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Pope blasts 'inhuman and indifferent' Europe over migrant response

Summit in Marseille hears Holy Father's strongest criticism yet as he demands they open their ports

'We cannot send these people back into the arms of the traffickers'

Andy Drozdziak

Pope Francis used a speech to French President Emmanuel Macron and other European leaders of Mediterranean nations to lambast their response to the migrant crisis, saying they had shown "a lack of humanity" and a "fanaticism of indifference".

The pope challenged the leaders to open their ports to people fleeing violence, persecution and poverty, insisting that the continent does not face a migration "emergency" but rather a long-term "reality" that governments must deal with humanely.

"Those who risk their lives at sea do not invade, they look for welcome," he said. "The phenomenon of migration is not so much a short-term urgency, always good for fueling alarmist propaganda, but a reality of our times. It is a process that



Pope Francis chats to his host, President Macron of France. While previous criticism of Europe's response to the migrant issue has been strong, his language while in Marseille left leaders in no doubt as to his anger over their lack of humanity towards desperate people trying to find a better life for themselves

involves three continents around the Mediterranean, and it must be governed with wise foresight, including a European response capable of coping with the objective difficulties."

He also criticised nations that

planned to "turn migrants back into the hands of the traffickers", rejecting policies that justify their repatriation.

Pope Francis was speaking during a long address at the closing session of a week-long Mediterranean

Meeting at the Palais du Pharo in Marseille, which was hosted by the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, and attended by all political leaders of nations that border the Med. Also invited were well as Mediterranean Catholic bishops.

Although the pope did not mention countries or policies by name, several European countries, including the UK, have created laws which severely restrict the possibilities of migrants being able to settle.

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Braverman's attack on migrants labelled cruel

Andy Drozdziak

A leading Catholic justice charity has blasted a major speech by Home Secretary Suella Braverman as a “cruel, vaunting attack on refugees” and criticised her attack on the UN Refugee Convention.

The Home Secretary delivered a wide-ranging attack on the principles on which the UN Refugee Convention was built during a speech to the American Enterprise Institute on Tuesday. She questioned whether the UN's 1951 Refugee Convention is “fit for our modern age,” and declared that no migrant crossing the Channel to Britain is in “imminent peril”. She also accused some asylum seekers of “shopping around” for their “preferred destination”.

Sarah Teather, JRS UK director, said she was appalled by the Home Secretary's speech. “The Refugee Convention is a vital mechanism to protect people fleeing persecution, and it is badly needed, now as much and more than ever,” she said.

“These comments from the Home Secretary are the latest in a cruel, vaunting attack on refugees. To suggest that many of those to whom it has extended protection for decades should be shut out and cast back into danger is appalling.”

The Government's Illegal Migration Act, which has been criticised by JRS UK and the UN's refugee agency, legislated for those arriving via the Channel to be deported to their country of origin or to Rwanda. Ms Teather said that “the Government should work to extend protection to those who need it, not to find new ways to deny sanctuary.”

In her speech, Mrs Braverman also suggested that fleeing discrimination for being gay should not be enough to qualify for asylum in the UK. “Where individuals are being persecuted (for being gay), it is right that we offer sanctuary,” she said.

“But we will not be able to sustain an asylum system if in effect, simply being gay, or a woman, and fearful



Suella Braverman delivers her speech to the AEI

of discrimination in your country of origin, is sufficient to qualify for protection.”

Sarah Teather blasted this statement too: “Her attack on (the) LG-BTQI+ community is particularly concerning given the scale of oppression worldwide,” she said.

“Is her focus political and aimed at her own party? If so, she is recklessly giving comfort to dictators and tyrannical regimes on the world stage for vain purpose.”

Ms Teather also reiterated the call of Pope Francis in his message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees on 23rd September, in which he renewed his call for the practice of “good politics – transparent, honest, farsighted and at the service of all, especially the most vulnerable.”

“These actions from the Home Secretary today are anything but,” Ms Teather said. “Where people are forcibly displaced from their homes, we have a human duty to work together to seek solutions. Trying to draw others into a co-ordinated attack on those in need is a new low.”

The Home Secretary also took aim at multiculturalism in her speech, which, she said, “has failed because it allowed people to come to our society and live parallel lives in it.”

Pointing to “streets all over Europe – Malmo, to Paris, Brussels, to Leicester”, Suella Braverman said that multiculturalism enabled people to “pursue lives aimed at undermining the stability and threatening the security of our society.”

She added: “Uncontrolled immigration, inadequate integration and a misguided dogma of multiculturalism have proven a toxic combination for Europe.”

She was also critical of migration to the UK and Europe in the last 25 years which, she said, “has been too much, too quick, with too little thought given to integration and the impact on social cohesion.”

She denied it was “anti-immigrant” to speak out if you believe a nation state must be protected. Ms Braverman pointed to her own background as “a child of immigrants”.

Europe ‘inhuman and indifferent’

Continued from page 1

As the UK continues to explore ways of sending asylum seekers to Rwanda, Italy's Government has reacted to the latest group of migrants to arrive on its shores by threatening to organise a naval blockade of Tunisia and to step up repatriations.

The French Government, meanwhile, has strengthened patrols on its southern border to stop migrants in Italy from crossing, and has refused to offer sanctuary to any migrants who land at the Italian island of Lampedusa.

Pope Francis urged these and other European countries to respond with charity instead of closing bor-

ders. He said: “May we let ourselves be moved by the stories of so many of our unfortunate brothers and sisters who have the right both to emigrate and not to emigrate, and not become closed in indifference,” he said.

“In the face of the terrible scourge of the exploitation of human beings, the solution is not to reject but to ensure, according to the possibilities of each, an ample number of legal and regular entrances.”

Pope Francis has made the plight of migrants a priority in his 10-year pontificate. His first papal trip in 2013 was to the Italian island of Lampedusa to honour migrants

who drowned. His current visit, scheduled months ago, came as Europe's migrant dilemma is again in the headlines after nearly 7,000 migrants arrived on Lampedusa in a day, more than its resident population.

“Cruelty, a lack of humanity. A terrible lack of humanity,” he said of the Lampedusa drama.

While acknowledging “the difficulties involved in welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating unexpected persons,” the pope stressed that “the principal criterion cannot be the preservation of one's own well-being, but rather the safeguarding of human dignity.”

Manx joy as Douglas church elevated to cathedral status

Pope Francis has granted cathedral status to the Church of Saint Mary of the Isle based in Douglas in the Isle of Man.

The announcement comes after Douglas was awarded City status by the Queen as part of her Platinum Jubilee celebrations in June 2022.

The Church will be a co-cathedral for the Archdiocese of Liverpool alongside the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, based 80 miles away in Liverpool city centre and will be the first Catholic co-cathedral in the British Isles.

Co-cathedrals are rare in the Catholic Church, but exist when two dioceses, each with its own cathedral, are merged or when a single diocese spans two distinct civil jurisdictions. The Irish Sea separates the two cathedrals in the archdiocese.

Monsignor John Devine, parish priest of St Mary of the Isle, described the announcement as “wonderful news.”

“I am delighted that St Mary of the Isle has been granted cathedral status, it is wonderful news for Catholics across the Isle of Man,”



Douglas's new cathedral

Monsignor Devine said.

“It has been a year long process to get to this point. I was first approached by Douglas Borough Council who pointed out that cities have cathedrals. The island already has an Anglican cathedral in Peel on the west coast of the island, but they enquired whether it would be possible to elevate the church of Saint Mary of the Isle, Douglas, to the sta-

tus of a cathedral.

“The Archbishop of Liverpool, the Most Rev Malcolm McMahon, on the advice of canon lawyers, petitioned the Holy Father.”

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon said: “It is with great joy that St Mary of the Isle has been granted cathedral status. The Isle of Man is a significant part of our archdiocese. It constitutes one third of its land

mass and the island’s Catholic community has increasing diversity with parishioners coming from many different parts of the world.

“It is fantastic that we can acknowledge this with the announcement of a co-cathedral – a status that is rare in the Catholic Church.”

Monsignor John Devine added: “It is not just an honour for Douglas, but it acknowledges the unique faith story of the Isle of Man.

“Christianity in the Isle of Man traces its roots to the time of St Patrick and St Maughold in the 5th century. The granting of co-cathedral status to St Mary’s will raise consciousness throughout the Archdiocese of Liverpool and the UK to the riches of the Manx church.”

Right Reverend Peter Eagles, Anglican Bishop of Sodor and Man, said: “It is a source of great gladness to me that we have such strong ecumenical relationships here on the Island.”

An official ceremony is planned, when Archbishop Malcolm will formally take possession of his seat to mark the Church becoming a Cathedral.

Praise for *Laudato Si II*

Pope Francis has revealed that the name of his next encyclical on the environment will be *Laudate Deum*, (*Praise God*), a frequent refrain in several psalms.

The new document, expected to be released 4th October, is a follow-up to his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’, On Care for Our Common Home*.

Pope Francis revealed the title of the new document during a meeting at the Vatican with rectors of Catholic and public universities from Latin America.

The new document, he said, is “a look at what has happened” since 2015 and a look at what still “needs to be done.”

The world is facing “a process of environmental degradation,” he said, but it is a problem that impacts much more than nature. It “leads down to the bottom: Degradation of living conditions, of the values that justify these living conditions, because they go together,” with some people believing they are entitled to exploit natural resources and completely ignore the impact on people.

The extraction industry has players who have moved into “extractivism,” that is, the hoarding of natural resources; “they think they have a right to remove whatever they find in the ground.”

Joy as ‘aborted’ baby born safely after mum seeks APR help

Andy Drozdziak

A Catholic doctor is celebrating after a young mother gave birth to a healthy baby daughter after receiving abortion pill reversal treatment – in spite of messages of “hatred” on social media.

Dr Dermot Kearney, who has offered ‘abortion pill reversal treatment’ (APR) to women who wished to keep their babies, told the *Universe*: “When the joyful news of the birth of the 54th successful APR baby in the UK was announced on social media, hundreds of messages of support from all over the world were received.

“As expected, however, there were also several messages of hatred and anger posted from extreme abortion promoters.”

These messages included a call for Dr Kearney to ‘lose [sic] your license [sic]’ and another telling Dr Kearney that ‘placing your personal beliefs above patient safety is not a good thing.’

Dr Kearney accused abortion providers of “actively misinforming women that abortion pill reversal is not possible and that it is dangerous for women.”

In contrast, he said, “the pro-life movement...is built upon truth,

courage and love.”

When the policy of allowing home abortions by taking pills was introduced in 2020, many women expressed regret after taking the first of two pills, mifepristone, and searched for a reversal process.

Dr Kearney prescribes progesterone in an attempt to save the baby. The young mother who used APR gave birth to the 54th child who was born in the UK with its help.

Dr Kearney explained: “APR is essentially a two-stage process. The first step is the mother choosing not to take the second abortion drug, Misoprostol, when she regrets that she has taken Mifepristone, in the hope that her baby might survive. The second step is Progesterone therapy in the hope that this might help to save her baby,” he said.

The APR service was initiated in 2020, but was temporarily interrupted in April 2021 when false allegations against the two doctors providing the service were brought to the attention of the General Medical Council. The cases were dismissed when the GMC found there was no evidence of any professional misconduct.

Find out more from AbortionPillReversal.com.



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In Brief

Hollywood strike deal ended

Screenwriters in the US have announced a tentative deal with studio bosses that could see them end a strike that has lasted nearly five months. The Writers Guild of America said the agreement was “exceptional, with meaningful gains and protections for writers”, but members will have the final say and the tentative deal does not end the strike. The industrial action has “lasted 146 days, tossed thousands of people out of work and exposed deep anxiety over changes brought by technology”, said the Los Angeles Times.

Rupert Murdoch retiring as head of Fox, News Corp.

Rupert Murdoch, 92, is stepping down as chair of Fox and News Corp. in November, the companies announced Thursday. The conservative Australian media mogul's eldest son, Lachlan Murdoch, will take over. “For my entire professional life, I have been engaged daily with news and ideas, and that will not change,” Murdoch said in a memo to staff. “But the time is right for me to take on different roles.” Murdoch inherited an Australian newspaper from his father in 1952, and built a news and entertainment empire in the U.S. and Britain. He purchased big name newspapers, including The Wall Street Journal, but it was his creation of the conservative Fox News Channel that cemented his influence in U.S. politics.

Police apologise to Catholic woman arrested for silently praying outside abortion facility

Simon Caldwell

Police have apologised to a Catholic woman six months after she was arrested for praying silently outside an abortion facility.

Isabel Vaughan-Spruce was arrested in March outside a British Pregnancy Advisory Services clinic in Birmingham by two officers and has finally received notification that she will not be prosecuted.

In a video, an officer is heard telling Vaughan-Spruce: “You’ve said you’ve been engaging in prayer, which is the offence.”

The police apologised for the length of time taken to reach their decision. They also said that “there will be no further investigation into the alleged matter, and there will be no further action taken.”

It was the second time since December that Vaughan-Spruce was arrested outside the facility, where in



Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, pictured in an updated photo. (OSV News photo/courtesy of ADF UK)

September 2022 Birmingham City Council imposed a 150-metre exclusion zone forbidding prayer, protest and counselling.

A judge in Birmingham dismissed the first case against her in February, along with that of Wolverhampton priest Father Sean Gough, also arrested for praying silently outside

the same abortion facility.

Vaughan-Spruce was arrested again within weeks when she returned to the site and prayed silently in her mind.

The decision to drop the latest case comes within two weeks of

Home Secretary Suella Braverman writing to every police force in England and Wales to tell them that silent prayer was not a criminal offence.

Vaughan-Spruce said: “I welcome West Midlands Police’s decision to end their investigation and their apology for the time it took to do so,

but it’s important to highlight the extremely harmful implications of this ordeal not just for myself, but for everyone concerned with fundamental freedoms in the UK.”

Jeremiah Igumnubole, legal counsel for ADF UK, called for ‘legal changes.’

“We hope the decision from West Midlands Police that they will not prosecute free thought, alongside the Home Secretary’s public commitment to protecting silent prayer, will be reflected in legislation, guidance, and practice,” he said.

Vaughan-Spruce is considering whether to sue the police for wrongful arrest and to seek compensation. She also urged Catholics to be part of the pro-life movement.

“If we want to continue to be faithful Christians, we have to get out of our comfort zones and prepare to be different,” she told the Universe.

Princess Royal shows support for Mercy Ships

HRH The Princess Royal attended a 45th anniversary dinner with Mercy Ships on 26th September, where she celebrated the role of volunteers in delivering the charity’s work on its two hospital ships.

The charity launched a new Volunteer Support Fund during the evening, to enable more volunteers from developing nations to consider being involved in the life-saving work of bringing surgical care to those who need it most.

The Princess Royal, who became the Patron of Mercy Ships International in 2020, is a long-term supporter of the charity. She spoke of how it would remove the barriers for a new generation of volunteers, those from developing nations and anywhere in the world, giving the opportunity to learn alongside international colleagues and bring those skills back to their own countries.

International charity Mercy Ships operates hospital ships that deliver



free, safe surgeries and life-changing healthcare to people in sub-Saharan Africa where 9 out of 10 people cannot access safe surgery.

In 2011, HRH The Princess Royal visited the Africa Mercy hospital ship in Sierra Leone. Last year, she visited Mercy Ships’ newest ship, the Global Mercy, in Rotterdam before it sailed to Senegal.

Each year, more than 3,000 vol-

unteers from over 60 countries serve on board the world’s two largest civilian hospital ships, the Africa Mercy and the Global Mercy. Professionals from a variety of professions dedicate their time and skills to accelerate access to safe surgical, obstetric,

and anaesthetic care.

Many volunteers from the UK and around the world will be volunteering onboard the Global Mercy, which has now docked in Freetown, Sierra Leone for the next 10 months. These include nurses, surgeons, teachers, physical therapists, radiologists, anaesthetists, admin staff, and even a captain of the ship.

Mrs Rachel Buckingham, Con-

sultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon at the Oxford University Trust, also spoke at the anniversary dinner. She explained why she gives up her annual leave to volunteer on board and what a privilege and joy it is for her to see the lasting legacy left to both patients and in-country professionals she mentors and trains.

Mercy Ships UK CEO Joanne Baalam said: “We are delighted that our patron HRH The Princess Royal was here to celebrate our 45th anniversary and while we launch our Volunteer Support Fund. Her Royal Highness’ continuing support and recognition of all our volunteers’ efforts is more important than ever as we need more than 3,000 a year to volunteer on our two-ship fleet.”

Mercy Ships was started in 1978 by Don and Deyon Stephens. Since then, it has worked in more than 55 countries, helped more than 1.2 million people and performed more than 110,000 life-changing surgeries.

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Women’s voices must be heard at Synod

James Somerville-Meikle
Deputy Director, the Catholic Union of Great Britain

Page five of last week’s Universe was very striking. On the left-hand side of the page was a photograph of the Children’s Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, with Catholic Union Chairman, Richard Collyer-Hamlin. On the other side was a photograph of Education Secretary, Gillian Keegan, with Catholic Union President, Sir Edward Leigh.

These two pictures not only showed what a busy month it has been for the Catholic Union, but also the success of lay Catholic women in Britain today.

Here were two lay Catholic women in arguably the two most important jobs in the country, certainly in England, when it comes to children and education. I had the pleasure of meeting them both and they struck me as people trying to do good with the positions of responsibility they hold.

It’s not just at home where British Catholic women are making an impact. Leslie Ferrar and Ruth Kelly both sit on Pope Francis’ Council for the Economy with oversight of Vatican finances. Ruth spoke at one

of the Catholic Union’s “Pub Talks” earlier this year about her role on the Council.

Until recently, Baroness Hollins was part of arguably one of the most important groups at the Vatican – the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. She is a world-renowned psychiatrist and expert in mental health treatment. Last year, Baroness Hollins gave the Catholic Union’s Craigmyle Lecture where she spoke about the Church’s response to child sexual abuse.

Next month, another lay woman, Anna Rowlands, will be heading to Rome to take part in the latest stage of the Synod of Synodality. The author and academic will take her place alongside bishops, priests, and lay people from across the Church to review the work of the Synodal process so far.

One of the many questions for the Synod is how to develop the role of the laity, especially lay women, within the Church. Along with the many high-profile roles held by lay Catholic women, it is so often women who keep churches open and keep families together. The voices of women need to be heard at this Synod.

A Synod on Synodality was per-



haps always going to raise expectations and deepen fears about the direction of the Church. Amongst all the noise that will no doubt emerge over the coming weeks, hopefully the

opportunity is not missed for serious discussion on how the laity can help address many of the challenges faced by the Church. British women are showing the way.

Anna Rowlands will go to Rome in October to take part in the Synod of Synodality.

CARE: We must curb teen access to extreme porn

Access to extreme pornography is driving a rise in harmful sexual behaviour among young people.

According to one charity, there has been a 30% increase in under-18s contacting them and a 26% rise in adults contacting them because they’re concerned about what a young person is watching and doing.

Lucy Faithfull Foundation, a charity which set up the Stop It Now helpline for adults, now says it’s getting more and more calls from teenagers.

As a result, the group have launched a new site called Shore which has a chat and email service for teenagers aged 13-18 who can get in touch anonymously.

Last week, politicians passed the Online Safety Bill. Part of this new legislation will see age verification introduced for online pornography in a bid to curb the number of under-18s who watch it or stumble

across it online accidentally.

Christian social justice charity CARE strongly supports the new measures. CARE’s chief executive Ross Hendry shared his concerns about the link between pornography and ‘the alarming rise of sexual harassment in schools.’

“Most younger children encounter pornography online by accident. Robust age verification measures will help prevent the youngest and most vulnerable kids being exposed to content that is disturbing and damaging to them,” Mr Hendry said.

“For older children, the impact of pornography is evident in the alarming rise of sexual harassment in schools. Our societal response to this issue must involve curbing young people’s access to porn. Pornographic sites glorify sexual violence and amplify toxic attitudes towards women and girls.”



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COMMENT

British police are unusual compared with other countries' forces, in that they are not routinely armed. Rather, each force has a specialist firearms unit ready to assist their colleagues when required. Such armed officers are essential for the protection of the public and to back-up operations against terrorists and armed gangs.

These experienced officers undergo rigorous training and are often required to make life and death decisions in the most trying of circumstances.

If they discharge a weapon there is an immediate inquiry, during which the officer is suspended from firearms duties. These rules are, of course, fair and are understood by the units.

It is alarming, therefore, that more than 100 members of the Met Police's firearms unit temporarily handed in their weapons' permits after one of their number was charged with murder.

Unusually for such a serious offence, the alleged offender is on bail and is identified only as NX121. He has been afforded the anonymity that is becoming a worrying feature of the judicial process. The charge stems from an incident in which Chris Kaba, a 24-year-old black man, was shot dead last year.

Suella Braverman, the Home Secretary, has ordered a review, saying armed officers should not fear ending up in the dock, a view echoed by Sir Mark Rowley, the Met Commissioner. But they clearly do. Rightly, politicians cannot interfere in that process; but the Crown Prosecution Service will be under close scrutiny to demonstrate that the evidence and eventual verdict supports their decision.

Met firearms officers have thankfully agreed to return to duties, meaning that there has been no need to ask Army personnel to step in and cover for them, as looked likely.

But this is only a temporary reprieve for this story: many officers now fear the future, and recruiting new officers to take on weapons duties may be difficult. Morale is low enough as it is in the Met and the public will pay the price for the increased lawlessness that will ensue if trained armed officers are not ready to respond.

*Keeping your faith
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The UK just passed an online safety law that has been praised by many, including Christian charities, but not everyone believes it will improve safety online...

Tech giants' alarm over content of online safety bill risks leaving UK social media users exposed

ONLINE COMMENT

Benjamin Dowling



As you will have read in recent issues of the *Universe*, the UK's long-debated online safety bill (OSB) has been approved by the House of Lords, clearing the way for it to become law.

But it has been controversial, pitting the Government, which proposed the bill, against tech companies that provide secure messaging services. Critics say it will allow authorities in the UK to compel service providers to break users' encryption.

In July, 68 cybersecurity academics published an open letter outlining their concerns about the OSB. In it, they argue that the bill undermines the safety and privacy of users online.

The OSB has met with significant opposition from industry as well. Apple released a statement explaining that encryption "helps everyday citizens defend themselves from surveillance, identity theft, fraud, and data breaches. The OSB poses a serious threat to this protection."

In April, several secure messaging providers, such as WhatsApp, Element, Session and Signal, signed another open letter urging the Government to rethink the bill.

Yet the bill is now set to become law. On a high level, the OSB imposes duties of care on to providers of so-called 'user-to-user' internet services, those that allow users to upload or share content that can be seen by other users.

This covers activities such as uploading photos onto Instagram or sending messages via WhatsApp.

This distinguishes social media and online messaging services from internet services such as online banking, in which only the provider sees the content uploaded by the end user. These duties of care are aimed at preventing users from communicating illegal content such as child sexual abuse material.

Why is encryption important?

Since the OSB addresses messaging applications, cybersecurity experts have expressed alarm at the potential of the bill to undermine so-called end-to-end



encryption. For messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Signal, end-to-end encryption ensures that only the sender of a given message and their intended recipients can read the content of the message. Even the service provider is prevented from reading the message.

This has been a point of contention for governments and intelligence agencies worldwide, since it means they can no longer persuade tech companies to let them access a user's messages.

Proponents of end-to-end encryption, such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation digital rights activist group, argue that privacy of communication is a fundamental right that protects vulnerable groups, such as dissidents in authoritarian regimes. Encryption, they argue, helps ensure this privacy. However, critics such as intelligence and law enforcement agencies argue that the widespread use of this form of encryption hinders their ability to detect criminal activity such as terrorism or child sexual exploitation.

Is the OSB the only legislation to do this?

The OSB is not the first piece of legislation that has come under fire over its potential to undermine the safety and privacy of end-to-end encryption. In 2018, the Australian Government passed the Tola Act,

which also contained measures to compel tech companies to work with the authorities. Politicians argued that it was necessary to address terrorism. But there was a strong backlash from critics who said it could undermine encryption.

A recent proposal by the European Commission suggests similar requirements for service providers of user-generated content in EU countries and has sparked its own open letter from security and privacy researchers concerned for the potential harm to secure digital societies.

Can the OSB help undermine encryption?

The bill specifically requires the UK communications regulator, Ofcom, to issue "codes of practice" to providers of user-to-user services. The codes provide a basis for Ofcom to obtain information from these providers and fine them for non-compliance.

These codes also require that all providers of user-to-user services "must take or use proportional measures to prevent individuals from encountering illegal content by means of the service".

Conservative MP Damian Collins, who – as Minister for Tech and the Digital Economy from July to October 2022 – helped develop the OSB, said in a recent debate that companies should "use their best endeavours to detect,

proactively detect, content related to child sexual exploitation". But he also added: "We are not going to ask companies to break encryption."

