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Help young people - stay silent in Lent

by Greg Watts

Parishes, schools and individuals in the Archdiocese of Southwark are being encouraged to take part in a sponsored silence during Lent to raise money for youth projects that help create a better world.

The SiLent campaign is the idea Catholic youth charity Million Minutes. The aim is to clock up a million minutes of silence.

Participants can take part in a variety of ways, including silent relays, 24 hours silence, or by giving up their phone and social media accounts for a prolonged amount of time.

Archbishop John said: "I am delighted that as a diocese, we are endorsing and encouraging Million Minutes' annual Lenten initiative for young people.

"This year alone already 747,700 minutes of silence have been pledged.

"The silence both 'speaks up' for young people, especially those without a voice, and helps raise money for projects that support young people to put Catholic social teaching into practice across the country.

"I would be grateful if you would join with Million Minutes and the archdiocese this Lent as together, we can help to create a deafening silence for voiceless young people."

Founded in 2011, Million Minutes raises money and helps youth action and advocacy activities that give voice and support to young people to transform their lives and their world, inspired by Catholic social teaching.

It supports young people making a difference through participation in society, assuming responsibility and developing as leaders. It works alongside other organisations, including For Jimmy, the Cardinal Hume Centre and the Young Christian Workers.

Those backing it include TV chef Delia Smith, Abbot Christopher Jamison OSB and Margaret Mizen OBE, mother of Jimmy Mizen, who was murdered in Lee in 2008.

Delia Smith said: "We have in the Church a rich inheritance of contemplative tradition and it's in



Green-fingered students at St John Bosco College in Battersea

the still silent moments of life that we reach not only the heart of ourselves and who we are but the heart of God, who alone can satisfy our deepest desires."

Money raised from the SiLent initiative will help a range of projects involving young people. An example is the garden at St John Bosco College in Battersea, which was created by students on a small area of the playground. Last summer the college's young gardeners were

awarded a "Celebrating Young People Award" from Million Minutes.

Claire Colleran, former chaplain at St Francis Xavier College in Balham, said: "My students were particularly inspired by SiLent because they knew young people were going to benefit from their actions.

"They were keen to be part of something which gave young people a voice, even if this meant they had to quieten theirs for a bit!

"Some of the participating students chose to use their quiet time in the chapel, praying or reading scripture.

"SiLent proved valuable in so many ways and is so much bigger than just raising money; it's an opportunity to invest in our young people and create a real change."

• To sign up or for more information, visit: millionminutes.org/silent.



Archbishop makes urgent appeal for persecuted Christians

Archbishop John has made an urgent call for action to support persecuted Christians, saying helping them "is not somebody else's business: it's our business".

Speaking at a Mass at the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Sutton, he said the persecution of Christians around the world "is so frequent that we are now used to it. It has become acceptable for Christians to be persecuted for their faith.

"It is not acceptable that people should be brought before the court, brought before the militia for what they believe. Freedom to believe is essential and if we do not speak up nobody else will."

He called on Catholics to take three steps to help suffering Christians:

- Pray a decade of the Rosary every day for the persecuted Church;
- Share the latest news and facts about persecution;
- Ensure their parish communities are taking action to help through prayer and giving.

"There is the solidarity of our prayers and there is the solidarity of our words and thirdly there is the solidarity of our financial support," he added.

"We, who have the freedom to practise our faith, must act in support of those who do not have such freedoms. It is not an option, it is a necessity; it is something we must do."

After the Mass, Archbishop John visited the nearby UK national offices of Aid to the Church in Need, who he praised for its work in supporting persecuted Christians.

• See pages 6 & 7



A scene from *The Two Popes*; the film imagines a fictional meeting between Pope Benedict and the then Cardinal Bergoglio in Rome

Pizza, football and a tale of two popes

Bishop Paul Hendricks

When I first heard about new Netflix drama *The Two Popes*, I was fairly unenthusiastic. So much media coverage of the Church gets reduced to a simplistic “liberal versus traditionalist” framework. What chance is there that any film could show the relationship between Francis and Benedict in a way that goes beyond crude stereotypes and shows something a little more profound?

In the end, though, I had to see it – and I’m very glad I did. Despite some reservations, I was won over by the portrayal of the characters, in terms of their humanity and their own interior struggles.

The film is based on a visit to Rome, some years before Cardinal Bergoglio became Pope Francis (Jonathan Pryce). He wants to persuade Pope Benedict (Anthony Hopkins) to allow him to retire. What he doesn’t realise is that Benedict himself has decided to retire, feeling that his health and strength are no longer enough for him to lead the Church effectively.

I don’t know whether this meeting actually happened, but as far as I’m concerned it’s quite valid to imagine what might have happened if they had come together in this way.

To a certain extent, the film does play into the usual stereotypes: Francis the reformer and Benedict the cautious conservative. It doesn’t show the many continuities between the two, in areas such as social justice, the environment, evangelisation and discipleship.

And yet the differences it shows between the two are real enough – particularly in terms of personality and lifestyle.

At one point, Benedict says, “You’ve been one of my harshest critics ... The way you live is a criticism.”

He might well have felt this, after Bergoglio had been Pope for a while, by which time the difference in their lifestyles would have become even more evident. But perhaps I’m being a bit too literal here. After all, the title of the film is *The “Two” Popes*. To me it makes more sense to think of it as an imaginative encounter between the two of them, as Popes, even though it’s set at a time when Bergoglio was still a Cardinal.

Though the differences between the two men are shown as very stark to begin with, they do gradually warm to each other and come to a greater understanding – at least, on a personal level.

Though it’s difficult to imagine it actually happening in reality, it’s rather charming to see them settling down to a

bit of banter over take-away pizza and Fanta, or watching Benedict’s favourite TV show, about a crime-solving dog in Vienna – or, in the closing scenes, getting excited about a Germany v Argentina football match.

Earlier, there’s a lovely scene where Benedict has to walk through the Sistine Chapel, crowded with tourists. As I saw him shyly greeting them, I was reminded of the time when he visited a care home in Vauxhall, when he came to Britain in 2010. He went toddling off into the crowd to greet the people – and got quite some distance before his security men came along and steered him back to where he was officially supposed to be!

The greater understanding and acceptance between Benedict and Bergoglio is helped by their sharing of memories which have haunted them for years – mistakes they have made, which can never be totally put right.

One of things that has impressed me most in the writings of Pope Francis, is a sense that his pastoral wisdom has been the result of a long journey, learning from mistakes made along the way.

An appropriate thought as we move through Lent, reviewing our own life and prayerfully considering what may need to change.

Remember what unites us

In *Querida Amazonia* (*The Beloved Amazon*), the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis summed up the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian Region, which took place in October of last year. Here is what he says about ecumenical and inter-religious relations.

“In an Amazonian region characterised by many religions, we believers need to find occasions to speak to one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor.

This has nothing to do with watering down or concealing our deepest convictions when we encounter others who think differently than ourselves. If we believe that the Holy Spirit can work amid differences, then we will try to let ourselves be enriched by that insight, while embracing it from the core of our own convictions and our own identity. For the deeper, stronger and richer that identity is, the more we will be capable of enriching others with our own proper contribution.

We Catholics possess in sacred Scripture a treasure that other religions do not accept, even though at times they may read it with interest and even esteem some of its teachings. We attempt to do something similar with the sacred texts of other religions and religious communities, which contain ‘precepts and doctrines that... often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women’.

We also possess a great treasure in the seven sacraments, which some Christian communities do not accept in their totality or in the same sense. At the same time that we believe firmly in Jesus as the sole Redeemer of the world, we cultivate a deep devotion to his Mother. Even though we know that this is not the case with all Christian confessions, we feel it our duty to share with the Amazon region the treasure of that warm, maternal love which we ourselves have received. In fact, I will conclude this Exhortation with a few words addressed to Mary.

