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The CatholicPost



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Times Are Tough

A similar story across the world: families who'd ordinarily cope are now struggling

Christine Allen, CAFOD's Director.

Times are tough, but if you are able to give this Christmas, CAFOD's World Gifts are a great way to help those who need it most.

The cost of living crisis has families all over the UK worrying this Christmas. As the crisis deepens, people who'd ordinarily cope are now struggling.

Factors out of our control, such as soaring energy bills and food prices, mean what is left doesn't go as far as it used to.

But this isn't unique to the UK. In East Africa, which is suffering the worst drought in 40 years, the climate crisis means families who were used to coping with hardship now find themselves on the brink of starvation.

The situation is particularly bleak in South Sudan, a country facing the disastrous phenomenon of too much and too little water. Crippling droughts are broken by equally damaging floods, devastating communities. CAFOD's local partners are working with people who are internally displaced - meaning they have had to leave their homes to find safety elsewhere in their own country.

One such family is Simon, a farmer, his wife Angelia and their three beautiful children. Extreme floods destroyed their village, forcing them to move to a different area. But the climate crisis has once again put the family at risk, this time because of a deadly drought.

Though Simon is an experienced farmer, the lack of rain has made it impossible for him to grow anything. He is worried for his family: "We are scared people are going to starve. We pray to God to give us showers, so we can grow our own food."

This tragic tale is a familiar one across East Africa. Communities here have dealt with the harshest of climates for generations, but like many here in the UK, Simon's family are confronted with a situation beyond their control.

There is however, a door to hope. CAFOD works with local partners to provide immediate life-saving relief, as well as longer-term solutions to the climate crisis.

Times are tough, but if you are able to give this Christmas, CAFOD's World Gifts are a great way to help those who need it most.

You can donate £5 to provide emergency water, helping to save lives. For £12, you will contribute to weatherproof crops which can survive longer without water, making the impact of drought less severe.

These gifts will delight the people who receive them, while helping transform the lives of families and communities living in poverty.



Simon Gatkuer and his wife Angelina Nyadol, with two of their children.

Photo Credit: CAFOD

But if you can't give this Christmas, please do keep the families struggling to cope here and in East Africa in your prayers.

Visit worldgifts.cafod.org.uk to browse the life-changing gifts. You can order eCards, sending the gift instantly via email.

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Please send articles for publication by email, supplying any photos separate to the text We welcome contributions

Here are answers to some basic questions about writing for The Catholic Post

How long should articles be?

Usually it seems to work out best if contributors simply say what they have to say and let us worry about finding a spot for it in the paper.

What is the submission procedure?

Please send as a Word file attached to an e-mail. To submit articles for publication, contact John Clawson by email at johnclwson@icloud.com Charts, graphs, and photos should be submitted as separate PDFs. Electronic photos should not be embedded or pasted into a Word document as this reduces their quality.

Photographs and Illustrations

Photographs and Illustrations should be supplied electronically as high resolution JPEG (*.JPG) files.

Photographs and illustrations should be sent in colour with a resolution of 300 dpi and a minimum size of 100 mm x 100 mm when printed (approx. 1200 pixels wide on-screen).

Computer print-outs are not acceptable. Screen captures are not ideal as they are usually not very high

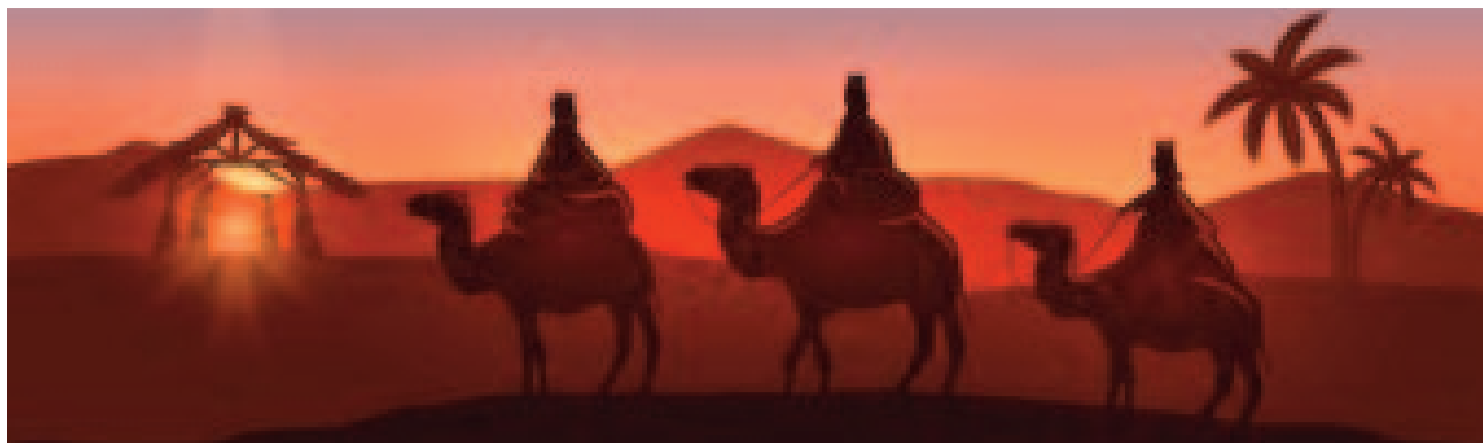
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The Magi – What a Revelation

From the presbytery..... by Fr Neil McNicholas

The Feast of the Epiphany is a celebration of revelation – the revealing of the Messiah to the Gentile world in the person of the three kings (Magi) wise men.

St Matthew is the only one of the four evangelists to recount the story of the three kings, which isn't to say that there is any question that their visit may not have taken place, but rather it points to Matthew's purpose in including the story:

The theme of the story is not only the royal messiahship of Jesus but also the adoration of him by the Gentiles. In contrast to Luke, who places Jewish poor [the shepherds] at the scene of the nativity as the first to worship Jesus, Matthew puts the Gentiles [the three kings] first. (Jerome Biblical Commentary)

Matthew describes the event as follows:

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage... Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem... The star halted over the place where the child was... and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. (Mt 2 v 1-12)

So who were these visitors? First of all Matthew doesn't say there were three of them just "some", but the fact that three gifts are mentioned as being offered seems to have given rise to the tradition that there were three "givers" of those gifts. Matthew says they came "from the east" and refers to them as "wise men" not kings as such. It has been suggested that the tradition may have grown out of the prophecy in Psalm 71 about the establishment by God of the kingdom of peace with the coming of the Messiah:

The kings of Tarshish and the sea coasts shall pay him tribute. The kings of Sheba and

Seba shall bring him gifts. Before him all kings shall fall prostrate, all nations serve him. (71 v10-11)

It fits very nicely, but it isn't actual historical proof of who the visitors were.

So let's look at Matthew's description of them as wise men. The Jerome sums things up most concisely:

The term Magi designated the learned priestly caste of Persians [Iranians]; later it came to mean anyone skilled in occult knowledge and power much the same as our word "magician" which is derived from the same word.

The caste also had a reputation for astrology and so we have an explanation for the Magi's interest in the star they had observed rising and which they had followed to Palestine. There was a belief that the appearance of a new star, or one not previously observed, was a sign of the birth of someone destined for greatness – we talk today about someone's star rising.

The gospel account doesn't name the visitors, but tradition and legend give them the names Melchior, Caspar (or Kasparor even Gaspar), and Balthazar, and all sorts of traditions and legends have grown up around them in various different cultures. Traditionally they have been depicted as representing the allegorical ages of man: Balthazar as a young man, Melchior as middle-aged, and Caspar as old and white-bearded. Also allegorical are their gifts: myrrh used in embalming is given to Christ to acknowledge his mortality; frankincense is given to him as a deity; and the gift of gold acknowledges his kingship. There seems to be a difference of opinion as to which one gives which gift, so it's probably best not to get into that.

Even though the names of the Magi are not scriptural, still they have found their way into the Martyrology - the list of martyrs and other

saints: St Caspar (January 1st), St Melchior (January 6th) and St Balthazar (January 11th) though the dates are not celebrated liturgically. In some parts of Europe the three initials are marked with chalk above the front door of Catholic homes as a New Year's blessing, "C - M - B", which then also become the initial letters of "Christus Mansionem Benedicat" (may Christ bless this house).

In the same way that the Magi have been given an allegorical role in representing three ages of man, it is also claimed that they represent what were, in the Middle Ages, the three known continents – Europe, Asia and Africa. When we see works of art showing the three kings as European, African and possibly Asian, we have to remember that these are artists' interpretations, not a photographic record of the reality - the artists weren't there at the time to know, and scripture doesn't tell us.

