

FLLOURISH

Official Journal of the Archdiocese of Glasgow

December 2025

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Archbishop's message for Advent

It's time to rediscover Advent hope of children

If you really want to know what Advent is all about, you really need to go into a primary school and visit the children in primary one and primary two.

They just can't wait for Christmas! They have such a longing in their hearts and are already counting the days...

Advent should be a period of longing for us too. We should try to develop that same sense of hardly being able to wait.

For the children, of course, the wait is for all the presents of Christmas morning! But for us the wait is for something different – the coming of the Emmanuel – God with us.

We are longing and waiting for God to be part of our lives and to be active in our lives.

If we have a loved one who has been away from home for a while it's natural that we long to see them return home to be with us. Advent is like that. It's a time for us to develop that sense of longing. We feel separated from God but we need to be with God and God needs to be with us.

The closer we get to Christmas the more the children get excited about what's going to happen.

As we celebrate the coming of Jesus our Saviour among us, may we too be excited that the promised birth of the Saviour is taking place and God is with us.



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Jubilee is about to begin for St Blane's

PUPILS and staff, past and present, gave Archbishop Nolan a typically warm welcome at a Mass of thanksgiving at Immaculate Conception Maryhill to celebrate the golden jubilee of St Blane's Primary School, Summerston.

And as is usual for the Archbishop at school anniversary celebrations he mingled with the enthusiastic young pupils, asking them questions about their faith and gently reminding them of the importance of having Jesus in their lives.

Before the Mass Archbishop Nolan met head teacher Mrs Lara McVey and her colleagues where he learned more about the school's plans for its upcoming year of celebrations.

Mrs McVey told *Flourish*: "Each class has been creating their own jubilee prayers and pledges, reflecting on the faith and values that unite our St Blane's family. In January there will be a Scottish-themed family, a display of memories, photo-



BY BRIAN SWANSON

PICTURES BY PAUL MCSHERRY

graphs, and stories around Easter, and a summer show in June celebrating the music, culture, and community spirit that have shaped our school through the years.

"The jubilee year will close with a Fun Day as a joyful way to honour the past while looking with hope to the future."

The head teacher added: "Our Golden Jubilee is a

time of joy, reflection, and gratitude. It allows us to celebrate the past, cherish the present, and look forward with faith and hope to the future.

"As we journey through the Holy Year as 'Pilgrims of Hope,' we are reminded that St Blane's is more than just a school – it is a loving community built on faith, learning, and care. We give thanks for all who have been part of our story and look ahead with excitement to the next 50 years."



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Suicide bill could force the closure of Catholic hospices

A SCOTTISH Parliament Committee has voted down proposals to strengthen safeguards in the controversial assisted suicide bill... and put into question the future of Catholic hospices.

Among the proposals dismissed last month were calls for stronger protections for disabled people, a more robust conscientious objection clause, and checks to ensure individuals are not choosing death because of poverty or inadequate housing.

Concerns were also raised about the potential impact on hospices and care homes, with fears that facilities unwilling to participate in assisted suicide could face defunding or closure.

A vote on an institution-

BY RONNIE CONVERY

al opt-out for hospices and care homes is expected later, but the MSP in charge of the Bill, Liam McArthur, signaled firm opposition, arguing such a move would create "a significant barrier" to accessing assisted suicide.

The failure to include an institutional opt-out on the face of the Bill could have devastating consequences for Catholic hospices and care homes across Scotland, which may lose vital funding or be forced to shut down.

An amendment from Clare Baker to raise the minimum age for assisted suicide from 16 to 25 – aligning with Scottish Sentencing Council guidance on brain maturity –

was also rejected. Instead, the committee agreed to increase the age threshold to 18.

Catholic Parliamentary Office Director Anthony Horan expressed deep concern: "Instead of beefing up this Bill with safeguards and tightening provisions, the committee is doing everything in its power to make the Bill unsafe and a significant risk to vulnerable people."

"Liam McArthur's insistence that there should be no institutional opt-out will be particularly alarming for hospices and care homes that do not wish to participate in assisted suicide. It could mean that, should this law pass, those hospices and care homes will lose vital funding and be forced to close."

Faith leaders sign historic declaration



IN a powerful show of unity amid rising global and local tensions, faith and belief leaders from across Glasgow's communities have signed the 'Glasgow 850 Interfaith Declaration' a statement of shared values and commitments to build a more just, inclusive, and compassionate Glasgow.

Archbishop Nolan joined faith and civic representatives to sign on behalf of the Catholic community at a reception in the City Chambers as part of Glasgow's 850th anniversary programme.

The Declaration sets out a shared vision for the city's future – committing its supporters to nurture understanding across faiths and worldviews; work together for equality, peace, and climate justice; welcome refugees; and challenge preju-

'We unite against hatred and division'

BY **RONNIE CONVERY**

PICTURES BY **PAUL MCSHERRY**

dice in all its forms.

Launched against a backdrop of hate crime, anti-immigrant sentiment, and strains on interfaith relationships caused by international conflicts and social polarisation – the Declaration states that Glasgow is a city of unity, compassion, and dialogue.

Provost

The Declaration was launched by Interfaith Glasgow in the presence of the Rt Hon The Lord Provost, Councillor Jacqueline McLaren. The Scottish Government Minister for Equalities, Kaukab Stewart MSP

highlighted the significance of the occasion for Scotland.

Lord Provost, Jacqueline McLaren, said: "This Declaration is a powerful statement of common purpose, shared values and commitments from the different faith groups and communities represented in Glasgow. It is clear that with local, national and global challenges affecting our daily lives and wellbeing we need initiatives such as this, backed by leaders, with a robust action plan, to support our aim of being a just, inclusive and resilient city."

Dr Rose Drew, CEO of Interfaith Glasgow, said: "In these challenging times, this Declaration stands as a hopeful and courageous act of solidarity. It's a public

reminder that people of all faiths and beliefs in Glasgow are committed to standing together – against hate, against division, and for the wellbeing of all."








Archbishop Nolan said: "I welcome this declaration which recognises that the diverse faith and belief communities are a force for good in society, actively seeking peace and harmony and working together for the benefit of the people of Glasgow."

■ Via the Glasgow 850 Interfaith Declaration page on Interfaith Glasgow's website, supporters can download a poster and email signature to help promote the Declaration.

We support the Glasgow 850 Interfaith Declaration

On the occasion of Glasgow's 850th Anniversary

As people from diverse faith and belief communities and out of a shared wish for Glasgow's flourishing - and a wider concern for people and planet - we commit ourselves, in a spirit of friendship and cooperation, to:

-  **Nurture** constructive relationships with people of all faiths and none, staying in dialogue about the issues that affect us all and striving to understand one another - especially where we differ.
-  **Celebrate** the role of faith and belief in building a more compassionate, just, and cohesive Glasgow, recognising the values, wisdom, and motivation that diverse traditions offer in the work of healing, serving, and transforming our world.
-  **Contribute** to efforts to tackle the climate crisis, drawing on the resources of our traditions to speak out for climate justice and advocate for environmental responsibility.
-  **Work** for equality in our communities, tackling poverty and speaking out for dignity, fairness, and opportunity for all who call Glasgow home.
-  **Welcome** and support refugees displaced by conflict and persecution, receiving them in a spirit of hospitality and compassion, and helping newcomers participate fully in the life of the city.
-  **Advocate** for peace in a world marked by conflict, drawing on the moral and spiritual resources of our diverse traditions to speak up courageously for just and lasting alternatives to war.
-  **Challenge** prejudice and discrimination in all their forms, and support efforts to counter ignorance, stereotyping, and hate, fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

United in our common humanity and in recognition of this city as our shared home, we pledge to work together to build a more just, inclusive, and compassionate Glasgow for generations to come.



For more information, please scan the QR code



Archbishop's poignant act of remembrance

BY **RONNIE CONVERY**

PICTURES BY **PAUL MCSHERRY**

THE annual Mass for deceased clergy of the Archdiocese was preceded by a poignant moment as the Archbishop descended to the Cathedral Crypt (right) to pray at the tombs of his predecessors.

The space – below the Marian shrine at the Cathedral – contains the tombs of Archbishops Tartaglia and Conti and Cardinal Winning as well as previous Archbishops and auxiliary bishops of Glasgow.

Later the Archbishop was joined by fellow members of the clergy for a moving Requiem to pray for the priests who have served the Archdiocese over the years and have now gone to their rest.



Nigerian Sisters' Glasgow welcome

SISTERS from a Nigerian Sorder who have taken up a new ministry in the Archdiocese were given a warm Glaswegian welcome at a special Mass in St Andrew's Cathedral.

And for Archbishop Nolan it was a chance to catch up with an old friend from his days as Bishop of Galloway.

The newly arrived religious, who belong to the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy, were in long discussion with the then-Bishop of Galloway in the hope of setting up a community in Ayrshire but despite their best efforts were unable to find suitable premises.

Speaking on behalf of the order, Sister Mary Joseph, who has been part of the order's community in Aberdeen for the past nine years, said: "Archbishop Nolan was truly inspiring when we were in Galloway and when he moved to Glasgow, I contacted him and it was God's will that he was able to invite us here.

"From the minute we arrived we have been blessed

BY BRIAN SWANSON

PICTURES BY PAUL MCSHERRY

to receive a very warm cordial welcome from everyone."

During their time in the Archdiocese, expected to be for at least three years, the sisters will be based in St Flannan's presbytery, Kirkintilloch.

The leader of their local community will be Sister Maria Dymphna Maduforo, with the support of Sister Mary Chidalu Mbajorgu, (pictured with the archbishop) and Sister Mary Nora OluChi Eleanya who will join them later.

Sister Mary Joseph added: "The Sisters will be carrying out our apostolate of giving practical love and support to the poor and the needy. They will also be involved in any other assignment the Archbishop will give them in the Archdiocese or the Parish Priest of the Parishes the Sisters belong to.

"So our work in the in the Archdiocese will be a com-

bination of the apostolate of our Religious Order, and any required pastoral duties in the Archdiocese."

Archbishop Nolan said: "I welcome the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy. They bring with them to the Archdiocese a lively faith, a concern for the poor and a great enthusiasm for serving God by serving God's people. I thank God for blessing us with their presence."

The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy was founded 42 years ago in the Archdiocese of Owerri, the capital of Imo state in South Eastern Nigeria after the Nigerian Civil War.

They now have a presence in other countries in Africa as well as in Italy, France, the USA, England, Aberdeen and now Glasgow.

Their focus is on imparting the Catholic faith and a healthy moral lifestyle to the young, on building a culture of life and on reaching out in partnership with other agencies especially to vulnerable girls and young women.



Student Jordan's Papal honour

ON November 1st, under the clear Roman sky, I experienced one of the most extraordinary moments of my life: serving Mass for the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, in St Peter's Square.

It is my first year in Rome at the Pontifical Scots College, having only arrived on the 28th of August, and I could never have imagined that within a few short months I would stand beside the successor of St Peter himself.

Before the celebration of Mass, I had the immense privilege of meeting the Holy Father at one of the side altars of St Peter's Basilica, the place where he vests for Mass.

As I approached, he looked at me with a gentle, fatherly smile, the kind that instantly puts one at ease.

There was a calm about him that seemed to fill the whole space, a serenity that came from deep prayer and peace. We spoke briefly, and his words were kind and warm, filled with genuine interest. Then, to my surprise, he gifted me a rosary, a gesture I will treasure for the rest of my life.

