

## NJPN North West Justice & Peace E-Bulletin May 2025

*The e-bulletin for the North West, linked to the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN), is produced jointly within the dioceses of Lancaster, Liverpool, Salford, Shrewsbury and Wrexham. Please send articles and diary dates to: [anneoc980@hotmail.com](mailto:anneoc980@hotmail.com)*

### EDITORIAL: A MAN OF PEACE — A POPE WHO READS THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

In the Gospel reading for 25 April (John 21:1-14) after his resurrection Jesus appears to the disciples who are downhearted as they have caught nothing on their night's fishing. Just as day breaks, Jesus stands on the shore and calls out to them. He tells them to cast out their nets again, to the right of the boat. So, they cast out, and now they struggle to haul in the net – it's overflowing with fish. When they reach the shore, Jesus asks Peter three times: 'do you love me?' echoing the three times Peter denied knowing Jesus after his arrest. To each of Peter's replies to 'do you love me?' Jesus gives a different command: 'Feed my sheep,' 'Tend my lambs,' 'Follow me.'

In Pope Francis' address to the world's priests at the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday March 28, 2013 he said: "The priest who seldom goes out of himself ... misses out on the best of our people, on what can stir the depths of his priestly heart. ... This is precisely the reason why some priests grow dissatisfied, lose heart and become in a sense, collectors of antiquities or novelties – instead of being shepherds living with 'the smell of the sheep.' This is what I am asking you – be shepherds with the smell of sheep."

Already there are hopeful signs that Pope Leo will lead in a similar way. He has walked alongside the poor in Peru as a missionary priest, is regarded as a moderate and was close to Pope Francis. His first statement focused on peace, being a missionary church that builds bridges and is open to dialogue, saying: "We must seek together how to be a missionary Church, a Church that builds bridges, dialogue, always open to welcome all those who need our presence." He has spoken of fostering a synodal church, ready to listen to the views and concerns of laity and clergy alike. Like many others, I had been worried that a traditional Pope might be chosen and that there would be a shift in focus away from the openness and humility of Pope Francis.

A clear indicator of what sort of Pope he will be is in the first outward signs: the choice of name, lodgings and the vestments for his first appearance to the world on the balcony. Some were disappointed to see Leo wearing the finery that Francis eschewed but perhaps this was a carefully considered move to unite the progressive liberal factions and the traditionalists who struggled to accept Francis' approach – building much-needed bridges between the two. This may be a way of showing that he is his own man and not Francis 'mark II.'

Why Leo? The choice of a name gives a clear indication of the tone and direction of the papacy. Jorge Bergoglio modelled his papacy on St Francis to embrace simplicity, humility and a love for all creation with a special focus on the poor. Robert Prevost has opted for Leo. (See pages 2-3)

In a time when the world is becoming increasingly unsettled, he will be inspired by Leo I and Leo XIII who also lived in turbulent eras. Leo XIII is remembered for his great encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, regarded as the first document of Catholic Social Teaching. It seems likely that Leo XIV will be a Justice and Peace Pope, motivated by his many years as a missionary priest serving the poor in Peru. I hope he will also work to achieve justice for women in the Church, building on Francis' appointment of women in positions of authority. It seemed significant that he placed 'women' before 'men' in his first address – might it give a glimmer of hope for us to have a presence and a voice at last? Certainly his fellow American Cardinal Joseph Tobin has expressed progressive views on the role of women in the Church.<sup>1</sup> He has said women should be able to speak at Mass, have input on Church doctrine, be able to publicly dialogue with bishops, and play a role in decision making processes. He has gone so far as to say that he doesn't believe there's "a compelling theological reason why the pope can't name a woman cardinal."<sup>2</sup>

It was fascinating to watch the past few days unfold, starting with the funeral of Pope Francis, the gathering of the conclave and finally, the appearance of the new Pope. The size of the crowds in St Peter's Square was remarkable, their enthusiasm infectious, but the image that lingered for me was the sea of red as the cardinals gathered for the funeral Mass, broken up only by small patches of purple for the bishops and black for the priests. All of them men. A stark reminder (as if we women needed one) of the absence of women in the Church. (See pages 7-8)

Anne O'Connor May 10, 2025

<https://collegeofcardinalsreport.com/cardinals/joseph-william-tobin/>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/01/08/cardinal-tobin-i-hope-women-will-continue-speak-truth>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/francis-appointed-cardinal-pope-could-name-a-woman-cardinal/>

See also: "A Church which ignores its women is like a bird with a broken wing."

<https://www.rootandbranchsynod.org/papabile-women>

## POPE LEO XIV: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Nick Spencer, Theos May 9, 2025

The new Pope, formerly Cardinal Prevost, will be known as Pope Leo XIV. Is it too early to know the significance of this name?

One of the joys of watching a papal election – beyond the extraordinary and weirdly gripping choreography and theatre of the whole affair – is its unpredictability, and thus the sheer space there is for speculation. How much should we read into the fact that the new pope, formerly known as Cardinal Prevost, took time to speak in Spanish and talk about Peru in his opening address? What can we take from the fact that he retweeted an article in the National Catholic Reporter entitled “JD Vance is wrong: Jesus doesn’t ask us to rank our love for others”?<sup>1</sup> What should we make of the fact that he appeared wearing the traditional mozetta, which his predecessor had eschewed in 2013? One further question is why did he choose the name Leo?

Leo I was bishop of Rome during a period of extraordinary political turmoil in the mid fifth century. The known world’s greatest power was crumbling, violent armies threatened from the north and the east, and Rome was beset by refugees and poverty. Leo energised the Church’s response in these inauspicious times, but he also went further, crossing the line, so to speak, in order to meet and negotiate with the infamous, hostile Attila the Hun. Although we don’t know much about the content of his negotiations, they appear to have been successful, and Attila withdrew from Rome. The whole enterprise must have been... a risk.

Leo XIII was elected in 1878, at a time of near-comparable turbulence. The forces of capital and labour, liberalism and socialism, the individual and the state, modernity and tradition, materialism and the spirit faced off against one another, with extreme distrust, bordering on hatred, sometimes slipping into violence. The Church was seen by many as part of the problem in all this, all too often siding with the forces of wealth and tradition, despite its rhetoric about care for the poor.

Into these choppy waters, Leo launched a remarkable craft. Leo XIII is credited with starting (what came to be known as) the modern tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, with the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* on the “Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour”. “The elements of the conflict now raging are unmistakable,” the encyclical began, “in the enormous fortunes of some few individuals, and the utter poverty of the masses.”

*Rerum Novarum* was (and remains) a remarkable document (beginning a remarkable tradition) which sought to bridge many of these chasms. It was very careful to talk about the duties of capital and labour. It articulated a relational understanding of the human person that avoided the extremes of individualism and collectivism. But in doing so, it did more than just reach across the divide. It made a powerful and provocative case for workers’ rights.

“To sum up,” it concluded, “we may lay it down as a general and lasting law that working men’s associations should be so organized and governed as to furnish the best and most suitable means for attaining what is aimed at, that is to say, for helping each individual member to better his condition to the utmost in body, soul, and property.” In a world in which unions were often feared, loathed and even banned as dangerously revolutionary, this was itself revolutionary stuff.

Both Leo I and Leo XIII were not only bridge builders, working for peace, reconciliation and a stable and fair path forward in difficult times. They travelled across those bridges, to potentially hostile territory, and make risky gestures to enable that peace. In the choice of his papal name, Cardinal Prevost may be signalling his willingness to do that same. Alternatively, he may not be. We’ll see.

