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# Pope denounces conflict and the ‘famine of peace’

**Traditional Christmas message appeals for more aid to Ukraine and an end to fighting in Holy Land, Yemen and eastern Africa**

**Cindy Wooden**

Pope Francis used his traditional Christmas message from the balcony of his apartment in St Peter's to appeal for the faithful to pay less attention to presents and more to prayer, particularly for Ukraine and other places where war and strife challenge the angels' proclamation of "peace on earth."

Addressing tens of thousands gathered in the square below to receive his blessing *urbis et orbi* (to the city and the world), the pope urged them to "leave behind the hue and din that deadens our hearts and makes us spend more time in preparing decorations and gifts than in contemplating the great event: the son of God born for us."

"Brothers and sisters, let us turn our eyes to Bethlehem and listen to the first faint cries of the Prince of Peace. Truly Jesus is our peace."

To follow Jesus' path of peace, he said, "we must divest ourselves of the burdens that weigh us down and block our way," the same obstacles that prevented King Herod from welcoming the birth of Jesus: "attachment to power and money, pride, hypocrisy, falsehood."

In the "small and innocent face" of the baby Jesus lying in the manger, he urged, "let us see the faces of all those children who, everywhere in the world, long for peace."

In his tenth Christmas message as pope, Pope Francis denounced the "grave famine of

peace" around the globe. Mentioning specific hot spots, he started with Ukraine, praying for those celebrating Christmas "in the dark and cold, far from their homes due to the devastation caused by 10 months of war."

He urged people to continue being generous in making donations and welcoming people displaced by the fighting. His almoner, Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, was spending Christmas in Ukraine, delivering generators and warm clothing and other aid in the pope's name.

May God "enlighten the minds of those who have the power to silence the thunder of weapons and put an immediate end to this senseless war," he prayed.

And while Ukraine dominates the news, Pope Francis also prayed for peace in Syria, Yemen, Myanmar and across the Sahel region of Africa.

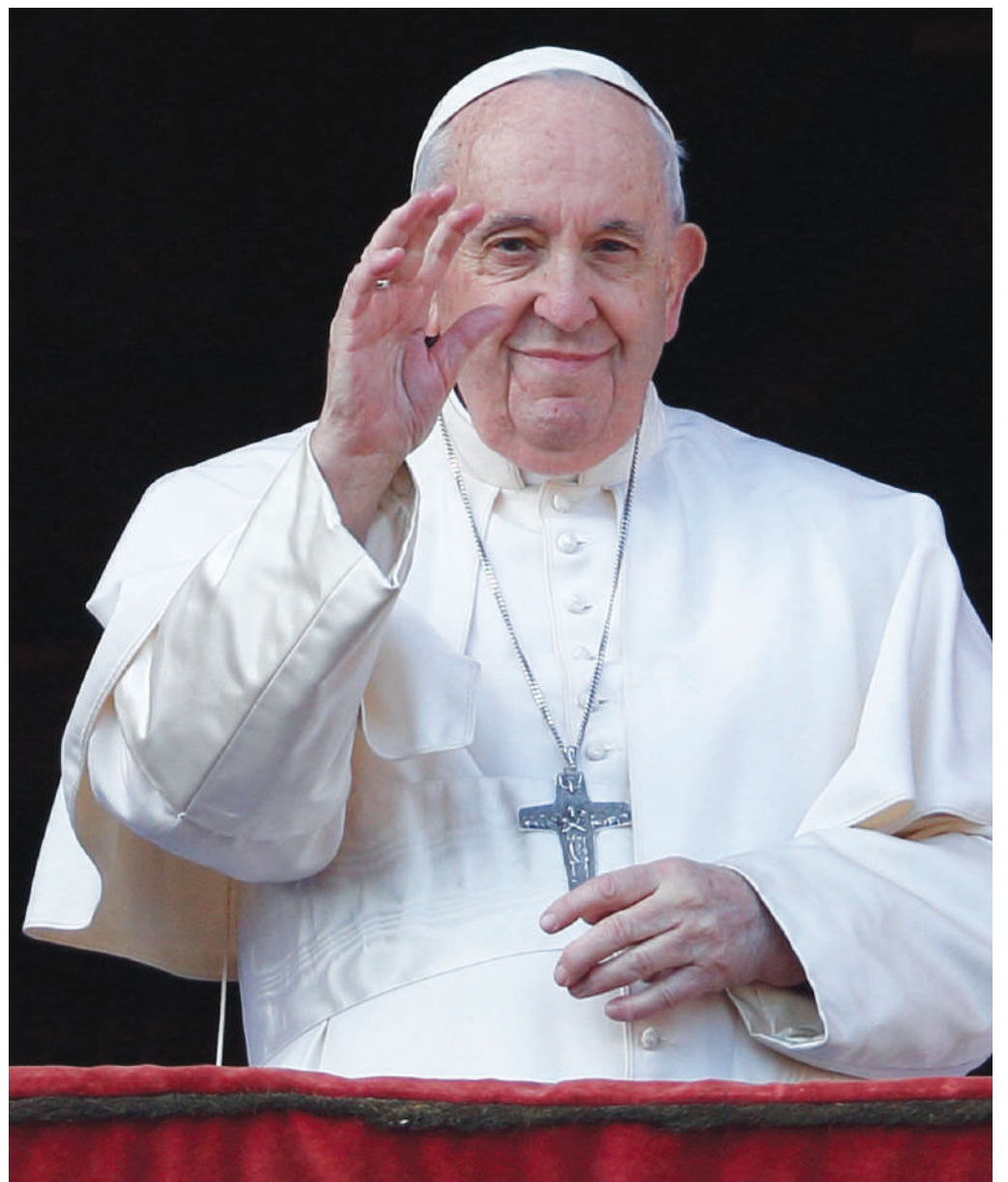
Turning to the Holy Land, "where in recent months violence and confrontations have increased, bringing death and injury in their wake," he prayed that "there, in the land that witnessed Christ's birth, dialogue and efforts to build mutual trust between Israelis and Palestinians may resume."

In Lebanon, where economic and political crises continue, the pope prayed that the country can "finally rebound with the help of the international community and with the strength born of fraternity and solidarity."

In Central and South America, where "political and social tensions" continue in several nations, the pope prayed that the light of Christ would inspire political leaders and all people of good will.

And he offered special prayers for "the people of Haiti who have been suffering for a long time."

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**'Pray for Benedict' as concern grows over former pontiff's health – pg 16**

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## Time to refresh your routine

Let's take a new approach to our diet in New Year

**IN COMPANION**



# Cardinal looks to light of Jesus in Christmas message

**Andy Drozdzak**

Cardinal Vincent Nichols used his Christmas homily to encourage the faithful to “come in spirit to Bethlehem” at Christmas.

He also discussed famous summits throughout history, such as Yalta in 1945; Camp David in 2000; Glasgow’s COP26 summit on climate change, and referred to the birth of Christ as “a different kind’ of summit – the ‘summit of Bethlehem.’”

This summit, he said, is the place where people will “meet the one who alone is the Lord of our hearts and lives – who alone can bring his salvation to our souls.”

“Summit meetings are always surrounded by fanfares, expansive media coverage, grand promises and, quite often, subsequent disappointments,” the cardinal said.

“Our meeting, our Summit of the Soul in the stable, is rather different. Yes, there are fanfares, for the song of the heavenly messengers, the angels, filled the skies as they proclaimed the

heavenly birth. The Gloria sung at Mass reflects the song of the angels, never more so than tonight.”

“Many other places and meetings promise us fulfilment and success,” he said. “But here, in the stable of Bethlehem, we find the one on whom we can truly depend. We welcome him again into our hearts.”

The Cardinal highlighted the call to love neighbour as oneself as an important part of the Christmas message. “We should, for a moment, consider that we are not always as generous in making a place for Jesus as we should be. We might reflect that neglect of his presence in our lives shows itself first in neglect of our neighbour.”

“When our neighbour becomes forgotten, irrelevant or too much trouble, then the light of this stable meeting is dimmed. Every failure of compassion and respect is a sign of the failure of our meeting with the Christ. Then we are heading into the darkness.”

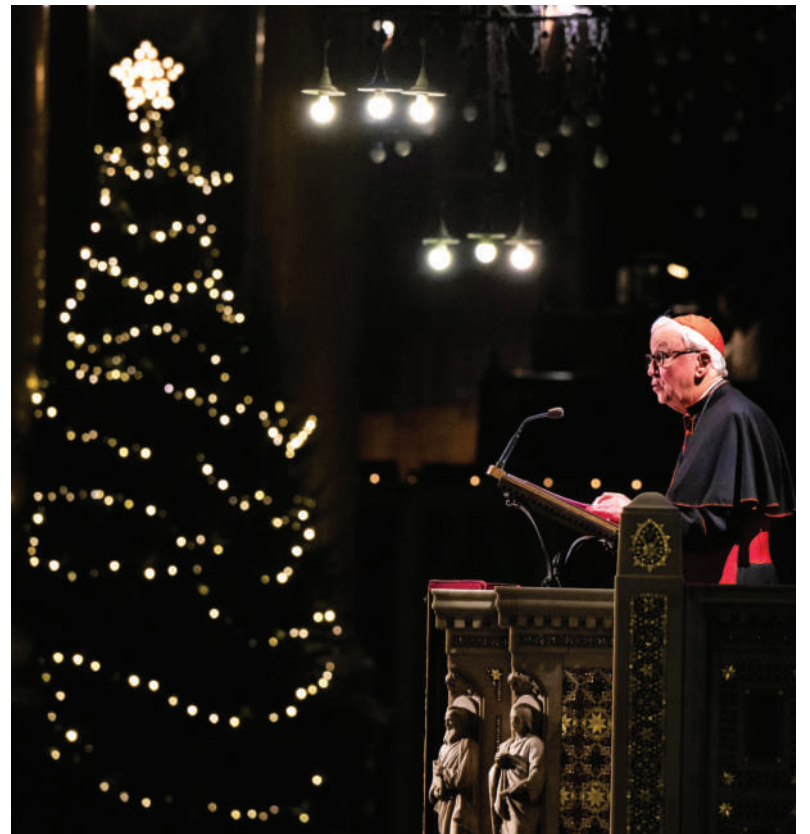
He urged the faithful to “make new contact” with Jesus in order to become

more compassionate and transform ‘our daily experience.’

“Let us enter the stable and make new contact with this anointed one, the Christ,” he said. “He is our teacher, our mentor, our guide, our light, our joy and our fulfilment. His is the only power that overcomes death itself and casts a totally new light on our daily experience.”

The Cardinal ended by reiterating the call to be witnesses of Christ’s light in the darkness of war, to those whose lives are “wrecked in evil and cruel conflicts not least in Ethiopia, in Yemen, in Ukraine.”

“That task is down to us: to sing of the beauty and importance of this birth, announcing it with love, perhaps with presents, certainly with generosity towards those in need. And those in need are many today, here as we struggle with material hardship and elsewhere, where many others have their lives wrecked in evil and cruel conflicts not least in Ethiopia, in Yemen, in Ukraine,” he said.



The pope greets the crowds gathered in St Peter’s Square to receive his traditional Christmas blessing



**Continued from page 1**

Knowing that many people in St. Peter’s Square and watching around the world would soon be sitting down to a festive and abundant meal, Pope Francis asked that they be mindful of “all those, especially children, who go hungry while huge amounts of food daily go to waste, and resources are being spent on weapons.”

Russia’s war on Ukraine, a major supplier of grain for the world, is put-

ting whole nations at risk of famine, he said, condemning the use of food as a weapon of war.

Unfortunately, he said, just like 2,000 years ago, “Jesus, the true light, comes into a world sick with indifference – a terrible sickness – a world that does not welcome him and indeed rejects him, as it does with many foreigners, or ignores him, as we all too often do with the poor.”

Pope Francis prayed that this Christ-

mas “may we not forget the many displaced persons and refugees who knock at our door in search of some comfort, warmth and food.

“Let us not forget the marginalised, those living alone, the orphans and the elderly who risk being set aside, and prisoners, whom we regard solely for the mistakes they have made and not as our fellow men and women.”

We must also not forget the inspiration we receive from the birth of Je-

sus, “when God became flesh to share the joys and sorrows, hopes and fears of all people, especially the poor and those living daily amid danger.”

“He comes as a helpless child. He is born in the cold night, poor among the poor. In need of everything, he knocks at the door of our heart to find warmth and shelter,” the pope said, before giving the crowd gathered below him his blessing “*urbi et orbi*” (to the city and the world).

The incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus “opened the way that leads from a world closed in on itself and oppressed by the dark shadows of enmity and war, to a world that is open and free to live in fraternity and peace.”

**The pope’s Christmas, see page 16**  
**The pope’s year in review:**  
**See pages 20 & 21**

# Nichols recalls Benedict's 'affinity with our Queen'

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI shared a "great affinity" with the late Queen and is "one of the great theologians of the 20th century", Cardinal Nichols has said.

The 95-year-old former pope's historic decision to resign due to age in 2013 will remain "an exception", and he admired the Queen for continuing her royal duties until the end, according to the Cardinal.

His comments came after the Vatican said the former pope's health has

worsened due to his age, and doctors are constantly monitoring his condition.

Speaking on *Times Radio*, Cardinal Nichols spoke about former pope Benedict's legacy and his relationship with the Queen.

He said: "I think there was a great affinity between Pope Benedict and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

"When Benedict decided to come to this country, he decided that the first thing he had to do was visit the



**Queen Elizabeth II with Pope Benedict XVI at the Palace of Holyrood house in Edinburgh, on the first day of his four day visit to the United Kingdom in 2010.**

Queen. And she was 95, she held her office to the end and I think he admired that very much.

"It was a measure of his self-understanding and the difficulties he was getting into physically as well that he said no, it needs somebody else to do this."

On Benedict's decision to resign, Cardinal Nichols said: "This is the first time in 600 years, so who knows what might develop. I think it will remain an exception, myself."

The cardinal also described the for-

mer pope as "one of the great theologians of the 20th century".

He said: "I met Pope Benedict on quite a number of occasions, and he was a very sensitive, a very thoughtful person, who was a great theologian.

"He will be remembered as one of the great theologians of the 20th century.

"But he was always so courteous. When he came to this country in 2011, he was described as 'God's Rottweiler', but by the time he left our country I think he was considered to be every-

body's great uncle.

"There was a real gentleness about him, and, when I saw him just over a year ago – September last year – that hadn't changed. He was very, very weak, but very bright and very alert and very with it."



**Picture of candles and prayer in Ukraine:**  
Photo: Umit Bektas, Reuters

# CTE urges people to stand with Ukraine

**Andy Drozdziak**

The people of Ukraine were singled out by ecumenical group Churches Together in England (CTE), which includes Cardinal Nichols, who called upon Christians in the UK "to stand in prayerful solidarity" with those caught up in the "unjust" war.

The Presidents of Churches Together said: "We urge Christians to continue to stand in prayerful solidarity with the people and churches of Ukraine and to support them in their hour of need. We also hold in prayer all those displaced and suffering the effects of war and oppression.

"As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and his love, justice and peace, we wish the people of Ukraine – and all people – a chance to celebrate in peace the coming of our Lord into this world of need."

They reminded Christians of the

"special" reasons for praying for the suffering people of Ukraine, pointing to the hostility and difficulties faced by Jesus' family prior to his birth.

"Our Saviour's family were themselves refugees in Egypt, led by the Spirit to escape Herod's persecution, cut off from their home and community, and no doubt travelling in great fear. Churches Together calls to mind the suffering of the people of Ukraine this terrible winter as the unjust Russian invasion continues."

The group includes a variety of UK Christian leaders, including the Archbishop of Canterbury and representatives from the Free Churches, the Orthodox Churches, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement and The Fourth Presidency Group, which comprises Lutheran, Quaker and The Church of Scotland (English Presbyterian) Member Churches.



## SJOG HOMES FOR UKRAINE




Would you be willing to open up your heart and home and welcome individuals displaced by the war in Ukraine?

If you are willing to share your space with those in need of a safe place, you can find out more information here and register your interest:

[www.sjog-homesforukraine.uk](http://www.sjog-homesforukraine.uk)





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# CAFOD praises supporters after a year of making a positive difference

**Andy Drozdzak**

CAFOD has hailed 2022 as “a year of real change” – and thanked supporters for making a ‘genuine difference.’

“For so many across the world, 2022 has been one of the most difficult years in recent memory,” CAFOD said. “But Catholics across England and Wales have continued to make their voices as loud as ever to call for a better, fairer world.”

The Catholic charity pinpointed the support for those affected by the Ukraine war and the campaign against the climate crisis as signs of a “positive genuine difference.”

As the Ukraine war began in February, CAFOD called on the Government to take action.

“We asked our supporters to call on the Foreign and Home Secretary to push for peace in Ukraine and support those fleeing the conflict,” the charity said.

“Within a month, more than 3,000 Catholics sent a message, joining calls from all parts of society for the UK to step up. Since that date, more than 100,000 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in the UK.”



The campaign against the climate crisis was dominated by the COP27 climate summit in Egypt in November. CAFOD highlighted how its members mobilised themselves to “demand action.”

“Ahead of world leaders and negotiators arriving in Sharm El-Sheikh,

CAFOD supporters sent emails in their thousands to Rishi Sunak, calling him on to deliver the promises made at COP26, and to make sure those most affected by our changing climate were at the heart of talks,” CAFOD said.

“To reinforce the point, CAFOD supporters joined marches taking

place across the UK, from London to Cardiff to Newcastle, to demand action as negotiations in Egypt hit their midpoint.”