The open letter from the 68 academics points out the fundamental flaw in this argument: "There is no technological solution to the contradiction inherent in both keeping information confidential from third parties and sharing that same information with third parties."

The president of messaging app Signal, Meredith Whittaker, says the bill contains no protections against breaking encryption.

Indeed, the OSB's language allows Ofcom to issue "notices" that could be used to compel messaging applications to undermine encryption. These would require the provider of the service to "use accredited technology to identify illegal content communicated publicly or privately by means of the service, and to swiftly take down that content".

Since end-to-end encryption fundamentally prevents the service provider from reading user-sent content, this necessitates breaking encryption to identify that content.

What outcome are we likely to see?

Looking at the language of the OSB, the concerns of cybersecurity experts would appear to have some foundation, despite the denials of Damian Collins and the Home Office. The OSB provides mechanisms for the government to compel messaging applications to undermine their own security measures to achieve its goals.

Removing these provisions would be straightforward. Deleting the phrasing 'or privately' from the bill would allow the OSB to stand mostly untouched while addressing the concerns of providers that use end-to-end encryption.

It is painfully ironic then, that since both Signal and WhatsApp have indicated that they would leave the UK rather than undermine encryption, that the current wording of the UK's online safety bill would potentially leave UK users of end-to-end encryption less safe online.

**Benjamin Dowling is the
Lecturer of Cybersecurity,
University of Sheffield**

Raac-hit Catholic school calls for 'lockdown' GCSE and A Level assessment

Andy Drozdziak

A Catholic education trust running a leading secondary school shut due to the reinforced concrete crisis wants teachers to be able to assess pupils' GCSE and students' A-level grades – as happened nationally during lockdown.

At St Leonard's Catholic School in Durham, reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (Raac) has been found in buildings across the site, meaning children in most year groups have had to be taught online for four days a week since term started.

There are also concerns that pupils will be disadvantaged, through no fault of their own, in public exams in 2024, compared to other students whose education has not been disrupted.

The Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, which runs St Leonard's, is seeing if it can use centre assessed grades (CAG) – as was allowed across the country during the pandemic, using pupils' and students' previous work to judge their abilities.

The trust has approached the Parliamentary Education Select Com-

mittee for assurances that, if they are allowed to use CAG "for the duration of this upheaval", that youngsters will not be disadvantaged when applying for university or jobs.

Schools minister Baroness Barran visited the site on Wednesday and parents held a peaceful demonstration in support of the school and its 150 staff, urging the Government to move St Leonard's up the Schools Rebuilding Programme list. Parents have set up a group called Save St Leonard's.

Parent Ling Pyle, whose son is a pupil, said: "We support the teachers, but the authorities have got to get things done as quickly as possible in terms of getting the school back to normal.

"The Government must give priority to St Leonard's."

Meanwhile, a working group of senior leaders, the trust, Department for Education and Durham County Council has been looking for safe alternative accommodation which could be used pending any rebuild.

They are currently assessing using former seminary Ushaw College, a nineteenth century site four miles

west of Durham.

A spokesman from the Bishop Wilkinson trust said the trust 'understands' the parents' 'frustrations and disappointment.'

"We need to get back to having all our school community benefit from our excellent team of staff, teaching face-to-face lessons as soon as practicably possible," the trust said.

"The co-ordination of planning the weekly timetable in the limited space we have is time-consuming and relentless for our staff.

"Thankfully, we have more on-site classrooms being deemed as safe by our surveyors in a staggered release.

"This will help extend our face-to-face provision to some degree."

Parents have shown their support

for the 'excellent team of staff' at St Leonard's through an online fundraising campaign to share their appreciation.

"Teaching and support staff have been working tirelessly in dreadful conditions to teach the pupils," the fundraising page states. "This fundraising will go towards a nice coffee for each staff member."



Pupils and parents outside St. Leonard's RC School in Durham, which has partially shut due to reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (Raac). Tom Banks/PA Wire

Bishop urges pro-lifers to make abortion 'unthinkable'

Andy Drozdziak

A bishop has urged pro-lifers at SPUC's national conference to make the 'tragedy' of abortion an 'unthinkable' option.

The conference took place last weekend in at Kents Hill Park Training Centre, Milton Keynes, part of the Diocese of Northampton which Bishop David Oakley leads.

"It is a tragedy that so much human life is lost to abortion," Bishop David said in a message of welcome to the conference.

"Our challenge as disciples of Christ is to reach out compassionately, to those who are suffering, including those mothers and parents who are considering the desperate decision to abort, while upholding the precious nature of all life from the moment of conception."

The conference followed the theme 'Making Abortion Unthinkable' and featured political commentator, writer and broadcaster Deacon Calvin Robinson alongside John Deighan and Alithea Williams from SPUC. Workshops took place on a variety of subjects, including: Branch development and branch fundraising, evangelising local clergy, youth and education, and after abortion.

When asked how men can contribute to the pro-life cause, Deacon Calvin Robinson said: "Lots of people say-you're a man, you can't speak up for women. Well, that's a man's role- to speak up for women. Throw any abuse at me you want. I think, as a man, I should be standing up for women."

Bishop David Oakley told SPUC he is 'grateful for organisations such as yours who are willing to do this for the unborn.' He urged the pro-life charity to 'continue the work you do, and pray with conviction and courage...so that abortion may be 'unthinkable'."

As the weekend drew to a close, SPUC thanked attendees, saying: "Thank You, most of all, for renewing your commitment to Making Abortion Unthinkable. The future is bright for the UK pro-life movement and for unborn babies, women and families."

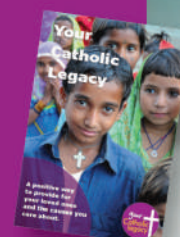


SPUC CEO John Deighan and Deacon Calvin Robinson

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COMMENT

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

SVP needs your help

Sir John Battle

September is SVP awareness month aimed at raising the of the work of the SVP within the Church as service to the wider community. St Vincent's Community Support Centre is sadly one of the only places left in Leeds offering free debt advice, a service now publicly cut back and underfunded, yet at a time when most needed, not least as the cost of living crisis has brought forward more loan sharks than ever (and increasingly accessible online).

Luke, our debt team manager at St Vincent's reports that "Every year we help hundreds of people in our community with every debt related matter imaginable: rent arrears, council tax arrears, water debts, credit debt and fuel debt lately riding monumentally."

He describes our times as "the most challenging in the last decade in relation to many people just not having enough to get by with let alone pay their creditors. We're increasingly seeing situations where outgoings exceed income. This is putting additional strain on our services as the traditional methods of helping people (eg, being able to get debts written off) are having a lessening effect as people continue to struggle even after we've got to a point of being debt free. We're seeing people coming for debt advice who aren't even in debt yet but know they will be due to soaring living costs". Luke adds "We've also purchased a large supply of blankets, children's fleece pyjamas and hot water bottles to give away to families we will be working with this winter who we know are going to be cold due to struggling to pay their heating bills. Unfortunately this represents most of our clients so supplies quickly dwindle".

People oppressed by problem debt are three times more likely to attempt suicide than those who aren't.

Luke concludes: "Can we eradicate all problem debt and financial difficulties? No, we can't! Most financial difficulties are completely unavoidable, with the most common insufficient income, health problems, job loss, separation, bereavement and unexpected and emergency expenses."

The SVP is now no longer a 'secret society' of the Catholic Church but increasingly the 'go to' referral place in our communities and society in the absence of other agency help.

For us as Catholics it is a crucial work of evangelisation in the spirit of Pope Francis's vision of the Church as a 'field hospital'. The SVP needs our practical support.

Get in touch: info@svp.org.uk

My faith in the police has been shattered

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Caroline Farrow

I have to admit to a pang of jealousy when hearing the news that Catholic campaigner Isabel Vaughan-Spruce had received an apology from West Midlands Police after she was arrested for a second time, for praying silently outside an abortion centre, having been cleared of the same offence months earlier in a magistrates court.

My jealousy sprang from the fact that this week marks the first anniversary of when the police turned up at my house at teatime when I was in the middle of cooking the family dinner, forced their way in, claiming that they did not need a warrant, seized all my electronic devices, including those belonging to my children and whisking me off in the panda car so that I could sit in a jail cell for hours, before being questioned about things that other people had posted on the internet.

My ordeal didn't end there. Almost six months later they arrested me for a second time at 9:45am in the morning; four officers threatened to break down my door while I had nipped in the shower having returned from the school run. The reason for my arrest was because I had told the police that I would not be able to attend a scheduled interview with them (again over other peoples' posts on social media) because I would be dropping my daughter off at the young peoples' autistic support group she is mandated to attend by the local education authority.

A few months later, the police summoned me to court with two days' notice in order that I could have a 'stalking protection order' imposed upon me and, incredibly, ordered my solicitor not to share their 'evidence' bundle with me. The order, if granted, would have prevented me from being able to access the internet without first obtaining the permission of an 'offender manager', despite the fact that I have not been convicted of any offence, required me to produce the serial numbers of every single internet enabled device owned by every member of the family, hand over all my email and social media passwords, and I would need the express written consent of my offender manager before I contacted anyone via the internet or text.

In other words, I would not be allowed to text my husband, mother, children or any other friend or family member for any reason, without first having written permission. Furthermore had the



'I've become so jaded that whenever I learn of an arrest, I automatically presume that the police have made some enormous bungle.'

order been granted, the police could have entered my premises at any time between 8am and 8pm to check the order was being complied with and to look at my devices.

When justifying their actions, the police wrote that they understood that this order represented a serious infringement upon my basic human rights, but that such an interference was proportionate and necessary in order to prevent loss of life and serious crime!

Fortunately, thanks to the help of an expensive legal team, the police saw fit to drop their application, but nonetheless the experience has left me extremely shaken up and distrustful of my local police force.

I cannot say too much more, for now, about why the police believed that such draconian measures were necessary because my case is currently being considered by the Crown Prosecution Service and I may still face criminal charges in court.

As Isabel and myself both know, being arrested is an unpleasant business. Isabel's silent prayer necessitated her hair being searched by officers; my alleged posting on the internet, required for my socks being searched for drugs and both of us were shoved into a dark police cell with an open toilet and CCTV trained on you, for a number of lonely hours. If it ever happens to you, I recommend asking for a pen and paper, so that you can use a tally chart to catch up on several decades of the rosary. It is also

overwhelmingly stressful to have potential criminal charges and a court ordeal hanging over you for a prolonged period of time and frustrating to have to deal with police officers who seemingly parked their common sense and intelligence in their changing room lockers at the beginning of their shift.

It is excellent that Isabel has received an apology, but this has likely only come because of the intervention of the Home Secretary who wrote a letter to every chief constable in the country, reminding them that silent prayer, even within a buffer zone, is not an offence. Isabel was literally apprehended because of what was going on in her head.

Sadly, our cases are not isolated. Over the summer a vulnerable autistic teenager was arrested because she made a remark perceived as homophobic towards a police officer. The remark was not intentionally homophobic or rude: the girl who, like many autistic people, has no filter, noticed that the police officer resembled her lesbian grandmother. The police officer then summoned other officers to drag the girl, who was so terrified she was self-harming, into custody, even though technically, because the comment had been made in the girl's own home, no public order offence had been committed.

Thanks to the resulting outcry the officer is now being investigated but still other incidents have emerged,

such as a woman in her seventies being visited at home by two police officers and lectured on transgender issues, because she'd been seen taking a photograph of a 'transphobic' sticker.

This week, another absurdity has emerged of the police ringing up a woman at home and informing her she had caused 'harassment, alarm and distress' for refusing a carrier bag from a local shop because it was emblazoned with the Pride flag.

Until a few years ago, I was a staunch defender of the police, always believing that 'there was no smoke without fire' and that arrest was something that happened to other people. What has happened to me and others, has in many ways been a useful wake-up call in terms of visceral understanding that gross miscarriages of justice can occur, and underlined my abhorrence of the death penalty. I've become so jaded that whenever I learn of an arrest, I automatically presume that the police have made some enormous bungle.

I don't like to attack our public servants who do put themselves and their personal safety on the frontline in the service of others. It's important for society and for law and order that public confidence and trust is restored in the police, which is why some kind of reckoning or inquiry is long overdue.

When innocent people are arrested for silent prayer or visited by officers to correct their thinking, the thin blue line has moved too far.

Mustard Seed Café is simply the best

Andy Drozdziak

A Sidmouth Christian café has fended off key competitors to win a key award.

Customers' votes helped The Mustard Seed Café and Christian Bookshop to win the Sidmouth Herald Café of the Year for 2023. The café came top of a shortlist of 10 local cafés – in a town with about 40 places to buy a coffee.

Ruth Ray, current chair of the Mustard Seed's trustees, paid tribute to the café's 'faithful customers.'

"A huge thank you to all our faithful customers who voted for us to be Café of the Year," Ruth said.

"The Mustard Seed is a special place, which seeks to serve the Sid Valley in various ways and to be a community café that is open to all. The other trustees and I are truly

grateful also to the great staff and many generous volunteers who make it possible."

Established in 1992, the Mustard Seed is a charity and operates as a 'social enterprise café' and bookshop. One of its objectives is to sell Christian literature. It is run by part-time staff, including an in-house baker, and a team of volunteers. Through them, it has close links with local Catholic, Church of England, Methodist and independent churches.

The Mustard Seed's coffee is sourced locally from Sidmouth's Buzz Coffee Roasters. Eggs are from Fowler's Free Range, Sidbury. The charity also uses 100% green electricity from Ecotricity.

As a social enterprise café, the Mustard Seed offers opportunities for regular volunteer work to people

whose needs limit opportunities for employment. Volunteer Debbie Brown said: "I have been volunteering at the Mustard Seed for a year and I love it."

Bookshop manager Nick Townsend said: "I've been involved only in the past year and I've learned there is more to the Mustard Seed than meets the eye. The staff, volunteers and regular customers, along with the strong links with churches across the Sid Valley, make it quite a community. The Mustard Seed is the kind of place that practical Christian faith is supposed to be about."

The café and Christian bookshop said it is 'grateful to God for the goodness and generosity of all those whose giving has enabled the Mustard Seed to grow and develop.'



Study shows positive impact of dads on children's educational outcomes



A new study has shown that children whose fathers read, sing and draw with them show a 'small but significant' increase in educational attainment at primary school.

Greater involvement by fathers before their child attends primary school gives children an educational advantage in their first year, according to the new research by the University of Leeds.

Funded by the Economic and Social research Council, the study

drew a distinction between the impact of mums and dads. While mums have more impact on emotional and social behaviours, dads had a bigger impact on educational attainment.

Dads should carve out at least 10 minutes a day to engage in playful and educational activities with their children. Schools and early year providers should develop strategies to engage dads.

CARE's Director of Communications and Engagement,

James Mildred, highlighted the study's findings.

"This fascinating study gives us further evidence that having dads involved in a child's life improves their life outcomes," he said.

"Tragically, we have a chronic problem of absentee dads, with the vast majority of single parents being the mum. Coupled with this is a society that has routinely undermined marriage and made it financially inaccessible to many. Alongside the fantastic work of

frontline charities like 'LadsNeedDads', we need to better understand why Dads are often absent and we need to address the financial barriers to marriage."

James Mildred ended by proposing an extension of 'the marriage tax allowance so it's a 100% transferable allowance, rather than the current 10%.' He described the proposal as a 'quick win.'

Caroline enjoys 'fascinating' Buckfast Abbey visit for Channel 4 programme

Andy Drozdziak

Actress Caroline Quentin described Buckfast abbey as 'one of the joys of Dartmoor' when she visited the Benedictine abbey to film Channel 4 programme 'The UK's National Parks with Caroline Quentin.'

The programme showed the Men Behaving Badly actress interacting with the community of Catholic Benedictine monks in Dartmoor National Park. Buckfast Abbey highlighted how she was 'fascinated' by the stories of Abbot David, the community leader.

After hearing the organ at Buckfast abbey, she said: "That's incredibly moving. It fills you with energy. It's delightful, absolutely delightful." After visiting the Abbey's Blessed Sacrament chapel and its grounds, Caroline Quentin called the place 'fascinating' and 'beautiful' and 'one of the joys of Dartmoor.'

Referring to her experiences of being taught about the Abbey's history and surroundings by Abbot David, she said: "I've met my first ever Father Abbot and he's an excellent one."

Buckfast Abbey spoke of the visit



of Caroline Quentin and filming crew.

"We thoroughly enjoyed meeting Caroline Quentin and the crew during filming of 'The UK's National Parks with Caroline Quentin' earlier this year," the Abbey said.

"Caroline got on exceptionally well with Abbot David, and was fascinated to hear him talk about the abbey church. Caroline also spent time with Clare Densley, Head Beekeeper at Buckfast Abbey, together with a visiting Veterans group who were happy to share their bee experiences."

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COMMENT

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

In Brief

Smaller population ‘positive’

Population growth will lead to a decline in living standards, said the chief forecaster of the Government’s spending watchdog. Although the Office for Budget Responsibility has previously said that lower birth rates and longer life expectancy would create a £250bn hole in Government finances by the mid-2070s, the OBR’s Prof David Miles CBE has now said that dwindling populations could be positive for leading economies.

Forecasters said that by 2070, the total population figure will be around one million lower, at 66 million.

Paying by cash bounces back

Payments made in cash rose for the first time in a decade last year as consumers grappled with the cost of living crisis. Revealing that the number of cash transactions went up by around 400,000 to 6.4 billion last year, industry body UK Finance said the increase came as more people relied on notes and coins to help them budget as prices rose. “It’s something we do tend to see in times of falling consumer confidence and economic uncertainty,” said a spokesperson.

However, the number is “still dwarfed” by debit card use, which accounted for half of all payments, its highest ever level, noted the BBC.

Boris nanny in unfair sack claim

A nanny who worked for Boris and Carrie Johnson has claimed that she was unfairly dismissed three days into the job after having a drink with the former PM while his wife was in hospital with their third child.

Theresa Dawes, 59, said that she was given 15 minutes to pack her bags by Carrie Johnson the day after she returned to the couple’s home. She also said that the former Tory leader said his wife was “hormonal”.

The Johnsons have rejected the claims.

Cracknell rows in to Tory seat

Olympic rowing champion James Cracknell will stand as a Conservative candidate at the next general election after he was as the candidate in Colchester, where the sitting Tory MP Will Quince is standing down. Paul Dundas said Mr Cracknell was the “clear choice” of members.

Libya floods: the drowning of Derna was a man-made disaster decades in the making

WORLD AFFAIRS

Scott Lucas

In the early hours of 11th September, residents of Derna in north-east Libya woke to the sound of loud explosions. After more than a decade of conflict – initially between the Gaddafi regime and local factions, then among militias fighting for rule – they were used to the noise.

But this was different. This was the breaking of two dams upstream towards the Jebel Akhdar (the Green Mountain) overwhelmed by the rain surge from Storm Daniel.

A seven-metre wave thundered down Wadi Derna through the city, washing whole suburbs into the sea. Soon, thousands of people would be dead and tens of thousands missing.

But even as aid organisations and foreign medical services were trying to organise rescue and recovery operations, Elseddik Haftar – eldest son of the regional warlord General Khalifa Haftar – chose the moment to announce he was planning to stand as a candidate in the next presidential election.

That moment is almost the perfect metaphor for the plight of Derna – and for Libya itself. A cataclysm of climate change, neglect and conflict, made worse by one family’s relentless quest for power.

It’s not that there hadn’t been ample warning of the dangers facing Derna. In November 2022, hydrologist Abdelwanees Ashoor of Omar Al-Mukhtar University in nearby Bayda published research that showed that the barriers needed urgent attention if they were to hold for much longer. As Derna’s deputy mayor, Ahmed Madroud, acknowledged after the flood hit: “The dams have not been maintained since 2002.”

Derna: a story of conflict and neglect

The reason for this stretches back to the authoritarian years of Muammar Gaddafi. From the time Gaddafi took power in 1969, dissident factions in eastern Libya, including Derna, chafed at his rule and his base among western tribes. Gaddafi responded by depriving the region of resources and investment.

The dictator’s demise brought no relief or stability for the east. In the factional struggle that ensued, two main competitors emerged: the



Government of National Unity based in Tripoli, backed by the UN and led today by prime minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh.

In the west and south, meanwhile, Haftar built a power base in Benghazi and Tobruk from where his National Liberation Army held sway with the help of foreign allies such as Russia, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and France. To lend a veneer of credibility, Haftar established a parliament in Tobruk with a government led by prime minister and career politician Osama Hamad, who owes his position to Haftar.

Both sides have put a priority on building up armies and militias rather than the day-to-day necessities of infrastructure and services.

In a country ravaged by civil war for more than a decade, Derna has suffered more than most areas. The city had always been a hotbed of political dissent, and in 2014, it was seized by militants who declared it to be part of the Islamic State caliphate. Haftar laid siege to the city from 2015 until its fall in 2018. Since regaining power there he has been accused of reprisals against civilians and political opponents.

The mutual distrust between local citizens and Haftar means that there has been virtually nothing in the way of reconstruction and development for the battered city and, most importantly, the dams that held millions of gallons of water for irrigation and drinking.

Instead, Haftar’s Military Investment Authority was established as a family vehicle,

exploiting industries and resources across the board, including agriculture, energy and construction. Deforestation above Derna accelerated, with trees cut down for holiday homes and businesses and for sale of the wood as charcoal.

Exploiting the disaster

Once Storm Daniel made landfall in Libya, it was clear Derna was in danger. With no clear organisation in place, Derna’s civic officials and Haftar’s personnel issued contradictory instructions.

The city’s mayor, Abdulmenam al-Ghaithi, said he had ordered an evacuation, but that other officials ordered a curfew and texted residents to stay in place.

As Derna reeled from the disaster, the Haftar family assumed control. Another of Khalifa Haftar’s six sons, Brigadier General Saddam Haftar, was given the task of overseeing rescue efforts.

His father, meanwhile, was supposedly “assessing the needs of rescue crews and ensuring they have the necessary capabilities and resources to conduct operations safely and efficiently”.

But any appearance of order or organisation was punctured when journalists asked a relief doctor what he knew about the death toll and he broke down, admitting he didn’t know how many of his fellow citizens had perished. Nor does anyone else. After years of strife in Derna, there is little in the way of bureaucracy that might otherwise collate this sort of information.

Reports vary wildly. The Turkish Red Crescent has estimated the toll

at more than 11,000 with a further 10,000 people missing. Meanwhile, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs assessed the number of deaths at just 3,958.

A quarter of all buildings in Derna have been affected: almost 900 buildings destroyed, more than 200 partly damaged and almost 400 completely submerged in mud.

Haftar, meanwhile, played politics, touring the stricken city in what has been described as a public relations exercise, halting for an hour the efforts of search and rescue teams made up mainly of volunteers. Emadeddin Badi, Libya analyst with the Atlantic Council, told the *Guardian* that Haftar and his entourage were “creating bottlenecks rather than being conducive to the provision of relief”.

Meanwhile in Paris, Elseddik Haftar was furthering his political ambitions, telling journalists: “I think I have all the means to relieve and stabilise Libya, and put in place the cohesion and unity of Libyans.”

He has the blessing of his warlord father who, in 2021, had announced he would run for the presidency, but has stepped aside at the beginning of 2023 to allow one of his sons to carry on the family business.

In the Haftar family’s business model, it seems, the people of Derna are expendable.

Scott Lucas is a Professor, Clinton Institute, University College Dublin

NI pro-life group: Exclusion zones won't stop us fighting for 'every unborn child'

Andy Drozdziak

Northern Ireland pro-life group Precious Life has vowed to 'redouble' their pro-life 'efforts' once exclusion zones outside abortion clinics are introduced from today (Friday).



The new law states that harassing, obstructing or interfering with someone attending an abortion clinic will be a criminal offence, but Director of Precious Life Bernadette Smyth shared that she is 'not deterred' by this.

"We will now redouble our efforts in our public awareness campaigns to expose the horrific reality of what abortion does to an innocent baby in the womb, and the real physical and emotional harm that abortion causes women," she said.

A private member's Bill, brought by former Green Party leader Clare Bailey last year, means that exclusion zones will be introduced across all five health and social trust areas in Northern Ireland.

A statement said it will be illegal for those visiting abortion clinics 'to be impeded, recorded, influenced or to be caused harassment, alarm or

distress within the zones.' There will also be a zone of 'between 100m-250m' where protestors cannot enter.

Bernadette Smyth warned that the exclusion zones would have 'serious implications for free speech.'

"Free speech denied anywhere is a threat to free speech everywhere. These zones have serious implications for the rights to free speech," she said.

"We are urging people in Northern Ireland to lobby their MPs to seek clarity from the UK Home Secretary that prayer in any public space is still legal."

She added that Precious Life will continue to campaign, and called for the abortion law in Northern Ireland, which was decriminalised and introduced in 2019, to be repealed.

"Precious Life will not be silent until every unborn child is protected in law, policy and practice and we see full Repeal of Section 9 of the (Executive Formation Act)," she said.

