

We welcome you to the 12th edition of *The Word*. We hope that within the few articles presented that you will find something that is useful to you and/or resonates with you.

At the same time I would like to highlight the March monthly prayer from Pope Francis. Although we are almost at the end of March I felt that it may be appropriate to share given that we are about to enter Holy Week.

Pope Francis prays: **Sacrament of reconciliation**
"Let us pray that we may experience the sacrament of reconciliation with renewed depth, to taste the infinite mercy of God". He also says, elsewhere, "Recognise the immense love of God for me, who never tires of forgiving".

I hope that we will all have a happy, holy and blessed Easter.

Mike Eggleton

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HOPE

Poem by Alexis Valdes – quoted by Pope Francis

When the storm passes
and the roads are tamed,
and we are the survivors
of a collective shipwreck.

With a weeping heart
and a blessed destiny
we will feel happy
just for being alive.

And we will hug
the first stranger
and praise the luck
of not having lost a friend.

And then we'll remember
everything we lost
And all at once we will learn
all we had not learned before

We will no longer be envious
because we have all suffered
We will no longer be lazy
And will be more compassionate

What belongs to all will be worth more
than that never achieved
We will be more generous
and much more committed

We will understand how fragile
it means to be alive.
We will sweat empathy
for who is and who has left.

We will miss the old man
asking for a dollar in the market
we didn't know his name
although he was next to us

And perhaps the poor old man
was your God in disguise.
You never asked for his name
because you were in a hurry.

And everything will be a miracle
And everything will be legacy.
And life will be respected,
the life we have won.

When the storm passes
I ask God, full of sadness
to return us to be better
as he had dreamed we would be.



A Post-Lockdown Gospel Message

Br Chris Dyczek OFM

'Can You Look Her in the Eyes and Say You Are Socially Distancing?' is what one NHS advert proposed for a challenge during the pandemic. A struggling patient or nurse looks out of the photo with anxiety about staying safe. Looking into another person's eyes is how we show our honesty and sincerity.

We can hardly proclaim the good news of Christ unless we have made good responses to the needs of those trapped by the sudden illness, or to their carers. We could usually in the past have regarded our Christian gatherings as times for finding the shared faith into which we would invite others, by looking at them with direct readiness, keen to create a well-grounded trust. To proclaim Christ's love is an expression of hope because it includes opportunities for heart-to-heart listening. Yet what was normal for believers has also been placed in a vulnerable position.

We have realised how often could no longer fall back into our typical routine of community friendship, our patterns of entering church and praying or singing. These were being discouraged or forbidden. Children across the country and around the world have had to observe with some discomfort a fragmenting of the previous styles of worship and meditation. How can we make any part of this burden of sad memories meaningful, even when vaccines have brought about a revived range of good human collaborations, and experiences can be jointly appreciated once more? Like the children, we shall have memories of living with fearfulness, of uncertainty about future employment and about providing good meals. Our religious language has to stay focused on lessening these fears and burdens.

Part of the difficulty is that our televisions have bombarded us in our front rooms with stories about families and supermarkets running out of supplies, students trapped in college housing with no proper learning process available and no food, graphs of increasing numbers of people hospitalised, wars in Syria, Yemen or South America, cuts to previous aid programmes, details of forest fires, oil spills and the destruction of the natural habitats of animals. There is a general image of vulnerability without much to turn to that can restore some creative resilience.

Yet if all we have to share when we look at others close to us is that inner insecurity, there is too much sadness and pain, and too little joy, patience and support. For this reason it is important to take time looking at our inner world, the thoughts and imaginings which could be bringing a freshness of outlook into our relationships.

If the past year has felt like 'an enforced sabbatical,' as Gerard Conden puts it, what would be valuable in the ideas we trust, to prevent us sinking into a culture of "safetyism"? It would be better, he suggests, to prefer faith that is still able to seek the freely chosen road, 'because the human spirit is made for something more than the obvious.'