The basilica, usually filled with pilgrims, was quiet that morning. Only the Holy Father, the bishops and cardinals, and the small group of seminarians were present.

To stand in that vast and sacred space while it was empty was almost overwhelming.

As we vested beside the cardinals, I felt an immense sense of gratitude and awe. I was aware that



BY JORDAN WELSH

SEMINARIAN, PONTIFICAL SCOTS COLLEGE, ROME

this was something truly special, a grace that I would never forget.

I was assigned the role of book bearer, which meant that I stood beside the Holy Father throughout the Mass, holding the Missal as he prayed.

I joked with the other seminarians that it was the most important job of the day, and in some ways, it felt like it was.

Vocation

More than anything, though, it was a role of quiet service and attentiveness, a reminder that our vocation begins not in prominence but in humble assistance at the altar of God.

When the time came, I processed out of the basilica directly behind the Holy Father, carrying the book as we stepped into the light of St Peter's Square.

The sound of the *schola* echoing through the ba-

silica and St Peter's Square accompanied our steps.

As we emerged into the sunlight and the vast square filled with pilgrims came into view, I could feel the living heartbeat of the Church: a unity that transcended language and nation, gathered around one shepherd and one Lord.

The Mass marked a historic moment, as St John Henry Newman was declared a Doctor of the Church.

To serve that liturgy was to witness the Church honour one of her great sons, a man whose faith and intellect continue to guide and inspire all of us today.

At the close of the celebration, as the Holy Father gave his final blessing, I caught a last glimpse of his gentle smile. In that moment, I was reminded that true holiness is found in quiet grace and peace of the heart.

That day in St Peter's Square deepened my love for the Church and renewed my desire to serve her with my whole heart.

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The Michelle and Michael show

JUST a few weeks ago Michelle McManus sang solo for Pope Leo in his summer retreat at Castel Gandolfo but her latest ecclesiastical engagement was much closer to home... serenading her parish priest Father Michael Woodford, of St Gabriel's, Merrylee, who has retired after 51 years of priestly service.

The former Pop Idol winner and now host of BBC Scotland's afternoon show joined fellow parishioners, family, and friends, and members of the clergy for a night of celebration and nostalgia at Christ the King Church Hall, King's Park.

Her vocal tribute included a scaled down version of the hymn 'Because' specially written for SCIAF's 60th anniversary and which she sang for the Holy Father during a special conference on the care of creation.

And after finishing with a rousing version of 'My Way' she thanked Father Woodford for making her and family so welcome when they moved to St Gabriel's



BY **BRIAN SWANSON**

PICTURE BY **PAUL MCSHERRY**

Parish six years ago where their two sons were baptised.

She said: "I thought it would be impossible to find the same community I had always known in my own parish in Baillieston – but from day one, Father

Michael, you could not do enough for our family and I am so so grateful for that.

"I'm getting all emotional when I think of everything you have done for us over the years – so I better stop before I start bubbling!"

After being presented with a cheque on behalf of the parish and warmly thanking Michelle, Father Michael, who celebrated his 75th birthday the previous

day, recalled his early days as a priest when a friend helped him to buy his first car.

He said: "The registration was TGD and my friend said it stood for Thank God Daily and indeed I have to admit I do.

"I feel blessed by all the positions to which I have been appointed by different Archbishops but most particularly for my appointment here in October 2002. Little did I know that I would spend the latter half of my priestly ministry in

this beautiful community.

"When you look at St Paul in the Scriptures only three things matter – faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love.

"As St Therese of Lisieux said 'It is love alone that matters' and I hope that is something I have been able to transmit as a follower of Jesus Christ and parishioners have responded and returned that love to me."

Father Woodford studied at the Gregorian University,

Rome and was ordained on June 21st, 1974, in his home parish of St Bernard's, Nitshill by the recently-appointed Archbishop of Glasgow, Thomas Winning.

His first appointment as a curate was to Our Lady of Good Counsel, Dennistoun, in August of that year but only months later he returned to the Scots College Rome at the request of the Scottish bishops as their delegate for the Holy Year of 1975 to liaise with Scottish pilgrims.

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Peter and Harry are installed as Papal Knights of St Gregory

Two of Scotland's most prominent Catholic laymen have been named Papal Knights.

Peter Kearney, long-time Director of the Catholic Media office and Sir Harry Burns, former Chief Medical Officer for Scotland were invested as Knights of St Gregory at a Mass last month in St Mirin's cathedral, Paisley.

The awards, which were granted by Pope Francis shortly before he died, came at the request of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland, in recognition of the outstanding work both men had carried out over many years.

Medals

Conferring the medals and scrolls, Bishop John Keenan, the President of the Bishops' Conference, said: "The bishops were united in seeking to honour Peter for his enormous contribution to the life of the Church in over two decades as Director of the Catholic Media Office and Sir Harry for his enormous contribution to public life and particular support and guidance to the Bishops during the



BY **RONNIE CONVERY**

Covid epidemic." The Papal Knighthood of St Gregory the Great, established in 1831 by Pope Gregory XVI, is one of the highest honors conferred by the Holy See. It recognises individuals for

distinguished service to the Church, society, or the Holy Father.

Named after Pope St Gregory I (590–604), renowned for his reforms and missionary zeal, the order emphasises virtues of loyalty, faith, and civic responsibility.

Dublin gets its own cathedral ... at last



Archbishop Dermot Farrell shows the papal letter designating the Cathedral

THE Archdiocese of Dublin has a cathedral once more... after a 500 year wait.

St Mary's Pro-Cathedral has been redesignated as a full cathedral by Pope Leo.

Dublin lost its Catholic Cathedral, Christ Church, when it was seized by Prot-

estant authorities during the Reformation to serve as the cathedral of the new Church of Ireland.

When it became clear the cathedral would not be returned, following the end of persecution and the foundation of the modern Irish state, plans were drawn up

to build a new cathedral, and a parish church, St Mary's, was established as a (temporary) pro-cathedral.

However those plans were never realised, and now the church has been finally designated as the Mother Church of the Archdiocese of Dublin.

Historic move as Bishops appoint Luisa to top role

A GLASGOW-BASED businesswoman has been named as the first ever layperson to serve as the General Secretary of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland.

In parallel with her working career, Luisa Campbell has been actively involved in the life of the Church in Scotland at both parish and diocesan level in the areas of youth work, parish administration, liturgy, evangelisation, RCIA and finance for decades.

She retired early from work in 2020 to pursue her passion for voluntary work in the Catholic Church.

After gaining Master's degrees in both Engineering and Business Administration, she worked for almost 40 years in industry, ultimately as chief executive of a Scottish business which she led for over two decades.

Her roles involved leadership, governance, strategy, commercial finance, mergers and acquisitions and organisational development.



BY RONNIE CONVERY

During that time, she also acted as a trustee of several charities, served as a non-executive director and as trustee of a large pension scheme.

Luisa grew up in the Dio-

cese of Galloway and has lived in both the Archdiocese of Glasgow and the Diocese of Aberdeen. Her work has taken her to every diocese in Scotland.

In recent years Luisa has volunteered her expertise at St Patrick's Anderston

and at the Cathedral and is a member of the Evangelisation team of the Archdiocese of Glasgow.

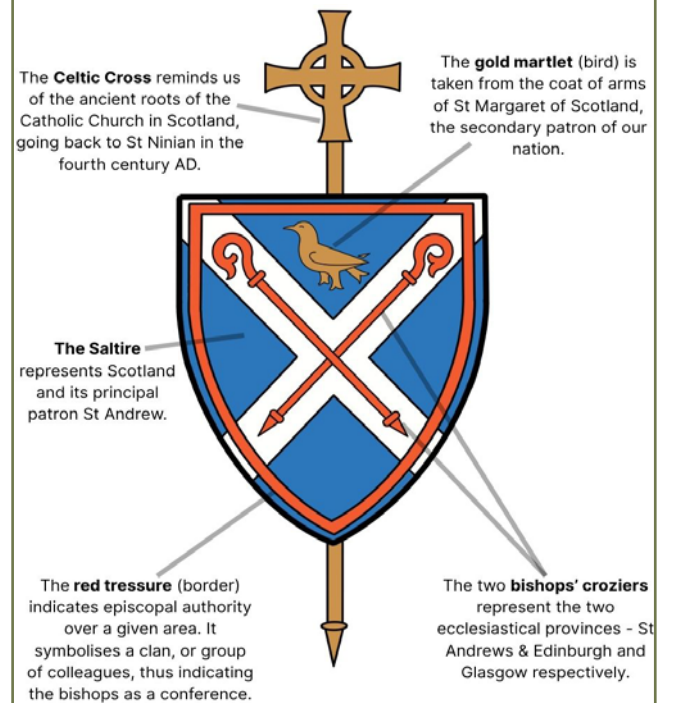
Luisa said: "I look forward to serving the Bishops of Scotland in my new role as General Secretary, bringing together my experience in the Church and in the world of business."

Bishop Keenan, President of the Bishops' Conference said: "The bishops are delighted that Luisa has accepted this post and will continue the good work carried on by Fr Gerry Maguinness over the past years."

"Luisa brings a wealth of experience both as a committed laywoman in the Church who has served our parishes and dioceses loyally over the years and who also has vast experience of life in the world and where she has made a fruitful contribution."

"We look forward to working with her as General Secretary of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland in the years ahead."

Bishops get new arms



THE Bishops' Conference of Scotland has its own Coat of Arms. They were handed over last month following their granting by The Lord Lyon.

In Scotland, the authority responsible for granting coats of arms - including those to public bodies - is the Lord Lyon King of Arms.

The Lord Lyon King of Arms, who presides over

that court, has the exclusive legal power to grant new coats of arms and to confirm existing ones.

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Plan early for Lourdes pilgrimage

SUMMER may be far away but... could a pilgrimage to Lourdes be an ideal Christmas gift for a loved one?

The dates of travel for the Glasgow Archdiocesan Pilgrimage have been announced early this year to allow plenty of time to plan. The pilgrimage will be led by the Archbishop from Thursday 16th till Thursday 23rd July 2026.

The Theme for 2026 is the Annunciation... "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" from the Gospel of Luke.

Bookings will open this month through JWT Tours with an indicative price of £995 for a three star hotel and £1099 for a four star to include direct flights from Glasgow Airport, full board,

BY **BRIAN SWANSON**

programme of spiritual events, taxes, information pack and ID badges.

If you would like to come to Lourdes as part of the Archdiocesan Pilgrimage and you have a medical condition, you will receive a questionnaire asking you to provide more information for the medical team. A visit from one of our nurses will then be arranged with a view to moving your application forward.

Pilgrimage organisers cannot always guarantee that a person will be fit to travel, and may require confirmation from a GP that they are happy to give their consent for would-be pilgrims to travel.

When in Lourdes, the weather can often be changeable, and the temperature may rise above 27°C.

The weekly programme involves a lot of physical activity, including walking and periods of standing or sitting. People often do not take this into account and can feel challenged when they arrive.

It is helpful for organisers, during the planning stages, to know if you would benefit from mobility assistance.

Volunteers from the St Margaret of Scotland Youth Group and Lourdes Hospitalité Group, will be happy to help.

