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Bishop Peter with the Jubilee Cross at the Opening Mass at St John's Cathedral. Picture by Keith Morris. See a full report and picture gallery at rcdea.org.uk



Cross is focus of the Jubilee

■ A treasured cross, bequeathed to the Diocese of East Anglia Youth Service by Bishop Michael Evans, is set to play a key role in the Jubilee Year celebrations during 2025.

The Jubilee of 2025, which will be marked across the Catholic Church worldwide, began in East Anglia on December 29 when, as an echo of the liturgy of Good Friday, Bishop Peter Collins led a procession across the threshold of St John's Cathedral, carrying a cross which is to be a focal point of devotion throughout the year's celebrations.

Bishop's Private Secretary Fr Peter Wygnanski, explained: "Because this simple rite is a sign of the journey of hope of the pilgrim people behind the cross of Christ, Pope Francis has called for the cross used in the Holy Year's opening to hold particular significance, whether through its history, artistic quality, or the devotion it inspires among the faithful.

"To serve this role, Bishop Peter has selected a cross which was once the most treasured possession of his predecessor, Bishop Michael Evans; a prayerfully, hand-crafted replica of the cross venerated by the Taizé community in France which Bishop Michael considered his spiritual home. This Icon of the Crucifixion was bequeathed to the Diocesan Youth Service in the final days of Bishop Michael's battle with cancer, reflecting his particular love and concern for young people.

"By this choice of Diocesan Jubilee Cross, Bishop Peter hopes to emphasise how understanding our past, and our connections to it, is essential for looking ahead with hope. This is particularly true in supporting our young people in their faith, who are the future of the diocese, as they pick up their cross to follow Christ," said Fr Peter.

The cross is currently kept at the residence of the Ignite Team, as it is used in school and parish retreats across the Diocese as a focus for prayer, but has found a home at St John's Cathedral for the Jubilee year.

Mass marks start of Jubilee in East Anglia

The Jubilee Year of 2025 was officially started by Bishop Peter Collins with an Opening Procession and Mass at St John's Cathedral in Norwich on Sunday December 29. Keith Morris reports.

■ Bishop Peter joined bishops in Catholic dioceses across the world who were asked by Pope Francis to celebrate the Opening of the Jubilee Year at their cathedrals today.

The Rite began in the Cathedral Narthex with the singing of the Jubilee Year hymn – Pilgrims of Hope – which is also the theme of the year.

Bishop Peter said at the opening: "In fellowship with the universal Church, we solemnly open the Jubilee Year. This rite is, for us, the prelude to a rich experience of grace and mercy – we are ready always to respond to whoever asks the reason for the hope that is in us, especially in this time of war and disorder. May Christ, our peace and our hope, be our companion on the journey

in this year of grace and consolation."

A Papal Bull of Indiction – Spes non confundit ("Hope does not disappoint" [Rom 5:5]), was then read out. In it, Pope Francis writes: "Hope is the central message of the coming Jubilee that, in accordance with an ancient tradition, the Pope proclaims every 25 years. My thoughts turn to all those pilgrims of hope who will travel to Rome in order to experience the Holy Year and to all those others who, though unable to visit the City of the Apostles Peter and Paul, will celebrate it in their local churches.

"For everyone, may the Jubilee be a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the 'door' (cf. Jn 10:7.9) of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as 'our hope' (1 Tim 1:1).

"Let us even now be drawn to this hope! Through our witness, may hope spread to all those who anxiously seek it. May the way we live our lives say to them in so many words: 'Hope in the Lord! Hold firm, take heart and hope in the Lord!' (Ps 27:14). May the power of hope fill our days, as we await with confidence the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ,

to whom be praise and glory, now and forever."

A solemn procession then began to the west door of the Cathedral, where Bishop Peter held high the special cross of former Bishop of East Anglia, the Rt Rev Michael Evans, which will be at the centre of much of the Jubilee celebrations across the diocese.

Bishop Peter then led a procession, including the whole congregation, inside the cathedral for Mass.

During his homily, Bishop Peter said: "The Holy Father calls us to be 'Pilgrims of Hope' in the midst of the world; calls us to a fresh and genuine encounter with the Lord Jesus, who is the 'door' of our salvation (Jn.10:7.9). The hope we speak of is no mere optimism, it is the serene gift that confronts and conquers all pessimism and cynicism. The hope we speak of fosters that patience which addresses the frenetic haste of a world that has lost its way.

"Pope Francis opened the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica on Christmas Eve to inaugurate the Jubilee Year," said bishop Peter. "Whilst the faithful are encouraged to

■ story continued on page two.



The Papal Bull is read.

Mass opens the Year of Jubilee

■ story continued from page one.

undertake a pilgrimage to Rome during a Year of Jubilee, the vast majority will be unable to travel. Therefore, each diocese has been empowered to designate its own Cathedral Church as a location for Jubilee pilgrimage, together with one other named site. I have nominated the Catholic National Shrine and Basilica of Our Lady at Walsingham as the second location for our own diocese. By undertaking a Jubilee pilgrimage the faithful can obtain a plenary indulgence whilst fulfilling the established norms.

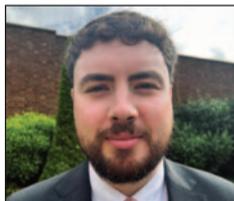
"In January I will be journeying to Rome on pilgrimage, accompanied by ecumenical leaders from our region, including the Bishop of Norwich. We will encounter the Holy Father and hold meetings with the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and with the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. I will again make pilgrimage to Rome in July when I will be leading our diocesan pilgrimage for Young People. Over 30 young adults have already committed themselves to this journey and I call upon others to consider joining our joyful project."

The theme, 'Pilgrims of Hope', invites Catholics to deepen their faith and embody hope amidst global challenges. With pilgrimage sites at the Cathedral and Walsingham offering plenary indulgences, the year promises grace and renewal. As Bishop Peter journeys to Rome and beyond, he encourages all to embrace the Jubilee's message, spreading hope and preparing for the Lord's coming.

Catholic EastAnglia

Newspaper of the Diocese of East Anglia

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Articles and photographs for the next edition are very welcome and should be sent to the editor, ideally via email, by Monday February 17.

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Bishop celebrates cathedral Christmas

■ Bishop Peter Collins celebrated a solemn pontifical Midnight Mass on Christmas Day at a packed St John's Cathedral in Norwich.

He greeted the baby Jesus and carried him in procession to the crib in St Joseph's Chapel in the cathedral.

"Today marks the beginning of a Holy Year, as this night Pope Francis has opened a Holy Door in the Basilica of St Peter in Rome," said Bishop Peter in his homily. On December 29, on the Feast of the Holy Family, every diocese across the universal church will celebrate the start of each diocesan participation in the pilgrimage which is the Holy Year," said Bishop Peter.

See more pictures at rcdea.org.uk



Big impact is made by Cambridge nativity scene

A Cambridge Catholic church had a large scale nativity scene on show until February 2, created by Italian painter and art restorer Francesco Connola.