We can develop creative resilience by making deeper uses of our Catholic religious writers, for instance. Our childhood routines may need to be deepened. The Scottish Jesuit Gerard Hughes liked to tell a story about this. He pictures a modern family, being visited by Jesus. They are thrilled, and decide to throw a party to show Jesus off to their friends. It is a great success. But then it becomes complex, because Jesus decides to

stay, to move in with the family. The whole process becomes very different. Jesus starts to invite visitors too, bringing in all sorts of questionable characters from the streets, from 'the highways and byways' as the gospels put it. A chaotic pile up of emotions enters their lives.

Neighbours begin then to complain about the dropping of their property prices. Large amounts of food are being bought and eaten. The demand on the family has become too high. One member of the family has an idea to offer, for keeping things simple. Jesus is having an afternoon siesta, so they build a brick wall across the bed room door. They place a little altar in front of it, with nice candlesticks and a silver crucifix. Every time they go past they will genuflect. It seems like a way of dealing correctly with Jesus.

But this means they don't let him show them how to move along the open road, or to relate their resurrection faith to anyone else on that road. Their chances of becoming well-guided in the arts of forgiveness, healing and compassion have shrunk. These are not trivial single sound-bite topics.

When we change our behaviour a bit, with the lockdown ending, there will be a lot of chaotic emotions bursting out. Flashes of bitterness and distress are likely to hit many of us and our neighbours, young and old. Will Christ the peacemaker be welcome to enter this chaos and bring back a vision of love, a strong perspective on how to let others take part in our gospel language of conversion, celebration and careful attentiveness?

It has been interesting, over the past year, to notice how some writers in the ordinary popular newspapers have recognised that this need for inner wholeness and integrity will become more real to people in the months ahead. Hospitality situations for those who are struggling with losses and deprivations could be developed in Catholic halls and gathering places. But how well have we cherished our faith capacity for inner wholeness and integrity?

The newspaper articles have include titles such as 'The science of silence: why quiet is good for your health' by Peta Bee, and 'How to talk yourself out of a negative thought,' Damian Whitworth's interview of the psychologist Ethan Kross. Concerns of this sort should be ones which society at large in our area would associate regularly with our lives of prayer, worship and meditation, because our Catholicism contains a focus on inner resources. But will people around us be disappointed if they come to us for tips and fuller guidance on their inner attention to real life?

Each of us will have some failures in this area, and must themselves decide on ways to make the flow of God's gifts more genuine in relating to others. Peta Bee tells her readers that noise slows recovery from pain, and noisy mealtimes turn people into less attentive parents, while silence makes us happier and can boost the minds abilities in memory, emotions and learning. Being quiet will probably make us reduce our consumption of food, so a silent breakfast allows us to be more mindful, and likely to eat less too, later that day. Two minutes of silence, like listening to classical music, can have 'a dramatic effect in relieving tensions in the body and mind,' lowering a raised heart rate and blood pressure.

This is not just about wholeness as a physical dimension to wellbeing, but recognises the spirit dimension which, as Christians, we hope pass on to others. The research by Ethan Kross in Michigan focuses on the silent conversations we have within ourselves. He believes that 'our inner voice is our superpower' enabling us to solve many problems, to innovate and be creative.

However, the inner voice can just be chatter, a source of much despair. Its quality is very important. It can undermine how we perform in all aspects of our lives and decisions. There is a relationship between introspection and self-control. Talking to ourselves by name, called "distanced self-talk," can enable us to gain perspective on the current social events that are troubling us. It can stop us from inner-voice ranting which often occurs in romantic relationships. A friend or partner may help by stepping outside the flood of thoughts and arguing calmly.

Augustine's Confessions are a remarkable exercise in this aspect of faith as a recovery process for those immersed in social and family pressures. Conversion can search out multiple pathways of healing to approach deeper levels of awareness. Other writings can help people to find which spirituality or theology has the most beneficial features for them. This is sometimes referred to as 'adult catechesis', and is now widely acknowledged as something badly needed in our current Christian circumstances, where familiarity with even essential knowledge of Christian beliefs, imagination and concepts is absent.