■ **For more information email info@joewalstours.co.uk Freephone: 0808 1890468 or 0161 710 0800.**



City's tribute to Sister Isabel



SISTER Isabel Smyth SOBE, a Notre Dame nun for more than 60 years, has been presented with a lifetime achievement award for her pioneering work promoting interfaith relations in communities throughout Scotland.

Two of her colleagues from Interfaith Glasgow, Dianna Wolfson from the Jewish community and Brij Gandhi representing the Hindu faith, who worked alongside her for 50 years were also honoured at a ceremony in the City Chambers to launch the Glasgow 850 Interfaith Declaration.

Described as unifying statement of shared values

BY **BRIAN SWANSON**

and commitments to build a more just, inclusive, and compassionate Glasgow it was signed by a number of religious leaders, including Archbishop Nolan, pictured here with Sister Isabel and her lifetime achievement certificate.

Citation

Presented on behalf of the City of Glasgow the citation praised Sister Isabel's 'vision, leadership and gentle persistence' in promoting interfaith dialogue in the city and beyond.

With typical modesty she claimed the award was only

given because she had 'been around for so long'.

Sister Isabel told *Flourish*: "It has been a long road but an event like this one and the declaration which has been signed only goes to show how far we have come and how much the coming together of the different faith groups has contributed to the life of the city and beyond."

Sister Isabel led the Bishops' Conference of Scotland Committee for Inter-Religious Dialogue for many years and two years ago was presented with a Pro Ecclesia medal for long and distinguished service to the Catholic Church.

Vatican's new stamps



THE Vatican Post Office has issued new stamps dedicated to Christmas 2025 and produced a special stamp dedicated to UK Saint, John Henry Newman, newly proclaimed a Doctor of the Church.

The Christmas stamp offers two denom-



inations: €1.30 with a group of shepherds and €1.35 with the Holy Family, both taken from the 16th-century tapestry 'Adoration of the Shepherds' by Pieter van Aelst.

The Newman stamp features a portrait of the saint.

The Pope's Christmas tree is up!

THE Vatican's Christmas tree is up... a 25-metre red fir tree is now standing in St. Peter's Square, a gift from the province of Bolzano in northern Italy.

Bolzano is known for its extraordinary beauty filled with lakes, forests, mountains, and meadows. After thorough examination, the forest guard service selected the tree.

As is tradition, in addition to the main tree, 40 smaller trees will also be brought to the Vatican and be placed in different offices and buildings of the Holy See. More mature



trees are chosen as part of a natural renewal process.

The Vatican Christmas tree tradition began in 1982 with Pope John Paul II when he received a Christmas tree as a gift from a Polish farmer, who had brought it

all the way to Rome. Since then, the offering of the Christmas tree to the Pope has become an honour, and each year the Vatican accepts a tree donated by a different European country or region.

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St Margaret's Adoption Society issues plea for new parents

GLASGOW charity is **urgently seeking adoptive parents who can offer a forever home to a child.**

St Margaret's Adoption Society, based in the city's Charing Cross, has issued the call to action as the numbers of adopters coming forward has dwindled in recent times.

As Christmas approaches over 1200 children across the UK are currently waiting for adoptive families.

The society welcomes applications from couples or individuals who are willing to adopt within the Catholic faith, all faiths and none.

Prospective adoptive parents would be supported through every step of the process by St Margaret's experienced team of trauma informed social workers and support workers.

Need

As the charity celebrates its 70th anniversary, service manager, Janine Fraser, stated that the need for adoptive parents has 'never been greater.'

She said: "The need has never been greater with the number of children waiting on a home far outweighing the number of adoptive parents coming forward. This is due to a number of factors."

"While many people who approach us expect to be



BY **RONNIE CONVERY**

offered a baby, that's not always possible. We like to say that when a baby is conceived, it grows in the womb but when an adopted child is claimed, it grows in the heart.

"The Holy Family is the first real example of adoption. Joseph adopted Jesus into his heart through the holy spirit and we are asking you to consider if you could do the same?"

"St Margaret's is therefore looking for people interested in adopting older children, sibling groups, children with additional support needs and those from differ-

ent cultural backgrounds.

"We are the only Catholic adoption agency in the United Kingdom and our faith is something that really drives our service and everything we do."

As well as recruiting adopters the charity also provides an extensive range of post-adoption support, including educational and therapeutic services, training programmes, playgroup and an origins service to assist adults affected by historical adoption.

St Margaret's will launch its annual crib appeal during Advent and donations can be made at parishes in

the Archdiocese of Glasgow, Diocese of Paisley, Diocese of Motherwell and from the Province of St Andrews & Edinburgh, parishes in the Diocese of Dumfries, throughout the period of Advent and Christmastide.

The Crib Appeal helps fund and support the services offered to children and families across the country.

The charity is also looking for volunteers and asks anyone who can give some of their time to get in touch.

■ **For more information contact us by email at info@stmargaretsadoption.org or call us on 0141 332 8371.**

Advent and Christmas services at the Cathedral

THE Christmas season is one of the busiest times of the year in the Cathedral. To help you plan here is the calendar for the festive season:

Tuesday 16th December

■ Day of Confessions on from 9am to 5pm

Wednesday 24th December, Christmas Eve

■ Mass at 1pm and First Mass of Christmas at 5.15pm

■ Midnight Mass of Christmas at 12.00 midnight, celebrated by Archbishop Nolan

(Carols before Mass from 11.30pm)

Thursday 25th December, Christmas Day

■ Mass at 10am and 12 noon. No Evening Mass

(The Cathedral will close after the 12 noon Mass)

Friday 26th December, Feast of St. Stephen

The Cathedral will open at 12 noon

■ Mass at 1pm

Saturday 27th December, Feast of St. John

■ Mass at 1pm and Vigil Mass at 5.15pm

Sunday 28th December, Feast of the Holy Family

■ Masses at 10am 12 noon, 5.15pm
Mass celebrated by the Archbishop to close the Holy Year.

Monday 29th December – Wednesday 31 December

■ Masses at 1pm and 5.15pm

Thursday 1st January 2026, New Year's Day, Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

■ Mass at 12 noon. No Evening Mass
(The Cathedral will close after the 12 noon Mass)

Friday 2nd January

■ Mass at 1pm

Saturday 3rd January

■ Mass at 1pm and 5.15pm

Sunday 4th January, Solemnity of the Epiphany

■ Masses at 10 am, 12 noon and 5.15pm



Bethlehem's Advent of uncertainty and threat

As we look at a crib we should see hope and life in the vulnerability of the child newly born.

Whatever the current political chaos that exists in Bethlehem we must remember that the significance of that town is that it is the place where hope became alive at the birth of Jesus. That is why we celebrate Christmas.

So we can celebrate Christmas while still acknowledging knowing that Bethlehem is currently suffering. The last two years and more have been a period of considerable difficulty.

Dwelling on the obstacles to peace in Bethlehem gives little cause for optimism. But understanding the willingness of the Christian communities to stay and serve all who live in Palestine

BY **PROFESSOR BART MCGETTRICK**
BETHLEHEM UNIVERSITY
FOUNDATION

does give cause for hope.

One might have thought that the first phase of the U.S.-brokered cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas on 10 October this year would have been a cause for celebration, securing the release of hostages held by Hamas, the release of some Palestinian prisoners and detainees, and the end to a devastating war in Gaza in a 20-point plan.

Destruction

Week-by-week people in Gaza have returned to the chaos left by two years of destruction... of places and people.

While the attention of the

world has been focused on Gaza, the occupation on the West Bank proceeds apace. The illegal settlements are being constructed and the land taken over at an accelerating pace.

The move to the second phase of the so-called "Peace Plan" will confront a set of difficult issues, including the disarmament of Hamas and the future of Palestinian governance.

A ceasefire and the exchange of hostages is a far cry from "a peace plan".

Meanwhile there is considerable uncertainty surrounding the West Bank. The sense of a continuing planned chaos is very real. There is no clear vision of what a Palestinian state might look like and what governance arrangements there might be.



Between June and September 2025 Israeli authorities advanced or approved some 20,810 housing units in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. There is no sign of this being changed after the 10 October ceasefire.

The deep-seated longing for independence and peace in this part of the Holy Land feels increasingly distant.

Around Bethlehem residents grapple with the persistent threat of violence from settlers and the tightening restrictions on move-

ment imposed by Israel.

A growing fear among many Christians (and they are now less than 1% of the population) is the potential for Islamist radicalisation to escalate across the region, further compounding their anxieties.

People are functioning in a haze of political fog and administrative uncertainty. All around there is risk and threat. Yet the mission of the Church remains steadfastly to establish a society of peace and hope, imbued by the Gospel values to cre-

ate a society of justice.

Amid all of this, should we enjoy and celebrate Christmas? Most definitely YES!

Yes, because it was the birth of Our Lord that changed the world. That is what we celebrate. We are not just celebrating small steps towards a ceasefire or reconciliation – important though these may be!

The fact that there has been created a politically chaotic world cannot obscure the reality of Jesus among us – even if we have to find Jesus in the rubble.

SCIAF's ecological stocking filler

If parents or grandparents are looking for a unique Christmas gift this year how about this?

It's an inspirational new children's book from SCIAF encouraging youngsters in Scotland to learn from communities in Ethiopia how to care for the environment.

Entitled "The Wisdom of the River", it has been written by Elaine McGinlay, SCIAF's Development Education Officer.

Inspiration for the book came after she visited SCIAF's partner communities in southern Ethiopia to see how communities coped with severe droughts.

She said: "I was struck not only by the difficulty of the situation but by the leadership and resilience within the community – people drawing on local knowledge, taking forward solutions shaped by their own strengths, and supported by SCIAF."

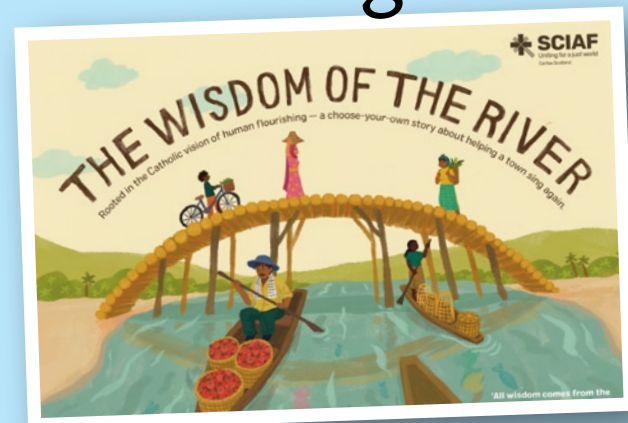
Beautifully illustrated by

Vietnamese-born freelance illustrator Anh Cao, who has worked with a number of well-known publishers, it is designed for 7–10 year olds and for families and classrooms exploring themes of faith, sustainable development and human flourishing.

The River itself narrates the story, guiding Riochara – the reader, (meaning 'friend of the River') – to listen patiently, walk alongside others, and discover how a community can "sing again".

One of the first to read the book was her son Matthew, aged five, a pupil at her former school St Timothy's Primary in the East End where Elaine's mum, known affectionately in the school as "the SCIAF lady" for her long term commitment to fund raising was an early inspiration.

Elaine said: "The Wisdom of the River brings SCIAF's work to life in a gentle way, and I think it is a wonderful addition to any school



or home library.

"My hope is that families enjoy reading this book aloud together and learn how flourishing isn't only about material needs, or simple solutions to complex global issues including poverty and hunger but about many connected solutions."

