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YOUNG CATHOLICS' QUARTERLY

World Youth

The Chuch of Now: reflections from Lisbon

PORTUGAL PORTUGAL PORTUGAL



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Life at Lourdes • Careers and vocations Spiritual cricket • Reviews and events

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COVER: ALAMY, BEATA ZAWRZEL

Welcome to inspire

CROWDS CAN be the loneliest places on earth. By myself, I can imagine other people however I like; meeting anybody risks disappointment, both in others and in myself. We need reminding from time to time that it is a risk worth taking that to feel part of a crowd is something special.

If you've ever found yourself caught up in a charismatic service or solemn procession which isn't really your scene, it can be tempting to retreat to anonymous Mass-going, nodding to your neighbour at the sign of peace and trotting out after communion. It's often easier to believe in God in an empty church.

Conversely, finding a crowd you like can be intoxicating, a drug that stops you finding meaning anywhere else.

The struggle between the personal and the collective is one of those either/or conundrums of human nature to which the Church obdurately answers "both

and neither". We are made more individual by belonging to its crowd.

In his message to the 40,000 people at the Medjugorje Youth Festival last month, Pope Francis urged them to leave "no place in your life for selfishness or laziness" because "God has a plan for each of you". The point of huge gatherings like Medjugorje is not homogeneity but to show us how thinking less of ourselves in one sense makes us more ourselves in others.

This edition of Inspire reflects on the crowds at World Youth Day and Lourdes - crowds characterised by the value they impart to individuals, particularly the young and the disabled. Elsewhere, a new item on courses and careers explores how different people find what that plan for them might be, while Nick Champness' column on the "theology of cricket" looks at the most individual of team sports. Ultimately, it is other people who make us more ourselves. Patrick Hudson



Venue:

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ALAMY, ROBERT HARDING



The Church of Now

As tens of thousands of young Catholics make their way home from Portugal, **Cáitlín Boyle** remembers her first time at World Youth Day and how it informed her continuing journey of faith in Lisbon and beyond

IN 2016 the host city was Krakow in Poland. While I'd always wanted to visit, I wasn't sure if World Youth Day – whatever it was – was for me. Going away with people I didn't know was a daunting prospect, so I politely declined the offer from my parish priest and someone else took the chance to go. When she returned, she spoke to the parish about her experience and I knew I had made a mistake. If another opportunity came up, I was going to take it.

The next chance I had was in 2019 when I signed up to attend World Youth Day in Panama, which was the last one before this year's event in Portugal. The event alternates between a venue in Europe and one elsewhere in the world. This was the first time it was in Central America so a small group of us went with Westminster Youth Ministry.

As soon as I arrived at Gatwick airport on a cold

January morning, I knew I'd made the right decision. Almost instantly, I made friends. By the time we landed in Costa Rica it was like we'd known each other for our whole lives.

Although it is known as World Youth Day, the events and services actually span the course of a week, reflecting its origins in the Polish Light-Life Movement that ran summer camps over 13 days. There is a campaign underway to beatify the movement's founder Franciszek Blachnicki, a priest who survived the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz and led a renewal movement in the Polish Church during the time the country was under the communist regime. In the 1980s, there were two million Life-Light members.

John Paul II initiated World Youth Day in 1985 to expand this "movement of the living Church". In its first iteration, he addressed the youth of the world: "In Jesus Christ, God definitively entered the history of Mankind. You, young people, should find him first."

Each morning in Panama we would start with a catechetical session. Bishops, young people, and other laity would share their testimonies with us.

Because of the diversity of attendees at World Youth Day, groups are arranged to include people who speak the same language. Our English-speaking group included young people from the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, among others. This allowed me to befriend a girl from Australia and we have kept in touch since, meeting up several times over the years.

If there was a single highlight of my time at World Youth Day, it was perhaps the vigil for the closing Mass.

Because of the huge number of people present, this Mass is usually held in a large open space to accommodate everyone. University campuses and disused aerodromes have done the job in the past. It's estimated that more than 700,000 young people were present in the Campo São João Paulo II 2019.

As part of the vigil, everyone comes together and camps outside for the night. Being together in one space with thousands of people from different nations speaking different languages was unlike anything else I have ever experienced. I was in awe that, despite our differences, we were all together in the same place, united by faith. Pope Francis said that this enormous witness "made Panama, America and the entire world shake".

