



# THE VINEYARD

PARISH MAGAZINE OF ST. VINCENT'S RC CHURCH, ALTRINCHAM ISSUE 54 CHRISTMAS 2023

## OUR FATHERS

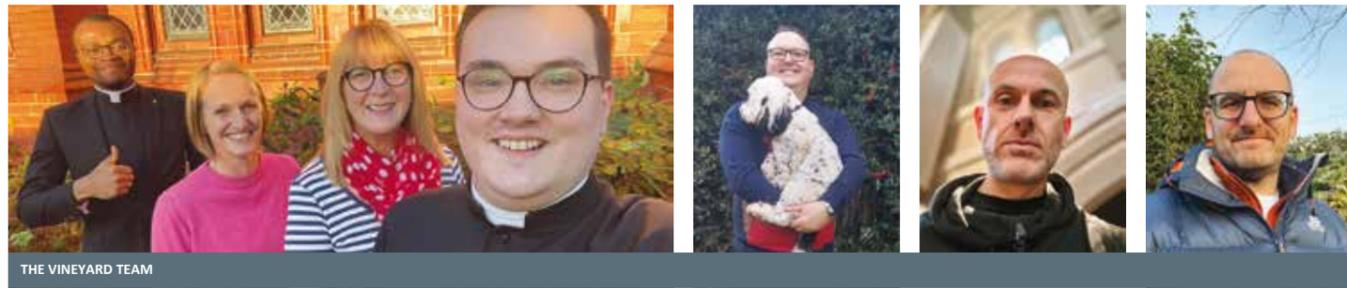
SPOTLIGHT ON THE CLERGY

## SEEKING SAFETY

FLEEING FROM WAR

## PARISH IN PICTURES

CELEBRATING OUR COMMUNITY



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The previous issue published in December 2019 had an introduction stating that 'certainty is something we prize and appreciate.' Who knew then that global uncertainty was on the horizon?

As the pandemic took hold our future was unclear. With social restrictions, sacraments were limited or cancelled, church doors were shut and Easter 2020 became the first time since 1208 that Catholics were unable to attend Mass. We adapted to the 'new normal' of social distancing, live-streamed a 'virtual Vinnies,' and anxiously returned to roped off pews and mask-wearing at Mass.

But amid the ever-changing guidance and endless unknowns, we had one immovable certainty: God's love. As those living alone felt increasingly isolated and loved ones were lost, we prayed for answers, for comfort and for our future. He is always there whoever we are, whatever we do and whenever we need Him.

Post-pandemic our parish - and our world - has changed. Not everyone has returned to church, but new faces have found a home. We hope The Vineyard provides a reminder of the warmth of our community. We are always here.

This issue includes interviews with our clergy, school news, a catch-up of sacramental celebrations, reflections on spiritual activities, plus tasters of our busy parish groups. At a time when we focus on Mary and Joseph's search for shelter, we also feature the powerful tale of one woman's pursuit of a safe refuge from war. We should also remember those caught up in the atrocities of war in Europe and the Holy Land and pray to our Prince of Peace.

Thank you to all our contributors. We are committed to involving as many parishioners as possible in our magazine. Please contact the Parish Office if you can contribute to the Easter edition.

We wish all our parishioners a very happy and holy Christmas and a 2024 filled with joy, hope and peace.

**The Editorial Team**

Note: Advertising in the magazine is accepted in good faith. No recommendation is implied.

**MASS TIMES**  
Saturday Vigil Mass: 5:30pm

**SUNDAYS:**  
8:30am, 10:00am, 11:30am and 6:30pm

Note: Children's Liturgy: 10:00am Mass on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month

**WEEKDAYS:**  
Monday - Saturday: 12:15pm, Friday: 7:00pm  
Tuesdays and Thursdays: 10:00am at Bowdon Vale

**SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION:**  
Fridays immediately following the 12:15pm Mass  
Saturday: 11:00am to midday and 4:30pm - 5:15pm

**EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION AND BENEDICTION**  
Monday - Saturday: 11:00am to midday  
Monday and Thursday: 6:00pm - 7:00pm

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# CHRISTMAS REFLECTION



I last wrote for The Vineyard four years ago. I noted then that one of the most important elements of our Christmas celebration is being together as a parish and with our family and friends. Little did I know that life would be brutally interrupted by the COVID pandemic and we would be isolated. Thankfully, restrictions have lifted and we can again celebrate our Saviour's birth together.

As that crisis receded, new crises have come the fore once more: the crisis of the environment; threats to life at its most vulnerable stages; and of course, the war in Europe, the Holy Land and around the world. Amid much darkness we celebrate Christmas, a festival of light.

The Early Church chose the 25th December to celebrate Christ's birth because it was a well-established Roman feast date: a pagan celebration of the renewal of the light and coming of the new year - *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti* - the Birthday of the Unconquerable Sun. Our Christian brothers and sisters of the Early Church did not like to waste a good pagan feast if they could recast it with a Christian meaning! Jesus Christ is the true light who has come into the world. He is the unconquerable sun. At the darkest time of the year, and with much darkness in the world, we are invited to remember and celebrate the truth that in the Lord Jesus the darkness cannot overcome the light.

The story of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, a town important to the Jewish people as King David's city, but insignificant to the wider world as a small place in an obscure nation of the vast Roman Empire, reminds us that God did not come to us in awesome majesty but in the vulnerability of a small child. Yet that extraordinary child, the Word made flesh, is the hope of all the nations and our hope: a trustworthy hope because we are not saved by power but by Divine Love.

I wish you all a blessed Advent and a happy and holy Christmas.

**Father Jonathan**

## WHAT'S ON THIS CHRISTMAS

**ADVENT PRAYER SERVICES:**  
Themed services of prayer, readings and songs following 7:00pm Mass

- Friday 1st December - Hope
- Friday 8th December - Peace
- Friday 15th December - Joy
- Friday 22nd December - Love

**PARISH CAROL SERVICE:**  
• Sunday 17th December at 3:00pm followed by festive refreshments at Westleigh

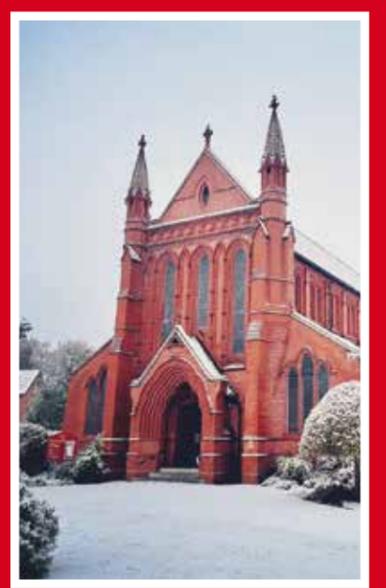
**SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION:**  
• Fridays immediately following the 12:15pm Mass  
• Saturdays: 11:00am - midday and 4:30pm - 5:15pm  
• Sunday 17th December following each Mass (8:30am, 10:00am, 11:30am and 6:30pm)

**SUNDAY 24TH DECEMBER:**  
• 4th Sunday of Advent Masses 8:30am 10:00am 11:30am

**Plus:**  
• 4:00pm Christmas Mass for elderly and vulnerable  
• 5:30pm Children's Mass  
• 7:30pm Mass  
• 11:30pm carols followed by Midnight Mass