The presenter of a recent documentary visited Hereford Cathedral to look at the "Mappa Mundi", a 12th century map of the world drawn from a European Christian perspective. It wasn't intended to be geographically accurate, it was purely schematic, illustrating in a fairly limited way what was known at the time. Consequently the map shows only three continents – Europe, Asia and Africa - though they are hardly recognizable compared to modern maps. If nothing else it shows that there was (albeit limited) knowledge of, and contact with, Asia and Africa. It also places Jerusalem at the centre, the expectation being that as more of the world became known, so more and more people would come to faith in Christ - which did indeed happen as missionary activity followed in the steps of exploration.

The gospel account of the Gentile Magi coming to pay homage to the Messiah King provides a perfect allegory of that conviction, something we need to bear in mind for theology's sake even when we see them portrayed in art and in our nativity scenes (for allegory's sake) as being of other nationalities. It doesn't detract at all from the scripture account illustrated in the work of art, and any symbolism of Christ being revealed to the world as its King is the very definition of the word epiphany after all.

**Even all kings shall serve and worship the Lord.
Isaiah 60:3**

Pope Francis on.....

The meaning of Christmas for you

'God's Christmas wish isn't buying-frenzy and feast, but gift of self'

Pope Francis has said many things about Christmas. We have selected a few quotes for you to ponder:

'If Christmas ends up as just a beautiful traditional holiday where everything revolves around us and not him, it will be a lost opportunity.'

'Christmas will not be authentic if people get caught up in a frenzy of shopping, presents and meals, all while ignoring the poor and forgetting who the celebration is really all about.'

'God's Christmas wish isn't buying-frenzy and feast, but gift of self'

'Jesus is good, Jesus is tender, Jesus is humble. This is the real Christmas!'

'May you feel wonder when you gather in your homes in prayer before the Nativity, gazing at Baby Jesus.'



'Just as Mary was called to welcome and bring the Christ-child into the world, people today are also called to welcome the Gospel and so that it can "become flesh" and come into the world in people's actual lives.'

'Christmas is preferring the silent voice of God to the noisiness of consumerism. If we can be silent in front of the crib, Christmas will be a surprise even for us, not something seen before.'

'We will celebrate Christmas well, if, like Joseph, we will give space to silence; if, like Mary, we say 'here I am' to God; if, like Jesus, we will be close to those who are alone; if, like the shepherds, we will leave our enclosures to be with Jesus.'

'Christmas is the payback of humility over arrogance, of simplicity over abundance, of silence over hubbub, of prayer over 'my time,' of God over my ego.'

Papal Nuncio to Great Britain appointed prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches

Vatican

He was first appointed as an official to what was then called the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, in 1985

Pope Francis has appointed His Excellency Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, until now Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain, as prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches. He succeeds Cardinal Leonardo Sandri as prefect.

Archbishop Gugerotti studied Eastern Languages and Sacred Liturgy and was a professor of Patristics, Eastern Liturgy at the Institute of Ecumenical Studies in Verona from 1981 to 1985.

He was first appointed as an official to what was then called the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, in 1985. Twelve years later, in 1997, he became its Undersecretary.



He has also taught at the Pontifical Oriental Institute. Pope Francis named Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti as Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain on Saturday, 4 July 2020.

Arriving during the Covid-19 pandemic, he served for just over two years. Please pray for Archbishop Gugerotti as he prepares to serve the Roman Curia in this important role.

The Wayfarers Lantern

The legend and tradition of the Wayfaring Lantern is a most thought provoking activity for Christmas Eve. A lantern (or candle placed safely in a jar) is lit and placed on the doorstep at dusk, and a prayer of welcome is said to the Holy Family. The lantern shines on through the night, being a sign to the Holy Family, that should they pass by in search of lodgings, that they would be welcome within the home.

It is however also a confirmation that we are ready to welcome those that Christ may choose to send to us during the coming year, those who are marginalised and in trouble, those who need a helping hand through life's challenges and hurts. Those who just need someone to speak to, to hear their story.

Again, at the end of each year, as we light the Wayfaring Lantern to welcome Christmas Eve once more, it is equally a moment to ponder over the previous year and how we have lived it. And we can hope that in some small way, even just by listening, we have maybe made life easier for someone and their load lighter. That in a critical situation someone has found warmth and understanding and onward support.

It is not usually large actions that make a difference, but rather those small and often repetitive actions of goodwill and kindness, of encouraging others and raising hopes where confidence has failed.

At Crown of Thorns we continue our support of chaplains with items for their work with prisoners, seafarers and hospital patients and visitors. Small actions that support their work and make a big difference to those that they encounter. Thank you to all who assist this work and make it possible.

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A beautiful ecumenical gesture at Lichfield Cathedral

CBCEW

“The Anglicans are very happy to have this relic so it can become a focal point for Christians in the Midlands.”

A relic of St Chad was recently transferred from St Chad’s Cathedral, Birmingham’s Catholic Cathedral, to the nearby Anglican Lichfield Cathedral.

With the original medieval shrine to St Chad in Lichfield set to be reinstated, the Archdiocese of Birmingham decided to give the relic to the Anglicans as an ecumenical gesture of Christian solidarity and fellowship.

Father Jan Nowotnik, director of mission and national ecumenical officer at the Bishops’ Conference, was in attendance throughout the day, which he described as “beautiful” and “very emotive”, and included an ecumenical service.

Explaining the significance of the transfer he said: “It’s a generous gift because it’s predicated on relationship. Archbishop Bernard Longley, the Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham, and Bishop Michael Ippgrave, the Anglican bishop of Lichfield, have a friendship, as do the deans of both cathedrals.

“The Anglicans are very happy to have this relic so it can become a focal point for Christians in the Midlands.”

St Chad, a monk and abbot, was made bishop of Mercia in 669 and moved his See from Repton to Lichfield. Together with his brother Cedd, St Chad is credited by the Venerable Bede with introducing Christianity to the Mercian kingdom. Father Nowotnik said: “The transfer of the relic came from an ecumenical gesture, as the two cathedrals have been on walking pilgrimages together, and the Catholics carried the relic of St Chad.

“In doing so, this brought interest from the Anglican side about the relic. The idea grew that the Catholics would offer this relic to the cathedral at Lichfield. It has a historical significance because that is where St Chad was based.” Father Nowotnik described how the day played out: “The church was full of Anglicans and Catholics who had gathered. The service was just beautiful. There was a great sense of joy, joy and gratitude that we had been brought together. There was a desire to walk together, and be an example of Christian witness to people in the area. When Archbishop Bernard hugged Bishop Ippgrave, after both of them had spoken, there was a round of applause.

“As the National Ecumenical Officer, I found it very moving.”

Christian ecumenism was one of the primary concerns of the Second Vatican Council which has continued under Pope Francis’ papacy, who according to Father Nowotnik “leads by

example”. For the Birmingham-born priest, Christian ecumenism is merely responding to the directions of Jesus, although he emphasised that “we cannot shy away from the fact that there are theological differences between Christians”.

He said: “Ecumenism is rooted in the prayer of Christ on the eve of his Passion, in John Chapter 17, where Jesus prays that we may all be one. This desire for the unity of the church is a response to the Lord’s own prayer. So if it is something that the Lord wants from his people, that we live in unity, then we are conscious of this in our contemporary age of division in the Church.

“We can’t go back and change history but what we can do is say that in the here and now, we will attempt to put those words of the Lord into practice, to fulfil his prayer, and to do our best to journey together in the light of faith.”

Father Jan hoped that the significance of the transfer of the relics would be felt not just today, but in many generations to come. He said: “When you have done something like this,



it’s not just an act for once, but the very act of remembering that you have done it impels you to want to continue working together and building on the relationships that are already there.”

He finished by saying that when it comes to the future of Christian ecumenism “my hope

would be, notwithstanding our theological challenges and differences, that we will concentrate on what binds us together – our love of God, our love of the scriptures, our desire to love our brothers and sisters – and to provide an example to the world in which live.”

Image With thanks to Randy OHC on Flickr – CC BY 2.0

Parish Matters

Willie Slavin MBE



Having spent a lifetime teaching in Catholic Primary schools, memories of Nativity plays past come readily to mind when the ‘preparing the way of the Lord’ call comes round on the first Sunday of Advent. No teacher who has ever produced a Nativity play needs to be reminded that Advent is a penitential season. Collapsing scenery and forgotten lines are the least of one’s troubles.

Any incorrigible innovator who emphatically refused to give in to the ‘we have always done it this way’ brigade is immediately challenged to pitch ambitious aspirations against passive resistance articulated in such phrases as ‘you can’t possibly do that in Church’; ‘Father doesn’t like these modern carols’; ‘you can’t give every child a part – there aren’t that many characters in the whole Gospel’. All that before the encounter with the irate parent who demands to know why her daughter was passed over once again for the part of Mary; as sure a sign as you can get to identifying a reserved sin in the mind of the aggrieved parent who had heard every pathetic cliché available to a Catholic Headteacher, the final, however reluctant, arbiter in these situations. The one comment that did leave me totally, and irretrievably, non-plussed was: ‘I wouldn’t have cast that girl as Mary. She looks too Jewish’ – memorable for all the wrong reasons.