■ Our Lady of the Assumption and the English Martyrs (OLEM) in the city centre hosted the captivating presepio (Christmas crib), created by Francesco, working every evening for two months.

Fr Giuseppe Rizzi envisioned the nativity scene as a way to unite families and children, encouraging them to rediscover and embrace values that may have faded over the years.

He said: "The presepio displays how the Lord Jesus was born to share the humanity of our human condition. The figures portray men and woman carrying out their daily jobs, because the Son of God became man for every man and every woman,



The Nativity scene in OLEM, Cambridge and, left, its creator Francesco Connola.

regardless of their conditions of life. The Holy Family attract the attention of the visitor and all figures. The humble crib is the centre and the ultimate fulfilment for those who decide to look at the Saviour and His gentle light."

Francesco, says that this initi-

ative represented a wonderful opportunity for families to gather and reflect on the teachings and path that Jesus illuminated through His birth. The cherished tradition of crafting nativity scenes has been passed down through generations of his family.

A talented artist Francesco was born in Naples and has made his home in Cambridge with his wife, Concetta, and their son, Jacopo.

Francesco earned his fine arts degree in Naples and has since

established himself as an accomplished painter and ancient art restorer, known for his dedication to craftsmanship and tradition. He started work on the presepio on October 4 and finished on December 8, working every evening.

The presepio served as a reminder of the timeless message of hope and unity brought by the birth of Christ, inspiring visitors to reflect on faith and tradition during the festive season.



■ Bishop Peter Collins gathered the Diocese's students for the priesthood for the annual Christmas Seminarians' lunch at The White House in Poringland on December 21. Bishop Peter, Anthony Reilly, Peter Ho and Matthew Allen, were joined at Mass, and the social time that

followed, by the new Vocations Director Fr Christopher Smith, Fr Peter Wygnanski, and two men who are seriously discerning a priestly vocation. Please pray for all those who are responding to God's call to be priests in our Diocese.

Alive in Faith's £5.3m for projects & priests

The Alive in Faith (AiF) programme to raise donations for social action projects, parish projects, training seminarians and retired priests within the Diocese of East Anglia has now topped an impressive £5.3m.

■ AiF Chair, Dcn James Hurst, wrote in the latest newsletter: "It has been nine years since the first donations were made in the six parishes that began a five-year cycle of pledges and the last parish completed its cycle in January of this year. During this time diocesan parishioners have raised over £5.3 million to finance vital projects enabling us to deliver our mission of providing Catholic worship throughout East Anglia. Some donors have kindly continued their pledges, so the total continues to grow, we received just over £100,000 this year so far.

Each parish had its own fundraising target, and once this was achieved most of the funds were returned to the parishes for their own projects. This has amounted to £2.5 million, most of which has been drawn down for the sort of projects that you can read about below. About £400k of these funds are still to be spent. At the heart of the diocesan project

was the life blood of our Faith; the priests of the diocese. While priests are in ministry within a parish, their financial needs are met by that parish, but the diocese is responsible for paying for our priests in retirement and in formation, and that is where the bulk of the diocesan share of the money raised has gone."

■ £1.1 million for Retired Priests.

Over the nine years of the project 13 priests have retired from active ministry and during the next ten years 13 further priests will reach the retirement age of 75. AiF funds have been used to purchase or refurbish four retirement properties, as well as to fund the post of Clergy Welfare Officer. £1.1 million has been spent, and this fund will be fully used up this year.

■ £1.2 million for Seminarians:

Diocesan vocations director, Fr Pat Cleary, writes: "We have several priests whose whole priestly preparation was paid for by donations to AiF.

It costs over £30,000 a year to train our priests. The diocese has just about used up the funds set aside for seminary training, we have four in seminaries as I write, and so we are challenged to find new ways of funding our present and future priests."

■ £500k for Social Outreach/Corporal Works of Mercy:

Dr Claire Daunton writes: "Although funding has been directed to a number of different types of projects, there has been a focus on the marginalised in our society and particularly the homeless and women in distress.

The SVP continues to receive support for its tireless work with the homeless. AiF has also continued to support projects aimed at helping women in danger of exploitation and or of domestic abuse and rape, including for Talitha Koum, an Ipswich based charity providing support for vulnerable women.

■ £2.5 million for Parish Projects

Peter Ledger writes: "Despite the programme approaching its natural conclusion AiF projects continue to be started while others come to fruition.

In some parishes the availability of Alive in Faith funds has made possible improvements that otherwise would have been unachievable, such as replacing the church heating system in the East Dereham church, installing solar panels on the Swaffham church roof and renovating the wonderful stained glass east window at the Grade II listed church of St Felix, Felixstowe."

The Alive in Faith programme has demonstrated the extraordinary generosity and commitment of parishioners across the Diocese of East Anglia.

You can find out more at: www.rcdea.org.uk/alive-in-faith

news in brief

CAFOD celebrates Jubilee year with special new icon

■ 2025 is a Year of Jubilee for the Catholic Church and to celebrate CAFOD has commissioned a special icon which will be visiting the Diocese of East Anglia, Jane Crone reports.

In the Old Testament, the Jubilee Year was a time of renewal, freedom and celebration: Debts were cancelled, people and the land could rest, prisoners and slaves were freed, and land was given to those who didn't have any. It was known as the year of the Lord's favour. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

To celebrate and commemorate the Jubilee, and to remind us that this is a global Jubilee, CAFOD commissioned an icon for the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It was created by Mulugeta Araya in Ethiopia. The icon will be touring England and Wales in 2025, including a visit to East Anglia, more information will be available in early 2025. To find out more keep an eye on the diocesan website and monthly newspaper.

Jesus makes it clear that his mission is to bring the justice and freedom of the Jubilee and we are called to share in his mission. At CAFOD, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, this is at the heart of what we do.

The Jubilee Year of 2025 offers a powerful reminder of our shared mission to bring justice, freedom, and renewal to the world, echoing the spirit of Jesus' proclamation in the Gospel of Luke.

May this Jubilee Year inspire us all to be bearers of God's love and instruments of His peace in our world.

CAFOD's Jubilee resources can be found at cafod.org.uk/jubilee



Mulugeta Araya.

Bishop honours retiring Communications Director

Former Director of Communications Keith Morris was honoured by Bishop Peter Collins with the bestowal of a Diocesan Medal, presented during Mass at St John's Cathedral on Sunday December 15.

■ Keith retired from his role at the end of December after nine years in the job, as the first-ever diocesan Director of Communications.

Keith has been editor of Catholic East Anglia, the diocesan Yearbook and the diocesan website. He has also handled media relations for the diocese and helped Bishop Peter, clergy, curia and parishes tell their stories of faith and works.

