

## Bishop's Column

**On the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, 2024, we began the celebration of the opening of the Ordinary Jubilee Year 2025.**

A year on, the Holy Door at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls was closed on December 28 and the Holy Year concluded in all the dioceses throughout the world, including our own. The Holy Door in St Peter's Basilica will close on January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany, thus concluding the Ordinary Jubilee 2025. We now look forward to the Holy Year of Redemption in 2033, 2,000 years since the death and resurrection of Jesus – if God spares us!

Each one of us will have our own blessings to count as we come to the end of the Jubilee and begin the calendar year of 2026. Even in the face of difficulties and pain, both personal and global, if we look with eyes of hope we can see blessings rather than losses; we will see once more the Father offering the grace, the gift of his Son, Jesus, who through his life, death and resurrection brings us the freedom of the children of God.



Crowds before a Jubilee audience in St Peter's Square – Photo © Mazur/cbcew.org.uk

Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Father and the Son, we are given the strength and inspiration to continue our journey of hope. We beseech the blessed Trinity to...grant us the faith that moves mountains, the hope that does not disappoint and the love that is patient and kind, because, never separating ourselves from God's will, we may thank him for his blessings without number.

May I conclude this reflection with some words of our Holy Father, Pope Leo, from his homily on the Seventh Sunday of Easter (the Jubilee of Families), June 1 2025.

*Let me add one last thing. The prayer of the Son of God, which gives us hope on our journey, also reminds us that one day we will all be... one in the one Saviour, embraced by the eternal love of God. Not only us, but also our fathers, mothers, grandmothers, grandfathers, brothers, sisters and children who have already gone before us into the light of his eternal Pasch, and whose presence we feel here, together with us, in this moment of celebration.*

In blessed hope

*+ Leo*

## What's Inside

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# Making a new start for a new year

**At the beginning of a new year, I always find myself in a reflective mood. I like to review the year that has gone, the highs and lows, and ask myself what I learnt about others, myself and God.**

Just as the first disciples heard the call of Jesus during an ordinary day, we too often meet God not in the spectacular but in the simple, quiet moments when the year turns.

It can be hard for us to predict what the next year may have in store for us, but we can be certain we are being invited to grow in faith. Jesus is offering us the same invitation to "follow him" as he did to St Peter and St Andrew beside the Sea of Galilee.

But what does it mean to be a disciple in 2026? January is the perfect time for us to reflect on our own journey in faith and to listen to the gentle invitation of the Holy Spirit to go deeper this year.

The Catechism provides us with a kind of spiritual health check for our discipleship: "The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it and spread it." (CCC 1814)

This short line is both reassuring and challenging. It reminds us that faith is not passive. It is meant to shape our choices, our conversations and the way we love.

Discipleship often begins with curiosity, a desire for something more. Many people in our communities are at this first threshold of faith. Some may have begun to trust the Church again; others may be tentatively exploring questions that have been stirring within them.

We can welcome them in and gently introduce them not simply to ideas but to the one they are ultimately searching for – Jesus.

Discipleship should always facilitate



January is the perfect time to reflect on our journey of faith

encounter with Christ. Not a one-off meeting, but a daily one, through prayer, the sacraments and the Scriptures.

If we want to follow Jesus, we need to learn to recognise his voice. A simple way to begin is to sit with the Sunday Gospel for a few minutes each day and ask: "Lord, what are You saying to me?" Often the best place to start in prayer is by admitting that we don't really know how to pray and inviting the Holy Spirit to be our teacher.

Discipleship also requires continuous formation. We need to grow not only in our knowledge and understanding of the faith but also in the quiet interior work that shapes our hearts.

There is a wealth of information available –

books, videos, podcasts and courses – and it can feel overwhelming. The Church has given us a great gift in the Catechism and the Compendium, both easily accessible online.

Formation isn't about becoming an expert; it's about becoming more available to God and to others, learning our faith so that we may live it and share it.

But we must also remember that no one becomes a disciple alone. Growth happens within the community of the Church, through Mass, parish life, small groups, ministries and friendships rooted in Christ.

Continued on Page 2

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NEWS

A new start for a new year

Continued from Page 1

When we accompany one another, encourage one another and pray for one another, discipleship becomes not just a personal journey but a shared mission.

At the start of this new year, God is inviting us into a deeper relationship with him. If you, as an individual or a parish, are looking to grow in discipleship this year, why not get in touch?

Often all God needs is a small “yes” from us and we soon discover that Christ has already made the first move.

Nicola Sweetman  
Adult Formation Coordinator

### BISHOP TERRY'S JANUARY ENGAGEMENTS

- 11 Celebrates Mass for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord at St Mary's Cathedral, Middlesbrough 10am
- 13 Attends a meeting of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales via Zoom 10am
- 15 Chairs a DTEC Meeting at the Curial Office in Middlesbrough 11am
- 20 Attends Ecumenical Vespers and Reception at the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Most Precious Blood, Westminster, London 5pm
- 22 Chairs a meeting of the Bishop's Council via Zoom 10.30am
- 25 Attends a Missio event at English Martyrs Parish, York 10.30am
- 28 Annual update meeting with the President of Middlesbrough SVP Central Council via Zoom 9.30am

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Bringing our faith home

As a parent, I'm always looking for ways to bring faith more deeply into our home – to make it something my children love and enjoy celebrating.

Over the years, I've discovered that faith doesn't have to stay confined to Sunday Mass; it can be woven into our everyday lives in small, joyful ways.

In the early days of motherhood, long nights with a newborn left me scrolling through social media to stay awake during feeds. It was there that I discovered Instagram accounts introducing the concept of liturgical living.

At first, I thought, “We already live through the liturgical seasons every year.” But these accounts showed me countless ways to celebrate them with themed meals, games, decorations and prayers. One even featured a book of cocktails inspired by saints' days – one for the parents!

While celebrating every saint's day on the calendar would be overwhelming, our family decided to focus on three special celebrations for each person: their birthday, baptism anniversary and patron saint's day.

After baptising several babies, Pope Francis once said to parents: “It is like a birthday, because baptism makes us reborn in Christian life. That is why I advise you to teach your children the date of their baptism as a new birthday: that every year they will remember and thank God for this grace of becoming a Christian.”

That is exactly what we aim to teach our children when we celebrate their baptism anniversary each year.



Why not celebrate your child's baptism anniversary every year?

On Sunday January 11 we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. In the Gospel we will hear the Father's voice declare that Jesus is “my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him”.

Our own baptism confirms our deepest identity as people created, loved and chosen by God. This is surely worth celebrating, not just on our baptism day but every day of our lives.

At home, on the anniversary, we light a candle, renew our baptismal promises, bless ourselves with holy water and enjoy a small treat — usually doughnuts.

We try to invite their godparents, though busy schedules don't always allow it; still, they send messages of love and prayer. It's simple, yet it's becoming one of our favourite family traditions.

I hope that one day, my children will look back on these little moments – the candlelight, the laughter, the doughnuts – and remember not just that faith was always at the heart of our home but who they are; a child of God.

Nicola Sweetman  
Adult Formation Coordinator

Cannon Street's lively Catholic life

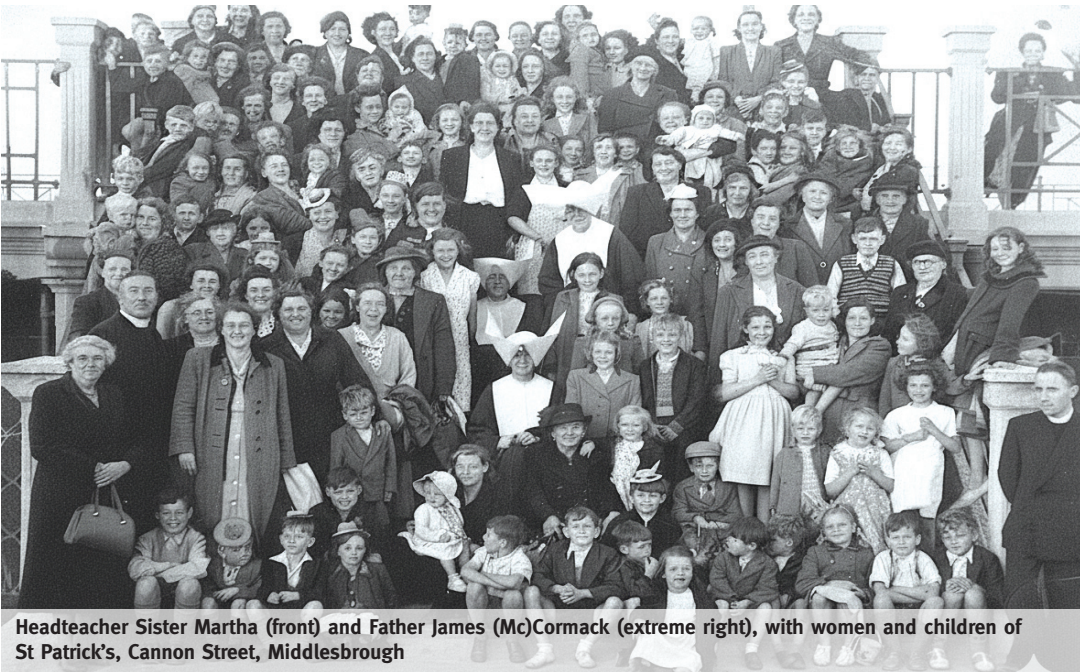
A young lady of 90, a parishioner of St Thomas More, Middlesbrough, recently presented me with these two photographs for the diocesan archives.

Both relate to the parish in which she was brought up, St Patrick's, Cannon Street, Middlesbrough.

The larger photo shows women and children from the parish, most likely gathered for one of the famous trips from St Patrick's School.

The Daughter of Charity towards the front of the photo is Sister Martha, headteacher of the school, and Father James McCormack, sometimes known as Father Cormack, parish priest from 1939 to 1967, is on the left front.

