

FLOURISH

Official Journal of the Archdiocese of Glasgow

April 2025

‘We came so close to losing him..’

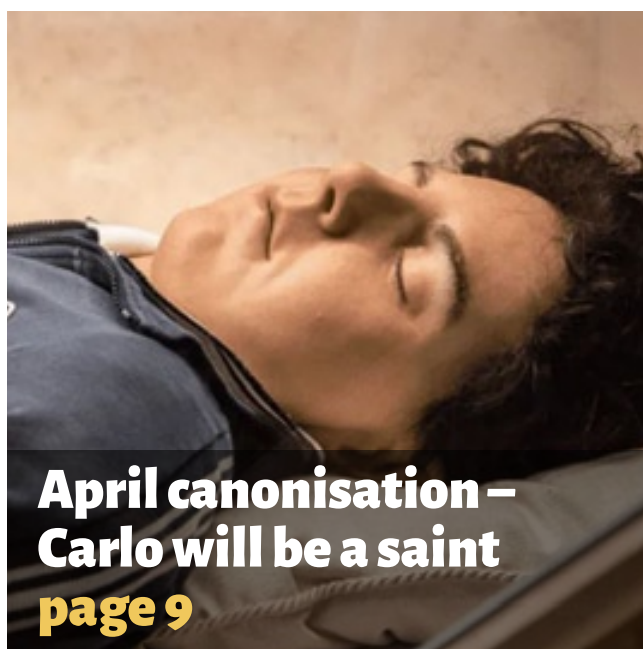


Pope’s doctor reveals: “When things were really bad he held my hand for a few minutes as if seeking comfort. It’s a moment I will never forget.”

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Happy hundred ‘new Catholics’ this Easter
[page 3](#)



April canonisation – Carlo will be a saint
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Mass behind closed doors – Covid five years on
[pages 10–11](#)

Our Jubilee Year pilgrimages of hope



Stephen Callaghan (right) meets Cardinal Tolentino



Picture by Paul McSherry

AGAP Vatican blessing

“CATHOLIC Cultural Centres exist because the Church believes in community and the common good; a common plan that goes beyond the individual.”

BY STEPHEN CALLAGHAN
CREATIVE DIRECTOR, AGAP

These were the words spoken by Cardinal Jose Tolentino de Mendonca (above), Prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education at a meeting entitled “Artisans of Hope” which took place in Rome as part of the Jubilee of Artists.

As the Director of Scotland's only Catholic Cultural Centre, I had the privilege of addressing the meeting.

Each of us spoke of the ways in which we work in our own local context to further the relationship between faith and culture.

We were presented with a Manifesto from the Holy Father, that urged us to be “public forums, not hidden light... places of listening, respect and tolerance... artisans of peace, putting hope in culture”.

These values have always been at the heart of AGAP!

AGAP has responded to the call of Pope Francis to be

“prophetic artists” by bringing the themes of the Papal letter on the Jubilee to life through two very different theatre productions.

Lent

This Lent, The Margaret Sinclair Story began a tour that took in six Glasgow parishes, with requests to take the show to parishes and schools around the country.

The play originally premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2016 with *The Scotsman* newspaper remarking that “The response of the audience lining the pews... is undeniable. For many it is an emotional experience to see their saint brought to life before their eyes.”

Margaret Sinclair's life was highlighted by the Bishops' Conference of Scotland in a letter for the Jubilee Year written by Bishop John Keenan of Paisley:

“More than ever, we need examples of hope to inspire us, and few better in Scot-

land than Venerable Margaret Sinclair, who belonged to the modern world – of mass industry, the movie theatre and high street fashion – and whose young face, captured on camera, is of a modern girl and one of us.”

The role is currently played by my wife, Rachel Callaghan, a blood relative of Margaret Sinclair (second cousin or ‘great grand-niece’ on her father's side).

After each performance, we had a Q & A with audiences, allowing them to share with us their stories.

At such moments, hope is very palpable. We are reminded of the importance of sharing the stories of past heroes of our faith to inspire us and future generations, whilst also having a hopeful eye towards the future.

Soon rehearsals will begin for a new solo theatre production, “Pilgrim of Hope”. This comedy distils Pope Francis's ideas into the story of an everyday man who goes out in search of hope.

Both productions will visit the Edinburgh Fringe in August.

Youth pilgrims' walk

SUNSHINE, prayer, and 11 miles of grace-filled encounters – those were the ingredients for the Archdiocesan Youth Office's Lenten Pilgrimage Walk last month, and what an unforgettable journey it was!

BY JOANNA DO REGO
RCAG YOUTH OFFICE

Starting at Cardross, the young people made their way to St Mahew's in Cardross – the oldest parish church in the Archdiocese which was built in 1467 - where Archbishop Nolan joined them for a meditation (or Lectio Divina) on the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Then, with hearts stirred, they set off across the rolling hills just outside Balloch, joined by Fr Vincent Toal, Parish Priest of St Michael's, Dumbarton, and a keen hill walker himself, sharing stories and laughter, united in faith.

Along the way, the group prayed the Rosary in Italian, English, Spanish, Malayalam, and Gaelic – a powerful reminder of the Universal Church.

At St Kessog's, Balloch, Fr John McGrorry welcomed

the pilgrims for a much-needed lunch break before they gathered for the Stations of the Cross, led by Canon Gerry Tartaglia, the Director of the Youth Office.

Reflecting on Christ's Passion through Mary's eyes, he reminded the group that they were a Resurrection people!

The silent walk along the canal path allowed for personal prayer before reaching St Martin of Tours, in Renton, where Eucharistic Adoration was held with opportunities for Confession, led by Canon Peter McBride, the Parish Priest and Fr Edward Toner, the youngest priest in the Archdiocese.

The final stop, St Patrick's, Dumbarton, felt like a homecoming – Vigil Mass celebrated by Fr Ross Crichton, warm welcomes from parishioners, and, of course, pizza!

As one young woman put it: “More than a walk, this was a journey of the heart –

a reminder that no matter how far we stray, the Father's arms are always open.”

One of the participants, Daniel, aged 18, told *Flourish*: “I really enjoyed praying the rosary while walking downhill after a climb!

“It gave a needed rest to my legs and a top up for my spirit as we prepared to reflect on the Stations of the Cross.”

Hannah, aged 21, said: “It was a great experience. Being surrounded by nature on such a sunny day was beautiful and it was such a good way to live Lent, it helped me to refocus on my relationship with God and enter more deeply into prayer, especially through adoration and confession. Met great people and ate great food. 10/10 !!”

■ **If you're a young adult aged 16+, the Youth Office would love to see you at their next event – A Lenten Reflection with Archbishop Nolan on 14th April 2025. To register or find more ways to connect, visit www.rcagyouth.co.uk or email youth@rcag.org.uk.**

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Easter welcome for 100 'new Catholics'

ARCHBISHOP Nolan had two powerful messages for the 100 or so people who will be received into the Church or baptised as adults this Easter... first, 'feel very welcome', and then, 'don't keep the faith to yourselves'.

BY RONNIE CONVERY This year saw a huge increase in the number of adults entering the Church, with 63 seeking baptism and 36 who have already been baptised who will be received into the Catholic Church.

As they gathered in the Cathedral for the Rite of Election, the Archbishop spoke to the new converts humorously about the TV travel programmes of the past which 'exposed' hidden gems as possible holiday locations. And he recalled how,



as a priest in Rome, he was happy to keep his own 'hidden gems' – a fishing village

or restaurant – to himself to avoid them being spoiled by over-tourism.

of encountering God that we have had.

"That's the best way of expressing our appreciation of the gift of faith we have been given ..."

This year's group of 'new Catholics' is the largest for many years, and one parish – Immaculate Conception in Maryhill – has a record number of 12 adults completing their faith journey this Easter – eight to be baptised and four to be received into the Church having al-

ready been baptised.

Canon David Wallace, who oversees the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) programme in the Archdiocese, said: "It was heartening and to see so many people coming together, sharing their faith stories, experiencing the support of the whole Archdiocese as they prepare for Easter and this major step in their spiritual lives."



African sisters will bring joy and new hope to East End

Getting ready to meet locals where they will be assured of a warm Glasgow welcome are (l to r) Sister Felicia, Sister Immaculata and Sister Evelyn
Picture by Paul McSherry



THE Archdiocese has given a warm Glasgow welcome to three Nigerian sisters who have become the first from their order to be sent to the UK.

The religious sisters will remain here working in the community for at least the next three years.

Based in the former presbytery of St Bernadette's, Carntyne, Sisters Immaculata, Felicia and Evelyn, who are Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, based in Lagos, Nigeria, will shortly begin working in the community.

As they slowly get used to moving from Lagos – where the average March tem-

BY BRIAN SWANSON perature is 33 degrees – to a chilly Glasgow, all three have praised locals for the warmth of the welcome they have received.

Sister Evelyn said: "When I knew we were coming to Glasgow I was excited, and nervous about coming to a place with different cultures and customs from ours."

"Everyone spoke about the wind and the rain and said that it was cold all the time in Scotland, but we have found even in the short time we have been here everyone is so very friendly – people have been so nice, very friendly and pleased to see us."

The Sisters worked in schools and hospitals in different parts of Nigeria and a year ago they were brought to the order's Mother House in Lagos to begin their preparation to move to Glasgow.


