

# The Catholic universe



FREE inside - Catholic TIMES

## 'Care not camps for refugees' – cardinal

### Insensitive and cruel accommodation behind wire fences risks traumatising people who fled from persecution

**Nick Benson**  
Cardinal Vincent Nichols has joined Christian leaders in calling on the Home Office to stop the use of disused military barracks as accommodation for asylum seekers.

The cardinal, together with Bishop Paul McAleenan, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales' (CBCEW) Lead Bishop for Migrants and Refugees, joined other Church leaders in writing to Home Secretary Priti Patel to stress that the use of such facilities, even as a temporary measure, is 'entirely inappropriate'.

Using the example of Napier Barracks in Folkestone, Kent, the signatories point out that the strategy is at odds with the restrictions in place to combat the spread of Covid-19. Members from different households living in shared facilities suffer an increased risk of infection and residents cannot be held responsible for virus transmission rates when social distancing is not possible.

But they also point out the deeply worrying psychological impacts such accommodation can have on refugees, many of whom have fled conflict and

persecution. To make such people 'then live behind wire fences is simply insensitive' to the ordeals they have been through.

The letter states: 'As you know, in the absence of safe and legal routes to apply for refugee status outside the UK, many have no choice but to make a dangerous and perilous journey to seek safety from conflict, persecution, and violence.'

'After such a traumatic journey, having had to often spend time behind wire fences in refugee camps, it is simply insensitive to house people in such environments. In a global pandemic it is nothing short of irresponsible and risks the lives of residents and staff alike.'

'Even as a temporary measure, ex-military barracks are unfit for purpose and entirely inappropriate. Requiring members from different households to use and live in shared facilities greatly increases the risk of infection and residents cannot be held responsible for virus transmission rates when social distancing is not possible.'

Continued on page 2

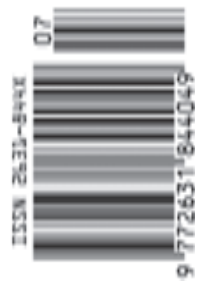


## Vaccinations are becoming a habit...

Carmelite Sr Patricia of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is pictured receiving her Covid-19 vaccine at St Charles Centre for Health and Wellbeing in London. Her jab came as the UK reached the target set by Prime Minister Boris Johnson to administer 15 million vaccinations by mid-February, covering the four highest priority groups, an achievement hailed as "a significant milestone" by the PM.

The landmark paves the way for an easing of restrictions, with Johnson preparing to set out a roadmap to normality on Monday evening. • Anyone aged over 70 in England who hasn't received a first dose of the vaccination can go book an appointment by calling 119 or going online: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/> Photo: Hannah McKay, Reuters.

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# education





Protesters pictured at Liverpool's Beatles statue offer their support for refugees  
Photo: Care4Calais

### Continued from page 1

Leaning on the shared Christian teaching that upholds all human beings as equal and deserving of respect, dignity and welcome, the leaders promote a model in which asylum seekers are housed within communities.

'We have witnessed at first hand, the generous welcome provided by civic and faith groups to those seeking protection. When asylum seekers are housed within communities, it allows for better integration and access to support services.'

'Asylum seekers are often no longer seen as 'other' but as neighbours and friends. It is in this environment that asylum seekers physical and mental wellbeing can be protected, and they are also able to better engage with their asylum application.'

The letter comes a week after judges ordered the relocation of two asylum

seekers from Napier barracks, with both rulings citing the 'prison-like' conditions. A recent fire at the site resulted in a lack of electricity and hot water.

Refugee groups have long condemned the Government's use of the disused barracks as asylum accommodation, branding it "intentionally cruel" following revelations that Home Office officials intentionally deployed substandard asylum accommodation to manage public opinion.

Sarah Teather, Director of JRS UK, said: "People who have been forced to flee their homes have been subjected to unsafe, undignified, and inhumane conditions in barracks accommodation. It is intentionally cruel and part of a wider strategy: the Government is risking the lives of the most vulnerable in order to make a political point."

## Catholics urged to back Lord's plan to tackle 'crime of crimes'

**Nick Benson**

Prominent Catholic politicians are calling on the support of *Catholic Universe* readers as they have vowed to continue their battle to provide justice for victims of genocide after the UK Government was branded 'shameful' for blocking a vote on the 'crime of crimes'.

Catholic peer Lord David Alton of Liverpool has urged readers of *The Catholic Universe* to contact their MPs, encouraging them to "vote with their conscience" on the issue when they have another chance to do so.

The call comes after Prime Minister Boris Johnson narrowly avoided a Tory rebellion over signing trade deals with countries suspected of committing genocide. MPs narrowly voted to remove two Lords amendments from the Trade Bill, including one tabled by Lord Alton, which would have forced ministers to withdraw from any free trade agreement with any country which the High Court ruled is committing genocide.

It was replaced by a Government-backed compromise amendment aimed at giving Parliament a vote on whether to pursue agreements with such countries.

However, politicians called this option 'parliamentary gameplay' and



Rohingya Muslims protest against their treatment in Myanmar

"chicanery" in obstructing a straight vote on the issue by arranging it so that any Conservative rebels who voted in favour of Lord Alton's amendment would also be backing a separate Labour-sponsored amendment.

Catholic Tory MP Sir Iain Duncan Smith said: 'Parliament should have had an historic opportunity to end decades of dither over the 'crime of crimes' – genocide – and provide a meaningful avenue for justice and accountability.'

Lord Alton confirmed to the *Universe* that he will table a further amendment next week. "I will be laying a further amendment before the House of Lords; if passed it will give MPs the chance to vote on the central

question of providing a judicial decision on whether a genocide is underway.

"It is deplorable that such a vote has been denied by machinations and chicanery."

He said if a competent Court was to be given this power it would force Government to fulfil its duties under the 1948 genocide Convention, putting genocide prevention at the heart of foreign policy.

He urged *Catholic Universe* readers and the public to "contact MPs and urge them to vote with their consciences and to back Sir Iain Duncan Smith, who will be leading the House of Commons campaign to provide justice for victims of genocide."

## UK arms sales accused of fuelling Yemen civil war

Peace campaigners have urged the UK Government to stop fuelling the civil war in Yemen as "shocking" figures revealed the true extent of arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

The UK Government licensed £1.4 billion worth of weapons sales to Saudi Arabian forces in the immediate aftermath of its decision to renew arms sales in July 2020. The majority are ML4 licences which cover bombs, missiles and countermeasures. The deal brings the total cost of UK-made weapons sold to the Saudi forces since the bombing of Yemen began in 2015 to £6.8 billion.

The UK is one of Saudi Arabia's leading arms suppliers, along with the US, but crucially President Joe

Biden has committed to end arms sales while the conflict continues. The UK-made equipment used in the war includes Typhoon and Tornado aircraft, Paveway bombs and Brimstone and Stormshadow missiles.

In June 2019, the Court of Appeal ruled that the Government acted unlawfully when it licensed the sale of arms to Saudi-led forces without assessing whether they would be used in ways that would breach humanitarian law. This followed a case brought by the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT). The government was ordered not to approve any new licences, but in July 2020 it resumed arms sales, claiming any violations of International Humanitarian Law were 'iso-

lated incidents', despite the fact that hundreds of attacks on residential areas, schools, hospitals, civilian gatherings, and agricultural land and facilities have been documented.

Sarah Waldron, of CAAT, branded the new figures "shocking" and said they illustrate the Government's determination to keep supplying arms at any cost.

"UK weapons have played a devastating role in Saudi attacks in Yemen, yet the UK Government has done everything it can to keep the arms sales flowing," she said.

"The arms sales are immoral, and we believe that the decision to renew them was illegal. They must change course work to support peace."



A worker stands on the wreckage of a vehicle oil and tyres store hit by Saudi-led airstrike in Yemen

  
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# Cardinal calls on Mary to help us see out the Covid pandemic

**Nick Benson**

As the Covid-19 pandemic rages on, Cardinal Vincent Nichols has urged the faithful to bring their needs to Our Lady, “asking her to intercede for us with her son”.

She already knows “the longings of our hearts and the despair that sometimes touches them”, he said: “We ask, fervently. Like many a mother, she is there before us. But the asking is so important.”

The cardinal’s call came during his homily at the Mass in honour of Our Lady of Lourdes in Westminster Cathedral on Saturday, 13th February.

Recalling how live pictures were streamed from the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes to mark her feast on Thursday, 11th February, the cardinal noted how the faithful were able to “be with people gathered at the Grotto, quietly moving around, praying peacefully” and “take part in Mass in the Underground Basilica”.

“These moments brought comfort and encouragement to many who love the Shrine and look forward to visiting in the future,” he said.

He asked Our Lady to “stream to us not images of Lourdes but her gifts of compassion and hope”.

“The Gospel reminds us that we are right to do so,” he said. “The Wedding Feast in the village of Cana gives us real insight into the relationship between the mother and her divine son. As only a mother can, she knows his heart. She understands his deepest longing to redeem his people. And she is utterly confident that he will answer her requests.”



Cardinal Nichols invited the faithful to pray for the sick, the dead and those who are suffering in hospital or at home. He prayed for those awaiting treatment, as well as perseverance and deep resilience, an inner strength of spirit and all those standing on the front line during the pandemic.

The cardinal also asked for prayers for all priests, that they “may be steadfast in our ministry”.

Noting that it is not surprising how in the midst of the pandemic there is a revival of prayer, he recalled how

someone who had been in an intensive care unit had told him of the vast amounts of rosary beads there. “In our hour of need we turn to her who is always close,” the cardinal said.

“The instinct to pray is deep within us. At times of need it cannot be easily resisted. Indeed, we know that the fabric of faith is so important to our daily living, and we can give a reminder of this truth to others simply by saying that we are going to pray for them. It is an offer that is rarely rejected!”

**Cardinal Nichols celebrates Mass in honour of Our Lady of Lourdes, in Westminster Cathedral**  
Photo: Mazur/cbcew.org.uk.

## New warning of ‘DNR’ notes on disabled patients

Disability campaigners in the UK have warned again that Covid-19 patients with learning disabilities may be having do-not-resuscitate (DNR) orders imposed on them, with one doctor branding it ‘eugenics’.

Charity Mencap said it was receiving reports that people with learning disabilities were being told they would not be resuscitated if they were taken seriously ill with Covid-19.

It comes after the Care Quality Commission (CQC) reported in December that some people had received DNR orders last year without their knowledge or consent.

Edel Harris, Mencap’s chief executive, said “many people with a learning disability have faced shocking discrimination and obstacles to accessing healthcare, with inappropriate Do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (DNACPR) notices put on their files. It’s unacceptable. The Government must act to save the lives of some of society’s most vulnerable by urgently prioritising all people with a learning disability for the vaccine.”

Responding to the reports, US virologist Angela Rasmussen tweeted: ‘This is eugenics and it is revolting.’ See **Caroline Farrow, pg 10**

# Lent pledge to open hearts to sick and cultivate kindness

**Nick Benson**

This Lent, as the UK marks the first anniversary of Covid-19, Catholics must open their hearts to the sick and love them as brothers and sisters, the Catholic Bishop for Healthcare has said.

Bishop Paul Mason said the pandemic has taught the faithful to “cultivate kindness” in their treatment of the sick. “Today, we bring to mind all those who are suffering, including those afflicted with Covid-19, those for whom treatments and therapies have been delayed or postponed, the mentally ill, the lonely and isolated, those working on the frontline, and the countless thousands of others who have made quiet and selfless acts of sacrifice,” Bishop Mason, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales’ (CBCEW) Lead Bishop for Healthcare, said in his message for the World Day of the Sick.

This year’s day was given special significance, he said, by the extraordinary and challenging times through



which people are living. Remembering those who have died, as well as their loved ones in mourning, Bishop Mason said: “The fact of our fraternity reminds us that we are social beings, and Jesus’ warning against hypocrisy is an encouragement to kindness.”

He cited Pope Francis’s encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, in which he wrote: ‘Kindness ought to be cultivated; it is no superficial bourgeois virtue. Precisely because it entails esteem and respect

for others, once kindness becomes a culture within society it transforms lifestyles.’

Bishop Mason said: “The pandemic has brought an urgent need for society to take up this call to cultivate kindness, particularly for the sick.

“The last year has generated tragic scenarios in which heart-breaking decisions have had to be made about who receives urgent care. These decisions must now prompt us as a society to reflect on how we view and value the lives of the sick.

“We are bound to the ill, suffering and dying by their vulnerability,” he said. “Their trust in us is a gift which we must cherish, honour.”

Bishop Mason pointed out that during the season of Lent, Christians recall the suffering, death and glorious Resurrection of our Lord. “I invite you to join me in making a commitment to open our hearts to an encounter with the human face of Christ in the sick, to judge them worthy and valuable no matter their state.”

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**Children under the age of five are dying from malnutrition and vitamin deficiency**

The Sisters of Charity of St Vincent De Paul write to The Little Way Association from north-eastern India: “Covid means that people are completely depending on the St Vincent Health Centre which we established in 2015 in Darenchigre. Patients are suffering from anaemia, jaundice, typhoid, diarrhoea, malnutrition, calcium and iron deficiency, and many children below the age of five are dying. We are unable to provide better medical care and treatment due to the lack of finance and the other issues like lack of medical equipment and oxygen supply monitors in emergency situations.”



One of the Sisters of Charity and grateful patients at St Vincent Health Centre, north-eastern India.

### “Please can you help us?”

The sisters work in one of India’s poorest regions, where the people scrape a living from subsistence-agriculture. The health centre was intended just to provide first aid but people from 20 villages have come to use it as their principal medical facility. The sisters urgently ask for funds for vitamins, diagnostic equipment and treatment for those suffering from various dietary deficiencies.

The sisters conclude their letter: “We earnestly ask you to participate in this humble effort to offer our medical support to the people in need.”

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## Council criticised for vigil ban extension

Pro-lifers have branded plans to extend for another three years a buffer zone banning vigils outside an abortion clinic in Ealing as a “disingenuous decision”.

Ealing Council first imposed the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) of 100 metres around a Marie Stopes clinic on Mattock Lane in April 2018.

It was the first buffer zone of its kind in the UK and censors any pro-life witness, as well as offers of pro-life services to pregnant women coming to the clinic, thereby taking away any real choice from them.

The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) said at the time that the move was “a bad day”

for women and democracy and marked the first time “a council has banned peaceful public acts of witness and freedom of expression”.

SPUC commented that the extension “vilifies life-saving actions founded most of all on love. Far from protecting pregnant women, a PSPO robs vulnerable women considering an abortion of any other alternative.

“As we have reported in the past, there are numerous instances when a pro-life vigil could have, and sometimes did, provide a woman with ‘a ray of hope’. This disingenuous decision has nothing to do with hope, but instead libels pro-lifers in order to forward a pro-abortion agenda.”

## Plans to criminalise rows in the home shelved

The Law Commission has ditched controversial plans to criminalise conversations in private homes in England and Wales.

The commission had proposed extending hate crime laws into private homes, which could have resulted in people being prosecuted for ‘hate speech’ in a private dwelling.

However, the plan has now been dropped following a consultation on the matter, which saw concerns raised over people being prosecuted for causing offence during dinner party debates on controversial topics.

In a letter seen by *The Telegraph*, Lord Justice Green, the commission’s

chairman, wrote: “The criminal team is looking at alternative ways in which the law might be reformed in order to ensure that these laws, which criminalise only the most serious forms of incitement, are compatible with both the right to freedom of expression and respect for one’s home and private and family life.”

The Law Commission will present a 500-page legal review to ministers later this year.

In England and Wales, speech stirring up hatred is only considered a potential offence when said in public, or in a private place where it can be heard outside.

# Pro-lifers divided on abortion proposals

A DUP MLA has proposed a new law that would prevent abortions being carried out in Northern Ireland in cases of non-fatal disabilities.

Paul Givan, Northern Ireland Assembly Member for Lagan Valley, introduced the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill for its first reading into the Stormont Assembly.

If passed it would no longer allow unborn babies with a ‘serious fetal impairment’ (SFI) to be aborted to term. The Bill would not amend the law in cases of ‘fatal fetal abnormality’ (FFA).

Currently abortion is legal under the Northern Ireland regulations up to birth based solely on a primary diagnosis of disabilities such as Down’s syndrome, cleft palate, cleft lip or clubfoot. Mr Givan’s Bill proposes that non-fatal disabilities are not grounds for abortion in Northern Ireland and that the current law is discriminatory

against those with such disabilities.

“The current law tells those with disabilities that they are worth less than other people, their contribution is less valuable, their lives less important, less full,” he said. “It invites us to view those with disabilities as less deserving of the protection of the law.

“The idea that Down syndrome should be addressed by abortion is chilling. You don’t have to look far to see the full lives those with disabilities lead; they enrich our communities and families.”

The Bill is produced in association with leading disability campaign group Don’t Screen Us Out and campaigner Heidi Crowter has been working alongside Mr Givan in support.

“This Bill that allows abortion up to birth in Northern Ireland makes me feel that I am not as valued as anyone else,” said Ms Crowter.

“Maybe people are even told that living with Down syndrome is too hard, but research confirms that people with the condition and their families are happy with their lives!”

However, Philip Lynn, the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children’s (SPUC) Northern Ireland development officer, has said his organisation is not backing Mr Givan. He warned that the Bill could lend democratic legitimacy to abortions that would fall outside its scope – “which is 99.993 per cent” – and undermine the chances of repealing the radical legislation imposed by Westminster by creating the false impression that it is less extreme than it really is.

SPUC is urging the public to write to politicians calling for legal protection for all unborn children and the repeal of Section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Act 2019.



Photo: ADF International.

**Amid growing attempts to censor pro-life groups across Europe, local authorities in Pforzheim, Germany have been challenged for being the latest to prohibit pro-life prayer and demonstrations outside an abortion advisory centre.**

**Pavica Vojnovic, with the support**

**of human rights organisation ADF International, ishas taken the decision to court to “restore my fundamental rights to freedom of religion, assembly and speech.”**

**The case will be heard in the country’s national court. “I want to be there to pray, not**

**for myself, but for the vulnerable women contemplating abortion, and for their unborn children,” she said.**

**“Every life is valuable and deserves protection. Surely a simple prayer for the vulnerable cannot be banned?”**

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## Health locums need vaccines

The Government has been urged to ensure that non-NHS nursing staff are not “left behind” in the Covid-19 vaccine roll-out.

The call comes in response to a Royal College of Nursing (RCN) survey, which found 85 per cent of 24,370 nursing staff members polled between 29th January and 2nd February had received a vaccine.

Of the 15 per cent who had not, 70 per cent work in non-NHS settings.

RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary Dame Donna Kinnair said: “Temporary and agency staff face the same level of risk as their NHS colleagues. Every effort must be made to ensure all nursing staff have the same level of protection.”

## Care home failures over PPE must not be repeated, says MP

Catholic MP Meg Hillier has urged the Government to acknowledge its personal protective equipment (PPE) failures, as she called for better preparation in the future.

Her comments came as the Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) said care home staff were left without adequate PPE during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic as

the Government chose to prioritise the NHS over the social care sector.

It also criticised the lack of transparency around the procurement process, particularly pointing out how orders had been placed with companies based on recommendations from politicians rather than experts.

“Government had permission to procure equipment at pace and with-

out tendering, but acting fast did not give it license to rip up recordkeeping on decisions,” said Ms Hillier, Labour Co-operative MP for Hackney South and Shoreditch and PAC chair.

“Frontline workers were left without adequate supplies, risking their own and their families’ lives. The Government needs to acknowledge the errors and be better prepared.”

The committee said care homes only received a fraction of the PPE needed compared with the health service and were only taken seriously after high mortality rates became apparent. It said frontline staff in both health and social care experienced shortages of PPE, with some forced to reuse single-use items as stocks ran ‘perilously low’.

# Bishops label suicide bill as failure of society

**Nick Benson**

Catholic Bishops in Ireland have urged politicians to reject moves to introduce assisted suicide and euthanasia, warning that not to do so would 'reflect a failure of compassion on the part of society'.

The Council for Life and the Consultative Group on Bioethics, part of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference (ICBC), made their remarks in a submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Justice regarding the Dying with Dignity Bill 2020, which is currently being assessed by politicians.

The bishops state that 'the Committee would best serve humanity and the common good of society by recommending to the Oireachtas that

this Bill should not be passed'.

Pointing out that the Bill does not make use of the term 'suicide', except with reference to amendments to the Criminal Law (Suicide) Act 1993, they note that is 'essentially about making provision for a person who wishes to end his or her life, to make a formal declaration to that effect and to seek medical assistance in doing so'.

'It is therefore appropriate to refer to the Bill as an 'assisted suicide' bill,' they add.

Noting that palliative care already provides assistance to those who are dying, they say the Dying with Dignity Bill instead provides for the medical endorsement and facilitation of suicide.

This, they say, runs 'radically counter to the common good, the promotion of which is a particular responsibility of the State'.

The bishops urge legislators to 'honestly recognise' the difference and 'call things by their proper name'.

The bishops say their submission is rooted in the Church's conviction 'that we have a moral responsibility to care for our neighbour according to the Gospel image of the Good Samaritan'.

They warn that the Bill fails to require care givers to provide adequate palliative care for the terminally ill person, nor does it recognise the vulnerable patient's state-of-mind or assess whether they may feel like they



are under emotional and social pressure.

The bishops also voiced concerns that the Bill would coerce the consciences of objecting healthcare providers in order to facilitate some-

thing they know to be gravely immoral and utterly incompatible with their vocation to heal.

'This burdening of conscience is unnecessary, disproportionate and seriously unjust,' they add.



The Dancing Couple sculpture in Stardust Memorial Park, Coolock, Dublin

The Archbishop of Dublin has paid tribute to the victims of the Stardust nightclub fire, as he marked the 40th anniversary of the "dreadful night".

Forty-eight people died and more than 200 were injured in the fire in Artane, Dublin, in the early hours of St Valentine's Day 1981.

Archbishop Dermot Farrell told a memorial Mass that so many families have endured enormous suffering and are now re-living the

horror of the tragedy, which, he said, "is seared into the hearts and memories of a generation".

"As your bishop, I stand in solidarity with your inexpressible grief and sadness, to pray both for the victims of this awful tragedy and for healing for the families who suffered such loss."

All of those who died in the fire were aged between 16 and 28.

A fresh inquests is to be held into the causes of the fire.

## Faith alliance unites against Hate Crime bill

An unprecedented alliance of Catholic and Evangelical Church leaders are urging the Scottish Government to drop part of its proposed Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill.

The Bill would potentially criminalise any criticism of transgender ideology and has been criticised by the Catholic Church, the Free Church of Scotland and the Evangelical Alliance. Church leaders have told Cabinet Secretary Humza Yousaf that greater protections are needed for freedom of expression.

The leaders say they welcome 'open debate' on any issue, but are concerned that any disagreement with or criticism of transgender identity could fall foul of the new law, if passed in its current form.

The Church leaders point out that

'transgender identity has been subject of 'extensive and emotional public discussion. Such free discussion and criticism of views is vital as society wrestles with these ideas.'

They warn however, that they 'cannot accept that any position or opinion at variance with the proposition that sex (or gender) is fluid and changeable should not be heard'.

The letter marks the first time Catholic, Free Church and Evangelical Alliance leaders have jointly petitioned the Scottish Government.

Supporting 'open and honest debate' the letter ends with an assertion, that 'a right to claim that binary sex does not exist or is fluid must be matched with a right to disagree with that opinion; and protection from prosecution for holding it'.

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## Comment

### The Universe – Comment –

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Last weekend the Prime Minister hailed hitting the target of 15 million Covid vaccinations as “an unbelievable effort.” But the true test of this achievement must surely be what it allows us to do as a consequence.

Now that the most vulnerable groups in the population have received the jab, that accounts for more than 80 per cent of the likely hospitalisations and fatalities. New cases are falling rapidly and will lead to a reduction in Covid patients on wards, which remain high.

But the conversation has switched from saving the NHS from being overwhelmed to getting cases right down to reduce the risk of new variants. That makes the road back to normality much longer.

There are now under 10,000 new infections a day, much reduced from the 60,000 at the start of the year. Modellers predict this number will halve every 17 days, which gives 5,000 by the beginning of March. Is that low enough? Or does the Government want it to zero? At what point are mutations controlled?

Matt Hancock said we would have to live with Covid as we do with flu, yet no-one suggests the entire adult population must be vaccinated against that virus or that normal interactions must be forbidden while any cases exist. The rationale is hard to discern.

Mr Johnson wants this lockdown to be the last; who could possibly disagree with that? But if that means cases must be reduced to a level at which there is no longer the slightest risk of an upsurge even among age groups for whom Covid is overwhelmingly a mild illness, the collateral cost of doing so will be enormous.

Are we seeing too much caution and not enough optimism? We need to hear more about the vaccine's potential to let people live normally again and as soon as possible.

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# Covid has reopened sectarian tensions over NI policing

## Kevin Hearty



The problem of enforcing coronavirus restrictions without coming into conflict with significant parts of the population has afflicted many police forces during the pandemic. Reports, unimaginable a year ago, of weddings, christenings and other social gatherings being broken up have led to concerns about police overreach.

In Northern Ireland, however, this problem comes with historic baggage. During the years of conflict, the police force (the Royal Ulster Constabulary) was associated with the British state. It enjoyed a close relationship with the largely Protestant unionist community but a fractious one with the largely Catholic nationalist community, who didn't recognise its authority. Cases of unfair treatment made it worse.

Post-conflict police reform in Northern Ireland was aimed at remedying this. Symbolic changes were made – like renaming the force the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and attempting to recruit more Catholics. This was meant to build support for the new police force from all communities. Whether it involved too little or too much change remains contested.

Even before the pandemic, many working-class communities felt they were unfairly targeted by the PSNI when it came to policing political protests yet, at the same time, were receiving a sub-standard service from the force when it came to investigating crime and anti-social behaviour.

In the north of Ireland, policing is interpreted through what happens in other communities and areas as much as it is by what happens in one's own community. The PSNI has therefore been under constant scrutiny over its handling of the pandemic. Every move the police have taken, or not taken, has been closely observed by those in 'hard-to-reach' communities that have traditionally had a difficult relationship with the police.

Since March 2020 there have been various restrictions on gatherings like weddings and funerals, which have also extended to other social and public gatherings in Northern Ireland. Acting in one situation, but not in another, has led to renewed claims of over-policing and under-



policing. The PSNI stands accused of failing to prevent mass gatherings at a number of high-profile funerals in both Irish republican and Ulster loyalist communities. Complaints that some grieving families were above the law while others are subjected to it soon followed.

Likewise, the decision to issue fines to protesters at Black Lives Matter protests, while failing to take similar action against those who had gathered to 'protect' statues in Belfast, was also heavily criticised.

But two more recent incidents have caused even greater tension.

In the first, footage emerged of PSNI officers failing to stop dozens of masked loyalists taking to the streets of east Belfast as part of a local dispute there.

The sight of PSNI officers failing to make any attempt to arrest those contravening coronavirus-related

public-safety regulations quickly gave rise to claims that the PSNI was turning a blind eye to what looked like loyalist paramilitary activity. Still reeling from the criticism of its mishandling of this incident, by the end of the same week, things went from bad to worse for the force.

A number of people gathered for a socially distanced wreath-laying at a bookmaker's shop on the Ormeau Road where, 29 years previously, loyalist gunmen had shot dead five patrons. There are conflicting accounts of the exact numbers involved and whether the event breached Covid restrictions. But as the event came to a close, PSNI officers intervened and, as matters escalated, they arrested one attendee. This attendee, it transpired, was a survivor who had lost his brother-in-law in the 1992 attack.

As footage of the arrest emerged

on social media, PSNI chief constable Simon Byrne was forced into a panicked Saturday night apology. This, however, has done little to dampen disquiet over the PSNI's actions.

Not only has the arrest left a very bad taste in the mouths of victims and survivors of the 1992 attack, it has also immeasurably damaged the PSNI's attempt to reach out to excluded working-class nationalist communities in the hopes of increasing its legitimacy.

The force has been attempting to recruit people from these communities in order to ensure that its officers better represent the areas they are policing. Unfortunately, the PSNI's actions throughout the pandemic are unlikely to encourage prospective recruits to join and, therefore, could set back progress towards resolving this longstanding problem.

An apology after the fact does little to convince already sceptical audiences. Seeing is believing, as they say, and what 'hard-to-reach' communities have seen during the pandemic has only reinforced, rather than challenged, their misgivings about the PSNI.

**Kevin Hearty is a Research Fellow, School of Law, Queen's University Belfast**  
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## Adams calls for action after death threat

**Nick Benson**

A banner that appeared at Belfast City Hall containing an apparent death threat aimed at former Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams is being investigated as a hate crime by police.

The banner, which appeared at the front railings of the building earlier this month, included an image of Mr Adams under the title 'Tick-Tock'.

It also contained abusive and sectarian language, as well as an apparent threat to kill Mr Adams.

A solicitor acting for Mr Adams made a formal complaint about the banner to the PSNI Chief Constable and to the Legal & Civil Services of Belfast City Council. The solicitor said: "The image on the banner can only be construed as a threat to kill and a hate crime."

The PSNI and Belfast City Council confirmed they are investigating.

Chief Inspector Gavin Kirkpatrick said: "Inquiries are ongoing into this matter, which is being investigated as a hate crime."

Mr Adams (*below*) said: "There is no place for hate crime or public threats. The PSNI has a responsibility to confront those responsible for such offences when they appear and to pursue those responsible through the courts."



# Granny Nancy keeps the faith as she sets off on global Mass tour

**Nick Benson**

A 107-year-old great-great-grandmother has used the pandemic to tour churches around the world from the comfort of her home in Co. Meath.

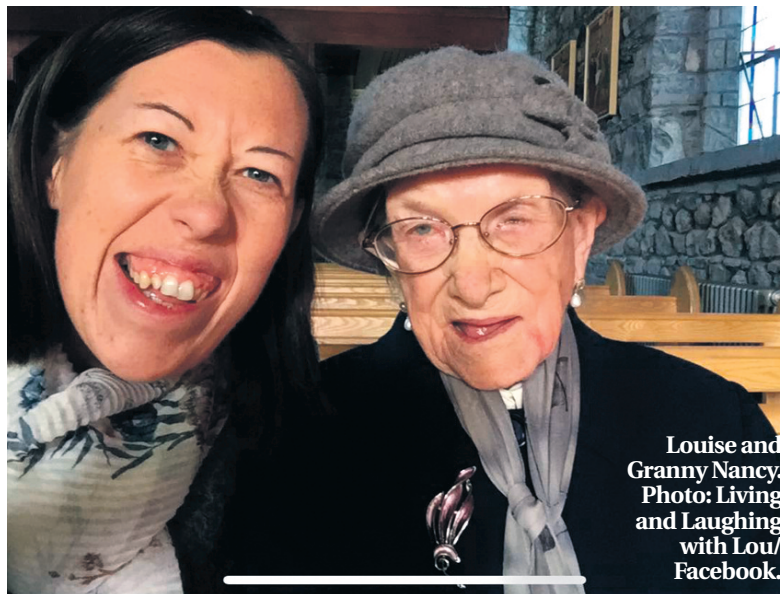
Nancy Stewart, affectionately known as 'Granny Nancy', has chalked up online Mass in all 32 counties of Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic and has now embarked on a new virtual spiritual journey – attending online Mass across the globe.

Ms Stewart, the oldest person in Ireland still living in their own home, has been shielding in Clonard with her granddaughter Louise Coghlan, 37, since last March.

The pair have been kept busy drinking plenty of Barry's Tea, baking and video-calling friends as well as attending Mass. They have shared their adventures through their Facebook page, *Living and Laughing with Lou*, as they attend online Masses throughout the country.

