



**Image of the day**  
**St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast**



## 560 UK Churches Ready to Welcome Hong Kong Wave

**British Christians seek to learn from past Windrush mistakes in their nation’s largest planned migration in 50 years.**

Last Sunday, a local Chinese church’s multilingual service was broadcast live on BBC Radio 4, the United Kingdom’s most popular radio station, for the first time in history—a gesture of welcome to the hundreds of thousands of Hong Kong residents expected to migrate to the country under a new visa provision.

“This feels like a watershed moment for the Church in the UK,” wrote Mark Nam, an Anglican priest in Bristol. “I never dreamed I would be alive to hear Chinese songs and voices broadcast across the nation for Sunday Worship like this.”

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Nam is among hundreds of pastors, ministry leaders, and laypeople who are preparing local churches for what could be the largest planned migration to the country in over half a century.

As of January 31, nearly 3 million British nationals in Hong Kong are said to be eligible for this new passport program, which will allow them and their families to live and work in the UK and to apply for British citizenship within six years. The UK government expects over 300,000 to register and estimates that at least 130,000 will arrive in 2021 alone.

Political tensions are high in Hong Kong, particularly for pro-democracy activists - including Christians - who have become the target of a crackdown from Chinese authorities in the region. While the government has committed to open the door for everyone who applies, Christian leaders believe the church should be waiting on the doorstep to welcome them.

It's in our DNA; it's in our doctrine," said Krish Kandiah, a former pastor, missionary, and adoption reform advocate who has rallied local Christians around the Hong Kong Ready initiative. "The welcome is an important part of what the church is about, and we don't always get it right, but we're keen now."

Kandiah, recently appointed the chair of a government board on adoption, connected officials to Christian leaders who were eager to help with resettlement. A team from his ministry network and representatives from the Chinese church community have partnered together to lead the way forward.

More than 600 people signed up for the Hong Kong Ready virtual event in late January, and so far 560 churches and counting have joined the movement. Evangelical groups like Welcome Churches and the UK's Evangelical Alliance are among the many ministries partnering in their efforts.

**Welcome Churches is helping to profile local congregations willing to receive newcomers from other nations and offering cross-cultural training on how to fully incorporate these new families into their church bodies.**

Campaigns like the One People Commission and South Asian Forum share a similar goal, according to the Evangelical Alliance's church and mission coordinator Donna Jennings, by "actively promoting the truth that diversity can and does exist in unity, in and through God's people."

Working together across denominational and organizational lines, the network is linking church leaders and civic officials, empowering the Chinese Christian community, mapping and mobilizing a growing list of welcome-ready churches, and building a bank of multilingual orientation resources for newcomers.

"I believe God is doing something special," wrote Nam, who was recently ordained in the Church of England as one its first British-born Chinese priests. "Looking at the landscape ahead, my heart is filled with joy at the prospect of my children inhabiting a land where the stranger is welcomed and difference is celebrated."

## Witness against racism

Many of the leaders involved, including Kandiah and Nam, are themselves the children of immigrants and know the practical struggles and prejudice foreigners face—much of which has resurged in recent years.

“COVID and Brexit have intensified a sense of nationalism in the UK that has emerged in acts and attitudes of racism,” said Jennings. “In this context, the counter-cultural witness of the church is vital.”

The Hong Kong programme will be the largest and fastest planned migration to the UK from outside Europe since the Windrush migration between 1948 and 1971, when the British invited families from former colonies in the Caribbean. At the time, the UK church along with the rest of



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the country not only failed to offer a warm welcome to the Windrush generation—it treated them in unjust and outright racist ways.

Officials were urged to issue a public apology on behalf of the UK government in 2018, and the Church of England did the same last year, as leaders repented and promised to renew their pursuit of racial reform.

“I’m still haunted by some of the stories around Windrush,” Kandiah said. “Fifty years later, we’re still reaping the negative consequences of people being treated appallingly.”

## **Belfast school's admissions policy unfair, court is told**

**A Belfast grammar school has allegedly discriminated against children from disadvantaged backgrounds by its admissions criteria, the High Court heard this week.**

Lawyers for a boy seeking to attend St Malachy's College claimed greater priority should have been given to pupils entitled to free school meals.

An emergency legal challenge has been brought against its board of governors over criteria published for the September 2021 intake.

With transfer tests cancelled due to the pandemic, schools have drawn up alternative methods of selection.