Even when things have gone well, and just at the point where you had foolishly thought it

had done so, you discover, as my Nursery teacher once did, that a very small girl who was cast as the baby Jesus purely on grounds that she fitted the crib, was left behind in Church and was mercifully found before the Church was locked up. I recently came across the adult ‘Jesus’ stacking (the lower) shelves in a local supermarket. She cheerfully recalls the incident but, as a tribute to a perceptive piece of casting, bears no grudges thirty years later.

The longer I taught the more I became convinced that it is the experience of this kind of event set in the cyclical nature of the Church’s year, and how we enter into it, that makes the lasting impression. No one remembers an RE lesson but people do recall their participation in school assemblies and Nativity plays, perhaps especially memorable on occasion for the inclusion of a mini disaster. If the incident has become imprinted in the memory, they are more likely to relive the story in which they, and it, played a part.

Is not the call to prepare the way of the Lord just another way of inviting us to re-enter an all too familiar story? Suppose you are invited to become part of the cast of a Nativity play now. Which part would you choose to play? Where would you see yourself standing in relation to the events that are unfolding in the story? How close do you feel to the young mother about to give birth, to the father trying to help but also trying to make sense of his being cast in a story and event well beyond his making? If you were a shepherd would you

really be a mere spectator or would the event be a compellingly life changing experience?

In recent years the Church has rediscovered Lectio Divina (Divine Reading) a traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God’s word. In the view of one commentator, it does not treat Scripture as texts to be studied, but as the living word in which we can enter into as participants.

Traditionally, Lectio Divina has four separate steps: read; meditate; pray; contemplate. First a passage of Scripture is read, then its meaning is reflected upon. This is followed by prayer and contemplation on the Word of God.

In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed its importance stating: I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of Lectio Divina: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart. If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church – I am convinced of it – a new spiritual springtime.

A long way from the innocence of a Nativity play? Perhaps not!

Bishops Conference autumn plenary meeting statements

CBCEW

The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales gathered in Leeds for their autumn plenary meeting, at Hinsley Hall. At the end of their meeting they issued the following Resolutions.

Environmental Matters Friday Abstinence

The Bishops' Conference urges all Catholics to refresh their weekly observance of Friday abstinence by refraining from eating meat on that day. In this way we dedicate to God the pressing need for us all to live more simply.

A recent study at Cambridge University published research suggesting that this penitential act has a considerable impact on lessening carbon emissions by 55,000 tonnes each year. This is equivalent to 82,000 people taking return flights to New York from London.

In abstaining from meat on Fridays, we also act in solidarity with those who face hunger and poverty every day, with the care of creation by recognising the environmental impact of meat production and in memory of the death of Christ, by which our broken relationships with each other and with God's creation are healed.

Carbon Emissions

The Bishops' Conference asks dioceses of the Catholic Church in England and Wales to declare target dates for a stated reduction of carbon emissions or report on how close they

are to having the information necessary to set such a target. These may be informed by the current research undertaken by the project Guardians of Creation. The bishops will report on the progress of the dioceses at the Easter season and November Plenary Assemblies in 2023.

LiveSimply Award

The Bishops' Conference commends the LiveSimply Award as a response to Pope Francis' invitation in *Laudato Si'* to "work with generosity and tenderness in protecting this world which God has entrusted to us". Recognising that some schools and parishes may already have similar projects on-going, the bishops encourage all remaining schools and parishes to consider signing up to this award as a sign of their solidarity with the poor and their desire to live in harmony with God's creation.

Dr Carmody Grey

The Bishops' Conference asks that Dr Carmody Grey be invited to present to the Bishops on the environment and the responsibilities it brings on leaders in faith.

Contactless a vital part of income recovery for parishes post-Covid

ICN

This event has equipped us to ensure income improves during the coming years



Around 75% of church charities saw a drop in church collections during COVID, according to results of a survey presented at the winter Catholics in Fundraising seminar. The seminar heard how contactless giving is a vital part of the income recovery for dioceses, parishes and church charities. Guest speakers from GiveStar showcased the next generation of 'tap on phone' software that promises to upskill churches to fundraise.

The event noted that technology is not the silver bullet to recovering church giving, but that it will play an increasingly important

role, particularly when combined with well-trained volunteers and good messaging.

Catholics in Fundraising convenor, John Green, said: "COVID has been tough for churches and charities alike, this event has equipped us to ensure income improves during the coming years so we can continue to help those in need, thanks to the support of so many parishes and Catholic charities."

The event was attended by fundraisers for Catholic charities, parishes and educational institutions and was generously hosted by EdenTree Investment Management.



Buffer Zones

Proposals to impose buffer zones outside abortion facilities raise concerns about freedom of religion, belief, association and expression.

Clause 9 of the Public Order Bill as amended currently seeks to criminalise a range of activities within a 150m radius of an abortion clinic. Its broad formulation is disproportionate and unnecessary. Its implications extend beyond the perimeters of an abortion clinic and raise questions about the state's powers in relation to the individual in a free society, both those with faith and those without.

This legislative proposal extends trends at a local level, which have seen Public Space Protection Orders banning prayer and the recitation of Scripture. We express concern with these moves at local level too.

There is a risk, despite any other intent, that existing and proposed measures constitute discrimination and disproportionately have an impact on people of religious faith.

We condemn all harassment and intimidation of women. It was accepted in a 2018 Home Office Review that there are already laws and mechanisms in place to protect women from such behaviour.

Religious liberty is essential for the flourishing and the realisation of the dignity of every person. It is a foundational freedom for any free society.

Short Plenary Resolutions Visit of the Relics of St Bernadette

Following the fruitful visit and pilgrimage of the Relics of St Bernadette in the autumn of 2022, the Bishops' Conference desires to express its thanks for all concerned with the promotion and execution of the tour, and especially to Bob Lavery and Gerry O'Malley who took care of the relics.

Upgrading the memorial of Our Lady of Walsingham to a Feast in England

The Bishops' Conference asks the Department for Christian Life and Worship to prepare the necessary texts and other materials to petition the Dicastery for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments to grant the recognitio for the memorial of Our Lady of Walsingham to be celebrated as a feast in England.

Note: The memorial of Our Lady of Walsingham was celebrated on 24 September.

Women@theWell Report

The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales notes the publication of 'I am real, I am here'; a letter to Catholic bishops from women@thewell. It recognises that prostitution violates some of the most fundamental human rights to security, physical and psychological integrity and health. We value the work of women@thewell and we encourage Catholic communities to pay attention to the plight of prostituted women and to work for change.

Culture of Vocation

The Bishops' Conference notes the importance of promoting a culture of vocation in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. Conscious of the specific need to encourage vocations to the priesthood the bishops invite families, parishes, priests and schools to renew their efforts to support possible candidates for ordination, prayerfully and practically, in hearing and responding to the Lord's call. Those who come forward often testify that, as part of their journey, it was the example of priests that drew them towards the priesthood. The bishops are grateful for the work of the National Office for Vocation and of diocesan directors and promoters of vocation. The bishops ask that prayer for vocations finds a regular place in the life of every Catholic parish and community.

Historic 'St Margaret's declaration' signed by Catholic Church and Church of Scotland

SCMO

“The declaration is a consciously new approach to ecumenism, an attempt to re-imagine the path towards Christian unity.”

The 'St Margaret's Declaration' was signed at Dunfermline Abbey in Fife recently by Rt Rev Dr Iain Greenshields, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and Archbishop Leo Cushley, Catholic Archbishop of St Andrews & Edinburgh.

The document was also signed by the Princess Royal who endorsed the historic friendship agreement between the Church of Scotland and the Catholic Church in Scotland. The document was signed during a service at Dunfermline Abbey to mark its 950th anniversary on what is St Margaret's Day.

In his homily at the service, Archbishop Cushley said: "The declaration is a consciously new approach to ecumenism, an attempt to re-imagine the path towards Christian unity.

"Instead of listing our problems and points of friction or grievance, old or new, the

Declaration chooses to focus on what we have in common and underline that we treasure together, so much that is inspiring and ancient, profound and beautiful.

"We stand shoulder to shoulder before an unbelieving world and we wish to respect each other, to be a support to each other, and to do all we can to achieve the unity that the Lord prayed for."

Dr Greenshields said: "I am deeply honoured and privileged to be one of the signatories of the St Margaret's Declaration at Dunfermline Abbey in its 950th year and on St Margaret's Day.

"This new friendship agreement has been many years in the making and is aptly named after a Scottish Queen who was venerated for her missionary Christian faith and her kindness and generosity to poor people.



Archbishop Leo Cushley, Princess Anne and Dr Iain Greenshields, sign St Margaret Declaration

"The declaration reflects the steadfast desire of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland and the Church of Scotland to continue to journey together and to see the healing of division within our nation.

