

St Michael's News



The magazine for the people of St Michael, Ashford

Issue 107

Christmas 2023



Meet Batman fanatic: Father Sidon Sagar

Meet Father Sidon Sagar. We know that many of you will know Father, leading both of our parish churches in Stanwell and Ashford, for the last five years. But how well do we really know him? We sat down with him in his Ashford office, and got to know him a little better... Full interview on pages 5 & 6

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ONLINE – at: <https://parish.rcdow.org.uk/ashford/st-michaels-news/>

Schools near Ashford Parish**St Michael's Primary School (Age 5-11)**

Feltham Hill Road, Ashford, Middlesex
 TW15 2DG Telephone: **01784 253333**
www.st-michaels.surrey.sch.uk

Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Primary School

Parish: Staines-upon-Thames
 Distance: 2.6 miles
www.ourlady.surrey.sch.uk

St Ignatius Catholic Primary School, Sunbury

Parish: Sunbury-on-Thames
 Distance: 3.1 miles
www.st-ignatius.surrey.sch.uk

St Paul's Catholic College

Parish: Sunbury-on-Thames
 Distance: 3.6 miles
www.st-pauls.surrey.sch.uk

St Lawrence's Catholic Primary School

Parish: Feltham
 Distance: 2.8 miles
www.st-lawrencesprimary.co.uk

St Michael & St Martin's Catholic Primary School

Parish: Hounslow
 Distance: 5.1 miles
www.stmichaelandstmartin.co.uk

**Editorial**

This edition has been edited by Sonia Talbutt. The former newspaper reporter and digital editor used to work for a group of newspapers in the Berkshire area. She is now working in internal communication and marketing in bp. Sonia is an Ashford resident and mum to Rowan, 7, and Joshan, 5, who both attend St Michael's School.

If you would like to act as editor for the next edition or submit an article, please email Sonia on soniatalbutt@gmail.com

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Mental health: the church's response

Lavoisier Fernandes was born and raised in Goa. He's now living in our parish and a member of St Michael's. In his spare time, he contributes through his podcast and writings for various Catholic news portals. This article is Lavoisier's reflections on the topic of mental health.

In the Catholic Community discourse, despite its significant impact on parish and community settings and individual families, mental health does not receive an equal level of recognition as physical health issues due to the prioritization of sensationalized topics like abortion, sexual scandals, or gay marriage. It is said that one out of every five adults experience psychological distress. The invisibility of mental illness makes communication about its severity difficult, despite being common and extending beyond just having a bad day.

The most significant hurdle preventing people from accessing proper treatment is stigma. Some regions, people wrongly assume that mental illness is a form of punishment by God or an outcome of ancestral wrongdoings. Some even think this contradicts a life of faith or Church teachings. I recall in the early 90s when my brother battled schizophrenia. There were misconceptions surrounding this. At that time, in India, well-meaning Catholics and priests suggested reparations for sins committed by our forefathers through mass services or prayers. Although I believe in the power of prayer and its important role in psychological healing, it's important to realise that mental illness shouldn't be treated as a form of divine punishment. As for visible diseases such as cancer, this is just another tumultuous wave of suffering which deserves the same empathy and compassion: just as we wouldn't tell a cancer patient to "just pray it away," the same holds for individuals with mental illness.

The Catholic Church's social teaching emphasizes that access to primary healthcare is a collective responsibility and crucial for the common good (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 166). Furthermore, in line with *Gaudium et spes*, 27, every individual, irrespective of their affliction, is created in God's image and likeness (*Genesis 1:27*) and deserves to be treated with love and dignity.



St. John Paul II unequivocally affirmed the inherent worth of individuals struggling with mental illness, stating that they always bear the divine image and possess an inalienable right to be recognized and respected as persons. Pope Benedict XVI dedicated the 14th World Day of the Sick in 2006 to shed light on the plight of those affected by mental illness. In his message, he underscored the urgent need to address the mental health crisis that afflicts one-fifth of humanity, describing it as a pressing social and healthcare emergency. In his Apostolic Exhortation to Young People (*Christus Vivit*, 149), Pope Francis acknowledged the aspirations of young individuals with mental health challenges, emphasizing their unique abilities and calling for their inclusion and appreciation within the community.

Despite the Catholic Church's teachings and the consistent emphasis by the last three popes on the significance of mental health care, there remains a need for greater attention and action within the Church to address this vital issue.

