

## Bishops consult Catholics on divorce, same-sex marriage and contraception in online survey

**The Catholic Bishops' Conference for England and Wales (CBCEW) has urged Catholics to respond to [a survey](#) on same-sex marriage, divorce and contraception, ahead of the Vatican synod on the family next October.**

The Catholic Herald reports - Following a request from the Vatican to the world's bishops, urging them to distribute the questionnaire as widely as possible, the Archbishop of Westminster announced the launch of the consultation in order to prepare for the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the 'Pastoral Challenges of the family in the context of evangelisation.'

Writing in the Catholic Universe, Archbishop Vincent Nichols said: "Your participation is important. It will bring to bishops attending this synod the thoughts and experiences of people who live the vocation of Christian marriage and family life and of those who have responsibility for their pastoral care."

He continued: "As this Extraordinary Synod is attended by Presidents of Bishops' Conferences from around the world, I will be one of those bishops. I will attend carefully to the outcomes of this broad process of consultation."

The first question of the consultation asks: "Describe how the Catholic Church's teachings on the value of the family contained in the Bible, Gaudium et Spes, Familiaris Consortio and other documents of the post-conciliar Magisterium is understood by people today? What formation is given to our people on the Church's teaching on family life?"



It also asks: "What critical situations in the family today can obstruct a person's encounter with Christ?"

The synod will take place from October 5 until October 19 next year.

Archbishop Lorenzo Baldisseri, secretary general to the Vatican's Synod of Bishops, asked the world's bishops' conferences to distribute the poll "immediately as widely as possible to deaneries and parishes so that input from local sources can be received."

## Church agency upbeat about adoption

**A Durham Adoption Agency started by the Bishop of Durham more than a 100 years ago is upbeat about the national adoption week and about the new Bishop of Durham being an advocate for children and young people.**

DFW Adoption of Stonebridge, Durham, is using National Adoption Week to launch a monthly drop-in for those interested in adoption to find out more about becoming adoptive parents. The agency which has been recognised as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in three consecutive inspections over the last 8 years knows that its offering is different and unique.

Margaret Bell, Director of DFW adoption said: "My sense of pride and ownership in an organisation that supports families for life and keeps children safe is just amazing. I have worked in children's services all my professional life and with DFW for 13

years – starting as an adoption social worker. I took over running the agency back in 2005 – and since then we have inspected by Ofsted three times and each time they have recognised us to be outstanding in every aspect of our work.

"DFW adoption really makes a difference in the lives of children and young people through working in partnership with adoptive parents throughout the lifetime of the adoption. We are there when we are needed, whenever we are needed – and that is what makes us different and outstanding."

The monthly informal adoption information event which will be held on the first Wednesday of the month from 3–7pm at its Stonebridge, Durham, headquarters is an opportunity for prospective adopters to find out more about what it takes to get involved and make a difference to the lives of children and young people.

Started by the Bishop of Durham more than 100 years, DFW Adoption continues to be supported by the Church of England Diocese of Durham with the Ven. Stuart Bain, Archdeacon of Sunderland, as Chair of its management board.



### ***DFW adoption Director Margaret Bell - Upbeat About National Adoption Week***

Margaret said: "We were very excited to learn that the new Bishop of Durham is to be the Rt Revd Paul Butler, the Church of England's lead bishop on Children and Young people and co-chair of the National Safeguarding Committee. To have a new bishop with children and young people at the heart of his mission is fantastic and we will welcome his involvement in our work here at DFW."

"Our work is not instead of the services offered by local authorities – it is an addition, and in lots of areas we work in partnership with them. What makes us different and is part of why Ofsted hold us in such high regard is that we are small enough to take a personal and long term interest in our adopters and their adopted children – we are in partnership and that really matters to our families."