The other photograph is of girls in the Young Christian Workers at St Patrick's, with Father Patrick Morris, a curate in the parish from 1943 to 1962.



Headteacher Sister Martha (front) and Father James (Mc)Cormack (extreme right), with women and children of St Patrick's, Cannon Street, Middlesbrough

Cannon Street and St Patrick's parish were very close-knit communities, despite, or perhaps because of, very low levels of income, and many readers will still have happy memories of living in the area and parish.

Perhaps, like the donor, there are still some living who appear in one or other of the photographs. Please let us know!

Father Dominique Minsk



Girls from St Patrick's YCW, with curate Father Patrick Morris



# Bishops meet Pope Leo after Rome audience

**Bishop Terry and Bishop Emeritus John had the honour of meeting Pope Leo during a special pilgrimage to Rome for jubilarians from throughout the country.**

Canon Michael Loughlin and Father Michael Keogh were also present, joining a group of about 35 in total.

They were hosted by the Venerable English College, staying at Villa Palazzola outside the city. Pope Leo later came to meet the whole group, greeting them with the words: "Hi, guys!"

Bishop Terry said the pilgrimage was very special for all involved, despite the rain and cold weather.

The tradition of a pilgrimage for priests celebrating their ruby anniversary (40 years) of priestly ordination and upwards has been going for many years.

Congratulations to all our jubilarians – *ad multos annos!*



Bishop John meets Pope Leo – © Vatican Media



Bishop Terry meets Pope Leo – © Vatican Media

## All change in the finance department

**John Walton will be retiring at the start of March after working for the diocese as Financial Secretary since 2016.**

He has been working on a part-time basis for the past three months as he hands over his responsibilities to Patricia Thomas.

Patricia joined us as Head of Finance in September and has already visited a number of parishes throughout the diocese, meeting priests and their finance committees.

Patricia lives locally and has more than 30 years' experience in financial and management accounting.

Meanwhile, Lisa Campbell recently left the diocese after six years and has started a new job with Redcar & Cleveland Council.

"Lisa has played an important role in the team over the six years she has been working for the diocese and will be missed," said chief operating officer Deacon Peter Warren.

In other changes, Jack Pickering has joined the department, initially on a temporary basis, and George Lawler is also spending a couple of days a week with us with a view to him taking up a finance apprenticeship from April.

Cath Baggott joined the finance department during the year as gift aid and finance administrator.

Our picture shows John, Patricia (right) and Lisa, middle, holding the flowers she received along with a leaving gift from her colleagues.



## THE WELL

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*'Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will  
never be thirsty again.'*

John 4:14



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## NEWS

# Living Pope Leo's message, 'To hope is to choose'

**CHRISTOPHER LOVELL**, who teaches at **St Margaret Clitherow's Catholic Primary School** in South Bank, Middlesbrough, reports on a very special pilgrimage to Rome where he took part in the Jubilee for Educators...

**As a teacher who has faced loss of those close to me, Pope Leo's call to "choose hope" reminds me that even in grief, my vocation can heal and uplift, and that having hope, especially in the Jubilee Year, is a conscious choice taken to bring light in the dark.**

After being in Rome for the funeral of our late Holy Father, Pope Francis, I knew I had to come back to Rome again.

In what started out as a birthday present for my mum's 60th birthday, the trip perfectly aligned with the Jubilee for Educators – the Spirit was at work and confirmed those dates were very right for our visit.

Even more so, the dates for the audience with educators were on the sixth anniversary of the passing of my father, Martin Lovell. It was just meant to be!

At the start of the trip, we were on our way to cross the Holy Door at St Mary Major and to pay our respects to Pope Francis, but we passed the Capuchin Crypt, a Franciscan burial ground, with the remains of 3,700 bones of Franciscans in there.

Although this may sound like not the nicest place to visit, it felt comforting and right,



Christopher managed to take this snap of Pope Leo as the papemobile passed by



Celebrating our Schools

especially reading St Francis' Canticle of Creation in embracing "Sister death", as this is part of creation; it is a rite of passage in our journey with Christ.

This was comforting to read on the day before we celebrated my father's anniversary and when we would visit the tomb of Pope Francis – two people I loved dearly.

Embracing sister death, knowing it is not the end, but part of the journey, is part of the healing journey, bringing light where there most certainly feels like there is darkness – it may still not feel that way, but it's certainly a thought I'm going to try to embrace.

On the day of the audience, we started out early, but it was well worth it, as we managed to get right in the front row, so very close to the shadow of St Peter.

Before the audience, a fellow pilgrim asked me to pray the Rosary with him, which felt right to be in a community of prayer. Fun fact, he was the guy who passed on the knitted doll of the Holy Father, so it was nice to hear his story of how it came to be a TikTok sensation!

In his audience, Pope Leo XIV urged teachers and learners to make education a journey of interiority, unity, love and joy. He reminded educators that their mission is not merely to transfer knowledge but to form whole persons – awakening hearts, building community and nurturing dignity.

Education, he said, must be rooted in hope,

an active decision to trust God and look beyond fear or failure. By teaching with love, seeking truth with joy, and fostering genuine relationships, educators become bearers of light in a world often marked by anxiety and division.

Pope Leo's message calls each of us to let our work, study and daily actions become signs of hope, drawing others toward a fuller, more compassionate humanity.

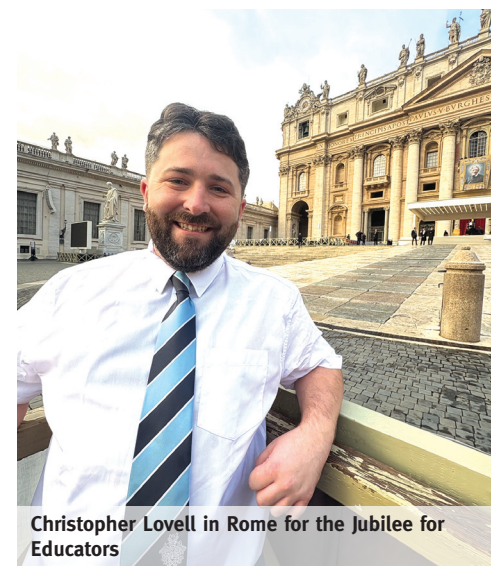
The Holy Father's teachings and presence filled me with great joy, excitement, but what feels most important, hope in the Jubilee Year.

Hope in a community of prayer, hope in the faith and compassion which can be brought from the vocation, but what feels most important personally, even amid loss, his words assure us that hope is not denial of sorrow, but the courage to keep believing that new life and meaning can emerge from it.

The Jubilee for Educators has renewed my sense of vocation and reminded me that, at its heart, teaching is a work of hope.

Pope Leo XIV's words, "To hope is to choose", have taken on a personal meaning – calling me not only to bring hope to my students and community but also to live it in my own journey of grief.

This pilgrimage to Rome, intertwined with moments of remembrance and faith, revealed that hope is found even in sorrow, and that



Christopher Lovell in Rome for the Jubilee for Educators

death, as St Francis reminds us, is not the end but part of the path toward new life in Christ.

The Jubilee has made me try to look towards the idea that through love, learning and faith, I can honour those I've lost by continuing to share light where there is darkness, trusting that hope endures beyond death and leads us all closer to resurrection and peace.

It may not be a completed article, but it's certainly made me look towards that thought.

## Youth SVP group raises funds to help homeless guests

**Members of Trinity Catholic College Youth SVP fundraised in the autumn term to buy items to add to Christmas gift bags for the 80 guests at the Upper Room Saturday breakfast club for homeless people.**

They raised £150 with a giant raffle and a bake-off competition and provided 325 items for the Christmas bags, including pens, notepads, hand sanitiser, deodorant and tissues.

Thirty young people were commissioned with chaplain Mrs Sanders at a ceremony held in the Middlesbrough school's chapel, where

they promised to live by Vincentian values, Turning Concern into Action every day.

Upper Room Volunteer Pat Hall and I presented badges and then accepted the gifts to take back to the Upper Room guests.

Congratulations to all on the hard work and prayerful attitude to their Vincentian calling – the gifts will be gratefully received!

The Upper Room project treats guests to a hot meal and other services every Saturday morning throughout the year.

**Susan Gardiner**  
Middlesbrough District SVP President



A Trinity pupil hands over donations to Susan Gardiner and Pat Hall of the Upper Room Project

## Schools invited to join Friends of the Lady Chapel



**Schools, families and other groups, as well as individuals, are welcome to join the Friends of the Lady Chapel.**

Members are united in the spirituality of our diocesan Marian shrine through an annual Mass and daily prayers and also receive newsletters and invitations to events. A suggested membership donation is £10 a year for an individual or a family group. Visit [ladychapel.org.uk/friends](http://ladychapel.org.uk/friends) for more information.

Father Anthony Storey's booklet describing the history of the Lady Chapel, which was updated by Father Neil McNicholas, is available from the Curial Office, St Mary's Cathedral or the Lady Chapel itself, priced £1.

Have you ever thought about leaving a legacy to the Friends of the Lady Chapel in your will? By doing so you will help to preserve this important shrine to Our Lady for future generations and bequests are free of inheritance tax.

You can also donate using this QR code.



This beautiful woodcarving was left in the Lady Chapel by an anonymous donor last year



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# Queen of dressing up takes her final bow

**After over three decades of dedication to some of York's youngest learners, much-loved teaching assistant Sue Magson is taking her final bow.**

Sue, 66, is retiring after spending exactly half of her life up to now working at St Wilfrid's Catholic Primary School in Monkgate – a remarkable 33 years of service.

During that time she has won a place in the hearts of generations of pupils, who will especially remember Sue's love of dressing up as colourful characters from Queen Elizabeth II to the giant from Jack and the Beanstalk.