Their efforts were rewarded when, in the summit’s final hours, it was finally announced that a historic ‘loss and damage fund’ was established to

help nations suffering the worst climate disasters.

Ahead of the G7 summit in June, thousands of Catholics in England, Wales and Scotland signed a petition organised by CAFOD and SCIAF which urged the Prime Minister to push for a global vaccine roll-out.

Other highlights included the popularity of the LiveSimply Award and the Walk against hunger. The Live Simply Award was recently commended at the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, and many bishops are encouraging schools and parishes to sign up to the award as a sign of solidarity with the poor and a desire to live in harmony with God’s creation.

Walk Against Hunger was a hugely popular Lenten challenge which encouraged people to undertake 200 km of walking across the 40 days of Lent to help raise funds and end malnutrition.

“2022 was a year of real change. Together, we stood alongside our sisters and brothers around the world and made a genuine positive difference,” CAFOD added.



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The department staffing comprises two further full-time and one part-time Music teacher who assist with the curriculum delivery across the College. The Music Administrator supports the Director of Music with event planning as well as the co-ordination of the peripatetic staff. The Music Department also benefits from the support of other high calibre musicians amongst the teaching staff, including the leader of the Leicester Symphony Orchestra.

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**The closing date for receipt of applications is Tuesday 31st January at midday.**

Ratcliffe College is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. The successful applicant will be required to undergo an enhanced DBS check.



## Ill health forces early retirement of Bishop of Dunkeld

The Vatican announced on 28th December that Pope Francis has accepted a request from Bishop Stephen Robson, the Bishop of Dunkeld, to be able to retire early on health grounds.

From today, the Diocese of Dunkeld is now vacant (*sede vacante*), and Bishop Robson is now the *Emeritus* Bishop of Dunkeld.

Since the Holy See is not yet at the point of being able to nominate and appoint a new diocesan Bishop, the College of Consultors, a sub-set of the Council of Priests of the Diocese of Dunkeld, will elect a Diocesan Administrator from among the priests of the diocese who will undertake responsibility for the day to day running of the diocese. The Consultors have eight days in which to fulfil this requirement.

Commenting on the decision, Bishop Robson said: “Since I came to the diocese in 2013, priests, people, religious and deacons have all been very good to me, and I have tried to serve them as best I can.

“However, I am now almost 72 years of age and, although three years short of the normal retirement age I am, as you might expect, sad to have come to the conclusion that I no longer have the strength necessary to carry on effectively shepherding the diocese.”



He added: “However, I am happy to say that the diocese is in relatively good shape, and I have every confidence that a good, younger, and fitter priest will be selected by the Pope to carry on the work of pastoring and feeding the People of God by means of the Word of God and the Sacraments.

“I thank the Holy Father for allowing me to retire, and I wish every blessing and grace on the good priests, deacons, religious and people of Dunkeld.”

# Scotland gender act faces UK challenge

MSPs have been criticised by Christian justice campaigners for sending a false message to children and young people after a new controversial gender bill in Scotland was passed.

After days of debate, including unprecedented late-night sittings, MSPs have passed the controversial Gender Recognition and Reform (Scotland) Bill by 86-39 MSPs.

The bill was immediately condemned by pro-lifers, while Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said he may invoke section 35 of the Scotland Act, which gives him an effective veto on laws he believes impact on reserved matters.

The bill was supported by the SNP-Green Scottish government, Labour and the Liberal Democrats, and faced staunch opposition from the Scottish Conservatives.

Cries of 'shame' were heard from the public gallery when the result was announced.

Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, dismissed concerns from the Conservative Party, feminist groups and some of her own MSPs that the reform will endanger women and girls

and put them at risk, particularly from sex predators looking to exploit the reform and enter women's spaces.

CARE for Scotland's Parliamentary Officer, Michael Veitch, warned that the legislation "could cause significant harm."

"Holyrood has endorsed legislation that over-rides reality and could cause significant harm," he said.

"MSPs are sending a false message to children and young people that their biological sex is not a fixed reality but entirely a matter of personal choice, thereby encouraging them to make potentially life-altering changes to their bodies.

"Thankfully many parliamentarians, including some brave Government back-benchers, were prepared to take a stand for truth, regardless of the cost."

The legislation, which is expected to be implemented at some point in 2023 will result in the following changes:

The minimum age for someone applying for a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) is lowered from 18 to 16. The requirement for a medical di-

agnosis of gender dysphoria is removed.

Someone need only live in their 'acquired gender' for three months, or six months if you are 16 or 17, rather than two years.

While the parliamentary process might be over in Scotland, as Stage 3 is the final part of a Bill's journey through the Scottish Parliament, it is possible the Bill will be challenged by UK government ministers and the courts.

Alister Jack, Secretary of State for Scotland, stated that the UK Government may use powers to block the legislation. "We share the concerns that many people have regarding certain aspects of this Bill, and in particular the safety issues for women and children," he said.

"We will look closely at that, and also the ramifications for the 2010 Equality Act and other UK-wide legislation — up to and including a Section 35 order stopping the Bill going for Royal Assent if necessary."

The reforms mean the process for a GRC in Scotland diverges significantly from the rest of the UK.

# Charity joins ex-PM in appeal to help victims of slavery

**Andy Drozdzia**

A Catholic anti-slavery charity has called for "care and compassion" towards slavery victims as Theresa May told PM Rishi Sunak not to "reduce protections for victims of modern slavery."

The Prime Minister has promised to "raise the threshold someone must meet to be considered a modern slave" and "remove gold-plating." But in doing so he risks creating more loopholes through which victims will fall, said Mrs May.

The Medaille Trust, which provides refuge from modern slavery, is one of the largest UK providers of supported safe houses for victims. Its CEO, Garry Smith, said the Government should "reach out with care and compassion" to victims.

"Think of so many today, who have travelled hundreds of miles with nowhere to stay and are at the mercy of their traffickers. We must reach out with care and compassion to them."

Former prime minister Theresa May, who championed world-leading protections for victims of modern-day slavery when in office, warned Mr



Sunak against unintended consequences in his attempts to prevent the rules being exploited.

Mrs May told BBC Radio 4 that "we need to ensure we don't reduce our world-leading protections for victims of modern slavery and – inadvertently – create another potential loophole.

"For example, there's talk of requiring more evidence from individuals.

"If you've been trafficked here as a sex slave, and you manage to find your way out of that and look to somebody for help, the chances are you probably haven't got a piece of paper or a written statement from somebody to say 'you've been in slavery.'"

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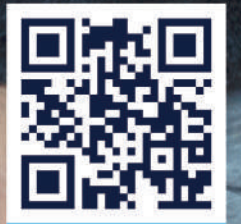


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— COMMENT —  
 ‘After a challenging year, perhaps the former pope shows us a way forward’

It's been a busy year for the Catholic Church, lived out in the shadow of the Ukraine war, and ending with one of her most loyal sons, Pope Benedict XVI, coming closer to the end of his life.

The end of the year seems an appropriate time to reflect on the life of, in Cardinal Nichols' words, 'one of the finest theologians of the twentieth century.' Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI lived through the major political and theological events of the century, including the terrible Nazi years, and retained his hope in the good the Church can bring in presenting the light of Christ in a dark world.

As he wrote in his seminal encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*: "Faith, hope and charity go together. Hope is practised through the virtue of patience, which continues to do good even in the face of apparent failure, and through the virtue of humility, which accepts God's mystery and trusts him even at times of darkness."

As we enter a new year, there is much to pray for, but there is also much to celebrate and hope for. Pope Francis focused upon "silence" as a gift brought by Pope Benedict XVI to the Church he has served so faithfully. Silence in the light of Christ's love enables us to see clearer and to dare to dream new possibilities of peace, of hope and a prosperous future. These possibilities are best summed up in the beautiful blessing found in Numbers 6: 24-26: 'May the LORD bless you and keep you; May the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; May the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.'

On behalf of all at the Universe, have a blessed 2023.

# Putin looks set to intensify his energy war in 2023

## POLITICS

### Thomas Froehlich

Not since the 1970s oil crisis has the west seen such a focus on energy security. Suddenly in 2022 it became a critical part of the battle for Ukraine. Russian attacks on energy facilities have left millions of Ukrainians without power during a freezing winter.

Since it couldn't force a quick, decisive win onto Ukraine, Russia shifted its strategy to attrition, specifically targeting energy infrastructure. Nighttime photographs of Ukraine now show a dark territory akin to images of North Korea. The theory is simple: freezing populations stop supporting the defending troops and scorched earth makes Ukraine less attractive for post-war investment, weakening western support.

This strategy is not new. Vladimir Putin's regime had been using selective gas supply cuts as a pressure tool against Ukraine since at least the winter of 2005-06, when EU gas supplies were also affected – a first signalling of Moscow's willingness to use energy as a geopolitical tool.

US governments had long warned about over-reliance on Russian gas, but the EU, and especially Germany, had expanded imports from Russia over the past decade.

European leaders accepted this increase due to low cost combined with historical reliability of supply. The political nature of energy was ignored, especially in Germany, most prominently by designating the Nord Stream pipeline as a purely commercial project

In 2021, the EU imported about 144 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas via pipelines from Russia, accounting for roughly 30% of its gas supply. Russian gas represented about 8% of Europe's total energy consumption in 2021 and resulted in payments reaching almost 20 billion (£17.4 billion). It



spent about 70 billion on petroleum products that year.

This winter Ukraine requires international support, especially from the US and EU. The EU appears to be fairly well prepared for this winter, although gas shortages are still possible. But three questions determine the sustainability of the EU's stance towards Russia:

1. Will Russia stop all hydrocarbon deliveries to the EU?
2. Will the climate be more extreme in the coming 12-18 months?
3. Will China return to pre-lockdown economic activity which would put further pressure on global liquid natural gas (LNG) markets?

In terms of geopolitics, questions remain how the EU/G7 price cap on Russian oil will affect global markets, whether markets comply, and if so, whether the price was set correctly.

China could follow G7 sanctions and buy Russian oil at a discount, costing Russia lost revenues and influence. But China has the opportunity to create a trade and logistics system outside the G7 sanctions. This would come at an initial cost but it would gain independence from the west, and possibly larger oil supplies via Russia and Iran.

Russia had been preparing to weaponise energy from as early as the summer of 2021. Later that year, Europe's largest gas storage unit in

Rehden, Germany, remained at an unusually low level, putting German storage levels at around 70% in late October 2021, compared to 95% in previous years. The signal was clear: Putin could inflict high costs on a non-compliant EU.

Europe's reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a continuation and expansion of the sanctions that were imposed after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. The EU passed legislation to decrease energy dependence on Russia and to sanction the regime and its economy – including its energy sector – by boycotting Russian products.

In March 2022, a plan was presented to cut Russian energy imports completely, including a ban on coal that came into effect a month later. The EU aims to reduce Russian energy imports by two-thirds by the end of 2022 and reach zero by 2027.

After demands to pay gas in Russian roubles were not met, Russia halted exports to Poland and Bulgaria in late April, while supply through the Nord Stream pipeline diminished.

In April, the EU launched plans to start negotiating gas and hydrogen purchases jointly to take advantage of its strength in the market.

In May, a plan to rapidly reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels and fast forward 'the green transition'

outlined a strategy of energy efficiency, diversification of suppliers and expansion of renewables.

Individual member states stepped up diversification efforts. Notably, Germany secured a long-term LNG deal with Qatar and sped up licensing processes for three new LNG terminals. A total of six new LNG terminals will be completed in Germany by the 2023/24 winter.

A few days before the EU stopped importing Russian oil, the EU and G7 agreed on a price-cap for Russian crude oil of US\$60 (£50) a barrel. This aims to keep Russian oil flowing to global markets while limiting Moscow's revenues.

Nine EU sanction packages against Russia were complemented with domestic programmes to decrease overall energy demand and support European consumers with energy costs.

Combined with global inflationary tendencies, this looming energy crisis has set in motion preparations for replacing expensive gas supplies with coal or renewable energy in addition to domestic moves to reduce costs to consumers, predominantly tax cuts, direct energy subsidies and in many cases price regulations.

At the time of writing, Europe's gas storage is above the five-year average, gas consumption has decreased and prices have stabilised at high but manageable levels. Political cohesion in the EU has been maintained, despite fissures caused by countries highly dependent on Russian energy, in particular Hungary.

If the Russian regime does not collapse or end the war, new EU sanctions to shipping and insurance of Russian oil, and eventually to gas can be expected.

The effect of the oil crises of the 1970s was economic recession and a diversification of suppliers. 2022 was the year that energy became political again and worry about shortages kickstarted the much-needed diversification of energy towards renewables. In 2023 this issue is not going away.

**Thomas Froehlich is a Research Fellow, King's College London**

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## New ideas for a New Year?

Sir John Battle



2023 is the tenth anniversary of the reopening of Bramley Baths as a community owned and led social enterprise. It is a classic Edwardian swimming pool, bath house (now a gym) and Russian steam room. The Grade 2 listed building had been run by Leeds City Council but faced closure as it was losing nearly £230,000 a year. But the people of Bramley wanted to keep it as a community facility and elected a team (which I was privileged to chair) to take it over and develop it as a sustainable social enterprise. That meant all profits going back into the baths and not going to directors and shareholders. It involved working out new, imaginative sessions to attract users of all ages, offering swimming lessons to local schools, lifeguard training for students and sessions for mums and babies, as well as water exercises for pensioners. We also put on film shows, aqua zumba and had a children's pirate ship at weekends. Ten years on and it well used, local children are taught to swim there, and it is a place of community fun that employs over 40 young people as managers, lifesavers, swimming teachers and fitness trainers – all paid at least the real 'living wage'.

We even employ a young heritage historian to capture the stories of the people and their historical connections to the baths.

It is a model of partnership between the people and the public sector, between the community and the council who trust us to look after the iconic building.

Bramley Baths is now asked by health authorities and local surgeries to deliver Covid recovery work and wellbeing, and is in a good financial position as a result of community support despite rising energy and water bills. Recently, it was named the Yorkshire and Humberside social enterprise of the year.

Few attempts at social enterprise last two years, never mind 10. But the social enterprise model deserves real attention as an local economic alternative. Could social enterprises provide care homes now being closed by hedgefund owners or take over local shopping centres from absentee investors who let them run down, or provide new craft and recycling workshops?

Rebuilding local economies of caring and sharing, rooted in local communities, based on co-operation and reinvesting profits rather than ruthless asset stripping capitalism was the model proposed by St Pope John XXIII in 'Mater et Magister' and more recently by Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI. The new economics are deep within our social justice tradition. Let them be fully tried out in the coming year.

# Benedict the kindly uncle and theologian deserves our prayers and deepest thanks

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Caroline Farrow



As 2022 draws to a close, so too, it seems, does the life of the *Emeritus* Pope Benedict for whom the Vatican has requested special prayers, as he is very ill and his condition is being constantly monitored.

It is not premature or unseemly speculation to suggest that the former pope may not have many days left to live, given that he is 95 years old and his most recent public appearance revealed that he was increasingly frail.

Now, however, is not the time for an obituary but rather a time for sincere prayer that Joseph Ratzinger may experience peace, consolation and pain-free transition from this world to the next.

I was somewhat shocked, though perhaps I shouldn't have been, to see some hostile responses on social media when I echoed Cardinal Nichols' call to prayer for Pope Benedict, with several people expressing the sincere hope that he was currently experiencing an agony that would prove to be eternal, because of the abuse crisis that the pope was believed to have mishandled.

Again, now is not the time to rehash the statistics and no doubt when Benedict does pass away the media will not hesitate to grab the opportunity to pump out their usual narrative, but it is nonetheless worth saying that for the past 25 years, both as Cardinal Ratzinger and then as the Holy Father, Benedict was at the forefront at the battle against the scourge of clergy sex abuse, defrocking 400 priests in the final two years of his pontificate.

It's always striking to see people who claim that religious belief has no basis in fact and no place in modern society nonetheless express a visceral urge for eternal punishment and revenge. It speaks to the fact that for all their protestations to the contrary, humans are still, at heart, deeply metaphysical creatures who know that there is more to the world than the temporal realm.

Praying for Pope Benedict will not be a hard task for Catholics as regardless of what we thought of his pontificate, we recognise him as not only being an extremely gifted theologian but also a man of great holiness and humility. Many of us will never forget being profoundly moved during the papal visit to the



United Kingdom in 2010. One of my favourite memories is of my father, a staunch Protestant, who had been expecting a rigid fierce German authoritarian figure being totally won over by the gentle unassuming old man who spoke words of such universal wisdom.

What those who are earnestly hoping for pain and suffering for Benedict are doing, is casting themselves in the role of Roman soldiers nailing Christ to cross and in so doing, demonstrating the reason why He came to save us.

No doubt, were he to be aware, Benedict would offer them the same forgiveness. We pray for people as they die because it is the compassionate and loving thing to do. In praying, we aren't pre-empting God's judgement, but we are imploring for mercy – the same mercy that we will one day require for ourselves.



What those who are earnestly hoping for pain and suffering for Benedict are doing, is casting themselves in the role of Roman soldiers nailing Christ to cross and in so doing, demonstrating the reason why He came to save us.

Who but the most dedicated sadist would genuinely want someone to experience pain and suffering as they die? One of the hardest facets of being a Christian, is offering forgiveness to those who have harmed us, but no matter what people may have done, we still have to pray that in those moments before death they manage to make an act of perfect contrition and go on to experience heavenly paradise.

I am not for one moment suggesting that Benedict is deserving of eternal punishment, however his illness and passing can still provide us with a teaching opportunity, which is an extremely fitting legacy for a man whose papacy should not be defined by the abuse crisis, but by his stalwart defence of traditional Christian teachings.