Stuart Bain said: "This last 12 months has been outstanding too in terms of the numbers of children placed. The pressure is still on for recruitment, especially for older children, sibling groups and children with particular needs. As an agency we are always looking for new ways to increase

our core business which is finding families for children, who can provide loving and stable home

## Tanzanian bishop tells UK politicians that love is the only way

**‘Love is the only way’ was the repeated message of Bishop Given Gaula, Bishop of Kondoa in Tanzania, to a meeting at the UK House of Commons of the Tanzania All Party Parliamentary Group hosted by Jeremy Lefroy MP.**

Bishop Gaula and his wife Revd Lillian Gaula was addressing the concern of the group for community cohesion in Tanzania in the context of increased tensions between Muslims and Christians. The meeting was also attended by Baroness Berridge, the chair of the APPG on International Religious Freedom and the Director of Continuing Indaba Canon Phil Groves.

Bishop Gaula stressed the history of religious tolerance in the secular society of Tanzania. The nation has flourished because of its diversity with all being able to be open about their religion and to speak with their neighbours without fear.

The diocese of Kondoa is situated in a predominantly Muslim area in the centre of Tanzania where Christians are in a tiny minority. The area was passed over by missionaries and does not benefit from the school system or health facilities that accompanied Christian mission. Tensions had been heightened by the bombing of a Catholic Church in Arusha in April and by isolated incidents in Zanzibar attributed to fundamentalists. Bishop Given cautioned the politicians against labelling such atrocities as being religiously motivated, but called for the British government to treat them for what



they were – acts of murder of one human being by another.

Revd Lillian spoke of the work she is doing with the Mothers Union to counter the practice of Female Genital Mutilation. Such abuse is illegal in Tanzanian law but continues to be practised because many believe that ‘uncircumcised’ girls will not be able to conceive and will turn to prostitution. As one of only three female Anglican Priests in the Anglican Church of Tanzania she is able to speak of her own life. She was not cut as a child and she has three healthy children and she is a priest not a prostitute. The Mothers Union has a vital role in countering Female Genital Mutilation in the rural areas of Africa.

Revd Lillian argues that the need is for education. Many women cannot read or write and they have been excited by the opportunity to learn offered by the Diocese. Men too were coming to get a basic education and the hunger for knowledge was great. Her message to the Parliamentary Group was clear and simple – invest in education.

When asked about the impact of global warming Bishop Given spoke of seven years of drought as a consequence of man-made climate change. He challenged the West to consider their use of resources and the effect it had on people who now had no food.

Returning to the questions of interreligious harmony he called on all religious groups to put Tanzania first and ensure they confronted the fanatics and fundamentalists in their own religion. He spoke of his work alongside the Roman Catholic leadership to calm down some of the more extreme Pentecostal and charismatic church leaders who were calling for revenge. In contrast he committed himself to the reconciliation agenda of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Bishop Given and Revd Lillian endorsed the principles of Continuing Indaba set out by Canon Groves. They agreed that the priority is to build relationships, to value diversity and to enable honest conversation to establish a healthy community.

Love is the only way for Christians to respond they said.

## **Christian Aid has grave concerns about Lobbying Bill**

**The churches' global development agency Christian Aid has welcomed the limited concessions which the Government has made to its Lobbying Bill, but still says risks harming legitimate campaigning for good causes in the UK.**

"The Government has finally relented to pressure and announced a very limited pause in the passage of its much-maligned Lobbying Bill," said Christian Aid's Senior UK Political Adviser Barry Johnston.

"The decision follows months of pressure by the extraordinary range of groups ranged against the Bill, and demonstrates the vitality of the very campaigning which the Bill threatens.

"The Government has finally shown it is prepared to listen. Now it must use this breathing space to respond to the many,

many concerns being expressed from all corners of civil society.

"In its current form, the Bill remains totally unacceptable and needs further, major amendments if it is not to damage legitimate campaigning in the UK.

"The Government must take whatever time necessary to get the Bill right," said Mr Johnston.

Christian Aid is a supporter of the independent Commission on Civil Society and Democratic Engagement.

