

St. Lawrence's Voice

Summer 2018

[Issue Date: 10.06.2018]

£1.00

Growing in Love

"You are
kind,
God"



"and
you are
good.
Amen"

**I am the
VINE,
you are
the branches**

EDITORIAL TEAM

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We accept letters by post (c/o Parish Office, 1 Hamilton Road, Sidcup DA15 7HB, marked "The Voice"), or email to either of the abovementioned email addresses. Please include your name, address (postal and email), and telephone contact details.

Editors' Note

**AUTMUMN ISSUE
DEADLINE:
17TH AUGUST**

Dear Readers,

The Cover Page

image drawn by our children here at St. Lawrence during their Sunday Children's Liturgy, captures the glory of life and how we are all rooted in divinity. The only bit of 'artistic licence' employed was the addition of a human embryo in the middle of the tree - a symbol of the greatest and most precious of life-bearing "seeds".

It is this theme of 'life' and 'growing' that sets the tone for our summer issue, which is similarly chock-full of inspiring and informative articles: from the Pre-Schoolers at St. Peter Chanel achieving an 'Outstanding' commendation from Ofsted (Pg. 10), to Tom Baker's article on the Marist Society, aptly using the tree analogy to describe its multifaceted make-up and mission (Pg. 24).

'Small' does pack a mighty punch, and the mustard seed story is so well-known, further elaboration is not required. What does, however, is the life-changing work undertaken by the Mustard Seed Communities in caring for the abandoned (Pg. 28). In the same vein, Dr. Mary Mather highlights the very real need for giving children a second chance through adoption (Pg. 30).

Sadly, for some there are no second chances - or even a first - as 'Father X' knows only too well. On Pg. 35 he recounts his painful experience of abortion.

Summons usually have legal connotations. Providentially, for Mary Seery her 'summons' were more in the form of a very special pilgrimage to Medjugorje (Pg. 36).

Finally, the sainted Mother Marie-Adèle Garnier and John Bradburne, could do with our help and prayers in their Cause for Canonisation (Pg. 17). Please help yourself to the information (booklets; DVD) available at the back of the church, and lend your support in ensuring these two very special people get the recognition they deserve.

Have a very safe and happy summer!



Joan



Joan
and
Sheila

Sheila

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BEXLEY DEANERY DEVELOPING WORLD GROUP

By Susan Grace

It has been a busy time for the Developing World Group!

In February we sent money to Rwanda and goats were distributed to families a month later. Please see following photos that show the distribution of goats (#1), identity tagging of the animal (#2) and a beneficiary with her goat at an animal hut (#3).



#1



#2



#3

Later in the month we sent money to a parish in Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, to fund parish facilities.

In March we sent £500 to a home for blind teenagers in Kenema, Sierra Leone. This was to enable them to build a workshop on site, so the teenagers could learn to make soap to sell and therefore support themselves independently.

In early May, we sent £500 to a school in Kissy, Sierra Leone, so a further classroom could be built and equipped with cooking equipment for pupils aged ten and eleven.

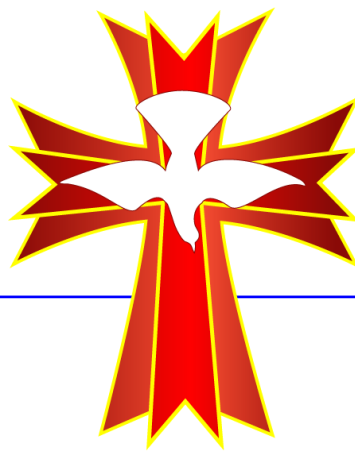
We still have more projects to support this year; so, to help with fundraising we will be holding a Quiz Night at St Lawrence's on **Saturday, 15th September 2018, at 7.30pm.** More details to follow but please put the date in your diary!

Thank you for your continued support and please remember the box at the back of the church.



ST. LAWRENCE'S PARISH NOTICES

**'CLAIMING FOR CHRIST'
AS WE WELCOME INTO OUR PARISH FAMILY
IN BAPTISM**



Edward John Barker	11.03.18
Shiloh Kapinga Malutshi	18.03.18
Lila Florence Lopategui	24.03.18
Evie Elizabeth Prett	24.03.18
Oliver Patrick	25.03.18
Emma Tania O'Donnell	31.03.18
Ava Amelia Gange	07.04.18
Peyton Montanarini-Burke	08.04.18
Delilah Mave Coleman	29.04.18





MAY THEY REST IN PEACE

"For we know that when the tent we live in on earth is folded up, there is a house built by God for us, an everlasting home not made by human hands, in the heavens."

[2 Corinthians 5: 1]

◆	Keith Pearson	12.02.2018
◆	George Alfred Goulette	17.02.2018
◆	Doreen Lillian Roberts	21.02.2018
◆	Ernest John Jones	23.02.2018
◆	Gwendoline Joan Carver	11.03.2018
◆	Martin Paul Gavin	10.04.2018
◆	Margaret Josephine Griffith	29.04.2018

MARRIAGES



*"My
command is
this:
Love
each other
as I have
loved you."*

John 15:12



PARISH NOTICEBOARD

What's ^{up} in the parish...

FIRST HOLY COMMUNION ENROLMENT MASS



Fr. John, assisted by Deacon Peter Varnes and Deacon Peter Littleton, conducting the blessing of the First Holy Communion candidates and their parents at the 10am enrolment Mass on Sunday, 4th February

Over the weekend of 3rd/4th February, enrolment Masses for a total of forty-six children preparing for their First Holy Communion, took place.

The children, along with their parents, were invited up to the sanctuary by Fr. John, where they were all asked to confirm their commitment to participating in the programme.

After receiving a blessing, each child was presented with a book called 'I Belong' as well as a medal, which was blessed by a Sister from the Missionaries of Charity order in India (Mother Teresa of Calcutta's order). [See left].

Fr. John asked that the children wear these medals every time they attend Mass.



THE SISTERS OF MARY MORNING STAR

Over the weekend of 10th/11th February, we were visited by some of the Sisters of Mary Morning Star (The Sisters of Maria Stella Matutina), who are a contemplative order and part of an international community of contemplative nuns. Their community was founded 35 years ago in France, with the Mother House now in Spain.

Whilst their mission is to pray, unlike most contemplatives they are not an enclosed order as they believe it is really important for them to be the *visible* person of Jesus. In keeping with being the human form of Christ, the other crucial aspect of their mission is prayer and adoration. The congregation at St. Lawrence's were accordingly invited to send their prayer requests to the Sisters, which they in turn offer to the Lord during 'Holy hours'.

The Sisters believe in divine providence to provide for their needs whilst also putting to good use their individual God-given talents in the form of: handmade calligraphied cards, rosaries, jams, biscuits, cakes, pottery, to supplement their income. A tempting selection of their monastic crafts were on display (see below), and proved irresistible to us all!

Although the craft-making does provide for the community's needs, because of their commitment to a life of prayer and the demands this makes, they are unable to meet daily living costs. Hence, donations are gratefully received. See boxes below for contact details to send prayer requests and donations.



Sr. Rebekah-Marie



Sr. Germaine



Address:

Sisters of Maria Stella Matutina
St Joseph's Convent,
Harvey House, Headley Road,
Grayshott,
Hampshire, GU26 6DP.

Tel: 01428 289481

Email: srsmarymorningstar@gmail.com

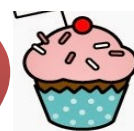
Donations can be made to:
PRCDTR SISTERS OF MARIA
STELLA MATUTINA

Account number : 31401060

Sort code : 30-80-27

Registered charity number : 246871

Tea for two (or three, or more....!)



Sunday, 18th February

Fr. Marcello, who served at St. Lawrence's for about two years but has since returned to his native Italy, dropped in to Sidcup and parishioners were given an opportunity to catch up with him over a nice cup of tea/coffee - and cake (lots of it!).

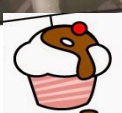
Earlier at Mass, Fr. John complimented Fr. Marcello on how well he was looking. A simple explanation for that: "*plastic surgery!*" was Fr. Marcello's quick response. His surgeon is to be congratulated, obviously!