Meanwhile, Precious Life has joined pro-life politicians in opposing 'the Government's compulsory promotion of abortion in schools in Northern Ireland.' MP for Upper Bann Carla Lockhart echoed the calls.

She said: "Parents in Northern Ireland are genuinely angry, they are fearful, teachers are feeling vulnerable and fearful, and yet this Government continues on a track of potential wide-reaching changes to RSE (relationships and sex education) teaching in post-primary Northern Ireland."

Conservative whip Robert Langan said the regulations were moved this year to implement the "clear will of Parliament with respect to sexual and reproductive health education in Northern Ireland".

Christian family share anger at courts after daughter dies



The family of Sudiksha Thirumalesh give a statement outside the Royal Courts of Justice in central London. Tom Pilgrim/PA Wire

A Christian family, who were eventually allowed to name their daughter when she died after being denied the opportunity to pursue specialist treatment abroad, have shared their anger at the courts.

Sudiksha Thirumalesh, who had a rare mitochondrial disorder, was involved in a court fight with an unnamed NHS trust over whether she should be moved onto palliative care.

Speaking outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London, the teenager's brother, Varshan Chellamal Thirumalesh, said the family had been "gagged" and "intimidated".

He said: "We are a Christian family who believe in life, love and forgiveness."

"We are deeply disturbed by how we have been treated by the hospital trust and the courts. We have been gagged, silenced and most importantly, prevented from accessing specialist treatment abroad for Sudiksha. Had she been allowed to seek nucleoside treatment six months ago, it may well be that she would still be with us and recovering."

"After a year of struggle and heartache we can finally say our beautiful daughter and sister's name in public without fear: She is Sudiksha. She is Sudiksha Thirumalesh, not ST."

The Court of Protection heard that committed Christian Ms Thirumalesh – who could "communicate reasonably well" with her doctors – wanted to travel to North America for a potential clinical trial, described as "experimental".

Judges were told the A-level student was a "fighter", and that she had told a psychiatrist: "This is my wish. I want to die trying to live. We have to try everything."

However, the London court previously heard there was a "fundamental disagreement" between the fami-

ly and the trust over the teenager's care and what was in her best interests. Christian Concern says that a ruling was made in spite of two psychiatrists proving evidence to the contrary.

The family statement said: "Despite our grief and the continuing shock over everything we have been through, today a part of us is at peace."

"Sudiksha was a wonderful daughter and sister who we will cherish forever. We cannot imagine life without her."

"We did not look for this fight; this fight came to us from a 'system' that too readily gives up on life. We were brutally silenced, intimidated, and taken to court in the hour of our need."

A judge had imposed reporting restrictions on the case, making it impossible for the media to name Ms Thirumalesh. In addition, her family could not campaign to raise money for treatment.

"It is shocking that a family in the middle of stress and tragedy had a threat of imprisonment hanging over their heads," the family said.

"We seek justice for Sudiksha today, and for others in her situation."

"We have never been out for revenge, we just want justice and to be able to tell our and Sudiksha's story."



Why do we take Holy Communion?

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In Brief

Leeds picks up shoplifting title

Leeds is the shoplifting capital of England, according to analysis of police statistics by The Times. Since 2012, more than 17,000 episodes of shop theft have been recorded in Leeds city centre, comfortably outstripping locations of a comparable size around the country.

Shops are getting robbed “left, right and centre”, a store owner in Leeds told the paper.

Cardiff was in second place, followed by Westminster, Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle.

Lib Dems drop penny tax pledge

The Liberal Democrats have abandoned a key pledge to put a penny on income tax to improve public services in a bid to become the “party of the home counties”.

Sir Ed Davey, the party leader, said that the pledge, which the party first adopted in 1992, was unsustainable when people were struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.

He believes his party has a “big opportunity” to replace the Tories in towns across the home counties. They hope to win as many as 40 seats and hold the balance of power.

Work ‘shift’ revealed

Unprecedented numbers of people in their 50s and older are in part-time work, according to new data from the Office for National Statistics.

The study revealed that 3.6 million older people are working part-time in the UK: a record high and a 12 per cent increase since 2021.

This is also a 26 per cent increase in the past decade and a 56 per cent increase in the past two decades.

The findings have been hailed as a “paradigm shift in how we view work and retirement.”

Gym apology to girl

Gymnastics Ireland has issued an unreserved apology to the family of a black girl who was not given a medal at an events ceremony in Ireland.

The incident occurred at a event in Dublin in March 2022, when a line of children were awarded medals but a young black girl did not get one.

A video of the incident emerged in recent days and has been watched millions of times on social media. Gymnastics Ireland apologised “for the upset that has been caused”.

Newman’s idea of university highlights why there’s more to theology than people suppose

EDUCATION

Roderick Strange



The study of theology is reported to be in decline. Many universities have abandoned it. There is not the interest, there are not the students.

At St Mary’s University in Twickenham, however, the picture is very different. Here there are more than 60 students studying theology, a substantial number that breathes life into the School of Theology.

One reason for the high number is the presence of Mater Ecclesiae College, the pontifical institute that is based there. But what is a pontifical institute?

The Jesuits’ decision to close Heythrop College, which was a part of the University of London, could have meant as well the loss of the Bellarmine Institute, the pontifical institute that was integral to it. But the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales did not want to lose so valuable an asset and the Jesuits, with immense generosity, did not wish it to be lost either. So, after detailed negotiations, it was decided that the pontifical institute that had been based at Heythrop would be continued as an autonomous college in relationship with St Mary’s and based there, named after Mary, the Mother of the Church, Mater Ecclesiae.

What made the institute so valuable was the common expectation that a proportion of the staff of Catholic colleges and universities would have pontifical degrees, that is, degrees recognised by the Vatican. To be clear, that is not a matter of the Vatican exercising sinister control. It is common practice. I met a doctor once who, on qualifying in the UK, wished to emigrate and practice medicine in Canada. But he could not do so immediately. He needed further qualifications that Canada recognised.

Those who study theology here may receive, therefore, not only a BA, leading perhaps to an MA, with the possibility of pursuing research and obtaining a doctorate, but at the same time the corresponding pontifical degrees, a Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology (STB), a Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL), and a Doctorate in Sacred Theology (STD).

Of course, to study for a pontifical degree it is also necessary



Cardinal Nichols with the St Mary’s theology graduates.

to have a grounding in philosophy. Those studying theology as a part of their preparation for ministerial priesthood are required to study philosophy for two years, but Mater Ecclesiae also has in place for lay people a concentrated one-year course of philosophy, enabling them to complete the three-year STB within four years.

So, while a significant number of those studying at Mater Ecclesiae are preparing for priestly ordination, there are others who are not. And indeed the Vatican encourages enthusiastically the situation in which those preparing for ministerial priesthood should do so in the company of laymen and women, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. It makes for a healthy, stimulating mix.

But there is a further question. Besides those preparing for ordination, why would anyone be interested in studying theology? There may be a small number who wish to become teachers of RE in schools or perhaps have their sights set on becoming university lecturers. But more generally who

would be interested? What use can it be to them?

At this point, Catholics often turn to John Henry Newman’s seminal work, *The Idea of a University*, lectures he delivered in Dublin more than a 170 years ago. His opening sentence stated: “The idea taken of a University in these Discourses is the following: - that it is a place of teaching universal knowledge.” That notion has come in for robust criticism. How can any university teach everything? As the late John Roberts, former Warden of Merton College, Oxford, has remarked, “[Newman] takes for granted a university which exists nowhere in the world today.” The status he attributes to theology Roberts declared to be ‘unconvincing’.

Nowadays it is commonly recognised that people come to university in the first place to be trained in specialist skills that, secondly, will equip them with the expertise they need, in order, thirdly, to enter professions in which they will prosper. This intense specialisation is something Newman never envisaged. Only recently the Prime Minister was encouraging a review of universities in accordance with such criteria. Is there nothing more to be said? Perhaps there is.

In September Dame Sally Mapstone, who is the principal and vice-chancellor of St Andrews University and president of Universities UK, was reported in *The Times* as warning against too great a focus on vocational degrees at the expense of learning for its own sake. And she added: “I understand entirely why vocational degrees are seen as important. I

completely get that, but I think it’s regrettable if we lose sight of the other element of going to university which is that it enables you to grow and challenge and experiment.”

Contrary to what people may often suppose, growth, challenge, and experiment are at the heart of the theological enterprise.

Analogies are never perfect but think of a camera filming in total darkness. It can film nothing in the dark, unless, of course, it is aided by infra-red light. Theology, exploring the mysteries of faith, the deep truths veiled, if not entirely hidden, from unaided human reason, comes to perceive them nevertheless through the presence of the Spirit. As St Paul noted, “We have received the Spirit that is from God,” and for a purpose, “that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God”.

The unaided human eye, gazing into the deep mysteries of faith, like the camera’s eye filming in the dark, sees nothing, but, when aided by the light of the Spirit, acting, however feeble the analogy, like the infra-red light, transforms the human eye into the eye of faith, capable of perceiving those profound truths. And so we are able to make connections, not only within theology, but with other disciplines as well.

As Wilfrid Ward, Newman’s first major biographer, wrote, paraphrasing a letter he had received from Newman, “The religious mind sees much that is invisible to the irreligious mind. They have not the same evidence before them.”

There is more to be learnt from theology than people may suppose.

“*I think it’s regrettable if we lose sight of the other element of going to university which is that it enables you to grow and challenge and experiment.*”

Dame Sally Mapstone

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Pope demands compassion towards migrants wins over cruelty and hatred

Migrants are people: not a 'hot potato' to be thrown around or a game of ping pong

The Pope has used his strongest language yet to denounce the way migrants are increasingly being treated by European nations, turning his visit to the Mediterranean Summit in Marseille into a clarion call for more compassion and humanity.

He decried the language used to describe the issue, saying it is not "an emergency" but rather a long-term "reality" that governments must deal with humanely.

But governments must resist the temptation to send migrants back to where they embarked like a game of "ping pong," Pope Francis told reporters, as it will only put them back in the hands of the evil traffickers.

"Migrants are to be received, accompanied, promoted and integrated," he said, and if the host country is unable to take them in, then "accompany them" in being integrated in a dignified way in their country of origin so they will not end back up in the hands of these "wretches," the gangs and traffickers.

Asked by reporters if he felt his urgent appeals for protecting the lives and dignity of these men, women and children over the span of his 10-year pontificate have failed, Pope Francis said he believed that there is greater awareness now of the seriousness of their plight than before, but that this growing awareness has been slow.

Instead, what it is happening, he said, is countries are treating the problem like "a hot potato that they don't know how to handle."

So, it ends up like a game of ping pong, he said, with migrants going back and forth between the hands of ruthless traffickers and the European shores that reject them at the border.

Often migrants end up in 'lagers' [detention camps] where their lives are worse off than before, he said. "We can't send them back without seeing or understanding what will

happen to them. We have to be careful and do something."

Helping these people in need "is good for us," he said. "It makes us more human and more divine."

As part of his visit to Marseille he visited a memorial on a cliff overlooking the Mediterranean, which remembers all those who have lost their lives at sea. Pope Francis led a moment of silence for the countless lives lost in its blue but treacherous waters.

And he warned the world it was now at a crossroads: people must choose either to take the path of compassion, encounter and fraternity or veer off toward a track of indifference and conflict.

Calling it "a duty of civilisation," he said that "people who are at risk of drowning when abandoned on the waves must be rescued. It is a duty of humanity."

In his appeal for more compassion he asked that the world does not "get used to considering shipwrecks as news stories where the people who died are faceless and nameless numbers," he said.

They are brothers and sisters who "drowned in fear, along with the hopes they carried in their hearts."

"We need deeds not words," he said, and then led those gathered in a moment of silence in memory of those who died.

"Let us be moved by their tragedies," he said.



Do not close your borders and ports: open your hearts instead

The pope also turned his anger on those nations who were looking to close their ports and borders to migrants, noting the measures were often preceded by the repetition of "two words" that fuelled "people's fears: 'invasion' and 'emergency.'"

"Yet those who risk their lives at sea do not invade, they look for wel-

come," he said. "As for the emergency, the phenomenon of migration is not so much a short-term urgency, always good for fueling alarmist propaganda, but a reality of our times."

Offering a response that respects each person's human dignity is "a process that involves three conti-

nents around the Mediterranean and that must be governed with wise foresight, including a European response capable of coping with the objective difficulties" involved in welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating "unexpected persons," he said.

Without naming any countries his words came just days after the Italian PM, Giorgia Meloni vowed to resurrect a controversial plan to blockade Tunisia, turning back migrants at sea before they reach Italian waters.

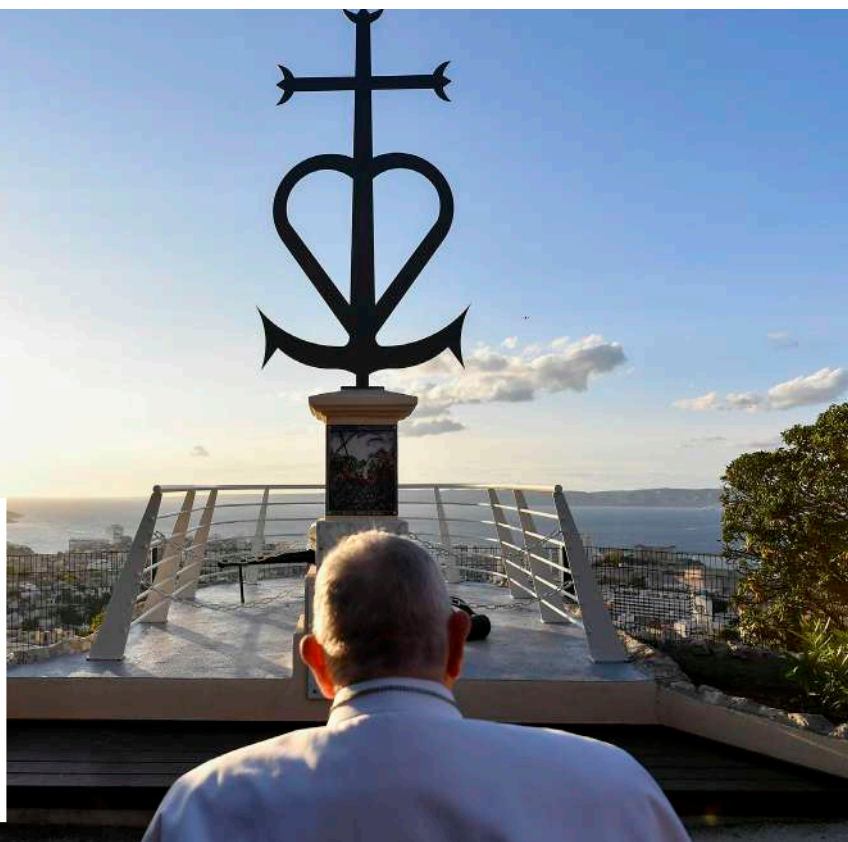
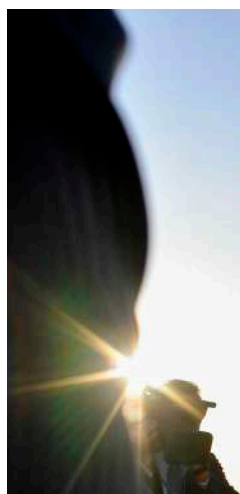
And at the same time his host in Marseille, France, has barred all migrants arriving from Lampedusa from being illegible to its resettlement schemes. It has also increased security and controls on the Italian border.

These actions, along with similar moves in central Europe against migrants moving overland, and in Greece, add up to a climate of fear and oppression for migrants.

"In the face of the terrible scourge of the exploitation of human beings, the solution is not to reject but to ensure, according to the possibilities of each, an ample number of legal and regular entrances," Pope Francis said.

"This would be sustainable with an equitable welcome on the part of the European continent, in the context of co-operation with the countries of origin."

Right, Pope Francis prays before a memorial to those who have lost their lives at sea, on the cliffs above Marseille. Below, he left a wreath to migrants who had died



A packed Velodrome Stadium, home of Marseille FC, prepares to welcome the Pope for Mass



Cruel traffickers and indifferent politicians blamed for turning Med red with blood

At this time in history, following the path of fraternity will allow the human community to flourish, while the road of indifference “bloodies the Mediterranean,” the pope told a Mass at Marseille’s Velodrome stadium

“We cannot be resigned to seeing human beings treated as bargaining chips, imprisoned and tortured in atrocious ways,” he said, blaming the countless shipwrecks on “cruel trafficking and the fanaticism of indifference.”

The pope said religious leaders must show people the way and be exemplary in their offer of “mutual and fraternal welcome,” shunning the “woodworm of extremism and the ideological plague of fundamentalism that corrodes the authentic life of communities.”

He urged the people of Marseille, marked by religious pluralism, to choose well what path it will take, whether that of encounter or confrontation.

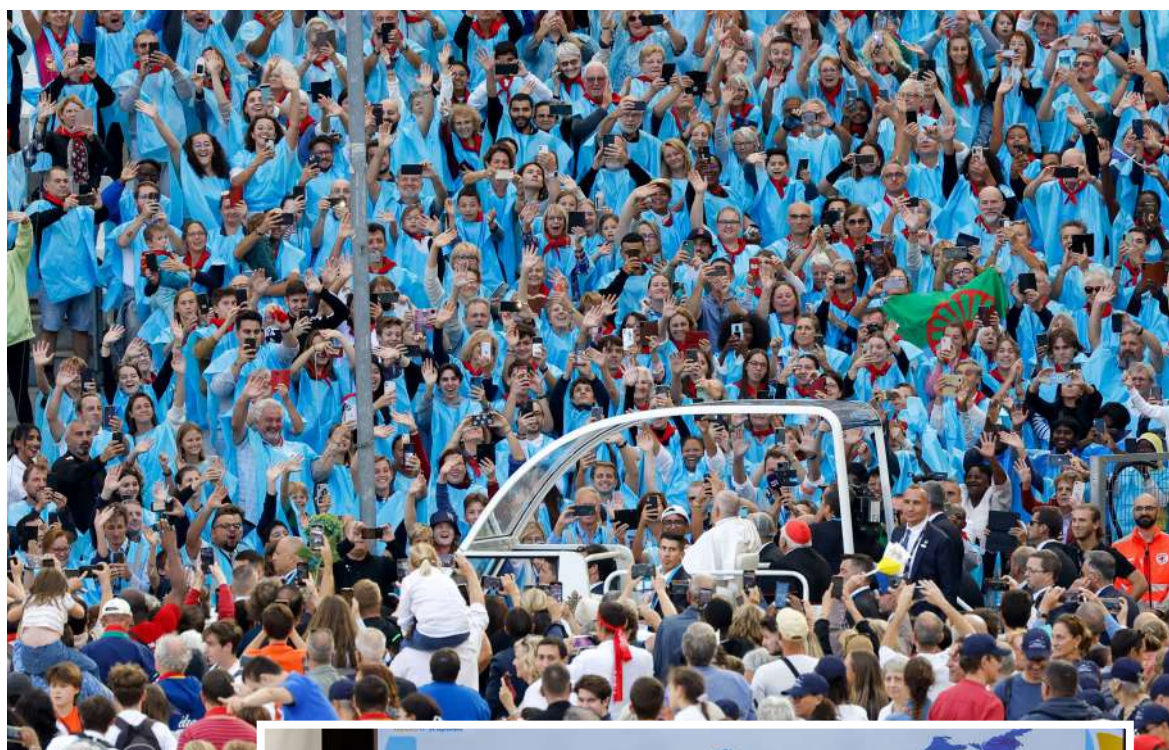
He praised those gathered with him who are dedicated to rescuing and assisting migrants at sea and in danger. He said he was well aware of efforts that try to block rescuers, and he called such actions “gestures of hatred against one’s brother,” call-

ing for “balance.” Some governments have blocked non-governmental organisations from carrying out rescues because they claim they encourage people to attempt illegal crossings.

“Let us not cause hope to shipwreck; let us together make a mosaic of hope,” he said, before listening to several prayer intentions read aloud by those representing different facets dedicated to the care of sailors and migrants.

The real evil plaguing communities and countries is not the growing number of problems, but the collapse of care, Pope Francis said at the final session of the Mediterranean Meeting. “The commitment of institutions alone is not enough; we need a jolt of conscience to say ‘no’ to lawlessness and ‘yes’ to solidarity,” he told his audience, which included French President Emmanuel Macron.

“How greatly we need this at the present juncture, when antiquated and belligerent nationalisms want to make the dream of the community of nations fade!” he said, warning that, “with weapons we make war, not peace, and with greed for power we always return to the past, rather than building the future.”



Above, the pope arrives at Marseille’s Velodrome stadium to be greeted by a crowd of 50,000 to celebrate Mass

Right, the pope addresses the final session of the Mediterranean Meeting. During this speech, in front of French President Macron, he criticised what he saw as a lack of compassion among politicians



WORLD

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

Trump has 'clear lead' over ailing Biden

Donald Trump enjoys a 10-point lead over Joe Biden before next year's US election, according to a new poll for ABC News and the *Washington Post*.

The numbers, which *The Times* said will "cause alarm in the White House", would suggest a "clear win for the former president" rather than a repeat of 2020, when the result was tighter.

The data suggests that among the reasons for Biden's "waning popularity" are his age and his handling of the economy, *The Times* added.

France quitting Niger after coup

France will end its military presence in Niger by the end of 2023, Emmanuel Macron has announced.

"We are putting an end to our military co-operation with the de facto authorities of Niger because they don't want to fight terrorism any more," the French president said, referring to the military leaders who took over rule of the northwest African country.

The announcement "appeared to end two months of French defiance over the coup", said *Le Monde*, which had seen Paris "keep its ambassador in place" despite him being "ordered" by the coup leaders to leave. The ambassador, Sylvain Itté, left at the weekend.

Bishop voices fears as Azerbaijan regains control of disputed region

Armenian Catholic Bishop Mikael A. Mouradian has said he hopes that "history will not repeat itself" following the takeover of the Christian Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan.

A Russian-brokered ceasefire ended 24 hours of fighting that saw Armenian forces routed by Azerbaijan. Talks led to the local separatist Government stepping down, paving the way for Azerbaijan to regain control over the region.

It's the latest tragedy to hit the enclave, whose Christian citizens broke away from the rest of Azerbaijan in the 1990s when the Soviet Union fell. A long-running war between the two nations ended in 1994 with Nagorno-Karabakh under the control of ethnic Armenian forces. Fighting restarted in 2020, with Azerbaijan taking back parts of Nagorno-Karabakh along with surrounding territory, before peace returned.

But tensions rose sharply this year after Azerbaijan blocked a key supply route connecting the enclave to Armenia, leaving the population close to starvation.

The tensions were ended with Azerbaijan's 24-hour blitz last week, forcing the local authorities to start talks on Nagorno-Karabakh's 'reintegration' into Azerbaijan after three decades of separatist rule.



A protester is detained by police after rioting in Yerevan, Armenia following Nagorno-Karabakh's surrender to Azerbaijan

Photo: Vahram Baghdasaryan

While Azerbaijan has pledged to respect the rights of ethnic Armenians in the region and restore supplies after the blockade, many local residents fear reprisals and have fled for Armenia.

Armenia's government said this week that more than 30,000 people — about a quarter of Nagorno-Karabakh's population — have fled to Armenia this week.

Around 20 were killed after a huge blast rocked a fuel depot where they were stocking up for the journey west. The blast took place hours after the second round of talks between Azerbaijani officials and separatist representatives.

Talks were said to be "constructive" and focused on humanitarian aid.

Armenian prime minister Nikol Pashinyan said his government was working with international partners to protect the rights and security of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. "If these efforts do not produce concrete results, the government will welcome our sisters and brothers from Nagorno-Karabakh in the Republic of Armenia with every care," he said.

"The ceasefire is what we were asking for," said Bishop Mouradian, "but I hope that Russia and Azerbaijan will keep their promise that the Artsakh Armenians will live in

peace on their ancestral lands with the full rights of free citizens."

He said the latest aggression added to a long history of Azerbaijan efforts to eradicate Armenians and their culture from the region.

Demonstrators demanding Mr Pashinyan's resignation over what they call his failure to protect Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh have caused disruption to services in the Armenian capital, with occasional clashes with police.

French President Emmanuel Macron pledged support for Armenia and Armenians, saying that France will mobilise food and medical aid for Nagorno-Karabakh, and keep working toward a "sustainable peace" in the region.

France, which has a big Armenian diaspora, has for decades played a mediating role in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Azerbaijan on Monday in a show of support to its ally. Russia has been the main ally and sponsor of Armenia and has a military base there, but it also has sought to maintain friendly ties with Azerbaijan.

But Moscow's clout in the region has waned quickly amid the Russian war in Ukraine while the influence of Azerbaijan's top ally Turkey has increased.

Relief as latest priest kidnap victim freed

Ngala Killian Chintom

Nigerian Christians were left angered after news broke of another priest being kidnapped — only for him to be freed four days later, to the relief of his diocese.