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But it was claimed that St Malachy's has unlawfully failed to adhere to guidance issued by the Department of Education. Children with a sibling who previously attended the school are wrongly being given priority over those eligible for free school meals, it was contended.

Mr Justice Colton was told the criteria is allegedly irrational, in breach of a statutory duty and a violation of human rights.

Hugh Southey QC, for the boy at the centre of the case, claimed the Department's guidance had been misunderstood.



He also argued that the free school meals criteria was important for helping to remedy educational disadvantages suffered by children from poorer backgrounds.

“The reason why free school meals is such an important criteria is that quite clearly

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there is a recognition historically that children from disadvantaged economic backgrounds have been disadvantaged in the education system.

“The underlying objective of this guidance is quite clear, it is to a significant degree intended to reduce the discrimination suffered by those who are economically disadvantaged,” he said. “That criteria needs to be applied with care, and it hasn't been.”

Paul McLaughlin QC, representing the board of governors, told the court the legislative framework was “deliberately looser” than for pre-school admissions.

“It is one in which any recognition of free school meals is not mandatory,” he said.

**“There is no legal requirement upon any post-primary school to prioritise to any degree free school meals-eligible pupils as part of their admissions criteria.”**

According to Mr McLaughlin there is “flexibility” for boards of governors to formulate criteria in a way which fits the priorities and ethos of individual schools.

“They are fully entitled to do that within the constraints of regular public law powers,” he said. Judgment was reserved.

Report courtesy of the Belfast Telegraph 25.02.2021



## **New coalition seeks greater ‘inclusive’ clout in Church of England dioceses**

**A new coalition describing itself as a “movement of supporting Anglicans for an inclusive Church” — and to be known by the acronym Mosaic — is to bring together campaigns on issues of race, ability, sexuality, gender, and gender identity.**

One of its two co-chairs, Canon Tim Goode, a newly elected member of the Archbishop’s Council, said that Mosaic represented “the full range of marginalised groups within the Church of England. We stand far stronger together — for you cannot be a little bit inclusive.”

The coalition draws together leaders from the Campaign for Equal Marriage, Disability and Jesus, Inclusive Church, Modern Church, One Body One Faith, and the Ozanne Foundation. It hopes to grow to include other organisations.

Each of these bodies will continue to function independently, but the coalition is an attempt to coordinate their efforts to eradicate discrimination from church statements, policies, appointments, and actions

The other co-chair is Mosaic’s founder, the Revd Trevor Wyatt, Vicar of Christ Church Bexleyheath, in the diocese of Rochester.

The new group plans to work in dioceses “to give voice to the silent majority”, and currently has conveners in 23 of them. The Archdeacon of Sarum, the Ven. Alan Jeans,



who is the convener in Salisbury diocese, said: “There are many clergy and laity who have an interest or need for our campaigning group. Mosaic offers those who are marginalised or subject to discrimination a listening ear. We also aim to be a point of contact for the bishop’s staff with regards to inclusivity issues within the diocese.”

Jayne Ozanne, one of eight patrons, said that one of the group’s early objectives was to ensure that LGBTI+ people could engage safely in debates about *Living in Love and Faith*.

<https://mosaic-anglicans.org/>

## **Special needs children in NI 'failed by education system for too long'**

**Families and children with special educational needs have been failed by a dysfunctional system, a Stormont watchdog has concluded.**



A highly-critical report from the Public Accounts Committee accused the Education Authority (EA) of continually delivering a sub-standard service.

It called for an independent external review.

A child has special educational needs (SEN) if they have learning difficulties and are assessed as requiring special help.

Statements are legally binding documents issued by the EA, setting out a child's needs.

Almost one in five of the school population here is deemed to have SEN. In 2019/20, this equated to 67,224 children — 19,200 have a statement. Most attend mainstream schools. Last September a report by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) called for an urgent overhaul of the system.

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Auditors found demand was rising with key targets routinely missed. A 26-week deadline for issuing statements was broken for nearly nine out of every 10 children assessed.

A review into issues around assessment has been running for 13 years and cost £3.6m but is incomplete. None of the recommendations from a previous NIAO report, published in 2017, have been fully delivered.

The Audit Office findings have now been considered by the PAC.

It noted that from 2015 to 2020, the department and EA spent more than £1.3bn supporting children with SEN, with costs rising each year.

Committee chair William Humphrey said: “We have been disappointed to find a culture within the Education Authority that has allowed it to continually deliver a sub-standard service for far too long.

“These weaknesses have failed both families and children with Special Educational Needs.”

