. There always will be people who are unable to travel, so the virtual tours and talks have helped him reach a much larger audience.

And followers have been generous in supporting him through Patreon, a website that hosts subscription services for a huge variety of content creators.

"There were a few moments

when we thought, 'Oh, maybe we should go back to the States,' but we thought this is where we needed to be at this moment, so we stayed," he said.

But, Butorac said: "I've had quite a few guide friends move back to the States; there's no work; there's no way to pay the rent, so they've moved back with their parents."

When asked if there is a place in Rome that was particularly meaningful for him during the pandemic, Butorac said, "the Scala Santa, the Holy Stairs," which tradition holds are the stairs Jesus ascended when Pontius Pilate brought him before the crowd and handed him over to be crucified. The tradition says St Helen, mother of the Emperor Constantine, brought the stairs to Rome from Jerusalem in 326 A.D.

The stairs "give us a preview of the pandemic, because it is a little painful," Butorac said. "You climb up these stairs on your knees and you learn life isn't always easy, even if it is just 28 steps you are climbing up."



(above) Art historian Elizabeth Lev is pictured outside the Vatican Museums in Rome in this May 2018 photo. Italy's lockdown to fight Covid-19 prompted Lev and some colleagues to create the Masters' Gallery Rome, which offers virtual tours and online lectures about art, architecture and Church history. (Catholic News Service photo/Robert Duncan)

(below) Ashley and John Noronha are pictured in Rome near the Vatican on 15th April. The US couple are founders of the Truth & Beauty Project, which offers visitors to Rome and the Vatican experiences designed to help them "understand the roots of their faith and Christian identity." (CNS photo/Paul Haring)



■ Chris McDonnell's page is temporarily on hold for a few weeks due to health reasons.

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Hosffman Ospino



JOURNEY IN FAITH



Nuns and others wait in line to receive the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, on 12th April. (Catholic News Service photo/Jose Luis Gonzalez, Reuters)

Arise, receive the vaccine, save lives

“The Lord is risen!” This is our cry during the 50 days of Easter. We celebrate life with joy: our present historical life and life eternal.

As we celebrate like Easter people, we know with confidence that death does not have the last word. In rising Jesus from the dead, God conquers death. Indeed, death does not define us; life does!

Every year during Easter, Catholics have a new opportunity to celebrate the gift of life while contemplating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. “The Lord is risen,” we proclaim. In contemplating his resurrection, we look forward to our own.

This particular year we find ourselves into the second year of the Covid-19 global pandemic. This is the second Easter when

the celebration of life happens amid the conditions created by a virus that has affected everyone on our planet.

Millions of people have died worldwide because of the virus. Millions more mourn our loved ones who died and miss them dearly. Countless people of all ages will live the rest of their existences with the wounds of an illness that caught our world by surprise.

This year, however, things are different. A miracle has happened. Not as powerful and decisive as the miracle of the resurrection, yet a miracle. The scientific community has developed a cadre of vaccines that have the ability to bring the Covid-19 virus under some control.

Science placed at the service of life and the common good can

prevent people from dying prematurely. When modern medicine mesmerises us in addressing a major threat to human existence, we stand in awe. And awe is an invitation into the greatness of the divine.

The next question is, what do we do with the miracle? This applies to the miracle of the resurrection and the lesser miracle of the development of a series of vaccines to protect human life at this historical moment when we are confronted with the Covid-19 pandemic.

God's salvation in Jesus Christ is a gift, yet it must be embraced. God wants us to make the gift our own. What drives the Church's evangelising thrust in history is the conviction that we want people to have a profound experience with the risen Christ and embrace the gift of

salvation.

There is something analogous about the gift of vaccines that protect our lives, the lives of those we love and the life of every other human being. We have them there, but we must receive them.

After more than a year in the current pandemic, we know that death is a real possibility because of the virus. This is neither a game nor a drill. Receiving the Covid-19 vaccine – or not – can make the difference between living and dying; seeing others live or die.

Pardon me if I sound somewhat dramatic. However, I am concerned that many people in our society, and particularly in our own Catholic communities, seem to downplay the importance of vaccination during the present pandemic. Many reject vaccination

altogether.

There is far too much misinformation. Too many conspiracy theories. Too much fearmongering. The antidote to all of this is good information and good pastoral outreach. The Vatican, the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and nearly all credible Catholic organisations have endorsed Covid-19 vaccination as morally acceptable and a priority to protect life and the common good.

If we care about life, we have a responsibility to do what is possible to protect it. Our discernment must involve more than our personal views. In the spirit of Easter, as we contemplate the risen Lord, allow me a simple invitation: Arise, receive the vaccine, save lives.

Fr Michael Collins



The de' Medici (Part 3)

The de' Medici and their papal connections

Just as Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici had fostered a mutually enriching relationship between his family and the antipope John XXIII so Cosimo developed a relationship with the future Pope Nicholas V.

Tommaso Parentucelli, a native of Sarzano in Emilia-Romagna, was the son of the town's doctor. Tommaso spent the early years of his adult life as tutor to the children of two Florentine families where, in return for board and a small stipend, he was able to study at the University of Bologna.

The bishop of Bologna, Niccolò Albergati, spotted the young man's talent and generously sponsored his further education. Tommaso may well have expected to follow the predictable discipline of a university scholar until a strange event changed the course of his life.

Following the death of Albergati on 9th May 1444, Nicolò Zanolini, a Canon Regular of the Lateran Basilica in Rome was immediately appointed his successor. A few days following his nomination, Zanolini set off with his entourage for Bologna. Shortly after arriving at Lucca, the bishop-elect took ill and died unexpectedly on 18th May.

During the summer Pope Eugenius IV considered the names of several candidates for the prestigious See of Bologna but on 27th November 1444, he appointed Parentucelli as archbishop.

Shortly after his arrival at Bologna, Parentucelli approached Cosimo de' Medici for loans both personal and for the needs of the archdiocese. Cosimo accepted the new client with alacrity, confident that further loans would flow from his new acquaintance.

To Parentucelli's surprise and Cosimo's delight, the cardinals gathered in conclave following Eugene's death in March 1447 and elected the Archbishop of Bologna as the new pope. While

protesting his unworthiness for the office, Parentucelli consented to his election and assumed the name and title Nicholas V.

From the beginning of his pontificate, Nicholas set about enriching the papal library with hand-copied parchments and books in Greek and Latin. Nicholas was immensely proud of his collection, writing to Enoch of Ascoli of his desire to ensure "that for the common convenience of the learned we may have a library of all books in both Latin and Greek that is worthy of the pope and the Apostolic See." The library was funded in part by de' Medici money.



Pope Nicholas V, portrait by Peter Paul Rubens.

Nicholas was never happier than in his library, arranging books in cabinets, admiring the elaborate gold-tooled leather bindings and leafing through parchment pages. The papal librarians became used to the diminutive figure bent over the table at the centre of the library, his pale face buried in a small book.

The Jubilee Year of 1450 brought thousands of pilgrims to

Rome complete with the offerings of the visitors at the shrines and churches. Since the first Jubilee celebrated by Boniface VIII in 1300, the jubilee had brought thousands of pilgrims from all over Europe. These had enriched the papal coffers as the pilgrims made their way around the churches and shrines of the city. Innkeepers, tavern owners, hawkers, thieves and beggars had all profited from the influx of visitors who crowded into the city every quarter century. From the expanded income Nicholas commissioned a number of artworks as well as ordering the construction of 40 new churches, an ambitious plan which fell short by half. The Rome branch of the de' Medici profited handsomely.

In early 1453, Nicholas was alarmed when he received ambassadors from Constantinople, who recounted tales of Muslim violence and also of their fearsome armies. With little persuasion he wrote to the princes and monarchs of Europe, urging them to assist the beleaguered city where the saintly emperor Constantine was buried.

Nicholas also took the opportunity to dispatch a legate, urging the Patriarch and people to unite and end the schism which had divided the two great cities since the rupture of 1054. The patriarch and clergy were more concerned about the arrival of invaders at the city walls and retorted that they would rather live under the Turkish turban than under the triple tiara.

Nicholas nonetheless dispatched ten galleys to the aid of the beleaguered citizens of Constantinople. Their arrival was too late, for when the ships sailed up the Bosphorus in early June, the city had already fallen to the invaders. The walls had withstood a 53-day siege before being breached on 29th May. The sultan gave the city over to his soldiers to

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Nicholas V set about enriching the papal library with hand-copied parchments and books in Greek and Latin. The library was funded in part by de' Medici money.

plunder for three days. When he entered the ruined city in early June, he found churches burned to the ground, houses stripped bare of furnishings and corpses littered along the streets. Moved to tears, the young man lamented: "What a city we have given over to the sword."

Scholars fled the ancient city and made their way westwards. Many brought their precious manuscripts with them, hoping to save them from certain destruction. The pope welcome those who begged for an audience at his residence at the Vatican. As

the impoverished refugees sought help, the pontiff bought their books and placed them in his library. Those who had knowledge of Greek were deployed in his library or recommended for posts in the city's university and archives.

In his financial dealings, Nicholas V called upon Cosimo de' Medici for assistance and found a ready ally. While Nicholas was assured of financial support, Cosimo extended his influence among the cardinals, one of whom he astutely calculated, was to succeed his



BEHIND ROMAN EYES

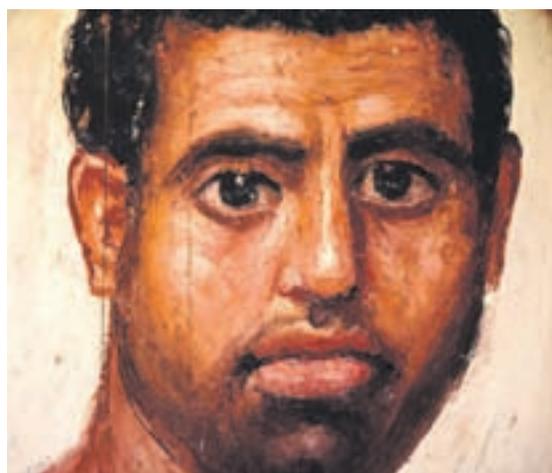
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bibliophile friend.

While Nicholas's efforts to enlist help for a crusade to assist the emperor at Constantinople were unsuccessful, he participated in negotiations to reconcile warring parties in Italy. The year following the fall of Constantinople, the powers of the Italian peninsula succeeded in forming a peaceful pact at Lodi to conclude a series of wars which had begun in 1423.

The rulers of the Italian states believed that France posed a continuous threat to the northern territories of Italy and as no one state could provide adequate security, they decided to form an alliance. Each state was in a position of rapid expansion, with growing populations which had been decimated a century earlier by the Black Death.

The Venetians were extending their lands on the islands of the lagoon and the surrounding territories. Milan was consolidating its power to the south under Duke Francesco Sforza whilst the Spanish Alonzo V of Aragon, who had taken Naples 15 years earlier, was busy fortifying his new lands. The

Florentines continued to solidify their power over Tuscany, as various cities and towns capitulated to their rule.

In the face of these territorial advances, the popes were determined to extend their control over the Papal States in order to ensure their independence. As part of the agreement, member states agreed to send and retain ambassadors to each court. The treaty, the Peace of Lodi, was signed in the town hall of Lodi in Lombardy after which the guests repaired for an elaborate banquet at the hill-top castle, built by Frederick Barbarossa in the 12th century.

The de' Medici meanwhile continued to support the flowering of the classical arts in Florence, providing generous patronage for a band of fortunate artists. Cosimo knew that his patronage not only embellished the city but impressed the citizens and assured him of the civic administrator's loyalty.

Chief among the fortunate beneficiaries of de' Medici largesse was Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, known by his family and friends as Donatello.

Donato was the son of a goldsmith and, as a young man in the first years of the 15th century while still in his teens he had accompanied Filippo Brunelleschi on a visit to Rome where both had studied the ruins of the ancient capital and the statues abandoned by time. The two vied with one another to make evermore perfect drawings and master the art of perspective. As the pair wandered through the deserted forum, overgrown with weeds and through which cows and sheep grazed, they learned the language of capitals and plinths, tympana and pediments.

Cosimo and Donatello formed a very close bond and provoked envy from the many artists who flocked to the Medici residence. Of Cosimo's architects, the favoured was Michelozzo di Bartolomeo Michelozzi, with whom he spent hours making plans

for churches, residences and villas.

An even more talented painter was Giovanni da Fiesole. A native of the Mugello, Giovanni was a Dominican friar who had spent several years at the convent of Fiesole, specialising in the production of illuminated manuscripts. When in middle age he came to Florence, he found a generous sponsor in Cosimo, who commissioned him to decorate nine cells in the Convent of San Marco. One of the cells Cosimo retained for his private use, withdrawing regularly to pray with the friars and engaging conversation with some of the theologians of the house. Through his connections with the papal court, Cosimo presented the reticent friar to Pope Nicholas V, for whom he painted scenes from the life of St Laurence in the pontiff's private chapel at the Apostolic Palace.

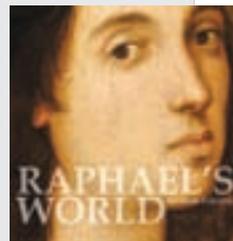
In 1460, Giovanni da Castro found a large piece of quartz-like rock on his lands at Monti della Tolfa. On examination of the white crystal, Giovanni discovered that it was alum, a sulphite produced within volcanic rock. The crystal, which measured little over the length of his finger, led Giovanni to excavate the area, where he found large deposits of the valuable mineral essential for dying cloth and fixing colours in glass. Two years later, the astute Giovanni obtained the concession for extracting the mineral in the Papal States. Within half a century, the mining of alum would provide one of the principal incomes for the papacy and accordingly contributed to the wealth of the de' Medici, who banked the sizeable profits returned to the papal agents.

■ To be continued

The *Journey of the Magi* was painted in the de' Medici residence by Benozzo Gozzoli in 1459. The artist depicted several members of the family in the scene, as well as participants at the Council of Florence.



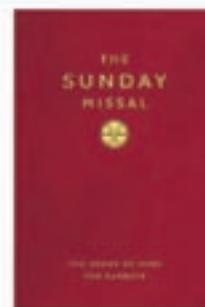
Fr Michael Collins is a priest and author living in Dublin, Ireland, with a passion for history, arts, culture and travel writing. His most recent book is a short biography. **RAPHAEL'S WORLD**, published by Messenger Publications, was written in 2020 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the death of the High Renaissance painter, Raphael Sanzio da Urbino. The book is available to buy from www.messenger.ie Follow Fr Michael on Twitter: @frmikecollins



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■ David Torkington's page is temporarily on hold for a few weeks due to health reasons.

ORDINARY CATHOLICS LIVING THEIR LIVES IN EXTRAORDINARY WAYS

These three personal reflections are reprinted with permission from the spring issue of Maryknoll Lay Missioners' *Voices of Compassion* magazine.



Emelia Yabang counts money with Gabe Hurrish at the Anika store in Yambio, South Sudan.

Emelia Yabang: Recognising the power of working in groups

Gabe Hurrish

Throughout most of the world, women live life at a disadvantage. It's even tougher in Africa, and many women in South Sudan experience severe oppression. Several men here have told me that "a cow is more valuable than a woman."

Most girls are not allowed to finish school; many are married off at the age of 13 or 14 to old men – being sold for cows or cash as their dowry. All too often their life is drudgery and abuse. During armed conflict, they are sometimes raped by combatants or used as slaves and concubines.

Many have been abandoned by men or are widows struggling to raise their children. Emelia Yabang, whom I met two years ago in Yambio, is helping women facing these challenges.

Emelia impressed me with her cheerfulness and big smile when she came to our teachers' college to sell trinkets such as dish soap, hand lotion, peanuts and baskets. I later found out she is the director of Anika ("We can do it" in the local Pazande language), a women's group she started with no outside funding or assistance. The group helps women create small businesses, making and selling clothes and many other products.

The women also pray together; faith is a big part of why they do this work.

Emelia also helps mediate domestic issues between husbands and wives. When one of the women experiences domestic violence, the others will take her into their homes.

The group recently brought a court case against one man. In

South Sudan, there are two systems of law – civil law, run by the government, and traditional law, administered by the chiefs and tribal courts. In domestic violence cases, the lawyer usually defers to the tribal court, and in 99.9 per cent of the cases, the verdict is decided in the man's favour. So even the fact that the women organised and united to bring this case was a shock to the men who run the law.

Now well-known in Yambio, Anika continues to grow. During the pandemic, the women helped with public information campaigns and produced hand soap and face masks.

Despite many hardships, women are the ones holding this country together. Women know what the problems are, but they often lack the power to solve them. Working together in groups, like Anika, gives them strength.