Granny Nancy has now become something of a celebrity, with her Facebook page boasting thousands of followers.

Her story has also led to online Mass invitations from a host of churches, including Old St Pat's in Chicago; St Barnabas' Church in the Bronx,



**Louise and Granny Nancy. Photo: Living and Laughing with Lou/Facebook.**

New York; the Irish Pontifical College in Rome; and St Anthony's Church in London.

"We always planned to complete the nationwide 32 county virtual tour by January and then go international from St Bridget's day," Ms Coghlan said.

Born on 16th October 1913, Granny Nancy has had an eventful life, witnessing two world wars and two pan-

demics, having been an infant during the 1918 Spanish 'flu outbreak.

She has 84 grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren, three daughters, Kathleen, Mary and Olive, and one son, Finian.

Her husband, Bob, died in a car crash in 1989 and she lost her twin daughters Margaret in 2007 to motor neurone disease and Anne in 2010.

"I have a great faith and it has helped me keep positive throughout the struggles I've met," said Granny Nancy. "I thank you for keeping your faith and for keeping your resilience strong, through this hard time."

For those who may be feeling low during this challenging time, Ms Stewart suggested phoning a relative or a friend, or even going for a walk.

"I also ask God to help me if I'm feeling low," she said. "This is a hard time for everyone but please make sure you keep yourself well and wear your mask. If you keep healthy, your mind will stay healthy too."

"Keep talking to one another," she said. "All my life I have always believed in chatting and drinking tea and saying a prayer or the Rosary and it has got me through. This is our moment to keep our faith and to keep believing that everything will turn out okay."

Granny Nancy also called on people to make sure their neighbours are looked after. "Try to make sure we leave nobody behind and we don't lose sight of each other," she said.

"This is a moment for humanity to step forward to take care of the other. We must mind ourselves but we must also mind all those around us. Look up and smile even if you have your mask on."

## Malia received treatment to drain fluid from her brain and is now able to walk independently

Malia (6) and Moris (4), South Sudan



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Eat out to help out misses the point that many cannot afford food at all

## John Battle



You would think that this year Lent is being cancelled. The take-away app Deliveroo is urging the Government to reinstate the Chancellor's 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme to encourage people back into pubs and restaurants when they reopen. Their appeal is backed among others by the owners of Itsu and Pizza Hut UK.

Last August a 50 per cent Government discount up to £10 a head led to 160 million meals being claimed at a cost to the taxpayer of £849m in subsidised eating out. Of course, it was aimed at boosting the hospitality sector but not everyone could afford to eat out at even subsidised meals. One-in-four adults in the UK have been left financially vulnerable, driving 14.2 million into serious debt according to the Financial Conduct Authority and redundancies are rising at the fastest rate on record with the end of furlough still to come. In other words, millions are forced to cut back on essentials and are among the 5.6 million now turning to foodbanks.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that some two million families are now struggling to afford to feed themselves, stay warm or keep clean.

In other words while some are saving and an estimated 14 per cent of adults have had an improvement in their financial situation and can afford to eat out, many others are far from being able to afford to eat at all.

While campaign pressure is building to support extending the emergency £20 a week added to Universal Credit, which is due to end in March, it is important to spell out that the income of the bottom tenth in society has fallen by about £1,800 a year since the Conservative Government imposed a benefit freeze in 2016.

Meanwhile, how do we make sense of a time of fasting and repentance under Covid?

Theologian Fr Jon Sobrino, in a Lenten reading, writes: 'Solidarity is another name for the kind of love that moves feet, hands, hearts, material goods, assistance and sacrifice towards the pain, danger, misfortune, disaster or death of other persons or of a whole people.'

'The aim is to share with them and help them rise up to become free, claim justice, rebuild.'

'In the pain, misfortune, oppression and death of the people, God is silent. God is silent on the cross, in the crucified and this silence is God's word, God's cry.'

# When it comes to vaccines, we know it's good to share

## Robin Cohen



In a number of wealthy countries, the number of Covid-19 vaccines ordered vastly exceeds what's needed, while many poorer countries will have to wait – possibly for years – for vaccines to become widely available.

If these rich countries' orders are fulfilled, what will happen to the excess vaccines? Will they be wasted, traded to the highest bidder, or allocated free or at cost to those poorer countries where Covid-19 is still raging?

Lamenting many countries' lack of access to vaccines, the director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has described the world as being "on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure". Wasting these over-ordered doses would compound this accusation many times over.

Ordering so many vaccines is not in itself immoral. It was completely reasonable that those in charge of procurement in countries such as the UK and Canada ordered a wide portfolio of vaccines. There was no way of knowing which would meet regulatory approval.

The speed of development, as well as the relatively low number of failures, has also been unexpected, producing a good number of potentially viable vaccines in a short space of time. Nonetheless, Covid-19 vaccine development cannot be considered a success until this redistribution issue is resolved.

### Assessing the size of the problem

The Duke Global Health Innovation Center in the US is tracking how many vaccine doses each country has ordered. Calculating the number of surplus vaccines requires making some assumptions – for instance that every adult will get vaccinated – so these are quite rough estimates.

The EU has ordered 1.6 billion doses for its adult population of roughly 375 million. As these vaccines require two doses to provide full protection – except for the 200 million single-shot vaccines from Johnson & Johnson – the bloc's orders will cover just under 900 million people. If all orders are fulfilled, this is a surplus of around 525 million full vaccinations.

Similarly, the UK has ordered 219 million vaccinations for its 54 million adults; that is a surplus of 165 million. Canada has ordered 188 million full vaccinations for its 32 million adults (an excess of 156 million).



Redistribution could focus on giving vaccines to those who aren't able to socially distance, such as displaced people.

Of course, these surpluses will change as fresh data emerges. New orders will be placed, some may be cancelled, and vaccines still in development could fail during testing.

Note that I've focused on Canada, the UK and the EU for a few reasons. While they aren't the only nations to have over-ordered, this group of countries engages significantly with the WHO and with international development issues more generally. Civil society organisations in the field of global justice are also active in holding these governments to account, so there's a much greater likelihood that they will develop policies for redistribution.

### How redistribution could happen

Much will rest on the goodwill of governments and the nature of their contracts with vaccine makers.

It could be argued that vaccine hoarding is sensible, considering the possibility that annual or periodic vaccinations may be needed. However, the expiration dates on vaccines and the likelihood that vaccines will need to be tweaked to handle new variants suggests that hoarding is irrational.

Some contracts may also allow for over-ordered batches to be deferred or cancelled, but this is unlikely to make the problem of excess vaccines disappear completely. Also, unused vaccines that have nearly expired, or those less effective in some parts of the world in the face of mutated variants of the virus, might suddenly become available for redistribution in large quantities.

Several international agencies could help with the redistribution,



including the WHO, Gavi and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. But perhaps the most obvious redistribution route is the Covid-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility – better known by its acronym, Covax. This was set up specifically to share Covid-19 vaccines fairly around the world. It has already made progress in ordering new vaccines and planning their initial distribution, but it has yet to clarify how it would redistribute any surplus vaccines donated to it.

Covax also has no power to compel states to share their surpluses with it. The decisions of individual governments will therefore be crucial. It appears that the European Commission has decided to leave redistribution to individual countries. Outside the EU, Norway has committed to sending its surpluses to Covax, and Canada has said it will do likewise. Other decisions are in the balance. It's possible that vaccine surpluses may be used instead to placate near neighbours or to advance foreign-policy goals. Spain, for example, announced that it will sell 30,000 excess doses to Andorra at cost.

For countries that don't hand their

surpluses to Covax, a more positive approach would be for redistribution to be led by need. If this were the case, the next step would be to identify where vaccines should be sent. Two targets suggest themselves: places where infection is high and places home to displaced people, such as in Yemen, Syria, South Sudan and Bangladesh, where it is difficult to socially distance and medical supplies, hand sanitiser and PPE are often lacking.

Finally, surplus vaccines requiring intense cold storage will be harder to distribute, as not all countries will have the necessary infrastructure. One innovative idea could be to use international airports in recipient countries as 'cool-ports', with freezers installed and all approved vaccines administered from there. However, it might be easier to simply redeploy vaccines with easy storage requirements to countries where cold storage is difficult. To some extent, redistribution may end up being driven not by need or politics, but by logistics.

Robin Cohen is an Emeritus Professor, Development Studies, University of Oxford





HM Government

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# AND TELL HER YOU NEVER BEND THE RULES.

*Lorna Covid-19 patient*

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**STAY HOME ▶ PROTECT THE NHS ▶ SAVE LIVES**

## NJPN 2021 to focus on ecological conversion

The National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN) has organised its annual conference for July, pandemic restrictions permitting, with the theme '2021: Life on Earth - moment of truth'.

The event will be held at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire, from 23rd-25th July. The theme is the same as proposed for the postponed 2020 conference, tackling issues that the organisers believe cannot be put off for another year.

Though planned as an in-person event, if continued constraints prevent the conference going ahead in person NJPN will present the programme, or similar, as a bookable only online conference.

Delegates will look at various issues around climate change, including the biodiversity crisis and Covid-19, making clear that ecological conversion is becoming a matter of life and death. Decisions to be made this year at the November COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, and in the context of the recovery from the pandemic, are critical for salvaging a sustainable future. Inspiration will be taken from the encyclicals *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti*.

The conference aims to inspire ecological conversion, update Christian witness in light of the climate and ecological emergency and Covid-19 and reimagine the justice and peace movement and our Church to meet the challenges ahead.

The conference will be chaired by CAFOD's Director Christine Allen. Marty Haugen, the liturgical composer and pastoral musician, will lead the liturgy. Speakers booked include Lorna Gold from FaithInvest, Bishop John Arnold, who is the lead bishop on the environment in England and Wales, the Spiritan Priest Fr Eamonn Mulcahy and the Integral Thinker Mark Rotherham. Also recently confirmed is Lord Deben, chairman of the UK Independent Committee on Climate Change.

There will be a host of workshops and activities covering topics such as COP26 and divestment; conflict and the environment; biodiversity loss; the role of extractive industries; eco-anxiety; and liturgy planning.

There will be also age-appropriate parallel programmes for young children and teens, as well as provision of a creche.

The JUST FAIR will consist of more than 20 stalls from different agencies displaying goods and resources, as well as information and ideas about practical action throughout the weekend.

Booking forms and more information can be found at [www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference](http://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference)

# Covid has shone a spotlight on how we treat the disabled

## CATHOLIC COMMENT

### Caroline Farrow



There is righteous anger over the news that patients with learning disabilities were issued with 'do not resuscitate' orders during this second wave of the pandemic, especially after this practice was condemned and subject to an investigation by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) when it came to light during the first peak of the virus, last year.

In December 2020, the CQC said that potentially avoidable deaths had been caused by patients with learning disabilities being given inappropriate DANCPR (Do not attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) orders, and yet less than a month later, in January of this year, Mencap, the UK's leading advocacy charity for those with learning disabilities, reported that people were still being told that if they contracted Covid-19, they would not be resuscitated.

Let's be clear, in some cases these orders have their place; resuscitating a patient who has gone into cardiac arrest is a traumatic procedure and not everyone who is brought back from the brink of death goes on to make a full recovery. A Catholic understanding of the dignity of life does not require that elderly, frail or terminally sick patients are put through a brutal process which is not going to significantly improve either their quality or length of life.

I know when my own grandmother finally had to go into a nursing home at the age of 98, after 30 years of living with us, my mother found it very difficult to instruct her carers that if something should happen, Nana should not be resuscitated, but she also knew that an aggressive procedure which would likely break the ribs of a frail old lady causing both her and the staff trauma, would not be in her best interests.

Fortunately, the situation never arose and my grandmother died peacefully in her sleep, just a month short of her 100th birthday.

As Catholic ethics make clear, patients should never be subject to overly invasive or burdensome procedures and there is a clear difference between allowing someone to pass away peacefully and pain-free and taking active steps to end their lives. With decent palliative care, the second option should never be necessary.

When it comes to patients with learning disabilities, the decision not to resuscitate seems to be based on an appalling value judgement that their condition means that their lives are of less value. What so many



Radio 2 presenter Jo Whitley with her sister, Frances. The DJ has asked why she has received an offer of a vaccination when her sister, who has learning difficulties and diabetes, has not

people, including those in the medical profession, fail to understand is that those who are cognitively or physically impaired, are still able to enjoy a good quality of life and still deserve the same chance as the rest of us.

One of the common themes when discussing those with disabilities or life-limiting illnesses is that of projection. We imagine how we would feel if we were in the position of someone who is disabled and react with horror, thinking about all the things that we would not be able to do. Very often, however, those with disabilities have grown up with their condition and have been able to adapt and take pleasure in life and the choices that are still open to them, instead of lamenting their fate.

Obviously, the situation is different for those who lose functions due to a sudden onset of illness or accident, but even then most people find that they are still able to find fulfilment and happiness in life. To make value judgements that the lives of those of sound mind and body should be prioritised over those with disabilities leads us down a very dark eugenic path.

The Covid-19 stats for those with learning disabilities make for chilling reading. Since the January lockdown, Covid-19 has accounted for 65 per cent of deaths among those with learning disabilities, compared to 39 per cent of deaths among the general population, although admittedly the stats are drawn from differ-

ent measurements.

That said, according to figures released by the National Office for Statistics, six in 10 deaths from Covid-19 were of those with a disability.

According to Mencap, younger people, aged 18-34 with learning disabilities, are 30 times more likely to die of the virus than other people of the same age. Every day as we hear news of older celebrities, some under the age of 65 and with no underlying vulnerabilities, receiving the vaccine, such as celebrity chef Nigella Lawson (aged 61) and even Nadia Essex, aged 39, (she's apparently a reality show host...), nothing is said of those with learning disabilities who are still waiting to hear a date when they are due for the jab.

The BBC radio presenter Jo Whitley, who is 55, has revealed that she has been offered the job, despite not having any underlying conditions, while stating that she would rather her younger sister Frances, who has both diabetes and a chromosomal condition requiring residential care and is still waiting for the vaccine, receives her dose.

According to an interview in the *Guardian* with a consultant in learning disability psychiatry, one of the major factors in the deaths of those with learning disabilities is that they are not always able to effectively communicate their symptoms and very often changes in behaviour are written off as being part of their condition. There is a concern that while the elderly in care homes were prioritised for the vaccine, those in

residential care were completely overlooked.

The Chief Executive of Care England is calling for those with learning disabilities to be re-categorised and moved into a higher priority group so that they receive their vaccination sooner.

It should be stressed that the Department of Health has said that it is completely unacceptable for a blanket DNACPR policy to be applied to any group of people.

In many ways the outrage of the way that those with disabilities have been marginalised and sidelined during the pandemic is good news. It demonstrates that society is not prepared to treat them as lesser individuals. Covid-19 has laid bare the appalling inequality faced by those with disabilities, and this may lead to meaningful change.

That said, in a world where it is acceptable to kill babies with a disability right up until the point they are born, can we really be surprised that this group of people are treated as though they are worthless? It would be nice to see those left-leaning commentators who have called out this inequality towards those born with a disability and used it as political capital against the Conservative government (with some justification), join the dots and re-think their own attitudes towards the still sacred cow of abortion.

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

# Chaplain gives football trolls the red card after top referee attacked

**Nick Benson**

The Westminster Chaplain for Sport has hit out at social media trolls after referee Mike Dean decided not to officiate any Premier League games last weekend following online abuse and death threats.

Dean, 52, received criticism from fans, players and pundits following two controversial red cards he gave in recent games.

However, this turned sinister with online trolls aiming death threats at the official and sending abusive messages to him and his family members.

Mgr Vladimir Felzmann condemned those behind the hate-filled social media messages, likening them to radicalised fundamentalists. He warned that if officials became too intimidated to send players off it could result in an increase in reckless play and serious injuries.

"With the best will in the world, we all make mistakes," he told *The Catholic Universe*. "To threaten any referee – and act like a radicalised fundamentalist – is to have misinterpreted Bill Shankley's famous quote, 'Some people think football is a matter of life and death. I assure you, it's much more serious than that.'"

He also warned that "if referees become too scared of giving red cards for fear of an online response, more



Mike Dean dismisses West Ham's Tomáš Souček – a decision that provoked online threats to the ref

players would suffer many more serious injuries."

Mgr Felzmann praised West Ham midfielder Tomáš Souček for "doing the right thing" in supporting Dean and speaking out against the abuse the official received after sending him off in his side's recent draw with Fulham. "Whatever decisions are made on the pitch should stay on the pitch," said Souček. "I don't like hearing about it interfering with personal life and I send Mike Dean and his family my support. There is no place for abuse of any kind. It is in the past and I'm

now focused on the rest of the season."

The incident occurred just four days after Dean sent off Southampton defender Jan Bednarek in the team's 9-0 defeat to Manchester United.

Both red card decisions were overturned on appeal.

Premier League chief executive Richard Masters called the abuse and death threats directed at Dean and his family "inexcusable".

Merseyside Police confirmed officers are investigating "allegations of malicious communications".

# Catholic manager calls on firms to tackle online abuse

**Nick Benson**

Leicester City manager Brendan Rodgers has condemned the sharp recent rise in racist and discriminatory abuse aimed at footballers online.

The top boss said that while he acknowledged that players should be prepared to accept criticism for their performances by fans through social media, they should not have to deal with any form of abuse.

The Catholic Northern Irish coach, who has received sectarian abuse during his own career, urged authorities and social media companies to ensure that abuse is not tolerated and that those spouting such messages face the appropriate action.

"There are probably a couple of sides to it," he said. "You have the racist stuff and discrimination which is not acceptable at all and that is something the Government and people in charge of the social media outlets have to get a handle on."

"The other side is you are going to get criticism, so you are going to have to be able to take it. If not, don't go on it."



Brendan Rodgers

Rodgers' comments come amid a rise in cases of online abuse, much of which is racist. Facebook recently announced that it is changing the rules governing direct messaging on its Instagram platform, so that accounts found to have repeatedly sent abusive private messages are disabled.

Fadzai Madzingira, Facebook's UK

head of content policy, told BBC Sport: "I'm horrified at the types of abuse that people, especially footballers, have to deal with on the basis of who they are, whether it's their race or their religion or their gender. As a company, we're disappointed to see that sort of behaviour that plays out offline also playing out on our platform."

The Government has warned social media companies they will be hit with large fines that could amount to billions of pounds if they fail to tackle abuse on their platforms.

Rodgers, who was raised a Catholic, hails from a half-Catholic, half-Protestant family in Northern Ireland.

During his time as Celtic manager from 2016 to 2019, he was outspoken on the issue of sectarian abuse, warning that it could "ruin" society.

Revealing the abuse he was subjected to at the time, he said: "Whatever your religion is and wherever you're from and whatever your personality as a manager, it doesn't matter. You shouldn't be subject to that. It's irrelevant."



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## Controversial BPAS clinic shuts down

**Nick Benson**

Pro-lifers are celebrating the closure of the second-largest late-term abortion centre in the UK.

The BPAS abortion clinic in Streatham, South London, has been closed for a number of weeks and the premises is now up for sale.

It is believed the clinic performed 13,114 abortions between 2017 and 2019, including 2,235 terminations of unborn babies between 13 and 19 weeks' gestation and a further 1,297 at 20 weeks-plus.

The clinic was also at the centre of a number of controversies and scandals, with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) reporting in January 2020 that it required improvements on safety, effectiveness and responsiveness.

The CQC report highlighted that staff had not completed immediate life support training, sepsis training, or medicine management training. In addition, some staff had insufficient safeguarding training and not all equipment was found to be in good working order.

The CQC also said the service did not always manage patient safety incidents well, with staff failing to report some incidents.

Michael Robinson, of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) said it was "a great relief to see this clinic close its doors," a view echoed by Catherine Robinson, of Right To Life UK, who added: "The closure of an abortion clinic, somewhere that ends large numbers of innocent lives, can only be a good thing."

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# US football star hopes film will sway debate on abortion

**Nick Benson**

Former American Football star Benjamin Watson has produced a TV documentary which seeks "to unveil the truth about abortion".

Watson, 40, a former NFL tight end who won Super Bowl XXXIX with the New England Patriots in 2005 and is a committed pro-life Christian, has executive-produced and partially self-financed *Divided Hearts of America*, which looks at the debate around abortion in America.

The subject has been at the centre of heated debates in the country since the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973.

Watson and his wife Kristen, co-chairs of the One More Foundation, were inspired to create the film after witnessing states like New York and Virginia expand abortion access, while states like Georgia and Alabama restricted its availability.

"In an era where civil discourse is on the verge of extinction, we set out to engage people on both sides of this important issue," said the Watsons. "Though our commitment to serve and protect mothers and their pre-born children is no secret, this is a documentary, not propaganda. Our hope is that people will watch this film and think about abortion in a whole new way, based on facts, not partisanship."

Written and directed by Chad Bonham, the film is structured around a series of more than 30 interviews with Americans with varying opinions from across the political and social spectrum.

Watson, who addressed the Washington March for Life in 2017, said his motivation to make the film was to "unveil the truth about abortion, the laws, the history and where our country is headed".

"I believe in the sanctity of life, be it in the womb or on your deathbed. That's my conviction," said Watson, a



Pro-life demonstrators outside US Supreme Court  
Photo: Tyler Orsburn  
Inset: Ben Watson.  
Photo courtesy Mr Watson



devout Christian who is known for being outspoken about his faith. "But with the film, I'll engage those who disagree and hear their reasoning. The number one thing I'm looking for is empathy on both sides."

The documentary includes interviews with Alveda King, niece of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.; former presidential candidate and neurosurgeon Dr Ben Carson; US Senator Tim Scott; as well as New York State Senators Liz Krueger and Gustavo Rivera; and pro-life speaker and obstetrics and gynaecology specialist Dr Monica Ruberu.

"The thing that I notice most [after an abortion] is that emotionally women are traumatised," said Dr Ruberu. "They're dealing with the anxiety and the depression of that loss and they're being told by society that they should shout about their abortions and be proud of that choice, but inside they're in such turmoil."

Dr Carson said he believes a lot of

people are now "seeing what's happening" and "recognising that life is sacred". "You know with all of our knowledge that we've accumulated ... can we create life? No. That should tell you something right there about how sacred it is," he said.

The documentary also examines the relationship between abortion and race in the US, including the fact that in New York City "more black babies have been aborted than born alive".

"Abortion is targeting black America," said Pastor Walter Hoye, founder of Issues4Life. "That's not an accident. That's genocide."

• *Divided Hearts of America* is available to rent or buy on Amazon Prime.

## Singer left heartbroken as his beloved wife 'slips away to God'

Engelbert Humperdinck has been left "heartbroken" following the death of his wife Patricia Healey at the age of 85.

The singer, a Catholic, revealed that his family had prayed together with his wife and blessed her with "water from Lourdes" just prior to her death.

He thanked fans for the "unbelievable response" to the family's plea for prayers, which came as Patricia tested positive for Covid-19 at the end of January.

Announcing the death of his "darling wife", Humperdinck, 84, said she had "slipped softly away, as if by God's clockwork" on 5th February. Patricia had been suffer-

ing from Alzheimer's for more than a decade.

Humperdinck added that "the last rites were given just before our usual prayers at 8pm, by our nephew, Fr Paul. It was 4am for him. We were so grateful to have him gently lead Popea through this last chapter, with a familiar voice and such love."

The singer, who topped the UK singles chart with a number of hits in the 1960s, said Patricia was surrounded by three of their four children, Louise, Jason and Brad, with their fourth, Scott, joining them via FaceTime.

He also paid tribute to her long-time caregivers, saying they had

"lovingly helped make her transition easier on us all".

"Her earthly limitations no longer hold her down as she is freely running the glorious gardens of Heaven reunited with so many loved ones," he said. "We prayed as a family, blessed her with the water from Lourdes and off she went... ushered into the arms of Jesus with help from the generous heart-filled prayers from all around the world."

Humperdinck extended his family's thanks to all those who reached out in prayer during Patricia's final days, before paying a final loving tribute: "We love you beyond words, forever and always... Goodnight my baby."



Engelbert Humperdinck pictured with Patricia



Anti-semitic vandalism  
Photo: Community Security Trust.

## Anti-semitic abuse on rise despite Covid

A Jewish charity recorded its third highest annual total of anti-Semitic abuse across the UK last year, despite the country being in a lockdown.

The Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 1,668 anti-Semitic incidents in the UK in 2020, eight per cent down on 1,813 in 2019, but still the third highest on record.

Many of the incidents were linked to the pandemic, with 41 referencing Covid alongside anti-Semitic language, including conspiracy theories alleging Jewish involvement in creating and spreading the virus and those wishing that Jewish people would die from it.

Amid an increased use of video calls, 19 Jewish events were 'Zoom-bombed' by anti-Semites.

While there was a fall in the number of incidents affecting schools, teachers and students, there was an increase in incidents at people's homes, rising from 118 in 2019 to 158 last year. CST put this down to perpetrators lashing out at those in close proximity as frustration built during lockdown.

The highest monthly totals were before lockdown in January (188 incidents) and February (140) and when restrictions were eased in June (178) and July (180).

Other worrying activity saw possible hostile reconnaissance at Jewish locations; criminal activity affecting Jewish people and buildings; and anti-Israel activity.

CST chief executive Mark Gardner said: "CST had hoped that anti-Semitic incidents would fall by more than this during 2020. The fact that they didn't means we must remain even more vigilant for 2021, especially as the economic impact of Covid-19 may cause more extremism and division within society."

Home Secretary Priti Patel branded the abuse "shameful" and pledged to continue tackling hate crime.



The DUP MP was critical of the Songs of Praise Gospel competition, describing it as 'BBC at its BLM worst'

# DUP MP attacked for criticising line-up on gospel competition

**Nick Benson**

DUP MP Gregory Campbell has faced fierce criticism for refusing to apologise for describing a special gospel choir edition of *Songs of Praise* as the 'BBC at its BLM (Black Lives Matter) worst'.

The East Derry politician complained on Facebook that the *Songs of Praise* Gospel Singer of the Year programme featured only black singers and presenters.

"There were five singers, all of them black. There were three judges all of them black and one presenter who was incidentally, yes, black," Mr Campbell wrote.

"The singers were all very good but can you imagine an all-white line up with an all-white jury and presented by a white person? No, I can't either," he added.

His comments drew strong criticism from many, with the the Derry-based North West Migrants Forum (NWMF) urging him to withdraw them and issue 'a full public apology'.

"It is both astonishing and shocking that Mr Campbell watched this deeply moving edition of *Songs of Praise*, full of love and praise for God, and saw only skin colour," the forum said.

It questioned whether Mr Campbell is 'uncomfortable watching a programme where Black British people and culture are celebrated centre-stage' and asked if he thought the BBC was racist when other programmes featured only white people.

It also called on Mr Campbell to provide evidence that the singers or judges were on the show for any reason other than their skills and expertise.

Branding his remarks 'deeply irresponsible', the forum added: 'Black and ethnic minority people are not 'other'; they are equal citizens in an increasingly diverse country, including in Mr Campbell's constituency.'

'He needs to withdraw his ignorant and insulting post and make a full public apology to the black and minority ethnic community of his constituency and beyond.'

However, Mr Campbell stood by his remarks, telling BBC Radio Ulster's *Evening Extra* that he was pointing out that there "wasn't much diversity or inclusion on that edition of *Songs of Praise*".

Insisting that he is a "committed anti-racist", he said he would not apologise for "stating the obvious".

Justice Minister Naomi Long said Mr Campbell's criticism of the show was "quite bizarre".

"To suggest that there was anything at all to do with BLM or any other kind of positive discrimination in the fact that the best singers were through to the competition, and those most experienced were judging it, I think is a mistake," she said.

DUP leader Arlene Foster said her party is "totally, absolutely committed to racial equality" and that Mr Campbell's comments were "not a sentiment that I identify with."

She said she "actually does enjoy *Songs of Praise* every Sunday and the diversity that is exhibited thereupon".

## Vicar reveals hostility faced in wake of Covid-19 outbreak

**Nick Benson**

A London-based vicar who is originally from Hong Kong has spoken of the racism he experienced following the outbreak of Covid-19.

Rev. Hin Lai 'Harry' Ching, assistant vicar for international ministry and priest to the Chinese congregation at St Martin in the Fields, London, received his minister's licence in the last week of February, just before the

initial lockdown. He told the BBC that he had lived in Britain for many years without incident but was racially abused by a stranger for the first time during the first week of lockdown.

He said the "misunderstanding" occurred as he was buying communion wine and was served by an Italian gentleman at a time when Italy was being ravaged by coronavirus.

"Obviously there was something in

our interaction he didn't like or maybe it was because of the atmosphere here," he said.

"For me, things like that are unprecedented because I've integrated into this country very well.

"I went to school here and I see myself as British too, so I never would have imagined my Chinese identity would be exposed and abused in that way."



Rev. Hin Lai 'Harry' Ching.  
Photo: St Martin in the Fields

## Unison wants EU status rules to be extended

One of the UK's largest trade unions has urged the Government to extend the deadline for applications to the settled status scheme, beyond the current deadline of June 2021.

Unison argues that the Covid-19 lockdown has prevented many EU nationals from making their application, as some measures supporting workers in applying have been withdrawn during the pandemic, such as the closure of libraries.

"Unison believes that EU citizens who have made their lives in the UK should have a guaranteed right to remain," said Christina McAnea, Unison general secretary. "With immigration services under strain during Covid-19 and a deadline for a settled status application fast approaching, the Government must at least extend the deadline.

"Without urgent action, there is a real danger that we let people slip through the safety net," she added. "Many are key workers on the Covid-19 frontline and deserve all the support and help we can give – and not be made undocumented overnight."

## Marriages stay strong during lockdown

Fears that Covid-19 lockdowns would fuel an increase in divorce have proved wrong, a survey has found.

A survey found that twice as many couples said their relationship had improved rather than deteriorated, while the number considering divorce dropped by two-thirds.

The study, from the Marriage Foundation, looked at 3,005 parents who completed the UK Household Longitudinal Coronavirus survey from the ONS. Just one per cent of married dads and 0.7 per cent of married mums said they were considering divorce. This compared to 0.6 per cent and 1.1 per cent in June.

Significantly both these figures were lower when compared to pre-Covid times. Asked the same question between 2017-19, an average of 2.5 per cent of married dads and 5.6 per cent of married mums said they were considering divorce.

"This data busts the myth that there is going to be a divorce boom soon," said Harry Benson, Marriage Foundation's research director.

## Positive social media app launched

A former *America's Next Top Model* has founded a new App to help Catholic women connect with God.

Leah Darrow said the app was in response to her own social media crisis, when she couldn't remove herself from the negativity of many platforms, even when she followed accounts associated with faith.

The app brings together "a deep community that suffers together and prays", she said, and includes resources for spiritual formation, has its own chaplain and live Rosary prayers every evening.

Search *Lux Catholic* in your app store.

## Move forward with the power of prayer

Prayer makes every day better, even the most difficult days, Pope Francis said, transforming a person's day "into grace, or better, it transforms us: it appeases anger, sustains love, multiplies joy, instills the strength to forgive."

Prayer is a constant reminder that God is nearby, he said, and so, "the problems we face no longer seem to be obstacles to our happiness, but appeals from God, opportunities to encounter him."

"When you start to feel anger, dissatisfaction or something negative, stop and say, 'Lord, where are you and where am I going?' The Lord is there," the pope said. "And he will give you the right word, a piece of advice to move forward without this bitter, negative taste, because prayer is always – to use a secular word – positive. It moves you forward."

"When we are accompanied by the Lord, we feel more courageous, freer and also happier," he said. "So, let's pray always and for everyone, even our enemies. This is what Jesus advised us, 'Pray for your enemies.'"

By placing one in touch with God, the pope said, "prayer inclines us toward an overabundant love."