The 300-strong order was founded in 1943 by the late Archbishop Leo Hale Taylor of the Society of African Missions.

The chief distinguishing trait of the Congregation is the spirit of reparation. Each Sister of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus is asked to spend at least two hours before the Blessed Sacrament every day – one hour in common and the other hour privately.

But, he said, the faith is different!

"The faith is something we should share," he said. "Think of it as being like candlelight... we can share the light of one candle to another without affecting the light of our own candle."

"We are all here because someone has passed on the light of faith to us, so now we have to let the light of faith shine out so that others can have that experience



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Scottish Charity No SCO22611

BILLS are being presented at both Holyrood and Westminster Parliaments to allow terminally ill adults to end their own lives.

Both Bills open society to unintended and frightening consequences.

The unique, distinguishing feature of 'assisted dying' (suicide) is the consensual, intentional killing of the patient, even if they administer the dose themselves.

Introducing death as a legitimate healthcare provision would not be an expansion of healthcare. Rather, it could only be introduced by rejecting a basic healthcare norm, that of no intentional killing.

That norm is at the basis of all we hold dear as a society, namely to protect equally the life of every person without exception. Everyone deserves the right to be safe.

CAAD (Campaign Against Assisted Dying) has initiated conversations across Scotland with people for and against the proposals. We have held conferences and meetings, spoken to individuals and groups, and engaged well over 3,000 citizens on the issue.

Response

After sharing the impact of legislation in other countries, common responses have been 'I didn't realise'; or 'I thought it would only affect a few people'.

Both Bills – Holyrood and Westminster – are unsafe, unnecessary, and unequal. Although well-placed stories in the media understandably evoke emotion, this is not a sound basis for a law change to protect the common good of all.

Our legislators should consider all of the facts and arguments, rather than focussing on personalities and emotions.

Proponents argue that safeguards within the Bills will ensure safety. Yet no jurisdiction in the world has been able to keep the safeguards promised in initial law either by legal extension or through practice. Safeguards in some countries have come to be seen as obstacles!

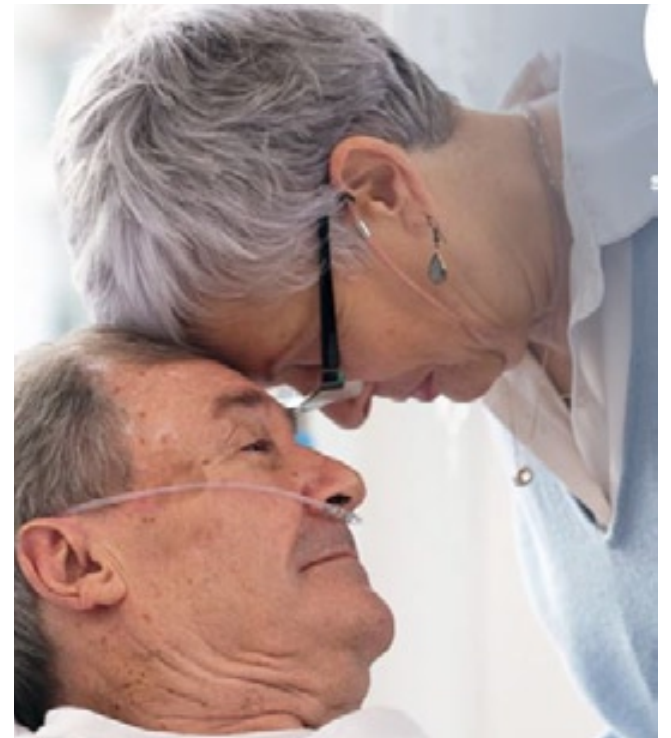
BY JOHN BROWN

Quality palliative care can address the concerns of both patients and relatives, and relieve symptoms, where there is no cure. Modern palliative care can help people live as well as they can, with pain control medication, but tragically these are not available to all.

In Westminster, the promoter of the bill, Kim Leadbetter has stated that 'feeling a burden' is an acceptable reason for asking for assisted dying. Is it?

Chilling

Surely offering state-assisted death as a response to the burdens of life, introduces a chilling change to our current understanding and practice of care?



Good law should seek to support all; but these Bills legislate for exceptions. The poor, the disabled and the elderly will be made to feel a burden on their family and society, with value judgements being made by third parties. Disabled groups already feel they are currently treated unequally and are opposed to the bills.

Parliamentarians should consider providing better palliative care and end of

life care rather than facilitating death by suicide.

Our legislators have the duty to protect all citizens; not facilitate suicide. If our MPs and MSPs have any doubts, then they should oppose the Bills.

Time is getting short. Please contact your MP and MSPs asking them to oppose the passing of such laws. If our generation does not act, future generations will have to live with the appalling consequences.

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‘He nearly died on two occasions..’

Doctor reveals full story of Pope Francis’ hospitalisation and long road to recovery

THE doctors who treated Pope Francis have revealed the Holy Father came close to death twice last month.

It was the afternoon of February 28. Pope Francis had been hospitalised at the Gemelli Hospital in Rome for 14 days. Suddenly his condition worsened, he had a bronchial spasm, he was fighting to breathe. He asked for help.

Professor Sergio Alfieri (right), said this was the worst moment of the Holy Father’s hospitalisation.

“Yes, that was the worst. For the first time I saw tears in the eyes of some of the people who were around him. People who, I understood during this period of hospitalisation, sincerely love him like a father.

We were all aware that the situation had further wors-

ened and there was a risk that he would not make it.

“We had to choose whether to give up and let him go or force it and try all the drugs and therapies possible, risking damage to other organs. In the end we took that second option.

“His personal healthcare assistant said: ‘Try everything, we won’t give up’. That’s what we all thought too. And so no one gave up”.

Professor Alfieri, in an interview with the Milan newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, was asked if Pope Francis understand that he was at risk of dying...

“Yes, because he was always alert. Even when his condition worsened he was fully conscious. That evening was terrible, he knew, like us, that he might not sur-



vive the night. We saw the man who was suffering. But

from day one he asked us to tell him the truth and he

wanted us to tell the truth about his condition.”

Professor Alfieri said: “There is a scientific theory which suggests prayers give strength to the sick person. In this case the whole world started praying. I can say that on two occasions the situation was lost and then it happened like a miracle. Of course, he was a very cooperative patient. He underwent all the therapies without ever complaining.

Details also emerged of the struggle the Pope put up to avoid going into hospital.

The doctor said: “He had been sick for days, but he resisted because he probably wanted to respect his commitments for the Jubilee Year. He arrived at the hospital in great pain and a little annoyed. In a few hours, however, he regained his good mood.”

Now a long recovery awaits, but the Pope’s mood remains positive – according to the physician “he is physically tired, but the mind is that of a fifty-year-old.

“As soon as he started to feel better, he asked to go around with the wheelchair, one day he left the room five times, perhaps even more.

“And then there was the pizza night... He gave money to one of his assistants and ordered pizza for everyone who had assisted him that day!”

The Professor confessed he will always treasure one memory of the Pope’s hospitalisation.

“When things were really bad he held my hand for a few minutes as if seeking comfort. It’s a moment I will never forget.”



Glasgow goes green for St Patrick

THE faith and culture which generations of Irish people brought with them when they arrived as migrants has been a blessing to Scotland, Archbishop Nolan told a packed St Patrick’s Day Mass in St Andrew’s Cathedral.

He added: “Irish people who left their homeland and travelled to countries throughout the world brought with them their faith and their culture because the two things cannot be separated.

“One cannot exist without

the other. And so we too here in Scotland have been blessed with that faith and that culture and as we honour St Patrick let’s give thanks to God for the faith and culture which continues to affect every aspect of our lives.”

One of the most outstanding examples of bringing faith and culture from Ireland to another country, the Archbishop said, was that of Father PJ McGlinchey, a Donegal-born Columban

Missionary, who was sent to the South Korean island of Jeju in 1954, which in those days had just 25 Catholics.

By the time the Catholic population grew to 4,000 Father McGlinchey had built a church which when seen from the air resembled a Celtic cross.

Father McGlinchey, who died aged 89 in 2018, spent his entire ministry on the island, the largest in South Korea, where he was responsible for several projects which transformed the lives of all who lived there.

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Schoolboy Jackson takes Lent message of almsgiving to heart

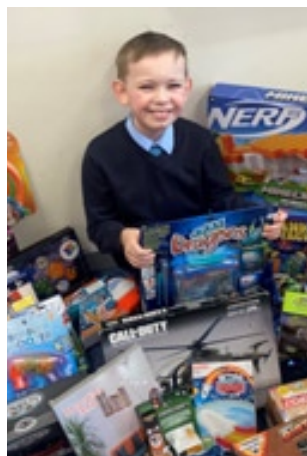
A NINE-YEAR-OLD schoolboy has been warmly praised for donating his unopened toys to his school during Lent as an act of almsgiving.

Jackson Cullen, a P5 pupil at St Bernard's Primary School, Nitshill, told his parents: "I've got plenty of toys so I want other children to have the ones I haven't even opened."

Deputy head teacher Ann-Marie McKee said: "In all my teaching career I have never known of such a heart-warming display of generosity as this one from Jackson."

"His thoughtful gesture is part of his commitment to the spirit of Lent, a time known for reflection, penance and acts of charity. By choosing to give away his toys Jackson has shown that he understands the importance of helping others especially those who may be in need."