Fr. Marcello (striped jumper)
speaking with parishioner



Fr. Marcello receives gift
from Joan (co-editor)



LONG-SERVICE AWARDS

During April and May, the following individuals were presented with medals and certificates (see below) from the diocese in recognition of their long-service as altar server, hospital visitor, musician, and a host of other duties selflessly rendered to the parish:

- ♦ **Moreen Hegarty**
- ♦ **Joan Hollins**
- ♦ **John Wilsdon**

In turn, John Wilsdon has written the following poem in appreciation of this honour:

ONE FOR ME?

A diocesan medal for each of us three,
Terry Gibbs,* Joan, then surprisingly,
one also for me.

Our Fr. John worked tirelessly, his communications unceasing,
but when my name came forward,
the bribes were soon increasing!

The Cathedral staff are aware of Fr. John's fame;
he and I have similarities - the same Christian name.
I searched for others, I'm sure he won't mind,
But a single one I just could not find.

But, wait! Of course, I won't break into a lather,
I'm old enough, it seems, to be his father!
So, that's the reason for my medal, 'cos I'm no sage,
I've fathomed it, yes, it is my old age.

Despite my years, has the "sage" bit passed me by?
Really more onion-like - I make folks cry.
Combined sage and onion, that's me, most quirky;
Perhaps I'm now known as the 'Parish Turkey'!

The parish community are great, even to me - a chump,
They're smiling and welcoming, even though I've got the hump.
I have received my medal, there may be pictures for anyone to view.
Thanks, Fr. John and St. Lawrence's, I'll dedicate this one to you.



Moreen Hegarty

*[previous recipient mentioned in Spring 2018 issue]



CHILDREN'S 'VOICES'

St Peter Chanel Pre-School

By Grainne Edwards
Extended Services Manager

St Peter Chanel Pre-School was inspected by Ofsted on 28 March 2018, and we are very proud and delighted that we have been found to be “Outstanding” in all areas. The report highlighted that, “Children’s well-being is given the highest priority and that all children receive expert support to develop extremely high levels of confidence and a positive sense of themselves.” A copy of the full report is available on the Ofsted website.

At St Peter Chanel Pre-School, we strive to create a warm and stimulating environment where learning is fun. We implement the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum which sets the standards to ensure that children learn and develop well, and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children’s ‘school readiness’ and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good progress through school and life.

[Continued overleaf]





We accept children from two years old. All eligible three and four-year-olds are entitled to 15 hours' free early-year education.

Children become eligible from the term after their third birthday until they go to school, and we offer flexibility over when you can use your 15 hours, depending on availability. There is also funding available for eligible two-year-olds through the Bexley Two Year Offer project.

Tuesday, 3 July 2018 (9.30am - 11.00am and 1.00pm - 2.30pm). You are welcome to pop in for a visit to have a look around and ask any questions you may have. Alternatively, you can make an appointment to visit the Pre-School.

Please phone the school office to make an appointment on 020 8302 6029.



**DON'T
FORGET
OUR OPEN
DAY!***

***OPEN DAY**

Tuesday, 3rd July 2018

9.30 - 11.00am

&

1.00 - 2.30pm



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CHURCHES TOGETHER IN SIDCUP (CTiS)



RECENT EVENTS

Good Friday's Walk of Witness, traditionally one of CTiS's best-attended events, was no exception this year, with our own parish well-represented. Tea and cakes were enjoyed by all at Christ Church afterwards.

Lent Lunches, hosted by Christ Church, was its usual success, with six different parishes providing lunch over four Wednesdays during Lent, one Wednesday being cancelled owing to snow. £1,360 was raised for Christian Aid.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Lark In The Park (LITP)

LITP takes place at Sidcup Place from 21 July to 5 August, 2018.

Closer to the date, please pre-register online at www.larkSidcup.com to save time on your arrival at the Registration centre.

NEWS

£229 collected at January's Unity Service will be forwarded to the Barnabas Fund.

After 12 years in charge of the CTiS website, Michael Barnes has stood down, allowing New Generation to design a new website, now up and running.

Rev. Rupert Hankey, vicar of St. Andrew's, continues to improve after an operation to remove a brain tumour.

MINISTERIAL CHANGES

Rev. Alison Davis has been appointed as new Minister for Emmanuel Church, dividing her time between this and churches in Bexley & Bexleyheath.

Rev. Brenda Brundritt will be inducted as new Minister for Foots Cray Baptist Church on 22 September.

Andy Masters of Avery Hill Christian Fellowship, recently accredited as a Minister in the Baptist Church, is actively seeking a local parish.

VACANCY FOR ST. LAWRENCE REP.

April's AGM passed with no rep. from St. Lawrence's emerging. To repeat the criteria: the candidate would be expected to attend up to five meetings per year and be part of an Executive Team of five, culminating in a 12-month spell as Chairman, after which he or she is free to stand down.

NEXT GENERAL MEETING

Tuesday, 26 June at Christ Church, Main Road, Sidcup; 7.45 for 8pm. All welcome.

HOWE MAXTED GROUP LTD

INSURANCE BROKERS & INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL ADVISERS

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'Voices' that Speak...



A page for you to share all those inspiring moments, which ultimately deepen our relationship with God. The inspiration may come in the form of a particular prayer, picture, thought, what someone said, even mirth-inspiring jokes! - *anything* that makes an impression on you, and which may similarly inspire others. There is a certain joy and fulfilment that comes from wonderment, especially when it is totally unexpected, and gives rise to a generosity and selflessness that cannot be contained. That in itself is a beautiful prayer offering.



MAKING FRIENDS - NOT THE FACEBOOK WAY!

I am trying to make friends outside of Facebook while applying the same principles.

Therefore, every day I walk down the street and tell random passers-by what I have eaten, how I feel at the moment, what I have done the night before, what I'm doing now, what I will be doing later and with whom, and where I'm going next.

I then ask them to follow me along the street and watch me.

I give them pictures of my family, my dog, and of me gardening, taking things apart in the garage, watering the lawn, standing in front of landmarks, washing the car, driving around town, eating lunch, getting a haircut, and doing what anybody and everybody does every day.

I also listen to their conversations, give them the "thumbs up" and tell them that I like them and will be friends with them.

It all works just like Facebook, only I do it face to face, not on a little glass screen.

I already have four people following me: two police officers, a private investigator, and a psychiatrist!



Never complain about
the difficulties in your
life, because a
director (GOD)
always gives the most
difficult roles to his
best actors.

HEALING PRAYER

Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit,
go back into my memory as I sleep.
Every hurt that I have ever gone through,
heal that hurt.
Every hurt that I have ever caused
another person,
heal that hurt.
All the relationships that have been
damaged in my whole life,
that I am not aware of,
heal those relationships.
But, Lord, if there is anything that I need
do, if I need to go to any person
because he/she is still suffering
from my hand,
bring that person to my awareness.
I choose to forgive and I ask to
be forgiven.
Remove whatever pain and bitterness
there may still be in my heart, Lord,
and fill these empty spaces with
your love.

I thank you Jesus.



HOME-ILY

Taking the priest's words home for reflection

CHOICE IS POWERFUL

The message of love - to love and be loved - couldn't have been more strongly proclaimed than it was in the reading (1 John 4:7-10) and Gospel (John 15:9-17) of today: 6th May, the sixth Sunday of Easter.

Fr. John delivered the homily, and drew on real-life examples to explain this central plank of our faith. Both the examples: one telling how a trainee priest, John, from an Italian family in south London, although raised a Catholic, had strayed from his faith. While at university studying for an Economics degree, John decided to take the opportunity to travel before final graduation. It was while he was in Ecuador that he was mugged and lost everything - passport, money - and left in a very fragile state. The Sisters of a local convent took him in and got him back on his feet. When they attended daily Mass, John was invited to join but his answer was always 'No'.

It soon came time for John to leave, and he promised to repay more than he had received from the Sisters. While this gesture was acknowledged by the Mother Superior, the more important message she wanted him to reflect on was this: "Remember who you are, and remember the Church; give it another go."

John did indeed begin to reflect on his experience with the Sisters, and the goodness that they showed him, which he likened to being *a glimpse of God*.