**Abridged - read in full:** <https://www.theothinktank.co.uk/comment/2025/05/09/pope-leo-xiv-whats-in-a-name>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/guest-voices/jd-vance-wrong-jesus-doesnt-ask-us-rank-our-love-others>

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**Catherine Pepinster** also reports on the significance of the new papal name, Leo XIV. It has been seen as a nod to Pope Leo XIII, regarded as the founding father of Catholic social doctrine. Writing in *The Guardian*, she says “Popes who take that name tend to be progressive reformers. If Trump and JD Vance think they have an ally in the Vatican, I think not”.

**Read her article here:** <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/08/what-will-the-new-pope-be-like-hes-chosen-to-be-called-leo-thats-no-accident>

## **POPE LEO XIV EXPLAINS HIS CHOICE OF NAME**

**Source: Vatican Media** May 10, 2025

In a brief video on the Vatican X site, Pope Leo XIV explains his choice of name today.

He said: "... I chose to take the name Leo XIV. There are different reasons for this, but mainly because Pope Leo XIII in his historic Encyclical Rerum Novarum addressed the social question in the context of the first great industrial revolution.

In our own day, the Church offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defence of human dignity, justice and labour."

The first Pope Leo, whose papacy was from 440 to 461 is particularly famous for meeting with Attila the Hun and dissuading him from attacking Rome. Leo I is also known as "a great intellectual and theological reformer," He wrote 'Leo's Tome' a document that influenced the official doctrine defining Jesus Christ as both fully human and fully divine.

Commentators have pointed out that the Pope's name could also be a reference to Brother Leo, a 13th-century friar who was a great companion of St Francis of Assisi.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/52346>

## **A MISSIONARY CHURCH WITH A FOCUS ON PEACE**

Pope Leo XIV is said to have been highly regarded by Pope Francis, and in his first address, he thanked his predecessor, confirming: "We want to be a synodal church, a church that walks, a church that always seeks peace, always seeks charity, always strives to be close especially to those who suffer".

His first words were: "Peace be with you all.

Dearest brothers and sisters, this is the first greeting of the Risen Christ, the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the flock of God. I too would like this greeting of peace to enter our hearts, to reach your families: to all people wherever they may be, to all nations, to the whole earth: peace be with you. This is the peace of the Risen Christ: a disarmed peace, a disarming peace, humble and persevering, it comes from God, God who loves us all unconditionally.

We still hold in our ears that weak yet ever courageous voice of Pope Francis as he blessed Rome – the Pope who blessed Rome, who gave his blessing to the world, to the whole world, that Easter morning. Allow me to follow up on that same blessing: God loves us, God loves you all, and evil shall not prevail. We are all in God's hands.

Therefore, without fear, united, hand in hand with God and with one another, let us move forward.

We are disciples of Christ, Christ goes before us; the world needs His light, humanity needs Him as a bridge to be reached by God and His love. Help us as well – help one another – to build bridges through dialogue, through encounter, uniting everyone to be one single people always in peace.

Thanks to Pope Francis. I also wish to thank all the brother cardinals who have chosen me to be the successor of Peter and to walk with you as a united Church, always seeking peace, justice, always striving to work as faithful women and men of Jesus Christ, without fear, to proclaim the Gospel, to be missionaries.

I am a son of Saint Augustine, an Augustinian, who said: "With you I am a Christian, for you I am a Bishop." In this spirit, we can all walk together toward that homeland which God has prepared for us.

To the Church of Rome, a special greeting: we must seek together how to be a missionary Church, a Church that builds bridges, dialogue, always open to welcome – like this square with open arms – all those who need our presence.

To all of you, brothers and sisters of Rome, of Italy, and of the whole world, we want to be a synodal Church, a Church that walks, a Church that always seeks peace, always seeks charity, always strives to be close especially to those who suffer."

**Read in full here:** <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/transcript-of-pope-leo-xivs-first-speech-after-election-peace-be-with-you/6256890/>

**Watch here:** <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/videos/c1kv38nk8w1o>

## REACTIONS TO THE NEW POPE'S APPOINTMENT

**Christine Allen, Director and Chief Executive of CAFOD:** "Pope Leo XIV will be a voice of wisdom in a fractured and divided world, as he continues the important work of leading the Church in the world and providing spiritual and moral guidance to the global community. Having spent years in Peru, Pope Leo XIV brings with him the vital perspective of the Global South, elevating voices from the margins to centre stage".

**Peru's President Dina Boluarte:** "His election fills our nation, which was his home, his mission and his faith, with pride and hope. May his pontificate be a guide of peace, justice and love for the world."

**Bishop of Chiclayo in Peru, Edinson Farfán, who succeeded Cardinal Prevost:** "He was undoubtedly deeply influenced by this particular church of Chiclayo. Chiclayo is a city that greatly values the simple faith of its people. He has a special affection for the diocese. It's his beloved diocese, it's his life. He learned here everything he can share and will share with the entire world."

**The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, said:** "Pope Leo XIV's many years of pastoral experience, his commitment to justice, and his deep spirituality are an example of life lived in service to Jesus Christ. As Anglicans we give thanks for his call to Christians to be bridge-builders across the divisions of our world, and the divisions that continue to exist between churches. This is something Jesus asks of us. He prays that the church will be one."

This evening, the new Pope spoke of a Church that seeks peace and remains close to those who suffer. Our wounded world needs the justice, healing and hope of Jesus Christ, and we look forward to working with Pope Leo XIV and Roman Catholics in every place to share that love with those in need."

**UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer:** "The election of Pope Leo XIV is a deeply profound moment of joy for Catholics in the United Kingdom and globally, and begins a new chapter for the leadership of the Church and in the world. Pope Leo is the first American Pope. This is a momentous moment."

As Pope Francis's papacy showed, the Holy See has a special role to play in bringing people and nations together to address the major issues of our time, especially on climate change, alleviating poverty, and promoting peace and justice across the world. I look forward to meeting the Holy Father and continuing to work closely with the Catholic Church here in the UK and internationally to advance our shared values and the common good."

**See these and other comments here:** <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/religion-news-9-may-2025/>

## POPE LEO XIV IS A MAN WITH THE RIGHT "COMBINATION OF TALENTS" TO LEAD THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

**Cardinal Vincent Nichols Source: CBCEW May 9, 2025**

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, one of 133 Cardinal-electors who took part in a Conclave that culminated in the proclamation of Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost as Pope Leo XIV, has spoken about the man who has succeeded Pope Francis as the 267th Supreme Pontiff.

Describing Pope Leo XVI as a "citizen of the world," Cardinal Nichols explained why his life experience and Catholic ministry provide the necessary ingredients to lead the Catholic Church: "He was brought up on the south side of Chicago – the poorer side of Chicago. He has been the General Superior of the Augustinians twice – which basically means he's travelled the world twice – fulfilling those responsibilities."

He's been a teacher, a diocesan bishop, and a member of the Roman Curia, and that's a combination of talents that, once we'd reflected on the life of the Church and what was needed at this time, made it pretty clear that here was a man who was bringing the right depth and breadth of experience to the papacy."

Speaking at a press conference at the Venerable English College in Rome, on Friday, 9 May, Cardinal Nichols elaborated further on the qualities of Pope Leo XIV: "He has a very gentle manner. He's very calm. He's clear in his mind, and can be decisive. I've seen him resolve difficulties, both organisational and personal, in a way that didn't leave enemies behind him, and he can hold people together. In terms of governance, he has a doctorate in Canon law, so he knows how things should be done."

Cardinal Nichols also reflected on the Conclave – a sacred time in the Sistine Chapel with his brother Cardinal-electors acting at the service of humanity: "I found it very refreshing, more like going on a spiritual retreat than anything else. There was a sense that here was a sacred space, and within that space, at a very profound level, it was possible to just be myself. By the time we were coming to lunch today, there was quite a bit of me that didn't want to leave because there was something to be deeply treasured in the fraternity and the prayerfulness of it... I didn't get a sense of people trying to gather in clusters or groups or any of that... this was a very, very lovely and congenial and fraternal time together."