Lorraine Currie, SCIAF's chief executive, said: "The Wisdom of the River is a beautiful children's picture book with a story rooted in our Catholic faith, which I think families will treasure reading together, and re-

turn to again and again."

A Gaelic edition of the book is planned and next month, thanks to the generosity of the Drummond Trust, a Stirling-based charity which supports the publishing of theological works, a copy of the book will be sent to every Catholic primary school in Scotland.

The Wisdom of the River by Elaine McGinlay (SCIAF) is published by SCIAF, priced at £9.99 (+ delivery), and is available from sciaf.org.uk/wisdom

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New statue unveiled to mark Margaret Sinclair anniversary

THE first ever statue of the Venerable Margaret Sinclair has been erected in Carfin, Scotland's National Marian Shrine, as efforts continue to further the cause of her beatification.

The new statue was unveiled 100 years after the death, aged 25, of the woman many would consider Scotland's next saint.

Venerable Margaret Sinclair is regarded as a shining example of holiness in the ordinary life.

Struggles

Born into a working-class family in Edinburgh, she grew up amid the daily struggles familiar to many families of her time.

Despite the challenges, Margaret had a deep faith from an early age. She attended Mass, nurtured a strong devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and carried a quiet but resolute desire to serve God in every circum-

BY BRIAN SWANSON

stance. As a young woman, Margaret worked first as a French polisher and later in a biscuit factory, where her kindness and simplicity left a lasting impression on co-workers.

In 1923 she entered the Poor Clare Colettines in London, taking the name Sister Mary Francis of the Five Wounds.

Though her time in religious life was relatively brief – she died of tuberculosis at only twenty-five – her patience and unwavering trust in God inspired all who knew her.

She died on November 24 1925, and her supporters hope that the statue being erected almost 100 years to the day since her death will raise awareness of the saintly qualities of the Edinburgh born nun, especially following the canonisation of Carlo Acutis.

It took the Venerable Margaret Sinclair committee, based at St Patrick's in Edinburgh's Cowgate where she is buried, two years of planning for the statue, which was largely funded by the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh with the rest coming from donations.

Example

John Doohan, chair of the Venerable Margaret Sinclair committee, said: "St Carlo Acutis was just 15 when he died and his life was a wonderful example especially to young Catholics all over the world.

"By displaying her statue in Carfin we want to capitalise on that and so we are saying to the young people of Scotland that it's also cool for them to be inspired by Margaret Sinclair who also died young and whose Catholic faith and values shaped everything she did throughout her short life."



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Praising

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Caring Sunday, 14 December 2025

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From Sister Rita, the Board of Directors and all at St Margaret of Scotland Hospice

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St Margaret's
Children & Family Care Society



At this time when the whole Church rejoices in God's gift of the Holy Family of Nazareth, St Margaret's Children & Family Care Society would like to wish you all a Happy and Holy Christmas and a big thank you for helping us give so many vulnerable children the irreplaceable gift of a forever family.

Belonging



May the child Jesus fill our hearts with love, hope and joy during this Advent/Christmas season

What a Jubilee year that was ...



THE Holy Year of 2025, proclaimed by Pope Francis as a 'Jubilee of Hope', has proven to be a time of joys and sorrows, departures and returns.

From the joyful opening of the Holy Doors by the ailing Argentinian Pope last Christmas Eve to his Easter death and the election of his successor, the year has been a rollercoaster reminder of the importance of the virtue of hope enduring in the face of trials.

The Jubilee began with great solemnity on December 24, 2024, when Pope Francis opened the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica, marking the official start of the Year of Jubilee. He was visibly weak and had to push open the doors from a wheelchair.

All year, pilgrims from every continent flocked to Rome, forming

long lines to pass through the Holy Doors of the four major basilicas of St Peter, St John Lateran, St Mary Major, and St Paul Outside the Walls – in a visible sign of repentance and renewal. The Italian government and Rome's city leaders had planned for a near doubling of the city's tourist numbers during 2025 and they weren't wrong!

For the first time, innovative ways of obtaining the Jubilee indulgence were introduced – including 'fasting' from social media use and visiting a sick person. An app was brought in to organise pilgrimages to the Holy Doors, and smart phones carried live commentaries of Papal Masses.

Across the world, diocesan cathedrals took part, with special jubilee crosses being displayed for the course of the Holy Year. In Glasgow, Archbishop Nolan unveiled

BY **RONNIE CONVERY**

a specially designed cross which hung above the cathedra for the duration of the year.

On Easter Monday, Pope Francis passed away after more than a decade of guiding the Church. His death seemed to unite the world in prayer and gratitude for a pontificate which will long be remembered for its focus on mercy and inclusivity.

The College of Cardinals elected US and Peruvian citizen Cardinal Robert Prevost to succeed him as Pope Leo XIV. The new Holy Father quickly captured hearts with his call to unity in a world often shadowed by division.

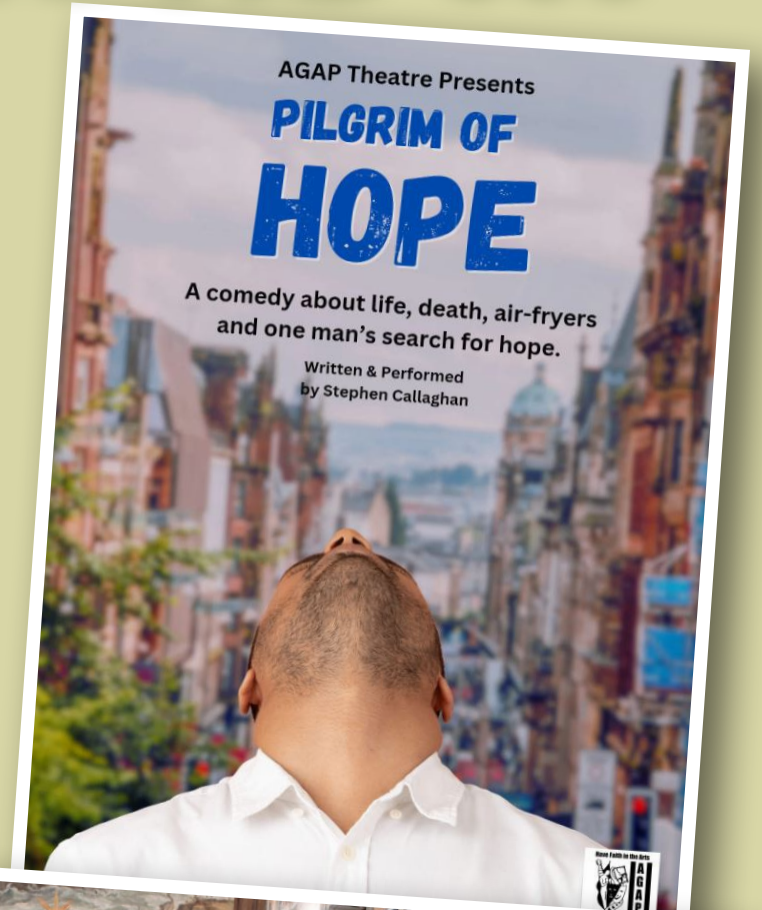
Under Pope Leo XIV's leadership, the Jubilee continued with renewed fervour. Major events – from the Youth Pilgrimage to the Jubilee for the Sick and Disabled – drew millions to Rome and countless more

participated spiritually from afar.

Closer to home AGAP took the Holy Year message around Scotland and played to great reviews at the Edinburgh Fringe in August with the play 'Pilgrim of Hope'. There was great joy at the canonisation of the young saints Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati in September.

Glasgow's Archdiocesan pilgrimage was held in September, and earlier in the year, the Archbishop had met the new Pope while leading a summer pilgrimage of early career teachers to Rome. Many parishes organised their own pilgrimages to the Eternal City and the Archdiocesan Youth Office organised a pilgrimage for the Jubilee of Youth in August.

As the Holy Year draws to its conclusion on January 6, 2026, with the closing of the Holy Doors in Rome's basilicas, we can look back on a year that blended sorrow with grace, and ends as it began: in hope.



Top: Archbishop Nolan blesses the Jubilee Cross in the Cathedral
Above: Pope Francis opens the Holy Door of St Peter's
Right: Pope Francis died in April

Centre: The Holy Year Conclave
Left: Cardinal Prevost elected as Leo XIV
Above: Archbishop Nolan and Scots pilgrims meet the new Pope
Top: AGAP's Holy Year play toured Scotland

AI doesn't have all the answers

Archbishop urges young people to cultivate consciences

ARCHBISHOP Nolan
Used technology to get his point across last month at a Mass to mark Catholic Education week.

Speaking to the youngsters about the current debate over AI (artificial intelligence), he produced his mobile phone and asked 'Alexa' two questions: 'How do I make an atomic bomb?' and 'Should I make an atomic bomb?'

While the app answered the first question fully, the second produced no response.

Archbishop Nolan said: "Technology is great at gathering information and providing us with technical answers. But it doesn't help us when it comes to questions of values or issues of right and wrong."

Setting his mobile phone aside he took up a newspaper (*Flourish* of course!) and a bible, and quoted the theologian Karl Barth who said "Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspa-



BY **RONNIE CONVERY**

PICTURES BY **PAUL MCSHERRY**

pers from your Bible."

His message was clear... faith and technology are not in competition, but the insights of faith help us to use technology well and for the benefit of humanity.

The Cathedral was packed for the Mass which saw senior pupils from across the Archdiocese fill the pews, while the music was provided by the schola of St Aloysius.



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Dilexi te Pope Leo XIV issues first Apostolic Exhortation on love for the poor

The Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te* "I have loved you" (Rev 3:9), focused on love for the poor, was signed by Pope Leo XIV on October 4, 2025, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, and published on October 9.

"I am happy to make this document my own - adding some reflections - and to issue it at the beginning of my own pontificate, since I share the desire of my beloved predecessor that all Christians come to appreciate the close connection between Christ's love and his summons to care for the poor. I too consider it essential to insist on this path to holiness, for 'in this call to recognize him in the poor and the suffering, we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices, which every saint seeks to imitate', writes Pope Leo XIV.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te*, the Holy Father affirms: "I am convinced that the preferential choice for the poor is a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society, if we can only set ourselves free of our self-centeredness and open our ears to their cry" (DT 7) but he points out that "this 'preference' never indicates exclusivity or discrimination towards other groups, which would be impossible for God. It is meant to emphasize God's actions, which are moved by compassion toward the poverty and weakness of all humanity. Wanting to inaugurate a kingdom of justice, fraternity and solidarity, God has a special place in his heart for those who are discriminated against and oppressed, and he asks us, his Church, to make a decisive and radical choice in favor of the weakest" (DT 16).

Dilexi te also highlights the importance of being "a Church for the poor" and emphasizes that "this is not a matter of mere human kindness but a revelation" (DT 5). It is in this perspective that "we can understand the numerous pages of the Old Testament in which God is presented as the friend and liberator of the poor... « God's heart has a special place for the poor [...] T

he entire history of our redemption is marked by the presence of the poor" (DT 17).

The Holy Father highlights that "no Christian can regard the poor simply as a societal problem: they are part of our 'family'. They are 'one of us'. Nor can our relationship to the poor be reduced to merely another ecclesial activity or function" (DT 104) and recalls the teaching on work of Saint John Paul II to reflect on "the active role that the poor ought to play in the renewal of the Church and society, thus leaving behind a certain 'paternalism' that limited itself to satisfying only the immediate needs of the poor" (DT 87).