Paula Perez: Living through trauma, working for solidarity

Melissa Altman

During the 1979-1992 civil war in El Salvador, Paula Perez, her sister Esmeralda, and their 10 siblings were living in their hometown of Monte San Juan. One night they were warned that the army was going to come and burn everything down. They fled and settled in Zaragoza.

Despite government intimidation, Paulita, as we called her, worked together with other community leaders and became very active in her new parish's social ministry. The parish was served by the Cleveland Diocese mission team, and Paulita knew and worked with two of the four US church women who were martyred in 1980 – Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel and lay missionary Jean Donovan.

In those years, Paulita helped take care of many children who lost their parents in the war.

I met Paulita when I started working in Zaragoza in 2016. She was one of 15 women who started an association called *Mujer y Comunidad* (Woman and Community). She knew how to hand-embroider, and one of the other women, María Julia, knew how to sew. The two of them taught other women, and that's how our women's co-operative, ACOMUJERZA, began.

The community and co-op were always first in Paulita's mind. "We need to remember that this is for the co-op," she would say, always focused on the common good and on bringing in and including others.

I remember the great way Paulita had of dealing with one woman who was always looking for an angle to make some



Paula Perez poses while teaching embroidery to a young woman during a 2016 summer class in Zaragoza, El Salvador.

personal profit. She would say: "That's a great idea, but let's think of it for the co-operative. Let's put the community, the women, the children, the people at the centre of what we're doing."

I always think of her when I'm in a meeting and someone is missing the point. How can I do this in a Paulita way, reminding this person of why we're here and reorienting them towards the common good?

Paulita would never be the person to get up and give a speech, yet she lived a deep faith through her actions, whether it was taking care of the orphans during the war or teaching a mother how to sew. That was her spiritual way to walk.

Paulita was already ill when I met her, but she continued working full time. Unfortunately, her illness progressed and she eventually died two years ago. It was hard watching her decline and visiting her on her deathbed. She and her sister, Esmeralda, who is also a pillar of our co-op, are an example of living through trauma, coming through to the other side and still working for solidarity.

Sister Annunciata: A ministry of presence in Tanzania

Liz Mach

I met Sister Annunciata Chacha when I was working with the Musoma Diocese and needed help with Jipe Moyo, a shelter that helps children, mostly girls, who have been orphaned or abandoned.

She had joined the Immaculate Heart Sisters of Africa, a Tanzanian order of women religious that was initially founded by Maryknoll. After working for some time on women's issues, she was elected to her order's council and moved to their motherhouse in Musoma. Because of her previous experience, we asked her to head Jipe Moyo.



Running Jipe Moyo is a big responsibility, and Sr Annunciata is very good at it, including at fundraising and finances. Unfortunately, as a result, she has had to deal with a lot of criticism from some of the priests in the diocese, who think women should not be handling money and make

life tough for her. I admire how she stands up to that criticism and doesn't let it distract her.

Sr Annunciata also prays with the children and connects them with the wider world. After I moved back home to Minnesota last summer, one of my good friends here had to go on a ventilator and eventually died of Covid. I let Sr Annunciata and the girls know right away. The children were praying for Cindy, whom they knew because she had

visited us in Musoma.

Many of the children at the shelter have experienced severe trauma – they may have been raped, escaped child marriages, or been beaten and kicked out of their homes for refusing to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM). Although illegal, the practice of FGM, sometimes called female circumcision, remains a common practice in this part of Tanzania, including in Sr Annunciata's ethnic group. Luckily, she and her sisters were spared because her father, a catechist, could not reconcile it with his Christian faith.

Having had these traumatic experiences, the children need

someone like Sr Annunciata who has tremendous compassion and empathy. She spends a lot of time just being with the children in small groups. They might be cleaning, gardening, sewing or making rosaries. When you are doing these things together, you can start talking about issues in a nonthreatening way. She does that so beautifully.

There were times, after hearing the story of a child who was raped, I went home and just cried my eyes out, but Sr Annunciata listens to those horrendous stories all the time. She told me: "I just take it to prayer and give it back to God because that is all you can do."

FEATURE

New radio station will help keep rural Malawi Catholics informed

Tonny Onyulo

While working on his tomato farm in Blantyre, a district in southern Malawi, Peter Kamwendo listens to a Kuwala FM radio programme meant to raise awareness of Covid-19 and religious tolerance.

Kamwendo, a parishioner in Chikwawa, told *Catholic News Service* the Catholic radio station allows him to find out what is going on in local communities and across the country without having to browse the internet on his smartphone. He also said the station ensures parishioners are well-versed in Church teachings.

"We have very many false preachers in our areas who give us false teachings," he said. "But we'll now rely on our radio station for spiritual nourishment and other teachings."

"We are enjoying the programmes because they are entertaining and educative," the 45-year-old said in Chichewa, his language. "But the most important message is that of Jesus Christ. The Church is spreading the word of God through the radio station, and the message is transforming our lives."

Kamwendo's feelings are mirrored across the Archdiocese of Blantyre and surrounding areas of more than 2.5 million Christian listeners. The newly founded radio station serves as a tool of evangelisation with a particular focus on catechetical programmes, social and pastoral challenges.

Father Frank Mwinganyama, communications co-ordinator in the Archdiocese of Blantyre, told *CNS* the radio is also meant to benefit and educate young people,

who need good morals and spiritual guidance. During the Covid-19 crisis, the radio is sending out prevention messages to communities, but it also offers programmes to develop the spiritual gifts of young people as well as Bible studies and interactive discussions, said Fr Frank.

He said it is the fourth regional Catholic radio station in Malawi. Rural communities are particularly grateful the Church chose to broadcast programmes in the languages of each region, since other radio stations in the country transmit in English, which is not understandable in many rural communities.

Father Alfred Chaima of the Archdiocese of Blantyre said Kuwala FM, whose name means light in the Chichewa language, was using local dialects to ensure that parishioners receive grow in relationship with Jesus, since not everyone in the area can physically attend a Mass.

According to 2018 census data, 77.3 per cent of the country's nearly 18 million people are Christian; Catholics are 17.2 per cent of the population.

"We want to ensure our parishioners are deeply rooted in Jesus Christ through our new radio station," Fr Alfred said. "We want to simplify catechesis teaching to parishioners and use the new station as a platform for our lay leadership to receive additional training for their spiritual formation."

Fr Alfred said Catholics often look to lay leaders for instruction and spiritual direction.



"We want to provide various trainings to our lay staff and spiritually mentor them because, based on research, they are involved in prayers, counsel youths and nurture children in their areas and lead the ministries that engage others in Christian formation," he said.

Mphatso Phiri, an elder in Chirimba, said the programmes being aired on the new radio station have enabled him to receive and grasp the leaders' powerful message of Christ and other important topics, especially about Covid-19.

Residents of the region, especially Catholics, share their opinions on diverse topics by calling into the radio station, he said, adding that, "by participating in live broadcasts from their village, residents are able to understand the discussion well."

"I have learned a lot on how I can protect myself and my family from the virus," said Phiri. "I didn't have a lot of information when the pandemic hit us. But now I wear my mask properly in public areas and ensure I limit attending gathering such as funerals, weddings and parties."

As the name in local language suggests, Kuwala means light. Light in the Bible stands for spiritual illumination and truth. It encompasses all that is pure, good and holy as opposed to the darkness of evil. Hence the radio station stands to reflect this.



Archbishop Thomas Luke Msusa of Blantyre, Malawi, is pictured with members of the Kuwala FM radio task force. The newly founded Catholic radio station serves as a tool of evangelisation, with a particular focus on catechetical programmes, social and pastoral challenges for people in rural areas. (CNS photo/courtesy Kuwala FM)

Ellis Heasley

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Christian priest sentenced amid continuing concerns for religious minorities

Earlier this month Turkish authorities sentenced Assyrian Christian Priest Father Sefer Bilecen, known as Father Aho (pictured), to two years and one month in prison on unfounded charges linking him with a terrorist organisation.



Church leadership, and both of which took place in Turkey prior to the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of those targeted have resided in Turkey for decades.

CSW recently conducted a series of interviews with several of those who

have been expelled, many of whom expressed serious concerns that the Turkish authorities are likely to start targeting Christian Turkish nationals as the natural progression from their campaign against foreigners. Speaking to CSW after Fr Aho's sentencing, one human rights activist from the Syriac community in Turkey said: "The Turkish authorities have been making every effort to erase the Christian heritage of Turkey; they have created a hostile environment, making it extremely difficult for the very small Christian community in Turkey to survive. They are suffocating us."

With the Turkish authorities continuing to seek engagement with the international community, and particularly with the European Union, it is essential that states continue to press the government to end all forms of discrimination against religious minorities, and to uphold its constitutional obligations to protect and respect the rights of all citizens regardless of their religious affiliation or ethnic background.

Prior to his arrest, Fr Aho had been taking care of the 1500-year-old Mor Yakub Monastery in Mardin province for several years. In February 2020 he was charged with joining a terrorist organisation. The priest's sentencing comes amid an increasingly concerning picture for Christians and other religious minorities in Turkey. The current government, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has repeatedly propagated the view that to be Turkish is to be Sunni Muslim, with all other religious groups facing growing challenges to their religious and cultural identities.

In February, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) raised concerns at a campaign that has specifically targeted foreign missionary workers and has resulted in the expulsions of close to 70 Christian foreign nationals, including the spouses of Turkish citizens, since early 2019.

Most of the expulsions appear to relate to two annual training seminars which took place in late 2019 and early 2020, one on working with children and the other for

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Please pray for Fr Aho, asking God for his sentence to be overturned and for the charges against him to be dropped immediately and without condition. Pray also for an end to the Turkish authorities' campaign of expulsions against foreign Christian workers, and that Christians and religious minorities across the country would be free to practise their faith as promised to them in the Turkish constitution and by various international laws.

Fr Francis Marsden



A woman of intense prayer and close union with God

Church politics is a messy business, and seldom more so than during the 'Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy' (1309-76). For 67 years the popes never entered their city of Rome, but instead luxuriated in Avignon in the south of France. This Thursday we honour St Catherine of Siena, who was instrumental in bringing this deplorable state of affairs to an unsatisfactory end.

It had begun with a feud in 1302 between Philip IV, King of France (1285-1314) and Pope Boniface VIII. Philip the Fair, le Roi de fer, tried to tax the French clergy of 50 per cent of their income to support his wars with England. In his Bull *Unam sanctam* Boniface claimed with undue hubris: "It is necessary to salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman pontiff."

Philip retaliated: "Your venerable conceitedness may know that we are nobody's vassal in temporal matters." Threatened with excommunication, he sent in his goons to rough Boniface up, in an episode known as *lo schiaffo* (slap) *di Anagni*. Boniface died a month later. In 1305 the papacy passed to Bertrand de Got, a close friend of Philip IV. He took the name Clement V, was crowned in Lyon and refused to go to Rome.

In 1309 the Papal Curia moved to Avignon. The pope was now under the thumb of Philip IV. The King had expelled the Jews from France in 1306, to avoid paying his debts and to confiscate their property. Next he forced Clement to suppress the Knights Templars, grabbed their wealth, and burnt their leaders at the stake on false charges of heresy and sodomy. Eight months later Philip died of a stroke, aged 46. Divine justice exacted retribution.

The next six popes were all French. In 1367 Urban V briefly returned to Rome for two years. Largely at the insistence of St Catherine of Siena, the last Avignon Pope, Gregory XI (1370-1378) returned to Rome.

Catherine was born in 1347, 24th of 25 children of Giacomo and Lapa Benincasa. Half of her siblings, including her twin sister, died in infancy. She was a lively and friendly child. At the age of six she had a vision of Jesus in papal robes, in glory with the Apostles, enthroned above the local Dominican church. This generated in her a decision to dedicate herself entirely to God.

She was 16 when her older married sister Bonaventura died. Catherine's parents wanted to marry her off to the young widower. She refused, cut off her hair to make herself look less attractive, and started fasting on bread and vegetables. "Build a cell inside your mind, from which you can never flee," was her advice.

She tried to join the 'Mantellate', mostly older widows who were members of the Dominican Third order. They did charitable work among Siena's poor, but were reluctant to accept a strange teenager who seemed totally withdrawn and over pious. Eventually in 1365 they accepted Catherine.

For three years Catherine lived at home in solitude and prayer, until a profound mystical experience turned her towards public life and helping her neighbour. God, she said, is always "gentle, first Truth." However, our relationship with God cannot simply rest in intimacy and union, but must reach out, as God reached out to humankind in Jesus.

The famine of 1370 and plague



St Catherine of Siena receives the sacred stigmata. This mystical event is depicted in the Rosary Chapel of Santa Sabina basilica in Rome.

of 1374 gave her ample opportunity for love of neighbour. When she started preaching, however, she faced considerable opposition. Women were not supposed to preach.

Her spiritual guide and biographer, Blessed Raymond of Capua, reports hundreds crowding in from the mountains and countryside around Siena to hear her speak. He arranged for three priest-confessors to accompany her on her missions, so many were those inspired to repent and convert.

The Church was in dire need of reform: the clergy, she wrote to Pope Gregory XI, "ought to be mirrors of freely chosen poverty, humble lambs, giving out the Church's possessions to the poor. Yet here they are, living in worldly luxury and ambition and pretentious vanity, a thousand times worse than if they belonged to the world."

She criticised the bishops for ordaining "little boys instead of mature men...idiots who scarcely know how to read and could never pray the *Divine Office*...ignorant of Latin and unable to say even the words of consecration. They consider it beneath them to visit the poor, refusing to lift a finger to help, they stand by as others die of hunger."

Milan and Florence had formed an anti-Papal league against Rome and were fomenting rebellion in the Papal States. Catherine persuaded Pisa and Lucca not to join this League. Gregory XI placed Florence under interdict and excommunicated its Government, resulting in the so-

called War of the Eight Saints.

Addressing Pope Gregory as Babbo, Daddy, she urged him to remedy the evils in the Church, return the papacy to Rome, and launch a Crusade against the Turk. Despite the protests of the French King and most of the cardinals, Gregory left Avignon on 13th September 1376, and took ship from Marseilles to Tarquinia. He landed at Ostia on 14th January 1377, and sailed up the Tiber to the Monastery of San Paolo. From there he made his ceremonial entrance into Rome. He died two months later!

Catherine had done her best. A conclave was held. A Roman mob burst into the chamber to force the election of an Italian. They chose a non-cardinal, Bartolomeo Prignano, who took the name Urban VI. He is the last non-cardinal to be elected pope to date.

But, Roman politics! What did the cardinals do next? They withdrew to Fondi, half-way to Naples, annulled the election of Prignano, and in September 1378 elected Robert of Geneva as antipope Clement VII. What a mess! Robert had scant resources in Italy, so he returned to Avignon and set up court there. For the next 40 years there would be two popes, briefly three, in this Western Schism (1378-1417).

Catherine committed herself to prayer and fasting for the unity of the Church. During these last years she wrote *The Dialogue*, her conversation with God the Father. Most of it is prophecy, with the Father speaking in the first person.

Her extreme fasting – for some time living on the Eucharist alone –

and inability to eat (which sounds like anorexia) brought on physical collapse and paralysis. She offered herself as a sacrificial victim for Christ's Church, and died on 29th April 1380, aged only 33.

Her body found rest in Rome's Dominican church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, near the Pantheon. She suffered the medieval indignity of being dismembered for relics. Her head went to Siena. In 1461, Pius II, himself Siennese, canonised Catherine. In 1939, she was made primary patron of Italy together with Francis of Assisi.

Until 1970, it was considered impossible that any mere woman could be declared a Doctor of the Church. The *munus docendi*, the teaching mission, was a male preserve. Then on 27th September 1970, Pope Paul VI named the Carmelite St Teresa of Ávila a Doctor of the Church, and added Catherine a week later. She is still the only lay Doctor.

In 1999, Pope John Paul II made her one of Europe's patron saints, along with Edith Stein and Birgitta of Sweden. We celebrate her feast next Thursday. Let me conclude with her prayer to the Holy Spirit: "*Holy Spirit, come into my heart; draw it to Thee by Thy power, O my God, and grant me charity with filial fear. Preserve me, O beautiful Love, from every evil thought; warm me, inflame me with Thy dear love, and every pain will seem light to me. My Father, my sweet Lord, help me in all my actions. Jesus, love, Jesus, love. Amen.*"

CREDO



Responding to the good shepherd's voice

25th April, 2021. Fourth Sunday of Easter

1st Reading: Acts 4:8-12

By the power of the risen Jesus we can be saved.

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.

This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Responsorial: from Psalm 118

R./: The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever.

It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.

It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes. (R./)

I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have been my saviour.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. (R./)

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord;

we bless you from the house of the Lord.