"His toys, still in their original packaging and never used, will be shared



BY **BRIAN SWANSON** with those who can enjoy them spreading joy and kindness within the school community. The donations are part of our ongoing efforts to teach pupils the values of generosity and compassion during Lent.

"St Bernard's has a long tradition of encouraging pupils to reflect on ways they can help others whether through charity events, volunteering, or in Jackson's

case, personal acts of kindness.

"We are very proud of Jackson's kind-hearted decision and look forward to seeing the ripple effects of his generosity throughout the school."

His parents Tracy and Garry, who are parishioners at St Robert's, Househillwood, are equally proud of their son.

Tracy said: "He's our only child so he does get lots of toys from his family at birthdays and at Christmas but he's not spoilt – he's just always been a kind wee boy."

"I said to him a few weeks ago that maybe he should have a clear out of his toys and to sell some of them but he said: 'No mum, I would like to donate the unopened ones to the school for Lent so other children can enjoy them' and of course we were so proud of him for that."

"The school does a great job when it comes to teaching the children about Lent and obviously Jackson took it all in."

Scottish cabinet visits St Ninian's



WHEN it comes to getting answers from politicians it pays to go straight to the top – and that's just what Michael McGovern and Luca Hughes, senior pupils from St Ninian's High School, Kirkintilloch did when they met First Minister John Swinney during a visit to their school.

Mr Swinney and his senior Scottish Cabinet colleagues were in Kirkintilloch for the day as part of their regular policy of holding cabinet meetings outside Holyrood to meet local community groups and the visit to St Ninian's was part of that.

Deputy head Gary Hughes said: "Michael and Luca were invited along by East Dunbartonshire Council as they are

they are part of the local authority pupil voice group called My Voice, My Choice.

"They are also two of our Rights Ambassadors for the Rights Respecting Schools group."

"They asked good questions about mobile phone usage in schools and John Swinney took the time to chat to them after the formal part of the event."

"The First Minister was impressed by the young people's care and passion around education and took their views on board."

"Luca and Michael were both thrilled having the chance to talk with Mr Swinney and express their options directly to the First Minister. It was a fantastic experience for the pupils."

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JUBILEE YEAR

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PILGRIMS OF HOPE

PILGRIMS OF HOPE

New options for Holy Year Papal blessings

To mark the Jubilee Year of 2025, and to meet the special requests of Holy Year pilgrims, the Vatican has created two new parchment Papal blessings which can be ordered online and the proceeds of which will go to the poor.

Blessings can be requested for the following occasions: Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage, Priestly Ordination, Religious Profession, Permanent Diaconate Ordination, Wedding Anniversary, Priestly Ordination, Religious Profession and Birthday.

Blessings for special occasions, such as Anniversaries of the establishment of a Parish, Centenaries of the foundation of Congregations, and generic blessings for family units can be requested directly from the Apostolic Charity Office.

The Pope's Apostolic Blessings can now be ordered online on the official website www.elemosineria.va

To order a Papal blessing online just go to the website and choose the occasion for which the blessing is being sought, choose the look you prefer, and enter your details.

You will have the choice of collection directly from the office at the Vatican or mailing to anywhere in the world, by DHL Express Courier

Payment is by credit card (only VISA and MasterCard). An email is then sent from the Charities office to confirm the process has been completed correctly.

The Papal blessing will be ready in about three weeks if delivery is by post. The personalised parchments range from 20 to 29 Euros according to the design chosen and mailing by DHL Express Courier costs €22.00 to the UK.



Jubilee calendar

The Jubilee Year sees a series of major events planned for the months of April and May in Rome.

4-6 April 2025

International gathering of Charismatic Renewal prayer groups

5-6 April 2025

Jubilee of the Sick and the World of Health Care

25-27 April 2025

Jubilee of Teenagers

28-29 April 2025

Jubilee of People with Disabilities

1-4 May 2025

Jubilee of Workers

4-5 May 2025

Jubilee of Entrepreneurs

10-11 May 2025

Jubilee of Bands and Popular Entertainment



Turin Shroud goes online for Jubilee

To mark the Jubilee Year, the Shroud of Turin will be given a new prominence thanks to technology.

The aim is that everyone can make a virtual pilgrimage to the Shroud through a dedicated website and special online events.

The Archbishop of Turin, Cardinal Roberto Repole, has announced that to mark the Holy Year there will be a novena of special events from 25 April-5 May, to highlight the relevance of the Shroud, which, "showing a man defeated by history, abused, tortured, and killed, reflects current events, wars, diseases and the abandonment of the most vulnerable."

The Shroud is, he said, an "invitation to live a new life, it opens us to hope, "which is always the belief that all the defeats in our history are not the final word..."

There will be no public exhibition of the Shroud during the Holy Year,

but there will be a number of initiatives related to the Shroud.

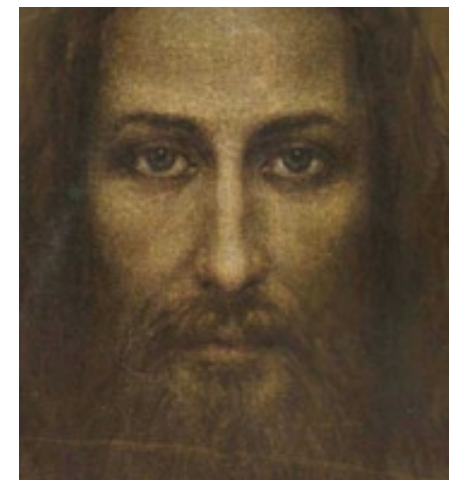
A Shroud Tent will be set up in Turin where visitors will be welcomed and given the opportunity to learn about the Holy Shroud, its history, and its meaning.

In the tent, a full-size reproduction of the Shroud will be displayed on a table, which can be "explored" by 'lighting' some of the most significant details, such as the face, the crown of thorns, and the marks of the nails.

And an online 'pilgrimage' can be made allowing those who cannot travel to Italy to engage with the sacred cloth bearing Christ's image from home.

"I hope that this new approach," emphasised Cardinal Repole, "will bring more people closer, especially many young people."

You can book an online visit to the Shroud at www.avvolti.org/en/



JUBILEE 2025

JUBILEE 2025

PILGRIMS OF HOPE

PILGRIMS OF HOPE

Confessions day in Cathedral



SAINT ANDREW'S CATHEDRAL
CLYDE STREET

DAY OF CONFESSIONS

PRIESTS WILL BE AVAILABLE
ALL DAY IN THE
CATHEDRAL ON
FRIDAY 11TH APRIL 2025
FROM
09:00AM UNTIL 5:00PM

In previous years the Day of Confessions in the Cathedral proved very popular.

This is being arranged again this Lent on Friday 11th April 2025.

The first slot begins

at 9am and confessions will be held throughout the day until the 5.15pm Mass.

Why not put the date in your diary and prepare in the best possible way for Easter?

Pope's astronomer is coming to Glasgow

ONE of the best-known and best-loved Catholic Professors at Glasgow University of recent times is being recalled this year with a special lecture in his name.

The Professor Patrick Reilly Memorial Lecture, in memory of the late *Flourish* columnist and academic who died in 2018, will this year be delivered by none other than the 'Pope's astronomer'.

Brother Guy Consolmagno – a Jesuit brother who heads up the Vatican Observatory – will travel to Glasgow on 30 April to deliver the lecture at Glasgow University. The event will run from 6:30pm-8:30pm in Room 718 (Lecture Theatre) at 42 Bute Gardens.

The lecture will be entitled 'A Jesuit's Guide to the Stars'.



Prof Patrick Reilly



Br Guy Consolmagno

One of the organisers told *Flourish*: "Jesuit spirituality is centred on 'finding God in all things'. What better represents 'all things' than the universe itself?"

"Jesuits have figured prominently in the history of astronomy, engaging both

the mind and the heart... the mathematical and scientific study of the phenomena, and also its history and philosophy, and its reflections in art, photography, and poetry... how we find God in the joy we experience observing the sky."

Brother Guy Consolmagno SJ was born in 1952 in Detroit, Michigan. He obtained his Bachelor of Science in 1974 and Master of Science in 1975 in Earth and Planetary Sciences from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and his PhD in Planetary Science from the University of Arizona in 1978.

In 1983 he joined the US Peace Corps, where he served for two years in Kenya teaching physics and astronomy.

He took vows as a Jesuit brother in 1991, and studied philosophy and theology at Loyola University Chicago, and physics at the University of Chicago before his assignment to the Vatican Observatory in 1993.

Tickets will be available via Eventbrite.

More Catholics... but fewer priests

New Vatican figures show both growth and decline

THE number of Catholics in the world is growing fast but the number of priests and nuns is in decline... that's the main takeaway from the latest statistics published by the Vatican.

The global Catholic population increased by 1.15% between 2022 and 2023, rising from approximately 1.39 billion to 1.406 billion, with the growth largely in Africa.

Africa now accounts for 20% of the Catholics of the entire planet. The number of Catholics there increased from 272 million in 2022 to 281 million in 2023. The Democratic Republic of Congo has the highest number of baptised Catholics, followed by Nigeria with 35 million.

North and South America claim 47.8% of the world's Catholics. The most Catholic countries in the Americas are Argentina, Colombia, and Paraguay where Catholics comprise more than 90% of the population.