\* Read the full Commission on Civil Society and Democratic Engagement report here: 'Non-party campaigning ahead of elections' - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/19330>

## **Quakers in Britain plan White Feather Diaries to mark World War I centenary**

**Quakers in Britain are to launch The White Feather Diaries, an online storytelling project to mark the centenary of World War I.**

The real-time story follows five Quakers as the war unfolds, exploring their dilemmas and different choices in a daily blog and Twitter feed. The project will run at incremental periods over three years (2014-2016) up to the anniversary of the 1916 Military Service Act which introduced conscription and recognised conscientious objection. The stories will chart the individuals' journey of discovery as they find out that opposing war is never easy and being a pacifist is always a brave decision.

By using digital media the project is designed to resonate with an audience who are the same age as those called up



to fight in 1914. The interactive nature of The White Feathers Diaries will create opportunities for discussion and a deeper understanding about the causes of conflict and current peacemaking. The White Feather Diaries will raise challenging questions and ask why this is still as relevant now as it was 100 years ago.

"We want people to understand choosing to be a pacifist is never easy in a culture of war. It is always a brave and difficult decision," said Jane Dawson, of Quakers in Britain. "Some people suffered, some were imprisoned and died there."

The tribunals which heard the cases of conscientious objectors were "not necessarily as fair as they could be" she added, "... we as British people should be incredibly proud [of establishing the right]. This is a fascinating part of our record as a liberal-minded country."

## Church-goers get heated cushions for winter services

**The prayers of parishioners at two cold and damp churches have been answered after the Diocese of Exeter agreed to trial re-heatable cushions on the pews.**

One hundred cushions are being trialled in Broadclyst and South Tawton's Anglican churches for three months.

Designed for use by sports fans, the cushions are part of a campaign to cut carbon emissions and look at new heating systems for church buildings.

If the scheme works, the cushions could be rolled out across the county.

The diocese said about 75% of its 600 churches in Devon were listed buildings, and many were large and difficult to heat.

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### *Martyn Goss of the diocese makes use of one of the heated cushions*

Diocese environment officer Martyn Goss said the cushions contained a re-heatable pad which remained warm for up to 90 minutes and could be reused 1,000 times.

The heat pack was biodegradable at the end of its life, he added.

He said: "This is a technology which has been designed for outdoor use in sports stadiums.

"We think it could have a lot of potential for church use in Devon where heating buildings can be expensive and inefficient."

The cushions will be in use until the end of January.

## Scientists in congregations programme

**The University of St Andrews has launched a new grant programme, Scientists in Congregations, Scotland, run by Prof Ivor Davidson and Dr Andrew Torrance, and backed by the University's School of Divinity.**



Dr Torrance explained: "The purpose of the programme is to explore the interface of contemporary faith and science, and seek to foster a much deeper and better-

informed conversation between scientists, clergy and congregations.

"To do so it is calling for churches across Scotland, from a range of denominations, to propose (just under) two-year projects that will excite and facilitate constructive engagement between the church and the scientific world. The project will be awarding around 15 grants of up to £10,000.

"We really believe that this programme has an incredible potential to proclaim the gospel in ways that could prove highly fruitful for the mission of churches in Scotland."

## Kirk's historic churches for sale

**Buyers have been moving to secure a slice of Scottish heritage after a surge in the number of historic churches being put up for sale by the Kirk.**

Bargain hunters have been looking at properties ranging from £20,000 for an island church to £500,000 for a city-centre site in the Edinburgh complete with original features including stained glass windows and oak panelling.

The number of properties offered is three times the total sold or let in the last round of sales reported by the General Trustees in May, although a small number of those put on sale last year are understood to remain under negotiation.

The Church of Scotland's website last week had 77 properties for sale, including churches, halls, manses and plots. When the asking prices are totalled they are worth well beyond £10 million.

Monies raised from the sales, with many already under offer, are reserved for the congregations.

The landmark St Stephen's Church in Edinburgh is said to be under offer after being put on the market for over £500,000 while the A-listed Plockton Church, designed by Thomas Telford, is priced at offers over £90,000.