Sue began helping out during dinnertimes when her own girls, Sarah and Andrea, were pupils at St Wilfrid's.

Soon Sister Teresa – the first of five headteachers Sue has worked under – spotted her way with the younger pupils and asked her to take a classroom role.

After that her passion blossomed and she became a constant presence, bringing lots of fun and laughter along the way and never missing a chance to put on a costume.

"I've always loved dressing up with the kids," Sue said. "One time I pretended to be the giant at the top of the beanstalk with a beard, a long coat and scruffy hat.

"Nobody recognised me and afterwards the kids wouldn't believe it had been me. I had to get the clothes out at the end of the day to prove it!"

She says former pupils often stop her in the street and say, "Didn't you work at St Wilfrid's? I remember when you wore that gorilla outfit!"

Over the years, Sue has witnessed many changes at St Wilfrid's, with each headteacher having their own way of doing things.

After Sister Teresa retired, Betty McDougal took over as headteacher, followed by Colm Flanagan, Jane Conway and current head Helen Keith.

"Technology has also changed and it's a faster pace of life than it was then. Children had less, so they appreciated things more."

But what kept Sue motivated throughout the decades was the close bonds she formed with the children as they began their school lives.

She said: "It's so important to get those foundations right. If we can get it right at the beginning, it's just going to build on top of that.

"You can see when they're struggling and doing something daft can bring them out of it, as long as they feel safe and comfortable with you. I always treat the children how I would want people to treat my grandchildren.

"I've never been somebody who wanted to chase wealth or big houses, which is a good job really! Those things to me don't really matter. People matter more.

"It's been lovely, and I just hope I've got lots of healthy years ahead of me."

Sue's advice to new teaching assistants reflects her caring philosophy: "Just try to think on their level. Think as a child would. And being kind and respectful to whoever you meet in life should be everybody's ethos, in my view."

When asked what she will miss most, Sue's answer was simple: "The kids."

But she's also looking forward to spending more time with her family, especially her six grandchildren.

Current headteacher Helen Keith says Sue will be a big loss to the school community and she is always welcome to come back and see the St Wilfrid's family.

She said: "It's been a great pleasure and joy to work with Sue during my time at St Wilfrid's. Every day, she has been a welcoming, happy and reassuring person as she greets our pupils and families arriving in the morning.

"She has always gone above and beyond to make sure our pupils are happy, cared for and achieve their very best in her care. She's been an instrumental member of the team. She always looks after the staff and shows great care and love to them.

"There aren't enough words of gratitude I can say to thank Sue for her exceptional dedication to the pupils, staff and the St Wilfrid's community over the last 33 years.

"Her wonderful sense of humour, numerous jokes and outfits on dressing up days will certainly be missed by us all."



Sue Magson on one of the many times she has dressed up during her 33 years at St Wilfrid's Catholic Primary School in York



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## NEWS

# Pupils pay tribute at parish remembrance service

Pupils of St Joseph's Primary School in Pickering joined a parish remembrance service supported by Pickering Royal British Legion.

A member of Stape Silver Band played the last post to honour those who gave their lives for our freedom and for all who suffer from the effects of war and for peace.

Pupils contributed hymns and prayers to the service, which was celebrated by Deacon Douglas McKittrick.

Especially remembered was an early member of the Royal Flying Corps, Captain John Aiden Liddell VC, MC, who died of his injuries in 1915, and whose family donated to the font that graces the church after an appeal by Father Bryan, our first parish priest.

Paul Robb



Deacon Douglas McKittrick leads the remembrance service at St Joseph's in Pickering

## Marking the latest chapter in the story of a parish

The feast of our patron, St Charles Borromeo, was marked with a Mass of celebration and the formal service of induction of Father Phil Cunnah as the latest parish priest to serve here.

The service was celebrated by Canon David Grant, our dean, and was attended by many of Father Phil's brother priests from the southern deanery.

It was a great celebration of this latest chapter in the story of St Charles Borromeo Parish and marked the start of the rejuvenation of the mother church of Hull.

The congregation included parishioners from all three of Father Phil's parishes, St Charles, St Mary and St Joseph, Hedon, and St Peter and St John Fisher, Withernsea.

Pupils and staff from St Charles Catholic Academy also came along to join the celebration.

For many of us this was the first induction of a parish priest we had attended and it was a beautiful and poignant occasion.

Micki Coyle



Father Phil Cunnah, left, and Canon David Grant, right, after the formal service of induction

## A prayerful invitation to join the Big Lent Walk

This Lent, we are invited to walk together in faith and solidarity in CAFOD's Big Lent Walk 2026.

By taking on the challenge of walking 200 kilometres in the 40 days, we join thousands of others to bring the gift of clean water to our neighbours who need it.

Every £1 raised in sponsorship through the Big Lent Walk will help bring life-saving water to communities such as Mortikana's, in southern Ethiopia.

Mortikana, aged 70, lives in a rural village that did not have access to a water source, so she and the other women had to walk six hours each day to collect safe water.

Thanks to a local organisation dedicated to women's empowerment that CAFOD works with, a cement water cistern was built.

This not only ensured that water didn't evaporate but provided safe water close to her home.

Now Mortikana and her community are freed from the burden of long journeys, and their lives are renewed with dignity and hope.

We are excited about the Big Lent Walk 2026 and would love you to join us as we walk, run or stroll 200 kilometres in the 40 days of Lent.

You can walk when and where you choose – alone, with friends, fellow parishioners or with your school!

To add to the excitement, Harry Clarke, winner of the second series of The Traitors,

will also join the Big Lent Walk, encouraging others to take part.

When you sign up, you'll receive a Big Lent Walk Wallchart and our new pin badge. We also have a Big Lent Walk Beanie Hat for those who raise over £200.

Come on, let's be part of a global community working together to bring safe water to Mortikana and our other neighbours!

*Lord, bless our steps as we walk in hope. May each mile be a prayer for justice, each stride a sign of love, and each breath a reminder of Your presence among us. Amen*

Find out more or sign up at [walk.cafod.org.uk](http://walk.cafod.org.uk).

Rachel Blaylock

CAFOD Community Participation Coordinator



Traitors winner Harry Clarke is taking part in CAFOD's Big Lent Walk – why don't you?





# A faithful servant with a deep thirst for God

**Sister Catherine (Kitty) McManus CJ and her blood sister, Sister Sheila CJ, formed a community with Bishop John during his years as our bishop, and were a great blessing to the diocese.**

They practised a wonderful variety of welcome and hospitality to all who came to Bishop's House and were much loved for their warmheartedness and for their religious dedication as members of the Congregation of Jesus.

Sister Sheila died in October 2017 and with Sister Kitty's death at the age of 98 on November 13 2025, a precious connection with the recent history of the diocese drew to a close. May they both now enjoy the fullness of life in God's kingdom of love.

Here are Bishop John's words from Sister Kitty's Requiem Mass at the Bar Convent Chapel...

**Dear friends in Christ,**

**Let's listen once more to those wonderful hope-filled words of Jesus, so full of consolation and encouragement in the face of death.**

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me... I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone to prepare you a place, I shall return to take you with me, so that where I am you may be too."

For all those of us who loved Kitty, and this brim-full chapel is testament to that, when news reached us of her death on November 13 there was, amid our great sadness, a collective sigh of relief, surely.

These last months of her long life had become a very tough road for her to walk, both physically and psychologically, and Kitty was longing to go home. But, my goodness, how beautifully, how lovingly she was cared for in those hard miles by the remarkable staff who bless the life of St Joseph's. And what about Catherine, her utterly faithful niece, who kept vigil with her last aunt in those final days of Kitty's sojourn on this earth? Not to forget either how loving and supportive her own CJ sisters in St Joseph's were in all her years there.

Before the end of Mass today Sister Ann will speak to us about Kitty's life story in the CJs and we look forward eagerly to that. But for my part, I want to focus mainly on the Middlesbrough years, which were so

important and life-giving.

First though, two brief sentences about two earlier phases of her life of which Kitty spoke with great warmth; her time in the children's care home in Leeds where all her rich mothering qualities were front and centre; and her years as sister in a Cambridge parish where she was hugely appreciated. Parishioners got used to the sight of a dashing Sister Kitty whizzing around on her cherished Lambretta scooter with crash helmet nicely setting off her religious garb! But now to Middlesbrough, the years I know best from the inside out. I know that my brother priests so gladly with us today will bear their own witness to the remarkable ministry of self-giving love that Kitty and Sheila (Gertie to the Congregation) gave unstintingly over those years.

It's fair to say that Kitty's previous life-story within the congregation had not always run smoothly; she was too strong-willed, even feisty a person, to fit seamlessly into any inevitably hierarchical structure. But those years at the service of the diocese saw the full flowering of all her manifold gifts.

Kitty was highly intelligent, a superbly competent manager of a very busy Bishop's House, able to employ her many disparate, down to earth, practical skills to full advantage, not least the creation of countless delicious meals for often large numbers of happy beneficiaries. With Sheila at her side it was wonderful to witness how they became such a blessing for the whole diocese.

Underlying it all, of course, was an immensely loving heart, and the gift of self, which had been honed and refined amid all the twists and turns of religious life.

That fine-looking young Irish girl who had crossed the sea those long years previously had found her place where all her gifts of grace and nature came to their full flourishing. Those years in Middlesbrough were intensely happy ones, a united, praying family household who worked extremely hard in the Lord's service, but who also knew how to relax and enjoy themselves with various expeditions hither and thither to add zest to everyday life.

Dear friends in Christ, I want to return briefly at the last to the Scriptures Kitty chose for this farewell Mass, and in particular to the first reading from the Book of Revelation, so full of consolation and hope: "God will wipe



Sister Kitty celebrating with Bishop John – Photo courtesy of the Congregation of Jesus, York

away all tears from their eyes, there will be no more death, no more mourning and sadness, the world of the past has gone."