"I would want people across Scottish society to look at this new relationship between the Church of Scotland and the Catholic Church and take away a powerful message - there is

more that unites us than divides us as we strive to be an ever more united Christian voice in this land."

Named after the 11th Century Scottish Queen who is buried in the abbey,* the agreement is the culmination of years of ecumenical relationship building between the two Churches which recognise each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Written by senior figures from both Churches, the declaration describes the Churches' shared beliefs, 'rooted in the Apostles, Christ's first disciples,' and acknowledges a common heritage as Christians in Scotland.

It also recognises the divisions of the past, apologises for the hurt and harm caused and seeks to make amends, asserting 'we repent and ask forgiveness of one other.'

It is accepted that some divisions between the Churches remain challenging and more work is needed on reconciliation and healing. Nevertheless, both Christian denominations say that what they hold in common is far greater than what divides them, and they commit to continue working towards greater unity.

Princess Anne was among more than 300 invited guests in attendance from the local community, ecumenical partners, civic society and heritage organisations.

The Abbey Church of Dunfermline is the last resting place of Robert the Bruce and nine other Scottish monarchs.

* NOTE: Thomas Davidson writes: As I understand, Saint Margaret's remains are not in Dunfermline Abbey, having been removed at the Reformation along with those of her husband, King Malcolm. They both now rest in El Escorial, near Madrid.

Peter Kearney

Two East Anglian churches given listed status

Diocese of East Anglia

The Secretary of State's listing decisions recognise the national importance of these physical expressions of our faith

Despite its modest size, the Diocese of East Anglia has more listed churches than any other Catholic diocese in England and two more have just been added to that number.

Following a recent review of the Catholic churches in England, undertaken by Historic England on behalf of the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport, that number is set to rise still further.

The review has also seen a number of East Anglian churches promoted to even higher levels of protection - recognising their significance as important examples of English church architecture.

New churches added to the list are Our Lady of the Annunciation in King's Lynn, which has been designated as Grade II listed. Also added to the list at Grade II is St Felix's church in Felixstowe, recognizing its unique contribution to local and regional design heritage.

A number of presbyteries have also been given protected status, including those belonging to St Joseph's church in Sheringham, and St Peter's in Gorleston.

The review has also seen the level of protection for a number of churches increased, with the magnificent church of Our Lady and English Martyrs in Cambridge having been redesignated as Grade I listed.

Paul Raynes, Operations and Finance Director for the Diocese, said: "From the monumental to the modest, from a timber-framed mission chapel to gothic glories in stone, the listed buildings in the Diocese's care testify to East Anglia's deep Catholic heritage and the devotion of generations of donors, architects and builders. The Secretary of State's listing decisions recognise the national importance of these physical expressions of our faith."

Not all of the decisions have yet been published by Historic England, and it is



Our Lady of the Annunciation church, King's Lynn.

Picture: Taking Stock

expected that further churches in the Diocese will also be added to the list.

Matthew Champion, Historic Churches Support Officer for the Diocese, said: "This is wonderful news for the Diocese, and a great recognition of the part these buildings play in the regions varied and diverse history."

PACT: Operation Elf offers hope for parents in prison

prisonadvice.org.uk

At this time of year, the charity is thrilled to offer parish communities an opportunity to support mums and dads in prison at Christmas through Operation Elf



Minimising the harm of imprisonment

Christmas can be a particularly difficult time for prisoners and their families. Over the past few years, the pain of separation felt by both parents in prison and their children has been worsened by restrictions on visits due to the pandemic. PACT's Operation Elf aims to offer a light in these dark times.

PACT – the Prison Advice and Care Trust – is the national Catholic charity providing support to prisoners' and their families. The charity works in prisons, prison visitors' centres, courts, and communities across England and Wales to minimise the harm caused by imprisonment. This includes support for many of the 300,000 children who have a parent in prison.

You may have heard on Prisoners' Sunday that while memories of Covid restrictions may be fading for those of us 'on the outside', prison regimes 'inside' remain locked down. This means that mums and dads in prison are in many cases more isolated from their children and family members than before. Christmas can be a special time for families, but consider what it is like for those who are separated by imprisonment.

Nurturing family relationships is a big part of what PACT seeks to achieve. At this time of year, the charity is thrilled to offer parish communities an opportunity to support mums and dads in prison at Christmas through Operation Elf.

Operation Elf enables mums and dads in prison to give their children a Christmas gift. One mum supported by the initiative last year explained that she had been unable to give her son anything since entering prison three years ago. She was very emotional as she said, 'It makes me feel like a mum again'. With your support, we can help more parents to feel like this.

How can you help?

In an exciting development, this year PACT have partnered some parishes and groups with PACT staff in their local prison. By working together, you can see the impact Operation Elf has on families in your local area. The charity are looking forward to hearing from those involved!

Find out more on their website, www.prisonadvice.org.uk/operation-elf



Canon Victor Darlington

Caritas Formation Meeting

rcsouthwark.co.uk

In the Archbishop's Letter to all parishes, he has invited everyone in his diocese to be a part of this vision of making Caritas a reality in our diocese

On Saturday 5th November a fruitful initial formation day for the inauguration of Caritas, Southwark took place in Amigo Hall, next to St George's Cathedral. It brought together over a hundred parish representatives from the Southeast, Southwest, Kent and an online group from every part of the Diocese. We also welcomed non-parish-based representatives from different charities. Canon Victor Darlington, who will be directing the new agency, offers his thoughts below.

Caritas means love.

At the heart of the gospel message, is our calling to love one another, as Christ loves us. This love is meant to go beyond words and our spirituality into concrete actions that make a change in the community. It is meant to be transformative and life-giving. This is what Caritas Southwark sets to achieve. It is not going to be a body that seeks to take over charities in our parishes, but to be that umbrella that coordinates all the various charities in our parishes and offers support when required.

The headquarters of Caritas is based in Rome, and some dioceses such as Westminster, Clifton and Brentwood already have their own branch. Archbishop John Wilson intends to inaugurate our Caritas, Southwark in Lent 2023.

In the gospel, we know the story of the good Samaritan when the outcast, came forward to support someone in need. The good Samaritan took the stranger he has never met before as

his neighbour, as the one to reach out to. As the one to show love to. As the one to be Caritas towards.

We also know that at the last judgment Jesus is going to judge us on how we were able to support those on the margins: the hungry, those thirsty, those in prison, and those lonely. Our Catholic Social teaching always invites us to take our charitable actions outside our home, into the community. While we must always begin on the grassroots level, looking after those in our local parishes, we must move forward to support and make partnerships with other agencies to ensure that we give a voice to the voiceless and those in need.

In the Archbishop's Letter to all parishes, he has invited everyone in his diocese to be a part of this vision of making Caritas a reality in our diocese. We have had a formation day and heard from parishes across Southwark.

Using the Caritas Analysis model in various groups, we examined the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of the various charities within our Archdiocese. Together we used the method of seeing, judging and then making a decision to take some key actions forward as a roadmap for the future.

We rely on our dear Lord to be able to succeed and in your prayers and support. All of us in the Archdiocese are a part of the Caritas Family. Please pray for this new initiative in Southwark, which is at a very early stage, and for the discernment of those involved in taking the project forward.

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Inspiring Happy Somedays Visit

Saint Paul's Catholic High School, Manchester

Happy Somedays is a group where everyone is welcome to come along and join in the football or fitness sessions

Saint Paul's Catholic High School in Wythenshawe, Greater Manchester, was delighted to welcome Joe Farrar from the Happy Somedays group, to speak to the Year 8 pupils. Happy Somedays is a group where everyone is welcome to come along and join in the football or fitness sessions. The group, a safe space for people to enjoy football and fitness without worrying about fitting in, has become a massive hit in Wythenshawe.

Joe Farrar set up the club following a football injury when he found it difficult to find a welcoming club. He thought that others might have experienced something similar and weren't able to enjoy playing football because they felt they lacked the ability or confidence to join a team.

The group, which is based at Saint Paul's Catholic High School in Wythenshawe, has been designed to create a safe space for

people of all ages and abilities to enjoy football and fitness without worrying about fitting in.

Joe explained: "We want to enable all people regardless of race, sexuality, ability or anything else that may have prevented them in the past to achieve everything they ever wanted to. We hold a number of sessions each week, all with one thing in common a love for football or fitness e.g. Pilates and Box Fit.

"We are an incentive as opposed to a club, we found people wanted to play football, for example, but not have the constraints of being a club, it's casual so people can pick it up when they want. We created a safe space and an environment that participants can thrive in and enjoy and at the same time improve their mental health."

Mrs Susie Delaney, Year 8 Progress Leader at Saint Paul's, said: "Our pupils were interested to hear about Happy Somedays which has



opened the door for many local people in the community to get fit without any fear or worries, it is a truly inspiring achievement. The group is now extremely successful with many men and women attending each session!"