Fr Marcellinus Obioma Okide was abducted on his way to St. Mary Amofia-Agu Affa Parish, where he serves as a parish priest. Six other people travelling with him were also taken.

Fr Wilfred Chidi Agubuchie, the diocesan chancellor and secretary confirmed the abductions, and had called on the Christian community to pray for the priest's safe release. He later claimed that their prayers "had interceded in the blessed priest's release."

No ransom was paid to his kidnappers, the diocese confirmed.

The kidnapping was the latest in a long line of attacks on Nigerian clergy, with 39 Catholic priests murdered in 2022 and 30 others abducted. There were a further 145 attacks on Catholic priests.

In one of the most recent attacks, Fr Paul Sanogo and Melchior Maharini, a seminarian, were taken only to be released after three weeks in

captivity. Both men were kidnapped in Minna Diocese at the start of August. Again, the diocese claimed no ransom had been paid.

Christians in Africa's largest nation have become prized targets for terrorist groups such as Fulani herdsmen.

The Church has demanded action from the national Government on the security situation, pointing out that all attacks on faith leaders were directed against Christians.

Johan Viljoen, director of the Denis Hurley Peace Institute of the South Africa Catholic bishops' conference, told OSV News that "the situation in Enugu is particularly severe. Enugu state shares a border with Benue state, which has been under sustained attack."

He said the lack of response from the security forces could mean they are complicit in the attacks.

"Considering the complete absence of integrity on the part of the security forces, one can only assume that they are in cahoots with the kidnappers, and share in the profits," he said. "In Nigeria the security forces are not part of the solution. They are part of the problem."

Ukraine attacks 'a crime' – pope

Pope Francis has said Russia's war on Ukraine is a reminder of what the Second Vatican Council taught: "Any act of war aimed at the destruction of entire cities along with their population is a crime against God and man himself."

He made his remarks in a message to an ecumenical meeting at a Benedictine abbey in Hungary.

Such war "merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation," the pope continued, quoting Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

Pope Francis told those gathered for the ecumenical meeting at Hungary's ancient Pannonhalma Archabbey that each person has a role to play in bringing peace to the world.

"At this time, the war in Ukraine has dramatically called us to open our eyes and hearts to so many peoples suffering from war," he said. "Let each of us remain on the path of peace; let us each become messengers and servants of peace in the place where we live and work! Above all, let us pray for peace!"

He praised the monastery's tradition of the Rule of St Benedict, saying it was "an excellent guide for a practical commitment to peace."



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10.00 Veneration/Rosary
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Sunday 1st October

9am Mass
11am Mass (and Departure)
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German Church antagonises Vatican again with same-sex blessing Mass

Several hundred people gathered near the cathedral in Cologne, Germany, to hold a blessing service that catered especially to LGBTQ+ people and people who remarried after a divorce, while those protesting the service prayed the rosary next to it.

Some participants waved rainbow flags and held up placards with statements such as 'Love wins' or 'Blessings for all' on the square in front of Cologne Central Station in the shadow of the world-famous twin-towered cathedral.

According to the police, about 600 people attended the service, held under the motto 'All you need is love.'

It was conducted by 19 Catholic priests and pastoral ministers, 16 of whom were from the Archdiocese of Cologne.

The event was held in reaction to the reprimand of a priest from the archdiocese who celebrated the first such service in the town of Mettmann in March.

Officials from the Cologne Archdiocese, which includes Mettmann,



A gay couple light votive candles while other same-sex couples took part in the blessing ceremony outside Cologne Cathedral

had reprimanded the priest and stressed that the Vatican doesn't allow blessings of same-sex couples.

According to Catholic teaching, homosexual couples and remarried divorcees are living in sin.

The celebration in Cologne was timed to coincide with the anniversary of Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki's installation as archbishop in 2014, and seen as an event in defiance of the German cardinal-archbishop.

A small counter-protest attended by 20 people held up rosaries and prayed alongside the main event.

A gay couple that attended the service said they had been touched by the event. "It was a very profound moment to receive the Church's encouragement from ministers," one said.

The German government's LGBTQ+ commissioner called the service an important symbol for the demand that the Catholic Church recognise and accept same-sex couples, according to AP. "It is mainly thanks to the grassroots that the Church is opening up," Sven Lehmann told dpa.

"Archbishop Woelki and the Vatican, on the other hand, are light years behind social reality," he added.

Cardinal Woelki recently expressed understanding for same-sex couples who felt a deep desire for a Church blessing. However, he added that it was a question that first had to be clarified at the level of the universal church.

In mid-March, a majority of participants in the 'Synodal Path' – the reform consultations of the Catholic

Church in Germany held as part of the country's take on the Pope's Synod on Synodality – led by Bishop Batzing, had voted in favour of allowing gay blessings.

But their decision was rebuked by the Vatican in January, who said Germany's bishops and laypeople do not have the authority to establish such a body or take decisions on such reforms.

The Church in Germany "could not decisions on major developments in the Church and in society on matters that go beyond the diocesan level," the Vatican said.

"We wish to make it clear that neither the Synodal (Path), nor any body established by it, nor any episcopal conference has the competence to establish the 'Synodal Council' at the national, diocesan or parish level," said the letter signed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

But Bishop Batzing has said he disagrees with the Vatican's ban on the ordination of homosexual men to the priesthood, and would continue to challenge it.

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WORLD SPOTLIGHT

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

Last week's Universe carried the rather tart Vatican response to the Pope being dragged into his native Argentina's forthcoming general election, after he was heavily criticised by populist candidate Javier Milei. Here, South American correspondent Lucien Chauvin looks at the issue in more detail

Populist Javier gambles on future by dragging Pope into Argentina's election

Lucien Chauvin

Pope Francis may be nearly 7,000 miles from Argentina, but it certainly does not feel that way as the country gears up for a presidential election on 22nd October.

While the pope has strived to stay on the sidelines of political debates in Argentina, deciding against visiting home during the first 10 years of his papacy, he has been dragged into the race by the current frontrunner in the race, far-right congressman Javier Milei, who has made a name for himself by loudly proclaiming controversial ideas, from replacing Argentina's peso with the US dollar to allowing people to sell their organs if they are in need of cash.

One of his favourite targets, however, has been Pope Francis. Milei has been increasing the volume as the race has intensified, turning the pope and the Church's social teaching into electoral fodder.

The pope has received criticism at home in the past, including a whisper campaign prior to his election in 2013 about unfounded complicity with the country's military regime in the 1970s and early 1980s and its 'dirty war', but that pales in comparison to what has been said in this presidential campaign.

The Argentine Catholic Church has responded with Masses and public statements supporting the pope, but the attacks have not stopped, and there is increasing concern that the vitriolic rhetoric will deepen divisions as the country struggles through a deep economic crisis.

Bishop Oscar Ojea of San Isidro, who is president of the Argentine bishops' conference, published a reflection on the presidential campaign. He did not mention Milei by name, but called out "one of the candidates who has used irreproducible insults and lies" against the pope.

He said it was impossible "to build a country without dialogue and with insults and shouts."

Fr Jose Maria Di Paola, known as Padre Pepe, said statements from Bishop Ojea and other clergy were among the strongest by church leaders in the 40 years since Argentina returned to democracy with elections in October 1983.

Father Di Paola is the spokesman for the 'curas villeros' priests who live and work in shantytowns in Buenos Aires and other cities



Man of the people: Javier Milei

around the country. The group's latest statement, which coincided with Bishop Ojea's reflection, did not shy away from naming Milei, rejecting his "vulgar aggressions that are not worthy of someone wanting to represent our country." Fr Di Paola celebrated a reparation Mass with other slum priests, and with thousands of faithful present in the down-at-heel villa 21-24 neighbourhood in Buenos Aires.

Fr Di Paola said the insults go beyond the pope and are a direct attack on the Church.

He said the Church had to continue responding to Milei after the most recent comments on the pope, which were made during an interview with US media personality Tucker Carlson, who posted it on X (Twitter). The interview reportedly has been viewed more than 400 million times.

Milei repeated his previous line that the pope is a "communist" and "on the side of bloody dictatorships," but also launched criticism of social justice.

"Social justice is stealing the fruit of someone's labour and giving it to another ... I support for social justice is support for theft, which is against the Ten Commandments," he said during the interview with Carlson.

Fr Di Paola said that "this is more than an attack on Francis, it is an attack on the Church. Social justice is at the heart of Catholic teaching,

so we cannot sit back in silence. We must speak out."

He said the 'curas villeros' Spanish for 'slum priests' had met with other candidates, but flatly ruled out a sit down with Milei.

Milei stunned Argentina's political class by placing first in the open, simultaneous primary in August when all candidates ran. He received around 30 per cent of the vote, compared to 28.3 per cent for the traditional conservative Together for Change coalition and 27.3 per cent for the centre-left

governing coalition, Unity for the Homeland.

The poll numbers have not changed much since August, with Milei still in the lead but far from the total needed to win and avoid a run-off vote, which would take place on 19th November. Under Argentina's electoral law, a candidate wins with a majority of votes or with 40 per cent of the total if that is combined with a greater than 10 point lead over their nearest opponent.

What has changed since August

are Argentina's economic numbers, which have gotten worse. Inflation in the month of August alone hit 12.4 per cent, the highest in three decades, and is moving toward 130 per cent for the year. The economy shrank 4.9 per cent in the second quarter of this year, the first time since the pandemic that it has contracted.

Mariano Viale, a shopkeeper in Buenos Aires, said he did not think Argentines voting for Milei shared his views on Pope Francis.

"For many, what Milei says is about shock value," he said. "The people who come in here do not agree with what he says about Francis, but they are tired of politics as usual."

If Milei were to win, it is unlikely that Pope Francis would travel to Argentina, as well as neighbouring Uruguay, in 2024 as many, including the pontiff himself, have speculated. As the Vatican retorted to the suggestion last week, "why would the pope go somewhere he was not invited," in a clear reference to the fact that Milei is unlikely to roll out the red carpet for Francis.

Fr Carlos Galli, a theologian at Argentina's Catholic University, said the pope has stayed out of Argentine politics and that would not change.

He said the pope had a strained relationship with former President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (2007-2015). "It would certainly be worse under Milei," he said.

Lucien Chauvin from Montevideo, Uruguay.



Milei out on the campaign trail. Originally dismissed as an outsider and a 'Trump-lite' disruptor, Milei has shocked the political establishment by becoming the front-runner for the October election. His attacks on Pope Francis are seen as a tactic to reinforce his status as a political outsider and underdog

Advertising: Andrea Black – advertising@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

WORLD SPOTLIGHT

Lampedusa is sometimes dubbed ‘the isle of migrants’, reflecting the fact that it is the first European landmass many African migrants make for as they look to enter Europe. Tensions on the island have risen in recent weeks as the sheer number of newcomers threatens to overrun local facilities and amenities; more refugees landed in one week this month than the local population of the island. And yet, despite the pressure, there are still many locals who are happy to offer a warm welcome to migrants. Magdalena Wolinska-Riedi reports

In front of the Church of St. Gerland on the Italian island of Lampedusa, dozens of migrants lined up in a neat row, one after the other. The queue was long as they waited patiently.

The crossing of the sea abyss – across the Mediterranean from Tunisia – was already just a terrifying memory and they knew that there was enough food for everyone. More than 130 Red Cross employees and volunteers were working day and night to provide migrants not only with sanitary assistance, but also with a warm meal.

They prepared 5,000 portions at noon and a similar amount for dinner. From 12th-13th September, 7,000 migrants reached Lampedusa, the Italian island chosen by Pope Francis as his first papal trip in 2013. Authorities said a record number of 120 fragile boats arrived on the island within 24 hours.

So far in 2023, nearly 126,000 migrants have arrived in Italy, almost double the figure by the same time in 2022. Those desperately trying to reach Europe came mainly from Africa’s Guinea, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso, but also from Bangladesh and Pakistan.

“If you count all of us here on the island we are just 5,000 inhabitants,” former Mayor Totò Martello told journalists, when, together with other people of goodwill, he rolled up his sleeves and offered the outstretched hand of another refugee a plate of pasta al pomodoro.

“There haven’t been that many people here ever before probably,” said 80-year-old Salvatore, who only gave his first name, as he leaned on his bike in the shade on the opposite side of the church square and watched the endless queue. He looked with concern but also with peace, because, as he said, “at least there is a relative order here close to the church.”

A few hundred meters away, in the port of Favalaro, the situation was a lot more tense as more and more boats and pontoons arrived constantly to the “gate of Europe,” mainly from sub-Saharan African countries.

While preparing for his trip to Marseille, an apostolic journey focused on migration, Pope Francis referred to the scenes in Lampedusa during the Angelus prayer, saying that migration “represents a challenge that is not easy, as we also see from the news in recent days, but which must be faced together, since it is essential for the future of all, which will be prosperous only if it is built on fraternity, putting human dignity and real people, especially those most in need, in first place.”

In his message for the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees celebrated by the church

A smile and a meal await migrants as they make it to the ‘gateway to Europe’



Exhausted migrants gather at the port of Lampedusa. 7,000 arrived one weekend this month, dwarfing the local population of 5,000

on 24th September, Pope Francis talked about the root causes of migration. “Migrants flee because of poverty, fear or desperation,” he said. Eliminating these causes, the pontiff said, “and thus putting an end to forced migration calls for shared commitment on the part of all, in accordance with the responsibilities of each.”

This commitment begins with all of us, the pope stressed, “asking what we can do, but also what we need to stop doing. We need to make every effort to halt the arms race, economic colonialism, the plundering of other people’s resources and the devastation of our common home.”

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen visited the Italian island on 17th September, promising a 10-point European Union action plan to help Italy deal with the situation.

Crowded and exhausted, migrants stood on the pier waiting for transport to the “hotspot,” the area where migrants were gathering. It was cordoned off by officers with the state police – Polizia di Stato – trying to control the chaos. Some migrants started scuffles with police, others threw themselves into the sea in desperation and they had to be

rescued again.

Francesca Matina, a native resident of Lampedusa, saw a small boat lose its balance and hit a rock the previous day. Without hesitation, she and her friend Gonzalo jumped into the water and saved four drowning migrants.

She didn’t want to be called a hero. “It’s part of our nature to welcome them,” she said.

“We, people of Lampedusa, have it in our blood, but today I feel very angry. We cannot treat these people this way, crammed into Guardia Costiera (Coast Guard) boats, dehydrated, exhausted. The truth is that we are quite alone in this

situation. Europe has left us alone,” she said.

Since 12th September, the situation on this tiny island has been dramatic. The local authorities have introduced a state of emergency and said the next meeting of the European Council needs to be held in Lampedusa, at the gates of Europe, and not in the corridors of Brussels.

“Only here can you understand the tragedy that is unfolding before your eyes and at the same time in the silence of the whole world,” said Vincenzo Riso, a fisherman born on the island.

Italian Rai state television

reported that Italian coastguard tried to assist one boat and the smugglers’ vessel tipped over. A mother from Guinea with her 5-month-old baby fell into the sea – the woman was rescued, in shock, but the baby died, Rai said.

“I go fishing every night, I’ve always been there, my dad had a fishing boat. It’s a tragedy every time ... because not all of those who sail from Africa here reach the shore,” Riso said.

The fisherman then looked silently toward the open sea, pointing to the port behind his back and took a deep breath. “Tonight, again, like every day, while casting our nets in the dark, we came across a dozen sunken boats, the ones in which migrants tried to get to the island and failed,” he said.

“This is a great human tragedy ... and when we fish by spawning, we collect everything from the bottom of the sea ... many times not only fish,” he said, not willing to finish the sentence.

The hotspot in Lampedusa has been bursting at the seams for several days. On 14th September there were 6,762 people there for fewer than 600 places.

Most migrants arrive in Lampedusa via the so-called Tunisian route. This is the closest piece of African land from the Italian island, only 100 miles away, in good weather it takes just eight to 10 hours of drifting across the water.

When Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni accompanied von der Leyen on Lampedusa, their car was briefly blocked by locals protesting the burden facing the island. “We’re working on it ... we are doing our best,” Meloni told the protesters.

Among the volunteers next to the St. Gerland Church stood Fr Carmelo Rizzo, or Don Carmelo, the parish priest, who supported the others as much as he could.

“Everyone who was born here has a big heart and welcomes these exhausted newcomers with what they have at home,” moved by “this apocalypse,” he said as he described the current situation.

Oct. 3 will mark the 10th anniversary of the death of 368 migrants off the coast of Lampedusa when a fire broke out on board of the overloaded cutter. Ten years later, the inhabitants have not lost the will to help those in need, but more and more, are losing patience that the small community must shoulder rescuing tens of thousands on their own.

“In these last days, we are helping migrants not with humanitarian aid, but with our small home resources: someone will give shoes, someone a shirt, someone else will prepare a pot of food,” Don Carmelo said.



10 points on the ‘Synod on synodality’ – plus a warning to all lovers of gossip

Maria Wiering

From next week, the eyes of the Catholic world will be on Rome as the Synod of Bishops convenes on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi (4th October), to focus on ‘synodality’ and understanding what it means in terms of ‘communion, participation and mission’ in the Church. Here’s 10 pointers as to what it is, how we got here and what to expect – plus a warning over how information will be shared to the world.

1. The Synod on Synodality is three years in the making.

Pope Francis announced in March 2020 (at the height of the pandemic, especially in Italy) that the next Synod of Bishops would be held in October 2022 on the theme ‘For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission,’ which quickly became known as the ‘Synod on Synodality.’

In May 2021, he postponed the two-part meeting to 2023 (with a second gathering in 2024), due in part to the pandemic, and announced that it would be preceded by a two-year process.

That decision reflected Pope Francis’ vision for the Synod of Bishops outlined in the 2018 apostolic constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, including what Cardinal Mario Grech, the general secretary for the Synod of Bishops, described at the time as “transforming the Synod from an event into a process.”

Pope Francis officially opened the “synodal path” with a Mass on 10th October 2021, with dioceses around the world following suit.

2. Synodality is “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.”

Despite the long history of synods in the Church, the term ‘synodality’ is relatively recent, emerging in church documents about two decades ago. In 2018, the topic was addressed by the International Theological Commission, which defined it as “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.”

Synodality was also a topic of conversation at the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme ‘Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment’ which took place in 2018.

In the Synod on Synodality’s *vademecum*, an official handbook issued in September 2021, synodality is described as ‘the



Pope Francis attends a session of the Synod of Bishops on young people in the Vatican synod hall in 2018. The October assembly will be very different in structure to this one, with more lay people and women in attendance, rather than a dominance by bishops and cardinals, and members will sit at round tables, rather than in rows, to facilitate discussion. Photo: Paul Haring

particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel,’ adding, ‘Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church’s ordinary way of living and working.’

In his homily for the Mass opening the synod process, Pope Francis said, “Celebrating a synod means walking on the same road, walking together.” He said that when meeting others, Jesus would “encounter, listen and discern,” and those verbs “characterise the synod.”

“The Gospels frequently show us Jesus ‘on a journey’; he walks alongside people and listens to the questions and concerns lurking in their hearts,” he said. “He shows us that God is not found in neat and orderly places, distant from reality, but walks ever at our side. He meets us where we are, on the often rocky roads of life.”

He continued: “Today, as we begin this synodal process, let us begin by asking ourselves – all of us, pope, bishops, priests, religious and laity – whether we, the Christian community, embody this ‘style’ of God, who travels the paths of history and shares in the life of humanity.”

Are we prepared for the adventure of this journey? Or are we fearful of the unknown,

preferring to take refuge in the usual excuses: ‘It’s useless’ or ‘We’ve always done it this way?’”

3. A synod is a meeting of bishops.

It has ancient roots in the Catholic Church’s history and continuity in the Eastern Churches, but declined in the Latin Church. The modern Synod of Bishops was instituted near the end of Vatican II.

The word ‘synod’ has been historically interchangeable with ‘council’, such as the churchwide Council of Nicea or the Council of Trent, or more localised meetings. The late Jesuit Father John W. O’Malley, a leading theologian, noted in 2022 how local councils declined in use following the First Vatican Council, which defined papal primacy, but they didn’t die out: “One of the first things that the future Pope John XXIII did when he became patriarch of Venice was to call a diocesan synod,” he said.

The idea for a permanent bishops’ council surfaced during the Second Vatican Council, and in 1965 St. Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops with “the function of providing information and offering advice.” “It can also enjoy the power of making decisions when such power is conferred upon it by the Roman Pontiff; in this case, it belongs to him to ratify the decisions of the Synod,” St. Paul VI said.

4. The Synod on Synodality is the 16th Ordinary Synod since the global Synod of Bishops’ institution.

Three extraordinary general assemblies have also been held, including in 2014 to complete the work of the 2015 ordinary general assembly on the family. An additional 11 special Synods of Bishops have been held to address issues facing a particular region. Among them was a special synod on America in 1997 and one on the Amazon region in 2019. Synods have regularly resulted in the pope, who serves as the synod president, writing a post-synodal apostolic exhortation.

5. Preparations for the Synod on Synodality sought to be the most extensive ever, with an invitation to every Catholic to provide input.

An unprecedented worldwide consultation occurred at the diocesan/national and continental levels. The synod’s two-year preparation process invited all Catholics worldwide to identify areas where the Church needed to give greater attention and discernment. That feedback was gathered and synthesised by dioceses and then episcopal conferences, before being brought to the continental level.

The syntheses from episcopal conferences and continental-level meetings were shared with the

Holy See, and they informed a working document known as an *Instrumentum Laboris* for the general assembly’s first session. The document’s authors describe it as “not a document of the Holy See, but of the whole Church.” However, reports from around the world suggest that as few as 1 per cent of the Catholic population has been involved.

6. The Synod on Synodality’s objective boils down to answering a two-part question.

According to the *vademecum*, “The current Synodal Process we are undertaking is guided by a fundamental question: How does this ‘journeying together’ take place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allowing the Church to proclaim the Gospel? and what steps is the Spirit inviting us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?”

The working document released in June to guide general assembly participants includes many other reflection questions; but it particularly asks participants to reflect on these priorities, guided by its focus on communion, participation and mission: “How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?”; “How can we better share gifts and tasks in the service of the Gospel?”; and “What processes, structures and institutions are needed in a missionary synodal church?”

7. For the first time ever, non-bishops – including lay men and women – have a vote in the synod.

The synod’s general assembly includes more than 450 participants – 363 of whom are voting members – with leaders from the Vatican curia and episcopal conferences. More than a quarter of synod members are non-bishops, including laypeople, who for the first time will have a vote during synod deliberations. A deliberate effort was made to include women and young adults.

As of 7th July, when the Vatican released the initial list, the number of voting women was the same as participating cardinals: 54. The list was subject to change ahead of the synod, organisers said.

In previous synods, some non-bishop participants held the non-voting role of ‘auditor’, which has been eliminated at this assembly, although some attendees will be non-voting observers, called “special envoys,” or non-voting facilitators or advisers.

The presence of non-bishops, according to Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, the synod’s general



The Second Ecumenical Council, commonly known as Vatican II, was called by Pope John XXIII. Close to 3,000 delegates attended the sprawling event, which ran from 11th October 1962 – 8th December 1965

relator, in a letter published at the time the change was announced, “ensures the dialogue between the prophecy of the people of God and the discernment of the pastors.”

8. There is a healthy contingent attending from the UK.

As reported in last week’s Universe, the UK is well represented in the synod. Archbishop John Wilson, the Archbishop of Southwark, and Bishop Marcus Stock, Bishop of Leeds, were elected by their brother bishops to attend. Joining them will be Bishop Nicholas Hudson, Auxiliary Bishop for the Diocese of Westminster, who was chosen by Pope Francis, and Professor Anna Rowlands and Austen Ivereigh, who were chosen by the Vatican as expert facilitators. Fr Timothy Radcliffe, the Dominican preacher, will lead a retreat for all Synod members prior to the official opening on Wednesday, 4th October. Fr Jan Nowotnik, who will attend as a voting member and whose doctoral thesis focused, in part, on the preparation for a Synodal Church, will join theologian Professor Anna

Rowlands in Rome. Both will have a key role in proceedings.

9. The meeting has been a source of great expectation and great apprehension.

The synod has inspired both great praise and deep criticism for its approach, including allowing laypeople to vote; its subject matter, which includes controversial topics such as leadership roles for women, ministry to Catholics who identify as LGBTQ+, and the relationship between laypeople and clergy. At least one cardinal expressed concern that the meeting could lead to confusion and error in church teaching. However, Bishop Flores said recently that the meeting aims to better understand people’s reality so it can better minister to them. “We can’t respond with the Gospel if we don’t know what the reality they’re facing is,” he said of people, especially those on margins and in difficult situations.