As recently as February this year, Pope Benedict wrote a letter

addressing the sexual abuse crisis and outlined his horror and shame. He concluded on this note and echoed the example of Saint John Paul II in terms of showing us how to approach death:

*'Quite soon, I shall find myself before the final judge of my life. Even though, as I look back on my long life, I can have great reason for fear and trembling, I am nonetheless of good cheer, for I trust firmly that the Lord is not only the judge judge, but also the friend and brother who himself has already suffered for my shortcomings, and is thus also my advocate, my 'Paraclete'. In the light of the hour of judgement, the grace of being a Christian becomes all the more clear to me. It grants me knowledge, and indeed friendship, with the judge of my life, and thus allows me to pass confidently through the dark door of death.'*

2022 has been a tough year. It also saw the death of another great and humble Christian leader, Queen Elizabeth II. But as Pope Benedict reminds us, when at the beginning of the Apocalypse, St John sees Christ in all of his grandeur and falls as though dead, at his feet, Christ puts his hand on his shoulder and reminds him "do not be afraid".

Whatever 2023 may bring, we are promised better times, if not in this world, but the next.



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## Catholic Union 2023 will be decisive year

**James Somerville-Meikle**  
Deputy Director



One of the first pieces of work I did for the Catholic Union was in summer 2009. I was still a student and had been sent to the House of Lords to watch a debate on making it legal to help people travel overseas for euthanasia.

I remember the hairs on the back of my neck standing up as Baroness Campbell – a Crossbench peer with spinal muscular atrophy – spoke to a packed Chamber from her wheelchair. She pointed out that under the proposed criteria set out by Lord Falconer, she would be eligible to seek euthanasia. You could have heard a pin drop.

The amendment was voted down, but the arguments have not gone away and there is plenty of work to do for those making the pro-life argument. 2023 is shaping up to be a decisive year in opposing assisted suicide, and we need everyone's help.

In Westminster, there is a new parliamentary inquiry into assisted suicide being carried out by the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee. It seems extraordinary, given the challenges in the health and care sector, that the Committee has made this one of its priority areas for next year, but we cannot afford to ignore it.

While it does not have the power to change the law, it will submit a report and recommendations to the Government next year. It's vital that the voice of the laity is heard in this inquiry, with strong evidence to support our arguments.

The Catholic Union has launched an online survey – at [www.catholicunion.org.uk/2022/12/assisted-suicide-survey/](http://www.catholicunion.org.uk/2022/12/assisted-suicide-survey/) which gives people the opportunity to shape our evidence to the inquiry. There is also a survey on the Committee's website which people can take.

In Scotland, a backbench Bill on assisted suicide looks set to be introduced in the Scottish Parliament early in the New Year. Given the ineffective scrutiny of Bills in Holyrood, not least the Gender Recognition Bill, it makes the contribution from those outside Parliament all the more important.

The Isle of Man has recently launched a consultation on assisted dying following a Private Member's Bill introduced earlier this year. In Jersey, plans to introduce assisted suicide are at an advanced stage having held a 'Citizen's Jury' on the matter a few years ago.

The challenges facing us on the assisted dying front have arguably never been greater, but the arguments against are just as strong – if not stronger – than ever. In each case, the contribution from the Catholic laity will be crucial if we are to be successful. We all have our work cut out in 2023.

# A place between Heaven and Earth: Arundel and Brighton pilgrimage to Lourdes, 2022

**Cynthia Harper and Sarah Green,**  
St Mary's University, Twickenham

As lecturers in primary Religious Education (RE), we love to teach the subject and we were very fortunate this year to have the experience of going to Lourdes to further spark our own enthusiasm, passion and faith in RE.

The decision to go on pilgrimage to Lourdes was done with kindness in our hearts but we were also a bit unsure of what to expect. We had no idea of the immense emotion we would experience, together with a closeness to God that we had never felt before. When we heard one of the pilgrims describe Lourdes as a place between 'Heaven and Earth', they could not have been closer to the truth.

Many of the people we met in Lourdes told us that the hardest thing about Lourdes was going home. At the time, it was difficult to understand what they meant by this but now we have been home for a few months, it is very clear. When you go to Lourdes, the impact is so deep that those who have not shared the experience cannot understand. We don't believe that any words will ever really describe what Lourdes felt like, but we will try! We can capture the experience in four main themes: love, spirituality, community and a lasting legacy.

The love we witnessed in Lourdes is tangible. It is seen everywhere and is genuine. We supported the assisted pilgrims in the Accueil (the hospital in Lourdes) and these people needed the most care. Some people said that we were really going in at the deep end while others told us that we were having the 'true Lourdes experience'. It didn't take long to realise that the people we were going to assist were truly amazing. Many had experienced strokes while others needed daily support to get through the day. One lady we looked after was 100 years old. All of them had a lot of love to give and, as a result, that love was contagious.

We try to incorporate love into our teaching and care for students at St Mary's University – the love of learning and the love of being part of a community. This is achieved by our pastoral support that all students receive from our colleagues. The students are at the centre of our work and we love our students in the true sense of the word 'love'. We work with teachers who love their subject and enthuse their students with the desire to teach with passion and commitment ultimately for the pupils in our partnership primary schools.

Lourdes is also a place of spiritual



Cynthia and Sarah with one of the pilgrims they helped while in Lourdes

renewal. In our busy world, and as in the words of the famous poem by William Henry Davies (1871-1940), we rarely have time to 'stand and stare'. As a result, our inner spiritual resources can become depleted. If we are fortunate to have a few spare minutes, we often fill it with distractions from mobile devices or catching up on jobs. This is where Lourdes was so different.

We had a whole week away from the daily distractions of work, family and friends and we had time to listen, time to think and time to feel the Holy Spirit working within us. The opportunity to take time in prayer was overwhelming and many of the helpers found themselves in tears.

These were not sad tears but tears of emotion and connection we had with each other, with the assisted pilgrims and with God.

Developing the spirituality of our students is important to us as lecturers. We discuss the thinking of different religions and how humans are spiritual beings with our students. We find that our students visit our university chapel and sit in stillness giving space for the spiritual side of our students' lives to grow. In Lourdes, there is a strong feeling that the Holy Spirit is with you at all times, in places of worship

and the work of your hands in helping others.

When you make a pilgrimage to Lourdes, you immediately feel part of a worldwide community which stretches back through the ages. Many readers will be part of that community, and some of the future teachers of your children and grandchildren are also now members. It is a community in which it is normal to pray, to sing, to reflect, to cry, to weep with joy and more. The town and the people are united in belief and love of God. This is one of the key aspects that makes Lourdes so special and united – everyone is there for a common purpose.

We try to foster these community values in St Mary's University too. The community of St. Mary's transcends time and place and includes past and present students. Generosity of spirit is at the core of our university community in which students, staff, visitors and alumni are valued and encouraged to excel.

David W. Augsburg, an author and teacher said: "Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable." Lourdes allowed us the time to engage with so many people of different ages and skills and abilities.

"When you listen and hear what they say, you learn about them and yourself.

"By taking the time to listen to others, to listen to ourselves and to listen to God we are truly living. And it is impossible for this love not to have a lasting impact.

Now we are back home and busy teaching again, it can be easy to forget the place between 'Heaven and Earth'. Daily chores occupy our busy minds and the experiences become a more distant memory. However, as teachers of RE and training the next generation of primary school teachers, we are lucky to have the opportunity to draw on our experiences and use them. We are passionate and enthusiastic about our role. Lourdes, to us, was an affirmation of our own faith and also an affirmation of the importance of religious education at the core of educating our youth. All too often RE is side-lined but many students at St Mary's choose it as their specialist subject and go on to become co-ordinators and leaders in this important subject.

We need religious education in order to become whole as persons.

Lourdes allowed all of us – academics and future teachers – to reflect and live our Catholic Values and to grow.

# Pro-lifer's arrest for silent prayers dubbed 'terrifying'

Twitter has erupted over "terrifying" video footage of the arrest of charity volunteer, Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, for silently praying near an abortion facility in Birmingham.

Vaughan-Spruce was searched, interrogated, arrested and charged for breaking a Public Space Protection Order censorship zone (or "buffer zone") four times. The footage was shared on Twitter by journalist Mary Margaret Olohan and has so far been viewed over 6 million times.

The video shows Vaughan-Spruce being searched, including through her hair, and arrested after admitting that she "might be" praying inside her head.

Anglican Priest Calvin Robinson has called the arrest "terrifying", later commenting, "Regardless of your position on abortion, this is wrong."

Former Mumford & Sons musician and *Spectator* Podcast host Winston Marshall stated, in disbelief: "Arrested for praying, in her head. In England. In 2022."

Broadcaster Darren Grimes called the arrest "the most depressing thing I've ever seen the police do", while acclaimed author Sohrab Amari tweeted, "Oy you go' a license to pray in your 'ead ma'am?".

Lord Pearson has challenged the

**Mary Margaret Olohan** @MaryMargOlohan  
Police in the UK arrest a woman for silently praying:

**One of the Twitter feeds showing the video of the arrest**

"Are you praying?"

"I might be praying in my head."



government following the arrest of Vaughan-Spruce, who was praying silently and peacefully, posing no threat to public order.

Raising the case in Parliament, the Life Peer asked the government: "What assessment they have made of the arrest of Isabel Vaughan-Spruce by police

in Birmingham in December; and what steps they intend to take to ensure that the rights of (1) freedom of religion, and (2) freedom of thought, are upheld."

Vaughan-Spruce prayed inside a censorship zone imposed via a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO). The

charity volunteer was standing silently, praying, until police approached her and asked her what she was doing. She said she "might" be praying inside her own mind.

Jeremiah Igunnubole, legal counsel for ADF UK, which is supporting Vaughan-Spruce, questioned the "draconian" arrest.

"Nobody should be arrested for the thoughts they have in their own mind. The arrest and charge appears to be premised entirely on her admission that she was praying internally," he said. "But for the fact that Isabel was praying internally, it is highly unlikely that she would have been arrested and charged, making this a prosecution based on her thoughts. Isabel's case demonstrates just how draconian "buffer zone" or "censorship zone" measures can be.

"Politicians in Westminster and Holyrood should take note as they consider rolling out this censorial measure nationwide."

Vaughan-Spruce also condemned the arrest. "It's abhorrently wrong that I was searched, arrested, interrogated by police and charged simply for praying in the privacy of my own mind," she said.

In Westminster, parliamentarians are considering legislation to introduce



censorship zones around abortion facilities across England and Wales. Clause 9 of the Public Order Bill, currently under parliamentary debate, would prohibit pro-life volunteers from "influencing", "advising", "persuading", "informing", "occupying space" or even "expressing opinion" within the vicinity of an abortion facility. Those who breach the rules could face up to two years in prison.

A 2018 government review into the work of volunteers outside of abortion facilities found that instances of harassment are rare, and police already have powers to prosecute individuals engaging in such activities.

At 150m, the national censorship zones would be larger than a football pitch (115m).

**You can watch the video of Isabel Vaughan-Spruce's arrest by searching Twitter; it is available @MaryMargOlohan, among others**

## MPs to challenge gambling law amid concern current safeguards are too weak

The Digital, Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS) select committee has launched an inquiry into the government's approach to the regulation of gambling, following warnings that "more needs to be done to protect people, including children, from gambling-related harm".

The cross-party committee will investigate, "the progress the government has made in addressing the issues raised by parliament, how to ensure regulation can keep up with innovations in online gambling and the links between gambling and broadcasting and sport."

Alarming recent figures show a 42 per cent annual rise in demand for NHS gambling clinics. In October,

data from the Gambling Commission showed more than 1 in 100 people aged 16 to 24 (1.4%) are problem gamblers – a three-fold increase on 2021. The Commission also noted a significant growth in online gambling.

The UK Government has promised reform to gambling laws, but these were delayed for a fourth time this summer.

Christian charity CARE has repeatedly called for updated legislation on gambling, arguing that current laws 'are seriously outdated'.

CARE's James Mildred said: "The Government must introduce robust, far-reaching reforms that treat gambling addiction as a public health issue."



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Public Engagement by Catholics for the Common Good



# Mary's Meals is creating a river of hope that's flowing through Africa

**Karen Gray, director of communications at Mary's Meals, reflects on her recent visit to Turkana in northern Kenya where the charity's promise of a daily meal in school is a beacon of hope during difficult days.**

Although Turkana may not have seen consistent rainfall for far too long, I believe there is a river of hope running through this dry place in the form of Mary's Meals.

I see this hope in the volunteers who light fires at the crack of dawn to cook Mary's Meals for their children; in the dedicated teachers who educate with enthusiasm despite having little resources, and in the parents who long for their children to make a better life through education.

In Turkana, people are experiencing the country's worst drought in 40 years. The livestock they rely on for their livelihoods is dying, families are hungry and water can barely be found. Yet, in the schools I visited, Mary's Meals is giving children the chance to fulfil their dreams.

At Kakore nursery school, children learn under a tree, with a huge rock face used as a makeshift chalkboard.



The family know that education is the best route out of poverty... 'without Mary's Meals many refugee children wouldn't be at school

Epur, 12, is singing along with the other children. Her education has been interrupted by many hardships. It was only when Mary's Meals began to serve its daily meal of maize and beans, that her family could send Epur back to class.

Her father, Ezekiel, hopes she will become a doctor or a politician, but she has other ideas. She says: "I want to be a teacher. I want to work in a school like this and help children like me to learn."

The family know that education is the best route out of poverty. One of Epur's sisters has become an engineer and the determination that Epur can also carve out a better life is clear, despite the challenges they face. "I pray we can find a way, and

she will succeed like her sister," Ezekiel says.

During my visit to Kenya, I am also introduced to Fred, an inspirational man who says his faith and God's love has carried him through troubled times.

I meet him at the colourful school building in the heart of the Kakuma refugee settlement, where two of his children eat Mary's Meals – the daily bowl of rice and beans fuelling their concentration as they learn the alphabet.

Fred says: "If it wasn't for Mary's Meals many refugee children wouldn't be at school."

Throughout our chat, Fred is playing with the edges of a battered book, and it's only towards the end

that I notice it's a well-read Bible. Not his, he tells me, but he adds that his faith and God's love has carried him through troubled times.

He explains: "I was brought up by a faithful Christian mother and I am a Catholic, my wife a Protestant. My whole family goes to church, and we pray together every day."

In 2013, after being forced by bandits to help them hide items or be killed, Fred fled from his home in Burundi as he knew he was in danger. He left so quickly that there was not even time to say goodbye to his family.

He eventually arrived at Kakuma refugee camp, and a couple of years later, was reunited with his wife Nabintu-Louise and their children.

Although they are now safe, life holds a new set of challenges as there is never enough food at home to sustain the family.

Fred longs for their children to make a better life through education. In the 20 countries where we work – those often scarred by conflict, drought and indescribable poverty – so many people, like Fred, pray in determination for their children to grow up well-nourished and well-educated, to be the men and women who can lift their communities out of generational poverty.

We have reached the end of what has been another challenging year for us all. Thanks to the goodness of God and the kindness of those who believe that every child should have enough to eat and to be able to go to school, 2,279,941 children are today sitting in classrooms with full stomachs, learning how to read and write.


We do this work of ours in the name of Our Lady with supporters dedicating prayers to the mission since the very beginning – joining together with families all around the world in solidarity.

This Christmas, I invite you to join me in prayer for all those who stand determined in hope that their children will find a better tomorrow because, today, they hold the certainty that their children will eat Mary's Meals.

## Double donations

Donations made to the Mary's Meals' Double The Love campaign before 31st January 2023 will be matched by a group of generous donors – with up to £1.5 million of match funding available, helping it to reach more hungry children. Please visit [marysmeals.org.uk](http://marysmeals.org.uk) for more information.



A photograph of a woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a white floral-patterned top, holding a young child. The child has a visible eye condition, likely trachoma, with a visible growth on the eyelid. The background is slightly blurred, showing an outdoor setting.

# Will you help protect children like Nalukena from **cruel, blinding trachoma?**

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Nalukena, from Senanga in Zambia  
© Sightsavers/Jason J Mulikita

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# Nothing can stop Chris as he heads for radio stardom

A blind Sunderland University student who dreams of being a successful national radio presenter has won the opportunity to host his own BBC Radio 1 show.

Chris Cameron, a former pupil of St Joseph's Catholic Academy in Hebburn, only has 3% vision – but has never let his blindness stand in the way of achieving whatever he sets his mind to.

In fact, his former St Joseph's teacher Andrew Young describes him as a “role model” and an “inspiration” to everyone who meets him.

Chris was named Best Newcomer at last year's National Student Radio Awards – but this year took Gold in the best presenter category at the awards, as well as the Bronze award in the Inclusion, Diversity and Equality category for a documentary.

“He's absolutely amazing,” Mr Young, who is head of religious studies at St Joseph's, said. “I met Chris when I first joined the school in 2015 and he was in year nine. He has 3% vision and is severely restricted in terms of his blindness, but when I first got here, he was trying out for the school football team.

“When he's got his heart set on something, he just goes for gold.”

And that's exactly what he's achieved with his radio career so far, with his Gold award helping him to secure his own show, which was broadcast on Radio 1 on Thursday, December 29th between 6pm and 8pm.

After successfully completing his A-levels at St Joseph's, including an A-Level in Religious Studies, Chris joined Sunderland University to study media production.

He also joined Spark FM, Sunderland University's student radio, as a presenter and quickly made progress.

After being named best newcomer in the country at last year's Student Radio Awards, he received feedback from executives at media companies



Chris pictured in the Radio 1 studios as he prepared for his stint on the station

like Bauer on how he could take his career to the next level.

Now, after being named the best presenter of student radio in the country, Mr Young hailed Chris as “phenomenal” and “salt of the earth.”