Mr Humphrey said committee members were surprised to discover that the EA does not know how many children are seeking to access SEN support.

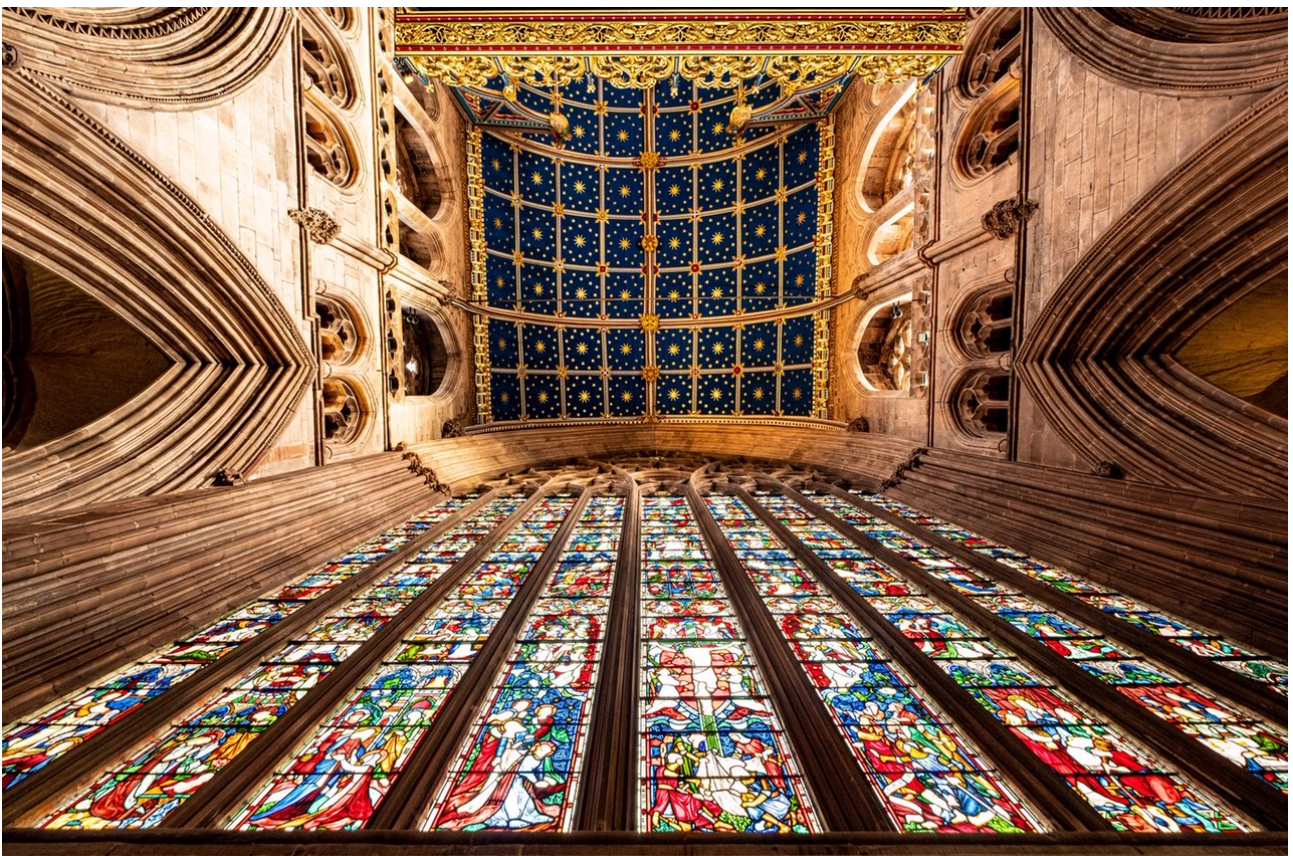
During evidence sessions, the PAC heard that 38% of Statutory Assessments are now exceeding the 26 week timeframe — down from 85% during 2019/20. .

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While MLAs welcomed the EA's commitment to reducing delays, they expressed concern that children and their families had been failed for many years.

The report states: “There have been unacceptable delays in the SEN Statutory Assessment process. The PAC believes there has been a culture within the EA whereby the continued failure of the Statutory Assessment process and the delivery of a sub-optimal service with deep rooted and systemic weaknesses was tolerated for far too long.”

It added: “Whilst the commitment for improvement is welcomed, the committee remains concerned at the number of children that have been failed and how long these failings have been allowed to continue. In PAC's view there are elements of dysfunctionality within the EA.”