Mr Mike Whiteside, Deputy Headteacher, added: "We are delighted to have Happy Somedays based at Saint Paul's. They have removed the stigma from sport and fitness and ensure that the sessions are inclusive for all. The sessions are a safe space where people can exercise, chat and thrive."

Warm and Cosy with the Archdiocese of Liverpool

During the coming winter months the Archdiocese of Liverpool is opening its parish centres...

During the coming winter months the Archdiocese of Liverpool is opening its parish centres to provide somewhere comfortable and friendly for people to be warm and cosy as the weather gets colder and the cost of living crisis begins to bite.

Each of the centres will be open on different days of the week from 1.00 pm to 3.30 pm for people to drop in and enjoy free tea, coffee and biscuits along with access to TV and wi-fi and most important of all some friendly company.

Director of Finance for the archdiocese, Jill Boggan, has been instrumental in setting up the scheme and says, 'warm and cosy truly reflects what our parish centres are about and it is about giving people a warm welcome to help them through these difficult times. Many of our centres host activities during the day and during these times we have set aside an extra room to welcome people. In many areas we have liaised with other community groups to try and ensure that people have somewhere to go everyday during the winter months'.

A full list of parish centres and other archdiocesan churches and halls with opening times is on the archdiocesan website



Our 'warm and cosy' parish centres will be open to all during the winter months. There will be free tea, coffee and biscuits with access to TV and wifi and friendly company. The centres will be open from 1.00 pm-3.30 pm but opening days will vary, please check out www.liverpoolcatholic.org.uk



Launch of the Archbishop's Appeal

rcsouthwark.co.uk

The Archbishop's Appeal seeks to invest faith, hope, love, and charity into three key areas of mission and ministry in the Archdiocese of Southwark

Archbishop John Wilson of the Archdiocese of Southwark launched the Archbishop's Appeal recently at Archbishop's House. Amongst those in attendance were Monsignor Gerald Ewing, Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia, Episcopal Vicar Father Victor Darlington, and the new Dean of St George's Cathedral, Father Michael Branch. The Archbishop's Appeal seeks to invest faith, hope, love, and charity into three key areas of mission and ministry in the Archdiocese of Southwark.

Youth and Evangelisation

To strengthen the formation of young people in the faith within our schools and parishes, enhance the faith life of parishioners, support the work of parish catechists, enhance the faith journeys of new Catholics; and for Southwark to become an evangelising and missionary Archdiocese.

Our Faith in Action

To show compassionate and active service in the world around us through love for all people: the protection of human dignity, respect for the inter-connectedness of our world and common home, hearing the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth. Supporting social outreach projects in parishes and schools.

Clergy Care and Formation

To care for sick and retired priests in their old age and ill health. Supporting the ongoing



Laura Dudhee, Sancia da Costa and Mia Gilmour from the Southwark Fundraising Team join Paul McCallum (COO) and Archbishop John Wilson at the Launch of the Archbishop's Appeal

formation of our priests and deacons. Providing ongoing formation of clergy in active ministry. Supporting the work of the vocations team and formation of seminarians and deacons.

Pooled together, your support can have a significant impact on our faith community. A portion of the monies raised will be granted to parishes and Catholic schools to support local projects. Parishes and Schools will be invited

to apply in Easter 2023. The appeal was launched in parishes across South London and Kent on 13th November. You can give to the fund online via the Archdiocesan website, by calling the Fundraising team on 0207 960 2504 or by cash/cheque using the Archbishop's Appeal envelopes at the back of your church.

Please support the Archbishop's Appeal today, every gift is welcome..

Faith, Hope and Love



Frank Goulding

The Joy and expectation of Christmas is much needed this year. On a number of occasions in 2022 I have met friends or acquaintances who have told me that they have stopped reading or listening to news bulletins because of constant bad or sad reports of tragic or negative items.

Whilst some of this is due to editors or journalists trying to make the news instead of reporting new developments we do all need cheering up this Christmas with one important proviso - That is to "stand up for our values". That last quotation came from a comment this Advent from a Government Minister speaking of the many comments regarding Qatar being the venue for the football World Cup. I could not help contrasting that political statement with the sparse attendance in the House of Commons when the persecution of Christians was debated just a year ago. Secular thinkers usually keep quiet at

Christmas and perhaps this year is the time to show that the Nativity and our Christian Faith is why we are celebrating Christmas.

One area of serious concern this year is the need for food banks in our country. We often pray for those in greatest need and this Christmas it looks like one in six festive meals will incorporate items from the local food bank. Let us never stop saying just how active Christians are in assisting these valuable social services serving nurses, children and those over 65 amongst many others.

My local Co-op has a car park attached to the store. A few years ago on Christmas morning the area was a useful venue for children playing in full safety.

That Christmas the sheer joy of those children was not only special but it did occur to me that perhaps this was the only morning in the year that they were all equal in life whatever their



social background. If only that could be said all year round.

We should not forget that some who have lost loved ones this will be a hard time particularly if they have seen a child suffer. It is now 33 years since the Cardinal Hume Centre was opened in Central London for young homeless people, it now has a 39 room facility. When the late Cardinal first opened an eleven room hostel it showed his concern for young people. We should all follow his example to any young person in distress this Christmas. Let us also remember his words "Each person matters: No human life is redundant".

A Peaceful Christmas to all readers.



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Supporters help Radio Maria celebrate in Cambridge

rcdea.org.uk

Radio Maria England is a 24-hour station and part of a worldwide network of more than 80 radio stations on all continents

Catholic broadcaster Radio Maria England celebrated three years of broadcasting from studios in Cambridge on Saturday November 5 with a Mass at St Laurence's in the city.

As prayer is always at the heart of all of Radio Maria's activities, the event began with the First Saturday Devotions, adoration and confessions, said the station's National Promoter, Helena Judd. Fr Toby Lees OP then celebrated Mass, joined by Fr John Minh and Fr Stefan Park OSA, a RME trustee.

Helena said: "The congregation then enjoyed a lovely bring and share lunch in the parish hall. A whole host of listeners, volunteers, and supporters came along, both local and from further afield. However, the single largest group, who were in fine voice, were the

Women of Christ's Love group from London along with all their delightful children.

"The event concluded with the men walking together to Midsummer Common in Cambridge to pray the rosary as part of the Men of St Joseph's Rosary Rally – a beautiful witness as men of all ages knelt in prayer, honouring the Mother of God."

Radio Maria England is a 24-hour station and part of a worldwide network of more than 80 radio stations on all continents.

You can listen to Radio Maria England via the website, the Radio Maria Play App, or DAB in London and Cambridge areas. Alternatively, you can just ask Alexa to 'Play Radio Maria England'.



Women of Christ's Love group from London along with their children with station staff at the Radio Maria England third birthday celebrations at St Laurence's in Cambridge.

Petition to create Our Lady of Walsingham feast



rcdea.org.uk

Delighted that the Holy See has been petitioned by the Bishops' Conference to upgrade the memoria of Our Lady of Walsingham to a feast

The Bishop's Conference of England and Wales is set to petition the Holy See in Rome to upgrade the memorial of Our Lady of Walsingham to become a Feast in England.

The move has been warmly welcomed by Mgr Philip Moger, the Rector of the Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady, in Walsingham.

In a resolution from the Bishops' Autumn Plenary held in Hinsley Hall, Leeds, last week (early November), the Bishops' Conference has asked the Department for Christian Life and Worship to prepare the necessary texts and other materials to petition the Dicastery for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments to grant the recognitio for the memorial of Our Lady of Walsingham to be celebrated as a feast in England.

He said: "I am delighted that the Holy See has been petitioned by the Bishops' Conference to upgrade the memoria of Our Lady of Walsingham to a feast.

"Clearly, both at the national shrine and in the Diocese of East Anglia, September 24 is already an Important feast. But having it as a feast nationally will help make the message of Our Lady's Annunciation, and the 11th Century shrine at Walsingham which honours it, even more significant for our country."

The memorial of Our Lady of Walsingham is celebrated on September 24.

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Award-winning Manchester children's choir both signs and sings to ensure more people can be included.

The Choir of Angels Signs the Way Towards Inclusion of Deaf People

Sacred Heart & St. Francis parish, Gorton, Manchester

Minna says she has truly “felt included and become more interested in the sung words and their meanings”

This festive season, a ‘Choir of Angels’ from Sacred Heart & St. Francis parish, Gorton, Manchester, is being celebrated for learning sign language and using drums to help include a deaf member of their church, Minna Moffatt-Feldman (pictured front left). Minna nominated the children for a ‘Luke 5 Award’ for disability inclusion from charity Through the Roof (throughtheroof.org). Minna said, “I am deaf. I use both British Sign Language (BSL) and English. Although I can read the lyrics, I cannot follow hymns or music during Mass ... This group of children aged 7–16 have taken it upon themselves to incorporate signing into their songs so I can be included.”