“He goes from strength to strength

and inspires everyone he meets,” he said.

“Now he will have the chance to go down to the studio of BBC Radio 1 in London and see how everything works in a national radio station.

“He's a role model for other students

and everyone who meets him.

“He's salt of the earth – just phenomenal.”

**Chris was on BBC Radio 1 on Thursday 29th December between 6pm and 8pm.**

## Mark 10's on mission to tell the Gospel

**Andy Drozdziak**

An online Catholic schools mission is celebrating after doubling its viewing figures and becoming a fixture in UK Catholic primary schools.

Tens of thousands of Catholic primary school children are tuning in each week to watch The Mark 10 Mission and hear the Gospel in their classrooms.

The Mark 10 Mission was initially founded by Catholic teacher Greg Finn in 2020 to help children during the pandemic.

“We thank God for the year that we have had,” Mr Finn told the *Universe*. “Over the last year, the mission has doubled its viewing figures, with as many as 60,000 young people watching their liturgy for the First Week of Advent, as an example.”

“It has been so wonderful to see so many schools joining us and we hope

**‘We hope to grow the ministry still further in 2023’, said Greg**



to grow our ministry in 2023.”

The Mark 10 team creates videos which share the Sunday Gospel, guide children in prayer and seek to initiate encounter with Jesus.

Serving Catholic schools with free weekly online Gospel liturgies, the Mark 10 mission is inspired by Mark 10:13-15, in which Jesus says: “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”

The Mark 10 Mission will be moving to a new office at the Diocese of Leeds pastoral centre at Hinsley Hall where Finn is aiming to create ‘life-changing content’ for pupils in secondary schools in 2023.

“It's has been incredible to see how primary age children have responded; we have had such awesome feedback about what God is doing in classrooms,” he added.

See <https://www.themark10mission.co.uk/> for details

# Cash boost for Catholic schools announced

The Catholic Education Service (CES) has welcomed the news that a number of Catholic schools, academies and colleges have been included in the Government's School Rebuilding Programme.

The Department for Education said that 239 school buildings in England are to be transformed as part of the ten-year scheme. Of those, 26 are Catholic, making up nearly 11% of the total, despite Catholic establishments only accounting for 9% of all schools in England.

CES Director Paul Barber called the award of the rebuilding funds “welcome recognition”.

“This is good news for the Catholic schools, academies and

colleges included, and for their pupils, parents, teachers and staff,” he said. “It is also welcome recognition from the Government that Catholic education is a sound investment for the future.”

Mr Barber highlighted the advantages brought by Catholic schools. “Catholic schools and academies outperform national GCSE averages for English and Maths by five percentage points, with more pupils from the most deprived areas, and from ethnic minorities,” he said.

“Parents and pupils of other faiths and none rightly value this success and the distinctive, all-inclusive ethos of Catholic education.”

The School Rebuilding

Programme aims to create new and modern education environments, including facilities such as state-of-the-art classrooms, science labs, sports halls and dining rooms.

Education Secretary Gillian Keegan said: “We've looked at the condition of the school estate and had bids come forward. There are some schools that are 1950s or 1960s-style-they're not particularly energy efficient either,” she said.

“There's much more modern methods of construction now, with triple-glazing, heat pumps and solar panels.

“A lot has changed in terms of modern methods of construction in the intervening period.”

St Aloysius Catholic Infant

School in Hebburn and St Mary's, in Meadowside, Sunderland, are two Catholic schools which will benefit from the programme. Headteacher of St Aloysius, Kathryn Fenwick, said she was “absolutely delighted” with the news her school is to be rebuilt.

“It is fantastic news and will ensure that the facilities and potential of the building complements the outstanding education we are so determined that our pupils continue to receive,” she said.

“This is something very exciting and positive to look forward to and brings tremendous hope to the community of Hebburn.”

Miss Fenwick said the news also

came as a “huge boost for our staff, who work so hard to deliver an exceptional standard of education, despite the current restrictions of an outdated building”.

Martin Clephane, headteacher at St Mary's, also said he was delighted that a new build for his school, which has grown in popularity throughout the city of Sunderland over the years, had been approved.

“The intake of the school has grown over the years due to the reputation and popularity of the school and so a new build will provide much needed space,” he said.

“We are now excited and ready for the next era for St. Mary's.”

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**In brief****God is there to help overcome obstacles**

Believers do not need to be afraid of obstacles, struggles and choices in life because God is always near, offering his love and guidance, Pope Francis said.

“We can often have a distorted idea about God, thinking of him as a sullen, harsh judge, ready to catch us in the act,” the pope said at his weekly general audience. “On the contrary, Jesus reveals a God who is full of compassion and tenderness for us, ready to sacrifice himself so He can come to us.”

“There is no need to be afraid,” he added, because God offers many aids to help people with this process.

Life always presents choices to us, and if we do not make conscious choices, in the end it is life that chooses for us, taking us where we do not want to go.

“The goal is to recognise the salvation God is working in my life,” he said. “It reminds me that I am never alone and that, if I am struggling, it is because the stakes are high.”

**Wife’s plea to pope over POW husband**

A Ukrainian woman has asked Pope Francis to help free her husband, who is believed to be a prisoner of war in Russia after being captured defending Mariupol.

Larysa met the pope at the end of his general audience at the Vatican and handed him a note with dozens of soldiers’ names on it, including that of her husband’s.

She said she hoped the pope “may be able to facilitate their liberation or at least an improvement in their conditions of detention,” *L’Osservatore Romano* reported.

Pope Francis already has helped facilitate hundreds of prisoner exchanges between Ukraine and Russia, using the Vatican’s diplomatic channels to do so.

Larysa also gave the pope a calendar titled, *Azovstal*, the name of the large steel plant in Mariupol that sheltered the city’s last group of organised defence against the Russian siege and eventual takeover of the city.

Diana Yurash, the wife of Andrii Yurash, Ukraine’s ambassador to the Holy See, gave the pope a *didukh* – a traditional Christmas decoration made from sheaves of wheat from the year’s harvest.

“They are the last sheaves harvested in fields where now there are bombs and mines,” Iryna Skab, embassy assistant, said.

The pope was also given a gift of a pair of white boxing gloves – which were previously owned by Larysa’s husband.

# Pope admits fears for ailing Benedict as health worsens

The day after Pope Francis told people retired Pope Benedict was “very sick” and in need of prayers, the Vatican said he had had a restful night and described him as being in serious, but stable condition.

“I would like to ask all of you for a special prayer for emeritus Pope Benedict,” Pope Francis told his weekly general audience on Wednesday.

The 95-year-old retired pope “is sustaining the Church in silence,” Pope Francis said. “Remember him. He is very sick.”

“Ask the Lord to console him and sustain him in his witness of love for the Church until the very end,” Pope Francis said.

Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, told reporters that Pope Francis visited Pope Benedict at his residence after the audience.

“I can confirm that there has been a worsening (of Pope Benedict’s health) due to advancing age,” Bruni said. “The situation at the moment remains under control, constantly followed by doctors. However, he rested well overnight and “is absolutely lucid and alert.”

“His condition remains serious,” Bruni added, “but is stable.”

“Pope Francis renews his invitation to pray for him and accompany him in these difficult hours,” Bruni added.

Cardinals, bishops, bishops’ conferences and faithful around the world offered prayers for the ailing former pope and the Diocese of Rome announced that an evening Mass would be offered in the Basilica of St. John Lateran “for our beloved Benedict XVI.”

In the 24 hours after Pope Francis asked for prayers for his predecessor, news crews started heading to St. Peter’s Square to give updates, although there was not much new to report. The square was filled with pilgrims, tourists and families taking advantage of the holidays to see the Nativity scene and visit St. Peter’s Basilica.

On 11th February, 2013, Pope Benedict announced that he would retire



Pope Benedict pictured this time last year with Ratzinger prize winner Joseph H. H. Weiler, left, a professor of law at New York University School of Law, and Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi,

effective that year. He spent the first several months of his retirement at the papal summer villa in Castel Gandolfo before moving into the Mater Ecclesiae Monastery in the Vatican Gardens where he has lived since.

The retired pope has looked increasingly frail, but as recently as 1st December the foundation that promotes his theological work released photos of him meeting with the two winners of the Ratzinger Prize.

He also met in August at the monastery with Pope Francis and the new cardinals the pope had just created.



## The manger holds the answers world seeks

Pope Francis used his homily at Mass on Christmas Eve to remind people that Christ was born to touch their hearts and show that love is the power that changes the course of history.

“The faithful must ask themselves, ‘Do we want to stand at his side? Do we draw close to him? Do we love his poverty? Or do we prefer to remain comfortably ensconced in our own interests and concerns?’” the pope asked.

“We are called to be a Church that worships a Jesus who is poor and that serves him in the poor,” the pope said, calling for a renewed commitment to charitable action and concrete change.

“The Church supports and blesses efforts to change the structures of injustice and sets down but one condi-



Pope Francis kisses the infant Jesus during Mass on Christmas Eve

tion: that social, economic and political change truly benefit the poor,” the pope said, quoting St. Oscar Romero.

The pope reflected on the danger of a Christmas filled only with “deco-

rations and gifts, after so much consumerism that has packaged the mystery we celebrate.”

“How do we rediscover the meaning of Christmas?” the pope asked. “We need to look to the manger.”

“In the manger of rejection and discomfort, God makes himself present.”

“He comes because there we see the problem of our humanity: the indifference produced by the greedy rush to possess and consume,” he said.

It is there that people can discover Jesus’ closeness to humanity, his choice to be present in the poor and marginalised, and his demand for “a concrete faith, made up of adoration and charity, not empty words and superficiality,” Pope Francis said.

In what appeared to be a criticism of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine he added: “The manger, as a feeding trough, can also symbolise a hunger for wealth and power, and people willing to consume even their neighbours, their brothers and sisters.”



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SPA22CH1

## In brief

**Zelensky shows 'US needs Ukraine,' says archbishop**

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky is a powerful symbol of eternal values, said the head of Ukrainian Catholics in the United States, and represents "those who are willing to give their lives for the truth, for God-given human dignity and for freedom," said Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia.

Archbishop Gudziak joined a delegation of Ukrainian and Ukrainian American leaders at the US Capitol for Zelensky's in-person evening address to Congress before Christmas. The group included Fr Mark Morozowich, a Ukrainian Catholic priest who is dean of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington.

Zelensky's speech capped a one-day visit to Washington – his first known venture outside of Ukraine since Russia launched its full-scale invasion on 24th February. In his 20-minute speech, which he delivered in English, Zelensky demonstrated "he stands with his people, and ... in a particular way he wanted to thank Americans," said Archbishop Gudziak. "He expressed the gratitude of Ukrainians in many forms and many ways."

**Aquila hits out at media slurs**

Denver Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila has criticised as "flat-out lies" claims by *The Denver Post* and other local media that Catholic teaching on human sexuality was contributing to hatred against transgender and LGBTQ people.

The claims were particularly hurtful as they came in the wake of a mass shooting at a Colorado gay bar in November.

The archbishop made his comments in an interview on a Denver radio talk show about an op-ed he wrote for *The Wall Street Journal*. Archbishop Aquila was among religious leaders who immediately condemned the attack on Club Q in Colorado Springs which left five people dead at the scene and injured at least 25 others.

"My state witnessed a tragedy in the gay club shooting," Aquila wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*. "Unfortunately the reaction has fostered more vitriol and division than peace and unity as the press has blamed religious communities including the Catholic Church, to which the shooter has no apparent connection."

Saying the Church's approach to human sexuality contributed to the violence is "just a flat out lie," the prelate said.

# Church leaders link the Holy Family to plight of refugees

**Judith Sudilovsky**

Comparing the suffering Jesus and the Holy Family endured to the way many people and refugees are suffering today, the patriarchs and heads of Churches of the Holy Land reminded the faithful of the "deep and abiding love" God has for all his people.

"Similar sorrows and travails continue to afflict the world in our time, whether they be in Ukraine, Armenia, Syria, or throughout the Holy Land itself," said the Church leaders in their Christmas message, which listed problems such as threats of violence, forced registration, family displacement, and existence as refugees in a foreign land.

The Christians expressed special concern for the 'Christian remnant' in the Holy Land, which is under their pastoral care. The community has increasingly faced physical assaults on people and property, restrictions on freedom of worship and legal threats against possession and management of Church property, they said.

In recent years, Church leaders have come out against restrictions placed on worshippers by Israeli police during the Orthodox holy fire ceremony at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher during Holy Week. Such restrictions included strict and aggressive police presence and limits on people permitted to enter the church for the ceremony, which involves bringing forth the holy fire from the Edicule and sharing it with all the faithful at the ceremony, as well as flying it to Greece and other countries on special flights.

Young Christians especially have been affected by this growing discouraging environment, they said.

"Such a disheartening atmosphere has led to a lack of hope, especially among our Christian youth, who increasingly feel unwelcome in the land



**The return of tourists to the Holy Land has been welcomed by the Church leaders**

where their ancestors have dwelt since even before the birth of the Church on Pentecost," they said.

They said that as a result, many of the young Christians are leaving the region for places with greater opportunity, further reducing the Christian presence below its tiny 2% minority of the general population.

The leaders offered the message of Jesus' birth as a "beacon of hope" to the youth, reminding them that "our Lord continues to suffer both with us

and for us, leading us to new life in the light of his risen glory." They added that the Churches continue to offer places of comfort, strength and support through worship services, education, health care and meaningful employment opportunities.

The Church leaders also said they were thankful for the returning of pilgrims to the Holy Land and encouraged them not only to visit holy sites but also to engage and support the "living stones" of the local Christian

community.

"Similarly, we invite Christians around the globe to support adherence to the religious Status Quo, and to continue to work and pray for a just and lasting peace in the land of our Lord's birth – as well as in the many war-torn regions of the world – that the blessed message of hope first proclaimed by the angel to the shepherds around Bethlehem may more and more be realised throughout the earth," they said.

## Death toll rises after Philippines flooding

The death toll from heavy rains and floods that devastated parts of the Philippines over the Christmas weekend has risen to 25, with 26 others still missing, the national disaster response agency has said.

Nearly 400,000 people were affected, with over 81,000 still in shelters and nine others injured, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council added.

Sixteen of the 25 deaths were reported in Northern Mindanao region in the south, while 12 of the 26 missing are from the eastern Bicol region, the council said.

A shear line – the point where warm and cold air meet – triggered rains in parts of eastern, central and southern Philippines, the state weather bureau PAGASA said.

The weather disturbance disrupted Christmas celebration in affected provinces. Some residents were seen hanging on to floaters as coast guard

rescuers pulled them across chest-deep floods using ropes.

The disaster management council said 1,196 houses were damaged by the floods, while sections of 123 roads and 12 bridges were affected. Some areas remain without power or water supply.

While the effect of the shear line has weakened, a new low pressure area may bring moderate to heavy rains within the next 24 hours to the same areas affected by the Christmas weekend floods.

The weather bureau said on Wednesday that flooding and landslides are likely, especially in areas with significant prior rainfall.

Each year about 20 typhoons and storms batter the Philippines, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries. The archipelago is located on the "Ring of Fire" along the Pacific Ocean's rim, where many volcanic eruptions and earthquakes occur.



# Spring is coming...

## So it's time to start thinking about how to get the garden into shape!

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**JANUARY:** Pope Francis with members of Rome's Rony Roller Circus troupe



**FEBRUARY:** Pope Francis holds a child on his lap during his general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican

## Catholic-Anglican unity requires both Churches walking and working together



**MAY:** Pope Francis and members of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, including Anglican Archbishop Linda Nicholls and Archbishop Bernard Longley of Birmingham

### Pope's green light for women to take top jobs

**JULY:** No movement on female clergy but the pope confirms senior level Vatican jobs, including running some dicasteries, were now open to women

A big thumbs-up from a wheelchair-bound pope as he salutes his new Swiss Guards. At the time the Holy Father was struggling with a knee ligament problem that was preventing him walking, but doctors suggested a short period of rest would solve the condition. Sadly, it did not improve through the year and he remains dependent on a wheelchair to get around



The pope meets members of the financial community at the Vatican during a year in which he personally oversaw the tightening of regulations around Vatican finances

### Pope confirms Traditionals can continue to use pre-Vatican II texts

The Church announced restrictions on 'Latin Rite' Mass – but some groups were exempt

### Pope cancels African peace trip

Health problems forced the Holy Father to cancel a planned trip to Sudan in July

### Ukraine's mall dead 'martyrs' says pope

A Russian missile attack on a shopping mall in Kremenchuk in Ukraine in July which killed dozens of civilians prompted real anger from the pope, who up until that moment had maintained a diplomatic line on the war. At one point he even appeared to side with Vladimir Putin over his reason for invading Ukraine, criticising Nato, until making it clear he held the Russians responsible for the conflict.