None of this needs to create enmity between us. In a true spirit of dialogue, we grow in our ability to grasp the significance of what others say and do, even if we cannot accept it as our own conviction.

In this way, it becomes possible to be frank and open about our beliefs, while continuing to discuss, to seek points of contact, and above all, to work and struggle together for the good of the Amazon region.

The strength of what unites all of us as Christians is supremely important. We can be so attentive to what divides us that at times we no longer appreciate or value what unites us. And what unites us is what lets us remain in this world without being swallowed up by its immanence, its spiritual emptiness, its complacent selfishness, its consumerist and self-destructive individualism.

All of us, as Christians, are united by faith in God, the Father who gives us life and loves us so greatly. We are united by faith in Jesus Christ, the one Saviour, who set us free by his precious blood and his glorious resurrection. We are united by our desire for his word that guides our steps. We are united by the fire of the Spirit, who sends us forth on mission. We are united by the new commandment that Jesus left us, by the pursuit of the civilization of love and by passion for the kingdom that the Lord calls us to build with him. We are united by the struggle for peace and justice. We are united by the conviction that not everything ends with this life, but that we are called to the heavenly banquet, where God will wipe away every tear and take up all that we did for those who suffer.

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Area bishops Kent

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Streatham terror attack service

Archbishop John led a service for peace at English Martyrs church in Streatham following the terrorist attack a short distance away.

Plain clothes police shot dead Sudesh Amman on Streatham High Road on Sunday 2nd February after he stabbed two bystanders.

One of his victims was 51-year-old Monika Luftner, who worked at St Bede's Catholic Nursery and Primary School in Clapham.

The Anglican Bishop of Southwark, the Rt Rev Christopher Chessun, joined Archbishop John for the service.

"As the Catholic community in Streatham we will continue to build good relations and work for the common good of all those who call this part of London their home. Violence solves nothing.

"We are, and remain, a people united for peace," said Archbishop John.

Following the service, leaders of local faith communities, including Fr Gregory Verissimo (pictured right), the parish priest of English Martyrs, along with Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, gathered outside Streatham Odeon to pray for peace and unity.



Pope blesses Folkestone artist's icon



Pope Francis has blessed an icon of Our Lady by a Folkestone artist.

The blessing took place during his weekly audience in St Peter's Square. Present were the artist Amanda de Pulford (pictured centre), Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, and Monsignor John Armitage, rector of the Catholic National Shrine of Our Lady in Walsingham.

Following the blessing, the icon was taken to the tomb of St Gregory the Great, the pope who sent St Augustine to evangelise the people of England, in St Peter's Basilica.

The icon will be at Walsingham for the re-dedication of England as Mary's Dowry on 29 March. Afterwards, it will begin a journey to every Catholic parish in England.

For more information on the re-dedication, visit www.behold2020.com.

Romero Mass at cathedral to mark saint's feast day

Archbishop John will celebrate Mass this month at St George's Cathedral on the feast of St Oscar Romero.

The Mass will take place on 21st March at 12.30 pm, 40 years after St Oscar Romero was shot dead by a sniper as he celebrated Mass in a hospital chapel in San Salvador in 1980. His death came during the civil war in El Salvador, in which an estimated 80,000 people died and 12,000 disappeared.

St George's Cathedral contains the Romero shrine. Archbishop John has appointed four "guardians" to it - Mgr John O' Toole, Canon Alan McLean, Kathleen O'Brien and Julian Filochowski - who will assist Canon Richard Hearn, the rector of the cathedral, in fostering devotion to St Oscar and promoting the mission of the shrine.



The Romero shrine at St George's Cathedral

New ministers commissioned

Bishop Paul has commissioned 125 extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at St George's Cathedral. They came from 29 parishes in the diocese, including Abbeywood, Bromley, Colliers Wood and Gillingham.

Muslim MP to run for persecuted Christians

Rehman Chishti, MP for Gillingham and Rainham, is to run this year's London Marathon Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).

Mr Chishti, who is a Muslim and the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, said:

"The work ACN does is fantastic and I am delighted to support what they do to help Christians persecuted for their faith."



He liaised with the Sutton-based charity in defence of Christian woman Asia Bibi, who was on death row for blasphemy in Pakistan. "I worked closely with ACN on the Asia Bibi case and, when the charity brought her family over to the UK in 2018, they invited me to meet them," he said.

Mr Chishti, pictured above with John Pontifex and Neville Kyrke-Smith from ACN, resigned in November 2018 as vice chairman of the Conservative Party and the Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Pakistan, citing the UK's refusal to grant Asia Bibi sanctuary as one of the reasons for his resignation.

Archbishop records catechesis podcast

A four-part podcast of Pope Saint John Paul II's landmark document, *Catechesi Tradendae* (*Catechesis in Our Time*) has been recorded by Archbishop John.

The podcast is part of a guide to the document produced by the Catholic Bishop's Conference of England and Wales.

Published in 1979, the document followed a meeting of bishops from around the world to discuss the subject of Catholic formation and religious instruction.

To listen to the podcast, visit www.cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/catechesis/catechesi-tradendae/

Bishop Tripp's milestone



Bishop Howard Tripp (pictured) has celebrated his 40th anniversary as a bishop.

He was appointed as an auxiliary bishop of Southwark by Pope St John Paul II and ordained alongside Bishop John Jukes at St George's Cathedral on 30th January 1980 by Archbishop Michael Bowen.

Bishop Howard has been a priest for 68 years.

VE Day stories wanted

To mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day, Southwark archdiocese is working on a project to capture stories about the role Catholic parishes played in the war.

For more information, email catholicheritage@rcaos.org.uk.

Wimbledon night shelter

The church of the Sacred Heart in Wimbledon will be running a night shelter each Sundays for seven weeks between 15th March to 26th April. It will be open from 6 pm - 8 pm and will offer hot meals, shelter for the night, and breakfast in the morning.

Archbishop consecrates new Kent church



St Joseph's Church in Borough Green has been consecrated by Archbishop John. St Joseph's, which opened in 2017, is a chapel-of ease in the parish of St Thomas of Canterbury, Sevenoaks, which is in the care of Fr David Gibbons. The ceremony included the depositing of the relic in an aperture under the altar, the prayer of dedication, and the anointing of the new altar and of the walls of the church. The relic was sealed in by the stone mason, Adrian Powell. Among the guests present was Tom Tugendhat, Conservative MP for Tonbridge and Malling. Catholics in Borough Green originally met in private houses and later a hall, which was purchased in 1957 and converted into a chapel.

Pictured left, Archbishop John anoints the walls of the new church



A grotto to Our Lady has been built outside St Simon Stock Church in South Ashford. It was blessed by parish priest Fr Hans Puthiakulangara, and cost £6,500, which was met by donations.

Champion boxer warns Camberwell pupils about gangs

Pupils at Sacred Heart Catholic School in Camberwell heard about the dangers of gangs when former pupil and boxing champion Richard Riakporhe paid a visit.

Richard, who grew up on the nearby Aylesbury Estate, narrowly avoided death at 15 when he was stabbed in the chest at a house party and had to be rushed to hospital.

He turned professional in 2018 and won the British cruiserweight title in December 2019 when he was awarded a Lonsdale belt.

Assistant head teacher Luke Williams said: "Having undergone some tricky times during his teenage years, he now regularly speaks in schools about the importance of staying on the right path in life and is passionate about guiding the youth of today in the right direction."



Maidstone school marks holocaust

St Simon Stock Catholic School in Maidstone has re-dedicated its "holocaust tree" to mark Holocaust Memorial Day.

The ceremony took place during a school Mass. Fr Damian Esene of St Francis' church blessed clay luggage tags made by students in their art lessons.