In addition to praying for one's family and friends, Pope Francis asked people to "pray above all for people who are sad, for those who weep in solitude and despair that there still

might be someone who loves them."

Prayer helps people love others, "despite their mistakes and sins. The person is always more important than his or her actions, and Jesus did not judge the world, but he saved it."

"Those people who judge others have an awful life; they are always condemning, judging," he said. "It's a sad, unhappy life. Jesus came to save us. Open your heart, forgive, excuse the others, understand them."



A scattered audience listens as the pope prays the Angelus from the window of the Apostolic Library. Covid restrictions continue to limit access to the square

## Cheers for priests who listen and heal sinners

The Gospel story of Jesus healing the leper illustrates how nothing will stop God from tenderly and compassionately drawing close to people who want to be healed and saved, Pope Francis said.

"Each one of us can experience wounds, failure, suffering, selfishness that make us close ourselves off from

God and others," the pope said. "Sin closes us in on ourselves because of shame, because of humiliation, but God wants to open our heart."

"Jesus announces to us that God is not an idea or an abstract doctrine, but God is the one who 'contaminates' himself with our human woundedness and is not afraid to come into contact

with our wounds," the pope said on 14th February before praying the Angelus with visitors in St Peter's Square.

On a brilliantly sunny, but frigid day, Pope Francis asked people in the square to give a round of applause to priests who model God's closeness, tenderness and compassion in the way they administer the sacrament of reconciliation.

Such priests, he said, are able to draw people back to God — "people who feel that they are nothing, who feel they are laid low because of their sins — with tenderness, with compassion, good confessors who do not have a whip in their hands, but just welcome, listen and say that God is good, and that God always forgives, that God does not get tired of forgiving."

After reciting the Angelus prayer, Pope Francis noted it was Valentine's Day and offered his prayers and blessings for couples in love, especially engaged couples.

He also used the occasion to publicly praise the government of Colombia for granting temporary protection status to Venezuelan migrants who have fled the chaos and extreme poverty in their country — "a true act of compassion" at this time.

## Why we should still celebrate the wisdom of the ages

### VATICAN INSIGHT

### Mgr Anthony Figueiredo



As Popes grow older and face their own frailty, they speak of the burdens and graces of old age. In 1999, St John Paul II penned a prophetic letter of encouragement 'To my elderly brothers and sisters.'

'Despite the limitations brought on by age,' he noted, 'I continue to enjoy life ... it is wonderful to be able to give oneself to the very end for the sake of the Kingdom of God.'

Some of the last words spoken by Benedict XVI, as he renounced the papacy in these days eight years ago, point to the reality of an end for us all, no matter who we are: "I am no longer the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church ... I am simply a pilgrim beginning the last leg of his pilgrimage on this earth."

In the last weeks, Pope Francis has called us to remember the value of those grown old with age in two ways. First, he has established an annual World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly on the fourth Sunday of July, close to the Memorial of Ss Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus. "The Holy Spirit still stirs up thoughts and words of wisdom in

the elderly today," the 84-year-old Pontiff said. "Their voice is precious ... old age is a gift." Second, the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life has published a document, "Old age: our future. The elderly after the pandemic."

The document is striking in three ways. First, it is not afraid to confront the fact that coronavirus has hit the elderly more than others. "They did not have to die that way," Pope Francis says. "We are all in the same storm, but it is increasingly evident that we are on different boats, and that the least seaworthy boats

are sinking every day."

Second, the document points to the "unimaginable tragedy" of institutions for the elderly, where "death struck disproportionately." An arbitrary institutionalisation of the elderly is part of what Pope Francis calls the "throwaway culture," where, from the person just conceived to the person near death, in words expressed by the Roman playwright Terence more than two millennia ago, "*Senectus ipsa et morbus*" — "Old age is itself a disease." The weak and vulnerable are to be eliminated through a hidden euthanasia.



Pope Francis anoints Mgr Figueiredo's mother in his residence at Domus Sanctae Marthae.

The document is clear: "The family, one's own home, one's neighbourhood, is the best choice for every ageing man and woman." It calls for a "social, civil, cultural, and moral conversion" to make the home and family environment possible for the frail elderly person.

Third, in calling for a Copernican revolution of closeness to and not discarding the elderly, the Holy See's document uses a theological term to help us understand why they are a gift of God to society. The precious witness that the ageing person bears with his or her frailty is a "magisterium, that is, a real teaching." The one who, when grown old and frail, must "stretch out" (John 21:18) his or her hands for help teaches dependence on others and abandonment to God.

At the same time, the "wealth of years" is an irreplaceable vehicle of faith and wisdom to teach the young.

My own Mother in Watford has become that 'magisterium' for me. As she grows weaker with age and her mind fails with Alzheimer's, her serenity in God's will and her simple faith teach me "to number my days aright, that I may gain wisdom of heart" (Psalm 90:12).

Thanks to the Holy See and my archbishop, I am able to spend time each month caring for mum, assisting night and day. I have a doctorate in theology, but this is the most challenging, yet best learning experience that I am receiving on the

core of the Gospel: 'Love one another, just as I have loved you' (John 13:34).

My parents did that for me when they defended my life from the first moment of conception. It was the mid-1960s, a time when the drug thalidomide was being prescribed to help mothers sleep during pregnancy. But thalidomide left many new-borns with shortened limbs. My mother's doctors, knowing that I was to be born with some disability, counselled my parents to have an abortion. "How is it possible to care for a child whom you know will be handicapped? The burden, the time, the suffering ... ." On the day of my ordination to the priesthood, mum and dad recounted that advice to me for the first time and the answer that they gave: "If God has willed this child, then surely He has a marvellous plan!"

The pronouncements from Rome remind us of God's 'marvellous plan' for grandparents and the elderly, too: 'Still bearing fruit when they are old, still full of sap, still green, they proclaim, "The Lord is just; He is my rock. In Him, there is no wickedness"' (Psalm 92:14-15).

**Monsignor Anthony Figueiredo has served in various capacities at the Vatican and as a Spiritual Director for over 20 years.**

**He is a regular guest analyst of Church affairs for media networks throughout the world.**

# Pope vows to stick to Iraq schedule

## Holy Father remains 'determined' to visit country despite Covid and security threats

The Iraqi government has announced stringent new Covid-19 precautions, including the closure of mosques and churches "until further notice," as the country prepares for the visit of Pope Francis on 5th March.

A rising number of coronavirus infections led to a "total curfew" last weekend followed by an 8pm-5am curfew for the rest of the week. This will run over the period of the pope's visit, during which time only essential food stores and pharmacies will be exempt.

Iraq had been experiencing a daily increase in new infections, with a total of 643,852 cases since the pandemic began; over 13,000 people have died.

The Vatican did not comment on how the new restrictions would impact on the planned trip – which could still be postponed, even at this late hour – or the activities of the pope and small entourage of Vatican officials expected to travel with him.

The papal party will all have received their second doses of the Covid-19 vaccine at least a week before the trip was scheduled to begin.

Pope Francis told journalists that



Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan (centre) celebrates Mass on Palm Sunday 2018 at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Qaraqosh, Iraq. The church was vandalised, desecrated and torched by the Islamic State. Pope Francis is scheduled to visit the church 7th March.

Photo: courtesy Syriac Catholic patriarchate

unless there is a serious new wave of Covid-19 infections he had every intention of visiting Iraq in early March.

Even if social distancing requirements mean most Iraqis will see the papal events only on television, he said, "they will see that the pope is there, in their country."

"I am the pastor of people who are suffering," Pope Francis said.

The Holy Father's determination to visit has proved a huge boost to Christians in the country.

"Words can't describe how happy we are," Syriac Catholic Father Roni Momeka said, regarding the papal visit. "The people feel that it's a miracle that the pope will come here. They are happy not only for the visit, but they are happy that Pope Francis is thinking about those people who are in pain, those people who lost everything, but who never lost their faith."

Fr Momeka, who lives in Qaraqosh, one of the host cities for the visit, said that despite pandemic restrictions

the city was "bustling with activity, the streets already awash with papal flags and banners".

Parishioners have been busy cleaning and painting the interior of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, transforming the blackened interior to its original radiance for the pope's visit; he is scheduled to pray the Angelus there.

The church, built by parishioners in the 1930s, had seating for 2,200 people. It was vandalised, desecrated

and burned during the Islamic State invasion.

In January, a new statue of Mary was erected atop the reconstructed bell tower, which had been demolished by the terrorists. Its presence affirms the trust that "the Virgin Mary will keep Qaraqosh safe," Fr Momeka said.

Inside, a nearly seven-foot image of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, embroidered by a Qaraqosh native who immigrated to the West, has been enshrined over the altar.

"We thought that Pope Francis would visit only Baghdad and not come to the Ninevah Plain, but when we heard that he will come to Qaraqosh, we felt so honoured that he is thinking about his sheep who were injured," Fr Momeka added.

Overall, "Iraqi Christians are very much optimistic because it's a sign of hope and solidarity," Iraqi Father Emanuel Youkhana said.

Asked whether security concerns could hit the trip, Cardinal Louis Sako, the Baghdad-based patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church, said, "there is no risk for the pope."

"There are security challenges, that is quite clear, but the Shi'ite militias will help in securing the visit. We hope, we pray there will be nothing," said Fr Youkhana. "The government will not want to risk anything, because it would be a failure. The pope is respected across Iraqi society," Fr Ameer Jaje, an expert in Shi'ite relations, said.

## Spain's Church ready to defend nation's crosses

Jonathan Luxmoore

A group of Spanish lawyers has launched lawsuits to prevent the removal of crosses by local officials, after claims that Christian symbols are linked with the country's former dictator General Franco.

"Many towns are being pressured to get rid of public crosses," said Maria Riesco, spokeswoman for the Association of Christian Lawyers. "We are investigating each case, as well as talking to regional governments in the hope of having them restored."

Riesco spoke as the Valladolid-based association announced legal proceedings against the mayor of Aguilar de la Frontera, near Cordoba, for ordering the demolition of a cross outside the town's Carmelite convent.

She said the 20-foot concrete cross had been taken down illegally amid Catholic protests, in violation of religious freedom.

The Spanish bishops' conference said that the association was acting independently of the Church and would not comment on the removal of public crosses.

Action was also underway to protect crosses in Spain's western Extremadura region, after at least 34 municipalities were ordered to remove them from streets and parks.

A spokesperson for the lawyers association said that "the decision to demolish these monuments is purely

ideological; if carried out, it would cause irreparable damage."

"Every time a cross is knocked down, we will bring the person responsible to justice."

The cross in Aguilar de la Frontera, installed in 1938, was thrown into a landfill site last month after the mayor, Carmen Flores, said it violated Spain's 2007 Law on Historical Memory, which prohibits symbols deemed to praise the rule of General Franco.

Blyvzr 4"o "xiz-€"xwms"7E-zw7i7 of Cordoba warned officials Christians would take note of their actions at election time.

The Law on Historical Memory is expected to be replaced this year by a Law on Democratic Memory, which will promote awareness of the country's democratic history and push for the exhumation of mass graves from the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War.

The law also will facilitate sentence annulments and reparations for victims of repression, as well as for members of ethnic minorities and LGBT groups who suffered under Franco.

Riesco said that she was particularly concerned about regulations at local and regional levels, which often were "much harsher" toward Christian symbols than national laws.

"Some state that any cross in a public place, whatever its inscription, exalts Franco's regime and must be taken down," she said.

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## World News

When will we learn not to interfere with nature?

**Fr Shay Cullen**



The human species thinks that it is the smartest thing that ever evolved on this planet. But have we met our match by non-living entities, pathogens no less?

The Covid-19 is an almost invisible species that has invaded our society, infected our bodies, devastated families, brought suffering and loss. It has taken 2.32 million lives and crippled our economy. One hundred six million people have been infected and most are grievously sick.

One year ago, this great shock hit our once impervious and proud world; what a humiliation it was to the human species. Not only did we not understand how to protect and cure ourselves, but millions of people still go about their lives in gross ignorance of the danger and ignore the protective measures, such as masks, distancing and lockdowns, needed to protect ourselves and our neighbours. Many still lack respect for this killer virus and they are giving it free rein to replicate and kill more people. Hospitals in many countries are overwhelmed.

Scientists have come to the rescue in super quick time to invent vaccines. Many were already halfway there, having worked on developing a vaccine for previous relatives to Covid-19. But too many ignored the warnings. The World Health Organization (WHO) says that the virus passed from animal to animal and then on to humans, first emerging from a 'wet' food market in Wuhan where exotic animals were kept and slaughtered for food.

Bats and pangolins are potential candidates for transmission. Cats and minks are also likely carriers. The traders in illegal capture and sale of such wild animals are to blame. The empty belief that animal parts are effective traditional medicine just has to change. The demand of rhino horn is insatiable, it seems, and has devastated the rhino populations and one species is now extinct.

Humans' desire to invade the natural world and plunder, devastate and lay waste to it is at the root of the problem. Scientists and researchers know that the destruction of the rain forests everywhere make animals live in closer proximity to humans and infections is likely. The HIV and Ebola came from humans eating 'bush meat', that is, monkeys and forest pigs, perhaps.

When will we learn?

Visit [www.preda.org](http://www.preda.org), and on Facebook, Preda Foundation.

# Africa feels left behind in the global scramble for vaccines

**Bronwen Dachs and Rob Beswick**

Concern is growing across Africa that the continent's people are being priced out of the scramble for Covid-19 vaccines as wealthy nations to the north snap up all the supplies.

In Sudan and South Sudan, mass vaccination against Covid-19 is so far off that it is not even mentioned, said a retired bishop.

The malnourished people in the Nuba Mountains are "moving skeletons," and their compromised immune systems expose them "to all kinds of diseases, not just Covid-19," Bishop Macram Max Gassis, retired bishop of El Obeid, Sudan, said from Nairobi, Kenya, where he now lives.

Malnutrition, drought and rumors about vaccines are just some of the problems facing Africa's 54 countries. But thus far 48 of them had not approved a vaccine. Confirmed Covid-19 deaths on the continent are close to 100,000, with more than 3.6 million cases overall.

Mother of Mercy Hospital in Gidel, the only hospital in the Nuba Mountains, reported its first confirmed case of Covid-19 through rapid antigen testing in February, said Jane Andanje, director of the Bishop Gassis Relief and Rescue Foundation in Nairobi.

Bishop Gassis told Catholic News Service while "there is very little testing" in the Nuba Mountains or South Sudan, "it is a fallacy that there is no coronavirus" in the region.

The 82-year-old bishop said he is desperate to be vaccinated against Covid-19 so that he can visit Mother of Mercy Hospital as well as the other hospital he is responsible for, in South Sudan's Diocese of Wau.

While vaccinations are not yet being administered in Kenya, the bishop said his "hopes are set on Easter."

The Rift Valley Institute said in a report that Africa needs 'more practical information and training on Covid-19... with a proper understanding of symptoms, disease progression and transmission, so people can better protect themselves, identify suspected cases and care for sick patients.'



Nuns and others wait in line to receive a Covid-19 vaccination at a recently opened centre in Tel Aviv, Israel. Israel's rapid roll-out of vaccines has been praised by many, but criticism continues that it is refusing to offer help to its neighbour Palestine, where stocks of vaccines are said to be negligible.

Photo: Amir Cohen, Reuters

"The richer countries should not forget the poor countries as they rush to vaccinate all their people," Bishop Gassis said; "if they do this at the expense of poor countries, they cannot be content that they are safe."

"As Church, we don't have the capacity to get involved in vaccination. We are overwhelmed feeding the hungry," he added.

Bishop Sithembele Sipuka of Mthatha, South Africa, said Churches need to join together in calling for equitable international distribution of vaccines, then use their local structures to ensure that rollout is fair.

"Hoarding of vaccines by richer countries is lamentable," said Bishop Sipuka. With "co-operation and solidarity," the Church can play an oversight role in ensuring that vaccines reach the poorest in Africa, he said.

The Vatican's coronavirus commission and the Pontifical Academy for Life have repeatedly called for a coordinated international effort to ensure the equitable distribution of vaccines worldwide.

With more than 1.4 million cases and more than 45,000 deaths, South Africa has recorded the most Covid-

19 infections and deaths on the continent. With setbacks and amid criticism that the Government has been slow to procure vaccines and doubts about the effectiveness of the current vaccine against new strains, vaccination of the country's health workers is poised to begin next week.

Civil society, including churches, "will need to keep watch" that the inoculations are done fairly, Bishop Sipuka said, noting that "we must guard against corruption."

But the scale of the problem facing many African nations was revealed when Bishop Anthony Fallah Borwah of Gbarnga, Liberia, said that there were no signs yet of any vaccines reaching the West African nation. Indeed, World Health Organization officials said that Guinea was the only low-income country of 29 worldwide to have begun vaccinating.

"We are fortunate in that we had not had it too badly in Liberia," Bishop Borwah said, noting that "with our inability to afford vaccination, we can't afford to have the levels of infection other countries have."

When asked why the country had not been badly affected so far he

pointed out that "we learned our lesson from Ebola;" an outbreak in 2014 that killed more than 2,500 people.

"While people do get careless, we've been through difficult times by people observing the health rules and regulations, such as washing hands, wearing masks, social distancing."

In Tanzania, in East Africa, rumours and misinformation about Covid-19 abound. President John Pombe Magufuli, a Catholic, has kept the country open when others have implemented measures such as curfews and lockdowns. Last June, Magufuli declared the country coronavirus free, attributing the defeat to prayers. He recently warned against Covid-19 vaccines, saying inoculations were dangerous.

This stance was criticised by Archbishop Gervas John Mwasikwabihila Nyaisonga, president of Tanzanian bishops' conference, who urged the people to use all ways to fight the virus – including science, faith and community safety protocols.

Archbishop Charles Palmer-Buckle of Cape Coast, Ghana, said that his country had not procured any vaccines, with the earliest vaccine not available until the end of March.

## Latin America fears worse as solidarity crumbles

As Latin America nears the end of its summer and eyes a return to autumn, fears are growing that Covid-19 could return with a vengeance – and there is little confidence the continent's economy or healthcare system can handle the threat.

In Peru, which had the highest per capita death rate from Covid-19 in Latin America, an already struggling economy contracted by 12 per cent last year; unemployment remains above 13 per cent.

A solution would be vaccination, but Peru has received just 300,000 doses of a Chinese-made vaccine.

It is not alone in Latin America in having difficulty obtaining vaccines

against the spending power of the North. "The pandemic has exposed the worst side of humanity," said Maria Rothe, director of Bolivia's health system. "The wealthy countries are not interested in solidarity with their neighbours, let alone poorer countries. This has slowed the global response."

The region's bishops' conferences have been urging governments not only to secure vaccines, but to prioritise the most vulnerable. They are also calling on citizens to get inoculated and steer clear of fake information.

Mexico's bishops' conference has encouraged the population to be

vaccinated after its death toll topped 175,000, making it the third worst in terms of deaths, behind the US and Brazil.

Brazil has had parallel developments with the vaccination process. The government roll-out has been slow and riddled with problems, but the public Butantan Institute in Sao Paulo state is starting to produce vaccines created by China's Sinovac and AstraZeneca, which could make it a regional hub for fighting the virus going forward. Neighbouring Argentina also will produce vaccines.

However, there were concerns that the Amazonas region will re-

ceive little support: Porto Velho Archbishop Roque Paloschi said that vaccinating the region's indigenous people "was not considered a priority" by the Government. He said there is also a problem "with the Brazilian practice of people 'jumping ahead in the line.' Many people who are not in a high-risk group have been vaccinated and this is a direct attack on the poor," he said.

Archbishop Paloschi said the Catholic Church had an important role "to encourage people to trust in science and combat the denial mentality that has been increasing with the pandemic."





A German Red Cross volunteer distributes clothing for homeless people in Berlin. The volunteers toured with a bus through the city to supply the homeless with hot beverages, sleeping bags and blankets due to extremely cold weather conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic. Photo: Fabrizio Bensch, Reuters

## ACN admits founder was accused of assault

International Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) has accepted that claims by a former employee that its founder, Fr Werenfried van Straaten, had sexually assaulted her in the 1970s were “very plausible.”

The charity, which supports Christians suffering persecution around the world, confirmed that the victim made the allegation in 2010 and that it led to preparations for a sainthood cause for Fr van Straaten being suspended.

“The leadership of the charity took the accusation very seriously,” ACN said in a statement. The charity made a payment of 16,000 euros to the woman involved after it was decided that, with Fr van Straaten having died seven years earlier, criminal proceedings could not be initiated.

ACN said the money was “a solidarity payment” in order to underline its desire to recognise the suffering of the person concerned.”

Fr van Straaten died in 2003 at the age of 90 after decades devoted to

helping persecuted Christians, particularly in Eastern Europe.

While ACN did not make the woman’s accusations public at the time, the charity said it did inform the Vatican Congregation for Clergy and the German bishops’ conference, as well as Fr van Straaten’s order.



Fr van Straaten was 60 at the time the alleged assault took place. He died in 2003, aged 90

The victim “expressed a clear wish for the confidential handling of the accusation,” ACN added, while also admitting the group hoped “to prevent damage to the reputation of the charity” and “harm” to its work.

The alleged assault took place during a trip to Italy in 1973. Fr van Straaten was 60 at the time and the woman was part of an ACN delegation travelling with him.

It is not the first time the charity has been involved in a scandal. The Vatican conducted an investigation from 2009 to 2011 into claims made against Fr van Straaten, including allegations of sexual harassment, ‘intemperance in lifestyle’, and a ‘susceptibility’ to fascist ideas.

However, ACN pointed out that a review found no evidence suggesting “far-right or fascist leanings”.

On the contrary, “Fr van Straaten condemned all dictatorships and took a strong stance against them.”

Allegations around his lifestyle centred on “an excess of alcohol or food,” the charity said, and “we cannot confirm this accusation from the information available to us.”

The charity said it “deeply regrets the serious allegations and condemns any kind of behavior of which Fr van Straaten has been accused.

“Since 2011, decision-making and control structures have been put in place to avoid misconduct, abuse and to foster a collegial working culture.”

## Allegations made to hurt seminary, accused claims

A priest accused of abusing a younger student at a minor seminary located at the Vatican has claimed the allegations are false and driven by jealousy and a dislike of his driven character.

Taking the stand at the Vatican criminal trial, Fr Gabriele Martinelli said he had been confused by the “unfounded” accusations against him, which he also claimed were made to hurt the reputation of the St Pius X Pre-Seminary, where the alleged abuse occurred.

He accepted that he got on “many people’s nerves because of my character, because I try to do the best I can in everything.”

Fr Martinelli, 28, is accused of abusing a younger student from 2007 to 2012. Although he and his alleged victim were under the age of 18 when the abuse allegedly began, the court accused him of continuing to abuse the younger student when Martinelli was already 20.

Mgr Enrico Radice, the former rector of the seminary, is also accused by the Vatican of hindering the investigation into the abuse allegations by lying to investigators in 2018 when he affirmed with absolute certainty that he had no knowledge of sexual acts ever taking place at the seminary while he was rector.

## Bishop cleans up drug city

The bishop of a Colombian city that is suffering from a deadly spike in drug violence has sprayed its main street with holy water from a fire engine in a bid to “cleanse it” of evil.

Bishop Rubén Jaramillo Montoya performed the gesture as a protest against violence in Buenaventura, a city on Colombia’s Pacific Coast.

Thousands of local residents, some dressed in white and wearing face masks, joined him at the protest and formed a 12-mile-long human chain that crossed the city. “There is evil in this city, and we want it to leave,” Bishop Jaramillo said. “We are imploring the people in gangs to leave their weapons behind.”



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A popular devotion, this statue is extended to the Blessed Virgin’s intercession for us in Heaven. The knot is a good representation of the results of sin in our spiritual life: As we engage habitually in sin, it becomes harder and harder to return to virtue, just as a knot that is pulled tighter and tighter becomes harder to untie. God’s grace, however, offered to us through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, can undo any knot and conquer any sin.

*Pope Francis said: Through Mary, “All the knots of our heart, every knot of our conscience can be undone.”*

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## NJPN Comment

Transformation  
a task for us allNiall  
Cooper

Church Action on Poverty's vision is that the UK can and must be transformed into a country where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty. In the midst of a global pandemic, we might feel further from this goal than ever, but our Christian faith drives us to believe that another world is possible.

What is clear is that this vision will not happen without the determined efforts of a broad social movement, in which the Church has a central role to play. For Church Action on Poverty, such a movement has to be rooted in the principles of dignity, agency and power.

Pope Francis' recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, in the words of Maria Power, "offers a new vision of society in which human dignity and the human rights of all are respected... He has always wanted to make it clear that his papacy is one of action – placing the needs of the poorest, most marginalised and disenfranchised at the centre of his ministry."

But being human also brings with it the capacity for creativity and change. One of the worst things about living in poverty in the UK is the way in which people are assumed to be helpless, hapless and lacking in any agency of their own. In my experience, many people with the best ideas for how to tackle poverty are those who live with it and struggle against it on a daily basis. Our task is therefore to recognise and affirm the wisdom, insights and agency of people struggling against poverty themselves, and to align ourselves with their struggles.

The task of transforming society can only be achieved by speaking truth to power. As Martin Luther King once said, power is simply "the ability to achieve a purpose... It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change."

To bring about true change, we must seek to build power with people in poverty, and to challenge institutions which exercise power in unjust ways.

So do our efforts to tackle poverty affirm the dignity, agency and power of the people we encounter? This is not some abstract question, but a practical task for all of us to engage in with others, where we are, as we seek to build a movement for change together. I invite you to join us in this task.

• **Resources for prayer and worship on Church Action on Poverty Sunday (21 February) can be found at:** [www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday)

Niall Cooper is Director of Church Action on Poverty.



Demonstrators in Yangon, Myanmar, play chess as they protest against the military coup and demand the release of their elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. Myanmar's military leaders have filed new charges against the former prime minister, claiming she 'violated Myanmar's national disaster law', and she remains under arrest. Growing unrest continues, however, with strikes held at key ports and transport hubs, while students held more demonstrations at key points in Yangon across the weekend and into this week. The military has resorted to shutting off the internet in a bid to hamper communication among dissident groups.

Photo: Reuters

## World Day of Social Justice: consider opening your home to a refugee

Hosting a refugee guest at home offers the unique opportunity for mutual encounter and social justice in action, writes Hannah Markay of the Jesuit Refugee Service.

Imagine living through the coronavirus pandemic without a roof over your head, or a place to call home. This is the harsh reality for many people seeking asylum in the UK, who are forced to live in chronic poverty as they wait to be granted refugee status. In the meantime, they live each day at risk of abuse, exploitation, and discrimination.

This Saturday, on the UN World Day of Social Justice, we are invited to promote social justice in our communities and parishes, and work towards the goal of greater social integration. For our friends seeking asylum, one of the most powerful forms of social justice in action takes place at home, through refugee hosting schemes pairing volunteer hosts with refugees in desperate need of accommodation.

Through the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS UK)'s hosting scheme 'At Home', refugees are welcomed by individual households, parishes or religious communities who are able to offer accommodation for a three-month period. By opening their homes to a stranger, our volunteer hosts respond to the Christian call for hospitality.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis renews his invitation to us all to take concrete steps to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate refugees and migrants seeking sanctuary on our shores: "The arrival of those who are different, coming from other ways of life and cultures, can be a gift". This gift is of a 'culture of encounter', through which host communities and new arrivals can exchange the gifts of one another's culture and enrich all those involved.

Volunteers encouraged to host by



Fr. Bart of St Thomas More RC Church, London, offers a cup of tea and a biscuit with refugee guest, Abdul, through JRS UK's 'At Home' scheme. Photo: Mazur/cbcew.org.uk

their faith, are the driving force of our 'At Home' scheme. Their anchoring in faith enables them to appreciate that behind the label 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker' is a person of dignity – a person with a story, hopes, dreams and fears; who like all of us, is seeking to get on with their life.

Volunteer host, Nora, said: "I am very lucky to have a house; how could I not give a home to somebody? It is rewarding even though it's just day-to-day living. But for my guest, it is something big."

Another host, Miko, said hosting refugee guests was "just such a privilege. Most people in life you meet for a short amount of time and you get a general impression of things. But if somebody is actually there, then there's the possibility to have a proper conversation and really learn."

This mutual, sustained encounter between refugee and host puts principles of social justice into practice. It is an act of charity which upholds dignity, shows solidarity with the vulnerable, and increases avenues of participation.

Seeking asylum is a complex, drawn-out process during which refugee friends are banned from working and earning a living, lose

the right to rent housing, and face multiple barriers to healthcare. They live in a cycle of uncertainty and endless waiting. Their physical and mental wellbeing suffers dramatically as they wait for an answer, living in the constant fear of homelessness.

Our friends are forced to seek respite by sleeping on night buses to escape the streets of London, rely on friends for a night or two, or risk the exploitation sometimes associated with an offer of temporary shelter.

The security of a home to return to in the midst of this debilitating uncertainty allows JRS's refugee friends to live with dignity – not constantly in a state of worry about where to sleep or find food. These seemingly basic concerns can be all-consuming and prevent our refugee friends from thinking strategically about important decisions ahead.

One refugee guest, who has been hosted twice through JRS UK's hosting scheme, told us: "Hosting was like I was escaping. I didn't expect too much... I just want the certainty of a place where there will be peace and you will be considered as a human being"

Being hosted offers peace of mind and an opportunity to strengthen a

sense of self-worth and inherent dignity. Suddenly, refugee guests find they are able to progress their lives and engage with their cases. Some even find their new-found confidence allows them to participate in meaningful community volunteering.

One refugee friend put this in to words, describing his host family: "The comfort was present. All was for my peace of mind. Their children gave [me] respect and sympathy. We all were really close to each other."

This Saturday, on the World Day of Social Justice, may we be reminded of the inherent value of our fellow human beings. May we open our hearts and our eyes to the injustices of destitution, perpetuated by an asylum system which robs so many of their basic right to human dignity. May we find it in our hearts to bring about change for those seeking sanctuary.

**If you live in the London area and would like to become a refugee host with JRS please get in touch with Hannah at [uk@jrs.net](mailto:uk@jrs.net) or call 020 7488 7310**

**Find out more about the scheme: [www.jrsuk.net/at-home-hosting-scheme/](http://www.jrsuk.net/at-home-hosting-scheme/)**

# America's right hide behind God as they spin their false theories

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Sean Ellard



The recent NFL Super Bowl and its political equivalent, the attempted second impeachment of former President Donald Trump, shows just how much North America loves a big show on the biggest stage!

With televised impeachment proceedings in the US Senate, political-theatre-meets-democracy-meets-conspiracy was out on full display. Even more so, it unfurled a roadmap of where America might be heading.

We have now reached an era where publicly theorising that 'Jewish space lasers are setting forest fires in California' is a rational opinion to have as an elected official of the US government. (If only the great comedic genius of Mel Brooks was here to offer his insightful commentary...)

On the flip side, laser-fearing newly-elected Republican Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene had the wherewithal to do the courtesy of clarifying that, in fact, the tragedy of September 11th did happen.

So that's nice. Here, we call that progress enough for a beer.

It all make society an interesting place to be. Let's put aside the buffoonery of the statement about a possible cabal operating a secret Death Star, or how one assembles the rational to support that idea. What's scarier is the fact many people are either okay, indifferent or unaware of the blatant anti-Semitism behind it. This is just one small snapshot of many troubling themes, albeit only for some, that Congresswoman Taylor Greene is associated with.

Yet she remains very well supported and endorsed by her elected Republican colleagues in Washington. It speaks to the fear and power that Trump and his supporters still wield. Which circles back to the impeachment.