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/52343>

**Watch a video of the press conference here:** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PdP4kxDttM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PdP4kxDttM)

### **A POPE IN MUDDY BOOTS: The Unmistakable Footprint of Pope Leo XIV**

He did not emerge from behind gilded curtains but from the muddy lanes of a flood-ravaged town in Peru.

Long before he appeared on the Vatican balcony, Pope Leo XIV had already made his message clear – not with encyclicals, but with a pair of black boots and rolled-up sleeves.

In Peru, he walked through rising waters, not as a visiting dignitary but as one among the afflicted. He served food in a modest kitchen, not as an act of charity, but as a gesture of kinship. These images – serving rice, listening to grief, walking through ruins – have already etched a theology more potent than sermons: one of proximity, presence, and shared humanity.



His chosen name – Leo – reaches back to another turning point in Church history. Pope Leo XIII, who gave voice to exploited workers in the age of industry, reshaped Catholic conscience with *Rerum Novarum*, the Church's first social encyclical. Leo XIV inherits that legacy not merely in word, but in living example.

If Leo XIII defended labour with his pen, Leo XIV affirms dignity with his hands and feet.

He does not arrive to restore power but to restore nearness.

There is something unmistakable in his posture – less a ruler than a companion; not one who visits the poor, but one who understands what it means to be poor in spirit and circumstance. His papacy will speak in the language of humble witness, not clerical command. This is not leadership from above, but alongside.

At a time when the world teeters under the weight of nationalism, cruelty, and widening inequality – when brute strength is too often mistaken for vision – Leo XIV brings a different kind of authority: that of one who walks with, not over.

The word pontiff comes from pontifex – bridge-builder. With Leo XIV, the Church has perhaps found a man who can build bridges across our most painful divides: between privilege and poverty, doctrine and doubt, power and tenderness.

He may not shout reform. But his life already whispers revolution – the kind rooted not in strategy but solidarity.

*(Sent by a friend – source unknown.)*

### **A POPE IN A PONCHO: THE GOSPEL OF FRAGILITY**

It was not the papal cassock, the golden cross, or the solemn gaze from a palace balcony that marked April 10, 2025. Instead, it was a fragile old man in a striped poncho, worn black trousers, and oxygen tubing, rolling quietly through the grandeur of St. Peter's Basilica.

No proclamation, no camera crews, no ceremonial fanfare. Just a tired pilgrim in the skin of a pope, moving slowly toward the restored chair of Peter and the tomb of Saint Pius X.

To some, it was a scandal. To others, a shock. And to a few – perhaps not many – it was a moment of profound, unscripted holiness. Because it was not the Vicar of Christ clothed in tradition but something far rarer: a leader without costume, a priest without performance, a man who dared to embody the Gospel in raw, human skin.

In an institution where clothing is language – the cassock, the skullcap, the ring – all speak of office, succession, and sacred continuity – Francis chose a language older than vestments: the language of presence. In his beige Argentine poncho, he wasn't signalling authority; he was invoking memory – of his homeland, of the poor, of the Jesus who walked dusty roads with no sceptre, throne, or robe worth envying.

Some saw an older man too frail to dress appropriately. Others saw disrespect for ritual. But to those attuned to the undercurrent, it was something else entirely: a gesture of undoing, the kind that refuses to uphold a performance when the soul is calling for honesty.

He didn't come to be venerated that day. He came to be. And in doing so, he reminded the Church – perhaps unintentionally – that the robes, collar, rituals, and relics are only bridges. They are not the water beneath.



When we strip away the grandeur, what remains is a question the Church must confront more often: What happens when the sacred no longer looks impressive? When authority arrives in a wheelchair, with sunken eyes and no cross on its chest? Whether deliberately or by accident, Francis exposed the quiet truth: the real scandal is not the poncho, but how much we've come to rely on appearances to sustain our reverence. We want our popes upright, glowing, and draped in theology. We don't want them too human, too frail, too much like us. But isn't that precisely the paradox at the heart of Christianity?

Today, when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a colt, his official representative on earth is wheelchaired into the most ornate church on earth, dressed in an Argentinian poncho reminded us that fragility is not the opposite of faith it may be its most honest form. That perhaps, in a moment like this, the Church caught a glimpse of what Jesus meant when he knelt to wash feet instead of issuing commands.

This was not the Pope as prince or priest. This was the Pope as a person, as a pilgrim, as a reminder that grace may arrive not dressed in white but in weakness.

And maybe, just maybe, that is the Church we need to become.

**Johnson Kotaram - found at:** <https://resource-ni.com/2025/04/25/death-of-our-holy-father-pope-francis/>

### **THE BEATITUDES OF THE BISHOP**

November 21, 2021:

Pope Francis has given a text called "The Beatitudes of the Bishop" to all the Italian bishops meeting in plenary assembly in Rome. The text offers encouragement and pastoral guidance not only to the Italian bishops but to the more than 5,000 Catholic bishops in the world today. The text was written by the archbishop of Naples, Domenico Battaglia, who first used it at the ordination of three new bishops for that diocese in a homily on October 31.

Blessed is the Bishop who makes poverty and sharing his way of life, because with his witness he is building the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed is the Bishop who is not afraid to streak his face with tears, so that the sorrows of the people, the efforts of the priests, may be reflected in them, finding in the embrace of those who suffer the consolation of God.

Blessed is the Bishop who considers his ministry a service and not a power, making meekness his strength, giving everyone the right of citizenship in their hearts, to inhabit the land promised to the meek.

Blessed is the Bishop who does not shut himself up in the palaces of government, who does not become a bureaucrat who is more attentive to statistics than to faces, to procedures than to stories, trying to fight alongside man for God's dream of justice because the Lord, encountered in the silence of daily prayer, will be his nourishment.

Blessed is the Bishop who has a heart for the misery of the world, who is not afraid to dirty his hands with the mud of the human soul in order to find God's gold, who is not scandalized by the sin and fragility of others because he is aware of his own misery, because the gaze of the Crucified and Risen One will be for him a seal of infinite forgiveness.

Blessed is the Bishop who drives away the duplicity of the heart, who avoids every ambiguous dynamic, who dreams of good even in the midst of evil, because he will be able to rejoice in the face of God, finding his reflection in every puddle of the city of men.

Blessed is the Bishop who works for peace, who accompanies the paths of reconciliation, who sows the seed of communion in the heart of the presbyterate, who accompanies a society divided on the path of reconciliation, who takes every man and woman of good will by the hand to build fraternity: God will recognize him as his son.

Blessed is the Bishop who for the Gospel is not afraid to go against the tide, making his face "hard" like that of Christ on his way to Jerusalem, without letting himself be held back by misunderstandings and obstacles because he knows that the Kingdom of God advances in the contradiction of the world.

<https://www.chiesadinapoli.it/wd-interventi-vesc/beato-il-vescovo/>

In a response (at that time) Robert Prevost wrote on X (formerly Twitter):

"These beatitudes also highlight the temptations faced by bishops, like that of seeking power and a comfortable lifestyle."

## POPE FRANCIS: COMPANION ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Ian Linden April 21, 2025

There will be many wonderful, long prepared and detailed tributes to Pope Francis. But for many Catholics his death will simply have come as a shock – oddly, as he was obviously dying – and as a moment for tears and for cherishing personal memories. Heaven above knows how many people he greeted, shook hands with after visits, meetings and conferences, how many babies blessed and held, how many prisoners, sick, disabled, spoken to with love. There was something very moving about those daily phone calls to the Church of the Holy Family in Gaza, something, I would dare to say, that defined this papacy.