Margate pupils sweet on career as crime solvers

Pupils at St Gregory's Primary School in Margate became detectives to solve the "sugar snatcher" case. The children worked in teams to solve the mystery of who stole some chocolate. They needed to gather evidence and apply their creativity to examine key pieces of evidence from the crime scene.



School supports D-Day memorial

St John's Catholic Comprehensive School in Gravesend raised £130 for an inscription on a Second World War memorial in Normandy.

The fundraising initiative was launched to have the name of one of the local servicemen who lost their lives in the D-Day Landings inscribed on the memorial.

The cheque was presented to George Batts, who landed on Gold Beach in June 1944, and whose idea the memorial is.

Bermondsey gold rush

The Church of the Most Holy Trinity in Dockhead, Bermondsey, is looking for gold.

Parish priest Canon Alan MacLean is asking parishioners to donate any gold jewellery they no longer wear as part of a fundraising initiative to build an annexe to the church. It will include meeting space, a kitchen and toilets.

The gold will be collected at the repository at the back of the church. When there is enough, it will be taken to Hatton Garden to be sold

Canon McLean wrote in the weekly newsletter, "It won't be stored in the repository. Just in case you were thinking!"



Did you know...

The Pilgrim is now available online, making it possible to read all the editions since it was launched in 2011. To view it, visit the diocesan website at www.rcsouthwark.co.uk and click on the link on the left hand side of the page.

We want your news!

Email your stories to pilgrim@rcaos.org.uk or telephone 0208 776 9250.



Chúc mừng năm mới
Vietnamese Catholics came together to celebrate their New Year at St Joseph's Church in Shooters Hill.

Catholics built their Southwark on the joy of restoration

Joanna Bogle

The Catholic diocese - or archdiocese if you want to be formally correct - of Southwark was established in 1850, with the restoration of the hierarchy (ie, bishops and archbishops) of England and Wales.

Restoration? Well, yes, because, of course, the former bishops and their dioceses ceased to be part of the Catholic Church following Henry VIII's break with the pope in the 16th century and the various events that followed.

Following the revival of Catholicism in the 19th century after complicated years of persecution and so on, it was possible to establish a proper Church structure in Britain again: we were no longer mission territory under the care of vicars apostolic.

With the restoration, new dioceses were created, because the law prevented the Catholic Church from using the ancient diocesan names (Canterbury and York, etc).

This actually worked well for the Church, because by 1850 the ancient boundaries, which had existed since medieval times, no longer made sense. Whole cities - such as Birmingham and Liverpool - had emerged with the rise of the industrial era, but had no bishop or cathedral.

The new Catholic dioceses reflected accurately the map of Britain. Chief among them would be Westminster, seat of Britain's Parliament and world-famous as the heart of what was, in the 19th century, a great and powerful nation with a growing Empire in Africa, Australasia, North America and India.

But this new diocese of Westminster would, it was agreed, only cover that major half of London on the northern banks of the Thames - the City, the suburbs going out into Middlesex and Hertfordshire and, of course, Westminster itself.

What about the southern bank of the river and its environs, stretching down to Kent and the coast? This was given the ancient name of Southwark.

It would cover not just the old borough of Southwark itself with its new railway terminus at London Bridge and its planned Tube line out towards Balham, Tooting and Wimbledon, but all of Kent, with its hop fields and orchards, and right down to the Channel ports at Dover and Folkestone.

So the new diocese came into existence. But, just to be confusing, 50 years later the Church of England also created a Diocese of Southwark, having recognised the need to do so - and for the same reason created dioceses of Liverpool and Birmingham and elsewhere.

To this day, people often get muddled by the double use of the names. When Pope - now Saint - John Paul II visited Britain on his great

missionary journey in 1982, some people waited expectantly at the Anglican cathedral of Southwark, which stands by the Thames at London Bridge, to see him.

But the Pope was not visiting that Cathedral - he was, of course, at the Catholic Cathedral, St George's, not far away. Fortunately, there was and is goodwill between the Church of England and the Catholic Church, and people were quickly directed to St George's.

The story of St George's is interesting in its own right. It was built before the restoration of the hierarchy, designed by the great architect Augustus Welby Pugin. Stately in its gothic design, it was the obvious choice to become the cathedral of the new diocese.

There is a sad twist to the Pugin link. Later in life he became mentally ill and was sent to the Bethlehem Hospital which, ironically, stood immediately opposite the cathedral. Today it is the Imperial War Museum, the hospital having been moved out to Kent later in the 19th century.

There is something rather bleak about the thought of Pugin perhaps looking out of the window towards the church that he himself had designed.

St George's was badly damaged in an air raid in World War II. Photographs show its gutted remnants of walls, open to the sky. Rebuilt in the 1950s, it remains today as the gathering-point for major diocesan events including the annual Chrism Mass each Holy Week, at which priests from across the diocese arrived to receive the sacred oils, newly blessed, which will be used for sacramental anointing in the year ahead.

A fine stained glass at St George's depicts St John Paul on that memorable visit in 1982. Great numbers of sick and disabled people were brought in from all over the area, and made comfortable in hospital beds and chairs, accompanied by their nurses and doctors, families and friends.

The pope, accompanied by other clergy, led the Anointing of the Sick. It was one of the most dramatic events on the papal visit. Incidentally, there is another stained glass window honouring St John Paul not far away, in the Polish Church of Christ the King in Balham, which also boasts a statue of him by the main door, looking out to the busy Balham High Road.

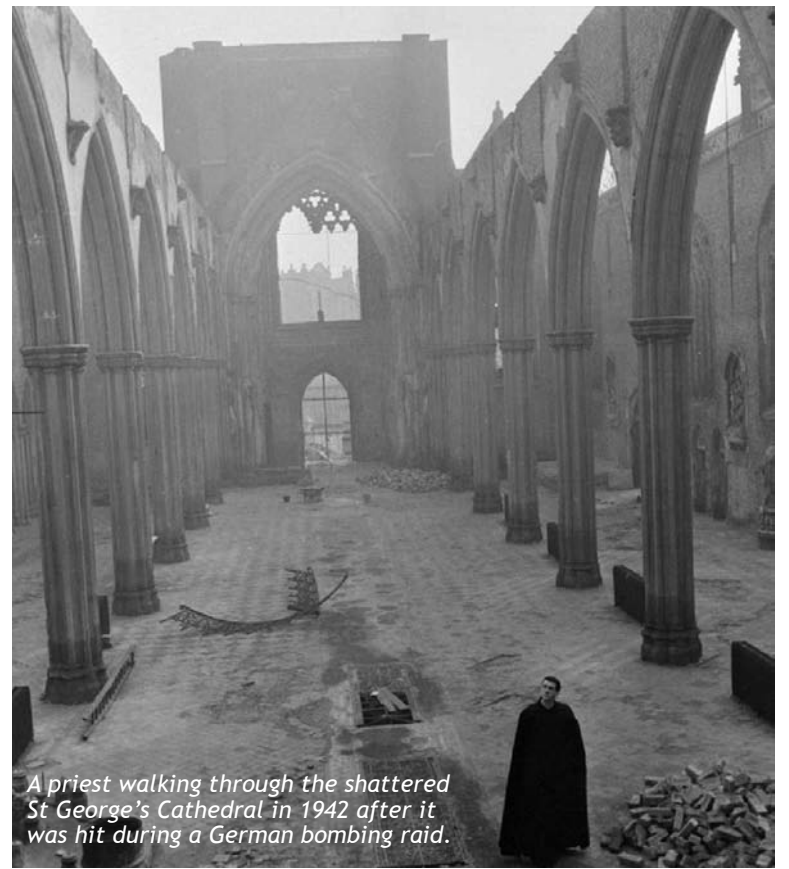
The diocese of Southwark has its own history, its stories and its traditions, and over the next issues of *The Pilgrim*, we'll be exploring some of these.