**MONDAY 25TH DECEMBER:**  
• 8:30am,  
• 10:00am,  
• and 11:30am  
• Please note: no evening adoration or Masses

**TUESDAY 26th DECEMBER:**  
• 12:15pm



# OUR FATHERS



## FR. ROBERT GETS A ROASTING

- **Favourite sport to watch?** Football
- **Favourite team?** England
- **Favourite sport to play?** Is watching TV a sport!
- **Favourite meal of all time?** My mum's spaghetti Bolognese
- **Your 'signature dish' to cook?** Chicken and chorizo pie
- **Favourite drink?** Tea
- **Which four people (alive/dead) would you invite to a dinner party?** Benedict XVI, Joey Tribiani from Friends, Elizabeth II and Mother Theresa
- **Favourite TV programme?** Doctor Who
- **Xbox or PS?** PS
- **Song most listened to on your Spotify?** Sound of Silence, Simon and Garfunkel
- **Favourite band?** McFly
- **Musical talents?** I can sing but can't play any instruments
- **Favourite Christmas carol?** In the Bleak Midwinter
- **What are you hoping for this Christmas?** World peace... and a Netflix subscription!
- **Best gift you've ever received?** Socks!
- **Best gift you ever gave someone?** I'm making a special gift for my six month old nephew
- **Best cracker joke?** What was Frosty the Snowman doing in the vegetable patch? Picking his nose!
- **Any starring roles in the Nativity at school?** Joseph when I was six
- **Do you like Brussels sprouts?** They're my favourite vegetable
- **Hidden talent/party trick?** None, sadly
- **How many languages can you speak?** Two (English and French)
- **Favourite subject at school?** Food Tech: I love making and eating food. RE too!
- **Least favourite subject?** Geography. Why do I need to know about different types of rock?
- **All time hero (dead/alive)?** Jesus
- **Your dream superpower?** Teleportation. I don't like long distance travel. I'd love be in the Bahamas in an instant!
- **Most embarrassing moment?** Tripping on Maggie's dog toy and ending up in hospital!
- **Best thing about being a Priest?** Being with people and helping get them to heaven
- **If Jesus knocked at the door right now what would you say to him?** My Lord, My God
- **Do you undo/ do up your cassock buttons every day?** No I just fasten a few and step into it! When it returns from the dry cleaners all the buttons are undone so I have to start again.

Eddie Kilburn



As lockdown loomed, Fr. Robert joined St. Vincent's as Deacon. He immediately established social media channels and co-ordinated the live-streaming of Mass as the pandemic forced church doors to shut. Fr. Jonathan said: "Robert enabled parishioners - and visitors worldwide - to share in Mass online at St. Vincent's. It wouldn't have happened without him."

Reflecting on the past three years, Fr. Robert said: "It's been quite a ride! Being ordained and becoming an uncle are two major occasions. But I've been so blessed to share the milestones of peoples' lives - Baptism, Marriage, First Holy Communion, Confirmation and Ordination - and been privileged to anoint the sick and witness final moments."

But how did his journey to priesthood begin? He says: "I was 15, praying the Rosary and heard a clear voice say 'become a priest.' It was a powerful, exciting and confusing moment for a teenager who planned on heading to university. During the next few years I felt 'the call' again. Debating whether to submit my UCAS or Diocesan application, I prayed for an answer. The rest is history."

Via Ars in France, Shrewsbury, four years at St. Mary's College in Oscott, and as Deacon at Wallasey, he joined St. Vincent's in late February 2020 before being ordained in August. He says: "It was a stripped back service due to pandemic restrictions. I had to join the Bishop's 'bubble,' no public singing was allowed and guests were limited. It was 'raw' but that added to the power and emotion. But I am very blessed: I celebrated the biggest moment in my life when so many were struggling."

As lockdown limits eased, Fr. Robert became embedded in parish life. Asked to name the highlights since 2020, he says: "The friendships and warmth of parishioners. Being your priest is humbling, rewarding and fun! Thank you also for your patience: Homilies can be nerve-wracking!"

He describes being Chaplain at Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College and involvement in our Confirmation programme as "wonderful." He says: "I love young peoples' energy. Accompanying them on their faith journey is an honour."

For Fr. Robert, 2023 will always be special: he became an uncle to Teddy. He adds: "He's such a brave, smiling treasure. His arrival has expanded my heart and he brings such joy to our family. Thank you for the love and prayers during vital heart surgery when he was four months old: God's definitely watching over him."



## FR. GODLOVE GETS A GRILLING



"Immediately after my birth, the medical experts said my mother would die due to the postpartum complications. All medical help proved futile, and so my family prayed for a miracle. Against all odds my mum survived and I was named in thanks for God's love in her salvation."

Arguably his name foretold a path to priesthood, but Fr. Godlove, the newest member of our clergy, explained that his vocation was "a gradual process," inspired initially by the "happiness which radiated from my parents, local church and priest."

He said: "My parents went to daily Mass so I went too. I was the youngest in church and very excited when given the responsibility of ringing the bells at five-years-old. I loved being at Mass - a time of joy and calm - and the priest was always smiling. I wanted to be like him. I used to 'play mass' at home using a bed sheet as an alb, my tennis trophy as a chalice and my sisters, cousins and aunts as the congregation. Great practice for the future!"

A talented sportsman who played tennis and football competitively following in his dad's semi-professional footsteps, Fr. Godlove said he continually prayed and discerned whilst studying Bilingual Letters at the University of Buea. He adds: "I felt a calling to be a diocesan priest to help and serve the Church in the West, although this would involve a move away from my family in Cameroon at a time of civil unrest."

More than 6,000 have been killed by government forces and armed separatist fighters in the Anglophone Crisis raging in Cameroon since 2017. Born in Bambui, a village in the North West Region, Fr. Godlove has lost family and friends in the war. He says: "Anyone can get shot, caught in the crossfire, arrested, tortured or detained arbitrarily. I've witnessed gunshots and faced gunmen's questions. The Lord has kept me safe thus far!"

While living and training in Spain, he was in Barcelona during the terror attack in Las Ramblas which killed 14 and injured 100. Commenting on all those at war, Fr. Godlove adds: "We have to pray that God ignites the consciences of each person. Let us love one another whether we share the same beliefs or not and work together for a better world."

After completing his training at St. Mary's College, Oscott, he was ordained in July 2023 only days after the death of his beloved father, Prof. Athanasius F. Amungwa. He adds: "I know my father is always with me - probably laughing at my long homilies - and while it can be hard to be away from home, I'm thankful for the love of the St. Vincent's parishioners."



- **Favourite sport to watch?** Football and tennis
- **Favourite team?** Many, due to the places I've lived. Still deciding for UK
- **Favourite sport/s to play?** Football (teamwork and shared emotion) and tennis (reliance on yourself)
- **Favourite meal of all time?** Garri and eru, a Cameroonian dish
- **Your 'signature dish'?** I love making fufu, njama-njama and ka'ati ka'ati
- **Favourite drink?** Fruit juice
- **Which four people (alive/dead) would you invite to a dinner party?** My parents and siblings but that would be 9, so John Paul II, Djokovic, Hitler and the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- **Favourite TV programme?** Brooklyn 99
- **Xbox or PS?** PS. Favourite games? FIFA, Call of Duty, Match Point and Counter Strike
- **Favourite music?** I don't have Spotify but I enjoy classical music, Naija (Nigerian music) and Praise and Worship/Gospel
- **Musical talents?** I can sing, play the keyboard and adapted my skills when the seminary needed an organist. I also play the Rattle and Calabash - instruments from Cameroon.
- **Favourite Christmas carol?** O Holy Night and Mary's Boy Child
- **What are you hoping for this Christmas?** PS5 and sports equipment!
- **Best gift you've ever received?** Gift of life
- **Best gift you ever gave someone?** The Eucharist
- **Best cracker joke?** My Grandad's final words were 'Are you still holding the ladder?' (not from a cracker)
- **Any starring roles in the Nativity at school?** I've been Joseph and one of the Wise Men
- **Do you like Brussels sprouts?** Yes
- **Hidden talent/party trick?** I can do the splits!
- **How many languages can you speak?** 11. Currently learning German, Arabic and sign-language.
- **Favourite subject at school?** History and languages. RE too.
- **Least favourite?** Maths
- **All time hero (dead/alive)?** Jesus
- **Your dream superpower?** Invisibility
- **Most embarrassing moment?** My car accident
- **Best thing about being a Priest?** Saying Mass, hearing Confessions and meeting lots of amazing people
- **If Jesus knocked at the door right now what would you say to him?** Come on in. Take me with you.