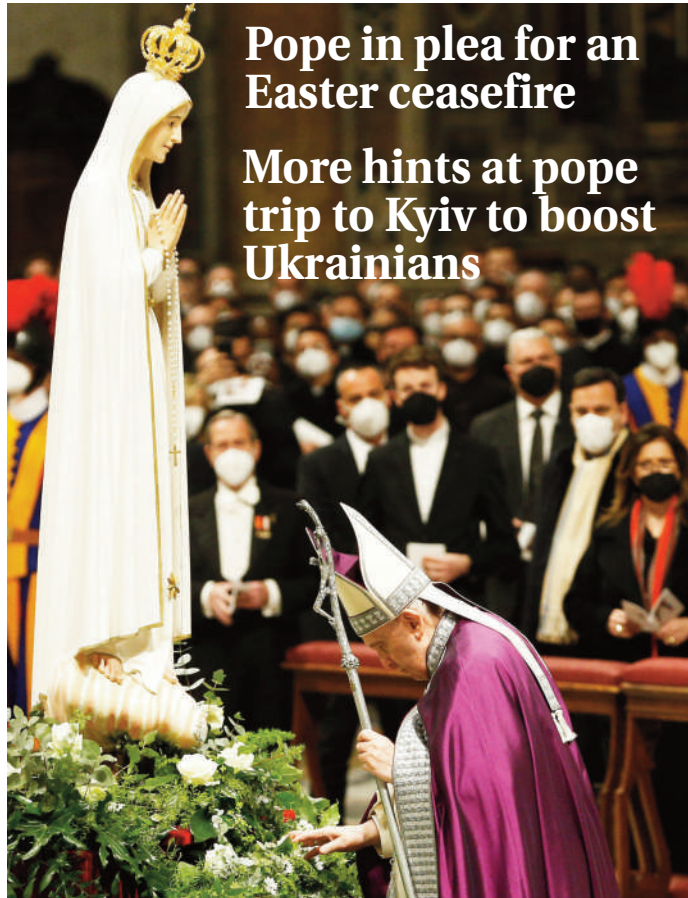
**JANUARY**  
**Vatican sells controversial London property at a loss**

**APRIL**  
**Pope vows Church finances will be 'exemplary' after scandal**

Pope Francis arrives at the Granaries in Floriana to celebrate Mass during his visit to Malta



# Pope is walking a tightrope for peace, admits Gallagher



**Pope in plea for an Easter ceasefire**

**More hints at pope trip to Kyiv to boost Ukrainians**

“Mother of God and our mother, to your Immaculate Heart we solemnly entrust and consecrate ourselves, the Church and all humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine .... please accept this act that we carry out with confidence and love. Grant that war may end, and peace spread throughout the world.”

The pope pronounces the Act of Consecration before a statue of Mary as he begs for an end to the fighting in Ukraine.

Throughout the year the Holy Father pleaded for peace and urged talks between Russia and Ukraine, to no avail. He also faced criticism for not being tougher with Russia over its invasion, particularly his reluctance to publicly criticise Vladimir Putin's conduct. However, as he told reporters in December, “I do not need to use certain words for everyone to know who I hold responsible for this conflict.” He has continually asked for prayers on behalf of “Martyred Ukraine.”



Pope delivers his ‘urbi et orbi’ blessing to a packed St Peter’s on Easter Sunday



**Pope issues heartfelt apology to Canada’s indigenous**



**AUGUST:** Big smiles as the pope greets a group of young priests

**This Christmas please bring HOPE to families devastated by the floods in Pakistan.**



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# UKRAINE... IN PICTURES

Editorial Contact: [Andy Drozdzak – News@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:Andy.Drozdzak@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)

The big story of 2022 was Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The world united in both condemnation of President Putin's brutal actions, and in support for Ukraine and its people, with offers of humanitarian and military aid as well as sanctuary for those civilians forced to flee the fighting. The UK took in around 150,000 refugees – a sizeable gesture but one that was minor compared to Germany (one million) and Poland, which accepted over 1.5 million Ukrainians. The photos on this page capture some of the horror and heartache of the conflict



There were scenes of destruction across Ukraine – but much of Russia's much-feared army crumbled in the face of fierce resistance (here and below right)



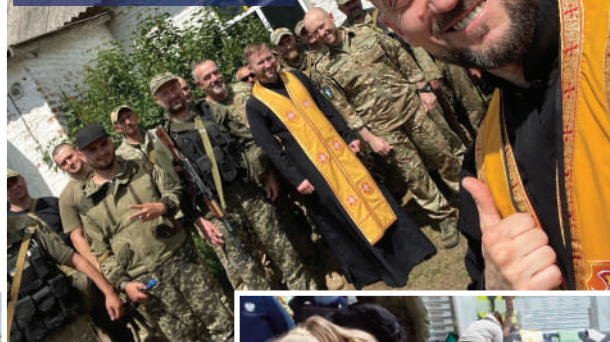
The shattered children's hospital of Mariupol, targeted in a Russian missile and artillery attack, was seen as a symbol of the barbarity of the conflict



Support from Germany (right) and in London (below), as the world united in support of Ukraine



Jesuit Father Andriy Zelinsky, co-ordinator of chaplains for the Ukrainian Catholic Church, celebrates Mass on the front line



Man of the year (above): Ukraine's President Zelensky.

Right, the poster says it all



A tearful mother waves off her family as they flee the fighting



Refugees were provided sanctuary throughout Europe; this temporary shelter was in a supermarket in Korczowa, Poland



**Pope Francis speaks to cardinals and top officials of the Roman Curia in the Vatican's Hall of Blessings. In his traditional pre-Christmas speech, the pope focused on the Gospel calls to conversion and to peacemaking. Photo: Vatican Media**

**JOURNEY IN FAITH**

**CHRIS MCDONNELL**



# The light that came 2,000 years ago was for all mankind

We have visited again the feast of Nativity, the coming of the Lord into the poverty of this world, a child born in a barn in the small Judean town of Bethlehem.

So where are we now, approaching the early days of a new year, all this time on from that singular event?

Traditionally the 12 days of Christmas end with the Feast of Epiphany, the celebration of men bringing gifts, sometimes called “kings”, at others, “wise men or magi”.

They were in any case, outsiders, men from the East, rich men we are led to believe, Gentiles, who came to acknowledge the poverty of a Jewish newborn baby.

Not only did they explore and find, but in their exploration found and gave. Later, when Simeon blessed the Child, he said that this boy would be “a light of revelation to the Gentiles”.

It was clear from the earliest days that the Incarnation was not an event restricted to a select few but had broad and inclusive consequences for the whole of

humanity. Others don't hear a story unless someone has taken the time to tell the detail. It was to give rise to the substance of the Council of Jerusalem.

That was the first task of the early Church, that in their living of the Gospel they determined not to keep it to themselves but to invite others to hear the Good News.

To see someone standing on a street corner bellowing the Christian message to all and sundry, is to invite a cynical and somewhat bemused response. Our cultural background would not be receptive to such an approach.

What is in tune with the times, is the action of individuals or groups whose life patterns tell of their belief.

The image that is reflected of their own lives and the encouragement they give to others is a continual re-enactment of the Magi encounter with the Christ.

It happens within the home, round the family table, it happens in our relationships at school and at work. It is ever-present. In our drive to obtain ever higher grades in

academic work, we too easily forget what should be the foundation of a school.

Lawrence Downey wrote that ‘a school is known by three principles: what it teaches, how it teaches and by what kind of place it is’. To me, that last point underpins all. The kind of place a school is, is determined by the teachers who shape it and sustain its welcoming culture, offering care and security to both children and adults alike. The education that follows is secure in its foundation.

Replace school by Church and teachers by Christians and the model still holds. St Benedict spoke of the monastery as a “school of charity”. That is why it has been so damaging when scandal and misbehaviour taints the Church. It is not the encouraging welcome that we expect. It does, however, reveal a Church in need of redemption.

On this coming feast of Epiphany it is worth remembering that they came and found, they found and shared. Let us do likewise, for the New Year we enter is strewn with stones waiting for incautious feet.

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## CREDO

FR HUGH DUFFY

# Baptism of the Holy Spirit

What is Jesus's baptism of the Holy Spirit?

It is to possess the same Spirit of Jesus. St John the Baptist talks about the uniqueness of Jesus's baptism of the Holy Spirit which could change the human heart in contrast to his own baptism with water that invited people to perform external acts of repentance (Luke 3 : 16 ).

Jesus's baptism of the Holy Spirit goes much deeper than St John's baptism. It transforms the person within by giving him or her a new spirit, the Holy Spirit, to follow the example of Jesus.

This baptism of the Holy Spirit has the power to overcome the limitations of the human spirit, to remove the roots of sin, to change our attitudes, and to make us more Christ-like in our behaviour. It has the power to make us more like Jesus in what we do, and in how we behave towards one another. "By this they will know you are my disciples, by your love for one another" ( John 13 : 35 ).

In the Gospel, Jesus says: "Unless you repent, you will perish" ( Luke 13:3 ). But, real repentance comes from a change of heart or attitude for that will determine what you do. If your heart is in the right place, your actions will bear good fruit. If your heart is in the wrong place, your actions will produce bad fruit. If you possess the Holy Spirit, your heart will always be in the right place.

Jesus reminds us that all evil acts



Make it your special project to let go of anything that prevents you from possessing the Holy Spirit. Without the baptism of the Holy Spirit, how can you possess the kingdom of God within you?

come from the deep recesses of the human soul, from attitudes of hatred, pride, greed, and so forth (Matthew 15:19). To be baptised in the Holy Spirit is to abandon those bad attitudes we are born with in order to be reborn with the attitudes of Christ in the gospel.

And, let's not forget that Jesus has gifted us with eight blessed

attitudes, called Beatitudes (The gospel of Matthew, chapter 5:1–10). Those who live by the beatitudes live by the Holy Spirit within them.

You cannot put new wine into old wineskins, Jesus tells us, for the new wine will burst the old wineskins (Mark 2:21–22). In the same way, you cannot possess the Holy Spirit (the new wine of Christ) if you cling to,

rather than abandon the old spirit of selfish attitudes. You must get rid of the old in order to put on the new.

Make it your special project to let go of anything that prevents you from possessing the Holy Spirit. Without the baptism of the Holy Spirit, how can you possess the kingdom of God within you? With Jesus, you are baptised into a new

way of life and have been given a new spirit, the Holy Spirit, to follow his example.

**LET US PRAY :**

**Come Holy Spirit,  
Fill the hearts of your faithful.  
Kindle in us the fire of your love.  
Send forth your Spirit  
So we may be re-created.**

## An uncanny coincidence... or are there angels among us?

When an acquaintance had a sudden nervous breakdown, disappeared from home and was found by police a week later living outside Euston Station, Kelly's perspective on life was changed irrevocably.

"If it happened to him, it can happen to me," a voice whispered within Kelly. "Am I so arrogant as to think that I can remain untouched by life's vicissitudes?" reasoned Kelly.

Then she reflected: "There but for the grace of God go I."

This mantra became the motto by which Kelly lived from that point forward. She began to look at troubled souls differently, with a softer, gentler eye. Working as she did in inner London, Kelly had frequent encounters with these down-and-out souls.

This is her story:

One evening, I was standing outside my office building waiting for my husband to pick me up by car when I heard these

words: "Please, lady, can you spare some change?"

The voice, soft and entreating, broke into my reverie. A beggar stood before me in tattered clothes, his manner mild, apologetic. His eyes were gentle and kind and sweet. Despite the harshness of his life, his face was luminous and radiant. There was a certain aura he emanated that made me feel safe.

I dug into my pocketbook and began to pull out a five pound note. It was nestled close to a ten. I began to feel the tension, a tug at my temples. I gave him the five. His mouth crinkled into a large grin, and his eyes lit up: "Oh thank you," he said effusively. "You don't know how much this means to me. I haven't eaten a decent meal for days."

I nodded my head in acknowledgement and he began to walk away. A minute later, he made a U-turn and wheeled back to my

side: "I want to thank you again and shake your hand," he announced earnestly, extending his arm in an almost chivalrous way. "What's your name?" he asked softly.

"I trusted this man, but for some strange reason that I still can't fathom, I told him that my name was Alexandra.

"Alexandra," he mused. "I'll never forget you, Alexandra. My name is James. I'm sure we'll meet again one day."

Two years later, deeply engrossed in my thoughts, I stepped off a kerb at a busy road. A horn blared and a woman screamed. I had stepped right into the path of an oncoming car. A voice shouted in warning: "Alexandra, look out!"

Suddenly, I felt a strong hand pull me away and back up to the kerb. The car whizzed by, just inches from where I had stood a second ago.

I turned around to face my benefactor

and pay him my thanks. To my intense surprise I was looking into the face of James. Where did he come from? I gazed at him in disbelief, thunderstruck. He, however, didn't seem to share my surprise at all: "I told you we would meet again," he smiled sweetly.

He stretched out his hand once again – the hand into which I had dropped the five pound note, the hand that I had shaken with such restraint, the hand that had saved my life. We shook hands once again and then James disappeared into the crowd. But where did he go? He was nowhere to be seen.

Sometimes we encounter God's protection in ways unimaginable. The gospel of Matthew says, 'God will put his angels in charge of you' (Matthew 4 : 6). James, the beggar, who saved my life on the streets of London and disappeared conveniently was my ministering angel.



## SUNDAY WORSHIP

ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS



# Behold the mother of the Lord!

1st January 2023

Mary, The Holy Mother Of God

1st Reading: Numbers 6:22-27

A new-year prayer for God to bless and protect his people

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, the Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.'

So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

**Responsorial: Psalm 66: 2-3, 5, 6, 8**

*R.: May God bless us in his mercy*

*God, be gracious and bless us and let your face shed its light upon us.*

*So will your ways be known upon earth and all nations learn your saving help. (R.)*

*Let the nations be glad and exult for you rule the world with justice. With fairness you rule the peoples. you guide the nations on earth. (R.)*

*Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. May God still give us his blessing till the ends of the earth revere him. (R.)*

**2nd Reading: Galatians (4:4-7)**  
The distance between God and man has been bridged, so we can call God "Abba! Father!"

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

**Gospel: Luke 2:16-21**

The shepherds visit the manger. Later, Jesus is circumcised and named

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by



the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

**A woman of strong and simple faith**

At the Council of Ephesus (451), the mother of Jesus was solemnly proclaimed as Mother of God or Theotokos, acknowledging the Godhead of her Son, Jesus Christ. Under this noble title she is still honoured by most Christians around the world, and today's feast invites us to place our hopes and plans for the new-starting year under her motherly care. We can entrust to her our personal concerns and those of our era, the conflicts the glaring injustices, the unequal wealth and opportunity, the war in Ukraine and elsewhere; in short, all that troubles peace and fairness in our world at this time.

In spite of everything, we can enter this new year with a sense of wonder and trust. Somehow we can share in the spirit of St Peter at the

Transfiguration of Christ when he said, "Lord, it is wonderful for us to be here." Such wonder and reverence was typical of Mary, our Mother in the faith, the first believer in our great Christian family. But Mary was also a flesh-and-blood woman of her times, a hard-working girl from Nazareth, cheerfully willing to be of service to others. It would be illusory to imagine her as a Christmas-card Madonna, set serenely against a golden background with hovering angels. Such a figure is simply not true to her life-story as told in the Gospels.

The real Mary from Nazareth knew no riches or privilege in her

lifetime. Nobody has ever lived, suffered and died in greater simplicity, marked by a strong and simple faith.

As she saw herself, Mary was the handmaid of the Lord, trusting in Providence and sustained by the goodness of God. Indeed, she stands out among the Lord's anawim, the humble hearts who confidently trust that God has everything in hand (Lumen Gentium 55).

In the first four Christian centuries, Church writers emphasised Mary's faith rather than her divine motherhood. As St Augustine put it, "She conceived Jesus in her heart before conceiving

him in her womb." Also venerated as Mother of Good Counsel, Our Lady can be our guide and counsellor in the area of faith. She wants to beget faith in us, to be our Mother in faith. That is why, in the gospel of John, she is present at the beginning and the end of Christ's public life.

John is the only one to record Mary's presence at Calvary, as in the terse statement, "Near the cross of Jesus stood his Mother" (Jn 19:25). When all the miracles of Jesus seemed a delusion to many, his mother stood there faithful to him to his last breath, still believing in God's power to save. Her faith did not need astounding miracles, but rested on childlike trust in the mysterious ways of God our Father. Nor did her role as mother cease then, for in his dying hour Jesus gave it a new focus when he said to John, "Behold your Mother." The mother of Jesus will henceforth be the mother of all his disciples, sharing with us her strong and simple faith.

**Marvelling and Treasuring**

Today on the feast of the Holy Mother of God we see Mary marvelling at what has happened, treasuring the events of Christmas in her memory, and pondering them in her heart. The image is that of the contemplative woman who ponders the marvels the Almighty has done for her and for all people. She ponders in response to what the shepherds said to her. Those simple, humble shepherds had preached the gospel to her, repeating what had been told to them by the angels, "Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." It is this good news, this gospel, that she treasured and pondered over.

The same gospel has been preached to us, and we are invited to treasure it, to ponder on it and to respond to it, as Mary did. Today, New Year's day, is a day when many feel drawn to make good resolutions. What better new year's resolution could we make today than that of adopting Mary's stance before the grace of God? Today's feast invites us to share in Mary's sense of awe and wonder before God's merciful love, made known to us in Christ, her son. As we look towards the new year, which begins today, we ask Mary to help us to treasure the gospel as she did, so that Christ might come to others through us as he came to us through Mary.

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Mary was the handmaid of the Lord, trusting in Providence and sustained by the goodness of God. She stands out among the Lord's anawim...

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH FR DOYLE

# The Lord hears you always – even when you don't talk out loud

**Q. I am 88 and have a question that bothers me almost every day. I talk and pray to God, to Jesus and to the Blessed Virgin Mary out loud, every morning and at night. But there are also times when I pray silently, in my head – especially if I wake up during the night. I would like to know whether those silent prayers are heard.**

A. Please relax and be at peace. The Lord (and Mary, too) hears all our prayers, including the silent ones. In fact, the Bible speaks directly to that. The Letter to the Hebrews says: 'The word of God is living and effective ... penetrating even between soul and spirit ... able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart' (4:12).

Even when we are burdened and find prayer difficult, the Lord is there to help us. Paul's Letter to the Romans says that the Spirit 'comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit... intercedes with inexpressible groanings' (8:26).