As one who grew up in this diocese (St Elphege's parish, Wallington, since you ask!) and still lives in it, I am among so many Catholics whose life-story is bound up with it all. I

remember Girl Guide gatherings at St George's in the 1960s, with the solemn reading aloud of the Guide law and the renewal of our promise.

And as an adult, attending the annual Chrism Mass with friends has been a moving experience as we hear the voices of our priests affirming their commitment to the faith, and watch them walk in procession, and greet them afterwards.

If you have some snippets of history that you would like to share in this series, contact the editor at *The Pilgrim*: we'll be glad to hear from you!




A priest walking through the shattered St George's Cathedral in 1942 after it was hit during a German bombing raid.

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'Listen, my son'

Rule of St Benedict

www.buckfast.org.uk/vocation
vocations@buckfast.org.uk


 Buckfast Abbey

God calls to us constantly, longing to guide those who yearn for life and desire to see good days into the way of peace. The Rule of Saint Benedict helps us to hear God's voice, in the Holy Scriptures, in the sacred liturgy and in our brothers in community. If you are a single man longing to live your Catholic faith in a way which brings great joy as it demands the best of you, consider whether God is calling you to be a Benedictine monk at Buckfast Abbey. Please reach out to us, and we will do all we can to help you.

John Pontifex, head of press and information at Aid to the Church in Need (UK), describes how Christians in Iraq are trying to rebuild their lives after the horrors inflicted on them by Daesh

“Our people, whose roots in Iraq go back 2,000 years, have suffered genocide. We are determined now to build a new future back in the ancient heartlands, but to do so we need your continuing prayers, your help and your support.”

These are the words of Bashar Warda, the Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Erbil in Kurdish northern Iraq.

A community who use Aramaic, the language of Christ, in the liturgy, have suffered in ways few of us could ever imagine.

Theirs is a Christian tradition dating back to Apostolic times, an unbroken line which almost broke forever when Daesh (ISIS) militants invaded.

The land of Babylon, of Nineveh, the Cradle of Christianity and the Cradle of Civilisation, became a principal target for Islamist militia who wanted to remove every trace of this ancient antiquity.

And it all happened in the summer of 2014 when Daesh seized Mosul and the Nineveh Plains, prompting a mass exodus of Biblical proportions.

More than 120,000 Christians were among a sea of people who fled in search of sanctuary. For two years and more, Aid to the Church in Need provided food, shelter, medicine and schooling for Christians cared for by Archbishop Warda in northern Iraq’s semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan to where so many had sought refuge.

Until, at last - with the military defeat of Daesh - they were able to begin their long-awaited return to their homelands.

What they found when they got back almost broke their hearts: churches where the crosses had been used for target practice by trainee snipers, walls covered with offensive graffiti defaming the name of Jesus, homes blackened by arsonists, who had made use of a noxious chemical which blackened everything with soot.

The militants even booby-trapped toys with explosives to tempt an unsuspecting returnee child. I have seen some of this for myself in my various travels to Iraq.

One of the worst scenes of devastation I saw was at St Benham’s Syriac Catholic Church in Qaraqosh, the largest of the Christian towns of Nineveh. I remember attending a wedding in this very same church in happier times back in 2008. Now it was a blackened shell.

But somehow hope remained; my guide that day, Fr George Jahola, took me outside the church. There, we saw the vast belled tower toppled to the ground by a bomb. And then Fr George pointed to the church bell that had somehow survived the fall. It had been recovered and was found to be in full working order.

Standing next to the bell, Father George began ringing it, a smile spreading across his face. All this is part of an amazing story of survival against all the odds - little less than a miracle.

In the three years since Nineveh was liberated from Daesh, ACN calculates that:

Nearly half of the 19,230 families originally living there have now gone back.

Just over half of the 14,035 homes damaged and destroyed have been repaired - many of them thanks to the benefactors of ACN.

For the families themselves, such a transformation would be impossible without a determination to put behind them the horrors inflicted on their communities.

As Archbishop Warda put it in a message to ACN: “We forgive those who murdered us, who raped us, who sought to destroy everything about us. We forgive them. In the name of Christ, we forgive them.”



Archbishop Nizar Semaan, former chaplain to Syriac Catholics in London, was installed as co-adjutor Archbishop of Mosul, Kirkuk, and Kurdistan last year at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Qaraqosh, which Aid to the Church in Need helped restore

Christians in Iraq keeping faith alive

And so the charity is determined to help those Christians who want to stay and who can stay.

I have had the privilege of travelling to the Nineveh Plains to meet some of the newly returned Christian families. What struck me most was their courage and conviction to keep the heart of faith beating in Iraq.

I remember one family in particular: Athar, her husband, Majed, and their three-year-old son, Majed. I met them barely four days after they had returned to their newly repaired home in Qaraqosh.

Athar explained that she had had the opportunity to join relatives abroad. She said she had turned the offer down: “My husband, Ashour, and I, came back to Qaraqosh because we want to stay in Iraq.

“The support for my sick mother is better here. I have a job as an administrator in a government office and you can find anything

you want in the shops.”

Majed, she went on, was now attending a kindergarten in Qaraqosh run by Dominican Sisters funded by ACN. Athar said: “Without faith, we wouldn’t have had the courage to come back. Please help more families to return by repairing their homes.”

The resettlement of Christians in Qaraqosh is far advanced, unlike in Batnaya, another mainly Christian town in Nineveh, which was all but totally destroyed in the fighting.

And yet, even here, there are signs of hope. With more than 300 Christians now back in Batnaya, ACN is working with the local faithful who are determined to rebuild both the kindergarten and a convent, both completely destroyed in the bombardment.

Meantime, ACN is helping Christians who, having sought refuge in Kurdistan, have decided to stay there. ACN is supporting the new Syriac Catholic Archbishop Nathaniel

Nizar Semaan. After 14 years as the London-based chaplain to UK Syriac Catholics, last year he was appointed to the new diocese of Hadiab-Erbil.

He started his new role late last year based in a static caravan. ACN has helped him with basic costs to help start up his diocese, including catechesis for youth spread across five parishes as well as support for his priests.

Describing to me his mission, Archbishop Nathaniel said, movingly: “Christians in Iraq are known as being honest people, a people who work hard for the future, who encourage education and build up civilisation.

“And so Christianity is like a candle in a dark room. No matter how small the flame, the Church still sheds light. If that light is taken away, we will have darkness in the Middle East.”

For information about Aid to the Church in Need, visit www.acnuk.org.



Christians in Iraq are now free to express their faith



Security is still a concern for Christians in Iraq

Church stands defiant, a symbol of hope

Every day, parishioners gather to pray in the charred shell of the Church of Al-Tahira (the Immaculate Conception), although they are saddened to worship in a church which was once the pride of the town of Qaraqosh, but now bears the scars of Daesh's occupation.

When Daesh held the city, the church's courtyard was used as a firing range - you can still see the bullet holes. Inside the church the walls are daubed with graffiti.

When residents finally returned to Qaraqosh they found that Daesh had made a bonfire in the church from the furniture, manuscripts and prayer books. The church's iconic clock tower was also blown up.

Syriac-Catholic Archbishop Petros Mouche of Mosul told ACN: "For us, this church is a symbol. This church was built in 1932, and it was the villagers of Qaraqosh who constructed it. For this reason, we want this symbol to

remain as a Christian symbol to encourage the people, especially the locals of Qaraqosh, to stay here."

ACN's help with the first phase of rebuilding has enabled more than half of the families forced out by Daesh to return. Nevertheless, many are still recovering from the trauma of displacement, murdered relatives and the knowledge that local Christian and Yazidi women were forced into sexual slavery.