I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have been my saviour.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his kindness endures forever. (R./)

2nd Reading: 1 John 3:1-2

The love of the Father, lavished on all God's children.

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

Gospel: John 10:1-10

Christ is the true Shepherd; nobody can take away his sheep.

"Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and



the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

Again Jesus said to them: "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

A very personal relationship

When people go to Rome on pilgrimage, they usually try to include a visit to the Catacombs, the earliest Christian cemeteries in existence. The earliest Christian art is there in the catacombs, in images are very simple and unadorned compared to the art that would emerge in later centuries. Yet these pictures are very striking just because of their simplicity and directness. One of the images of Jesus most found in the catacombs is that of the Good Shepherd. One is in the Catacomb of San Callixtus, showing a young beardless man with a

sheep draped around his shoulders and holding a bucket of water in his right hand. Clearly the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd that we find in today's gospel spoke to Christians from the earliest days of the church.

The shepherd image in the catacombs appealed to Christians from the start, because it conveys the personal nature of the relationship between Jesus and his followers; it portrays the close personal care that the shepherd has for the sheep. The shepherd has gone looking for the one sheep that was wandered off and having found it, he takes it home to the flock upon his shoulders. There is a bond between the shepherd and this one sheep. That is what Jesus conveys in today's gospel. He declares that he knows his own and his own know him, just as the Father knows him and he knows the Father. It is an extraordinary statement to make. Jesus is saying that the very personal relationship he has with his heavenly Father is the model for the equally personal relationship he has with each one of us. Jesus knows us as intimately as the Father knows him, and he wants us to know him as intimately as he knows the Father. There is a great deal to ponder there. When it comes to the Lord we are not just one of a

crowd, lost in a sea of faces. In a way that we will never fully understand, the Lord knows each one of us by name. He relates to us in a personal way and he invites us to relate to him in a personal way. He wishes to enter into a personal relationship with each one of us. I am often struck by a line in Saint Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia, where he says: 'I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me'. We can each make our own those words of Saint Paul. When Jesus says in today's gospel that, as the good shepherd: 'I lay down my life for my sheep', he is saying that he lays down his life for each one of us individually.

The Lord who knows us by name, who gave himself in love for each one of us, also calls us by name. Today is *Vocations Sunday*. The Lord has a calling that is personal to each one of us. He calls us in our uniqueness with our very particular temperament, our unique identity, the background that is specific to each one of us. No one of us is like anyone else. Parents know how distinct and unique each of their children is. They will all have been given the same love; they grow up in basically the same environment. Yet, from a very early age, their uniqueness becomes very evident.

The family is a microcosm of the Church as a whole. From the time of our baptism, we are each called to be the Lord's disciples, to follow the good Shepherd. However, the way we do that will be unique to each one of us. The particular way in which the Lord works through us is unique to each one of us. I can do something for the Lord that only I can do. Each person in this Church can do something for the Lord that only he or she can do. Each one of us has a unique contribution to make to the work of the Lord in the world, to the life of the Church, and that contribution is just as vital as anyone else's contribution. We each have a unique vocation and each vocation is equally significant. Each one of us is vitally important to the Lord. When we each respond to our unique vocation, we give a lift to everyone else. When any one of us fails to respond to that vocation, we are all a little bit impoverished.

The first reading talks about the stone that was rejected by the builders becoming the keystone of the building. There is a clear reference there to Jesus himself, the rejected one. We can all feel at times like the rejected stone, for whatever reason. Yet, we are never rejected in the Lord's eyes. He continues to call us in the way that is unique to us. He sees us as the keystone for some aspect of his work. He recognises the potential for good that is within us all. On this *Vocations Sunday* we commit ourselves anew to hearing and responding to the call of the good shepherd.

■ Published by kind permission of The Association of Catholic Priests, an association for Catholic Priests who wish to have a forum, and a voice to reflect, discuss and comment on issues affecting the Church and society today. See www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie

Questions and answers... with Fr Francis Doyle

Do miracles have a place in the modern-day Catholic Church?

Q. Why don't we see many healings today? I'm told that they were more numerous in the early Church. I read that the theologian Athanasius in the year AD 354 wrote: 'We know bishops who still work signs'.

Recently, I was watching a documentary on television which showed a clip of Pope Francis embracing and kissing what seemed to be a seriously ill child. What if he had laid hands on that child and miraculously cured him, as did some of his predecessors in the past? What an impression that would have made in today's ultrasecular world!

A. Certainly, some miracles do still occur. In recent years, Pope Francis approved a miracle attributed to the intercession of Blessed Carlo Acutis, a 15-year-old Italian teenager who died from leukemia in 2006 and was beatified last October. The miracle involved the healing of a young Brazilian boy afflicted with a rare congenital disease of the pancreas. And at last count, after extensive scrutiny, the medical bureau at Lourdes in France had documented 70 miracles since the virgin appeared there in 1858.

But I have the same impression as you – that miracles are not as frequent now as they were in the early Church – so it is reasonable to ask why.

It may have something to do with our faith not being sufficiently strong. Remember in Acts 14, Paul cured the crippled man after seeing “that he had the faith to be healed” and in Luke 18:42, when Jesus said to the blind beggar: “Have sight; your faith has saved you.” Faith, lively and strong, seems to have been an essential ingredient in a miracle and a necessary prerequisite.

Jesus, it should be pointed out, did not cure every sick or disabled person that he met. The number of Christ's miracles was limited. He seems to have healed not to ‘put on a show’ but only when it seemed critical to the messianic mission or when, moved with special compassion, he wanted to reward a person's faith.

Why he did not heal everyone is the same question as why God doesn't cure each sick child whom Pope Francis embraces with obvious affection – and the answer is something I don't think we'll fully know while we are on this side of heaven.

Meanwhile, it may be important to broaden our view as to what we consider to be a healing. In the 1960s, after my sister had been sick for several years with multiple sclerosis, my family took her to Lourdes. We were hoping that by bathing in the spring waters of that shrine, she might be freed from her illness. She was not.



Blessed Carlo Acutis, an Italian teenager who used his computer programming skills to spread devotion to the Eucharist. He was beatified on 10th October, 2020.

(Catholic News Service photo/courtesy Sainthood Cause of Carlo Acutis)

But what did happen was that from that day until she died four years later, she seemed perfectly at peace. She evidently felt that she had done everything that God had asked of her, and so she bore her suffering with true serenity. I had wished and prayed for a different outcome, but the Lord, I am confident, was wiser than I.

Q. In some Catholic churches, I have heard Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Dietrich Bonhoeffer invoked during the chanting of the *Litany of the Saints*. Are they saints we can pray to?

A. By canonisation, the Catholic Church declares with the fullness of its authority that a person is in heaven and worthy of veneration. Theoretically, I suppose that the

Church could make that judgement of a non-Catholic, but to date it has not done so.

This is not because we believe that heaven is populated only by Catholics; to the contrary, the teaching of the Church is that heaven may be granted through God's grace to people who live morally and follow the promptings of God.

There is a reluctance on the Church's part to usurp another religion's role in evaluating the life and works of its members. Additionally, classical Protestantism, while it sets up historical figures as worthy of admiration (Martin Luther, for example, or John Wesley), does not invoke their prayerful intercession.

To enrol Dr King or Pastor Bonhoeffer formally in our own *Litany of the Saints* could be seen as an ecumenical *faux pas* – although I would have no problem enlisting such heroes (along with Gandhi) in private prayer, as I do with members of my family who have gone before me.

Q. My husband likes playing PlayStation video games. One of the games, called *Summoner*, is a role-playing game where you summon the devil. It is violent and uses spells, hex, magic and other occult practices.

He had been playing for hours every day, but I insisted that he not play this game. The Bible says to stay away from anything that deals with the occult. He becomes more distant, angry and addicted when playing and I want these games out of my house.

He threw a chair across the room once when I tried to talk to him about the dangers of engaging in this kind of game. He has now stopped playing for a while but he has not removed the games from our home. I am afraid that when he retires soon, he may return to these games. Do you have any advice?

A. Study of the link between violence and video games began in earnest with Columbine. In the spring of 1999, two heavily armed adolescent boys walked into Columbine High School in Colorado, in the US, and shot to death 12 of their schoolmates and a teacher, before killing themselves.

When authorities investigated, they discovered that the two boys had spent thousands of hours playing a ‘first-person shooter’ video game. The following year, a Chicago-area paediatrician named Michael Rich testified before the Chicago City Council and said that “more than 3,500 research studies have examined the association between media violence and violent behaviour; all but 18 have shown that the more violence you see, the more likely you are to be violent”.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his message for World Communications Day in 2007, said that “any trend to produce programmes and products – including animated films and video games – which in the name of entertainment exalt violence and portray antisocial behaviour or the trivialisation of human

sexuality is a perversion, all the more repulsive when these programmes are directed at children and adolescents.”

So I agree with your concern over your husband's fascination with violent video games; whether it actually produces violent behaviour or not, it baffles me that any Christian could find entertainment in the suffering or death of others – whether real or simulated. Throwing a chair is certainly not homicide, but it bothers me that your husband did that!

Q. I know a family who are originally from Jordan but are now UK citizens. They are members of the local Eastern-rite Catholic Church. They would like to get their five-year-old grandson baptised in the Roman Catholic Church.

Also, they said that while a relative who is an Eastern-rite Catholic nun was visiting here from Jordan, she was refused Holy Communion at a Latin-rite church.

So I have two questions: What are the rules for receiving Communion if you are a Catholic of the Eastern rite? And how should I advise her about her grandson's baptism?

A. First, as to Holy Communion, which is the easier part, Eastern Catholics are in full communion with Rome and the Vatican and are, of course, welcome to receive the Eucharist in any Catholic church.

As to baptism, a valid baptism in the Latin Church is recognised as a valid baptism in the Eastern churches, and vice versa.

But I do have a couple of questions: First of all, why is it the grandparents who are deciding about the baptism? Normally it is the parents of the child who make that determination, and in fact the *Code of Canon Law* provides that ‘for an infant to be baptised licitly, the parents or at least one of them or the person who legitimately takes their place must consent’ (No. 868).

And second, in which Church is the child going to be brought up? If the boy is going to be raised and educated as an Eastern Catholic, doesn't it make sense to begin his sacramental path in that same Church?

■ Please note that Fr Doyle cannot answer readers' personal questions through this column.

Tackling the hidden risks of Covid-19

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Sean Ellard



As another savage Covid-19 wave crashes around the world, governments, companies and institutions are failing people. Between disinformation, unequal vaccine access, production limitations, inconsistent social regulations, and nearly unfettered, continual global travel, it can seem like society is happy to put a fire out with one hand, while setting a new one with the other.

With only around 700 million doses of vaccine injected into people's arms, mostly in the western world, most of the Earth's remaining seven billion people have little or no access to a vaccine right now.

The clock is ticking, and while supplies are slowly expanding and more remote, far-off places are able to receive vaccines, the simple reality is there is not enough to go around. Worse still, developing countries that already struggle to feed and provide basics to its people, cannot be reliably counted on to conduct mass public inoculations of millions of people.

One thing the Vatican has access to and experience with is missionary work in far-off corners of the globe. Now, more than ever, institutions like the Catholic Church can turn the page on some of its past culturally destructive practices, and instead use that same institutional horsepower to help preserve and protect these same at-risk rural populations. Brazil is great example.

More Catholics live in Brazil, over 120 million, than any other country. It is also home to some of the most vulnerable indigenous populations on earth, like the Yanomami. Delicate populations that are already being ravaged by Covid. And if more is not done, these mutating viruses could wipe out nearly the entire population with such ruthless speed and efficiency not seen since smallpox arrived in the new world. History books tell us what happens when our diseases descend upon unsuspecting, isolated populations.

Brazil is also home to more deadly and contagious variants than almost anywhere else, while also having Covid-19 disproportionately impacting its younger population. The reasons are unclear. What is clear, is not enough is being done and the continual march of time is a like a ticking clock counting down to an unknown, yet ominous finale.

The Church needs to flex its considerable muscle and help preserve and protect in situations like this, whatever way it can. While the Church operates within the boundaries of sovereign states, it's power, reach and collective voice can transcend imaginary political boundaries in different ways. Now is the time for a new approach, a willing-



A vaccine clinic in Lima, Peru. Access to vaccines is hugely biased to the richer, western world

ness to forge a different path.

We have learned during these terrible times that governments cannot be fully depended on to take care of people during sufficiently. While spiritual guidance is essential for billions of people right now, regardless of faith, logistical guidance from politicians and governments is failing many of those same people.

The Vatican has the ability to transcend many governments. It can go to the ground and work directly with people who need immediate assistance in managing this crisis. While ongoing small and isolated efforts are critically important, this crisis demands a much larger, more centralised approach, utilising the same logistical, financial and organisational horsepower a two millennia-old religious organization can bring.

Helping end the Covid-19 crisis is also a prudent, forward-thinking approach for the Church. Now is the time to create new, unlikely alliances with other like-minded groups and even different religious organisations. We are stronger together. The longer people must endure the crisis, the greater chance we let ourselves fall victim to ourselves.

An example of this is the dangerous beachhead of creating Covid-19 passports. If people, mainly the working class and those less fortunate, suddenly find themselves on the wrong side of a new discriminatory passport system, it would be foolhardy to believe this is where it will stop. The danger with surrendering even more of our dwindling freedoms and protections of our privacy is the inevitable slope it puts everyone on. Systems like that, produced and developed by large corporations to provide services to governments, is another technological layer separating us from our independence and freedom.

Naomi Klein's book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, shows how rushed Covid policies, and the economic benefits some reap from them, ultimately come at the cost of our individual freedoms. When businesses and governments are allowed to provide huge, dramatic solutions to immediate crisis, people are often too weary or 'shocked' by the overall experience,

to question if what is happening is right – let alone digest the long-term ramifications. In a bid to save ourselves from Covid, we run the risk of surrendering too much of ourselves, and our future, to do it.

Technology alone cannot save us. The vaccine itself is proof. While the most effective remedy to try to protect ourselves from Covid-19 is available to many in the west, polluted, conflicting and outright false narratives being spread (to serve various agendas, both political and economic) succeed by continuing to fuel disinformation and reluctance about the vaccines.

Those same social media platforms used to spread the disinformation allow it because it is good business. They cannot risk alienating groups. If you shut down or censor one group's 'disinformation' campaign today, others will fear you'll shut them down tomorrow and that is bad for business. So, the doors stay open.

Big businesses are reluctant to take responsibility because responsibility is a very human characteristic. Businesses are not people and don't think or operate like them. Society must stop expecting otherwise. Unless we wrestle back control and

protection for ourselves, nothing is safe, and nothing can be held sacred.

There is also another hidden risk in the shadows. Just because the passports are used for Covid-19 today, doesn't mean they can't be adapted for something else, tomorrow. Like, say, religious classification 'to help governments keep track'. Once you open the door to labelling and bifurcating society into haves and have-nots, there are no rules for fair play about other labels you can or cannot add. No one is in charge; it simply becomes a universal tool that can be adapted *ad nauseum* to meet specific, political, and ideological agendas. The bridge between a Covid-19 passport and an armband with the Star of David is much shorter span than people realise.

This is where the Vatican can step forward; it needs to speak out against the idea of vaccine passports and work to get more people treated, faster. The reality is, the longer Covid remains swirling and spreading, it will continue to mutate and put humanity on its heels trying to play catch-up, hoping it doesn't change into something we can no longer deal with.

Or when we do, the outcome risks being no better than the problem we are trying to solve.

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Feature

British son of a Holocaust survivor laments dwindling of the 'Righteous'

Mark Pattison

The number of Holocaust survivors is dwindling but so, too, are those "righteous Gentiles" who saved Jews who were almost certain to perish, according to the son of one such survivor.

"On my father's side, he and his parents and his brother all survived in Italy because of the kindness and bravery and human decency of the people who saved them," said Jonathan Sacerdoti, a London-based writer and broadcast journalist.

Three of those who protected Sacerdoti's father, uncle and grandparents have been recognised by Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to Holocaust victims, as Righteous Among the Nations.

They include the mother superior of a convent who took in the boys, ages five and three, in 1943, and their mother; and two priests who arranged for new hiding places in Italy when the Nazis got too close for comfort.

"It was a traumatic experience, but one that saved them," Sacerdoti told Catholic News Service. He wrote an essay, 'How should we honour the 'angels' of the Holocaust when they're gone?' for *Spectator* magazine. The article was posted on 8th April, recognised in Israel as Yom HaShoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Sacerdoti's father, Cesare, was the son of an Italian rabbi. "This emphasis he put on these people is as good people. These are people they should all try to emulate," Jonathan said of his father.

"My father had an exceptional memory in life," he added. "He remembered everything, remembered enormous amounts of that experience," Jonathan said, recalling that his father would speak often of his experiences in hiding under the sister's protection.