The second example Fr. John described involved Stephen Lawrence, the teenager who was murdered in a racially motivated attack in Eltham (near a Catholic church as it so happened). The story is not widely known but it was reported that a gentleman was picking his wife from the church, and it was he who held Stephen as the young man lay dying and told him: "**You are loved; remember you are loved.**" When asked why he did that, the man replied that in all the chaos and hatred, the last words he wanted Stephen to hear was that he was loved.

In both these examples, a conscious and deliberate choice was made: the Sisters *chose* to help John when he was left bereft in Ecuador; the gentleman *chose* for Stephen Lawrence to hear the words of love despite his death being the result of exactly the opposite sentiment.

Human beings are social animals and therefore need each other to thrive and survive. Unlike God, who has no favourites - He loves us all - humans are selective with their affections, including or excluding as they like. For the one doing the selecting, it is hard not to enjoy the feeling of power and superiority this gives them over other human beings. For those on the outside looking in and waiting to be invited, it can be a long wait to the point where they are almost invisible. It is at times like these when we are rejected by the world for whatever reason that we should heed Jesus' words: "**You did not choose me, no, I chose you.**" That is a statement of fact - and intent - without equal!

Quoting from his favourite Catholic author and priest, Cardinal Newman, who said: "**You cannot discover God's love on your own; you have to witness God's goodness at work,**" Fr. John asked that we at least *try* and obey God's command to love, especially as we know that we are loved by Him - unconditionally.





C. H. R. I. S. T. Christian Hope Rests In Solidarity Together

Cause for Canonisation: Marching in to Sainthood - *with our help*

MOTHER MARIE-ADÈLE GARNIER

1838 - 1924

“Holy Mass was the SUN of her life”



Mother Marie-Adèle Garnier, Foundress of the Adorers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Montmartre, established her contemplative congregation in 1898 in Montmartre, Paris.

However, three years later she and her fledgling community had to flee France because of its laws against religious Orders. The new location for this monastic order (conformers to the Rule of Saint Benedict) was to be Tyburn in London, the famous site where more than 100 Catholic martyrs lost their lives.

From a very young age, Marie-Adèle was drawn to the Eucharistic Christ, a deep union made possible through the celebration of Holy Mass. This devotion led her to establish the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

Although Marie-Adèle died in 1924, her Congregation were unable to start the costly process of her Cause for Canonisation due to lack of funds. However, on recent evidence of the growing numbers (worldwide) of people not only turning to her seeking her powerful help, but also to give thanks for prayers answered through her intercession, her community felt now was the right time to press ahead with her canonisation journey.

Mother Marie-Adèle is known for helping with prayers involving “babies, families, property, financial matters, priests and spiritual needs.”

Contact details for further information, to send prayer requests or make a donation:

Tel: 020 7723 7262

www.tyburnconvent.org.uk

Tyburn Convent, 8 Hyde Park Place, W2 2LJ

JOHN BRADBURN

1921 - 1979

Missionary and Poet



[The following biography downloaded from the *John Bradburne Memorial Society*, JBMS, website]

John Randal Bradburne was born at Skirwith, Cumbria in 1921, the son of an Anglican clergyman. After secondary school in Norfolk he joined the army in 1939, and served in Malaya and Burma, before being invalided home. Something in Malaya - a conversion experience, it is said - turned him from adventurer into pilgrim.

He became a Roman Catholic in 1947 when staying at Buckfast Abbey. After some months with the Carthusians, he felt the urge to travel, and for 16 years wandered between England, Italy and the Middle East, living out of a Gladstone bag. Then he wrote to his friend Father John Dove in Zimbabwe asking "Is there a cave in Africa where I can pray?" Soon after his arrival, in 1962, he confided to a Franciscan priest that he had three wishes: to serve leprosy patients, to die a martyr, and to be buried in the habit of St Francis.

From 1964 he was caretaker of a new centre near Harare. Then in 1969 he was appointed warden at Mutemwa Leprosy Settlement, in Zimbabwe. The single-minded loving care he gave the residents eventually brought him into conflict with the management committee. He ... was sacked.

During the Zimbabwean civil war ... [he] refused to leave the place for safety and was abducted and on Wednesday 5 September 1979, he was shot. His lasting legacy is that Mutemwa is now a place of pilgrimage, and there is a growing movement in support of his cause for sainthood.

Contact details:

JBMS website: www.johnbradburne.com

JBMS, PO Box 32, Leominster HR6 0YB

CHILDREN'S MASS

At the 10.00am Mass on Sundays, during school term time, the children are offered a Children's Liturgy. After the first hymn and welcome from Fr. John Diver, the children are invited forward and then proceed out of Mass by the catechists to the St. Lawrence's Community Centre ("SLCC"). Here they can learn about the Gospel stories in ways suited to their age and needs.

7-year-olds and younger

Large upper room in SLCC

(Parents are welcome to attend with pre-school children, if necessary, where they can participate in the Liturgy of the Word with their children.)

All the Catechists are CRB-checked.

Parishioners who would like to volunteer as a catechist are always welcome. Please contact Fr. John Diver.



ST. LAWRENCE'S ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH CHURCH DIRECTORY

Presbytery & Parish Office:

1 Hamilton Road, Sidcup, DA15 7HB

Tel: 020 8300 2480

e-mail: stlawrencesidcup@gmail.com

website: www.stlawrenceschurch.org.uk

Deacon: Rev. Peter Varnes

Parish Priest: Fr. John Diver

Secretary: Mrs. Bridget Edwards

SERVICES

Sunday Masses: 6.30pm (Sat Vigil), 8.30, 10.00 & 11.30am

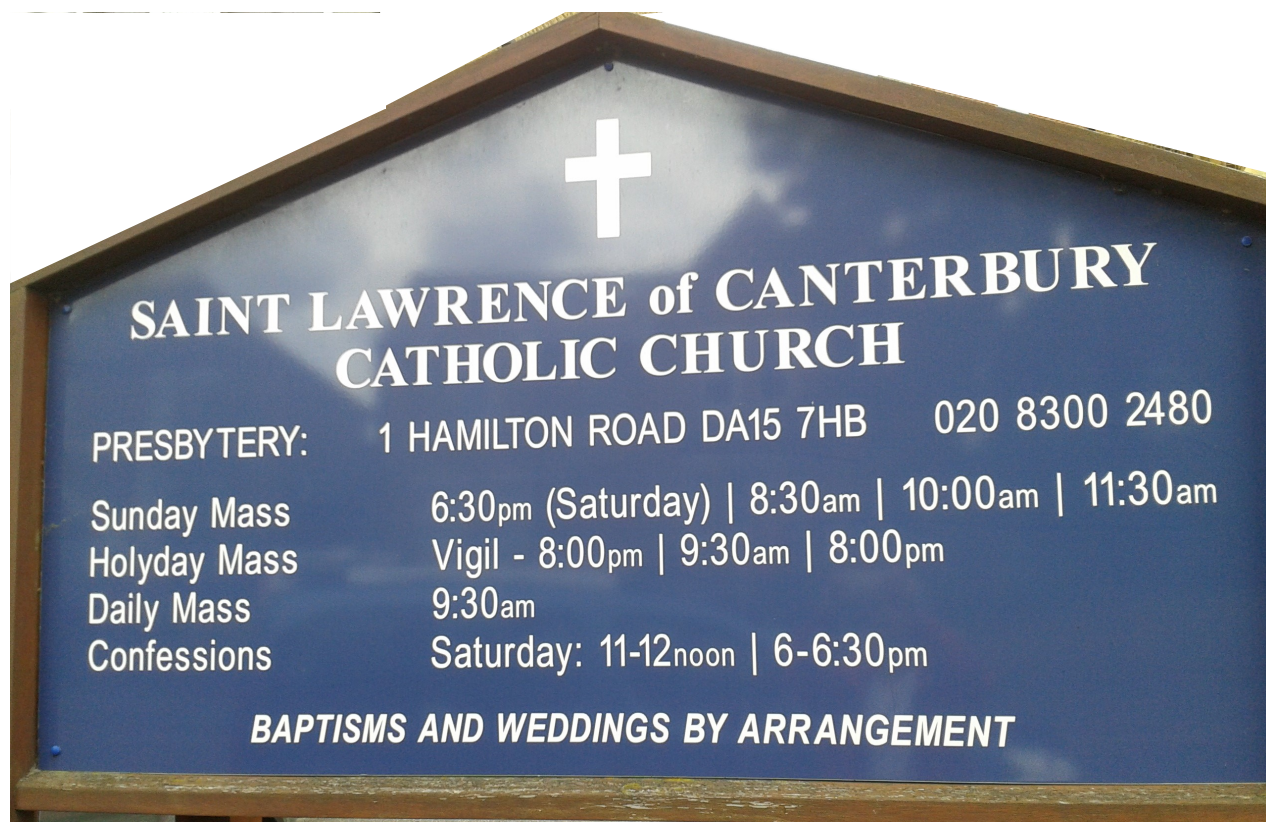
Weekday Masses: Mon-Sat 9.30am

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament: Wed 10.00am-12 noon & 5.00-7.00pm

Sacrament of Reconciliation: Sat after 9.30am Mass, 11.00am-12 noon,
6.00-6.30pm, and at call.