Besides announcing the host city for the next World Youth Day – this year in Lisbon – the Pope bestows a blessing on all the young people. In Panama, he encouraged us to take home the gifts and joy we experienced.

"Brothers and sisters, the Lord and his mission are not a 'meantime' in our life, something temporary – they are our life!"

He ended his final homily with this appeal: "We are on a journey, keep walking, keep living the faith and sharing it. Do not forget that you are not the tomorrow, you are not the 'meantime', you are the now of God."

These words have stuck with me these past few years. They inspire me to act and go for something in all aspects of my life.

All of us who attended this year's World Youth Day in Lisbon were reminded that we are the now of God. Now is the time to take up new opportunities, to explore and develop our faith, to make lifelong friendships.

Cáitlín Boyle works for Caritas Westminster.

Letter from Lourdes

Volunteering to help smooth the path of pilgrims can be nothing short of miraculous, says **Patrick Hudson**

FLICKR, PEDRO PABLO



"THE CHURCH'S fairground"-"Holy Blackpool" - "Catholic Eurovision" - and this what people who like Lourdes call it. In 1858, Bernadette Soubirous saw 18 visions of Our Lady in a cave on the shabby, flood-prone fringe of a remote Pyrenean town. A centuryand-half later, that cave is the fulcrum of a pious urban sprawl, with churches and shrines and mass-catering hotels and gift shops and an airport, all to accommodate the millions of pilgrims who have come here since. On my first night here with the Diocese of Westminster pilgrimage, still dizzy from the 4 a.m. departure, we walked along the back wall of the grotto, stroking a waist-height band of mountain rock worn pebble-smooth by generations doing the same.

You hear a lot about Lourdes: the apparitions, the miracles, the kitsch. What you actually hear in Lourdes is music, almost constantly, whether you like it or not. Even the basilica bell chimes to the tune of "Immaculate Mary". At any moment pilgrim groups in the domaine – the area around the grotto – will have three or four renditions of "Ave Maria" on the go, none quite synchronised with the others. Discreet chapels suddenly reveal themselves with peals of hymns in Dutch and Korean. The shimmering holy medal shops pipe versions of those hymns back to souvenir-hunters. As I write, in the dining room downstairs, a French pilgrimage has just struck up a choral if not-quite-tuneful grace before dinner.

The variety is catholic bordering on the cacophonous. Hymns solemn and bloodcurdling or the happiest of clappy; a deafening organ voluntary followed by a Basque folk band; bagpipes in the hospital foyer. If you attempt to be discerning - or snobbish - you'll trip up. I may not have liked "Sing it in the valleys" when we learnt it at primary school, but it is now part of our common Catholic patrimony and if you know the words you'll find yourself singing (even if you pretend it's ironic) and understanding the point of the song. One afternoon, as the clergy smoothed a rain-affected outdoor Mass towards a prompt-but-dignified conclusion so we could evacuate the wheelchairs off the

mountainside, the choir struck up "Our God Reigns" and everybody laughed and cheered up, though somebody had to explain the joke to me.

At a tea party, I had a chat with a bishop who had said Mass that morning for the handicapped children of the pilgrimage. "We had the clap-clap Gloria," he said, "which isn't my favourite, but when you saw how the children joined in you realised what it's for." Lots of things reveal their unaffected purpose this way. The subterranean Basilica of Pope Pius X is compared by its critics to an underground car park (quite unfairly - it's more like the War Room in Dr Strangelove) but the heaving International Mass on Sunday where the Eurovision moniker certainly applies - showed the architecture at work, monumental concrete giving all the thousands present an unimpeded view of the altar. Its construction had less to do with highfalutin liturgical concerns than the need for somewhere to keep the Blessed Sacrament procession out of the rain.

The exotic outfits on display have similarly sensible explanations. People who work in the domaine (called brancardiers - "stretcherbearers") wear rather flashy straps over their shoulders, which today serve as their badge of office but were originally used to hold stretchers. They are no less useful now for identifying somebody to help you with a wheelchair. Even the tat shops have their role: Lourdes is a remote town with little employment to offer - the shocking poverty in which St Bernadette's family lived was partly a product of this mountainous, even desolate situation. Today, it's those tasteless shops which allow its inhabitants to make a living and keep the place alive for pilgrims. (Our Lady knew what she was doing when she appeared there, though it can be hard to think that when you're pushing a wheelchair up a 20-degree incline.) Lourdes doesn't go in for symbolism: it's about brass tacks and the supernatural and not much in between.