Asia has around 11% of the global Catholic population, mostly concentrated in the Philippines, with 93 million.

Europe now accounts for just over 20 per cent of the world Catholic community. Italy, Poland, and Spain are

the strongest, where Catholics make up 90% of the population.

The new figures show there were 406,996 priests in the world – a decrease of 734 compared to 2022, despite an increase in diocesan priests in Africa of more than three per cent.

Permanent deacon numbers continue to grow worldwide – up almost three per cent mostly due to a rise in vocations to the diaconate in North America.

The decline in the number of professed religious sisters continues with their number down almost two per cent which is largely attributable to deaths of elderly religious sisters. The number of those abandoning religious life has reduced.

Africa

Again, Africa bucked the trend with a significant increase in the number of nuns – up more than two per cent while Europe saw numbers fall by almost four per cent.

The number of seminarians shows an uninterrupted decline that has been recorded since 2012. Candidates for the priesthood

decreased globally from 108,481 in 2022 to 106,495 in 2023, down almost two per cent.

The decline affects all continents except Africa, where

numbers of seminarians actually increased. In Europe, though, numbers are down five per cent. Africa and Asia now host 61 per cent of the world's seminarians.



News and views for

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Editor-Flourish@rcag.org.uk

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Canonisation beckons for the internet teenager who had a heart for God

The canonisation is scheduled later this month of the so-called 'Saint of the New Millennium'. **Ronnie Convery** looks back on the life of Carlo Acutis and the Glasgow link

CARLO Acutis, a young British-Italian teenager who lived a short but remarkable life, has captured the hearts of many with his deep faith, vibrant personality, and modern approach to spirituality.

Born in 1991, in London, Carlo's family had firm roots in the UK. He was baptised in Our Lady of Dolours in London and his grandparents were married in Westminster Cathedral in 1963.

He soon moved back to Italy, though, where he grew up in Milan. From a young age, Carlo displayed an unusual love for both technology and religion, a combination that would later lead him to leave an indelible mark on the Church.

His story continues to inspire millions around the world, and his forthcoming canonisation is a testament to the holiness he embodied in his 15 years of life.

Carlo's life was marked by a deep devotion to the Eucharist. Even as a child,

he had a profound love for the Mass, which he attended every day if he could. He is often quoted as saying, "The Eucharist is my highway to Heaven."

Carlo's devotion was not just an abstract feeling; it was a driving force behind his actions. He sought to share the beauty of the Eucharist with others by creating a website that documented Eucharistic miracles around the world. His project, 'Eucharistic Miracles of the World', became an important resource, connecting the wonders of the Church's history with the digital age, showing how faith and technology could coexist.

Aside from his passion for technology, Carlo led a life full of simple but significant acts of kindness and holiness. He was known to be humble, with a kind heart, and was never drawn to fame or material wealth.

He enjoyed ordinary hobbies such as playing video



games, but always balanced them with prayer, and a commitment to helping those in need.

Tragedy struck though when he was only 15. He was diagnosed with leukemia a devastating blow to his family. It would ultimately take his life on October 12, 2006.

During his illness, he continued to show an extraordinary level of peace and faith, even offering his suffering for the Pope and for the Church. His mother, Antonia, recalls that Carlo showed no fear of death,

trusting completely in God's plan for him.

Carlo's beatification on October 10, 2020, marked a major milestone in the Church's recognition of his holiness. His life and message resonate particularly with young people, offering them a model of how to live a faith-filled life in the modern world. His love for technology and his ability to use it for good shows that being a saint does not mean rejecting the world around you; rather, it means transforming it with faith, hope and love.



Glasgow school has a very special link to Church's newest saint

As the faithful gather in St Peter's Square later this month to join a global audience of millions to witness Carlo Acutis' canonisation, the staff, pupils, and community of St Ninian's High School, Giffnock, will have a special reason to rejoice.

For they have the rare privilege of having a relic of the new young saint in the school oratory.

Four years ago, a hair from his head contained in a reliquary was supplied to the school oratory through the good offices of Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the President of the Vatican office dedicated to Evangelisation and Monsignor Graham Bell, a priest from Paisley based in Rome who works in the same department.

In a moving ceremony on June 23rd, 2021, the last day of the school term, the late Archbishop Mario Conti blessed the new altar sealing

the reliquary beneath it to serve as a focal point of devotion for the school community.

Following the ceremony Monsignor Tom Monaghan, a regular visitor to St Ninian's said: "When I look at the picture of Blessed Carlo with his track suit and computer, I think, 'he is just like one of the pupils I see in St Ninian's.'" "Today my thought is, 'you pupils could be just like him.'"

Head teacher Gerard O'Neil said: "The canonisation of a new Saint is an exciting time in the Church. We have pictures from his life, and he was a similar age to our young people in those pictures."

"This, combined with the fact that he was alive in the 21st century makes him very relatable for young people. He is a great example for the young people in our school."



The late Archbishop Conti places Carlo's relics in school altar
Picture by Paul McSherry

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That silent Holy Week

Covid five years on ... memories of the pandemic

THE words of the old hymn to St Joseph had never sounded so powerful... 'When the death shades round us gather, teach O teach us how to die, teach O teach us how to die...'

The location was St Andrew's Cathedral.

The date, March 19, 2020, the feast of St Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church.

It was the day the doors of churches across the land closed, without any indication of when they might ever re-open.

Archbishop Philip Tartaglia had dreaded that day. But he wanted to preside at the final Mass in the Cathedral... and anyone who was present will long remember the emotion as the Archbishop struggled to finish his homily and wept openly as he left the sanctuary.

Later he wrote to parishioners and spoke of his sorrow: "The decision to suspend Masses was, for me, more than distressing. Heartbreaking, I would say. In the end, however, I could not avoid it."

"I know that you will be as sad as me at this new reality which has come upon us so quickly. It is really hard to contemplate weeks and months without Mass."

"I said in my homily that, whatever happened, the Church would not abandon you. I repeat that pledge to you now. The Church is our Mother and with the care of a mother wants to look after her children in moments of danger and trial."

Thus began the most extraordinary period in the life of the Catholic Church in Scotland – and wider society – in living memory.

Closed

St Andrew's Cathedral, which had opened its doors to provide daily Mass since 1816 was now locked up. Every parish church was similarly closed.

Marriages were cancelled with immediate effect leaving brides and grooms heartbroken. Baptisms were postponed. First communions were not celebrated. And most harrowing of all, funerals were celebrated in near empty churches.

BY RONNIE CONVERY

Of course the Covid pandemic also had a devastating impact on the life of the Catholic Church worldwide.

Pope Francis was unable to be in contact with his people as audiences were cancelled, and all public ceremonies suspended.

In an effort to offer some spiritual sustenance, the Holy Father arranged for cameras to carry his own private morning Mass from his residence at Casa Santa Marta, at which he preached a simple daily homily offering words of support to people afflicted by Covid.

Urbi et Orbi

One image in particular captured the mood of those extraordinary days... the sight of the Holy Father, alone in a rain-swept St Peter's Square, with rain lashing the earth from the night sky, in an extraordinary blessing Urbi et Orbi – to the city and the world.

Believers and non-believers across the globe tuned into the live broadcast...

"For weeks now it has been evening," said the Pope. "Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void, that stops everything as it passes by; we feel it in the air, we notice it in people's gestures, their glances give them away."

Perish

The Covid-19 pandemic had reminded us that we are all on the same boat, said Pope Francis, and so we call out to Jesus... "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?"

As the virus was brought under control, the Cathedral re-opened, and how joyful was Archbishop Philip as he threw open the wooden doors onto Clyde Street (right).

Alas, it was to be a short-lived respite. The virus was to return and another lockdown was imposed.

During that lockdown the Archbishop died – one of countless victims whose deaths were fully or partly linked to the virus.

His funeral in his beloved Cathedral was unbearably poignant.

Though thousands wished to mourn him, and thank him for his paternal care during the Covid ordeal, the rules were strict, meaning only close family and his brother bishops could attend.

The hymn to St Joseph came to mind once more... 'Teach O teach us how to die'.

Right: Mass in an empty St Andrew's Cathedral
Below: The late Archbishop Tartaglia opens the Cathedral after the first lockdown



Imago Mundi



Pope's prayer as world came to a halt

FIVE years have passed since Pope Francis ascended the steps of St Peter's Basilica alone. It was raining that evening.

BY ANDREA TORNIELLI
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, VATICAN NEWS

The square was dramatically empty, even though millions of people around the world were tuned in to him, glued to their television screens, still locked inside the long quarantine of the lockdown, frightened by the invisible virus that was claiming many victims, taking them away to the intensive care units of hospitals, without relatives being able to see them, greet them, or even hold funerals for them.

With that gesture, with that prayer, and with the daily Mass from the Chapel of the Casa Santa Marta, the Successor of Peter made himself close to everyone.

He embraced all of them in the emptiness of the square, in the blessing with the Blessed Sacrament, in the simple act of kissing the feet of the crucifix, which

seemed to weep because it was exposed to the harsh weather of an inclement early spring evening.

"I was in contact with the people. I was never alone at any moment," the Pope would later recount. Alone, but not by himself, praying for a lost world. It was a powerful, unforgettable image that marked his papacy.

On that occasion, Pope Francis addressed God saying: "It is not the time of your judgement, but of our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others."

