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Editorial

Just 35 years ago, on the first Sunday of Advent 1989 (December 1st., like this year) St Francis parish moved into the present, newly-completed building. We look back over the past year and think nothing has changed, then realise that plenty has.

We meet and pray and keep trying to do the best we can – that doesn't change.

But new families join us, babies are born, teenagers go off to university, further training or

work. Deaths make unfamiliar spaces on pews. Some, like John and Anne Green, move out of Sheffield, while others emerge to take over their tasks.

The parish acquires a bike rack, then a card reader. And very soon we shall be listening to new versions of readings at Mass.

Our parish life sails on through the church's year. So, (eventually) Happy Christmas!
When it all began

Jenny

Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes

If a pilgrimage is a journey to a significant place, made with the intention of encountering God in Christ then Lourdes has it all.

Phil Wilkinson, the creator of the Pilgrim Ways website for the UK, had his doubts about the role of this ancient tradition on a postmodern, secular society. He felt reluctant to be 'pigeon holed into piety' but the process and welcome he received along his way converted him into creating pilgrim ways all around the UK, including formalising the route from the Cathedral to

Padley for our own diocese.

Is a pilgrimage a holiday? The spiritual element makes it hugely different. The most interesting analogy is with the early communities described in the Acts.

People share. They share more conversation, time and their skills and most importantly their prayers. The journey is different. Largely gone is the 'are we



there yet' conversation. Instead there are hugs of reunion, catching up on old acquaintances or the forging of new.

Two hundred friends, old and new, from around the diocese are there for fresh conversation to ease the stress from the start off. Blue shirted helpers and yellow shirted youth are there to assist getting your bags from plane to your hotel door. Indeed the administration of the Pilgrimage is a culmination of decades of experience shared between all the diocese of the country. Just recently there have been conferences held in Edinburgh of all the medical and administrative leaders all around the country to share and develop best practice. The common thread I saw amongst the medical attendees was the fun they all had in enabling the less able to participate as fully as possible.

Lourdes is indeed a special place: The activities, from daily Mass to torchlight processions and Eucharistic adorations are all pre-planned, scripted and optional if tired. Personal needs are important along with group activities. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is available at a special service led by the youth and attended by every flavour of priest. Stations of the Cross can be either a easy walk around the park to a vigorous climb up a steep hill with stunning inspirational statues.

Outside the planned events there is plenty of time for socialising with coffee or something stronger. Many groups have their favourite cafe and will vanish for some bonding time away from the rush. There is a party every year held for the youth by their teachers with some of them forming a band.

The youth come from the diocesan schools and travel by bus to save money. Their teachers can transform them from covid scarred individuals into enthusiastic teams during the week. The change from confused spectators on day one to joyous singers and dancers in 'Sion' or 'Servant



King' at the end is wonderful. Their reward is new and often enduring friendships with their contemporaries and from the pilgrims they learn to care for.

Disabled pilgrims are elevated to the top of the pilgrimage's priorities. The wheel chairs are at the front of every Mass. Almost every disability is catered for with gusto by teams of doctors, nurses and carers. Four youth push each wheelchair to and from each event and cafe.

Encounters with God are often subtle graces rather than the headline miracles, although those do still happen. You are far more likely to look back at an experience hours after and say 'Wow, that was good'. Indeed many first timers look back, days or months after the trip, realising that they want more.

This year was my 15th in the last 18 years. On retirement from medicine I moved from pilgrimage doctor to coordinator of the Hotel Alba and of the readers at Mass. To be of service in Lourdes is addictive; to be in the company of so many friends is wonderful.

It would be good to have a bigger representation from the parish next year both as pilgrims or volunteer helpers. Parish groups are accommodated together in one of the five hotels. The dates for 2025 will be Friday 27th June to Thursday 3rd July. Further details and booking forms will be available in January.

David Bellamy

Justice and Peace Bulletin

As part of the St Francis LiveSimply Campaign, the Justice and Peace Group has revamped and revised the St Francis Covenant with the Poor. The Covenant helps us to focus our aim of expressing solidarity with people living in poverty throughout the world through, wealth sharing, campaign actions and through our prayers and liturgies. We aim to support both world and local needs. The Covenant can be found on the St Francis website (<https://shorturl.at/NBv76>).

Part of the Covenant is for the parish to make a commitment to support charities financially working to meet the needs of the poor. This year it was agreed that we would focus on local charities as they often struggle to raise sufficient funds and this gives us the opportunity to give something back to our local community.

The Parish Council has supported the Covenant and has agreed to donate 5% of the annual offertory contributions. This year's charities were agreed at the AGM and are:

- **ASSIST**
- **S2 Foodbank**
- **Sheffield SVP**
- **Sheffield City of Sanctuary**
- **St Wilfrid's Centre**
- **Buzz contact centre**
- **Baby Basics**
- **Roundabout**
- **Care in Crosspool**

Each year we will review the charities at the AGM and Parishioners will have a say in which charities we support. We will renew the Covenant with the Poor each year at Mass on the Sunday after the AGM.

Eva Kaltenthaler

All Souls

November. The day chapel
softly lights our waiting, five minutes till Mass.

In front of us, beyond the glass partition,
altar, font, pews stretch off into shadow.

Yet seen from here, the glass,
mirror-like, shows our reflections too --

and there we are, faces, coats, scarves,
our ghostly selves sketched on the scene before us.

'Communion of saints.' We living remember the dead,
here with us in convoy on the track of time.

We see ourselves, the struggling, earthly ones,
'in a glass darkly', like the God we seek.



Jenny King

CAFOD on the Parish Day

The St Francis Parish Day on the 6th October was very successful. Over 50 people came to share lunch and get to know each other informally. During lunch we were given an excellent talk by Thom Flint, who is a CAFOD filmmaker & tphotographer and is a Christian living in Sheffield. Our Parish has supported CAFOD for years, principally through funds raised by the Panto and Dance Club. Here is a summary of what Thom had to say.



(From L to R): Merveille Kavira Kamate (CAFOD Volunteer), Thom Flint (CAFOD Film and Photo Producer), Marie-Claire (community member), Emmanuel Bahati Cimanuka (CAFOD)

I travelled to Goma in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo in June 2023 and spent two weeks meeting community members and staff who have been part of programmes that CAFOD supporters have donated towards. It was a real blessing to meet such inspirational people and to be able to share their stories, and it was amazing to see the impact that our Catholic community's incredible generosity has on people like Daniel and Marie-Caire.

Mike Campbell

From L to R): Mark Chamberlain (former CAFOD Writer), Marie-Claire (community member), Thom Flint (CAFOD Film and Photo Producer)