10. October’s meeting is just the beginning.

In an unusual move, the synod

general assembly has been divided into two sessions, with the first running from 4th-29th October, and the second planned for October 2024. The decision, announced in October 2022, has parallels to the Synod of Bishops on the Family, which met in 2014 for an extraordinary general assembly of the Synod of Bishops, and then continued its work the following year as an ordinary assembly. The work of both meetings culminated in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (“The Joy of Love”), released in 2016. Prior to the synod, Pope Francis will preside over an ecumenical prayer vigil in St. Peter’s Square on 30th September. Synod participants will attend a retreat from 30th September - 3rd October in Sacrofano, about 16 miles north of Rome. The retreat includes morning meditations – which are the ones to be offered by the UK’s Fr Timothy Radcliffe, accompanied by Benedictine Rev. Mother Maria Ignazia Angelini of Italy – afternoon small-groups and Mass. Meanwhile, the Taizé community and other organisations have

organized a meeting in Rome that weekend called Together – Gathering of the People of God for young people to pray for the synod. The synod’s general assembly opens 4th October with a papal Mass that includes the new cardinals created at a consistory on 30th September.

And finally, a warning... don’t believe all you hear from the synod until it’s over.

Journalists will be shut out of proceedings, and will have to make do with a redacted briefing paper that sums up the day’s discussions. This is a deliberate plan to “safeguard the synodal climate,” the pope said on his flight home from Mongolia at the start of the month. “The Synod of Bishops is not a television show or a parliamentary debate, and its discussions will not be open to the public or to reporters. It’s not a TV programme where you talk about everything; no, it is a religious moment, a religious exchange,” he said. An initial idea was to livestream the general discussions from the synod hall, or at least allow

reporters some access, but the pope made it clear on the plane that would not happen. An official summary of the day’s discussions – without saying who said what – will be made by the synod’s communication committee. Journalists will therefore try to interview participants to at least get individual points of view about the day’s synod work. Most - if not all – such comments are likely to be offered off the record and unacknowledged, leaving room for considerable gossip and intrigue from among some of the participants, particularly if they wish to steer the synod in a particular way. The pope admitted that this was not ideal: “we must safeguard the religiosity (of the synod) and safeguard the freedom of those who speak, but may not want to do so publicly,” he said. “But more open than that, I don’t know,” he said. “The commission will be very respectful of the speeches of each person and will try not to gossip, but to recount things about how the synod is progressing that are constructive for the Church.”

China confirms delegates as synod working schedule released

On the recommendation of the Catholic bishops of mainland China in consultation with the Chinese government, Pope Francis has named two bishops from the country’s mainland as members of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang of Zhoucun, who has served as vice president of the government-related Council of Chinese Bishops, and Bishop Anthony Yao Shun of Jining, the first bishop ordained after the Vatican and China signed a provisional agreement on

the nomination of bishops in 2018, will be among the 365 synod members. Bishop Luis Marin de San Martin, undersecretary of the synod, told reporters that 464 people are expected to be involved in the synod, including 54 women participating as full members and 27 women joining as experts, facilitators or special guests. The updated membership list, he said, also includes Pope Francis’ appointment of Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, as a synod member, the substitution of

members who were elected but then retired or, in one case, died, and the addition of several bishops elected by their national bishops’ conferences but whose names either did not arrive in time to be included in the July list. The list also included the names of the 12 “fraternal delegates” from other Christian churches and communities, who will follow the synod’s work. They represent a variety of Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches as well as the Anglican Communion, World Methodist Council, the World

Communion of Reformed Churches, the World Baptist Alliance, the World Pentecostal Fellowship and the Disciples of Christ. The Vatican also released the daily schedule for the synod sessions Monday through Saturday, which demonstrates most of the work is expected to take place in small groups. The “general congregations” of the assembly will be occasions for introducing the themes to be focused on, reports from the small groups and some regular “free discussion.”

Welcome to this, the first page in a new regular series by PAUL ASHTON, covering Church music, specifically liturgical and sacred music which forms such an important part of our worship. The music that we take part in during our church services also contributes to our much wider enjoyment of music in concerts and listening at home. This series will be for those who appreciate sacred music in all its forms.



Music that reaches up into the Heavens

This is the time that church music leaders are planning for the new Liturgical year. Advent is just around the corner. Planning hymns is one of those tasks where you need to balance so many opinions. Do we introduce new hymns? What if people don't know them?

Will they join in and, of course, are our new choices even in our hymnals? How many hymns does your parish know - 100, 150, maybe 200 (and I'd suggest this is now pushing it).

With hymnals containing several hundred hymns there is still a lot to go at but still there can be good reason to choose beyond these.

Many will be happy with the traditional choices. I would say that all the music we use had to be new at some time. We are lucky to be able to choose from our 19th century classics, our Baroque past, our occasional early medieval tunes and the wealth of music written from the 1960s following the Second Vatican Council. After six decades, many of these are now considered traditional old favourites, too.

Of course, the problem with new hymns is that nobody knows them and unless you have a choir or cantor it can be a tough job to introduce a new piece or a different Mass setting. But music will continually evolve. Our hymns, adoration and prayer in music, need to resonate with the congregation that we are today and the themes of our hymns do change over time and of course the style of music does too.

So, again we are fortunate that



hymn writers continue to create new music for us to use in our Mass – and to enjoy.

New music for Advent

If you are looking for new music for Advent and Christmas, then OCP (Oregon Catholic Press), which you can find online, has a wealth of resources for the season. There are audio sample and videos so you can listen. It is worth noting that they also publish British writers. Online purchases can be

downloaded and printed so you don't have to wait.

Talking of music and concerts...

Salford Cathedral Choirs are staging a free concert at The Holy Name RC Church, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PG on Saturday, 14th October, at 7.30pm. This is to launch their new CD entitled *'Rise Up and Wonder'*. This is a compilation of sacred choral music by contemporary women composers.

Salford Cathedral, the choir's usual home, is closed for extensive restoration work and the Holy Name church makes a wonderful venue. A review of the concert and CD will be on this page next month.

We will also be including your sacred music event dates so if you are the organiser of such an event please email the Universe Catholic Weekly (see pg 4 for addresses) with details of concerts and recitals with a sacred music theme (ie, not a general events calendar)

It's time our churches took action on Haas

On a more controversial note, and related to current news on Russell Brand and actions taken to remove his videos and podcasts from distribution, I'd like to talk about David Haas.

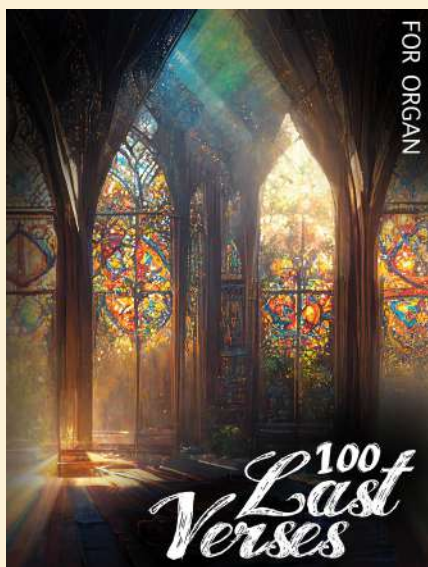
A liturgical music and choral composer, David Haas had allegations of sexual misconduct laid against him that spanned 41 years. As a result his music has been withdrawn from many churches, Catholic and others, in the United States. In 2020, at least 84 American Catholic dioceses announced they were urging or imposing a suspension of Haas's music, out of concern for abuse victims.

The argument is twofold: first, to give a clear reaction against what has happened, but also that potentially, his victims may be present and the use of his music will be a reminder of their trauma.

There is no disputing that the allegations have substance: Haas issued an apology in July 2020.

So, while this is relatively old news in the US, this has somehow failed to filter through to the UK where his work is still listed in many of our hymnals. For the same reasons that decisions were taken in the United States, we should ensure that we also make the right decisions in our own churches.

Uplifting and inspiring - if a little difficult to follow!



A couple of recent book publications caught my eye, writes PAUL ASHTON...

100 Last Verses

published by Kevin Mathew

The idea behind this book is to provide a collection of uplifting and inspiring hymns to send the congregation on its way feeling suitably uplifted and likewise inspired. The hymns I sampled were not just the standard hymn book arrangements. They are written for the organist.

The settings are organised by tune names and the words are not included (of course, some tunes might be used for a few different hymns). No verses mean that more music can be fitted on the pages. It is quite common that an

organist will use a different book to the congregation – which explains why sometimes, the organist may play a different number of verses (not that this has ever happened to me, of course!).

The downside to this collection is that the music is listed by tune name and there is no cross-reference index to popular hymns for which they may be used. For example, 'Cranham' in this book would translate to *'In The Bleak Mid-Winter'*. The organist must know the 100 tune names or look these up.

I tested myself on recognising the 100 titles and while knowing many of the names, the popular hymn names escaped me.

The inclusion of a cross-referenced index would have made it a much more usable book.

Available from <https://www.kevinmayhew.com>. Price: £23.95

Carols for Choirs 6

50 Christmas carols arranged for choir, a collection 'for Advent to Epiphany' curated by Bob Chilcott and David Hill. The previous five titles in this series are also an excellent resource for choirs and the selections and arrangements never disappoint.

I am sure some of these arrangements will be included in concerts this coming Christmas.

Available online from the publishers OUP Oxford. £21.95.

I spotted it at higher prices elsewhere so if you're buying for a choir, it is definitely worth checking the price.

A VIEW FROM THE PEWS

MICHAEL CAINE

ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, LYMM, CHESHIRE



Incense symbolises our prayers rising to Heaven

What is incense? Since the early days of the Catholic liturgy, the burning of incense has been used in the Catholic Church. It's the grains, powders or gummy chunks of resin which are placed on glowing charcoal briquets in a metal censer called a thurible, a kind of lantern suspended from chains and swung by a priest, deacon, altar boy or co-celebrant of the service, from which fragrant aromas emanate, flowing upwards symbolising the prayers of the people rising like smoke to Heaven.

The incense itself is made from various natural resins, woods and oils, with either Frankincense and/or Myrrh usually the main resins.

Incense is often mentioned in the Bible: Exodus 30:1, and its symbolism is mentioned in Psalm 141v2: *let my prayer be incense before you; my uplifted hands an*

evening offering."

There are references of it being used in the New Testament. Luke, in the beginning of his Gospel, speaking of the birth of John the Baptist, writes: *"Then, when the whole assembly of people were praying outside at the hour of the*

incense offering, the angel of the Lord appeared to him standing at the right of the altar of incense. Zechariah was troubled by what he saw and fear came upon him".

Incense is used in the Mass, to sanctify, bless, and venerate. As the smoke rises, it symbolises the



mystery of God Himself and how the Mass is linked to Heaven as it rises

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal permits the use of incense at several times during the Mass. When something is incensed, the censer (thurible) is swung three times, which represents the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.

There are different times during the Mass when incense may be used.

- During the entrance procession
- At the beginning of Mass to incense the altar and the cross.
- Before the Gospel reading.
- After the bread and the chalice

are placed on the altar to incense the offerings, the cross, the altar, the priest, and finally the people.

In addition, incense is used at funerals both in the church, at the casket and at the cemetery. It is

also used on Holy Thursday as the Blessed Sacrament is put in repose, and during the Easter Vigil, five grains of incense are placed into the Paschal Candle.

Finally, in the Book of Revelation 8:3-4 *"Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer (thurible). He was given a great quantity of incense to offer, along with the prayers of all the holy ones on the gold altar which was before the throne.*

The smoke of the incense along with the prayers of the holy ones went up before God from the hand of the angel".

The use of incense is deeply rooted in our Catholic heritage. You can have incense in your homes during prayer time, and the church considers incense to be both purifying and sanctifying.

JOURNEY IN FAITH

CHRIS MCDONNELL



Why thinking globally works best when we are acting locally

Much has been written about the encyclical *Laudato Si* since it was published, and many more words will be written and spoken in the coming months as the full import of the text is explored.

I will not dwell on the global implications for our common home, but rather I want to explore the theme of desolation for the individual person. That thought came to mind after recently reading a quotation from Thomas Merton. "As to your own desolation and loneliness: what can anyone say? It is the desolation of all of us in the presence of death and nothingness, but Christ in us bears it for us: without our being consoled.

To accept non-consolation is to mysteriously help others who have more than they can bear."

Everyone has times in their lives when things are not going well, either at work, socially, within a marriage or within oneself-times when long-held certainties are questioned and consolations in response are few.

To cover them all with the blanket term 'desolation' would be an exaggeration, but just once in a while that is an appropriate term. It is then that our hope and trust in our Christian faith is tested and, to use Merton's phrase, 'Christ in us bears it for us'.

Remember the motif for the year of mercy, of Jesus carrying the



JUBILEE OF MERCY

fallen man?

I wrote these lines a few years back after finding a sheep wandering alone in a country lane.

"It had strayed beyond the barbed fence, head down, to graze the grass verge by the roadside.

Careless of traffic, a single sheep, carrying a rust-red stain of identity, had walked away from the field flock.

Slowly it cropped the road edge unhurried, waiting to be found".

The 20th century, with its major wars and numerous conflicts, brought us face-to-face with evil in a manner not previously experienced.

And, in the first few years of this century, that process continues apace. Within the greater story of

the Middle East and other places of social disturbance are the lives of families, of disruption and fear.] The suffering of displaced children and their parents on desolation row must not be ignored, for when we read of stories from these war zones, it is all too easy to forget the distraught young ones who don't understand what it is all about. They are, nonetheless, caught up in the all-pervading trauma.

Gerald Hughes SJ, who died in 2014, had a phrase, "Think globally, act locally".

That is the attitude we should take if the Gospel message of *Laudato Si* is to be implemented by nations as well as in our own lives.

The care of those about us who, at times, feel desolate and lost is a contribution we can make, day by day, to this living planet.

CONGREGATION OF OUR LADY OF FIDELITY



**GOD IS CALLING!
ARE YOU LISTENING?**

As you reflect upon where God is calling you in life, are you willing to leave your boat and follow Him? Join us for a day of prayer and to know more about the religious life.

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The Good Shepherd

Jesus compares himself to a Good Shepherd, and he calls those who follow him his flock.

The representation of Jesus as a ‘Good Shepherd’ was the favourite image of Christ for the early Christians. The earliest Christian sculpture in Rome, dating from the first century, portrays Christ as a Shepherd carrying a sheep on his shoulders. It depicts his loving care for each member of his flock individually, the kind of care that will go to any lengths to unite a stray member with him and the rest of the flock.

But what does this image of the Good Shepherd mean to you? How does it apply to your life?

This image represents the intimate relationship Christ wants to have with all his people. Jesus says that his sheep (his followers) “hear his voice” and “follow” him (John 10:3).

The question is: how do we hear his voice and follow him?

We “hear his voice” when we meditate on the word of God in scripture. That is the voice of the Good Shepherd, the voice of his holy word which we can listen to and meditate upon when we read the scriptures.

We “follow” him when we put his word into practice, when our

behaviour is inspired and guided by his example.

St. Francis of Assisi was a most Christ-like man. He was not always like that. In his early life, he was a playboy, a lover of extravagance and loose living. Then one day he heard the call of the Good Shepherd who drew him back into the flock he abandoned in his youth, and he followed him.

Francis was never happier than when he abandoned his old ways. He embraced a life of simplicity so that he would no longer be a prisoner to wealth and riches and the fleeting attractions of the world. He discovered the pure joy of living, unencumbered by worldly possessions. He found the joy of following the Good Shepherd.

What is true of the call of St. Francis is also true of everyone who wishes to follow Christ, the Good Shepherd. You don’t have to give up your profession, or your car, on your house, or your savings account. But, you have to be detached from all these material things if you want to follow the Good Shepherd. “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?” says Christ, the Good Shepherd (Mark 8:36).

What is the most important thing in your life? Your



possessions? Your job? Or, your soul? To the degree that you listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd in scripture, and put his words into practice, you are nourishing the needs of the soul. To the degree that you do not listen to the Good Shepherd, and put more emphasis on material possessions than spiritual riches, you are worshiping at the God of Mammon; that is, money or possessions.

Now is a good time, when this Coronavirus pandemic is turning

the economy on its head, to examine your calling to listen to and follow the teachings and example of the Good Shepherd.

But will people ever learn and pay attention to the voice of the Good Shepherd in these challenging times? When the “great recession” of 2008 swept through the world, toppling people’s financial investments, I was naive enough to think it would make people wary, finally, of putting their trust in money and possessions. I

was wrong. Greed came roaring back worse than ever. But now, we have another chance. The Good Shepherd is again calling us to our senses. There’s more to life than money and there’s nothing like helping someone in need.

The voice of the Good Shepherd has always been counter-cultural. It is a voice that will always be listened to by the faithful members of his flock who know he will always be there for them and will never abandon them.

Taking care to rejoice in the gift of gratitude

We take so much for granted in life. God has given us so many gifts, and one of the most precious is the gift of sight. Never take it for granted. It is only when you don’t have sight that you realise how precious it is. Following is a story on the gratitude from Virginia Owens, who was born blind.

Gwen cannot see well enough to drive or read large print, but she moves around the familiar setting of her house with few problems. “After all, I can see something as big as a chair!” she tells me. “At least most of it.”

She also cooks, though she admits she has made mistakes, mixing ingredients up, and there have been times her earrings or her shoes have not matched. Gwen laughs at these mistakes.

Although she is blind, Gwen claims that blindness has its advantages. “I don’t spend nearly

as much time as sighted people worrying about my looks. I keep my hair cut short so that it’s easy to manage. I rarely wear make-up. When you can’t see yourself, you assume others can’t either,” she says.

Her children often warn Gwen about this insouciance. “Mother,” they say, “just because you can’t see them doesn’t mean they can’t see you.” They are especially amazed when Gwen begins dancing down grocery store aisles to the piped-in music.

“Another advantage to blindness,” Gwen claims, “is it gets you out of some activities you would not want to do anyway. I don’t have to work at the church bazaar, and I get to read while I’m cooking.”

By read, Gwen means listen. She orders audio material from the Talking Books.

There are a few downsides to blindness, Gwen admits. She can’t

work crossword puzzles by herself. Inability to drive keeps her at home more than she’d like. She’s dependent on others to take her to the shops and to the chemist. This means fitting into other people’s schedules. It doesn’t leave much time for idle browsing in shops or hardware stores. But Gwen shrugs this off, “I probably save lots of money that way.”

Then she grows serious: “I remember the autumn day when I was taking my dog for a walk down a country road near my house. I looked across a spacious field where the grass was growing pale gold. I knew it was what’s called a beautiful day. But all I could see was a blur of yellow and a smudge of blue sky. All the detail was washed out.”

She pauses to take a deep breath. “That was the day I said goodbye to beauty.”

Of course, Gwen still enjoys the beauty she finds in music, scented candles, listening, the touch of a loved one, the differing textures of her cat’s fur and the grainy clay she shapes into bowls.

Gwen feels wonderfully grateful that her vision has stabilised over the past few years, thanks to the doctors. She has learned a lot about the disease and encourages all her family and friends to have their intraocular pressure checked often. “Don’t be satisfied with ‘normal,’” she says. “What was normal didn’t fit my situation, resulting in several years of visual down drift that could have been avoided.”

Gwen accepts her loss with resignation, gratitude and optimism. “Something happens to everyone eventually,” she shrugs. “This is just what happened to me.”

Every morning when she wakes up, Gwen looks around at familiar objects—her dresser, the overhead fan, and a quilt rack—assessing how much she can make out. For the past few years, those objects have retained their misty, truncated shapes.

Then Gwen feels a surge of joy. She’s learned to value what remaining sight she has, about five per cent, her doctor estimates. “It’s true you never know what you have till you lose it,” Gwen says. “But what I do have, thank God, makes so many things still possible.”

Sighted people may take vision for granted, but not Gwen. For Gwen, it’s a gift, not to be taken for granted.

When you wake up in the morning, do you thank God for the gift of sight and all the other gifts you take it for granted?

SUNDAY WORSHIP

ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS



There is no hierarchy, just good people

1st October 2023 – 26th Sunday, (A)

Jesus warns that prostitutes and tax-collectors may be closer to God than their supposed betters. Social or religious standing means little in the sight of God. The parable of the two sons, neither of whom does what he says he will do, highlights the dictum that “actions speak louder than words.” Doing good actions is better than speaking fine words

Ezekiel 18:25-28: God deals justly with us, forgiving the sinner who repents and rewarding those who persevere

Yet you say, “The way of the Lord is unfair.” Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die.

Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die.

Responsorial: Psalm 24:4-9

R./: Remember your mercies, O Lord

*Lord, make me know your ways.
Lord, teach me your paths.
Make me walk in your truth, and
teach me:
for you are God my saviour. (R./)*

*Remember your mercy, Lord,
and the love you have shown from
of old.
Do not remember the sins of my
youth.
In your love remember me,
because of your goodness, O Lord.
(R./)*

*The Lord is good and upright.
He shows the path to those who
stray,
he guides the humble in the right
path;
he teaches his way to the poor. (R./)*

Philippians 2:1-11

Unity depends on Christians imitating the humility of Christ who became obedient unto death

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from



selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32
The parable of the two sons reminds us that good actions speak louder than fine words

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders: “What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, “Son, go and work in the vineyard today.” He answered, “I will not”; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, “I go, sir”; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.”

Not a Members-only club

Until around 1900, bishops in Ireland were chosen only from the ranks of the aristocracy.

Of course, there was a good economic reason for this: they had to be self-supporting because the people were too poor to pay them. But it was equally true in wealthy countries like France. There too the first requirement in a bishop was that he be from the ranks of the nobility. The lower clergy, parish priests and curates were excluded from bishoprics. Some of the trappings of aristocracy still survive in the church, titles like ‘princes of the church,’ living in ‘palaces,’ forms of address like ‘Your Lordship’ and offering a ringed hand to be kissed rather than shaken. One of the last aristocratic appointments in Ireland was appointed Bishop of Cork, where he served for 23 years. When his brother, Lord Dunboyne died, he abandoned the Catholic Church, became a Protestant and married to ensure an heir to the family. Ironically, he failed to produce an heir. Rome had lost a bishop while the Dunboyne lineage died out.

The beginning of the end of the aristocratic world came when the French Revolution abolished hereditary titles and made all citizens equal before the law. The world of the common man was begun and now what titles remain are largely honorary. But old habits die hard, not only in the Church. A new elite has replaced the old. Aristocrats have given way to plutocrats. The exclusive world of privilege never really dies. It only changes hands. The modern rich have all the trappings of the old nobility, save the titles. They live in security-guarded palatial homes and frequent exclusive clubs, to

protect them from contamination from the common herd.

The need for exclusivity and superiority seems imbedded in human nature and has invaded even the sanctuary. The Jews were happy with their exclusivity, excluding not only pagans from God’s favour, but even the Samaritans who failed their rigid test of orthodoxy. Jesus was indignant when he told the chief priests and elders, “Prostitutes and tax-collectors are making their way into the kingdom of God before you.” From the Jewish elders to Calvin’s elect, to our own former mantra “outside the Church there is no salvation,” exclusivity is a temptation to religious people. With the diminishing numbers of churchgoers and religion no longer a mass event, we may be more than ever tempted to circle the wagons. So Jesus’ warning to the Jews has a special relevance for us today, as a warning against seeing the church as a ‘Members-only’ Club.

Keeping an open mind

A theme common to all three readings is that of changing one’s mind. Our capacity to change our minds leaves us open to hazard and to hope; hazard when we choose to “renounce our integrity and to commit sin, hope when we choose to renounce sin to become law-abiding and honest” (Isaiah.)

The Gospel story shows us the nobility of a humble change of mind. The first son “thought the better of it.” He was open to change, to better thoughts. The second son was set and closed. The ability to change one’s mind is essential to all healthy relationships. A mind that is closed, whether from pride, stubbornness or stupidity, tends to destroy all relationships—e.g., when

we refuse to admit a mistake, when we are unwilling to apologise and change our ways, when we persist in prejudice against a person or group, when we think we know it all.

The second reading, from Philippians, talks of a more specific and positive change of mind: ‘In your minds, you must be the same as Christ Jesus,’ or as an older translation put it, ‘let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus.’ This is the direction in which we must be constantly changing our minds day by day.

Paul emphasises one aspect in particular of the mind of Christ—his humble openness and self-emptying in contrast to the conceited grasping and clinging of Adam: “he did not cling to (or grasp at) his equality with God (as Adam did in Eden) but emptied himself.”

Ever since Adam, we are all born as clingers and graspers. The new-born babe has to have a tight grip, and as we get older the grip often gets stronger. Clinging permeates all of life; we cling to people (possessiveness); to things (greed); to power and position (ambition); we cling to opinions (pride.) At the root of our clinging lies fear and insecurity. The apparently strong person who clings aggressively to set ways or ideas is in reality full of fear. Notice your physical reactions to fright; you clench up and grasp at something or someone, as a frightened child clings to its mother.