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Education Minister Peter Weir said: “My department is giving urgent consideration to the contents and recommendations within the report.

“In response to various reports in this area there is a programme of improvement already under way which has seen a significant improvement in the performance of the Education Authority on SEN statutory assessment and statementing processes in recent months.”

Report courtesy The Belfast Telegraph 25.02.2021

## **Explainer: A brief history of the Christian sites Pope Francis will visit in Iraq**

**Pope Francis hopes to embark on the first-ever papal visit to the biblical land of Iraq in early March in a spiritual pilgrimage of sorts to the place known in Arabic as the "land of the two rivers" -- the mighty Tigris and Euphrates -- and once renowned as Mesopotamia, the "cradle of civilization."**

The Garden of Eden is believed possibly to have been in ancient Iraq, but certainly the famed Hanging Gardens of Babylon and the Tower of Babel were located there. Jews exiled to ancient Iraq in Old Testament times, such as the prophet Daniel, experienced God's miraculous grace; Daniel was rescued from the lion's den and his friends from the fiery furnace.

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"The pontiff said he looks forward to visiting our country, which is also where Abraham began his journey," Cardinal Louis Sako of Baghdad said of the March 5-8 trip.

The historically rich country is full of religious sites important to understanding the antecedents of the Christian faith, making the visit significant for Pope Francis. Here's a snapshot of some of these places.

Old Testament patriarch Abraham is recognized as the father of faith in one God by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike and was born in the southern town of Ur. The place, which dates back to 6000 B.C., lies on a former course of the Euphrates and is one of Iraq's oldest sites.

The pope will see a dry, flat, and ocher-colored plain renowned for its well-preserved stepped platform or ziggurat, which dates back to the third millennium B.C. Also, some of the earliest known writing, cuneiform, has been uncovered at Ur.

Around 2000 B.C., Ur was a bustling urban center, drawing traders from both the Mediterranean and the Indian subcontinent, until its conquest by Alexander the Great a few centuries before Christ. Pope Francis will participate in an interreligious meeting there.

Pope Francis will travel to Najaf, also in the South, for a key encounter with one of Shiite Islam's most authoritative figures, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, as part of his efforts to embrace all of the Islamic world.



A caretaker climbs the stairs of the reconstructed Ziggurat of Ur, Iraq, which rises up near the settlement where Abraham was born, in this 1998 photo. Pope Francis will visit Ur during his March 5-8 trip to Iraq.

Lying 100 miles south of the capital, Baghdad, Najaf is a center of Shiite Islam's spiritual and political power as well as a pilgrimage site for Shiite adherents. Its spectacular gold-domed Imam Ali Mosque is considered the third-holiest site for the Shiite Muslims, after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.

**The historically rich country is full of religious sites important to understanding the antecedents of the Christian faith, making the visit significant for Pope Francis.**



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Flying into Baghdad from Rome, Pope Francis will be received in an official welcome ceremony at the presidential palace. At the capital's Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Deliverance, he will meet bishops, priests, men and women religious, seminarians and catechists. The cathedral was the site of a 2010 massacre that killed 58 people and was claimed by Iraq's al-Qaida group, which splintered into the so-called Islamic State.

Mass is scheduled at the Catholic Chaldean St. Joseph Cathedral, also in Baghdad, a city with a rich, storied history where some 8 million inhabitants now live.

**Heading north, Pope Francis will meet the Christian communities of Ninevah Plain, an area overrun by the Islamic State group in 2014 until its liberation three years later. The Old Testament prophet Jonah, who asked people to repent and return to God, lived in Ninevah.**

It's the historic Christian heartland of Iraq, where Christians have lived since Jesus' earthly ministry, when St. Thomas brought the Gospel message around A.D. 35, aided by St. Jude. The pair were thought to base themselves in the northern city of Irbil in modern-day Kurdistan, where they preached to the local people.

And it is in that city where Pope Francis will be welcomed by religious and civil leaders. Irbil and the nearby Christian enclave of Ankawa have hosted tens of thousands of Christians and other religious minorities forced to escape Islamic State atrocities.

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Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar Warda of Irbil said "international support for livelihood programs" is needed "to help families remain in Iraq." Some of those groups include Aid to the Church in Need, the Knights of Columbus and Catholic Near East Welfare Association.