I am here as one of the helpers in the Accueil Marie Saint Frai, which provides hospital accommodation for disabled pilgrims. While there is valuable time for reflection built into the military schedule of devotions and mealtimes, I have found that the hard graft itself reveals the meaning most directly. We wryly exclaim "It's a Lourdes miracle!" when a coffee machine works or a recalcitrant pilgrim makes it to breakfast in time. But it really is miraculous that we are all here in spite of circumstance and difficulty, making coffee and eating breakfast and doing simple things in an extraordinary place. Our job in the Saint Frai, as the organisers explained at the start, is to give the residents the best possible holiday and leave any profundities to them. I hope that they have enjoyed it; I have, in the meantime, had the best week of my year.

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The art of craft

A pair of young professionals describe the whys and wherefores of their chosen paths



Isabelle Davies

The luminous windows that I stared at during the church services of my childhood inspired my initial interest in stained glass. Although I studied archaeology and ancient history as an undergraduate, I missed using my own creative skills, so when I discovered stained glass and its conservation as a career, everything felt like it clicked into place; my desire to work practically, creatively and with historic material were all satisfied.

I love working with stained glass because of the incredible colours, the role of light, and its storytelling powers. It is an historic craft, dating to the seventh century. Perhaps surprisingly to some, the medieval principles of slotting pieces of glass together between strips of lead to form a panel have largely gone unchanged, and I feel honoured to be a part of this legacy when conserving old and creating new stained glass.

Unfortunately, stained glass making is at risk and was this year added to the Heritage Crafts Association's Red List of Endangered Crafts. Therefore, it is vital that the craft, skills, knowledge, and physical windows are protected for the future.

As a conservator, I find the problem-solving involved with understanding, assessing, and conserving historic glass panels the particularly rewarding part of the job. It is also an incredible privilege to be entrusted with the care of such significant material. A recent personal highlight has been working on twelfth-century glass from one of Canterbury Cathedral's magnificent Miracle Windows.

Working in stained glass is endlessly interesting, challenging and important. Every day is different and, what is more, contributes to keeping this beautiful craft alive.

Isabelle Davies is a stained-glass conservator at the Cathedral Studios, Canterbury.

FREEPIK, MUMEMORIES



Faramade Olaitan

You know that smug feeling you get when you know something that nobody else does; and that they will not know until you tell them? The tingling in your fingers and the smirk you are trying to disguise? The pleasantly odd feeling in your chest that grows and grows until it consumes all the air in your lungs, and you just have to say something, have to breathe again? That is why I wanted to become a journalist.

I can pinpoint my obsession with writing things down to just after my grandad passed away; before he did my cousins and I spent a great deal of time in his office painting, laughing and just being children. After the funeral I developed the habit of taking the obituary notebooks and writing in them whatever nonsense seemed important to my four-year-old mind. There was just something about putting pen to paper that made my blood feel like sparkling water.

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'I think each person on the planet was placed here by God with endless possibility, each with a common theme'



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Although I hoarded magazines at school, at the time I wanted to be a dentist. Because of the clipboards they held at consultations, they always seemed to be scribbling something down. I also have an odd attraction to teeth, but that's beside the point.

But I somehow had a way of knowing everything that went on in my "set" – as we call year groups in Nigeria. I knew everything that had happened, was happening, and was going to happen. All of that detailed knowledge was something no one else could claim; it made me insanely happy.

I think each person on the planet was placed here by God with endless possibility, each with a common theme. It was only natural when applying to university that I found somewhere that shares this belief. Being surrounded by others who believe in their own endless possibility, even if they haven't all pinpointed their common theme, is refreshing. The theme of my possibility is storytelling.

Faramade Olaitan is studying for a BA in Journalism at Goldsmiths, University of London.

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The Spirit and cricket

Despite the thrilling finale on the fifth day of the fifth Test with England clinching victory over Australia at the Oval in London to level the series at 2-2, the most important result of the 2023 Ashes was actually decided nine days earlier on a rainy Tuesday in Manchester. The famous miniture urn will remain in the hands of the Aussies, the current holders having won the last series in 2021-22. They have come under quite a bit of flack this series over the dismissal of England's wicketkeeper-batsman, Jonny Bairstow, during the second Test at Lord's. The debate has led to a discussion of what the "spirit of cricket" is and whether the actions of Alex Carey, the Australian 'keeper, embody whatever that may be.