Benediction: 1st Friday of the month, following half-hour Adoration after 9.30am Mass

Rosary: Sat 9.00am



ST. LAWRENCE'S DIRECTORY

Parish Council Team

(Correspondence with Councillors via the suggestion box in the back of church)

Fr. John Diver

Rev. Peter Varnes, Deacon

Marie O'Grady-Hills

Kevin Dadswell

Doris Afreh

Fabiola Mestriner

Derek Ferris

Mike Crowhurst

MINISTRIES

Sacristan:

Marie Gurhy

Altar Servers:

Parish Team

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion: Peter Varnes

Home Visits for Holy Communion:

Gabrielle Grant

Welcomers:

Pam Dennis 8309 0439

Readers:

Jill Martin 8302 7263

Denise Baldwin 8300 4984

Choir & Instrumentalists:

Caron Tragheim 07505 617607

Flowers:

Anne Maxted 8300 1215

Parish Library:

Mary Townsend 8302 1155

The Repository (Missals, cards):

Open after 8.30am & 10.00am Masses (in the hall) on Sundays

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION CO-ORDINATORS

First Communion:

Confirmation:

Marriage Preparation:

Baptismal Programme:

Please contact the Parish Office for further details

020 8300 2480

Children's Liturgy (age 0 – 7): Wendy Boyle

QUEEN MARY'S HOSPITAL.

RC Chaplain

Fr. John Diver

Holy Communion Coordinator:

John Wilsdon

ST. LAWRENCE'S DIRECTORY (continued)**CHRISTIAN UNITY****Churches Together in
Sidcup (CTiS):**

Mr Mike Conway

8300 8911

SAFEGUARDING CO-ORDINATORS FOR THE PARISH**(for the protection of children & vulnerable adults)**

Mrs. Carolyn Briggs, Mrs. Kathy Rice, Ian Middleton

In emergency please ring: 07504 751239**ORGANISATIONS****100 Club:**

Colin Bradbury

**Deanery Developing World
Group:**

Susan Grace

Marist Way

Tom Baker

07719 338375

Mothers' Prayers:

Heike Varnes

Monday 4.30pm

8300 5074

Parish Magazine Editors:

Joan Coles

8309 5110

Sheila Pereira

8309 5913

St. Lawrence Charitable Fund: Nick Wells**St. Lawrence's Prayer Group**

Tony Regan

8300 6656

SCHOOLS & HEAD TEACHERS**St. Peter Chanel (Primary)**

Mrs. S. Gower, Head Teacher

8302 6029

CTK: St Mary's

(Christ the King College)

8309 4760

Shireen Razey, Associate Principal

YOUTH**Brownies (age 7-10):**

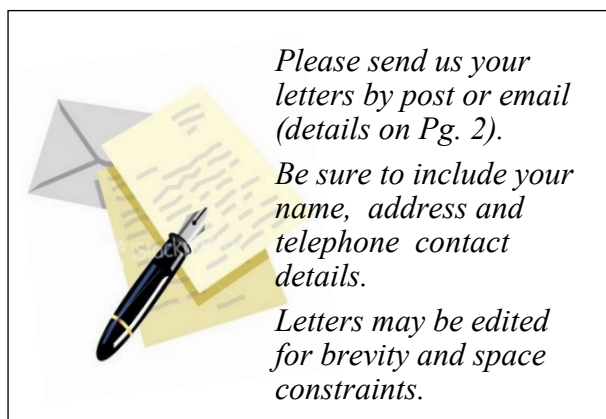
Rebecca Crisp

07833 501196

Guides (age 10-14):

Kate McGranghan

07891 559419



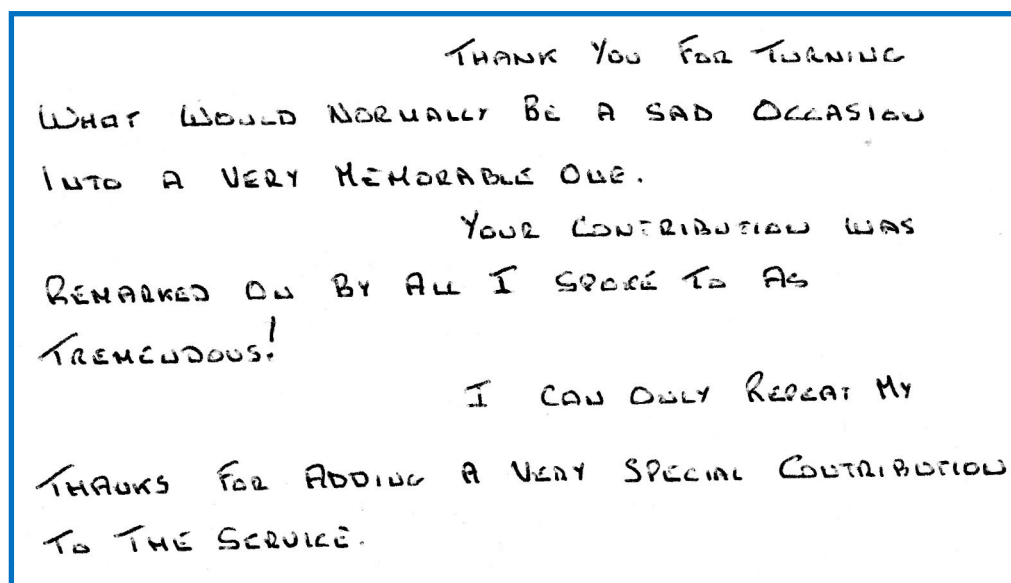
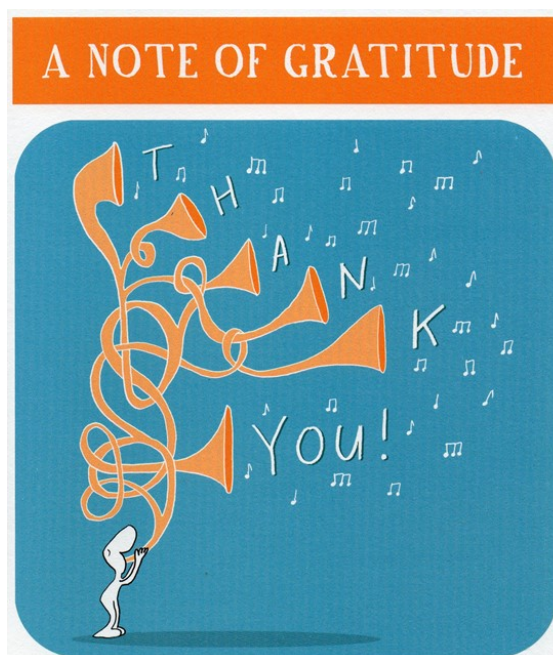
We are very pleased to publish, on behalf of the choir, the following tribute paid to them by the deceased's family for their singing ministry at a funeral service held at St. Lawrence's in March this year.

The card reads,

"Thank you for turning what would normally be a sad occasion into a very memorable one.

Your contribution was remarked on by all I spoke to as tremendous!

I can only repeat my thanks for adding a very special contribution to the service."