How can we practically address mental health as a Church and as individuals? Here are three approaches:

1. Support families and promoting open dialogue. Families should recognize that perfection is unattainable. Research shows that people often turn to the Church for support during distress. Unfortunately, many parishes lack the resources to assist individuals with psychological trauma, leading them to seek alternative solace in practices like yoga or nature. Creating open and non-judgmental discussions about mental health within parish communities is essential to bridge this gap. This can be accomplished through workshops, tapping into the riches of the church like Benedictine or the Ignatius spirituality for a balanced life, mental health ministries, or support groups. These initiatives foster understanding, empathy, and support for those struggling and their loved ones.
2. Secondly, integrating human psychology into the priestly formation is crucial. Recognizing the value of psychology and psychiatry in Catholic thought: priests should know human psychology. The document "Ratio Fundamentalis" (universal guidelines for the formation of priests) from the Dicastery for the Clergy in 2016 emphasizes the beneficial contribution of psychology to pastoral theology for the education of future pastors.
3. Finally, it is important to emphasize that there is hope for those facing mental illness, as both science and faith affirm. Seeking professional help is crucial for individuals or anyone they know who may be experiencing mental health challenges. While it is unnecessary to consult a Catholic psychologist exclusively, many psychologists strive to respect their patients' faith backgrounds and spiritual needs. It is essential to understand that faith and prayer are not substitutes for therapy or medication but can complement psychological treatment. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, specifically in paragraph 365, recognises the profound unity of the soul and body, considering the soul as the "form" of the body, highlighting their intimate nature. The Catholic Church's

understanding acknowledges the eternal and spiritual aspects of the union between body and soul, rejecting the notion that the psyche solely determines behaviour. This holistic perspective appreciates the human person's dignity, complexity, and diverse needs, encompassing spiritual, psychological, and physical dimensions. Consequently, the Church's teachings hold significant relevance for individuals with mental illness, providing insights into the mysteries and purpose of the human experience.

God has wired us as physical, emotional, and spiritual beings with the ultimate desire for our wholeness. However, the journey to wholeness differs for each person. Despite acknowledging that God can heal us now, we might feel apprehension since we cannot predict when or if healing will occur in this life. It could happen today, tomorrow, or it could be in heaven. The Church's primary mission is to remove barriers that hinder people from encountering Christ. Therefore, when we witness the struggles and prevalence of mental illness worldwide, we must ensure that individuals genuinely grasp God's love for them. They need to hear from the Church that their condition or suffering does not define their identity. Whether healing comes or not, our interactions should leave people feeling loved when they leave our presence. Through ministry encounters, people must know that God loves them (1 Cor. 14:1) - *"Let love be your highest goal."* Love will always entail the highest risk in the Kingdom of God.

Ascension Liturgy

by Hannah and Millie

"On Thursday 18th May, the Liturgy Leaders and Followers led a whole school liturgy to celebrate the Ascension and Jesus going back to heaven. We were joined by some of our ACAT (Ascension Catholic Academy Trust) schools over Zoom to celebrate this special day."





Meet Batman fanatic: Father Sidon Sagar *(continued from front page)*

by Sonia Talbutt

Tell us a bit about your Indian background and the meaning of your name.

"I am a Tamil and Hindi speaker. I was born in the north of India in a place called Sunday Bazar, Bokaro Colliery, Giridih District, Bihar (known today as Jharkhand). Now you know why I love Sunday so much! My name 'Sidon Sagar' comes from the Bible. It was the former city of Lebanon – where Solomon cut cedar trees to build the Jerusalem Temple. Sagar means Ocean. I have no surname. In the Tamil culture, your father's name is your surname, in my case it was not added (I don't know why!) So, my name is Sidon Sagar – meaning Ocean of Sidon".

How do you relax and avoid burnout?

"I love going on long drives. I love driving to Hampton Wick and seeing my conferrers who are my 'brothers.' I listen to lots of music when I drive to help me relax. I love Soundtracks! I use Spotify as it helps you access all genres. I normally type in Praise and Worship songs and listen to the soundtracks. Also, a load of Bishop Barron on Word on Fire podcast.

I am a big superhero fan. My favourite is DC's Batman because he has a strong moral and ethical code where he'll 'never cross the line.' I relax by watching TV. I'm enjoying new Asterix and Obelix on Netflix at the moment.

Stress is an emotional state. The best exercise is to sit in-front of God. Talk to him about what is going on. You'll be amazed at what he answers. Faith can help with any anxiety and fear."



With Papa Benedetto



Indian Traditional Photo when the Child begins to Stand on their feet 1 yrs old



From Left Me, Dad, 2nd Brother, Mom and 3rd Brother



Me on Blue Bike 1 Year of Philisophy India

Where is your next holiday?