Sport has long been seen as analogous to the spiritual life; St Paul no less wrote, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). Now, how does this help us get towards the "spirit of cricket"? Let's suppose the Christian is the batsman who protects the stumps, symbolic of the soul naturally. The bat is the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17) protecting the believer's soul. The numerous items of protective equipment could either be read as an allegory of the Sacraments, or of the Seven Capital Virtues - personally I would opt for the former. Either way, the batsman is fortified in his battle against temptation, namely the ball. One might surmise that to bat is to fight the good fight.

I am not entirely sure how England's cavalier "Bazball" style fits into my analogy. The ideological, near pathological commitment to "entertainment", the preference for attacking bowlers to defending the wicket, the frankly reckless shots with which England's innings in Edgbaston and Lord's disintegrated – surely this isn't what St Paul had in mind?

But I have a sneaking suspicion that Marnus Labuschagne, one of Australia's top batsmen, may well understand my ramblings. In an interview for the documentary *The Test*, he talked about his faith, explaining he puts a sticker of an eagle on the bottom of his bat in reference to Isaiah 40:31, which talks of how the believer "shall mount up with wings like eagles ... shall run and not be weary ... shall walk and not faint". He said: "The value of me as a person isn't in cricket – it's in my faith". As long as he plays his best and fights the good fight, all shall be well.

Alas, we will not see the urn in the hands of Ben Stokes. However, we can see a side improved. In the course of the series, Bazball has matured into something more meaningful than wild shots in unsuitable situations. Stokes himself has declared that it is not about playing in a certain fashion but everybody playing in their own fashion and feeling comfortable with it. The commitment to entertaining play is not born of disregard for victory and the need to fight hard for it, but of a belief that entertaining play is the best route to victory - and the best way to fight. Far from indiscipline, Bazball has been a remarkable piece of discipline, sustained over months with a faith in the final result. England's victory in the final Test at the Oval was the just reward.

Labuschagne may be one of relatively few players to couch the sport in Christian terms, but one can discern a secular theology of cricket: a desire to fight the fight well. For me, the spirit of cricket became evident as I watched the first test at Edgbaston. I was in the jolly company of two Protestant friends in the heat of a quintessential English summer's day. We watched a good fight and discussed the ultimate good fight. There, the Spirit moved.

Nick Champness is reading German at Oxford University, where he plays for the St John's College XI.

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Reviews

At the Movies

Last month it was Barbie's world and we were just living in it. Google her name and the search engine turned flush. The enormous hot-pink film posters on the side of every bus - "She's everything. He's just Ken" - were disorientating if you grew-up with unironic Barbie adverts during children's TV on weekend mornings. They drew the eye rather more than the subfusc publicity for Oppenheimer, the biopic of the chief architect of the Manhattan Project. His most famous one-liner was a quote from the Bhagavad Gita after the first successful atom bomb test: "Now I am become death, destroyer of worlds." Both Barbie and Oppenheimer opened in cinemas on 21 July.

Far from proving a scheduling howler, the simultaneous release of films about nuclear fission and a physiologically-improbable doll has fascinated and amused the viewing public. The portmanteau "Barbenheimer" started as a comic riff on the apparent dichotomy but has developed into reflections on what these films say about our cultural moment. The studios, meanwhile, revelled in box-office takings as people with the time and inclination bought tickets to view both as a double feature.

This didn't happen in 2008 when Mamma Mia! and The Dark Knight hit the cinemas within a fortnight of each other. People who like Abba and people who like Batman were seen as distinct audiences with minimal overlap. What is it about this year's audience that has made harmony of their dissonance?

Part of it is the nature of cinema itself. The decision to attend a screening of anything with others in a darkened room admits you to a community of common interest. People in 2023 who want to watch *Oppenheimer* in a cinema are more likely to watch anything in the cinema – including *Barbie*. Both films are popular fronts in the struggle for the survival of picture theatres.

