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No 9

A magazine for the Local Missionary Area

Holy Years

Lichfield:
An Odyssey

Our Polish Parish

An Unusual
Travelling Companion

Married
at St Anne's

Mary's Tale

Pilgrims' Progress
Antur Cymraeg

A Tale of Two Cities

'The Longest Yarn'

Editorial

One of the pleasures of editing this magazine is that it allows me to maintain the sense of connection with the four member-parishes of our LMA, that I always had for so many years, when I was working at St Thomas More School.

I was conscious of this, when I joined other members of the parishes at the LMA Mass of Togetherness at St Thomas More on Thursday 28th November. To be in a congregation of past pupils, present pupils, parents, teachers, past magazine contributors and (hopefully) future contributors, gave me a sense of oneness with those worshipping together.

We are all there to play our part - and we are very lucky in our priests and deacons, who do so much to foster this cooperation and respect for each other.

I hope the magazine gives you a similar sense of unity with our neighbouring parishes. Each parish has its own identity, and I can almost tell by the type of article which parish it comes from. However, a common thread that runs through them all is a sense of faith and belonging.

Next year, there will be more opportunities for us to come together and strengthen our Catholic community. Here are some examples for you to consider:

- **The Lenten Talks during Lent:** There will be one held in each parish. Please read Fr Morton's article on Mysticism for more details.
- **LMA Day Out - in early July:** A day at Lichfield, with Mass in the cathedral. There is an article about this in the magazine
- **LMA No.9 Pro-Life Group:** Read Fr Kern's article on this. Following the Assisted Suicide vote in Parliament at the end of November, there is now

an even greater need for those who value life to work together.

There is so much more in the magazine. The past year has been a full one, with lots of experiences to share.

A Happy Christmas to everybody, and may the year ahead be one of togetherness, purpose and good cheer. Please keep writing!



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Mary's Tale

A thought experiment

I know I can be a bit opinionated and determined at times – headstrong, some people say – but I am a teenage girl, after all. What else do you expect? Still, I never just go along with my friends when they get up to mean pranks or mischief. They make fun of me for it, and sometimes I feel a bit left out and excluded from the group. But I think they respect me for it too. Sometimes I even manage to talk them out of their worst ideas.

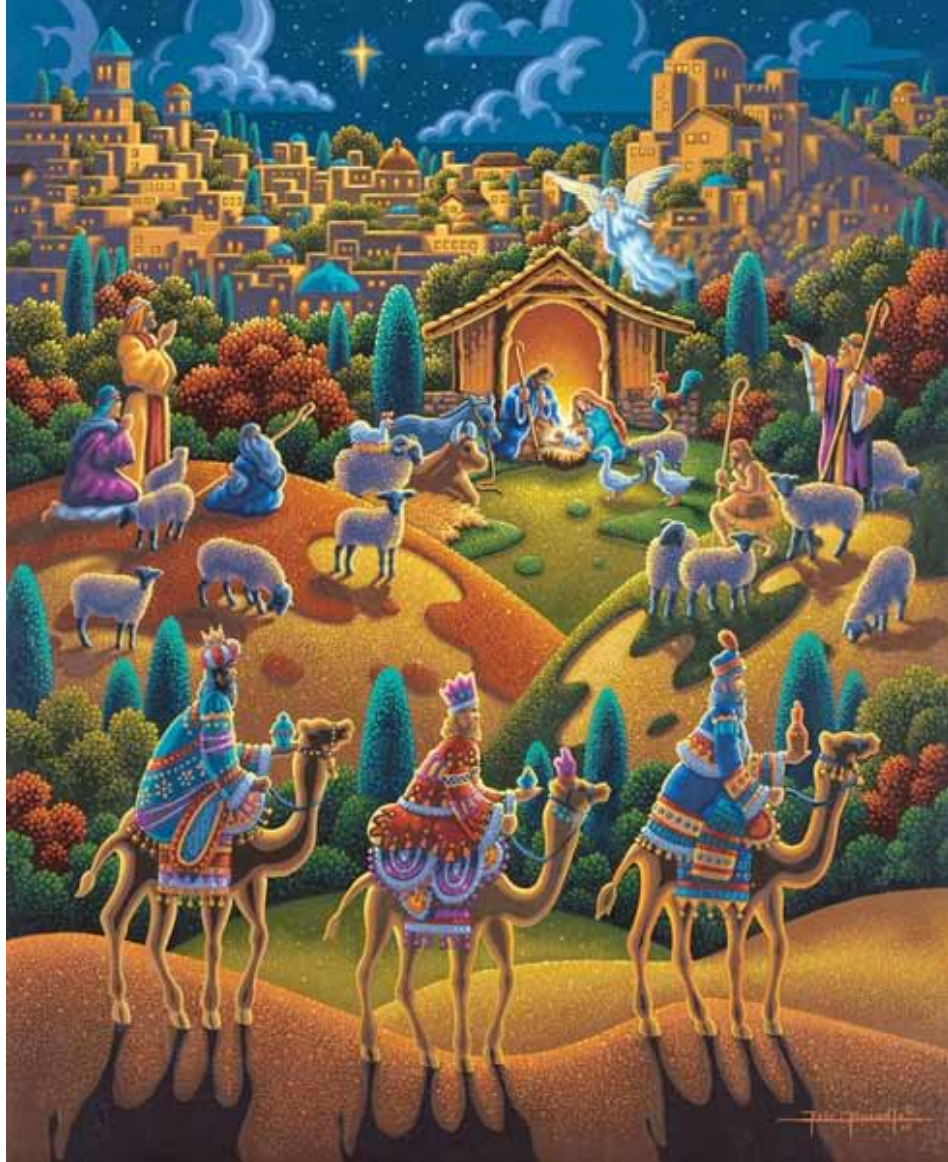
Still, when I'm upset, there's always the synagogue and the rabbi to turn to. I love my faith and my God. I also love the Scriptures – my mother Anna has taught them to me ever since I was born. I particularly like the prophecies about the coming of a Messiah – they make me dream and give me hope whenever I feel troubled.

When Joseph asked me to marry him, I was in two minds. He's a good man, and I like him a lot. But I've always felt somehow different - as though I'm meant for God rather than for a man. It's a strange feeling, because there's nothing in our Jewish history that honours a woman who chooses to remain single and childless for God. So I accepted his proposal. My mum was delighted. She felt he was a really good catch, especially since I had no dowry because Dad had died some years back.

Then one night when I was praying, I had an amazing dream. I dreamed of an angel who came to ask me to be the mother of the Son of God, the Messiah himself! I couldn't believe it. But it was an angel, so I decided not to doubt him.

All kinds of thoughts went through my head. Would I be stoned for being pregnant while unmarried? Would my son always be called a bastard? And would I always be called a whore? Where could I live? How could I support him?

There was no way, I felt, that Joseph would ever accept me if I was already pregnant. Nonetheless, I loved God. He'd never let me down before. So I said, 'Yes. May God's will be done.'



After the angel left, all sorts of thoughts raced through my head - thoughts of death, rejection, scorn, poverty, starvation and all kinds of misery. Yet I felt somehow at peace inside, thinking over and over about the wonderful angel and what he'd said.

There was something else the angel said that really puzzled me. He called me 'full of grace', saying that the Lord was with me. Me, 'full of grace'? I've never done anything special in my life, just lived at home like every other kid, learning my lessons, helping my mum out and doing my bit. I'd only recently become a woman, was still just a teenager.

I thought that only people who do great things for God are honoured by Him. Yet still the angel called me 'full of grace'. I thought long and hard on that: perhaps it means that God actually values us for the little things we do, and that it's doing them well that makes us ready for anything big he may ask of us.

Soon afterwards, I decided to go and visit my cousin Elizabeth. The angel had told me she'd conceived a child - despite her age! She's way too old to bear children - but that's what he'd said. And he was a messenger of God, so I had to believe him, didn't I?

Mum took some convincing, though, and I still don't think she really bought into it, even when I set off. I thought I needed to visit Elizabeth because in some way we shared this calling. Otherwise, the angel wouldn't have mentioned her, would he?

I also felt it would give me a bit of time away from everyone at home while I tried to get to grips with what had happened to me: it was all so overwhelming. And as Elizabeth too was bearing a miraculous baby, I guessed she was the only person in the world who'd understand right then.

And I was right: she knew, from the moment I arrived and called out her name. And she told me that her baby was to be the prophet of mine, according to the angel.

It was a wonderful time, especially with Elizabeth's husband Zechariah being so quiet! He'd been struck mute for doubting the angel's message. Until, of course, God gave him his voice back at John's circumcision. That was a miraculous and joyful moment - and he'd really used the time of his silence well, to meditate on it all.

When I returned home after John's birth, it was exactly as I had feared:

Joseph wouldn't accept me now he knew I was already pregnant. I told him the baby was God's, but I can't blame him for not believing me. Nothing like this ever happened before. There's something in Isaiah about a virgin being with child, but even the priests and lawyers don't understand that bit.

But Joseph's a good man and he wanted to save my life. So he gave me the chance to slip away quietly, promising he would keep quiet about ending our betrothal until I had quite disappeared. Bless him! I accepted his offer and made plans to leave as soon as possible. Mum was in tears, racking her brains to find a relative who would look after me.

Then something amazing happened. Joseph had a dream that convinced him that the baby was indeed God's. Praise the Lord! He got the marriage pushed through at once to make it look as if the baby was his - though quite a few people realised the truth anyway. All the same, I was rescued!

Then came the census. The prospect of travelling all the way to Bethlehem while eight months pregnant didn't bear thinking about. However, it's Joseph's family's ancestral home, and



the authorities said we had to go there to register. By coincidence, it's my family's ancestral home too.

All the way there, I thought it over: being born in Bethlehem is fitting for a baby who will be called the Son of David. And because we hadn't realised that and gone there by our own initiative, God had given us a push.

But what a push, taxing the whole empire and moving most of the people of Israel! Was that all done just to get us there, just at the right time? If so, it shows that God is the God of the whole world, not just Israel – He's able to get the Emperor and the whole Roman empire to do His will.

What a dreadful journey! That poor donkey! But Joseph was good to us all the way and never grumbled once, however often we had to stop - well, he didn't grumble much! The journey took so long that, when we arrived, we couldn't find anywhere to stay, so we had to make the best of it in the innkeeper's stable.

That night the boy was born. We called him Jesus, the anointed one, because of our dreams. Joseph was great at the birth. I think even the innkeeper's wife helped out, but can't remember for sure. What I recall most clearly through all the pain and stress is the peace and joy I felt. And between the tears and screams of my birth pangs I prayed and blessed God in my heart.

Then the visitors arrived. First of all, the shepherds, with a fantastic story full of angels and divine messages. They're people who don't read books or spend much time in the temple, so that's the way God chose to speak to them. I have to say they stank a bit and were pretty filthy, but they were really lovely, and full of joy and wonder. They presented us with a couple of lambs, and said the angels had told them that Jesus was the Son of David, the Messiah. Then they worshipped him.

I couldn't figure out why God would choose to have Jesus born in a place like that and worshipped by people like these, yet it all seemed so fitting somehow, so peaceful, and so joyful. I'm still trying to work it all out: one day I'll understand fully. That line out

of the Psalms, 'The Lord's my shepherd', keeps coming into my mind.

Once the census was over, all the travellers left for home. Joseph thought the baby and I were still too fragile to travel, so he took lodgings and did some work for the local carpenter. There was certainly plenty of work to be done, what with all the wear and tear from the crowds and the soldiers!

While we were there, we were able to have Jesus circumcised in the temple. It just seemed the right thing to do, given that he's going to be the Messiah. We wanted to do it quietly, not standing out from the rest of the people in the queue, but a prophetess called Anna found us and started telling everyone about our baby.

So did an old man – named Simeon, I believe – who took Jesus and stared at him, as though my baby had made his whole life complete. He even said so, in a wonderful little psalm that he made up on the spot. The priests looked very confused and uncomfortable with it all.

Then Simeon announced that a sword was going to pierce my soul. Oh dear! He said I should start preparing for hardship and loss. Well, I did say yes to God through His angel, and I'm not going to start changing my mind now. I'm sure God and Joseph will help me through.

Some time later, another set of visitors came knocking at our door, and they were stranger still. Exotic Magi they were, come all the way from Persia. They had travelled a thousand miles from the north, as quickly as they could after they saw a new star in the sky.

I can't say I'd noticed any new star myself, but people like that do study that sort of thing, as well as the ancient writings of the world. They gave us the most peculiar gifts for Jesus, saying that they represented his kingship, his divinity and his suffering. I'm still trying to understand all this. In God's good time I will, I suppose.

That very night, after they left, Joseph had another dream. He woke me in the middle of the night, and said



we had to leave in a real hurry – I've never seen him so agitated and fearful, before or since. Or so insistent, imperious even. Nobody travels at night, and for good reason: the roads are difficult and dangerous.

No time to do more than chuck his tools, a little food, and a few essential clothes and cooking utensils into a couple of bags. He rushed us away to Egypt, where once again he took lodgings and found work with a carpenter.

We found out later that, the very next day, Herod had sent his soldiers to murder every baby and infant in the area where we were staying. What a close shave! And what a merciful escape! Thank God we got away! I wonder how long we'll be living here in Egypt as refugees, though.

**Mark Howitt:
St Gabriel's, Alsager**

(This tale is expanded from 'Mary's Tale', part of a set of Carol Service readings by the same author.)

An Unusual Travelling Companion



Following Margaret's retirement from her job as School Secretary, after 28 years at St Gabriel's School in Alsager, we decided it was time to go and see some wild animals in their natural environment. So we booked a Safari holiday in Kenya.

It was an incredible experience - not just a holiday, but a magical adventure. One unlikely favourite animal for Margaret was the giraffe. An unusual animal indeed, with that long neck and long, spindly legs. However, seeing a giraffe run was one of many unexpectedly

beautiful experiences we enjoyed – who knew it was so graceful and beautiful?

Some time after this brilliant Safari holiday, our son Mark rang Margaret to see what present she might like for her approaching birthday. Margaret replied immediately: 'A giraffe ornament. But NOT a twelve-inch one, to go on a shelf – I want one that's about six feet tall!'

She proceeded to explain to Mark the magic of the moment when we watched and waited for the giraffe to emerge from the trees concealing it. An oval grass clearing, bathed in beautiful sunbeams, provided a stage-like setting for a sight that was about to amaze the whole group in the people-carrier vehicle.

We were instructed not to move, not to take photos, and not to speak! The exquisite giraffe, with its stunningly bright cream and rich rusty brown markings, emerged slowly, glanced towards us, then began to move with such poise and elegance that it was breath-taking. The delightful creature appeared to be as beautifully choreographed as a ballerina!

Every slow and calm step was fascinating. The sideways look towards us was unrushed, considered and patient. Having totally captivated its audience, the glorious creature spun round deftly and pranced off in the direction from which it had first appeared. The performance was over! We were blown away with the stunning perfection of the encounter. Margaret said it was a pure gift for us to appreciate the rest of our lives.

Mark and his partner spotted a suitable giraffe present in a shop window in Kent. Mark went in to make enquiries, but left the shop without buying it. Later that day, he returned to seal the purchase. On our next visit to Deal in Kent, where Mark lives, Mark and his stepson, Sonny, briefly left the living room, then re-entered, carrying the wonderful giraffe! What a shock and surprise that was!

A seven feet tall wooden giraffe! We immediately christened it Geoffrey. But how were we going to get it home?

There was no way it would fit into our car. I offered to return to collect the fantastic present and transport it by train from Kent to Alsager.

I know Kent is known as 'The garden of England'; but I did not realise how many trees with low-hanging branches line its streets. I had decided that carrying the giraffe upright would be the safest method, but poor Geoffrey was nearly decapitated several times before I grasped the fact that I needed to watch out for low-hanging branches,

The first train we took was a local one from Deal to Ashford. Geoffrey immediately attracted attention. One young child pleaded with his mum to let him come and take a closer look. At Ashford I had to change platforms. I decided to use the lift, reckoning that would be safer for Geoffrey, rather than trying to push our way through the bustling crowds on the steps.

Our second train was a high-speed one into St Pancras international. I had decided that I would walk from there to Euston, not too great a distance, rather than risk Geoffrey among the busy crowds on the tube or buses. We took the escalator at St Pancras down to ground level.

As we went on the down escalator, I received lots of smiles and laughs from the passengers on the up escalator next to us. On the walk from St Pancras to Euston the busy crowds parted with puzzled looks as we passed by. One young man walked with us for a short distance - he thought we must be part of some sort of Theatrical Company.

From London to Stoke we were on a Pendolino train. They lean as they travel around curves, so they don't have to reduce speed. Unfortunately, to allow for this lean, the design tapers a little towards the roof, so as not to hit trains travelling in the opposite direction. The carriage was too narrow at the top for Geoffrey, so I sat on a tip-up seat in the vestibule by the toilet.

I am sure one child paid several more visits to the loo than he actually needed, in order to have another look at Geoffrey. 'Fast trains these Pendolenos,' I'm sure Geoffrey would be thinking. 'They run even faster than my friend, the cheetah.'

Before too long we reached Stoke, where we changed onto the normal two-carriage train to Alsager and home. Finally, Geoffrey was standing in the corner of our lounge, looking across at all the family. I imagine he may have had a little smile to himself, thinking: 'What a nightmare journey that was! But I think I'm going to be well looked after here!'

(PS: Margaret was convinced that the extraordinary giraffe in Kenya that captivated us all so much with her elegance and poise was definitely female. She prefers to think of her birthday present as 'Grace' rather than Geoffrey).

Michael Massey: St Gabriel's, Alsager



Holy Years

It was Pope Boniface VIII who proclaimed the first Holy Year in 1300. The story goes that he was overwhelmed by the thousands of pilgrims who had decided to come to Rome to pray at the tombs of SS Peter and Paul for Christmas in 1299. Because of their great number, the Pope, full of admiration for their faith, proclaimed a 'year of forgiveness of all sins'.

At the time, he thought a similar year could continue to be held every hundred years. Amongst famous contemporary people recorded as making the pilgrimage are the artist Giotto and the great Italian poet Dante. Giotto later painted a picture of the Proclamation, a fragment of which survives in the basilica of St John Lateran.