But it was the penultimate sentence that especially caught my eye: "I will give water from the well of life free to anyone who is thirsty."

Well, Kitty was surely thirsty for God, no question about that. Amid all her gifts of grace and nature, and all her struggles and coming to terms, like all of us, with the shadow side of our personalities, she had

handed over her life to God with no ifs and buts those many years before. Now she was ready, and more than ready, to see God face to face and be finally united with all her loved ones.

How happy we are for her. We will miss her loving presence enormously, but how could we not rejoice that her thirst for God is at last to be fully and everlastingly satisfied?

Eternal rest grant to her O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon her. May she rest in peace and rise again in glory.



Sister Kitty, left, and Sister Sheila, right, with Bishop John's sister, Mary, in between

## A Letter From Madonna House – The New Year challenge

**Catherine de Hueck Doherty, the foundress of Madonna House, died 40 years ago.**



Sitting at her bedside, my last words to her were, "We love you, the saints and angels love you" and I hugged her.

Ninety minutes later she suddenly gasped as if surprised by a kiss and then her long illness was over. I had officially joined Madonna House just six days earlier.

Searching for God brought me to Madonna House in Combermere, Ontario, in 1983.

I was told, "You are serious about God and he is serious about you, so stay for a month or at least a week."

I said, "OK, a week." But I didn't leave. This encounter with lay women, men and priests who were radically living the Gospel as a family challenged me to change.

After two years of applicancy (like postulancy) I made my First Promises on December 8 1985 to live in poverty, chastity and obedience according to the Madonna House spirit and mandate.

Why did I stay? Catherine had the fire of the Holy Spirit sent by God to inflame many hearts including mine.

She was a spellbinding speaker and writer and she "walked the talk". Known especially for the book *Poustinia, Eastern Spirituality for Western Man*, she wanted to "set the world on fire" for Jesus Christ.

She loved God passionately and that meant loving one's neighbour just as passionately. She could shake people out of complacency. Here is a sample of her challenging words.

"If he (Jesus) comes then we who call ourselves Christians, especially those of us who have dedicated ourselves to be his followers, should make ourselves ready to greet him.

"Are we ready? Have our hearts really touched his heart in the sense that we are forgetting ourselves more and more?..."

"Are we walking the path he has laid out for us – the strange path of the monotonous, little duties of every day?"

Catherine often spoke of the "vision of the whole". For her that meant applying the Gospel in every aspect of life, from something as simple as a cheery hello to

serious life choices.

She had suffered much in her life and spoke plainly of the cost of "picking up one's cross" to follow Christ. She prayed daily for more faith.

"I've been praying to the Infant for one grace – a growth in faith for all of us..."

"Growth in faith means that we will understand the meaning of God's words: 'He who loses his life will save it.' ...we have been called to this lovely, hidden, simple and ordinary vocation to set the world on fire with the love of God." \*

Clearly, her words apply to all Christians, for faith is lived out in the nitty gritty of every day.

We call following our spirit and mandate "living in Nazareth" in imitation of the Holy Family. It's ordinary and an available way of life for everyone.

\*Catherine's letter to the family in *Dearly Beloved*, volume 1, pp150-152

Carol Ann Gieske



## NEWS

# A year of pilgrimage for our parish community

**Early last year, the parishioners of St Bernadette's, Nunthorpe, held a "parish synod" to look at the meaning and the message of the Jubilee Year inaugurated by Pope Francis on Christmas Eve 2024 under the banner of "Pilgrims of Hope".**

After some prayer and discussion, out of all the various themes proposed to us by the Church for this Year of Grace, it was decided that we would try to enter the spirit of being "pilgrims", and so we opted to make several one-day pilgrimages to the designated pilgrimage destinations in our diocese for this Holy Year.

The first group off the mark were a small group of prisoners from Kirklevington Grange, where our parish priest, Canon John Lumley, is the Catholic chaplain.

Upon hearing Bishop Terry's pastoral letter explaining that the year was a way to "draw a line in the sand from the past" and look forward to a new start with past sins and offences forgiven, this small group of prisoners enthusiastically set about getting permission to visit the cathedral, pray for the Pope's intentions, make their confession and then celebrate Mass.

The refreshments provided by the cathedral volunteers were superb and much appreciated and a visit from Bishop Terry topped off the occasion.

Within the parish itself, we travelled in early summer to St John of Beverley Church in Beverley, where we were warmly welcomed by Canon David Grant and his parishioners.

There we focused on the Jubilee idea of mercy, with a symbolic washing in Lourdes holy water during Mass to remind us of our baptismal dignity and of the invitation to be cleansed of our sin and receive the Lord's healing.

This was followed by an equally warm welcome from Canon Paul Farrer and his team at St Mary's Cathedral a couple of months later. We walked to this venue (all of two miles!) carrying our Pilgrims of Hope banner –

a small attempt at witnessing to our faith in the local community.

Finally, we travelled in December to St Wilfrid's, York, where Father Richard Duffield gave us a fascinating insight into the city's Christian history, stretching back to early Roman times.

We then focused on the closing of the Holy Doors by Pope Leo on Tuesday January 6 and the ways in which the Lord's mercy is never closed: he always guards and guides us through the many comings and goings of our life.

What have we discovered over this year? Firstly, we are grateful for the warmth of welcome from our hosts. Secondly, a renewed sense of the importance of hope to live by and an appreciation of the ever-present mercy of God.

And thirdly, we have grown in appreciation of our own community spirit. We are all pilgrims and we have sensed that God is with us as we journey together, not simply at the destination. We travel together, not alone. This understanding that we are a pilgrim people – a Pilgrim Church – has been a real blessing for us this year.

**A St Bernadette's parishioner**

**Members of St Joseph's Travel Club and their friends enjoyed a week in Torquay thanks to the hard work of organisers Peter and Gerry Campbell.**

Highlights of the holiday included a waterborne tour of the River Dart and Dartmouth, a visit to Exmouth and Exeter and a trip to Plymouth, including a tour of the harbour, taking in the Royal Dockyards and Drake's Island.

The group is based at St Joseph's Parish in Grove Hill, Middlesbrough.

**Ian Stubbs**



The group before setting off for St Wilfrid's, York



## Walking together in hope to celebrate Jubilee

**Andrew and Sarah Laird of Our Lady and St Benedict's Parish in Ampleforth undertook a pilgrimage that embodied the spirit of renewal at the heart of the Jubilee Year of Hope.**

With nothing more than their rucksacks and sturdy boots, they walked nearly 500 kilometres along the Via Francigena, from Lucca in Tuscany all the way to Rome.

For Sarah, the pilgrimage was the fulfilment of a long-held dream, following in the footsteps of Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury, who walked from Canterbury to Rome to receive his pallium from the Pope in the 10th century.

Upon arriving in St Peter's Square, they received their Testimonium, the official certificate recognising the pilgrimage.

Along the way, Andrew and Sarah met other pilgrims from all over the world, some walking for healing, some in thanksgiving, others in search of direction.

On dusty footpaths under Tuscan sun or in quiet villages tucked into Lazio hills, they shared stories, meals and prayers.

Some stages stretched for up to 30 kilometres and the terrain ranged from peaceful country tracks to more challenging climbs.

Today, the route is recognised as a European Cultural Route, maintained by organisations that support pilgrims with accommodations and spiritual resources. This section from Lucca to Rome remains one of the most beloved pilgrim journeys.

Andrew and Sarah hope their story will inspire other Catholic pilgrims to consider this ancient route, offering renewal, grace and hope.



Andrew and Sarah Laird of Our Lady and St Benedict's Parish in Ampleforth during their walking pilgrimage

## British leg joins historic route

**The Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome has announced the formal recognition of the Francigena Britannica from London to Canterbury.**

The vote by the general assembly of the European Association of the Vie Francigene (EAVF) was unanimous and permission has now been granted for it to be marked with Via Francigena signage.

Nick Dunne, chair of trustees of the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome, said: "A

walking or cycling pilgrimage is a physical and spiritual adventure.

"Joining London to Canterbury, the formal recognition of the Francigena Britannica as the northern extension of the Via Francigena provides more opportunities for people to discover pilgrimage in England before the very different experiences of France, Switzerland and Italy.

"Church communities along the Francigena Britannica are now directly connected to the

great journey to Rome and they can celebrate this among themselves and with pilgrims who pass their doors."

The Via Francigena is an historic 2000-kilometre pilgrim way from Canterbury to Rome.

It follows the route described by Sigeric, Archbishop of Canterbury, on his journey back from Rome in AD 990 after receiving his pallium, or cloak of office, from Pope John XV. Work has been underway since 2019 to

develop the Francigena Britannica as a northern extension of the Via Francigena connecting London with the start of the historic Via Francigena at Canterbury.

The new route takes walkers from Southwark Cathedral through the Darent Valley, along the North Downs Way and Stour Valley Path to Canterbury. The route passes the Greenwich UNESCO World Heritage Site, Eynsford Castle, Otford Palace, Aylesford Priory and tranquil chalk grasslands, woods and orchards.



# The SVP needs you and your unique skills

**Do you know what the St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) does? The society is often perceived as a group of old people visiting the elderly, but that's not our only activity.**

We have always been more than a parish visiting group and our founder was just 19 years old. We are also part of an international

Christian voluntary network dedicated to tackling poverty in all its forms.

In 17th-century France our patron, St Vincent de Paul, did visit the elderly in their own homes, but it was his work with families that inspired the SVP's founders.

When Father Vincent noticed an entire family missing from Mass, he encouraged the congregation to visit them. The poor sick family was inundated with more food than they could eat and Father Vincent realised charitable acts need organisation to be effective.

He founded groups including the Daughters of Charity, a community of women devoting their lives to ministry in the everyday worlds of the poor and the marginalised.