As a result, Minna says she has truly “felt included and become more interested in the sung words and their meanings. Before, I missed out on this part of worship and at times felt sad... It is wonderful how the choir have encouraged the whole parish to be involved and opened awareness even more – indeed the choir have been the role model.”

The Choir of Angels was stunned to receive the award – Minna had kept it a surprise! The children shared some amazing wisdom about why it's important everyone is included:

Michelle, age 11 – It gives our choir a different touch and makes it better. And if any other deaf people join, they will feel even more welcome and special. I can't wait to learn more.

Deborah, age 10 – I feel happy when I sign, especially with others. I think it is really cool that we are helping individuals in our parish, as well as doing something that we love. I am really surprised at how the language has grown and how it has become a normal thing in our parish over time.

Isabella, age 7 – Singing whilst signing is good because the deaf will feel included and know what we're singing to praise God. Also, people will know a bit of sign language; that good skill will make people proud of themselves.

Joseph, age 12 – I feel happy that sign language has been introduced to our parish because it helped us learn a new way to help people with a disability (deaf people). Sign language will also help us in the future because we might find more deaf people and they might not be able to lip-read.

Samuella, age 7 – I like signing while singing because it helps people who have hearing problems know what you are saying. I also like it because it will teach people a bit of sign language.

Hope, age 17 – Thank you, God, for showing a different way of getting your Word to be spread to everybody. For truly you are for everyone, and you accept anyone to be in your ever-growing family.



Minna is proud of the choir and is grateful that they have become so aware of barriers faced by deaf people, especially those who use BSL. This whole experience has really encouraged the parish, who are now asking to learn some sign language. It's the plan now to teach them all, and the children's choir have really led the way.

Annette Stuart from Through the Roof said: “Many hearing people are nervous about how to communicate with deaf people, so if that is you, watch our Deaf Awareness video – and share it with your local church.

Bring Heaven to Earth!

W Rounce

Now 80 years old I am blessed with both health and the time with which to reflect on life, religion and the future of the world.

Born in the middle of the second world war I was unaware of the horrors of war, but saw only, in early childhood, the aftermath of the bombing of our cities, devastation of acres of farmland littered with multiple airfields. The graphic scenes of war in Ukraine, which almost take us into the war, unlike at any other conflict, brings a new dimension into my childhood memories.

What, I ask myself, is it all for? Looking back on my life there has been conflict somewhere in the world always, in Korea, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Africa and many more, and throughout recorded history. The question still in my mind is Why? What reason(s) can there be for one nation to invade another, or for national governments to force it's people to the point of rebellion and internal conflict? My conclusion is that all conflicts are driven by a minority of people seeking to dominate land areas or people, in other words a desire for power, or a desire for material wealth, or, of course, the combination of both.

All wars end in either total victory of one side over the other, or negotiated settlement. In either case there will be dissatisfaction on one side, or sections of both sides, which, like a festering wound, will ultimately result in repercussions of the dispute; thus conflict becomes self perpetuating.

Sadly, religion has too often been the cause of conflict, or at least used as an excuse for it, but there is something radically wrong when a Christian church in Russia supports the actions of Russia in Ukraine.

I consider myself to be a Christian, though perhaps not what would be thought of as a good Catholic. I believe there is a God (who I see as a force that created the universe and therefore this planet) and I believe there is a Holy Spirit (which I see as the catalyst, or force, which starts the chemical reactions and interactions resulting in all life forms on earth) and I believe in the fundamental two commandments that Jesus taught, i.e. love God and love your neighbour as yourself (the fundamental principles of harmony in a society). Love in this context is respect and consideration, and our neighbour is not just our human neighbour but all life forms on earth. My faith is that goodness will overcome evil, witnessed by the vast majority of people, of all religions and none, who show compassion and kindness for those who suffer from both human conflict and natural disasters.

I am not a theologian but if I look at the basic beliefs of all the major religions I see these same principles reflected, though perhaps expressed differently. I like to think of the different religions as though they are different mediums of painting, all painting the same picture using different materials and styles.

Why then, I ask myself, is there conflict between religions, or perhaps of more concern, why is there division within the religions themselves?

My conclusion is that the rules and traditions of the religions have probably become the focus rather than the principles. An accusation that Jesus levelled at the high priests of his day.

A more cynical view might be that when we look at the opulence of many of the great churches and temples, we might ask whether they are for the glory of God, or statements of domination over people and wealth. The two main causes of conflict.

War and conflict will continue until mankind acknowledges that we do not own the land that we consider to be our nations, or the resources in it, but we are custodians only. The land and it's resources are for all life forms on earth to share. A nation should not have material wealth purely because the land it controls has desirable commodities such as oil, gold etc.

My message to all national leaders would be strive for a truly United Nations willing to distribute resources throughout the world at world controlled exchange rates in a way which has least impact environmentally, and uses those resources in a way to least affect climate change. Conflict between and within religions will continue until they unite with a common mission, not just to save mankind, but to save all life on the planet from the current threat of climate change.

I believe the religions can be a leading force in the mission to save the earth, for ultimately the voices of people will determine the direction of national governments. My message to the World Council of Religions (Is it's existence widely known?) to unite religions and promote this mission. This does not mean abandoning all traditions and faiths, but focusing them on a common mission.

This would take courage or more colloquially pluck, which is a good acronym for Patience, Love, Understanding, Compassion and Kindness, all the ingredients necessary to bring Heaven to Earth.

Should this mission fail, mankind, the most efficient predator on earth, (who seemingly lives to kill, rather than as in the natural world, where killing to live is the law), will succeed only in destroying himself.

God, however, the force for creation of the universe, and the Holy Spirit, the force that gives life, will remain and continue in some way with or without mankind.

We have the freedom of choice, good or evil, but it is a choice limited by an obligation on us not to destroy the future of this planet for our children and future generations.

Do I have a Utopian dream, or just the ramblings of an old man?

The gift of kindness is needed more than ever, says the St Vincent De Paul Society

svp.org.uk

Support people who are struggling with spiralling energy bills, rising food prices and the rocketing cost of everyday essentials

‘Kindness has never been more important, says the St Vincent De Paul Society for England and Wales (SVP) who launched their Gift of Kindness Christmas Appeal yesterday (13 November), to coincide with World Kindness Day. The appeal, which is prompted by the rising number of people asking the SVP for help due to the cost of living crisis, aims to raise vital funds to support people who are struggling with spiralling energy bills, rising

food prices and the rocketing cost of everyday essentials.

In the last few months, people seeking support from the SVP has doubled, and this figure will continue to rise during the coldest winter months. The SVP is urging anyone who would like to turn their concern into action to donate to the SVP Gift of Kindness Christmas Appeal this festive season. Funds raised from the

appeal will help the SVP to give someone the ‘gift of kindness’ this Christmas and bring comfort, joy, hope and reassurance during the coming months. Donations will go to the SVP’s Cost of Living Support Fund and as an extra incentive, donations will be doubled* thanks to the generosity of some of the SVP’s supporters.

The appeal will run throughout the festive season and ends on Sunday 8 January 2023. The SVP recently helped Darren, who was homeless and living on the streets in a small tent. The charity helped find him a safe place to live. The joy on his face when he moved into his own flat was priceless. This Christmas, he will be helping others by volunteering at his local St Vincent’s centre in Southend-on-Sea. Darren said “I would not have been able to turn my life around without the SVP. I owe so much to the charity.”

Donations from the Gift of Kindness Christmas Appeal, will help SVP’s local community-based volunteer groups and its St Vincent’s community support centres, to provide compassionate services such as befriending, a warm meal in a heated hall, food parcels, warm winter packs, as well as advice on managing debt and mental health, to help cope with the anxiety the current financial climate inevitably brings. SVP Chief Executive Elizabeth Palmer says: “In these troubled times, it is lower income households, those sidelined by society,



or people who are already struggling, who are hit hardest by the financial squeeze. Thanks to your donations to our Gift of Kindness Christmas Appeal, we will be there to help anyone who needs us.”

Every year SVP volunteers spend more than 350,000 hours providing support to those who need it, and more than 55,066 people have been given material or practical help by local SVP groups with services including food, furniture, clothing, electrical goods and daily essentials. Elizabeth Palmer concludes: “Please turn your concern into action and give the gift of kindness to someone who really needs it this Christmas. Please support our Gift of Kindness Christmas Appeal, because we’re always stronger when we are united.” To donate to the SVP Gift of Kindness Christmas Appeal, visit fundraising.svp.org.uk/kindness or call 07593 384 429 during office hours.

Alive in Faith donation feeds housebound in Ukraine

rcdea.org.uk

I saw an Instagram post with a call for bicycle volunteers and was very happy, because it opened up an opportunity to finally feel useful and needed



older people and those with disabilities who cannot leave their homes.