The mother superior, Maria Agnese Tribbioli, the convent's



Jonathan Sacerdoti says the number of Gentiles who helped Jews during the war has dwindled to 193

founder, did not tell even the other sisters that the new children in their care were Jews.

Cesare Sacerdoti, who married an English woman and settled in the UK, returned to Italy about 11 years ago with his son to visit the places where he had been hidden. While there, they tracked down a couple of the nuns who had been in the convent during the war.

"They remembered the same stories my father told me about his time in the convent," Jonathan said. In one instance, little Cesare refused to make the sign of the cross. The mother superior brushed aside the obstinacy, saying the boy was trau-



Belgian Andrée Geulen-Herscovici, right, visits the Hall of Names at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. For more than two years during World War II she helped hide Jewish children with Christian families and at monasteries, where they could stay until the end of the war. She was recognised as Righteous Among the Nations in 1989. Photo: Yonathan Weitzman, Reuters

matised after having been forced to leave his home.

Another story a nun corroborated: Seeing the priest in the sanctuary of the convent chapel in his vestments must have reminded Cesare's three-year-old brother of the robes his rabbi father would have worn in the synagogue, for he cried out, "Papa! Papa!" It was a case of mistaken identity.

Cesare's mother knew two hairdressers. One was named Licia. "Her husband was a policeman who told the family to run away at the right moment and go into hiding," Jonathan said. "Another hairdresser friend of my grandmother's was called Margo. She hid my grandfather in their home. The pharmacist gave money every month to Margo, who couldn't afford to keep him."

All of Cesare's rescuers, Jonathan said, had died by the time of that visit. Cesare Sacerdoti himself died in 2019.

But Jonathan, using his journalist's training, recorded interviews with his father about his experiences as a Jewish child during the war. "I have them on tape – literally, on



Fr Pawel Rytel-Andrianik stands by a stone marking the 'Garden of the Righteous' outside the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum

tape. So I have that for the next generation – and future generations, I guess. He was pleased to tell the stories, I would say, the last 10 or 20 years. He seemed reinvigorated, re-energised to tell the story more," he said. "We knew his gratitude to the people who saved him."

Others helped the Sacerdoti fam-

ily although their names are lost to history. These include the people who ran an orphanage where the Sacerdoti boys lived for several months when they could no longer stay at the convent.

"My father's overriding memories of his nine months in the orphanage were of hunger and cold, but also of

the warmth of the nuns who protected him – he told us that warmth stayed with him all his life," Jonathan said.

"As my father once said, 'They seemed to appear where and when you needed them, like angels,'" Jonathan told *The Spectator*. "In fact, their actions were decidedly human, actively choosing to protect their fellow man at a time when evil and indifference prevailed. When faced with the question of what our duty is as citizens of the world, each of us can choose to make a difference."

The number of surviving Righteous Among the Nations has shrunk to 193, as two more died during Holy Week. "They weren't Jews, but whatever their backgrounds – nuns or priests in my father's case, peasants in Eastern Europe or Poland, or teachers or industrialist in the famous case of Oskar Schindler, they were Righteous," Sacerdoti said, pointing out a royal connection with those heroes of the past: "Even the Duke of Edinburgh has a connection; his mother was recognised as a Righteous Among the Nations for saving people she knew.



(left) Venezuelan refugees are seen inside a coliseum in Arauquita, Colombia, earlier this month. A temporary camp was set up after the Venezuelans fled their country due to a military offensive.

(below) Venezuelan refugees walk down a street in Arauquita, Colombia, after fleeing their country. Church groups in Colombia are mobilising to support thousands of Venezuelan refugees who recently fled the military offensive and are now stuck in the remote Colombian border town. (Catholic News Service photos/Reuters)

Colombian church groups mobilise to help newest Venezuelan refugees

Manuel Rueda

Church groups in Colombia are mobilising to support thousands of Venezuelan refugees who recently fled a military offensive and are stuck in a remote Colombian border town.

More than 5,000 people are currently sleeping in shelters in Arauquita as fighting between the Venezuelan army and rebel groups that traffic cocaine continues just a few miles away in the Venezuelan state of Apure.

The refugees have accused the Venezuelan army of arresting people without warrants and looting homes, as they try to root out a group of rebels. Refugees also are scared of getting caught in the crossfire. Since fighting broke out in late March, nine rebels and eight soldiers have been killed, according to the Venezuelan Government, which has sent tanks and fighter jets to the area.

"We left within half an hour of seeing the planes, because we were afraid bombs could fall on us," said a refugee from the Venezuelan town of La Victoria, who wanted to be identified only as Gabriel.

He took a boat and crossed the river with his wife and two daughters, landing in Arauquita.

"We've had neighbours whose homes have been broken into, and my wife doesn't want us to go back because she's afraid the soldiers could grab me," Gabriel told a local TV network, *VPI*.

In Arauquita, which has a population of 30,000, the Arauca depart-

ment government declared a state of emergency to speed up fundraising for refugees.

Laureano Daza, director of Caritas in Arauca, said a school, a local basketball gym and a football field in Arauquita have been turned into shelters that are holding about 700 people. Daza said the rest of the refugees are staying in local homes.

"People are showing a lot of solidarity," he said. "But there is also a lot of overcrowding."

Daza said there is no knowing when the fighting will stop or when it will be safe enough for the displaced families to return to Venezuela.

He said Caritas has helped about 600 people with food and sanitation kits that include face masks, toothbrushes, soap and women's sanitary supplies for women, which sometimes are scarce in Venezuela.

This support has been delivered mostly to families escaping to Colombian villages along the Arauca River, which marks the border between both countries. In Arauquita, the UN Refugee Agency and the World Food Programme provide support to the recently arrived refugees.

In Bogotá, Bishop Héctor Fabio Henao, director of Caritas Colombia, called for greater solidarity with this group of refugees and asked people to donate to a Church fund for Venezuelan migrants.

"These are people who are in need of international protection," Bishop Henao said in an interview published on the bishops' conference website.

More than five million people have left Venezuela since 2015 as the country's economy implodes following years of mismanagement that has led to food shortages, hyperinflation and the lowest wages in Latin America.

Colombia has received about a third of these migrants and refugees, and its government recently passed a law that will provides work permits, access to health care and a path to permanent residency to one million Venezuelans who are currently undocumented.

But only Venezuelans who arrived in Colombia before March, or who enter the country legally, are eligible

for the protection.

Daza said the situation in Arauquita will present officials with a new set of challenges.

"Some of these refugees will want to settle in Colombia now and stay with relatives in other parts of the country," Daza said. "They will need help with transport to get there" and with documentation.

For years, the area around Arauquita has been fought over by rebel groups that move drugs and have a presence on both sides of the border.

Colombia's defence minister said fighting is currently taking place because the Venezuelan army has de-

cidated to push one of these groups out of the area, in order to hand control of local drug trafficking routes to a group led by Iván Márquez, a Colombian rebel who abandoned a 2016 peace deal with Colombia's Government.

Venezuela's socialist Government denies it is staging alliances with rebels and says Colombia is to blame for the violence because it is not doing enough to dismantle armed groups on its side of the border.

Venezuela's defence minister says his country is fighting terrorists who "have the support of Colombia and the CIA."



Universe weekly special

Around the Parishes

CATHOLIC NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM ACROSS THE UK AND IRELAND

“Remembering all those in our parishes who have lost their lives during the pandemic”




Food voucher programme is a blessing for families

Arundel & Brighton: The Covid-19 pandemic has caused significant hardship to people across the UK, leaving many members of the community unable to buy food and sanitary necessities for themselves and their wider family.

One of the diocese of Arundel and Brighton's responses to this crisis was the setting up of a Supermarket Voucher Scheme. So far, it has helped more than 1,000 families, providing essential items for over 3,000 children and over 2,000 adults living in or at risk of poverty.

To date, 48 parishes and 46 schools in the diocese have participated in the scheme, supplying Asda, Morrisons, Sainsbury or Tesco supermarket vouchers to people in need across our school and parish communities.

The scheme is ongoing and is available to people of all faiths or worldviews.

- Over 50 per cent of the families helped have been from low-income households.

- 18 per cent had lost work due to the pandemic with four per cent experiencing reduction in their income due to shielding or having to isolate.

- Eight per cent had been very badly affected by the loss of Free School Meals.

The diocese told *The Universe* that the diocesan Catholic schools and parishes have been invaluable to its success, helping to administer the initiative to people and families in their communities.

Speaking about the scheme, Ms Claire Jarman, principal at Cardinal Newman Catholic School in Hove said: “While no-one was left untouched by this pandemic, some families have had more challenges than others. Families have told us how appreciative they are to have their stress alleviated, safe in the knowledge they can put food on their table.”

St Richard's Catholic College in Bexhill have distributed hundreds of vouchers since the scheme began last year. A representative from the college said: “I think this has been such a wonderful scheme. We are so grateful for this blessing.”

The scheme is expected to run until July 2021, or until the funds have depleted.



The English College in Rome

Fr Stephen Wang excited as he prepares for new role in Rome

Fr Stephen Wang has been appointed as the new Rector of the Venerable English College in Rome.

Fr Wang will replace Mgr Philip Whitmore, who has been Rector of the VEC since 2013. The VEC was founded in 1579 and since then has prepared priests to serve mainly in England and Wales, as well as being a home to priests undertaking further studies in Rome.

There are currently 27 seminarians in formation for the priesthood and five priests engaged in further studies. Most study at either the Gregorian University or the Angelicum.

As well as seminarians from England and Wales, there are seven from the Nordic countries, two from Ireland and one from Canada.

Fr Stephen Wang, who studied at the VEC as part of his formation, will start his new ministry as rector at the start of the new academic year in September.

He said: “I’ve been incredibly happy as a university chaplain in

London, and it will be very hard to leave Newman House chaplaincy centre and say goodbye to students and staff across the universities.

“But I’m delighted to be starting at the Venerable English College in Rome.

“I have a great love for the seminary and for the city, and a love for the priesthood and the work of formation. I’m really looking forward to getting to know the seminarians and staff, and to building on the wonderful work that Mgr Whitmore has been doing as Rector.

“And yes, I’m also looking forward to savouring an authentic Roman pizza again and the finest ice cream in the world.”

Mgr Philip Whitmore, the current Rector, welcomed the appointment.

“I am delighted by the news of Fr Stephen Wang’s appointment as Rector of the Venerable English College and I thank the Lord for the eight truly blessed years I have been privileged to spend in this role.

“The recent health crisis has made



us more aware than ever of our need for priests and it is both a responsibility and a joy to be charged with the formation of priests to serve the next generation.

“We assure Fr Stephen of our prayers as he prepares for his new ministry.”

Cardinal Vincent Nichols said: “I welcome most warmly the appointment of Fr Stephen Wang as the new Rector of the Venerable

English College, Rome. Fr Stephen will bring to the College all his experience as a university Chaplain as well as his passion for proclaiming the Gospel in contemporary ways, a gift so much in keeping with the great traditions of the College. I thank Mgr Philip Whitmore wholeheartedly for his years of tireless service to the College and I look forward to welcoming him back to his Diocese in due course.”

To see your parish featured in these pages, contact Michael Winterbottom on 07949 987771 or via michael.winterbottom@thecatholicuniverse.com

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Around the Parishes

Culture grant helps Alton Castle get back on its feet after Covid

Birmingham: Alton Castle in the Staffordshire Moorlands has received a grant of £52,900 from the Government's £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund to help the organisation recover and reopen after the pandemic.

The grant was part of nearly £400 million awarded to thousands of cultural organisations across the country. In total, more than 2,700 organisations benefitted.

Alton Castle offers a unique blend of outdoor adventurous activities and inspiring retreat experiences that promote personal, social and spiritual development. Young people from schools and youth groups across the West Midlands and beyond visit for day programmes and residential trips that encourage them to develop new skills and grow in their relationships and resilience, all animated by an enthusiastic team of gap year volunteers.

The award from the Culture Recovery Fund will help the Kenelm Youth Trust who run Alton Castle to continue bringing history to life by supporting them as they respond to the challenges of reopening in a Covid secure way.

As well as ensuring the completion of some already planned refurbishments to the residential accommodation, they are also able to develop resources for more casual visitors and so share this unique heritage with a wider audience.



Over £800 million in grants and loans has already been awarded to support almost 3,800 cinemas, performance venues, museums, heritage sites and other cultural organisations dealing with the immediate challenges of the coronavirus pandemic.

This brings the Government's total investment across grants, capital and repayable finance from the Culture Recovery Fund so far to more than £1.2 billion across over 5,000 individual cultural and heritage organisations and sites.

The second round of awards will

help organisations to look ahead to the spring and summer and plan for reopening and recovery. After months of closures and cancellations to contain the virus and save lives, this funding will be a much-needed helping hand for organisations transitioning back to normal in the months ahead.

Sandra Satchell, CEO of the Kenelm Youth Trust who run Alton Castle told the *Universe*: "We're just delighted to receive funds in this second round as it will help us bridge the gap until we are able to be fully open once more!"

Fr Peter marks Golden Jubilee in chasuble he wore on ordination

Judith Franks

East Anglia: Fr Peter Brown has celebrated his golden jubilee with a Mass at the Church of Our Lady, Star of the Sea, Wells-next-the-Sea.

The event took place on 6th March and was attended by a socially distanced church-full of parishioners from the Walsingham group, though the merry, post-Mass get-together for which they are renowned had to be put back till later.

He wore the same chasuble as for his Ordination 50 years earlier.

Fr Peter, just 83, has lived in Wells since his retirement from active ministry in 2008. He still celebrates weekly around the group, from Burnham Market to Blakeney and Walsingham.

During the week, he enjoys the bracing seaside air on his regular walks to the sea, around Holkham Park or in the picturesque alleys of

Wells, checking his Fitbit for the distance covered and those all-important steps.

Born near Haverhill just before the Second World War, Fr Peter converted to Catholicism after his National Service in the RAF. He trained for the priesthood at Campion House and Oscott College and was ordained by Bishop Grant on 7th March, 1971 in Farnham in the presence of a congregation of 600 and around 30 other clergy.

According to a contemporary newspaper, a fair number are reputed to have welcomed him with 'soccer-style' hugs, the kind exchanged by exuberant players when a goal has been scored.

After short spells at Farnham, Corby, OLEM, St George's Norwich, Kings Lynn and Downham Market, Fr Peter spent 14 years in Wymondham from 1984 to 1998, where he is still remembered with great respect and affection, in many cases, by two

or three generations of the same family. They are hoping to welcome him back for their Jubilee Celebration when conditions allow.

By the time of his 10-year incumbency in Cromer (1998-2008), he had been Chancellor to all four Bishops of East Anglia.

We wish him many more years of happy, healthy retirement.

Pictured is Fr Peter Brown. Image from just before the Celebration Mass in March



Leo and Pio Altarelli

Down Under maestro helps keep music playing

The parish of St Edmund at Bungay was distressed when it learned that it could have no singing at Masses during lockdown, but not to be daunted went ahead and recorded its own collection of favourite music.

Clare Seabrook, organist and music director in the parish, enthusiastically took up a suggestion from a parishioner of making an album.

It is a recording by the parish choir of familiar pieces from its repertoire, to be played before, during and after Mass to fill the silence.

Clare wrote a short introduction for the sleeve and after several recording sessions settled on no fewer than 21 short pieces.

One stroke of luck was that the son of one of the parish's leading families, Leo Altarelli (who lives in Australia) had the necessary equipment to master the recordings into a coherent collection with an attractive sleeve and brochure. The CD has now covered its costs and is available from the parish.

Pio Altarelli, (a brother of the Norwich Circle of the Catenian Associations), expanded on the story to *The Universe*. "Mass following the first lockdown was bereft of music from our choir and the beautiful tones of our pipe organ, so it was a quiet affair. Choirs were not allowed, so no singing.

"The serving rota disrupted, I, long-time sacristan and MC, brother of the Norwich Circle of the Catenian Association, served our priest, Dom Charles Lombard, during this challenging period.

"One Sunday, a parishioner, Peter Smith-Cullen, and I were lamenting the state of affairs, when he proposed that we might consider recording the choir, socially distanced of course, and play these recordings during Mass.

"Armed with a digital recorder,

over a number of weeks, after Mass, limited members of our choir came together and laid down a number of hymn tracks which were played at strategic times, enriching our worship.

"Peter then came to me with another proposal; this music is so well received, he said, why don't we put these tracks into a CD and raise funds for our parish?"

"Peter arranged the production of CDs and I, with a little experience in sound production, but none in mastering, am fortunate enough to have a son who is a professional musician and singer songwriter. With a bit of persuasion he agreed to 'master' the tracks... though the only issue is that he is based in Brisbane!