By paying more attention to the relevant resources, we could not only benefit a local church in greater post-lockdown peace of mind, but also in acquiring the raw material for a livelier, more genuine pattern of community worship. A more responsible sense of practical living can emerge from this. Likewise a deeper love of God can result, which brings about a more varied and alert range of responses to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Careful reading of books such as John Navone's Communicating Christ, and more recent equivalents, would

set out some aspects of an improved mapping of the inner lives of those who meet in churches, and who will speak heart-to-heart about their lives of conversion together.

Some may like to devise ways of applying such a renewal of hope that are particularly appropriate to a local area. Perhaps a lot of unemployed musicians and practitioners of the arts in general could be pulled into the reflection on a recovery from the pandemic. A modest level of funding would not only be welcome and charitable, but could help the more timid churchgoers to awaken their inner voice of patient self-control, composure and sensitive interaction with friends and neighbours.

We are called by Christ, and we receive a mission from him. But the vitality that is possible for those who take on that mission is a mixture of gifts, which have to be discerned. The discernment process ought to be worked on in conjunction with our fellow worshippers and fellow Christians. ✚

CAFOD Catholic Agency for Overseas Development

Mass for people of Ethiopia

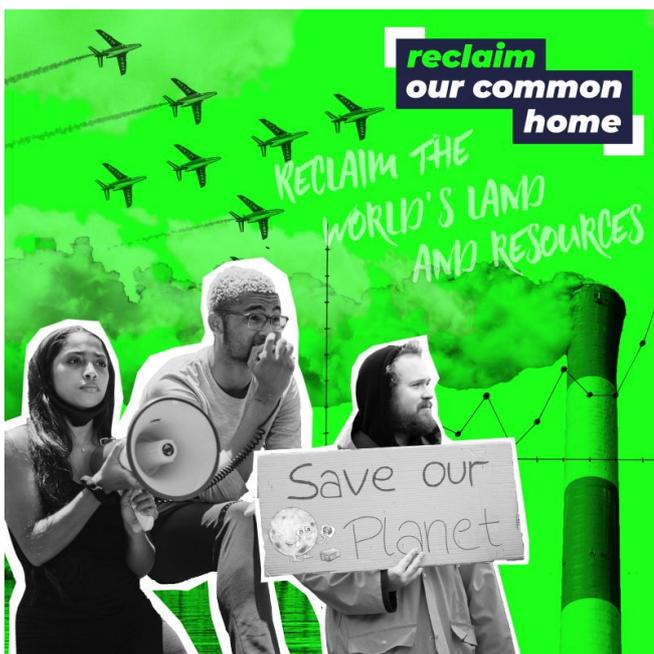
You may have seen in the news recently that there is conflict in Tigray, in the north of Ethiopia. At times of crisis, we feel called to pray together.

You are invited to join us on **Friday 26 March at 7pm** for our special CAFOD Mass for the people of Ethiopia.



You may be concerned about how the communities in Ethiopia that we shared stories with you in our Lent appeal are doing – in particular, Abdella and Hagos. The young man you will have seen in our Lent appeal, Abdella, lives in the Afar region, away from the fighting. You may also remember Hagos and his young family whose community benefitted from a new water supply. They are featured in our Lent appeal videos and on the reverse side of the parish poster. Unfortunately, we received news recently that the fighting has affected Hagos' community in Tigray. We were relieved to hear that he and his family are alive but we are painfully reminded that innocent women, men and children are caught in the middle of conflict.

Register here for the special CAFOD Mass: <https://www.bigmarker.com/cafod/Mass-for-Ethiopia>



Reclaim our common home

This year, the UK will host the largest gathering of world leaders ever to take place on British soil: the 'COP26' climate talks are being held in Glasgow in November, postponed from last November due to the pandemic.

As Prime Minister, Boris Johnson must push world leaders to show the ambition we need to keep temperature rises below the disastrous 1.5-degree threshold. This means that all countries must play their part.