The tolerance for what was once considered abhorrent behaviour, such as anti-Semitism, from an elected or public official has been thoroughly obliterated by the Trump era. It is hard to draw a defining line around things civil society once regarded as outlandish taboos when nothing seems too inappropriate for rational consideration.

So, believing that Trump should escape punishment for inciting the Capitol insurrection isn't a big stretch from believing in renegade space lasers. Without a middle ground from which we can balance all other issues and behaviours, it makes it harder to pinpoint those actions and beliefs that are truly harmful or dangerous. So when you try to engage in public debate and



Donald Trump supporters pictured after they forced their way into the US Capitol in Washington on 6th January. The trespassers were 'whipped into a frenzy by Trump and his mouthpieces... the most violent and ardent followers are fuelled by fear.'

Photo: Mike Theiler, Reuters

stead, it seems God has been drafted first overall by the extreme right and is their goalkeeper. They are using religion to provide the perfect cover behind which they shield their nonsensical beliefs, while exploiting vulnerable people for personal gain.

The growing culture taking root in North America, fuelled by social media, fear, ignorance, faith and foolhardiness, is alluring. Which is why, now more than ever, people should be using this test of faith to resist the temptations of false idols and prophets, and instead believe the messaging at the heart of all major religions; love and understanding.

Besides, I'm pretty sure God wouldn't approve of his supporters beating police officers to death who were defending the very Government the mob was trying to 'save'.

Sean Ellard is a professional feature writer for CBR.com and a former senior national news producer. He has also served as director/producer for a number of TV series, including *Border Security: Canada's/America's Front Line*, *Yukon Gold*, *Love It or List It* and *60 Minutes International*. See him on Twitter at [SeanE@SingingRebels](https://twitter.com/SeanE@SingingRebels)

reasonable discourse, it makes it nearly impossible to agree on not just the rules, but also what constitute facts.

The problem with breaking rules or conventional norms is, most often, the biggest consequence is simply the unfiltered reality that usually nothing happens. No scathing public outrage or civil protests ensue. The goal posts that mark the middle ground simply shift. Then again. And again.

Much can and has been said by those smarter than I about how we've all arrive at this position. However, one thing I feel is greatly overlooked is the idea of false idols. The people who followed their beliefs right into the public insurrection against the US Government did so believing someone else's fictional truth over the reality facing the rest of us.

Believing the intoxicating words of Trump and his allies that fuelled their followers' fears and aggression has, and will, bring many to ruin – especially with Federal charges looming. Prison, not political victory, awaits many. And where was their leader? Absent. They were not pardoned nor will they escape punishment.

Whipped into a frenzy by Trump and his mouthpieces, the most violent and ardent followers are fuelled by fear. Real fear that the government, the 'left' and 'liberals,' will come and take their freedom if they don't fight back. Many are born-again Christians who feel Trump was sent by Jesus, and believe God is on their side.

It is easier to believe something when consumed with blind devotion, rather than take the difficult path of researching facts independently, which are often complicated, multi-dimensional and non-linear. However, North American's love things in appealing and simple packaging that takes little effort to consume. When the formula is applied to public debate, it makes it so much easier to package and serve a specific

agenda that people readily devour.

Problems are tangled in webs; there is never a simple straight line between problem and solution. You need to use a simple formula for delivering your message, one that makes it easier to swallow – such as 'immigrants are bad' and 'the election was stolen'. People are being given permission to believe and fear

false realities perpetuated by false idols who co-opt religion, economic hardship and people's longing for a better life.

The need to vilify and demonise others by Trump supporters has clouded the eyes and minds of those who feel strongly about their cause. Religion teaches us to forgive, empathise, understand and accept. In-

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# The call to pastoral conversion: Pope Francis' guide to Lent for everyone

Colleen Campbell

In his 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis spoke of his dream for a “missionary option” (No. 27). To Pope Francis, this “option” is a new order of priorities in the everyday reality of ministry within the life of the Church that moves from an outlook of self-preservation to evangelization.

What might this missionary option mean for us this Lent?

The pope's greatest dream is that we are a Church that does not stop to navel gaze. Instead, he envisions a community that “seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way’” (No. 33).

Pope Francis notes that this option does not look like small changes, like the addition of a new ministry programme or change in a personal prayer routine; rather, what he dreams of is an entire change of heart and reorienting of attitude.

He envisions a pastoral conversion that transforms everything from the root, including “customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures” to make the Church “more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself” (No. 27).

Pastoral conversion requires us to shift our gaze from ourselves to the world in need around us, from those closest to us to those furthest away.

As pastoral ministers, Pope Francis' call to pastoral conversion may seem like an exercise mainly aimed

at making changes in our ministerial life. However, Pope Francis' exhortation to transform everything with a mission-focused mindset is an invitation not just directed at the Church – it is a call to a dramatic shift in our own priorities, intentions and practices to become personally mission-minded.



**Pope Francis holds a copy of his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*). In the exhortation, Pope Francis notes that a “missionary option” is one that radically transforms everything. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)**

What wisdom does this call to pastoral conversion hold for our journey through Lent as pastoral ministers?

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis notes that a “missionary option” is one that radically transforms everything. What Pope Francis advises is not a quick fix, but a whole-sale process of discerning every-

thing, considering if it truly leads to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

A Lent reimagined according to Pope Francis' call to pastoral conversion involves considering our present spiritual habits and practices, evaluating them for their fruitfulness, before adding new practices or subtracting others.

After looking inwards, Pope Francis' vision for pastoral conversion encourages us to then look outwards. He reminds us: “It (is) clear that the Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God” (No. 180).

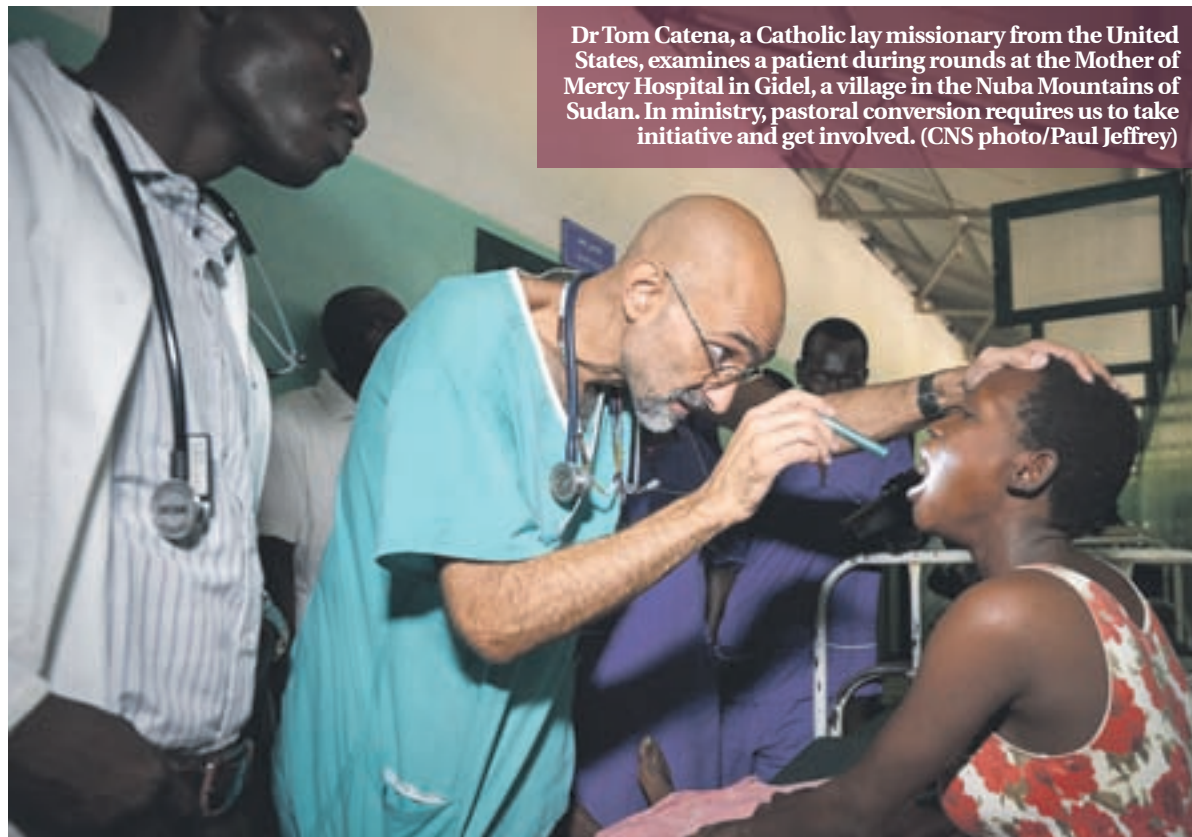
In other words, the pope calls us to take stock of our spiritual life not just as an exercise in itself, but to consider how our spiritual practices and habits form us to be in relationship with others and God. Do our spiritual practices inspire and prepare us to love and accompany others in our life and ministry?

After reflecting and discerning, Pope Francis' call to pastoral conversion requires us to take action. He reminds us that being on mission involves “taking the first step” (No. 24). In our life and ministry, pastoral conversion requires us to take initiative and get involved.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus commands the church to make disciples, using the word “Go!” (Mt 28:19). Inspired by Jesus, Pope Francis encourages us to remember that evangelisation is not a spectator sport; rather, we are sent out as missionary disciples for the purpose of making missionary disciples.

This Lent, let Pope Francis be your guide. Rather than giving up chocolate and saying: “I have always done it this way,” dream of pastoral conversion that is capable of transforming everything in both your life and ministry.

**Dr Tom Catena, a Catholic lay missionary from the United States, examines a patient during rounds at the Mother of Mercy Hospital in Gidel, a village in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan. In ministry, pastoral conversion requires us to take initiative and get involved. (CNS photo/Paul Jeffrey)**



If you're looking to meaningfully deepen your relationship with Christ, below are a few ways to nourish you on what may feel like a long road to Easter. As the reality of Covid-19 has continued to make some traditional forms of gathering difficult this year, these ideas may be incorporated into family and individual life at home.

## Prayer

• **Listen to sacred music.** If you enjoy praying with music, be sure to check out the work of Harpa Dei, a choir whose mission is evangelisation. The four siblings who make up Harpa Dei sing from a variety of Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish traditions and in multiple languages.

Listening to their music is a peaceful experience that connects listeners to a rich treasury of music from around the world. You can find Harpa Dei on YouTube, and their music is a wonderful accompaniment to personal or family prayer time.

• **Honour St Joseph.** Pope Francis has declared this year the Year of St Joseph and shared a beautiful apostolic letter titled *Patris Corde*. Consider reading *Patris Corde* with family or friends and reflecting on the fatherhood of St Joseph. One of the letter's themes that has personally inspired me is: “Tenderness is the best way to touch the frailty within us.”

You might especially honour this tender father in March and on Wednesdays (both are dedicated to St Joseph) by praying the *Litany of St Joseph*, reading about him in Scripture or engaging in the many prayers or spiritual works that will allow you to receive a plenary indulgence this year (see [yearofstjoseph.org](http://yearofstjoseph.org)). Also consider celebrating the solemnity of St Joseph on 19th March, for which there are many traditions.



**A statue of St Joseph.**

## Fasting

• **Fast from negativity.** One Lent during my college years, my Newman Centre challenged students to fast from negativity, giving us a small practice to do each day, like sitting next to someone we didn't know during a meal or staying off social media for a day. With family or friends, consider creating your own personalised fast with small, doable, daily practices.

• **Fast from self.** Add extra beauty to your Holy Week by engaging in traditional practices that promote emptying of self. Tenebrae services might not be happening in your parish or diocese this year, but it's possible to find the readings and psalms for this beautiful service online and to read them with family or friends. On Good Friday, consider making hot cross buns, the traditional food eaten on this day to remember Jesus' death and provide needed sustenance.

Another way to fast from self is to engage in prayerful reflection on the experiences of biblical figures (like Mary Magdalene, Simon of Cyrene and Mary, the mother of Jesus) during the passion and death of Christ by reading Scripture or praying through the Stations of the Cross. If stations are not offered inside your church this year, pray the stations as you take your daily walk or near your church. Some churches may have outdoor stations.

## Almsgiving

• **Give materially.** With family or friends, consider choosing an organisation, community service or religious group to financially support this Lent. Though many organisations are not open to volunteers at this time, financial help allows them to continue serving others.

You might decide to collect not only spare change but more information about the organisation's mission, charism and goals. How might you or your family creatively live out the spirit of this organisation or community in your own lives? Don't forget to pray for this organisation; send a card or spiritual bouquet with your financial gift to give your offering a personal touch.

• **Give time or talent.** Though many of our usual ministries may not be fully up and running, you can still make your time and gifts available to others this Lent. This might be in the form of tutoring a student via video call, virtually gathering friends for a Bible study or calling homebound parishioners to check on their needs.

If you stumble along the way this Lent, remember that our Lord delights in our offerings that like the widow's coins may be small. We don't walk the road alone; he is travelling beside us and is a gracious companion. May our spiritual practices lead us to better knowing him.

By Lindsey Weishar

www.thecatholicuniverse.com

# education

February 2021



Joseph Kelly  
Building a new era for Catholic Education

Fr Sebastian Jones  
Whose children are they ?

Professor Martin Myers  
Inequalities in home schooling during Covid 19

# Beginning of a new era for Catholic education

As we are fast approaching a full year under Covid-19 restrictions, it's naturally a time to reflect on all manner of things. Of course there is the unbearable tragedy of those we have lost, and the separations and deep uncertainties that swarm around us. We are living through an episode in history that has no precedent, so there is no 'roadmap' to guide us through it, or out of it, other than our faith in God.

Because of the nature of this pandemic, our attention has focussed on protecting the elderly, older adults and those with existing health concerns. Strategies to provide pastoral care and support for our younger generations have been far less focussed – I'd say frankly non-existent. The government has failed miserably to get to grips with the education challenges right across the age ranges.

At the top level, many desperate residential students were left 'locked in' at our universities for weeks, abandoned with meagre food parcels and little in the way of practical or spiritual support.

At secondary and primary level there have been desperate attempts to acknowledge teachers as heroic frontline workers, but the reality has been that they too have been left to discern and implement vague government policies, with little known about the behaviour and transmission of the virus among children.

The teachers I have spoken to are exhausted and demoralised. They have been burnt out by the need to teach physical lessons during the day to pupils who are at school, whilst providing the same standard of lessons in online format for those waiting by their PCs at home. So our teachers have two types of work to prepare and assess, before tackling their own home life and supporting and educating their own families.

And all of this delivered in an atmosphere of a severe and potentially fatal health risk to themselves and those in their care.

Across the four nations of the UK there is little consensus or consistency about solutions to the education dilemma. Much has been made of the adverse effects of the lockdown on young minds, but the vast majority are actually enjoying a rare time of freedom, individuality and – in an increasing number of cases – an improved learning environment.

Whilst the pandemic has done much to make parents aware of the great work that teachers do, it has also given some parents a rare window on what is not being done in some schools. So much so that the government is becoming increasingly concerned about parents becoming too effective at educating their children at home.

(Recent confidential press briefings to national newspaper editors have pleaded repeatedly for journalists to use the phrase 'home learning' rather than 'home schooling'. The reason is obvious.)

It should also be obvious to most that government education policy right now has precious little to do



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with child mental welfare, and everything to do with restarting the economy. In blunt terms, get the children back in school and the parents can go back to work. Whether that will ramp up the R number again and result in many further deaths no-one can be sure, but the government seems determined that a combination of older people being vaccinated, parents back in socially distanced workplaces, and vast numbers of young people travelling and casually mixing is a Covid exit strategy worth a roll of the dice.

This week most schools are on half term, but thereafter legislators are already starting to push pupils back into the system, though there is little agreement on who, how, where and especially why.

Teachers too are desperately worried that their schools are unprepared to deal with the un-natural and highly stressful atmosphere that masks, perspex screens, sanitisers and distancing will create for themselves and their pupils.

From the outset of the pandemic the government has made much of 'following the science', and the science being pushed just now is that there is 'no substantial evidence' to prove that schools play a significant role in the transmission of Covid-19 in communities. But as we know, 'absence of evidence' is not 'evidence of absence' and, where lives are at stake, erring on the side of absolute caution should be the default.

Of course whatever you hear legislators say, there is actually no legal requirement to send your child to school at all, the requirement is to provide them with an acceptable and measurable level of education.

For younger children in particular, home schooling may even offer a better option right now than the stress of a state institutionalised education system that was already collapsing long before Covid arrived.

For older university students too there are huge challenges, and many unanswered questions. Students these days pay between £9k and £10k per year for tuition fees, and often a further £5k per year for university accommodation costs.

One has to ask whether or not Zoom lectures and emails represents fair value for the high fees being charged, and rooms that can't be accessed. Some universities are already relenting on accommodation fees, though they'll no doubt fight to the bitter end not to have to refund those precious annual tuition fees.

At this level, too, there are enormous uncertainties about the impact on the R number of university students travelling around, and indulging in ultra-social lifestyles.

Whilst there may be some evidence that young people aren't mass carriers of Covid, young people are



dying from it, and there are no proposals at this stage to vaccinate younger people before our schools and universities are forced to return.

(It's worth remembering here that the regular end of term 'migrations' of university students to and from home represents the biggest single movement of people in the UK.)

All of this may sound dour and pessimistic, but if we are to guide our young people out of this mess and into a brighter future it's vital that we don't indiscriminately follow ephemeral and unsubstantiated advice, but rather focus our thoughts entirely on the pastoral care and protection of both the children in our care, and their families.

Like most of the UK, Catholic education was also experiencing tough times before the pandemic hit. Many of our dioceses had grave cash issues – funding local Catholic schools had become increasingly challenging, and recruiting Catholic teachers had become difficult too.

With all that's happened over the past 12 months it's very easy to forget that this time last year many dioceses had put drastic plans in place to rationalise, with churches being slated for closure and parishes merged into larger 'clusters'.

Catholic schools too were under profound review. Many of our school buildings, built of steel and concrete in the ebullient 1950s and 60s, had reached the end of their serviceable lives.

Against that, a sustained cam-

paign from the Church over recent years had finally forced a government u-turn on its refusal to fund faith schools, and – despite Covid – we have begun what looks like a brave new era of building Catholic schools. The Hampton Lakes Primary School in Peterborough and the £21m Christ the Word Catholic School in Rhyl for instance, both completed last autumn, are exemplars of a modern, inclusive approach to Catholic education within a state-of-the-art teaching setting.

The government would do well to continue its support for such projects, as they do point to real pathways out of the present difficulties.

Since their inception Catholic schools have always functioned with clear and highly focussed remit of placing the spiritual welfare of the human person at the centre of education, regardless of their background, outlook and circumstances.

In these present difficult times, when children of all ages have had to deal with huge challenges to their welfare and mental wellbeing, a return to school cannot be just a re-immersion in an inflexible system of learning, it has to include deep pastoral support and understanding of what will be a hugely complex and diverse range of issues and anxieties – for children, but also for teachers, school support staff and parents.

Ironically, or perhaps fortunately, the lengthy series of lockdowns will make it extremely difficult for educational planners to simply put ad-

“ our children will be building the world beyond our time, so we owe it to them to ensure they have a decent, caring and far better place to run towards.

ditional pressures on the system to 'catch up' with lost learning. The highly mechanical and impersonal mechanisms of testing, assessment and examination require a relentless timetable that cannot be compressed or skipped and still deliver the required academic results.

It would appear that the government faces two choices – it can either abandon qualifications for an uncertain period of time, as has already been done with some GCSEs and other exams, and condemn numerous young people to a life of uncertainty; or it can be brave and visionary and start examining new and better routes through education and on into wider life.

Exam results do define a certain type of intelligence, and are necessary in some areas, but generally employers prefer to take on people rather than qualifications.

In the months ahead our Catholic schools will have to follow whatever directions the government dictates, and we must keep all those involved in our prayers. Parents too will need to do more than simply drop their kids to the bus. This is a time to support our Catholic teachers and the incredible work that they and our schools do in nurturing the best instincts in human nature and society.

It will be a difficult time for all, but we should remember that our children will be building the world beyond our time, so we owe it to them to ensure they have a decent, caring and far better place to run towards.

# Encouraging Big Ideas – a brand new film from Ratcliffe College



At Ratcliffe College, the concept of encouraging 'big ideas' is synonymous with our Rosminian heritage and sits firmly at the heart of our school ethos today.

Our founder, Blessed Antonio Rosmini, urges us in all our endeavours; *pen-sare in grande* – 'think big' and aim high, seeking truth and purpose in your learning.

Our latest inspirational film brings Rosmini's words to life, because we believe that when you encourage a young person to think big, you encourage them to be the very best version of themselves, both inside and outside of the classroom. You can view the film at: [www.ratcliffecollege.com](http://www.ratcliffecollege.com)

Ratcliffe College is a school where you're never on your own. Someone has always got your back and, as a Catholic School, someone has 'really got your back'. Ratcliffe is about bringing people together and supporting their ambitions, whatever they may be.

As a Boarding School, this message is at the heart and soul of everything we do, as we strive to provide the same high standard of education and pastoral care for each child, even during a pandemic.

Of course, the world is a very different place right now due to Coronavirus yet, even during this time of uncertainty and struggle, students' big ideas continue to bubble to the surface, daily.

It is so exciting to imagine what more we will achieve when everyone returns to our beautiful campus in the coming months and life begins to resemble normality once more.

Our outstanding remote learning provision has ensured that the whole School community has remained connected.

We have received some extremely positive feedback from our parents and students about their online experience. You can read more on our social channels/website newsfeed.

Our founder, Blessed Antonio Rosmini, urges us in all our endeavours; "pen-sare in grande" - 'think big' and aim high, seeking truth and purpose in your learning.

We were delighted to have worked in collaboration with Affixius Films on our film, a company founded by two Old Ratcliffians.

As students, they had a big idea of their own and, with their teachers' support, they have fulfilled their dream of creating their own film company!

We hope you enjoy our new film and that it inspires you to 'think big' and to follow your dreams, whatever big idea you may have!

**Mr Jon Reddin**  
Headmaster Ratcliffe  
College



To find out more about Ratcliffe College, don't forget to book your place online for our forthcoming Open Morning on Saturday 6th March 2021.

**RATCLIFFE COLLEGE**

Encouraging **Big Ideas**

Open Day

**Saturday**

**6th March**

**09:30 - 12:00**

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# Whose children are they?



Another alarming casualty of the Covid Pandemic in Wales is parental rights. Leading Labour Senedd member Jenny Rathbone (Senedd, Cardiff Central) wrote last week in response to concerns about the Labour Government's Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill: "I do not think we can leave parents to educate their children about sex and relationships" as parents "do not talk to their children..."

The "we" not being the family courts or social services, but the Welsh Labour Government.

Despite vocal opposition from parents, headteachers, school governors and faith leaders in Wales the Bill continues through the Welsh Assembly to enter into Law. Once it becomes Law it will remove parent's rights to choose the most appropriate moment in their child's emotional and intellectual development to introduce the topics of love, relationship and sexuality.

The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill represents unnecessary legislation. Law abiding parents will face prosecution should they oppose the Welsh Labour Government's no parental choice policy as the "Relationships and Sexuality Education" will be "mandatory" (Curriculum and Assessment [Wales] Bill [as introduced], § 3, no. 2).

Sufficient legislation already exists on the Statute Book (particularly in the various Equality Acts) to confront hate and phobic speech, if that were the issue. The Bill once Law in Wales will do nothing to re-dress the grinding generational child poverty that afflicts many Welsh towns and cities, nor the post code lottery of life chances for the children and their parents. The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill is an exercise of raw power. It is not social welfare.

This Bill is ideologically driven. It will remove ancient freedoms and duties of parents in the education of their children.

The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill is an affront not only to devout Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim parents in Wales, but every decent hard working parent in Wales.

It is not unreasonable to expect to see the same demonstrations in Wales as were seen in England. Once parents realise

what has been taken from them, the removal of parental choice risks becoming an unwelcome flashpoint in an already fragile atmosphere in many socially deprived areas of Wales.

A sense of powerlessness does not encourage support for the local community or a broader engagement in society. People need a voice. This is yet a further silencing by Government. The Bill as proposed violates fundamental freedoms of conscience, expression, worship and conscientious objection.

A Welsh Labour Government that trumpeted "The Rights of

“ The protection of a child's rights to age appropriate learning and the protection of their parents against political and ideological interference is a fundamental Human Right.

Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011" to assert a child's "right to have a voice in the decisions that affect them" is steamrolling a Bill through the Welsh Assembly Government that removes a child's right to protection from their own parents, the very person who knows and loves them most.

Anonymous Welsh Ministers will assert their own voice and opinions without any experience of an individual child's needs or hopes. The protection of a child's rights to age appropriate learning and the protection of their parents against political and ideological interference is a fundamental Human Right.

The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill violates the inherent balance of family life and "Society's glue": the trust we place in parents to do the best for their child.

The Welsh Labour Government's policy may not be malicious, but it is wrongheaded and cannot go unchallenged by those who believe in constitutional freedoms enjoyed prior to devolution.

Now is the time for the Welsh Labour Government to pause, to put children, parents and teachers before this ideologically driven Bill. The responses to the consultation on this Bill have been largely ignored by First Minister Mark Drakeford, his Cabinet and his Party.

The Welsh Independence Party, Plaid Cymru, always the Bridesmaid, never the Bride, supports the Bill's passage through the Welsh Assembly, as with most issues, for this party it's a battle of language, not substance.

Covid has prevented the normal remedies to un-challenged Government. Email responses and zoom meetings are no replacement for looking politicians in the eye. The May 6th Welsh Assembly Elections come too late. There has been insufficient time to scrutinise the Bill and proposed amendments.

If the Welsh Assembly Government legislates on the presumption that parents in Wales cannot be trusted to talk to their own children, then should we be surprised if the next Bill determines the job description for candidates to become parents in Wales..?

Fr Sebastian M. Jones holds a doctorate in canon law from the Marcianum in Venice. He is Parish Priest of St Alban's Parish, Splott; a Fellow of Cardiff Law School's Centre for Law and Religion where he has lectured for 10 years in the Law School's Canon Law post graduate course on Western and Eastern codes of Canon Law. He was Judicial Vicar for 6 years and has been Cardiff University Chaplain since 2009. He is Dean of Newman Hall a private student hall. Fr Jones is a Foundation Governor of the Parish School and Editor of the local free community newspaper. He also holds Master's degree in architectural history.



## Let children play this summer, instead of extra schooling, psychologists urge



By **Zoe Tidman,**  
**The Independent**

Young people should be allowed to play with friends this summer for their mental health instead of doing extra lessons, child psychologists have said.

It comes amid speculation catch-up plans for pupils who have missed out on learning due to coronavirus could include summer schools, extended school days or shorter summer holidays.

The new education recovery tsar said teachers will be asked to increase learning time in light of disruption, suggesting school days or terms may be extended when classrooms reopen to all.

A group of experts in child development have written to Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, calling for measures prioritising the

emotional wellbeing of children when England's lockdown eases.

"This spring and summer should not be filled with extra lessons," PlayFirstUK – which includes 15 child psychologists and education specialists – said in their letter.

The group warned plans for intensive "catch up" activity and summer schools may worsen young people's mental health and wellbeing, and instead called for children to be encouraged to spend time outdoors, be physically active and play with friends.

They also said children in England should be exempt from the rule of two as soon as it is safe.

Professor Helen Dodd, who leads PlayFirstUK, said: "If we don't get this right we run the risk of pushing struggling children back into a pressured educational environment, which could cause further damage to their

mental health and development."

The University of Reading professor added: "Our children have missed out on enough over the past year, they deserve a summer filled with play."

Sir Kevan Collins was announced as the new education recovery commissioner last week, with the task of overseeing the government's catch-up programme.

Speaking to the BBC this week, he suggested it was important to think about other areas beyond just academic study where children have lost out on due to the pandemic.

"I think we need to think about the extra hours not only for learning, but for children to be together, to play, to engage in competitive sport, for music, for drama because these are critical areas which have been missed in their development," he said.



# St Columba's Prep builds skills needed for life



We're a close-knit and happy family, underpinned by strong values. At the heart of these are the three Cs of St Columba's College: Courage, Courtesy and Compassion.

We help instil a dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking mindset, which enables the children to thrive in an intercultural and fast-moving world whilst retaining the fun and creativity associated with being a child.

For most of our pupils, their educational journey starts with us in the Prep then continues into our Senior School at age 11 before entering our Sixth Form at 16. They go out into the world fully equipped with the skills they need for the next stage in their lives.

At St Columba's Prep we aim to form well-rounded pupils through our varied curriculum and strong pastoral care and extra-curricular programmes. We build an excellent community with our parents, and this begins with communications.

Our remote learning programme has been a great success with parents and pupils. Our dedicated staff utilised a range of resources, including Microsoft Teams, to deliver interactive and engaging lessons, following the normal timetables.

We have continued our provision of strong pastoral support through regular communications with the children and their families as they adapted to remote learning.

Do come to our interactive Open Afternoon on Tuesday 2nd March. We'd love to meet you!

St Columba's College is the only independent Catholic day school for ages 4 to 18 in the heart of St Albans.

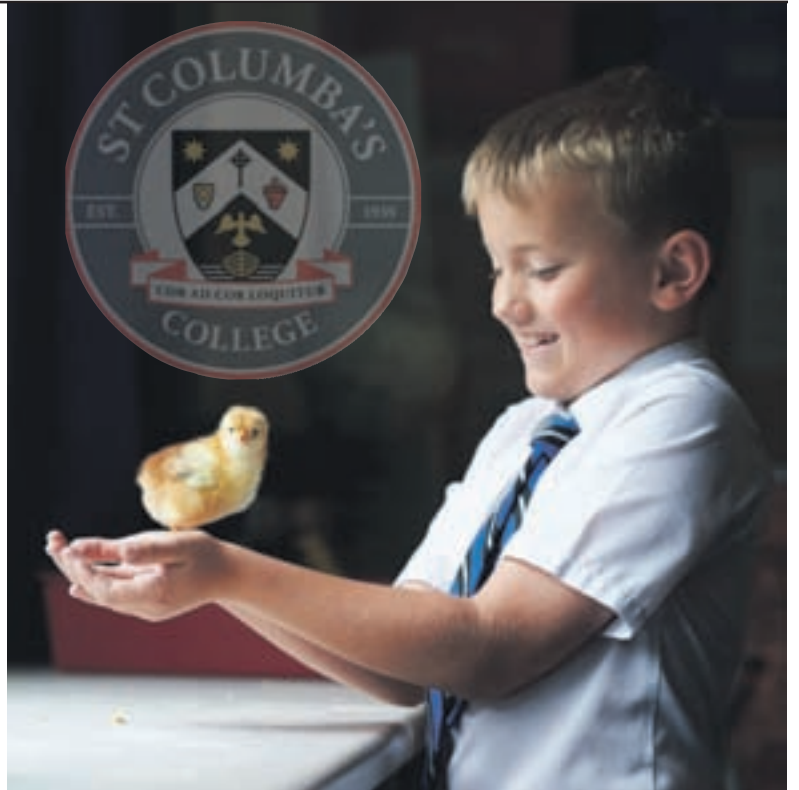
The Prep School is a warm and vibrant community. We educate children aged 4 to 11, offering them a stable sanctuary where they can flourish and be themselves.

The start of our Lent term saw a landmark day for St Columba's: just six months on from announcing our move to co-education, our first group of girls started in Reception.

In September we look forward to welcoming girls into Prep 1 and Prep 2 where they too can benefit from all that St Columba's has to offer.



Mr Richard McCann, Head of Prep  
Book your place at St Columba's Prep Open Afternoon online:  
[www.stcolumbascollege.org](http://www.stcolumbascollege.org)



## An education of the head and heart



### Prep Open Afternoon 2 March

St Columba's is an independent Catholic day school for ages 4–18 in St Albans, Herts. We are welcoming girls into the Lower Prep and Lower Sixth from September 2021.