Francis made both the secular and religious-minded aware of a deeply personal way of being Bishop of Rome and leader of the Catholic Church. He cut away so much of the formality of the office. It was not only his stunning workload – an example to all in their 80s – but how he modelled love, concern, and compassion in his interactions with the public.

Watching the television pictures I was often reminded of words attributed to Pope Francis' hero St. Francis of Assisi "Preach the Gospel with all your heart, all your mind and all your soul and sometimes use words". Francis used plenty of words, easily understood ones, sometimes too loosely for his critics who clung to tradition and didn't like his approach, nor his emphases. In words and actions he so clearly took the side of the poor and vulnerable. His great encyclicals *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti*, his repeated calls for compassion towards migrants and asylum seekers, used words to great effect. At a time when sexual abuse scandals had eroded the credibility of leadership in the Catholic Church, this mattered a great deal and gave hope, especially for those working for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

Pope Francis was perhaps at his most traditional in his conduct of international affairs, his efforts to protect local Churches as head of the Vatican State. Even in those last hours before his death Pope Francis found time for Easter greetings with the Vice-President of the United States, J.D Vance whom he could so easily have avoided. It could have been no easy matter to engage with the Chinese Communist Party, its persecution of religion, whilst attempting to stay outside the politics of a polarized world.

From the crowds in St. Peter's square it is obvious Popes have symbolic importance for Catholics. Pope Francis also had importance for what he was as a man and as a priest, for other Churches and faiths, and for the secular world who recognized his goodness, humility and sincerity. His spirituality fitted our troubled times. The Spanish poet, Antonio Machado wrote: "Traveller there is no path – we make the path by walking". Francis taught us how to walk. And following the life of our beloved Pope Christians will emerge on the Emmaus road.

<https://www.ianlinden.com/latest-blogs/pope-francis-companion-on-the-road-to-emmaus>

• **Professor Ian Linden** is Visiting Professor at St Mary's University, Strawberry Hill, London. A past director of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, he was awarded a CMG for his work for human rights in 2000. He has also been an adviser on Europe and Justice and Peace issues to the Department of International Affairs of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales. Ian chairs a new charity for After-school schooling in Beirut for Syrian refugees and Lebanese kids in danger of dropping out partnering with CARITAS Lebanon and work on board of Las Casas Institute in Oxford with Richard Finn OP. His latest book was *Global Catholicism* published by Hurst in 2009.

## THE POPE'S FUNERAL: WHERE WERE THE WOMEN?

Ian Linden April 28, 2025

What did the funeral of Pope Francis in Rome say to the world about today's Catholic Church? A Catholic requiem mass and funeral is almost always impressive; it holds grief within the formal framework of a profound and meaningful liturgy. A Pope's funeral does much more. A spectacular ceremony, the words, symbols, prayers, deep human emotions and messages, attract a global audience. Where else and when do the world's national and political leaders - except perhaps on this occasion Trump - appear like respectful but unimportant spectators, awkward bystanders hoping a fraction of the crowd's devotion might rub off on them?

At the most trivial, the Church's farewell to a Pope says that the Vatican is as good as Britain at creating a spectacular, memorable, newsworthy event. Better actually. We really don't need, pace Alastair Campbell, mawkish labels like the "People's Pope". The backdrop, St. Peter's Basilica, the beautiful square, take a lot of beating, made for that unique mixture of gravitas and solidarity that can bring silence to a crowd of a quarter million.

Pope Francis' funeral was an unusual event for the Vatican, the grand assertion of hierarchy somewhat sabotaged by the memory of his life and his wishes for the ceremonies accompanying his death. The plain coffin, the journey metaphorically across the tracks to Santa Maria Maggiore on the converted Popemobile, the homeless and vulnerable waiting to greet his body in death as he had greeted them in life, were fulfilling his instructions.

And in case anyone missed the message, Cardinal Re in his sermon delivered a faithful, fearless account of Francis' priorities: respect for human dignity and the environment, caring for immigrants, building 'bridges not walls', and 'war always a defeat for humanity'. These reminders drew applause from the crowds in Rome and doubtless also the watching millions at home.

The BBC did a good job. Watching on TV, we had a proficient translator, though sadly not for the bidding prayers - no indication who was giving them either - and many must have been wondering if President Trump would understand what Cardinal Re, who spoke in Italian, was saying. It was refreshing not to have any commentary for much of the time but, when it was needed, clear explanation for non-Catholic viewers.

And yet... and yet. The view of the pall-bearers moving with dignity – one doing a little surreptitious puffing – and from high above inside the basilica the two lines of Cardinals, captivating camera-work. And when the Cardinals processed out of the Basilica it reminded me of the clergy at Westminster Cathedral processing for Cardinal Hume's funeral. Not a woman in sight. It must have said to many of those watching "the Church still doesn't get it". One woman from the Vatican Press Office had brief prominence in the Mass, giving the first reading. Two others made very short appearances during the bidding prayers. No sign of any Women Religious (nuns), let alone the few women appointed to senior positions in Vatican departments. We saw nuns in the square amongst the pious onlookers. Around the altar and in the square all the front ranks were taken by men.

There are so many things that can be said about this absence of women it is difficult to know where to start. Worldwide there are some 640,000 nuns thousands of whom get up every day to work in development, peace-making, health and education. Nuns exemplify Francis' message of service to humanity, working for the poor and vulnerable around the world, often unseen, sometimes in very hazardous situations. I noticed one newspaper recently describing Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, as having led the Catholic movement against sexual trafficking. It was, of course, nuns who initiated this work, though Cardinal Nichols gave it warm approval and support. But the nuns are somehow invisible.

The failure to acknowledge the role of women in the Catholic Church on such a public occasion as Pope Francis' funeral suggests a systemic problem alongside sexual abuse. It overlooks the fact that, when it comes to the transmission of faith to the next generation, the heavy-lifting is done mostly by mothers, and in Africa, after the depredations of HIV, sometimes grandmothers. In the USA, Dorothy Day founded the Catholic worker communities. In the UK CAFOD - the Catholic organization which at the international level most closely follows Francis' vision of solidarity and service - was begun by Catholic Women in 1960. In every parish the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, supporting the most in need, relies mainly on women volunteers. It was a woman, Mildred Neville, who founded CIIR, The Catholic Institute for International Relations (later known as Progressio) that promoted the option for the poor around the world.

Official reasoning seems to be that the 12 apostles, appointed some 2,000 years ago in another culture, were all men and therefore, when it comes to who has authority and seniority in decision-making in the Church today, with a few exceptions introduced by Francis, women should be excluded. Many, many hours have been spent discussing whether there should even be women deacons.

Diversity and inclusion today are now widely seen as the key to increased creativity in organisations. But the Church continues to exclude from most leadership positions, such as priesthood, the commitment, creativity and wisdom of the majority of Catholics who happen to be women. Meanwhile the gradual transformation of women's lives and roles outside the Church continues.

Religious patriarchy seems to be treated by Catholic leadership as an integral part of Catholic identity and faith. But need not be. It is part of an entrenched culture, a set of man-made rules that could be changed. And, of course, organizational cultures are notoriously difficult to change. Such change is not something that should be dealt with in "the perspective of eternity" but with faith in the future 'taking us deeper into the saving mystery of Christ' – Cardinal Nichols' words describing the dynamic sought from the next Pope, on the BBC last Sunday. In this important regard what Francis' funeral says is that the Church needs to catch up and to catch up fast. <https://www.ianlinden.com/latest-blogs/the-popes-funeral-where-were-the-women>

**Anne O'Connor writes:** Some years back I had a discussion with a parish priest who was strong on Justice and Peace and welcoming the stranger. I asked why he had no girl altar servers. The response was enlightening. Because, he said, the girls would be more reliable and do a better job and the boys would drop out. So, he restricted the role to boys only, otherwise, he said, there would be no boys. When I look at the first-rate female priests (first appointed in the Church of England in 1994) who fought so hard to gain acceptance and the inspirational women bishops now in senior leadership roles, I recall that conversation and I wonder....