As a sign of hope for Qaraqosh's Christians, ACN has pledged to help restore the interior of the church.

Archbishop Mouche said: "I would like to thank all the people who help, as ACN couldn't help us without the support of their benefactors."

Right, with the help of Aid to the Church in Need, Christians in Iraq have been able to repair and rebuild some of their churches.



Ephremite Sisters are back caring for Qaraqosh children

The Ephremite Sisters' nursery in Qaraqosh was left devastated by Daesh's occupation of the city - which before the extremists seized it was the last Christian majority town in Iraq.

A hole was made in the side of the nursery by a grenade - which fortunately did not cause any significant structural damage - and the roof has several shrapnel holes from a mortar shell that exploded.

When the sisters returned from the refugee camps, they also found the inside in a terrible state: walls were daubed with graffiti, while ceilings and other fixtures had been torn down.

Yet despite all this, the sisters opened the nursery's doors again shortly after Daesh were driven out. They managed to make the first two floors operational, but

the upper two levels are still unusable.

The building needs plastering, painting, new windows and doors, not to mention new electrical wiring and plumbing - including major repairs to the sewage network.

The sisters currently look after 47 children, from six months to five years of age, but their Mother Superior, Sister Mariam, is hoping that ultimately 80 children can be cared for after ACN has helped them repair the building.

The Ephremite Sisters have their convent next door to the nursery, and are restoring it with ACN help.

Sr Mariam told me: "We thank the Lord and thank you for your support and generosity which enabled us to return... and to serve our Christian people."



Right, the Ephremite Sisters care for some of the children of Qaraqosh.

My Parish: St Elizabeth of Portugal, Richmond upon Thames

Fr Stephen Langridge

St Elizabeth's is the oldest church in the Archdiocese of Southwark. It was opened in 1824 thanks to the generosity of a single benefactor, Elizabeth Doughty, who spent part of the year in her summer house overlooking a beautiful stretch of the Thames.

The church was expanded and considerably embellished just before the Great War. The crypt used to be home to a music venue called the Hanging Lantern. Ralph McTell (of "Streets of London" fame) played here, as did Elvis Costello who recalls it as the place where he had his first public performance.

In 2016 St Elizabeth's joined the Divine Renovation Network, a global movement of parishes dedicated to respond to the call to mission repeated by every Pope since Paul VI reminded us that "the Church exists to evangelise".

Recently, in recognition of our commitment to evangelisation, Alpha UK asked us to become one of its Alpha Hubs where others can come to learn how to make use of some of the most effective evangelisation tools available to us today.

Apart from evangelisation, a distinctive feature of St Elizabeth's is our emphasis on lay leadership. We recognise that while it is the parish priest's task to set the direction or establish the vision for the parish, he can't do it by himself and has to work by delegating real responsibility (not just tasks) to suitable lay people who share that vision.

In practical terms this means the parish is led by a senior leadership team who meet for a couple of hours each week and who take

decisions collectively. The senior leadership team seeks to implement the parish vision, which is "to become a joyful, invitational community where people encounter and entrust themselves to Jesus Christ; grow through formation and the Holy Spirit; and, as missionary disciples, find new ways of witnessing to God's love in the world".

The members actively support the leadership teams of all the other pastoral ministries in the parish. A good example of this is a network of fellowship groups we are developing, each with its own leadership team. The aim is to ensure a real, sense of joyful Christian discipleship and that no one in the parish is gets left alone, or forgotten about.

By delegating responsibility to the leadership of each group, the parish priest can be sure that the members are cared for and supported individually in a way that doesn't increase his own workload. By raising up lay leaders we can ensure that all our ministries are both sustainable and scalable as we grow.

I am the former vocations director for the archdiocese, and am a coach for the Divine Renovation Network and often speak at conferences on parish renewal.

David Wills, former director of adult formation in Arundel & Brighton diocese, is the director of pastoral ministries and is responsible for ensuring all our pastoral ministries are supported and cared for.

Jo de Paola works for Alpha International and is actively engaged in developing Alpha in a Catholic context. Lissette Jeannet is a graduate of the Steubenville University theology programme. She has worked as a youth minister in a number of US parishes and has a



passion for youth, leadership and Christian formation.

Another feature of our parish is our emphasis on service because we believe a flourishing parish is marked by a spirit of service among its parishioners. We try to encourage all our parishioners to get involved in the life of the parish by offering

different ways for them to exercise their gifts and charisms within the parish context and beyond.

In recent months our regular homeless lunches have developed into a weekly night shelter, and we have begun to host a project to help the long-term homeless become reintegrated into society. We are

also developing support for family life and are working on developing a project to meet the needs of the isolated elderly in our community.

Our focus on becoming an invitational community has meant that intentional hospitality is very important to all of us at St Elizabeth's and is particularly noticeable on a Sunday morning when teams of enthusiastic and friendly parishioners will engage with visitors even before they enter the church. In three years we have seen a 50% increase in Mass attendance.

Richmond is an area with many primary schools, both independent and state. Our own school serves the parishes of Ham, Kew and East Sheen as well as St Elizabeth's. A single-form entry, it is consistently rated outstanding by Ofsted and was recently one of the top 20 primary schools in the country.

The proliferation of schools has meant we have had to look again at our sacramental preparation to ensure that, rather than just sacramentalising them, we introduce our children to a real relationship with God.

Taking inspiration from the baptismal rite that parents are the "first educators of their children in the ways of faith", we are developing family-based catechesis, essentially equipping parents with the tools they need to share their faith with their children within the context of the home.

Now, 200 years after the church was first built, the parish is facing the need for extensive external repairs and considering how we might best ensure its facilities meet its stated purpose which is to form intentional disciples who joyfully live out the mission of Jesus Christ.

The joy of receiving gifts - and giving something away

Lucy Russell

"Maybe we can get it for his birthday?" Edgar said as we walked towards the underpass. We were in Canterbury and had come across a music shop where James had the opportunity to handle a baritone saxophone.

This had been an ambition for some time. But baritone saxophones come with a hefty price tag. "What happens," I asked, "if we can find the money and buy this for James, and then he can't get a note out of it?"

James is very good on his alto saxophone, but the bari sax is a much harder instrument to play. "Well, he can have a go now," came the reply.

How much James loved playing that bari was plain for all to see. He made a fantastic sound, getting down to the low A smoothly. I looked at my husband. We had some serious thinking to do.

Edgar and I walked into the underpass, "Could you and Dad get the money?" he asked. "I'm not sure," I said. In the underpass, there was a man asleep on the ground underneath a red tartan blanket. "Or," said Edgar, "maybe we should give him the money."

I was proud of Edgar for noticing the man, not just walking by. I was proud, too, that it occurred to him, aged 11, that not having enough money to walk into a music shop and buy an expensive musical instrument was a nice problem to have.

We had enough to put a roof over our heads, food on the table and buy the man in the underpass a cup of coffee. Most of us could live more simply and share more fully. Especially during Lent.

With this in mind, I went through my drawers and found a Russian gold wedding ring that I didn't often wear anymore. I had bought it 20 years ago with a few hundred

pounds given to me from my grandparents' estate.

Something they had always supported and encouraged with their own children was music. All had the opportunity to have music lessons as children and play an instrument. I was attached to the ring emotionally. But it wasn't given to me by my grandparents, and its current financial worth would be about what I paid for it.

How wonderful it would be if my Granny and Grandpa could help us put a deposit on that saxophone. Have you ever given away something you loved? How did it make you feel? I have given up various things that meant something to me.

When I have done so, it has always been for someone I love. My emotions have been mixed and it hasn't always been easy to give up certain possessions, but it has always been very liberating afterwards. People are more



important than things. Love is what matters.