"An ex-St Edmund's Bungay and Notre Dame Norwich pupil, graduate of the Birmingham Conservatoire of Music, Leo, his wife Kathleen and four-year old daughter Mia now live in Australia. So I had to learn how to make WAV files, transfer them to Dropbox and then make them available for Leo to do his magic before sending them back to me for compilation.

"While this was going on Peter was arranging for the design of the CD sleeve, a foreword by Fr Charles and a description by Claire Seabrook our organist and choir leader.

"The CD was ready for Christmas and sold well within the parish.

"Since then we have continued to record and play hymns at Mass, culminating in a full programme of music for Holy Week and Easter, including a glorious *Exultet* courtesy of Dom Andrew Moore of Downside Abbey.

"With a possible continuation of the Covid limitations, we look forward to a continuation of this process that adds another dimension to the 'lockdown Mass,'" added Pio Altarelli.

Education

Food for Stafford Appeal helps keep 50 families going over the holidays

A Food for Stafford Families appeal launched at the start of Lent by staff at Blessed William Howard Catholic High School has proved a real lifesaver for 50 local families, who between them had over 100 children.

The appeal resulted food parcels being delivered to the families. Each one contained key dried food staples such as cereals, rice, crackers and pasta along with fresh meats, soups, sauces, fruit juices, cheeses, yoghurts, eggs, bread, fresh vegetables and, as a treat for the children, chocolate Easter eggs.

The food parcels were delivered to the homes of all those who had applied for them by BWH staff volunteers on Thursday, 1st April.

"As schools close for the Easter break, many families in the local area had concerns about feeding their children," said Helen Duffield, assistant principal at the school. "Over 25 per cent of children in Stafford are living in poverty.

"The school felt that Government support available in the current circumstances may not be enough to support the most vulnerable. There



are also many families who aren't eligible for free school meals who are struggling and in need of support.

"As a community, we wanted to ease this worry during these difficult times."

Families simply had to complete an online form to register for a food parcel. The school community showed its support by bringing in food donations or raising money that was spent on additional fresh food items.

"We have been overwhelmed by the generosity of our students and their families, along with staff and friends of the school," added Mrs Duffield.

"What we have collected will really



Art teacher Jenny Capewell helps with a delivery run. Left, some of the goods donated

make a considerable difference to people in need of help. Thank you to everyone who has donated, to the students who have helped us sort the items into packs and the staff who have helped to deliver them."

Christ the King's Everest fundraiser for Mrs Griffin



Simon Hart

The pupils and staff of Christ the King Primary School in Childwall have completed a virtual climb of Mount Everest as part of a fundraising campaign in memory of former head teacher Kate Griffin.

Every pupil at Christ the King participated in the 'Step up for Mrs Griffin Challenge' on 24th March, with each class undertaking a step aerobics session and teachers adding up all the steps taken.

Overall, 58,070 steps equate to a successful scaling of Everest, which stands 8,849m high.

The 'Kate's Everest' fundraising project was devised by family and friends of the popular teacher who passed away aged 40 last summer. Six other schools have taken part with more than £15,000 already raised (Gift Aid included).

This will be donated to Rainbows, a charity which provides bereavement support and which Kate had long championed.

Matt White, headteacher at Much Woolton and St Ambrose Catholic Primary Schools, helped set up the 'Kate's Everest' challenge. He explained: "Headteachers, schools, friends and

family have been doing it in their own ways. I've climbed stairs and done some hill climbing on my bike. There are other people who've walked the equivalent distance. Others have run."

He added that the scale of participation was no surprise given the "huge impact" Kate had had on people. "She had unbelievable warmth and a sense of giving to others, as well as a rock-solid determination to do the best for children in her school and children in Liverpool."

Dave Delaney, headteacher at Christ the King, said the school was determined to continue the connection with Kate's favourite charity. "We remembered her on her birthday and talked a lot about Rainbows.

"The charity is really important to



us as a school, and staff will be taking part in Rainbows training on our inset day after the Easter holiday to enable us to make sure all children are supported in that way.

"For the children, the Everest challenge was another way of expressing their thanks and gratitude for what Kate did," he added.

"It's been a huge event and it's nice for our school community to do something together. She valued sporting activities and we were thinking about her as we did it."

To find out more or to make a donation, please visit: <https://rainbowsgb.org/a-new-fundraising-initiative-in-memory-of-kate-griffin/>



To see your Catholic school or college featured in *The Catholic Universe*, send your stories in to **Michael Winterbottom** at michael.winterbottom@thecatholicuniverse.com or call him on 07949 987771

Student wins bronze medal at Para Powerlifting World Cup

A Sports and Exercise Science undergraduate at Leeds Trinity University has won a bronze medal for Team GB at the Para Powerlifting World Cup.

19-year-old Charlotte McGuinness, from Harrogate, won the bronze medal at the Para Powerlifting World Cup in the women up to 50kg category with a lift of 74kg. Charlotte joined her GB teammate Olivia Broome on the podium, who won the silver medal in the same category.

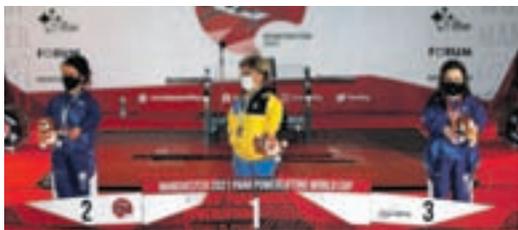
The competition, which took place at the Wythenshawe Forum in Manchester, also gave Charlotte the opportunity to qualify for the Commonwealth Games in 2022. Due to ongoing restrictions around the coronavirus pandemic, the competition took place without spectators and with Covid-19 safety measures in place.

Charlotte said: "It's my first World Cup medal so I'm very happy. The lockdown training in the winter and the cold sessions paid off, so I'm thrilled it all went to plan.

"This is my second World Cup so I have more experience now, and going to the next event I won't be as nervous as I know what to expect and what's going to happen.

"I'm also pleased that my performance in this competition stands me in good stead for the Commonwealth Games in 2022. The competition went by so fast and I'm looking forward to getting back to training and university."

Sarah Todd, sports development manager at Leeds Trinity University, said: "I could not be prouder of Char-



Charlotte on the medal winners' podium for her bronze medal, with Team GB colleague Olivia Broome in silver

lotte. To achieve a bronze medal at the World Cup at 19 is incredible.

"She works so hard and is such a determined and focused young woman in her sport and her studies, so it is fantastic to see the hard work pay off with a medal."

She added: "The university is excited to see her medal when we're back on campus. I have no doubt this is only the beginning of great things for Charlotte."

The Para Powerlifting World Cup was funded by the National Lottery.



That's fine says librarian after overdue book returned 32 years late

Librarians at a Catholic school in Peterborough had a surprise this month after a book was returned over 30 years after it was borrowed.

The book, titled *Manners Make a Difference*, arrived in an envelope, addressed to 'The Librarian' at St John Fisher Catholic High School on Monday, 12th April, accompanied by a note which read 'Sorry! Just 32 years overdue! Call it Catholic guilt.'

The school extended their thanks to the former student in a social media post, saying: "Thank you to the lovely ex-student who returned this book borrowed from our library in 1989.

'We've done a quick calculation on the possible fine that will be overlooked and it would be approximately £832. All is forgiven though.'

However, the identity of the book borrower remains a mystery, as they did not sign their name and the key card system that was in place when the book was checked out, on 27th February 1989, is no longer in existence at the school.

However, it is likely that Rosie Roe, the school's chief of administration who opened the parcel, actually knows the borrower, as she, too, was a pupil at the school in 1989.

"It was a real surprise when I opened it and saw what was inside.

"I thought it's a real shame they didn't leave a name because I was at the school at that time and wonder if I know them," she told *The Peterborough Telegraph*.

Jo Sennett, a librarian at the school, added: "The fact that someone has sent it back, and that it's about manners, is lovely. We would love to find out who sent it.

"The school community is a family, and they've clearly remembered that and taken that into adulthood."

Published in 1954, *Manners Make a Difference*, was distributed by the John C Winston company.

Go on... do you know who it was? Or are you the mystery Catholic former pupil who sent the book back? The Catholic Universe would love to know. If you are he/she, contact our News Editor, Nick Benson, at nick.benson@thecatholicuniverse.com



The book in question. Photo: St John Fisher Catholic High School/Twitter.

New senior leadership team ready to unlock potential

A Coventry school has appointed a new senior leadership team to support its pupils' ambitions to thrive – and one of its first tasks was to launch a new development project which will benefit the whole community.

Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School, part of the Romero Catholic Academy, has promoted Matthew Everett to Head of School to Principal.

He is joined by Laura Burtonwood who has been promoted to Vice Principal and Zoe Seth who has joined the school as Operations Manager.

In addition, Amy Hirons and Leanne Wale have taken on more senior roles as Senior Assistant Vice Principals until the end of the year to oversee pastoral and academic matters respectively.

Matthew, originally from Teesside and who currently lives in Derbyshire, joined Cardinal Wiseman as Assistant Vice Principal in 2017. He has gone on to become Vice Principal and Head of School, supporting the school in its delivery of a high-quality academic curriculum.

In his new role as Principal, Matthew will be working with the senior leadership team to continue the positive work that has already been done, to ensure the 1,400 pupils receive an outstanding education during their seven years at the school.

He is also set to launch a major development project which will see the school's hall transformed into a modern theatre which will not only be used by pupils, but also children from the primary schools within the academy as well as the local community, and a major refurbishment programme for the humanities and science blocks.

The growth of the school, which now has waiting lists for Years 7, 8 and 9 and a sixth form which has doubled in size in the last three years, will also see the creation of new breakout areas to support pupils with their studies.

Matthew said: "Since joining Cardinal Wiseman I have always thought that there is more potential ready to be unlocked throughout the school – we now need to continue the good work that's been done and help bring out the best in the pupils and staff.

"I absolutely love working at our school, and although I don't currently live locally, it's certainly worth the commute, so I'm thrilled to have been promoted to Principal.

"The school is passionate about delivering a curriculum that will get pupils on to the next stages of their lives, whether that is an apprenticeship, moving on to the world of work

or to university.

"A key priority at the moment is working on making staff and students feel reassured and safe during Covid and it's fantastic to have such a strong leadership team to support with this.

"Laura has been working hard with staff to establish which areas students most need to catch up on, while Zoe has set up a school testing centre from scratch where in the first two weeks alone of students returning, we carried out more than 3,500 tests.

"We also have a flourishing enrichment programme which we are continuing to develop to support pupils who have spent so long away from

the classroom, with groups ranging from languages and creative writing societies to DJ, film and art clubs – all run by teachers who are passionate about the subjects.

"Some of the next big projects for us will be a number of developments at the school, including transforming our hall into a theatre which will be great for our pupils and staff, but also for our fantastic local community to use.

"It's an incredibly exciting time at Cardinal Wiseman and I am delighted to be leading the school going forward."

Helen Quinn, CEO at Romero Catholic Academy, said: "Matthew brings a strong faith dimension to his love of education and service to the school community.

"I am confident he will continue to build on the existing collaborative relationships among the staff, parents and partner primary schools while providing the students with opportunities to deepen their faith, engage in life-long learning and reach their God-given potential.

"He has been instrumental in some of the excellent work that has already taken place at Cardinal Wiseman in the last three years and is well placed to lead the school along with an extremely strong leadership team."



The new leadership team, headed by Matthew Everett and Laura Burtonwood, believe there is plenty of unlocked potential at Cardinal Wiseman

Caring for the migrant: Kino Border Initiative

Josephine von Dohlen

A few years ago, a woman migrating from Mexico to the United States with her children arrived at Kino Border Initiative's centre in Nogales, Arizona. Her family had suffered in custody with border control as her children's food was taken from them and they were forced into a cold room. She had been sworn at and called names.

As she shared her experience with Sister Tracey Horan, a Sister of Providence of St Mary of the Woods, Indiana, the religious sister asked her if she would like to file a formal report of what she experienced.

"I just saw her face change," Sr Tracey said, that it clearly meant a lot to the woman "just to know that it was possible that she could be heard and that her story could make an impact and that someone cared and wanted to acknowledge that what had happened to her was unjust."

At the heart of Kino Border Initiative's ministry is education, advocacy and care for migrants – from listening to their stories, offering food and shelter, to providing them guidance throughout their journey.

Through educational programming, Sr Tracey, the associate director of education and advocacy, said she



To learn more about Kino Border Initiative and their ministry to care for migrants, visit www.kinoborderinitiative.org

works to "move minds, hearts and policies towards more human migration."

By inviting groups from throughout the United States and beyond to immerse themselves in the migrant experience, Sr Tracey said that people are able to really learn the truth about conditions at the border and encounter those who are in the midst of their "sacred journey of migrating."

Prior to the pandemic, about 40 groups would visit Kino Border Initiative each year.

"We really challenge them to re-

turn home and take action in their communities in solidarity with migrants."

Working to advocate for migrants both in the United States and in Mexico, Kino Border Initiative documents abuses that migrants experience as they're travelling to the border or while in the custody of US officials and reports them to the proper authorities, Sr Tracey said.

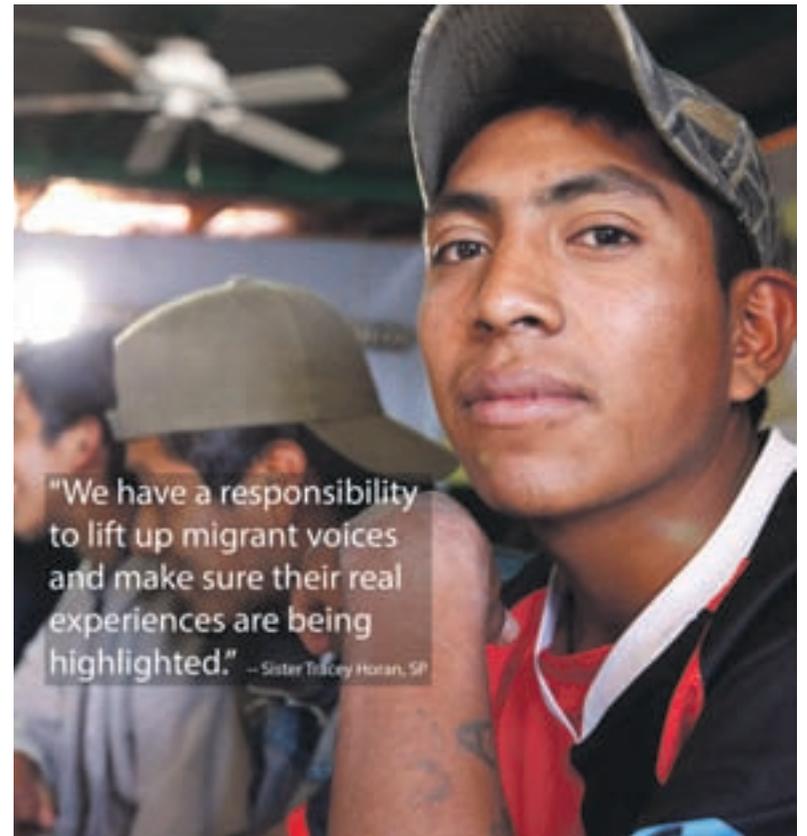
"Part of it is just people having the chance to be heard," she said. "Sometimes people will come in and say that this is the first time in months or even in a year that someone actually cared about their story or why they are migrating."

Much of the work of the Kino Border Initiative is rooted in Catholic social teaching on the dignity of the human person and the respect that every individual deserves as a child of God.

"We think a lot about the Holy Family here because we see many holy families that come through our door fleeing persecution for a number of reasons," she added.

"Venezuelans who are fleeing dictatorship and political persecution, mothers with small children fleeing domestic violence, young people fleeing abuse at the hands of organised crime.

"For me, it's so easy to see how the



person of Jesus is so present here," Sr Tracey said.

Prior to the pandemic, Kino Border Initiative's shelter and offices in Nogales would open up their soup kitchen to those who wished to attend Mass. Since the pandemic has introduced several challenges to their programming, Sr Tracey said that ensuring that their work continues to "encounter" migrants has become a main priority.

"You see their faces and recognise the way that they light up – and so

often I think people come just as much for our company and the environment of welcome that we have as they do for the food."

As situations at the border are still difficult and often dangerous for migrants, Sr Tracey said, "we have a responsibility to lift up migrant voices and make sure their real experiences are being highlighted."

She encouraged people to reach out to their elected officials, expressing their concern and care for the migrants seeking shelter in the US.



Sister Tracey Horan, associate director of education and advocacy at Kino Border Initiative. (Catholic News Service photo/Julius Schlosburg, courtesy Kino Border Initiative)

A little laughter goes a long way

Studies show that laughter really can be the best medicine. But did you know it can actually improve your wellbeing?