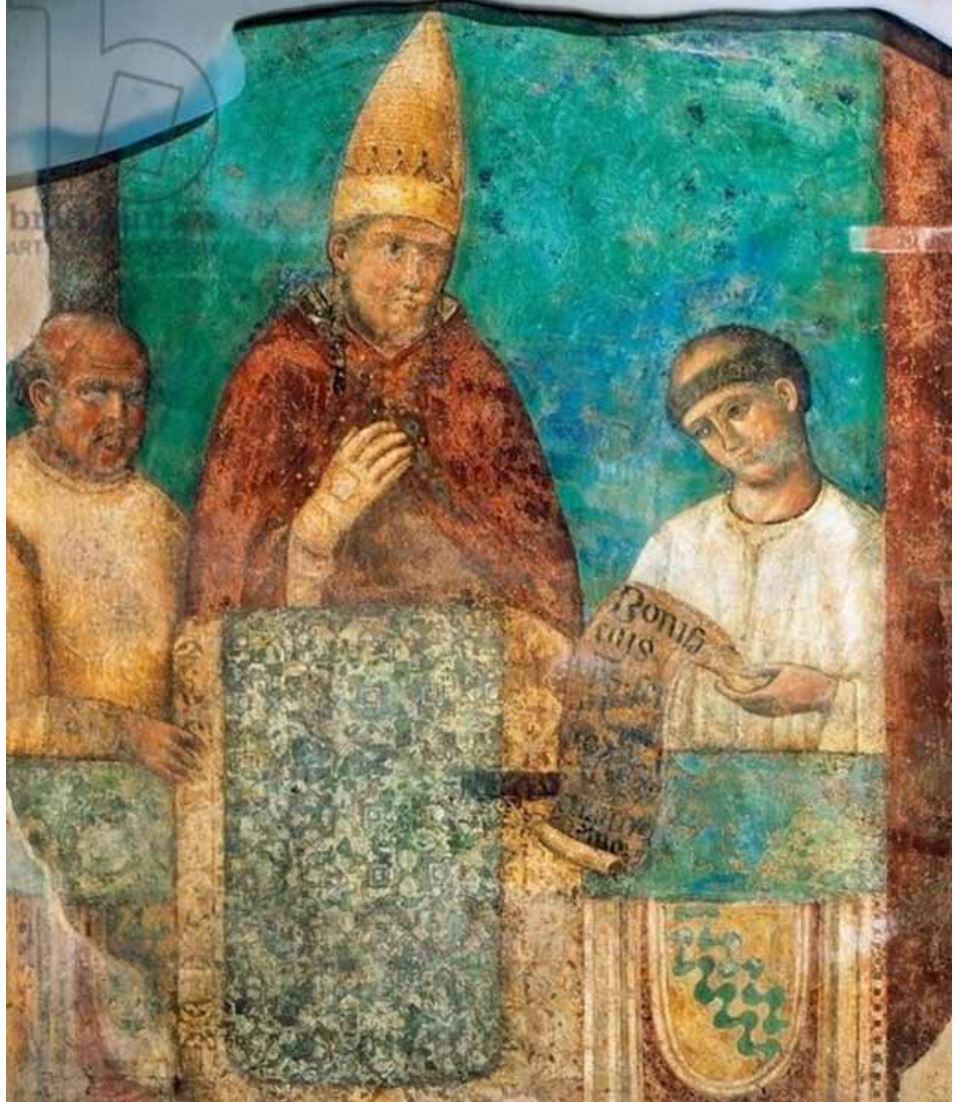
At one point in 'The Divine Comedy', Dante describes how they had to set up a one-way system across Rome's bridges as there were so many pedestrians! (Inferno: Canto XVIII, lines 28-33).

Such was the popularity of the event that, in 1350, Pope Clement VI acceded to the request that Holy Years should take place every fifty years. In 1470, the Pope of the day fixed them at every twenty-five years, allowing most people to take part in at least one during their lifetime. Owing to the ups and downs of history, Holy Years have not always kept to a regular pattern.

There wasn't one in 1800, when Europe was under the grip of Napoleon, for example. At other times they were very important: the Holy Year of 1950 after the Second World War was a time of new hope.

The concept of a Jubilee Year comes from Scripture. In the Law of Moses, we read: 'You shall hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family... The Jubilee is to be a holy thing for you.' (Leviticus 25, 10, 12a)

Slaves were set free, and those who had had their family property seized to pay a debt were given a chance to buy



Pope Boniface VIII proclaims the first Holy Year: what survives of a fresco by Giotto in St John Lateran, Rome.

back their ancestral land. So the idea of 'Redemption' in its original meaning was central to biblical teaching, and this has been applied in a Christian way. CAFOD always produces good material for the Holy Years, highlighting the ancient themes of Social Justice.)

Various customs have grown up round the practice. Historically, it has mainly been a time for pilgrimage to Rome, the Holy City, including visiting the various basilicas. There is a special door in St Peter's basilica that is only opened in a Jubilee Year.

Sadly, another 'constant' is that the prices go up in Rome in response to demand! The English College in Rome (now a seminary, where, at different times, Fr Morton and I both studied) began life around 1362 as a Pilgrim Hostel – a haven for English visitors to Rome (and, we think, therefore the oldest English institution abroad). If you have not booked for Rome in 2025, you may already be too late if you are on a modest budget!

What is suggested instead is that pilgrims visit their own Cathedral. Many Catholics in our diocese have never visited Shrewsbury! It may not be the biggest or the grandest of cathedrals, but it is a fine Pugin church with some beautiful stained glass.

A programme has now been put in place for a day-pilgrimage: Welcoming pilgrims by 11.00 am - an opportunity for Confessions – then at 12:15pm, Mass in the Cathedral. Lunch will be in the Orchard Café, followed by a tour of the Cathedral with its history and art, and concluding with a time of Eucharistic Adoration (when this is possible) and Holy Year Prayers.

We think we might organise an LMA trip at some point in the year, probably on a Saturday. I know that the LMA have had a day trip to the Cathedral in the past, but this Holy Year perhaps calls out for a repeat visit.

Different Popes have often chosen different themes for the Holy Year. For

the Holy Year of 2025, Pope Francis has chosen the theme: 'Hope does not disappoint' (Rm 5:5). It is good to celebrate our Redemption in Christ. This is mainly about each one of us reviewing and renewing our commitment to Christ.

When Jesus went back to the synagogue where he had been brought up, he proclaimed: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me...he has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives...to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.' (Lk 4:18-19 edited)

Fr Nick Kern: St Mary's, Crewe



A Visit from Alsager Food Bank

On the second Tuesday of each month, the SVP at St Gabriel's hold a social afternoon for local pensioners. This month we were happy to welcome Tracey and Nessie from the Alsager Food Bank, who came to tell us about the wonderful work they do.

They support people living in Alsager, Church Lawton, Rode Heath and Scholar Green. People in need of help can be referred by a number of agencies such as a doctor, social worker, housing association, church or school.

Alsager Food Bank was started in 2013, giving out parcels for 374 adults and 362 children. They

envisaged being needed for only 2-3 years. Sadly, this has not been the case and, eleven years on, they are now supporting more and more people each year. In 2023, they issued food parcels for 1684 adults and 1444 children.

The recipients come from many different backgrounds. While many are not working, the reasons for this are not just unemployment. People are often referred due to health issues which prevent them from working. These can be physical or mental, and are sometimes terminal illnesses.

Some recipients are actually working, but in low-paid jobs or on zero-hours contracts, so they struggle to cope with the ever-increasing costs of living. Others, such as those fleeing domestic violence, may be in temporary accommodation with little or no access to cooking facilities.

The food bank ensures that these people are given items such as noodles, which can be eaten cold or only need boiling water. Generally, the food bank aims to provide a mixture of food items according to the number and age of each group. They also try to help with special dietary requirements such as gluten-free, whenever possible.

The food bank relies totally on donations of non-perishable goods or monetary donations, which the staff will use to shop for items needed. There are donation boxes in churches, supermarkets and the health centre. Alsager food bank is run by a group of totally unpaid volunteers who do not claim any expenses for themselves and give their time freely.

We are very grateful to both Tracey and Nessie for coming to speak to us and making us more aware of the work they do.

Please support your local food bank.

**Joan Stratton:
St Gabriel's SVP, Alsager**



An 80th Celebration with a Ceilidh

Chin and Alan Brown from St Anne's in Nantwich decided to celebrate their 80th year with a Ceilidh. It had become a family tradition, started by Alan's brother and sister; and Chin and Alan had celebrated their 70th birthday year in a similar fashion ten years ago.

Alan's birthday is in May, and Chin's is in September, but their wedding anniversary (this is the 56th year of their marriage) falls almost exactly half-way between the two, in July. So the date they chose was the 13th July.

Plans were discussed, and a list of people to invite was drafted. It soon numbered over eighty guests - too many for our new Parish Hub. So we booked Acton Parish Hall and found a Ceilidh band thanks to contacts within the parish.

Basmati Restaurant provided curries of many kinds, and sandwiches and savouries were also available for those whose palate favoured less exotic fare. There was drink for all, and, of course, a cake!

It was an occasion to meet up and chat with family members of several generations, who came from all over England and Wales. Friends from our previous parish in Bingley, and from Syria and from Ukraine as well as our neighbours, joined us too.

We would like to thank the parish for the Mass offered for us on the day of the Ceilidh; the Shropshire Heroes for the music; our daughter, Anna, and neighbour Sue; and the caretaker Nick, at Acton Parish Hall, for all the assistance



they gave. And, of course, our guests for the flowers and Champagne.

**Chin and Alan Brown:
St Anne's, Nantwich**

Maybe in ten years' time we'll do it all again.





Mysticism: A Preface to Discussion

Since the Scientific Revolution in early Modernity, the emphasis in philosophy has shifted to the study of knowledge - or epistemology to give its formal name. And the questions that dominate the discipline are these: what are we doing when we say we are knowing? What justification do we have for calling the result knowledge? And what is it that is known?

Apologists for religious thought often model their discourse upon the appeal to science-experience in early modern times. They argue that we can gradually build up a body of tested knowledge about the visible world and so, through the spiritual experience that some are fortunate enough to enjoy, we can build up a body of knowledge about the spiritual world too.

It is true that many people are completely blind to religious thought and say that religion is a waste of time. But this does not invalidate the religious quest any more than the fact that some people are deaf to music proves that music is also a waste of time. And yet arguments of this type have long been popular.

Some psychologists in particular will argue that religious experiences everywhere are shaped by local religious beliefs; and philosophers will object to the idea that you can sensibly take our experience of seeing light or feeling warm as proving the truth of some transcendent belief. Where is the controlling experimental test for that sort of claim?

Now mystics are often people who are dissatisfied with mediated religion - that is to say, the whole apparatus of clerical hierarchy and organised religious faith. They seek happiness and find it in writing that tries to undermine or melt away the orthodox gulf between the soul and God.

And they can show that standard, official theology and dogma leave many of the best people feeling very dissatisfied (for example, the people who have visions of the Virgin Mary are generally young or teenage girls, and she appears to them looking like the statues of Mary in the churches they attend - that is how they recognise her. Visions do not give information, but they do express our feelings).

The monks of the West, especially the Carthusian and Cistercian orders, developed a pattern of contemplative prayer that became the focus of their religious life. But there were also individuals - the lower clergy, religious and townspeople - who used meditation, poetry and contemplation as ways to individual religious fulfilment and happiness. However, such practices could be dangerous.

The religious authorities were always on the alert, and quick to detect any implicit criticism of themselves or threat to their power and privileges. The mystical writer faced a suspicion of heresy and the threat of persecution, often with great severity. They therefore wrote in a kind of code to maintain what we

should now call 'plausible deniability'. The mystic will start from an innocuous-sounding theme or doctrine, and only as the argument develops do you begin to suspect some kind of subversive or deconstructive commentary is being written.

The mystic has to be a deconstructor, because religious orthodoxies were all constructed with the aim of making the goal of religious completion (salvation, the beatific Vision of God) impossible in this life. Orthodoxy tries to prove to the individual that, because we cannot personally attain religious happiness, we must be content to be faithful and obedient and trust the mediation of the Church.

The mystic was obliged to deconstruct orthodoxy and, especially, the standard doctrine of God, if he or she was to achieve personal religious happiness. But if found out, he or she risked being burned at the stake.

If people are concerned about crisis of faith or a crisis in organised religion, then an examination of the mystical experience will prove to be of value. In a series of four talks at the beginning of Lent 2025, we intend to look at the subject closely and offer a series of reflections in each of the four parishes of our LMA and perhaps outside too. Please come along.

**Fr Michael Morton:
St Winefride's, Sandbach**



Regina (R), Thomas (T), Vion (V), Teresa and Joseph (J&T),

A Tale of Two Cities

(For the sake of poetic license, let's pretend that Alsager is a city!)



‘你好嗎?’ (Pronounced ‘Nay Ho Ma?’, this means ‘How are you?’). This is how Hong Kong people greet friends in Cantonese. It is not difficult to notice that there are more and more people from Hong Kong now residing in the UK and so in every parish.

In St Gabriel's parish, there are five of us: Joseph and Teresa, a married couple; Thomas and Vion, another married couple; as well as Regina.

We came to this parish around 2022, and have all settled in very well, thanks to the many parishioners and friends who talked to us after Sunday Mass and invited some

of us to join in parish ministries.

We occasionally have lunch together to share our fond memories of Hong Kong, the difficulties of adapting to changes in this, our new homeland, and smart tips on how to cope with our daily lives - including bleeding the radiator and how to fry food with a wok on an electric hob (since the wok has a spherical base, instead of being flat like a pan).

Often, we compare the experience of living here in the UK and back in Hong Kong, as well as discussing the changes that have occurred in Hong Kong since we left. Here we would like to share

some of our thoughts with you all.

Is there anything similar in parish life between the two places?

T: Literally, there was no parish life for me in Hong Kong. As there are so many churches around, I could attend Mass at any time or place that fitted my schedule, so in reality I had no roots in any parish.

V: Some hymns have the same melodies, for example ‘The Church's one Foundation’.

R: In Hong Kong the liturgies are strictly planned to make sure nothing goes wrong. Here in the UK, all are welcome

and free to participate. I participated in the Way of the Cross for children, and participants volunteered to be the readers.

Are there any differences?

J&T: In Hong Kong, there are many parishioners in one parish. We usually have three or four Sunday Masses. Sometimes, it's not easy to meet friends, because we attend different Masses. The parish community in St Gabriel's is not big, so that we can make friends easily.

T: When I was young, I was a choir member, and thus the focus was always on that small community. Here at St Gabriel's, I became a Eucharistic minister and am part of the church cleaning team. It seems the whole parish is a family, and that I will gradually get in touch with the whole family.

V: The small community here is very different from what I experienced in many of the parishes in Hong Kong. Fr Tony always reads the names of people that need our prayers during the liturgy. This gives me a real sense of religious community in the parish.

R: There is always chatting between the parishioners. That's so friendly.

What do you like most about this parish?

J&T: The Sunday Mass at 11:30am suits us perfectly. In the past, we needed to attend Mass at 7:00am.

T: The simplicity and efficiency of the liturgy, as well as our lovely and friendly

priests and deacon, attract me most.

V: There are many. I like the stone building, because hardly any churches in Hong Kong are built in stone. I also like the fact that Deacon Eddie asks us to greet each other before Mass begins, which makes me feel that I'm connected to all in this parish.

R: The church is small, that gives a feeling of a family

What is your favourite British food so far?

J&T: All the fresh ingredients that I can use for cooking. In Hong Kong, many ingredients are a very low price, but you need to spend much effort to select the good and healthy ones. Now, fresh and healthy food is so accessible.

T: Carvery is good, as I can have lots of vegetables!

V: Absolutely sultana scone with Cornish clotted cream and strawberry jam!

R: Potatoes, carrots, and all kinds of meats. They are fresh and inexpensive!

Which thing is the most needed to adjust to living in the UK?

T: Although lots of people complain that the weather is a bit unreliable, I do enjoy the sunshine as well as the bitter cold weather here. For me maybe, the most difficult thing is the 'small talk' culture, as I'm probably the type of 'too serious' person who doesn't always know what to say. And, quite often, people speak indirectly, so I am not able to get the

real meaning.

V: Distance. The UK is such a big country that we need to spend much more time travelling. Hong Kong is a compact city with a well-developed and convenient public transport system, which allows people to shop for groceries in a supermarket then head to the gym in another place and then to dinner with a friend in a third place, all in one evening.

R: Having to learn to drive.

What do you enjoy most in the UK?

T: Everything, including all the weird and strange things. But hopefully, there will be no more rocket-like inflation. Above all, I treasure the culture, history and democracy of this country.

V: Poems and history. When I learned English poems in primary and secondary schools, I always thought it was something only to be put in books. I didn't expect it to be so widely used. It can be sent as a gift or used as a source of meditation. And I was very surprised to learn that Mark Howitt, the person sitting in front of me every Sunday in the church, is a poet!

R: Enjoying sunshine and nature in the park. In addition, I became a member of U3A and joined their activities. That allows me to do some exercise and meet new friends.

**Thomas and Vion Ng:
St Gabriel's, Alsager**

Afternoon Tea at St Winefride's

On Saturday 22nd June the SVP turned the church hall into St Winefride's Tea Room.

Forty parishioners enjoyed an afternoon tea of handpicked strawberries with cream followed by freshly baked scones with strawberry jam and whipped cream.

The event was greatly enjoyed by all who came and proved to be a successful fund raiser for the conference.



A Tour Guide at Little Moreton Hall



'The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders' was a TV production made in 1996, starring the lovely Alex Kingston. Some of the filming was carried out at Little Moreton Hall, situated near Congleton; and some months later, the television company lent costumes specially made for the series to be exhibited at the Hall. I started working there as a volunteer around about this time because of an advert in the local paper, The Advertiser, asking for help with this rather special exhibition.

Although I have lived in Alsager since 1968, I had only visited Little Moreton Hall a few times. My working life before then had been as a medical secretary, working in hospitals in Liverpool, Manchester and Stroud, and finally a part-time job at Alsager Mother and Baby clinic.

Although I loved those jobs, working at the Hall is such a delight that I have worked there now for twenty-six years. Visitors enjoy their time there so much, and I am still charmed when they express their pleasure, particularly when it is their first visit.

After you have parked your car and passed through a small copse, the first sight of the house is wonderful - it looks rather wonky and magical, like something out of a fairy tale. If you look to your right as you walk up to the house, you will see what looks like the ruin of a castle on the skyline. This is actually a folly, built in 1754 by Randle Wilbraham of Rode Hall to enhance the view.

My job as a room guide is to welcome all visitors and answer their questions about the history of this amazing place. It is perhaps the best-known example of timber-framed architecture in England.

The Moreton family had been wealthy landowners since the 13th century, with more land becoming available after the Black Death of 1348 and the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s. The construction of the Hall was started around 1500 and continued over the years, until the Long Gallery was added, with the Brewhouse chamber being added a little later.

No doubt, at the height of their success and up to the time of the Civil War, the Moreton family would have been

Catholic. But persisting with their faith would have been hard. Though there is no priest's hole at Little Moreton, there is a small but attractive chapel near the entrance to the Hall.

Until the Dissolution of the Monasteries it would have been more richly decorated, with costly vestments available. It was customary for the family to attend Mass in the room above the chapel, viewing the altar through the 'squint', an opening in the wall through which they could see but not be seen. The field workers and other servants would have worshipped below in the chapel itself.

As the Moreton family were not noble, there are no archives; and stories about the family are in short supply, gleaned from letters and notes. Suffice it to say, the family must have become Anglican, because they were not the stuff that martyrs are made of.