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Courage. Courtesy. Compassion.

# Catechetics place Christ at the centre of school life in uncertain times

By **Ingrid La Trobe**

If you are a Catholic teacher, in a Catholic school, you will know the joy of being a teacher, but also, at times, a catechist. As a fellow catechist (I catechise as a parent, a member of a parish and as a diocesan employee) the Church is asking us all to consider anew what it means to be a catechist.

So, perhaps now is a good moment to pause and, asking for God's grace, to reflect on your vocation as a catechist in particular.

What does it mean to be a catechist, whether in school, parish or the home?

First, catechesis is not theology. Theology is the study of the science of God, a place where opinions are the norm (and hopefully only undertaken by those who themselves have been very well catechised). Catechists are called to simply echo the teachings of Christ, found in Sacred Scripture and in all the wisdom the Church has to offer ('catechist' comes from the Greek *katēchein* meaning to 'echo down' or pass on an oral teaching). It is not a matter of just offering your own opinion.

Secondly, catechists are called to witness to their own faith. Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* said 'Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.'

When we witness, we evangelise.

Even excellent teaching of Scripture and the contents of the Catechism can easily miss the point, an encounter with the person of Jesus himself. Pope Francis succinctly sums this up in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (the Joy of the Gospel) 'On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you."' This kerygmatic proclamation ('kerygma' is Greek meaning to proclaim or herald) should be part of every catechetical session one leads.

For Pope Francis goes on to say 'Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation. ... The kerygma... is reflected in and constantly illumines, the work of catechesis' (EG 165).

The new *Directory for Catechesis* emphasises that catechesis cannot always be distinguished from the first proclamation (DC 57), that moment of evangelisation. We must be conscious of these blurred lines between evangelisation (to bring the good news of Christ to others) and catechesis (the deepening of a passed down truth), including when catechising in our Catholic schools. Your Catholic school is part of a great adventure.

When Christ is truly and intentionally placed at the centre of a school's life, the Christian ed-



ucation of children becomes something bigger than its parts. We are, quite simply, being invited to be evangelising in our catechesis.

In schools, you teach and catechise other people's children. The primary role of parents, who are called to be evangelising catechists too, cannot be overstated. The newly published NICER (National Institute for Christian Education Research) report *Faith in the Nexus*, found that while children want to speak about their faith in the home, many parents feel that they cannot engage in these conversations as they don't have fully-formed 'correct' answers. The report shows that children who attend Catholic schools are particularly open to these conversations with their parents, which is a credit to your work.

We all now need to find a way to empower parents, who have a preeminent role as evangelising catechists in the home.

St John Henry Newman speaks directly to us all: 'God has created me to do him some defi-

nite service; he has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another... I am a bond of connexion between persons.'

It has been a difficult year for all in Education. But there is always joy to be found in being a connection between persons, including bringing others to an encounter with the person of Christ.

Perhaps we will emerge from the pandemic determined to profoundly strengthen, with warmth and patience, the bonds between schools, parishes and families to do this missionary work.

*Ingrid La Trobe is the Catechesis Advisor for the Agency for Evangelisation and Catechesis, Archdiocese of Southwark to learn more visit <https://aec.rcaos.org.uk/>*



## Choosing lockdown apps for kids

**Joanna Kolac**



Lockdowns and school closures have pushed more aspects of our lives online. This has encouraged parents and children to engage with apps and other forms of digital media more frequently than before the pandemic. For parents of young children, touchscreen apps may be a valuable resource for educational purposes.

When it comes to searching for educational touchscreen apps for children, parents are spoilt for choice. Hundreds of thousands of apps on the market claim to be educational. But the market is unregulated and as a result, the majority of children's apps advertised this way in fact lack educational value and are not based on research.

Some apps can support children's learning. But picking the right one from the vast number available is tricky. Our research has identified some of the important features to look out for when choosing apps for young children.

A review of research that combined the findings of 36 studies – involving a total of more than 4,000 children aged up to five years – found that children of this age can learn from touchscreen devices. Importantly, the research found that older children

learned more from touchscreens than younger children.

Touchscreen apps can be used to support language acquisition: children aged four learned new words from a touchscreen app played once for just 10-12 minutes.

Children's apps often present new words in isolation from the context, such as on a flashcard. In this study, the app allowed children to learn the meaning of new words as part of a game narrative. The game used attractive images but did not include visual and sound effects unrelated to the vocabulary, in order to limit distraction.

Four and five-year-olds showed increased literacy skills after using a literacy-focused app for 20 minutes a day over ten weeks at home. In this app, a cartoon bear guided children through a series of interactive early literacy lessons such as tracing letters and combining sounds to form words. The app gave children feedback on their performance to support their learning.

While these apps offered children genuine learning opportunities, previous research has found that apps labelled as educational in the Google Play app store were, in general, unlikely to help children learn.

Researchers rated the educational potential of those apps lower than app users did.

For our research, we developed criteria to assess the learning value of apps aimed at preschoolers. When we carried out a survey of 44 of the most popular apps for children aged up to five years old from the Amazon, Google and Apple app stores, we found that most apps scored low on our measure

of educational potential. And even the most popular apps for young children might not guarantee a high-quality educational experience.

So how do you pick an educational app for your child? Here are four aspects to look out for when choosing an app for a pre-school aged child, based on our research.

**Learning goal:** To qualify as educational, apps should have a clear learning goal which supports the development of early skills, such as teaching sounds, letters, numbers, or teaching about emotions.

**Solving problems:** Learning within an app should offer children problems to solve that encourage them to use reasoning and creativity. This could include finding a missing element in a pattern or dragging letters to build a word.

**Feedback:** Children perform better when they receive meaningful, specific and constructive feedback which helps them learn. This feedback should be delivered through an audio message, by an animated social character present on the screen who "looks" directly at the child.

**Plotline:** Children's learning can benefit from content that is presented as an entertaining narrative. For example, characters in the app might go on a treasure hunt and the app might set some tasks for the child as part of that adventure.

We have developed a questionnaire that can be used by parents and teachers to assess whether apps aimed at children between the ages of two and five have the potential to teach them new skills.



If an app scores highly on our questionnaire, it is likely to offer an educational experience for children. And parents should get involved too – using an app with a child can further support learning.

• **Joanna Kolac is a Researcher in Developmental Psychology at the University of Salford. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)**

# Fellowship program offers unique path to help build bridges between faiths



A fellowship program of the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue, the Russell Berrie Fellowship supports priests, women religious, and members of the laity for the purpose of studying one full academic year at The Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas—Angelicum.

Every year, the John Paul II Center brings 10 international students to the Angelicum, a Pontifical University in the heart of Rome, to pursue a Licentiate in Theology or a Doctorate in Theology, as well as a Diploma in Interreligious Studies.

The Fellowship Program aims to build bridges between Christian, Jewish, and other religious traditions by providing the next generation of religious leaders with a comprehensive understanding of, and dedication to, interfaith issues.

Over the past 13 years, the John Paul II Center supported 112 clergy, religious leaders, and members of the lay community from over 37 countries to study at the Angelicum, together with 1,200 professors and students of the university.

*“There is no doubt that the Russell Berrie Fellowship has had an impact on my life, both personal and professional. I see dialogue as a way of being and living, as a method, rather than just a theory of teachings and books.”*

Fr. Cyrille Uwizeye, Russell Berrie Fellow of Cohort IV from Rwanda.

*“It was a blessing for me. It brought me a new vision to build a society of peace and an eye opener towards the entire humanity.”*

Sr. Gracy Vadakara, Russell Berrie Fellow of Cohort III from India

## Russell Berrie Fellows:

- Live and study in Rome for one full academic year.
- Take classes in Ecumenism and Dialogue, Judaism, and Islam.
- Travel to Israel for a 10-day study tour, study at the Shalom Hartman Institute and

*“There is no doubt that the Russell Berrie Fellowship has had an impact on my life, both personal and professional. I see dialogue as a way of being and living, as a method, rather than just a theory of teachings and books.”*

Fr. Cyrille Uwizeye, Russell Berrie Fellow of Cohort IV from Rwanda

visit the sacred sites in the Holy Land.  
• Participate in interfaith events with leading practitioners and theologians in the field of interreligious dialogue.

## What Fellows take with them upon graduation:

- Skills and learning tools to facilitate dialogue and mediate conflict.
- Opportunities to apply for grants to implement projects in interreligious dialogue.
- Membership in an international network and learning community of leaders dedicated to dialogue and peace building.

Applications for the 2021-2022 academic year are accepted by 26th April 2021.

To join the next cohort of Russell Berrie Fellows and embark on a transformative pathway to interfaith leadership, visit our page and apply: [iie.eu/berrie](http://iie.eu/berrie)

*\*The Russell Berrie Fellowship and initiatives of the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue are made possible through the generous support of The Russell Berrie Foundation.*



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Many pupils in Wales still need home laptops, charity says

By William Kelly

The drive to enable all pupils across Wales to get a laptop for home-schooling is still falling short, a charity has warned.

Business2Schools, which distributes refurbished technology to children, said a “high volume of need” remains.

One teacher said a lot of families are still forced to share one device and the fear pupils’ education will be irreparably damaged remains.

The Welsh Government said 128,000 devices had been sent to local authorities with 54,000 more expected.

Most children aged between three and seven are due to return to school on 22nd February, after the half-term break, but for most others, learning from home will continue.

Last April, the Welsh Government provided £3m for laptops and wi-fi devices, but it is claimed some pupils, especially those from poorer families, are still waiting.

In January, the charity Child Poverty Action Group said it was concerned some schools were only offering IT help to children on free school meals.



Bethan Jones, (above) assistant head at Queen Elizabeth High School in Carmarthen, told *BBC News*: “We have a lot of families where there’s only one computer, iPad, or mobile.”

“Kids won’t be able to learn if they only have one laptop between four of them. One device for each family doesn’t really tackle the problem.”

The BBC has donated thousands of mi-fi dongles to help pupils who do not have home broadband to get online, through its give a laptop scheme.

“There’s a high volume of need,” said Nigel Cooke, Head of Schools Wales for Business2Schools, which has worked with the corporation.

“Companies and businesses have been extremely generous and we have donated lots of equipment. But schools need to sign-up and register with us and then we can get it out to them,” he said.

Plaid Cymru education spokeswoman Sian Gwenllian said: “The Welsh Government must progress at pace with their discussions with major UK mobile and broadband providers so that offers to English counterparts are extended to learners in Wales.”

# Home schooling during Covid-19: links with inequality far from new

Martin Myers



In 2020, the pandemic has made home schooling a fact of life. Even before this, though, what was once the obscure choice of a few families has grown in popularity over the past decade. In 2019, the Children’s Commissioner for England estimated that around 60,000 children were homeschooled.

A persistent concern over home-schooling as a result of COVID-19 has been that it is causing new inequalities in children’s education. The closure of schools means children’s learning has relied increasingly on their family’s social and domestic circumstances. The pandemic has shown that the poorest families in the UK do not have access to the resources necessary to educate children at home.

But focusing on the effects of the pandemic overlooks two important – and interconnected – points. The first is that persistent educational inequalities are a feature of schools, too. The second is that schools and homeschooling operate in close relation to each other. My research has found that inequality has long been a feature of homeschooling, and this often stems from inequalities in schools.

One of the clearest examples of the links between inequalities in school and homeschooling is “off-rolling” – when schools informally persuade parents to homeschool their children. Off-rolling can be attractive to schools because, in principle, it means limited resources, such as teacher time, are not squandered on “difficult” individual pupils.

It is difficult to identify the number of pupils who have been off-rolled, but research by the education inspection body Ofsted suggests that is on the rise. The Ofsted findings also indicate that off-rolling was mostly initiated by senior leaders in secondary schools to remove children with behavioural problems, poor attendance records or special educational needs.

My research has found that the children most likely to be off-rolled were from ethnic minority and poorer backgrounds. They are a mirror image of the children who always seem to be let down in schools.

Racist stereotypes about Gypsy and Traveller children, for example, often identify them as difficult, problematic pupils unlikely to succeed academically. As the children most likely to be excluded from schools, their educational outcomes are very poor. The evidence of poor results is itself cited to justify racist



beliefs. Similar patterns emerge around other ethnic groups and working-class pupils. These biases, held by senior school leaders, inform decisions to off-roll some pupils to protect the academic performance of the whole school.

Off-rolling is an example of how educational inequalities within schools lead to some poorer, ethnic minority pupils becoming homeschooled. Their limited access to money and other resources compromises their education both in, and out of, schools.

Before the pandemic, media accounts of parents making the choice to homeschool often emphasised positive stories. Typically these portray affluent families embarking on an exciting adventure and taking back control of their children’s education. Unlike the families of children who are off-rolled, these families have greater financial security and other resources that make such life-changing decisions possible.

For many families, though, the choice to take their children out of school is no choice at all. Instead, it is a response to problems over which they have no control.

Commonplace examples include the families of children who experience racism in schools that refuse to acknowledge that racism exists in their classrooms, and those of children with special educational needs

that are not matched by school support. These families describe home schooling as a better option for their children – but not the best option. They often struggle with limited access to resources and identify the best option as mainstream schooling that could meet their children’s educational needs.

This brings us to the nub of the problems facing families in lockdown: many families have limited resources.

In 2020, during the first lockdown and after the closure of schools and cancellation of exams, I was involved in research conducted by the universities of Nottingham and Birmingham to carry out a survey of more than 500 A-level students studying at home. We also interviewed 53 students about their experiences.

Our preliminary analysis – new research which has not yet been published in a peer-reviewed journal – suggests that students from ethnic minorities, poorer backgrounds and state schools were most fearful that the cancellation of exams would negatively affect their grades.

They pointed out that inequalities associated with race and ethnicity as well as family income affected their experience of schooling in the past as well as home schooling in the present.

This research pre-dated the A-level grade moderation scandal, in which students from disadvantaged backgrounds and ethnic minorities tended to receive worse results while students at private schools benefited from the moderation process. It was striking that the students in our research anticipated and predicted the unfairness of this process.

If nothing else, COVID-19 has demonstrated that homeschooling does not exist in isolation.

It is enmeshed in broader educational practice, social life and all their associated inequalities.

It is too easy to view inequalities that have materialised for homeschooled children now as an unfortunate and unforeseen consequence of the pandemic.

• **Martin Myers is an Assistant Professor in education at the University of Nottingham. He is a sociologist whose work has explored the lives and identities of marginalised communities. His research has focused on Gypsy families, in particular their experiences of education and schooling, relations with non-Gypsy neighbours and understandings of mobility. His most recent research explores the experiences of home educators in relation to risk.**

This article first appeared at: <https://theconversation.com>



Fr Michael Collins

Two artefacts that highlight our faith - p34



David Torkington

Context and direction of prayer - p36



Fr Francis Marsden

The Chair of St Peter - p38

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A CATHOLIC UNIVERSE SUPPLEMENT

## Lent is time to grow in faith, hope, love and to share them, says pope

Cindy Wooden

As Christians pray, fast and give alms during Lent, they also should consider giving a smile and offering a kind word to people feeling alone or frightened because of the coronavirus pandemic, Pope Francis said.

“Love rejoices in seeing others grow. Hence it suffers when others are anguished, lonely, sick, homeless, despised or in need,” the pope wrote in his message for Lent 2021.

The message, released by the Vatican on 12th February, focuses on Lent as “a time for renewing faith, hope and love” through the traditional practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. And, by going to confession.

Throughout the message, Pope Francis emphasised how the Lenten practices not only promote individual conversion, but also should have an impact on others.

“By receiving forgiveness in the sacrament that lies at the heart of our process of conversion, we in turn can spread forgiveness to others,” he said. “Having received forgiveness ourselves, we can offer it through our willingness to enter into attentive dialogue with others and to give comfort to those experiencing sorrow and pain.”

The pope’s message contained several references to his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, on *Fraternity and So-*

*cial Friendship.*

For example, he prayed that during Lent Catholics would be “increasingly concerned with ‘speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement, and not words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn,’” a quote from the encyclical.

“In order to give hope to others, it is sometimes enough simply to be kind, to be ‘willing to set everything else aside in order to show interest, to give the gift of a smile, to speak a word of encouragement, to listen amid general indifference,’” he said, again quoting the document.

The Lenten practices of fasting, almsgiving and prayer were preached by Jesus and continue to help believers experience and express conversion, the pope wrote.

“The path of poverty and self-denial” through fasting, “concern and loving care for the poor” through almsgiving and “childlike dialogue with the Father” through prayer, he said, “make it possible for us to live lives of sincere faith, living hope and effective charity.”

Pope Francis emphasised the importance of fasting “as a form of self-denial” to rediscover one’s total dependence on God and to open one’s heart to the poor.

“Fasting involves being freed from all that weighs us down – like con-

sumerism or an excess of information, whether true or false – in order to open the doors of our hearts to the one who comes to us, poor in all things, yet full of grace and truth: the son of God our saviour.”

Cardinal Peter Turkson, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, presenting the message at a news conference, also insisted on the importance of “fasting and all forms of abstinence,” for example, by giving up “time watching TV so we can go to church, pray or say a rosary. It is only through self-denial that we discipline ourselves to be able to take the gaze off ourselves and to recognise the other, reckon with his needs and thus create access to benefits and goods for people,” ensuring respect for their dignity and rights.

Mgr Bruno-Marie Duffe, secretary of the dicastery, said that at a time of “anxiety, doubt and sometimes even despair” because of the Covid-19 pandemic, Lent is a time for Christians “to walk the way with Christ towards a new life and a new world, towards a new trust in God and in the future.”

**A priest hears a confession in St Peter’s Square at the Vatican in this April 2014 file photo. In his message for Lent, Pope Francis said the season is “a time for renewing faith, hope and love.”**

(Catholic News Service photo/Paul Haring)



## Vatican Radio celebrates its ninetieth anniversary

For 90 years, Vatican Radio has carried the voice of the pope to far-flung corners of the world, translated into dozens of languages

Celebrating its 90th anniversary, Vatican Radio received well-wishes from Pope Francis and an avid listener who is the second oldest person in the world.

Sister Andre, a French member of the Daughters of Charity who made headlines

recently for testing positive for Covid-19 but weathered it with no symptoms, told the radio in a brief interview: “Happy birthday, Vatican Radio! 90 years-old, that’s young!”

The second oldest after a Japanese woman who turned 118 in January, Sr Andre turned 117 on the 11th February – the eve of the anniversary of Vatican Radio’s birth on 12th February, 1931.

The French nun, who has lived through the Spanish flu pandemic, two world wars and 10 pontificates, is blind and lives in a

residential home where she is a “dedicated listener of the radio that offers her a window of the world” and supports her prayer life, *Vatican News* reported.

Pope Francis also sent his greetings to the radio, thanking its staff, who come from 69 different countries, for the work they do and “the love you put into it.”

He said the “beautiful” thing about radio was its ability to reach the most distant and remote places.

He encouraged staff to “forge ahead with courage and

creativity in speaking to the world” in ways that help people “see the truth of things.”

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, presided over Mass in St Peter’s Basilica with employees from the radio and the Vatican Dicastery for Communication of which the radio became a part in 2017 along with the Vatican’s other media outlets.

*Vatican News* currently offers radio programmes in 41 languages and starting last Friday launched “Web Radio” in English, Italian, French,

Spanish, Portuguese, German and Armenian at [vaticannews.va/en/epg.html](http://vaticannews.va/en/epg.html). About 30 live programme schedules will be created throughout the year.

Vatican Radio was established when Pope Pius XI invited the inventor of radio, Guglielmo Marconi, to build a radio broadcasting station on the grounds of the newly established Vatican City State. The pope’s inaugural message – in Latin – was heard simultaneously in London, Paris, New York, Quebec, Sydney and Melbourne.

## In brief

**VATICAN CITY:** The Council of European Bishops' Conferences announced the launch of a prayer network during Lent to pray for the victims of Covid-19 and for the families of those who died of the coronavirus.

The council, known by the acronym CCEE, announced that throughout the Lenten season, bishops across Europe will celebrate a Mass and create a "eucharistic chain, for the more than 770,000 people in Europe who have died from Covid-19. Each European bishops' conference has engaged in the organisation of at least one Mass," said Italian Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, CCEE president.

**VATICAN CITY:** Marking the sixth anniversary of the beheading of 21 Christians on a beach in Libya, Pope Francis said they gave witness to Christ through their martyrdom.

In a video message released on 15th February for an online event commemorating the "Day of Contemporary Martyrs," the pope said that while their brutal murder was a tragedy, it was also true that "from their simplicity, from their simple but consistent faith, they received the greatest gift a Christian can receive: bearing witness to Jesus Christ to the point of giving their life. They had gone to work abroad to support their families: ordinary men, fathers of families, men with the desire to have children; men with the dignity of workers, who not only seek to bring home bread, but to bring it home with the dignity of work."

The martyred Christians – 20 Egyptian Copts and one Christian migrant from Ghana – were beheaded in 2015 on a Libyan beach by the Islamic State group, which later released a gruesome video that sparked worldwide outrage.

**VATICAN CITY:** Pope Francis approved a number of changes to Vatican City State's penal code and criminal justice proceedings, including the possibilities of reduced sentences, rehabilitation programmes and community service sentencing, as well as no longer allowing trials *in absentia* (while absent).

The changes, were made because the field of criminal justice requires "constant attention" so that norms and procedures can keep up with changing needs, particularly when old solutions are now "outdated," the papal document said.

One allows for a sentence reduction of 45 to 120 days for each year already served by the convicted person when he or she "has behaved in such a way as to presume repentance and has successfully taken part in a treatment and rehabilitation programme."

# Salvadoran bishops urge peace and democracy, not violence, before elections

**Rhina Guidos**

El Salvador's bishops called on citizens to show the best Salvadoran society is known for – faith, hard work and solidarity – not the rancor and violence on display during the last days of one of the most contentious political campaign periods in the country's recent history.

"We are people who have earned the respect of those who admire us for the virtues that enhance us, such as the sense of family, love of work, strength in the face of adversity, great capacity for solidarity and our deep faith in God," said Bishop Constantino Barrera Morales of Sonsonate, reading part of a statement the Salvadoran bishops' conference published on 9th February, less than three weeks before the country's legislative elections on 28th February.

"But the Salvadoran family is currently going through a deep crisis, aggravated by the pandemic and the hostile climate that reigns in El Salvador. It seems that we have been losing our identity and we have allowed ourselves to be contaminated by the anti-values that are destroying the best in us as people and as a national community," Bishop Barrera continued.

Anyone picking up a newspaper, turning on the radio or turning to social media is exposed to the message of intolerance transmitted, carrying out what some political leaders want voters

to consume, the bishops' message said.

Nowhere is that more on display than in television commercials and social media where allegations of bribery, corruption, scenes of violence and all forms of accusations make up a good part of the daily media diet Salvadorans are consuming before they cast ballots. Some say the consumption of those angry messages is what led to the killings of two Salvadorans in late January; they were shot while riding in a truck decorated with colours and insignia following a rally by one of the country's two major political parties.

"As pastors of (these) noble people, we regret that this campaign takes place in a climate contaminated by lack of dialogue, lack of respect for the adversary, intolerance and contempt," said Bishop Oswaldo Escobar Aguilar of Chalatenango. "We have the right to live in peace. The current situation contradicts this project of God."

The bishops encouraged Salvadorans to get to know the faces and proposals of the different candidates on the ballots to make an informed decision.

"Behind those faces, there are people with virtues and defects, with greater or less interest in the search for the common good of the Salvadoran community, especially the poorest and most excluded," said Bishop Miguel Moran Aquino of Santa Ana. "It's important to get to know that principles and

values that guide their lives as people and as politicians."

The message, titled: "We are Brothers and Sisters," made reference to Pope Francis' encyclical by a similar title in Italian, *Fratelli Tutti*, which was widely referenced in the message.

Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez said that for El Salvador to move forward, it needed to take a sincere look at its past, marked by poverty, marginalisation, injustice and disregard for human rights, as well as by the different forms of violence that tore apart the country's social fabric "until reaching the madness of a fratricidal war."

Cardinal Rosa Chávez referenced the country's 1992 Peace Accords, which ended the civil conflict that made possible El Salvador's nascent democracy, one that many fear has been fractured by the recent political violence.

"We invite you all to unite in prayer, invoking the grace of God

for our country, that God grant our people to choose (political leaders) in an environment of harmony and peace, the appropriate people, those who can best legislate in favour of all Salvadorans and in defence of their rights," he said. "We invoke a special blessing from God for all Salvadorans, through the intercession of the (Mary) Queen of Peace and St Oscar Romero."

During a news conference on 7th February, San Salvador Archbishop Jose Luis Escobar Alas called for an end to the bloodshed and to the discord, appealing to the leaders of political parties to guide their members and followers towards peace and to teach them to see others as political adversaries, not as enemies.

He said the Catholic Church in the country has been asking politicians for a long time to "lower the volume of the verbal aggression," expressing worries



Bishop William Iraheta Rivera of Santiago de Maria, El Salvador, is pictured in a screenshot speaking alongside other Salvadoran bishops during a conference on 9th February, about the forthcoming legislative elections.



A woman participates in a protest against Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele at the National Congress in San Salvador on 9th February. The message on the helmet reads: "No to violence." (Photo: Jose Cabezas, Reuters)

about the violence that has been unleashed against civilians just for expressing their political preference.

"I remember I said that aggressive words could lead to violence, physical and material, and it looks as if that has happened," he said. "It's evident that it's happened ... and it's reprehensible."

# Solidarity, not competition, must rule the vaccine rollout

The only ethical and practical response to the coronavirus pandemic is solidarity, not competition – including when it comes to the vaccines, said a priest working on the Vatican Covid-19 Commission. **Cindy Wooden** reports

The need to develop and widely distribute vaccines for the coronavirus is the perfect example of how prioritising solidarity serves the common good, a lesson Catholic social teaching has been promoting for decades, said Father Augusto Zampini, adjunct secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and a member of the commission's directorate.

Getting the vaccine "is not a competition, because if I arrive first and the other doesn't arrive, it doesn't work," Fr Augusto said, noting that most scientists agree that to protect everyone, at least 70 per cent of the population would need to be vaccinated or to have had Covid-19 and recovered.

The global spread of the pandemic has shown the need for global vaccination, he said. It is not enough that a few wealthier countries vaccinate 70 per cent of their populations because the virus does not stop at the borders.

"If one person is not safe, nobody is safe," Fr Augusto said.

Even if the vaccines are expensive, he added, they are the most cost-effective way to end the pandemic and the billions of pounds it is costing the world in health care, job losses, production slowdowns and other economic consequences.

The Vatican, he said, is calling for universal access to the vaccines with a special emphasis on vaccinating the poor, the elderly, migrants and other vulnerable populations often left out of public health care programmes "because this is a case where, if we don't vaccinate everybody, it won't work."

The pope, the Vatican Covid-19 Commission, the Vatican Secretariat of State and its representatives, Caritas Internationalis and the Pontifical Academy for Life also have been calling for an easing of patent protections so that internationally approved Covid-19 vaccines can be made less expensively in multiple facilities around the world and delivered quickly to nearby

populations.

Patents are necessary to motivate and reward research, innovation, creativity and investment, Fr Augusto said, "but now what we need is an urgent innovation for the common good."

And, he said, if most of the money invested in the vaccine development "is public money," which it was, then the vaccine should be considered "a public good" and not simply a product to be sold.

The world has experienced pandemics before, "but never one like this that affected so much every single country in the world and every single person on the planet," he said. Property rights must be protected, but the



Father Augusto Zampini, adjunct secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, speaks during a Zoom interview with *Catholic News Service* in Rome earlier this month. He explained how the Vatican's Covid-19 Commission is working to promote equitable access to the vaccine.

international community has other goods to protect as well – the life and health of its people, first of all.

But the Vatican Covid-19 Commission's goal is not simply "vaccination for all," he said. "The aim is a healthier planet where we can have healthy people and healthy institutions."

The pandemic "is a very serious crisis related to public health,

geopolitics, economics, jobs, climate change," education and more, Fr Augusto said.

The commission, which is in constant dialogue with health care experts, dioceses and religious orders around the world, also is trying to help by developing educational material explaining the coronavirus and the vaccines, including the Catholic Church's

judgement regarding the morality of their production, he said.

With the local communities' trust and their vast local networks, Fr Augusto said, Catholic and other religious leaders and organisations have a big role to play assuaging fears and convincing people that getting vaccinated is good for them and for their neighbours.



Vials with a sticker reading, "COVID-19/ Coronavirus Vaccine/Injection only" and a medical syringe are seen in front of a displayed Pfizer logo. (CNS photo/Dado Ruvic, Reuters)

# There is both joy and freedom in forgiveness says genocide survivor

Jean Gonzalez

Immaculee Ilibagiza found freedom in forgiveness after seeing her family wiped out by genocide in Rwanda, and she shared her extraordinary journey towards that forgiveness in an evening keynote on 5th February during the SEEK21 conference.

She was one of two keynote speakers who addressed the theme of forgiveness; the other was Edward Sri, a theologian, author and a founding leader of the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, which sponsored the annual four day conference, which was held online this year and drew over 26,000 participants from across the globe.

Holding her father's rosary in her left hand, Ilibagiza shared her story of suffering and how she discovered forgiveness of her sins could set her free and forgiving the crimes of others also could lift pain from her heart.

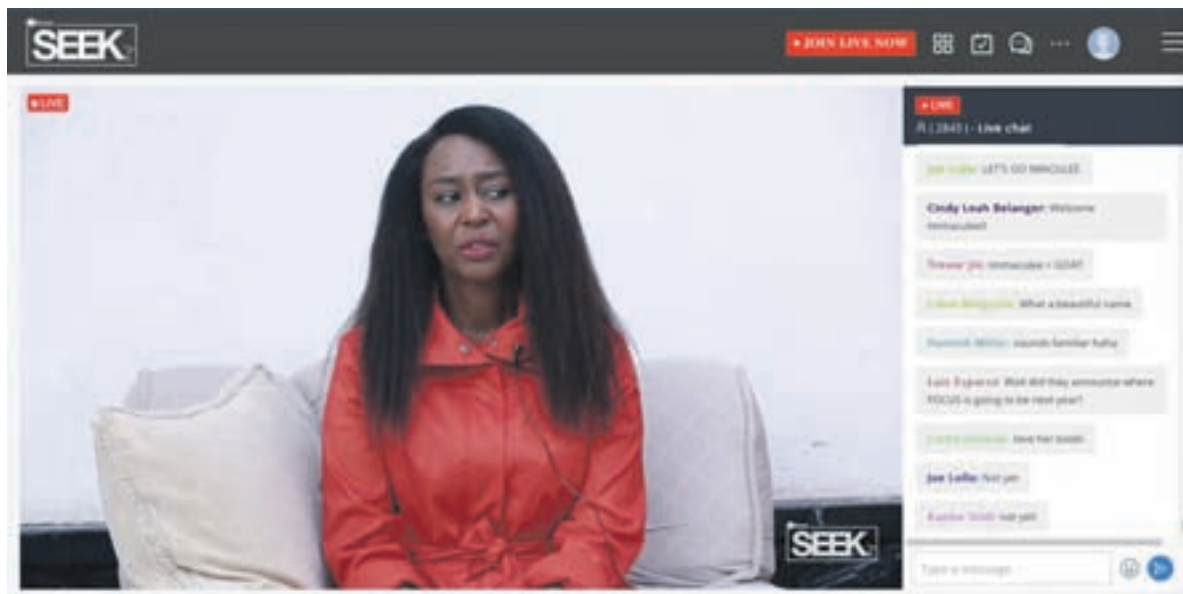
Today, Ilibagiza is an international speaker who previously worked for the United Nations. But in 1994, she was a student who lived in a small village in Rwanda.