**One such program providing livelihood training is the Christian Aid Program Northern Iraq run by Iraqi Father Emanuel Youkhana, who a priest, or archimandrite, of the Assyrian Church of the East.**

CAPNI has assisted some "8,500 displaced Christian families to return to their Ninevah Plain towns, helping first to rebuild homes, infrastructure and businesses. Now it is providing English language and vocational training for practical jobs needed in the marketplace," Father Youkhana told Catholic News Service by phone.

He said that while Pope Francis "may not be able to visit the rebuilding projects due to time, he will certainly be informed."

"When he is visiting the churches in Mosul and Qaraqosh, of course, he will be updated on rebuilding efforts," Father Youkhana said, "because he will ask about that and the destruction that happened there."

An order of nuns now runs a nursery school in Qaraqosh for 130 children, according to the Italian bishops' conference. The rebuilding of Mosul's famed Conventual Church of Our Lady of the Hour, along with the Al-Tahera Syriac Catholic Church, is underway.

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Rebuilding efforts, including that of Mosul's iconic Al-Nouri Mosque, is to see Muslims, Christians and other communities "work together, to do something positive together," French Dominican Father Olivier Poquillon told CNS from Irbil. Then, he said, Christians and other religious minorities must see again that Mosul is "their home and that they are in their own land."

"We know it will be a challenge for everybody to rebuild trust among people, families and communities. But this is our faith. We believe in a God of mercy, and we believe we have this humanity as a common responsibility," Father Poquillon said.

## **Tributes to Father Enda McDonagh**

**Father Enda McDonagh was a priest of the Archdiocese of Tuam and Professor *Emeritus* of Theology at Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth**

**Archbishop Michael Neary of Tuam writes -**

It was with great sadness that I received the news yesterday of Father Enda McDonagh's death in Saint Vincent's Hospital, Dublin. A colossus on the Irish theological landscape for more than six decades, he continued to research, write, and inspire throughout his distinguished teaching career and during the years of his retirement.

Father Enda was known and respected by people of all theological hues and none, and because of the way he

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wore his learning so lightly, and because of his genuine humility and personal warmth, people felt comfortable in his presence, and enriched by the encounter. While he had well thought-out opinions of his own, he was always utterly respectful of those who had different and sincerely held opinions, and his good-humoured and personable manner always saw to it that nobody felt belittled in a discussion or debate.

While the Archdiocese of Tuam was always proud of the fact that he was a priest of this diocese, he was at home in every diocese because of the simple fact that he taught generations of Irish priests, most of whom served in Ireland, some of whom brought the Gospel to the very ends of the world. Many will point to Enda as the person who opened their minds in the quest for *faith seeking understanding*. Born on 27 June 1930 in Began, Co. Mayo, Father Enda attended the local primary school where his parents were teachers. He received his secondary education at Saint Jarlath's College, Tuam, and from there he went to Maynooth in 1948 where, as things turned out, he was to spend the rest of his life. He was ordained to the priesthood in the College Chapel of Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth, on 19 June 1955. He took undergraduate degrees in science and theology before embarking on postgraduate work in theology culminating in a Doctorate in Divinity (DD) in 1957. He continued his studies in Rome and Munich and was conferred with the Doctorate in Canon Law (DCL) in 1960. Already, in 1958, he was appointed Professor of Moral Theology in Maynooth, a position he was to hold until his retirement in 1995.

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Despite his high profile as a scholar, theologian and intellectual, and despite his being in demand by so many educational institutions and public personalities, Enda never forgot his native place and maintained contact with his brother priests in the Archdiocese of Tuam. During his retirement it was more convenient for him to attend various diocesan functions and celebrations, and he was always perfectly at ease and thoroughly entertained by the stories and anecdotes from pastoral ministry – for which he prepared many, but never had the opportunity to experience for himself.

*Tá laoch ar lár. Go raibh leaba aige i measc na naomh.*

## **Archbishop of Dublin, Most Rev Dr Michael Jackson of the Church of Ireland**

“Members of the Church of Ireland will be saddened by the death of Professor Enda McDonagh, a household name in Irish religious life.

“Throughout that long life Professor McDonagh carried his learning and erudition gracefully and at the same time fearlessly.

“Those of us who now take for granted a whole range of human rights and shared ecumenical opportunities are indebted to this soft spoken and fiercely argued man of God and man of ideas – but also man of justice – for the lifting up into the public consciousness of so much that is good and needful.

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“I had the privilege of knowing him and on every occasion I met him came away enriched and humbled at the same time.

“He is sorely missed and greatly appreciated. May he rest in peace.”