The SVP was founded in Paris in 1833 by students, 19-year-old Frederic Ozanam and his friends in response to the challenge "What are you Christians doing for the poor?"

At first they didn't know where to start. Luckily, one knew of the work of Sister Rosalie Rendu of the Daughters of Charity.

She had already built trusting relationships with the poor and guided their activities and they came to realise the power of the person-to-person approach to God's work, which we continue to offer to anyone in need today.

Sadly, the need in 21st-century Britain is as great as it was in France all those years ago and so SVP members continue the work started then, "Turning concern into action", as our motto says.

Our members will befriend anyone, not just Catholics. We provide a hand of friendship and a listening ear for those who feel they have no voice.

Motivated by Christ's instruction to love God and love our neighbour, we visit people

wherever they feel most comfortable, usually their own home.

As our new friends speak, their needs become clear. We will then discuss confidentially, as a group, what practical help we can provide. Often, they just need someone to talk with, but maybe they're worried about not having enough to pay the electricity bill or to feed their children during school holidays.

The SVP needs your unique skills and talents. Of course, we need those who are called to listening and talking with someone in need of a friend, but we also need people who are comfortable chairing a meeting or who know their way around a spreadsheet to help with financial reports.

New members often bring fresh ideas and SVP membership offers spiritual and emotional support to help you better serve the community and the expert advice, training and development opportunities provided by the national SVP team.

If you would like to learn more about our work or how to become a member, please join us for one of our Zoom information sessions on Monday February 2 (11am-noon), Tuesday February 3 (7pm-8pm) or Thursday February 5 (4pm-5pm).

For a link, please email Teresa O'Hagan at [teresao@svp.org.uk](mailto:teresao@svp.org.uk) with your preferred date and time.

**Patricia Nobbs**

**Middlesbrough SVP Central Council President**

## Live-saving award for York parishioner David

**A parishioner of Our Lady's, York, has received a Royal Humane Society award for saving the life of a woman who entered the River Ouse.**

Rowing coach David McNeill, 43, noticed some ripples on the water below the embankment and checked and found the woman struggling to stay afloat.

David rushed to the water's edge and shouted, encouraging the woman to swim back to the shore. He extended his arm but could not reach her, so he entered the water until it was knee deep and he could pull her in.

The woman was emotionally distressed and immediately said she had tried to take her own life. David, a former army officer, provided reassurance and warmth and called the emergency services.

Each year in the UK about 200 take their own lives by drowning. It is not unusual for rowers to rescue people and, unfortunately, they sometimes find bodies in the water.

In accepting the certificate of commendation, David said: "I am so glad I was in the right place at the right time to help this young lady. I was able to reach her and pull her up just as she was going under."

"My training and service in the British Army and my work as a British Rowing Coach gave

me the skills and the confidence to rescue her from the water safely and to give her the physical and mental first aid she required."

In the past David has rescued dog walkers who have chased after their pets into the river and been unable to swim.

"The strangest thing I've ever had to rescue was a deer swimming through the river in the middle of York that had been startled," he said.

David was received into the Church a couple of years ago and is now a regular in the congregation at Acomb.

He said the river rescue has taught him about the importance of compassion and not being afraid to help someone in need.

"When I think about that poor woman, she had had a lot of help but I'm also sure many people will have just walked by her on that day and other days," he said.

"I just wonder how much small acts of compassion and kindness might have helped her not get to the deep, dark place she found herself in."

"That's one of the biggest things I take from my experience being in the congregation at Our Lady's – how seemingly random acts of empathy and compassion can make a big difference."



David, left, receives his Royal Humane Society award from Stephen Worley, honorary safety adviser from British Rowing



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*Fr Derek Turnham,  
St Anne's Parish*

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NEWS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Pope: ‘Pray for peace as way, not just a goal’

Pope Leo has completed the first overseas apostolic visit of his pontificate, to Turkey and Lebanon. In his final words of the six-day visit, at Beirut Airport, he made an impassioned plea for peace. “We hope to involve the entire Middle East in this spirit of fraternity and commitment to peace, including those who currently consider themselves enemies,” he said. “We must recognise that armed struggle brings no benefit. While weapons are lethal, negotiation, mediation and dialogue are constructive. Let us all choose peace as a way, not just as a goal!”

Campaign to canonise Brother Michael gains momentum

The campaign for the canonisation of HCPT founder Brother Michael Strode is moving forward as efforts continue to gather testimonies and documentation. Supporters and those wishing to contribute testimonies or assist in other ways are encouraged to visit [brothermichaelstrode.org/how-you-can-help](http://brothermichaelstrode.org/how-you-can-help). Supporters are also compiling and organising Brother Michael’s writings, prayer cards, published materials, videos and other related media to support the cause.

Anyone who has personal correspondence from Brother Michael is asked to keep a copy and send the original marked “Private & Confidential” to The Postulator, c/o HCPT, Oakfield Park, 32 Bilton Road, Rugby, CV22 7HQ.

New courses at Christian Heritage Centre

The Christian Heritage Centre (CHC) at Stonyhurst is holding a Marriage Preparation residential weekend course from January 9 to 11 for couples who wish to engage more deeply with the Catholic vision for marriage. It is also taking bookings for a five-day man’s retreat on Ignatian Spiritual Exercises from February 4 to 11, guided by the monastic community of St Joseph’s Abbey, Flavigny, France. The retreat is open to men in all states of life who wish to seek God’s will through a deepened detachment from the world. The CHC also has free resources on its website, including recordings of retreat talks and lectures, articles on theological themes and posts on saints and feasts. For more information visit [christianheritagecentre.com](http://christianheritagecentre.com).

Bishop welcomes scrapping of two-child benefits cap

Bishop Richard Moth, chair of the Department for Social Justice for the Catholic Bishops’ Conference, welcomed the government’s decision to scrap the two-child cap on Universal Credit payments. He said: “Since 2017, this policy has directly pushed many families into poverty and created anxiety for working families who often have no choice but to claim Universal Credit as a result of common, but unpredictable, life events, such as job loss or the onset of disability. Repealing this policy, although overdue, comes at a significant cost to the government and we applaud that decision. Large families are a blessing rather than a burden.” Pro-life charity Right to Life UK also welcomed the move, saying evidence suggests it could be a significant factor in many women’s

Looking back on 25 years of service

On December 4 2025, I celebrated 25 years of service to the Diocese of Middlesbrough, a milestone that has given me the chance to reflect on a journey that began when I joined the curia as a 20-year-old back in 2000.

I was already active in my parish, serving as the organist, and had a passion for church life and community – something that shaped those early years and helped prepare me for the work that lay ahead.

The idea of a “paperless office” was more aspiration than reality. The whole curia shared a single email address and checking it meant crawling under a desk to connect the modem to the phone line.

The screech of dial-up was considered cutting-edge technology, and fax machines still clattered away as part of everyday communication.

Even the building looked different. What is now the main entrance was then occupied by a firm of architects, and diocesan staff entered through the side door.

Reception, rather unusually, was on the first floor – something that never failed to surprise visitors, who didn’t expect to climb a flight of stairs just to sign in.

I’m especially grateful to Canon Alan Sheridan, then my parish priest, whose glowing reference helped me secure my role. Not long after I started, I was handed two large red ledgers and informed that I would now be responsible for parish accounts. Even then, I suspected this had been someone’s plan all along!

I owe a great deal to Anthony McKenna, whose leadership, humour and memorable one-liners played a huge part in my early development. With his encouragement, I gained my AAT accountancy qualification and later a Diploma in Management.

More recently, with the support of the diocese, I completed a Diploma in Fundraising, opening the door to an important and increasingly impactful part of my work today.

Over the years, I’ve had the privilege of contributing to projects that have delivered real and lasting benefits for our parishes.

Developing the parish accounting



A young Dan, second right in this group of curial office staff, with Canon Alan Sheridan standing beside him

spreadsheet helped transform how financial information is managed and reported. I then spent five years as gift aid officer, streamlining processes, before being appointed the diocese’s first-ever fundraising officer.

In this role, I’ve led the rollout of digital giving, helping parishes connect with the way people live and give today. I’ve introduced My Parish, My Mission, an initiative already having a transformative effect across the diocese.

I’ve also become increasingly involved in securing grant funding, supporting parishes with applications for churches, halls and social outreach projects, and helping them access the resources they need to sustain their communities.

One of the greatest joys of my work has always been meeting parishioners. Their kindness, stories, resilience and faith make every visit worthwhile.

They truly are the heartbeat of the diocese, and spending time in our parishes continually reminds me why this work matters so deeply – and why I am so proud to serve.

Across 25 years, I’ve worked under four popes, three parish priests and two bishops (so far...), supported countless parish projects

and drunk enough tea to refloat Noah’s Ark! Technology has changed beyond recognition, and diocesan life has evolved with it – but the constants have always been faith, service and a deep sense of shared purpose.

I’ve been blessed to work alongside many wonderful clergy, parishioners and colleagues – including those no longer with us, whose kindness, humour and dedication left a lasting mark on both the diocese and on me.

I’ve always tried to bring enthusiasm, energy and a smile to my work. Whether supporting a parish through a stewardship initiative or helping secure funding for vital repairs, it’s a joy to know the difference it makes.

From those first red ledgers to today’s digital dashboards, it’s been a privilege to be part of the diocese’s story for a quarter of a century. I’m proud of how far we’ve come together – and I’m even more excited for what lies ahead.

And after 25 years, I’m still serving the diocese, still the parish organist and still doing the parish books...a gentle reminder that time may pass, but some things remain constant – and for that, I feel truly blessed.

Dan Woodgate

Anglican neighbours step in to help stricken St Joseph’s

Interdenominational cooperation between two neighbouring Scarborough churches has resulted in St Joseph’s Catholic Church celebrating Masses in St Mark’s Church of England Parish Church this winter.