On 6th April, 1994, dictator and president of Rwanda Juvenal Habyarimana was assassinated, which put militant Hutus in charge of the government. In the 100 days that followed, 500,000-800,000 Rwandans – Tutsis and some moderate Hutus – were slaughtered by their countrymen and, in some cases, their next-door-neighbours.

"We knew it was coming. Hatred had spread among the two tribes on the radio. That radio was hired by the government to spread hatred among people," said Ilibagiza, a member of the Tutsi tribe who was raised Catholic. Most members of her family were brutally murdered.

The entire village feared the days ahead and many arrived at Ilibagiza's home, where her parents were highly respected and loved. The government had already forced a shutdown and borders had been closed. People were being killed family by family, including 18 families in a two-hour period of time.

"By the second day, we had 10,000 people around our house," Ilibagiza explained and while the people might have gathered for words of hope, her father spoke realistically about impending death. "He said they should use the time to ask for forgiveness. He said: 'Let's repent and ask forgiveness so we can go to heaven.' People were listening and praying."



(left) Immaculee Ilibagiza, who survived the 1994 Rwanda genocide, speaks on 5th February, from Rwanda to over 26,000 participants globally gathered for the SEEK21 conference sponsored by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students. Ilibagiza spoke about her journey of forgiveness while in hiding from Hutu militants. (Screenshot/ courtesy The Florida Catholic)

(below) A young Rwandan stares at bodies in a mass grave on 20th July, 1994. Rwandans this year will mark 27 years since a genocide that killed hundreds of thousands of people. (Catholic News Service photo/Corinne Dufka, Reuters)

Before bloodshed arrived at her village, Ilibagiza's father gave her his rosary and told her to seek shelter at a neighbour's house. He was a Hutu and was willing to shelter her and seven other women. They were kept in a bathroom that was three feet by four feet. The women literally sat on one another and were told not to make a noise. They stayed there for 91 days.

Silence and starved, by the end of the first week Ilibagiza asked the Hutu man if he could put on the radio briefly so they could hear what was happening in her country.

"I couldn't believe it. The leaders in the country was asking to kill anyone of my tribe," she said, adding she recognised one of the voices of the officials calling for the genocide.

"He was a man who earned a Ph.D. in France. And he was saying: 'Don't forget the children. A snake is a snake. We must cleanse the country,'" she said. "That was a big lesson for me. ... It was a moment that I realised you can educate your mind, but if you don't have love in heart, it is meaningless. It is the first time I truly understood that faith means so much more than what we learn in school."

In those 91 days of silence, Ilibagiza examined her own faith and relationship with God. She described her fear and anxiety as "a thousand needles through her body" and a voice in her head told her to open the door of the

bathroom and end the suffering.

But another voice told her: "Remember, ask God to help you. God is almighty. He can do anything." She mentally battled with that voice and said how could God be there in the middle of a genocide? That is when she challenged herself: Did she really believe in God? Was her faith truly strong?

She believes God spoke to her and told her: "I created you because I love you. I gave you guidance; I gave you the commandments." Ilibagiza read Scripture, but when she stumbled upon "Love your enemies," she had to close the page.

"I realised that I was in trouble. I might not go to that nice place of heaven because I did not forgive. How can you when everyone who looks like you is killed?"

She didn't like the idea of forgiveness, but because she knew her faith was in trouble, she started praying the rosary dozens of times a day. It brought her peace, even as she would be consumed with anger.

"Fear was killing me as much as anger. And impatience," she recalled. "I ended up saying the rosary all day. ... But when I came to the part of the *Our Father* to forgive those who trespass against us, my voice would say: 'You don't mean it. You are lying to God. You know you are not saying the truth. You risk losing him.'"

So she would skip that part of the prayer, until she realised she didn't have to skip it.

"For the first time in my life, I learned how to surrender. You don't have to figure out everything," she said. "God said, 'Give it to me,' so I gave it to God, realising I still didn't know how to forgive."

"He was handing me a formula. (Those performing the genocide) don't get it. They don't understand the consequences. They don't get the pain they are causing you. ... And you being like them doesn't change anything," Ilibagiza said. "The world was divided two parts – love and hate. My plan was one of revenge, but the side of love offers peace. They forgive. They defend the truth and love. They defend peace. These are people I wanted to be with. ... I knew I would spend my life praying for people on side of hate. Pray for them so that the grace of God would touch their heart. So, they too could change."

But reality still tested her resolve and faith. When she exited the bathroom after three months, she weighed just under five stone and discovered that among the thousands of dead was her family. "I put my rosary down and



On 6th April, 1994, dictator and president of Rwanda Juvenal Habyarimana was assassinated, which put militant Hutus in charge of the government. In the 100 days that followed, 500,000-800,000 Rwandans – Tutsis and some moderate Hutus – were slaughtered by their countrymen and, in some cases, their next-door-neighbours.

cried. Then it was as if I felt a giant hand of God. His voice said: 'Hey the journey of loved ones are done, but your journey is not over yet.'

Her choice was love or hate. She heard God tell her: "If you choose love or kindness, I will be with you. Whatever you need, I will give it to you."

"For (the) first time, I felt the breeze on my face, and the warmth of sun. All those things I took for granted, but had never been thankful for. I felt free to talk," she recalled.

While in a refugee camp, she turned to care for others. Even though she looked like a skeleton, she showed mercy, love and forgiveness.

"Take every moment as a gift. To this day, I take it as a gift. A day for new prayers, new intentions," she said. "I have to be that loving person every day. I fall many times, and every time I do, I go to confession or get on my knees, confess and start again. ... Hold on to God, no matter what is coming. Focus on prayer. Read the Bible and go to Mass. If I can forgive, anyone can forgive. I know the pain and damage of unforgiveness. There is so much joy. So much freedom in forgiveness."



Chris McDonnell



JOURNEY IN FAITH

# It's about our future

what  
did you  
learn  
in school  
today?



There have been many casualties brought about by Covid, lives lost, families broken, businesses closed. Society has been brutally and hastily re-arranged with the impact of lockdown restrictions as the edges have been tested. In the midst of it all are our children, young people caught up in the maelstrom of a pandemic that has without warning swept through their lives, creating havoc.

For adults, hard though it is, there is the chance to rationalise what has happened and maybe now, with the advent of vaccines, we begin to see some distant light at last, but for our children it is a different problem. Their world has been turned upside down and the broken pieces lie scattered on the ground around their feet.

The closure of schools has deprived children in so many ways, with the disruption of their 'normal', week after week creating a tension that challenges them. They wander round like a lost tribe in the desert.

Without doubt, many schools have been magnificent in their response to exceptional circumstances and teachers, together with all the other people who staff our schools deserve a sincere thank you for their hard work. We should always remember that the closure of schools has not been complete for there are those children of essential workers who have been attending school throughout this time. Their needs in

the classroom have had to be managed alongside the remote learning offered to the majority of pupils who have been kept at home.

Instead of the morning school run, breakfast has been followed by the log on to the laptop for remote lessons, often in the isolation of a bedroom. Tedious enough for an adult working from home, screen watching hour after hour, but what is the consequence for a young person, what short term and long term effects is this having on their lives? There are of course those who do not have good access to the necessary technology who are therefore hampered even further.

Recently I was sent the words of a song, written by a local man, Geoff Brookes, that in simple imagery makes the point. Geoff is a retired railway signalman. Now in his 70s, he has learnt to play the guitar in his retirement. It is entitled, *See it through for the children*. Here is the link to a YouTube recording of the song – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjFiiupgZqg> ...or just type in the title and the name of the singer in your YouTube search. His singing and playing are set to photographs, taken by his wife Christine, The lyrics follow.

*It's an awful time  
That we're living through  
In a different world  
To the one we knew  
What we miss so much  
Is just a kiss or touch*

*Because the human race  
Was never meant to space  
So will it ever end?  
One day it will, my friend.*

**Chorus**  
*One day we'll love again  
One day we'll hug again  
We'll all go out to play  
And throw our masks away  
And when this Covid ends  
We'll meet with all our friends  
We must see it through  
For the children.*

*Everything has changed  
Our lives are rearranged  
We must make a vow  
Support each other now  
And in the end you'll see  
We'll claim a victory  
For you for me  
For every family.*

In a poignant yet concise way it highlights the real dilemma that children and those who care for them have faced. The mention of friendship is important for schools are much more than 'learning factories', where the transmission of facts alone counts as the measure of success. There is a crucial social context, the building of relationships and friendships that form long-lasting bonds between children that is vitally important. It is the place where we learn to be, one with another.

The buzz of classroom activity, the casual interchange between friends is missing. It is replaced by the coldness of isolation brought

about by the loneliness of screen watching. There is only so much they can take.

When usual routine goes out of the window to be substituted by an unfamiliar pattern, there are consequences. The short years of childhood cannot be repeated, much is lost and the seeds of future difficulty sown. We have no idea of the long term problems that months of de-schooling might bring for this generation of children. We must be sensitive to their needs as they struggle to come to terms with a new and immediate reality.

The natural environment for children is one of balanced company, one with another under the watchful eye of caring adults. Parents and grandparents have shown great dedication in their supervision of home learning, coping not only with the practical lesson detail but also with the emotional stress that results from the day to day sameness of home schooling. Maybe they have also realised that 'I don't know' is an honest answer.

The sooner our schools re-open for all children, the better. The age-related needs do of course vary. For very young children, the new normality of school life has been a poor introduction to the real thing. For some the excitement of transfer from the Primary phase to Secondary education has been lost and cannot be made up. The Year 6 experience at the end of the

primary years has been confused and disjointed. The damage done cannot be restored.

For those pupils expecting to take public examinations at GCSE and A-level this summer, it has been a time of frustration and confusion. Certainties have vanished on the wind as their programme of learning has moved first one way and then another. Their path to further education has for many become a matter of confusion, doubt and uncertainty.

There will be a price to pay for what has happened, a cost that is being played out now in homes across our country as well as the longer term cost that will only become apparent over a much longer timescale.

It is not only the academic aspect of school that has taken a hit. What are the consequences of the disruption to school sports activities? So much energy that would have been burnt off through healthy exercise is fuelling behavioural change within the home, leading to frustrated outbursts within families. These should not be occasions for blame or accusation, rather for an understanding of cause and effect. Tolerance can be hard to find in the cramped surroundings of a family home when pressures become too great.

We now told to anticipate the planned re-opening of schools on 8th March, whether or not it is a phased or a full return, we don't yet know.

What we can do without is the yo-yo effect of opening and then closing again. That would be the worst of both worlds. When it does happen, we all have a responsibility of care and understanding of both pupils and staff returning to pick up the pieces.

Maybe through the passage of recent months, we might have learnt that school is a broad and precious experience that benefits the whole of society and not just the young people sitting at a classroom desk. My thanks to Geoff Brookes for permission to reproduce the lyrics of his song.

A picture of a mother and son studying together as they follow an online lesson on a laptop. (Photo: iStock)



Fr Michael Collins



# Two fascinating artefacts that highlight our faith

Lent is on the doorstep. The Church calendar rotates on its liturgical axle and here we are once more about to enter the purple season of preparation for the Paschal celebration.

How did the year fly by so quickly? We may be forgiven for not noticing as we have had a pandemic on our minds, absorbing us entirely and sapping our energy. There has not been a year of such universal suffering in our lifetimes.

Many of us have found comfort in our faith, and the words of the Bible come to our aid. Almost a year ago, Pope Francis called the entire world to pray together, choosing as his text the passage from the Gospel which recounts how the disciples were caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee.

As the terrified men struggled to keep the vessel upright, they called on Jesus, who had fallen asleep in the stern, to rouse himself and come to their help. In response to

their entreaties, Jesus commanded the winds to subdue and the waves to subside.

Words from the Bible have provided comfort and solace from the beginning of our faith. Plague, pestilence and famine may seem rather medieval words, but they are still very much part of our vocabulary. Indeed, there is little else to talk about during the present pandemic.

In the medieval period, artists in the Netherlands began to produce exquisitely carved devotional objects. Delicately made from boxwood, these ranged from statues to crucifixes, rosaries to bas-reliefs.

One such undated masterpiece is found in New York's Metropolitan Museum. The curiously shaped item is a small gilt silver sphere which opens at the centre to reveal two carved surfaces.

The lower carving features a number of guests, three men and

two women, eating at a table. Their pleasure is suddenly interrupted by the appearance of a skeleton above their heads. The grim figure appears to hold a jug from which it pours out four skulls.

The startled diners look up in terror at the apparition. A jug is knocked on its side and the male figure on the right pulls his sword from its scabbard. The female figure on the left turns away from the spectre.

All five figures seated at the table have their eyes closed, whether from fright or surprise is impossible to say. Around the metal rim runs a Latin inscription adapted from Chapter 24 of St Matthew's Gospel. *Vigilate ergo quia nescitis qua hora (m) d(om) (inu)s – Keep watch for you do not know at what hour the Lord (will come)."*

The meaning is clear. The diners had probably sat down a short time earlier to enjoy their meal. How could they have guessed that Death would abruptly appear to demand their souls. Jesus often admonished people to be attentive and ready for the moment of their death which, he forecast, would overtake them like a thief in the night.

The upper part of the hemisphere contains a carving of the Last Judgement. Jesus appears flanked by two angels, one on the right bearing the column on which he was flogged the night before his crucifixion and, on the left, the cross on which he died.

Four other angels sound their trumpets to summon the dead. Ironically, over the four centuries since the carving was made, parts of the trumpets have broken off.

Yet the dead in the scene hear the shrill sound and rise from their tombs to confront Jesus the Judge. The semi-naked Jesus is seated on one of two arches. His feet balance on the lower arch while with his left hand, he grasps the upper bar.

Seven figures kneel before Jesus, imploring his benign judgement. Their hands joined in prayer, the figures await the sentence, their eyes closed expectantly in dread or hope. Below them, more figures struggle to escape from their graves.

Lest the holder of the object fail to understand the meaning of the scene, a quotation runs around the outer rim of the metal container. It is a quotation from Chapter 14 of St Paul's Letter to the Romans. *Omnes stabimus ante tribunal Christi – we shall all stand before*



(above) Prayer Bead with the Adoration of the Magi and the Crucifixion – early 16th century.

(left) Rosary bead – ca. 1525–50.

the tribunal of Christ.

The Metropolitan Museum holds another, even more elaborate rosary bead. The bead is called a *Pater Noster*, as this was the first of the decade on which was recited *The Lord's Prayer*.

As the prayer began, the bead was opened to provide a visual aid to contemplation. The bead is entirely carved from boxwood, without a metal case.

The workmanship is superior to the first bead which we have seen, the depth of its carving and the sheer number of figures far outnumbering those of the Last Judgement.

The bead is read from top to bottom. Two wings open on the upper case. At the centre, the artist depicts the nativity of Jesus. The focus of the story is the journey of the Magi, the wise men who came bearing gifts for the newborn infant. The Magi and their attendants are shown several times in the procession to Bethlehem. The star which the Gospel story asserts that they followed is curiously missing – it may have fallen off sometime over the past few centuries.

The carved interleaf, in two parts, opens to the left, depicting the nativity of Jesus, while to the right Mary and Joseph present the infant for the ceremony of circumcision in the temple at

Jerusalem. A kneeling figure holds a cage with two turtle doves offered by the parents to accompany the ritual.

The lower part of the bead is breathtaking. The artist depicts the crucifixion of Jesus, flanked by two thieves. In the background, one can make out the city of Jerusalem. To the left, Peter draws his sword to strike off the ear of the High Priest's servant Malchus, who had accompanied the soldiers to arrest Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane. To the right, Judas hangs from a tree, having repented of betraying Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

The foreground is taken up with the mounted Jewish officials and Roman soldiers. One figure holds a small flask which was filled with hyssop. The gospel story recounts how the drink was offered on a sponge tied to a stick. The upper part of the stick is missing.

In the lower left corner Mary faints and is comforted by an angel and possibly Mary, the wife of Cleopas. Below them, Adam slumbers. According to a pious myth, the first human was buried at Calvary.

It is thanks to the work of these largely unknown artists that our faith has been passed on to us, a welcome source of trust in our present difficulties.



## Questions and answers... with Fr Francis Doyle

# Inspired by the visions of Anne Catherine Emmerich

**Q. Recently, I listened to Mel Gibson being interviewed about the making of his 2004 film, *The Passion of the Christ*. He referred to the visions of a certain Anne Catherine Emmerich. That prompted me to read more about those visions, which I found to be inspiring and, frankly, life-changing. What is the Catholic Church's stance on Emmerich? Is she a candidate for sainthood?**

**A.** Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, a Catholic nun, was a member of the Augustinian order who lived in Germany and died in 1824 at the age of 49. She was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2004 after a miracle was documented through her intercession. She was a mystic, a person drawn to deep prayer from an early age, and regularly experienced visions in which she felt herself talking directly with Jesus.

She was also a stigmatic who bore on her body the wounds of the crucified Christ. Sr Anne Catherine suffered from a debilitating illness, spending much of her adult life bedridden and in persistent pain, and she offered her suffering in union with that borne by Jesus. Those who were sick regularly asked for her prayers.

Mel Gibson has said that he based much of his 2004 film, *The Passion of the Christ*, on the visions of Sr Anne Catherine as reported by the poet Clemens Brentano in a book called *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to the Meditations of Anne Catherine Emmerich*.

Brentano wrote the book after extensive interviews with Sr Anne Catherine. The controversy regarding Sr Anne Catherine, in large part, surrounds the writings of Brentano, which are considered by most experts to be unreliable, filled with pious fabrications and poetic elaborations. There is also, in Brentano's work, a strong anti-Semitic strain; he portrays Jews not only as obsessed with torturing Christ but also with killing Christian children and using their blood in demonic rituals.

When Sr Anne Catherine was beatified in 2004, it was made clear by the Vatican that the Church's judgement was based on her personal life and sanctity, and not at all on Brentano's writings, which the Vatican announced that it was setting aside due to their questionable authenticity.

**Q. In a book about the Shroud of Turin, I read that when Jesus was crucified, the nails were driven through his wrists. The photos of the shroud seem to confirm this. But if that were so, then why did saints such as St Francis and Padre Pio have stigmata wounds on the palms of their hands rather than their wrists?**

**A.** In the 1930s, a French physician named Pierre Barbet conducted a number of medical experiments regarding the crucifixion of Christ. One of his observations was that nails driven through the palms of Jesus would not have supported the weight of his body on the cross. Barbet theorised that, instead, the nails were driven into a hollow spot (biologists call it 'Destot's space') among the bones in the heel of the hand at the top of the wrist.

Some commentators challenged that conclusion. They pointed out that Roman execution techniques also included tying the wrists to the crossbar by ropes and that the nails through the palms were meant not to support the weight but simply to increase the pain.

In the 1990s, research by Dr Frederick Zugibe of Columbia University came to a different conclusion. He theorised that the nails could have been driven into the palms at an angle, exiting at the wrists. This, he said, would have supported the body's weight and would be consistent with the location where most of the stigmatics had displayed their wounds and with how artists had depicted the Crucifixion throughout the centuries.

The Shroud of Turin, considered by many to be the actual burial shroud of Christ, shows a blood print in the location of the bones of the wrist. But it should be noted that the imprint on the shroud is from the back of the hand and could depict only the exit area of the nail and not its entrance.

Most of the stigmatics throughout history, though not all, have shown the wounds of Jesus on their hands. Padre Pio, for example, had large sores in the centre of his palms. However, St Francis of Assisi, the earliest stigmatic whom Christian history records, was described by his first biographer, Thomas of Celano, as having his wrists and feet pierced by nails.

Obviously then, the precise position of the nails in Christ's body is not a matter of faith, and theories vary. As to why most of

the stigmatics have received the wounds on their palms, some have observed that since centuries of history had displayed the nail marks in that location, stigmatics would have most clearly understood that they were being asked to bear the wounds of Jesus.

**Q. Because of chronic pain, I have trouble getting the good restorative sleep that everyone needs. And due to the fact that I cannot tolerate medications, the only possible relief that I have from pain is sleep. Is there some saint to whom I could pray to help me?**

**A.** There are many saints who experienced considerable physical suffering in their lives. One of them is Gemma Galgani, an Italian mystic who died in 1903 at the age of 25 and was canonised in 1940.

She was one of eight children whose father was a prominent pharmacist in the Tuscan city of Lucca. Orphaned at 18, Gemma took over the responsibility for raising her younger siblings. At 20, she developed spinal meningitis, which required her to wear a heavy iron back brace and eventually confined her to bed. At 21, she began to display signs of the stigmata, the wounds of Christ.

Several months before her death, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis, which brought constant pain during her final days. Through it all, she maintained her prayerfulness and her trust in the Lord. She is widely venerated in Italy and Latin America, especially by those who are ill and suffering greatly.

**Q. Would you please clarify the Church's position regarding a marriage annulment's effect on children? I have some friends who are in a second marriage. They would love to have their first marriages annulled and their present marriage blessed so that they can receive Holy Communion at Mass. But they have refrained from doing so because the children of their first marriages say that an annulment would render these children illegitimate or 'nonexistent'. It is a tender situation, and I believe that your reply would bring comfort and enlightenment.**

**A.** Although believed by a surprising number of people, it is a myth that a Church annulment renders the children of that marriage illegitimate. It does not. Legitimacy is a legal term. It



Anne Catherine Emmerich experienced visions on the life and passion of Jesus Christ, reputed to be revealed to her by the Blessed Virgin Mary under religious ecstasy.

means that the father of a child is known and that the parents were legally married to each other at the time of the child's birth.

A Church annulment does nothing retroactively to change that. Canon 1137 of the Church's *Code of Canon Law* speaks directly to this: 'The children conceived or born of a valid or putative marriage are legitimate'. ('Putative' means that the marriage was considered valid by both parties at the time they were wed.)

A Church annulment has no effect in civil law – neither on legitimacy nor on other arrangements such as custody or child support. Nor does it alter the responsibility of parents towards their children. In fact, during the annulment proceedings, the Church reminds petitioners of their continuing moral obligation to provide for the proper upbringing of their children.

A Church annulment simply means that certain circumstances at the time of the marriage prevented it from being a sacramental marriage forever binding.

**Q. Is there anything wrong with a woman writing a reflection on**

**the readings for the Mass each day on her own personal blog? I am the volunteer co-ordinator for Catholic ministry at a local women's prison and teach an RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) class for those inquiring into the faith.**

**I believe that I know the basics of our faith very well, and I am loyal to the magisterium of the Church. I know that only ordained clergy can give a homily in the context of a Mass, but does what I am doing violate any rules?**

**A.** I applaud what you are doing and encourage you to continue it. True, Canon 767 of the Church's *Code of Canon Law* says that 'among the forms of preaching, the homily, which is part of the liturgy itself and is reserved to a priest or deacon, is pre-eminent'.

But what you are doing is apart from the context of the Mass and is clearly not a homily. You are simply reflecting on the daily readings – and you have every right to do that; I would think that many might benefit from a feminine perspective.

■ Please note that Fr Doyle cannot answer readers' personal questions through this column.

David Torkington



## MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

# Prayer in a certain context and direction

Returning to eavesdrop once more on the conversation between the academic, James Robertson, and the hermit, Peter Calvey, let us listen to the next question that enables us to understand the contents and direction of all authentic Christian Prayer.

“You have convinced me of the importance of time when it comes to prayer. But now I would be most grateful if you could give me some idea of how to fill that time. Would you teach me how to pray, from the very beginning?”

## The Our Father

Peter replied saying that the first time that question was asked of Christ by his first followers, he answered by giving them the prayer that we call the *Our Father*. In the first two words of that prayer the word *Our* and the word *Father*, sum up the context and direction of all Christian prayer. The place where this prayer begins, or more precisely the person in whom that prayer begins and the person to whom that prayer is directed.

Take the word *Our*. This one word sums up the whole context of all prayer. The great mystery of Christian rebirth at baptism means that we are instantly lifted up out of ourselves and into the life and action of our Risen Lord in whom ‘we now live and move and have our very being’. And this love that surges out of him now, and always, is open to all as it never was before, because his infinite loving has its centre everywhere and its boundaries nowhere.

## In the eternal dimension

Before the Resurrection Jesus’ human body was subject to all the restrictions of space and time that bind the rest of us. He too could only be in one place at any given moment. Contact with him therefore was necessarily limited to where he happened to be, how long he was going to stay there, and how many other people wished to see him. But once he had been lifted out of the world of space and time, by the infinite love that now possessed him, he was freed from all those limiting laws and restrictions.

In the eternal dimension he could be present to countless numbers of people at any given moment, because he could be present to them, not just from the outside as before but from the inside, through love. This is the love he released like a supernatural tsunami on the first Pentecost Day, to penetrate and possess all who would freely choose to receive it. Now, since Christ can enter into everyone through love, then everyone can enter into each other in him. Just as the spokes of a wheel automatically come closer to one another as they draw nearer to the centre, so everyone

automatically comes closer to one another as they draw nearer to Christ.

## Within the mystical body

When we say the *Our Father*, then, we do not just mean that we pray with Christ, and in him, but also that we pray together with all who are alive in him, with the whole community of the living or dead because in him there is no death. We pray with Mary too, with Peter and Paul, Augustine, with Francis and Dominic, with Ignatius and Teresa. We pray with loved ones now dead who have been reborn in Christ. Prayer opens us to the world where space and time have no meaning. Our prayer can reach out and unite us with other Christians now languishing in the prisons of the world for the faith we can so easily take for granted. It can enable us to bring strength and comfort to an innocent victim of some vicious regime, who is about to be tortured at this moment.

You probably saw the Catholic doctor on the television who had been tortured in a Chilean jail. She was given the electric shock treatment and been subjected to all sorts of indignities. She stated quite simply that she received tremendous help from the prayers of friends back home. She likened their prayers to ‘waves of love’ that sustained her through some of the darkest moments of her ordeal. Coming from anyone else, such a phrase could all too easily have sounded like pious hyperbole.

On the same news programme I heard the story of a group of Christians suffering in Chinese indoctrination camps who had risked their lives to smuggle a tape recording out to their brethren in the West begging for their prayers. Suffering always makes people of deep faith more sensitive to the extraordinary power of prayer. You may be alone in your own room, or in a deserted

church, but when you begin to pray, you enter into the whole community of all who live and love in Christ. The Church made an enclosed Carmelite nun, St Thérèse of Lisieux, patroness of the Missions, to emphasise that the prayer of love transcends all boundaries, even the boundaries of space and time.

## Infinite loving, to eternity

All who allow themselves to be possessed by love will be swept up out of themselves, to be more deeply immersed into the life of the glorified man, Jesus Christ; into his mystical body, through whom they will meet each other on a level that they never imagined possible.

“Now,” said the hermit, “let me return to the word *Father*.” The first word, *Our* puts us in the right context; the second points us in the right direction.

The Gospels show how it is the Holy Spirit who progressively invades and fires the human person of Jesus Christ, until he is eventually set ablaze with the love that raised him up and into his Father’s infinite loving, to eternity. It is the flame of this self-same Holy Spirit who radiates between the Father and the Son that reaches out to us also, to fire us with the same love, that will enable all to be drawn into the sublime life and love that has been blazing in them, and between them, from eternity.

## Where we were first conceived

It is from within the vortex of this infinite mutual loving that God conceived the plan to share with others, *whom he would create for that purpose*, the ecstatic bliss of eternal and ongoing beatitude. That is why his love, not only created our world, but became flesh and blood in that world and was born there on the first Christmas Day, to tell mankind of their sublime destiny.

This destiny was not just to a place, but to a person, who wanted it to be known that he was not just Our Father, but in the word that Jesus himself used, our divine ever-loving dad, or to use the Aramaic word that he used, our *Abba*.

This word actually means Daddy, or at least the word Daddy is the closest that we can get to its original meaning. Christ’s use of this familiar and homely pet name was not only new, but it would also have been shocking to his fellow Jews. I don’t mean that God was never referred to as Father before. He was called Father 13 times in the Old Testament. But each time the word was employed it was used as another word for creator. In other words, God was a Father insofar as he was responsible for his own handicraft, in the sense that we would say, Michelangelo was the Father of his statue David because he carved it, or Herodotus was the Father of all History because he created the literary genre.

## Abba - Father

The traditional word for Father, then, was already loaded with a meaning that Jesus wished to supersede. The word *Abba* or Daddy, or its equivalent in any language, can mean only one thing. What is a daddy? Who is a daddy but one who communicates his life and his love to his children? This nuance is crucial for the new understanding that Jesus wished to convey about God. God is now no longer to be understood merely as our Father, the One who created us, but the One who chooses to share his own life and love with us.

This love cannot be imagined even in our wildest dreams because this love for which we are destined is beyond the conception of human minds. Even if we multiplied the love of the most loving Dad imaginable by infinity, it would not de-

scribe the quality of the love for which we are destined. So, Jesus not only came to tell us that we have such a dad, but to show us that by entering into his mystical body, we would be taken up, not just into the ecstatic bliss of experiencing our divine dad’s infinite loving, but into epestasy.

## The meaning of epestasy

St Gregory of Nyssa, a mystic and a poet created this word epestasy to express as closely as possible the inexpressible. For, when we come to experience the fatherly love of our infinite dad, we come to experience, not just ecstatic bliss, but ongoing ecstatic bliss (epextasy), that keeps on becoming ever more engrossing, as the love with which God fills us opens up our capacity to receive infinite loving in ever greater measure.

“I know what you are saying is all true, but my trouble is that so often the world of faith seems far away.” Said James sadly.

## Build a daily prayer life

“This is exactly why, said Peter that it is so imperative that from now onwards you seriously begin again to rebuild a daily prayer life.”

By faith we know that God is our Father, but it is only when that faith grows and ripens in prayer that we actually start to experience God’s love progressively entering into us. We can call God Father but what is in a word, unless that word expresses something vital and real, something that we know because we have felt it. It is not enough just to accept the bald and undeniable fact that God is a Father. If this truth is to change our lives, which it can, then it must be translated into an experience. This can only happen if we put aside the time daily and create the space in which to allow God to become a loving Father to us.

Until we come to realise that there is nothing more important than letting God enter our lives through prayer, then we can never be changed deeply, and will never be able to change others either. It is not enough just to know with our minds that God loves us. We need to experience that love if it is going to change us deeply and permanently for the better.



Jesus taught his disciples how to pray with the “Our Father...”

■ David Torkington’s new book *How to Pray*, was published by Our Sunday Visitor and released on 29th January. It is available at Amazon or Gracewings. He is also the author of *Wisdom from the Western Isles - The Making of a Mystic*, *Wisdom from The Christian Mystics - How to Pray the Christian Way and Wisdom from Franciscan Italy - The Primacy of Love*. See [www.davidtorkington.com](http://www.davidtorkington.com)

## PROFILE

# Dedicated to the field of genetics for over 50 years

Working into her 70s, Sheila Stiles Jewell credits her Catholic education with much of her success, which she has earned despite barriers due to her race and gender

**Karen Pulfer Focht**

As a child, Sheila Stiles Jewell played outside the public housing where her family lived in Memphis, Tennessee. She felt one with nature weaving clover and catching bumblebees, not realising that she was really feeding her curiosity for science and the natural world.

During the days of segregation, the Catholic Church recruited her family, living at Lemoyne Owen Gardens at the time, to receive a Catholic education. It was a noble act that she credits with much of her success today.

Working into her 70s, Jewell is a research geneticist at the US NOAA Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Milford, Connecticut. NOAA Fisheries is an office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"Science has made my faith stronger," she said. "The DNA structure is amazing. It is beautiful and is evidence of what God can do and has done. Look around you, it is just wonderful!"

Women from her generation are under-represented in the field of science.