When I found my gold ring, I also found a silver bracelet made of tiny suns and moons which my Grandpa had given me for my 18th birthday. The suns and moons had sharp edges which scratched my wrist, so I had stopped wearing it.

I decided to take this to the jeweller's with me, too, and have some earrings made from it. This was a piece of jewellery which had a memory of my Grandpa attached to it. I could also have more than one pair of earrings made and give a pair each to my nieces.

There are numerous references in the Bible to musical instruments. James has played at Masses and assemblies at school, using his alto saxophone to praise God. When my aunts and uncles learned of James' trip to the music shop in Canterbury, all offered to chip in with a donation towards the baritone saxophone.

This will be a gift he will never forget. Not only for the fact that he will love it and it will nurture one of his God given talents, but also for the outpouring of love that the instrument represents. "Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day" (Psalm 81:3).

How to treat the Bible

Father Ashley Beck

This month I want to look briefly at two things: first, how we treat the Bible in general, and second, ways in which we should read and study it. Both subjects are pretty big so I will really be suggesting things for you to follow up in this special year of the Word of God.

For all religions who have sacred texts the physical volumes have always been treated with care. Both the Torah and the Quran as physical texts are revered by Jews and Muslims respectively.

For example, Jews might point to Hebrew words in the Bible by means of a pointer to avoid soiling the paper; so for the Christians the Bible as a physical object should not be treated like any other book.

Because the Church encourages us to read the Bible, it is increasingly common for a large Bible to be available in chapel in a Catholic church, perhaps open at one of the daily Mass readings.

This physical sense of respect and veneration is particularly true of the gospels which recount the life and ministry of Our Lord. So in the Mass, the book of the gospels is often carried in procession by the deacon.

Before the gospel reading is read the book may be incensed, and at the end of the reading the text is kissed, either by the deacon or priest reading it or by the bishop if he is celebrating the Mass (at a papal Mass the pope blesses the people with the book).



At Mass the readings are proclaimed from a decent and well bound book, not a disposable Mass sheet; often gospel books have been elaborately decorated and the text illuminated (eg, the Book of Kells).

Assuming we have our own Bible at home we should take care to treat the book properly; Bibles are generally well made, sometimes leather bound, for a reason: it is a special book for Christians. This sense of the text being special, whatever translation we are using, should also determine how the text is read aloud in church.

Sometimes scriptural texts of world religions are marked by being

chanted or sung within worship, and for Catholics and others this is sometimes the case with the gospel reading. Moreover, the Church expects the biblical texts at Mass and other acts of worship to be read properly and decently.

Readers at Mass should be properly designated and trained in the ministry which they have been asked to fulfil; they should make sure they prepare the text well beforehand. All this means that at Sunday and weekday Masses there should be proper rotas of readers, and care should be taken to choose readers from a wide range of people who are at Mass - sometimes the

group of readers can be a clique of people who have always done it.

Unfortunately, the fact that most of our churches have public address systems, often very expensive, has actually led to a decline in the quality of reading out loud at Mass.

People think often that the microphone makes life easy for them and that they don't have to worry about how to project their voices, about the speed at which they read or the way in which they vary the tone of their voices and pay attention to the structure of sentences. So often the priority seems to be to get to the end of text being read as soon as possible. So if you are a reader at Mass - please slow down!

This reverence and sense of seriousness should also determine how we read the sacred text. As I indicated last month, you should have a Catholic Bible, and these are required to have at least brief notes and introductions to the biblical books.

This reminds us that we have to read the text intelligently, with at least some awareness of the setting in which the text was written, knowing something of the context. This affirms what is called the historical-critical approach to the study of the Bible. Don't get frightened: it is a lot more accessible than people often think.

The Church wouldn't insist that our Bibles have notes and introductions if this wasn't considered important: it's not

simply for clergy or biblical scholars. During this year I will try and share examples with you from the books of the Bible which show how valuable and essential this is.

One key fact shows this above all: I referred above to the Quran and the great respect our Muslim brothers and sisters show towards its text, which we should respect. But there is a big difference between what they believe about their sacred text and the Bible (and many incidents from the Bible reappear in the Quran).

Muslims hold that the entire text of the Quran was dictated to the prophet Mohammed by the angel Gabriel, over a number of years. So there are for them none of the issues we face with regard to the Bible about when, where and by whom the books of scripture were composed. We say different things about our respective holy books.

It is astonishing how many Christians, even Catholics, feel threatened by all this; you get the impression some would prefer the Bible to be like the Quran. I hope one thing we can gain from this year of the Word of God is a sense of how exciting reading and learning about the Bible really is, and how enriching for our faith.

• Fr Ashley Beck is assistant priest of St Edmund's, Beckenham, and teaches at St Mary's University, Twickenham. If you are interested in the new MA degree in Catholic social teaching, email ashley.beck@stmarys.ac.uk.

A Pope's dream for the Amazon

Sister Janet Fearn

"The beloved Amazon region stands before the world in all its splendour, its drama and its mystery." Thus begins the new post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the Amazon Region, *Querida Amazonia*.

Querida Amazonia stands beside the encyclical *Laudato Si'* as arguably one of today's most - if not the most - relevant, urgent challenges to the whole world in the search for social justice and environmental preservation.

Cardinal Michael Czerny, special secretary of the Synod for the Amazon, declared: "The destiny of the Amazon affects us all, because everything is connected and the salvation of this region and its original peoples is fundamental for the whole world." He added, "Love the Amazon and its people to save the planet."

In *Querida Amazonia* Pope Francis presents to the world his dreams for the Amazon, regularly using poetry to convey a message which goes beyond mere words. These dreams can be described as social, cultural, ecological and ecclesial:

"I dream of an Amazon region that fights for the rights of the poor, the original peoples and the least of our brothers and sisters, where their voices can be heard and their dignity advanced.

"I dream of an Amazon region that can preserve its distinctive cultural riches, where the beauty of our humanity shines forth in so many varied ways.

"I dream of an Amazon region that can jealously preserve its overwhelming natural beauty and the superabundant life teeming in its rivers and forests.



Pope Francis visited Peru in 2018, where he met members of the indigenous communities who live in the Amazon rainforest.

"I dream of Christian communities capable of generous commitment, incarnate in the Amazon region, and giving the Church new faces with Amazonian features." [7]

Querida Amazonia recognises the Amazon's indigenous peoples, often ignored by national and multi-national companies as they extract profit from the region's natural resources. They are also sometimes

forgotten by environmentalists who, deeply concerned for the rain forest's future, overlook the people who have cherished and preserved the Amazon for millennia.

And they are disregarded by the State and institutions which see the area as a potential source of personal wealth and power... Pope Francis describes some of the horrific abuses to which they were subjected.

The exhortation recognises the urgent need for the world to guarantee sustainable development in the Amazon region, so that we can love and "not simply use it"; finding in it "a theological locus, a space where God himself reveals himself and summons his sons and daughters."

Pope Francis invites us to "develop a Church with an Amazonian face" through a "great missionary proclamation", a "message that needs to be heard in the Amazon region". God has been revealed and worshipped through the culture and traditions of the Amazonian peoples.

The Gospel and the Church must therefore be inculturated among the people of the waters and the jungle, who have often experienced poverty, injustice and oppression; who cherish unique nuances and insights which God has inspired and nurtured.

In local cultures in which communal discernment and action have played such a vital part, *Querida Amazonia* calls for the deeper involvement of the laity, and especially of women, in the life of the Church in the Amazon region.

Many decisions should be made locally, by the people and Christian communities themselves, rather than within the completely different culture and environment of Vatican-based offices.

Pope Francis calls for women, not to be clericalised but, instead, to "make their contribution to the Church in a way that is properly theirs, by making present the tender strength of Mary, the Mother".