The two churches in Newby are less than 100 yards apart, at the junction of Green Lane and Coldyhill Lane, and St Joseph’s underfloor heating system has had to be shut off permanently due to a leak.

Researching and selecting a suitable replacement system, raising funds and the subsequent installation may be a lengthy process.

As the weather became colder, parish priest Canon Eddie Gubbins approached St Mark’s vicar Reverend Mike Cansdale to ask if they could hold services in St Mark’s.

Reverend Cansdale said: “When the call came from Father Gubbins, the immediate response from the St Mark’s Church Council was unanimous in our desire to help.

“There have been good relations between the churches over many years, but I hope this will cement the friendship and open new ways of working together for the good of our local communities.

“At a time when the national political agenda seems so divisive, this shines out as an example of generous sharing, being good neighbours and finding unity. I have no doubt there will be many blessings as we live and worship together in this way.”

The times of both churches’ main services have been altered to allow for a smooth handover from one congregation to the next.

St Joseph’s 9.30am Sunday Mass now starts at 9am, while St Mark’s 10.30am service has been put back to 10.45am.

Canon Gubbins added: “The St Mark’s community has graciously welcomed us to full use of their church building for the foreseeable future.

“Reverend Mike, the church wardens and the St Mark’s community have been most welcoming and accommodating in every respect. We rejoice as our two communities of faith grow in friendship.”

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# Victoria Cross hero inspires poppy memorial

The term “Lest we forget” originated in Rudyard Kipling’s 1895 poem *Recession* and became associated with military remembrance, particularly after World War One.

I was inspired to lead Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Hessle’s first Poppy Memorial by a young private called Thomas Hughes who was from Castleblayney, my hometown in Ireland. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery by King George V.

I am proud to see our Poppy Memorial display now in place throughout the month of November for all to see and hopefully to find time to say a prayer and reflect on those brave men and women who gave their lives for this cause.

On Remembrance Sunday, Father Xavier led a beautiful service in which parishioners gathered around the display and a young army officer from our parish recited John McRae’s poem *In Flanders Fields*, after which

we observed a two-minute silence followed by the Our Father. Sunday School children then laid a wreath they had specially made. Thank you to the team of volunteers who made this happen by dedicating their time, skill and money to knit and crochet hundreds of poppies and a special thank you to Tony Moore for erecting this beautiful tribute to those who have died for our freedom.

Ann Purdy



The Poppy Memorial at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Hessle



Monsignor Gerard walking in the Torchlight Marian Procession in Lourdes

## Pope confers honorary title on Monsignor Gerard

Many congratulations to Monsignor Gerard Robinson, who has had the honorary title of “Monsignor” conferred upon him in his own right by the Holy Father.

Previously, he had the title by virtue of his office as Vicar General. This new papal distinction grants him the dignity of the title independently of any ecclesiastical office.

The citation from the Vatican reads: “Pope Leo XIV has appointed the Very Reverend Monsignor Canon Gerard Robinson as a Chaplain of His Holiness.

“I would like to offer my congratulations to Monsignor Gerard and thank him for his many years of faithful service and dedication to the Diocese of Middlesbrough.”

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Apostolic letter marks 1,700 years of the Council of Nicaea

Pope Leo XIV has called the Church to renew enthusiasm for the shared Christian faith in a new apostolic letter *In unitate fidei*, issued to commemorate the 1,700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 AD). The letter highlights the significance of the council’s affirmation of Christ’s divinity and the Nicene Creed as a unifying profession of faith. The letter emphasises the creed’s enduring hope amid global challenges such as war, injustice and suffering. He invites all Christians to draw inspiration from the creed as a foundation for dialogue, common prayer and renewed commitment to peace and witness. Pope Leo’s recent apostolic visit to Turkey included a visit to Iznik (ancient Nicaea).



### Resources celebrate Pope’s Peace Sunday message

The theme of Pope Leo’s message for Peace Sunday, on January 18, is “Peace be with you all: towards an ‘unarmed and disarming’ peace”. Pax Christi, the international Catholic movement for peace, has produced online and paper resources to celebrate the theme, with materials for parishes, communities and families, allowing for as much creativity as possible. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference has produced a statement, “Called to be Peacemakers”, which urges the UK to forsake its nuclear arsenal, support the global ban on nuclear weapons and promote “general and complete disarmament”. The resources can be found at [paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday-2026](http://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday-2026). Contact [info@paxchristi.org.uk](mailto:info@paxchristi.org.uk) for more details.

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Deadline Friday January 2 for February edition.

Where possible please send articles in Word and photographs as jpegs. Please confirm when you send in your photographs that those who appear in them have given their permission for publication.

NEWS

# Out & About

will return next month

## Parish party brings All Saints Day to life

The parish hall of Our Lady of Lourdes and St Peter Chanel was transformed into a colourful celebration of faith and fun on All Saints Day as children gathered for the fourth annual All Saints Party.

Young parishioners arrived in imaginative costumes portraying saints from across the centuries, including St Mary and St Joseph, St Thomas More, St Michael the Archangel, St Maximilian Kolbe, St John the Baptist and many more.

The event gave children a chance to step into the lives of these holy role models and share their stories with the community.

The afternoon was filled with laughter and games, from musical chairs and Twister to a bow-and-arrow challenge targeting cups representing sins. Craft activities, quizzes, colouring and face-painting added extra creative fun, while the day ended with a piñata bursting with sweets, delighting all the young participants.

More than a party, the celebration offered a hands-on way for children to learn about the saints and see them as real companions on their journey of faith.

The parish extends heartfelt thanks to all organisers, catechists, parents and volunteers who made the day such a joyful success. May



Children dressed as saints from across the centuries for the All Saints Day celebration

the saints' example continue to inspire courage, love and faith in the parish's youngest members.

Lidia Sanderson

## How well do you know your Marys?

**Have you ever got confused between Mary Magdalene and Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha? Or between the various Marys who stood at the foot of the cross?**

If so, you're in good company! Back in 591 AD, Pope Gregory the Great declared in a homily that the sinful woman anointing the feet of Jesus with oil of myrrh (Luke 7:37), the Mary who sat listening at the feet of Jesus while her sister Martha worked in the kitchen (John 11:2), and the woman from whom Jesus cast out seven demons (Mark 16:9) were all the same "Mary".

Pope Francis corrected this error in January 2021. But in the intervening 1430 years there had been much confusion.

It was therefore fascinating to attend a talk given by Canon Emerita of Durham Cathedral Reverend Caroline Worsfold to the Cleveland Newman Circle that delved into the various accounts of Mary of Magdala and Martha of Bethany that appear in the gospels of Luke and John.

As we read the words of stories that we thought we knew very well, it became apparent that one evangelist was presenting these women in a much more positive light than the other.

Luke's gospel is often portrayed as a gospel for women, and indeed he portrays Elizabeth, Mary the mother of Jesus and Anna the prophetess in a positive light at the beginning of his gospel.

In Acts, Luke also includes prominent, named women, for example Tabitha, Lydia, Damaris and Priscilla. But the women who were Jesus' contemporaries receive less favourable treatment in his gospel.

Martha (see Luke 10:38-42) is portrayed in a servile role and as a complainer and is never mentioned again in Luke's gospel. Contrast this with the account in John 11:1-45, where a feisty Martha is mistress of the household, demonstrates faithfulness, affirms her belief in resurrection and publicly affirms Jesus as the Messiah.

The treatment of Mary of Magdala is equally interesting. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John, she first appears (contrary to what you may think) at the foot of the cross (for example, John 19:25).

In John (20:14), the risen Jesus appears to her outside the tomb and her account was believed (20:18). In Luke's account, she appears much earlier (8:2) as one from whom seven demons had been cast out – not a good first impression! – and her account of the resurrection is dismissed as nonsense (24:11) until later confirmed by Peter.

Based on these and many more examples, we discussed the different aims and audiences of the various evangelists and about how women were viewed at the time of Jesus.

For all that we may glean a certain level of understanding from listening on Sundays to the shortened accounts that appear in the Lectionary – with different gospels in different years – we all came away with a fresh appreciation of the value of closely studying the original gospel texts and pondering on the differences.

For further information about the Cleveland Newman Circle programme email p.egerton123@gmail.com or phone 01642 645732. Talks are held in St Mary's Cathedral hall and all are welcome.

Dermot Roddy



Christ in the House of Martha by Johannes Vermeer, which is in the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh



# Generous donations offer festive cheer to seafarers

More than 100 Christmas presents for seafarers who arrive at Tees Dock over the festive period have been provided thanks to the parishioners of St Clare's, St Francis and St Mary's Cathedral in Middlesbrough.

A substantial donation from St Francis choir and other anonymous donations added to the total raised.

A big thank you also to the children of St Augustine's Catholic Primary School and St Clare's Catholic Primary School, who organised a non-uniform day and raised £167 towards the gifts, which were handed

over to Stella Maris, the official maritime agency of the Catholic Church.

This has enabled us to provide each recipient with a T-shirt, boxer shorts, socks, hat/snood, shower gel, sweets, card and a fridge magnet of Middlesbrough – something many seafarers like to collect at each port.

Catholic seafarers often ask for Rosary beads throughout the year and once again parishioners have been very generous in providing these as well.



Reverend Peter Barrigan, regional port chaplain of Stella Maris, (back row, fourth from right) and colleagues collecting the Christmas sacks from St Clare's, together with representatives from the churches and schools that supported the event

# Santa Sharon helps raise vital baby hospice funds

Diocesan property manager Sharon Westcough raised well over £2,000 by once again taking part in the annual Boundary 500 Santa Rally.

Sharon joined hundreds of riders who dressed up and decorated their motorbikes before riding together to raise Christmas spirits among the watching crowds as they made their way through the town.

The event raises vital cash for Zoe's Place baby hospice, which provides respite, end-of-life and palliative care for babies, infants and children with life-limiting conditions and complex needs.