HEALTH

The chance to relax and have a real laugh is one of the best tools we have for dealing with stress and letting go. However, science says that laughter could be even more useful and powerful as a healthy tool for battling stress as well as other mental and physical health issues.

It may be an old proverb, but it seems research shows that laughter may really be the best medicine there is.

Laughter releases endorphins

Laughter is one of the quickest and most effective ways of releasing endorphins and giving our bodies a hit of their favourite happy chemical. Endorphins are naturally occurring, and laughter releases a significant amount, with the effect increasing dependent on the number of opioid receptors in the individual's brain. Laughter can even induce euphoria and while this may not be something you want to experience every day, it's a nice release from the business-like nature of the world of work and the normality of day-to-day life.

Laughter is key to social bonding

The endorphins that flow when

you laugh are also central to how contagious laughter can be in social settings.

We are wired to mimic those around us, particularly if it's something positive – like something that releases endorphins. Hence, laughter is contagious. This also explains why you may find yourself laughing at something but not really knowing why. And as laughter spreads quickly throughout a group so the levels of endorphins rise too, enhancing the sense of togetherness and cementing relationship bonds.

Laughter lights up the brain

Not all types of laughter are the same, and research published in PLOS One found different types of laughter activate different parts of the brain. Laughter makes our brains light up with connectivity and forces them to remain active and engaged. Joyous laughter versus taunting, mean laughter, would stimulate different brain activity and neurological reactions.

Laughter helps support the heart

Researchers at the University of Maryland found that laughter has an anti-inflammatory effect. It protects the blood vessels and heart from the damaging impact of cardiovascular



“Laughter is one of the quickest ways of releasing endorphins and giving our bodies a hit of their favourite happy chemical.”

disease. This is a relatively new discovery, and more research is needed but it's fascinating to think that when we laugh, our body's stress response lessens, and our cardiovas-

Laughter is at the core of successful relationships

Women are said to laugh more than men, while men are found to instigate more laughter and this alone is an interesting assessment of the importance of laughter in relationship building.

Women also rate a sense of hu-

mour highly in their desires for a potential partner and couples who laugh a lot together have longer-lasting and happier relationships.

There is no doubt that laughter is a fantastic thing and even a little giggle can help clear away stresses and worries.

While it should never be forced, finding time to relax, unwind and enjoy a laugh is something everyone should make time for.

Your body and mind will both thank you for it.

Four ways to keep your mind active at any age

Keep your brain sharp and engaged during retirement with these activities...

HEALTH

Without the continuity of going to work every day and thinking through the week's tasks, you can start to get a bit bored and it feels like your mind is slowing down. Thankfully, there are plenty of ways to discard this feeling while developing new skills along the way.

Pick up a book

You may have earned the right to put up your feet during your retirement, but by reaching for a book and flicking through the pages you can learn a variety of facts and happily pass the time.

Non-fiction is perfect for educating the reader on a particular subject, and really gets you to think about the words at hand.

Fiction stories are also brilliant for

working the mind, as they allow you to question the upcoming plot, especially if the story is a murder mystery and you are trying to figure out who did it.

Solve those puzzles

Crosswords and numbers puzzles, like Sudoku, keep you thinking and therefore stimulate your mind.

They also provide a brilliant feeling of triumph once you have completed them.

You can purchase specific word or number puzzle books, ranging in skill set and length, which you can pick up and have a go at whenever you find yourself with a spare five minutes.

If quizzes are a particular favourite of yours, then joining a team provides an ideal opportunity to share your interest with others in a fun and friendly way.

Go back to school

Signing up to learn a new subject, or perhaps an old one that you want to discover in more detail, is another way to continue to develop your mind. Have a look at courses your local adult education college offers, as they cover a variety of academic levels and subjects. However, if regular classes are off limits, then there are plenty of online courses you can try and complete in your own time from the comfort of your home.

Exercise mind and body

As well as keeping the physical body active, exercise can also stimulate your mind. Joining an exercise class, such as yoga or pilates, gives you an opportunity to learn a new skill under the watchful eye of an experienced instructor. Through repetitive exposure, in no time at all you'll be naming all of the different



Joining a weekly exercise class is a great way to be social.

moves you are doing, what areas of the body and muscle groups they work, and how this positively affects your health. Joining a weekly class is also a great way to be social and meet friends who are interested in learning new things just like you.



Bimble is the app for great little places like this

www.bimble.com

Bimble



Bold art and decor for a stand-out bathroom

Make your bathroom have as much of your personality as any other room

HOME

Bathrooms can be clinical spaces with large expanses of white making up the bulk of the room. But it doesn't have to be this way and your bathroom can be a place of fun, character and have as much of your personality in it as any other room. Art and accessories are key to giving your bathroom a beautiful makeover, but how do you pick the right piece? Does certain art lend itself better to bathrooms? Consider these suggestions below for a new look for your loo.

Embrace minimalism

Some people like the clean lines and simplicity of their bathroom and want the art to match. Graphic art fans can opt for simple line drawings, geometric-inspired mirrors and monochrome art works which add character without overwhelming the space or creating too



Opt for minimalism in bathrooms with white space

much confusion. A minimalist bathroom can be tasteful, attractive, and also lowkey.

Keep it cohesive

It's very easy to get carried away with artworks and select too many pieces which may or not work well together. Take time to decide on the look you want and select pieces which genuinely fit well into this idea. The same colour palette and style should be kept in mind, so if you have a coastal themed bathroom interior, with soft tones and nautical elements, keep the same focus for your choice of art.

Style it up with wallpaper

Bold printed wallpapers are not usually something you associate with bathrooms but the trend for cloakroom wallpaper has grown and grown. More and more designers are opting for the boldest and most vivid printed papers for bathrooms, with many designs available in waterproof or water-resistant materials, ensuring your room looks great even when wet.

Go green with vines and pot plants

Bathrooms are a wonderful home for a wide range of different houseplants. Lush greenery is the perfect partner for crisp white surfaces and there are a wide range of different plants which particularly suit bath-

"A minimalist bathroom can be tasteful, attractive, and also lowkey."



Bold and vivid prints are now a popular choice for bathrooms

Find a focal point

You can use a portrait or a bold piece of art to create a focal point for your bathroom. It draws the attention away from the facilities and creates the feel for the room. If you want to make more of an impact, you could use the shower cubicle space as a canvas and utilise it as the single substantial piece of art for your space. If you go bold, then you need to make sure you stick to the single feature or things could start to look messy.



room environments, such as spider plants. Hanging baskets and pots from the ceiling can create a unique look and turn your bathroom into your own miniature jungle retreat.

Make a mini gallery

For vintage style in your bathroom consider decking it out with tons of small, framed prints and pictures. Positioning the artwork symmetri-

cally and in columns helps to create a bold, stylised look. The placement of the art and the choice of frames will impact the overall look.

The way you style your bathroom with be dependent on many factors, including the size of the room, the natural light and of course your personal taste. With a little bit of planning whatever look you're hoping for can be achieved.

I do like to be beside the seaside...

Clear waters and sea fronts is now the popular choice.

HOME

Forget that flash city penthouse or a grade II listed cottage in the Lake District, most of us dream of living in a detached four-bedroom family home by the sea, according to a recent report.

According to property portal, Thinkproperty.com, a seaside house in the south east is the most desired home in the UK.

Given the choice, a quarter of us would snub an 18th century house in favour of a far more modest family-sized detached house, while 21 per cent of us dream of living in a cosy country home. Surprisingly, only one per cent of house hunters are searching for a posh designer flat, with most of us preferring a more humble abode.

A mid-sized semi-detached house would suit seven per cent of the population, but less than five per cent of us would like to live in a small terraced property, according to the company's research report. The same number would like to live in an executive home or a suburban mansion. Not surprisingly, just one

"After seaside towns, the south has become the most desired location to live."

per cent would consider their ideal property to be a studio flat.

Nearly one million homes are bought and sold each year in the UK, but despite this more than half of us are not happy living in our current home; nearly 50 per cent of homeowners say they would be prepared take less expensive holidays in order to afford their dream home, while 39 per cent would be prepared to dip into their savings.



Once considered tacky, seaside properties have seen a marked rise in popularity, as more than one third of us would like a home by the sea. As a result, seaside towns have become a more solid investment given the current market conditions, thanks to high demand from those seeking to retire.

After seaside towns, the south has become the most desired location to live in as 18 per cent of respondents would like their ideal home to be in the south east. The north west is where 10 per cent of homeowners would most like to reside while eight per cent have set their heart on a home in Wales.

Which exotic animals make the best of pets?

These quirky characters are a great option for something a little more interesting.

PETS

The moment you decide your family is ready for its first pet is a big one. If you're not used to having animals at home, then it's worth doing your research before giving the kids a chance to enjoy this new responsibility. Choosing a pet that is a little bit different will definitely give the kids something to talk about, plus many unusual pets are quite low maintenance and easy to care for.

Here are five ideas to get you started:

Parakeet

The grey-cheeked parakeet is a beautiful choice of bird and one which can be super-friendly too. Their lively personalities and reputation for acrobatics make them a fun choice for kids of all ages. They can get bored easily, so you have to



make time to play with them and let them enjoy plenty of cage-free time. Parakeets even enjoy the occasional splash in a basin so this is another fun activity you can enjoy as a family. They are quite loud and like to make themselves heard so keep this in mind if you're children aren't used to loud noises.

Ant farm

OK, an ant farm may not seem like much of a pet as the kids can basically let them get on with their own thing, but you can pop in leaves and wood chips and watch the ants living their lives and making the most of the goods provided to them. There are thousands of species of ant and you can easily get hold of a wall-mountable ant farm so the pets can be kept in the children's bedrooms.

Chinchilla

With the softest fur there is and a personable nature when you give them the time, chinchillas are an interesting alternative to a rabbit or



guinea pig. They like to live in a cool environment and you can benefit from them being both super quiet and almost smell-free, unlike many



House Gecko's are an excellent option for young children

other small creatures. Remember, they can live as long as 20 years and you will need to make sure your children understand they enjoy a lot of quiet time as well as being held and stroked.

Gecko

Amphibians are the perfect solution if you're household has any allergy sufferers. And of all the amphibians out there, geckos are a great choice as they are quite easy to care for and

they have a docile nature. This is particularly good for families with excitable younger kids. But they can be delicate so make sure you're always on hand to keep the kids in check.

Zebra Finch

If you're looking for a quieter bird to add to the family, sweet little zebra finches are a great choice. They come in a wide range of eye-catching plumage colours. The fun thing about finches is they'll quickly fall into step with the rest of the family, sleeping at night and enjoying cage-free time in the day. But they need to live in pairs, if not larger groups, as they need each other to remain content and live a full life, so you will need to keep this in mind. You also need to be gentle but with patience and perseverance, they make great pets.

Not every household is made for cats and dogs, but it's understandable you still want the kids to experience the learning curve and fun a new pet brings.



Zebra Finch
Credit: Jim Bendon

Entertaining your grandkids now you're retired

Make the most of the time spent with your grandkids with some fun activities that will keep them happy and occupied.

HEALTH

One of the joys of retirement is the extra time you have to spend with your family. It can be hugely rewarding to watch your grandkids grow up, and lots of fun to spend the day with them.

Here are a few top activities to enjoy together.

Go on a nature hunt

Discovering different species in the natural world can be lots of fun for children, so there is nothing better than going on a nature hunt on a sunny day and seeing what you can spot. Start by selecting the area you are going to go for a walk with your grandchild, whether this is the local park, a beach or the back garden, and create a chart of different animals that you could spot in that area. Spend the time searching together for these creatures and ticking off your finds on your nature list. You only need paper and a pen to complete this activity, but you can make it more high-tech with a pair of children's binoculars to make spotting birds easier, or by using a magnifying glass to help see those little creepy crawlies.

Paint a picture

Drawing and painting are great ways for children to express them-



Grandkids love a day out to somewhere new and exciting,

selves, and it allows them to produce an artwork that they can take home and show to their parents. Create a station for painting by putting some newspaper over the table to catch any spillages, then arrange some paper, paints and brushes in the centre for the children and you to choose

from. Why not try asking your grandkids to paint their favourite animal, or get them to paint a picture of their friends and family?

You can also purchase paint by number sets too, so you can both create a set picture, and all of the equipment is provided.

Enjoy a day out

Grandkids love nothing more than a day out to somewhere new and exciting, or a familiar location that they feel safe and get excited about visiting. These trips out are something for grandparents themselves to look forward to as well. Visiting local animal sanctuaries and wildlife parks are popular with children, as well as educational, as they can learn about specific species and conservation schemes around the world. There are also playgrounds and theme parks that have a variety of fun rides for children and adults to go on together.

Create magic with cookery ingredients

Starting off with a list of ingredients and creating a tasty meal or bake is hugely rewarding for anyone, and it is something children can enjoy. Whether your grandkids are of a young age or teenagers, the skill level of the recipe gives everyone something to do and learn. For younger children, starting off with recipes that don't need to be cooked is a good idea. Why not try making a tasty refrigerator cake? Then, you can move onto creating an array of treats from cupcakes to scones. This activity also means the children have something to take home to their parents, or they could even help you prepare a family dinner.

Fat pets: Tackling canine obesity

A little bit of extra weight on our pets can be a big problem. Here are some tips to get them back on track.

PETS

As a pet owner, it's your duty to provide your furry friend with the best life possible. This may mean you spoil them, however, and too many treats can lead to excess weight and life as an obese pooch is no fun. Research from the University of Liverpool found that overweight dogs could lose over 2 years of their lifespan, and no one wants their time with their canine best pal cut short.

The canine obesity problem

Canine obesity is quite a common problem for dogs living in the modern world – it is one of the most common nutritional disorders seen in them. But there are plenty of tell-tale signs which indicate your pooch is packing a few too many pounds including:

- **Not being able to see their ribs, spine or waistline**
- **Abdominal sagging**
- **Rounded body and face**
- **Reluctance to walk or go outside**
- **Excessive panting**
- **Extra help need up steps or in and out of the car**
- **Complete refusal to play or move**
- **Overeating**

Obesity is a serious health problem for any animal and just like humans, it can impact on quality of life too.

Common health problems that come from canine obesity include diabetes, which can be very hard to manage for dogs, heart disease, which can lift cholesterol levels, and arthritis, which can stop dogs from enjoying their time outside and walks.

Being overweight also puts dogs at high risk of issues that require surgery to combat them.

Tips for reducing canine obesity

If your pup is carrying more weight than is healthy, diet and habit is key to helping them get back to their proper weight and full health.

A diet rich in protein and fibre is the best place to start if you're looking to help your dog get back to their healthy weight. Protein is the perfect way of boosting your dog's energy levels and also makes them feel fuller. Processed snacks and treats can be swapped out for healthier alternatives like carrot sticks and even puppy peanut butter.



"A diet rich in protein and fibre is the best place to start if you're looking to help your dog get back to their healthy weight."

You also need to change your mindset as a family and stop thinking your food is good enough for the dog. It isn't.

Scraps from your plate, as well as snacks and treats that you enjoy, are not designed for dogs so don't share. It's a natural habit to share your favourite snacks with the whole family, but you're doing

your dog more harm than good. Beyond food, you can also do your best to get your dog more engaged and enthusiastic about time outdoors. If your dog has become used to spending most of their time lying or sitting down, then getting them up and about may take a little time but as dogs naturally love being outdoors, it won't be long before they're enjoying it again.



Pick healthier food choices to boost your dog's energy levels

Enjoying as many years as possible with your dog is something all pet owners want. This is why tough love is sometimes important and why you can't always share your favourite snacks with your furry best friend, not if you want to spend many more years in their company.

Superfoods to insect proteins: The exciting future of pet foods

These are some of exciting trends to consider if you want your pet to have the best nutrition available.

PETS

The UK pet food industry is worth a huge £3 billion – so finding new ways to keep our furry friends fed and full is clearly big business.

Traditional dog food usually consists of wet and dry pouches and kibbles, but for the modern dog, there are many other options and plenty of exciting trends to consider if you want your pup to have the best nutrition available. Below are some of the leading trends in food for dogs.

Insect proteins

This is a bit of a weird one, but creepy six-legged critters are becoming a more common feature of many pet foods. Much like in the human food world, manufacturers are looking for effective alternative proteins for dogs too, and invertebrates seem to be a top source. Insect protein is still an innovative concept (remember Bug Bakes on *Dragon's Den*?) but it's a sustainable and effective way of ensuring pets get high protein food without overuse of red meat and the environmental impact this causes.