ENACTMENT OF THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Our very own 'Oberammergau' - the small town in Bavaria, Germany, noted for its long-standing tradition of performing the Passion Play - as St. Lawrence's similarly brought, if not the Passion Play, but the Stations of the Cross to life at 3pm on Palm Sunday, 25th March, the start to Holy Week.

No detail was overlooked: from the costumes, to the props and the music - a combination of live singing and recorded music - together with the prayers and reflections, both expertly narrated and delivered, Jesus' agony and suffering were poignantly recreated right before our very eyes. [A few highlights below.]

Olivia Paasche, the instigator and creative force behind the performance, is to be applauded for all her hard work and enthusiasm as, indeed, should all those who took part because, thanks to each one of them, they made possible an even deeper appreciation and understanding of our faith, especially during this most holiest of weeks.



Simon helps Jesus to carry the cross



How often am I made to do things I do not want to do? Maybe we have to cope with elderly parents, a special needs child, someone mentally ill. Do I try to hide behind someone else or maybe the social services? How generous am I with my time?



FIFTH STATION



TWELFTH STATION

Jesus is laid in the tomb



As I picture this scene, let me place the image of the empty tomb before my eyes. Whenever I stand at a grave and grieve, please let me remember this empty tomb and know that this is not the end.

← Jesus dies on the cross

It is from the Penitent Thief that we owe the beautiful words "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He recognised who Jesus was and was consoled knowing he was assured of salvation. Can I ask myself if I am in a position to bring consolation...? One small action from me could alleviate someone's suffering.



FOURTEENTH STATION



THE MARIST WAY

By Tom Baker

Someone recently asked me, “With the Marists gone, what’s the point of having a Marist Way group in the parish?” An observation that set me reflecting - not just on our current constitution and purpose, but also on how the group came to exist in Sidcup, which I now share.

From its formation (in France) in 1836, the Marist founders believed that their Society should be ‘a tree of many branches,’ incorporating fathers, brothers, sisters (including missionary sisters) and laity. However, although Marist priests had been at St. Lawrence’s since 1911, it was not until shortly after WW2 that a Third Order of Mary (as the lay branch was then known) established itself, and here, 70 years later, we remain, still seeking to keep alive the ideal of ‘thinking, judging, acting and feeling’ as Mary did.

‘a tree of many branches’

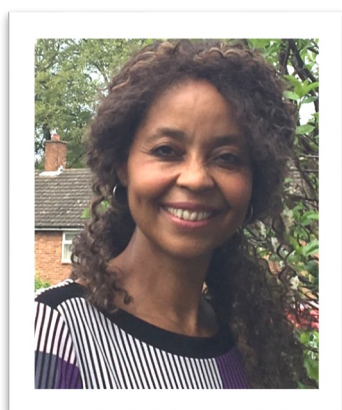
Although obviously missing the direct spiritual guidance of the clergy (who departed in 2012), we do our best to retain links with them by invitations to speak at our meetings, Days of Recollection, Council meetings, even by sending birthday cards. But, ultimately, it’s down to ourselves, and the Holy Spirit, to ensure Mary’s ‘way’ of quiet grace and humility is upheld in the parish.

Our guiding mantra: to be *hidden and unknown* in the world, is sometimes interpreted as “secretive and anonymous.” Inaccurately so, for, while not seeking to deliberately draw attention to ourselves, we’re quite open and real, and always happy to accept new members. Meetings are held monthly at 10am on the first Saturday of each month (except July, August and September) and newcomers are assured of a warm welcome – plus tea/coffee and biscuits!



‘Our guiding mantra: to be hidden and unknown in the world’

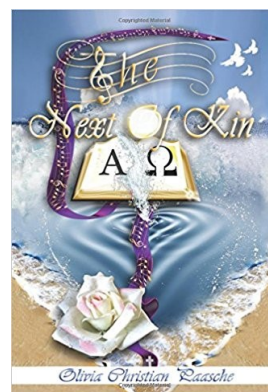




'THE NEXT OF KIN'

By

Olivia Christian Paasche



Olivia (and her family) are long-standing parishioners of St. Lawrence, and take a very keen and active interest in various church ministries.

This is Olivia's debut novel. She writes:

*My long-awaited novel is finally out! Based on many real-life events, it narrates the heart-rending experiences, trials and tribulations of Fr. Angelo, and - most of all - **the accidental discovery of the transcendent love of God and His Amazing Grace!***

The narrative swiftly moves the reader from deeply emotive events, thought-provoking and challenging life situations, hilarious episodes, to profound, soul-searching and many breath-holding moments. You are invited to make this compelling and unforgettable spiritual journey with Father Angelo, an Italian Franciscan missionary priest.

'The Next of Kin' is available to order on Amazon. Get your copy, and it would be great if you could give leave a review on Amazon as well!

Email: paascoliv@aol.com



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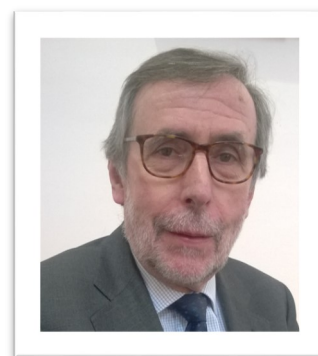
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MUSTARD SEED COMMUNITIES

CARING, SHARING, TRAINING

By **Peter Mitchell**



Msgr. Ramkissoo

Back in 1978, Monsignor Gregory Ramkissoo noticed that babies and children with disabilities were being abandoned on the streets of Kingston, Jamaica. With the help of a small donation from a local businessman, he formed the first Mustard Seed Community where some of these children could find shelter and be given food and education. Now 40 years later we care for over 400 children and adults in 13 homes in Jamaica, over 70 in Nicaragua, around 50 in the Dominican Republic, over 60 in three homes in Zimbabwe and, currently, 15 children in our newest home in Malawi.

CARING: We care for abandoned children with disabilities and HIV/AIDS in homes where we give them dignity and we work to enable them to reach their full potential, whatever that might be. Examples include **Brilliant** in Zimbabwe who has spinal cord paralysis and hydrocephalus. He attends our school and his goal is to be able to



Sheldon

write one day. He can't walk but gets around on a skateboard. In Nicaragua, **Jorge Miguel** is asthmatic and has cerebral palsy, epileptic and psychomotor delays. His goal is to be able to sit up without help. **Shel-**

don came to us in

Jamaica when he was five. He has spina bifida and had been abandoned. He is now 26 and is the IT manager in our headquarters in Kingston.



Brilliant

sy
to

When our children become adults we continue to help them as we want to ensure that nobody is ever abandoned twice. In Jamaica, we currently care for 90 adults in a rural area with a farm where residents can work. When this project is completed we will house around 400 adults here.

SHARING: All our homes are in very poor communities, often lacking basic human needs such as food and primary education. We help to improve social and economic conditions around our homes by providing nutrition programmes, pre-schools, primary schools, food packages, medical assistance, clothing, beds etc. In Zimbabwe, we provide meals for over 500 children every day around Bulawayo.

TRAINING: We believe in helping the poor to help themselves. Our care workers and other staff are recruited from local communities and receive training through our special programmes. At our home for abandoned pregnant teenagers, girls are given childcare classes as well as vocational training to enable them to obtain work and care for their child after they

have left us. In Nicaragua, we provide a resource centre where women from a community living on a huge rubbish tip are given basic education in language and mathematics as well as specialised training in sewing or baking. When they graduate from our programme, we provide seed funding for them to set up their own businesses.

We run several businesses that provide work for our residents and for other members of the surrounding communities. These include a pottery, card shop, brick-making, bakery, farms, biomass power. Through apprenticeship schemes and on-the-job training we empower local people who would otherwise have no prospect of employment. We also run a community radio station.



Pottery, Jamaica



Bakery, Zimbabwe

Each of our homes has projects of varying sizes to provide food (and work) for our residents, reducing the amount of food that we need to buy. Any surplus is sold to the local community or sometimes to hotels to provide us with additional income. Our biggest farms are in Jamaica, where we rear fish, chickens, sheep, pigs and rabbits. We farm 10 acres of land with tomatoes, peppers, sweet potato, cabbage, sorrel, Irish potato, also breadfruit and other fruit-bearing trees. In Zimbabwe, we produce 60 loaves of bread and 100 eggs daily as well as various types of vegetables.