## Pointers for prayer

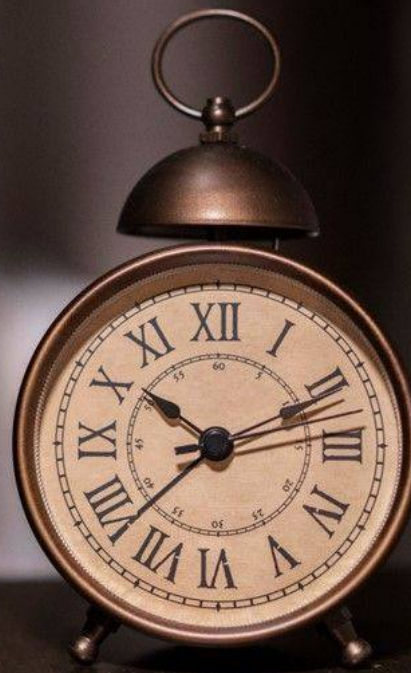
Heavenly Father,  
your Son battled with the powers of darkness,  
and grew closer to you in the desert:  
help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer  
that we may witness to your saving love  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty Father,  
whose Son was revealed in majesty  
before he suffered death upon the cross:  
give us grace to perceive his glory,  
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him  
and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

Pray for all teachers and parents involved with students or their children. We ask for stamina and creativity as they seek to educate in less than ideal circumstances.

It has been announced that on Ascension Day - 13 May 2021, Bishop Hosam Naoum will be installed as Bishop of

O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. ~ The Book of Common Prayer



the Diocese of Jerusalem, bearing the title Archbishop. Please pray for Bishop Naoum, his family and the Diocese.

We think today of families who are struggling to cope with the ongoing restrictions to normal life, especially those who live in small homes with no outside space. We pray for an abundance of tolerance to help ease their less than ideal circumstances.

Today we give thanks for young climate activists. A UN survey shows that demand for green business and jobs is particularly high among young people, who have been a driving force behind getting the issue onto the political agenda.

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We pray today for the church across the world, especially in places where they are experiencing hardship and persecution. We stand together with our sisters and brothers and pray for God to bring relief from their circumstances.

Lord Jesus, you prayed that we would all be united together so the world would believe and experience your love. Help us to put aside that which keeps us apart and work together to share your love through our actions and our lives.

Holy God,  
you know the disorder of our sinful lives:  
set straight our crooked hearts,  
and bend our wills to love your goodness  
and your glory  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God,  
you have created the heavens and the earth  
and made us in your own image:  
teach us to discern your hand in all your works  
and your likeness in all your children;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all  
things,  
now and for ever.

Almighty and everlasting God,  
you hate nothing that you have made  
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:  
create and make in us new and contrite hearts  
that we, worthily lamenting our sins  
and acknowledging our wretchedness,



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may receive from you, the God of all mercy,  
perfect remission and forgiveness;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## Speaking to the Soul

When we arrived in Macedonia, there was no rest for us. We faced conflict from every direction, with battles on the outside and fear on the inside. But God, who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. His presence was a joy, but so was the news he brought of the encouragement he received from you.

2 Corinthians 7:5-7 NLT

I was once chatting to two friends of mine when the subject of encouragement came up. One of them worked in a bank and the other was an engineer. They both said that they couldn't remember the last time their bosses had given them any word of encouragement. I was shocked by that. They were both great people and I can only imagine that they were diligent and effective workers, but they had been denied the oxygen of encouragement which we all need.

Paul had clearly been going through a really tough time. He had been working in Macedonia which is what we now know as northern Greece. In Acts 17 we read about some of the opposition that Paul had encountered. He felt that he had been attacked from all sides. So the arrival of Titus was a very welcome encouragement and not least because he

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brought the news that the Corinthians, in southern Greece, had been an encouragement to him. Result! Paul's conviction was that God is a God who encourages the discouraged and that's exactly what had happened.

Everyone needs encouragement and today we will all have opportunities to share some with others. It may be in the form of a kind comment, or a thoughtful text, or a bunch of flowers. They may appear quite small actions in themselves, but they can have life-changing effects because God is at work in our encouragements and he can use them to transform people's lives. There is almost certainly nothing greater that we can achieve today than to be encouragers.

## QUESTION

Who are you going to encourage today and how are you going to do it?

## PRAYER

Thank you Lord that you are a constant source of encouragement. Increase in me the determination to be an encourager. Amen.