## FRANK REGAN RIP

**Ellen Teague writes:** Frank was a Columban from New York in the United States who worked in Peru for 22 Years. He was particularly dedicated to being chaplain to the Young Christian Workers in Lima. His experience of Liberation Theology in Peru and his interest in Justice and Peace brought him to England in the mid-1980s where he was a member of the Columban Justice and Peace Team for two decades. He was a regular contributor to the newsletter 'Vocation for Justice'. He regularly gave theology inputs and reflections at J&P diocesan events and the annual NJPN conference. His reflection at one conference of J&P people being ants and spiders – being weavers of webs and grassroots workers – was particularly memorable. In more recent years he has helped edit newsletters of NJPN and Catholics for a Changing Church.

**See:** <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/app/uploads/2017/10/Autumn-2017.pdf>  
<https://catholicsforachangingchurch.uk/722/index.php/articles/frank-regan>

Frank married Tiirke Linnemann in 2006 and has been based in Devon since that time. He always attended the annual NJPN Conference, including last year. When he died last month he was 83 years old.

- A celebration of Frank's life will be held in The Salvation Army Hall, Newton Abbot, Devon, at midday on Saturday 21 June with a meal and sharing of tributes to him. All are welcome.

**Valerie Stroud writes:** I am very sorry to hear this sad news. Frank was a great supporter of Catholics for a Changing Church and when we published the magazine, *Renew*, he was a regular contributor. We have missed his insights since the magazine closed and now we shall miss his presence. May he rest in peace and rise to glory.

**Anne O'Connor writes:** Frank 'introduced' me to Catholics for a Changing Church at a time when I was struggling to find a spiritual home that aligned with my J&P views. He was a great support to me when the J&P Commission for Shrewsbury Diocese was disbanded in 2013 by the new Bishop Mark Davies. Two wonderfully kind men, Brian Davies and Frank Regan, both now deceased, regularly offered advice and encouragement as I continued the e-bulletin that our Worker Joan Sharples had established and then, later, the NW e-bulletin. I miss them both.

As a tribute here are two of the many articles Frank wrote:

### THE UNBEARABLE GRAVITY OF STASIS

Cardinal Raymond Burke recently gave the De Lubac lecture at Manchester University. In the course of the lecture he stated that stasis is to be preferred to change in the Church. Friedrich Nietzsche, father of post-Modernity, wrote in *The Gay Science* that he could not believe in a God who did not know how to dance. He went on to say that in looking at the church all he saw was *gravitas* and by *gravitas* all falls down.

Our institutional church has lived in a post-Trent, post-Vatican I mode for the past 400 years. The official Church struggled to remain in a permanent state of stasis. It had not promoted the formation of a laity able to explain and give witness to the person of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Church. It had given itself a clergy attuned only to the life of the church, not to the life of the world, not to the poor of the earth.

The bishops of Vatican II tried to open the church to the needs of a wounded world. To do that an alert, articulate and committed laity was an essential necessity. That laity came forward, men and women who wanted a church for the world, able to be salt, light, leaven and mustard seed. It was an adult laity who wanted to assume adult responsibilities in the pastoral mission of the church according to the charism and vocation of each. But that was going to mean that the laity would exercise its baptismal powers of priesthood and mission. Generally speaking, bishops and priests felt threatened and moved to curb an ebullient energy generated by the Spirit who wanted to dance, to move mountains, to bring joy—in a word, to renew the face of the earth.

Sadly, our church leadership is opting for stasis and *gravitas*. It is reaching out to the most reactionary forces in its fold to forward a march to the past when everything appeared as God wanted: static, uniform and patriarchal. Our church is losing its soul because it cannot hold opposites in creative tension. Those opposites are: male/female; heterosexual/homosexual; lay/cleric; married/divorced; leader/led; secular/religious; have/have not and others. Our leadership is resolving those tensions in favour of its own institutional needs; thus it relegates huge numbers of talented and committed persons to the margins.

The church cannot be a Good Samaritan sort of neighbour to the divorced and remarried, to the abused child and its family, to the single parent, to the homosexual et al because it is incapable of crossing the frontier of exclusion and woundedness to become healer and pastor. The present church wants only the "pure", the docile, the infantile and the co-dependent. From a culture of change, openness and hope we are reverting to a culture of fear, suspicion and reactionary conservatism.

We want a church in the spirit of Vatican II's *Gaudium Et Spes*. That church will be engaged in the struggle to nurture and conserve our planet against a man-centred exploitation. It will be concerned with poverty global and local which lacerates the human spirit and threatens human life. It will be a Peace church which ceases to bless tanks and bombs. It will be person-centred able to accompany those on the spiritual journey in their search for depth, meaning and identity.

The institution wants to inaugurate a New Evangelisation. That will not happen because the church rejects inclusivity, transparency and accountability. These so-called modern values are the hallmark of an institution which has credibility and which deserves the trust of souls given into its care.

Stasis as a preferred way of existence is an invitation to a living death. The exterior will be pomp and circumstance, Disney-style international Youth encounters, Eucharistic mega-meetings and papal decrees and audiences. But what is there but a hollow body and a dispirited soul? Therein lays the tragedy of our institutional church.

**Frank Regan** November 2011.

- From issue 160 (December 2010) of *Renew*, the quarterly magazine of Catholics for a Changing Church.

### **BOOK REVIEW: Scott Wright, Oscar Romero and the Communion of Saints, Orbis Books, 2009**

If you ask any US North American then alive where she was the moment she heard of the assassination of President John F Kennedy, she will remember. I certainly do. And if you ask me where I was the moment thirty years ago I found out that Archbishop Romero was dead, I recall that I was crossing a busy street in Lima, Peru. There on the corner was a kiosk with one of the afternoon tabloids on display with the headline: OBISPO ASESINADO.

I knew the author Scott Wright as a fellow participant in a seminar on Liberation Theology in Washington DC back in 1995. He always spoke of his experience in El Salvador with great respect and tenderness. Like myself he went to do good and came back done good to. His book is written in the same tenor. With 'cariño, affection.

Gustavo Gutierrez said that the martyrdom of Oscar Romero divided the history of the Latin American church into a 'before' and an 'after'. Before, the Latin American church was the concubine of the oligarchy and military elites. Afterwards, that sad history, already fractured by Medellin (1968), was now in rupture. Not only that, the imperial presence of the United States was also put under critical examination. In the person of Saint Oscar the poor had definitively irrupted onto the stage of Latin American history. Faith reflection had discovered a new 'locus theologicus' where the poverty, the culture, the hopes, the struggles of the poor became part of a new theological lexicon.

Those in church and society, as well as the forces of Empire, looked with alarm at what was occurring. The Pope did not permit his Nuncio to attend the funeral fearing distancing the church from the regime. He sent a personal delegate instead. The official line became that Oscar was a victim of political violence, not a martyr of a faith which does justice. The old avatars of Marxist violence and atheism were invoked. Uncondemned were the violence and terror inflicted upon thousands of innocent peasants over a long stretch of time —from 1932, the year of the 'Matanza', the great slaughter. Their crime? They wanted land to be able to feed their families.

The mission of the church is to announce the Good News in the history of the people, as an ecclesial community, celebrating the Eucharist. Those three dimensions — history, community, Eucharist — gave life to the energy field in which Romero and his disciples, the people, moved. In every moment of his ministry St Oscar accompanied the various communities. He listened to their historic grief and pain. He celebrated the Eucharist with the bread as a broken body and the wine as spilt blood.