Cardinal Czerny remarked: "Pope Francis dreams that in the Amazon region there might be a commitment on the part of everyone to defend the rights of the poorest, of the original peoples, of the least.

"He dreams of an Amazon that preserves its cultural wealth. His ecological dream is of an Amazon that takes care of its abundance of life. Finally, he dreams of Christian communities capable of incarnating themselves in the Amazon and of building a Church with an Amazonian face."

Pope Francis concludes *Querida Amazonia* by praying to Our Lady of the Amazon.

"...Show yourself the Mother of all creatures, in the beauty of the flowers, the rivers, the great river that courses through it and all the life pulsing in its forests.

Tenderly care for this explosion of beauty. "Ask Jesus to pour out all his love on the men and women who dwell there, that they may know how to appreciate and care for it.

"Bring your Son to birth in their hearts, so that he can shine forth in the Amazon region, in its peoples and in its cultures, by the light of his word, by his consoling love, by his message of fraternity and justice...

• *Querida Amazonia* is available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbooks.co.uk for £4.95.

Cicely's vision for a hospice has made a difference to so many

John Bateson

Early morning on a bright day in mid-June last year and 50 cyclists are making last-minute preparations before their departure from St Christopher's Hospice on Lawrie Park Road in Sydenham.

An air of expectation hangs over the gathering as the group of men and women, all dressed in brightly coloured cycle gear, finally get on their bikes and begin to spill out the road on the first leg of their journey to Paris.

The London-to-Paris sponsored cycle ride was just one of the numerous events held to celebrate the founding of St Christopher's hospice 50 years ago by an extraordinary lady who set in motion the modern hospice movement.

When Cicely Saunders decided she wanted to build a hospice that would be at the forefront of palliative care services, she was fully aware that dying people often ended up in hospitals where death could be painful, undignified and lonely.

Her vision was to create something new, a place that would combine down to earth compassion with education, research and medical expertise, particularly in the area of pain control.

She also wanted to address the needs of the whole person - body, mind and soul.

It was a far-sighted vision that required not just courage but a sense of real purpose and, like Florence Nightingale, whose work completely changed the public attitude towards the sick and the dying in a previous generation, Cicely Saunders found this purpose in her faith. It was her personal faith in Christ that galvanised her



Dame Cicely Saunders sits with a hospice patient

and gave her vision real meaning.

But her journey was not without its obstacles. She had trained originally as a nurse but colleagues advised her she would need to become a doctor in order for people to take her seriously, and so she did just that.

She also needed money and this came as a donation from the most unlikely source. When caring for a Polish Jew named David Tasma she discovered she had fallen in love with him. Before he died on the

hospital ward where she worked he left her a gift of £500 for the home he knew she would build.

Anyone stepping through the glass doors of St Christopher's today might be wondering if they had come to the right place. The friendliness of staff and volunteers, the openness and general sense of positivity might be at odds with their expectations of what a hospice is all about.

This was certainly my experience when I arrived, having spent 14 years

in a busy general hospital where the focus was often on getting people out as quickly as possible.

I discovered something quite different at St Christopher's, so different in fact that I wondered if I'd come to another planet. The atmosphere was calm, people looked happy and there was this sense of light that I found quite irresistible after having been cooped up in a windowless room full of whirring computers for a good part of the working day.

The idea that a hospice is simply a building where people come and die is a popular one that people who have never set foot inside the place often hold. They are often surprised when they do to discover a place as far removed from what they imagined as possible.

It is true that people who come on to the hospice wards are often reaching the end of their earthly journey and death is a frequent occurrence. Yet I am surprised by the number of patients who once they have arrived simply do not want to leave.

They find in the general care and concern which both staff and volunteers offer something that gives them and their families a sense of peace.

My job focuses on the process of rehabilitation, which in a hospice setting may strike someone who isn't familiar with a hospice as odd, but often people with life-limiting illnesses are still leading active lives and want to maximise their potential even if they know they will not make a full recovery.

A gym, for example, in a hospice may sound like a complete contradiction, but it is a surprisingly well-used place, both by the inpatients and the many out-patients living at home.

I am also involved in helping those who wish to die not in the hospice but in the familiar surrounding of their own home, a process that sometimes requires careful and sensitive planning.

This does not mean that I haven't encountered real pain among the sick and the dying on the wards at the hospice. I don't mean so much physical pain, because modern pain control means that the majority of people who are approaching the end of their life do not have to die in pain.

Rather, I mean the pain of a young mother having to leave behind her husband and young children, or the pain of a young woman whose husband is coming to the end of his battle with an incurable tumour, or the pain of a young man who is dying alone, estranged from his entire family.

For this kind of pain there are no easy answers or solutions. As Christians we believe in the overwhelming love of God for each and every one of us. But seeing a young person who has everything to live for ravaged by an incurable disease can test this truth to the limit for just about anyone.

I have learned too that there are no easy or simple solutions and that death has a way of confronting us with our own human frailties and limitations.

We remain strangely impotent in the face of death.

But that process of accompanying the dying person on the last stage of their journey is, I have discovered, a great privilege that I hope I never take for granted.

"Anyone stepping through the glass doors of St Christopher's today might be wondering if they had come to the right place. The friendliness of staff and volunteers, the openness and general sense of positivity might be at odds with their expectations of what a hospice is all about."

St Christopher's is pictured right



Lent is the time for us all to have a spiritual spring clean

Julia Beacroft

I was watching TV the other day and I was struck by how many insurance adverts are aired.

There's ads for car insurance, house insurance and life insurance. There was "Compare the Market" (the meercats), Churchill (the dog), Admiral, Direct Line (Winston Wolf) and plans for the over 50s, to name but a few.

In fact, many years ago I used to work in insurance so I'm certainly no stranger to it, but I'm sure that there seems to be both more advertising and more insurance companies than there ever used to be!

However, the policy of "new for old" remains unchanged, I'm glad to see. This essentially means that goods which have been stolen or accidentally damaged will be replaced with new ones to the same value by the insurers.

No-one ever knows what is going to happen in the future, so the moral of the story is: make sure your insurance is up-to-date!

This idea of new for old, though, did cause me to ponder. If only everything in life could be replaced in this way - our health, for example. Of course, certain parts of us can indeed be replaced - joints and organs - but we are still a long way from being able to replace everything.

And there are certain aspects of our lives that it's just impossible to replace, such as the death of a loved one. But there is a huge consolation available to us, and this can be found in our spiritual lives.

In baptism our old life is replaced by a new life in Christ, in the Trinity. Indeed, in the early Church, where the baptism of adults was the norm, the



total immersion in the baptismal waters and the coming up out of them symbolised the turning away from a life of sin and embracing or replacing this with a spirit-filled life - in the Lord Jesus Christ.

During this time of Lent we also have ample opportunity for "out with the old and in with the new" as we practice our Lenten observances. Lent is a time for us to take stock, to re-evaluate our secular and, more importantly, our spiritual lives.

Lent is a period when we can reflect, revisit the Sacrament of Reconciliation and find the peace and love of Jesus

Christ. Most importantly, as we prepare for the great celebration of Easter during Lent, our "spiritual spring clean" should include prayer, fasting and almsgiving alongside a determination to serve the Lord more fully.

And so in conclusion: insurance will provide for us if the worst should happen. Christ provides for us *ad infinitum*.

And not to mention the idea of new for old...

Julia Beacroft is a spirituality workshop leader and the author of *Sanctifying the Spirit*.

Diary dates - March

If you have an event, e-mail details to us at pilgrim@rcaos.org.uk

3: Mother of the Church, a talk for young Catholic adults by Sister Andrea Fraile, 7 pm, 24 Golden Square, W1, followed by a Q & A and cheese and wine.