They always went along with whatever their king or queen at the time wanted. This led to the beginning of their downfall in the 16th century Civil War, where they chose the losing side.

Though the Moreton family supported the Royalist cause, any displays of royal support would not have been allowed by the victorious Roundhead soldiers billeted at the Hall. The chapel became much less ornate accordingly

Sir William Moreton was imprisoned in London for some months for his royalist sympathies. During this time, the Roundhead soldiers and their horses based at the Hall were a heavy drain on the family finances.

The Moreton Estate was confiscated, and heavy fines levied on the family for the return of cattle and goods. They never really recovered financially from this blow, and the younger members of the family drifted away from the Hall.

The house was never sold, but let to tenant farmers from nearby. The advantage of this has been that few

changes were made to the Hall over the following years, and what we have now is an authentic representation of the architecture and life of its time.

The last member of the family named Moreton was Elizabeth, who inherited the Hall in 1892. She was a sister in the Anglican Community of St John Baptist at Clewer in Berkshire.

On her death in 1912, she made her second cousin, Charles Thomas Abraham, Suffragan Bishop of Derby, heir to the house, on condition that it was never to be sold. In 1937, he generously offered the Hall to the National Trust, handing it over officially in 1938.

The Dale family, Thomas and Ann and their fourteen children, rented Little Moreton Hall from about 1880 until 1955 - first as tenants under the Moretons,

and then as caretakers for the National Trust. The Hall was at the centre of a working farm during this time. After 1913, the house was open to the public from 9.00 am until dusk, with the Dales giving tours and serving teas.

There is also an attractive knot garden, which I often take a stroll round after finishing my shift, chatting to visitors enjoying their time there.

People come to the house from all over the world, and it is lovely for me to see the pleasure they get from their visit. There are many stories to be told about Little Moreton Hall and the people who have lived there. I feel I am very fortunate to work in such an amazing house.

Pam Evans: St Gabriel's, Alsager

St Gabriel's Flowers

St Gabriel's is blessed with a group of talented and enthusiastic volunteers who decorate our church with flowers each week and create displays for special occasions such as Christmas, Easter and First Communions.

A rota is set up for each half-year, so our team can check their availability and perhaps swap with someone else should their date coincide with family holidays or other events.

If anyone is interested in being part of this friendly and welcoming group, you can contact me at carolineellerton@outlook.com or call 07812 352034. New volunteers are partnered in the first instance with one of our team, so you can gain experience and share in the fun.

Our Christmas flower display has been arranged for Saturday 21st December in church at 10:30am. Volunteers are welcomed. Just bring along your enthusiasm and join in the fun.

My thanks go to our current team of amazing ladies: Anne S, Anne P,



Christine, Diana, Jackie, Jane, Joan, Maureen, Pam E, Pam S, Sue; and our support group: Linda, Margaret, Norma, Father Tony, Deacon Eddie and the St

Gabriel's congregation.

**Caroline and Pam S:
St Gabriel's, Alsager**



Lichfield: An Odyssey

LMA Day Trip next July

In early July, the Local Missionary Area No 9 is planning to organise a coach trip to the Cathedral city of Lichfield in Staffordshire. We hope to celebrate Mass in the Lady Chapel, as we did in Hereford Cathedral some years ago, and also to spend an afternoon, with luck in the sunshine, visiting the city itself, which is one of the gems of the Midlands and not as well known as you would think.

Lichfield is situated not far away from here - only 18 miles south-east of the county town of Stafford, and 55 miles

from Sandbach. It has a population of around 35,000, which makes it one of the smaller of England's Cathedral cities.

The city is most noted for its three-spired medieval cathedral, but Lichfield was also the birthplace of Dr Samuel Johnson, the writer of the first authoritative Dictionary of the English Language.

Further back in time, the city's recorded history began when Chad of Mercia arrived to establish his Bishopric in 669 AD; the settlement then expanded

as the ecclesiastical centre of Mercia. In 2009, the Staffordshire Hoard, the largest hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold and silver metalwork, was found nearby.

The origin of the modern name Lichfield is twofold. At Wall, south of the current city, there was a Romano-British village called Letocetum, which, it seems, derived from an ancient Briton placename, meaning a grey wood. 'Grey' perhaps refers to the varieties of tree prominent in the landscape, such as the ash and the elm.

This small village gave its name to the new settlement which was to become today's city of Lichfield (the Roman villa of Letocetum is just two miles away).

For the city is really a Saxon settlement, founded by the Germanic tribe who invaded England after the end of the Roman period, bringing their own culture and language. In time, they were converted to the Christian faith and established several independent kingdoms, one of which was Mercia.

The kingdom's first bishop was the humble and learned Chad, an Anglo-Saxon monk educated in Ireland. When he died in 672, he was buried at Lichfield and promptly made a saint. He is still commemorated at the modern-day Catholic Cathedral in Birmingham.

The first cathedral was built on the present site in 700, when one Bishop Hedde built a new church to house the bones of their revered St Chad. His grave had become the focal point of a sacred shrine, attracting many pilgrims.

The later burial in the cathedral of the kings of Mercia further increased the



city's prestige. In 786, the powerful Mercian King Offa made the city an archbishopric, with authority over all the bishops from the Humber to the River Thames. But after Offa's death in 796, Lichfield's power waned, and in 803 the primacy was restored to Canterbury by Pope Leo III after only sixteen years.

But enough of 1066 And All That, or even 'Sing a Song of Saxons'! The modern city is well worth visiting as much for its

present-day charm as its past history. Lichfield is a wonderful city to explore.

With the city parks, the magnificent Lichfield Cathedral, the museums and independent shops, you can spend a day wandering this 800-year-old city, visiting its attractions. There is also a chance to discover the art on the streets of Lichfield by following the new Lichfield City Sculpture trail.

So we hope that you will join us and sign up for a visit to one of old England's more hidden jewels and one of its finest Cathedral cities.

**Michael Morton:
St Winefride's, Sandbach**

Ten Successful Boreholes in Matebeland, Zimbabwe



For over forty years I have worked as a medical professional in the NHS. During the past fifteen of these years, I have combined this work with visits to Zimbabwe, spending a month there every year to carry out health-related projects. It is one of the poorest countries in the world, with a life expectancy of only fifty years.

My initial trips to Zimbabwe involved health promotion, disease prevention screenings, and public health strategies. However, it soon became clear that the major need in the rural areas was water – especially, clean water.

My work is in Matebeland, in the north-west of Zimbabwe. It is a drought-ridden area, where children die from simple enteritis, because of poor water quality. There is also much malnutrition, due to crop failure. Imagine having to walk five kilometres to collect twenty litres of water, and then having to carry it back home. That amount of water is very heavy.

By coincidence, I also have a degree in geology and environmental science, so I decided to provide clean water for rural communities by drilling boreholes. My first borehole was in Bhomela in 2015. I have recently returned after my twelfth borehole was successfully completed.

Borehole drilling is a high-risk heavy engineering project - the logistics of access are difficult, and the science is far from exact. On this last occasion, the community was in Insuza, 100 km north-west of Bulawayo. The only access is by poorly maintained or non-existent roads, and the machinery is old and unreliable. The work can be frustrating, but above all it is richly rewarding. The water we find will provide a complete change of life for communities of around five hundred people.

One of my ongoing projects is to help prevent malnutrition by providing peanut butter to children in rural areas. This is an excellent nutritional product, rich in protein and fat, compared to their usual diet of poor-quality carbohydrates.

In 2014, I visited Bhomela and delivered a consignment of peanut butter. The following year I drilled a borehole for them. By 2019, they had fenced off a garden area of two acres to grow crops. I returned this year to be greeted by the village elder, who gave me a jar of their own peanut butter, saying: 'You brought this to us in 2014. Now we can return the gift.'

A testament to self sufficiency indeed! I intend to carry on returning to Zimbabwe for as long as possible, funds and health permitting.



**Dr Brendan Ratcliffe:
St Winefride's, Sandbach**

My Christian Retreat Experience



My name is Aidan Thomas, and I am a Yr 8 pupil at St Thomas More Catholic High School. My church is St Mary's in Crewe. In October, I went on a family retreat, and I want to share this experience with you.

What is a Retreat?

A Christian retreat is a time set apart for spiritual growth, reflection, and renewal. These retreats provide people with the opportunity to step away from their daily routines and focus on their relationship with God.

My Retreat

I went to Cefn Lea which is a Christian conference and holiday park in mid-Wales with my family. We arrived on Friday evening and went straightaway to listen to the main presentation. This was a talk about our connection with God and how we can strengthen our

faith. After this, we went to our family accommodation to sleep.

On Saturday morning, we had a welcome speech and started to learn new songs with actions. We also took part in different activities and workshops. The main speaker was Br Reji Kottaram. He is a world-famous speaker for the Christ Culture movement, and it was an honour to listen to him during the retreat.

On the last day, we had a chance to meet Br Reji as a family. When he spoke to us, it was like he had known us for years! Over the weekend, we also had Mass, celebrated by the Rt Rev Mar Joseph Scampickal who is the Apostolic Eparchy for the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church of Great Britain. I was so pleased to be asked to be an altar server for the bishop at this special Mass.

My experience of the retreat was amazing. During my time there I really felt a deep connection with God. I felt His presence most when we did adoration. I found I had created a strong spiritual mind there and I would really love to go again.

Why you should go

You should go to a retreat because you get to have such a great experience, and you get to develop a good spiritual mind. It is a great time to forget about the outside world and its intrusive technology, and to spend some time with God, looking at the real inner world, which is the one that truly matters.

Aidan Thomas:

Yr 8, St Thomas More School, Crewe





Joseph's Four Dreams

Named after a dreamer, I had just four dreams,
Enough to turn my whole world upside down,
To show me that people are not what they seem,
Allow me a part as his mercy God crowns.

The first, to believe an incredible thing,
That Mary, though pregnant, was innocent still,
The babe in her womb God's salvation would bring,
His son come to earth and conceived by his will.

While coming to terms and adjusting my life,
A series of happenings followed in train.
A census decreed meant I took my new wife
To Bethlehem as we bore David's good name.

Endured she the journey before she gave birth
In stable among all the beasts of the field,
Yet visiting Magi, with gifts of deep worth
And shepherds so humble, by angels revealed.

My second dream followed as wise men depart,
To flee for our lives from a merciless king
To exile in Egypt, to make a new start
And follow my namesake God's promise to bring.

I heard of the massacre done the next days
And thanked the Lord gratefully, with wife and son,
Resolving to follow my dreaming always,
As refugees settled, with life we got on.

The third of my dreams came years later to say
'Uproot your new life and return to your land.'
We packed all our goods and set out on our way
To build yet again a new life from the sand.

The fourth followed soon to forewarn us avoid
Judea's new king, with his father one mind,
Arriving in Nazareth, all overjoyed
To finish our wanderings with our own kind.

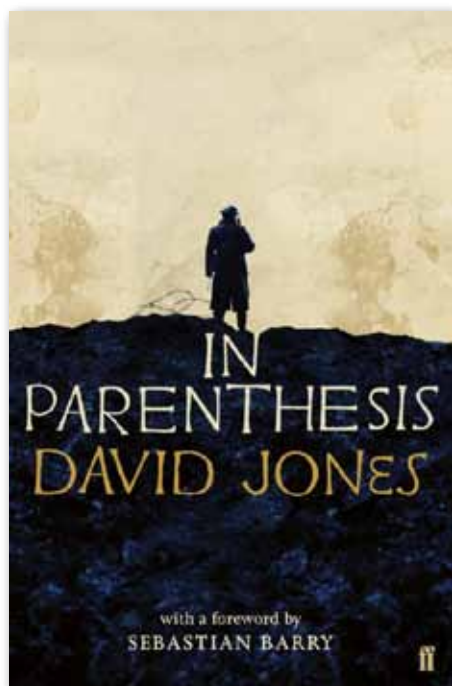
Disruptive, disturbing, upsetting and hard,
These dreams and God's word are uncomfortable ways.
Accepting them gave me a wonderful part
To play in God's plan for my time and always.

Mark Howitt: St Gabriel's, Alsager

'In Parenthesis'

A Theology of Mary in
the Communion of Saints

by David Jones



This book is a 'prose-poem' written by a Catholic poet in 1937. David Jones served continuously on the Western Front in the First World War from 1915-1918. He started to write in 1927, so it took him ten years to complete. As he puts it in his Preface: 'It took me time to appreciate some things, which, at the time of suffering, the flesh was too weak to appraise' (p.x).

He called his poem '**In Parenthesis**', 'because for us amateur soldiers... the war itself was a parenthesis – how glad we thought we were to step outside its brackets at the end of '18' (Preface, p.xv).

I think you might like to read this work for two reasons. If you are interested in the First World War and have read other things by people affected by those events, here is another different insight.

A lot of us got to read the poetry of Wilfrid Owen and Siegfried Sassoon when we were at school. Since then, I have also read '**Goodbye to All That**' by Robert Graves, '**All Quiet on the Western Front**' by Erich Maria Remarque, and '**Testament of Youth**' by Vera Britten - all of them prose accounts giving me respectively the viewpoint



of a British soldier, a German soldier, and a woman working as a nurse just behind the Front. David Jones' work, which is 187 pages long, certainly brings something different. It is not a prose account - it is poetry. And, like all poetry, it bears reading and re-reading.

The second reason you might take a look at this is that David Jones (1895-1974) is a creative artist who deserves, in my opinion, to be better known. He was of Welsh stock but grew up in London. Before the war he went to art school to become a painter. After the war, he became a Catholic in 1921 and worked as an artist alongside that other great Catholic artist, Eric Gill.

But he also wrote poetry. It is significant that TS Eliot was influential in getting this work published, and he wrote a short introduction to it. Eliot says: 'David Jones is a representative of the same literary generation as Joyce and Pound and myself... David Jones is the youngest and the tardiest to publish' (p.viii).

So, think of a TS Eliot poem like '**The Wasteland**' - not a short poem, not always the easiest to understand, but one that creates an atmosphere. '**The Wasteland**' intrigued me from when I first read it as a teenager, and I keep turning back to it to try to understand a bit more. Eliot rooted his own disillusionment in a lot of the religious and literary writing of the past quite deliberately, in order to connect it to an older story of humanity as a whole.



David Jones' prose-poem is a bit like that, but (you may be relieved to hear) more accessible. You could describe it as the story of how an ordinary man draws closer and closer to danger. It starts in Britain, with the hero, John Ball, being late on the Parade Ground. The first two sections describe his departure for France, introductory lectures and marching towards the Front Line – it ends with their first experience of a shell exploding nearby.

Part Three describes very vividly arriving in a front-line trench at night. Part Four describes their first day on duty on Christmas Day 1915, in what is actually quite a quiet section of the Front. Part 5 starts in a café in the Back Area behind the lines, but ends with them getting orders and marching south towards the Somme.

Part 6 describes the men waiting, with the sense that a big battle is about to happen. Only Part 7 is concerned with the actual fighting on the first day of the Somme. The sights and sounds, the routine of army life and the camaraderie of the men are therefore described very intensively.

One knows that this is a firsthand account – for example, how deep in the memory is that very first night on the front line, and how miserable and dull that first day was. On the first day of the Somme, Jones devotes five and a half pages to just waiting interminably until the signal is given to advance.

Where is the likeness to TS Eliot? Well, David Jones too draws on older stories to put his own story into perspective. One example, which runs throughout the work, is that he recalls the Welsh

soldier Fluellen digging during the siege in Shakespeare's Henry V and talking about keeping 'the discipline of the wars' (Act Three, Scene One). Jones comments in his notes: 'Trench life brought that work pretty constantly to mind' (Part 3, note 24). Another quote recalls the common soldiers Pistol and Bardolph from the same play. There, after all, albeit in 1415 rather than 1915, was a 'British Expeditionary Force' in France, with many of the same grumbles as the men who came five hundred years later.

On another occasion, when all the soldiers are sleeping, Jones recalls all the legends (and we know a local version, in the tale of the wizard on Alderley Edge) of Arthur's knights sleeping underground, waiting for the moment when they will be called to fight again. Because Jones is a Welshman, he has a rich knowledge of Welsh stories - what he dubs 'the more venerable culture in

that hotch-potch that is British culture as a whole' (p.xiii). This does mean that you have to refer to his notes at the back from time to time - just as you have to when reading **The Wasteland!**

The Catholic element is also present throughout the poem, though understated. You start to realise that John Ball is probably a Catholic, as he thinks of Our Lady. He realises that his German counterparts, being from Bavaria, are also Catholic.

There is a sad moment when the Germans start singing a Christmas carol, but the British soldiers think they have to outdo the Germans, so they start singing a contemporary popular song, 'Casey Jones mounted in his engine', to drown them out (Part 4, pp 67-8).

I am now going to spoil the ending for you! John Ball, our hero, is injured at the

very end. Exactly at this point David Jones recalls the ancient French story of Roland. When Roland is mortally wounded at the end of his exploits, he is concerned to safeguard his sword so that it doesn't fall into the hands of his enemy.

John Ball feels the same way about his rifle, which has been his constant companion in the trenches. He keeps tight hold of it, even though it actually encumbers him as he crawls backwards from the action, hoping to meet a stretcher party.

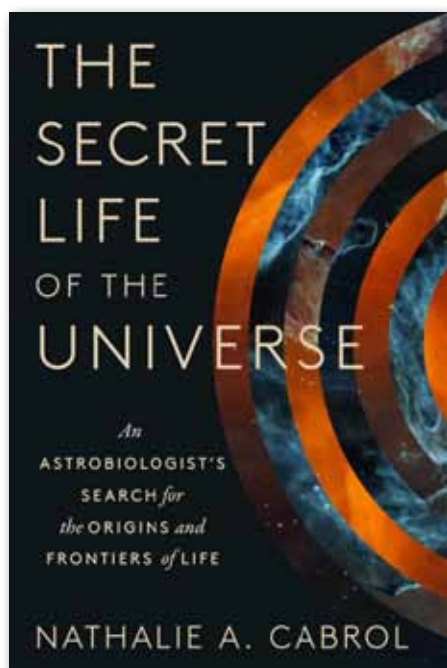
In an amazing way, Jones therefore gives the ordinary soldier the respect and the glory given to the great heroes of the ancient tales. He even ends with a quote from the '**Song of Roland**': 'The geste says this, and the man who was on the field...and who wrote the book.'

Nick Kern: St Mary's, Crewe

The Secret Life of the Universe

by **Nathalie A Cabrol**

Simon & Schuster. 320 pp £22-00



It seems that Goldilocks might not be as fussy as we once thought. We have long imagined that life as we know it is only likely to emerge in a particular habitable zone, at a certain distance from a suitable star. This meant that the search for life within our solar system was limited to Mars - a planet with so much folklore surrounding it that, even before people saw 'canals' and faces on its

surface, it has always been a candidate for habitation - in the past and perhaps again in the future.