In his book, Scott Wright traces the sinuous and tortured process which Romero lived until he cast the die in commitment to the poor and to a church of the poor. He was of humble origin of a poor rural village. His education was simple, but at the age of thirteen he expressed a desire to study for the priesthood. He entered the minor seminary. From there the pathway was straight. He went to Rome for studies and was ordained there April 4, 1942. ("How beautiful will be the day when all the baptised understand that their work, their job, is a priestly work, that just as I celebrate Mass at this altar, so each carpenter celebrates Mass at his workbench." 20 Nov 1977).

Upon his return to El Salvador he was sent to a poor mountain village as curate. He was generous to the poor and a friend to all. As a priest of his time he was conservative and cautious, rigid and inflexible. He was out of touch with the reality of the poor.

One critic said of him: “He was a friend of the poor and a friend of the rich. To the rich he would say, ‘Love the poor.’ And to the poor he would tell us to love God, and that God knew what he was doing by putting us last in line, and that afterwards we would be assured a place in heaven.” (Maria Varela)

(“The Lord has inspired in me a great desire for holiness. I’ve been thinking of how far a soul can ascend if it lets itself be possessed entirely by God.”) But change loomed. The Second Vatican Council occurred. Romero understood it as a call to priestly renewal. He did not see much beyond that. Then came Medellin (1968), perhaps the most radical bishops’ meeting in modern history. There the themes of poverty in the church, the option for the poor, liberation were treated and radical commitments undertaken. Romero was a Vatican II priest, but not a Medellin priest. On June 21, 1970 he became auxiliary bishop of San Salvador. From that moment on Oscar Romero became a man with a destiny, a destiny which like Christ he would not have chosen. At the beginning of his episcopal ministry Romero was the enemy of any manifestation of a church assuming an option for the poor. He saw that as purely political and ideological. He was in favour of the poor as objects of the solicitude of the Church, but not as potential protagonists of their own history.

It took more than time. It took the bloody death of a friend, Rutilio Grande SJ, to awaken him to the horrendous situation his own people were living. The blood of martyrs is indeed the seed of Christians. The blood of Rutilio Grande spattered the soul of Oscar Romero and thus was born a new, paschal Christian.

The rest is the history and the martyrology of a people and the story of a Pastor of souls within that grand narrative. It is well narrated by Scott Wright. The way to Romero’s Golgotha was clearly marked. In sermon after sermon, letter after letter, consultations with his clergy and fellow bishops, and interviews – not always happy – with Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul, Oscar went discerning his way, almost every day a Gethsemane, wrestling Jacob-like with his God, needing to see clearly and follow closely. Finally, on March 24, 1980, at the altar as he raised the offertory chalice, an assassin, for the price of \$9000, shot Romero through the heart. Within 24 hours the assassin was also dead, buried no one knows where. That same year 12,000 peasants, priests, catechists and local leaders were killed.

This is a well-wrought book. It has photos, excerpts from Romero’s homilies, letters and diaries, and wide margins where one can make personal annotations. Wright gives us a tender and affectionate portrait of Romero, warts and all. I am grateful that having lived 22 years in Peru, I could live again those passionate years.

**Frank Regan.**

- From issue 154 (June 2010) of *Renew*, the quarterly magazine of Catholics for a Changing Church.

#### **THE HOMILIES OF ST. OSCAR ROMERO**

Read all the homilies from 1977 (when he stepped into the role of prophetic witness following the assassination of Fr. Rutilio Grande) until his own assassination in 1980. The Romero Trust has the texts of the homilies in both Spanish and English, and there are recordings of many of them. It is so powerful to hear his voice. <http://www.romerotruster.org.uk/homilies-and-writings/homilies>

#### **THE OSCAR ROMERO AWARD TRUST JOINS CARITAS SOCIAL ACTION NETWORK**

April 30, 2025: At their March board meeting, the trustees of Caritas Social Action Network, chaired by Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, voted unanimously to accept an application from the Oscar Romero Award Trust to join CSAN. The Oscar Romero Award Trust supports Catholic schools in their journey of embedding Catholic Social Teaching in the governance, curriculum and social outreach of the school. With a new focus on CST in the Catholic Schools Inspection Framework, this Award has been valued and appreciated by many Catholic schools.

CSAN now has 51 Catholic and ecumenical charities in membership, working across a wide range of human need, all with the same mission: to bring the love of God to people in our communities who are most marginalised and to advocate for justice. The Oscar Romero Award Trust plays a key role in forming the staff and pupils in our schools to be agents of positive change who will contribute to this mission.

Raymond Friel, CEO of Caritas Social Action Network, said: “We’re delighted to welcome the Oscar Romero Award Trust into the CSAN family. Our patron saint and inspiration is St Oscar Romero, so it really feels as if the Oscar Romero Award is a perfect fit. I look forward to working with Mugeni and his colleagues on projects which will enrich all our work.” Mugeni Sumba, the Co-ordinator of the Oscar Romero Award Trust, said: “I am grateful that the Oscar Romero Award Trust has been accepted in the CSAN family. Our aim is to help schools become centres of evangelization by helping them embed CST principles in their everyday life and fabric. I am looking forward to working with other members of CSAN in building the Kingdom of God here on earth.”

<https://www.csan.org.uk/news/the-oscar-romero-award-trust-joins-caritas-social-action-network/>

## THE POPEMOBILE OF PEACE: POPE FRANCIS' FINAL GIFT TO GAZA

Source: Vatican News, Caritas Sweden May 4, 2025

The closeness Pope Francis showed to the most vulnerable during his earthly mission continues to radiate after his death. His popemobile, the vehicle from which he waved and was close to millions of faithful all around the world, is being transformed into a mobile health unit for the children of Gaza. This was one of Pope Francis' final wishes. He entrusted the initiative to Caritas Jerusalem, seeking to respond to the dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where nearly one million children have been displaced. Amid the horrific war, collapsed infrastructure, a mutilated healthcare system and lack of education, children are the first to pay the price, with starvation, infections and other preventable conditions putting their lives at risk.

Pope Francis often stated: "Children are not numbers. They are faces. Names. Stories. And each one is sacred", and with this final gift, his words have become action. The repurposed popemobile is being outfitted with equipment for diagnosis, examination, and treatment - including rapid tests for infections, diagnostic instruments, vaccines, suture kits, and other life-saving supplies. It will be staffed by doctors and medics, reaching children in the most isolated corners of Gaza once humanitarian access to the strip is restored. In a press release, Peter Brune, Secretary General of Caritas Sweden, writes: "with the vehicle, we will be able to reach children who today have no access to health care – children who are injured and malnourished. This is a concrete, life-saving intervention at a time when the health system in Gaza has almost completely collapsed".

Caritas Jerusalem, which has long served Gaza's communities under difficult conditions, is leading the on-the-ground effort. With over one hundred staff members committed to healthcare delivery, the organisation is now building on the Pope's legacy of compassion and strength whilst bringing his final blessing to the people of Gaza. In photos released from the project, the vehicle appears to have been carefully adapted to fit the needs of those most in need. But "it's not just a vehicle," Brune said. "It's a message that the world has not forgotten about the children in Gaza." And it is also an invitation: that the rest of the world remember, too.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/52300>

### "IF NOT US, THEN WHO?"

#### A report on child poverty and mental health needs in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Salford

Salford have launched a brand new report on child poverty in local schools, showing the staggering increase in children living in poverty within the Diocese. They are calling for urgent action after their research has shown a staggering increase in child poverty within Catholic schools in Greater Manchester and Lancashire over the last three years.