Sharon's efforts raised an incredible £2,390 in sponsorship, including generous contributions from Sharon's curial office colleagues.

If you'd like to add to that total, visit [justgiving.com/page/sharon-westcough-3](http://justgiving.com/page/sharon-westcough-3).



Sharon Westcough preparing to take part in the Boundary 500 Santa Rally

**The Holy Name of Mary in Middlesbrough Union of Catholic Mothers invited parishioners to join them in collecting items such as clothing, toiletries and sweets this Christmas.**

The items were packed into bags to be given to seafarers spending the festive period in our local ports and away from home and family.

Deacon Peter Barrigan, our Stella Maris port chaplain, who is pictured here in the back row, was delighted and grateful to collect more than 50 bags for distribution.

He said the seafarers were so happy to find they were cared for in such a way.



**SHAWN RAS, a Dutch-born historian and parishioner of Our Lady and St Peter Chanel in Hull, begins a series of articles about Church history with a look at the origins of the Nicene Creed, which recently celebrated its 1,700th anniversary...**

**Christ's apostles set out from Galilee in the first century, and to say Christianity would slowly spread like wildfire would be something of an understatement.**

This "Jewish cult" spread quickly enough to warrant plenty of concern. The Emperor Nero famously disliked the Christians, who were spreading throughout his Empire, and martyred the apostles Peter and Paul. But the pace of Christianity could not be stopped.

For 200 years, though, several Roman emperors would try to eradicate the Christians or at least make them submit to the crown.

Emperor Diocletian famously tried to subdue them. He had restored the empire in a time of extraordinary crisis and was faced with the challenge of maintaining order. Together with his co-rulers, Maximian, Galerius and Constantius, he started to massacre the Christians in large numbers.

Constantius would eventually travel to Britannia and died in Eboracum. There, by York Minster, stands a statue of his much more famous son, seated in the shadow of the church.

Constantine, soon to be called "the Great",

# The lasting spiritual legacy of the first Nicene Council

took the crown after his father's death and soon met his enemies in the field. Constantine famously defeated his foe Maxentius at Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312, and then in 324 defeated Licinius, securing sole rulership over Rome.

Constantine's victory came as a relief to an exhausted Roman Empire. For the past century, it had been in a near-constant state of civil strife. Its citizens suffered civil wars and outsiders endured persecutions.

In a bid to save the empire from further ruin, Constantine decided to take rapid action. It was clear that Christianity simply could not be stopped. Rome was filled with Christians and their bishop, future saint Sylvester, was an influential citizen in the Eternal City.

But nowhere did Christians thrive as much as in the East. Here, the apostles preached to its cities and peoples, and here the apostles wrote the epistles.

The persecutions had to end. Inspired by the scholar Lactantius and St Hosius, the Bishop of Cordoba, Constantine did something unprecedented. He called a council, a great ecumenical council, meaning for all the civilised world.

Preparations were soon made, and in 325, more than 200 bishops, including many who would later be canonised, travelled to the city of Nicaea, modern Iznik in Turkey.

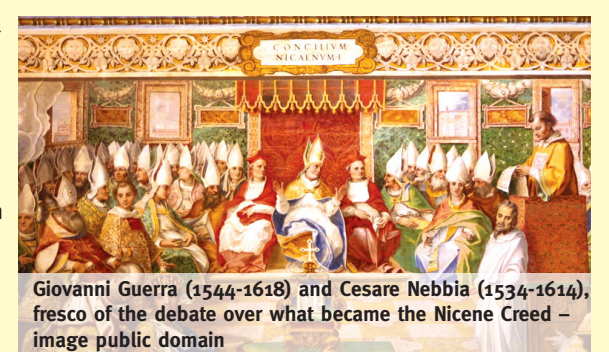
With their attendants, it is believed that more than 2,000 clergymen travelled to the city, filling its inns and taverns.

The council was held in the imperial residence near the city (and not, contrary to popular belief, in the recently discovered basilica ruins in the nearby lake, which could not have seated 200 bishops), and was meant to unify the quarrelling Christian factions, to codify the faith and to put an end to the Donatist and Arian controversies.

In these early centuries, many scholars espoused different ideas about the nature of Christ, and having recently legalised Christianity, Constantine wanted to put the record straight. Placing the Bible on the imperial throne, the bishops formulated a creed that is still in use to this day, with some medieval additions.

It was a way for all Christians to identify the core tenets of the faith and oppose those schools of thought now declared heterodox and anathema: to be forgotten. Many famous bishops attended the council, and one was, according to legend, defrocked by Emperor Constantine himself. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, outraged at some of the things he heard, purportedly rose up and slapped the priest and scholar Arius across the face.

However, the record shows that the man whose secret gift-giving gave rise to the legend of Father Christmas did not, in fact, slap Arius, as neither are proved to have been present at the great council.



Giovanni Guerra (1544-1618) and Cesare Nebbia (1534-1614), fresco of the debate over what became the Nicene Creed – image public domain

Regardless, many images exist of this legendary event, and it is a story often told.

On November 28 last year, Pope Leo met with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, first of all Orthodox bishops, at Iznik. In a display of Christian unity, both leaders recited the Nicene creed, in its original form, translated to English. Both leaders expressed their renewed desire for closer ties between the churches. The following day, at the Patriarchal Cathedral in Istanbul, both leaders recited the Lord's Prayer in Latin.

Nicaea reminds us that within our faith we have always relied upon the wisdom of holy and educated men, that the wisdom of centuries ago is still valuable to us and that our faith lives today, just as it did 1,700 years ago.



NEWS

# Explore Catholic theology by distance learning

**Applications are open for 2026-27 distance learning programmes in Catholic Theology led by Durham University's Centre for Catholic Studies (CCS).**

The programmes are designed so participants can work through material at their own pace, studying in any time zone and in different life situations, alongside work, ministry, family or caring obligations.

In addition to the Postgraduate Certificate, the Postgraduate Diploma and the MA,

students can enrol for a single module – Catholic Theology: A Preliminary Tour and new for 2026/27 single modules in Catholic Social Thought and Practice and High Medieval Franciscan Theology.

Students with a BA or BSc who have not studied theology or a related discipline before can apply for Catholic Theology: A Preliminary Tour and proceed to the MA after its successful completion.

Further details of all options are available at

Durham University, including videos from current students.

Bursary funds are available for 2026-27, including the Janet Erskine Stuart Scholarship Fund, funded by the Society of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ), intended primarily to support teachers or chaplains.

Applications are especially invited from RE teachers wishing to pursue an MA to enhance the quality of their subject knowledge and teachers of any discipline who wish to retrain

to teach RE. Other bursary funds are also available. Full information can be found at Durham University. If you have any questions about the distance learning programmes or bursaries contact CCS manager Theresa Phillips at [theresa.phillips@durham.ac.uk](mailto:theresa.phillips@durham.ac.uk) or 0191 334 3952.



St Mary's Cathedral altar servers Leo, Jack and Louis would like to thank everyone in the parish and beyond who donated more than 150 selection boxes for the Justice & Peace hampers. Sweets and lots of other items were also handed over to be given to visitors to the Upper Room project.

## Crippling school fees wiped out

**The families of more than 20,000 students across the Holy Land and beyond are rejoicing after the Church cleared their school debts.**

Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa wiped out accrued education debts at all schools across the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (LPJ), which covers Cyprus and Jordan as well as Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.

Key to the initiative is to preserve the small but strong Christian community in the Holy Land.

Even though Christians are the smallest of the three major faith groups present in the Holy Land after Jews and Muslims, the Catholic Church runs the largest network of schools in the region.

Father Davide Meli, chancellor of the LPJ, speaking to Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), said: "We have over 20,000 students, and in all of our schools there is a concrete opportunity for people of different faiths to meet, to respect one another, to learn together and to build relationships that last a lifetime."

ACN has already pledged to cover fees for more than 800 Christian students in 13 schools in the Holy Land, in the belief that their education is an investment in the future of Christianity in the entire region.

At a time of worsening poverty with unemployment among Christians at 72 percent, Father Medi said the cardinal was determined to act but, forced to either close

schools or dismiss students unable to pay, he chose a third way, an option of hope.

Father Medi added: "The Patriarch said that since this year is the year of the Jubilee of Hope and that part of the practice during the jubilee is to forgive debts, he had decided to forgive all accrued school debts, except for the ones for this current school year.

"He basically crossed out millions in debt with the stroke of a pen, which, from a purely financial point of view ruffled some feathers, but it was the right thing to do.

"Many of our families were very worried about this, and when he forgave those debts, they saw it as a sign of dignity, that the Church is with them, that it cares. God can never be exceeded in generosity."

He said the LPJ has been contacted by people who wanted to make large donations for schooling.

George Akroush, director of the LPJ Development Office, said schools are an important asset for keeping Christians in their homelands and that many young people want to stay.

However, if parents cannot access quality Christian education for their children, they will most likely leave to seek a better life elsewhere as many have done in recent decades.

Mr Akroush added: "We are deeply committed to preserving a vivid and strong Christian community in the Holy Land."

Nathalie Raffray and Filipe d'Avillez

## Bishop's mixed feelings on closure of COP30 conference in Brazil

**Bishop John Arnold, Bishop of Salford and lead bishop for the environment for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, has issued a statement after the Conference of the Parties (COP30) UN climate change conference, which took place in Belém, Brazil, in November.**

COP is the United Nations' annual meeting held to assess progress in dealing with climate change. COP30 offered an important opportunity for countries to recommit to the multilateral promise made through the Paris Agreement – to limit the rise of average global temperature to well below 2°C, commit to net zero and to assist poorer countries to reach climate targets.

### Statement

At the COP30 summit in Belém, Brazil we were reminded once again of the pressing need to transition away from fossil fuels and recommit to keeping the global temperature rise below 1.5C degrees.