Wealthy nations, who bear the greatest responsibility for the crisis, need to step up. With the eyes of the world on the UK, we must urge the Prime Minister to make sure communities hardest hit by the climate emergency are listened to at COP26.

Sign the petition now:

<https://e-activist.com/page/73304/petition/1>



Lenten Appeal

Lent is a time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving and we have always been fortunate to receive generous donations and prayers from our community during this period.

This year those donations will be more vital than ever. While some of us are choosing to 'give something up for Lent', others are being forced into living with far less than usual and are facing real hardship and an uncertain future. These families are reaching out to us and we are seeing a significant rise in the demand for our specialist care and services.

Why our work is so important

50%

of those with lifetime mental health problems first experience symptoms by the age of 14.

1 in 6

children and young people have a diagnosable mental health problem such as depression, anxiety and conduct disorders.

70%

of children and young people who experience mental health problems do not receive intervention at a sufficiently early age.

With the help of our dear supporters who kept us close by providing financial support in 2020 and despite all the difficulties and challenges we have faced, we are proud to be able to share our successes:

170 families supported with food vouchers, clothes and other essentials via our Crisis Fund

230 families received food vouchers at Christmas

Over **6000** sessions delivered to children and young people

450 new cases opened

720 children, young people and families supported by our professional team

80 professional meetings attended

Over **100** supervision sessions delivered to exhausted school staff

Weekly wellbeing check-ins provided to school staff

During 2020 - 28 members of staff supported 720 families and 90 schools

If you are giving up something for Lent, please transform it into lasting change by donating the money you save to make a difference to those who need us most.

To donate using your on-line banking, you can make a direct transfer to our bank account using **Lent 2021** as a reference:

Account Name: Brentwood Catholic Children's Society

Account Number: 31094130

Sort Code: 40 13 22

Alternatively, you can donate online by going to our VirginMoneyGiving page by clicking [this link>>>](#)

Thank You.



TOP 8 FAIRTRADE EASTER EGGS

The farmers who grow the cocoa in the chocolate eggs we in the UK enjoy each Easter, earn on average \$1 per day, which isn't enough to cover their basic needs.

Cocoa farmers must also deal with the immediate and ever-increasing threat of the climate crisis. Even though farmers in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana have contributed the least to the climate emergency, they are disproportionately affected and struggle with crop failure.

Through the chain reaction of choosing Fairtrade, you're supporting environmentally friendly farming and supporting cocoa farmers to move towards earning a living income. So check out the Easter treats in all their egg-cellence! <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/media-centre/blog/top-8-fairtrade-easter-eggs/>

Web Resources

Mike Eggleton

On the parish website homepage if you look along the top menu on the site and go to **Schools** then here you will find a list of schools within the parish. The last item along on the menu is **More** and within this category is listed the various other programmes and activities within the parish which have not been covered elsewhere.

On the homepage you can also find a link to watch live mass being streamed on Sunday mornings at 10am during the lockdown. If you are unable to view mass at this time then scrolling further down on the homepage you can find the icon **Mass Online**. Clicking on this will enable you to be able to view the recording of the Sunday mass once it has been uploaded.

You can also find us on Facebook and Twitter (details in the section below).

- St. Thomas Parish Website: <http://www.stthomaswoodford.org>
- The Prayer App: Pray with the Pope – ‘Click to Pray’ prayer app – available on Android and iOS.
- Steward of the Gospel – The Vision Document and other documents related to our Parish Partnership are available on our website. To view go to: <https://www.stthomaswoodford.org/steward-of-the-gospel>
- Parish Facebook: [@STOCWoodford](https://www.facebook.com/STOCWoodford)
- Parish Twitter: [@STOCWoodford](https://twitter.com/STOCWoodford)
- Pope Francis at the Vatican: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html>
- Follow Pope Francis on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/Pontifex>
- The Art of Dying Well - what does the church say about death? <http://www.artofdyingwell.org/>
- Order of Friars Minor in Great Britain: [http://www.friar.org/ home](http://www.friar.org/home)