In the Buddhist tradition, clinging is seen as the root of all suffering. When you are unhappy, it can be enlightening to pursue the question “What am I clinging to?” It might be an idea, a plan, an expectation, power, possessions, reputation, a place, a person, health, even life itself. All wise traditions recommend a light grasp of everything. Anxious clinging leads to misery. As soon as we begin to relax our tight grasp and let go, we begin to be free and happy. (‘Letting go’ is a useful modern equivalent for ‘self-emptying.’)

Jesus did not cling. He knew that reality could be trusted, because at the heart of reality is ‘Abba—dear Father,’ and that underneath everything, even death, are the everlasting arms. So he did not cling even to life, ‘accepting death, death on a cross. “Into your hands, I commend my spirit,” he said.

May this mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus.

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See www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie

Relax, your priest won't remember what you said during confession

Q. Did the resurrected Jesus have a human body?

A. It is a fundamental truth of Christianity that Jesus rose from the dead in his physical body. (This differs from the doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses, who hold that the post-resurrection Christ was spiritual, not physical.) Christians believe that the Jesus who appeared to more than 500 witnesses after Easter (1 Cor 15:6) was not a ghost but was actually, physically present – walking, talking, even eating.

When Jesus showed himself to the disciples in the Upper Room on Easter Sunday night, they were at first terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. But he said to them: "Why are you troubled? ... Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have" (Lk. 24:38-39).

Seeing them still amazed, Jesus asked them: "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish, which he then ate in front of them (Lk 24:41-42). A week later, still bearing the wounds of the crucifixion, Jesus appeared to Thomas and said: "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side" (Jn 20:27).

At the same time, though, it needs to be said that Christ's post-resurrection body was somewhat different than his physical body on earth, since it was now glorified – incorruptible and free of suffering, a promise of what our own bodies will be like in Heaven.

He could enter closed rooms, for example, even though the door was locked (Jn. 20:19), and he was able to disappear, as he did when he vanished from the sight of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:31); and, of course, he was able to ascend into Heaven (Acts 1:9). This should fill us with hope and joy - Jesus has shown us that eternal life and happiness is real if we put our trust in Him and make Jesus Lord of our lives.

Q. At Mass recently, I was stunned by a statement made by the deacon who was giving the homily. That has made me wonder whether deacons have sole independence when preparing remarks, or if the priest exercises oversight.

A. On the parish level, the pastor has the ultimate responsibility for the orthodoxy and propriety of



A woman goes to confession in a makeshift confessional outside the Steppe Arena before Pope Francis celebrates Mass in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
Photo: Lola Gomez

what is said from the pulpit. To answer your question directly: A deacon does not have "sole independence" for his remarks.

In practice, though, rarely does this result in the pastor's pre-screening a deacon's homilies. By the very fact that he has allowed and invited the deacon to preach, the pastor has indicated his confidence that the deacon will handle things maturely and well. Deacons do not pop up suddenly from a congregation on a Sunday morning.

Before being ordained, deacons undergo a fairly intensive vetting process that includes several years of theological education, psychological evaluation and tutoring in pastoral techniques.

Returning to your question, you would be best advised to bring your concern to your pastor. If he, like you, is "stunned" by what the deacon is said to have said, he will surely bring it to the deacon's attention to avoid future problems. If he deems it necessary, the pastor might even see fit to make a correction from the pulpit.

Q. I love children, and I know that babies will cry at

inopportune times. That said, I am puzzled by young parents who allow their children to cry loudly in our church for extended periods of time. I believe it might be part of our culture of 'freedom' – but freedom comes with responsibility. In our church of 700 congregants, those three or four babies are ruining the Mass experience for all the rest of us.

A. St. John Chrysostom, more than 1500 years ago, wrote this: "Nothing so becomes a church as silence and good order. Noise belongs to theatres, and baths, and public processions, and marketplaces; but where doctrines ... are the subject of teaching, there should be stillness and quiet and calm reflection and a haven of much repose" (Homily 30 on the Acts of the Apostles).

On the other hand, Pope Francis, celebrating Mass at a parish in Rome, once said this: "Children cry, they are noisy, they don't stop moving. But it really irritates me when I see a child crying in church and someone says they must go out. God's voice is in a child's tears."

As in many things, the truth is probably somewhere in the middle. Congregations do have a special

responsibility to welcome children, and parishioners need to be patient with small children's occasional outbursts. As one adage has it, "Your parish is dying if no baby is crying."

Yet crying that is constant and loud can hold a congregation hostage and, as the letter writer says, "ruin the Mass experience for the rest of us." The answer lies in balance and discretion; parents need to be sensible and take their child for a 'walk' when they recognise behaviour that is seriously distracting.

Certainly no celebrant should go suddenly silent, focusing attention on a disruptive child and the offending family; but perhaps an occasional bulletin announcement, prudently stated and in a kindly fashion, can remind parents that the Mass should be, as far as possible, a positive experience of prayer.

Q. When I attend funerals of friends who belonged to non-Catholic Christian churches, those funerals are called 'Celebrations of Life.' I understand that these denominations do not believe in purgatory and say that the person

"has gone to be with the Lord." Are Catholics the only ones who go to purgatory, while the others go straight to Heaven?

A. To answer your question directly: no, I don't believe that only Catholics go to purgatory. Purgatory is the name we give to the final purification of the elect to make them ready for the glory of God's presence. I suspect that a lot of us will need that last cleansing, and not just Catholics.

That belief of the Church is reflected in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which says: "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of Heaven. The Church gives the name purgatory to this final purification of the elect" (No. 1030-31).

The Church's belief is based on a number of scriptural passages, going all the way back to the Old Testament. In the Second Book of Maccabees (12:46) we read that Judas Maccabeus 'made atonement for the dead,' that they might be freed from sin – which suggests a Jewish practice of offering prayers to cleanse the souls of the departed.

In the New Testament, Matthew's Gospel (12:32) has Jesus saying that certain sins "will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come," an indication that some purging of the soul may need to occur following a person's death.

Q. Do Catholic priests forget what they are told in confession?

A. Yes, we do. Part of that is due, I'm sure, to the grace of God; but another reason might be the repetitive nature of most confessions. I always try to remind myself, when I enter the confessional box, to stay alert and to remember that my role is to put the penitent in touch with God.

Rather than have confession become simply a repetition of regular faults (and that is fine), I often try to engage penitents also with regard to their spiritual life by asking them, for example, "Do you try to pray each day?" Normally, within a few minutes of leaving the confessional, I have forgotten nearly all of the sins people have confessed.

Unfortunately, this column cannot accept questions from readers

SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY

DAVID TORKINGTON



Errors of the Church, and penal times

The Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl, described the search for life's meaning as the most important motivational force for human kind.

During the Nazi annexation of Austria, he was sent to four concentration camps where members of his family were murdered and his wife of only nine months died. After the war he wrote his international bestseller, *Man's search for Meaning* in just nine days. Here he formulated his desire to find a meaning in life. His conclusion that it is possible to endure all sorts of suffering if that suffering has a meaning.

For Catholics in penal times their suffering did have a meaning, because it enabled them to unite their sufferings with Jesus Christ every day of their lives; most particularly when the priest arrived to make Christ's redemptive love present in the sacred mysteries of the Mass. Here they would unite their love of God with Christ's love of God. This would create a kind of mutual mystical channel of Love that would enable their love to rise to God and God's love to descend into them. This would gradually recreate them in the image and likeness of Christ, enabling them to say with St Paul that it was no longer they who lived but Christ who lived in them.

Suffering makes you realise your need for God, and in your need to keep turning to him in prayer, so that as your love for him grows you begin to yearn to be united with him. It is this yearning that leads to the profound contemplation in which human loving is united with Christ's loving, enabling a person to love God in, with, and through him. In receiving his love in return, and through that love we receive what St Thomas Aquinas calls the fruits of contemplation.

Love is received by returning love in kind

In all forms of love, the love of another can only be fully received in the act of returning their love in kind. In returning God's love, our love for him is generated and deepened in meditation when we reflect and ruminate on his love, as embodied in Jesus Christ. Then, as this love cannot unite us with Christ as he once was, it leads us on, to unite us with him as he is now. The desire to seek his love in the first place rises from the very depth of our being. As God has created us in his own image and likeness, it is from here that our desire to love and be loved by infinite loving arises. It is for this reason that it can only ultimately be satisfied by God himself.



Thanks to Jesus Christ this desire can finally be fulfilled. For it is he who continually pours out into our spirit his Holy Spirit, so that a new and supernatural fusion of love and loving is born, as the two become one. This loving enables us to be taken up into Christ's own personal loving of God his Father, to receive and share with others the fruits of contemplation in this life, before experiencing them fully for themselves in the next.

In his book *Enthusiasm*, Monsignor Ronald Knox said in concert with many other experts, that in the century after the Council of Trent which coincided with penal times in England, mystical theology reached a peak that it had never previously reached since the early Church. Now let me be clear about what is being said. Theology is the study of God by using the mind. It is usually pursued in schools, colleges, seminaries and in universities. But mystical theology is different because it is the loving study of God using the heart. It is called mystical from the Greek word that means hidden, invisible or unseen, because the inner loving of the heart cannot be seen. This is particularly true when it is united with Christ's own mystical loving of God his Father, within his Mystical Body. While the serious study of theology is open to the few, mystical theology is open to all.

William of Saint-Thierry

A great medieval mystic and friend of St Bernard, William of Saint-Thierry, was a 12th century Benedictine, theologian and mystic from Liège who became abbot of Saint-Thierry in France, and later joined the Cistercian Order. He said that "You cannot love someone

unless you know them. But you will never really know them unless you love them". Knowledge alone will enable you to love someone from the outside, as it were, while the love that always yearns for union will take you within them, to know them in a way that is impossible to pure knowledge alone.

Two years after the last martyr, Thomas Thwing, died for the faith in York in 1685, the mystical theology that was the spiritual life blood of Catholics in penal times, as it had been for Catholics in ancient times, was taken out of Catholic spirituality thanks to the condemnation of Quietism. Mgr Ronald Knox said that the Quietists who are still commonplace in the Church today under a different guise, were pseudo-mystics who wanted to experience what St Teresa of Avila called true contemplation, or the Prayer of Quiet, in her masterwork *Interior Castle* but without the requisite purification. This is the purification described by St John of the Cross in *The Dark Night of the Soul*.

They wanted to experience the Resurrection of Christ but without experiencing his Passion and death. They want daily access to the love of Christ without taking up their daily cross to follow him. When their leader, a Spanish priest called Molinos was condemned he was accused of practising Protestantism and committing countless cases of sexual abuse for which he was sentenced to life imprisonment. For him all you needed to do in prayer was practically nothing – just remain there like a suet pudding waiting to be soaked in syrup. And when distractions and temptation came your way, do nothing either, just endure them or rather enjoy

them, particularly the sexual temptations, that led to the gross immorality for which they were condemned.

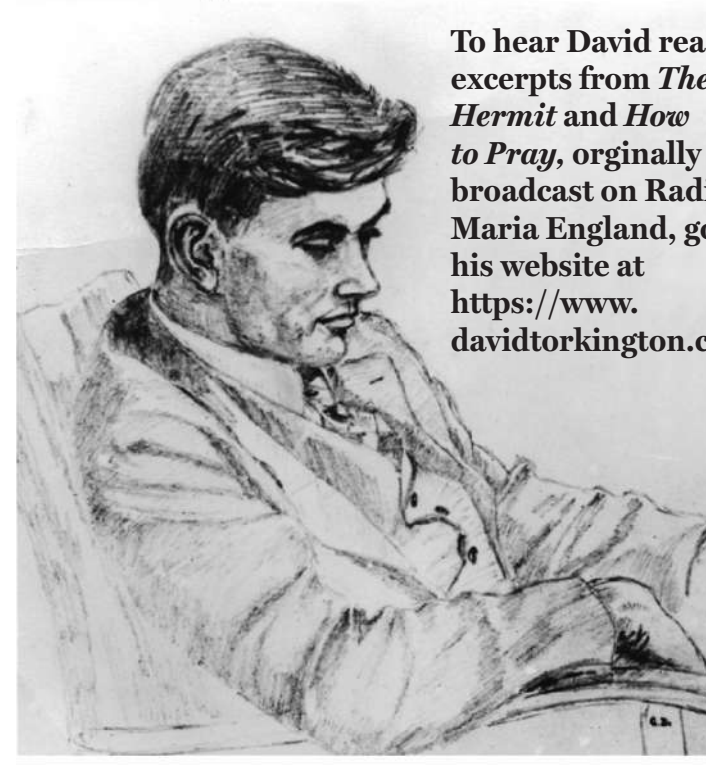
As his heresy had spread far and wide, anti-mystical witch hunts spread all over the Catholic Church, crushing everything that had the slightest whiff of Quietism about it. But sadly the baby was thrown out with the bath water and authentic mystical theology or learning the profound contemplative prayer that leads to union with God was extracted from mainline Catholic spirituality, down to the present day. Take love out of any family and that family implodes to the

detriment of all concerned and often for generations to come.

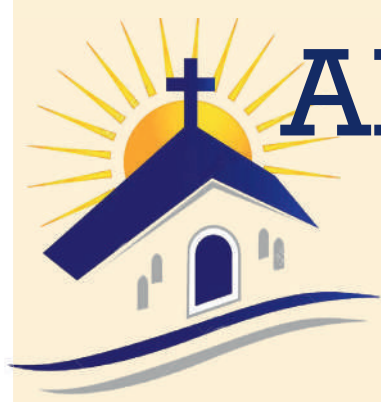
Even a perfunctory perusal of the contemporary Church will show the terrible and ongoing effects when divine love and infused wisdom has been lost and human perverted 'love' and 'worldly wisdom' has been found.

Our ancient and God-given Wisdom has been pulverised, or if you like synodised, and replaced by a new counterfeit orthodoxy that is a perversion, if not the direct opposite of the sublime teaching that Christ introduced into the early Church, not just for those times, but for all times.

David Torkington reads from The Hermit



To hear David reading excerpts from *The Hermit* and *How to Pray*, originally broadcast on Radio Maria England, go to his website at <https://www.davidtorkington.com>



AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION

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



‘Camino Supremo’ Ian dons his boots again on a five-week trek to Santiago

Tackling the Camino – the long-distance pilgrimage to the northern Spanish city of Santiago de Compostela on the Atlantic coast – has grown in popularity over the last few years, with TV programmes and books popularising the ancient practice. In the first part of an enthralling three-part series, Rowan Morton-Gledhill from the Diocese of Leeds shares ‘Camino Supremo’ Ian Burrell’s most recent adventure on the trail, during which he encountered wild horses, local sangria and witnessed the key role of the Church during his 40-day-long pilgrimage earlier this year.

Ian Burrell, Harrogate’s own ‘Camino Supremo’, has retired from his role as Chief Operating Officer for the Diocese of Leeds, but when it comes to long-distance walking pilgrimages, he hasn’t hung his boots up yet.

Whether through France, Florence or Finisterre, Ian is now veteran of six European Caminos. This year’s route totals around a thousand kilometres, with average daily ascents of 3,500 feet, all totted up on Ian’s GPS watch.

It starts in the far south of France, progressing through the Basque Country and along the wild and rugged northern coast of Spain: the ‘Camino del Norte’. He then turns inland and heads south-west to Santiago de Compostela along the ‘Camino Primitivo’. Would it be grim – not to mention ‘primitive’ – up Northern Spain?

The timing of this year’s travels is crucial. Ian’s parents are in their nineties and have been married for almost 70 years, so after celebrating his mother’s birthday, he set off the following day with the aim of returning in time for their Platinum Wedding Anniversary, two months later.

Leaving the Yorkshire moors behind, Ian headed for the land which in the 9th century was occupied by other Moors: Spain’s Muslim invaders whose initially terrifying influence mellowed over the centuries, giving especially the south of the country, some of its most beautiful architecture, food and customs. It was in those times, but in the relative peace of Spain’s

north-western land of Galicia, that the relics of Sant Iago, St James the Great, were found in Compostela, the city which now bears his name. To verify the authenticity of these bones, King Alfonso II walked to the city as the ‘original’ pilgrim. The route he took is now named the ‘Camino Primitivo’, meaning the ‘Original Way’.

As the Moors pressed northwards, pilgrims started to take a route along the northern coast of Spain, now known as the Camino del Norte (the Northern Way). King Alfonso made his capital at Oviedo, where the Northern Route intersected with his Original Way, and so made profits from the pilgrim trade which any Yorkshire accountant – including Ian – would be proud of!

One day after leaving Harrogate, Bayonne Cathedral in the French Basque Country is Ian’s official starting point. There is no sign of the traditional Pilgrims’ Mass to speed his journey. In previous pilgrimages, he has paused during or after a long day’s walk for prayer or Mass – or just to light a candle for the intentions of family, friends, colleagues, clergy and bishop. Finding Masses limited and many churches and chapels closed and locked along the Way is a disappointment to Ian who wonders whether these are casualties of the pandemic years. At the Cathedral, Ian attends the last Mass of the day, lights a candle and, refreshed by the Sacrament, decides to look for St Leon’s miraculous fountain which refreshed many a Camino pilgrim,

Ian on the Camino Primitivo. Note the church doors are closed; as recently as 2015 Ian found every church and chapel open to welcome visitors

setting out on the two-day walk through first the French and then the Spanish Basque Country, followed by a five-week trek through Spain.

The next day, Ian doesn’t need the GPS map on his watch as the directions on the first stage of the Camino are simple: ‘Just find the coast and turn left.’ Keeping the Atlantic Ocean on his right, he can just see the Spanish Basque town of Irun in the far distance. Upon arrival, though, he finds the bridge across the border closed and has to find another, as he does not fancy his chances in the wild waters of the notorious Bay of Biscay. This is the first of several detours around the coast, as in many places the cliff-top path has crumbled into the sea.

Ian has pre-booked interesting accommodation along the route, and this often means a few more kilometres’ walk to and from his hotels. The first one in Irun is

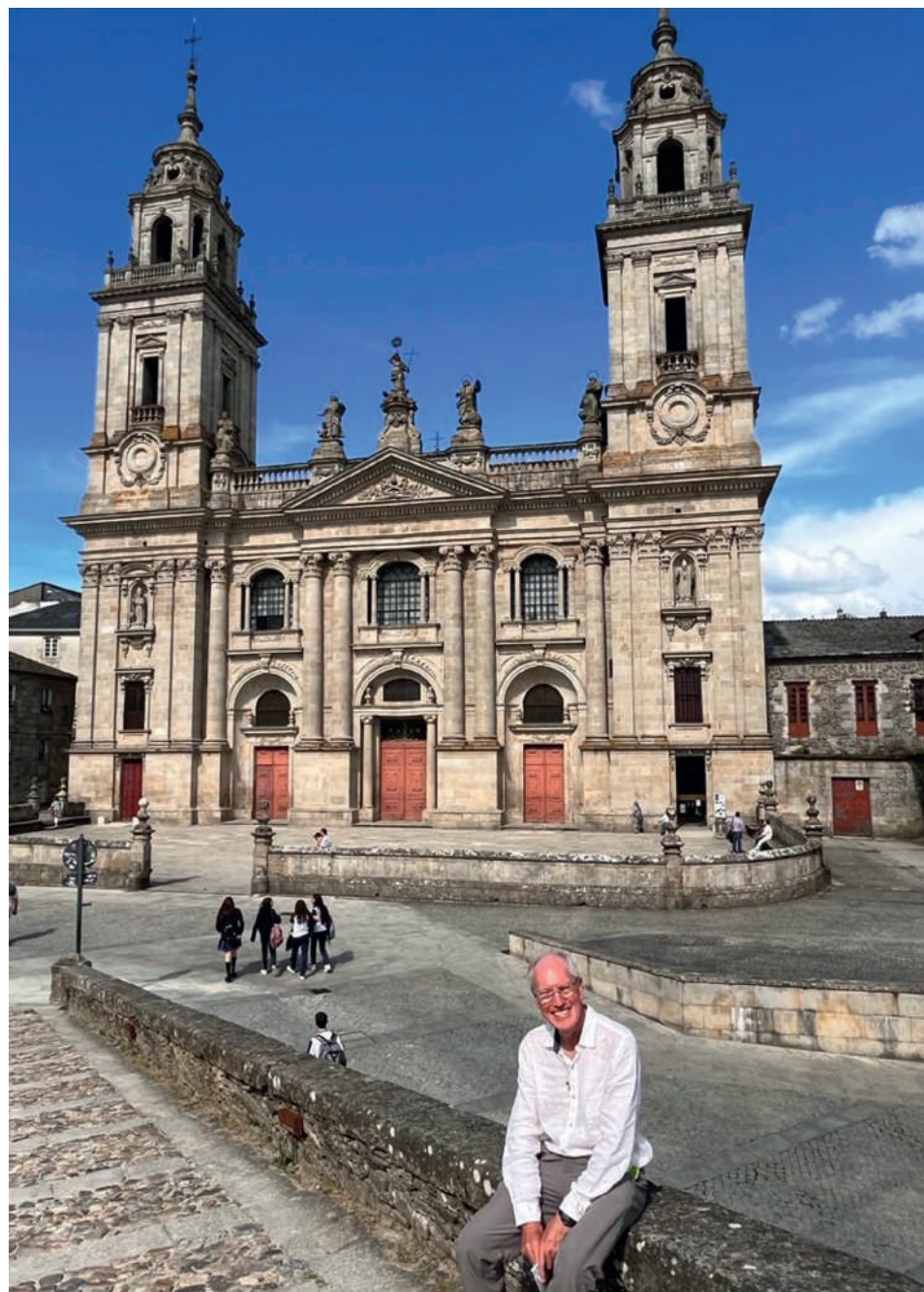
worth the diversion for character, if not for comfort. The ancient building is a former castle and his window is covered by an iron grille with a wooden shutter – but no glass.

As Ian sips a glass of Sangria before delicious local fare, a band of 20 Basque musicians adds to the atmosphere. The Basque people’s pride in their culture and traditions is evident everywhere. Ian spots graffiti on walls calling for Basque independence – and each Pascual Vascos (a delicious Basque cake made from almonds and providing much-needed protein on a long walk) is always served decorated with a cocktail stick bearing a little Basque flag.

Just over the border is the Spanish Basque town of Hondarribia, where Our Lady of Guadalupe is Patroness. In 1638 she interceded for the city when it was under siege. The town also has a ‘Black Madonna’ image, but the

church is closed and with many kilometres and 3,000 feet of ascent over two mountains still to walk, Ian decides to wait until Itziar, the next village boasting another 13th century ‘Black Madonna’. That church too was closed, as is almost every church and chapel along the Camino, by contrast with his last visit in 2015, when every chapel in even the smallest villages was left unlocked. As he starts his ascent of the first mountain, Ian stops by the oldest church in Hondarribia. It is known as ‘Santiago Belts’ (Black St James) as it once contained a blackened image of the Saint – until it was stolen. Now Ian begins to realise the reason why so many of the churches are locked.

Wild horses roam freely across the two mountains, the first of which is shrouded in mist. Ian’s destination is the Basque city of Donostia (San Sebastian in Spanish). It is famed for its Michelin-starred restaurants –





Above, Ian finds a beautiful spot at which to rest a while

Right, a 12th century sculpture of St James the Apostle

more than any other city in the world – but true to the penitential motivations of any pilgrimage, Ian has no time for such luxury. He presses on through another famous resort of Zarautz: a surfers' paradise with 2.5km of beautiful golden sands, thinking the only surfing he will be doing is on his mobile as he checks the challenging route for tomorrow.

The next day, as the surfers 'catch the waves' far below him, Ian joins them in being deluged with water, as the heavens open and torrential rain pours down, soaking Ian to the skin and making the cliff path treacherous underfoot. His next hotel is another thousand year old building, with basic facilities which do not include a drying room! To make matters even more 'primitive', the shower in Ian's room comprises large stone slabs over an open drain and he resolves to keep the bathroom door firmly shut in case of nocturnal visitations from the 'local fauna'!

The hotel is, however, only one of many ancient stone structures in the landscape. The next day, Ian visits the Ermita de San Miguel de Arretxinaga. The present 18th century church was built to a hexagonal design on the site of a much older chapel. At its centre are two huge 40 million-year-old megaliths which themselves form a natural chapel around an image of the town's Patron and Protector, St Michael the Archangel.

The rain in Spain continues to fall mainly on the pilgrims and The Way is now a waterway. There are constant reminders that this is a pilgrim route. Way markers at



regular intervals show the distance from Santiago; some buildings have the remains of yellow arrows painted on the floor, pointing the way; and in urban areas even the railings are decorated with wrought iron pilgrim shells.

As Ian approaches Gurnika, he sees the creative use of a car wreck as a Way Marker as perhaps a memorial nod towards the town's destruction in the Spanish Civil war bombing, famously imagined by Pablo Picasso.

Throughout his journey, Ian sees evidence of how much of a role the Church has played in the life of the local resident communities as well as for pilgrims; visiting a Cistercian monastery, the church interior is as beautiful and reverent as can be – while the land outside is made into a children's playground to provide facilities for the town's young families.