“Doing this kind of work in a team is a great relief for me. I spent the first two weeks of the war sitting in my bathroom while the city was bombed. Being alone during that time with my two cats was almost unbearable. Over time, I started to gain the courage to leave my home by bicycle to go to the grocery store or pharmacy.”

Viktoria is part of a team of volunteer cyclists whose support is a lifeline for housebound people in Kharkiv. Depaul Ukraine works tirelessly to ensure food baskets reach 700 people on a regular basis.

“One day,” says Viktoria, “I saw an Instagram post with a call for bicycle volunteers and was very happy, because it opened up an opportunity to finally feel useful and needed. This is my city and my country. I just want to be here, that is all.”

Alongside the Kharkiv project, CAFOD has provided aid in the form of food, drinking water, sanitary supplies like nappies and hand sanitiser, blankets and warm clothes, shelter and safety for families displaced internally and beyond Ukraine’s borders. It has also recently started providing a funding mechanism for pharmacists in the UK to be able to distribute much needed medicines and equipment to doctors, pharmacies and hospitals in Ukraine.

Pictured above is Viktoria, a cycle volunteer, delivering food to Larysa, an older resident of Kharkiv.

A £50,000 donation from the East Anglian Diocese Alive in Faith Fund is being used by Caritas Ukraine to bring food to housebound residents in Kharkiv, Ukraine.

As a Caritas member agency for England and Wales, CAFOD has been working to fund various strands of the humanitarian response in Poland, Romania, Moldova and within Ukraine itself through its Caritas partners.

One of those projects run by Caritas partner, Depaul Ukraine, is helping the housebound in Kharkiv, the second largest city in Ukraine. This city lies only 25 miles from the Russian border and so has been subject to siege and intense shelling.

One of the Caritas volunteers in Kharkiv is Viktoria, who uses a bike for the distributions.

“I work in IT and could easily get a job abroad,” writes the 35-year-old Viktoria, “but I have many relatives here in Kharkiv who need attention and care. I would not be able to take them all out of Ukraine, and I also do not want to leave them without support.”

Before the conflict, Viktoria would regularly attend cycling races around Europe. Now she cycles across Kharkiv delivering food to



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Our Global Community



Al-Bustan neighbourhood, Silwan - East Jerusalem.

Photo: WCC EAPPI

Holy Land: Palestinian wedding tradition brings joy and pain

WCC

"I had ambitions and beautiful plans-to leave my parent's home just like every normal bride does."

Here comes the bride. Donned in a wedding gown, Ribhieh Rajabi is walking over a pile of rubble in the Silwan neighbourhood of Jerusalem. She's surrounded by family, friends, journalists, and even strangers who came to show solidarity.

"My wedding was happiness mixed with pain," Rajabi explained. "I had ambitions and beautiful plans-to leave my parent's home just like every normal bride does."

But the home had been demolished by the Israeli authorities - and approximately 60% of the Palestinian homes in Silwan are threatened with demolition.

The Israeli authorities are seeking to transform Silwan into both a National Park and an Israeli neighbourhood. For Rajabi, honouring tradition meant walking across the pile of pieces that used to be her family home, despite the enormous hardship in her community.

"I was determined to leave from the remnants of my family home, even on top of the rubble and stones," she explained. "I am my parents' only daughter, and I wanted my parents to be happy."

She had long dreamed of leaving from her parent's home on her wedding day-a time-honoured tradition in Palestine.

"I feel sad that I left that way," she said. "But my family was at my side: my parents, brothers, and uncles - and lots of journalists."

Her wedding day became one shared with the world. "This made me feel happy," she said. "There are those around the world who saw what happened and understood my feelings." No matter what pain it brought, she was

determined to leave from her parents' home to start her new life. "Israeli soldiers tried to impede the festive atmosphere, but we would not let them succeed, so they left," she recalled. "The procession was beautiful!"

Video footage of the day shows friends and family, and strangers dancing, clapping, and singing. "I wanted to prove to the occupation that my happiness is up to me - that Palestinians are patient, resilient, and of unbreakable spirit," she said. "Nothing prevented me from leaving from my parent's home - not even the demolition."

The rubble represents the only childhood home she has left.

"When the home was demolished, 40 people from my family - including 15 children-moved to a nearby tent," she said. "We wanted to say that this is our land, and we will stay put."

According to Palestinian tradition, a bride leaves from her father's house; surrounded by her mother, uncles, brothers, and sisters. "Sure, I saw the pain in everyone's eyes," said Rajabi. "But in the end, everything happened like I wanted, and I left from my father's home."

She still has hope that her family home will be rebuilt - the same as it always was, down to the last details - and, most of all, that her family will move back in. "I hope that someday we can rebuild what was destroyed," she said. "I want to tell the world that we live under occupation and harsh conditions - yet we are steadfast and proud, despite the sadness."

UNOCHA data reveals that during the last five years, between 1 January 2018 - 31 October 2022, Israeli authorities demolished 96 structures in Silwan. 285 people were displaced, of whom 151 were children.

Pope visits relatives in his father's home town

Vatican News

Rose-coloured Christians... say they believe in God and want peace, but do not pray and do not care about their neighbour



Pope Francis spent the weekend in Asti, northwest Italy over the weekend - the area where his father came from. On Saturday he paid several private visits to relatives - in particular, he had lunch with a cousin, Carla Rabezzana, celebrating her 90th birthday in the small town of Portacomaro, his father's home town about 10 kilometres from Asti. He then went to a retirement home there to greet several residents before calling on another cousin in a nearby town.

The Pope's father, Mario Bergoglio, emigrated to Argentina in 1929. In Buenos Aires he met his future wife Regina Maria Sivori, a daughter of Genoese immigrants. They had five children. Jorge Mario was their first child.

Pope Francis stayed at the Bishop's chancery. On Sunday he met with several dignitaries, including local Mayor Maurizio Rasero who conferred on him honorary citizenship. The Pope was then taken to the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption in Asti. Many thousands lined the streets to greet him. While over 1,000 attended Mass with the Pope in the Cathedral, another 4,000 watched it on large outdoor screens.

In his homily the Pope said: "I have come to rediscover the flavour of roots... It was from these lands that my father left to emigrate to Argentina... these lands made precious by the good products of the soil and above all by the genuine hard work of the people."

He encouraged the people of Asti to remember their past and return "to the roots of faith," that of the "arid soil of Calvary where the seed of Jesus, in dying, made hope germinate."

The Gospel ... brings us back to the roots of faith, he said. They are found in the arid soil of Calvary, where the seed of Jesus, dying, made hope sprout: planted in the heart of the

earth, He opened for us the way to Heaven; by His death He gave us eternal life; through the wood of the cross He brought us the fruits of salvation. Let us therefore look to Him, let us look to the Crucified One.

On this feast of Christ the King, he recalled that God's kingship was manifested in the "paradox of the Cross," when "with open arms" and crowned with thorns, he decided to embrace humanity.

"He entered the black holes of hatred and the black holes of abandonment to illuminate every life and embrace every reality..."

Pope Francis contrasted two attitudes before the Cross: First, that of the "spectator," whose "refrain" is expressed in the words of the bad thief: "If you are a king, save yourself!"

This attitude is "a wave that spreads through indifference... rose-colored Christians who say they believe in God and want peace, but do not pray and do not care about their neighbour."

The attitude of one who is involved in the mystery of the Cross is embodied in the figure of the good thief who, beside Christ on Calvary, "becomes the first saint" because he places his trust in God and calls on his mercy. During the Mass, Pope Francis conferred the ministry of acolyte to seminarian Stefano Accornero.

Noted the lack of vocations in the Piedmont Diocese he invited the population to pray for young men to respond to the call.

At the end of Mass, the Pope prayed the Angelus before returning to the archdiocese for lunch.

His last appointment was a meeting with 1,340 children, before he flew back to Rome by helicopter.

Did you think leprosy was a thing of the past?



Dal Bahadur Pariyar, a man whose eyes, hands, face and feet are disabled or affected by leprosy, Lamatarra Leprosy Community, Nepal

For centuries, leprosy has plagued poverty-stricken communities across the globe. No one knew how it was transmitted and there was no known cure.

Even a few decades ago, more than five million people every year were still suffering severe disabilities and their lives were being destroyed physically, emotionally and socially.

But leprosy is curable

Multidrug therapy has been available since the 1990s and around 16 million people have been cured of the disease since then. Yet more than 200,000 new cases of leprosy are still being reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) every year. Millions more people may have the disease but are yet to be diagnosed.

Early detection can stop leprosy in its tracks

For 127 years, St Francis Leprosy Guild has been working to end leprosy and now, as we approach World Leprosy Day on 29 January 2023, we truly believe a leprosy-free world is within sight. Our TRACE operating strategy, which stands for Training, Research, Active Case-Finding, Care and Emergency response, is designed to help stamp out leprosy for good.