This all began to change with the discovery of many strange species on earth, such as those that live deep in the Antarctic ice, or at very high altitudes, or in the 'smokers', the hydrothermal vents in the seabeds of the deepest oceans. Definitions of life-as-we-know-it have expanded. Goldilocks might now be expected to try a hard futon and sample some volcanically microwaved porridge.

The search for life in our solar system has broadened to take in Saturn's moons, the asteroid Ceres and even the poisonous, boiling Venus. Now a multitude of probes have joined the search, and suddenly (at least in scientific terms) the number of possible inhabitable worlds is growing to dizzying proportions.

Nathalie's book is based throughout on actual science. She wastes no time whatever on speculation about what aliens might actually look like (on **Star Trek**, as many will remember, the universe was populated by 'humanoids' with funny ears and blondes speaking lightly accented English). Strange

insect-like beings are more likely, but Natalie goes beyond that and asks rather more profound psychological and religious questions.

It would seem that, rather than flashes of lightning over a pool of primordial soup, the building blocks of life can be as infinitely manipulable as language. Life may be nothing more than a function of chemistry and thermodynamics, or even the work of twelve monkeys with typewriters. Nathalie's most speculative thoughts are similar to the one voiced by Mr Spock: 'It's life Jim, but not as we know it.'

Nathalie is an astrobiologist, not a theologian, but she understands the implications of life-as-we-do-not-know-it. Today, theology appears ready to take on cosmic pluralism in a modern version of religious faith, in which aliens are part of God's plan and not in contrast to it.

With all her predecessors, such as Carl Sagan, she believes in a future encounter with otherness - unless life-as-we-don't-know it is already among us, on the other side of a quantum veil, in a parallel universe, simply never able to make contact. Whatever our exact beliefs, cosmic loneliness poses as many scientific and religious questions as cosmic plenitude.

**Michael Morton:
St Winefride's, Sandbach**

Our Polish Parish



**Polska Wspólnota Katolicka
Matki Bożej Ostrobramskiej**
Polish RC Community of Our Lady of Ostra Brama Crewe



The Polish parish of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn was first established in 1947, just after the end of World War II, in a resettlement camp at Doddington, near Crewe. This was originally a base for American troops.

After the departure of the Americans, Polish soldiers and their families were resettled there. These soldiers mainly belonged to the 5th Kresy Infantry Division, which was part of the second corps under the command of General Anders.

The residents of Doddington remember the orphans – war children who came to the camp in 1947. The Polish people nicknamed the American barracks ‘the barrels of laughter’. Two families were allocated accommodation in each of the barracks.

The first parish priest was Fr Mieczysław Stasz, a chaplain of the Polish army with the rank of major. Together with the inhabitants of one of the barracks, he created a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn.

An image of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn was made out of mess tins and the metal emblems of eagles on the soldiers’ berets, and then hung in the central place above the altar. Today, this painting is in our chapel and is endowed with numerous votive offerings. Before the face of the Mother of the Gate of Dawn we entrust our concerns, offer our supplications and thanksgivings.

Inside the camp, a nursery, kindergarten, school, kitchen, canteen and infirmary were all established, and here many of the Polish women were employed. English language, cooking, tailoring

and other courses were also taught, designed to help young people in finding employment.

The next parish priest in the camp was Fr Władysław Puchalski. The inhabitants of the camp were aware that it was impossible and unsafe to return to their family homes in Poland, because after World War II the borders of Poland were changed. In the Chapel, the camp’s inhabitants met for Mass and prayers and listened to the word of Lord, which helped to sooth the pain and longing for their lost homeland.

In exile, they kept and cultivated their faith and Polish traditions, which were very important to them. Deep interpersonal bonds were also formed, friendships that were a substitute for lost families.

It was the Church that became the backbone that guarded faith and moral principles among the displaced Polish families. Thanks to these principles and their righteous conduct, Poles were perceived, among the English community, as trustworthy and reliable working people.

The Corpus Christi celebrations were very important for the inhabitants of the camp. All of the camp inhabitants attended Holy Mass, and then went in a solemn procession to the four altars. After Holy Mass, feasts and dances took place throughout the camp. These moments spent together are still



A show of Polish dancing at Doddington



Polish teenagers dressed in national costumes

remembered with sentiment by former residents of Doddington.

In addition, all Polish church and state occasions were celebrated. A Polish dance and choir groups were also founded, which added splendour to the celebrations. A thriving scout team which is fondly remembered was established. The camp in Doddington was visited by many distinguished guests, including General Anders in the 1950s, whose presence encouraged the soldiers together with their families, to adapt to life in a new country.



A sewing class at Doddington

A frequent guest of the camp was prelate priest Michalski, who was involved in the work of the Polish mission in London. In the mid-1950s, a new parish priest, Fr Urbański, arrived at the camp, and was the first person to be in the possession of a car. Thanks to his mobility, he kept in contact with the numerous Polish communities scattered around the area.

Gradually over the years up to 1960, the camp slowly began to shrink as some of the inhabitants took advantage of the invitation to settle in other countries Canada, USA, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, to name a few. Families also moved to nearby local towns, Crewe, Nantwich, etc trying to find work and the Polish children also started to attend local English schools.



A visitation by Bishop Wesoly at Doddington

At the same time, other Polish refugees were beginning to settle in Crewe, their route to England was slightly different, these were Poles liberated from German concentration camps, forced labour camps, insurgents from Warsaw, airmen, paratroopers, soldiers and civilians liberated by the American army. There were also refugees from Poland who sought asylum fleeing from the new communist regime.

It was for these refugees that at St Mary's Church in Crewe there was a Mass celebrated by the Polish priest from Doddington camp in their native language. From 1958, the next Polish parish priest was Fr Leonard Czapski, a former prisoner of the concentration camp in Dachau who tried to gather as many compatriots as possible to the Polish parish. In the face of a large number of believers, there was a need to rent the church permanently.

Fr Leonard Czapski arranged with the English parish priest at St Mary's to have a Mass said every Sunday in Polish at 12:45pm, which is still continuing up to this present day.

However, there was still a lack of a place where it would be possible to celebrate Polish traditions and culture, so it was decided to purchase a building which would be adapted to the needs of our Polish community.

In order to achieve this goal, various artistic performances, refreshments, dances were organized, and all proceeds were used to purchase 71 West Street. The whole of the Polish community in Crewe took part in this goal of raising the finances to establish a centre dedicated to maintaining their Polish traditions.

The Polish Club was a subsidiary of the Polish parish, which had a large hall

used for occasional celebrations. Various entertainments were organised there, for example Bingo, which was very popular at that time.

The money raised by the club was used to pay off the loan for 71 West St and also helped in the upkeep of the parish. The Polish Club was registered as a charity unit, as all the people who worked at the club were volunteers who donated all their earnings to the parish.

When Fr Leonard Czapski retired, Fr Jerzy Januszkiewicz became the parish priest. After his retirement, Fr Czapski moved into his private house in Crewe. He was often a visitor at the Polish centre until he passed away in the 1980s. After the funeral, his body was transported back to Poland, and he was buried in Warsaw.

The parish continued to flourish, with a circle of the Holy Rosary being formed.



Polish dancing group in the Parish Hall in the Eighties

They met regularly for prayers and the praying of the mysteries of the Rosary. Altar servers actively participated in the Holy Mass.

The children regularly attended classes on Saturdays, where religion was taught by the parish priest. A church choir, accompanied by organ music, and an active group of lectors always participated in religious services.

From 1982 to 1991 a Salesian missionary priest Fr Teodor Bartnik, who had just returned from Brazil, became the new Polish parish priest. During his tenure, a lot of renovation work in the hall and club was undertaken. The next parish priest, for only a couple months, was Fr Stanislaw Cymbalist.

From November 1991, Fr Józef Woźniak-TCH, a member of the order of the Society of Christ (whose mission was to attend to the spiritual needs of Polish expatriates) became the new Polish parish priest in Crewe. During his time, various major renovations were carried out to the chapel, sacristy and priest's accommodation on the first floor at 71 West Street.

Members of the Polish community continued to decline, as the first generation passed on and the second generation gradually became absorbed into the English community. The Polish parish occasionally hosted copies of the image of the Divine Mercy during peregrinations which visited all Polish parishes in England.

For many years, every Friday after Holy Mass, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy was said, which meant the parish needed an image of the Divine Mercy. This was painted by a local artist of Polish origin, and was hung on the wall next to the tabernacle in our chapel on the first floor at 71 West St.

In 1997, the parish celebrated its 50th anniversary. At the solemn Mass, a marble plaque was blessed and embedded in the wall of St Mary's Church to commemorate this anniversary. After the Holy Mass, there were celebrations in the parish hall, where the parish priest decorated meritorious parishioners for their services to the Polish community.

In 1999, Fr Grzegorz Januszewski-TCH became the parish priest, and it was time for further renovations. The windows in the entire building were gradually replaced - first downstairs, in the club, then on the first floor.

After that, the entrance door was also replaced, and a new heating system was installed on the first floor. The parish experienced peregrinations of images: Our Lady of Kozielska, as well as a visit to the copy of the image. Regularly, every year, a coach was hired for pilgrimages to Holywell and Pantasaph and Hednesford near Cannock (a tradition since the post-war days).

The membership of the Polish Club had been gradually declining over the years - even the new migration of Poles from Poland in 2004 did not help. Eventually the Club collapsed and was declared

bankrupt in 2006, with the parish being left to pay all the club's debts. This greatly strained the parish's financial reserves. A couple of attempts were made to revive the Club, but to no avail.

This new migration of Poles in 2004 reversed the fortunes of the Polish parish in Crewe, which was on the point of closure. One Sunday Mass was no longer sufficient to meet the needs of the Polish community, so, with the consent of the English parish, a second Mass was celebrated every Saturday at 7:00pm.

In 2011, we had a new parish priest, Fr Piotr Gardon-TCH, who came to us with great enthusiasm and personal commitment. Major updating, upgrading and renovation of the priest's apartment was undertaken, and, as the upstairs chapel was also too small for the increasing number of attendees for the daily Holy Mass, the chapel was transferred downstairs.

A general revival of the Polish parish continued with a new prayer group, a new church choir, altar servers and religious education. This revival continued and increased when a new priest Fr Artur Stelmach took over in 2022. There has been a renovation of the ground floor at 71 West St (including the Chapel and parish hall). Further new groups have been formed, with a lot of new participants taking part in the day-to-day life of the Polish Parish in Crewe.

**A Parishioner:
Our Lady of Ostra Brama Crewe**

'The Longest Yarn'

Knitting D-Day



Made up of eighty woollen 3D panels, bringing to life the D-Day Landings of June 1944 and the stories of the eighty days of fighting for the Liberation of Paris, this is a modern-day Bayeux Tapestry. Magnificent in ambition and execution, it was created by over 1,000 knitters from France, the UK, Europe, USA and New Zealand.

Every community under Allied control, including those in today's Commonwealth countries, formerly part of the British Empire, played a vital part in focusing all their resources onto the Normandy beaches. This great push back against the Nazi forces ultimately hastened the end of WWII in Europe and brought about the peace we have today. These are our stories, and we should share them while they are still within living memory.

Also known as '**A Thread Through History**', these 80 one-metre-long 3D knitting and crochet panels, created for the eightieth anniversary of the D-Day landings, were on display at Stoke Minster until the 5th December. Some of the scenes depicted are taken from original photos of the time or from the film 'The Longest Day'. They include a full-sized knitted Churchill AVRE Tank, a Gown of Poppies, and stunning D-Day-themed post-box Toppers depicting some of the overlooked stories of D-Day, along with so much more.

From Stoke Minster, the exhibition will move on to Tewkesbury Abbey from 7th December to 10th January; to Enniskillen from 13th January to 8th February; to Norwich University of East Anglia from 10th February to 1st March; and to Peterborough Cathedral from 3rd March to 1st April. After that, it goes over the Atlantic to be shown at Cape May, New Jersey, from 25th April, before touring the USA for a year. It is free to visit.

The idea for its creation came from Tansy Forster, an Englishwoman living in Normandy, who was inspired by the knitted toppers and yarnbombing she had seen in the UK. Panels have been constructed by crafters around the world, from as far away as Australia, New Zealand, USA and Canada, as well as Ireland and the UK.

It took about 13,000 woman-hours, and thousands of miles of wool, to complete the toppers. The attention to detail is marvellous, and the team had two expert WWII historians advising on everything – not only the uniforms and insignia but also the tanks, battleships, aircraft and buildings depicted.

If you get a chance to visit this wonderful exhibition, you will be amazed by the exactness and creativity that have gone into this super depiction of D-Day.

Caroline Ellerton:
St Gabriel's, Alsager

Pope Francis' visit to Timor Leste



For the people of Timor Leste, it felt like a dream come true when Pope Francis visited our country for three days in September of this year.

We had waited 35 years for this, since the visit of Pope John Paul II on 12th October, 1989. But that visit took place in completely different circumstances, during the Indonesian occupation.

Timor Leste is one of the world's youngest countries and it has deep ties with the Catholic Church, which played an influential part in its tumultuous fight for independence from Indonesia.

This small country of just 1.3 million people is the second most Catholic country in the world, with 97% of the

population identifying as Catholic, the highest proportion outside of the Vatican City State.

We gained Independence in 2002, and Pope Francis' visit was a blessing from God after such a long wait. He was supposed to have visited in 2021, but the visit had to be cancelled because of the Covid pandemic.

He stayed in Dili, the capital of Timor Leste, from the 9th – 11th September.

The Timor people were full of enthusiasm, travelling from districts, villages, and towns to share these memorable moments with him. The young and the old, the healthy and the disabled, all lined the streets and laid

their 'tais' (traditional cloths or scarfs) on the route to greet him, and to show him how much we appreciated his thinking of us and being with us.

The streets of Dili were packed with cheering crowds, from elderly worshippers to babies in strollers, all hoping to catch a glimpse of the Pope. There was a veritable sea of people carrying yellow and white umbrellas, the colours of the Vatican, as they tried to shield themselves from the sun. At one point, a man was seen hosing down the crowd with water to cool them down.

During the Mass in Tasi Tolu (Three Seas), hundreds of thousands gathered in worship and thanksgiving - not only people from Timor Leste, but also visitors from the neighbouring country of Indonesia.

During the Mass, the message of His Holiness to the Timor people was: 'Your Faith is your Culture'. He praised us for recovering so quickly from our suffering and for reconciling with our former enemies in Indonesia. He entrusted the future of Timor to the protection of the Blessed Virgin.

His visit was a great healing after so much suffering during the occupation of our country, and we all see it as a blessing from God.

The Timorese people continue to visit Tasi Tolu to pray. It will become a place of remembrance of this wondrous visit.

Isaura Aquino: St Mary's, Crewe





Some LMA No.9 Pro-Life Group members at our last meeting in November

LMA No 9 Pro-Life Group

Catholics know the Church's teaching on Abortion and Euthanasia. Many Catholics are concerned about the way social attitudes are changing and want to do something about it, but they feel isolated and helpless. Hearing this comment from many parishioners, when I was a parish priest in Birkenhead (as well as Dean of the Wirral), I set up a cross-parish Pro-Life group, which met every six weeks or so.

A number of people in the group were very well informed, so we quickly got up to speed on some of the debates and the actions taken. We planned different events: parish talks, prayer and fundraisers. Mainly though, it was for mutual support.

Everyone did something. A less mobile member was unable to join in with the more active events, but she was happy to be the first point of contact on the phone and helped with administration.

For about a year now, a similar group has been meeting once a month at St Mary's presbytery in Crewe, with attendees from all four of our LMA parishes and some from 'over the border' in Newcastle and the Potteries. It has been advertised in the various parish bulletins, but not always with regularity, through my own fault.

I'd like to spell out here my philosophy for such a group. I want it to be as broad a coalition as possible. From the Assisted Dying Bill we have seen that this issue is

not related to any one political party! Quite deliberately ours is not a 'SPUC' Group, since I know that some Catholics have their reservations about some of SPUC's tactics.

Let me clarify! I have said before now, from the pulpit of St Mary's, that I joined the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) when legislation was passed allowing scientific experimentation on human embryos.

The Pro-Life cause needed a political voice. SPUC is the best-known and strongest pro-Life political lobby group. I felt (and still feel) I should support it - but precisely because it is a political group (amongst other things - it is also educational!).

We may not always agree with decisions made or opinions expressed by the leadership, any more than I will always agree with any political party I support. So if you feel like that, that's okay, you are still very welcome! In Wythenshawe (under the guidance of Fr Michael Gannon before my time there), a group of parishioners made the decision to set up a charity shop supporting Life.

For them it was more important to support an organisation giving practical assistance to mothers who had made the courageous decision to continue with their pregnancy.

So, whatever your views on particular aspects of the matter, if you would like to do something to support pro-Life issues, I invite you to come along. Some members have taken part in the March for Life down in London. Others have got information posters regarding help and counselling to be displayed in the porches of our churches. Others lead prayer.

At St Mary's, there is a Holy Hour spent praying for respect for human life on the first Saturday of every month, 10:50 - 11:50am. In my previous group, some people came and handed out the White Flower stickers in any local church when there was a SPUC Appeal and Collection.

If we all do one small thing, according to our gifts and aptitudes, and put it all together, we can make a difference! Our next meeting will be at St Mary's Presbytery on Wednesday, 22nd January 2025, from 7-8pm.

Fr Nicholas Kern: St Mary's, Crewe





Married at St Anne's

In May 2023 Dr Vicky Sadler and Mr Sean Daly were married at St Anne's church in Nantwich by Fr Tony Grace and Fr Gavin Landers, assisted by Deacon Peter. Fr Gavin is a Salford diocesan priest and a good friend of Sean's Irish Catholic family.

The couple now live in Flixton, but Vicky still works in the area. She is a GP partner in Crewe and also works at St Luke's Hospice. Vicky's work at the Hospice started in December 2023, and she finds the work most rewarding - hospice staff are able to provide excellent care and support to patients and their families at the end of the patient's life.

In April 2024, Vicky and Sean were extremely honoured to be invited to meet Pope Francis in Rome, to help

celebrate their marriage. They received the invitation as a complete surprise at their wedding. There were a number of other newly married couples at the ceremony. The Pope blessed them and held their hands - a very special moment to treasure during their married life.

Vicky and Sean chose to marry at St Anne's because of the family's long relationship with the parish. This wedding follows a long line of marriages at St Anne's for our family. Vicky's mum and dad, Brian and Anne Sadler, were married in the same church in July 1999 and are celebrating their Silver Wedding this year.

Also, her grandma and granddad, Jack and Freda Guest, were married at St Anne's in July 1954, and they shared 52 years of happy marriage. Likewise,

Jack's cousin Sheila and Stan Moss also got married at St Anne's (below right). Their wedding was on Boxing Day 1953, and they went on to celebrate almost 60 years of married life!