Furthermore, *Dilexi te* explains that "the poorest are not only objects of our compassion, but teachers of the Gospel. It is not a question of 'bringing' God to them, but of encountering him among them" (DT 79) because "while it is true that the rich care for the poor, the opposite is no less true. This is a remarkable fact confirmed by the entire Christian tradition. Lives can actually be turned around by the realization that the poor have much to teach us about the Gospel and its demands" (DT 109).

Read the full document at: dilexite.org



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Archbishop's call to be generous to St Nicholas Care Fund's appeal

Archbishop Nolan has issued a heartfelt appeal for support for the St Nicholas Care Fund on the weekend of December 14. The charity, which was founded by Cardinal Winning, and reconstituted by Archbishop Conti, offers vital support to those suffering in our midst from poverty of all kinds. Last year around £50,000 was distributed in grants to local communities in the Glasgow area. Among the recipients were local children to enjoy Christmas activities, learn musical instruments, helping refugees learn sewing skills, supporting a young mothers' group and countless other activities. The text of the Archbishop's Letter for Caring Sunday follows:

MY Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This year we have welcomed a new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, who has taken forward the theme for this Jubilee Year called by Pope Francis. That theme is 'Pilgrims of Hope'.

That call to be pilgrims of hope resonates deeply at a time when so much of our world is torn by conflict and unrest. Wars continue to rage, families are displaced, and many live in fear and

uncertainty.

Closer to home, it may seem hard to be a 'pilgrim of hope' when all around us hardship weighs heavily on individuals and families in our communities.

More than 30 years ago, moved by compassion, the late Cardinal Winning founded what was to become the St Nicholas Care Fund as a practical response to the suffering he witnessed in the Archdiocese. Today that mission is just as urgent.

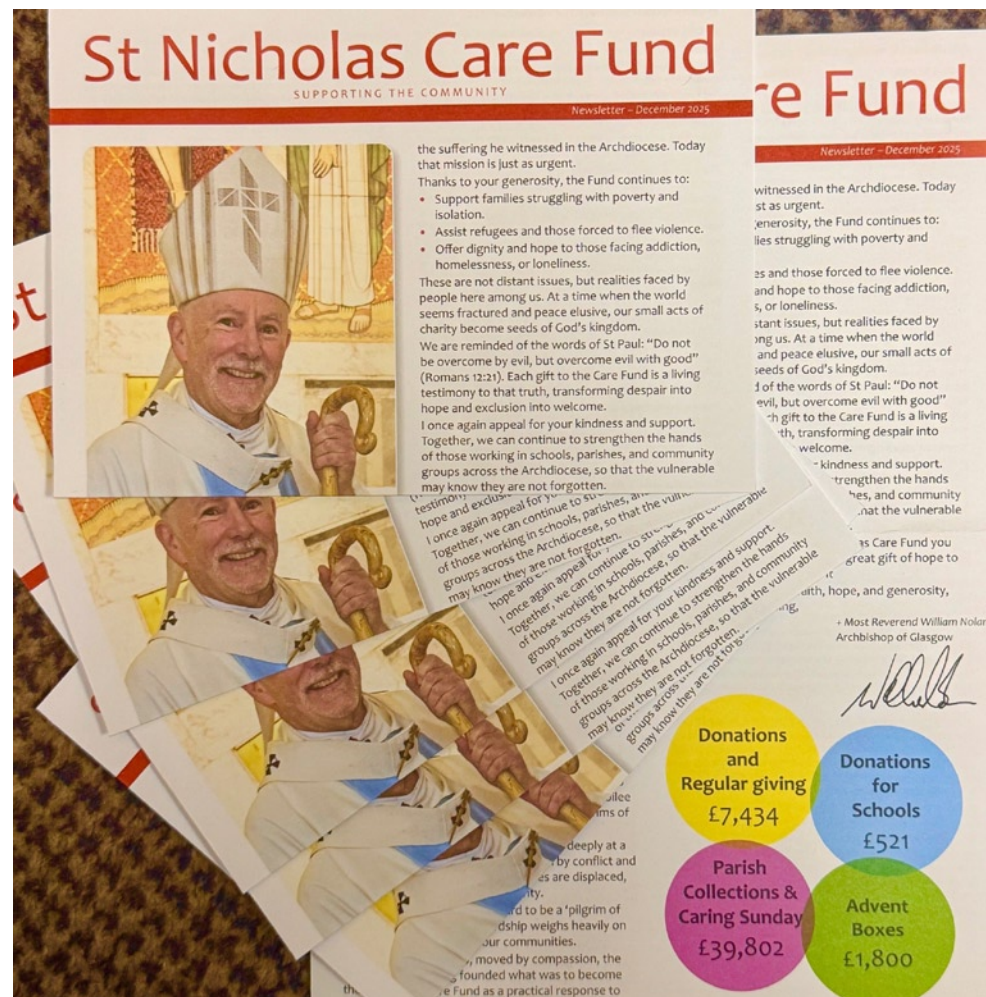
Thanks to your generosity, the Fund continues to:

- Support families struggling with poverty and isolation.
- Assist refugees and those forced to flee violence.
- Offer dignity and hope to those facing addiction, homelessness, or loneliness.

These are not distant issues, but realities faced by people here among us. At a time when the world seems fractured and peace elusive, our small acts of charity become seeds of God's kingdom.

We are reminded of the words of St Paul: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Each gift to the Care Fund is a living testimony to that truth, transforming despair into hope and exclusion into welcome.

I once again appeal for your kindness and support. Together, we can continue to strengthen the hands of those working in schools, parishes, and community



groups across the Archdiocese, so that the vulnerable may know they are not forgotten.

By your generosity to the St Nicholas Care Fund you are being a pilgrim bringing that great gift of hope to those who desperately need it.

With gratitude for your faith, hope, and generosity, and with every blessing
Yours devotedly

+William Nolan
Archbishop of Glasgow

Fr Francis strikes the right notes



PARISHIONERS at St Margaret Mary's in Castlemilk were joined last month by Fr Francis Ututo, the Regional Superior of the Congregation of the Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy – the religious order which has care of the parish and nearby St Batholomew's.

The distinguished guest arrived to check in on his two brother priests, Fr Vincent and Fr Richard to ensure they had settled in to

life in Castlemilk after their recent posting to the parishes.

He was pleased to hear they have been warmly welcomed and could see plenty of smiling faces from parishioners from the sanctuary and later in the hall.

Fr Francis (above, centre), a fine singer, delighted his listeners with his music and thanked everyone for welcoming him and his brother priests on his flying visit.

New catechists commissioned

IT was the end of a two year programme of study and reflection last month as seven lay people were formally commissioned as Catechists by the Archbishop to serve in parishes across the Archdiocese.

They have received their Award in Catholic Theological Education – which is an academic recognition reflecting 600 hours of study as part of a partnership between the Archdiocese of Glasgow and the University of Glasgow.

The new catechists are Catherine Dunipace from St Andrew's, Bearsden; Lindsey Short from St. Dominic's, Bishopbriggs; Avril O'Sullivan from Immaculate Conception, Maryhill; Leslie Austin from St Michael's, Parkhead; Breege Bean from St Eunan's, Clydebank; Leonie Healey from St Gregory's, Wyndford and William Docherty from St Joachim's, Carmyle.



BY **RONNIE CONVERY**

PICTURES BY **PAUL MCSHERRY**

They were presented with their certificates by Archbishop Nolan at a special Mass at which they were formally given the mandate to work in parishes in the

areas of religious education and evangelisation.

A new course for those keen to embark on the scheme will start next September.

The study programme is directed towards the formation of Catechists to work in

parishes, principally with adult Catholics, but also in RCIA, with children or with young people.

■ For more information contact the RE Department by e-mailing Christine. Burke@rcag.org.uk



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Birthday joy for Lay Dominicans

THE Glasgow Lay Dominican Fraternal Group celebrated its first anniversary last month and to mark the milestone they invited some friends including Dominican Friars from Nigeria and Vietnam who are supplying for the Archdiocese to join them.

Catherine Nolan, Convenor of the Glasgow Lay Dominican Fraternal Group explained: "The Dominicans are the Order of Preachers. With the Nuns and the Friars, Lay Dominicans are a vital part of the Dominican Family. We preach by how we live out our daily lives for God.

"Formation can last for a period of up to five years and until a year ago (like Martin Colpi, our group's secretary and myself) anyone wanting to make their Perpetual Profession would have to travel through to Edinburgh each month. Now this amazing opportunity is also available in Glasgow!

"We meet in St. Columba's Church (Hopehill Road,



BY RONNIE CONVERY

Glasgow) on the third Saturday of every month at 12 noon. We are indebted to Fr. Rene who welcomed us to St. Columba's and who continues to look after us so well.

"We are delighted too to be supported by Fr. Andrew Brookes, OP, who – as the Religious Assistant of our Glasgow Group – provides on-going spiritual direc-

tion.

"Over the last year we have hared in many of God's blessings and graces. Two people have entered the Novitiate and we have an Enquirer from Oban! So please keep us in your prayers!"

■ If anyone would like to know more about becoming a Lay Dominican, please contact laydominicansuk@gmail.com.



SCIAF donates crib to Scottish Parliament

THIS exquisitely-hand-crafted Nativity scene, created for SCIAF by students in Malawi, has been presented to the Scottish Parliament and is set to be displayed during Advent for years to come.

The figures of Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, the Magi, shepherds, an angel a donkey and camel were carved from teak wood by young students under the guidance of a local Malawian artist.

The completed artwork was flown to the Glasgow offices of SCIAF and formally handed over to the Scottish Parliament to presiding officer Alison Johnstone MSP,

BY BRIAN SWANSON

by Bishop Brian McGee, SCIAF's Bishop President and Chief Executive Lorraine Currie.

Lorraine said: "This Nativity Set is a wonderful symbol of friendship, cultural exchange, and the incredible talent of young people in Malawi. We are proud to share their creativity with the people of Scotland and hope it brings joy to Parliament during the festive season."

And thanks to SCIAF volunteer Michael Rainey there's now a permanent Scottish connection to the Nativity Scene after the

former tech teacher, with the help of technicians and pupils from Our Lady and St Patrick's High in Dumbarton, designed and created a foldable stable scene to house it when it is on display.

Mark Booker SCIAF's Education and Engagement manager said: "This is a great collaborative piece of work involving our schools work and volunteers here in Scotland along with our amazing partners in Malawi. It's lovely that this creative piece will be visible at Holyrood each Advent as a reminder of our partnership and solidarity."



Delivering expert hearing care with empathy and understanding

Expert Help for Hearing Loss

Glen and Jayne Caffley, experienced audiologists, founded Audiology House in Bearsden to offer personalised hearing care.

Their unique combination of clinical knowledge and personal experience with hearing loss allows them to connect deeply with their clients.

Glen, born deaf, and Jayne, with family connections to hearing loss, bring unique empathy and understanding to their practice.

Audiology House features a comfortable, wheelchair-accessible environment with a custom-built sound booth for precise testing.

They offer comprehensive hearing tests, expert hearing aid fittings, and specialised ear wax removal. The clinic provides a wide range of hearing aids, including advanced AI models, and allows clients to trial them before committing.