So God can hear our thoughts just as easily as he can hear our words. This may serve as a helpful reminder; even our thoughts should be kind and prayerful, too.

**Q. Does it count as true forgiveness if you don't hate the person, if you pray for their well-being, yet purposely avoid them because you've seen enough to know that they won't change their ways (gossiping, etc)?**

A. Forgiveness is essential to the Christian way of life. We have only to think of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Stoned outside the city of Jerusalem, he died praying for his executioners. He took his example, of course, from Jesus, who said from the cross: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34).

Earlier, after giving us the Lord's Prayer, Jesus had said: "If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you" (Mt. 6:14). So, a willingness to forgive those who have offended us is a Christian imperative.

At the same time, though, the Church does not dictate whom you have to associate with. In your own case, I believe that you have done everything you are obligated to do: You do not hate the one who offended you, and you continue to pray for his or her well-being.

To continue to fraternise with that person may not only be unpleasant for you; it could also "pull you down" into the world of gossiping that many people, including the pope, so dislike. You are justified, I would think, in keeping your distance.



'Generally, the sacrament of penance can be called confession or reconciliation, and the three terms are used interchangeably.'

**Q. My husband died suddenly and did not receive the Last Rites of the Catholic Church. We had just come back from Mass and Communion about three hours earlier. I am very upset that he was not able to receive the Last Rites, and this has been very difficult on me. I would be grateful for your thoughts.**

A. I would not be worried about your husband's salvation. I suspect strongly that he was wonderfully prepared to meet the Lord, having just shared in the celebration of Mass, together with receiving the Lord in the Eucharist.

God is not bound by the sacraments; if one has led a good, prayerful and charitable life, he has little to fear when the moment of death arrives-even if that should come suddenly.

At the same time, though, I don't want to minimise the importance of the anointing of the sick. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, the conferral of that sacrament has several effects: 'the uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole church; the strengthening and courage to endure in a Christian

manner the sufferings of illness or old age; the forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of penance; the restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul; (and) the preparation for passing over to eternal life.'

Given the salutary effects of this sacrament, the Church recommends not waiting until death is imminent before requesting to be anointed. Any serious illness, even early in its course, qualifies a person to ask for this sacrament.

**Q. My wife and I plan to take our two children on a trans-Atlantic to visit their grandmother. We expect that it will be her last opportunity to meet her grandchildren, as she is in poor health. However, my wife has expressed concern about taking that long plane trip if she should then be pregnant. Additionally, general medical advice seems to be that women are better off waiting for a year after birth before becoming pregnant again. (Our youngest is 8 months old.) Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* allows for the use of natural family planning to avoid pregnancy when there are well-grounded reasons (also translated as 'just cause'), while Pope Pius XII's 'Address to Midwives on the Nature of their Profession' required 'grave reasons' for such use. Has the Church clearly**

**settled which of these standards to apply?**

A. Your question is answered in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 'For just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood'.

Even Pope Pius XII's 1951 address to midwives, which you referenced, mentions 'medical, eugenic, economic and social' reasons as possible justification for licit use of the sterile period. In your own circumstances, my pastoral judgment would allow natural family planning. Your motive is certainly not one of selfishness, but kindness to the grandmother.

**Q. While I know that only confession will reconcile me with God, I am confused about the terminology used in my rural parish, where there are very few opportunities for confession. Any scheduled confessions are now announced as reconciliation, and I am not clear as to what to expect when I go. Sometimes there is a reconciliation service followed by confessions; other times there are only confessions. Does the Church no longer recognise a difference between the reconciliation service (which was to prepare us for confession) and the sacrament of confession (which is private)?**

A. Generally, the sacrament of penance can be called confession or reconciliation, and the three terms are used interchangeably. In fact, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Nos. 1423-24) lists several names by which the same sacrament can be designated.

These include: the sacrament of conversion, the sacrament of penance, the sacrament of confession, the sacrament of forgiveness and the sacrament of reconciliation.

The Catechism notes that 'the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament' (No. 1424).

Sometimes parishes offer reconciliation services that include prayers and scriptural readings on forgiveness, as well as a homily on the same topic. It would be good for a local church to mention in advance what the format will be for the sacrament-in particular, so that parishioners can know how much time to allow.

**Please note that this column does not accept reader inquiries or questions**



Holy oils are used in the anointing of the sick. 'The conferral of the anointing of the sick unites the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church.'

## SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY

DAVID TORKINGTON



# A resolution to end all resolutions

A hermit I know used to say, “When you stop falling you will be in Heaven, but when you stop getting up, you will be in Hell.” The fact of the matter is, we all fall.

The secret of spiritual growth is how long we take to get up again. St Francis of Assisi used to say that the difference between a saint and a sinner is not that the saint does not fall, but the speed with which the saint gets up again.

Reflect for a moment on how many times you have failed to keep your New Year’s resolutions. It is pride that prevents us from getting up after we have failed and soon we will have forgotten all about them.

Here is a bit of advice from my friend the hermit. “Try not to spend your life endlessly making resolutions that you never keep, just concentrate on one resolution that will help you keep them all.”

The theory is simple. We are all weak, so even if we do manage to keep an odd resolution here and there throughout our lives, we will never manage to keep them all, never mind conquer the sins that continually topple us. So, make just one resolution, and that is to turn and open yourself to receive ‘Love Unlimited’ as much as you are able, each day. Then your life, and the life of your family will be changed irrevocably for the better. The reason is simply this – ‘All things are possible with love that are quite impossible without it’.

So, here is the principle. Do not give up anything you like or enjoy, unless it prevents you from giving some quality space and time each day for God in prayer. There is nothing more important than trying to surcharge your own limited love with his unlimited love each day. Prayer is but the traditional word used to describe how we go about doing this. The more you come to know and experience this love then, without realising it all those things that you once thought you could never live without, simply fade away. If this can happen in human love when the love of another can totally absorb you to the exclusion of all else, how much can this happen in divine love? The quest for this love, however, can only begin when we sincerely seek and find the daily time to receive it.

## Energy management

I was talking to a friend of mine last week about sport, and he was saying that now middle age is on the horizon he is finding it more and more difficult to play with anything like the success he used to have. He told me he had to practise what he calls ‘energy management’. In other words, he has only a limited amount of energy these days, so he must use what little energy he has to best advantage. So, he freewheels whenever he can and uses what



‘So, here is the principle. Do not give up anything you like or enjoy, unless it prevents you from giving some quality space and time each day for God in prayer.’

energy he has to maximum effect at crucial moments of the game.

It is the same with us when it comes to the spiritual life. We are all weak and only have a limited amount of energy at our disposal. So, instead of dissipating it trying to do everything and ending up doing nothing, we need to practise ‘energy management’. In other words, use what little energy we have to maximum effect. This means trying to organise our daily lives so that we have regular times of access to the most powerful energy available to us. As this supernatural energy or Love begins to surcharge our own, we will be able to do what is quite impossible without it.

Jesus himself did exactly the same because he recognised that in freely choosing to enter into our weak human nature, he needed the help and strength that only his father could give.

He realised that he needed to structure his own life in such a way that he could have access continually to the help and strength that he needed from his Father. That is why he regularly went to the temple and to the synagogue with his disciples, and that is why he often went alone for more prolonged personal prayer into lonely places. However, in addition to all this, he needed daily personal prayer too, as we do.



Try not to spend your life endlessly making resolutions that you never keep, just concentrate on one resolution that will help you keep them all

## Momentum in our spiritual journey

It was the custom of orthodox Jews at that period to pray five times a day as Muslims do today. Jesus criticised his own contemporaries for the way they made such an exhibition of themselves at these prescribed times, ostentatiously praying in public to impress the plebs with their piety. He did not criticise them for doing what he would certainly have done himself, but for the way that they did it. When you pray, he insisted, “Go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you”.

We need to do the same if we are going to maintain any momentum in our spiritual journey.

When lifestyles and work patterns changed in subsequent centuries, Christians no longer found it possible to stick to the prescribed times that Jesus would have used with his disciples, except in religious orders where the practice is continued to this day. That is why for laypeople the practice of morning and evening prayer began to take its place, but sadly in recent years this seems to be disappearing. It is no good saying we simply don’t have the time because it is rarely true. A recent survey for the BBC discovered that an average person

watches television for over 30 hours a week. So surely, we could give up a couple of hours here and there for the only salt that will give savour to our lives and give meaning to what can so easily be meaningless without it.

It made me rethink the structures in my own life that had been looking a little wobbly at the knees of late. Time simply must be programmed into our daily lives if we are to follow Jesus’ example seriously. If he needed daily access to his Father to nurture and sustain his spiritual life, how much more do we? This is the first lesson that all the saints learnt from Jesus, but we become mixed up because we read the story of their lives backwards, and so totally

misunderstand the principles of the spiritual life that made them what they finally became.

## Heroic virtues

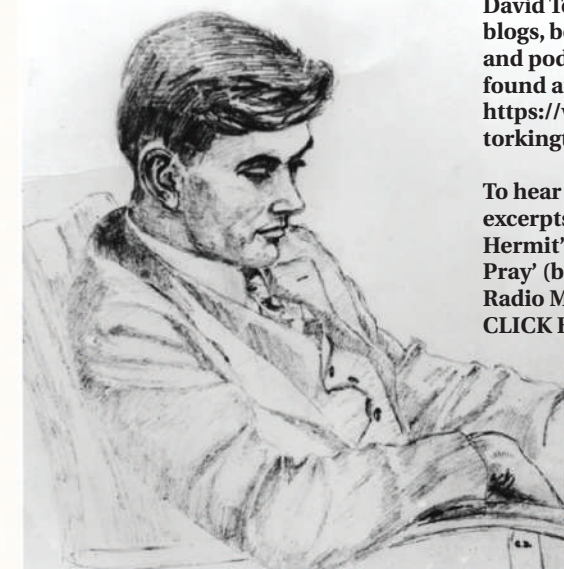
We read about their unrelenting selflessness, their heroic virtue and their feats of super-human asceticism, and we wrongly believe that we can only become like them by imitating what they did. This is of course a recipe for disaster that has destroyed the youthful idealism of many a would-be saint. Saints become saints not by performing heroic virtues, but by first opening themselves as Jesus did to the only Love that will give them the power to perform heroic virtues. If we only try to copy what are the effects of love, we are doomed to failure. We must copy the saints by realising as they did how weak they were and unable to do anything by themselves. Then we will open ourselves to receive the love that made them such loving people. They were the first to learn how to practise the energy management that enabled them to manage their lives better than anyone else.

We too must make quality space and time in our daily lives to tap into the supreme energy which is Love Unlimited. As this Love begins to penetrate and surcharge our own weak human love, we will be able to perform the sort of heroic virtues that should characterise everyone who claims to follow Jesus Christ. Then, animated by the same love that animated him, the world will come to see that Jesus is not dead but alive in us and in all who choose to receive him, and so seeing, they will come to believe.

Instead of making long lists of resolutions that we will never have the energy to keep anyway, why not just make one that will eventually enable us to keep them all.


David Torkington reads from *The Hermit* – Episode 1

by David Torkington | Jan 18, 2021 | Mystical Prayer, Podcast | 10 comments




David Torkington’s blogs, books, lectures and podcasts can be found at <https://www.davidtorkington.com>

To hear David read excerpts from *The Hermit* and ‘How to Pray’ (broadcast on Radio Maria England), [CLICK HERE](#)



# AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION



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



## Cardinal on hand to help school marks its 150th anniversary

On Tuesday 13th December, Our Lady of Dolours Catholic Primary School in Paddington celebrated its 150th anniversary in style, with a special Mass held at the local Our Lady of Sorrows Church.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, along with parish priest Fr Michael Jarmulowicz and Fr Alexander Master, celebrated Mass to mark this milestone with pupils, teachers and

staff, followed by a tour of the school.

The school prides itself on taking the pupil voice very seriously. Pupil representatives support the everyday life of the school, ensuring that all are safe and valued as individuals.

The most senior of these are the school council, school mayor and deputy mayors, who are

democratically elected. Every autumn, a whole-school election is held for mayor and three deputy mayors who are drawn from among Year 6 pupils, and are expected to be role models for the entire school.

At the end of the Cardinal's visit, the current mayor and deputy mayors posed for a photo with the Cardinal, headteacher Sarah Alley, and Fr Michael Jarmulowicz.



The Director of the East Anglia diocesan youth service, Hamish MacQueen, has raised money for the Benjamin Foundation by taking part in the 10k 'Run Norwich' event.

For many people, running 10k isn't much of an achievement, but for Hamish it really was. He admitted: "I'm unfit, fatter than I should be, and I hate running, so it was the perfect challenge!"

"I stupidly trained for only a month beforehand, running round the block and managed to get up to 7km, but that was a real struggle. I just hoped the atmosphere and adrenalin on the day would carry me through the last bit and thankfully it did.

"The first 6km was OK, but 7-8km were really tough. After that you know the end is in sight, and everyone is cheering, so you just keep going. I couldn't walk very well the following day, but it was worth it."

The Benjamin Foundation is a charity that brings hope, opportunity, stability and independence to children and young people experiencing challenges. More at [www.benjaminfoundation.co.uk](http://www.benjaminfoundation.co.uk).

## Double triumph for St Matthew's boys

A stunning long-distance strike saw a Catholic primary school football team win a prestigious South Tyneside cup competition.

Year 5/6 boys from St Matthew's Catholic Primary School in Jarrow took home The Bart Ribbon Trophy, which is open to all schools in South Tyneside, after sweeping through their group games, winning all three without conceding a goal. In the semi-finals they triumphed via a penalty shoot-out, before clinching the trophy by beating Westoe Crown Primary School from South Shields, courtesy of a long-distance strike from pupil Jamie.

It is the second year running that St Matthew's has won the football competition.

"The boys have had a great start to the season and played incredibly well during the whole tournament," St Matthew's PE Co-ordinator Maddy Wiblin said. "It is quite an achievement to win the competition in consecutive years, and full credit must be given to the boys, who have a great team spirit and show such a determined desire to win.

"A special mention must be made to their coaches David Mole and Davey Patterson, who are so encouraging and supportive."

*The victorious boys are pictured right*



# Listening is best way to start our conversations

**Sr Veronica OP from the Dominican Sisters of St Joseph in Sway shares news of a fledgling Lay Dominican group planning to be formally established in the New Year.**

The Lay Dominicans are a secular group of people who try to follow closely the life and spirit of St Dominic. A small group of lay people have been meeting in recent months to try to discern whether they could form a Lay Dominican fraternity based in the New Forest at St Dominic's Priory.

At present we have eight members discerning a vocation to become fully professed members of the third order. It is a process in which special formation is given and promises (vows) are made over a period of about two or three years. They follow the pattern of religious profession of initially being

enquirers then novices and followed by First Profession and Final Profession. The difference here is that the vocation is lived out in a person's own ordinary everyday life.

The chosen Preaching Apostolate has been to try and become good listeners, and encourage fruitful spiritual conversation once a month in Lymington on the Saturday Market Day. We ran a coffee and cake morning for passers-by who are enticed into the parish hall for refreshments and a welcoming conversations.

Members of the group have recently undergone training in how to best accompany people and lead them into a relationship with Jesus Christ. This involves developing good listening skills and learning how to discern the various stages in a spiritual journey. Once we recognise where a person is on their



journey, the more fruitful a conversation can be initiated.

Some of the group are welcomers, who stand on the street and invite people in, others will serve coffee and cakes, others will sit at tables and engage in conversation with people.

The proceeds of our efforts went towards helping a local community initiative to provide Christmas lunch and fellowship for the lonely and homeless on Christmas Day.

Our conversations may give rise to

opportunities for generous listening to the stirring of someone's heart. We are hoping to hear what is in their heart rather than talk too much about ourselves. Just being there is all some people need to feel welcomed.

During these most recent occasions we have tried to focus on Advent and Christmas, so we had a few questions in mind that might spark fruitful conversations on Market Day, such as 'I see you're getting ready for Christmas. How do you celebrate – and what does that

mean for you?', 'You go to Church at Christmas? That's lovely! Where do you go and what is it like for you?' and 'What does Christmas mean for you? What is good and beautiful about it for you?'

Hopefully we can all meet people where they are on their journey. Listening sometimes makes people curious about how we spend Christmas, and the joy we find in the feast, but remember: just a thimbleful of story rather than a gallon.

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# AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION

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



## Snow and ice can't deter Peterlee litter pickers

Children from a Peterlee Catholic primary school braved sub-zero temperatures to clean up litter on the beach at Crimdon Dene.

Year 2 pupils from Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic primary school took part in a beach clean and survey after learning about the ocean habitat and marine life in science.

"When the children saw images of what litter can do to sea creatures, they were desperate to take part in a beach clean," Year 2 class teacher Susan Jones said. "They really wanted to help and make a real difference.

"As a Catholic school, we live out

Gospel values each day. Psalm 24:1 tells us that everything in the world belongs to God. Picking up litter is a great way of living this out and making the world a better place."

"It was sub-zero temperatures, but this didn't put the children off. Everyone wrapped up warm and toasty."

After a safety talk, the group picked up litter and conducted a survey of the different litter they spotted. It included plastic, dog toys, scraps of metal, empty cans, fishing equipment and even a piece of orange carpet.

The group then created some

beach art including mermaids, a turtle, jellyfish and killer whale. After lunch and a hot chocolate at the Dunes Cafe to warm them up, they went on a wintry walk around the Dene, where they discovered giant icicles, frosted twigs and frozen streams.

The children are keen to invest in litter-picking equipment so they can carry out more litter picks in the school grounds and in public places across Peterlee.