Today, we need your support to train local healthcare workers who can visit hard-to-reach communities where leprosy is endemic in order to screen and treat people for the disease. By giving £30 today to support regular monitoring, early detection and immediate treatment – before the disease takes hold – you can help to prevent terrible and avoidable suffering.



A leprosy-free world is now within sight

St Francis Leprosy Guild supports around 40 leprosy centres across Asia, Africa and Brazil. Your gift of £30 today can help this essential work continue. Together, let's seize the opportunity to end leprosy once and for all.

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Bishop Sherrington saddened at outcome of Heidi Crowter case

CBCEW

“I want them to look at me and say ‘this is just a normal person.’” Heidi Crowter

Bishop John Sherrington, Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster and Lead Bishop for Life Issues for the Bishops’ Conference, has commented on the Court of Appeal’s decision that the Abortion Act did not interfere with the rights of those with disabilities.



Heidi Crowter, 27, a woman with Down’s Syndrome, lost her appeal and said, “I want to change the law and I want to challenge people’s perception of Down’s syndrome. I want them to look at me and say ‘this is just a normal person.’”

Bishop Sherrington commented: “I am deeply saddened that Heidi Crowter’s campaign to recognise the child with disability in the womb as an equal has been rejected by the Court of Appeal.

“The law which protects her after birth did not protect her in the womb - indeed, a disabled person, such as Heidi, can be aborted up to the moment of birth on the basis of their disability alone. This is illogical and unjust.

“Whilst the judgment claims that the section 1(1)(d) of the Abortion Act 1967 does not have ‘any significant role in causing discriminatory

attitudes against disabled people generally, or those with Down’s in particular’, the year-on-year increase in disability-selective abortions tells a very different story. I echo the words of Pope Francis, who strongly discouraged the use of prenatal diagnosis for selective purposes as ‘it is an expression of an inhuman eugenic mentality, which deprives families of the possibility of welcoming, embracing and loving their weakest children.’

“We must continue to advocate for greater support for families caring for a child with disability. I offer my prayerful support as Heidi considers seeking permission for the case to be heard at the UK Supreme Court.”

King Charles and Ukraine's First Lady visit Ukrainian Cathedral in London

Each day prayers are offered for the President of Ukraine, its defenders and indeed all of the Ukrainian people

ICN

“We pray his next visit will be to give thanks for an end to the war - a war that has taken so many innocent lives.”



Arrival of King and Mrs Zelenska.

Image M Mazur

His Majesty The King and The First Lady of Ukraine Mrs Olena Zelenska were welcomed to the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of the Holy Family in Exile recently by Rt Rev Kenneth Nowakowski, bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy (Diocese) of the Holy Family of London.

Bishop Kenneth said: “The visit of His Majesty The King along with Mrs Zelenska offers a powerful sign of solidarity between the people of the United Kingdom and our sisters and brothers in Ukraine.

“We are honoured that His Majesty has come back to our Cathedral, and we pray his next visit will be to give thanks for an end to the war - a war that has taken so many innocent lives.”

Bishop Kenneth assured Mrs Zelenska that each day prayers are offered for the President of Ukraine, its defenders and indeed all of the Ukrainian people during these dreadful times.

While visiting the Cathedral His Majesty was presented with an icon, a gift from His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, Father and Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The icon was written featuring the Blessed Theotokos (Mother of God) of Eleousa (Tenderness) by Oleksandr Klymenko and Sofiia Atlantova - Ukrainian iconographers and artists who are founders of the charity project called “Icons on munitions boxes”. The icon is written on fragments of a munitions box brought from the front lines



You can use both sets of clues to solve the puzzle: the solutions are the same.

CRYPTIC Across

- 5 Sports two letters from Paul (11)
- 7 Log all chocolate that’s eaten around Christmas? (4)
- 8 Naive can, strangely to medieval Schoolmen, be an influence (8)
- 9 Building that appeals for Indian ruler to ‘go back in time’ in retrospective (7)
- 11 This kind of hell hole’s diabolical (5)
- 13 Levi’s sister’s anger initially follows row with husband (5)
- 14 Golden premier of chap being inducted into a mysterious religion (7)
- 16 Note a retrogressive toilet’s showy façade: a parable that highlights greed (4,4)
- 17 ‘No union, no strike’ letters initially given to women with habits (4)
- 18 Bernstein, or alternative name for the Premonstratensians (11)

CRYPTIC Down

- 1 He composed a tune ultimately the navy embraced (4)
- 2 Key number among Poles eroded benefice’s income (7)
- 3 Some in macho Irish group getting vocal when together (5)
- 4 Horse old Persian tracks to a town fortified by Rehoboam (8)
- 5 Means of executing Rugby’s capacity to bind individual’s attachment to one across? (11)
- 6 Solomon’s greatest hit? Perhaps not... (4,2,5)
- 10 ...Eucharistic Prayer heard in Athens maybe a rap Noah composed (8)
- 12 Abbot’s story is written up following Rector’s recording outside (7)

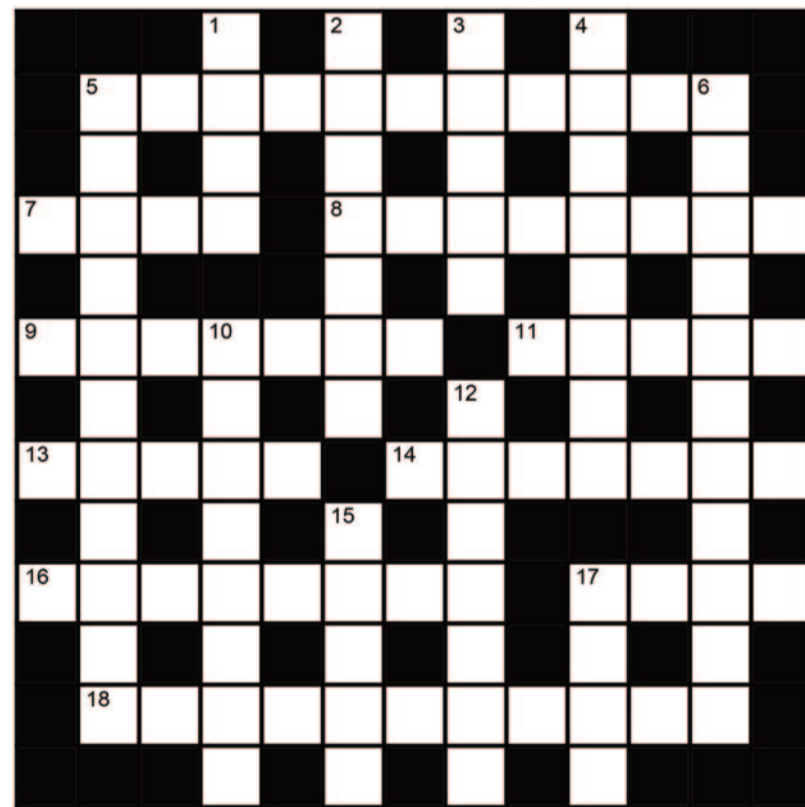
- 15 She was unfaithful to OT chap; married an all-round raver (5)
- 17 All over English meet with French negativity, which produces zilch (4)

QUICK Across

- 5 Either of two books of the NT (11)
- 7 Archaic term for Christmas from a 12-day heathen festival (4)
- 8 Muslim philosopher who influenced the medieval Schoolmen... (8)
- 9 ...and a pillar of Islam? (7)
- 11 Word appearing in the OT meaning the underworld or place for departed souls (5)
- 13 Daughter of Jacob and Leah (5)
- 14 Ancient Greek set of religious beliefs associated with Hades (7) 16 A ---- ----: parable appearing in Luke (4,4)
- 17 Females who have taken their final vows (4)
- 18 Alternative name for members of the Premonstratensian Order (11)

QUICK Down

- 1 Composer of two oratorios, but more famously Rule Britannia (4)
- 2 First year’s revenue of an ecclesiastical benefice, passed to the Crown in 1535 and abolished in 1926 (7)
- 3 Part of a church containing the seats of the clergy (5)
- 4 Town fortified by Rehoboam for which Micah prophesied disaster (8)



- 5 Means of Christ’s death as recorded by all four evangelists (11)
- 6 OT anthology of love poems, alternatively called ‘Canticles’ in some Bibles (4,2,5)
- 10 Word in the Eastern Church which equates to the Eucharistic Prayer (8)
- 12 High-ranking ecclesiastic (7) 15 Hosea’s unfaithful wife (5)
- 17 The last of the ‘Little Hours’ of the Divine Office (4)

SOLUTION

Song of Songs, 10 Anaphora, 12 Prelate, 15 Gomer, 17 None.
 Down: 1 Arne, 2 Annates, 3 Choir, 4 Maresha, 5 Crucifixion, 6
 13 Dinah, 14 Orphism, 16 Rich fool, 17 Nuns, 18 Norbertine.
 Across: 5 Corinthians, 7 Yule, 8 Avicenna, 9 Minaret, 11 Sheol,