Ian's travelogue will continue next week

Singing programme is in tune with diocesan vision of young faith

Birmingham's new Diocesan Schools Singing Programme has been launched with two new choral directors appointed by the archdiocese.

Victor Wong and Theodora Sharp started work at the beginning of September, and other choral director appointments are expected to follow to cover more of the Archdiocese.

This new programme is an integral part of the Diocesan Vision, helping young people to develop a deeper and lasting relationship with their Christian faith.

Victor, who will be working mainly with the 13 schools in Our Lady & All Saints Multi Academy Company (MAC) centred around Solihull, holds a music performance diploma from Trinity College, London, a BA in Music and an MA in Music Performance. He is also qualified in providing specialist support for teaching and learning in schools.

Theodora will be working mainly in the 12 schools in the Holy Cross and Holy Spirit MACs in Coventry and Nuneaton. She also holds a performance diploma from Trinity College together with a BA in music performance. She has previously worked in schools in Cambridgeshire under the Ely Cathedral Schools Programme.

Thanks to funding from the Hamish Ogsten Foundation, other external funding, and support from the relevant schools, the



Programme is largely self-funding and sustainable. It is affiliated to the National Schools Singing Programme, launched in 2022.

This will be one of the largest diocesan programmes of its type in the UK. It is intended that some schools that are not part of MACs will join the programme over the Autumn term, with MACs in other parts of the archdiocese joining next year.

Through this programme, we aim to bring our young people and those who hear them closer to Jesus Christ and more fully into the life of the Church. We hope to give them:

- Deeper engagement with the lived experience of our faith and liturgy.
- A shared sense of faith, belonging, individual well-being, positive mental health and social interaction.
- A new opportunity for evangelisation and formation.

The programme is managed by Keith Ainsworth. He said: "This is an integral part of the diocesan

vision as it will support and enhance liturgy in the archdiocese and provide a means for evangelisation of our young people," he said. "It will also assist our schools with the delivery of the National Curriculum for Music, provide in-service training support for teachers, and support the development of choirs for our young people to sing in throughout their school education, with a focus on liturgical music to keep hearts turned to God."

Archbishop Bernard Longley said: "I am delighted to see that the Schools Singing Programme is starting work in our Archdiocese this year, already involving 25 of our schools.

"It is important because it will deepen our young people's appreciation for the beauty of music in the liturgy, with its ability to touch the soul. I am very grateful to the benefactors who have made the programme possible. It has my full support."

For more information, visit www.nssp.org.uk

Archbishop comes 'home' to old school

On 20th September, the Emeritus Archbishop of Cardiff, the Most Reverend George Stack, travelled from Wales to lead a Deanery Mass at St Aloysius' College in Islington to mark the beginning of the new academic year.

As an Aloysius Alumnus, Archbishop George could strongly relate to the ethos of the school and expanded on it in a thought-provoking sermon.

He made the case for having the courage to go deeper and search for guidance within, in a world that focuses more on the surface and the distractions of ever louder and fast-moving environments.

The archbishop mentioned the Swiss psychoanalyst CG Jung, whose work centred around the profound wisdom we all carry inside us, even if it's often buried under layers of worries and anxieties.

The Mass was enjoyed by staff



from all Islington Catholic schools. Paula Whyte, headteacher of the host school, extended warm wishes to her colleagues for a blessed and fruitful new academic year.

Pictured above is Archbishop Emeritus George Stack with Paula Whyte and other staff from St Aloysius' College

Double anniversary joy for St Mary's church

On Sunday 17th September, the community of St Mary's Catholic Church on the High Road, celebrated a double anniversary. Bishop John Sherrington presided at a special Mass to commemorate 125 years since the parish of St Mary's was established in East Finchley, and 70 years since the present church building was opened.

Attending the celebration were local MP Mike Freer, Cllr Alison Moore, three of the surviving past parish priests and two of the five vocations from the parish: Canon Mehall Lowry and Canon Robert Plourde.

As well as Fr Peter Scott (parish priest) and Deacon Domagoj Matokovic lighting 12 church consecration candles, the celebration involved a procession of children from Our Lady of Lourdes RC Primary School in Bow Lane, and an offertory dance by the Nigerian Calabir Union Dancers.

In his homily, Bishop John paid tribute to St Mary's as a "sanctuary which offers a word of welcome to those whose lives are dry and parched."

"All these activities, with Christ at the centre, as well as the conversations in the streets and the local shops, are moment when we can give hope to others and communicate, often not in words, the hope that is in our heart that is Jesus Christ risen from the dead to save us and call us his friends," Bishop John said.

"The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and



celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members (to spread the gospel) to be evangelisers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach."

Bishop John also highlighted the importance of being a "healthy parish." "A healthy parish always looks after its families – so important for the good of our

children," he said. "The family needs to be at the heart of Catholic life. We thank God for our schools and teachers which play such a vital part for the good of children and the future. A healthy parish looks outwards to serve the needs of the people around it."

"It was an amazing day, full of prayer, solemnity and laughter. We have steadfastly put down roots to be here for another 125 years," Fr Peter said.



Parishioners thanked for backing CAFOD World Bank appeal

Jo Lewry would like to thank parishioners in the Diocese of Portsmouth who supported CAFOD's Fix the Food System campaign by signing Salina's letter to the World Bank.

"This summer the Fix the Food System campaign focused on seeds and how farmers' rights to use and share their own seeds needs to be protected.

"Salina, a farmer from Bangladesh, wrote a letter to the World Bank asking them to protect the fundamental rights of small farmers to save, use and exchange their own seeds and to put an end to policies which limits farmers' choices and freedoms.

"Many thanks to our wonderful parish volunteers who organised letter signings in their parishes over

the summer," she said.

"Patrick, our CAFOD parish volunteer from St Joseph's in Maidenhead, told me: 'The children of Years 5 and 6 from St Mary's School, and parishioners of St Joseph's Church in Maidenhead responded in their dozens to the invitation; 'Imagine! A farmer went out to sow but could not afford the seed to sow!'

"Copies of Salina's letter to the President of The World Bank were available at all Masses and 288 signatures were collected in solidarity with the plight of small-scale farmers like Salina."

Pictured above is Father Ephraim Odhiambo with St Joseph's and St Elizabeth's congregations, during one of the letter-signing opportunities.

Bishop delighted to hand over papal decrees to Paisley's two new Missionaries of Mercy

On Wednesday, 13th September, Bishop of Paisley John Keenan presented Monsignor Joe Burke and Fr Ryan Black with Decrees from Pope Francis that appointed them as Missionaries of Mercy.

The presentations were made during Holy Mass in St Mirin's Cathedral, where the pair were joined by the Missionaries of Mercy appointed in the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy in 2015-16

In the presence of Monsignor Tom Monaghan and Fr Joe Balmer, the bishop explained that the appointment came not from him but from the Pope, who alone names Missionaries of Mercy because they enjoy faculties to absolve sins reserved to the Holy See.

The four Missionaries of Mercy



in the diocese of Paisley are called upon to preach God's mercy, and they are asked to make themselves very available in bringing about that reconciliation of God through

the sacred ministry of Confession.

Pictured above are Bishop John with the four Missionaries of Mercy



Photo by Mark Fuchter.

In a moving ceremony at the Church of Our Lady and King St Edmund in Hunstanton, Fr Michael Stokes presented the Pope's blessing to two couples and a religious sister, marking significant milestones in their lives. On 15th June, Michael and Hillary Rhodes (on the right) celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary, while on 25th July, Tom and Elizabeth Koning (in the centre) marked their golden anniversary. Finally, on 28th August, Sr Mary Gonçalves FDC (left) pronounced her vows, making her final profession as a religious sister in the Daughters of Divine Charity. Pope Francis "invoked an abundance of divine graces" upon them all. The congregation was enthusiastic in its expression of congratulations.

Saint Michael – Patron Saint of Police Officers

The angel who protects us all – and keeps an eye out for those tasked with protecting society



Around policing it is quite common to come across challenge coins, medals, stickers and badges emblazoned 'St. Michael Protect Us'. Do you know why this is? Do you know who Saint Michael is?

St Michael is the patron of the Catholic Police Guild and for policing, his feast being celebrated on 29th September.

To understand the importance of St. Michael the Archangel, one must first understand the tenacity of demons. For us, in policing, we find it easy to appreciate the concept of good and evil – thereby of saints and sinners, or of angels and demons.

Every day we interact with souls who turn away from good and commit all manner of evil acts. Every day we find people living lies, perpetually accepting that wrong is right. All of humanity, every one of us, has an inclination to sin, to commit crime, participate in evil acts – in extremis, just look at the collapse of societies, morals and order in failed states. Our weaknesses are not just personal; others can agitate our weaknesses, amplifying a propensity to sin – and this is exactly what demons do.

As Mgr Alain de Boismenu wrote: "The devils inhabit and infest our world; they meddle with our lives and assault us continuously, forcefully, incessantly. Although degraded, their angelic nature remains vastly superior to ours; hence they know what motivates and moves us, and thus they play with us. God allows them to play and plague us, for our merit and for His greater glory."

"The devils act on our senses and toy with our imagination. They fill our minds with pride, envy and anxiety. They deal out just enough favours and hardships to lead us into sin, afflicting the just, rewarding sinners and always seeking to move souls away from the supernatural."

"In their defence, Catholics receive a steady stream of powerful and continuous graces. Grace is always available through prayer and the Sacraments, thanks to the aid of our guardian angels and priests. To conquer the temptations



Saint Michael Subdues Satan,
Dosso Dossi/
Battista Dossi
c.1540

of the devil, we only have to will it with all our might. God's infinite mercy will do the rest."

In the order of creation, the devils and demons are fallen angels – those angels who chose to not live by God's law. Of the trillions or more angels created, it is believed there are a mere seven archangels. These are the guardians of

institutions, countries, and other groups of people. They do for the institutions what guardian angels do for individuals.

The most notable archangels are Gabriel, the messenger – and Michael, a warrior and judge. St. Michael is the protector of Heaven and of Catholics, and he enforces the will of God by battling and

subduing the demons, especially Satan. He is the patron saint of police officers, paramedics, and the military. The significance and power of his role derives his name, with Michael translating from the Hebrew 'Who is like God'.

St. Michael, in fact, has four major roles in the Catholic Church. The first is to act as the leader of the armies of God, embodying the virtues of every spiritual warrior. The second role is to act as the angel of death, carrying the souls of all deceased persons into Heaven; he is said to visit everyone in the hour before their death and offer a final chance at salvation, acting as an agent of deliverance from Satan's minions.

His third role involves dispensing the justice of God; he is often depicted in this role by holding a pair of scales. His fourth and final role is the defender of the Catholic Church and her living members (all Catholics in the state of grace).

To varying extents St. Michael's patronage of policing supports our role in these four areas:

- St. Michael helps officers and staff to act with virtue
- He assists officers to turn citizens away from a path of crime
- When this is not possible, he assists officers to act wisely and justly
- And, in often-dangerous duties when we frequent devil-ridden environs, he is a protector to return us home to our loved-ones.

The patronage of St. Michael should not be under-estimated. There are stories in the Bible, from the Old and New Testament, and recorded in the millennia since which show St. Michael's ability to overcome demons on our behalf. It is for this reason that the Catholic Police Guild is proud to have St. Michael as patron for itself and policing, and to celebrate Michaelmas.

By asking, everyone in policing can benefit from his patronage:

Saint Michael the Archangel, guide and protect us in our duties!



Derby school has an exciting new vision for its future

Representatives from the Department for Education visited the Sisters of Mercy to talk about the new eco building for St Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy in Derby.

The Sisters heard how the biophilic design of the new school focuses on connecting those inside the building – the UK's first biophilic school - with nature, promoting physical and mental health.

Duncan Craig, development projects lead for the DfE, and DfE's lead design advisor Ian Naylor, gave a presentation to the sisters at St Philomena's Convent in Derby.

St Mary's original building, in Broadway, was destroyed by fire in October 2020 and the school has been based at St James House in Mansfield Road, Derby, since April 2021. Work started on the new building in February 2023 and it is set to open later this year.

Sister Carmel said: "We were all privileged to see and hear first-hand how this 'Phoenix' was rising from the ashes. It was a detailed presentation on how this biophilic school will benefit so many children, parents/carers and indeed the whole of this area of Derby. We now await the grand opening which will soon be on the horizon."

Sara Bolton, Vice Chair of Governors at St Mary's, also attended the DfE presentation.

"I was most impressed by the DfE presentation and their attention to detail. Our new school will be an excellent and unique learning environment for our pupils," she said. "Our staff will have the opportunity to teach in a new building with endless opportunities."

Amanda Greaves, executive headteacher of St Mary's: "It was a wonderful opportunity for the Sisters of Mercy to hear first-hand how the site they gifted in 2000 is being restored to provide the best Catholic education for the children of Derby."

"The Sisters of Mercy have a long-standing history and relationship with the school having founded St Mary's in 1814 on Edward St, and so it was vital for us to share the journey of the re-building of what will be the first UK biophilic school."

The Catholic Police Guild Prayer:

Most Merciful God, giver of all authority, by the merits of Thy Divine Son and through the intercession of His Holy Mother and our glorious patron St. Michael, grant that we may this day and every day, overcome all temptations, especially to injustice and disloyalty, and with our minds inflamed by Thy Holy Spirit perform all our duties in such a manner as may be pleasing to Thy Divine Will, so that when called to report for the last time we may not be found wanting, and may be allowed to remain for ever in Thy Presence.
Through Jesus Christ Our Lord, Amen.

GARDENING

Hedgehog highways: what are they, how to help build one and why they matter

Britain's urban hedgehog populations are stabilising after decades of worrying decline, although numbers in the countryside are still falling, a new report has found.

Gaps under boundary fences, known as "hedgehog highways", are being heralded as a key driver in this improvement for hedgehogs in cities and towns.

A hole at the base of a boundary fence will create a valuable, connected network of green space that hedgehogs can roam through. Whether it is a drilled hole in a wall or natural gap in an old wooden fence, highways help hedgehogs in their quest to find enough food and mates.

Hedgehogs disappeared

Urban and suburban areas have become busier and more dangerous for wildlife. Connected green space, such as these highways, increase hedgehog habitats and provide key refuges from pressures in the wider landscape, such as traffic.

Listed as vulnerable to extinction in Britain's red list for mammals, hedgehogs have been subject to significant conservation efforts. Key players in the fight for hedgehog survival – People's Trust for Endangered Species and The British Hedgehog Preservation Society – published a report on the state of Britain's hedgehogs this year. They also run a campaign called Hedgehog Street focusing on local action and encouraging people to create hedgehog highways in their gardens.

Hedgehog numbers have shown a 30 per cent–75 per cent decline across different areas of the countryside since 2000. Why hedgehogs are disappearing isn't straightforward.

Agricultural intensification has led to the loss of habitats. Great Britain has lost an estimated 50 per cent of their hedgerows since World War II. Pesticide use and slug pellets kill the slugs, worms, beetles and other invertebrates that hedgehogs rely on.

Urban areas are also being built with impenetrable fences that can fragment populations of ground-dwelling animals such as hedgehogs. If that wasn't enough, hedgehogs face a greater risk from vehicles than ever before due to an increasing road network.

All is not lost, however. A report by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust set out to monitor the animals' presence before and after making holes in people's garden fences. There were several encouraging results, including a 39 per cent increase in hedgehog sightings after people made highways.

In a similar study in Reading, researchers reported that 54 per cent of people observed an increase in hedgehog activity in their gardens after creating at least one hedgehog highway. The gardens changed from being isolated oases to part of a larger haven for hedgehogs.



There are approximately 520 thousand hectares of residential garden space in urban areas in Great Britain. That's 29.5 per cent of the total urban area. Undoubtedly, gardens are a critical place to ensure co-existence with wildlife.

Neighbourhood highways

Despite being relatively small animals, hedgehogs can travel up to 2km and visit up to 13 gardens per night through well-connected habitats. So while there are benefits to connecting two or three gardens, it's not enough. Green spaces need to be joined up across neighbourhoods to allow hedgehogs to access the varied resources they need to survive.

Hedgehog highways can also generate community spirit. The village of Kirtlington, Oxfordshire, is proud of its hedgehog highway where there are 60 connected houses, with gaps, holes and even ramps in all shapes and sizes for hedgehogs to use. Other

villages have announced plans to create similar networks in their bid to create the country's longest hedgehog highway.

It is estimated that more than 120,000 highways connecting around 240,000 gardens have been created in the UK. This is equivalent to approximately 1.1 per cent of UK households with access to a garden. Although incredibly valuable, there is still a long way to go to protect these prickly creatures.

How to create a highway

Removing barriers to a hedgehog's nightly wandering is the most important action we can take for the species. A 13cm x 13cm hole is sufficient to create a corridor from one garden to the next. This can be drilled through wooden fence panels or be a gap cut in a wire fence. A channel can be dug underneath a fence or gate, or a brick can be removed from a wall.

There's no maximum number of holes you can create. A hole on more than one boundary will

contribute to a bigger habitat network. Those with more ambitious goals may even want to replace the fence with a hedgerow to provide a corridor, nesting spot and food for hedgehogs.

In 2020/2021, house building in England soared to a 33-year high. The development of new homes shows no signs of respite and it is widely considered that building fences with no gaps has contributed to the hedgehog decline.

Developers have a key role to play in preventing the creation of hostile landscapes for nature.

Bovis Homes, Barratt Homes, Taylor Wimpey and several other developers have pledged to include gaps in garden boundaries throughout their housing projects. What's more, guidance on building hedgehog highways has been added to the National Planning Policy framework.

Hedgehogs have had a bumpy ride, characterised by catastrophic declines over recent decades. Against all odds, however, hedgehog highways provide a glimmer of hope.

HEALTH

Suck it up! Six of the best home exercises

Planks and wall sits are best for lowering blood pressure – here are six more reasons they're such great exercises

Alex Walker and Jamie Edwards
If you were told to do more exercise to lower your blood pressure, you might think you'd need break out your running gear or hit the weights. But one of us (Jamie) recently published research that found exercises that you hold in a static position, such as planks and wall sits, are actually the best way to reduce blood pressure. This kind of "isometric" exercise involves contracting a specific muscle or muscle group and holding it so the length of the muscle doesn't change throughout the exercise. But lower blood pressure is only one of the benefits of doing this type of exercise.

1. They improve heart health
Jamie's recent work looked at 270 randomised controlled trials involving a total of over 15,000 participants. It found that the best way to lower blood pressure was to perform an average of three isometric sessions per week. Each sessions consisted of four two-minute bouts of isometric exercises, with a one-to-four minute rest period between each. The resulting blood pressure reduction was comparable to that seen in people taking standard blood pressure medication.

Jamie's research group has also shown that isometric exercise improves the function, structure and mechanics of our heart, the health of our vascular system and the performance of our autonomic nervous system. All of these changes are important for good cardiovascular health and lower risk of disease. Although it's a complicated area of science, the reason isometrics may be so effective for our cardiovascular health is due to the unique nature of holding a static muscle contraction. This compresses the blood vessels – and then on release of the isometric hold, leads to greater blood flow to the previously compressed vessels.

2. They improve joint health
Our ligaments play an essential role in stabilising our joints when we move. But injuries can happen if we put too much pressure on a ligament, such as an awkward single-leg landing when jumping. Anterior crutiate ligament (ACL) rupture is one example of a ligament injury



that has a significant health impact. But our muscles play an important role in reducing the force placed on our ligaments by helping create stability around a joint. And research shows that training certain muscle groups through isometric exercises can help to reduce pressure on certain ligaments. For example, one study found that training the hamstrings (the group of muscles that run along the back of your thigh from hip to knee) helped reduce pressure on the ACL. This may help prevent injuries to this ligament in the future.

3. They help address muscle imbalances
It's common for the muscles on one side of your body to be stronger than the other. Known as limb dominance, this partly happens due to something called laterality, our preference to use

one side of the body over the other. It can also happen as a result of your body adapting to the demands of sports (or other activities) which require skills that place greater demand on one side of the body, such as football, volleyball and basketball. While there's typically nothing wrong with the muscles on one side of the body being stronger than the other, it may increase risk of injury and may also affect an athlete's performance. But doing unilateral (one-sided) isometric exercises – such as the split squat or side plank – may help reduce strength differences between limbs as they target one side of the body.

4. They improve performance
Isometric exercises are effective for improving strength in specific fixed positions. This is

because isometric exercises have the ability to activate very specific muscles or muscle groups. Isometrics often mimic challenging positions such as the sticking point at the bottom of a squat, maintaining a scrummage in rugby or removing the lid off a jam jar. This means they can help to build the strength required to tolerate the load placed upon the body during exercise, sport and every day life. This may improve athletic performance or physical function in daily life.

5. They're easily tolerated
Isometric exercises are often used as part of physiotherapy and sports therapy rehabilitation programmes for people recovering from musculoskeletal injuries. This is because they can be performed with limited mobility and where pain may be a limiting factor. As isometric exercises are performed in a static position, it can be more tolerable than exercises which require a lot of movement. Similarly, those with limited mobility can choose a comfortable position to perform the exercise, such as adjusting the height of a wall squat if they have limited hip mobility.

6. They're time efficient
Most studies which have investigated the benefits of isometric exercises for heart health have only required participants to do a total of eight minutes of exercise per session. This would equate to around four sets of isometric exercises, with each exercise held for around two minutes. Y ou would then rest between one and four minutes between sets. Numerous studies also show these exercises only need to be performed three times a week for three weeks in order to see beneficial changes. This makes isometric exercises easy to fit into even the busiest schedules.

Getting started
Isometric exercise can be performed pretty well anywhere since they only use your body weight to challenge your muscles. If you aren't sure where to begin when it comes to isometric exercises, some good examples include wall squats (pretending like you're sitting in a chair but with your back pressed against a wall) and planks (resting on your forearms and tip-toes, with your stomach raised above the ground and held level). It's also recommended you consult with a healthcare practitioner before starting your new exercise plan to ensure it's safe and effective.

Alex Walker is a Lecturer in Sports Therapy, University of East London
Jamie Edwards is a Lecturer in Exercise Physiology, University of East London



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FOOD

Too tempted to snack? Five top tips to inspire your workday snack habits

If snacking helps fuel you through the workday, you're not alone. According to a 2023 survey conducted for the Hillshire® Snacking brand, more than two-thirds of on-the-go workers (67 per cent) – like teachers, hospitality workers and nurses – say that's the case for them, too. The study revealed that workday snacking had a positive impact on their happiness (86 per cent), productivity (85 per cent) and well-being/mental health (85 per cent).

Yet it's not always easy to find or enjoy a high-quality snack while you're on the move. Here are five top tips from the Hillshire Snacking Snacktivity Directors.

1. Time your snacks thoughtfully

While many on-the-go jobs make it hard to take long breaks, you can still make time for quick snacks between meals.

Schedule your snacking for the times when you feel that your energy levels tend to dip. Opting for small snacks that require no preparation also makes it easier to fit them into a busy workday.

"I always try to bring something convenient and ready to eat on the go," says Snacktivity Director Taner.

"You need something that fits in the confines of the time you realistically have to eat."



2. Include proteins to keep help energy levels up

To help with a short burst of energy that isn't followed by a crash, the Hillshire Snacking Snacktivity Director agreed it's best to include some form of protein, like meat, cheese or nuts.

Snacktivity Director Julia says she includes

something nutritious to help her avoid an energy crash later: "I always opt for protein – something that helps keep you full for longer periods of time." Julia also makes sure to carry snacks with her, wherever she goes, just in case she needs a pick-me-up.

3. Ingredients matter

Rather than hitting the nearest vending machine when hunger strikes, plan ahead by packing snacks with high-quality ingredients.

"I avoid temptation by keeping myself satiated with foods that are filling and nutritional," says Snacktivity Director Phil. "Find a carry-over snack that can help you last between your bigger meals."

4. Variety is the spice of snacks

The Hillshire Snacking Snacktivity Directors say that satisfying hunger with a variety of flavour and textures is another effective strategy.

Julia says she also satisfies her snack cravings by "including small portions of multiple items, both sweet and savoury, as well as something that offers a good crunch."

5. Elevate your snacking

All Snacktivity Directors recommended Hillshire Snacking Small Plates as an ideal way to elevate workday snacking. Each Small Plate contains high-quality ingredients, like savoury salami, delicious cheese and perfectly toasted crackers for a premium and convenient experience.

Visit HillshireSnacking.com to find your next favourite workday snack.

Beat the travel tired blues

Expert sleep tips to help improve your trip

Do you love to travel but hate how tired it makes you? If you're tired when you finally get to your destination, there's a good reason. Travelling across time zones seriously throws your circadian rhythm out of sync. To help your body cope with travel, sleep expert to OURA, Dr. Rebecca Robbins, Ph.D., offers tips for adapting to your new schedule.