Jewell would like to see more African American females enter the field of science. She speaks at schools and brings her sea creatures to show the students hoping to spark an interest within them.

"My faith has been an important part of how I persisted and persevered. I can't imagine how I could have done it without my faith," she said. Jewell still comes home often to be with family and together they attend Mass at St Augustine Church in South Memphis.

She remembers the times as a child in the segregated South, when she went to Mass at a white church, she had to stand in the back, sit in the balcony at the movies, and drink out of separate drinking fountains.

"We came from humble beginnings," she recalled. Her mother, a teacher, was her first role model. She instilled in Jewell that an education was the key to a successful life. "We couldn't always realise our dreams because of segregation, but that did not keep us from striving to be somebody," she said.

The people in the public housing where she lived always looked out for the children. "We were sheltered and protected, it was a



**Sheila Stiles Jewell, a geneticist marine biologist, is seen at her home in Memphis, Tennessee, USA.** (Catholic News Service photo/Karen Pulfer Focht)

village." They were always encouraged to go to church.

Jewell studied science at Father Bertrand High School, where she was valedictorian (*The student with the highest academic rank in a class who delivers the valedictory at graduation*). It was there that Sister Mary Kilian, a Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, encouraged her to go to college and major in biology.

She attended Xavier University in New Orleans, the only historically Black Catholic university in the US, and then accepted an internship in Milford. She was apprehensive about leaving all she knew.

That summer, her advisers convinced her to go on a 30-hour bus ride to pursue new opportunities. Because she was Black, she rode in the back of the bus and even though the North was not officially segregated like Memphis at the time, there was nowhere to stay. Housing was not open to Blacks in the 1960s. Her advisers found a family for her to stay with.

She was the first permanent African American female employee in Department of Interior in the Milford marine

biological laboratory, where she has had a 56-year career and is still working today.

"I had a passion for genetics. Early in my career, there were no role models in this male-dominated field," she said. She studies shellfish, such as oysters, clams, scallops and mussels, and working on restoring this population through genetics and breeding for better survival and growth.

Women's rights and civil rights have helped and brought a lot of improvement, though there are still some barriers today, she said.

She loves working with young people, "reaching out and reaching back," she said. "If you have a dream, follow it, do what it takes, don't be discouraged, don't give up."

Jewell was a trailblazer. Last autumn she was inducted into the Memphis Catholic High School Hall of Fame.

For so many years, she drew on her faith. "If it were not for my faith, I would not have been as successful as I have been. God has been beside me throughout this journey. I could not have made this journey alone. I am so thankful for my faith, my family and my friends."

Ellis Heasley

## PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

### Eritrea: Release of 70 Christian prisoners is welcome news

In late January and early February, the Eritrean authorities granted the release of 70 Christian prisoners from Mai Serwa and Adi Abeito prisons. The prisoners had been held without charge or trial for periods of between two and 12 years, and their release followed those days earlier of six female prisoners who were arrested last September for worshipping in public.

This is good news, though the situation for human rights, and particularly for freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), in Eritrea remains highly concerning, with every religious group, including those that enjoy government sanction, experiencing extensive harassment and repression.

Last December the government released 24 Jehovah's Witnesses, including three high-profile conscientious objectors who had been held for 26 years. However, members of the Jehovah's Witness community continue to experience severe mistreatment, with any caught meeting facing detention and harassment. They have also been denied citizenship since 1993.

The Eritrean Government's hostility to religious groups and human rights is well-documented, but recent events in the Tigray region of neighbouring Ethiopia have laid bare the regime's fundamentally sadistic nature. There, members of the Eritrean military have been complicit in a brutal conflict which has been underway since last November.

Reports of violations which have emerged from the region, and for which Eritrean soldiers are believed to bear primary responsibility, are among the most egregious and severe taking place in the world today. They include large scale sexual and gender-based violence, indiscriminate bombing, mass extrajudicial killings, and the comprehensive looting of homes, businesses, and historical sites.

There are also serious concerns regarding the plight of Eritrean refugees in the region. An estimated 100,000 Eritrean refugees had sought

refuge in Tigray from their own repressive government, and the presence of Eritrean troops in the region presents a serious threat to their well-being and survival.

Satellite imagery has revealed that at least two of the region's large refugee camps have been destroyed deliberately, amidst reports of the destruction of homes and the execution of male residents. Hundreds of refugees, including pregnant women, small children, the sick, the elderly and the disabled, have also been forcibly returned to Eritrea, where they will no doubt face further reprisals at the hands of a regime that has criminalised the right to leave their country as articulated in Article 13.2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The crisis in the Tigray region requires swift international intervention, and highlights why the international community must not be misled or distracted by minor positive developments such as the release of a handful of religious prisoners of conscience, especially since tens of thousands of Eritreans remain detained arbitrarily. The Eritrean regime already stands accused of crimes against humanity by a United Nations (UN) Commission of Inquiry, and there is now credible evidence that the ongoing violations in Tigray may amount to genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The time for action is now, and the UK, along with other like-minded nations must lead the charge by imposing sanctions on the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea, who bear ultimate responsibility for any human rights violations that are being committed with impunity by their forces. The UN must also demonstrate a robust response, including by convening an urgent session of the Human Rights Council, and by imposing an arms embargo on all warring parties.

Please pray for civilians and refugees in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Ask God to protect the vulnerable from further attacks, to heal the wounds of those who have suffered physical and mental harm, and to comfort all those who have lost their loved ones.

Fr Francis Marsden



CREDO

# The chair which symbolises the pre-eminent position of the pope – the heir of Saint Peter

The feast of the Chair of St Peter falls this Monday, 22nd February.

A few pieces of ancient wood do survive, which formed part of the “chair of Peter” in the Old St Peter’s baptistery in fifth century Rome. They are now encased in Bernini’s chair-reliquary in the apse of the Vatican basilica. However the primary focus is not woodwork, but the teaching office of St Peter within the universal Church.

Until the 12th century, the Roman bishop was known as the Vicar of Peter, rather than as Vicar of Christ. He fulfils Peter’s role within the worldwide Church.

On Easter morning, when the pope stands on the balcony above St Peter’s Square and announces to the world “Christ is risen!”, he is doing what Peter did 1,990 years ago, after discovering the empty tomb.

When he preaches to the crowds at Pentecost, he is doing precisely what Peter did on the first Pentecost morning, proclaiming the Resurrection, the need to repent, to be baptised for the forgiveness of sins and to receive the Holy Spirit.

The original feast on 22nd February was that of the Chair of St Peter at Antioch. The Roman Martyrology reads: “At Antioch, the feast honouring the Chair of the Holy Apostle Peter. In this city the followers of Jesus were first

called Christians.” Near Antioch there is a cave church of St Peter, built into the rock face.

In 1558, an additional feast was added to the calendar on 18th January, the Chair of St Peter in Rome. The two were combined after Vatican II.

Peter was indisputably the leader of the Apostles. His name runs through the New Testament like the lettering through a piece of Blackpool rock. He is mentioned 169 times, as Simon, Simon bar Jonah, Kepha or Peter. The next most mentioned of the Twelve is John, with less than 40 hits. Paul is mentioned about 150 times, but he was not one of the original Twelve.

No one familiar with the NT can doubt the primacy of Peter. He heads all the lists of the Twelve Apostles. With James and John he was present at the Transfiguration and in Gethsemane. John gave way to Peter on Easter morning, standing back to let Peter enter the tomb first.

To Peter alone did Jesus give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 16:18) Upon Peter alone did Jesus bestow the triple commission: “Feed my sheep”. (John 21:15-21) Only for Peter did Jesus pay the Temple tax, with the shekel found in the fish’s mouth. (Matt 17:27)

Peter preached the Pentecost address to the crowds in Jerusalem. He answered the charges before the Sanhedrin. At his word Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for defaulting on a promise. Peter received the vision enabling him to accept the first Gentile, Cornelius, into the Church.

In 44 AD after killing James, King Herod Agrippa seized and imprisoned Peter in Jerusalem (Acts 12). One night, miraculously, an angel removed Peter’s chains and released him. Peter hurried to the house of Mary, mother of John Mark, and explained what had happened to him to the Christians praying there. To escape Herod’s search parties, he then “departed and went to another place.” (12:17)

Was this “other place” Antioch or Rome? No other cities claim a connection with Peter, which if they could they surely would.

Why did Peter go west to Rome? Why should a Galilean fisherman, leader of a proscribed sect, venture into the imperial lions’ den? Why endanger oneself by frequenting the pagan capital of the “divine

Caesars”? Why risk the execution meted out to anyone who refused to burn incense to the Roman gods or to recognise Caesar’s “divine genius”?

One can surmise that it was the leading of the Holy Spirit. Just as He guided Paul down to Troas to cross from Asia into Europe, so He brought Peter to Rome in accordance with the divine plan. There, as Jesus had prophesied, “when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will put your belt on you, and bring you where you do not want to go.” (John 21:18)

In his first epistle, Peter writes: “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark” (5:13). Babylon was code for Rome, the pagan capital.

Sometime between 64 and 68 AD, Peter was crucified upside down in Nero’s persecutions. His remains were buried on the Mons Vaticanus. Christians remembered and marked the spot. By 180 AD a modest monument stood there. The Roman church well remembered its apostolic founders.

Catholics maintain with good reason that Peter’s prerogatives were passed on to his successors, Linus, Cletus, Clement and so on. “Peter bade Linus to take his place and sit on the cathedra (chair) whereon he himself had sat” (Poem Against Marcion c. 200 AD)

In the same way St Paul had handed on episcopal authority for Ephesus to Timothy, and Crete to Titus.

The numerous local churches in the first century were joined in one faith: Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Philippi, Thessaloniki, Ephesus, Rome, Edessa, Smyrna, Alexandria etc. They maintained communion with each other, and with Rome where Peter’s successor presided in love.

This was the universal Church, i katholiki ekklesia, the Catholic Church. St Ignatius of Antioch referred to it as early as 107 AD in his Epistle to the Smyrnaeans. He does not explain the term, so we can assume it was already in common usage.

Every organisation needs a President, a Chair of Governors, a Monarch, a Mayor, a CEO. The buck has to stop at the top. There has to be a final court of appeal, universally accepted, if any organisation is to preserve unity.

About 95 AD, we find Clement, bishop of Rome, writing to the



The Chair of Saint Peter is a relic conserved in St Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City. The relic is enclosed in a sculpted gilt bronze casing designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and executed between 1647 and 1653. In 2012, Pope Benedict XVI described the chair as “a symbol of the special mission of Peter and his Successors to tend Christ’s flock, keeping it united in faith and in charity.”

Church in Corinth to resolve an internal dispute there. Rome was understood to have a power of arbitration and jurisdiction beyond its own territory.

In the early centuries, whenever schisms arose and bishops quarrelled, they had recourse to Rome to justify themselves and condemn their enemies.

It is Irenaeus, the Greek bishop of Lyons, c.180 who in his *Adversus haereses* gives us the clearest statement of Roman primacy:

“It is possible, then, for everyone in every Church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the Apostles which has been made known throughout the whole world. ....

“But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the successions of all the Churches, we shall ..... point out here the successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient

Church known to all, founded and organised at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul, that Church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the Apostles. For with this Church, because of its preeminent authority [potentiorum principalem], all Churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world; and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition.”

He then lists the Roman bishops down to his own day: “Eleutherius does now, in the twelfth place from the apostles, hold the inheritance of the episcopate. In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us.”

Eighteen hundred years later, we say the same about the 265th successor of St Peter.



This is the only surviving sculptural sketch for the Chair of Saint Peter, the focal point of the apse of St Peter’s Basilica.

www.thecatholicuniverse.com

# Joining Our Lord in the battle of prayer and fasting

21st February, 2021 –  
First Sunday of Lent

**First Reading: Genesis 9:8-15**

*The rainbow as the sign of God's covenant with mankind.*

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

God said: "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

**Responsorial: from Psalm 26**

*R./: Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth, to those who keep your covenant.*

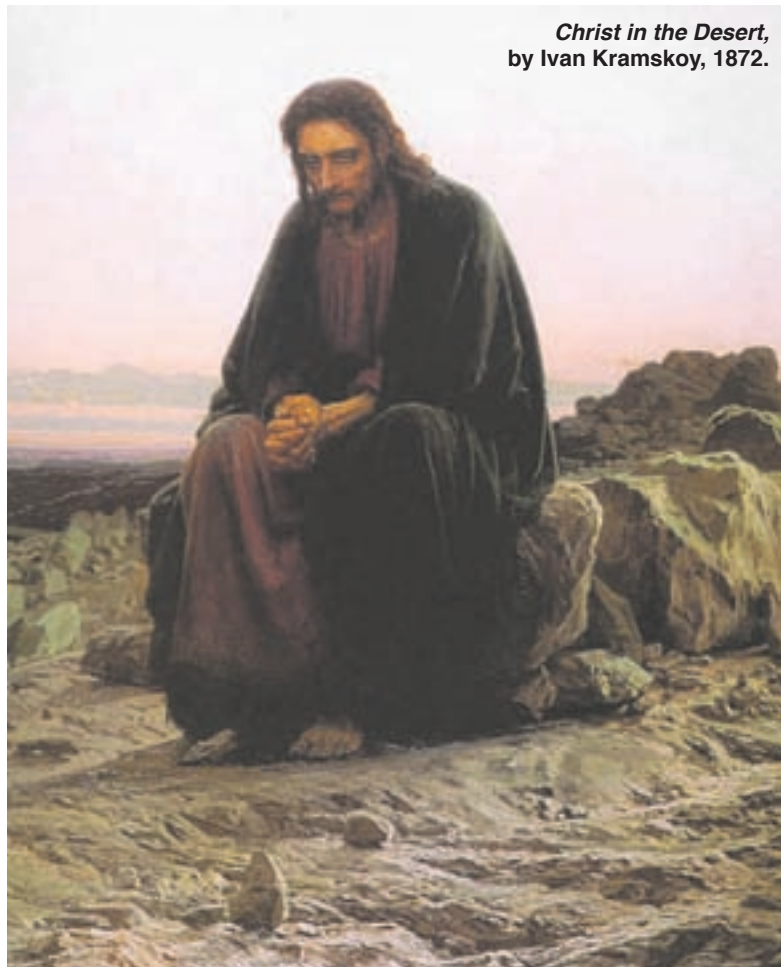
*Lord, make me know your ways. Lord, teach me your paths. Make me walk in your truth, and teach me: for you are God my saviour. (R./) Remember your mercy, Lord, and the love you have shown from of old. In your love remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord. (R./)*

*The Lord is good and upright. He shows the path to those who stray, he guides the humble in the right path; he teaches his way to the poor. (R./)*

**Second Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22**

*Christ's sacrifice which gives baptism its cleansing power.*

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who



*Christ in the Desert,*  
by Ivan Kramskoy, 1872.

has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

**Gospel: Mark 1:12-15**

*The start of Jesus' public ministry.*

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the desert. He was in the desert forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

**Shun not the struggle**

A reflective way of looking at life is to see it as a struggle between sin and grace, selfishness and holiness. Our time on earth will be successful in the measure that we put aside sin and try to live by the grace of God. Today's Scriptures show two contrasting reactions to temptation. The first humans, Adam and Eve, are imagined as preferring their own inclinations to the will of God. Jesus, the Saviour, on the contrary resisted temptation, remaining faithful to what God the Father required of him. St Paul reflects on how these choices affect ourselves: Adam's sin brought trouble on all, but we are saved and offered new life because of the fidelity of Christ.

An old priest who was blind for many years before his death, liked to urge his penitents to renew their

efforts with these inspirational lines:

*"We are not here to play, to dream, to drift. We have good work to do, and loads to lift. Shun not the struggle. Face it. 'Tis God's gift."*

Temptation in one form or another is an unavoidable part of life. If we honestly examine our daily experience, we can find many aspects of temptation: impulses or tendencies counter to the right way of doing things. To rationalise away these temptations, so that they become socially acceptable and politically correct – is itself an insidious temptation.

We want to dictate for ourselves what is right and wrong, to draw for ourselves the boundaries of "acceptable" behaviour, unencumbered by any notional commandments of God. This is rather like Adam demanding to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Our real growth to Christian maturity comes by acknowledging and accepting the vocation of struggling against temptation, to achieve the kind of behaviour and attitudes Jesus expects. We must submit our behaviour to his gospel. Christ and Adam show the two opposite reactions in face of temptation: Adam, archetype of sinful, evasive, self-seeking humanity, finds plausible reasons to yield to it, and rebels against God's will. Jesus, archetype of the new God-seeking man, resists temptation even repeatedly. It can only be conquered by this blend of patience and loyalty, supported by

trust that what God requires of us is what is best for us.

**Opposing forces**

Last Wednesday we began the season of Lent. We have five weeks of Lent now until Easter. Lent does not have quite the impact it used to have. It doesn't seem to have as much of an impact on the lives of Christians as Ramadan has on the lives of Muslims. Yet, it is worth reminding ourselves that Lent is beginning. As a Church we have set out on a journey which will end at the Easter Triduum, those three great days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The gospel reading for the first Sunday of Lent is always the gospel reading of the temptation of Jesus. Mark's account of the temptation of Jesus is the shortest by far. We are given no dialogue between Jesus and Satan; the temptations are not spelled out in any way. Instead we have that enigmatic statement that Jesus 'was with the wild beasts and the angels ministered to him'.

We could think of wild beasts and angels as two opposing forces. The wild beasts could be understood as servants of Satan, putting Jesus' relationship with God to the test, enticing him to put himself rather than God at the centre of his life. The angels, in contrast, are servants of God, supporting Jesus in his time of struggle, giving him the strength to stand firm in the test, to withstand the onslaught.

There is some parallel between where Jesus found himself in that wilderness at the very beginning of his ministry and our own lives. We too can find ourselves caught between wild beast and angels. We too can find our best convictions, our deepest values, being put to the test. The values of the gospel are not always at home in the world in which we live. The pressure to compromise with those values can be very strong. We can find ourselves in something of a moral and spiritual wilderness where there is very little appreciation for or understanding of the gospel message. Indeed, we can feel very alone as Jesus must have felt very alone in the wilderness.

At such times we have to remind ourselves that we are not alone, no more than Jesus was really alone in the wilderness. The angels are ministering to us. The Lord's ministering, empowering and comforting presence is always at hand. That was the opening message of Jesus as soon as he stepped out of the wilderness, 'the time has come; the kingdom of God is close at hand'. Jesus had come up against the kingdom of Satan during his forty days in the wilderness. However he emerged from that testing time knowing

that the kingdom of God was stronger than the kingdom of Satan, proclaiming that the reign of God was present for all.

In his letter to the Romans Saint Paul would put that conviction in a very succinct fashion, 'where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more'. That is why Paul could say to the members of the Church in Corinth: 'God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it'. There may indeed be wild beast out there, forces that seek to undermine our faith in the Lord and the way of life that flows from that. However, today's gospel reading assures us that there is an even more fundamental reality, and that is the reality of the Lord's empowering presence. The angels will minister to us; the Lord will stand by us. He has given us and will continue to give us an abundance of resources. God is constantly at work among us and within us. Like Saint Paul we can say: 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me'.

One way of understanding Lent is to see it as the time when we try to give in to the many ways that God may be trying to touch our lives. We often think of Lent as a time when we try to give up things. There can be a real value in that. However, more fundamentally and more positively we might think of Lent as a time when we give in to the Lord who is always present to us and calling out to us.

The Church sets aside this season of Lent in the springtime of the year as a reminder that we may need to awaken spiritually. Although the Lord is present to us, we are not always present to him. Although the reign of God is at hand, we don't always entrust ourselves to that good news. As we awaken spiritually, as we give in to the Lord, as we become more aware of the Lord who is around me, above me, below me, at my right hand and at my light hand, then we may experience a new desire to give up whatever is not serving our relationship with the Lord. We enter this season of Lent not just as individuals but as a community of faith. It is as a community that we are called to turn more fully towards the Lord and to walk together in his company towards Holy Week. 'We will get to our destination if we join hands' (*Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma*).

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# All together >

## NICHOLA VENABLES New Build Database (nbdb)

Nichola Venables is one of many employers offering young people an exciting new start under the Kickstart Scheme. She's CEO of a property-tech start-up called New Build Database (nbdb), offering DIY snagging software and a free national record of fire safety, leasehold and customer service issues.

With 20 years experience in finance, management and risk, Nichola can offer on-the-job training to candidates and has advertised seven vacancies at her Cardiff Bay-based business.

"I've led departments of up to 80 people, and one of my favourite aspects of past roles has been helping others grow," says Nichola, 42.

"I left school at 16 with few qualifications, but I'm currently completing a masters level business leadership course. I can help the applicants identify longer-term career paths and funded training opportunities.

"I have a lot to offer, and I understand that for some people getting into early employment is more critical to their long-term success or immediate needs than going to University. From a selfish point of view, I've missed the daily interaction of having colleagues around me, and I can't wait to start daily calls with the team."

Although companies need to offer a minimum of 30 positions, smaller firms can pool with others to fulfil the criteria and Nichola did this through the Federation of Small Businesses. And as a small start-up, nbdb is the ideal place to learn a broad range of skills.

"The team will learn customer service, data management, research and analysis skills and some will take on social media management," says Nichola.

Nichola's also excited about the ideas, skills and qualities 16-24 year olds have to bring to the business. "I expect some will have ideas about the software that I haven't yet considered," she says.

At the end of the scheme, companies can hire the staff if there's a permanent position available.

"I'm so excited to offer an opportunity to learn and grow through real-life work experience. Hopefully, I'll help the individuals go on to secure long-term employment, I'd love for that to be with nbdb if we're in a position to hire them, but if not I'll do everything I can to help them secure work elsewhere," says Nichola.



# Kickstarting careers and boosting UK businesses

If you're looking for a new job, there is plenty of support available



## MARIE MACKLIN CBE HALO Urban Regeneration

Marie is founder and executive chair of HALO Urban Regeneration, which is managing a £63m brownfield urban regeneration project on a 23-acre site in Kilmarnock, Scotland, which was formerly the home of Johnnie Walker Scotch whisky. The HALO will provide a sustainable community approach to a mixed-use development powered by electricity with a net zero carbon footprint.

The HALO Enterprise and Innovation Hub will collaborate with Scottish Power to create an industry leading cyber and digital training and learning facility, establishing The HALO at the forefront of the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' which is digital.

"HALO is a £65m regeneration project which will be the first town centre net zero carbon energy project in Scotland," said Marie. "We are hoping to create 1,300 jobs and £200m for the Scottish economy."

"The government announced in September last year a scheme called Kickstart, which is a new scheme for young people aged 16 to 24 who are on Universal Credit. So part of our enterprise and innovation hub includes a training hub for young people and the government awarded £1.5m to help with training and employability skills.

"As a result of the scheme, we have created 200 training placements for young people. The training with the government scheme lasts for six months and we've added on another six months," says Marie.

"The UK government has various different growth deal strategies throughout the UK, and they announced a growth deal strategy affecting us two years ago. It has meant that we have been able to make use of the government's Kickstart Scheme as well as being part of the Ayrshire growth strategy.

"The Kickstart scheme is very useful particularly because we are an urban regeneration company going into deprived communities, those areas with challenging economic conditions, and we're really trying to put something back.

"What we are doing with the funding is not creating jobs that would be the normal jobs that young job seekers would find if they looked in the marketplace.

Instead, we are using the money to put us at the forefront of that new green and digital economy post Covid-19.

"The money that the training is going to give us would basically allow us to take on 200 young people. With that new money it is putting us at the forefront of new jobs.

There was £1,500 allocated for each person for purpose-built training and that is enabling us to work with the best cyber experts to create a cyber security course for young people who have disengaged from school, and really have no hope.

"We are going to have four of these HALO buildings around the UK. This has been eleven years in the making but we will open the first phase of the HALO innovation hub in May of this year.

"Our Cyber Digital Capability Hub will be a mixed blend of online learning and workplace

learning. These types of government scheme are great and I'd like to see more of them.

"I would also like to see more employers taking them up on the offer. What we're really doing is putting the green economy at the forefront of the UK" says Marie.

"The Kickstart Scheme is life-changing in the sense that these areas – not just in Kilmarnock – but some of the most deprived communities in the country are being helped, and we need to give these young people a road to recovery.

"We have some amazing companies in our city centres, but young people in these challenging economic times, how do they get a job in these city centres?"

"Some of the people we are working with have great computer skills but they don't have the confidence. So this is offering a stepping stone into a whole new world, to protect our country and to give them confidence to work with some of the best cyber security experts in the world.

"I was that kid that came from a deprived community. The uptake on it has been immense, we basically purposefully say you do not need a qualification to do the course because there are too many kids who don't engage in going to college or university because it is an establishment.

"We have looked at various different models and my ultimate dream is to set up a hub for our young people which will then be a filter for them to go out and seek jobs. I call it the Halo army, and that is well-paid jobs but not necessarily at degree-level standard."



# Protecting and creating jobs

## ELLEN WAKELAM Welsh Wind Distillery

Ellen Wakelam runs a "small but ambitious" distillery on the west coast of Wales, and for her the Kickstart scheme is a way to give local youngsters valuable experience.

In the Welsh Wind Distillery makes spirits, including eight award-winning gins and is now developing a fully grain-to-glass Welsh whisky using barley grown by local farmers.

The company has five full-time employees and will be adding to that with their Kickstart recruits. "We've been approved for four placements," explains Ellen, 37, who lives just north of Cardigan.

"This is our quiet time of the year, so we're going to recruit one person now, then in a couple of months' time we'll recruit the others. We teamed up with a training company as our gateway provider to be approved and to advertise the places."

First up is a vacancy for a general distillery hand, a position that will help one young recruit develop a range of different skills.

"We do all the bottling and labelling of our spirits by hand, so that's the main focus of the role, along with helping to keep the distillery clean and tidy, which is a vital part of what we all do. Beyond that, we want to see what the person we recruit is interested in and whether we can give them experience in other areas.

"We think we can offer a young person a really good insight into every aspect of the business, giving them insight into the technical side of distilling, as well as bottling, labelling, customer service, marketing and business insight. Equally, if there's a specific area they want to learn more about, we should be able to accommodate that."

Ellen knows the importance of having job opportunities in the area and that's one of the reasons why she was so keen to base her business in west Wales.

"We're really excited. I grew up in west Wales and trained as a teacher, but had to leave to find work," she says.

"One of the drivers for setting up a business back here was to offer opportunities for employment for local young people. Even in buoyant economic times, it's not an area where there are lots of prospects, so we're excited to be able to offer new roles that will give people experience and lots of transferrable skills.

"Bringing people into the business brings in different ideas, insights and suggestions about how we can do things differently. It's something we thrive on.

"On the flip side, we can offer people the opportunity to train and develop their own skills. Even if there isn't a role at the end of it, hopefully we've opened their eyes to other possibilities and options, and given them experience they can take somewhere else."

For more information, go to [gov.uk/jobhelp](http://gov.uk/jobhelp)



“ It gives me joy when I see that governments make a lot of effort to find places of work and ensure that everyone has work.”

*Pope Francis*

## WHAT SUPPORT SCHEMES ARE AVAILABLE?

### Kickstart Scheme

The Kickstart Scheme is a six-month paid job with a local employer, paid for by the Government. It provides a fully funded opportunity for young people to gain experience of working in one of Britain's most exciting companies.

The Kickstart Scheme was announced by the Chancellor in the Summer, and will offer hundreds of thousands of job opportunities over the next two years.

A £2 billion pot will help to fund exciting positions in businesses across Britain. Jobs from the Kickstart Scheme are open to 16-24 year olds who are claiming Universal Credit and are at risk of long-term unemployment.

Visit [gov.uk/kickstart](http://gov.uk/kickstart) to find out more.

### Sector-based Work Academy Programmes

SWAPs are an opportunity for jobseekers who are claiming either Universal Credit, Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) to build their confidence in a new line of work, enhance their CV, and gain invaluable work experience and training.

So far, they have helped over 40,000 people across the country with employers from a range of industries stepping up to offer placements. Each SWAP focusses on working in a particular industry, such as care, construction or logistics and lasts up to six weeks, consisting of three parts:

- Pre-employment training – a short

module of vocational training run by a local college or training provider,

- Work experience with an employer in the industry – giving jobseekers the chance to learn new skills on the job.
- At the end of the programme, either a job interview with an employer in the sector or if an interview cannot be offered, help with the application process.

### DWP / New Enterprise Allowance (NEA)

NEA provides money and support to help people receiving certain benefits (including Universal Credit, Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance) to start their own business.

For the self-employed, it helps to develop their business.

Support includes a mentor, to give advice and guidance as the new business begins to trade, a weekly allowance worth up to £1,274 over 26 weeks. They can also apply for a loan to help with start-up costs if the business is less than two years old.

More than 215,000 jobseekers have become their own boss since the scheme launched in April 2011.

### Where can I find out more?

Visit [gov.uk/jobhelp](http://gov.uk/jobhelp) for help and opportunities in your local area.

Jobcentre Plus work coaches are experts in helping people back into employment.



# Protecting and creating jobs

Support is available to help you get a job.  
Find out more at [gov.uk/jobhelp](http://gov.uk/jobhelp)

All together >

# Universe weekly pullout Around the Parishes

CATHOLIC NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM ACROSS THE UK AND IRELAND



## Lottery windfall helps St Mary's mend leaking roof

St Mary's parish in Great Yarmouth has received a grant of £148,598 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for repairs to a leaking roof.

The grant comes from the Culture Recovery Fund and is specified to be used for the re-roofing of the sanctuary, both side chapels and the old sacristy. The contribution that St Mary's parish must raise towards the repairs is £37,150.

The Grade II\* listed building dates from 1850 and was designed by the acclaimed Catholic architect, JJ Scoles. The roof has deteriorated, and water has seriously damaged a mural painted by Archibald Jarvis in 1921.

The building has not just broken and missing tiles, but also displaced beams, cracks in the walls and internal damage due to leaks. Some of the tiles which have come off are above the organ loft, and water has been coming in, threatening the valuable organ below from possible rain damage.

The original slate tiles over the nave, as well as over the chancel and

side chapels at the western end, were replaced by concrete tiles in the 1960s. The excessive weight of these has displaced beams supporting the roof.

The current repairs, being made in partnership with Caroe Architecture, are dealing with the eastern end of the building. To protect all the beams of the church, the concrete tiles across the whole roof would need to be replaced with slate. A 2019 report from Nicholas Warnes architects put the cost of a complete repair at £1,500,000.

"The past couple of years we've been doing concerts, race nights and raffles," said Brian Lafferty, chair of the finance committee at St Mary's. "The parish are very committed and enthusiastic. We had everything planned for last year, and then along came Covid."

The parish has launched a 'Buy a candle and save our church' appeal. You can support this through the St Mary's website, at <http://www.stmarysgy.org.uk/>



To see your parish featured in these pages, contact Michael Winterbottom on 07949 987771 or via [michael.winterbottom@thecatholicuniverse.com](mailto:michael.winterbottom@thecatholicuniverse.com)

## Diocese takes stock of architectural heritage

A comprehensive architectural and historical review of Catholic churches across the diocese of East Anglia has been published online as part of the major Taking Stock project.

Taking Stock is an architectural and historical review of Catholic churches and chapels in England and Wales. The project is a partnership between the Patrimony Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, individual dioceses, and Historic England.

In the diocese they range from the spectacular architectural glories of churches such as St Benet's Minster in Beccles and Our Lady and the English Martyrs in Cambridge to the many humbler yet much-loved church buildings.

Cedric Burton, secretary of the Historic Churches Committee, said: "This audit of the Catholic churches and chapels in the diocese is an important tool. It will help to enable to proper preservation, and appropriate development, of the Church's patrimony."