42 per cent of head teachers and other school leaders said that more than half of the children in their school are affected by poverty related issues, with half of those responding stating that poverty affects more than 75 per cent of their pupils. This has a direct impact on the educational outcomes of pupils, as well as their health, wellbeing and future. Schools are on the frontline in communities across the area every day, but at a time of overstretched public services, particularly social care and mental health support, schools are increasingly stepping in to fill the gaps. As one headteacher said: "If not us, then who?"

<https://www.caritassalford.org.uk/campaign/endchildpoverty/>

#### BOOK REVIEW: *Patriot* by Alexei Navalny. Reviewed by Cameron Bellm

You won't find them braver than opposition leader and activist Alexei Navalny. His book begins as an account of his poisoning by the Kremlin, but becomes his prison diary, detailing his incarceration for three years on absurdly false charges until he was killed by the state in an Arctic prison camp in February 2024. I can't tell you that it ends well. But I can tell you that Navalny is as inspiring in his humor and faith as he is in demanding a better future for Russia. The phrase "triumph of the human spirit" is a well-known cliché, but it ceases to be one when applied to Navalny; it is simply the truth.

Before his poisoning and imprisonment, Navalny was the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation and an outspoken critic of a Russia bled dry by the oligarchs who continue to direct all of the country's considerable resources straight into their own pockets, leaving the average Russian mired in poverty. We are getting an extreme dose of that here in America, with billionaires brazenly slashing aid and public services, firing scores of people, and enriching themselves immensely in the process.

From prison and in his many court appearances, Navalny also condemned the war against Ukraine. As Trump aligns himself with Putin and the US opposes a UN resolution that Russia withdraw from Ukraine, Navalny's words feel ever more prophetic and urgent. In the Oscar-winning documentary *Navalny*, the director asks him, what is your message to the Russian people if you should be killed? Navalny answers, "Do not give up."

• Cameron Bellm is a Seattle-based writer and retreat leader.

## **RHS CHELSEA SHOW 2025 THE GLASSHOUSE GARDEN**

The Glasshouse Garden celebrates the transformative effect of second chances through horticulture. It embodies the sense of purpose, self-belief and hope The Glasshouse programme offers to women as they approach the end of their prison sentences, through a programme of horticultural training, employment and resettlement support.

An immersive space centred around a translucent elliptical pavilion emerging from the foliage, the Garden is full of sensory delights. Jewel-like colours and fragrant flowers sway to the sound of water from a narrow rill which winds its way through the space connecting different areas and ending in a tranquil pool.

The planting is rich and full of texture and includes beautiful river birch trees, ferns, grasses and roses including, Rosa 'Tuscany Superb', Rosa 'Charles de Mills', and Rosa 'Emma Bridgewater'. The planting colours are inspired by the notion of 'strong beauty' in a palette of deep reds and muted pinks.

The pavilion has a series of pivoting screens made from recycled acrylic which open like petals and have a tint which compliments the colour palette of the plants.

The garden is made for the participants of The Glasshouse programme – women based in UK prisons who receive horticultural training, employment and resettlement support as they approach the end of their sentence and plan for a successful return to society. The design for the garden is inspired by the love of nature and beauty of plants of the women inmates.

**Garden legacy:** After the show the garden will be relocated to HMP Downview women's prison in Surrey.

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show/gardens/2025/glasshouse>

Designer Jo Thompson says: "RHS Chelsea Flower Show is an international platform for world-class garden design. I am honoured to be working with The Glasshouse – a pioneering charity offering second chances through horticultural training to women in UK prisons – and embodying its message in The Glasshouse Garden at RHS Chelsea. The garden will have a transformational future as a permanent space dedicated to horticultural training and building self-belief, helping a new community of women to change outcomes and reduce re-offending."

Jo adds: "For years, I have been campaigning for everyone to have the right to access green space, so all the public gardens I create are really important to me. I have seen the positive effect that gardens and gardening have on individuals, as well as the impact of people coming together in public spaces. There is so much more to be done."

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/misc-shows/designer-biogs/jo-thompson>

## **HELPING PEOPLE GROW**

The Glasshouse is a social enterprise offering second chances through horticultural training to women based in UK prisons. We harness the power of botanics to make work and living spaces greener, healthier and more inviting. Plants are proven to improve mental and physical wellbeing, increase creativity and concentration and remove toxins from the air.

<https://www.theglasshouse.co.uk/>

**Read more here:** <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/health-and-wellbeing/real-life-stories/growing-hope-and-houseplants-in-prison>

## **THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS**

**Jon Kuhrt** April 27, 2025: On Friday night my wife and I had a great evening out with a few beers and a meal with old friends from my university. We got the bus home but after we had got off at our stop, I realised that I did not have my phone with me. I knew immediately what I had done – I had left it on the top deck of the bus. I was angry at myself for my stupidity. My phone is both a work and personal one and my mind immediately started racing with all the hassles it would cause.

Fortunately, my wife stayed a bit calmer and thought about how we could catch up the bus and recover the phone. Due to the drink, driving was not an option, so she immediately booked an Uber and gave me her phone. Being a Friday night and a packed bus, I thought it was a long-shot that I would find the phone but thought it worth a go. And when the Uber arrived about 3 minutes later, I explained the situation to the driver who was called Shirdon. I thought he might be sceptical or awkward about the idea of chasing a bus but he could not have been more positive. He turned to me and said: 'Jon, we are going to get this phone back!'



And off we went. The bus had gone a surprisingly far distance, but Shirdon was focused and at each traffic light he fist-bumped me to indicate how bought into the mission he was. About 3 miles on, we saw the bus at a stop and he said: 'Right, I'll stop in front and block the bus, and you jump out'.

I jumped out, re-boarded the bus and explained the situation to the driver who waved me in. I ran up to the top deck and 3 boys were sitting in the seats where I had been. I said a bit breathlessly, 'Have you seen a phone? I left it here.' They said 'No' but started looking around and were keen to help. But it was not looking good. But then a voice called out from further down the bus 'I've got it mate – is this your phone?' and a man came up and handed it to me. I was so relieved. I thanked him briefly but profusely.

I ran back down and jumped back into Shirdon's car. He was almost as happy as me. He said 'Right, I am going to drive you back home now to your wife. No charge.' I tried to insist on doing a new journey so I could pay him but he said he had turned off his availability to 'see this job through'. As we drove back, he explained how important it was that people looked out for each other: 'I have given up watching media because it's all about setting people off against others. Christians v Muslims. Blacks v Whites. We are all human, we gotta do things for others. It's what life is about.'

I was so grateful for the kindness and humanity he showed to me. And connected to what he said, its relevant to share that all of those who helped me recover the phone – Shirdon, the bus driver, the boys and the man who kept my phone safe – were all a different ethnicity to me.

In life, it is so much easier to highlight negative experiences than positive ones. I know from blogging that a negative article is far more likely to be popular than a positive one. Humans have an in-built negativity bias which means we are stimulated more by negative stories and we remember negative experiences better than positive ones. We recall insults better than praise and think about negative things more frequently than positive ones. All this may be understandable but it can stoke fear and deepen suspicion towards others.

We need to tell other stories too which provide a more balanced picture and can build our confidence in the goodness of others. Do the stories we tell build bridges or barriers?

I love my local community and experiences like this make me love it even more. I was truly blessed by the kindness of strangers. Let's all be more Shirdon!