That hasn't been enough for

some pseudish commentators, who have diagnosed studies of the Anthropocene in both scripts. The theory that we are living in a new geological epoch, where the planet is decisively affected by human actions, is a popular form of introspection. In Laudato Si', Pope Francis traced the link between man's apparent omnipotence and the crisis of our "throwaway culture": Oppenheimer's achievement is thus an ancestor of the conundrums of feminism and consumerism posed by Barbie dolls. Perhaps.

The films themselves are a little too keen to expound their importance. Oppenheimer is a Christopher Nolan masterpiece so must eschew chronology and even a consistent colour palette, employing beautiful auteur devices which become pretty hard work after three hours of complex physics and political intrigue. Greta Gerwig has written a witty script for Barbie but it is freighted with "meaning" that she winkingly acknowledges is just an excuse for jokes about pointed feet and impractical outfits.

Both succeed, however, at an oblique angle to their subjects: Nolan reveals more of the inner lives of those who encounter genius than of the genius himself, while Gerwig's most telling observations are about fragile masculinity. Robert Downey Jr as Oppenheimer's antagonist Lewis Strauss and Ryan Gosling as the neglected Ken are being talked up for Academy Awards, rather than Cillian Murphy and Margot Robbie as the title characters.

These are interesting films, worth seeing if not necessarily going to see, though a double-header must be like washing down a strawberry compote with a pint of absinthe. In an era of cultural fusion cuisine, Barbenheimer is perhaps the weirdest experimental menu yet.

Barbie (dir. Greta Gerwig) is distributed by Warner Bros Pictures, rated 12A.

Oppenheimer (dir. Christopher Nolan) is distributed by Universal Pictures, rated 15.

Events

Throughout August the **London** Jesuit Centre at Farm Street is running a Summer Screenings series of classic films to explore and enrich the spiritual life.

Not exactly popcorn stuff – Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St Matthew* is one of the lighter items on the billing – but now that you've seen *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* there'll be room in your brain to appreciate some old masters.

Details available on the events page of the centre's website: londonjesuitcentre.org.

Elsewhere on the page you can find sign-up details for fortnightly **guided prayer sessions** online, led by the team at Farm Street with a few special guests.

Running from the end of September to the end of November, each session introduces a new method such as the Examen or imaginative prayer and provides opportunities for reflection with the group.

Feast of the Assumption

Hardly noticed in the UK, 15 August is properly marked on the continent with processions, fireworks and parties. Some villages in Ireland still hold Assumption Day fairs, though the dodgems get more attention than the dogma.

It's a Holy Day of Obligation in many places so it's well worth mugging up on this baffling, distinct and joyful teaching – that Mary was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory – and using it as an excuse for festivity.

March for Life 2023

The annual pro-life rally in London on 2 September begins with Mass in Westminster Cathedral at 10.30 a.m. and a series of morning events in the Emmanuel Centre close by the Houses of Parliament.

This year sees the introduction of an "Engage" initiative – training to help demonstrators engage in meaningful conversations with a not-always-sympathetic public. Also in the Emmanuel Centre, this will be compulsory for those who want to join the teams speaking to the people on the streets during the march itself.

The organisers say this is about "changing our culture, one conversation at a time". Visit marchforlife.co.uk for details.

Season of Creation

The World Council of Churches initiative promoting our common home begins on 1 September and runs to the Feast of St Francis of Assisi on 4 October.

Since the Pope's official embrace of the season in 2015 – which established 1 September as the World Day of Prayer for Creation – Catholic participation has been whole-hearted.

Cafod and other charities provide prayers and resources to mark the week, and any parish worth its salt will offer blessings to animals come the day of *il Poverollo*.

Pilgrimage to lona

YouCan, the Young Catholic Adult Network, is running a pilgrimage to the Hebrides on 15-18 September, taking the ferry from Oban to Mull where pilgrims will be based in Craignure Bunkhouse, with the opportunity to hop across the water to the tiny isle of Iona.

Three miles long and one-and-ahalf miles wide, it was given to St Columba in 563 and became the base of a far-flung network of Celtic missionaries for three centuries. The ecumenical lona Community sustains the common spiritual life on the island today.

YouCan is also running a series of **Monastery Days** in the UK's "spiritual powerhouses" through September and October, including visits to the Bernadine sisters in Hyning, north Lancashire, and to the monks in Pluscarden in Moray.

For more information on YouCan events, email rina@ youngcatholicadultnetwork.uk



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