Other examples include Inverleith Church in Edinburgh (offers over £475,000, but already under offer), the B-listed Castlemilk West Church and Hall in Glasgow (offers invited) and the single-storey C-Listed Sellafirth Church in Yell, Shetland (offers in the region of £20,000).

The Kirk is selling surplus properties where in some cases congregations have merged as it is addressing changing needs of the local communities it serves while maintaining its key tenet of providing ministry in all parishes.

Last week the latest census figures showed the number of people in Scotland with no religion now outstrips those in the biggest denomination, the Church of Scotland.

The properties can often offer redevelopment opportunities subject to planning consents.

One heritage expert said that while converting churches can be challenging "the potential to re-use church buildings in imaginative and creative ways is endless".

Religious buildings currently represent approximately 12% of properties on the Buildings at Risk Register.

John Pelan, director of the The Scottish Civic Trust, said: "It is a fact of modern life

that an increasing number of church buildings are no longer viable as places of worship given the decline in congregations.

"Although redundancy is commonplace there are many example of creative adaptation and re-use.

"Church buildings, although challenging to convert, are often valuable in ways that make them attractive to developers and communities with vision."

Mr Pelan cited the Barony Centre in East Kilbride as an "excellent" recent example. He added: "They are often important historically and culturally with many unique architectural details."

A spokesman for the Church said: "The church is spiritual home of many living within the area it serves and, even to those of no faith, the church can still be involved in their lives. Buildings are used for a number of different purposes and used by many different organisations."

## **Catholics across UK venerate the relics of St Anthony of Padua**

**Catholics filled Westminster Cathedral on Saturday last to venerate the relics of St Anthony of Padua.**

The arrival of the saint's relics, which comprised a small piece of petrified flesh and a layer of skin from the saint's cheek



### ***Pilgrims at Westminster Cathedral***

was part of a UK tour marking the 750th anniversary of the discovery of St Anthony's incorrupt tongue.

Following an afternoon of veneration, where pilgrims queued for hours outside the cathedral in order to visit the relics, Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster celebrated Mass in honour of the great saint.

During his homily, Archbishop Nichols said that St Anthony was a guide to those who have lost their way. He said: "On this most fundamental of all journeys we often get lost, taking a wrong path, ending up in a cul-de-sac, distracted by bright lights or misjudgement. St Anthony is well known for helping us to find lost things. And he can help us in this way too. He can help us to find again our true path whenever we have lost our way."

Archbishop Nichols also emphasised the importance of praying continually. He said: "The third lesson we learn today for our pilgrimage through life is that we are to pray continually. St Anthony teaches us this, too. His finest gifts were those of preaching and teaching. But he had to wait until the time came for him to exercise

these gifts to the full. Patient prayer carries us along this pilgrimage of life.”

Following their visit to Westminster Cathedral, the relics’ tour concluded at St Peter’s Italian Church in Clerkenwell. It is estimated that the relics have attracted 250,000 people across the UK during their tour.

Prior to their arrival at Westminster Cathedral, St Anthony’s relics had visited Belfast, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool and Chester.

During their veneration at the Franciscan Church in Chester, the Church of St Francis, Bishop Mark Davies of Shrewsbury reminded pilgrims that they were too called to be saints.

Addressing a packed church last Thursday, Bishop Davies said: “In Rome yesterday Pope Francis reminded us of the startling fact that the term ‘saint’ refers to you and to me, to everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus and are incorporated in Him and in the Church through Baptism. We are to be all saints!”

He added: “The saints reveal the true face of the Church at a moment in history when the Church’s public image has too often been distorted by scandals. The saints recall us to what the Church is for and that her ultimate goal is to bring us to Heaven. Blessed John Paul II, who will very soon be recognised amongst the canonised saints himself, observed how it is the saints who have always been the source of renewal amidst the most difficult moments in the Church’s story.”

Fr Michael Conaty, parish priest of St Anthony of Padua Church in Newcastle upon Tyne, said that the visit of the relics to his parish was an “extraordinary success” with approximately 5,500 travelling to venerate the relics.