During his homily, Bishop Peter said: "John the Baptist was a herald and we are all called upon to be heralds. Keith has undertaken the work of a herald with great faith. Not being a Catholic, but a believing Christian, he has brought his personal faith to bear on his ministry in our midst working in the realm of social communications – a realm that is easily afflicted by cynicism. He has brought great professionalism to bear upon the task entrusted to him and never has he allowed cynicism to cloud his own voice in service to our diocese and the wider church, for he also exercises his professionalism serving the wider Christian community in our region and beyond.

"On behalf of the diocese, I thank you for your great service. I have been here for only two years of your nine years but, on the whole, you have kept me on the right path.

"Keith is a herald in our midst, capturing



Pictured is Keith Morris with Bishop Peter Collins, his wife Nicky, son Tom and his partner Becki.

our voices. My own as bishop of course, but his reach has been to every parish, encouraging them to engage with the means of communication for the sake of the gospel. Reminding us, as the church, to employ our voice, a voice that should rejoice in the midst of the world with a message of hope. Your work Keith reminds us to constantly return to that unified

thread, word and action.

"Keith, I bestow the diocesan medal on you as a symbol of our thanks, of our respect for your great work and as an expression too of our prayers for you in the days to come," said Bishop Peter. "May the Lord continue to bless you in your family and in the work which still awaits you.

Keith plans to do some travelling but will

also be continuing his work as editor of the ecumenical Christian news website www.networknorfolk.co.uk.

Keith said: "It has been a real pleasure working for the Diocese of East Anglia over the past nine years and helping them to tell the stories of their faith over that time. I am delighted that Bishop Peter has honoured me in this way."

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Seeing God's Hand at Work in My Life

Fr Alvan Ibeh's article, Seeing God's Hand at Work in My Life, reflects on recognising God's presence and guidance.



■ During one of my New Year homilies, I posed a question to the congregation: "How is the New Year treating you so far?" As anticipated, I received a range of responses, but one in particular stood out. A woman replied, "Father, it depends on how one sees it." That response struck a chord with me. On that note, I say a heartfelt Happy New Year and welcome aboard Flight 2025! We give thanks to God for granting us the grace to embark on this new journey.

Sadly, not everyone who set out with us last year completed the journey, but through God's mercy, we have arrived. As it says in Zechariah 4:6, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty.

As we embark on this year's flight, we cannot predict how it will unfold. Some of us

may not make it to the year's end. For some, this journey may be turbulent; for others, it may turn out to be one of the most remarkable years of their lives. Regardless of what 2025 holds, we can place our trust in God, our Chief Pilot. He is in control. All we need to do is fasten our seatbelts with the Word of God and rest in His arms as He guides us to our destination.

As St Paul reminds us, "I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day" (2 Timothy 1:12). Likewise, Proverbs 3:5-6 urges us to "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." This is the assurance that will carry us throughout the year. I pray that you enjoy this flight.

"How do you interpret the events in your life, especially the challenging ones? Do you perceive God's hand moving in every experience, even those you wish had never happened? Do you truly believe St Paul's words in Romans 8:28: 'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose'?"

Do you understand that when you are at your lowest, God is still at work, orchestrating everything for your ultimate good, in line

with His divine purpose? Recognising God's hand in our lives often means discerning His presence, guidance, and blessings in our everyday experiences. How we perceive these moments largely depends on our perspective.

We see God's hand at work when our prayers are answered, sometimes in unexpected ways. Perhaps you've experienced praying for something specific, only to find God provides something entirely different but ultimately better. "This could only be God's hand working for my good."

God's hand is also evident in unexpected blessings: a timely act of kindness, an unforeseen opportunity, or a word of encouragement just when it's most needed. These moments echo the words of Psalm 118:23: "The Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

God's hand represents His guidance, teaching, and discipline. Our ability to recognise and follow His lead grows as we become more attuned to His presence. This awareness is cultivated through studying His Word, maintaining a consistent prayer life, and nurturing a steadfast faith.

By God's grace, I will conclude this reflection in the next edition. Until then, stay connected with my messages of hope on social media (@voiceofhopefamily). Or get a copy of my book "A Fountain of Hope."

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Caritas celebrates social action

Caritas East Anglia held its fourth deanery festival at St Walstan Church, Costessey near Norwich, on Saturday November 30, reports Jane Crone, member of the Caritas Commission.

■ The day began with Mass celebrated by Bishop Peter Collins, during which he reminded us that it was the feast day of St Andrew, and that we are called to 'cast the net of faith' and to be witnesses to the truth of Jesus Christ.

At the end of Mass, the Caritas in East Anglia candle was taken though into a church hall filled with stalls representing organisations reaching out to our local and global neighbours and active within the deanery. Delicious refreshments were provided by the Union of Catholic Mothers (UCM) Foundation at Costessey. Some of the organisations represented, were large and well known, such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP), Stella Maris and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), while others were small and rooted in the local area.

Dr David Livesey, Caritas in East Anglia Administrator said: "At Costessey, we had the opportunity to find out about some groups active in the Norwich deanery. The Feed, a social supermarket serving around 2,500



Attendees at the Caritas East Anglia Festival in Costessey with Bishop Peter Collins.

members making around 500 shopping trips each week and Network for a Better World working through schools in Malawi.

"This was the first festival at which we had representation from organisations working with prisoners. Community Chaplaincy Norfolk, based at St Stephen's Church café in Norwich city centre, serves those leaving prison to live anywhere in Norfolk and the Prison Fellowship, a group supporting prisoners via their connection with their local

prison. It was also an opportunity to celebrate TEA, the homeless project of the North Norfolk Conference of the SVP, now championed by the national SVP as being of innovative importance to its future mission".

The final three Caritas Festivals are on February 8, 2025 – King's Lynn Deanery Festival at Holy Family Church, 34 Field Lane, King's Lynn PE30 4AY

November 1, 2025 – Peterborough Deanery Festival at St John Fisher High School,

Peterborough, Park Lane, Peterborough PE1 5JN

December 6, 2025 – Bury St Edmunds Deanery Festival at St Edmund, King and Martyr, 21 Westgate Street, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 1QG

These events highlight faith in action, fostering unity and outreach across the Diocese.

More details on Caritas in East Anglia at: www.rcdea.org.uk/caritas-east-anglia

Cambridge University aids church restoration bid

■ A student from the Department of Engineering at the University of Cambridge is beginning a new project that aims to help understand the issues currently faced by the Church of Our Lady and English Martyrs in the city.

The grade 1 listed building is of national significance, but in recent years questions have been raised concerning the safety of some of the high-level stonework. Following the recent loss of one of the pinnacles from the bell tower emergency works were undertaken in 2023 to remove any potentially unsafe stonework. The new project is a collaboration between the church and the University.

Dr Sam Cocking, of the Department of Engineering at Cambridge, said: "Over the years, cracks in the pinnacles have exposed their internal iron bars to water, causing corrosion and further damage to the masonry. This is a particular concern given the loading on the pinnacles from the wind and the possible vibration of bell ringing. The work is required to investigate methods of monitoring and assessing the condition of the pinnacles."