I was pleased to see that so many countries, including the UK, expressed support for building a roadmap to end fossil fuel use

globally and pledged to strengthen efforts to tackle climate change in line with the global 1.5C goal.

It is disappointing that references to phasing out fossil fuels and action on deforestation were not included in the COP30 draft agreement. These issues are at the heart of the climate crisis and affect the poorest and most vulnerable communities.

The time has passed for scepticism or delay on climate change. We are already seeing its effects in this country and around the world – and they will only worsen.

As Pope Leo reminded the delegates at the start of the summit: 'As stewards of God's creation, we are called to act swiftly, with faith and prophecy, to protect the gift He entrusted to us. But we must be honest: it is not the agreement that is failing; we are failing in our response. What is failing is the political will of some.'

While the challenges remain, I was encouraged by the renewed spirit of multilateralism during the summit. Also, young people, indigenous communities and

faith groups showed real leadership in keeping the care of the common home at the heart of the discussions.

These meetings require consensus across all participant countries. Failure to achieve that consensus is not an excuse for inaction either by our own government or through other multilateral forums.

I encourage Catholics to pray that we

become ever-more effective stewards of God's creation and that our political leaders act accordingly. I also invite political leaders, once more, to recommit to their pledges to reduce carbon emissions, promote policies that preserve the natural environment while also extending support to poorer countries, which are already suffering from effects of global warming.



Bishop John Arnold says the time for scepticism or delay on climate change has passed



# Book now for our 73rd pilgrimage to Lourdes

**Bookings are now open for the 73rd Diocese of Middlesbrough Pilgrimage to Lourdes, which takes place from May 24 to 30 2026, led by Bishop Terry.**

The pilgrimage includes direct return flights from Teesside International Airport to Lourdes, airport transfers and assistance between Lourdes Airport and your

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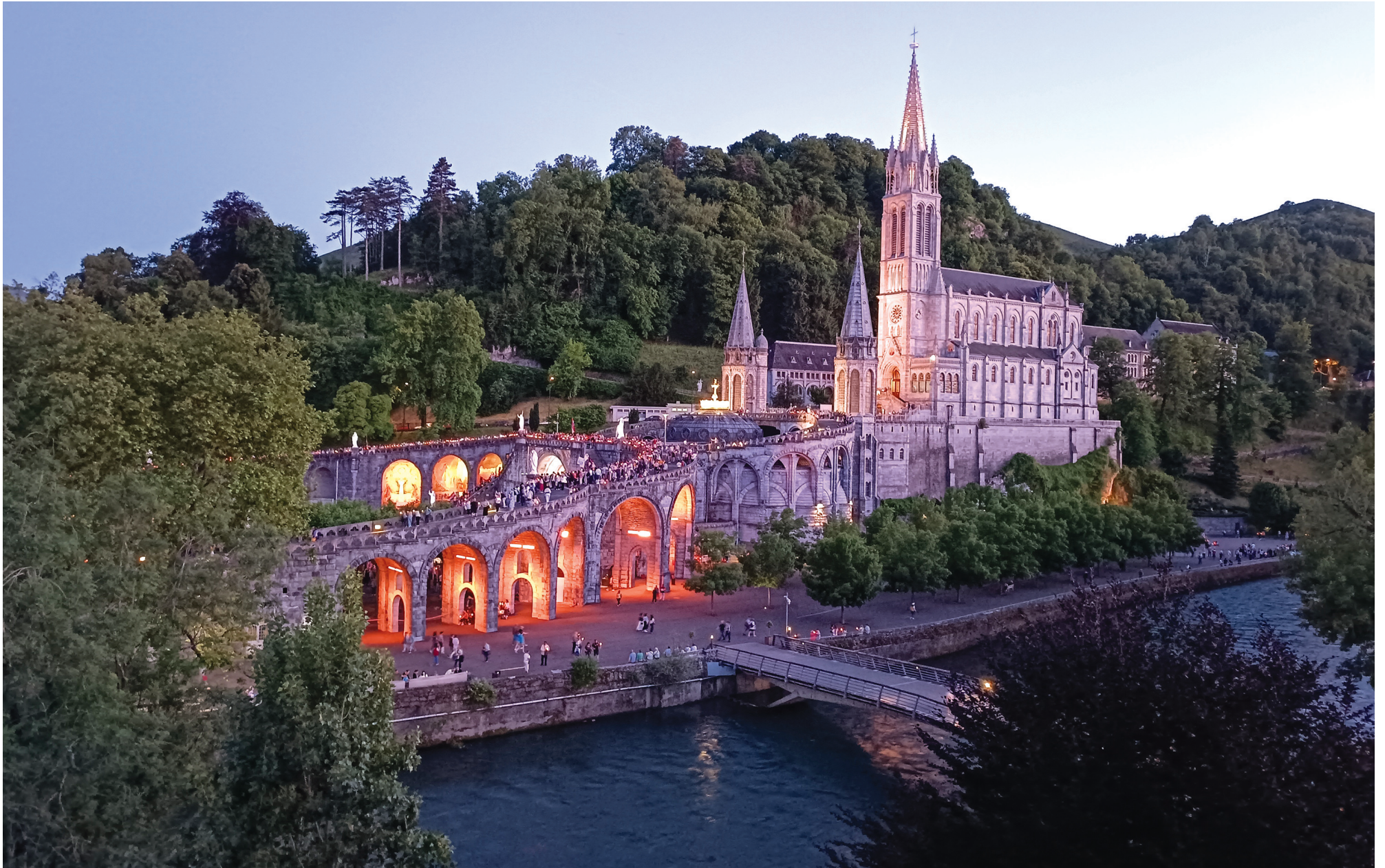
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Pat can be contacted by email at [lourdessecretary@rcdmidd.org.uk](mailto:lourdessecretary@rcdmidd.org.uk) or by calling her on 01642 760105.

Insurance regulators now stipulate that all those who travel on pilgrimage with the

diocese's designated tour operator must have travel insurance in place.

Insurance can be booked from Joe Walsh Tours. If you choose another provider, you will be asked for your insurance reference number when you book, enabling us to activate your cover more easily if needed.



A view from the top of the Accueil in Lourdes

## Stella Maris group to visit shrine

**Stella Maris invites sick, retired and active seafarers, fishers and their families from the UK and EU to join the charity on its inaugural Stella Maris Lourdes Pilgrimage from May 25 to 30.**

This pilgrimage brings together those who have lived and worked at sea or in fishing communities, offering time to pray, reflect and find renewed strength in faith and fellowship.

All major costs are covered: travel, accommodation, and meals will be provided for participants and carers.

For more details and to apply please go to [stellamaris.org.uk/lourdes](http://stellamaris.org.uk/lourdes).

By chance, the pilgrimage coincides with the Diocese of Middlesbrough Pilgrimage to Lourdes, which is from May 24 to 30.

## Dates for your diary

**Saturday January 31:** Lourdes Ceilidh, Holy Name of Mary Parish Hall, Middlesbrough

**Saturday March 7:** Hospitalité Formation Day, Trinity Catholic College, Middlesbrough

**Tuesday May 5:** Hospitalité Formation Day, Trinity Catholic College, Middlesbrough

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## NEWS

# Events mark ruby jubilee year of mother church

**St Mary's Cathedral is marking 40 years as the mother church of the diocese's Catholic community.**

The church opened in 1986 after the "old cathedral" in the town centre was declared unsafe. The new building soon became a centre of worship and diocesan life. Over the years, it has welcomed thousands for Sunday Mass, major diocesan gatherings and national celebrations.

Dedicated clergy have guided the cathedral since its opening. Previous deans include Canon Pat Harney, Father Gerry Smyth, Father Pat Smith, Monsignor Ricardo Morgan and Monsignor Gerard Robinson.

Their work laid the foundations for the cathedral's mission and strong connection with the wider diocesan community.

To celebrate the ruby jubilee, the following series of special events will run throughout 2026.

**February 26 – Riding Lights Theatre:** Night Falls: Riding Lights, one of the UK's best known Christian theatre companies, will present a new passion play titled Night Falls. The company is known for thoughtful, accessible storytelling. The production will invite audiences to experience the final days of Jesus with fresh clarity and emotional

depth.

**May 15 – Concelebrated Episcopal Mass:** A special evening Mass will bring together the bishop, clergy and parishioners from across the Diocese of Middlesbrough. The liturgy will be a moment of thanksgiving for the cathedral's 40 years of service and a chance to look ahead to its future.

**October 15 – The Sixteen:** Harry Christophers and The Sixteen will visit the cathedral as part of their annual Choral Pilgrimage. This world-renowned choir's performances are shaped by clear lines, balanced sound and careful attention to historical style. Hearing the group in the cathedral's acoustic will be a highlight of the year.

**November 6 – Gary Stewart's Graceland:** Gary's band will perform Paul Simon's Graceland in full. The album is also 40 years old in 2026. Audiences can expect bright vocals, tight rhythms and the joyful energy that has made this show popular across large UK venues.

**December 12 – Christmas at the Cathedral with Cantabile:** This popular evening with the gifted local choir, Cantabile, is the perfect way to mark the end of the ruby jubilee calendar year and the beginning of the new liturgical year as we look to the future, the



St Mary's Cathedral

MIDDLESBROUGH

1986-2026

renewed hope Christmas brings.

Cathedral dean Canon Paul Farrer said: "A ruby jubilee is a gift. It gives us time to remember where we came from and to celebrate all who shaped this community. It also lets us open our doors wide and welcome people from all over the diocese and beyond.

"After the Jubilee Year of Hope, it's wonderful to have our own local jubilee year. I hope

many will join us throughout the year."

Further details and ticket information will be released in later editions of the *Voice* and through the cathedral's website and parish newsletter. St Mary's welcomes everyone who wishes to take part in this anniversary year.

[middlesbroughcathedral.org](http://middlesbroughcathedral.org)

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