Please note: the clergy were quizzed separately in the quick-fire questions!

Eddie Kilburn

# A REFLECTION IN AFFECTION

As Fr. Keith Butterworth steps back from 'regular duties,' we asked him to reflect on his time at St. Vincent's...

1995 was a turning point for Ann and me. We left the Church of England with sad farewells to many. There was also sensitive, generous ministry from Christopher Mayfield, the then Bishop of Manchester. Only one long-term friend said it was the end of our friendship, but by and large we left surrounded by kindness and understanding.

Fr. Russell Cooke introduced us to Bishop Joseph Gray who directed us to St Vincent's where we were warmly welcomed by Fr. Peter Morgan and the congregation of the time - many of whom are still knocking about although a 'bit' older like us. A string of curates appeared and disappeared and a retired priest, Fr. Michael Wagstaffe, is memorable for telling us all in a Homily before Fathers' Day to go and buy our dad a packet of fags!

Three years later I was ordained priest for the Diocese of Shrewsbury by Bishop Brian Noble. Lying prostrate before the altar is just one of many emotive memories of that evening.

Again there was a huge welcome to this by the people of St. Vincent's. A good while afterwards some people said that they were a bit unnerved by the appearance at the altar of a man wearing a wedding ring. But they fairly soon got over it, realising that he was a normal human being, if not a normal Catholic priest.



Time flies. Fr. Peter Morgan, Fr. Stephen Coonan and Fr. John Rafferty came and went. Each time there is a sad farewell to a faithful loving priest but also a new regime to get used to and appreciate the fresh gifts and insights brought for us.

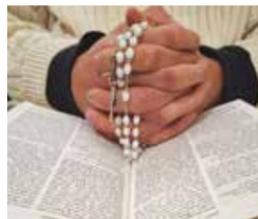
The future is God's and it's His Church. All will be well for you, me and that Church. It's good to be retired and be empowered to say 'no' and it's good to have years full of memories. Being old is good - apart from the aches and pains - but there are plenty of people in the same condition with whom to have long medical conversations and the occasional rant!

As someone somewhere in Dickens says "God bless us all, everyone". No prizes for knowing who. God bless and thank you all every one.

Father Keith



# LET US PRAY



Parishioners of all ages are encouraged to embrace a week of guided prayer in February 2024 to learn new ways of connecting with God and developing their friendship with Jesus.

Describing the forthcoming experience as "enormously uplifting," Fr. Jonathan said: "We are keen to offer all parishioners the opportunity to participate in a prayerful retreat. Rather than a week-long timetable of commitments, the format of in person or online guided prayer will enable more people with busy working lives to share in this rewarding experience."

The retreat begins on Sunday 18th February at 4:30pm with a meeting of parishioners and prayer guides - a mixture of priests and religious lay men and women - and ends on Friday 23rd February at 7:30pm.

Participants are asked to commit to 30 minutes of prayer each day and meet their guides - in person or online - for 30 minutes. All prayer guides are trained in the Christian spirituality of Saint Ignatius of Loyola who committed himself to God when discovering that God can be found in all things. Through different spiritual exercises he deepened his relationship with Jesus.

Fr. Jonathan added: "In one-to-one meetings with guides you may talk about your prayer time and how it fits into your life. The guides will listen, offer ideas for prayer, ways of praying and explore how God is at work in your life. Everyone's journey will be unique, just as everyone's relationship with God is unique. The guides are there to help so please don't worry. I'd recommend this experience to anyone who's new to spiritual events: you will definitely become closer to God."

MORE DETAILS WILL BE SHARED IN FUTURE EDITIONS OF THE PARISH NEWSLETTER



# THAT'S THE SPIRIT

Post-pandemic, the confirmation team has supported almost 300 candidates with a fun, faith-filled preparation programme for the Sacrament.

After more than a decade of dedication in leading a team of committed catechists, Adrian Lewis handed the baton to Suzanne Edwards who thanked him for his "hard work in establishing a wonderful parish programme."



Su, a familiar face to many having led Youth Masses and Youth Groups in church, explained: "Due to social-distancing restrictions several groups of young people were unable to make their Confirmation in Year 8 so we created a new 'catch-up course' to prepare teenagers for the Sacrament. The four-week 'I Am' series combines faith and fun and looks at how the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be used today."

Guided by catechists, candidates consider Jesus as the 'True Vine, Bread of Life, Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life.' Adds Su: "While the programme has its foundation in faith, we've deliberately created a 'safe, non-judgemental space' for young people to voice their beliefs. The energised, entertaining approach also enables opportunities for meditation and reflection to inspire a deepened faith."



Eliana Farr, part of the 2022 cohort, described the programme as "fun." She added: "It was great to share the experience with old friends from primary school and make new ones. I particularly enjoyed the Confirmation Mass - including a selfie with Bishop Mark - and the celebrations afterwards with a live band. It was reaffirming and reminded me of the warmth of our Catholic community." Nell McGoff, who made her confirmation in May, agreed: "Having a laugh with friends and the retreat were definitely highlights for me."



Alongside sessions focusing on faith in action and how the Church and Jesus could respond to today's challenges, candidates enjoyed a retreat at Savio House in Bollington.

A day of faith-based activities, sports, circus tricks and a hill stomp to White Nancy was a highlight for many, including Fr. Robert. He said: "The views across Cheshire were well worth the walk. Being part of the Confirmation team is inspiring. It's a privilege to be part of our young peoples' spiritual journey."

# A WHOLE HOST OF EXCITEMENT

More than 110 children celebrate their First Holy Communion at St. Vincent's each year. Two of those who received the Sacrament in May were Tommy and Hannah.

Tommy said: "I was a little bit nervous walking up to receive the host for the first time, but it made me feel happy and I knew that I was not alone. Afterwards I had loads of fun at home with my family, friends and godparents."

His mum, Suzanne Dickinson, described the day as "absolutely wonderful." She said: "The sun was shining, families were celebrating together and there were not many dry eyes when the children proudly performed a beautiful song at the end of Mass."

Also making her First Holy Communion was Hannah. She said: "I felt very special being closer to God and was excited to wear my beautiful dress and be with friends."

Hannah's mum, Donna Cosgrove, added: "What an emotional occasion! The children were very excited about their special day. We were so proud watching Hannah - it feels like five minutes since she was baptised at St. Vincent's! My son made his First Holy Communion when we were limited by Covid restrictions so it was wonderful for everyone to celebrate together. It's a day we will always remember."



# FULL OF EASTERN PROMISE



Mandarin-speaking parishioners have been meeting to consider the Liturgy of the Word and develop an in-depth appreciation of the readings and Gospel as part of a new 'Journey with Jesus' initiative.

"Parishioners say that being able to discuss their understanding of readings in their mother tongue with other Mandarin speakers is deepening their faith and bringing them closer to God," says Nati Chang who established the group with her husband, King Lu, and Sha Hu.