The project, by MEng student Rajiv Nailadi, is initially using a laser to measure any vibration or movement in the pinnacles of the bell tower. This information will then be used to inform and help plan any repair works to the stonework of the tower.

The Church of Our Lady and English

Martyrs is a familiar sight on the Cambridge skyline, with the spire visible across the whole city. Built in the decorated Gothic style, it was designed by Dunn, Hansom & Dunn of Newcastle at the sole expense of Mrs Yolande Lyne-Stephens.

The foundation stone of the church was laid by Bishop Riddell of Northampton on 30 June 1887 and the finished building was consecrated in October 1890. It was recently raised to being Grade 1 listed by Historic England in recognition of its national significance.

Diocesan Heritage Officer, Matthew Champion, said: "This project gives us a fantastic opportunity to understand more about this wonderful building. The findings of the project will be used to help us plan the repair and restoration of the church, and ensure it remains one of the city's best loved landmarks for many generations to come."



Dr Sam Cocking and Rajiv Nailadi.

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Bishop Peter's engagements

2025

February

■ **Feb 1, Sat:** Bishop to celebrate Jubilee Meeting of Religious and Mass at the Cathedral at 11:30.

■ **Feb 4, Tues:** Bishop to celebrate Mass at St John Fisher High School and to bless the Stations of the Cross at 11:00.

■ **Feb 8, Sat:** Bishop to say Mass before the Caritas Festival (09:30) to be held at Holy Family Church, 34 Field Lane, King's Lynn, PE30 5HQ which will end at 14:00.

■ **Feb 10, Mon:** Bishop to celebrate Mass for St Philip Howard (10:00) at the house and then to the Church to bless the start of the renovations.

■ **Feb 22, Sat:** Bishop to celebrate Jubilee Mass for All Deacons including Retired and their families at the Cathedral at 10:00.

March

■ **Mar 2, Sun:** Bishop to celebrate a Pontifical Mass at OLEM for the East Timorese Communities of Cambridge and Peterborough at 15:00.

■ **Mar 5, Wed:** 17:30 Bishop to celebrate a Solemn Pontifical Mass for Ash Wednesday at the Cathedral.

■ **Mar 9, Sun:** Bishop to Rite of Election at the Cathedral at 15:00.

■ **Mar 13, Thurs:** Bishop to celebrate Lenten Station Mass at St Peter and All Souls, Peterborough.

■ **Mar 18, Tues:** Bishop to celebrate Lenten Station Mass at Our Lady of the Assumption & the English Martyrs, Cambridge.

■ **Mar 19, Wed:** Bishop to say Mass at Quidenham (08:00) before the start of the Election of the new Prioress.

■ **Mar 20, Thurs:** Bishop to celebrate Lenten Station Mass at the Church of the Holy Family, Field Lane, Gaywood.

■ **Mar 21, Fri:** Bishop to St Louis Academy to celebrate Mass at 11:00 and to bless the new St Louis Wellbeing Hub.

■ **Mar 22, Sat:** Bishop to celebrate a special Mass at St Edmund King and Martyr, Bury St Edmunds for Fr Gerry Quigley who is celebrating his Golden Anniversary of his Ordination to the Priesthood.

■ **Mar 25, Tues:** Bishop to celebrate Lenten Station Mass at the St Mary's, Ipswich.

■ **All future dates at:**

www.rcdea.org.uk/bishop-peter-collins/bishops-diary/

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Bishop leads Pilgrim



Bishop Peter Collins meeting Pope Francis (courtesy of Vatican Media) and below the delegation visiting Basilica's of St Peter and St Paul.

In January, Bishop Peter Collins led an ecumenical pilgrimage to Rome, joined by prominent Christian leaders from Norfolk. The diverse group, representing a range of Christian traditions, undertook the journey to promote unity and dialogue, fostering mutual understanding and shared faith. Charlie Bohan-Hurst reports.

■ The delegation included Rt Rev Graham Usher, Diocesan Bishop of Norwich in the Church of England; Rev Canon Sally Theakston, Canon to the Bishop of Norwich; Rev David Mayne, Regional Minister Team Leader for the Eastern Baptist Association; Rev Lythan Nevard, Moderator for the Eastern Synod of the United Reformed Church; Ms Liz Hoffbauer, representing the Society of Friends (Quakers); Dr Ian Watson, County Ecumenical Officer for Norfolk and Waveney and a lay Catholic; and Fr Peter Wycznanski, Bishop Peter's Secretary.

Their pilgrimage itinerary was rich with meaningful encounters and spiritual experiences. The group visited the Anglican Centre in Rome, which serves as a bridge of friendship and theological exchange between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church. They also explored the Basilica of St Paul's Outside the Walls, one of Rome's major pilgrimage sites, and the Beda College, a seminary for mature men preparing for the Catholic priesthood.

A highlight of the pilgrimage was their atten-



age to Rome



dance at the general audience with Pope Francis in St Peter's Square. Accompanied by Benedictine monk Fr Martin Browne, who works at the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, the group listened as the Holy Father delivered a catechesis focused on the welfare of children.

During his address, Pope Francis expressed profound concern over the exploitation and abuse endured by children worldwide, calling for a global awakening of consciences. "It is therefore necessary," the Pope implored, "to awaken consciences, to practice closeness and genuine solidarity with abused children and young people, and at the same time to build trust and synergies between those who are committed to offering them opportunities and safe places in which to grow up serenely."

The audience concluded on a lighter note with a colourful performance by circus artists, which brought smiles to the crowd gathered in the Vatican.

The group also visited St Peter's Basilica, one of Christianity's most iconic sites, and the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, where they engaged in discussions on fostering ecumenical cooperation.

Reflecting on the pilgrimage, Bishop Peter described it as a sig-

nificant step in building stronger relationships among Christian communities. "This journey reflected our shared commitment to Christian unity," he said. "In the spirit of pilgrimage, we sought to deepen our bonds as brothers and sisters in Christ, while drawing inspiration from the richness of our diverse traditions."

The pilgrimage underscored the growing commitment of Christian leaders in Norfolk to work together across denominational lines, building bridges of friendship and faith. Their shared experiences in Rome have already begun to inspire further initiatives for unity and understanding within their communities back home.

This remarkable journey served as a powerful reminder of the value of unity in diversity and the role of faith in promoting healing and hope in a divided world.



The nativity display in Loddon.

Family's nativity light show touches hearts

■ A Catholic family in Loddon set up an impressive nativity display of lights in their front garden for friends and neighbours to enjoy.

Aloma Pampackal said: "Our faith is the centre of everything we do, and creating this nativity display is our way of sharing that faith with others. Christmas is a time to give back, to celebrate, and to reflect on the hope that Christ's birth brought to the world.

"The response from our community has been overwhelming. People have stopped by to admire the display, take photos, and share their own Christmas memories. Seeing the smiles on people's faces and hearing how it has touched their hearts means so much to us."

The project is also a way for the family to continue raising funds for Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).