He jokes: "A father never goes on holiday! I have been away only once in the last two years and that was to India. I want to go again soon to see my mum and my brothers and my sisters in Bangalore. I have two nieces who are my sister's children. They are five and two - and just full of life. I miss them but I am married man too; married to the Church, so that is my duty and my life."

What would you say to anyone reading who is going through a challenging time right now?

"Life is not always easy but trust the almighty God who is the creator of everything. He cares



My Wedding Day - Perpetual Vows

and he knows what you are going through. Imagine that he is trying to find all the pieces of the jigsaw to help you find the whole picture. Count the blessings more

than you count the amount of pain. When we forget about the blessings, things can seem dull and grey. But when you count them, you will see how beautiful Lord has made everything. Pray and pray. Praying is the only telephone line to God and when you connect to the line, you'll see he is there to hear you and heal you."



Candle procession of 50 Ann of II Vatican Council in Rome 2013

What's for dinner tonight?

Answering at 10am, Father jokes: "I haven't thought about that one yet so will need to get back to you! But I do love to cook. I cook tomato rice and vegetable biryani. I do eat meat, but I don't need to eat it every day. I do however love a great beef steak! Pongal is another one of my favourites. It's South-Indian and made-up of lentils and rice."



Papa Francesco



Learning about The Kingdom of Heaven

by Aiobhinn and Patrick

In RE, in the 2023 summer months, we learnt about the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven is how God wants us to live. We have listened to many parables that Jesus taught to tell us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like.

In Year 2 we listened to the Parable of the Mustard Seed. This story teaches us that doing small things make a difference.

The Followers and Liturgy leaders were about what small acts they can do to make a difference:

- Give someone a smile. – Makarios
- Donate old toys to charity. – Ella
- Pick up litter. – Noah
- Share with my friends. – Natalia
- Give food to Manna Food Bank. – Hannah

Children are invited to Sunday Friends

Our Sunday Friends group at St Michael's Church is running for 4-8 year-old children.

It's the perfect way to introduce your children to the church, through this children's liturgy group.

Come to the 9.15am mass on Sundays as normal, before Father invites the Sunday Friends to the front of the church. Your children are then taken into the hall behind the church and will practice singing hymns and answer questions based on the Sunday Gospel.

All our helpers and volunteers are DBS checked. We're always looking for volunteers. To join the team please contact Cheila Pontes, Sunday Friends Leader:
cheila.pontes@hotmail.co.uk

(Note: Sunday Friends is open to all children who are yet to receive their Holy Communion. Once they have had this, they should join the main Mass in church).

Caritas News *by* The Caritas Ambassadors

Caritas Visit with Sister Silvana and Nigel the Penguin

by Stanley and Darice.

Sister Silvana came to visit us with Nigel the Penguin to do an assembly on Catholic Social Teaching on May 24th. All of Year 5 were awarded their Caritas Ambassadors their badges for their hard work to put love into action.



Caritas Schools Festival

Six Year 5 Caritas Ambassadors were invited to the Caritas Schools Festival at Westminster Cathedral on Friday 16th June.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols welcomed us and we were very lucky to meet Bishop Paul again and share our work with him. Gabriel

"We were given certificates for our Imagining Futures Project and for our Caritas Ambassador work this year."

– Stanley

"The liturgy was really special; we loved the songs. It was great to meet the other schools and hear about their projects. We were honoured to be asked to read at such a special occasion."

– Ailish

PARISH HALL FOR HIRE
Please contact Shenda Holmes on **01784 252230** or ashford@rcdow.org.uk for further information.

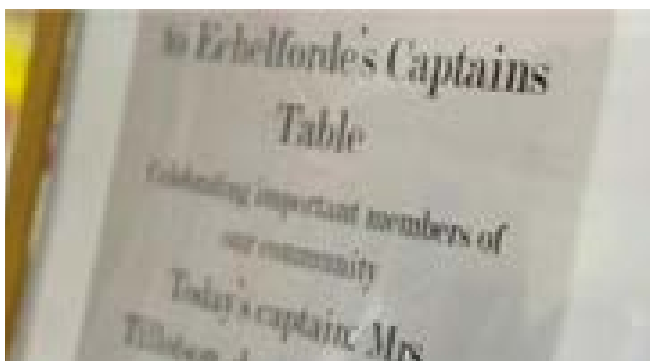
Lunch at Echelforde Care Home

A small group of Year 4 and Year 5 children were invited for lunch with Mrs Tillotson to Echelforde Care Home.

I really enjoyed spending time with the residents and talking to them. I feel very lucky to have had this experience. – Ailish

It was a real privilege to go to the care home for lunch.