Parishioners for more than 15 years, Nati said: "We have previously supported Sister Eileen with newcomers to the area who may not be fluent in English. Having become aware of increasing numbers of Mandarin speakers in Altrincham – and in the Parish – who want to better understand Catholicism and the Bible but struggle with the language barrier, we decided to set up a dedicated discussion group called 'Journey with Jesus.'"

The group meets monthly and provides Mandarin speakers with a more in-depth appreciation of the words and message of the readings and Gospel.

Nati said: "The group's grown and we've had such a positive response. Our 10 regulars feel that using their mother tongue to read the Gospel deepens their faith. It's also a 'safe space' for people to raise multiple queries that they may not have been able to do previously. It's also hugely supportive in helping newcomers settle in our community."

She added: "I feel blessed that God gave me the ability to speak different languages and believe He wouldn't want that gift to be kept secret. It's a humbling and emotional journey for everyone involved. Some members have wept with happiness when the meaning of the words is revealed after feeling isolated by the language barrier. Members say it enables them to feel more connected with the Mass and closer to our Lord. To be part of that is a real privilege."

**ALL ARE WELCOME. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT NATI VIA EMAIL NATIWENYUZHANG@GMAIL.COM OR SHA ON ANNACHRIST999@YAHOO.COM**



# PURL-Y QUEENS!

Whether making blankets for babies born asleep, creating Easter chicks for charity, or simply stitching for fun, the 'Knit and Natter' group welcomes anyone who fancies casting on over a cuppa.

Founding members Margaret Gallagher and Anne Gerrard explain: "Originally established in 2015 as a social sewing group, we've changed crafts simply because knitting needles and wool are easier to carry to and from Westleigh than sewing machines!"

UK Hand Knitting reported that a million people have taken up knitting since the start of the pandemic with wider audiences inspired by celebrities such as Olympian Tom Daley purling poolside and sharing his skills across social media. "Everyone is welcome." adds Anne.

While the physical and mental health benefits of knitting are recognised, regular socialising is important to the knitters. Anne said: "The impact of the pandemic was hard on everyone, especially those living alone or who lost loved ones. We stayed in touch by phone but focussing on knitting also helped."

A knitter since she was six, Lorna Barton created a pale grey, Aran wool coat in lockdown. Taught by her father who was "wonderful at knitting, sewing and weaving" she adds: "With the world in turmoil and no opportunity for normal human interaction, I decided to concentrate on something other than the bad news. Knitting is very therapeutic."

Kaye Needham adds: "After moving to the area I was keen to meet a few friendly faces and be involved in Parish life. Popping into 'Knit and Natter,' I received such a warm welcome. It's also been a friendly introduction to Parish socials and the wider community."

**KNIT AND NATTER MEET FORTNIGHTLY. CHECK THE NEWSLETTER FOR DATES AND TIMES.**



# SOCIAL NETWORK



From hosting St. Patrick's Day celebrations - complete with a couple of leprechauns - to seasonal socials, plus serving thousands of cups of tea every year, four musketeers are at the heart of the social life of the Parish.



With more than several decades of service, Karen Ackerley, Mary Dillon, Sandra Luby and Nic McConville have co-ordinated catering, booked Westleigh, arranged publicity, liaised with parishioners, decorated tables, sourced raffle prizes to fit the themes, prepared quizzes, hosted each event for parishioners (plus priests) and cleared away after guests have gone home.

Nic McConville said: "I love being involved. It's fun, but also incredibly rewarding to see the positive impact on parishioners, especially those who are older or live alone. Social events are a great chance to meet new parishioners, chat to those who attend a different Mass, welcome back those who may struggle to get to church and relax with our priests over a bottle of wine - or two!"

Kath Glynn said she'd recommend the social events: "Great nights with great food and great company." And Kaye Needham, who dressed as a leprechaun to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, added: "What fun! Lovely people and excellent food. I'll be back!"

While the team organises four socials each year, additional events have included theatre trips, cheese and wine tastings and quiz nights. "Parishioners of all ages enjoy quiz nights. It would be great to have volunteers to make this happen or events such as BBQs or summer picnics," said Nic.

The team also supports Ruth Holland in catering for Welcome Sunday and has also provided "hundreds of bacon butties" over the years. "They're clearly irresistible" laughed Karen "as most people enjoy more than one!"

Serving tea, coffee and biscuits after every 10am Mass (except in August and Christmas) means a few thousand cuppas for parishioners each year. "We're hugely grateful to those who support us, but we would welcome additional help: the more, the merrier," added Nic.



**WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE INVOLVED WITH THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE PARISH? PLEASE CONTACT THE PARISH OFFICE**



# PERFECT HARMONY

"Singing is uplifting but being part of a choir of co-ordinated voices is a joy that goes beyond the sound an individual can create. Lockdown brought into sharp focus the importance of music and being able to sing together."

Baritone Adam O'Rourke is a member of the 12-strong ensemble of mixed voices accompanied by organist, Tony O'Brien. Alongside his brother John and father Paul - a regular in the choir loft for more than 45 years - the group includes John's wife, Daniela, their son, Giovanni, plus Diana O'Brien, Michelle Haigh, Margaret Connaughton, Kath Whyte, Lydia Makayova, Tom Taylor and Dennis Connaughton.

Adam adds: "During the pandemic I missed the natural reverb of singing with others. While I was fortunate to be the cantor when only 30 could gather at Church, I missed making music with the ensemble."

"I have memories of sitting on the stairs leading to the choir loft when I was five-years-old watching Dad in the choir. Singing has always been part of family life. I sang at my brothers' weddings and they sang at mine. Now my seven-year-old nephew also sings enthusiastically on Sundays."

He adds: "It didn't seem right to be singing aloud when people were isolated or struggling during the pandemic, but music can be an emotional outlet. Music can fill emptiness, heal, inspire and unite. Most people have a favourite piece of music reminding them of moments in their lives and performing with other voices can be enormously moving."

Leading the music at the 11:30am Mass, the ensemble also supports additional Masses, weddings and funerals. With space along the front of the choir loft, there's the opportunity for young people to add their voices. Children can also be part of the joyous Children's Choir at the 10am Mass.

With a new organ in place (see 'Pedal Power' on page 17), the choir is looking forward to raising the roof at Christmas. Adam adds: "Hymns and carols are a beautifully condensed music form. Sometimes only 16 bars in length, they have such longevity and power. Nothing beats the sound of praise through song."

# FONT-TASTIC!

**“A wonderful celebration which radiated happiness and love.” These are the words of the McCann family who joined the joyful Thanksgiving for Baptism service to celebrate more than 110 little ones welcomed into the Church in the past year.**

The annual event to give thanks for the newest members of our community was held at St. Vincent’s Primary School and co-ordinated by the baptism team. Featuring a short service led by Fr. Jonathan including the lighting of baptism candles and blessing the children with water, it enabled families whose children were baptised at our church during the past year to rejoice and reflect together.



The Dreniw family said: “The warm, welcoming collective prayer time was wonderful. The baptism team were fantastic with lots of love going into the special service and the delicious refreshments. Visiting our daughter before her baptism in February, Sr.Eileen’s kindness clearly made an impact on our then 11-week-old Katie because she remembered her straight away. It is so lovely for our children to experience the fabulous St. Vincent’s family and take part in Masses and gatherings with our wonderful clergy. We feel very blessed to have Katie as a member of our wonderful Church.”

The Nicholls family also added their thanks for a “very special afternoon.” They said: “We were reminded how lucky we are to be part of the welcoming St. Vincent’s community.”