In the following months, he would repeat that "a crisis never leaves us the same, never. We come out better or we come out worse."

Five years later, looking around, it is impossible to claim that we have come out better, with a world shaken by the violence of the lords of war, who focus on rearmament instead of fighting hunger.

We are no longer in quarantine, and now the situation has reversed: the square is filled with people celebrating the Jubilee, while the Bishop of Rome, who prays for us and for peace from his room at the Casa Santa Marta, is absent, convalescing from a serious pneumonia.

Yet, that connection has not been broken, and his words from that day are more relevant than ever: even today, especially today, it is "time to choose what matters and what doesn't."

'We are still in recovery mode'

RECALL the eeriness of being in London for meetings in the days the Prime Minister was starting to make TV broadcasts about Covid and wondering what was coming next for us. Chilling images from faraway places still give me chills up the spine.

I was keeping in touch with my parish in those days as an ever-changing situation developed – asking people to remove holy water from fonts, hymn books from pews. It seemed so surreal.

On my return, the Bishops announced that for the safety of people, especially those most vulnerable, churches would open for limited times for private prayer only. Within days, we closed our doors.

I recall the emotion of celebrating a morning Mass at the Secondary School on the feast of St Joseph and wondering when we would gather again. Would it be weeks? Months, even?

We were advised to discourage people coming out and stay at home as much as possible. I was shocked to return to the parish for Mass to find an almost full church of worshippers who wanted to be there as they too had the same thoughts on their minds.

Discovering the "live" function on Facebook at least allowed us to stay connected with people, although it was far from ideal. We were forced to find new ways of bringing the gospel into people's homes and offering comfort to ease isolation. From holy hours to scripture reflections to the Friday hymn-a-long, we tried to keep people engaged.

Within days of the first lockdown, I was called to the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital to an elderly couple who were dying from complications related to



BY CANON DAVID WALLACE

Covid-19. The nurse explained the situation and I asked to access the ward. After a pause, she said "no". I asked if she could get a telephone to the couple. Again, she said "no". All I could do was ask her to reassure the couple that I was praying for them and I went to the locked church to light a candle and pray hard. I could never have imagined ministry in this way...

There were, of course, lighter moments along the way. At the beginning of the second lockdown, I decided to ring the church bells. Of course, they were old and hadn't been serviced for many years. A moment of solemn prayer was followed by a brief ring of the bell before I came back onto Facebook Live with the rope of the bell in my hands and much laughter at what happened!

Our churches suffered losses of people, some in favour of online worship.

Five years on, we are still in a recovery period. However, signs are hopeful. People are returning to church in gradually increasing numbers.

For many it has taken time to build up their confidence in living the life we lived before the virus came to visit.

'Funerals were hard for families'

LIKE most people, the scale of the pandemic was greater than I could ever have imagined – too many conversations guessing that it would be over by Easter, by the school holidays, by the new school year, surely by Christmas.

I decided not to stream from St Stephen's as I thought that it would only be for a few weeks, and I am never comfortable talking to a camera. I tip my hat to those who did stream and who did it well.

Celebrating Mass on my own was a real challenge. St Stephen's is a large church, and my voice echoed back from all around me. I got quieter as I said Mass finding the presence of the Lord in the gentle whisper of the scriptures and the liturgy rather in the wind, earthquake or the fire.

Funerals were very hard for families during Covid. The first funeral was postponed for two weeks because the family chose to be at the deathbed but then had to be in quarantine for a fortnight.

I remember a funeral in the church with two mourners, two undertakers, an organist, a volunteer, and me. The first (professionally) streamed funeral led to a lovely card from New Zealand from a son who had been comforted by the funeral broadcast and by being back in the church of his youth with memories of his First Communion and Confirmation.

The limitation of numbers allowed to attend to five, then 20, then 50 was a real trial for families, as was the refusal to allow them to carry the coffin or to lower it at the graveside. The people who had to be there were there, but the consolation



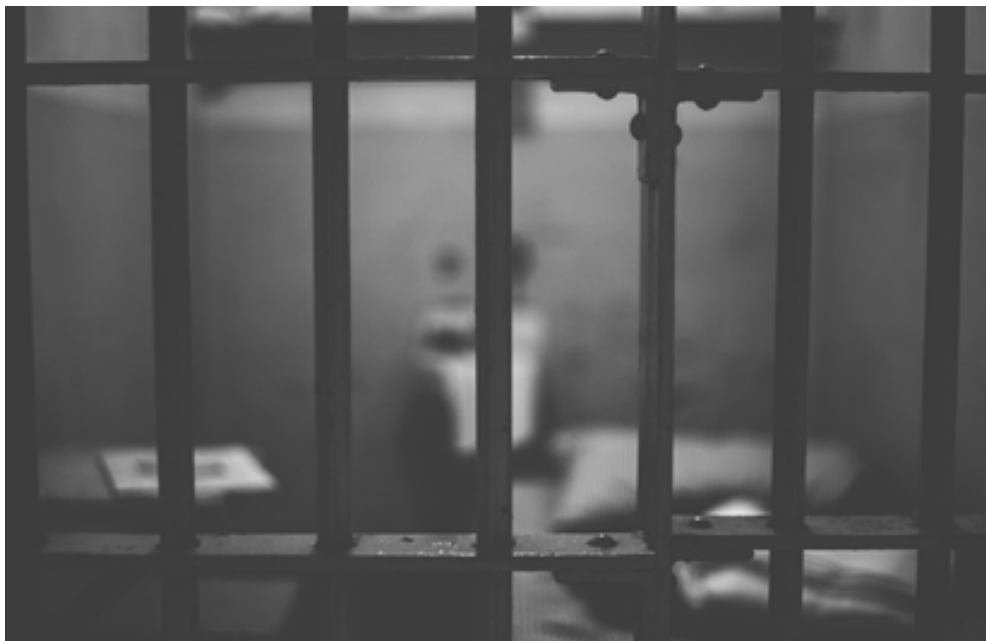
BY FR AIDAN MARTIN

at funerals is so often the old neighbour or a long-lost friend who would turn up unexpectedly with a story of generosity or love from long ago to add to the richness of the family's memories.

The protocol for visiting care homes was also very restrictive. Entry was normally through a garden door. On more than one occasion, the prayers for the dying were said through an open window. All our clothes were to be washed after a care home visit. My record was three complete changes in the one day. Hospital chaplains had the hardest of jobs during Covid.

There was one bright spot for me in Covid. I switched off my alarm clock!

Some mornings I was up at 6, others at 10. This was good for my mental health: I wasn't on the clock. Mass was still celebrated but I was no longer tied to 10 am. In the early months, getting out in the good weather regularly was also a blessing.



New fund will help prisoners' families

A NEW fund is being launched to support people in custody and their families.

The new Dignity Fund has been founded with support from churches and organisations across Scotland, among them the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

Individuals will be able to apply for help through the Scottish Prison Service, which will direct applications to the Prisoners Week Trust which will administer the new fund.

Many people arrive in custody with little or no money, while others lose their jobs and source of income when they lose their liberty.

They then rely on families, who often struggle to provide support, in many cases having lost a main breadwinner.

Under the new fund, they will be able to apply for support to buy items worth up to £50, such as a suit and tie or black shoes for a funeral.

They will also be able to request cash of up to £20,

which could be used for phone credit, to speak to loved ones.

While organisers have not been prescriptive about what types of things could be supported, the money will be used to enhance the dignity of individuals in moments of challenge.

Congregations

The Society of St Vincent De Paul (SSVP) has already committed a minimum of £5,000 a year to the fund, with the hope that other organisations and local congregations will follow suit.

Patricia McCartney, National President SSVP Scotland, added: "The Society of St Vincent de Paul (Scotland) wholeheartedly welcomes the opportunity to support the Dignity Fund. Although we have links with some prisons, what we can and are permitted to offer is limited, and at times challenging.

"Contributing to the Dignity Fund allows us to widen our Vincentian reach to all Scottish prisons. We hope that this launch is beginning of a strong collaborative partnership with SPS, Prisoners Week Trust, the Chaplaincy Service and SSVP Scotland."



Deacon Joe in plea for fishers treated as slaves

FISHERS arriving in the United Kingdom to earn a living can sometimes find themselves in extremely vulnerable situations.

Some are exploited, abused, not paid their agreed wage, or even denied wages altogether.

They trust that the contracts they sign are legitimate. But in some cases a ship's route and the work required of them can breach the conditions of their visa.

They get caught in extended limbo status in a legal system that they find baffling, waiting for their case to be heard. They can feel that they are treated like criminals.

With little contact with anyone from the outside world, many depend on the help and friendship provided by Stella Maris port chaplains and volunteer ship visitors.

BY GREG WATTS

Stella Maris Senior Area Port Chaplain for Scotland and Northern Ireland Rev Joe O'Donnell has seen many fishers that work too many hours without time to rest.

"I am currently supporting some fishers who were working twenty-three hours a day and receiving one meal a day and being paid half the salary they were promised.

"It's hard listening to their

individual stories and hearing about how sadly they have been let down by other human beings and how badly their mental health has suffered through their experiences," says Deacon Joe.

Steve Willows, Stella Maris Regional Port Chaplain in Northumberland and North and South Tyneside, has been supporting a group of fishers from Africa and South Asia since they were rescued a few years ago.