Aloma said: "We've always cherished Christmas as a season of faith, joy, and giving. Our connection to ACN began earlier this year when we undertook the challenge of climbing Ben Nevis, raising funds to support ACN's incredible mission of bringing hope and aid to persecuted Christians around the world.

"This experience left a lasting impression on our hearts, inspiring us to deepen our support for ACN and their cause. With Christmas being such a special time, we decided to create a beautiful nativity display outside our home to remind everyone of the true meaning of the season—the birth of Christ and the message of love, peace, and hope He brought to the world.

"Any donations received will go directly to the work of ACN, helping bring light and support to those who need it most.

Safeguarding is a priority says Bishop

■ Bishop Peter Collins has recorded a safeguarding message in which he declares: "A personal and collective commitment to ensuring that the highest standards are maintained regarding adherence to national safeguarding policies and procedures."

As they strive to exercise their duty of care in service to parishioners and to the wider community, our network of clergy and parish safeguarding representatives has been well supported by our professional safeguarding team.

No form of abuse will be tolerated by diocesan authorities and I offer my assurance that the diocese will continue to work with all relevant civil authorities to ensure that best practice is followed, and that all cases will be addressed in accordance with civil and canonical legal processes.

I have been directly involved in the evolution of the church's safeguarding work

since 1994. We have come a long way over the past thirty years, however, there is never any place for complacency in the arena of safeguarding.

As bishop of the Diocese of East Anglia, I declare a personal and collective commitment to ensuring that the highest standards are maintained regarding adherence to national safeguarding policies and procedures.

I wish to offer all victims and survivors the assurance that they are at the heart of our prayers. If anyone has a concern regarding safeguarding matters that involve the Diocese of East Anglia, I urge them to contact the diocesan safeguarding coordinator, whose details are available on our website.

We are all children of God. In obedience to Christ, we are duty bound to protect and defend the value and dignity of every human person. Applying this duty to those who are most vulnerable must be forever our greatest concern, our greatest work.

See the video at: www.rcdea.org.uk

HISTORY

East Anglian links to King Edward

■ **St Edward the Confessor, who ruled England from 1042 until 1066, had many links with East Anglia, with a new link now emerging through local historian Oliver Wessex.**

St Edward the Confessor, born between 1002 and 1005 in Islip, Oxfordshire, ruled England from 1042 until his death on January 5, 1066. Once seen as a weak ruler controlled by nobles, recent research by Professor Tom Licence shows Edward stabilised and unified the kingdom during his 24-year reign.

The son of King Ethelred II and Emma of Normandy, Edward spent time in exile after the Danish invasion of 1013, returning after his father's brief restoration in 1014. Ascending the throne in 1042, he successfully asserted authority despite challenges from nobles like Godwine, Earl of Wessex. He was canonised in 1161 and Edward left a legacy of piety and strong ties to East Anglia.

King's Ely, a historic school, dates back to 673 AD, when child oblates were educated at the abbey founded by St Etheldreda on the site now occupied by Ely Cathedral. Destroyed by the Danes in 840, the monastery and school were restored in 970 by Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester, and St Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury. Edward the Confessor was educated at this school, which has operated continuously since its restoration.

The Liberty of St Edmund, established by Royal Charter in the 11th century by Edward the Confessor, granted the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds significant power over Suffolk. The town, named after St Edmund, became a major religious site, with the abbey growing into one of Europe's wealthiest. Edward visited the abbey in 1044, moved by the monks' poverty, and granted them the manor of Mildenhall and other lands.

In 1061, during Edward's reign, Lady Richeldis of Walsingham reportedly experienced a Marian apparition, where the Blessed Vir-

gin Mary showed her the Holy Family's house in Nazareth and instructed her to build a replica in Walsingham. This "Holy House" became a major pilgrimage site.

Recently, diocesan historian Oliver Wessex proposed a new theory on the 1066 succession crisis, drawing from Professor Tom Licence's biography of Edward the Confessor. Oliver argues that Edward never intended for William of Normandy or Harold Godwinson to succeed him. Instead, Edward aimed to continue the House of Cerdic, the original royal family of England, through his nephew, Edward the Exile, and later through his grandnephew,



Edgar the Atheling.

Oliver suggests that the original English royal line did not end around 1126 with Edgar, as previously believed. He claims that landmarks like Huntingdon Priory and Castle Cary indicate that England's first royal family has living descendants today. A 1291 chronicle from Huntingdon Priory records that Edgar had a daughter, Margaret Lovel, who married Ralph Lovel II of Castle Cary. Their descendants held the title of Lord of the Manor at Castle Cary for several generations. The Lovels of Castle Cary are distinct from the Lovels of Titchmarsh.

Although the Lovels failed to produce a male heir during King Edward III's reign (1312–1377), the Lovel surname remains common today. Wessex hopes to trace a direct male-line descendant of the House of Lovel. So, if your surname is Lovel, you might just have a claim to the throne.

You can contact Oliver at: oliver.wessex@proton.me



The grave of Katherine of Aragon inside Peterborough Cathedral.

Katherine: queen and patient witness?

Peterborough's Anglican Cathedral opens its doors to welcome over 1,500 Catholics for the annual One Mass, an event made more significant by the presence of Katherine of Aragon's grave within the cathedral, infusing the ceremony with profound historical and spiritual meaning. Catholic historian Oliver Wessex reports.

■ Katherine of Aragon, was born on December 16, 1485 in Alcalá de Henares, and was the daughter of King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile. Their union was instrumental in the formation of the modern Spain. Katherine's nephew, Charles von Habsburg went on to become the first official King of Spain.

Katherine's journey brought her to England as the wife of Prince Arthur, eldest son of King Henry VII. After Arthur's untimely death, she eventually married his brother, Henry VIII, in 1509. Despite the myriad challenges she faced, in-

cluding the profound sorrow of losing five children and the ultimate breakdown of her marriage, Katherine remained unwavering in her devotion to her duties and her faith. Her refusal to annul her marriage to Henry was a pivotal moment that catalysed the English Reformation, leading to the establishment of the Church of England.

Katherine's life was marked by resilience and dedication. Her tenure as Queen of England saw her acting as regent during Henry's military campaigns, as well as engaging deeply in the political, educational and cultural life of the nation. However, the lack of a male heir placed immense strain on their marriage, leading Henry to seek an annulment in 1527 on the grounds that their union violated biblical law.

Katherine steadfastly contested this, asserting the legitimacy of their marriage. Henry's subsequent break with the Catholic Church and his marriage to Anne Boleyn dramatically reshaped England's religious landscape. Despite her personal suffering and enforced isolation, Katherine remained beloved by the English people, who admired her steadfastness.

Katherine of Aragon's story is one of unwavering faith, duty, and grace. Her legacy endures as an

example to the profound impact that historical figures can have on the fabric of society. Her life, marked by both personal tragedy and remarkable strength, continues to inspire and resonate, centuries after her time. In light of Katherine's extraordinary life, some have commented that she is worthy of sainthood. Her unwavering commitment to her faith, her resilience in the face of personal and political adversity and her dedication to her duties as queen embody many of the virtues that are celebrated in sainthood.