Aidan McCann, whose daughter Lily was one of those baptised in the past year, said: “It was a lovely occasion. The school hall was full of laughter and warmth. As a teacher at the school it was great to see so many children I know being excited for their younger siblings.” His wife, Bernadette, added: “The singing was wonderful - especially the harmonising of Fr.Robert and Fr.Godlove. Our son, Noah, was thrilled to hold his sister’s baptismal candle and he loved the cake afterwards!”

# THAT FRIDAY FEELING

**The Friday Club is a new venture organised by the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) to offer parishioners monthly get-togethers in Westleigh.**

From films on the new big screen to bingo and musical entertainment, the SVP team - supported by additional volunteers - is hosting the first of their free events this month featuring a Christmas Concert from the Mini Vinnies of St Vincent’s Primary School, plus mulled wine, light refreshments and a short film entitled ‘God is the bigger Elvis.’

Alan Edwards, a member of the SVP for more than 50 years, said: “The pandemic shone a spotlight on isolation and loneliness and highlighted the importance of the SVP’s work in visiting the vulnerable. Spending time with people is the greatest gift we can give. The Friday Club builds on our traditional outings and parties and aims to establish free, fun afternoon gatherings to boost our community spirit.”

Active in St. Vincent’s Parish since 1910, the SVP’s vision is inspired by Christ’s message to love our neighbour as ourselves. “The SVP operates through parish-based committees known as ‘conferences’ and our mixed conference is one of more than 875 across England and Wales. We offer practical support including visiting the sick, the lonely, the addicted, the imprisoned, those living with disabilities and struggling with financial hardship.” added Alan.

Alan said: “Our SVP was instrumental in establishing the ‘Lifts to Mass’ scheme and hopes The Friday Club will become embedded in parish life. We would like to do more but need new members. Our regular team has halved since the pandemic to a small group of seven. Please get in touch if you can help. It’s truly humbling and rewarding to be involved.”

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT THE SVP, OR KNOW SOMEONE WHO MAY NEED HELP, PLEASE CONTACT THE PARISH OFFICE. SEE THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE FRIDAY CLUB EVENTS IN 2024**

# AVE MARIA

**The visitation of the Centenary Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, blessed at the Chapel of the Apparitions at Fatima, was one of the highlights of a day of devotion to Our Lady in October.**

The World Apostolate of Fatima England and Wales also provided the relics of Saints Jacinta and Francisco which featured in an afternoon of prayerful reflection including Mass, Rosary for world peace, Reconciliation, Benediction and a film about Fatima.

Ashley Stratford, a statue bearer on the day, outlines his personal affection for Our Lady:

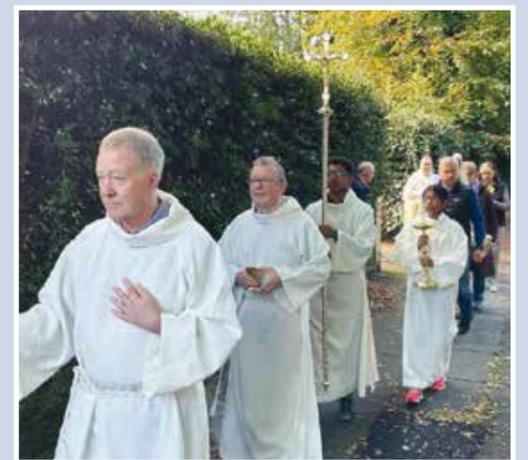


“As a Catholic growing up in England in the 70s and 80s, I didn’t really know Mary until I went to Lourdes aged 21. I ‘met’ her there and it was an overpowering encounter. This lady who said ‘yes’ to God, then carried His Son for nine months in her womb, shared the same blood as the second person of the Holy Trinity ...wow! She is so special like all mums. And in my opinion, mum’s are God’s greatest creation.



“Mary is so approachable and easy to talk to. I pray the Holy Rosary daily and use it for my many intentions. Mary is not God, but always directs us to her Son and who better to help us in our prayers than the Mother of God?”

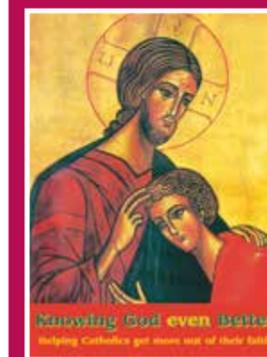
“Saints since medieval times have stressed the importance of praying the Rosary. If you don’t pray the Rosary, I suggest you give it a go. Marian Pilgrimages are also opportunities to rest, reflect and find peace. While we have many shrines of Our Lady, with Walsingham being the Catholic National Shrine, locally the Ladywell Shrine at Fernyhalgh near Preston is worth a visit. Or you could even spend time with Our Lady in the garden of St. Vincent’s!”



# KNOWING GOD EVEN BETTER

**As part of a number of new spiritual initiatives to support the parish priorities of growing our faith and growing our community, an inspiring programme was recently rolled out to bring parishioners together to reflect on their faith.**

Anna Croughan, instrumental in introducing the programme to the parish, explained: “The sessions welcomed parishioners of all ages with the aim of helping people become closer to God. And they proved very popular.”



The series of five pre-recorded talks by David Payne - a former drug addict who experienced a powerful conversion more than 25 years ago and now spends his life sharing the news of God’s healing love - was provided in a relaxed ‘café’ style approach under the theme of ‘Knowing God Even Better.’

Using CaFE (Catholic Faith Exploration) the talks included music, personal experiences and opportunities for reflection and discussion.

The weekly programme encompassed five topics: knowing the Father’s love, knowing Jesus as Lord, knowing the Spirit as friend, knowing God’s presence and knowing the Great Commission. In each session David Payne outlined God’s desire for a relationship with us and the programme provided parishioners with an opportunity to share how God has made himself known to them.

Anna described the presentations as “inspiring, practical and enjoyable with much laughter,” and Joan O’Cualain agreed. She added: “The programme gave me a chance to expand my relationship with God. It’s nice to be reminded that a connection with God doesn’t require long, complicated prayer: just a check-in is fine. I particularly enjoyed reflecting with others and have definitely taken on board some of their practices. Plus, anything offering tea and cake is always a winner!”



# THE PARISH IN PICTURES



1. A warm welcome from Monika and daughters
2. All smiles at the Parish social
3. All you need is (God)love! Parish secretaries Paula Yearsley and Alice Kilburn
4. Man of the cloth! Fr. Robert helps with the washing up
5. Tree-mendous! Celebrating autumn at St. Ambrose Prep
6. First-class service from Sam, Mary and Patrick on Palm Sunday
7. The Word of the Lord read by Anne Morris
8. Celebrating Grandparent's Day at St. Vincent's Nursery
9. Getting in the spirit! Suzanne Edwards and Bishop Mark after the Confirmation Mass
10. Fantastic little Fox! The Farrells celebrate their daughter's Baptism
11. Great Danes! The Thorgaard family
12. Hail Mary. Parish pilgrimage to Walsingham
13. Mug-nificent! Pauline and Phil Doyle serving tea and coffee after the 10am Mass
14. On the cards! Nick Hopkins spreads Christmas cheer
15. Seeing red! Fr. Jonathan and Annette Jackson wining and dining
16. Chaplain, Fr. Robert, celebrates Mass at Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College
17. Pulling out all the stops! Tony O'Brien prepares to make music
18. Eat, meet and greet! Fr. Godlove with the Haigh family
19. Karen Ackerley going barmy on Welcome Sunday!
20. Paddy power! Mary Dillon and Kaye Needham celebrate St Patrick's Day
21. Rest in peace. Blessing the graves of parishioners and their loved ones at Dunham Lawn Cemetery
22. Wedded bliss! Clive and Catherine Collins, one of 24 couples married at St. Vincent's this year
23. The Floss-pel of the Lord! Fr. Godlove inspires his followers
24. The light of Christ. Easter Vigil



# GUIDED BY GOD'S LOVE

Looking back on my first term as Headteacher, I can truly say that I have been humbled and amazed by our wonderful College family. And the words of our Chaplain, Fr.Robert, during our first Mass of the year have stayed with me...