They were victims of modern-day slavery and were kept in a safehouse. However it took a long time for them to be recognised as victims while the Home Office made its decision.

Appalling

Before their rescue, they lived in appalling conditions. "They were on their ship just over a month before they were rescued. They were having to drink water from a dirty tank, being given Personal Protective Equipment that was too small, and the machinery onboard was barely working, so the work was very dangerous," says Steve.

Fishers sailing off the UK's coast can be extremely vulnerable. Isolated at sea, with little connection to their families or the outside world, they may fear speaking out. Many endure their suffering in silence.

But they don't have to.

This Lent, your support can help give fishers a voice. You can help ensure that Stella Maris chaplains can continue their work with exploited fishers, rescuing them from unsafe conditions, fighting for their rights, and providing vital practical and emotional care.

■ Visit www.stellamaris.org.uk/lent for more details about how to help.

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Annual Ozanam Talk 2025

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Legion of Mary's 'Year of Hope' is underway

OVER 100 members of the Legion of Mary of all ages gathered at Our Lady and St George's in Penilee for the annual ACIES ceremony, last month to renew their Legionary Promise in a spirit faith and devotion.

Archbishop Nolan was in attendance as was Father Joe Boyle, Spiritual Director of the Senatus of Scotland, and Deacon John Fletcher, Spiritual Director of the Wayside Praesidium.

The ceremony began with the hymn Come Holy Ghost, Creator Come, and opening prayers, invoking the Holy Spirit's guidance, followed by the rosary.

Consecration

After the clergy had made their Act of Consecration, the legionaries, came before the Vexillum, the Legion's standard. Each legionary, one by one, renewed their Act of Consecration by saying – "I am Yours, my Queen, my Mother, and all that I have is Yours."

For those who have been part of the Legion for many years, these words continue to hold a fresh depth, a renewed promise of love and



Pictures by Paul McSherry

BY **JOANNA DO REGO**
LEGION OF MARY

service.

In his homily, Archbishop Nolan reflected on the trust God the Father placed in Mary, choosing her to bring His Son into the world.

He urged the legionaries to follow this divine example – entrusting themselves

to Mary's maternal care, wisdom, and guidance. By doing so, he said, they would more faithfully carry out God's will, bringing His love and mercy to the world through their apostolic work.

A collective Act of Consecration and Benediction followed, concluding with prayers and a final hymn.

After the ceremony, the Praesidium at the parish warmly welcomed everyone with a cuppa and refreshments in the Hall. The afternoon concluded with renewed zeal for the mission, as legionaries departed strengthened in their commitment to bring Christ to the world, one soul at a time.



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Arnold Clark

Almsgiving is faith in action

Almsgiving is one of the central planks of Lent ... but often we wonder how best to help those in need in our midst.

The answer can be by choosing to donate to a local charity which is well-established and which you can be sure will use your

money wisely for those who can most benefit. In the Glasgow area there are many such charities – often small, often run

by a few devoted volunteers whose commitment is deeply impressive.

Next, it's worth asking ourselves which area of

need we want to help with our donations. With so many charities doing such amazing good work it can be a bewildering choice.

But try breaking it down into areas of concern ... is your priority to help your local parish community? Is it to support a medical charity?

Do you want to help people in poverty?

Is your priority young people in trouble or elderly folk living on their own and needing help?


Once you have answered these questions you can move forward with your

Lenten almsgiving sure in the knowledge that it's an act of charity that is well-considered and sure to have a positive impact on the lives of others.


And of course modern tech means that you don't have to spend half the day searching for a cheque book and postage stamp to give your donation.

Most charities have a website or online giving platform that means you can gift your donation from your mobile phone.

So it's over to you, every penny you give will make a difference.



The Legion of Mary Wayside Club



At Wayside we offer no miracle cures but thanks to the support of many people who give their time or financial support we are available to the marginalised and the lonely 365 night a year at our premises in 32 Midland Street where our patrons can enjoy a warm friendly non-judgmental environment while availing themselves of the support on offer from enjoying some food to freshening up in our shower facilities or spending time in prayer within our oratory.

To find out more about our work please call in and we would love to show you around or if you would like to support us financially this can be done by cheque / standing order or bank transfer to:

The Legion of Mary Wayside Club
Sort code: 80 07 61
Account Number: 00906559
Please keep the work of the club in your prayers.

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St Nicholas Care Fund

The St. Nicholas Care Fund offers grant support to schools, churches and community groups working with vulnerable or disadvantaged groups and individuals in the Archdiocese of Glasgow.

We awarded £11,421 to 5 projects in March. Our next deadline for applications is Monday 5 May 2025.

More info is available at www.rcag.org.uk

Or contact us at:
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OASIS

Nourish your soul with our monthly spirituality supplement

Remember honeymoons don't last forever – not even in our spiritual life

THERE are times when our world unravels. Who hasn't had the feeling? "I'm falling apart! This is beyond me! My heart is broken! I feel betrayed by everything! Nothing makes sense anymore! Life is upside down!"

Jesus had a cosmic image for this. In the Gospels, he talks about how the world as we experience it will someday end: "The sun will be darkened, the moon will not give forth its light, stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken."

When Jesus says this, he is not talking as much about cosmic cataclysms as of cataclysms of the heart. Sometimes our inner world is shaken, turned upside down; it gets dark in the middle of the day, there's an earthquake in the heart; we experience the end of the world as we've known it.

Fidelity

However, in this upheaval, Jesus assures us that one thing remains sure: God's promise of fidelity.

That doesn't get turned upside down and in our disillusionment we are given a chance to see what really is of substance, permanent, and worthy of our lives.

Thus, ideally at least, when our trusted world is turned



Scribblings of the spirit

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



upside down, we are given the chance to grow, to become less selfish, and to see reality more clearly.

Christian mystics call this "a dark night of the soul" and they express it as

if God were actively turning our world upside down and deliberately causing all the heartache to purge and cleanse us.

The great Spanish mystic John of the Cross puts it this

way: God gives us seasons of fervour and then takes them away. In our seasons of fervour, God gives us consolation, pleasure, and security inside our relationships, our prayer, and our work (sometimes with considerable passion and intensity). This is a gift from God and is meant to be enjoyed.

But John tells us, at a certain point, God takes away the pleasure and consolation and we experience a certain dark night in that where we once felt fire, passion, consolation, and security, we will now feel dryness, boredom, disillusion, and insecurity. For John of the Cross, all honeymoons eventually end.

Why? Why would God do this? Why can't a honeymoon last forever?

Because eventually, though not initially, it blocks us from seeing straight.

Initially there are all those wonderful feelings we feel when we first fall in love, when we first begin to pray deeply, and when we first begin to find our legs in the world. These are part of God's plan and God's way of drawing us forward.

Consolation

The passion and consolation we feel help lead us out of ourselves, beyond fear and selfishness. But, eventually, the good feelings themselves become a problem because we can get hung up on them rather than on what's behind them.

Honeymoons are wonderful; but, on a honeymoon, too often we are more in love with being in love and all the wonderful energy this creates than we are in love with the person behind all those

feelings. The same is true for faith and prayer.

When we first begin to pray seriously, we are often more in love with the experience of praying and what it's doing for us than we are in love with God.

On any honeymoon, no matter how intense and pure the feelings seem, those feelings are still partly about ourselves rather than purely about the person we think we love.

Sadly, that is why many a warm, passionate honeymoon eventually turns into a cold, passionless relationship.

Until we are purified, and we are purified precisely through dark nights of disillusionment, we are too much still seeking ourselves in love and in everything else.

Therese of Lisieux used to warn: "Be careful not to seek yourself in love, you'll end up with a broken heart that way!" We'd have fewer heartaches if we understood that.

Also, before we are purified by disillusionment, most of the tears that we shed, no matter how real the pain or loss we feel, often say more about us than they say about the person or situation we are supposedly mourning.

Security

In all this, there's both bad news and good news: The bad news is that most everything we sense as precious will someday be taken from us. Everything gets crucified, including every feeling of warmth and security we have.

But the good news is that it will all be given back again, more deeply, more purely, and even more passionately than before.

What dark nights of the soul, cataclysms of the heart, do is to take away everything that feels like solid earth so that we end up in a free-fall, unable to grab on to anything that once supported us.

But, in falling, we get closer to bedrock, to God, to reality, to truth, to love, to each other, beyond illusions, beyond selfishness, and beyond self-interested love that can masquerade as altruism.

Clarity in eyesight comes after disillusionment, purity of heart comes after heartbreak, and real love comes after the honeymoon has passed.

Jubilee event for Teresa relics

To mark the Holy Year, the relics of Saint Teresa of Avila will be exposed for public veneration from May 11 to 25, 2025, at the Basilica of the Annunciation in Alba de Tormes, Spain.

Her tomb was opened in the summer of 2024 for an in-depth study of her relics, and researchers found her body in the same preserved state as before.

After the exposition, the renowned Carmelite nun's relics will be returned to their final resting place.

This will be only the third time in the 443 years since her death that her relics have been made available for public veneration.

In 1760, her tomb was opened for seven hours, and in 1914, it was opened for a day, having been previously accessible for private veneration.



ART OF THE MONTH

Lessons from the 'forgotten' Last Supper

THERE is a legend that Leonardo da Vinci used the same model for both Christ and Judas in his famous painting of the Last Supper.