Moreover, Vicky's great-grandmother, Teresa North, a former head teacher of St Anne's School, was also married at St Anne's in around 1910 - this was at the old church in St Anne's Lane. But unfortunately, no photographs are available.

Teresa and her husband John married in the days when female head teachers had to be spinsters, and she had to resign her headship upon marriage.

2024 has been quite a year for us! Our twins, Matthew and Elizabeth (both altar servers at St Anne's, alongside Vicky), graduated with First-class degrees from the Universities of Cardiff and Staffordshire on the 18th and 19th July. On the following day, 20th July, it was





25 years since Brian and I were married at St Anne's.

Elizabeth's degree is in Occupational Therapy - she is deaf, so this is a particularly significant achievement. Matthew got his First in Engineering Design, and he was also awarded the Student of the Year Award by the Institute of Mechanical Engineers 2024.

Earlier in July we had travelled to Edinburgh, as Elizabeth was being presented with her Duke of Edinburgh Gold award at Holyrood Palace.

As you can see, we have had so much to celebrate this year, so much to be thankful for!

Anne Sadler:
St Anne's, Nantwich



Pilgrims' Progress – Antur Cymraeg

Sandbach → Alsager → Nantwich → Llangollen ← and back



WELL now! A holy well at Holywell - our first stop on a memorable day trip sponsored and heavily subsidised by the St Anne's SVP Conference and thanks to a significant donation from a generous benefactor.

Then I received an after-the-event unexpected email from our Parish Priest Fr Tony Grace, an especially persuasive and effective delegator. Not for the first time he requested an article for No 9. If you are expecting and hoping for something serious from the part-time deacon of St Anne's, turn the page now.

I was reminded of a family holiday in the 1970s on the West Coast of Ireland adjacent to Clew Bay in the lee of Croagh Patrick, also a renowned pilgrimage site. Why? Because it transpired that the description of the rented cottage as being 'well equipped' had to be taken literally, as a bucket was provided to collect water from the well in the garden.

The first challenge was to change my mindset from that of preparing a homily to that of writing an article for our favourite magazine, No 9. This is especially onerous given the knowledge and expertise of the superbly written articles in every edition to date. And then there was the challenge of writing something that would survive the scrutiny of the brilliant editor - unexpurgated.

Despite having explored much of North Wales my wife and I had not visited Holywell before, although I have attended clergy retreats at Saint Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre not too far away. According to legend, it was St Beuno, Winefride's uncle, who replaced her decapitated head on her shoulders before her miraculous recovery.

An ecumenical and eclectic bunch of forty-odd people - and some not so odd - almost exclusively OAPs from Alsager, Nantwich and Sandbach, filled a well-appointed coach. Well, a WC anyway which was comforting to at least this geriatric octogenarian.

On Tuesday 17th September, with the coach expected to depart at 10:30 am and Mass at 10 am, we celebrated a record-breaking but nevertheless reverent 23-minute Mass with Fr Michael Ryan, resident OMI priest at St Anne's, presiding. The only downside was that we missed out on one of Fr Michael's homilies. His incentive was that he was accompanying us on the trip. Perhaps it was his presence that ensured there was no raucous behaviour requiring the admonishment of trip organiser or coach driver.

'For he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good' (Matthew 5:45). Well, today was a day for sunshine, all the way and all day. Given my ancestry, sun-

tanning comes very naturally to me, and I am now several shades darker than a 'Whiter Shade of Pale'.

On arrival in Holywell, we were deposited by the entrance to the pilgrimage site shortly after 11:30 am, as, fortunately, not too much of the journey was at 20 mph! We had a little time to wander around the gift shop and museum and have a look at the spring that sprang up on the spot where, according to tradition, St Winefride's severed head landed. A gruesome story but perhaps not too uncommon in those times, when many Catholic Christians were martyred for their beliefs.

St Winefride's Shrine is one of the 'Seven Wonders of Wales' and attracts many tens of thousands of visitors each year. They come in search of peace, reflection and even a cure for bodily ills. A Grade 1 listed building and scheduled ancient monument, it is considered to be the oldest continually visited pilgrimage site in Great Britain.

The Legend: Winefride (Gwenffrewi) was a Welsh virgin martyr of the seventh century. According to legend, her suitor Caradoc became enraged when he discovered that, rather than marry him, she intended to become a nun. He forcibly attempted to seduce Winefride, but she broke free of his grasp and fled

to the church at Holywell, which had been built by her uncle, St Beuno. The furious Caradoc pursued her and cut off her head. In the place where it fell a spring of water came forth.

On hearing the commotion, St Beuno came out of the church and placed her head back on her body, said a fervent prayer, and Winefride was restored to life, bearing just a white scar encircling her neck where Caradoc's blow had fallen. Winefride became a nun and lived at Holywell for eight years before joining a community at Gwytherin, where she eventually became Abbess, dying there some 22 years later.

By the 12th century, her popularity had become so great that, in 1138, her relics were translated to Shrewsbury Abbey, which then became a major pilgrimage centre. After the Abbey, like so many others, was destroyed by Henry VIII and his accomplice Thomas Cromwell in 1540, the veneration of Saint Winefride returned to Holywell, where her story continues to inspire and comfort countless pilgrims to the present day!

At noon, Fr Matthew Bond, the Parish Priest of St Winefride's Church in Holywell, joined us in the Well and Crypt in the Area of Sanctuary. In addition to the information in the extract below from the shrine leaflet he gave us a few additional snippets concerning the legends and traditions attributed to St Winefride.

I now wish I'd made notes. Having reached Shakespeare's 7th stage of life, a time of 'second childishness and mere oblivion', I have to add 'sans memory' to

his list of defects. We were each given a prayer leaflet, based on which Fr Matthew conducted a short prayer service. It incorporated the Litany of St Winefride, which is very comprehensive. Maybe you'll have better luck than me Googling it, but it is well worth finding and reciting.

As can be seen from the photo, I was glad to have the opportunity to reverence the relic of St Winefride. It was a special moment. However, in that reverential moment, I didn't notice that Patsy was poised with her phone camera. Hence, as you can see, I didn't manage to pull my tummy in!

The information leaflet shows that bathing in the waters is permitted three times a day in half-hour slots, all of which we, perhaps providentially, missed. The leaflet euphemistically states 'suitable attire is required'. Mind-boggling!

Back in 2008 I recall seeing pilgrims in the Holy Land clad in full-length white garments descending steps into the river Jordan to be baptised by total immersion. I donned my swimming trunks to float belly up in the much less inviting waters of the Dead Sea. It took an age to clean up afterwards. Having congenital anosmia (no sense of smell), I was spared the stench of the 'water'.

We were told that Lady Margaret Beaufort, the grandmother of Henry VIII, favoured the Shrine. So, although Henry ordered its destruction, it was not completely demolished, possibly in deference to Granny. The Lady Margaret Beaufort Chapel was built circa 1500 on the site.

It was suggested that those who wished to work up an appetite could saunter the 150/200 yards up the road to the Guest House run by Bridgettine Sisters. What we weren't told was that up really meant up – our 'saunter' involved an uphill climb of what seemed like a 1 in 5 gradient.

Sans crampons, my wife Jo and I, accompanied by a lady of similar vintage, arrived breathless, and with by now rumbling tummies, at the Guest House. This dear lady was slightly miffed to discover that the coach had transported the slightly less able-bodied and the downright lazy from the shrine to the guesthouse.

There was, of course, a gift shop, which most of our pilgrims crowded into, cheerfully spending their pension money, despite the government's recent withdrawal of the you-know-what. All in a good cause. The Sisters served our meal very efficiently.

My one good ear discerned a number of Indian accents among the nuns. But, luckily, I was not required to converse in either Hindi or Urdu. Just as well as, despite hailing from the Indian subcontinent myself, I have scant knowledge of either.

I was tempted to ask if any of them were from Goa, where my ancestors were from. But I wasn't sure if they were allowed to speak, as none of them uttered a word even when spoken to. Lunch, despite the Indian heritage of our hostesses, was prepared for staid English/Welsh/Scottish palates.



The tasty soup was asparagus (maybe), followed by chicken (definitely) in breadcrumbs (maybe). But then came a non-curry sauce with roast spuds, which my table companions overdosed on, and enough veggies to more than adequately fulfil our 'five-a-day' requirement twice over.

This was followed by carrot (maybe) cake and fondant crème (maybe). We were given a choice of tea or coffee. I opted for coffee but, when the Sister poured the liquid out of the jug, it turned out to be only hot water! She beat a hasty retreat to find the jar of Instant. If there was an embarrassing altercation in the kitchen, I didn't hear it, even though I don't think they are a silent order like the Carmelites. Nevertheless, it was a nice meal, thoroughly enjoyed.

I suspect that our lunch and the time we spent in the Bridgettine Guest House took rather longer than anticipated, so we were restricted to just forty minutes in the picturesque town of Llangollen - long enough to view the pretty and fast-flowing River Dee from the bridge, before purchasing some indulgent goodies from a deli and putting 40p on my debit card twice in order to spend a penny!



I think we were the last to board the coach for the journey home, arriving just ten seconds before the 4:00pm deadline. We relaxed on an uneventful, sleep-inducing journey home through Welsh and Cheshire countryside, arriving back at St Anne's at about 5:15pm. There was a slightly longer journey both ways for the pilgrims from St Gabriel's - and yes, St Winefride's!

The visit to St Winefride's Shrine was an enjoyable and worthwhile experience. But, on reflection, it would have been an even more spiritual one with fewer people milling around, however reverently.

The day was superbly well organised by Alan Brown, a fellow number-cruncher

and appropriately Treasurer of St Anne's SVP Conference. Before the Nantwich contingent disembarked, Ann Alexander, SVP President, thanked the pilgrims for coming and Alan for his significant role in contributing to a great day out. On behalf of us all, thank you, Alan.

WELL - there you have it. What a day, and all for a mere £10 each! Fantastic! If you've managed to wade through this from beginning to end, thank you. I applaud your perseverance and stamina.

**Deacon Peter Mascarenhas:
St Anne's Nantwich**

The Wedding of Rita Gea

On Saturday 24th August the wedding of Rita Gea to Lahib Ghareeb took place at St Mary's Church in Crewe, followed by a reception at Alsager Civic Centre in the evening.

Rita is a member of the Iraqi refugee family who were sponsored by St Winefride's in Sandbach, under the UNHCR Community Sponsorship scheme. The family arrived in May 2019 and after five years have now been granted indefinite leave to remain.

Rita was escorted up the aisle by her father, Mohannad, and left on the arm of her new husband, Lahib.

We wish them much joy and happiness in their new life together.

**Liz Johnson:
St Winefride's, Sandbach**



John XXIII

The Sixties Pope of Love and Peace



Perhaps no one had a greater influence on the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century than Pope John XXIII. Born Angelo Roncalli (1881–1963), he rose from humble beginnings to become a passionate advocate for social justice and world peace.

As Pope, he acted as a true shepherd for the people, full of compassion and charity, uniting cultures across the globe and championing inter-religious dialogue with his message of love and his warm teaching style. His achievement was recognised with canonisation by Pope Francis in 2014.

He was elected Pope in 1958 at the age of 77, after eleven ballots. Because of his advanced age, he was expected to be simply a caretaker pope. Instead, he ushered in a new era in the history of the Catholic Church, calling the historic Second Vatican Council (1962-65) in an attempt to bring the Church up to date (an 'aggiornamento').

Even though he did not live to see it through to completion, his efforts in initiating the council changed the Church forever.

Born into a large peasant family, he embarked on a career in the priesthood after completing his doctorate in theology in 1904, and went on to experience the horrors of war at first hand. When the First World War broke

out, he was drafted into the Royal Italian Army as a sergeant, serving in the medical corps as a stretcher-bearer and chaplain. He was honourably discharged from the army in early 1919 and returned to his work as lecturer in a seminary.

Before becoming Pope, he had served in various positions in the church, including acting as papal nuncio in France, Bulgaria, and Greece. While serving as the Apostolic Delegate to Turkey and Greece, he used his position to help save thousands of Jewish refugees in Europe. As Apostolic Nuncio to France during the Second World War, he made numerous efforts to save Jewish refugees from the Nazi Holocaust.

He played a key role in the Cuban Missile Crisis, which took place in October 1962. With the US and Russia teetering on the brink of nuclear war, Pope John XXIII helped to bring both countries back from the edge, urging President John F Kennedy and Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev to exercise restraint.

During a message broadcast on Vatican Radio at the height of the crisis, the pontiff pleaded: 'We beg heads of state not to remain deaf to the cry of humanity: 'Peace, peace!' We could make that same plea to the Heads of State today!

Days after the Pope's address, Khrushchev began withdrawing Russian missiles from Cuba, defusing the crisis. Months later, John XXIII published the

encyclical 'Pacem in Terris' ("Peace on Earth"), addressed to 'all men and women of good will' and calling on the world's populations to coexist in harmony.

In Paragraph 112 of 'Pacem in Terris', John XXIII quoted the words of Pope Pius XII: 'The calamity of a world war, with the economic and social ruin and the moral excesses and dissolution that accompany it, must not on any account be permitted to engulf the human race for a third time.'

In paragraph 126, Pope John says: 'Men nowadays are becoming more and more convinced that any disputes which may arise between nations must be resolved by negotiation and agreement, and not by recourse to arms.' This message is so important today - nations in dispute must seek reconciliation through negotiation and agreement through the United Nations

In paragraph 165, he writes: 'The world will never be the dwelling-place of peace, until peace has found a home in the heart of each and every person, until every person preserves in himself the order ordained by God to be preserved.'

Pope John realized that we need God's help to forgive and seek peace. He says in paragraph 168: 'God Himself must come to man's aid with His heavenly assistance, if human society is to bear the closest possible resemblance to the kingdom of God.'

It is Christ who brought us peace, Christ who bequeathed it to us: 'Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, do I give unto you.'

Let us, then, pray with all fervour for this peace which our divine Redeemer came to bring us. May He banish from the souls of men and women whatever might endanger peace. May He transform all men into witnesses of truth, justice and brotherly love. May He illumine with His light the minds of rulers, so that, besides caring for the proper material welfare of their peoples, they may also guarantee them the fairest gift of peace.

May that peace of Jesus be brought to the world today.

Fr Tony Grace: St Gabriel's, St Anne's

'We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.' - (Romans 12:6)



After being gifted a set of circular looms one Christmas, and having no idea where to start, I found myself raiding the yarn section of my favourite bargain-lovers' paradise. I bought more balls of yarn than I had odd socks and, thanks to YouTube tutorials, within a week I had more hats than there are heads in our church congregation! So, it was time to find a worthy cause!

Established in October 1920, The Apostleship of the Sea, now known as **Stella Maris**, began work supporting seafarers with practical and pastoral needs. A century on, it has grown to be the largest global ship visiting network.

At its inception, the charity defined itself as: '**A society of Catholic men and women united together in prayer and**

work for the greater glory of God, and the spiritual welfare of seafarers throughout the world.'

Visiting ships, distributing Catholic literature and organising Mass - these are just some examples of their work, as is offering seafarers the use of portable Wifi routers to contact home, or gifting shoeboxes of presents at Christmas time.

One way of volunteering to help such a worthy cause is to put your God-given talents to excellent use. Knitting is just one example! **Stella Maris** is most appreciative of all donated knitted items, be it hats, scarves, cowls, balaclavas or fingerless mittens.

Not only do they keep seafarers warm in the cold and blustery conditions in which

they work, but they remind them of our love and care as supporters of the charity.

I have heard many heart-warming tales, including that of an elderly lady who could only manage to make one hat a month but faithfully posted it in, like clockwork, every four weeks.

Another story I found particularly moving was that of two elderly ladies who had to catch three buses with several large bags full of hats from their church congregation to and reach Hull docks, where they ensured the hats were safely delivered to the local **Stella Maris** chaplain.

I have also heard of a note included with a hat which read: '**Every stitch is a prayer for you.**' By my calculation, a loomed hat of adult size tots up over



Seafarers receiving their gifts

two thousand stitches. What a wealth of prayers indeed!

It has been my privilege to put my knitting skills to use in supporting **Stella Maris** over the years, knowing that the time spent binge-watching a new Netflix series can see a bin bag filled

with hats destined to bless hardworking seafarers, facing challenging conditions far from home.

Whether you are considering picking up a new crafting skill, or are already a seasoned knitter or crocheter, reach out to a charity of your choice to see if you

can bless others through your gifts and skills. They will be thrilled to hear from you, and **'God loves a cheerful giver.'**

**Sarah Bridgewater:
St Gabriel's, Alsager**

Fingerless Mittens on Two Needles

Left mitten:

Cast on 48 stitches
Knit rib stitch (K2P2) for 8 rows
Knit stocking stitch (K 1 row, P 1 row) for 36 rows
Thumb hole: K3, Cast off 7, K38
P38, Cast on 7, P3
Knit stocking stitch a further 8-10 rows
Knit rib stitch (K2P2) for 8 rows
Cast off

Right mitten:

Cast on 48 stitches
Knit rib stitch (K2P2) for 8 rows
Knit stocking stitch (K 1 row, P 1 row) for 36 rows
Thumb hole: K38, Cast off 7, K3
P3, Cast on 7, P38
Knit stocking stitch a further 8-10 rows
Knit rib stitch (K2P2) for 8 rows
Cast off

Pin and sew up (inside-out works best, and weave the ends in!)



It's never too late to receive the wonderful sacrament of confirmation!

After a 50 year wait and after making my preparations earlier in the year at the local St Anne's Church, Nantwich, I finally made my confirmation at St Anne's Rock Ferry on the Wirral on the 27th November with Bishop Mark Davies.

It's been quite a journey but it was such a happy occasion. Fr Mario and the community of Rock Ferry made both me and my family feel so welcome.

My chosen Saint's name is St Helena. I first found out about St Helena whilst

sitting in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Her son, Emperor Constantine The Great commissioned the first church on this very holy site.

St Helena was a convert (as am I) and is the patron Saint of divorces and difficult marriages. I work voluntarily for a charity called Marriage Care and therefore regularly ask her for blessings in my work. She seemed like the perfect Saint to guide me in both my spiritual journey and my work.

I should like to thank all of those at St Anne's Nantwich who have supported me during my preparations for this

wonderful Sacrament, especially Fr Tony Grace, Deacon John, and Mary Ratcliffe.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Fr Mario and all of the folk at St Anne's Rock Ferry, and of course Bishop Mark who have all made it possible for me to celebrate my Confirmation.

Finally, to all those newly confirmed in both St Anne's Nantwich and St Anne's Rock Ferry, I am sending my warmest wishes.

Please keep us all in your prayers.

Maxine Hopkins: St Anne's, Nantwich

Pope Francis's encyclical Laudato Si

In June 2015 Pope Francis issued his encyclical Laudato Si and used part of the canticle of St Francis of Assisi which begins 'Laudato Si signori' (Praised be you, my Lord) and continues 'through our sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us and provides various fruits, coloured flowers and herbs.'