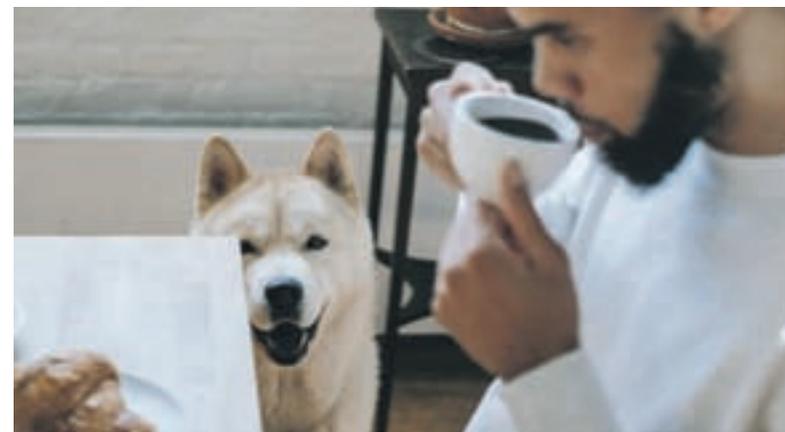


Health-first foods

Dog food has always been a highly processed product, but this is slowly changing. Companies are looking for ways to minimise processing and provide food with a more natural feel. Pet owners want their pups to enjoy a nutritious and wholesome meal every time, and manufacturers are recognising this too. Nutrient-dense superfoods are making their way into pet foods with chia seeds, kale and pumpkin popping up on the ingredients list of many brands.

Going raw

Raw meat diets aren't a brand new concept for dogs, but they are rising in popularity and you can buy frozen raw meats for dogs in many more retailers. There are also freeze-dried raw meat snacks and treats for dogs on the market, becoming much more popular for their longevity and the nutrient volume they pack.



"Dog food has always been a highly processed product, but this is slowly changing."

Humanisation

Pet food and pet food branding are becoming a lot more fun and human-centred, which makes sense, as it's us who have to buy the stuff. So it's about time the manufacturers started marketing to us. Manufac-

turers are following trends and making sure their food packaging is packed with everything a dog owner would want to see. You'll see food labels proclaiming the 'seasonal' benefits of their food and manufacturers are also very into showing off their 'homemade' credentials.

No one would consider a tin dog food particularly appetising but some of the newer foods on the market are actually quite tempting in comparison. We don't expect you'll be chowing down with your pooch on their next meal, but you can have more confidence in the improved quality on offer and the variety to choose from too.

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Delve into the origins behind London's most historic pubs

Each of these traditional taverns has its own weird and wonderful story to tell

TRAVEL

London is a city that wears its history on its sleeve, much of which can be found in the local pubs. And we all know that history is much more fun if it comes with a boozy twist. So when you've finished traipsing around the Tower of London or lucky enough to have one of these as your local, hit up one of these brilliant boozers and enjoy a pint in the same spot as some of London's most colourful characters.

The Ten Bells

This is not only a beautiful example of a traditional Victorian pub, it's also one of London's more notorious watering holes. It's suspected that Jack the Ripper was a regular customer at this Whitechapel boozery as at least two of his victims, Mary Kelly and Annie Chapman, were known to frequent it. In fact, Kelly was last seen at The Ten Bells just an hour before she was murdered. If you join a Jack the Ripper tour, chances are you'll end up at The Ten Bells. It's also just across the road from Spitalfields Market and close to Brick Lane, so you can stop by after a day of exploring and soak up the atmosphere in the stunning tiled Main Bar or enjoy killer cocktails in the bohemian upper lounge. Although the upper floors of the building are reputedly haunted, the toilets in the basement are by far the scariest part of the pub these days. <https://www.tenbells.com/>



The Ten Bells
Wordspotandsmith

The George Inn

It's easy to miss this gem of a pub as it's hidden away in a courtyard off Borough High Street. However, that's all part of its charm. You can escape the chaos of London Bridge and step into the past at the George, the only galleried coaching inn remaining in London. It's a unique place, with two wooden balconies running the length of the higgledy-piggledy old building. The George in its current form was rebuilt in the late 17th century following a fire and it's been there ever since, surviving both the Blitz and the coming of the railways (which led to the decline of the other great coaching inns). Like most of the pubs mentioned here, The George is supposed to be haunted and was frequented by Charles Dickens, who included it in his novel *Little Dorrit*. It's also possible that William Shakespeare was also a regular customer pre-fire and some of his plays were reputedly staged there.

<https://www.greeneking-pubs.co.uk/pubs/greater-london/george-southwark/>

The Prospect of Whitby

London has a wonderful array of riverside boozers and a fair few of them are clustered in Wapping. This characterful pub lays claim to being the oldest riverside tavern in London, dating from 1520. It was supposedly a den of iniquity, teeming with sailors, cutthroats, smugglers and thieves, some of whom might have ended up meeting a grisly end at nearby Execution Dock.

One of its more famous customers was Judge Jeffreys in the 17th century. Today, it's a much more pleasant spot to enjoy a drink while looking out over the Thames.

<https://www.greeneking-pubs.co.uk/pubs/greater-london/prospect-of-whitby/>



Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese. Rebuilt shortly after the Great Fire of 1666.

Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese

Located down another alleyway, this time just off Fleet Street, Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese was rebuilt immediately after the Great Fire of London in 1666 although there was a pub on the site since 1538. What you see today is a tiny bar at street level and a wood-panelled warren of dark rooms and corridors, leading down to a cavernous chop room in the basement which serves exactly the sort of hearty pub grub you'd expect to find in such a place. This is another pub with gold plated literary connections. Previous customers included Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Oliver Goldsmith and Arthur Conan Doyle. The building used to be a monastery which explains the network of tiny snugs and cellars.

The Dove

Another great riverside inn is The Dove in Hammersmith, one of several historic pubs in the area. The Dove, which dates from the early 18th century, actually holds the record for the smallest public bar in the UK. Fortunately, like a lot of London's old pubs, there are several other rooms



to explore with a drink in hand as well as a spacious terrace. It can be found down a tiny alleyway along Upper Mall but stretches back to overlook the Thames. The Dove has solid literary associations. Graham Greene, Ernest Hemingway and Dylan Thomas all enjoyed a drink there. James Thompson wrote the words to *'Rule Britannia'* there. Legendary designer William Morris lived just down the road (his former home is now a sweet little museum which is worth visiting). Today it's one of the loveliest spots to watch the famous Boat Race.

<https://www.dovehammersmith.co.uk/>

Ye Olde Mitre

This is another pub that's hard to find, in fact, at one point, it wasn't even part of London! Ye Olde Mitre claims to have been built in 1546, although the present structure dates from around 1773. It's hidden along a narrow alleyway just off historic Ely Place in Holborn. Until relatively recently, the area belonged to the Bishops of Ely, which technically made it part of Cambridgeshire, and there are rumours that criminals used to evade arrest here because it was supposedly out of the Met's jurisdiction. The pub was built for the servants of the Bishops of Ely although one of its former customers was none other than Elizabeth I, who apparently danced around a cherry tree with Sir



Christopher Hatton, one of her favourite courtiers. The tree still exists, preserved in a glass case inside the pub.

<https://www.yeoldemitreholborn.co.uk/>

The Spaniards Inn

Hampstead is worth a visit for the quaint village feel and beautiful Heath. There are several lovely old pubs but the Spaniards Inn is one you should make a beeline for. It's located on the edge of Hampstead Heath, and dates from the 16th century. One of its more notorious customers was the famed and feared highwayman, Dick Turpin, whose father was allegedly the landlord. There are rumours of Turpin's horse, Black Bess, haunting the grounds and road next to the pub, both with and without her terrifying owner. The pub today is a typically uneven, creaking wood-panelled affair, perhaps best experienced on a chilly winter day when you can sit in front of the open fire with one of their amazing roasts.

<https://www.thespaniardshampstead.co.uk/>

• Check reopening times for more information on outdoor bookings.

Drones help aerial photography take off

Capture unique viewpoints and previously hidden gems by combining your camera with one of the new range of drones

TECHNOLOGY

Drones are used for all kinds of business purposes, from dropping off parcels to delivering medical supplies, but they've also become more popular in the consumer market. With drones available at more affordable prices, they've topped many kids' Christmas lists and beyond this, hobbyists have become seriously attached to their new gadgets. The drone market is already worth billions of pounds and doesn't look to be slowing down any time soon.

What is a drone?

Drone is usually a term applied to any non-manned aircraft and are alternatively known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). Not unlike small flying robots, drones are used for a wide range of purposes and are vital in a range of industries including hurricane disaster recovery and even helping in missions to outer space. For hobbyists, however, it's

the very close-range drone that is the most popular. These drones can travel up to three miles from their controller and are enjoyed by collectors around the world. The longest-range endurance drones are used purely for industrial purposes and can travel beyond 400 miles and up to 3000 feet in the air. Drones in the home are mainly used for fun, although they have become popular for amateur and professional photographers alike.

Drone photography

Drone photography is one of the biggest areas of growth in photography as it provides you with the chance to capture new and unseen angles. Drone photography equipment is quite easy to come by with a

quick online search and entry-level drones don't have to be a huge expense either. Equip your drone with a gimbal that sits suspended beneath the drone and holds the camera in place and you're ready to go. Depending on the drone you choose, you can have a camera that fits it. Some drones have purpose-designed cameras available to fit perfectly with their design, while others can be equipped with a camera of your choice. You may not want to attach your top-end DSLR straight away until you've got used to controlling the drone, but many photographers use their best equipment with their drones once they've got the hang of it.

Endurance drones can travel beyond 400 miles

"Drone photography equipment is quite easy to come by with a quick online search and entry-level drones don't have to be a huge expense either."



Legal considerations for drone fans

A drone is considered a vehicle and as such, there are some regulations to keep in mind when using your new toy.

Drones being flown for recreational purposes do not require testing or certification for the user, but there are rules you need to stick to.

Recreational drone users must:

- Always keep the drone in sight so it can be seen and other objects can be avoided
- Keep their drone below 400 ft to minimise the risk of contact or

conflict with manned aircraft

- Stay away from airports and airfields, avoiding flight restriction zones
 - Stick to the manufacturer's instructions for use of the drone
 - Ensure all flights can be made safely before beginning
 - Not drop objects from the drone
 - Never fly for the purposes of commercial operations as this requires relevant permissions from the Civil Aviation Authority.
- Drones are a great gift for any gadget lover and with a little practice, you can enjoy hours of fun taking to the skies.

The Singing Strad: A 70th birthday collection by Julian Lloyd Webber

Brit Award-winning cellist Julian Lloyd Webber celebrates his 70th year with hand-picked collection of cello favourites, *The Singing Strad*.

NICK'S MUSIC PICKS

The Music Scene
Nick Benson

To mark his 70th year, British solo cellist, conductor and broadcaster Julian Lloyd Webber has released an outstanding three-disc collection of cello favourites, chosen by Julian himself, featuring his celebrated recordings spanning over two decades, capturing him at the height of his powers.

At the centrepiece of this new collection, titled *The Singing Strad*, is Lloyd Webber's award-winning recording of Elgar's *Cello Concerto*, with other highlights including his recordings of Shostakovich's *Cello Sonata* with John McCabe, the Saint-Saëns Concerto and works by Fauré & Debussy with Yan Pascal Tortelier, arrangements of Vaughan Williams, John Ireland & Percy Grainger with Sir Neville Marriner, Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations* with Maxim

Shostakovich (Tchaikovsky's original version) and a special recording of his brother's *Pie Jesu*.

All recordings were made with his Barjansky Stradivarius cello which he had played for more than 30 years.

The set also includes a beautiful miniature entitled *Jackie's Song*, composed by Julian as a tribute to the cellist Jacqueline Du Pré.

"I felt compelled to write something which hopefully encapsulates the special qualities of this unique musician," he said of the track.

In further celebrations of his 70th year, Lloyd Webber recently joined Classic FM for a brand-new show, *Julian Lloyd Webber's Rising Stars*, which celebrated 30 brilliant classical musicians aged under 30.



Julian Lloyd Webber, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Lorin Maazel. Photo: Clive Barda



The show, which ran for five weeks, from 28th February, featured the likes of star pianists Benjamin Grosvenor and Isata Kanneh-Mason; superstar cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason; child prodigy Christian Li; and the British-Italian tenor Freddie De Tomasso.

Widely regarded as one of the most creative musicians of his generation, Lloyd Webber inspired many new compositions and arrangements for cello – many featured in this new set.

Throughout his incredible career, he collaborated with an extraordinary array of artists, from classical legends such as Yehudi Menuhin, Sir Neville Marriner, Sir Clifford Curzon & Murray Perahia and Sir Elton John.

Lloyd Webber has also had an active involvement in music education for many years, forming the Music Education Consortium with James Galway and Evelyn Glennie in 2003 and chairing many projects including In Harmony, taking a leading role in the music curriculum in the UK and championing new talent.

Lloyd Webber was the Principal of Royal Birmingham Conservatoire from July 2015 until September 2020 and has been an ambassador for the Prince's Trust for more than 20 years and a patron of CLIC Sargent for more than 30.

• *The Singing Strad* by Julian Lloyd Webber is out now on Decca Classics.

Let's Create a World Without Racism Columban Competition

This article – **The Second Pandemic** – by Conn Fyfe of St Louis Grammar School, Ballymena, came second in the 2021 Columban Schools Media competition in Ireland. It is illustrated by the image which was awarded second place in the competition by Caoimhe Collins of Ballincollig, Co Cork.



The Second Pandemic

2020: The year of lockdowns and isolation.

A deadly virus preys on the multitudes, killing mercilessly.

The pandemic that plagues us: Covid-19.

2020

The year of protests and Black Lives Matter.

A world waking up to the racial injustice in our society.

The pandemic that plagues us: racism.

Not only are we in the midst of a global pandemic that continues to kill thousands daily, a second pandemic plagues us all. Racism has afflicted humanity for centuries and continues to divide us. Every nation is locked in the race to find a vaccine for Covid-19, a solution to the interminable nightmare that has suspended our lives.

Similarly, the vaccine for racism, the second pandemic, has never been more crucial.

Black people are dying in their homes, in front of their children and yet there is a widespread denial that anything is wrong. It is in our control to harness the power a united, global approach would have in eradicating racism, by showing love and compassion to our brothers and sisters.

Jesus taught us 'love one another as I have loved you' which has never been more felicitous when we consider the issues that face society today – to solve racism we must learn to empathise with our neighbours. We must learn to love one another irrespective of colour, creed or class.

The Black Lives Matter movement that has erupted throughout the world in the wake of the death of George Floyd has inspired hope. Action is finally being taken to avenge the casual racism that black people have had to endure for centuries. I recently heard the line 'slavery didn't end in 1865, it just evolved' which I believe echoes the message that the Black Lives Matter movement is advocating.

However, we must ask ourselves why these protests are even necessary. Is racism so deep-seated in our society that we must have these demonstrations to protect the rights of our fellow human beings? During the Covid-19 pandemic, the phrase 'we are all in this together' has been thrown around and become almost empty of meaning.

However, when we consider these words, we realise the power behind them, and how they also pertain to the pandemic of racism; we are all united in our fight against not only a disease, but our prejudices.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis shares a vision with us of fraternal

love. He reminds us that love and compassion for one another should supersede all forms of hatred, and that we must cooperate and empathise with one another to create a world free from racism. He writes: 'We have become accustomed to looking the other way, passing by, ignoring situations until they affect us directly' which I believe speaks volumes for the pandemic of racism that plagues us; despite not being the one suffering we all have a duty to condemn racism and take action to eradicate it.

As Desmond Tutu said: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." We cannot be bystanders while our black neighbours fall victim to an unjust and corrupt system that is imbued with racial animus.

The presidency of Donald Trump has highlighted the fragility of American democracy. An entire nation can be divided through the medium of social media; derisive political messages can be summarised in just 280 characters. This was epitomised in the attack on Capitol building on 6th January. This attack embodied the appalling condition of not only Americans' disrespect for other nations, but their disrespect for one another.

However, at Joe Biden's inauguration one voice managed to rise up against these demonstrations of hatred. Amanda Gorman's speech *'The Hill We Climb'* inspired hope in all who watched as she delivered her words that seemed to lift off of the page they were inscribed on. Just as Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his awe-inspiring speech nearly 60 years ago, when Amanda Gorman said "we will never again sow division" the words of King and his famous dream were echoed. Christ's message of love for our brothers and sisters in his greatest commandment 'love thy neighbour' was reflected in the words of the 22 year old whose advocacy of unity must not only be heard but listened to.

In addition, it must be noted that racism is not just an American problem. The pandemic that places the lives of our neighbours in danger on account of the colour of their skin is the case all over the world.