SPIRITUALITY: Every home has a chapel for Mass and community worship where you will often find many people from the surrounding communities, as well as our staff and residents. Each home also has an Adoration Room where staff and residents can spend time quietly with Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. We are in the process of building a Formation Centre in Jamaica where future priests, deacons and sisters will train to serve Mustard Seed Communities around the world.



Mustard Seed Communities UK is a registered charity that sends all donations received directly to Mustard Seed homes around the world. If you would like to help in any way, please contact Peter Mitchell on:

T: 01322 556955

M: 07770 931477, or

E-mail: peter.mitchell@mustardseed.com.



ADOPTION: GIVING CHILDREN A SECOND CHANCE

By Dr. Mary Mather



“Until it happened to me I would not have believed it was possible. But the moment I saw him, I experienced an overwhelming love. This tiny unknown baby, who to others must have looked like any other baby, was now my son forever. “

Adoption is the life-changing placement of a child, who is unable to live with his or her birth parents, in a new family who will love them and bring them up as their own. When most of us think of adoption, we imagine the popular picture of a childless, married couple adopting a baby. This form of adoption however has only existed for 50 years between the 1920s -1970s and then only in a limited number of Western countries. The story of adoption is more complicated and fascinating than this simplistic view. Adoption in Britain today is very different from what most of us imagine and there is a desperate shortage of adopters.

Adoption is a global phenomenon and one which is as old as humanity itself. Adoptions taking place before the 20th century were conducted in a very secretive manner. The stigma against unmarried mothers and their children was enough of a social threat that birth mothers would chose to place their children with other family members, friends or neighbours, rather than bring them up themselves. Other reasons included poverty, illness and family crises. There was no involvement of agencies, courts or lawyers. Only in extreme cases where there was no one else to care for the child, would the child be placed in an orphanage.

However, not all adoptions were beneficial to the child. While there were adoptive parents who genuinely cared for and loved their adopted children, there were also adoptive parents who took in children simply for labour and profit. The added disadvantage of informal adoptions made it possible for a child to grow up and never know they were adopted, or for their birth families to find them.



Orphanage Care

Informal adoptions like this were however not a barrier to success in life. Famous adoptees include Augustus Caesar, Truman Capote, Eric Clapton, President Bill Clinton, Nat King Cole, Bo Diddley, President Gerald Ford, Jamie Foxx, Steve Jobs, Eartha Kitt, John Lennon, Nelson Mandela, Marilyn Monroe and Edgar Allen Poe.

In Britain, informal adoption ended after the First World War. Disease and war, the so-called "Devils Alliance" always leave large numbers of children with no-one to care for them. In Britain in 1918, 1 million men had died, 2 million men were wounded, and an estimated 100,000 were missing. The Great War was then followed by a global flu pandemic when a further 228,000 Britons, weakened by four years of deprivation, died. A lot of children needed permanent substitute homes and an informal system of adoption or orphanage care was no longer adequate. Similarly, intercountry adoption first began after World War II, because of the substantial numbers of children fathered by soldiers abroad and then abandoned by their mothers. Even today, local civil wars and HIV infection are filling African orphanages with abandoned children.



Adoption in the 1950s

In 1926, the first British Adoption law was passed. For the first time, a court decided whether adopting parents were suitable. Adopters also were given the total legal security that no-one could ever remove their child. Adoption however was still seen as a service for babies and very young children. Secrecy was essential: courts took great care that birth families and children could not trace each other, and many children were simply never told. Siblings, disabled children, older children and children from ethnic minority backgrounds were all thought to be unadoptable. The legislation proved to be very popular. In 1930, there were 5,000 legal adoptions

per year. In 1968, over 28,000 children were legally adopted, the highest number on record. From this point, the number of adoptions fell dramatically as welfare and society support for single mothers improved. After only 50 years, the era of secretive baby adoptions was over.

As the years have progressed, so have the laws and views surrounding adoption. Currently, there are only about 4,000 adoptions per year and over 6,000 children are waiting for an adoptive family. Many of these children are of school age and over 50% of them are brothers and sisters who need to be placed together. These children come from a wide variety of different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Among those needing to be adopted are disabled children and some whose future development remains uncertain. Some children will have experienced abuse or been neglected. All of them will have experienced moving families and uncertainty, which may mean that their behaviour can be challenging.

So, who can adopt? You must be over the age of 21 and have been living in Britain for at least 12 months. There is no upper age limit to adoption. You can adopt if you are single, married, an unmarried couple, divorced or living in a civil partnership. Having a disability is not a barrier to adoption, nor is your ethnic or religious background. You can adopt even if you already have birth children. You do not have to own your own home. Being on a low income or benefits should not stop people adopting and they may be eligible for additional financial support.

There is no upper age limit to adoption

[Continued on Page 32]



[Continued from Page 31]

Adopters must be prepared to make space in their lives for a child. Patience, flexibility, energy and determination are essential. They must be prepared to undergo a rigorous assessment process lasting many months. They must realise the importance of the birth family in the child's life. Adopted children are now told the truth about their birth parents, their brothers and sisters. They have access to their records and their family health and genetic ancestry. Older children may remain in contact with their birth parents, all should be in regular contact with siblings who might be living in other families. Numerous studies have shown that adopted children, who grow up without mystery and secrecy, come to appreciate not only the love their adoptive family has offered but are also less likely to resent the decision their birth parents made.

Adopters are very special people, and more will always be desperately needed. The poet Maya Angelou, an adoptee herself, beautifully summed up the real second chance offered by adoption when she wrote, **"Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences and penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope."**



USEFUL LINKS AND MORE INFORMATION

- **Adoption UK** (www.adoptionuk.org): a national charity supporting adoptive families throughout the UK.
- **CoramBAAF Adoption and Fostering Academy** (corambaaf.org.uk): run free adoption information events across London and have an extensive, reasonably priced publications list.
- **First4Adoption** (first4adoption.org.uk): a website with lots of helpful information and advice, including an interactive step-by-step guide all about the adoption process.
- **Adoption | London Borough of Bexley** (www.bexley.gov.uk/services/children-and-families/childrens-social.../adoption). Locally, Bexley urgently needs adopters and foster carers for babies, older children and sibling groups from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

Dr. Mary Mather is a retired consultant paediatrician. She has 25 years' experience in providing medical support to adoptive and foster families. She has been the medical adviser to three local authority adoption panels, a voluntary adoption agency and an intercountry adoption panel. She is the author of "Doctors for Children in Public Care" and the co-author of "Parenting a Child with an Invisible Disability". She is married to a retired consultant in palliative medicine, and has five children.





You may have seen the film **Mary Magdalene**, which came out in March. Rejecting the false idea that she was some kind of "woman of ill-repute", it presents her as a strong person who knows her own mind and becomes a follower of Jesus, going around with Him and the 12 disciples. Only a few events from Jesus' ministry are shown, at which she is seen to be present, including at the Last Supper (not mentioned in the Gospels).

'the Vatican has given her the title "Apostle to the Apostles"'

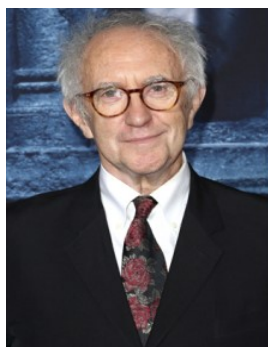
The film ends with her bringing the news of the Resurrection to the disciples, with an on-screen caption informing us that the Vatican has given her the title "Apostle to the Apostles". Well acted and with some great scenery, though the film is rather low-key and subdued.



The other biblical film I mentioned in the last issue, **Paul, Apostle of Christ**, was planned for cinema release at Easter, but this was changed. It is going straight to DVD.



A Netflix film called **The Pope**, starring Jonathan Pryce (as Pope Francis) and Anthony Hopkins, depicting the reign of Pope Benedict XVI culminating in his resignation, is being made at the time of writing and will be released in due course.



Jonathan Pryce



Pope Francis



Anthony Hopkins



Pope Benedict



CONSCIENCE AND LIFE

St. Patrick's Catholic church in Soho Square was the reason for me attending a healthcare conference in early March at which I met the individual who facilitated contact with the author of the article on the following page. Confused? You won't be if you read on!