Pope Francis then exclaims that 'this sister now cries out to us, because of the harm we have inflicted upon her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed us.

We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth, our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air, and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. Nothing in this world is indifferent to us.'

We have pillaged the earth, its seas and its soil. We have interrupted and damaged so many of the cycles of nature that should be self-sustaining and self regulating. Within these cycles there needs to be times of growth and abundance, followed by times of decay and of regeneration.

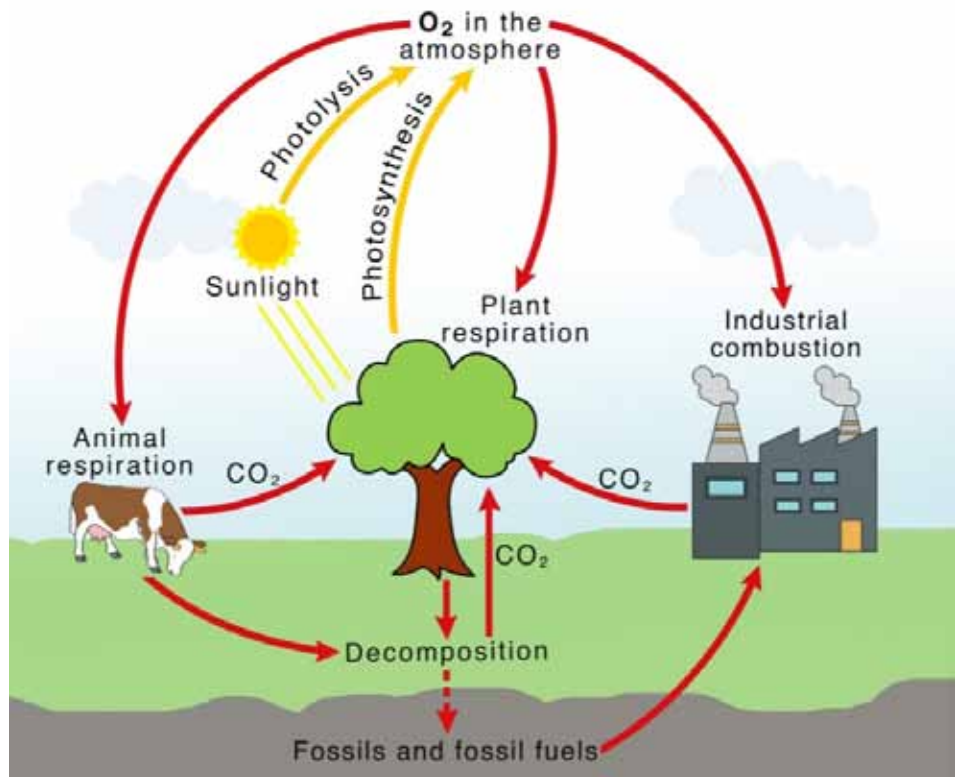
During periods of regeneration, resources should be recycled as food or fuel so the cycle can begin again. Left alone, nature has no waste. Everything has value - nothing is disposed of.

Natural cycles are the key to life-sustaining processes where there is a constant exchange of elements between earth, air, water, plants, animals and microbes. These cycles underpin the ability of all living things to thrive and develop.

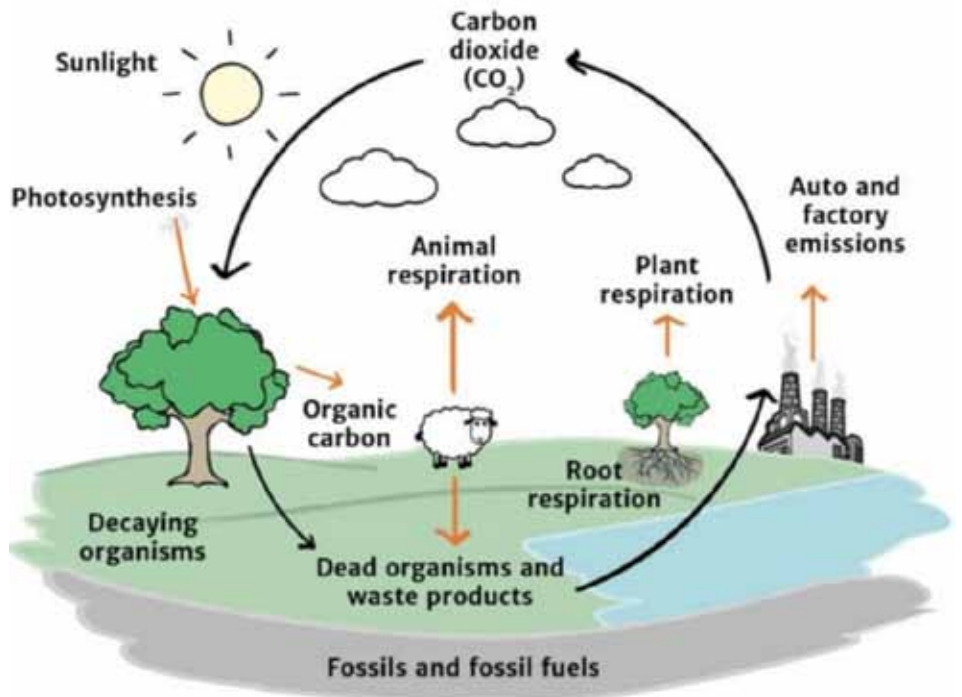
An obvious cycle is that of water. We know that water taken in by animals and plants is used and then returned, by excretion or respiration, to the land, the seas and the air. Many other cycles proceed through living organisms of all kinds.

In the oxygen cycle, this element is in the air inhaled by animals, which is used in energy generation, and then expelled in carbon dioxide. This gas in turn is

Oxygen Cycle



Carbon Cycle



taken up by plants and used by them in photosynthesis which takes place in their green leaves, uses the carbon to make carbohydrates, and then returns the oxygen back into the surrounding air.

Unfortunately, we also take oxygen from the air and convert it into carbon dioxide in energy production, in quantities far beyond the capacity of green areas of the world to consume. This contributes

to undesirable greenhouse gases that cause global temperatures to rise.

As well as the Oxygen Cycle, there are several more equally vital cycles that are being interrupted, such as the Carbon Cycle. Carbon dioxide also contains carbon, which is used by plants, through photosynthesis, to build the carbohydrates and oils needed by the plants themselves.

It is also exchanged with animals and returned to the air as carbon dioxide, and with the soil via organic matter, where it is used by microbes that also produce carbon dioxide. This is the Carbon Cycle.

Another major, universal and vital contributor to feeding all life forms is Nitrogen. This is essential in the production of amino acids, which drive many metabolic processes.

As well as making proteins that build muscles in animals, these acids regulate the fruiting and seeding cycles in all plants.

Nitrogen is then recycled by animals consuming and digesting proteins. This process is followed by excretion and also by the decay of plants, thus returning the element to nature.

Animals mostly cannot make their own proteins, and rely on plants in their diets as the major necessary source. In order to provide enough protein for animals (us included), farmers must be sure there is enough nitrogen available in the soil.

Traditional mixed farming took care of this - the soils were biological and alive as a result of ongoing carbon and nitrogen cycles, in which microbes played a large part down among the roots, converting wastes and liberating potassium and phosphates for the plants.

However, the need to feed more and more people, particularly those of the western economies, had to be met by large-scale industrial agriculture that separated arable and livestock production.

So it required large-scale production of synthetic nitrogen fertilisers. This left waste matter from animal farming as

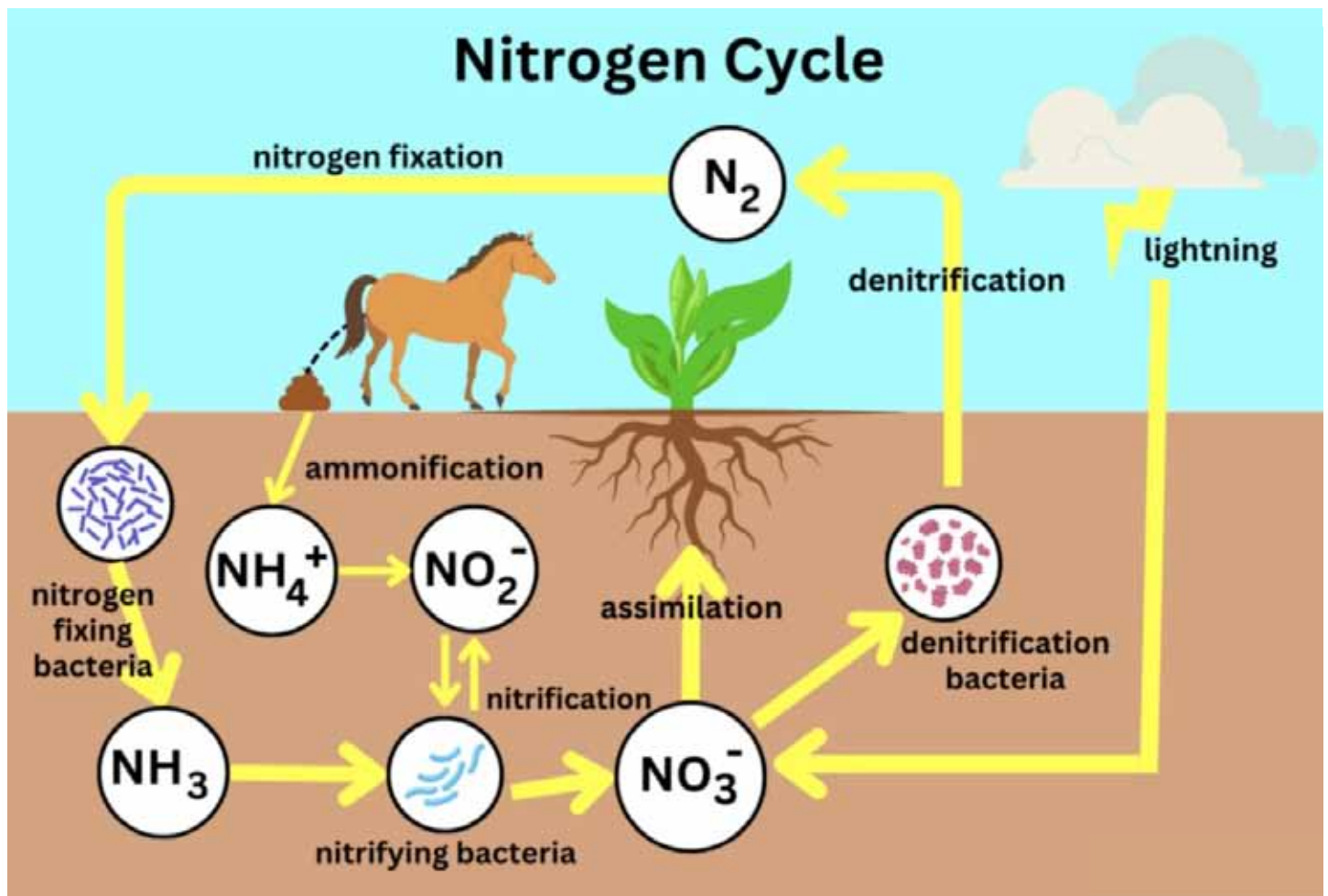
a source of pollution! Vast areas of soil lost much of its organic matter and its microbial occupants.

The cycles ceased. The soils died. These soils now only hold up plants which are fed with synthetics and protected with pesticides. Unfortunately, much unused excess nitrogen ends up as nitrogen dioxide, an even worse greenhouse gas and pollutant than carbon dioxide.

Pope Francis and many others have warned of the sickness of the planet, and we must take notice and start to acknowledge our need to re-evaluate and re-establish the stewardship of our natural resources, to meet the needs of the present but without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Regenerative agriculture and sustainability are urgently needed. An uphill but, I believe, achievable target which is gaining increasing attention and action around the world.

David Hudson:
St Gabriel's, Alsager



A Pilgrimage to Fatima

October 2024



Our Lady of Fátima is the Catholic title of Mary, mother of Jesus, based on the Marian apparitions reported in 1917 by three shepherd children at the Cova da Iria in Fátima, Portugal.

Beginning in the spring of 1916, three shepherd children –Lúcia dos Santos, Francisco and Jacinta Marto– reported seeing three apparitions of an Angel in Valinhos. Then on 13th May 1917, in Cova da Iria, six apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary were reported. The children described her as ‘a Lady more brilliant than the Sun’.

The children reported a prophecy that prayer would lead to an end to the Great War, and that on 13th October that year the Lady would reveal her identity and perform a miracle, ‘so that all may believe’.



Newspapers reported the prophecies, and many pilgrims began visiting the area. The children’s accounts were deeply controversial, drawing intense criticism from both local secular and religious authorities. A provincial administrator briefly took the children into custody, believing the prophecies were politically motivated in opposition to the officially secular First Portuguese Republic, established in 1910.

On 13th May 1917, the shepherd children reported seeing a woman ‘brighter than the sun, shedding rays of light clearer and stronger than a crystal goblet filled with the most sparkling water and pierced by the burning rays of the sun’.

The woman wore a white mantle edged with gold and held a rosary in her hand. She asked them to devote themselves to the Holy Trinity and to ‘pray the Rosary every day, to bring peace to the world and an end to the war’.

While the children had never told anyone about seeing the angel, Jacinta told her family about seeing the brightly lit woman. Lúcia had earlier said that the three should keep this experience private. Jacinta’s disbelieving mother told neighbours about it as a joke, and within a day the whole village knew of

the children’s vision.

The children said the woman told them to return to the Cova da Iria on 13th June 1917. Lúcia’s mother sought counsel from the parish priest, Fr Manuel Ferreira, who suggested she allow them to go. He asked to have Lúcia brought to him afterward so that he could question her.

The second appearance occurred on 13th June, the feast of Saint Anthony, patron of the local parish church. Lúcia would later report that on this occasion, the lady revealed that Francisco and Jacinta would be taken to Heaven soon, but Lúcia would live longer in order to spread her message and devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

During the June visit, the children said the lady told them to say the Holy Rosary daily in honour of Our Lady of the Rosary to obtain peace and the end of the Great War (three weeks earlier, on 21st April, the first contingent of Portuguese soldiers had embarked for the front lines of the war).

The lady also revealed to the children a vision of Hell, and entrusted a secret to them, described as ‘good for some and bad for others’. Fr Ferreira later stated that Lúcia recounted that the lady told her: ‘I want you to come back on the 13th and to learn to read in order to understand what I want of you. ...I don’t want more’.

In the following months, thousands of people flocked to Fátima and nearby Aljustrel, drawn by reports of visions and miracles. On 13th August 1917, the provincial administrator, Artur Santos (no relation to Lúcia dos Santos), intervened. He believed that these events were politically disruptive in the conservative country. He took the children into custody, jailing them before they could reach the Cova da Iria.

Santos interrogated and threatened the children to get them to divulge the contents of the secrets. Lúcia’s mother hoped the officials could persuade the children to end the affair and admit that they had lied. Lúcia told Santos everything short of the secrets, and offered to ask the woman for permission to tell the official the secrets.

That month, instead of the usual

apparition in the Cova da Iria on 13th August, the children reported that they saw the Virgin Mary on 19th August, a Sunday, at nearby Valinhos. She asked them again to pray the rosary daily, spoke about the miracle coming in October, and asked them to 'pray a lot for the sinners and sacrifice a lot, as many souls perish in hell because nobody is praying or making sacrifices for them'

The three children claimed to have seen a total of six apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary between 13th May and 13th October 1917.

Lúcia also reported a seventh Marian apparition at Cova da Iria. The year 2017 marked the 100th anniversary of the apparitions, and it was celebrated with the visit of Pope Francis to the Sanctuary of Fátima.

Francisco and Jacinta Marto died in the global flu pandemic that began in 1918 and swept the world for two years. Francisco Marto died at home on 4th April 1919, at the age of ten. Jacinta died at the age of nine in Queen Stephanie's Children's Hospital in Lisbon on 20th February 1920.

Their mother Olímpia Marto said that her children predicted their deaths many times to her and to curious pilgrims in the brief period after the Marian apparitions. They are now buried at the Sanctuary of Fátima. They were beatified by Pope John Paul II on 13th May 2000 and canonized by Pope Francis on 13th May 2017.

At the age of fourteen in 1922, Lúcia was sent to the school of the Sisters of Saint Dorothy (Dorotheans) in Vilar, a suburb of Porto in Portugal. In 1928 she became a postulant at the convent of the Sisters of Saint Dorothy in Tui, Spain, near the border with Portugal.

Lúcia continued to report private visions periodically throughout her life. She died on the 13th February 2005. Sister Lúcia's cause for canonization is ongoing, and she was declared Venerable by Pope Francis on 22nd June 2023.

I visited the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima for the first time, on a seven-night pilgrimage in October this year. The pilgrimage was accompanied by Fr Joe

McAuley, Spiritual Director of the World Apostolate of Fatima in Scotland

Fr McAuley said Mass in the Chapel at the Hotel Domus Pacis in Fatima, (where we sang the 'Fatima Ave') and at the Fatima Parish Church. The Rosary and Litanies of Our Lady were said on the coach. There was a tour of the Fatima Parish Church, where the three shepherd children had been baptized and attended Mass.



Hungarian Stations of the Cross

I prayed at the Hungarian Stations of the Cross, with Fr McAuley and the Pilgrimage Group. We sang a verse from 'At the Cross her Station Keeping', as we walked the route on a very sunny day to the point where the stations finish by the Chapel of St Stephen. They are called the Hungarian Stations of the Cross because they were a gift from Hungarians in exile throughout the world.



Rosary Basilica

I also visited the Rosary Basilica, attended English Mass at the Chapel of the Apparitions, and a Traditional Latin Mass. There was a fascinating Rosary Exhibition which included displays of Rosaries used by several Popes, including Pope Francis, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Paul VI.

I was in the Sanctuary Square with hundreds of thousands of pilgrims on Sunday 13th October the day known as the 'Miracle of the Sun', because in 1917 many thousands witnessed the startling spectacle of light in the noonday sky.

I attended the Rosary, International Mass, and the 'Fatima Adieu' - the impressive farewell procession to Our Lady of Fatima at the end of Mass, which includes the waving of white handkerchiefs to say goodbye to Our Lady. There was a Procession of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction in the afternoon.



Sanctuary Square for the Moonlight Procession

In the evening, large crowds gathered again at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Rosary in the Chapel of the Apparitions, followed by the Candlelight Procession (these took place each evening from 9:00pm).

We also visited Aljustrel, on the outskirts of Fatima, the birthplace of Lucia dos Santos, Francisco and Jacinta Marto, the three shepherd children of Fatima. There is a small house museum there.

On 31st May 1949, Lucia Santos made her solemn vows in the Carmelite convent of Saint Teresa in Coimbra, taking the religious name of Sr Lucia of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. I visited the church and the Museum about Sr Lucia.