4: The Year of the God Who Speaks: A Lenten retreat for Catholic women led by Sebastian Morello from the Centre for Catholic Formation, beginning with Mass at 10 am and ending at 3.30 pm. St John the Baptist Church, Dale Road, Purley. Coffee/tea provided. Please bring packed lunch.

6: Cafod Lent Family Fast Day all over the diocese. For information, email southwark@cafod.org.uk or phone 0203 349 1947.

7: The year of the God Who Speaks: An introduction to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark with Fr Denis McBride, 10.30 am - 3pm, St Stephen's Church, Deepdene Road, Welling. Please bring a packed lunch. Tea and coffee will be available from 10 am.

7: "Songs of Farewell" concert given by the Purcell Singers, St George's Cathedral, 7.30 pm. To book, visit www.purcellsingers.org.

14: The year of the God Who Speaks: The journey towards faith in John's Gospel with Fr Victor Darlington, Sacred Heart Church, 2 Knatchbull Road, Camberwell, SE5. Bishop Pat will offer a reflection and lead Adoration. For more information, email camberwell@rcaos.org.uk.

17: Devotion to Mary, a talk for young Catholic adults by Fr Richard Marsden, 7 pm, 24 Golden Square, W1, followed by a Q & A and cheese and wine.

18: Westminster Cathedral interfaith group, A talk by Rev Alan Gadd on inter-faith work in south London, Hinsley room, Westminster Cathedral, Morpeth Terrace, SW1. For more information, contact John Woodhouse on 07908-888586 or email woodhousesopten@btinternet.com.

21: Mass to celebrate the feast of St Oscar Romero, St George's Cathedral, 12.30 pm.



"In baptism our old life is replaced by a new life in Christ, in the Trinity. Indeed, in the early Church, where the baptism of adults was the norm, the total immersion in the baptismal waters and the coming up out of them symbolised the turning away from a life of sin and embracing this with a spirit-filled life - in the Lord Jesus"



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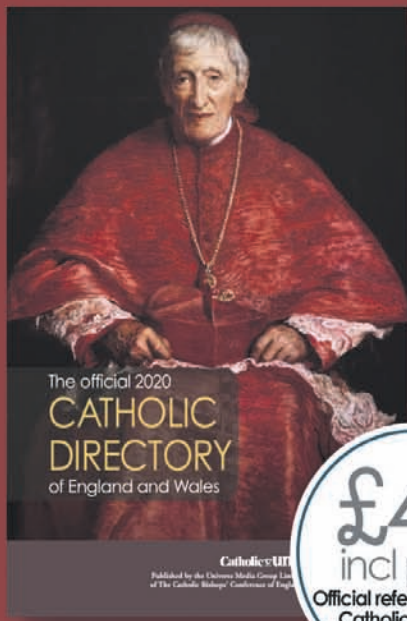
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Father Dominic Allain

Grief to Grace is a specialist programme of spiritual and psychological healing for those who have suffered abuse in childhood or adolescence: sexual, physical, emotional or spiritual abuse or chronic neglect, including clergy abuse.

It was founded in the United States by Dr Theresa Burke, an expert in the treatment of trauma. With the approval of Archbishop Peter Smith, Grief to Grace established itself as a UK charity in 2014. We now run two residential programmes annually in England, usually at the Kairos Centre in Roehampton.

A recent grant has allowed us to expand our work to include a support group for survivors, some counselling services and an educational outreach for clergy and laity teaching about the chronic legacy of sexual abuse and best treatment practice.

A common misconception is that because abuse happened a long time ago, you should be able to “get over it”, and move on in your thinking. In fact, abuse trauma has little to do with a person’s thinking and everything to do with living in a scared organism.

Abuse alters normal brain and body function, and even the ways in which memories are processed. The age at which abuse occurred; how invasive or prolonged its nature; the relationship of abuser to victim; and the victim’s other significant attachments, all determine the lasting severity of the impact.

Survivors experience prolonged emotional suffering. They are prone to anxiety disorders, addictions, confusion over their sexual identity, a sense of shame and worthlessness of being dirty or unlovable, struggle to find meaningful relationships. Many suffer from Complex PTSD.

Abuse is experienced as a threat to bodily survival or integrity. Profound helplessness characterises such an experience, destroying the child or young person’s sense of safety. Abuse evokes feelings about what is happening to the self which are so unacceptable that the thinking/executive part of the human brain cannot process them.

Instead, the primitive “survival” or “reptile” brain registers them. The trauma of abuse does not fade with time. It remains a “live” memory affecting the person’s entire brain and body function. The abuse victim’s brain is on survival “red-alert”, their body primed for fight or flight - or its opposite survival adaptation, which is to freeze and fawn when faced with danger.

Until the survivor develops new ways to process and understand what has happened, abusive memories continue to dominate normal ways of feeling, acting and relating. Mind,



Dr Theresa Burke

body and spirit are all affected. Therefore, conventional talking therapy alone is no longer considered sufficient to treat abuse.

In order to heal it is necessary to approach that original pain of the frightened child. There is a natural ambivalence about this but if it is to heal it must be confronted, the shameful secrets and the damage witnessed and compassionated by others.

I must grieve and learn to live with the loss by mourning it, so as to find a renewed sense of purpose beyond. To do this, it is essential that I feel safe and “grounded”, that is, kept within a zone of tolerance which prevents the nervous system’s survival response being overloaded, thereby repeating the original powerlessness.

If my body feels safe in the present, more parts of my brain will come back on-line, altering the way I process memories. By observing what happens to the body as I approach the painful memories, it is possible to recognise the way the body goes into survival mode and to calm the nervous system.

In this calmer state I can become aware of the defence mechanisms I habitually use to guard against the pain. I can then make a choice about whether these are still helpful. I must shed the identity formed in suffering and replace this with hope for what I could be. I must dare, too, to grieve, to trust, to forgive and to learn good boundaries.

The Grief to Grace programme skilfully facilitates all this in a five-day group process. The group acts like a mirror in which participants see their own damage and the ways they have coped with it. It ends the secrecy and shame around the trauma.

Because everyone has similar issues, the group becomes a powerful source of support and wisdom. The process is facilitated by a team of psychologists, priests and trained volunteers. We use the tools of psychology such as journaling, therapeutic facilitation, cognitive restructuring and group and individual discussions in order to

allow memories and grief to surface.

Whatever is brought to light is then united to the mysteries of Christ’s suffering death and resurrection using specially designed meditations and sensory-based activities called Living Scriptures.

The Grief to Grace process is grounded in the word of God, as well as the celebration of the sacraments, thereby allowing the Holy Spirit to act on individual histories. The psychological component helps remove the psyche’s resistance to the action of the Holy Spirit, the somatic exercises help participants stay grounded.

Like the Exercises of St Ignatius, Grief to Grace is designed so that prayer and meditation inspire concrete choices to change behaviours or attitudes which impede growth in virtue. What psychology helps recognise and acknowledge is brought within the ambit of God’s grace which builds on nature.

As they witness Christ suffering for them, participants can grieve deeply for what they have suffered, let go of anger and grief, open themselves to God’s mercy, and so experience the power of Christ’s dying and rising in their own lives in a more incarnate way.

The transformation evident in the participants after five days is remarkable. They look as if a great burden has been lifted from them; even their physical appearance changes since trauma was stored in their bodies.

As with any retreat, the work of the Holy Spirit is dynamic and not confined to those days alone. The attendees themselves attest to the power of the process.

One participant described the retreat as “The Church’s field hospital, operating at its most professional, deep behind enemy lines.”

• For more information or to support our work spiritually, practically or financially, please see our website at www.griegtogracesuk.org, or write to us at: Grief to Grace, 20A Kensington Square, London W8 5HH