Katherine's refusal to compromise her beliefs, even at great personal cost, reflects a sanctity and moral fortitude that has inspired many. Her humility under pressure further enhances her legacy as a figure of deep spiritual significance. While the process of canonisation is complex and rigorous, Katherine of Aragon's life presents a compelling case for her consideration as a saint.

The annual One Mass at Peterborough Cathedral not only honours the Catholic faith but also serves as a poignant reminder of Katherine of Aragon's enduring legacy. Her life, steeped in resilience, faith, and unwavering dedication, continues to inspire and resonate across centuries.

Retreat gives call to holiness

55 women gathered in OLISE Church in Newmarket on Saturday October 12 for the Diocese's Retreat Day for Women. The theme for the day was "Called to More", with the talks given by the Community of Our Lady of Walsingham. Antonia Braithwaite reports.

■ Sr Camilla Oberding from the Community of Our Lady of Walsingham reminded attendees that we are all called to be saints. "We have to be the face of Christ," said Sr Camilla, "and not just 'Sunday Christians' who then live the rest of their week by the secular values of the world."

The aim of the retreat was to help participants recognise how God acts in our daily lives and to realise that He most often chooses to act in hiddenness, as He did in the burning bush with Moses or as a defenceless child to the Magi. "We expect God to appear and make everything very clear to us," said Sr Camilla, "but to see how He is working in hiddenness and in the 'mess' and reality of my life, my family, and the Church, I must develop a personal relationship with Him."

Sr Camilla provided participants with various indispensable tools for this. She said, "We need to become comfortable spending time with Him in silence. We have one mouth



Sr Camilla Oberding addresses the Retreat Day for Women in Newmarket.

and two ears; however long we spend talking to God, we should spend twice as long listening to Him. If we don't take time to be with Him in silence, we won't know Him, and we will end up creating a god in our own image and likeness." Prayer is where we should bring our real selves to God—our hurt, pain, – nger, and questions – because God can use all the circumstances of our lives to help us grow closer to Him.

Quoting from Paragraph 2559 of the Catechism, Sr Camilla reflected on the essential nature of humility in prayer: "Man is a beggar before God." This humility is a fruit of frequent attendance at the Sacrament of Reconciliation ('confession') – at least once a month – or lay people – if we truly want to grow in humility, be healed of our wounds and pain,

and grow in knowledge of ourselves and God. "God is longing for a personal relationship with us," continued Sr Camilla. "Only we can impede that – if we live with the values of our secular culture and allow our egos to choose the easy way out."

The Eucharist is the real, living presence of Jesus among us, just as real as He was when He walked on earth, Sr Camilla said. An attitude of loving openness to Him in Holy Communion, preparing ourselves before Mass, making a thanksgiving prayer after Mass, and frequent attendance at Mass and adoration are further indispensable tools to grow in understanding of how God is working in our lives, as is daily Bible reading, especially the Gospels.

Sr Camilla quoted the English priest and

poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, who said, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God", to show that God is not utilitarian but lavish in His love. "The whole universe was designed by a God who is pursuing our hearts. It is all done to show us His majesty and beauty and to draw us to Himself," continued Sr Camilla.

The afternoon session involved a reflection on the many and varied gifts of women, and how those gifts can allow women to follow Christ more closely. However, these gifts can also have a 'shadow side', which women need to be aware of so that God can draw us out of ourselves to become whole and holy.

The retreat was edifying, spiritually nourishing, and enriching for both soul and mind. There were many calls from the audience for this to become an annual or biannual event.

Encountering God at St Ives recollection day

■ Around 35 parishioners of Sacred Heart Church, St Ives, Cambs gathered with team members from the Charismatic Diocesan Service of Communion (CDSC) on November 23 for a Day of Recollection on the theme of "Encountering God through His Angels". Pam Smith reports.

The Day of Recollection commenced with Mass, celebrated by Fr Anthony Shryane, followed by Adoration, Reconciliation and prayer ministry before the first of two talks from Derek Williams, Catholic Lay Evangelist.

Derek focussed his teachings on two aspects, the help of the angels in both our interior life and in our evangelisation work, and the necessity for a deeper encounter with God in contemplation. He taught from the scriptures and St John of the Cross.

Towards the end of the day we had a practical experience of the teaching when he encouraged us all to go deeper in prayer in the peace and quietude of contemplation, where the sins and wounds of our souls will be revealed and cleansed by God, enabling us not only to receive God's love but to also return love to God.



Speaker Derek Williams in St Ives.

Attendees shared that during the period of quiet contemplation in the afternoon, they felt 'a wonderful feeling of peace', 'lightness', 'warmth and peace' and 'heat'.

CDSC members Maggie Edwards and Phil Walters brought the day to a close with uplifting praise and worship. The team gathered and prayed for the people of Sacred Heart Parish. Parishioner, Elizabeth Barker, thanked Derek and the team for accepting the invitation to organise a Day of Recollection for the parish, and invited Derek to return to continue his teaching on Contemplative Prayer.

For more information on our events please visit renewaleastanglia.org or email CDSC Co-ordinator Pam Smith at renewaleastanglia@gmail.com.

Parish Bids Fond Farewell to Fr Trindade

■ Parishioners of Our Lady and St Joseph, Sheringham and Cromer, gathered on the Feast of the Epiphany for a joyous bring-and-share meal, which became a heartfelt farewell celebration for their beloved priest, Father Trindade.

The event saw a full turnout, with parishioners coming together to express their deep gratitude for Fr Trindade's time in the parish and their sadness at his departure. Having served the community with dedication and warmth, Fr Trindade will soon move to St Ives, leaving behind a congregation that holds him in high regard.

The gathering was filled with fond memories and light-hearted moments, including playful teasing about Fr Trindade's early struggles to adjust to the brisk North Norfolk weather, particularly the biting wind. His parishioners laughed as they recalled his layered approach to staying warm, which proved so effective that during a recent visit home to Goa, he found himself complaining about the heat!

Fr Trindade, who joined the parish from Ipswich, was initially expected to serve for just one year. However, plans changed, and he became a much-loved presence in the community for longer than anticipated.

During the celebration, Darryl Smith, Chair of the Parish Pastoral Council, presented Fr Trindade with a card and a special gift as tokens of the parish's appreciation. In response, Fr Trindade expressed heart-

felt thanks to all those who had supported him since his arrival and assured the community that they would remain close to his heart in love and prayer.

The farewell concluded with a beautifully iced cake, shared and enjoyed by all attendees. The parishioners extended their warmest wishes for Fr Trindade as he begins a new chapter in St Ives. They hope he will find the opportunity to put down roots and continue building on his inspiring ideas and commitment in his new parish.

Fr Trindade's time in Sheringham and Cromer will be remembered fondly, and his departure marks the end of a cherished chapter for Our Lady and St Joseph Parish.