High Altar of the Carmelite Monastery

The message of Fatima

The words of Our Lady to the three little children were meant not only for them but for us:

'Pray the Rosary every day in order to obtain peace.'

The memories of this Fatima pilgrimage experience and the people I shared it with will remain with me forever.

Lisa Cartlidge: St Gabriel's, Alsager

80 Years and Counting



On Monday 2nd September 2024, Fr Mike celebrated his 80th Birthday.

Psalm 90, Verse 10, says: 'The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.'

That's in the poetic King James Version. The Message says it more bluntly: 'We live for seventy years or so (with luck we might make it to eighty); and what do we have to show for it?'

What would we do without the ability to trust the Lord Jesus in all things?

This is God's world, and He will have the last word.

Fr Mike started his life in the parish of St Anne's in Rock Ferry on the Wirral – it was run by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI). As an altar server, he felt drawn to the religious life and entered the Junior Seminary of the Oblates in Colwyn Bay. Later, he went to Dublin and continued his studies in Ireland.

After Ordination, Fr Mike was appointed to the large parish of St Theresa's in Norris Green in Liverpool. Since then, he has served faithfully in many parishes throughout England, Scotland and Wales: in Leith near Edinburgh, on Jersey in the Channel Islands, in Birmingham, Colwyn Bay in North Wales, and in the Anglesey Team Ministry.

We had a lovely Mass on Thursday 5th September to celebrate Fr Mike's 80th Birthday, an occasion organised by Patsy Farrell, with music played by Mariella.

Fr Mike's cake had 8 candles, each representing 10 years.

A good time was had by all. Ad Multos Annos, Fr Mike. Thank you for your dedicated service and all your hard work.

Patsy Farrell: St Anne's, Nantwich



Missio



This year, the Diocese of Shrewsbury raised £127,807 for the Missio/Red Boxes/APF. We are extremely grateful for the support of Bishop Mark, our priests and religious, including Theresa Codd, Missio Regional Officer, the Missio Local Secretaries, promoters and benefactors in each parish to achieve this wonderful amount.

Bishop Mark at the Missio/APF Annual Mass of Thanksgiving in St. Michael and All Angels in Birkenhead on 1st June said in his homily that prayer and the interior life are crucial for Mission.

He said that the Founders of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith/Red Boxes began with the conviction that prayer and the Eucharistic life are at the centre of this world-wide mission, and that the funds raised make great things possible.

He stressed the importance of prayer quoting from the letter of St Jude: 'You must use your most holy faith as your foundation and build on that, praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping yourself in the love of God.'

On World Mission Sunday, 20th October 2024, the message of Pope Francis was taken from the Gospel parable of the wedding banquet (**cf Mt 22 1-14**), where the King tells his servants: 'Go therefore to the thoroughfares and invite to the Marriage Feast as many as you can find.' 'Go and invite' is the King's command to his servants.

Mission, we see, is a tireless going out to all men and women, in order to invite them to encounter God and enter into communion with Him, especially through the Pontifical Mission Societies (missio.org.uk).



Pope Francis says: 'The Church's Mission is directed towards all peoples and requires the participation of every baptised Christian. In the king's command to his servants, we find two words that express the heart of the mission: the verbs 'to go out' and 'to invite'.

The Church, for her part, in fidelity to the mission she has received from the Lord, will continue to go to the ends of the earth, to preach, over and over again, the Good News of the Gospel, without ever growing weary or losing heart in the face of difficulties and obstacles.

Our commitment is to the mission that Jesus entrusted to us, his disciples: 'Go and make disciples of all nations.' We continue to pray and thank God for the new and numerous missionary vocations, 9000 alone this year in Nigeria, through the work of Missio/ Association of the Propagation of the Faith (APF), for the task of evangelization to the ends of the earth.

The whole Church is called to continually go forth with her Lord and Master to the 'crossroads' of today's world. May all of us, the baptized, be ready to set out anew, each according to our state in life, to inaugurate a new missionary movement, as at the dawn of Christianity!

As we can imagine, the servants conveyed the king's invitation with urgency, but also with great respect and kindness. Missionary disciples should do the same, with joy, magnanimity and benevolence.

We know that among the first Christians, missionary zeal had a powerful dimension. They sensed the urgency of the preaching of the Gospel.

Today too, it is important to maintain this perspective, since it helps us to evangelize with the joy of those who know that 'the Lord is near', and with the hope of those who are pressing forward towards the goal, when all of us, will be with Christ at his wedding feast in the kingdom of God.

While the world sets before us the various 'banquets' of consumerism, selfish comfort, the accumulation of wealth and individualism, the Gospel calls everyone to the divine banquet, marked by joy, sharing, justice and fraternity in communion with God and with others.

This fullness of life, which is Christ's gift, is anticipated even now in the banquet of the Eucharist, which the Church celebrates at the Lord's command in memory of Him.

The invitation to the eschatological banquet that we bring to everyone in our mission of evangelisation, is intrinsically linked to the invitation to the Eucharistic table, where the Lord feeds us with His Word and with His Body and Blood.

His Holiness reminds us that mission implies a continuous outreach to all people, not only by going out, but also, by inviting each one in 'a personal way' to meet the Lord.

We must go to the ends of the earth with perseverance and without forgetting that we must incarnate a tireless commitment to the mission of evangelisation. God, great in love and mercy, constantly sets out to encounter all men and women and to call them to

the happiness of His Kingdom, even in the face of their indifference or refusal.

The mission **for all** requires the commitment **of all**. Pope Francis says:

'In the footsteps of the Second Vatican Council and my Predecessors, I recommend to all dioceses throughout the world, the service of the Pontifical Mission Societies, in our country, missio.org.uk and the Red Boxes. They represent the primary means by which Catholics are imbued from infancy with a truly universal and missionary outlook, and are also a means for instituting an effective collecting of funds for all the missions, each according to its needs.'

For this reason, the collections of World Mission Day in all the local Churches are entirely destined to the universal fund of solidarity, which the Pontifical Society of the Propagation of the Faith then distributes, in the Pope's name, for the needs of all the Church's missions. Let us pray that the Lord may guide us and help us to be a more synodal and a more missionary Church.

The following is a sample of the projects supported through missio.org.uk:

1. The establishment of an orphanage for 120 girls from 3-16 years old, who were abandoned in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya, and an orphanage for 120 homeless boys who were caught up in drugs and slave labour. All are now given a good education and counselling and a safe place to stay and grow up.

2. There is the establishment of a special needs school for over 100 children, with special training for work apprenticeships to set them up for the rest of their lives. Many of these children would have been abandoned and left to die in rural areas outside of Nairobi without this help.

3. Missio.org.uk has set up a Mission to support catechists and build a school and nursery for the children of the Maasai Tribes, a people who live out in the desert and highland regions of Kenya and Tanzania. They live in mud huts and live off farming and goats, just 3-4 hours from Nairobi.

4. The Missio/Red Boxes supports Christ the King Seminary outside Nairobi with over 310 seminarians, and is helping build a new dormitory for over 50 seminarians to cater for increased numbers.

5. There is the building of a parish centre for 100 people in a rural location in the mountains around Nairobi. The children and families walk 3-5 miles to go to Mass and receive porridge when they arrive. The new facilities will help their education and faith, and will be a good centre for mission and evangelisation.

6. There is a missionary project in the Philippines to help families that are homeless and live in make-shift shelters in the cemeteries of Manila. The religious sisters visit the families and have set up a creche and a school; they also help provide sanitation, clean water and feeding and medical programmes.

7. We support the training of over 35 Mill Hill Missionary seminarians in Kenya and India and religious sisters and brothers.

Over 4000 projects a year are sponsored by Missio.org.uk and other Pontifical Missionary Societies for work in Africa, India, Pakistan, Myanmar and other parts of the world, ranging from building churches, schools, medical centres, feeding programmes, sponsorship of seminarians, religious sisters and catechists and orphanages.

In this year devoted to prayer in preparation for the Jubilee of 2025, Pope Francis wishes to encourage us all to deepen our commitment and, above all,

to take part in the celebration of Mass and to pray for the Church's mission of evangelization through missio.org.uk.

Daily prayer and the Eucharist make us pilgrims and missionaries of hope, journeying towards everlasting life in God, towards the nuptial banquet that God has prepared for all His children.

For more information, please go to missio.org.uk

The children's branch is missiontogether.org.uk

To sponsor a seminarian for Missio, please ring The Society of St Peter the Apostle, on 0207 821 9755.

**Fr Tony Grace:
St Gabriel's and St Anne's**

Missio supports the training of over 25,000 future Priests and 11,000 religious Sisters every year by providing young churches in developing countries with funding to train their own future church leaders.

Today, these Priests and Sisters are building the vibrant Catholic Church of tomorrow, ensuring the gift of faith is passed on to future generations worldwide.

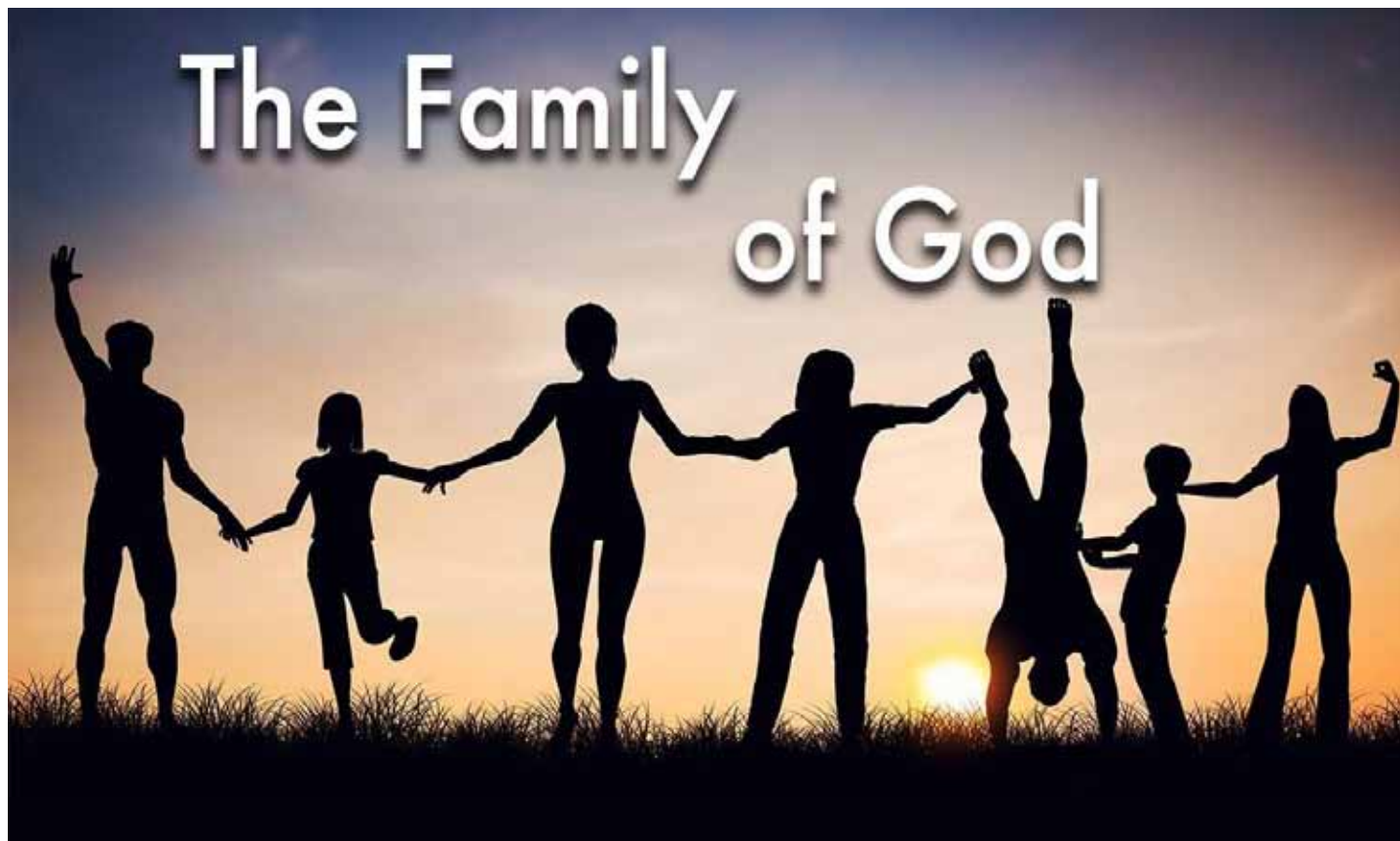
World Mission Sunday invests in the future of our Church

Missio England and Wales has a long-standing relationship with five seminaries in five countries in India, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria and Sri Lanka – and supports students studying for the priesthood. Today we pray that support continues and we make donations to spread the love of Jesus to the poor of the world.

Thank You for Giving Hope to The World's Poorest Families



A Divine Ego Trip?



Some people pose the question: if we can give nothing to God, then isn't our worship just God having an ego-trip? To answer that, let us remember that we are created in God's image, made to be both spiritual and physical beings - not one or the other, but both. So we can better understand the matter by considering family relationships.

If the family does not spend time together, it breaks apart, and the members feel little for each other. Those families who do more together and spend more time together remain much closer and live a much happier and more fulfilled family life.

The same applies to God and the Christian family: communal worship and service is 'family time'.

If the family does not do things together, their relationships can get stale. Christians have pilgrimages and church- or faith-related conferences and activities, including social and charitable ones.

If two members of the family (spouses, parent/child) don't spend time together

and discuss matters of interest to each other supportively, again they lose closeness, as well as losing touch with each other's character, likes and dislikes, needs and concerns, hopes and efforts. The same applies to personal prayer.

Building those relationships is not all about talking and listening. Much of it is about just being together, enjoying each other's presence, which is communing heart to heart. Similarly, Christians have meditation, contemplation and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

If a child drops out of family mealtimes and rejects the nourishment and guidance of their parents, they have to scavenge what food they can from wherever they can find it.

This will be an insufficient and unbalanced diet, supplemented by buying sweets and snacks from pocket money that only provide a semblance of goodness while actually harming them.

The same applies to dropping out from the ways offered by God - the Church and the Bible - to nourish oneself and each other spiritually.

The family needs ordinary activities too: the cooking, shopping, employment, housework, gardening, giving lifts, tidying and so on.

Doing these things at home, for neighbours, for the parish and for charitable or social purposes, out of love for God and our fellow human beings, also builds the universal family of God.

God is love. He made us to love and to be loved; that is both the purpose and goal of our lives. All we do that builds, supports and enters into that love is fulfilling; all that does not, however enjoyable in the short term, is empty and meaningless.

It is true that we can add nothing to God - nor can we give him anything apart from what he has already given us - but like any lover he craves our love and our happiness.

So, giving all these things wholeheartedly to God is ultimately for our benefit.

**Mark Howitt:
St Gabriel's, Alsager**

Special Visits

We have been lucky to have our parish priest, Fr Tony, and our parish deacon, Deacon John, coming to join us in school this half-term.

Fr Tony joined us to lead our whole school assembly all about 'Mission Together' and talked to us all about what the word mission means to us - in our school, our church and our home. We heard all about the wonderful work of 'Mission Together' and their logo: 'Children helping Children'.

Fr Tony told us all about his own experience of mission work and the life-changing impact our donations can have. Each class received a special red box, which we are working hard to fill with our donations to help those people supported by the work of Mission Together.

We finished by reflecting upon Jesus' call to us to show faith, love and service.

Deacon John spent time with our Key Stage Two classes, leading special sessions for our children.

In **Yr 4**, the children spent time in prayer and reflection, thinking about gratitude and what it means to thank God and those around us.

In **Yr 5**, the children compared and contrasted the two creation stories from the book of Genesis. The children asked



fantastic questions to help deepen their understanding of scripture.

In **Yr 6**, Deacon John helped the children to understand the Kingdom of God; what

it means to be in a kingdom; the history of kingdoms in the bible; and special qualities we can show others when we belong to God's kingdom here on earth.

Macmillan Coffee Morning

This year we held our annual Macmillan Coffee Morning at St Anne's in our fabulous community hub. The children and families made and donated an array of fabulous cakes and sweet treats to support the charity.

Parents, carers, grandparents and friends joined us in the hub for a cake and a drink! Our Yr 6 children helped to serve, tidy up and share a smile as part of their Faith in Action award.

A fabulous time was had by all, raising nearly £200 for such a wonderful cause!



Poet Visit

On Monday 7th October, St Anne's were very privileged to welcome children's poet Ian Bland to our wonderful school. What a fun day was had by everyone!

We began the day with an assembly led by Ian, where the children got to perform some of Ian's poems, including a 'Dinner Lady Dance'.

Next, Ian took classes for some poetry workshops, where the children wrote their own action poems - what wonderful poets we have here at St Anne's. Finally, some of our children were brave enough to perform their poem in front of the whole school.

Ian then held a book signing for children and parents at the end of the day. He also led a staff training session on the

importance of poetry and how poetry could be brought alive in our English curriculum.

What a marvellous and informative day we had!

Thank you to Ian Bland for inspiring us to read, write and perform more poetry at St Anne's.



Harvest

Our Yr 6 children led our whole school assembly this year, which was on Harvest Festivals. We heard all about harvest festivals from around the world – about

farmers, their crops, and even a story about a 'greedy farmer'.

We thanked God for the yearly harvest, for the crops, the animals and the beautiful creation He made and gave to

us. We learned a lot about the importance of looking after our special world.

Then we finished the assembly with our favourite harvest song: 'Cauliflowers Fluffy!'



Wear Yellow for World Mental Health Day!

Raising awareness is just as important as raising money and we are proud to have joined schools and organisations across the country to raise awareness for World Mental Health Day.

St Anne's 'blue' was replaced for the day by a wash of yellow! By wearing yellow, a

colour symbolising happiness and hope, children, staff and parents showed their solidarity and support for those in need.

Jesus showed love and compassion to everyone he met, and we too follow in his footsteps by recognising that we can help anyone in need.





School Reports St Gabriel's Catholic Primary School, Alsager

Ofsted news report July 2024

A primary school where children 'thrive' and 'have the best possible start to their education' has been given top marks by Ofsted. St Gabriel's Catholic Primary School in Alsager has once again been rated 'outstanding'.

It comes after the Well Lane school, which caters for more than 200 pupils, underwent a two-day inspection in June. St Gabriel's had previously been rated 'outstanding' back in 2012, but had not undergone an inspection since.

The recently published report states: 'Pupils thrive in this happy, nurturing school. Children in the early years, along with any pupils who are new to school, are given a warm welcome. They settle into school life quickly. Relationships between adults and pupils are exceptionally strong. Pupils' behaviour is remarkable.'

'They model the school's values each day, for example by being kind to one another. Pupils focus well during lessons. They show high levels of respect for each other and staff. Pupils leave at the end of Yr 6 as responsible individuals who are considerate of other people.'

'The school is extremely ambitious for pupils. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), rise to the challenges that the school sets for them, academically and socially.'