"Let God's love guide you," said Fr. Robert in his Homily, "in the classroom, on the playground, in friendships, learning, thoughts, conversations and as individuals."

Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College is a place of trust, hope, patience, perseverance, service, charity, protection and most importantly love. I am honoured to be Headteacher and I am committed to ensuring every student can flourish, grow, be challenged and become who God has called them to be.

From day one I knew I'd joined a very special supportive family. Former pupil, Jude Anderton, a wonderful young sportsman, was diagnosed with bone cancer aged 11. Despite chemotherapy and brutal surgery, tumours became widespread and he died far too young. But bravery and positivity remain his legacy. As he would be 18 this year, our staff - whether runners or not - will be tackling the Wilmslow 10K in his honour to support Bone Cancer Research.

During half-term I also felt particularly strongly that God's love guides us. Part of the St Luke's Cheshire Hospice Sahara Trek to raise charity funds, we were reliant on local guides to safely cross 50km of desert. Embraced by the local Berber community which protected us, fed us and brought us back if we strayed, I was struck by the wonder of God in the vast, brilliant night sky and kindness of strangers. As a rainbow appeared over the dunes - our College badge colour represents the Covenant - I knew God was protecting our school family.

I feel blessed to have had such a warm welcome. It's wonderful to meet parents, pupils, visit local schools and parishes. There will be much to protect, nurture and cherish as College is built on very strong Catholic foundations, successes and history, but there will be changes. As Cardinal Newman said: "To live is to change, and to change often is to become more perfect."

Clare Hogg, Headteacher



## WHAT WOULD YOU GIVE JESUS?

The Kings gave baby Jesus special gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, but what would these three wise ones from St. Vincent's Primary School give?



**Rory:** I would make a song for Jesus to show that he is special to me



**Esme:** I would give Jesus my love at Christmas because he is special



**Joseph:** I would give Jesus my Nativity story book because it's all about him



# OUTSTANDING

St. Vincent's Catholic Primary School has been judged Outstanding by a team of religious education inspectors in all 10 areas assessed.

Commended for its excellent approach, the school's Catholic education was evaluated across various criteria including Catholic life and mission, religious education provision and collective worship.

The Catholic Schools Inspectorate report described the "outstanding, joy-filled school which celebrates the uniqueness of all within its community and strives to live out daily its mission statement, 'Let Your Light Shine.'" It also recognised that "prayer and liturgy is central to the life of the school with well-established daily prayer routines, weekly teacher led and pupil led prayer and liturgy within classes, half termly school Masses, and opportunities for pupils to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation."

The report also highlighted the exceptional outcomes the pupils achieve and their strong understanding of religious concepts, diversity and Catholic Social Teaching. The dedicated clergy, leadership and staff were particularly praised for their expertise and commitment to religious education.

Inspectors acknowledged that "the quality of the environment, including prayer spaces and prayer focal points within the classrooms enriches provision for all," and detailed how pupils are encouraged to take on responsibilities in the prayer life of the school as prayer leaders, being members of the Mini Vinnies and through involvement in the Faith in Action programme.

Describing the partnership between leaders, governors and parents as a "significant strength of the school," the report states that "parents are glowing in their praise of the school's ethos and environment and very appreciative of all the school does to support pupils' faith journey."

Pastoral care was also judged as "outstanding" with the inspectors reporting that "all pupils are known and recognised and, as a result, this large school feels like a close knit loving family. Pupils say they love their school and feel that it is a very special place; they say they feel safe, secure, nurtured and encouraged to be the best they can be."

Anita Harrop, Headteacher, expressed her pride in the school's achievement: "We are delighted with the outstanding judgements. The report reflects our unwavering commitment to providing a high quality Catholic education for all."

## MAKING MEMORIES

Headteacher Jane Beever writes that Loreto will commemorate 115 years in Altrincham in 2024 and is keen to hear from former students.

She adds: "Today Loreto is home to 1050 students plus 100 staff - including former pupils - and part of a global network of Loreto Sisters' schools encompassing more than 70,000 students across six continents. While Ofsted describes Loreto as 'an inspirational place to be,' I believe the inspiration is rooted in the school mission statement and work of the sisters. There is a real energy in the school with a rich array of extra clubs running alongside the curriculum - from debating to Ballroom dancing, music, arts and sport. Students are encouraged to embrace leadership opportunities so our young Catholic women take a full part in shaping the society's future. Many of the school's alumnae are now in leadership positions, with most attesting to indefinable 'Loreto attributes' that remain strong long after leaving the school."

Former pupil and Loreto's Chief Financial Officer, Helen Gill, said: "With 15 family members having been pupils and teachers, I've a special perspective of seeing how Loreto's evolved. It is a unique place whether you are a pupil or staff member. And Loreto women do, as inspirational founder Mary Ward said, go on to achieve so much."

Loreto would welcome former students to share their stories. Please contact [alumnae@loretogrammar.co.uk](mailto:alumnae@loretogrammar.co.uk)

Jane Beever, Headteacher

## FAITH IN ACTION

Loreto's Lay Chaplain, Gemma Egan, says: "This year's value of Justice is inspiring us to put faith into action, especially through the Youth SVP."

She explains: "More than 60 students joining our re-launched Youth SVP demonstrates a strong desire to accompany those who are lonely and struggling in our community. Busy campaigning and fund-raising has seen the Youth SVP successfully support The Red Cross in aid of Morocco and Libya, CAFOD, Family Fast Day, plus host a Macmillan coffee morning in memory of teacher Dr Port.

"A visit from Colette Halkon, Youth SVP Ambassador for Shrewsbury Diocese, further inspired the students' focus on 'spiritual and social poverty'. They are making Christmas cards for prisoners who may not have the means to send cards to their loved ones."





### The Sunshine Club

at St Vincent's Catholic Primary School

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# MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Compassion for those in need and concern for the whole person are two of the 'Eight Essentials of a Christian Brother Education' and the young men of St Ambrose College are demonstrating these values by establishing a 'Mental Health Spa' to support fellow students.

Figures from the charity Action for Children reveal that one in six children aged 5-16 are likely to have a mental health problem: a figure which has increased by 50% in the past three years. Between 2021 and 2022 alone, one in four young people aged 17-19 in England had a mental health disorder.

The charity also reports on the lasting impact of Covid-19 on young people stating that more than 42% worry about their mental health compared to 29% pre-pandemic.

"We were all affected by the pandemic - the disruption to school life and exams during lockdowns, unable to play the sports we love or meet up with friends, fears about the spread of the virus, concerns about family and friends and the future," said Year 13 student Conor Halpenny. Leo Dillon added: "The importance of talking about worries cannot be underestimated - whether it's pressures of school life, home, identity, social or online issues - sometimes it just feels better to confide in those who will listen and can offer support." He said: "We know it can be tough to make that first step to voice your worries which is why a group of us have trained as Youth Mental Health First Aid Ambassadors to champion mental health support. Sometimes it may be easier to speak to someone in Sixth Form who may be able to relate to a student's issues. We're here to listen and help."