Mrs Jones added: "They said that they would like to encourage other year groups to take part as well so that we can protect the wildlife of Peterlee and make Peterlee look beautiful.

"We always try to promote our school values of Ready, Respect, Safe and we know the importance of respecting our world and keeping everyone safe.

"We hope to build a better awareness of the dangers of throwing litter to animals and humans and to encourage all year groups in school to take part in litter-picking exercises within school and the local area.

Teaching assistant Marguerite Elwick said: "It was wonderful to see the children so enthusiastic and involved in helping our community by picking up litter, and not being put off by the sub-zero conditions."



The 'Mini Police' at St Mary's Catholic primary school, Newton Aycliffe, helped promote the town's Christmas Extravaganza by selling raffle tickets and doing a bucket collection to raise money for the

community spirit and the Newton Aycliffe Police Appeal.

Additionally, half of the proceeds raised is gifted back to the school.

St Mary's set a target of selling 1,000 tickets to raise £500 for

outdoor play and learning equipment, and hit that target comfortably, with more than 1,100 tickets sold, and £280 raised in the bucket collection. We're all very proud of the 'Min Police.'



John Tickle from St Theresa of the Child Jesus Church in Sutton Manor, St Helens, has been presented with a Benemerenti Medal by Bishop Tom Williams for 60 years of service to the parish. For 40 of those 60 years he has been sacristan and Master of Ceremonies as well as tending the church gardens and cleaning the

church, and organising flower displays. The church was full for the presentation and included John's sister and guests, many from the world of poultry, as he is an accomplished award-winning poultry breeder and has organised the poultry section of the Royal Cheshire County Show for the last 15 years.



Children from Our Lady & St Anne's primary school popped along to Newcastle's New Bridge Street centre for asylum seekers and refugees to inspect presents donated by their parents to children of that community, and lend a hand to wrapping them up in time for Christmas. The event was organised by Our Lady & St Anne's teacher Ms Milligan, who said it was good for the children to see at first hand where their donations had gone.

# Church mourns loss of leading historian and theologian

## Michael Hodgetts: expert on secret hides and liturgy

Michael Hodgetts KSG was one of the most respected English Catholic historians of his generation, widely known for his unparalleled knowledge of the secret hides built into recusant houses in the sixteenth century, to shelter priests from capture.

This interest came from his lifelong devotion to Harvington Hall in the archdiocese of Birmingham, where his research, and in particular his realisation that what we see today is only half of the original Hall, led to a much clearer understanding of the building and its place in Catholic history.

Michael visited many ancient houses, finding and verifying secret hides, and publishing his research in articles over many years, but the main product of his research was his book, *Secret Hiding Places* (Veritas Publications, 1989).

He grew up in the parish of Erdington Abbey, serving at the altar as a boy. Michael graduated in Classics (Latin and Greek Literature) from Oxford, and tried his vocation in the English College, Rome. Eventually, he took up life as a teacher, initially of history, and later as Head of RE

at St Thomas More School, Willenhall.

During the 1970s and 1980s he also served on ICEL, the international working group charged with creating a new English translation of the liturgy for the use of all English-speaking Catholics worldwide. The current text of the Good Friday hymn *Cruce Fidelis* (*Faithful Cross*) was his work.

He retired from teaching in 1989 and spent the following 30 years researching and publishing the history of the archdiocese and teaching undergraduate philosophy, history and theology at Maryvale Institute where he also served as examinations secretary.

He was active within the Worcestershire and Staffordshire Catholic History Societies (merged to become the Midland Catholic History Society). He was a long-standing chairman of MCHS, and editor of its journal. His last published article in *Midland Catholic History*, published in October, was, fittingly, a further piece of research based on Harvington.

Michael was appointed to the Management Committee of Harvington Hall by Archbishop Couve de Murville in 1984 and served on it for almost the next 40 years, as director, historical director and vice-chair, seeing through a series of restoration projects, from mains gas and

sewerage to the replacement of the roof and renovation of the Malt House.

At the same time, he was part of the Archdiocesan Historical Commission, editing and writing a series of booklets on people and places of significance to the archdiocese.

On the national scene, Michael was the editor of the journal of the Catholic Record Society, *Recusant History* (now *British Catholic History*), and of its *Records* volumes.

His final volume, of original historical sources associated with Little Malvern Court, will be published in 2023.

Michael was a gifted musician, and for many years, director of the choir at his own parish of St Nicholas, Boldmere, and a member and sometimes director of a diocesan choir, the Newman Singers. He was devoted to the history and the life of the archdiocese of Birmingham, a frequent member of the cathedral congregation, and the longest serving papal knight in the archdiocese.

May he rest in peace, and receive the reward for his devotion to the Lord and his service to the Church.

**Michael Hodgetts KSG, RIP**



# Parents lose fight over Welsh sex education

## Rod Minchin

Parents have lost a legal challenge against the teaching of young children about gender identity and sex in primary schools across Wales.

Campaigners launched a judicial review in the High Court against the Welsh Government's new Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum.

The curriculum sees the mandatory teaching of relationships and sexuality education to children from seven.

The legal challenge at the Civil Justice Centre in Cardiff, was brought by Public Child Protection Wales, which says the new curriculum is inappropriate for primary age children.

Dismissing all aspects of the claim, Mrs Justice Steyn said: "In my judgment, the case law and texts relied upon by the claimants do not support the existence of a fundamental common law right of excusal. I reject the contention that such a right exists.

"In my judgment, the content of the code and the guidance is consistent with the requirement to take care to ensure that RSE teaching is conveyed in an objective critical and pluralistic manner, and does not breach the prohibition on indoctrination.

"There is nothing in the code or the guidance that authorises or positively approves teaching that advocates or promotes any particular identity or sexual lifestyle over another, or that encourages children to self-identify in a particular way."

Paul Diamond, representing the claimants, said the legal challenge centred on the "whole-school approach" of the new curriculum – and it was not

subject to parental excusal rights.

Mr Diamond said the claimants were five parents – four mothers and one father – with children ranging in age from nine to teenagers.

Some of the children attend state schools while others have been removed due to concerns about the curriculum.

"All five claimants have moral and philosophical objections to the proposed curriculum and would wish to exercise rights of excusal on behalf of their children in relation to the provision of any such classes," Mr Diamond said.

"The proposed teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education in Wales is specifically constructed to be value-laden since much of the teaching, particularly that regarding LGBTQ+, will concern not facts of a scientific nature but highly contentious theories relating to moral and behavioural choices made by individuals.

"Were it to be taught as a standalone class and subject to a right of excusal, there would clearly not be any possibility of indoctrination. At stake in the present case is the question of whether there is any limit to what can be taught to children in schools.

Mr Diamond said the role of the state was to "assist parents in fulfilling their duty to provide religious and moral education to their children, not to supplant it. They do not wish for their children to be subjected to the teaching of values which are contrary to those espoused by their parents, families and communities." They simply want the retention of the parental rights of excusal, and acceptance that the whole-school approach was wrong.



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**The closing date for receipt of applications is Tuesday 31st January at midday.**

Ratcliffe College is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. The successful applicant will be required to undergo an enhanced DBS check.





# No dig gardening is better for the soil, the planet – and your back!

**Charlie Nardozzi has some good news for gardeners – there's no need to do all that back-breaking digging after all**

One of my revelations as a gardener has been to pay more attention to the soil. I grew up in a shadow of my Italian grandfather's farm where tractors, tillers, and ploughs ruled the day. Turning and tilling the soil was just how farming was done.

But as an adult I started questioning the need for all this tilling, especially on a home garden scale. I started learning the downsides of tilling. Tilling and turning the soil brings up weed seeds that germinate and make for more work during the growing season. Turning the soil also disrupts the natural layering of the soil where air and water spaces thrive along with soil microorganisms and creatures. These organisms and the soil structure are critical to growing healthy plants.

If left in place the soil becomes more productive and less likely to erode from winds and rain. By simply adding organic materials each year on top of the garden you can build the fertility of the soil without having to dig the materials into the soil.

Plus, no dig helps in a small way with reducing global warming. The less you dig, the slower the organic materials break down releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

## Simple no-dig gardens

I've been no-dig gardening for a while now and see how much less work it is and more productive my vegetables and flowers have become. Many gardeners already use no-dig techniques when building and planting raised beds. Gardeners know how to make wood, stone or free standing raised beds at least 10 inches deep right on top of the lawn or garden surface. Fill the bed with a 50:50 mix of topsoil and compost and you can plant right into the bed. It's that simple!

The main difference with no dig gardening comes in the maintenance of the beds. Maintain the bed by adding a 2-



Do you really need to go through the process of tilling your garden soil every season?

to 3-inch thick layer of compost before every planting, but don't dig it in. After the garden season is finished instead of pulling up the plants, chop and drop them. Use a hand pruner or hedge trimmer to cut off the plants at the ground level. Then chop them into smaller pieces and leave them in the garden to decompose. This adds organic matter that will break down into compost without disturbing the soil and provides some winter protection. Only remove plants if they were heavily diseased or insect ridden.

## Multi-layered no dig gardens

Another way to create a no-dig garden is to build layers of organic matter. This reduces the amount of compost and topsoil you need to bring in.

If done properly you'll be able to plant in that bed while the organic materials are

still happily breaking down.

There are many recipes to use in making a multi-layered bed. The simplest is to add 4 to 6 layers of wetted newspaper over your lawn or garden area to kill the grass and weeds, and preserve the rich soil underneath the lawn, before you start layering.

If you have perennial weeds, such as brambles and quack grass, add a thick layer cardboard instead of newspaper. No dig methods eliminate the need for any digging so you save your back while building a healthy garden soil. Then add six to eight inches of hay or straw mulch and two to three inches of compost. We've used this simple lasagna garden technique to expand and build new beds.

More involved recipes mix in a variety of materials. Add three to four-inch thick layers of high carbon (brown) materials

such as hay, straw or chopped leaves, with layers of high nitrogen (green) materials such as fresh grass clippings from untreated lawns, plants without seed heads or roots, seaweed, vegetable table scraps, and compost. I try to use materials that are naturally around my environment when creating layers. Keep layering until you reach the top of the bed and cap the bed with a layer of compost. If building the bed now for planting this year, shred the organic materials before layering so they break down faster and make the top compost layer three to four inches thick for planting. Otherwise, let the materials naturally decompose for a few months before planting.

Once built and growing, keep the soil mulched with grass clippings, straw or chopped leaves to preserve moisture, keep weeds away and continue building

the organic matter in the soil. I've also been experimenting with living mulches around large vegetables such as tomatoes and squash. I sow mixed greens, such as lettuce, kale, Swiss chard, collards, bok choy and basil around the plants and let them fill in between the larger veggies. The idea is you'll get an extra harvest of greens, plus the greens will encourage more soil biological activity making it healthier for your plants. Some gardeners say this green cover crop reduces insect and disease problems as well. Stay tuned and I'll be giving you updates.

So give no-dig gardening a try. I've written a new book on the topic called *The Complete Guide to No-Dig Gardening* that offers lots of tips and techniques.

You can find it on Amazon.



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# The science of blood – and why we're still discovering more groups

## HEALTH

**Adam Taylor**



**Just think of blood as being A, B or O? There are plenty more types...**

You are probably aware of the two main blood group systems: the AB system and the rhesus system. Under the AB system, there are four main blood types A, B, AB and O. And each of these four types can be rhesus positive or rhesus negative.

It may surprise you to hear, though, that there are many more blood group systems than just these two. Indeed, researchers at the University of Bristol recently completed the 44th blood group system called Er.

Blood comprises white blood cells, plasma, platelets and red blood cells. It is the red blood cells that define these classification systems.

Although healthy red blood cells all appear the same down the microscope, close-up inspection shows they have crucial differences in the form of "antigens" – proteins and sugars that coat the red blood cells' surfaces. It is these antigens that determine which blood group a person belongs to.

Most people go through life not really thinking about their blood group, but there are two stages in life when blood groups are fundamentally important: during pregnancy and when a blood transfusion is needed.

The ABO blood groups are the most widely recognised. Austrian physician and biologist Karl Landsteiner discovered them in 1900. He noticed that when he mixed blood from different people in his lab, it sometimes tended to clump.

Landsteiner found three blood group types, which he named A, B and O (for the German ohne, meaning without or null, because it didn't clump at all). Researchers at Landsteiner's lab later discovered a fourth blood group: AB.

Today, we know the reason people with, say, blood group A can't donate blood to people with blood group B is because of antigens. Someone with A has the A antigen on their red blood cell surface and antibodies in their plasma that attack B red blood cells, which are seen as invaders. (Antibodies are Y-shaped proteins that neutralise things that don't belong in the body, such as



harmful bacteria and viruses.)

The reason Landsteiner noticed that O blood never clumped is because it has no antigens on the red blood cells, so antibodies have no reason to attack it. This blood group remains the most important when it comes to transfusion. People with AB can receive blood from any other group (their plasma has no anti-A, anti-B antibodies). People with O can donate to any other group and are hence known as "universal donors". It is also, fortunately, the most common

blood type – about 48 per cent of people in the UK have it.

Giving people the wrong blood used to cause a significant number of deaths. However, since our understanding of blood and blood groups has increased, this number has declined substantially.

#### Many other blood groups besides

After the ABO grouping, the next most commonly recognised group is rhesus. It relates to the presence of another protein on the surface of red blood cells and is

also one of the most complex blood groups. People are either positive or negative. Being rhesus (Rh) positive is more common than negative, with 85 per cent of the UK population being Rh positive.

Rh status can cause significant risk in pregnancy, particularly during labour, when there is potential for maternal and foetal blood to mix. Mixing of blood can cause rhesus disease, where the mother has Rh-negative blood and the baby has Rh-positive blood. This leads to the mother making antibodies to the baby's Rh-positive blood cells. (Blood type is inherited. A woman with Rh-negative blood can have an Rh-positive baby if her partner's blood type is Rh positive.)

While this is not usually an issue in the first pregnancy, it poses a greater risk to subsequent pregnancies where the foetus is Rh positive, as the mother retains a low level of circulating Rh antibodies. In any subsequent pregnancy,

**"When these different blood groups go undetected, it can cause an immune reaction that has the potential to kill the foetus"**

there is a risk to a Rh-positive foetus that these maternal antibodies will cross the placenta and begin to destroy the foetus's red blood cells.

When these different blood groups go undetected, it can cause an immune reaction that has the potential to kill the foetus. This was the case in the most recent discovery of the 44th blood group (specifically, two new antigen variations called Er4 and Er5), where the baby suffered a haemorrhage and sadly passed away. It can take as little as 0.01ml of blood to mix between the foetus and mother to cause death.

Thankfully, there are treatments available, such as intrauterine blood transfusions for the foetus, that can stop this from happening.

The next group, which is one of the most complex blood groups, is the Kell group. It was discovered in 1946 and named after 'Mrs Kellacher'. This mother expressed anti-K(ell) antibodies to her K-positive foetus. In Kell haemolytic disease, the precursor cells to red blood cells are destroyed, causing extreme and sometimes fatal anaemia in the foetus.

There are many other blood groups, too, including Duffy, MNS, Lutheran, Kidd, P and Lewis systems, which, like those described above, have the potential to trigger an immune reaction, particularly between mother and foetus.

These are some of the more common blood groups that are recognised and need to be considered when planning for any type of blood transfusion to minimise the risk of reaction. Thankfully, there are protocols in place to ensure that blood is suitably matched and checked before being given to minimise any risks.

The rarer your blood group, though, the harder it can be to get blood for a transfusion, should you need one. Spare a thought for those people who are described as having "golden blood". It is so rare that fewer than 50 people in the world are thought to possess it.

**Adam Taylor is a Professor and Director of the Clinical Anatomy Learning Centre, Lancaster University**

**"Giving people the wrong blood used to cause a significant number of deaths. However, since our understanding of blood and blood groups has increased, this number has declined substantially."**

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## FOOD

# Steak with parsley butter and green beans makes a healthy start to the new year

In the new year, you might be thinking about a new, healthy diet, but you don't want to give up nice food. Well, don't worry. Steak can help you develop a healthier diet – and it's delicious, too. Sirloin is one of the tastiest cuts of steak and, when cooked well, can provide the centre piece of a perfectly simple meal. Serve with home-made chunky chips for a true British classic to take you into the new year. If you don't want to use butter in this recipe, replace with a healthier and leaner low-fat margarine.

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 sirloin steaks
- 4 rashers smoked streaky bacon
- 150g fine green beans
- 30g unsalted butter
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp fresh parsley, finely chopped
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

### METHOD

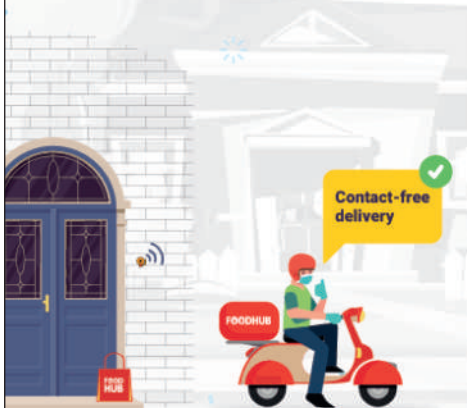
1. Blanch the beans until soft, divide into four equal bundles then wrap a rasher of bacon around each bundle before setting aside.
2. Heat a large frying pan over a high heat. Brush the steaks all over with olive oil and cook to your liking.
3. Remove from the pan and season to taste with salt and pepper. Place on a rack, cover with foil and leave to rest in a warm place.
4. Return the pan to the hob over a medium heat and add half the butter. Sear the bundles of beans for 2-3 minutes, turning regularly, until the bacon is clearly cooked.
5. Season to taste with pepper and arrange with the steaks on preheated plates. Add the parsley to the pan with the remaining butter and heat through, then drizzle over the steaks.
6. Serve.