"In particular it will provide the committee, and the new historic churches support officer, with a



Our Lady and the English Martyrs in Cambridge.  
Photo: Alex Ramsay / Architectural History Practice

baseline from which to assess the needs and proposals of parishes."

The review was carried out by Andrew Derrick, director of the Architectural History Practice.

He said: "We are all familiar with the great legacy of medieval church buildings in East Anglia, but not so well known is the modern heritage of Catholic churches. By modern I mean those built after 1791, when Catholic church building once again became legal in England."

"There are 25 listed churches in the diocese, including a couple of medieval outliers (the Slipper Chapel at Walsingham and the

church at Clare Priory). The most recent is Eric Gill's 1939 church at Gorleston.

"Many other churches, while not listed, are of local value and, of course, important to those who worship there."

"Taking Stock has assessed the architecture and history of all of them and aims to ensure that heritage considerations are given their proper weight when changes are proposed."

More information on the project as a whole can be found at [www.taking-stock.org.uk/](http://www.taking-stock.org.uk/)

## Diss parishioners celebrate their heroic saint's feast day

Parishioners in Diss gathered on 1st February for a virtual celebration of the feast day of St Henry Morse, known as 'The Priest of the Plague'. Judith Tooth reports. The parish church, built in 2012, is dedicated to St Henry Morse, a local saint who became known as 'The Priest of the Plague' for his work caring for the sick.

Parishioners also gave thanks and prayed for the repose of the soul of Joan Westwood, the parish's eldest parishioner, who had died, aged 101, just a few days earlier. Over many years Mrs Westwood had researched the history of the Henry Morse, shared her findings and encouraged wider devotion for the saint within the parish.

Diss parish priest, Fr Alex Anaman, opened the celebration with the day's reading from the letter to the Hebrews, which spoke of "men who through faith conquered kingdoms", some of whom "had to bear being pilloried and flogged...chained up in prison...sawn in half or beheaded". They were all "heroes of faith".

"Like them, Henry Morse, our patron saint, was a great hero of faith," said Fr Alex.



Fr Alex Anaman outside the church and below, an etching of St Henry Morse which hangs in the church.



Henry Morse was born in 1595 in the village of Brome, near Diss, and raised nearby in the Tivetshalls, at a time of violent persecution towards Catholics. Despite the dangers he became a Jesuit priest.

When plague broke out, he persevered in nursing the sick and dying, undeterred by spells in prison and in exile.

In 1645, without trial, Henry Morse was found guilty of treason for being a Catholic priest, and executed on 1st February, at Tyburn in London. He is among the 40 Martyrs

of England and Wales canonised in 1970.

At the virtual gathering Richard Poole shared his recollections of the parish's pilgrimage to Tyburn on the same day in 2016, and how it had inspired him to search for an artwork of the saint. His efforts resulted in a beautiful 17th century etching which now hangs in the Church of St Henry Morse.

More information about St Henry Morse can be found on Diss church's parish website, at [www.sthenrymorse.com/st-henry-morse](http://www.sthenrymorse.com/st-henry-morse)

To see your parish featured in these pages, contact Michael Winterbottom on 07949 987771 or via [michael.winterbottom@thecatholicuniverse.com](mailto:michael.winterbottom@thecatholicuniverse.com)

**Around the Parishes**

## OBITUARIES



# Ampleforth mourns death of Fr Alban Crossley OSB

Fr Alban Crossley OSB, Benedictine monk of Ampleforth Abbey, died on 2nd February at the age of 86.

He was born in Farnworth, Lancashire, and joined the monastic community at Ampleforth Abbey in September 1955. From 1958-1961 he was at St Benet's Hall at the University of Oxford where he took a degree in physics, and from 1961-1965 he studied theology at Fribourg University in Switzerland.

Fr Alban was ordained priest on 18th July 1965.

From 1968-1979 he worked in the Junior House of Ampleforth College, where for many years he was Assistant Housemaster. When he retired from that role in 1979 Fr Alban enjoyed a sabbatical year studying liturgy in the USA, Rome, and a number of European countries. On his return to Ampleforth Abbey he was appointed Master of Ceremonies and Liturgy, and then, in 1990, became assistant priest and then parish priest in St Mary's, Brownedge, Bamber Bridge.

In 1996 he was appointed parish priest of Our Lady and St Chad, Kirbymoorside, and its chapel of ease at St Mary's, Helmsley.

For many years Fr Alban was involved in the Scout movement both locally and nationally. He began as a



Fr Alban



Ampleforth College

Scout leader in Ampleforth College Junior House in 1965, and other roles included work as county chaplain in North Yorkshire (1969-1985), Assistant and then leader trainer in North Yorkshire (1972-1986), district commissioner for the Ampleforth District (1981-1990), and chief commissioner for Roman Catholic Scouts from 1985-1990.

In 1999 Fr Alban was appointed to the Monastery of Christ the Word, Zimbabwe, a foundation established by the monks of Ampleforth Abbey

in 1996. He remained in Zimbabwe until 2010. On his return to England he worked in St Austin's parish, Grassendale, before his appointment as Monastery Guestmaster at Ampleforth Abbey in 2012.

In recent years Fr Alban's health declined and he became less mobile. Fr Alban died peacefully in York Hospital on 2nd February, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and a day of prayer in the Catholic Church devoted to all men and women in the consecrated life.

# Tributes paid after Covid claims the life of devoted Norwich nurse

## Eldred Willey

Tributes have been paid to devoted Norwich nurse, mother and Catholic Cathedral steward Estrella Catalan, who died last Friday at the Norfolk and Norwich hospital where she worked, after a month-long battle against Covid-19.

Emergency Department Staff Nurse Estrella, aged 52, worked in the hospital's Accident & Emergency and was also an important member of the acute stroke team. Altogether she had worked at the hospital for nearly 20 years, since arriving from the Philippines. Colleagues and friends have flooded social media with touching tributes.

An active member of the St John's Cathedral parish, where she served as a steward, Estrella leaves behind a husband, Melvin, and sons John and Josh. Their middle son, Vince, sadly died two years ago.

"They are a lovely family," said Matthew Fernandez-Graham, director of finance and resources for the diocese. "We got to know them through Estrella's son Josh. She was part of the Filipino team which organised the Sinulog Festival for the Baby Jesus."

Canon David Paul from St John's



Cathedral said: "Estrella was a really devoted member of the cathedral community. She worked tirelessly to help others. The outpouring of support for her family is testament to how many lives she touched.

"During her last hours, Fr Leo led the rosary with other members of the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital nursing team as Fr Simon anointed her. Her passing leaves a hole in the lives of many, but we especially remember her family: we offer our prayers for her husband Melvin and their children, and all who grieve Estrella's passing. May she rest in peace and rise in glory."

Just a month ago Estrella gave an emotional interview to the BBC from her hospital bed. "I want to

help," she said. "But I don't know when. I don't mind working but I'm here as a patient. I'm helpless."

Two online fund-raising pages for Estrella and her family have already generated over £47,000 from donors.

Colleague and friend Jenelyn Bales set up one page, which pays tribute to Estrella as 'the most caring, conscientious and hardworking person a department could ask for. She puts the needs of others first before her own.'

Norfolk and Norwich chief executive Sam Higginson said: "Estrella was a hugely respected, loved and dedicated member of the team and the Acute Stroke Team. She was a wonderful person and a caring and conscientious nurse, who loved to teach and mentor students; she will be terribly missed.

"This is a heart-breaking reminder of the situation we are facing every day to help others and we want to thank our staff for their ongoing courage and commitment during the pandemic."

**To support the family see:** [www.gofundme.com/f/in-loving-memory-of-estrella-catalan](http://www.gofundme.com/f/in-loving-memory-of-estrella-catalan); and [www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/estrella-catalan-2021](http://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/estrella-catalan-2021)

# School so proud as it receives a UNICEF award



Main photo, Oliver Wakefield and some of the children display their UNICEF award. Inset, Ms Quirke

A Glossop primary school has been awarded the UNICEF Rights Respecting School Bronze Award – and is now going for Gold.

The status has been granted to St Charles' Catholic Voluntary Academy by UNICEF in recognition of the way it has embedded children's rights into its policies, practice and ethos.

The Bronze award means that St Charles' Senior Leadership Team understands what is involved in the award and is committed to embarking on the UNICEF UK rights respecting journey. It also recognises that the right foundations are in place for the school's journey to the second stage which is Silver.

The school has placed the UN Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) at the heart of its practices, helping to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people and making sure they realise their potential. UNCRC recognises that all children have the right to be treated with dignity, fairness, to be protected, to develop their full potential and to participate.

The Award is based on principles of equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination and participation.

Year Two teacher Oliver Wakefield is leading the programme at St Charles'. He said: "There are over 50 children's rights and we are putting them at the heart of our school and embedding them.

A lot of children didn't know they had rights so we created a corridor where their rights are displayed and they see them every day.

"We talk to them about their rights, like the right to have clean clothes, and they learn that some children don't have the rights that they have, for instance, there are a lot of children around the world who don't have an education or a house.

"We might look at one right a week and then follow that up with a linked activity and talk about what it means.

"We will be working towards the Silver award next and ultimately we would like to achieve Gold. The Unicef rights can be brought into every area for our children; it's all about that holistic approach to education."

Headteacher Bernadette Quirke said: "Becoming part of a UNICEF Rights Respecting School has helped to develop our Character Curriculum.

"The school recognises the importance of developing character traits in our pupils, which include personal and social responsibility.

"As part of our Catholic ethos, we want our pupils to grow into responsible citizens who care about the world and learning about children's rights helps to create understanding."

# The sugary truth about sports drinks

Re-hydrating with a sports drink after a long training session is the preferred choice for many, but should sports drinks come with a dental warning?

## HEALTH

When you are working up a big sweat at the gym or are down the park for a cross-country run, your body loses water, electrolytes, and minerals such as chloride, calcium, magnesium, sodium, and potassium. If you lose too much, your body runs the risk of dehydration. Those who train hard can find relief with sports drinks, but they do come with a dental warning.

As well as losing water and electrolytes through sweat, your body also rapidly uses up stores of glucose. This is the body's most efficient source of energy. During hard

training, carbohydrate can be depleted at a rate of three to four grams per minute. Over a period of two hours or more, less in hot periods, the body will exhaust its energy source. Sports drinks supply carbohydrate and effectively enhance performance.

### What's in a sports drink?

There are three types of sports drinks all of which contain various levels of fluid, electrolytes, and carbohydrate: isotonic, hypotonic and hypertonic.

### Isotonic

Isotonic drinks contain fluids, electrolytes and six to eight per cent

carbohydrate. These quickly replenish fluid, electrolyte and carbohydrate stores and are the preferred choice of rehydration for most high-endurance training athletes.

### Hypotonic

Hypotonic contain fluids, electrolytes, and a low level of carbohydrate. These also quickly replenish fluids and electrolytes, but the low carbohydrate levels make the drink more suitable for less intensive training sessions under two hours.

### Hypertonic

Hypertonic, meanwhile, has a high level of carbohydrate along with electrolytes. These are normally used after exercise to supplement daily carbohydrate intake and to top up muscle glycogen stores. These are only really needed for long distance running or if you are planning to take a long day of cycling.



While sports drinks help athletes rehydrate after a long training session, if consumed on a regular basis they can lead to dental decay. These drinks have been proven to cause irreversible damage to dental enamel, according to a study in the journal *General Dentistry*. Dental enamel is the thin, outer layer of hard tissue that helps maintain the tooth structure and shape, while protecting it from decay.

### Look after your teeth

The study continuously exposed enamel from cavity-free teeth to a

variety of popular sports drinks, as well as non-cola drinks such as lemonade and iced tea, for a period of 14 days. The exposure time and enamel damage was comparable to approximately 13 years of normal drink consumption. The study blamed the enamel erosion on the additives and organic acids in sports drinks. These organic acids are potentially highly erosive to dental enamel because of their ability to break down calcium, which is needed to strengthen teeth and prevent gum disease. As a result, dentists advise caution when sipping sports drinks over long period of time. They recommend limiting the intake of sports drinks and choosing water instead. When drinking them, they also advise that they are consumed as fast as possible, preferably through a straw to limit contact with teeth.



Dentists advise caution when sipping sports drinks over long period of time.

*"While sports drinks help athletes rehydrate after a long training session, if consumed on a regular basis they can lead to dental decay."*

## Healthy heart, healthy knees

Knee problems are the bane of many older people's lives, but research has shown that adopting a lifestyle that's good for the heart is good for the knees.

## HEALTH

Of all the joints in the body, the knees cause the most aggravation for people over 50. Weight-bearing knee joints see plenty of wear and tear during a lifetime and are often the first to show signs of osteoarthritis. Rheumatologists have long debated whether rest is the best treatment for arthritic knees and whether physical activity con-

tributes to the problem, but a new study suggests any exercise that is good for the heart is also good for knees.

### Exercise Increases cartilage

A research team in Australia have analysed the knee joint in detail and have come to the conclusion that physical activity may actually protect the knee joint from osteoarthritis. A total of 257 healthy adults, aged between 50 and 70 with



Older people benefit enormously from regular physical activity.

no history of osteoarthritis or knee injury, were used in the study. Using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) researchers were able to detect cartilage loss and early signs of osteoarthritis. Rheumatologists know that loss of knee cartilage is linked to worsening knee symptoms in sufferers of osteoarthritis. In the trials, subjects were put through physical exercise, varying in intensity, frequency and duration, and the results were analysed over a four-year period. It was found that vigorous physical activity – exercise that gets the heart pumping and the

body sweating – was associated with an increase in cartilage volume. The more the subjects exercised, the more cartilage volume was recorded. Weight-bearing exercise was also found to be beneficial. Another notable finding links moderate physical activity, including regular walking, with a reduced incidence of marrow lesions.

"This is the first study to demonstrate a potentially beneficial effect of walking on the reduction in the risk of bone marrow lesions in the knee. Bone marrow lesions have been associated with pain and radi-

ograph-defined progression of osteoarthritis, type-two collagen degradation and loss of cartilage volume," says Dr Flavia M. Cicuttini, leading author of the Australian study.

The amount of physical exercise is key to preventing, rather than causing, osteoarthritis. Knee injuries are a well-known precursor to osteoarthritis, as illustrated in many professional athletes and sports people. Too much vigorous exercise is detrimental to the physical health of the knee joint, but too little can also have the same effect.

Data suggests that at least 20 minutes once a week of physical activity sufficient to result in sweating or some shortness of breath might be adequate. This is similar to, if not somewhat less than, the recommendations for cardiovascular health.

What is known is that regular physical activity throughout people's lives provides protection for the knee joint in later years. The study also suggests that older people benefit enormously from regular physical activity. So, instead of putting those old knees up to rest, the message is to get them moving.



## Self-employed? Don't forget about your pension options

According to The Pensions Advisory Service, fewer than a third of self-employed people are paying into a pension.

### FINANCE

With no-one else around to do it for you, sorting your pension should be near the top of your to-do list. Self-employed pensions might seem like a great idea, but with lots on your plate, sorting one out can slide to the bottom of the priority list.

Our complete guide makes it simple – from the options you have to the best self-employed pension calculators on the web.

Despite working hard and building a business by yourself, you're much less likely to have a pension, if you're self-employed. It's a gloomy fact, but a report from The Pensions Advisory Service (TPAS) recently found that fewer than a third of self-employed people are paying into a pension. If you're working for an employer, there are all sorts of ways that you can take care of your pension, almost without thinking about it. But as a self-employed worker, what are your pension options – and how much should you be saving?

#### Why start saving?

Simply put - no one else is going to do it for you. It's true that you'll be entitled to the State Pension, but for the current tax year, this flat rate benefit would give you £168.60 a week. Even with a few savings

tucked away, is this enough for you to live on? For most people, the State Pension isn't going to cover retirement. But most people are not self-employed, which means that their employer has probably enrolled them into a pension scheme auto enrolment is a legal requirement for all UK employers.

With people living longer, retirement can last for decades, which is great if you are well-prepared with a pension, but not so great if you only start planning in the few years before you stop working.

*"The Pensions Advisory Service (TPAS) recently found that fewer than a third of self-employed people have a pension."*

#### Self-employed pension plans: Which one is best?

The most popular option for a self-employed pension is a 'personal pension'. But with lots of options available, take a look at our round-up below and decide what's right for you.

#### Personal pensions

A personal pension lets you choose your own provider, and then decide how to invest your

contributions from a range of funds. The provider will claim basic-rate tax relief on your behalf, which will be added to your savings. What you get back depends on what you put in, how your investments perform, and the level of charges you pay.

You can choose from three types of personal pension including a straightforward ordinary personal pension, offering by most large providers, a Stakeholder Pension or a SIPP.

#### Self-invested personal pension (SIPP)

SIPPs will give you a wider range of investment options, but usually carry higher charges, whereas a stakeholder pension will cap the maximum charge at 1.5 per cent.

#### The National Employment Savings Trust (NEST)

The National Employment Savings Trust is not just for people working for employers, despite being a workplace pension scheme. It's run as a trust by the NEST Corporation, meaning that there are no owners or shareholders. The guidance from NEST is that you can usually join if you're self-employed or a sole director of a company that doesn't employ anyone else.

If you're not sure which scheme is best, getting help from a regulated financial adviser can save a lot of worry.

They'll recommend a pension plan based on your circumstances. If the plan they suggest turns out to be unsuitable or the provider goes bust you'll be protected.

## Is your home as energy efficient as it could be?

Small changes to household items can improve your home's energy efficiency.

### HOME

You've got the hybrid car, you recycle your cans, bottles and paper and you even grow your own vegetables. But how energy efficient is your home?

Inefficient products such as fridge freezers and dishwashers could be causing you to sport a giant-sized carbon footprint. So how can you improve your home's energy efficiency and ensure that home items you buy in future are good for you and good for the environment? There are several giveaways that you're losing heat. Mould and mildew or high humidity can be an indication of water leaks in your toilet or pipework, meaning you use more water, or in your roof, windows or walls, which means that you could be losing heat. Fix leaks and you could save on water usage or heating bills. Leaking air conditioners can also be a real problem so do keep checking pipes for drips.

#### Check insulation and wasted heat

Old appliances can be extremely inefficient meaning that as well as damaging your green rating, your energy bills could be sky high. Items such as fridge freezers made before the mid-90s won't have been efficiency rated and should be replaced with a new appliance boasting a good energy efficiency rating. Replacing your washing machine with an energy efficient equivalent will save enough water to fill three home swimming pools!

Many homes are so poorly insulated that they lose heat endlessly throughout winter, meaning ever-rising fuel bills to keep the family warm. Replacing worn insulation is a must and thanks to improvements in technology is a job easily and cheaply done without professional assistance or safety equipment.

Double glazing also cuts down on heat leaks and should be fitted by a FENSA approved window fitter. Remember to check the Government website to see if you are eligible for a grant towards the cost of upgrading the energy performance of your home.

It's a well-known fact that TVs and computers left on standby waste electricity. Additionally, turn



Replacing worn insulation can keep your house warmer for longer

all appliances off at the wall to keep waste to an absolute minimum.

If every appliance in every home was rated energy efficient it would save endless amounts of greenhouse gas emissions. This is just one reason to ensure that future purchases bear the energy efficiency sticker, which guarantees maximum efficiency rating.

*"Fix leaks and you could save on water usage or heating bills."*

#### Check your materials

While checking your own home is easy to do and can prove invaluable in saving money on your fuel bills as well as ensuring that your carbon footprint is minimised, the website <https://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx> provides a free-to-use carbon calculator which, with the aid of just a few details from your home can calculate your household's carbon footprint. The website also provides tips and advice to help you cut carbon and energy costs.

When carrying out DIY don't forget to consider the green credentials of materials you use and dispose of unwanted building materials appropriately – wherever possible reuse or recycle, and use sustainable woods and other building goods so that your home, old or new, can be as green as the rest of your life!



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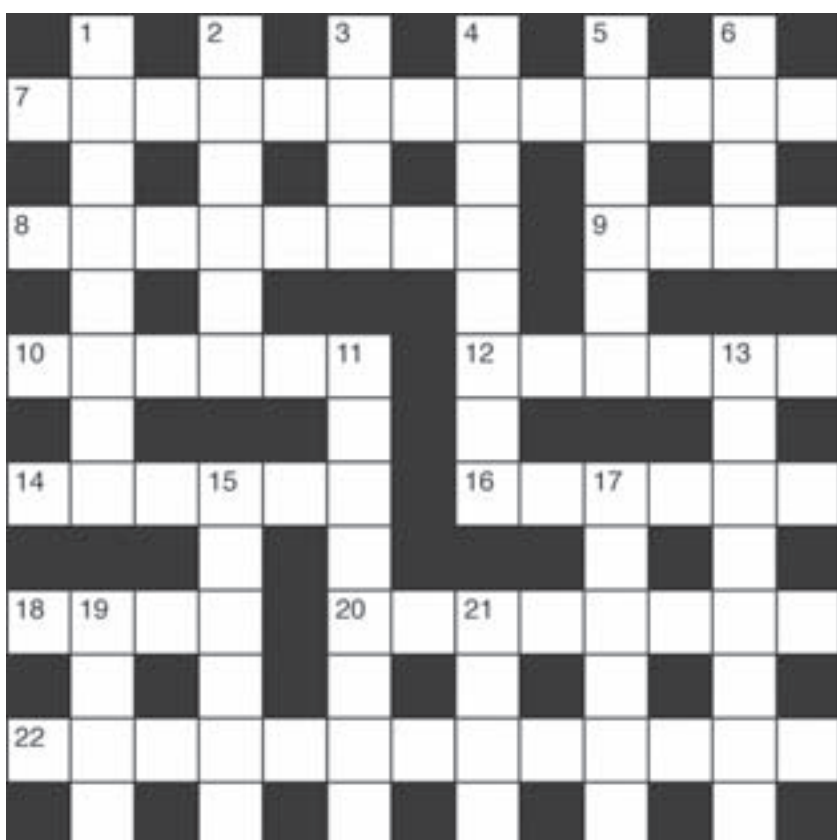
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### The Catholic Universe Crossword

No. 685



- Across**
7. Diverse (13)
  8. Identify (8)
  9. Afterwards (4)
  10. Obvious (6)
  12. Diatribe (6)
  14. Spirit (6)
  16. Indeed (6)
  18. Applaud (4)
  20. Guardianship (8)
  22. Thoughtless (13)

- Down**
1. Frail (8)
  2. Association (6)
  3. Unaccompanied (4)
  4. Renegade (8)
  5. Joker (6)
  6. Unsullied (4)
  11. Dissertation (8)
  13. Representative (8)
  15. First-class (3-3)
  17. Entice (6)
  19. Solitary (4)
  21. Neat (4)

SOLUTION - see page 47

### The Catholic Universe Sudoku

No. 285

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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During the coronavirus outbreak, the LMS Office is closed and our staff are working from home. For details of Masses being streamed from around the country go to [lms.org.uk/mass-listings](http://lms.org.uk/mass-listings)

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### Crossword Solution (from p46)

**Across:** 7 Heterogeneous; 8 Diagnose; 9 Then; 10 Patent; 12 Tirade; 14 Mettle; 16 Really; 18 Clap; 20 Tutelage; 22 Inconsiderate.

**Down:** 1 Delicate; 2 League; 3 Solo; 4 Deserter; 5 Jester; 6 Pure; 11 Treatise; 13 Delegate; 15 Tip-top; 17 Allure; 19 Lone; 21 Tidy.

### Sudoku Solution (from p46)

3	6	2	5	8	9	4	7	1
4	9	8	1	6	7	2	3	5
7	5	1	2	3	4	8	6	9
8	1	9	4	2	3	6	5	7
5	7	3	8	1	6	9	4	2
6	2	4	9	7	5	3	1	8
9	3	6	7	5	8	1	2	4
1	8	7	6	4	2	5	9	3
2	4	5	3	9	1	7	8	6

### MASS TIMES

**Jesuit Church, Farm Street**  
*Lockdown Mass times:*

**SUNDAY:** 18:00 (Saturday Vigil) 11:00 (Latin), 18:00.  
**MON-SAT:** 10:00, 18:00.

Due to severity of Covid-19 in London, the church will be closed during celebrations of the Mass. All Masses are livestreamed on our website.

**OPENING HOURS:**  
**SUNDAY:** 12.30-15.30. **MON-SAT:** 11:00-17:30.

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament  
**SUNDAY:** 12:30-16:00. **MON-SAT:** 11:00-16:00  
*Confessions are available by appointment only.*

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**CONVENT OF OUR LADY OF FIDELITY**  
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### Ordinary Form Liturgical Calendar Sunday Year B, weekday cycle 1

**February: Month of the Holy Family**      **Wednesday, 24th February:** Jon 3:1-10; Ps 50; Lk 11:29-32

**First Sunday of Lent, Sunday 21st February:** Gn 9:8-15; Ps 24; 1Pt 3:18-22; Mk 1:12-15      **Thursday, 25th February:** Est 4:17; Ps 137; Mt 7:7-12

**Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle, Monday 22nd February:** 1Pt 5:1-4; Ps 22; Mt 16:13-19      **Friday, 26th February:** Ez 18:21-28; Ps 129; Mt 5:20-26

**Tuesday, 23rd February:** Is 55:10-11; Ps 33; Mt 6:7-15      **Saturday, 27th February:** Dt 26:16-19; Ps 118; Mt 5:43-48

### Extraordinary Form Calendar according to the Roman Missal of 1962 (Tridentine Rite)

**Sunday, 21st February: First Sunday in Lent** 2 Cor 6:1-10; Mt 4:1-11      **Thursday, 25th February:** Feria Ezek 18:1-9; Mt 15:21-28

**Monday, 22nd February:** Chair of St Peter Apostle 1Pet 1:1-7; Mt 16:13-19      **Friday, 26th February:** Ember Day Ezek 18:20-28; Jn 5:1-15

**Tuesday, 23rd February:** Feria Isa 55:6-11; Mt 21:10-17      **Saturday, 27th February:** Ember Day Deut 26:12-19; Deut 11:22-25; 2 Macc 1:23-27; Ecclus 36:1-10; Dan 3:47-51; 1 Thess 5:14-23; Mt 17:1-9

**Wednesday, 24th February:** St Matthias Apostle Acts 1:15-26; Mt 11:25-30

Compiled by Gordon Dimon, Senior MC of the Latin Mass Society

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12 page Catholic Times supplement

# Wealth management in sport

**Mgr Vladimir Felzmann**

When people ask me: "How are you?" I reply: "Wonderful. Full of wonder at the beauty of creation, the foolishness of politicians and the graces – the gifts – I have." Remember, 'wealth' may be defined as an abundance of valuable possessions, a plentiful supply of a particular desirable thing; not just cash and material belongings.

There are people – like me – who are wealthy in friends. LeBron James (basketball player for the Los Angeles Lakers, widely considered one of the greatest NBA players in history) and Dwyane Wade (who played for the Miami Heat and won three NBA championships), have what is arguably the best friendship in sports.

They work out together. They vacation together with their wives. The two NBA superstars are the best of friends. Though their bond has been met with ridicule from fans and media personalities – who feel professional athletes should solely be competitors – James and Wade don't care. The two have been close since they met at the 2003 NBA pre-draft camp in Chicago. Besides entering the NBA together, they also won two straight NBA titles with the Miami Heat. James and Wade have a bond off the court that's tighter than most athlete friendships – and they won't let any grumps ruin it.

During a 1997 fight, Mike Tyson famously bit part of Evander Holyfield's ear off, but somehow the two former heavyweight boxers became good friends. In 2009, Tyson apologised to Holyfield on *Oprah*. Holyfield forgave Tyson, and the two have moved on. In February 2013, Tyson visited Holyfield at the Jewel-Osco supermarket on the South Side of Chicago, where Tyson said he loves his former opponent.

There is talent wealth: "which earth has given, human hands have made." Talent is the athlete's innate or learned ability to combine factors that contribute to performance into a successful whole. There are physical characteristics such as size, strength, maturation level. Physiological such as speed, agility and fitness. Technical skills such as dribbling, passing, control and shooting, along with defensive skills. The athlete also has to have a share of good fortune to be to be guided into a sport that suits that body, or the luck to get into that right sport by chance.

There is sense of humour wealth. Jürgen Klopp's facial expressions bear an uncanny resemblance to cartoon character Wallace, the Wensleydale cheese-loving inventor who lives with his trusty canine companion Gromit. His wide sunny smile, with both sets of gnashers on perpetual parade, is his trademark look and provides a clear clue to his



fun-loving personality.

The twinkle in his eye just confirms it. Klopp has a great sense of humour. You can have a laugh and a joke with him. And don't worry about comparing him to a comedy clay figure, because that's OK, it's absolutely fine; he will see the funny side and laugh it off in his own inimitable way.

However, if you attempted to caricature former Crystal Palace boss Alan Pardew, well, that would definitely not be OK. Any jocular motive may end up smacking of ridicule and be destined to fall as flat as a bellyflop. He would likely accuse you of laughing at him, rather than with him.

There is character wealth. At the start of 2016, Google announced that it had discovered the secret ingredients for the perfect team. After years of analysing interviews and data from more than 100 teams, it found that the drivers of effective team performance are the group's average level of emotional intelligence (EI) and a high degree of communication between members.

A manager's wealth in EI, giving him effective communication with his players – as shown by the likes of Klopp and Guardiola. Liverpool's Jürgen Klopp and Manchester City's Pep Guardiola have undoubtedly been the best managers in the Premier League in recent years.

Ever heard the popular saying, "health is wealth"? For me, the three most precious things in life are friends, health and hope. Worth a discussion over a meal or a wee drink?

"Good health", "Santé" (Fr), "Na zdraví" (Czech), are toasts not only to the absence of disease, but to a physical, intellectual, social as well as spiritual well-being of your friend. Some footballers are lucky, like Jack Wilshere of West Ham, Owen Hargreaves of Man Utd and then Man City, or Andy Carroll – who he spent six injury-impacted years at West Ham, and was released in 2019 at the end of his contract – are accident prone. NOT wealthy or rich in luck.

Finally – as I am running out of space – there is luck wealth. When Napoleon Bonaparte was criticised for winning battles simply be-

cause of luck, he famously retorted: "I'd rather have lucky generals than good ones."

Gary Player presents an entertaining story about the origin of the expression: "The harder I practise, the luckier I get." In 2002 he stated: "I was practising in a bunker down in Texas and this good old boy with a big hat stopped to watch. The first shot he saw me hit went in the hole. He said: 'You got 50 bucks if you knock the next one in.' I holed the next one. Then he says: 'You got \$100 if you hole the next one.' In it went for three in a row. As he peeled off the bills he said: 'Boy, I've never seen anyone so lucky in my life.' And I shot back: 'Well, the harder I practise, the luckier I get.' That's where the quote originated."

Thank God for your faith wealth. "Life only makes sense when our highest ideal is to serve God." Declared Neymar da Silva Santos Júnior, known as Neymar, a Brazilian professional footballer who plays for Paris Saint-Germain and the Brazil national team. He is widely regarded as one of the best players in the world.

Synonyms for 'wealth in imagination' we tend to use adjectives like, active, creative, vivid and wild imagination. Have you imagined how you might increase your spiritual wealth? A topic over a meal or a pint, perhaps? To get the ball rolling how



**Gary Player who famously said: "The harder I practise, the luckier I get," is pictured in 2008.**

about: a morning offering, spiritual reading, admiring the beauty of nature as it awakens this Spring – as

well as grace before and after meals.  
*In two weeks' time, we shall take a look at 'Responsibility'.*



**Neymar celebrates scoring against Costa Rica at the 2018 FIFA World Cup. As a Christian he has spoken about his faith saying: "Life only makes sense when our highest ideal is to serve God!" Additionally, he has sometimes worn a headband with the words '100% Jesus' (pictured inset).**