As the Mental Health Lead Group, the Year 13 students have hosted assemblies to all year groups, reminded students of the support available - via Designated Safeguarding Leads, form tutors and staff, plus online support such as Kooth, YoungMinds and SHOUT - and established a 'Mental Health Spa' to encourage students to "chill and chat."

Patrick Groves, Vice Principal at St. Ambrose College, said: "Looking after our young peoples' emotional health and wellbeing is paramount and central to our ethos. While academic achievement is very important, no student will achieve their potential if they are not happy and motivated. It is vital that everyone is supported and students have opportunities to express how they are feeling."

"It is a challenge growing up in any generation but even more so in the age of a global pandemic, social media and online technology. Working jointly with Loreto Grammar School we've recently hosted external young speakers who have shared their powerful stories of mental health struggles including the impact of social media on self esteem."

He added: "I am immensely proud of our students living out the 'Eight Essentials' to ensure everyone is cared for and no one is left behind."

The lunchtime Mental Health Spa is already proving popular. Conor Halpenny added: "The relaxed atmosphere allows students to pop in for a chat, or just chill out. We hope this approach can be our legacy, but ultimately, if we make a difference to just one person's life, that will be fantastic."



## CAROL SERVICES

**Monday 11th December at 6:00pm:**  
Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College Advent Service at St.Vincent's Church

**Sunday 17th December at 3:00pm:**  
Parish Carol Service at St. Vincent's Church followed by festive refreshments at Westleigh

**Monday 18th December at 6:30pm:**  
St. Vincent's Primary School Christmas Service at St.Vincent's Church

**Tuesday 19th December at 7:00pm:**  
St. Ambrose College Carol Service at Holy Angels Church



## PEDAL POWER!

"There was no one to play the organ at Mass, so at 19-years-old I took up the role of parish organist. I'm still here 68 years later!" laughs Tony O'Brien.

As a boy Tony was "absolutely fascinated" with the church organ. He recalls: "Organist Eric Dickinson let me play when the church was empty. Canon Donnelly heard me practising and suggested I play for Benediction so when Eric moved to Todmorden, the role became mine."

Tony reveals he's self-taught - "that probably explains some of my frequent blunders!" - but comes from a musical family. He adds: "My mother played the piano at Loreto and my father was one of nine who each played a different instrument and formed an orchestra."

St.Vincent's has had a number of organs during Tony's time. The original organ was scrapped as firewood before being replaced by the pipe organ in the loft today. Built to a design current in the time of Bach and Handel it has proved a challenge. Tony says: "The gaps between the 12 semitones were unequal meaning each keyboard could be out of tune themselves and with each other. Thus we campaigned for a modern digital instrument."

Due to St.Vincent's being a Grade II listed building, an independent survey of the pipe organ was undertaken. Then a "four year battle with English Heritage ensued." Permission was granted for a new digital organ on the understanding that the pipe organ remains in situ.

Tony adds: "Without the very generous donations from benefactors, the purchase of our new organ would have been impossible. The sound is glorious and it's a delight to play. It includes an adjustable stool, an option for pedal organ bass notes to be played on the keyboard, pre-set organ stop combinations and a sequencer to enable recordings. It never goes out of tune and the power consumption is said to be similar to an electric light bulb!"



Gillian Potter, Martin McCabe, Christine Medhurst and Mary Mackenzie also play the organ. Tony says: "Playing the organ is said to make the greatest demand on a musician."

On the occasion of the blessing of the Makin digital organ Fr. Jonathan commemorated Tony's years of incredible service. Tony said: "Music means everything. It communicates without words. It feeds the soul. It is the soundtrack to life's special moments."

## REFLECT, REFRESH, REJOICE

It was described by one parishioner as "a journey to heaven in miniature." This year's retreat welcomed the Franciscans of the Renewal who inspired parishioners of all ages with their enthusiasm and love of Our Lord.

All parishioners were invited to the celebration of faith, friendship and God's love with the opportunity to 'reflect, refresh and rejoice.'

Sisters from St.Clare's Convent in Leeds, plus a Friar from Bradford, led the four-day retreat under the theme of God's love. The experience included evening sessions discussing God's love, mercy and healing alongside daily lunchtime talks, prayers, Adoration, Reconciliation and Mass. The event closed with Mass of the Holy Spirit and a shared table celebration of God's work.

Families praised the retreat saying it captivated both parents and children. Melanie Ball added: "The Sisters spread joy throughout their visit. When they took over Children's Liturgy we were all in awe. Their enthusiasm and love for God was contagious and it was wonderful to see our children and young people involved with such women of faith."

I'll always remember how silence descended when Sister Chiara said very simply 'I love Jesus so much that I decided to devote my entire life to Him.' It was a powerful moment."

During their visit, the Franciscans of the Renewal's outreach programme in the community also included visits to local schools and the sick and elderly.

Anna Croughan, who co-ordinated the retreat, said the Sisters' "joy and laughter inspired us in reflections and in reconciliation with God and others." Her husband, Kieran, added: "I enjoyed the mission which built night-on-night. It was like our journey to heaven in miniature: a little pilgrimage. I would definitely invite others to another one. I noticed a real change in people's hearts as the mission progressed, they really opened up and their true selves were revealed."

Melanie Ball added: "Hearing about worship elsewhere in the UK and in America, and the role of God and The Word in the lives of others, was refreshing and incredibly inspiring... and the Sisters could really rock a tune!"

# SEEKING SAFETY



**“I was ready to fight for my homeland,” said Ukrainian, Alexandra Palesh, “but as friends told tales of the horrific violence towards children, I felt forced to flee to keep my daughter safe.”**

Describing the dangerous journey to the UK where she and five-year-old Anna sought asylum, Alex thanked Sister Eileen, parishioners of St.Vincent’s and the local community for their “life-saving support.”

She said: “When Dnipro airport was destroyed by Russian missiles, I knew we had to go. I needed to protect my little girl. Stories of the rape and abduction of children were rife.”

Despite begging her mother to come with them, Alex had to leave her in a city under fire: “Mum refused to leave. She’s 80, has cancer and was worried she’d slow our journey. She said she wanted her grandchild to grow up in a safe country. It broke my heart.”

Through a network of friends and strangers, Alex and Anna travelled on foot, in cars and on trains to reach Hungary. Eventually they arrived in Manchester and claimed asylum. Alex said: “There were hundreds of us journeying across Europe. There was no time to sleep. You had to be constantly alert. People shared stories of the horrors they had witnessed. Everyone knew someone who had been killed. The reports of children disappearing and suffering made me weep.”

One month after Putin’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, UNICEF Executive Director, Catherine Russell, said: “The war has caused one of the fastest large-scale displacements of children since World War II. This is a grim milestone that could have lasting consequences for generations to come. Children’s safety, wellbeing and access to essential services are all under threat from non-stop violence.” Ukraine’s Ministry of Reintegration and the National Information Bureau says that more than 19,000 children have been deported to Russia since the start of the invasion.

Alex describes the impact on Anna: “We left everything she knew. I had to explain that we may die and taught her to survive. I told her how and when she needed to be quiet and when to run. These are not conversations anyone wants to have with a child. Anna’s a little girl. She should have been playing, not fleeing from war.”

But amid the horror there were moments of humanity. Alex said: “Strangers fed us, gave us a bed for the night, let us travel in their cars... such kindness and warmth.”

Arriving in Manchester, Alex’s multi-lingual skills after a career in high-level management, enabled her to support others seeking refuge. She says: “I acted as an interpreter which allowed me to return the kindness shown to us.”