It was a lot of fun and I liked listening to all the resident's stories. – Luke



Caritas Ambassador 'LOVE IN ACTION' Project

In Year 5 we have been working on a special project as Caritas Ambassadors. We have been learning about Catholic Social Teaching and we have chosen to focus on the principle of 'Care for Creation.'

As a year group we were concerned about the decrease of insects and bees in our local environment and we asked the school community for donations of plants, seeds, pots, soil or money. We had lots of donations and raised a total of £128.50 and purchased bags of soil, bedding plants and herbs. Even B&Q in Twickenham gave us some donations to help with our project. THANK YOU EVERYBODY!

We spent the day weeding, planting flowers and sowing seeds that best attract insect pollinators and last in the sun. We also tidied up our bug hotel and planted wildflower seeds. A local resident Edna also came into help us. Thank you, Edna for helping us!

We sorted the seeds so that they can be plated throughout the year helping us to continue our project.

We also gave some of the seeds, plants and pots to Echelforde Care Home for their garden.

– Alanna, Ayla, Charlie & Hayden.

I enjoyed sorting the seeds out so everyone could plant them. I have already seen more bees. It was a really pleasant experience as we got to explore God's world and its wildlife. I felt elated knowing I was doing something that would help pollinators. I found it really fun tidying up the Bug Hotel.

– Michelle, Eros, Natasha, Zim and Ella



May Procession

by Ella and Emma

"The whole school celebrated a May Procession where we celebrated Mary, our Mother. We gathered on the field and listened to the Magnificat and Hail Holy Queen prayers.



We also prayed a decade of the rosary. The eldest girl in the school and the youngest girl in the school crowned Mary and then we all processed into the hall where we lay flowers and sang some hymns. It was a very special occasion, giving us time to think about how important Mary is to us.

After the celebration, we donated some of the flowers to Echelforde Care Home in Ashford and Ashford House in Stanwell for the residents and carers to enjoy."



Mass in school:

Year 4 Mass

by Benjamin and Imelda

"On the 13th June, we celebrated Mass with Fr Carlo and the parishioners at St Michael's Church. It was a lovely opportunity to all be together. We look forward to going again soon."

Year 6 Leavers Mass

by Emma and Ella

"On the 17th July, we celebrated our Leavers Mass with Fr Carlo. It was a special time to remember our time at St Michael's and to give thanks for all the wonderful opportunities we have been given. We celebrated with our families, friends and teachers. We will miss you St Michaels."

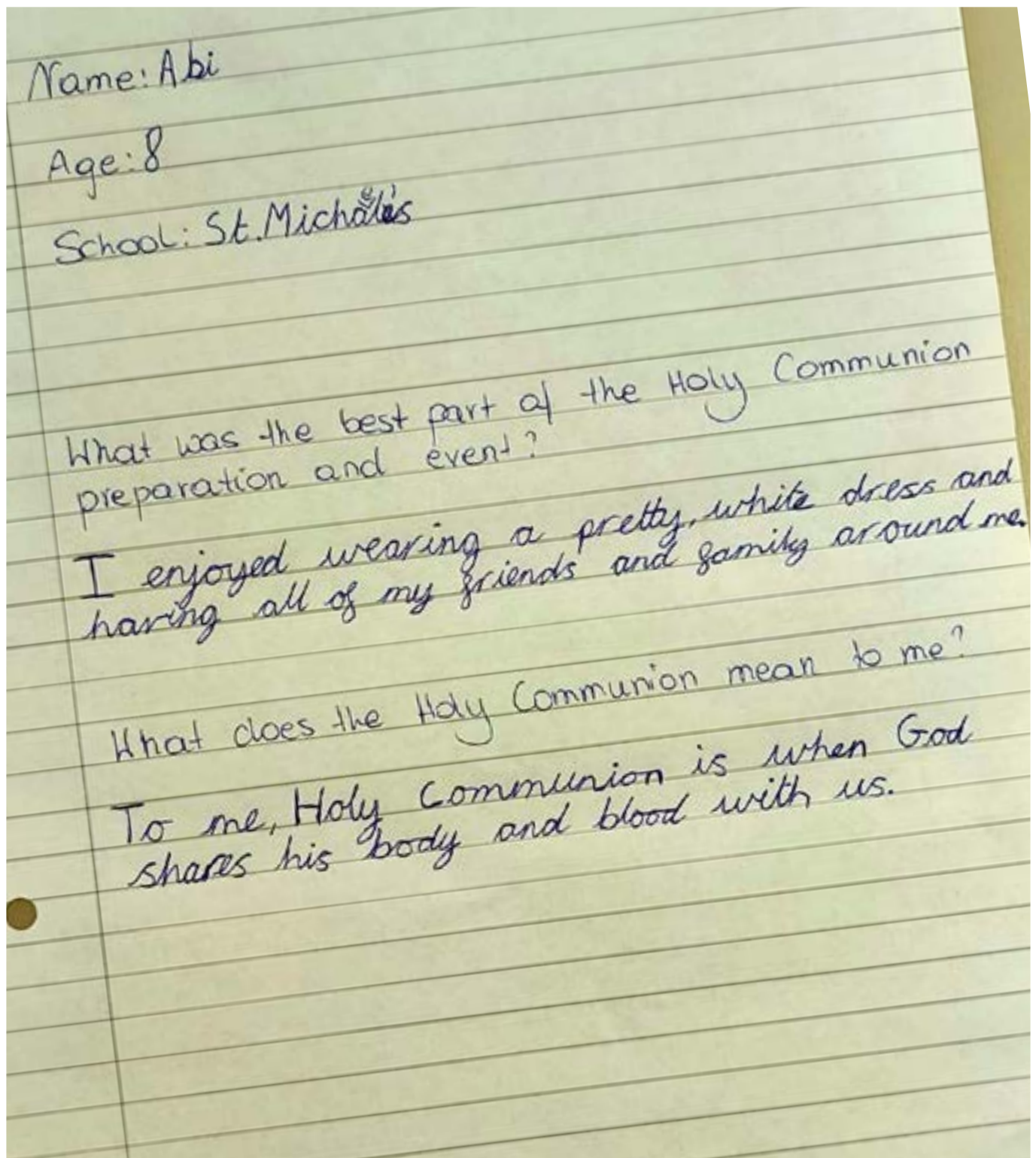
Catholic Faith: If you are interested in becoming a Catholic or in deepening your knowledge of the Catholic Faith, please contact Lee Gibson, Adult Faith Formation Catechist on: **07713 760281** or email: ashfordcatechist@rcdow.org.uk