It adds: 'The school, with the support of the governing body, ensures that pupils not only achieve highly, but that their time at school is filled with rich and memorable experiences. The school's ambition to ensure that pupils have the best possible start to their education is realised in full in many aspects of its work.'

'The school has developed an aspirational curriculum. From the start of the early years to Yr 6, the curriculum flows well. The school has ensured that teachers know what to teach and when to deliver subject content. Teachers have strong subject expertise. They use this to deliver the curriculum consistently well.'

'Teachers design learning activities that enthuse and inspire pupils. This ensures that pupils are motivated to learn. Teachers check pupils' knowledge carefully during lessons. They skilfully identify and address any misconceptions that would otherwise hinder pupils' learning. Pupils build an extensive range of knowledge across each curriculum subject.'

'They achieve very well. Pupils have a firm foundation on which to build when they move on to secondary school. Staff feel valued and respected by the school and the governing body. They appreciate the support for their professional development through regular training, which helps them to fulfil their roles well. Staff are immensely proud to work at the school.'

Headteacher Ed Byrne said: 'This is a testament to everyone who is part of the St Gabriel's community: the staff; the pupils; our governors and parents. St Gabriel's is a distinctly unique school, serving the children and families within. I am incredibly proud to be a part of it.'

Deputy headteacher Claire Stevenson added: 'The report represents the hardworking, fantastic team of staff at St Gabriel's. We are all blessed to be a part of this community, and our wonderful pupils are at the heart of it.'

Macmillan Coffee Morning

On Friday 24th September, our school enjoyed a delightful coffee morning raising money for Macmillan.

Our Yr 6 children hosted the morning beautifully, welcoming parents, grandparents and friends. Our school community raised £255.34 for this important charity.



Yr 2 visit to St Gabriel's church

As part of the children's learning in Yr 2, we have been learning about the sacrament of Baptism and what it means to be welcomed into the Church family.

Fr Tony kindly welcomed the Yr 2 children into church to show them what happens when someone is baptised.

The children very much enjoyed role-playing a baptism, and learned lots about this important sacrament.



Mission Day 2024

On Wednesday 2nd October, our school took part in our Mission Day.

This was an opportunity for us to celebrate the lives of our four house saints: St Teresa, St Mary, St Joseph and St Oscar Romero, and to launch our mission for the year, 'Be More!'

Mr Byrne started our celebration with a moving assembly, introducing our theme and talking about the life of Oscar Romero.

We then learned about Mr Rob Burrows MBE, the late rugby league player who was, and continues to be, an inspiration to so many.

Mr Byrne challenged the children to consider how each class can make a pledge this year to 'be more!'



Each class then took part in a range of activities to look deeper into the work of Oscar Romero, and what we could do to 'aspire not to have more but to be more'.

Activities ranged from creative artwork to the writing of poems and prayers, as well as drama scenes being acted out and hymns being sung.

At the end of the day, we finished our day of reflection with a special assembly, where each class shared with our school our special tag line for the year, 'Be More!'.

It was a wonderful day, full of love and prayer, and has given us all something to aim for in our special 50th year of celebrations at St Gabriel's.



School Reports



St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Crewe

Macmillan Coffee Afternoon

On Friday 27th September, St Mary's Catholic Primary School held a special event in support of Macmillan Cancer Support.

The school came together for a Macmillan Coffee and Cake Afternoon, and the turnout was fantastic!

The school hall was filled with delicious cakes, and it was a wonderful sight to see the St Mary's community coming together and, more importantly, raise funds for this worthy cause.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of all who attended, an amazing total of £763.24 was raised for Macmillan Cancer Support.

This donation will help the charity continue its vital work, supporting individuals and families affected by cancer.

The school would like to thank everyone who participated, whether through baking, donating, or simply joining for a cup of coffee and cake - your kindness and support will truly make a difference.





World Mental Health Day

On Thursday 10th October, St Mary's Catholic Primary School proudly joined millions around the world in celebrating World Mental Health Day.

In a wonderful show of support, the children arrived at school wearing a splash of yellow - a colour symbolising happiness and hope for the occasion.

This day was not just about raising awareness but also about engaging the children in activities that promote emotional well-being and mindfulness.

Throughout the day, children took part in activities that explored the significance of mental health.

Lessons focused on emotions, and what emotional well-being truly means, giving the children an opportunity to discuss and reflect on the importance of understanding and managing their feelings.

Teachers emphasised that there are always people at school, including staff and peers, who they can talk to if they are ever facing difficulties, assuring the children that they are never alone in their struggles.

One of the highlights of the day was the work on mindfulness. The children had the chance to connect with nature by creating miniature forests, all while listening to soothing, restful music.

This mindful activity helped them understand the importance of slowing

down and being present in the moment, offering a peaceful break from their usual school routine.

The day also featured a special assembly focused on managing emotions. During the assembly, the children listened to the story 'Find My Happy', which taught the children about different ways to control their feelings.

The children then practised breathing techniques, which are powerful tools to use when feeling overwhelmed.

By the end of the day, the children had not only had fun but also gained a deeper understanding of mindfulness and how it can help improve mental health.

International Day of Peace

At St Mary's Catholic Primary School, the beginning of the academic year was marked by a very special event. Mr Plant, the school's choir master, alongside members of the Peace Club, led the school in a special assembly to celebrate the International Day of Peace.

This annual event, recognised globally on 21st September, calls for a day of non-violence and ceasefire.

At St Mary's this message resonated strongly, as children and staff gathered to reflect on the importance of peace in our world, our country, and our homes.

The children sang beautiful hymns about peace, particularly at a time when many regions across the world continue to face war, unrest, and uncertainty.

One of the highlights of the assembly was a heartfelt prayer for global peace, which was led by the members of the Peace Club.

The assembly emphasised the importance of being peacemakers in our daily lives, reminding everyone that even small acts of kindness and compassion can contribute to a more peaceful world.





Anglo Saxon and Viking Day

As part of the school's history curriculum on Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, Yr 4 children enjoyed an exciting Anglo-Saxon and Viking Day.

The event brought history to life as the children experienced first-hand what it was like to live in those fascinating times.

The highlight of the day was a special visitor, who brought with them a wide range of authentic Anglo-Saxon and Viking artefacts.

The children were captivated as they learned about what people wore, how they lived, and the harsh punishments that were handed out in these ancient societies.

The visitor also demonstrated the methods and strategies used in battle, offering a thrilling insight into how the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings fought.

The children had the opportunity to try on traditional clothing, armour, and jewellery, as well as look closely at an array of historical weapons.

The chance to step into the shoes of these historic figures was both educational and fun, making it a history lesson to remember.

Adding to the excitement, the children and staff all arrived at school dressed as Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, helping to set the scene for the day.

The children thoroughly enjoyed themselves, fully engaging with the activities while deepening their understanding of this fascinating period in British history.

It was a fantastic day for all involved, and it left the children eager to learn more about the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings as they continue their journey through the curriculum.



School Reports St Thomas More Catholic High School

Celebrating 60 Years



The original school building at St Thomas More was erected in 1965 as Blessed John Sherd School. In 2025, the school will therefore be celebrating sixty years of Catholic education at Dane Bank Avenue. So we plan to host a celebration at school on Saturday July 5th.

The day will hopefully be an outdoor event, where pupils and staff, past and present, can all come together to enjoy and celebrate together. We are planning

for a festival-style day, with bands, singers, food, fun and games.

This event will require a planning meeting, which will take place at 6:00pm on Thursday 9th January 2025 in St Thomas More School Hall.

Anyone with a link to the school and ideas for the day, or an ability to contribute in any way, is very welcome. We are so looking forward to celebrating together.

Mission Day at STM

At St Thomas More, we hold an annual Mission Day at the very end of the Trinity Term (Summer Term). 2024 was no different, and each year group was assigned to two curriculum areas to plan their day together. The brief was about personal and spiritual development for the children, where they can learn outside of the classroom.

Yr 7 – Science and ACT (Art and Creative Technology) – Chester Zoo

Yr 7 all went off on coaches to visit Chester Zoo. The focus was on 'Care for God's Creation'. The pupils explored wildlife conservation and had a full tour of Chester Zoo. They loved seeing the animals up close and really enjoyed the experience.

Yr 8 – Maths and Languages: Tegg's Nose and school fun

While Mr Hill set off on a coach with one group of Yr 8s to walk the wild landscape

of steep, craggy hills and open moorland of Tegg's Nose Country Park near Macclesfield, Mr Lemon had prepared a full-on activities and team-building event on our school field.

We were blessed with great weather, which always helps! At school, an inflatable hire company came and set up team-building activities and games on the school field.

Cheshire College South and West also brought along their Digital Fun Bus for groups of children to come and see examples of emerging technologies. Meanwhile, at Tegg's Nose, pupils really got a great experience of a proper hike, something to which many of them had never been exposed before.

They loved their day in the hills, and were able to spend time in prayer and reflection in a little chapel along the route.

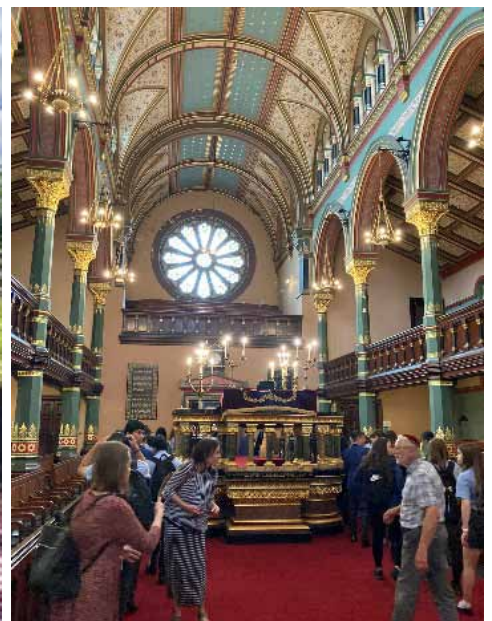
Yr 9 – RE and Humanities: Liverpool Titanic Museum and Liverpool Jewish synagogue

Mr Hallam took his half the year-group to explore the Titanic Museum on the Albert Docks. Our pupils were amazed by the detailed presentation of the epic story of the sinking of this great ocean liner.

Meanwhile, Mr Murray and his team went to the Jewish synagogue in Liverpool, where they had a tour and a talk which focused on Jewish beliefs, artefacts and celebrations in the synagogue. After each session had finished, the half year-groups switched round to experience the second activity.

The Yr 9s were absolutely fantastic, particularly enjoying lunch in the sunshine on the Albert Docks!

Pupils were given the opportunity to see the beautiful Torah scrolls that are kept



in the ark of the synagogue, and also learned about the history of the Jewish community in Liverpool. At the Liverpool Maritime Museum, pupils were able to develop a greater understanding of the role shipping had played in developing both the city of Liverpool and wider parts of England.

The places that we visited will support pupils in their studies at school. All pupils study Judaism as part of their GCSE studies – indeed, it equates to 25% of their entire GCSE course.

Pupils were given the opportunity to reflect on the role that faith and culture have played in the shaping of one of the great cities of Great Britain, and on how they continue to shape our country and

the world today. It was a memorable day for all of our pupils and staff. The sun even shone on our visit to Liverpool!

Yr 10 – English and Performance: Delamere Forest

All of Yr 10 went together on coaches to Delamere Forest. When they arrived, they were split into teams, each with a member of staff, and loved an orienteering course that was set up by Miss Slack.

The teams were spending time together out in nature, enjoying time away from the classroom, learning about and experiencing the joy and marvels of God's creation. They also developed leadership skills and a competitive streak!



Last Day of Term



The following day was the last day of term, and all pupils and staff joined together in two services of celebration to mark the occasion.

The Mass not only focused on the culmination and thanksgiving for the end of a school year, but it also celebrated the retirement from the Chair of Governors and from the STM governing board by Mrs Joan Evans.

Joan has been a longstanding member of the governing board and has given a lot of her time and commitment over the years, with a particular emphasis on SEND needs and inclusion in school.

We thank Joan for her commitment to all the staff and children of St Thomas More.

Joan shared this Mass with our devastating news that week of the loss

of our Yr 7 pupil Sam Bellingham. Sam died very quickly from an infection that the tireless work of the Alder Hey staff, could not control.

Mass was a beautiful way to remember all that Sam had given to us with his daily joy and smile, his work ethic and commitment, and his friendships and love.

Conway Residential

On Wednesday 2nd October, 120 Yr 7 pupils and ten members of staff boarded two buses and headed to Wales. We were on our way to the Conway Centre to spend three days together, taking part in team-building activities and creating a form Family Tree for our Family Mass. The day started cold, but by the time we arrived the sun was out to greet us.

Once we arrived, we split into three groups. One group began team-building exercises. This involved low ropes, communication tasks and trust-building activities.

The second group went with their forms to start working on a Family Tree to represent them, which is now displayed



in our form rooms. And the third group did a range of activities from kayaking to mountain biking.

Once the activities were finished, pupils discovered their dorm rooms and went there to get ready for their evening fun, which involved board games and BINGO! The following morning, we completed some more of our form Family Trees and our outdoor activities.

We spent our evening at DJ Walker's St Thomas More disco! Pupils also had the chance to play some more board games and go on a nighttime walk.

On our final morning, we spent the time waiting for the coaches in reflecting on our experience at Conway and how we had grown as a year group from this fantastic opportunity! Both staff and pupils had a great time, and we are all full of entertaining stories!

Family Mass

On Wednesday 9th October, we welcomed the families of our Yr 7 pupils to our Family Mass. It was a lovely evening, with our pupils showcasing their talents in singing and public speaking.

This was the final stages of their transition and building our Yr 7 family. There was an atmosphere of calm and belonging.

This year pupils and staff walked from St Thomas More to St Mary's Catholic Church in Crewe where our Mass was held.

Despite the rain our pupils walked in a calm and respectful manner, and it did not dampen their spirits for Mass. We are very proud of our Yr 7's and blessed to have them with us at St Thomas More.



Computer Club

Every Friday, we gather in the computer room at lunchtime to learn more about computer programming and to play games.

At the moment, there are nine members who program together or separately, but we are going to expand that.

Mr Wong helps us further understand the working of computer

programming, and we love to learn from him.

Computer club is a way to express your love for computer programming and find people with similar interests. It is an inclusive fun club for all to join.

Yr 9 Abigail, Kara, Sophie, Dylan



Art and Creative Technology

There are new displays in Art & Creative technology to promote the importance of Creativity, Diversity, and Oracy within the department. Focus is on the 'Dignity of Education' and providing our pupils with creative sources of inspiration.

In Art, Yr 8 and 9 pupils were getting that autumnal feeling. Pupils mixed Autumn colours and painted their leaves; they then added a range of Zentangle patterns to create the beautiful wreath.

Yr 8s have been working hard in the summer term to complete their Victoria Villasana outcomes. Pupils chose famous people to then work on in the style of the artist, including geometric shapes, line and colour.



Yr 9 Textiles Workshop

We invited back artist Nikki Parmenter to create these fab outcomes with our pupils. They used a range of

different materials to experiment with, exploring the theme of Natural forms/ Under the Sea.



Yr 9 Technology

Here are the Yr 9s proudly showing off their Cross Puzzle. They have been developing their measuring and marking-out skills and producing card developments to house their puzzles.

All pupils are really enjoying the new layout of the Technology room. The work benches have all been given a new surface, and the classroom area has gone to make way for the practical work elements.

The floor has been re-sanded and looks super smart. The provision of more cupboard room and a switch of the classroom direction for the interactive whiteboard have meant that pupils are more focused and have better space for practical activities.



Yr 10 Residential Retreat

In June, 25 Yr 10 pupils attended a residential Catholic retreat at Soli House, which is based in Alton. The theme of the retreat was 'Solid Ground'. The Solid Ground retreat at Soli allows young people to learn about, explore, and reflect on key areas of Catholic Social Teaching.

Each day is dedicated to different themes and activities aimed at fostering community, exploring social justice, discerning personal callings, and concluding with a final challenge.

Participants engage in team-building exercises, delve into Catholic Social Teaching principles, and reflect on human dignity.

They also immerse themselves in the experiences of marginalised groups,



participate in charity pitches, prepare for Mass, and celebrate their retreat experiences through affirmations. A final service encourages and equips them for

their return to school. Our pupils were amazing, and have continued talking about their experience well into the new school year

Macmillan Coffee Morning

Our Faith in Action team (FIA) have had a busy start to the new academic year.

The team organised the annual 'Coffee Morning' at the end of September and raised £585.00 for Macmillan. They have also recently held a hunger lunch to mark CAFOD's Family Fast Day.



LMA Mass 28th November



On Thursday 28th November our LMA No 9 held a Mass at St Thomas More School to Celebrate the Togetherness of our parishes; St Anne's, St Gabriel's, St Mary's and St Winefride's.

The Mass was concelebrated by Fr Grace, Fr Kern, Fr Morton, Rev Eddie Miller and Rev Mike Birchall and echoed the theme **"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity."** Psalm 133:1.

That unity and trust in each other was central to a moving spiritual act of worship and thanksgiving.

Our thanks to St Thomas More staff and pupils for their welcome and hospitality.

Parish Mass Times



Alsager - St Gabriel's:

Sunday (Sat 6:30pm), 11:30am
Holy Days As announced
Weekdays Mon 7:30pm (Exposition 7pm)
 Fri 10am Mass (Exposition 9:30am),
 10:30am Rosary

Deacon: Rev Eddie Miller
Contact: Fr Tony Grace, St Gabriel's Church
 Lawton Rd, Alsager ST7 2DE
 01270 877736 or 01270 625494



Nantwich - St Anne's:

Sunday (Sat 5pm), 9:30am
Holy Days As announced
Weekdays Tues & Thurs 10am Mass
Deacon: Rev Peter Mascarenhas
 Rev John Penny

Contact: Fr Tony Grace, St Anne's Church
 Pillory St, Nantwich CW5 6SS
 01270 625494 or 01270 877736



Crewe - St Mary's:

Sunday (Sat 12pm, 5:30pm, & 7pm (Polish));
 9am, 11am, & 12:45pm (Polish)
Holy Days 12 noon, 6pm (Polish), & 7:30pm
Weekdays Tues 7pm, Wed & Thurs 12 noon
 Fri 12 noon followed by adoration
 of the Blessed Sacrament until 4pm

Deacon: Rev Peter Lafferty
 Rev Mike Birchall
Contact: Fr Nicholas Kern,
 St Mary of the Immaculate Church
 13 Gatefield St, Crewe CW1 2JP
 01270 212533



Sandbach - St Winefride's:

Sunday (Sat 6:30pm) 9am, 10:30am
Holy Days 7:30pm
Weekdays Wed & Fri 12 noon
Deacon: Rev Mike Birchall

Contact: Fr Michael Morton,
 St Winefride's Church
 Middlewich Rd, Sandbach CW11 1HU
 01270 762198