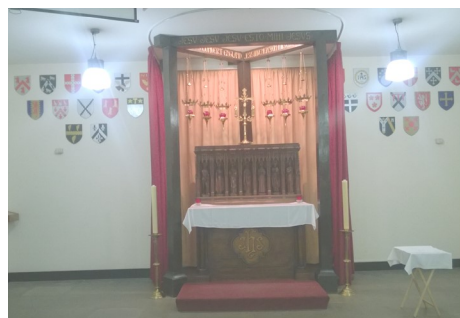
I couldn't help but be drawn into the warm glow of St. Patrick's (right) and to have the opportunity for silent meditation before the Blessed Sacrament seemed like providence to me, especially as I was seeking the Lord's grace for an important meeting that was to follow.



I imbibed the serene calm of that beautiful church and was making my way to the meeting when I happened upon a table in the vestibule holding various flyers and information leaflets. The "**Catholics in Healthcare: Men and Women of Conscience**" flyer caught my attention: a 'one-day conference for juniors and students of the healthcare professions, and young pro-life Catholics'. Not being in any way connected with the healthcare/medical profession, I decided to attend as an *observer* and I'm glad I did!



The venue for the conference was Tyburn Convent, Hyde Park Place - the National Shrine of the Martyrs of England and Wales. Before the actual start of the conference this was preceded by Mass, held in the crypt and said - or, more accurately, *sung* - in the



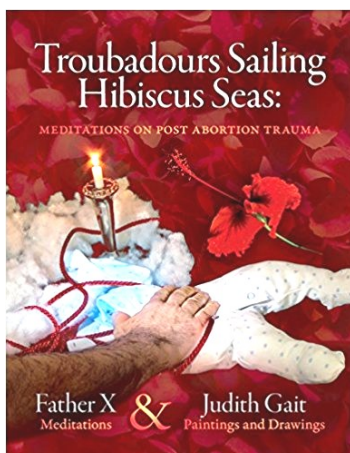
Traditional Latin Rite. With his back to us, Fr. Lanzetta of the Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, conducted the beautiful service and in-keeping with tradition, at Holy Communion, for example, we were asked to kneel (where possible) at the communion rail and receive the Sacred Host on the tongue.

Mass said at Martyrs' Altar, set within small replica of Tyburn Tree

In the grounds of the convent lies the tomb of Mother Marie-Adèle Garnier, Foundress of the Adorers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Montmartre (Order of Saint Benedict), a holy and devout woman for whom a Cause for Canonisation is currently underway [see Page 17]. There was a regular stream of people coming to pray at her tomb and to seek her intercession.

Against the backdrop of this holy place - one that speaks of abiding love, sacrifice and mercy - the conference was a forum for sharing expertise, debating ethics and seeking clarification on less-than-straightforward issues, especially abortion. I gained an even greater respect for all healthcare professionals when I saw what a difficult tightrope they walk between managing the (secular) demands of their profession and exercising the truth of their faith.

During a break in the conference, I had the pleasure of meeting Judith Gait, an artist and staunch pro-lifer. A book called '*Troubadours Sailing Hibiscus Seas*'* was the result of a collaboration between her and an anonymous 'Father X' (not a priest but a would-be father had abortion not denied him that honour), where Father X is the narrator and Judith, the illustrator. Judith was the intermediary who made it possible for Father X to share his abortion story with us (next page), a story by an oft-neglected minority: the fathers. We are moved by his experience, share in his sorrow and grateful to both for acknowledging life...



‘FATHER’S DAY’ (*that might have been*)

By **Father X**

I believe in God in spite of what happened to my unborn child.

I was brought up in the Catholic faith, it was a lone star; I knew the difference between right and wrong. The love of God blessed my relationship with the conception of a child, little baby X. My faith was inescapable - it taught me to respect unborn life. My ex-partner didn't have a religious outlook on life, so it was perhaps easier for her to choose a termination. To me, an abortion, especially when the child is conceived in love, goes against the grain of life. It goes against all the teaching I received in attending Catholic schools and from living in a Catholic home.

My grandmother was a staunch Catholic and lived in Bootle - a town flattened during the Blitz. She told me the churches were always full. When the bombs began to fall, people would gather in the air raid shelters. Many prayed the rosary and sang hymns together, and even strangers seemed close. Many died under the rubble from the explosions. My grandmother was bombed out twice and listed as ‘missing, presumed dead’, but she survived. Her generation had faith; it sustained them in times of hardship and war. The faith of our fathers is in our genes and it comes out especially in times of crisis.

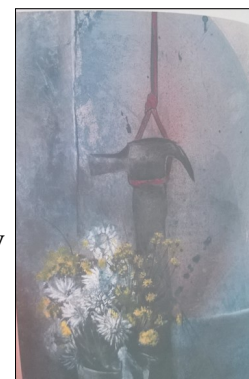
In my personal family crisis of life and death, I found myself turning to the Church for answers and consolation. Shortly after the termination of my baby, I called at the home of my parish priest. He assured me the baby was innocent and no blame would be attached to the unborn child, who would go straight to the bosom of Jesus. Afterwards, I travelled to Our Lady of Glastonbury church and attended confession for the first time in many years, and received absolution. Deep down I needed my faith and turned to it despite all appearances to the contrary.

If I wasn't such a lapsed Catholic at the time of the pregnancy, maybe I would have fought harder to persuade my then girlfriend not to have the abortion. For a few days I was critically swayed by the ideas of liberalism: that it was about her choice and I should support her decision. In doing so, I sacrificed my own Christian/family values I was brought up with. These values finally did return and I desperately voiced my opposition but, sadly, it was too late.

I recall in the late 1980s a high profile pro-life case involving two Oxford University undergraduates, which ended up in the High Court. The father was attempting to stop the mother from aborting their child. He lost the court case but won the argument as the mother went through with the pregnancy and gave birth to a baby girl, which she immediately gave up to the father to raise. Drawing strength from this example of courage, I would say *never give up and never stop fighting for life*, and for what you discern as morally right in the eyes of the Catholic Church and also, it must be said, in other religions too.

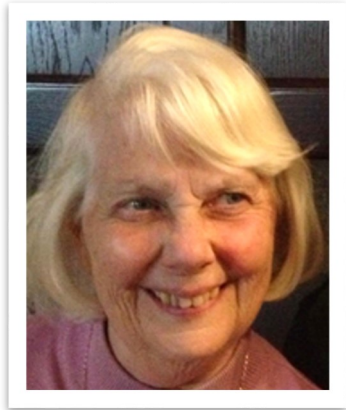
‘abortion...harms the mother, is fatal for the unborn child and leaves the man in a hidden limbo of fatherless longing’

I've since spoken to many representatives of different faith groups and they've all been unanimous in saying that abortion is wrong. According to these teachings, abortion is an unskilful action which harms the mother, is fatal for the unborn child and leaves the man in a hidden limbo of fatherless longing.



‘Hammer of Decision’ (image from the book)





MEDJUGORJE AND ME

By Mary Seery*

*EDITORS' NOTE: Sadly, Mary died in September 2017, and her thoughts as captured in this article were very kindly shared with us and suggested for publication in the magazine by her husband, Peter. We thank both for their generosity of spirit in inviting us to participate in this "pilgrimage" with them.

In 1981, I was introduced to the Medjugorje story by friends who thought I would find the available literature very interesting. How right they were! I have followed the course of events from the beginning until now - nine and a half years later.

From the beginning, I believed that the apparitions were taking place and gradually over the years I have tried to put into practice the Medjugorje messages. Despite the fact that I 'believed', I began to long to make a pilgrimage and in fact I felt I was being "summoned" to do so. A call I couldn't ignore and yet I could see no possibility of obeying. I left it all to God and Mary. I knew if I was to travel to Medjugorje a way would be found. I waited for almost nine years before I would finally visit this little village.

The obstacles that stood in the way were:

1. I had a fear of flying. Or, to put it another way, I didn't trust God. I lacked faith.
2. Family commitments.
3. I didn't want to travel without Peter.
4. I couldn't afford the fare.