BY MGR TOM MONAGHAN

The story was that Leonardo chose a man who radiated innocence, tenderness, compassion and kindness, to portray Christ. Ten years later, having searched among vagrants and prisoners he found the perfect character to portray the man who betrayed the Lord.

Near the completion of the painting, the model, full of tears, confessed that he had sinned and turned away from God altogether, resulting in a life of crime, anger, sadness, grief and imprisonment.

In fact Leonardo did not take 10 years to complete the painting. He began in 1495 and completed it in 1499. But the story, even if not true, warns of the dangers of spiritual decay.

Fifteen years before Da Vinci another artist, Domenico Ghirlandaio, painted the same scene for the Church of Ognissanti in Florence.

It is his peculiar misfortune that his stunning

masterpiece has languished in comparative obscurity, overshadowed by the mighty fresco of Leonardo da Vinci. But Ghirlandaio offers something different...

The apostles are portrayed in a contemplative recognition of the sacred event unfolding before them. While Leonardo captures an instant of human drama, Domenico focuses on the theological reality of the Eucharist.

A tranquil garden can be seen through the windows and above the heads of the apostles, there perches a row of painted birds and, look carefully, a little cat, as if to signify that all of creation witnesses the renewal of grace.

Judas is isolated away from Christ across the table, his hand reaching for the dish; a figure set apart; a witness to the sacrificial love that redeems.

This is a work, not so much about betrayal but about the tranquillity of divine mystery, in the breaking of the Bread and a world already redeemed.



PRAYER OF THE MONTH

Lord Jesus Christ, who at the supper with Your disciples revealed the mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist, grant that, nourished by this divine gift, we may ever abide in Your presence and, like the beloved disciple, rest upon Your heart in faith and love.

Who live and reign with the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen.

Moving on: the challenges of embracing the empty nest

THERE is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under the sun. A time for tears; a time for laughter; a time for mourning; a time for dancing.

There's also a time saying goodbye to the family home. The children are grown and you look around it's time for a new adventure.

The chicks have flown the nest. It might be a nest in which no self-respecting bird would rear its young, but it's your nest and you love it. The shabby chic to which you once aspired is now decidedly more shabby than chic.

The shrieks of laughter and sibling squabbles which once resounded around these walls still echo in your heart. The children (and their children if you're at that stage) fill the place on high days and holy days.

At weekends they visit and you help out in all manner of ways but their lives are their own. Round the corner or at the other side

of the world, they have made their own homes. It's how it should be and you give thanks for that.

While you haven't hung up your apron, your days of being a short-order cook are over and now it's a dinner-a-deux. Sometimes there are even candles, napkins and, if you're feeling extravagant, that special cheese you love, the cost of which would have paid for dinner for the entire brood in the old days.

But the old days are no more. Ambivalence fills the air as you survey the rooms filled with memories. The rooms are also filled with – for want of a better word – tat, which they have left behind.

While the chances are you're fit and healthy, it makes sense to look to the future. Retaining your independence for as long as you can is a priority. The kids, of course, tell you when the day comes it will be a labour of love to care for you; it's how you raised them.

Mary's musings

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



You've done your time as a member of the sandwich generation. Those years of caring for elderly parents

and young children were golden but also exhausting.

You know it's time to go and you've spied just the

place. There's nothing stopping you. You'd start if only you could think where to begin. Listen up, folks, to some tips from one who knows.

Start early. However early you think you need to start the preparations for the big move, start earlier. It's never too early. The truth is whenever you start you're already behind the game. Don't worry, you'll be fine as long as you have a plan.

You're not going to need a spreadsheet, although if you know your way around one it'll stand you in good stead. Even better if any of the troops can help. Let's face it, you've fed, clothed and nurtured them, so your account is very much in credit. All you need to get started is a pen and paper, lots of paper.

Apparently, current thinking is to sort by categories such as books, clothes etc. Take it from one who knows, this is a recipe for tears. Big, great, heaving sobs in my case. Take it

one room at a time.

Four little letters, one small word. If you think it looks easy, think again. Three piles seem to be the way to go. Keep, bin, charity. The tat the children left behind, and which they have never spoken of, will suddenly be treasures of inestimable value if you bin or donate to charity. You have been warned.

Memory boxes are the answer. First Communion certificates, first teeth and even for some of us, detention slips for the naughty young scamp of the family – chuck them all in and let your children decide to keep or discard. Again, be prepared for the tears.

The good news is that this time the overriding emotions will be of gratitude and you will take the memories with you wherever you go.

This stage is another piece of the jigsaw of your life. Please God there will be plenty more before it is complete.

The small details hidden in the Gospels can help bring the message of Holy Week alive



Fr Tom
Kilbride

Parish Priest of Christ
the King, Glasgow

How life changes! I find myself this month preparing for my first Holy Week and Easter in a new parish, launched straightaway into the most important celebrations of our year.

Having celebrated them in the quiet, serene setting of the seminary over the past few years, I'm looking forward it and to all that a parish Holy Week can be.

But there's much to ponder as we prepare the readings of the Liturgies that lie ahead, and it's worth taking the time to do so. What do the Passion and Resurrection readings this year offer us as we renew our faith and parish communities over these weeks?

moment. Luke draws a very close relationship between the two aspects: sharing the Eucharist must be lived out in service.

He also includes a prayer for Peter along with the prediction of his denials. He knows Peter will have a particular role in the community after Pentecost.

Lastly, we notice how all the disciples, and not just a chosen few, seem to go to the garden.

Even more, his friends ("his acquaintances" is how we read it) are still there at the foot of the Cross. Luke wants to avoid any sense that the disciples abandoned Jesus, showing instead that they had been eye-witnesses to the events around his death.

Sufferings

When it comes to the actual Passion story, Luke shares what the others tell us of Jesus' sufferings.

But there are a few things only he tells us: the healing of the wounded servant in the garden, the strange "reconciliation" of Pilate and Herod, the mourning women on the road to Calvary, Jesus' forgiveness and promise to the "good" (or repentant) thief.

What do these all sug-



Francesco Hayez, *Crucifisso con la Maddalena*, 1827

gest? Luke seems to want us to know that the salvation offered by Jesus – healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, compassion – is already at work even before he dies on the Cross.

He maybe also wants us to know that this saving work goes on even in the face of suffering and rejection (something his followers will need to know when they begin their mission). The women he meets are mourning ("Blessed are you who weep now; you shall be comforted") but their children will suffer more when Jerusalem is destroyed by the Romans a generation later.

His words on the Cross show that what he came to bring has already begun: "Father, forgive them". Then, the repentant thief stands as an example of one who was "lost" and is "found", like the Prodigal Son or Zacchaeus.

Just as he announced that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him "for he has anointed me", and as the dove had come upon him in the Jordan, so, at the moment of his death, Luke has Jesus refer to the Spirit whom he returns to the Father: "Into

your hands I commit my spirit". Jesus dies calling God "Father", bonded by the Holy Spirit they share, a Spirit which will flood the world and the disciples on Pentecost Day.

And when he dies, those standing there "beat their breasts", a sign of repentance by those for whose forgiveness Jesus had prayed.

Painful

So, while Luke doesn't flinch from the painful aspects of Jesus's Passion, he has a strong sense of what it is all about: salvation for all, including those seemingly furthest from God (Pilate, Herod, a dying criminal), both now (the healed servant, the "today" he promises the thief) and in the future (the children of the mourning women).

When we hear Luke's account of the Passion this Palm Sunday, let's listen out for those elements which are special to him, which differ from the other Gospels, since these will offer us some pointers for how we might listen to it differently this year: service, healing, compassion, forgiveness, prayer and the Holy Spirit

are all key to reflecting on how Luke understands Jesus and the Cross.

In short, Luke's is a Passion story filled with hope.

Easter Sunday, Year C

At the Easter Vigil, we hear Luke's account of the women's visit to the tomb, while Easter morning gives us John's. The two are similar but differ in a few details.

For example, Luke says that the disciples do not at first believe the women. He wants us to know that the disciples' later faith in Jesus did not come from themselves.

They thought it impossible that he would rise again (remember, he suggests they all saw what happened on Calvary). Only seeing the Risen Jesus himself standing among them would change their minds – and even that would not happen at once!

Also, Luke has a strong sense of the importance of witnesses and messengers: hearing the Good News leads to faith.

So, two figures testify to the resurrection and remind the women of Jesus' own words. These, in turn, run to tell others.

Believing

John, on the other hand, stresses that believing is a gift and a task in response to God's action. The Beloved Disciple will "see and believe" not because the risen Jesus stands there, but because he finally understands the Scriptures.

John's version is captivating and immediate, (with lots of running!) and he challenges us to reflect on our own response. Luke,

meanwhile, recognises that we might have our hesitations and uncertainties, but that we should put our trust in the word we hear and go tell others of our encounter with the Risen Lord today!

Second Sunday of Easter, Year C

This Sunday, we hear about two appearances of the Risen Jesus.

Thomas, missing on the first occasion, undergoes a total change on the second, as his doubts and misgivings are replaced by an act of deep faith in Jesus.

The encounter with Jesus changes them all, however. He speaks peace and breathes his Spirit into them, replacing fear with joy, locked doors with a mission outward, and doubt with faith.

Perhaps we could invite Jesus to breathe his Spirit into us again this Easter too, to transform us again into faith-filled, joyful witnesses to his presence.