Children take part in First Holy Communion

In May 2023, around 70 children have taken part in the First Holy Communion. The ceremony was conducted by Berne Shanker, a First Holy Communion Catechist. The event was organised over three Masses and concluded with a First Holy Communion breakfast in June.

Abi Mann, eight, an Ashford resident and St Michael's Catholic Primary School pupil, documented her experience after receiving her First Holy Communion. See below.

*Note: First Holy Communion takes place in May 2024. Applications are now closed for 2024.
For queries email Berne Shanker ashfordcomm@rcdow.org.uk*



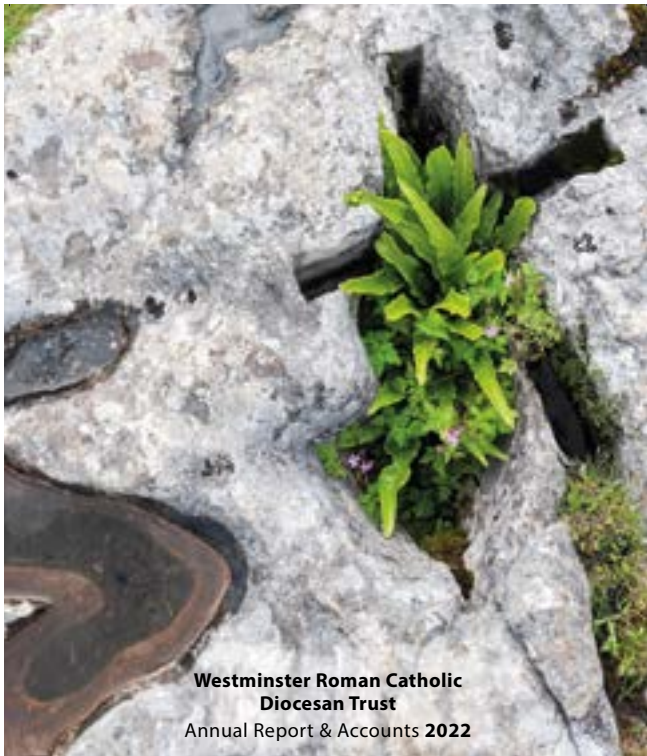
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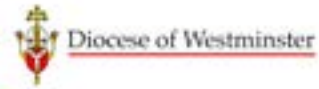


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Remember God's Will in yours

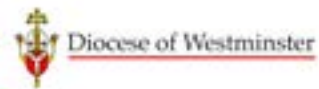


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Pact the Catholic charity for prisoners and their families, is offering free training and support for parishioners interested in volunteering with them in prisons or in the local community. No experience necessary. All enquiries welcome. To find out more please contact ParishAction@prisonadvice.org.uk