Supported by Sister Eileen and the local community, Alex and Anna have now been granted asylum, but the wounds of war remain. Alex adds: “Anna still has nightmares. I’ll never forget her terror as we fled. War causes many scars, inside and out.”

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has recorded more than 27,000 civilian casualties in Ukraine since the Russian invasion began. This includes 10,000 deaths.

Alex says: “I have a strong belief in God and prayed for our protection. I continue to hope and pray for peace. Much of my country is in ruins, but my mother refuses to leave. One day I hope we will all hug again, but for now I must give my daughter a chance to feel safe.”

“Like the Good Samaritan, we are called to be neighbours to all the wayfarers of our time, to save their lives, to heal their wounds and to soothe their pain.”

Pope Francis, Moment of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees, October 2023



# WHAT'S ON IN 2024

## JANUARY

- Sunday 7th, Epiphany of the Lord
- Sunday 14th, Romulus Singers Concert for Revive charity. Time: 3:00pm. Venue: St Vincent’s Church

## FEBRUARY

- Friday 9th, Evening for engaged couples. Priests meet those marrying at St Vincent’s in 2024. Time: 7:30pm. Venue: Westleigh
- Wednesday 14th, Ash Wednesday
- Sunday 18th - Friday 23rd, Week of Guided Prayer (Parish Retreat)

## MARCH

- Saturday 2nd and 9th March, Marriage Preparation course in Westleigh
- Parish Social, St Patrick’s Day Celebration - date TBC
- Sunday 31st, Easter Sunday

## MAY

- Thursday 2nd, Confirmation Mass
- First Holy Communion
- Thursday 9th, Ascension

## JUNE/JULY

- Sunday 30 June, St Peter and Paul
- Parish Summer Social, date TBC

## AUGUST

- Thursday 15th, Assumption

## SEPTEMBER

- Parish Autumn Social, date TBC

## NOVEMBER

- Friday 1st, All Saints
- Saturday 2nd, All Souls
- Parish Winter Social, date TBC

## DECEMBER

- Sunday 1st, First Sunday of Advent
- Wednesday 25th, Christmas Day. Nativity of the Lord

## REGULAR EVENTS

- Tea and Coffee, plus video games, table tennis, darts and other games every Sunday after 10:00am Mass
- Children’s Liturgy, second and fourth Sunday each month
- Bridge, every Monday at 2:00pm in Westleigh
- Knit and Natter, 10:00am in Westleigh twice a month
- Mothers’ Prayers, every Thursday 11:15am in Westleigh
- Playgroup, every Monday and Friday in term time from 9:30am - 11:30am in Westleigh
- Brownies, every Tuesday in term time from 5:45pm - 7:15pm in Westleigh
- Rainbows, every Wednesday in term time from 6:00pm - 7:00pm in Westleigh

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‘We are proud to have worked with St. Vincent's Church on the recent refurbishment of the presbytery, continuing to serve our local community for over 35 years.’

‘Every project starts with a conversation.....’

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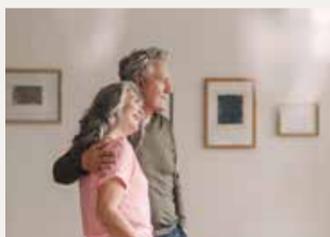


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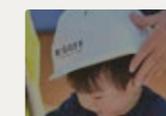
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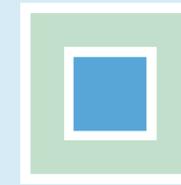


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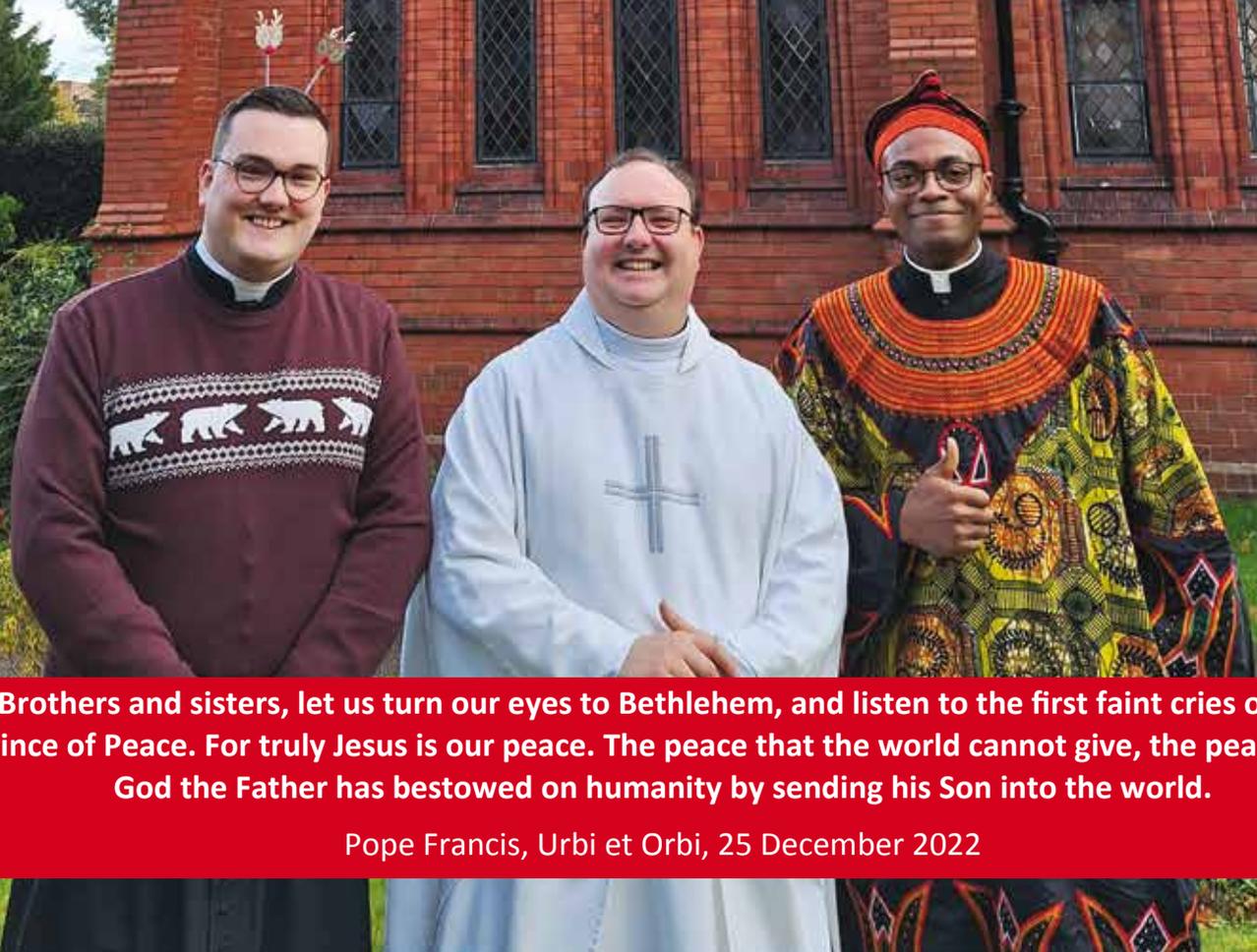
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Brothers and sisters, let us turn our eyes to Bethlehem, and listen to the first faint cries of the Prince of Peace. For truly Jesus is our peace. The peace that the world cannot give, the peace that God the Father has bestowed on humanity by sending his Son into the world.

Pope Francis, Urbi et Orbi, 25 December 2022