Their approach focuses on understanding each client's unique situation, considering factors like daily activities and aesthetic preferences.

Audiology House also offers ear protection for noisy environments and hobbies, custom-fit in-ear monitors for professionals, and specialised plugs for sleep and swimming.

Glen and Jayne's commitment to independence ensures clients receive unbiased care, with access to all hearing aid manufacturers in the UK.

Their goal is to provide a better experience for every patient, prioritising personalised, compassionate care.



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RECENTLY Pope Leo caused a ruckus among American Catholics by saying the death penalty and immigration are “pro-life” issues alongside abortion.

By extension, he also suggested that the lone yardstick for measuring a Catholic politician's pro-life commitment cannot be his or her voting record on abortion.

The consternation was especially pronounced among the cohort in the American church which has been raised, for more than two generations now, on the idea that Catholic identity is primarily about opposition to abortion: The more anti-abortion, the more Catholic, and vice-versa.

Some charged Leo had espoused a novelty which began under Pope Francis, in opposition to previous popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

In fact, however, a broader understanding of what it means to be pro-life is actually among the numerous points that unite the last four popes. St John Paul II is the classic example.

To begin, let's stipulate that John Paul yielded pride of place to no one in the fervency of his opposition to abortion.

John Paul's Vatican fought titanic battles in the mid-1990s against the Clinton administration and other forces which sought to enshrine access to abortion in international law as a fundamental human right. With Islamic states and a cross-section of nations from the developing world, the Vatican beat back those efforts at U.N. conferences.

Yet for John Paul, abortion was hardly his lone “pro-life” concern.

Abolitionist

John Paul was essentially an abolitionist on the death penalty, calling it an “unworthy punishment,” praying for a global ban on capital punishment, and arguing that whatever conditions may have justified the death penalty in previous eras are “practically non-existent” in modern societies.

He practised what he preached, personally intervening in death penalty

Being pro-life is about more than just being anti-abortion



BY JOHN L ALLEN JR
EDITOR OF CRUX

cases around the world to request clemency for the condemned.

In 1999 during a visit to St. Louis, John Paul personally appealed to then-Governor Mel Carnahan to spare the life of a death row inmate named Darrell Mease. Carnahan wasn't Catholic but he granted the pope's request despite remaining pro-death penalty.

Mease, 79, remains alive today because of the pope's appeal.

On immigration, John Paul recognised the right of nations to regulate their borders, but insisted the proper way of limiting entry isn't by “tightening laws and reinforcing border control systems,” but by addressing the root causes of migration.

John Paul taught that immigrants never lose their fundamental human dignity. He called especially on Chris-



tian communities to show solidarity and compassion, and, anticipating Francis, he called for the construction of a “culture of welcome”. Pointedly, he said this duty applies whether or not a given immigrant has arrived through the proper legal channels.

“Today the illegal migrant comes before us like that ‘stranger’ in whom Jesus asks to be recognised,” the pope said in his 1996 message for World Migration Day.

There's John Paul II on economic justice, for instance, He taught that the right to private property is not absolute because property is under a “social mortgage,” meaning that private ownership is justified only if it serves the common good.

Or, there's John Paul II on the environment. Long before Francis came along, a pope in 1990 was saying, “The gradual depletion of the ozone layer and the relat-

ed ‘greenhouse effect’ has now reached crisis proportions,” and declaring, “The ecological crisis is a moral issue.”

There's also John Paul II the “Peace Pope,” forever condemning armed conflict and the global weapons trade. He may not have been a pacifist, but he was a vocal critic of virtually every use of force of his era – including, memorably, his role as the leader of the global moral opposition to the 2003 war in Iraq.

John Paul II didn't really use the term “pro-life,” which is a bit of American political argot. Nevertheless, these examples, and countless others, make clear that when John Paul pondered threats to life, it wasn't just abortion he considered ... and when he thought about the responsibilities of Christians to defend life, it wasn't just opposing abortion he had in mind.

As a footnote, John Paul didn't necessarily embrace the full agenda of the more aggressively pro-life elements of the American church either.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, when some American bishops were publicly floating the idea of communion bans for pro-choice Catholic politicians, John Paul himself often administered communion to pro-choice Catholic public figures – including, for instance, then-Roman Mayor Francesco Rutelli during the Great Jubilee of 2000.

Obviously, that didn't make John Paul II soft on abortion. It perhaps did suggest, however, that he took a more ample view of what the full measure of someone's “pro-life” commitments ought to be.

CRUX
Taking the Catholic Pulse

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CRUXNOW.COM



As Christmas approaches it's right to feel comforted, but also disturbed...

I've never been fully comfortable with some of my friends who send out Christmas cards with messages like: May the Peace of Christ Disturb You!

Can't we have one day a year to be happy and celebrate without having our already unhappy selves shaken with more guilt?

Well, it's complex. Christmas is a time when God gives us permission to be happy, when the voice of God says: Comfort my people. Be comforted! Speak words of comfort!

But Christmas is also a time that highlights the sad truth that when God was born in our 2000 years ago, there wasn't room for that birth in all the normal homes and places of the day. There was no room for him at the inn. Peoples' busy lives and practical concerns kept them from offering him a place to be born. That hasn't changed. So, there are also good reasons to be disturbed.

But first, the comfort: A number of years ago, I participated in a large diocesan synod. At one point the animator in charge had us divide into small groups and each group was asked the



Scribblings of the spirit

Flourish's regular columnist, Fr Ronald Rolheiser offers practical insights each month into improving our spiritual lives

question: What's the single most-important message the church needs to say to the world right now?

The groups reported back and each group named some important spiritual or moral challenge: "We need to challenge our society toward more justice!" "We need to challenge the world to have real faith and not confuse God's word with its own wishes." "We need to challenge our world toward a more responsible sexual ethos." Wonderful, needed challenges, all of them. But no group came back and said: "We need to speak to the world of God's consolation!"

Granted, there is injustice, violence, racism, sexism, greed, selfishness, sexual irresponsibility, and self-serving faith around;



but most adults in our world are also living in pain, anxiety, disappointment, loss, depression, and unresolved guilt.

Everywhere you look, you see heavy hearts. Moreover, many people living with hurt and disappointment do not see God and the church as an answer to their pain but rather as somehow part of its cause.

So, in preaching God's

word, our churches need to assure the world of God's love, God's concern, and God's forgiveness. Perhaps before doing anything else, God's word is meant to comfort us; indeed, to be the ultimate source of all comfort. Only when the world knows God's consolation will it be more open to accept the concomitant challenge.

And prominent in that challenge is to make room for Christ at the inn, namely, to open our hearts, our homes, and our world as places where Christ can come and live, no matter how inconvenient that may be.

From the safe distance of two thousand years, we too easily make a scathing judgment on the people at the time of Jesus' birth for not knowing what Mary and Joseph were carrying and for not making a place for Jesus to be born. How could they be so blind?

But that same judgment can still be made of us. We aren't exactly making room in our own inns.

We see this today (and this will constitute a judgment on our generation) in the reluctance, almost all over the world, to welcome new im-

migrants, to make room for them at the inn.

If Christ is in the poor, in the stranger, and the Gospels assure us that he is, then Christ is surely in the immigrant. Today there are over fifty million refugees in the world, people whom no one will welcome. Why not?

We are not bad people and are capable most times of being wonderfully generous. But letting this flood of immigrants enter our lives would disturb us. Our lives would have to change. We would lose some of our present comforts, some of our old familiarities, and some of our securities.

We are not bad people, neither were those innkeepers two thousand years ago who, not knowing what they were dealing with, inculpable ignorance, turned Mary and Joseph away.

I've always nursed a secret sympathy for them. Maybe because I am still, also in ignorance, doing exactly what they did. My comfort and security often have me say, No room at the inn.

The skewed circumstances of Christ's birth, if understood, cannot but disturb. May they also bring deep consolation.

Christmas tree is full of memories and lessons

WHEN it comes to Christmas trees, Himself knows the drill. Don't darken this door with anything that doesn't look like it's been gifted by the people of Norway.

It all goes back to my childhood when we had the same sad and scrawny, silver tinsel tree until I was nine when my mum finally gave in to my pleading and our first festive spruce was bought.

I was a December baby, due on the 27th – my parents' first wedding anniversary. Champing at the bit, I was impatient even then, making my appearance a couple of weeks ahead of time.

My dad came home for his lunch to find things were underway. A mad dash to the hospital and I arrived soon after. While my mum did the necessary, my dad, like all good Catholic fathers of the day, was in the waiting room praying the Rosary.

At visiting time the next day, my dad told my mum he



Mary's musings

Flourish columnist Mary McGinty's monthly musings on faith and family

had discovered my birthday was the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Back then, little was known here about the 16th century Mexican apparition of Our Lady. For our family though, a great devotion had begun.

December 1962 wasn't the best time to bring home a newborn. It was shaping up to be the coldest winter the country had known for more than 200 years. In Siberian conditions mothers had to contend with nappies freezing on the washing line. Fires were burning in the grate all night.

It's fair to say, when we arrived home from hospital on Christmas Eve, a tree wasn't high on their list of priorities.

The following year one

was apparently bought in time for my first birthday. My mum loved to tell me my first word was 'tree' although she admitted to a certain dubiety. It might have been 'tea' which I was partial to even then. It was the start of a lifetime love for the hot beverage, only marginally surpassed by my enjoyment of its European cousin, coffee.

Fake or real, our trees were always adorned mainly with chocolate decorations. My dad had a lovely Italian friend who ran a café. His Christmas display was an extravaganza of sumptuous treats.

Wanting to give his friend our business, we bought all our edible goodies for gifts from him. That included

the chocolate decorations for the tree. This was long before it was understood that dogs should not be given chocolate.

Like my mum and me, our wee dog was partial to a sweet treat. Only my dad had any restraint so by Boxing Day the tree was embarrassingly bare.

I'm a sticker for the traditional Christmas colours. You can keep your metallic accents, contemporary purples and bold brights. It's red and green all the way in our house.

Not only do these rich hues cheer the dark winter with their warmth, they hold a deeper significance. Red for the blood of Christ and green for eternal life.

These majestic colours

also represent the leaves and berries of the crown of thorns. I think of my mum placing sprigs of holly and ivy around the living room.

In 2018 at the illuminating of the tree in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis, encouraged the faithful to reflect upon the meaning of our Christmas traditions.

"The Christmas tree with its lights reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world, the light of the soul that drives away the darkness of animosity and makes room for forgiveness," he said.

"The nativity and the tree, fascinating symbols of Christmas, can bring families and meeting places a reflection of the light and tenderness of God to help everyone to live the feast of the birth of Jesus."

When our parents are gone ahead the memory of our childhood traditions in the holy season of Christmas keeps us close to them in love and in faith. As you recall Yuletides past, I wish you and those dear to you a happy and holy Christmas.

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Nourish
your soul
with our
monthly
spirituality
supplement

ART OF THE MONTH

Advent art reminds us never to lose our sense of wonder

In these days of waiting for Christmas, our thoughts move naturally to the familiar figures of the crib: the shepherds keeping watch, the angels singing overhead, Joseph in his quiet steadfastness, and Mary cradling the Child who is her God.

Yet the Gospel gently invites us to something more than a reverent glance at a well-loved scene.