Fr Trindade receiving leaving gift.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Dawn Mass Celebrated at Cathedral

On December 20, 2024, the Filipino community in Norwich gathered in celebration of Simbang Gabi at The Cathedral of St John the Baptist. This cherished tradition brought together 350 worshippers for an evening of faith and festivity.

■ The Mass, celebrated by Fr. Jude Belnas, was organised by parishioners Jonathan and Jenuary Callejo, who expressed their gratitude for the vibrant turnout to honour such a special tradition.

Simbang Gabi, a series of nine dawn Masses leading up to Christmas, is a longstanding practice in the Philippines. Its name translates to "Dawn Mass," though in modern times, it is often celebrated in the evening for convenience. The tradition symbolises the nine months of the Blessed Virgin Mary's preg-

nancy and serves as a spiritual preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ.

The devotion is both a religious and cultural celebration, a moment for Filipino communities worldwide to reconnect with their heritage. For many in Norwich and across the Diocese, it's a chance to rekindle the spirit of Christmas and share the joy of the season with others.

Norwich's Filipino community is an integral part of the local parish, with over 1,000 members, many of whom work in the healthcare sector. Their dedication to their Catholic faith shines through in their daily lives as they care for the sick and elderly as doctors, nurses, and other health professionals.

During the Mass, the cathedral was filled with the soft glow of Christmas lights, the lilting melodies of traditional Filipino hymns, and the warmth of shared prayers.

The organisers hope that the success of previous Simbang Gabi Masses will inspire even greater participation in 2025 and beyond.



350 worshippers in The Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Norwich for the celebration of Simbang Gabi.



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Apostles of Jesus: Spreading Faith and Education Across Continents

Jean Johnson, a parishioner in Ipswich, reflects on a transformative journey that began with a conversation in 2004 at the Birmingham Oratory.

■ In the summer of 2004, during a meeting of Aid to the Church in Need at the Birmingham Oratory, I had a conversation that would shape the next two decades of my life. An African priest, Fr. Jimmy Lutwama, shared his vision of the Apostles of Jesus (AJ), a missionary congregation he belonged to and is still involved in as Regional Superior for Europe. As I neared retirement, I expressed a desire to do something meaningful in Africa. Little did I know, this conversation would lead me to Uganda that November for an exploratory visit.

While in Uganda, the government announced a new policy mandating that all students take the three core sciences – biology, chemistry, and physics – at O-level. Previously, many students had studied only biology. As a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry, I saw an opportunity to make a difference. Working with the AJ, I secured funding for teacher training courses, initially at the AJ

school in Bukinda, near the border with Rwanda. Partnering with the Institute of Physics, we developed a week-long residential course in both chemistry and physics. Bukinda became our main training centre, and I began spending about ten weeks each year in Uganda.

As our efforts grew, we opened another training centre at the AJ school in Moroto, Northern Uganda, near their mother house. Over time, I also visited their major seminary in Nairobi and, to my surprise and delight, began to be affectionately called a "Lady Apostle."

You may not have heard of the AJ before. This missionary congregation was founded in response to a crisis in the mid-1960s, when missionaries in Sudan were expelled almost overnight. Concerned about the potential expulsion of European missionaries from East Africa, two Comboni Fathers (then known as Verona Fathers) established the AJ in August 1968. Their mission was to form African missionaries for Africa and the world.

Today, the AJ have nearly 500 members, serving in East Africa and beyond. They operate schools across the region, inspiring countless boys to pursue the priesthood. Their mission has expanded globally, with Apostles now serving in the

United States, Australia, Cuba, Papua New Guinea, Germany, and even here in the UK. In the Birmingham Archdiocese, they are active in parishes in Coventry and Nuneaton, and in Wales, where an Apostle serves as Cathedral Dean in Wrexham Diocese.

This January, I had the privilege of celebrating two significant milestones: 20 years of working with the AJ and my 80th birthday. Joining me for this joyous occasion were Fr. Sunday and Fr. Aloysius, two of the priests I worked closely with in Uganda, both now based in Coventry. The day was made even more special as it coincided with Fr. Joseph's birthday. Together, we celebrated a beautiful Mass at St. Pancras, followed by a joyful gathering.

Looking back, I feel immense gratitude for the many blessings this journey has brought. One of the most moving moments has been seeing Fr. Mugabe Robert, who as a boy was in the first class I taught at Bukinda, now applying for a UK visa to join the Apostles' mission here. This year, 32 young men will be ordained as AJ priests, and I pray that some will be sent to serve in the UK, bringing their faith and energy to our parishes.

As St. John Henry Newman once said, "God knows what He

is about." I trust in His providence, knowing that the AJ will continue their vital work of spreading the Gospel and building communities of faith wherever they are sent.

Visit apostlesofjesus.com for more information.

Jean is an extraordinary minister and reader at both St Pancras and St Mary's in Ipswich, where she was received into the church 47 years ago. After living in Upminster and Birmingham, she returned to Ipswich 7 years ago to care for a friend, stayed through the Covid pandemic, and decided to remain.



Jean with an Apostle, Fr Inke in Moroto.

New Year, New Me

Marriage and Family Life Coordinator, Dr Antonia Braithwaite encourages us to focus on spiritual self-improvement alongside physical wellness.

■ The beginning of a new year is often taken as an opportunity to kickstart new routines and form new plans usually aimed at setting in place habits for health and wellness, for travel and new hobbies. Websites and social media posts abound with ideas for practical and creative ways to make the new year your “best yet”!

But what about focusing on developing habits for spiritual self-improvement? As important as physical self-improvement is, dieting and exercise and developing skills, our spiritual lives also need nourishment and attention. None of us can claim that we are where we should be in terms of our personal holiness; there is no standing still in the spiritual life, there is only growth or decline, and we can all benefit from assessing every now and then whether our daily habits are conducive to spiritual growth, or whether we have slipped into some bad habits and changes need to be made.

A good exercise is to sit down with a pen and paper and jot down five goals that are practical and conducive to spiritual growth, and also how you can achieve them.

1. *Goal: Pray a morning offering every day*

How I will achieve this: I will find a morning offering prayer and set it as the background on my phone, so I will see it each morning and remember.

2. *Goal: Read the daily Gospel reading*

How I will achieve this: I will sign up to a mailing list that will email me the Gospel each morning, and then read this before doing anything else on my phone (example: www.christian.art will send you the daily gospel reading and an associated art reflection each morning).

3. *Goal: Read the Bible with the children*

How I will achieve this: I will buy a Catholic children's Bible and set aside time on one evening every week to sit together and read the stories (or just read one of the Gospels from a regular Bible).

4. *Goal: Pray the Rosary*

How I will achieve this: I will choose a specific time in the morning/evening on specific day(s), and then set a reminder. If needed I will find an online rosary that I can pray with (on YouTube or Hallow app) or play it in the car while I am driving.

5. *Goal: Go to confession monthly*

How I will achieve this: I will note down in the diary the next time I am due to go to confession and then make sure I keep that morning/afternoon free so that I can go.