Here in Ireland we are the second biggest culprit in the EU for instances of racial violence. Shockingly, 51 per cent of Black people in Ireland said they have been harassed either verbally, physically, or online. (European Agency for Fundamental Rights)

Moreover, in the UK, 46 per cent of black households are in poverty in comparison to just under one in five white families. (The Social Metrics Commission).

These are just an infinitesimal number of statistics that embody the issue that faces us: there is a systemic racism in society today that needs to be addressed. Each day that passes in which no action is taken to change these statistics is a day too long.

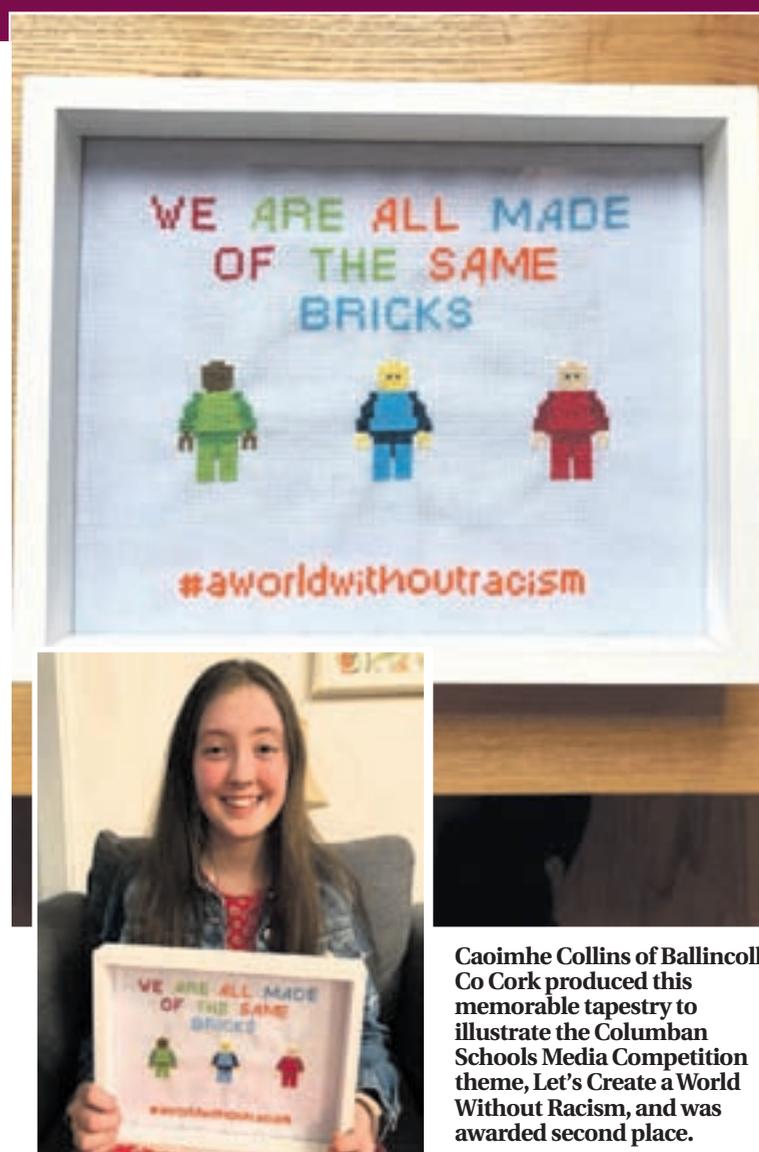
The blueprint that was set by Christ in his mission of love and compassion acts a source of comfort for many in the unprecedented times that we find ourselves in.

Similarly, the pandemic of racism that continues to afflict us will only be solved when we learn to follow Christ's teachings and indeed love one another as he loves each of us.

We must follow figures such as Pope Francis, Martin Luther King Jr and Amanda Gorman in rooting out the underlying racism that exists in society.

We must harness the power that a universal, global approach would have in eradicating this pandemic and make the invisible entities of love, empathy and justice, visible.

It is all in our hands.



Caoimhe Collins of Ballincollig, Co Cork produced this memorable tapestry to illustrate the Columban Schools Media Competition theme, Let's Create a World Without Racism, and was awarded second place.

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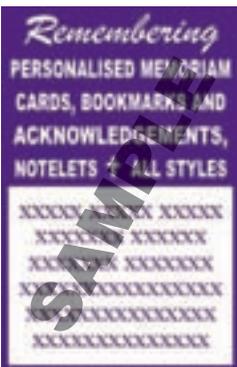
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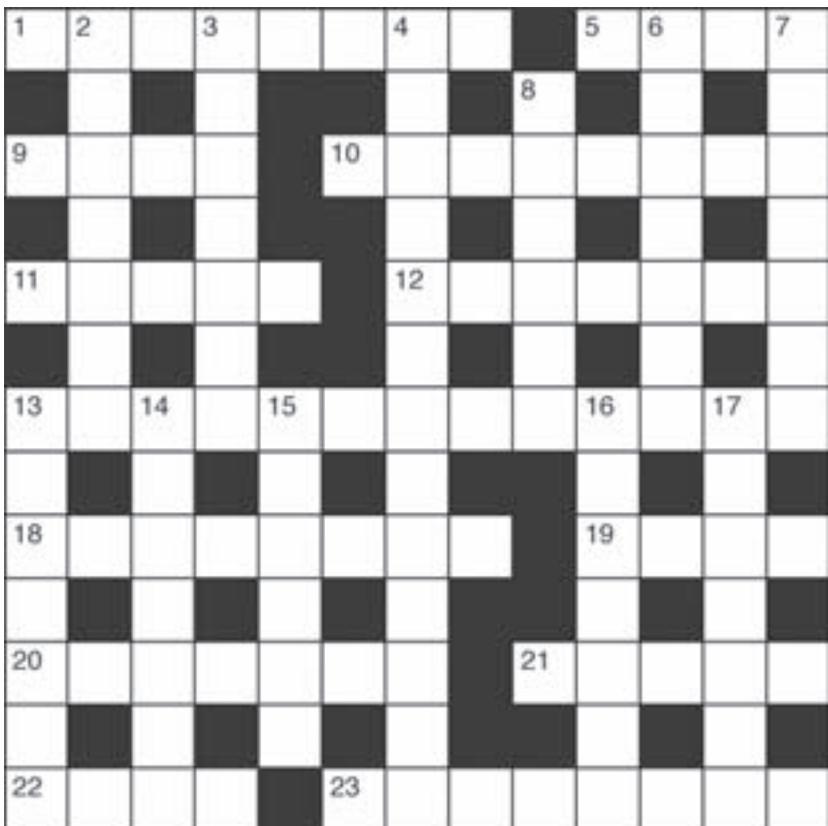
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The Catholic Universe Crossword

No. 694



- Across**
1. Squeeze (8)
 5. In excited eagerness (4)
 9. Swimming pool (4)
 10. Unaware (8)
 11. Adder (5)
 12. Trudge (7)
 13. Stupidity (13)
 18. Substantial (8)
 19. Anger (4)
 20. Determined (7)
 21. Circular (5)
 22. Barks (4)
 23. Died (8)
- Down**
2. Aperture (7)
 3. Affirm (7)
 4. Vow abstinence (4,3,6)
 6. Wrestle (7)
 7. Collects (7)
 8. Bog (6)
 13. Appease (7)
 14. Unceasing (3-4)
 15. Eatable (6)
 16. Tense (7)
 17. Quietness (7)

SOLUTION - see page 47

The Catholic Universe Sudoku

No. 294

Every Sudoku has a unique solution that can be reached logically. Enter numbers into the blank spaces so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.



Stuck? see page 47

Classified/Crossword/Liturgical Calendars

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SATURDAY: 8am; 6pm (Saturday Vigil)
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Crossword Solution (from p46)

Across: 1 Compress; 5 Agog; 9 Lido; 10 Ignorant; 11 Viper; 12 Traipse; 13 Senselessness; 18 Tangible; 19 Rile; 20 Settled; 21 Round; 22 Yaps; 23 Perished.

Down: 2 Orifice; 3 Profess; 4 Sign the pledge; 6 Grapple; 7 Gathers; 8 Morass; 13 Satisfy; 14 Non-stop; 15 Edible; 16 Nervous; 17 Silence.

Sudoku Solution (from p46)

4	6	5	9	7	8	3	2	1
3	2	9	6	1	4	7	8	5
7	8	1	2	5	3	6	4	9
9	3	8	5	6	7	2	1	4
5	1	6	4	8	2	9	3	7
2	4	7	1	3	9	8	5	6
8	9	4	7	2	1	5	6	3
1	5	2	3	9	6	4	7	8
6	7	3	8	4	5	1	9	2

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THANKGIVING PRAYER

Prayer to the Blessed Virgin. Oh most beautiful flower of Mount Carmel fruitful in the splendour of haven, Blessed Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin, assist me in this my necessity. Oh star of the sea, help me and show me, hear in you are my mother. Oh Holy Mary Mother of God, queen of heaven and earth, I humbly defeat you from the bottom of my heart, to succour in my necessity. There are none that can withstand your power. O show me, here in you are my mother. Oh Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have the course to be (3 times). Holy Mary I place this cause in your hands, (3 times). O Thank you for your mercy to me and mine. Amen. Say for 3 days and publication promised.



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**Ordinary Form Liturgical Calendar
 Sunday Year B, weekday cycle 1**

April: Month of the Holy Resurrection
May: Month of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Fourth Sunday of Easter, Sunday 25th April: Acts 4:8-12; Ps 117; 1Jn 3:1-2; Jn 10:11-18

Monday, 26th April: Acts 11:1-18; Ps 41; Jn 10:1-10

Tuesday, 27th April: Acts 11:19-26; Ps 86; Jn 10:22-30

Wednesday, 28th April: Acts 12:24-13:5; Ps 66; Jn 12:44-50

Feast of Saint Catherine of Siena, Virgin, Doctor of the Church, Patron of Europe, Thursday, 29th April: 1Jn 1:5-2:2; Ps 102; Mt 11:25-30

Friday, 30th April: Acts 13:26-33; Ps 2; Jn 14:1-6

Saturday, 1st May: Acts 13:44-52; Ps 97; Jn 14:7-14 (or Mt 13:54-58)

Extraordinary Form Calendar according to the Roman Missal of 1962 (Tridentine Rite)

Sunday, 25th April: Third Sunday after Easter 1 Pet 2:11-19; Jn 16:16-22

Monday, 26th April: SS Cletus & Marcellinus popes & martyrs 1 Pet 5:1-4, 10-11; Mt 16:13-19

Tuesday, 27th April: St Peter Canisius confessor & doctor 2 Tim 4:1-8; Mt 5:13-19

Wednesday, 28th April: St Paul of the Cross confessor

1 Cor 1:17-25; Lk 10:1-9

Thursday, 29th April: St Peter martyr Wis 5:1-5; Jn 15:1-7

Friday, 30th April: St Catherine of Siena virgin 2 Cor 10:17-11:2; Mt 25:1-13

Saturday, 1st May: St Joseph the Worker Col 3:14-17, 23-4; Mt 13:54-58

Compiled by Gordon Dimon, Senior MC of the Latin Mass Society

Grief is the price of love

David Bowie, Niall Hickey: (the nicest man you never met) and Race Europe

Dr Colm Hickey

At 11pm on Tuesday 13th April Niall Hickey, who had Multiple Sclerosis, was rushed to hospital. A little over 24 hours later at 1.30am on Thursday 15th April, he took his last breath and passed away in his sleep his brother Chris holding his hand. It was not a Covid-19 death; he had suffered a massive organ failure.

At first sight there is nothing particularly special in this sad story. After all, over 120,000 people have died in the last year, but he was my brother and I want to tell you a little about a remarkable man who was my, and many other people's, hero.

The Collins Dictionary definition of a hero is 'a man distinguished by exceptional courage, nobility etc.' In *Heroes*, the rock superstar David Bowie sang:

**'I, I will be king
And you, you will be queen
Though nothing will
drive them away
We can beat them, just for one day
We can be heroes, just for one day.'**

However, Bowie was wrong when he sang: 'We can be heroes just for one day.' He should have sung: 'We

can be heroes EVERY day.' Why? Simply because as Niall Hickey proved, it is possible. This is how he did it.

Niall was not a great sportsman: he was more comfortable in a sports bar than on a sports pitch. He did not play, but he loved sport and understood its positive transformative power. At 45, he was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. It is a terrible disease for which there is no cure. In Niall's case he had a particularly virulent strain which would result in severe bouts of flu-like conditions, from which he would make a partial recovery until the next attack always getting weaker and weaker. He became unsteady on his feet, then walked with a walking stick, then had to use a Zimmer frame, then occasionally a wheelchair, until he became completely wheelchair bound and had to be dressed by carers and helped into bed at night by his two brave sons, Ciaran and Patrick, or his devoted wife and childhood sweetheart, Andrea.

What would you have done when faced by your declining physical prowess? I know I would have been self-pitying, bitter, angry, and re-

sentful. I would have cried 'poor me' and 'why me?' and expected special treatment and deference. That is because I am weak and Niall was strong. He sought no pity, he displayed no anger, he asked for nothing. No, he was a hero; he showed exceptional courage, not now and again, but every day, because every day was another battle in a war he knew he could not win, and every day his resources to fight the battle were getting fewer. Every day he reached out to his family and gave the benefits of his tremendous experience and expertise in marketing and PR.

One example of his genius came in 1993. During that season Charlton's two goalkeepers: Bob Bolder and Mike Salmon were vying for the 1st team slot. Bolder made 33 appearances and Salmon 19. My Mum could not understand exactly what Niall did. So, I asked him to describe Charlton's goalkeeping dilemma and, without a moment's hesitation, he replied: "Easy: Salmon leaps over Bolder."

Never once, and I rang him most days, did I ever hear him complain. He always saw the sunny side of the

street and was always going there. He loved football and he loved Charlton Athletic and, although almost completely housebound, summoned the energy to go to Wembley to see Charlton play Sunderland in the League 1 play-off final in May 2019. He was ecstatic at the result, Charlton winning 2-1 in the 94th minute. It was the last Charlton game he attended and one of the best.

It is in giving that we receive. Niall knew that and was the embodiment of it. As regular readers of this article will recall, I recently wrote about Race Europe. This was the brainchild of London United, a loose alliance of all 14 London Premier and EFL football Community Trusts. Over the last 30 years, these Trusts have become important community catalysts working with the marginalised and socially disadvantaged to help improve their life chances. In the Race, squads of 23 from each club competed to be the fastest to cover the 6,720 miles that separate all the Euro 2021 host cities.

When I told Niall about the challenge he thought it a great idea and inspired me to participate. He was



one of the first to donate giving a generous £100 to my self-imposed £1,000 target. So Niall gave while I ran. We were in it together.

Charlton did well coming second to the eventual winners AFC Wimbledon. The Community Trust did well raising over £25,000. I did rather well raising over £1,500 and being the club's top fund raiser, but it was Niall's enthusiasm that spurred me on. Jason Morgan MBE, CACT's Chief Executive, said: "My thanks to everyone who has taken part and everyone who has donated money... this is an amazing amount to raise for CACT."

Yet you did not know Niall so why I am telling you about him? The simple reason is that you do know someone just like him: a single mother bringing up her family working as a school meals supervisor by day, and an office cleaner by night, a disabled military veteran struggling with a prosthetic limb, a newly widowed father suddenly having to bring up three small children all at primary school, a lonely pensioner who has lost their partner after 50 years of marriage with a family scattered all throughout the world, the child or partner of a dementia sufferer giving up promotion prospects, or even employment to care for a loved one.

These are the real heroes, not the runners, rowers, and walkers who took part in the Race. Yes, we did well. Yes, the money will be transformative. Yes, we showed the power of sport, but I ran because I can run. I pushed myself a little harder than normal doing something I love. I do not have to face each day as a struggle to move, to get out of my chair to get to bed. Niall did. Not just on one day, but every day. That is why David Bowie was wrong.

Niall Hickey, a devout Catholic, proved that it was possible to be a hero EVERY day. The words of St Paul described him perfectly: 'I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.' (Timothy 2, 4:6-8).

So, go to those you love, reach out to them, remind them of why they are special to you. Find the heroes that are in your family. They are staring you in the face if you but only open your eyes and your heart. We are all only passing through. Our life span is short so make the most of it reach out, touch, and care and say the three most powerful words that anyone in the world can hear: 'I love you' and always remember that grief is the price of love. **Niall Hickey 28/3/1962-15/4/2021. RIP.**



Niall (bottom right) is pictured at Wembley during the League 1 play-off final in May 2019 between Charlton Athletic and Sunderland. He was ecstatic at the result, Charlton winning 2-1 in the 94th minute. It was the last Charlton game he attended and one of the best.