St Luke tells us that Mary “treasured up all these things in her heart,” not merely observing, but pondering, turning over each word and event with reflective wonder.

It is this maternal contemplation – quiet, thoughtful, steeped in mystery that opens for us a doorway into deeper prayer this Advent.

Our painting, *An Imaginative Boy* (1915) by the American artist Robert Henri, was never intended as a religious image; yet it strikes, almost by accident, a chord that harmonises with the Nativity itself.

Henri portrays a child

BY MGR TOM MONAGHAN

with a searching, interior gaze – not the look of one distracted by the passing world, but of a mind carrying some hidden truth it can scarcely yet express. The boy’s expression suggests a soul alive with wonder, alert to something beyond the moment.

Wonder

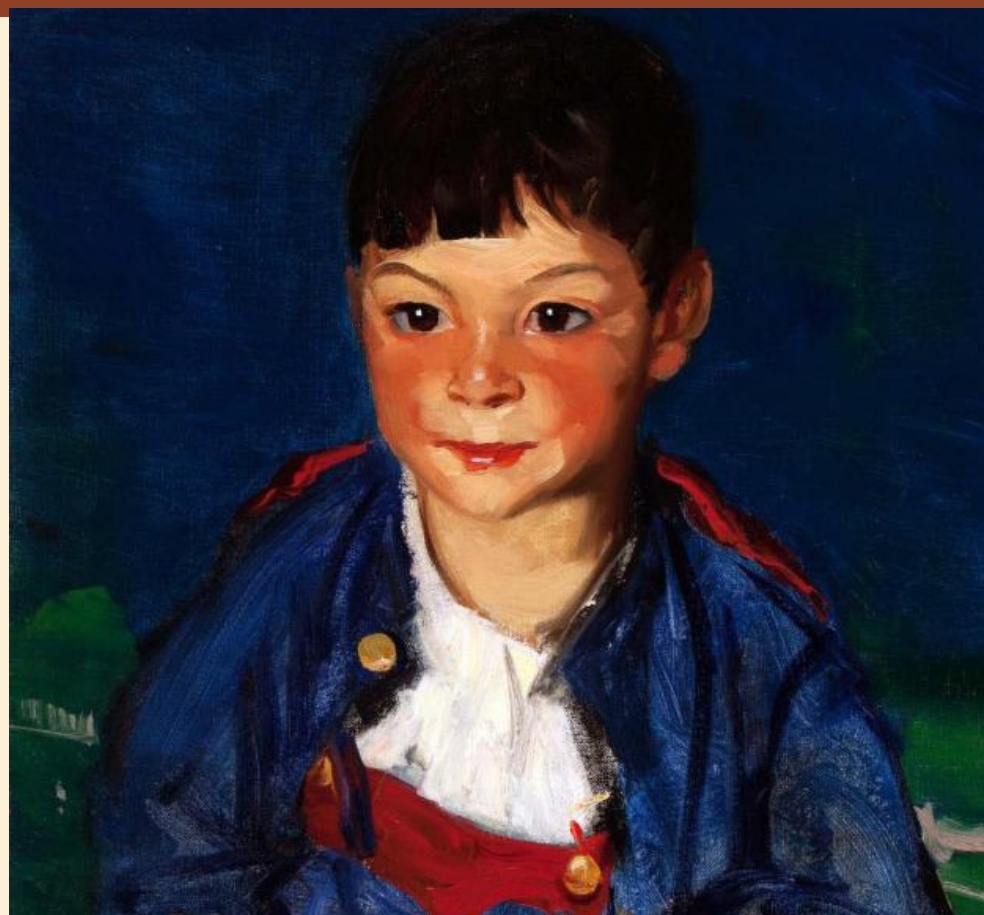
This same atmosphere of wonder pervades the Bethlehem stable. When the shepherds arrived – breathless, astonished, still echoing the angels’ message – they spoke of things no mother had ever heard: that her new-born Son was the promised Saviour, the long-awaited Lord. Their words, halting yet full of awe, rose like incense in that humble place. And Mary, listening, did not argue or demand certainty; she gathered their marvels into the silence of her heart.

What stirs in a mother’s soul when strangers pro-

claim divine things about her Child? What movements of grace filled her as heaven’s message was confirmed by these simple men? Her wonder was not fear, but contemplation – an openness to the mystery of God unfolding in her arms.

Henri’s portrait echoes that same attitude. The child’s face is calm, reflective, almost luminous. One can almost imagine the Infant Christ gazing upon His Mother with such depth – a look wholly human in its innocence, yet carrying the quiet radiance of divinity concealed within.

This Christmas, let us sit with Mary and learn her way of seeing. Let the mystery of God-made-Man awaken in us that deeper wonder which is the beginning of true faith. What does Mary see when she looks upon Him? What treasures does she guard in the silence of her heart? For in the quiet glow of Christmas, God speaks softly, and those who ponder with Mary, learn how to listen.



PRAYER OF THE MONTH

Lord Jesus, in the quiet light of Bethlehem,
let us draw near to Your Mother,
who held Your mystery in her heart with a wonder deeper than words.
Teach us to ponder as she pondered,
to listen for Your voice in the quiet moments of our days.
Give us the childlike trust that welcomes Your presence
and the attentive faith that treasures every grace You send.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

St Francis’ relics to be exposed for veneration for first time

AONCE in a lifetime opportunity to visit and venerate the remains of St Francis of Assisi is being offered to mark the saint’s 800th anniversary.

The relics of the Saint will be displayed in Assisi, in the Lower Church of the Basilica of Saint Francis, from February 22 to March 22, 2026. It will be the first public exposition of the mortal remains of Saint Francis – a unique spiritual experience.

Booking is free and mandatory to allow to everyone to experience the visit in a serene and reflective atmosphere.

Visitors will be able to experience a guided journey in their encounter with the Saint. A friar will welcome you and accompany you on your path to the urn containing the remains of Saint Francis, concluding with a moment of prayer.

Visits will be bookable Monday to Friday,



from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM with the option of choosing an English language guide.

A spokesman for the Franciscan Friars in Assisi said: “The exposition of the relics of Saint Francis in Assisi, on the occasion of the eighth centenary of his death, represents a historic and spiritual event of great significance.

“The event, approved by Pope Leo XIV, will take place in the Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi, where the urn containing the relics will be displayed

at the foot of the papal altar in the lower church. This moment of contemplation and prayer is rooted in the Gospel message of the ‘seed that dies to bear fruit’ celebrating life as a gift and a testimony of love.”

■ You can book a visit at <https://sanfrancescovive.org/en/booking/>

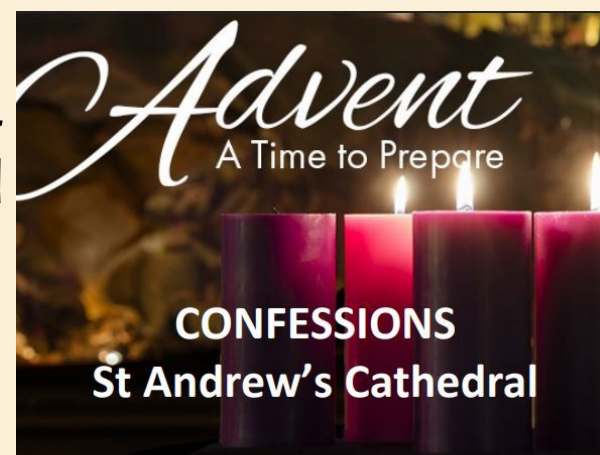
Confession day planned at Cathedral this month

THERE is a strong tradition of preparing well for Christmas by going to confession.

And this year, once more, special provision has been made to allow people to come to the Cathedral for that purpose.

Priests from across the Archdiocese will be available in the confessionals of the Cathedral all day on Tuesday 16 December from 9am–5pm.

Spread the word and mark the date in your diary... ‘Come home for Christmas’.



On Tuesday 16 December 2025
priests will be available all day in
Saint Andrew’s Cathedral
(from 9.00 am until 5.00pm)
for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Come home for Christmas!

St Joseph can teach us a lot this Advent season



Fr Tom Kilbride

Parish Priest of Christ the King, Glasgow

WHAT Christmas traditions do you most look forward to? Turkey? Carols? Being with family?

Or maybe Christmas will be different this year – a new baby in the family, missing a loved one who left us this year, a change of home or health worries.

However it comes, Christmas is always a mix of the familiar and the new, traditions and revelations. And so it is with the cycle of the liturgy as it renews again through Advent into Christmas.

Matthew's Gospel is our guiding text this year, with its stress on the fulfilment of the promises of the Old Testament, and his vision that Jesus bears all the weight of his people's experience, tradition and faith while making it new. Joseph, Isaiah and John the Baptist will be figures who point us to God whose word is faithful and to Christ, his new gift to us.

Second Sunday of Advent, A

There is a contrast in tone between the serene vision of Isaiah in the First Reading and the harsh words of John the Baptist in the Gospel. Still, John's call is to live by the very integrity, faithfulness and righteousness that Isaiah says are hallmarks of God's peaceful reign.

It is conflict, dishonesty, hypocrisy and injustice that bring the very hurts he comes to heal, renewing us in unity, harmony and peace

as Paul suggests. The vision of future harmony in all of creation (Isaiah) becomes a challenge to live in harmony with one another in the here and now (Paul).

Perhaps it is also a reminder that we should live in ways which respect our common home as well.

Third Sunday of Advent, A

John prepared the way for Jesus, but today he seems to need reassuring that his ministry wasn't in vain. Jesus points out that what he is now doing is precisely the fulfilment of the ancient promises: the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear – all mentioned in the First reading as tangible signs of the coming of God to save.

Matthew will tell us next week that Jesus will be "God-with-us". This week we get a preview of what that looks like in the ministry and preaching of Jesus. Jesus praises John to the people for his fidelity to his mission, even though it will cost him everything.

Fourth Sunday of Advent, A

In the final week of Advent, we reflect on the events leading up to the birth of Jesus. Today, we hear what Matthew considers the most important preparation for that event: Joseph's decision to take Mary as his wife and to claim the child she is carrying as his own, to name him.

He is "a just man" and

Michelangelo,
Tondo Doni
(Holy Family),
Uffizi, Florence
(1505)



wants to be faithful to the Law. However, the angel shows him that God is doing something wonderfully new and calling Joseph to take a key role in bringing it about. The child is given two names. First, "Jesus", like the great hero Joshua of old, who led the People into the promised land. Only now it won't be from the desert that the people are saved, but from sin.

Then, second, "Emmanuel" – "God with us" – bringing to reality the promise made through Isaiah (which we hear as the First Reading, and which Paul hints at in the Second).

Only Matthew uses this second title of Jesus, but he shows what it means in everything Jesus does, indeed that he will "be with us" to the end of time. God will be with us throughout the coming year, of that we can be sure.

Joseph says nothing: he simply gets up and gets on with it. Maybe we should be

more like Joseph in living our faith!

Christmas Day

All of the preparations of Advent lead us here. The promise that God will be with us, that a new era of salvation and grace is coming, is a promise kept when Jesus is born. The angel chorus singing out "good news of great joy" tell us as much. God has come among us in the saviour born for us. They will tell us it is a joy to be shared, a joy "for all the people".