These are just examples; there are many other things that even busy parents and families can do together such as attending Mass more often or praying together as a family.

Let a new year be an opportunity for taking stock and making changes for a new holier you!



Pictured are Andy and Mary with two Sitima community workers.

Norwich couple's inspiring African missionary work

St John's Cathedral parishioners Andy and Mary Clark have spent the last 18 years working with development charities in Africa. Andy is now chair of Network for a Better World and is looking for volunteers who might like to get involved.

■ Andy and Mary's journey began in 2006 when they left Norwich for Kakamega, Kenya, answering a calling to serve as lay missionaries, where they worked in an orphanage and school as a nurse and teacher, having been recruited by an organisation called Volunteer Missionary Movement (VMM). Later they were transferred to Makeni, near Lusaka, in Zambia, where, for 18 months, Andy worked in a school for orphans and vulnerable children and Mary worked as a nurse in a community-based HIV/AIDS project.

In Southern Malawi, the N4BW has been active for 12 years, particularly in the Sitima Parish in the Zomba Diocese, run by the Montfort Missionary Order. This area was chosen for its limited NGO presence and the profound material poverty of the local population, though Andy says these people are “rich in spirit.” The Clarks first task in Sitima was to oversee the construction of a volunteer house, a project funded through private donations, which has since housed volunteers for durations ranging from two weeks to over a year.

Throughout the last year, N4BW's initiatives

have ranged from constructing school buildings and training teachers, to organizing community-wide educational conferences. Their work extends beyond education into community assistance, like distributing essentials post-Cyclone Freddy, supporting vulnerable populations, and enhancing local infrastructure with fuel-efficient stoves and literacy programs.

Additional efforts include the creation of subject-specific resource boxes to enhance learning, the promotion of kitchen gardens in schools, and the refurbishment of several school buildings. In the community sector, N4BW has built houses for elderly women affected by Malawi's severe weather conditions and provided ongoing support to families to develop kitchen gardens. They've also launched craft workshops and organized sports leagues to enrich community life.

The Clarks' experience in Africa is a testament to the joy and fulfilment that comes from immersing oneself in a culture vastly different yet full of life and celebration. Andy said: “To work in local communities gives an opportunity to observe and at times to be part of an African culture which is very different but very joyful despite the hardships which many face every day. Celebrations are frequent and are vibrant, joyful occasions with much singing and dancing. Masses are celebrated in an especially lively manner and with real joy. It is a privilege to attend and brings home the various ways in which the universal church celebrates but the mass remains a central focus in our lives.”

N4BW's mission resonates deeply with the ideals of solidarity espoused by Pope John Paul II, emphasizing a committed effort

towards the common good. This call to action is not just for those in distant lands but also for individuals in the UK who can support through volunteering, donations, or prayers.

As Andy now chairs N4BW, he invites more volunteers to join in their mission. He says: “When we talk about projects in far-flung places such as Africa, they might seem very removed from us here in England and Wales. But you are building the Church around the world, by supporting our global family. Your prayers are needed to encourage the people who take part in the sort of activities that have been described here, as well as local communities; some of you may be in a position to support N4BW as a volunteer in this country or travel to Sitima, as will four new volunteers this year, and to experience the joy of answering God's call.”

For those moved by the Clarks' story or inspired by the prospect of helping communities thrive, N4BW offers a pathway to participate in a life-changing journey. It's about bringing joy, aid, and education to those who need it most and experiencing the profound satisfaction of answering God's call.

The work of Andy and Mary Clark, alongside the efforts of Network for a Better World, serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative impact of compassion, dedication, and faith in action. Their journey exemplifies how ordinary individuals can create extraordinary change by stepping beyond their comfort zones and embracing the needs of others. Whether through volunteering, donating, or simply offering prayers, there are countless ways to contribute to this meaningful mission.

Visit the N4BW website here or contact them at enquiries@n4bw.org.uk

Picture gallery from parishes around the Diocese

■ The village of Harston, Cambridgeshire, marked the beginning of Advent on December 1 with the joyful sound of festive music as over 120 people gathered for a first-ever community carol-singing event reports Charlanne Ward.

Organised by representatives from Our Lady of Lourdes, Sawston, All Saints C of E Church, Harston and Harston Baptist Church, this inaugural ecumenical initiative brought together villagers of all ages in a spirit of unity and celebration.

The Harston community came out in force to enjoy seasonal singing, playing and poetry while supporting two vital local charities: Harston Community Food Hub and Winter Comfort. The atmosphere was truly special, thanks to the delightful performances by the village school choir and the uplifting accompaniment of a local brass ensemble.

The success of the event was a testament to the power of collaboration among local faith groups and the enthusiastic participation of the wider community. Many attendees expressed their hope that this enjoyable gathering would become an annual tradition, continuing to bring people together in song and service.



■ Framlingham parishioners Vivienne and David Taylor have been thanked for their efforts over many years in raising funds for their church and the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust in its annual Ride and Stride event, which this year raised almost £200k.

On Sunday December 8, Simon Ronan, a trustee of the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust and chairman of the Trust's annual Ride and Stride event, presented a certificate of thanks to Vivienne and David. The couple have participated in the cycle ride for 37 years, raising funds for the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust and for Saint Clare's Church at Framlingham.

"The Suffolk Historic Churches sponsored Ride and Stride has been an annual event for over 40 years," said Simon Ronan. "It is the sole fundraising event for the Trust and this year raised £193,794. The donations from this popular county event fund grants to churches of all faiths for repairs and maintenance. The Trust relies on volunteers to help with the fundraising and to keep the churches open during the hours of the ride.

"As chairman of Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride, it gives me great pleasure to award certificates of long service to volunteers for their dedication and kindness. It is a small token of our gratitude, but also an expression of the importance they are to our charity. Our churches are houses of prayer, but they also have a historic significance in our villages and towns, and are an important part of our fabric."

The hundreds of supporters walking or cycling around their chosen route from over 500 churches that are open on the day, donate half their sponsorship to their chosen church, chapel or meeting house and the other half to the Trust to be given in grants to help preserve church buildings. Anyone is welcome to take part, not just church-goers. The next Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride 2024 is on Saturday September 13.

www.shct.org.uk

Pictured above, Vivienne and David Taylor are presented with a certificate of thanks for 37 years of fundraising for the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust by Simon Ronan.

■ After 35 years of service the old stacking chairs in use at St Luke's, Peterborough, were nearing the end of their life. Worn, tired and beginning to break, they also failed to meet modern safety standards.

Parish priest Fr Jeffrey Downie said: "After exploring options and consulting with parishioners it was decided to fundraise for wood-framed church chairs with drop-down kneelers. After just a few short months the £29,200 needed for 200 chairs was raised. Most came from parishioners sponsoring individual seats, with plaques commemorating events or loved ones fixed to the back.

"This has been an amazing achievement in a short space of time and we are very grateful to all who have supported the project. These new chairs should give many decades of service on into the next generation."