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## ...or is it straight to the salad bowl?

### GREEK SALAD

Salad is salad is salad – until you add some Greek magic and turn it into something more. The addition of cheese and olives makes this version a meal in itself. If you are entering the New Year with a drive to lose weight and keep healthy, this is a great way to start, and tasty, too.

### INGREDIENTS

- 3 large tomatoes, cut into medium pieces or wedges
  - 2 cucumbers, sliced
  - 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
  - 4 tbsp good quality olive oil
  - 1½ tsp dried oregano
  - 150g feta cheese, crumbled.\*
  - handful of black Greek olives, pitted
  - salt, sugar and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- \* If you are keen on starting the year in a low-calorie way, half-fat feta cheese is available in all major supermarkets

### METHOD

1. Combine tomatoes, cucumber and onion in a serving bowl. Sprinkle with salt, and a pinch of sugar to taste and let sit for a few minutes so that the salt and sugar can draw out the natural juices from the tomato and cucumber.
2. Drizzle with olive oil and season with oregano, and pepper. Sprinkle feta cheese and olives over salad.
3. Serve on its own with crusty bread or as a side dish.

Tip: The natural juices from the tomato combine with the olive oil to make a delicious dressing, with no need for anything else, so you can forget your diet-busting salad dressings



LIFESTYLE

# FIVE WAYS TO REFRESH YOUR ROUTINE FOR THE NEW YEAR

Adding more nutrition to the meals and snacks you're already eating works wonders; try a handful of almonds



With the start of a new year just around the corner, it's the perfect time to have a refreshed perspective on our health and well-being so we can continue to improve ourselves day by day.

The new year brings new possibilities when it comes to our wellness routines, but sometimes it's hard to know where to begin. If you're feeling unsure how to get started or which goals to set for the year, registered dietitian **MAGGIE MICHALCZYK** is sharing five expert tips on how to have a refreshed routine for the year that focuses on nutrition and health, while incorporating her favourite snack, almonds.

Maggie believes that wellness starts from within, including fuelling her body with the proper nutrition that makes her feel good. Here she shares how to refresh your wellness routine while keeping nutrition top of mind for the new year, allowing you to live your best life.

**1. Keep it simple**

It's easier said than done, but keep it simple! Eating healthy can feel daunting – do you change everything that you're eating, do you follow the latest trends? One simple and realistic strategy I

recommend is to start by adding more nutrition to the meals and snacks you're already eating. Here are a few examples: top yoghurt and oatmeal bowls with almonds, add a handful of greens to things like smoothies, stir fries and omelettes, or add a side salad to go with any main dish.

**2. Snack on healthy whole foods**

There are so many options for snacks these days, but not all are created equal. Snacks that contain protein, fibre and healthy fat, and are low in sugar, will keep you satisfied and energised throughout the day. Almonds contain 6 grams of protein and 4 grams of fibre, along with 13 grams of "good" unsaturated fat and 1 gram of saturated fat per serving. This makes them a great well-rounded snack, and there are many ways to enjoy them to keep things fun.

**3. Nourish your skin from within**

With so much emphasis on the perfect skincare routine, one thing often overlooked is supporting our skin from within with foods that contain essential skin-benefiting nutrients like almonds. A handful of almonds provides 50% of your recommended daily value of vitamin E in one serving, which helps protect skin cells from damaging effects of free radicals

caused by pollution, UV rays, cigarette smoke and other factors.

**4. Prioritise your magnesium intake**

Most of us are not meeting the daily recommended amount of magnesium in our diets. The good news is that almonds can help. Almonds are an excellent source of magnesium, which aids in the production of energy in the body as well as supports a healthy immune system. I add almond butter to my breakfast toast, topping my salad with almonds, or simply snack on them throughout the day to reap the benefits.

**5. Challenge yourself**

Pick up a plant food (think fruit, vegetables or nuts like almonds) at the grocery store or farmers market that you've never tried before and challenge yourself to try it. Not only does this help keep things fun and fresh in the kitchen, it also adds more nutrition to your diet, helps to improve gut health and can help improve your relationship with food.

"It's so important to me to start off every new year feeling refreshed and energised," adds Maggie. "For me, I like to look at how my snacks are benefiting my overall health. I'm all about keeping it

simple, which is why one of my go-to snacks is almonds. They are the perfect snack to take while on-the-go, given their mix of protein, fibre, and fat, keeping me energized throughout the day."

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# New treasure leaves us with more questions about 7th century women

## HISTORY

**Toby Martin**

### Spectacular Anglo-Saxon burial uncovered – here's what it tells us about women in seventh-century England

A village with the Old English name 'Filthy Pool' wasn't an auspicious location to discover one of the most spectacular burials of the Anglo-Saxon period.

Nevertheless, excavations by the Museum of London Archaeology at Harpole, Northamptonshire, in England's Midlands, have uncovered an astonishing Christian burial of the seventh century, a period when the religion was relatively new in England.

The star find is an opulent necklace of gold, garnet and glass pendants, including a centrepiece with cruciform decoration.

More unprecedented, however, is the ghostly X-ray of an enigmatic item still in its soil block, which appears to be a large crucifix.

If so, it would be the first time an item like this has been found in a grave. Only one other example has survived from seventh-century England: the cross from the Staffordshire Hoard unearthed in 2009.

Excavators believe the deceased was buried in a wooden bed, though conditions are so poor that nearly all organic material has decomposed, leaving only fragments of teeth for analysis.

These remains are unlikely to provide scientific evidence for the individual's sex. But the burial type and jewellery are consistent with a feminine burial between AD630 and AD670.

#### Wealthy women of the seventh century

While most reports have emphasised the uniqueness of the burial, it is actually just the latest – albeit among the most intriguing – in a series of wealthy female burials from this period.

Jewelled necklaces are consistent finds among this group. The Desborough necklace was found just 25 kilometres (15 miles) to the northeast of Harpole. A second strikingly similar example (the Galley Lowe necklace) was recovered from a barrow – or burial mound – in the Peak District. All three necklaces echo Christian fashions from the Byzantine Mediterranean.

To us, the women who wore these jewels in England seem far removed



A reconstruction of the Harpole burial, by MOLA / Hugh Gatt

from those warmer climes. But it is easy to underestimate the reach of seventh-century networks.

Despite being an island, Britain was not insular in this period. The consolidation of the new religion was aided by missions from prominent Italian and African Christians.

With these contacts came unequal access to social advancement, influence and wealth. It is no coincidence that virtually all items bearing Christian iconography from England in this early period drip with precious metals and gems.

#### Why were women buried in this way?

There are plenty of wealthy masculine burials from this period, with particularly famous examples at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk and Prittlewell in Southend-on-Sea on the Essex coast. But archaeologist Helena Hamerow has shown that the burial of these important men preceded the wave of rich feminine burials by at least a couple of generations.

Burials such as the one in Harpole represent a different, specifically feminine and overtly Christian phenomenon.

Graves are more likely to reflect what the surviving community wanted to think of the deceased than what they thought about themselves. Funerals can knowingly be used to transform the dead into symbols of their community. They mark an ending but they also create

ancestors.

Those directing the Harpole funeral were aware of the memories and the monument they were creating. To mark this they apparently placed the burial in a prominent position on a slight rise.

This location could be important. At Streethouse on Teeside, in the north-east of England, a single feminine burial lay at the centre of more than 100 other graves. Again, she had spectacular gemstone jewellery and was buried in a bed, underneath a barrow.

The burial of a teenage girl in Ely was also under a barrow. She too wore Christian jewellery and was surrounded by other burials.

In death these women became

**The Desborough necklace was found just 25km to the northeast of Harpole. Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-SA**



symbols of their community, resting under substantial monuments in important locations that stood for generations.

#### Who were these women?

Harpole would have been in Mercia, a kingdom then on the ascent and witness to the foundation of many rich monastic houses. One was at Weedon Bec, about six kilometres east of Harpole, where St Werburgh (daughter of the first Christian king of Mercia) resided.

It was common for royal women to enjoy society's highest status – as abbesses and nuns. St Werburgh was one such woman.

That so many wealthy female

burials belong to this period may not be coincidental. Some have already speculated that the woman from Harpole was an abbess or princess. Her mourners clearly acknowledged her special status. But the fact that her grave lay outside any known monastic complex rules out any automatic argument that she was an abbess.

Speculation that she was of royal status should also be tempered.

Though extraordinary, the repurposed clasp, eight gold coins and four garnet cabochons of the Harpole necklace hardly represent royal wealth, nor the kinds of riches that monasteries of this period would have amassed.

As the discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard reminded us in 2009, it is easy to underestimate the quantity of wealth in circulation in this period.

What the burial at Harpole does tell us, however, is that it was not uncommon for women to reach considerable levels of influence in this period and in death become symbols of their communities.

Whether within or beyond a monastery, their exceptional status was associated not only with a display of their devotion to the new religion but also their femininity.

These women forged their own pathways to considerable wealth and status and in doing so, shaped what it was to be a Christian.

**Toby Martin is a Departmental Lecturer in Archaeology, University of Oxford**



# Welcome to New Year, Songkran style!

FAITH

**Andrew  
Alan  
Johnson**



## New Year water fights, magical decapitated heads and family reunions – the south-east Asian festival of Songkran has it all.

Not every country celebrates New Year's Eve on the same date as us and in many countries in Southeast Asia, such as Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, the arrival of spring also marks the beginning of the new year. *Songkran*, as the festival welcoming in the new year is called in Thai, is often celebrated with playful water fights on city streets over the course of three chaotic days.

Over these days, cities turn into playful battlegrounds. Children emerge armed from their houses and bands of revellers gather on the sides of the roads ready to waylay passersby. This, though, is a war with water.

As a scholar of Thai religion and culture, I have done fieldwork in Bangkok and Chiang Mai off and on for many years. I first encountered Songkran in Bangkok in 2010, and it was shocking for me. After sustaining a few discreet squirts from children in my neighbourhood

I emerged into a full melee; staying dry was simply out of the question.

In Theravada Buddhism, the religion practised from Sri Lanka to Laos, this is the most significant holiday of the year. The day is known as Sangkren in Cambodia, Thingyan in Myanmar, or simply Pi Mai in Laos.

In the diaspora, Songkran festivals happen wherever there is a Theravada temple, most notably in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.

The festival is a clear display of 'sanuk', the Thai emphasis on making activities fun, when many hierarchies of class and generation are suspended, at least during the water war.

In the days before the beginning of Songkran, roadside stalls start to sell cheap plastic water guns – many of which break by the first pull of the trigger – to "armed" groups of children, who wait to soak adults whom they previously obeyed and respected. The most creative children fill their water tanks with ice, ensuring that the victims wince when they're hit.

Along major streets in Bangkok, or around the city moat in Chiang Mai, groups gather, firing water pistols and lifting goopy handfuls of chalk powder to slap on each other's faces – the chalk, incidentally, being a traditional sunscreen, often promoted as a natural beauty aid.

In the past two years, concerns over Covid-19 have put a damper on the festivities, as governments try to limit the number of participants and contact between them.

Having spent a significant part of the past 20 years living in and

writing about the region, I am struck by how Songkran mixes a public carnival and family connections. In rural villages, Songkran means reunions as well as parties. Many families are supported by remittances from members working in Bangkok or abroad, and the holiday provides a chance to return home with gifts, money and temple donations.

Here, too, things turn into a party. In 2015 I spent Songkran in a fishing community near Nong Khai, in northeast Thailand. The town was suddenly full of new faces – people who had been working in factories in Korea, had married overseas, or simply lived and worked in Bangkok. In the mornings of each day, a tent was set up alongside the road, with dishes of spicy som tam papaya salad, minced pork larb and copious amounts of beer.

A hose fed constantly into a series of buckets, and as cars came down the highway, each of us would carry a fully laden bucket of cold water out into the road to soak the drivers.

Of course, this mix of chaos and alcohol can have dire consequences. The numbers of traffic fatalities spike during Songkran week each year – in 2018, there were 418 deaths linked with drunken driving in Thailand alone.

### Mythic origins

There is more to the holiday than just a water fight. In Thai versions of Hindu-Buddhist myth, the day draws from the rituals surrounding the severed head of Kapila Brahma, or Kabila Phrom in Thai, a Hindu sage who challenged a poor child

with a riddle. A child who guessed incorrectly would lose his head, and the confident sage announced that he himself would suffer the same fate if the child guessed right. But the child could understand the speech of animals and overheard the correct answer. The sage lost his head, but his magic was so strong that his severed head would make the rains end if tossed into the sky, or cause the seas to dry if it touched the ground.

In the Burmese version, this myth stems from a conflict between two groups of divinities, and the headless Brahma's body was granted a new elephant's head and thus transformed into the Hindu God Ganesh.

In each version, a group of divine women – daughters of the sage in some versions, daughters of the god Indra in others – then took the original head and enshrined it in a cave on Mt. Kailash in western Tibet. Each year, one of the daughters would mount a different beast depending on the day of the week on which Songkran falls and take the severed head in a procession.

This year, the appointed daughter rides a donkey, carries a champaka flower, and wears green – something which everyday believers can do, too, to increase their fortunes. In Bangkok, this divine procession takes the form of a parade and beauty contest to elect 'Miss Songkran'.

European celebrations of the new year happen during the winter, when days are short. Those are celebrations of resilience amid hope that the world is about to turn toward light and warmth again.

But in Southeast Asia, the season of difficulty does not coincide with the winter. Indeed, daylight time differs by only just over an hour between June and December, and the winter months have temperatures that remain quite pleasant.

The significant seasonal variation is, instead, the monsoon. April is the moment just before the hot and dry weather breaks, when monsoon is set to begin and agriculture is at its most desperate. The water wars acquire a sympathetic sort of magic, presaging the rainwaters to come.

It is also a time to thank those who have provided support and bring hope for what is to come. Each Songkran, individuals go to the temples close to their hometown, where they donate, listen to Buddhist sermons or perform acts of service.

Many honour their elders by pouring water over their elders' palms and also over images of the Buddha, a symbolic giving of coolness and moisture, given the month's nearly unbearable heat and dryness.

Each of these aspects – the carnival water fight, the mythic story of the rain-destroying head, the bathing of elders' hands and the image of the Buddha – point toward the significance of water as a source of renewal. It is also a celebration of life in the midst of hardship; a sign of its resilience and, even, its joy.

**Andrew Alan Johnson is a Visiting Scholar of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley**

# A pictorial round-up of the past seven days...



Violet, a maltichon, in fancy dress looks on as the Clontarf Yacht & Boat Club annual Christmas swim in aid of the RNLI



Bathers take part on the annual Boxing Day Swim at Tynemouth Longsands.



King Charles III, the Queen Consort and the Prince of Wales lead the royal party to the Christmas Day morning church service at St Mary Magdalene Church in Sandringham, Norfolk.



Bove, competitors take part in the annual Windlesham Boxing Day Pram Race in Surrey, a charity event which sees runners complete a course through Windlesham Village to raise money for a wide variety of deserving causes in the local community.



Swimmers take part in the Macmillan Boscombe White Christmas Dip, in aid of Macmillan Caring Locally, at Boscombe Pier, Bournemouth, Dorset.



Flooded fields by the River Parrett at Somerset Levels near Bridgwater in Somerset. Parts of the UK face ice and heavy rain with the potential for flooding as the holiday period continues.

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## LITURGICAL CALENDARS

### Ordinary Form Liturgical Calendar

**Sunday Year A, Weekday Cycle II**

**Sunday, 1st January, Mary, Mother of God:** Num. 6:22–27; Ps. 67: 2–3, 5, 6, 8, r. 2; Gal. 4:4–7; Lk. 2:16–21

**Monday, 2nd January:** Ss. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, Bishops, Doctors of the Church: 1 Jn. 2:22–28; Ps. 98; Jn. 1:19–28

**Tuesday, 3rd January:** The Most Holy Name of Jesus, 1 Jn. 2:29–3:6; Ps. 98; Jn. 1:29–34

**Wednesday, 4th January:** 1 Jn. 3:7–10; Ps. 98; Jn. 1:35–42

**Thursday, 5th January:** 1 Jn. 3:11–21; Ps. 100; Jn. 1:43–51

**Friday, 6th January:** The Epiphany of the Lord, Isa. 60:1–6; Ps. 72:1–2, 7–8, 10–11, 12–13 r. 11; Eph. 3:2–3, 5–6; Mt. 2:1–12

**Saturday, 7th January:** St Raymond of Peñafort, Priest, 1 Jn. 3:22–4:6; Ps. 2; Mt. 4:12–17, 23–25

### Extraordinary Form Calendar

according to the Roman Missal of 1962 (Tridentine Rite)

**Sunday, 1st January:** Octave Day of Christmas, Titus 2: 11–15; Lk. 2: 21

**Monday, 2nd January:** Most Holy Name of Jesus, Acts 4:8–12; Lk. 2:21

**Tuesday, 3rd January:** Feria Titus 2: 11–15; Lk. 2: 21

**Wednesday, 4th January:** Feria Readings of Tuesday repeated

**Thursday, 5th January:** Feria Readings of Tuesday repeated

**Friday, 6th January:** Epiphany Isa. 60:1–6; Mt. 2:1–12

**Saturday, 7th January:** Our Lady's Saturday Titus 3: 4–7; Lk. 2: 15–20

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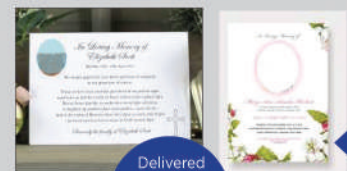
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