After returning from a trip to Lourdes, I asked Peter if he would come with me next time. His reply was simple and brief: "No!" But he did add, "*If ever you want to go to Medjugorje I'll come with you.*" The family by this time had finished school and were working, so family commitments were not so pressing. Even so, two big obstacles still had to be overcome. Obviously, the time wasn't right and we would have to be patient a little longer.

Around Easter 1989, I prayed to Jesus and His Blessed Mother for it to be possible for us to make our pilgrimage and asked them to overcome all the problems. I knew then that someday I would be going, and with Peter. I just left it all at their feet to sort out. I didn't have to wait very long! Late in the summer we were unexpectedly given some money and asked, "When you get to Medjugorje, please pray for us." And so began the preparations for Easter 1990.

I still had my fear of flying. I had to learn to trust implicitly and, I might add, that it wasn't until the return home did I eventually come to completely trust God. I didn't only fear flying; I didn't want to fly in the dark, in bad weather, change planes - these were nightmares to me. Guess what? On our way out the plane was delayed for five hours, we had to travel in the dark, it poured with rain and we *did* change planes! I did survive but

there was no trust - yet!

So, why did I go? I believed and I feared. It would have been much easier to stay at home and read! But I had to obey. I was being summoned. I couldn't refuse. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know why I was being called, but I knew that many graces and blessings would be poured upon Peter, myself and our family.

I did ask for two things. 1989/90 was the year set aside for marriage and youth. Through the years our marriage relationship had become distant; we had grown apart; we lost respect for each other - took each other for granted. I wanted that situation to be healed so that we could begin to know God and each other, that through a relationship with Jesus our own relationship would grow. The family, too, needed help and prayer. They needed to find God also.

From the first day in the village I realised there was something very special here. How wonderful to see a church not big enough to contain its congregation - every day - all day! To have around 100 priests concelebrate Mass every day. Our Masses were very moving and prayerful and the homilies were inspired by the Holy Spirit. We never did manage to get a seat - it was standing room only, and for many of the services it was standing *outside*! Imagine going to Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at 11.30 in the evening and only just being able to enter the church. It was quite incredible.



We met with the visionaries who were very humble and holy. Not seeking publicity but not shunning it either, because the only way to spread the "Good News" is to share it. The visionaries are just ordinary people like you and me, except that they have been chosen to do the Lord's work in a very special way. They have been very blessed and remain unspoilt by the throngs of people surrounding them.



Vicka (one of the visionaries)

Each has a story to tell but it is the same story. A bit like the gospels, their story is told in a different way but the facts remain the same. Having followed the situation from the beginning, I found the visionaries neither added nor took away anything at all - they did not exaggerate, they were honest, very prayerful and full of love and peace. From Vicka, in particular, joy exudes. She cannot contain her happiness despite suffering frequent illness. Their eyes tell it all. That they have gazed on the beautiful Madonna, I do not doubt.

We climbed the Hill of Apparitions, Podbrodo, where Mary first appeared. Not a difficult climb. But despite the hundreds of people on the hill, at the top the air of peace and tranquillity pervaded. It was wonderful to just find a rock and sit and pray quietly. To gaze on the beauty of God's creation, for it is a very beautiful country. To experience His presence when we prayed is very hard to describe - it was so peaceful and happy.

We travelled to a village called Tihaljina, some 20 miles away where Fr. Jozo is now Parish Priest. Fr. Jozo was the parish priest in Medjugorje when the apparitions first began.

[Continued overleaf]

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He is a very holy man - a man of prayer, humility and peace. I sensed something very special about him - once again, his eyes told it all. He creates a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere in and around his church. It is a very blessed place. At the time of pilgrimage I did not know that he too had seen Our Lady.

We listened to him talking (through an interpreter) and attended his Mass one morning. I can still hear his voice quietly urging and encouraging prayer, and conversion. There was an urgency in his voice: turn to God now before it's too late. Fr. Jozo has been imprisoned and tortured but he never speaks of his sufferings.

In the beginning he did not believe the children and he publicly confesses this. At one stage his Bishop ordered him to but he could not. His heart had to be touched by the Spirit before he could accept what was happening. And when he did believe, the Bishop had changed his mind and condemned Fr. Jozo and the children! Fr. Jozo not only suffered persecution at the hands of the Government but also his bishop. His witness is very moving but he never complains or speaks adversely against anyone.

We were very blessed to be able to spend a short time in prayer in Fr. Jozo's Chapel of Adoration. What peace! To be able to spend a few moments in Jesus' presence, talking and listening to Him. It was a very personal encounter.



Cross on Mt. Krizevac

The day before we left, we climbed Mount Krizevac. A tough climb over rocks and about 1500 metres up. Another fear - I didn't like heights. I was afraid. And so began the penultimate step in trust. All the way up, which took about three hours (because we rested at each Station of the Cross), I was saying "Jesus, I trust in you." I even enjoyed the climb and the view was just magnificent. There was no fear and no giddiness. Just before the top, we met some priests coming down. They were laughing and said, "They don't tell you before you start that they've added another three Stations." It was true - there were three more! When I reached the top, I could have danced with joy. I just thanked the Lord for helping me overcome my fear, and I praise Him for the trust and faith I was able to have. It only took one hour to get down and I could have run all the way! Praise the Lord.

During the week spent in Medjugorje I became aware of being asked to make a really firm commitment to God. To give my life totally to Him, to put Him first above everything else: above Peter, family, TV, radio - everything! God first. It's not easy but the reward is great. God never lets me down, He's always faithful, always by my side to guide and lead me. I am now beginning to say "My Jesus, I love you, my love, above all things", and really mean it. My life is in His hands totally. But there are many times when I fail and slip back into old ways. When this happens, though, I am aware of it and can do something about it. He is always there to welcome me back.

And of our marriage? Well, things are changing gradually. We have repented to each other; we try to respect each other; communicate more; try not to take each other for



granted. We do things together rather than go our separate ways. On my part, there have been jealousies and resentments but these have been forgiven and forgotten. We're both trying to put Jesus first and then each other. We have begun to pray together. But again, it's not easy - it's very hard, but a transformation is taking place. We do fail and we know that Satan is trying to pull us apart, away from God and each other. But he can't win because we have God on our side.

And the family? Well, there are times when it seems as if nothing is changing but there are moments when we can see the hand of God blessing and protecting them all. And again, we know that in time they will all have a loving relationship and knowledge of Jesus.

The story is almost complete. Remember, I did not quite have total trust - there was still the flight home to overcome!

We were delayed for a whole day and spent 12 hours at Mostar Airport. We had no means of communication and only our fellow pilgrims for company. After the realisation that we wouldn't be going anywhere, we settled down to prayer, discussion and getting to know each other more, sharing our feelings and impressions. In all that time no-one lost their temper or became angry - we just waited patiently for news of our eventual departure. The airport staff commented upon this and said they had never known anyone to be so calm, and they thanked us for it.

We were flown to Belgrade that evening and spent the night in a hotel; the following afternoon we were flown to Vienna and then on to Heathrow - three flights! But what I discovered was that my fear had gone. We flew at night and, at one point, we took off during the beginning of a thunderstorm. But I didn't worry. I relaxed and found the flights fascinating. It was wonderful to be free of that fear.

Since our return, I have been asked about the phenomena - the sun spinning, rosaries turning to gold etc. There are strange happenings, people do experience "signs and wonders". That fact cannot be denied. But I didn't get to see these things particularly. However, we did see the sun spin. I did look at the sun and I didn't go blind. The sun seemed to race towards me and then stop, almost as if I could reach out and touch it. It was beautiful and brilliant. I don't know why I experienced this phenomenon but feel it was a privilege God granted me, and that one day He will reveal His reasons to me.

Another lasting impression was confession. So many people queuing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It was overwhelming. All nations, day after day. So many blessings being constantly poured out on everyone.

It was a wonderful and lasting experience. Would I go again? I have no definite plans to, but I know that I would return if it is God's will. And if I'm called I will obey.

There is a perfect plan for all of God's people as they journey on the pilgrimage of faith. God does not always give understanding of His plan, but He does require faith and trust since the fulfilment of His plan requires our co-operation. If our hearts are surrendered to God as Mary's was, then He can do great things in our lives too.



**Our Lady
of Medjugorje**

***'If our hearts are
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