As we celebrate, perhaps we can share its joy with others – the poor, the forgotten, the lonely – as the angels did to the shepherds and as they do for others, who are filled with wonder "at what the shepherds told them" (Dawn Mass). May "people who walked in darkness" see that "great light" (Night Mass) bringing hope, joy and peace wherever these are missing. Christ-

mas reminds us that "the light shines in the darkness" (Day Mass) and the darkness cannot overpower it!

Holy Family, Year A

We again find Joseph at the heart of this Sunday's Gospel, as we did last week, still listening to the angel in his dreams, acting to protect and guide Mary and the child. Again, he says nothing, but simply gets on with doing what he is asked (Matthew repeats for his actions the very words that the angel speaks to him).

Moreover, Matthew wants us to hear (twice in this reading) that this is all an unfolding of God's plan and promises.

The life of Jesus – and his family – are in God's keeping and God is faithful to his promises.

The same is true for our families too, so we pray for all of them on this feast day at the heart of the Christmas season!

Epiphany

As always, we mark the day when Jesus is shown to the nations through the magi from the East. They are seekers after wisdom, truth and enlightenment and the star guides them to the true Light. Their response is worship and giving of their precious gifts.

They represent what Isaiah talks about when he sees all nations coming "to your light". It is the glory of the Lord shining over his people, Matthew suggests, in the child they find. That glory has passed from Temple and Palace, and God is found now in Jesus. Herod, the chief priests and "all of Jerusalem" don't see it, but these outsiders do.

They saw the signs and made their journey towards him and are changed by the experience (if going back "another way" hints not just at their fear of Herod, but at the change they have experienced through their encounter with Jesus).

As we worship Jesus like the Magi this Advent and Christmas, may we too be changed in some way for the good through our celebration and may Christ our light guide us throughout the year ahead!

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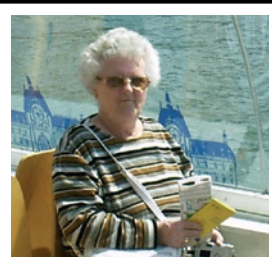
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5th Anniversary

Remembering with love always

Helen Friar

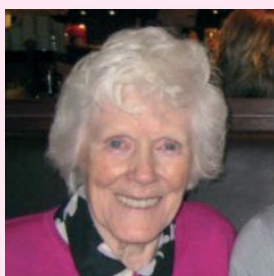
beloved wife of Bert, loving mother to Helen, Bert, Gary and their families.

Died on the 15th of December 2020

Our Lady of Lourdes pray for her.

She will live in our hearts forever.

McFarlane



9th anniversary

Remembering with love always

RACHEL McFARLANE

(Quigley) a beloved wife of Hugh, loving mother to Gail, mother in law to John and proud Gran to Kieran and Rachel. Died on the 8th of December 2016 aged 82. Our lady of Lourdes pray for her. She will live in our hearts forever.

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Remembering my first Christmas in Rome

IN 1982 I went to Rome to study for my diaconate year. I was staying in the Passionist Retreat of Saints John and Paul, and attending the Gregorian University, taking a course in Pastoral Theology.

I arrived in September for the start of the academic year, and I was scheduled to be ordained a deacon in December. I had completed all the necessary exams at the Milltown Institute of Philosophy and Theology in Dublin.

To proceed with the Diaconate, I had to provide a transcript of all the exams taken and passed.

I requested that the Milltown Institute post these on to me. In those days, it wasn't just a simple case of attaching them to an email, it had to be by snail-mail. However, as the time for Diaconate drew closer, I still hadn't received the transcript, and I was informed that I would have to take a set of oral exams in Scripture, Systematic Theology, and Moral Theology. These would take place in the Rome Diocesan Offices attached to the Basilica of St John Lateran.

So it was that, in early December 1982, and with some trepidation, accompanied by the Rector of Saints John and Paul's for moral support, I made my way to St John Lateran, spending



Fr Frank's log

Fr Frank Keevins CP is Parish Priest of St Mungo's Townhead



Diaconate ordination was in the Roman Basilica of Saints John and Paul

some time in prayer in the basilica, before proceeding to the offices.

This, of course, is one of the basilicas on the itinerary this jubilee year for visiting the Holy Doors. I was directed to a magnificent aula, where there were a number of tables spread throughout, each with an examiner sitting behind a

table, and a chair opposite for the examinee. I sat gazing at the wonderful ceiling, trying to stay calm, before being called forward for my exam.

Eventually I was summoned. My examiner was a Swiss Redemptorist, dressed in his Redemptorist habit, while I was wearing my Passionist habit.

The Redemptorists and the Passionists were founded around the same time in the 18th century, the "Reds" by St Alphonsus Liguori, mostly throughout the south of Italy; the Passionists by St Paul of the Cross, mostly throughout the north of Italy, each engaging in similar works of preaching popular missions and retreats.

There has always been a friendly rivalry between us, and I was hoping that this Swiss Red would not take that rivalry too seriously and be too hard on me.

Conversation

As it turned out, he was the nicest man I could have wished to meet. We had a good conversation, and then worked our way through some topics, before he graciously and willingly passed me with flying colours.

On that same day I headed north to the first ever Passionist Retreat, the Retreat of the Presentation of Our Lady, on Monte Argentario in Tuscany. I made an 8-day retreat there in preparation for my ordination.

I remember there being a number of very dramatic thunder and lightning storms throughout those days, as if the biblical God of the Mountain, El Shaddai, was speaking to me.

I then returned to Rome. Ironically, when I returned, I went to check my mail box.

Standing beside me, doing the same, was another Passionist who had been away for some weeks on a preaching tour. His name also began with an "F" and his mail box was next to mine. When he opened it, what did he find, only my transcript, which had mistakenly been put into his box instead of mine. All that stress for nothing!

Before the month was out, on December 18th, I was ordained a deacon in the St

Paul of the Cross Chapel in Saints John and Paul, where the founder's body is encased beneath the altar. A week later, at Christmas Midnight Mass, I would preach my first sermon as a deacon in the chapel of a local cancer hospital, run by Irish Sisters, the Little Company of Mary, accompanied by my Superior General and other members of the Passionist community. It was quite a few weeks, but all turned out well.

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Inevitably it's the poor who pay the price for nuclear weapons

LAST month I was in London for a conference to mark the 15th anniversary of the Lancaster House Treaties, re-signed by President Macron and Keir Starmer in July of this year to "maintain and develop" nuclear weapons.

The conference I attended – "An Alternative Vision of Security for the UK and France" – was aimed at letting these two leaders know that developing weapons of mass destruction is not the pathway to peace. After the conference, we delivered letters to the French Embassy and 10 Downing Street saying so in explicit terms!

I had the honour of reading a statement from Archbishop Nolan, which had also been heard at a meeting of Scottish peace organisations a few days earlier (our meeting in Edinburgh also made the point that these weapons of mass destruction are situated in



Marian Pallister

The chair of Pax Christi Scotland focuses on the issues of the day

Scotland, where they are not welcome by our Scottish Bishops Conference or the Scottish government).

Speakers at the London conference included the Bishop William Kenney, Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus of Birmingham, Mgr Bruno Marie Duffe, Secretary Emeritus of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; Etienne Godinot, co-founder of the Mouvement pour une Alternative Non-Violente, and Dr Joanna Frew, Outreach Co-Ordinator for Rethinking Security.

There was general agreement that nuclear weapons are not a deterrent, that

they are a threat to the environment and would wipe out most of humanity were they to be employed.

But it was the fact that they cost such obscene amounts that could be better spent on improving our lives – on health, on education, on the environment – that made a big impact, as it had at our meeting of Scottish peace organisations in Edinburgh.

And when we then walked through some of the poshest parts of London to hold vigils outside the French

Embassy, Lancaster House and 10 Downing Street to deliver those letters, we saw exactly how those billions of dollars could be used.

There were homeless people on every street (as there are in Glasgow and Edinburgh). In one underpass, a young man had set up home in a conglomeration of tarpaulins and sleeping bags. Elsewhere, young women sat on pavements huddled in blankets, clutching cardboard notices requesting help.

And then there was the train journey home. One woman was trying to cope with a youngster who clearly had learning difficulties. A man brought on a carrier bag full of cans of beer and steadily drank his way through them all.

Meanwhile, on another train, a man was stabbing his fellow passengers.

Mental health conditions, including anxiety and depression, have been

increasing, particularly among young people, and there is a clear link between mental health, poverty, and debt.

Around a fifth of people in England and in Scotland, around one in three people are affected by a mental health problem.

We are told we are facing an economic crisis. Taxes are rising. That can only exacerbate homelessness, health issues, including those affecting mental health. The UK has already slashed overseas aid at a time when developing countries are experiencing climate episodes that threaten lives and livelihoods. Happy Christmas!

Wouldn't it make sense to stop paying out those billions to "maintain and develop" nuclear weapons, as agreed by Starmer and Macron, and instead to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor? To invest in people?



Double the love with our Advent appeal

I HAVE recently returned from Rwanda, on a trip to visit some of the Batwa communities we work with.

As the Programme Officer for DR Congo (DRC) and Rwanda these scheduled monitoring visits are core. They are also an invaluable opportunity to deepen our understanding of the challenges faced by our local implementing partners and the communities they serve.

First stop was to Nyakarenzo school, one of a number SCIAF is supporting in western Rwanda, along the border with DRC. The school project is a long-term approach to empower Batwa communities by supporting children and young people in accessing education – primary, secondary and vocational training. Due to their severe marginalisation, only about 30% of Batwa children make it to secondary school and many drop out due to poverty, hunger and the distances

BY LOUISE JOYCE

they need to travel to attend school.

The head teacher explained the children were in the middle of studying for their exams; they talked about their favourite subjects and aspirations to become doctors, teachers, nurses and drivers. Yet it was sobering to hear in the next breath that studying after school is not feasible as most homes don't have electricity. For many, their only clothes are the school uniform provided by the SCIAF project, and the main, or only, meal of the day is from the Government subsidised school feeding programme.

SCIAF's work with the Batwa communities is holistic and through a Catholic Social Teaching lens; it includes advocating for people's rights and enhancing their skills, and ability to earn money. My next stop



Photo: Colin Hattersley

was Kabayengo, one of the 65 Batwa villages that CDJP Cyangugu, SCIAF's local partner, has been working with for 20 years. We visited a community pottery co-operative where Claudine skilfully demonstrated how to make a cooking pot

from clay. Pottery making is a traditional craft passed down by the Batwa but sadly not valued or purchased in Cyangugu. Instead, community members normally sell pottery in markets over the border in neighbouring DRC. However, with an es-

calation of conflict in DRC this year, the borders are tightly controlled so this is no longer feasible. This is hitting communities like Kabayengo hard.

Whilst Claudine's daily life remains tough, her sister Francine (pictured)

is a university graduate from SCIAF's schools' programme, who now works as a school accountant. She was able to break out of the cycle of stigma and exclusion. Before we left, Claudine and Francine's mother danced and sang the national prayer to us – "If the eternal God is your peace, it is the eternal God that is your joy".

Rwanda

Our SCIAF Advent Appeal this year focusses on the challenges the Batwa community face in Rwanda, and how we are working together to provide security, access to education, and the means for families to build more stable futures.

Loving donations to the Appeal will be doubled up to £60,000, thanks to a generous group of supporters, meaning anything you can give will make twice the impact.

■ Visit sciaf.org.uk/ double today to put your faith into action.

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Photo by Colin Hattersley.



Sylvie and family,
Rwanda