If the Passion according to Luke is about how God brings about our salvation, our forgiveness and our healing through the Cross, and if the Easter Gospels from Luke and John speak of the transforming of fear into mission, of doubt into faith, then perhaps the word which ties them together is hope.

There is a future of grace opening up for us all.

It seems very appropriate when Pope Francis has invited us to reflect on that very theme in this Jubilee Year and to be pilgrims and messengers of Hope together!

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Memories of a Palm Sunday spent in the desert

ANOTHER Lenten journey is well underway, and even though we might think it has come around so quickly, it has in fact begun a few weeks later than last year.

The first few days are always a bit hectic. Ashes have to be prepared and plans made for distribution, both in the churches and the schools, as well as to the housebound and to others.

It's extraordinary how anxious we are to get ashes on Ash Wednesday, to be smeared with dust, reminded of our mortality, and called out of our sin.

There is another dimension to that now as, for the past number of years, the Friday after Ash Wednesday has been designated as the annual Day of Prayer for victims and survivors who have experienced abuse in the Church.

This is a very poignant and important day, an initiative of Pope Francis back in 2016. While it seems to fit in well with those first few days of Lent, in other places it is marked on a different day. In England and Wales



for example, it is marked on the Tuesday of the 5th Week of Easter.

Ireland, like Scotland, is on the First Friday of Lent. Whenever it is, however, it is a time for deep and sincere prayer, as part of the healing process. It is primarily a day for victims and survivors, who have been so severely injured, either inside or outside the Church, but also a day for families and communities affected by grief for their loved ones, and a day for the whole church.

In Lent, we enter into the desert wilderness of Judea with Jesus where he

is tempted by the devil and cared for by angels.

I visited the Judean desert of Jesus' temptations on my one and only pilgrimage to the Holy Land over 30 years ago. However, I have other desert memories too.

One was on a holiday to Tunisia, which included a trip to the site of the ancient city of Carthage, where some of the early Church councils took place that gave shape to what we call the Canon of Scripture, which in the Catholic Bible is now the 46 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament.

But there was also a trip to the Saharan Desert, where we took a camel ride to the dunes of Douz at sunset, stopped awhile to admire the stunning views across the Sahara, and then took the camel ride back again by the light of the moon.

It was stunningly beautiful, but a bit lost on me because of the excruciating pain of riding on the back of a camel. It was about three days before I was able to walk normally again, and I have never attempted any such beastly experience since.

The other desert experience was also over 30 years ago when I visited our Passionist mission in South Africa and Botswana.

At that time Father Lawrence, whose 5th anniversary we will celebrate in a few weeks' time, God rest him, was living 400 kilometres out into the Kalahari Desert, and he asked me if I would like to come and celebrate the beginning of Holy Week with him.

I readily accepted his invitation and, on the following day, I borrowed a pick-



Fr Frank

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

up truck, and began my long drive out to the mission. It was a fairly bleak drive, it didn't have the same beauty as the Sahara, but at least the pick-up was more comfortable than the camel!

When I arrived at the mission the locals were cutting palms from the trees for the procession next day, and decorating the rondavel church with cow dung in beautiful spirals. In bed that night, even though tired from the long drive, I was kept awake by a disco in a local hall that went on to all hours – yes,

a disco, 400 kilometres out into the Kalahari! I couldn't believe it.

That was forgotten next day however, as the Palm/Passion Sunday celebration was so full of life and captured so well the joy of Christ's entry into Jerusalem and the sorrow of his Sacred Passion.

I wish everyone a very blessed journey through this Holy Season.

As ever, protect yourself, your loved ones and others, and protect Christ in your lives.

■ Father Frank's Log will be temporarily out of action while I deal with the sudden and unexpected death of my dear brother Patrick. I have been his carer for a number of years and I have often mentioned him in the log. He passed away in the QUEUH on Friday 14th March. I am deeply grateful for all the expressions of sympathy and support I have received. I, and all the family, will miss him greatly. He truly was a unique human being. Pray for him.

Coming face to face with a peacemaker

SOMETIMES you meet someone who just knocks you off your feet.

For me, that person is Martha Inés Romero, Secretary General of Pax Christi International, who was a guest of Pax Christi Scotland for 12 whirlwind days at the start of Lent.

We were lucky to be able to host Martha Inés. She is based in her native Colombia and was travelling to Brussels to start celebrations for the 80th anniversary of Pax Christi International on March 13.

She agreed to detour and I'm afraid we took full advantage of that, creating a programme that included her speaking at events at Glasgow University's theology department, the Scottish Parliament, the annual Catholic Workers Ash Wednesday Vigil at Faslane, and the Scottish Catholic Bishops' Conference Inter-religious Dialogue Committee Symposium.

We were generously hosted by the Xaverians at their Conforti Centre, and I was her roadie. You get to know people well when you are in such proximity for 12 days, and I found Martha Inés to be a dynamic actor on the peace stage. While we put her through her paces in Scotland, she continued to



Marian Pallister

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

operate internationally online in her 'day job'. Zoom is a wonderful thing.

Martha Inés is passionate about peace, about creating a nonviolent society, about tackling the world's conflicts through nonviolent means.

The vigil at Faslane was right up her street.

Her reaction to the police officers who oversaw that vigil reminded me that in Colombia, violence is an everyday occurrence and certainly in the very recent past, some of that violence was perpetrated by law enforcers on Columbia's citizens.

One of Pax Christi Scotland's first pieces of work was to ask Police Scotland to stop training Colombian officers – a contract that gave the then-Colombian government freedom to tick a box that said, "We're doing something about our human rights record."

Our police officers at Faslane were courteous

and helpful, allowing us to pray freely outside the nuclear submarine base's South Gate. Martha Inés's body language told me that even so, she was wary of their presence.

The next day we visited SCIAF's headquarters. Their Lenten campaign, of course, centred around their support for a project promoting peace in north-eastern Colombia where a combination of drug dealers and illegal mineral ex-

tractors make life hell for the local population.

We agreed with SCIAF that a way forward is to work together – and especially on issues such as mineral extraction which so damage the earth and people's livelihoods, driving people from their homes and adding to migration statistics.

That idea of bringing together agencies such as Pax Christi, Justice and Peace Scotland, Laudato Si Animators Scotland and SCIAF was something Martha Inés was pleased to take away with her.

Pax Christi Scotland belongs to that family of peace promoters, with faith at its core. Why not join us?

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UK aid cuts mean this year's Wee Box appeal is more important than ever

THE UK Government's recent decision to cut international aid is deeply disappointing and short-sighted.

This move not only undermines the UK's long-standing commitment to supporting vulnerable communities worldwide but also contradicts the very principles of building a more peaceful and just world.

While the government argues that the cuts are necessary to fund defence priorities, many experts agree that aid itself is an investment in global stability. If we genuinely wish to reduce conflict and insecurity, cutting aid is the wrong approach.

So why do we at SCIAF think it's such a bad idea?

International aid – now reduced to 0.3% of national income – plays a crucial role in preventing conflicts and supporting fragile peace processes. In

BY **BEN WILSON**
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC
ENGAGEMENT, SCIAF

countries like Colombia, the focus of SCIAF's Wee Box appeal this year, international aid has been crucial to the peace process in recent years. It has helped to convene warring factions, stabilise delicate peace agreements and prevent a return to violence.

The recent headline-grabbing cuts to international aid by the US and then the UK Governments risk undoing a lot of vital peacebuilding work that has taken place across the world.

When you consider the deeply entrenched extreme poverty in many countries and the additional burdens being faced in the form of climate change, many more conflicts have the potential of flaring up across the



world as a result of these cuts.

When the UK reduces its aid commitments, it is not just taking away money – it's walking away from a key part of its role in global peacebuilding.

It's often claimed that the British public doesn't support overseas aid. While that's the case for some, this view overlooks the significant number of people who do care about global poverty and justice

– our sisters and brothers overseas.

Scotland, in particular, has a strong tradition of international solidarity. The Jubilee Debt Campaign of the late 1990s and the massive 'Make Poverty History' movement of the early 2000s demonstrated just how widespread public support for international development is, and the spirit behind these mass movements has not disappeared.

Many people, particularly those of faith, still see aid as our moral responsibility. True leadership means standing by our moral commitments – even when they are politically challenging. The government should not dismiss the concerns of those who believe in the UK's duty to assist the world's most vulnerable.

Even if the government refuses to reverse its decision, there are other ways it can support international development without spending more.

One of the most impactful steps it could take would be to tackle the global debt crisis. Many of the world's poorest countries are burdened by unsustainable debts, preventing them from investing in healthcare, education, and climate resilience.

SCIAF, alongside the global Caritas Network, is calling for the cancellation of unjust debts and the

creation of fairer debt restructuring mechanisms. The UK should introduce legislation requiring private creditors to engage in debt negotiations and support a new UN framework to assist countries facing crises like natural disasters or civil conflict.

These measures would cost the government nothing while making a profound difference for struggling nations.

We must not lose our reputation as a leader in international development. Aid is not charity – it's an investment in a safer, more stable world.

Rather than reneging from its commitments, the UK needs to strengthen its role as a force for good. Now is the time for bold leadership which seeks to shore up support for the progressive values. They're our only hope of a just world where everyone don't just survive – they thrive.

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