1. Plan ahead

Before your trip, move your bedtime and waking times in the direction of the time at your destination by 15-minute increments every day. Once on the plane, set your smartphone or watch to the time at your destination, then start eating, drinking and behaving as you would at that new schedule.

"Avoid red-eye flights when possible, because any sleep you may get on a plane will be poor quality, which may start your trip on the wrong foot," advised Robbins. Understanding how to maximise sleep to support your health is a great first step toward improving your well-being – at home and abroad.

2. Take these steps upon arrival

When you reach your destination, get outside and walk or exercise in the fresh air and sunlight as much as possible. This will help your body make the transition to the new time. "However, if you're feeling sluggish after you arrive, try taking a 20-minute or 90-minute nap to recover



from lost sleep," said Robbins.

3. Eat thoughtfully

Avoid heavy meals around dinnertime or close to your new bedtime at your destination. It's recommended to choose a hearty breakfast and lunch, followed by a lighter and, when possible, early dinner. Eating lighter meals close to bedtime can help reduce the risk of sleep disruptions, particularly when you're adjusting to a new time zone and in a new place.

4. Exercise outside at your new destination

Exercise is an essential way to keep your body on track. Exercising outdoors at your new destination whenever possible is a particularly powerful tool for beating jet lag. Outdoors provides access to sunlight, which is the strongest input to our circadian rhythm, and can accelerate our ability to adjust to a new time zone. In a study of airline crewmembers, those

that were instructed to work out outside adjusted faster to their new destination than a control group that did not do so.

5. Make bedtime seem like home

Try to maintain your usual nighttime routine. Whatever strategies help you unwind at home – a warm shower, reading a book, praying or meditating – will help you relax anywhere. You're more likely to sleep well if you follow the same patterns your body expects at bedtime.

"Falling asleep is all about feeling safe, secure and at peace," added Robbins. "Bringing things from home can help a new place feel familiar, like a cosy scarf that doubles as a blanket, or even your favourite set of pyjamas, can enhance your ability to relax before bed."


How OURA can help improve wellness

You can also use an OURA Ring to improve your rest and recovery after you're back home. Their state-of-the-art research means you'll have personalised health insights and daily guidance to enhance your well-being before, during and after your travels.

Technology can help you understand your body's rhythms. The OURA Ring uses advanced, research-grade sensors to pack state-of-the-art heart rate, heart rate variability (HRV), personalised temperature, activity and sleep monitoring technology into a convenient, non-invasive ring.


Wearables like the OURA Ring can help you gain insights on your sleep and overall health to make the most out of your next trip.

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FILMS

Astronaut's tale shows you can reach the stars you aim for

"Tenacity is a superpower," observes a character in the fact-based profile *A Million Miles Away* (Amazon). And so it seems to prove for the subject of director and co-writer Alejandra Márquez Abella's warm biopic, Mexican American astronaut José Hernández (Michael Peña).

In adapting Hernández's memoir *Reaching for the Stars*, Abella traces his remarkable journey from child migrant farm worker to NASA engineer and candidate for a place on the space shuttle. Early on, as he watches the 1969 Moon landing on TV, the youthful Hernández instantly dedicates himself to the longshot goal of following in the footsteps of the Apollo 11 crew.

The odds against the lad are, of course, staggering. Perhaps the earliest of the stumbling blocks he faces, as pointed out by his caring teacher, Miss Young (Michelle Krusiec), is the negative effect on his

education of his parents' migratory work life. Admirably, mum and dad respond to this appeal for greater stability by making an economically sacrificial decision.

Thanks, in part, to their altruism, Hernández goes on to receive his master's degree in engineering and joins the staff of California's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Yet the fact that may still be a long way off from fulfilling his ultimate ambition is testified to by a telling incident in which, as a newcomer to the lab, he's mistaken for a janitor.

Abella's script, penned with Bettina Gilois and Hernán Jiménez, convincingly portrays the lifelong determination Hernández demonstrated – he applied to join the space programme 11 times before being accepted. It also shows the crucial support he received from his loving wife, Adela (Rosa Salazar), and



Michael Peña as José Hernández in a heart-warming tale

from the rest of his family.

As Hernández overcomes prejudice and breaks down social and economic barriers, teens as well as grown-ups will profit from his good example and from the strong values by which he's steadily guided.

Additionally, viewers of faith will note the Catholic trappings Abella briefly includes at various points. These at least imply a religious influence on Hernández's success.

José Moreno Hernández recently told *screenrant.com* about the process of helping Alejandra Márquez Abella and other screen writers to

bring his story to life on screen.

"The good thing is that they had books. I've written three books, one my self-penned biography, another one's a children's book, and then another one the middle reader. I think that helped them a little bit, at least to put things in sequential order of how they were going to tell it. We had three script writers, Bettina Gilois, Hernán Jiménez, and then our director, Alejandra Márquez Abella and with each one I spent time," he said.

Hernández was 'very happy' with the resulting script.

"They sent me their draft, and I would give them my feedback," he said. "Sometimes they took it, sometimes they couldn't, because of how the scripts work and all that. But again, for the most part, it was done great."

"And then when Alejandra started shooting I had met with my counterpart actor, Michael Peña. So he got to know my personality and accurately portrayed it."

"Rosa Salazar portrayed in an excellent manner, my wife, so I think everything was done. I was very happy with it."

Tough guy thriller series is surely expendable now?

We've reached number four in the *Expendables* franchises. What started back in 2010 as quite a fun feature, pulling together a host of Hollywood tough guy actors in an ensemble movie so they could spar jovially with each other in a big bromance, made too much money for the studio to turn down the chance to make sequels. Unfortunately, they've become more mindless and blood-soaked with each passing film.

And so we get to *Expend4bles* (Lionsgate). Director Scott Waugh has taken the usual mindless machismo up a notch for a truly lunkheaded movie.

Sylvester Stallone returns as Barney Ross, the longtime leader of the paramilitary outfit of the title. This time out, at the behest of a CIA official named Marsh (Andy Garcia), the gang aims to thwart the schemes of evil arms dealer Rahmat (Iko Uwais). Rahmat has managed to assemble his very own nuclear bomb and plans to use it to spark World War III.

After a botched raid chronicled in the opening sequence, Ross' number two, Lee Christmas (Jason Statham), finds his membership in the organisation questioned. As a result, his colleagues – including Christmas' on-again-off-again live-in girlfriend Gina (Megan Fox) – leave him behind when they set out to tangle with Rahmat's minions.

Still, as his comrades shoot, stab, slash and vaporise their faceless adversaries, Christmas manages to make his presence felt. As for Ross



himself, plot developments keep him mostly out of the picture.

Screenwriters Kurt Wimmer, Tad Daggerhart and Max Adams try to leaven the proceedings with humorous putdowns. They also throw Decha (Tony Jaa), a former Thai special forces operative-turned-pacifist, into the mix to reflect – albeit briefly – on the corrosive spiritual effects of too much manslaughter. Predictably, his musings do little to stay the slaying.

In fact, while this chapter of the quick-paced but pretentiously posturing saga mostly registers as he-man drivel, its wrap-up descends into outright immorality. For purposes of his own, and to fill what might otherwise be a

gap in the storyline, the screenplay has Ross subject an ornery but hardly murderous opponent to an undeserved death.

The clear intent is for the audience to find this not only fitting, but clever and amusing too. Amid all the fatality already depicted, the moment comes and goes. But to say that such behaviour on Barney's part isn't exactly wonderful would be an understatement.

Director Scott Waugh told *screenrant.com* that he is 'lucky to have worked with really physically talented actors', citing Jason Statham in particular.

"Sometimes you have actors like that that are better than the stunt double, so you're asking

them, 'Hey, man, can you do me a favour, bro? I need you to do this because you look better than your stunt double.' Jason's one of those guys; he's really talented and the way he fights is extremely specific to his style," he said.

"You're talking about Jackie Chan, then you've got Sly, and Jason. You're playing in a toolbox with crazy, amazing tools, and you just want to use them the best way you can."

See it at your peril. It goes without saying that violence is everywhere, as are fleeting glimpses of nudity, bad language and a moral tone that isn't in keeping with Church teaching.

Still, its star, Stallone, got on well with the Pope the other week!

Statham and Stallone in *Expend4bles*. It's the fourth in the series so they've spelt the title of the film wrong. Oh, those wags....

Resistance to invasion is in Ukraine's DNA – and it stems from its most-loved saint

HISTORY

Miles Pattenden


Saint Olga of Kyiv is Ukraine's patron saint of both defiance and vengeance

Ever since the Russian invasion of Ukraine we have seen images and film footage of the Ukrainian's defying Russian aggression.

Ukrainians are used to adversity and they have a special medieval role model who personifies their bravery in the face of hardship: St Olga. The Mongol horde destroyed her tomb in Kyiv in 1240 but a Ukrainian Orthodox cathedral dedicated to her was consecrated there as recently as 2010.

Olga of Kyiv, consort of Igor, second ruler of the Rurikid dynasty, is today recognised as one of Eastern Orthodoxy's greatest saints. A fierce and proud woman who protected her young son and avenged her husband's death, she was a crucial figure in the consolidation of the medieval kingdom of Kyivan Rus' as a political entity and in its peoples' conversion to Christianity.

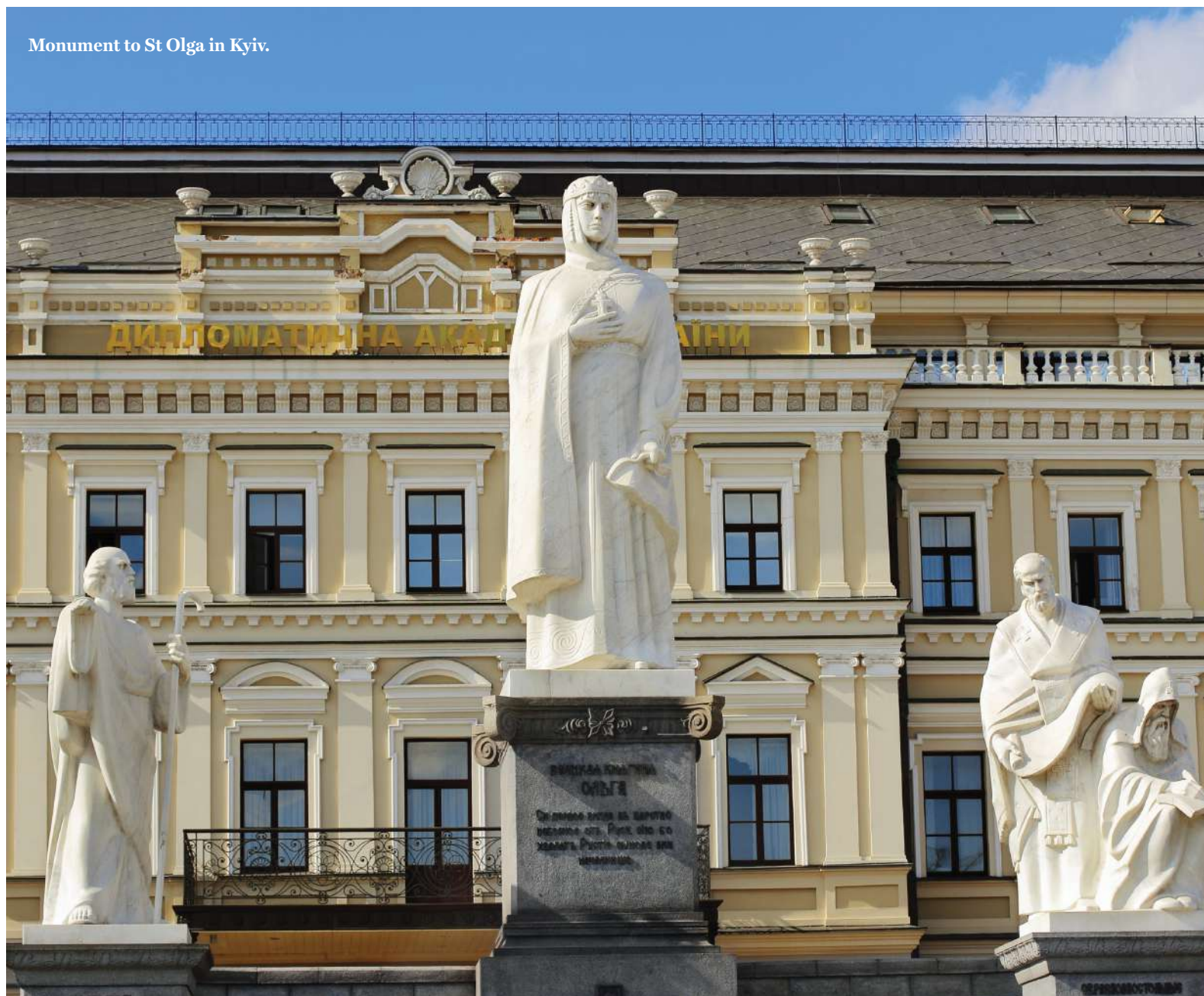
Olga was born to Viking parents in Pskov, northern Russia, around the turn of the 10th century. She married Prince Igor young and may have been only 20 when the Drevlians, a neighbouring tribe, rose up against his rule and murdered him.

The Byzantine chronicler Leo the Deacon gives gruesome details of Igor's killing: he was tied to two tree trunks which were then released so his body was split in two. Leo's account may have been embellished (the ancient historian Diodorus of Sicily in fact tells a similar tale), but Igor's death still left his wife and three-year-old son alone and potentially helpless in a particularly dangerous and brutal corner of the medieval world.

Burying her enemies

Olga's legend was born of her actions in the weeks and months that followed. The Drevlians sent her emissaries to suggest she marry their leader, Prince Mal. The *Primary Chronicle*, an 11th-century manuscript which is our main source for what follows, records Olga as greeting them deceptively, apparently to bide for time.

Monument to St Olga in Kyiv.



The account may be part-fictional or at least exaggerated. Yet that is not the point: in medieval hagiography it is the morality of the tale that matters most.

"Your proposal is pleasing to me", Olga allegedly told her interlocutors. "Indeed, my husband cannot rise again from the dead. But I desire to honour you tomorrow in the presence of my people. Return now to your boat, and remain there [...] I shall send for you on the morrow [...]"

The hubristic Drevlian delegation took her at her word gleefully. But what they did not know was that she had arranged for a trench to be dug into which they and their boat were flung.

They were buried alive.

Olga summoned a second Drevlian embassy before the rest of the tribe had had time to learn of the first one's fate. When they arrived she commanded her people to draw a bath for them.

The Drevlians then entered the bathhouse but Olga ordered the doors to be bolted and the building set ablaze.

For a third reprisal, Olga went to the place where the Drevlians had killed her husband, telling those present she wished to hold a funeral feast to commemorate him. Once the Drevlians were drunk and incapacitated she had her men massacre them.

Finally, she laid siege to the Drevlians' base at Iskorosten (the modern-day Ukraine city of Korosten). She tricked those inside the city with an offer of peace: all they had to give up were three pigeons and three sparrows from each house.

But when Olga had the birds in her possession she had her men tie a sulphurous cloth to one of each bird's legs. The flying arsonists then flew back to their nests for the night and the sulphur set every building on fire simultaneously.

Olga ordered her soldiers to

catch everyone who fled the burning city so they could be extirpated or taken into slavery.

Her revenge for her husband's death was at last complete.

Channelling St Olga's spirit

Olga lived a further 25 years, residing in her son's capital of Kyiv. She was instrumental in persuading him not to abandon the Ukrainian lands for "better prospects" further south on the Danube's bank. Her grandson, Volodymyr the Great (c.958-1015), then expanded the kingdom into what is now seen as the first Russian principality (which Vladimir Putin now views as the forerunner of the imperial Russian state).

Volodymyr too is acknowledged as a saint for his role in completing the Christianisation Olga had started.

Olga's Mad Max-style ventures ought to grate with us a bit today: the modern world really shouldn't

be a site of such bloodshed. That is why Russia's sudden large-scale invasion into a peaceful country struck us as so shocking.

Yet Olga's memory can clearly still provide an important focal point for Ukrainian resolve.

The Eastern Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches recognise her with the venerable and extraordinary title *Isapóstolos*: Equal to the Apostles. She and Kyiv's patron saint, St Michael the Archangel, remain key figures of intercession among those who need comfort in an hour of greatest need.

And Olga's Christian faith, acquired during a visit to Byzantium late in life, can sustain others now just as it sustained her after her own tribulations.

Miles Pattenden is a Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry, Australian Catholic University

Middle of the road – was I a winner or a loser in the Ealing half-marathon?

SPORT

Dr Colm Hickey

It is a strange time to write about New Year's resolutions. I never used to make them. I always thought that there was no point in pledging myself to do things I knew I might want to do, but would, in all probability, fail.

The list is endless: keep the faith, eat less, drink less, exercise more, give to charity, sort out my finances, be nicer to friends and family, have a long term saving plan, do some DIY, book a family holiday earlier, spend time with sick relatives, keep in contact with friends, work harder, be a better husband, father, brother, friend, person.

To be honest, it is so daunting that I ignored a specific target and, when asked by my wife what my New Year's resolution was going to be, I would joke and answer 'To be even nicer this year' – to which she would roll her eyes and reply: 'Why do you not just try to be nice?'

However, in December, I began thinking about what I want to do. I realised that avoiding giving serious consideration about the issues above were really a distraction. If I think that I should do them, why did I not try to commit to them? Saying I would not because I could not was a bit pathetic. Surely, at least I should TRY?

Do not get me wrong. I do not think I am useless at all these things, but that is not the point. Should I not try to be a little better?

So, for the first time in my life, I made a commitment for my New Year's Resolutions. I divided my life into five areas: Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, Spiritual and Work, and for each I made some specific targets. I also committed to keeping a diary and reviewing myself against these targets every three months. My next review is on 30th September.

One of the big issues was physical, where one of my targets was to run every day of the year, and the other was to complete the Ealing half marathon in 1hr 45 minutes. I reasoned that, if I could do the former, I might achieve the latter.

I have run every Ealing half Marathon since it first started in 2012. In 2019, it was shortlisted for the best UK Half Marathon of the Year and in 2020 won a silver award for the best UK Half Marathon. In 2013, it won the award for the Half Marathon with the best atmosphere. So, it was with, if not high, then at least moderate, hopes that I took my



place on the start line last Sunday. After all, it was on my target. The question was: would I succeed or fail?

There was another reason why I was running. It was to raise money for the PTA of Cardinal Wiseman High School in Greenford, West London. It is an outstanding school judged not just by Ofsted, but by the reality, that it is a real 'family' despite having over 2,000 students. I know this because I taught there, my wife teaches there, and all my sons have been taught there. Yet, because it is a family, we experience what all families experience, the highs and lows, the good and the bad, the joys and devastation of life. Two events shattered the school recently, with the death of two students. What can you do? How can you respond? How can you reach out? The answer, as we all know, is there is nothing we can do

that will make a difference. All we can do is show our support.

The PTA wants to raise money for children's charities to show signs of sympathy, love, and support. A few teachers and friends of the school have always run the event and this year over 30 of us ran for 'Team Wiseman'. I did not know them all, but after the race we all became a band of brothers and sisters.

The team was organised by Breedge. She is an experienced runner and knocked us all into organisational, if not, physical shape. She organised the t-shirts, the social media, the photos, the banners, the post-run party. Some of us had run before, others were running for the first time.

Let me tell you about some of them. Joe had been training hard. He had run 12 miles a few times before the event so was hopeful of

breaking two hours. Andy, a teacher, and his older brother, Dave, an electrician, both ran. Anne-Marie, a PE teacher, is a regular runner.

When the race started and the 7,000 runners set off, we were clapped and cheered on by hundreds, even thousands of supporters. All half marathons are hard. It is not easy to run thirteen miles. There are a few brutal hills that seem to get more brutal as the race goes on. Ealing is not so big, so you see friends and colleagues cheering you on. There are steel bands, Ukulele bands, rock, and pop music blaring from DJ sets. The Sikh gurdwara had a bhangra drummer, St Stephen's Church had an official water station.

At one stage, the road was divided into two so we slow runners could see the faster runners on their way back as we had another hill or two to complete.

The last mile is in the park and all the finishers cheer on those, like me, yet to complete. At last, it is over. We had a team photo. We all went home, had a bath or shower, and then went to the post-race party in a local pub.

What of our runners? Breedge

and Ann-Marie skipped round in less than two hours. Most of the team went round in around two hours. Joe was on course to smash two hours but suffered cramp in the last mile and just missed his target. Dave beat his younger brother Andy, while I came in last in the group.

So, did I fail? I certainly did not meet my target, so in that sense a resounding 'yes'. But is there something else? I suffered a serious injury at mile nine and could not run after that. I kept going because I had done them all and the 'shame' of dropping out was greater than the pain of finishing.

More than that, I took part in a community event, a family event, a fundraising event. We raised over £12,000 and we are all very proud of what we have achieved as a team.

Yes, I was slow. Yes, I was last. Yes, others raised more than me. But does that matter? Surely what matters is that you do your best? Of the 4,000 runners who took part in the first Ealing Half Marathon there are only about 60 of us ever-presents left.

So, will I do it again? Of course I will – but will I do a better time? Probably not.

“

Yes, I was slow. Yes, I was last. Yes, others raised more than me. But does that matter? Surely what matters is that you do your best?

A pictorial round-up of the past seven days



Ada Swift, three, sits on top of the winning giant pumpkin at the Malvern Autumn Show.



Endangered Rothchild's giraffe Sifa arrives at his new home in Blair Drummond Safari and Adventure Park, near Stirling, after travelling from Dublin Zoo, becoming the first male giraffe to call the park home in a decade. Five-year-old Sifa made the journey from Dublin in a special transporter, designed to accommodate his impressive height of 18 feet, and his journey included a voyage by sea, as well as a 337-mile road journey which took six hours to complete.



Former England goalkeeper David Seaman (centre) joins supporters sitting around empty seats in the shape of a heart at Selhurst Park, home to Crystal Palace FC, to represent the number of lives lost in the UK to coronary heart disease each day, for a British Heart Foundation campaign to shine a spotlight on heart conditions.



Members of re-enactment group Legio VI Victrix Eboracum during Malton Museum's Roman Festival in Malton, North Yorkshire. The festival includes live action demonstrations and military encampments that demonstrate Roman life throughout the 400 years of the occupation of Britannia.



A Queen of Hearts scarecrow, part of this year's Belbroughton Scarecrow Festival. The village in Worcestershire hosts the annual scarecrow festival with creations made out of locally sourced hay



Richard Corrigan (centre), Sheriff Andrew Marsden (right) and Master Woolmen Vincent Keaveny drive sheep over Southwark Bridge, London, in the 10th London Sheep Drive organised by the Worshipful Company of Woolmen of Freeman of the City of London. Any Freeman has the historic entitlement to drive their sheep over the River Thames toll free, retracing the steps of London's ancient trading routes.



The Ballintaggart Court Tomb. The court tomb, which is older than Egypt's pyramids has secured a permanent new home on display at the Ulster Folk Museum. The 6,000-year-old tomb, which dates back to the Neolithic era, was discovered in Ballintaggart, Co Armagh.

LITURGICAL CALENDARS

Ordinary Form

Sunday Year A, Weekday Cycle I

Sunday, October 1: 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Ezek.18:25–28; Ps. 25:4–9, r.6; Phil. 2:1–11; Mt. 21:28–32

Monday, October 2: The Holy Guardian Angels Zech.8:1–8; Ps. 102:16–21,29,22–23; Mt.18:1–5,10

Tuesday, October 3: Zech.8:20–23; Ps. 87; Lk.9:51–56

Wednesday, October 4: St Francis of Assisi Neh.2:1–8; Ps.137:1–6; Lk.9:57–62

Thursday, October 5: St Faustina Kowalska, Virgin; Neh.8:1–12; Ps. 19:8–11; Lk.10:1–12

Friday, October 6: St Bruno, Priest Bar.1:15–22; Ps. 79:1–5,8–9; Lk.10:13–16

Saturday, October 7: Our Lady of the Rosary Bar.4:5–12,27–29; Ps.69:33–37; Lk.10:17–24

St Faustina Kowalska, Virgin

Our Lady of Fidelity

The Church needs religious sisters **URGENTLY** to bring Christ to others by a life of prayer and service lived in the community of Ignatian spirituality. Daily Mass is the centre of community life. By wearing the religious habit we are witnesses of the consecrated way of life. If you are willing to risk a little love and would like to find out how, contact Sister Bernadette. *Mature vocations considered.*

Convent of Our Lady of Fidelity

1 Our Lady's Close, Upper Norwood, London SE19 3FA
Telephone 07760 297001

PRAYERS/THANKSGIVING

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INTERESTED?

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**29th September is the Feast Day of
Ss Michael, Gabriel and Raphael.**

**Sacred scriptures only reveals the
proper names of these three
Angels, all who belong to the
Choir of Archangels.**

**Late 19th century painting of the
Archangel Michael from St Peters Church
in old Jaffa, Israel by P Zalarn.**