• **Jon Kuhrt** has worked with people affected by homelessness for 30 years. He is a former government adviser on how faith groups address rough sleeping & is now CEO of Hope into Action <https://www.hopeintoaction.org.uk/>

## **RESIDENTIAL GROUP EVENTS AT BOARBANK HALL**

All our events take advantage of the rhythm of our community prayer, the comfortable facilities of our Guest House and the beauty of the local area. We offer a unique mix of prayer, study and opportunities for social and quiet time. We welcome bookings from school or student groups or any religious or other groups who may benefit from our hospitality. We also work with schools to provide INSET days, with the option of overnight stays. If you would like help in arranging a programme for a retreat or residential event please get in touch. For residential courses we only ask the standard Guest House price plus an optional donation in lieu of a course fee. For students, the low-paid or anyone who needs it to attend, payment by donation only is available. Please don't hesitate to ask! For further information or to book please contact Sr Margaret Atkins: Tel: 015395 32288 [margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk](mailto:margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk) Boarbank Hall Allithwaite Grange over Sands CUMBRIA LA11 7NH

**27-31 May Celebrating Creation Time** to explore how to live out Laudato Si' fully in our personal lives and within the Church. Talks, discussions, art, liturgy, gardening, walks. All welcome.

**26 July-2 August Thinking Faith Theme: St Paul** Time out for working Catholics.

**18-22 August St Augustine's Confessions** An introduction to St Augustine's classic spiritual autobiography. All welcome.

**4-10 October Celebrating Creation.** Time to explore how to live out Laudato Si' fully in our personal lives and within the Church. Talks, discussions, art, liturgy, gardening, walks. All welcome.

**24-26/27 October 2025. Magnificat!** Follow up to Our Lady in Latin, exploring the Latin and the music of the canticles from the birth narratives in St Luke. For those who know just a little Latin!

**5-7/8 December Hope in Health** For all who support or care for anyone who is sick, professionals and others.

<https://boarbankhall.org.uk/whats-on>

## DIARY

### MAY

**15 International Conscientious Objectors' Day** Pax Christi will be involved in a number of events around the country (included the National Event in Tavistock Square, London) as we remember all those who have refused to bear arms and participate in war, throughout history and today. For details of other events see the PPU website here: <https://www.ppu.org.uk/international-conscientious-objectors-day-may-15th>

**Manchester** 12:00 pm A short vigil to remember conscientious objectors across the world who refused to kill in wars in the past and who still refuse to kill in current conflicts. With a selection of readings, poems, reflections and a guided meditation. All welcome.

**Liverpool** Gather in Derby Square, Liverpool L2 1XA ( near the Law Courts) at 12.30 to honour the courage of conscientious objectors past and present. Organised by Merseyside Pax Christi. For information contact Jan Harper 07591082195 or email [janharper20211@outlook.com](mailto:janharper20211@outlook.com)

**15 CAFOD Debt, Justice and the Jubilee Year:** 7pm. Join Fr Charlie Chilufya - a debt crisis-expert and Kenya-based priest and Director of the Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network, Africa. Also Maria Finnerty, CAFOD's Lead Economist and author of our recent report about the Jubilee and the new global debt crisis. Register here: <https://www.bigmarker.com/cafod/debt-jubilee>

**15 Chester People Planet Pint** That Beer Place, Chester, 7.00pm Celebrate plant-based living with local vendors, talks, and delicious food.

**17 Chester Farmers Market Stall** – By Eco Communities and Chester Cycling Campaign, Chester Townhall Square, Chester. Come and visit our stall to learn more about our eco initiatives and Chester Green Weekend.

**17 Paddle Out Protest** – By Surfers Against Sewage Sandy Lane, Chester, 2:30pm Join the national movement demanding clean water and healthy rivers.

**Chester Repair Cafe by Chester** Friends of the Earth details <https://chesterfoe.co.uk/chester-repair-cafe/> email [chesterrepaircafe@gmail.com](mailto:chesterrepaircafe@gmail.com) Check facebook for location

**19 Gardening for Wildlife** - By Climate Action Frodsham Frodsham Community Centre, Fluin Lane, Frodsham, 7.30pm <https://www.climateactionfrodsham.com/>

**20 ACTIONism: Film & Working Groups** - By Eco Communities That Beer Place, Chester, 7:00pm An inspiring film screening followed by discussion on climate action and community resilience.

**20 CAFOD Spiritual practices in the Jubilee Year:** Join us for a series of online gatherings exploring ways to live out the Jubilee Year. Join us for the first session on Tuesday 20 May, 7-8pm to explore the theme of hope. Click here to register: <https://cafod.org.uk/pray/jubilee-spiritual-practices-webinars>

**21 Ellesmere Port Business Event** - By Groundworks - Understanding how to transition to Electric Vehicles Ellesmere Port Civic Hall, 8.00am - 10.00am for business. Register here: <https://groundworksbs.org.uk/ev-event/> Following the business breakfast presentations, the event will be open to the public from 10am to 1pm.

**24 May - Chester Ride Out** - By Fettle - Sponsors of Chester Green Weekend Fettle Chester, starting at 11:00am Celebrate active travel with a community cycle ride around Chester. Paul will be leading the ride and our Helen will be doing a talk about Chester Green Weekend. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/fettle-chester-bikes-brews-ride-out-fun-tickets-1345290292479?aff=oddtcreator>

**25 Tattenhall Repair Cafe** - By Transition Tattenhall Barbour Institute, Tattenhall - 10.00am <https://www.facebook.com/TransitionTattenhall>

### JUNE

**12 Merseyside Pax Christi meeting** 2.00pm at St Michael's Parish Centre, Horne St Liverpool L6 5EH. All welcome. Contact Jan Harper 07591082195 or email [janharper20211@outlook.com](mailto:janharper20211@outlook.com)

**15 and 16 Chester Green Weekend** – events, summer Sustainability Fair and June Eco Exposition <https://participatenow.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/climate-emergency/stories/chester-green-weekend-2025-a-celebration-of-sustainability>

### JULY

**10 Merseyside Pax Christi meeting** 2.00pm at St Michael's Parish Centre, Horne St Liverpool L6 5EH. All welcome. Contact Jan Harper 07591082195 or email [janharper20211@outlook.com](mailto:janharper20211@outlook.com)

**25-27 The National Justice and Peace Network 47th Annual Conference Moving from 'Just Politics to Just Peace'** at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire. Details and booking info on page 16 below

**Moving from 'Just Politics to Just Peace'**  
**The National Justice and Peace Network 47th Annual Conference**  
25 - 27 July 2025 at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire

We live in a world where many believe in the inevitability of violence as a means of resolving conflict.  
However, as people of faith, we believe that we have been given an alternative model.  
We are to put down our swords, and live out the gospel message of justice, peace and love.  
Violence is not inevitable, there is another way.

During this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis urges us 'to become pilgrims of hope,  
to silence the sound of arms and overcome divisions.'

Working in partnership with Pax Christi and the Quaker Truth and Integrity Group the conference will explore  
how we can build a just peace globally, nationally and in our own life.

Keynote speakers include Dr. Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury  
and Joanna Frew from Rethinking Security.

We have a great line-up of interesting Workshops, Stalls, and other events going on across the weekend.

For more information, and to book your place,  
please use this link <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference/> to the NJPN website where you will find  
two ways to book: - either through Microsoft Forms, or by downloading a Word version of the Booking Form,  
filling it in and returning it to [admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk](mailto:admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk)

- Many items taken from the daily e-bulletin Independent Catholic News [www.indcatholicnews.com](http://www.indcatholicnews.com) an invaluable free resource for up-to-date J&P news, events and in-depth articles.

- See current NJPN news here: <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/news/>

- Sign up for regular news and information from NJPN (plus copies of this newsletter & back issues for NJPN North West) at [www.justice-and-peace.org.uk](http://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk) or contact [ebulletin@justice-and-peace.org](mailto:ebulletin@justice-and-peace.org) 020 7901 4864

- Read the SPRING issue of **MOUTHPEACE** the quarterly online newsletter for Shrewsbury, Liverpool and Lancaster dioceses: <https://jpshrewsbury.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/mouthpeace-spring-2025-2.pdf>

*The views expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily those of NJPN*