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CATHOLIC HERALD
**SPIRITUAL
RETREATS 2023**

Introduction

From Arizona to Argyll, here is our selection of places to reset, reflect and spiritually refresh mind and soul. Many of our selected retreats are situated in or alongside monastic and religious houses, including those of the Jesuits, Passionists, Benedictines and Franciscans. It is also an opportunity for religious people to share their charisms with those in need of spiritual recharging.

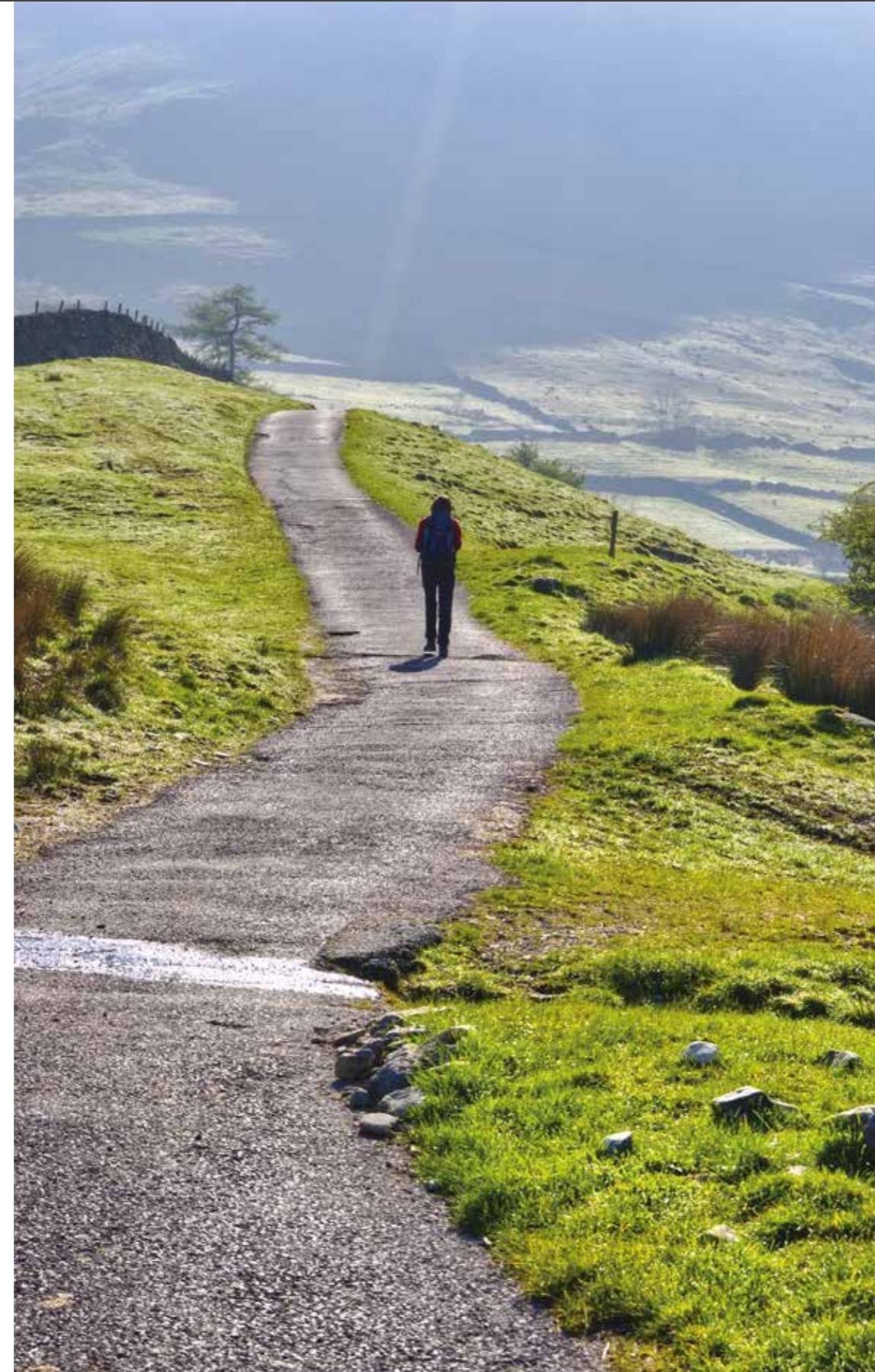
In a world of ever-scrolling screens and emails, we sometimes need to retreat from it, like so many saints chose to, and Christ did for 40 days. While we may no longer retreat to a hermit's cave to live off locusts, a stay in one of the retreat houses in our guide – often with delicious healthy food – can be a spiritually rewarding experience that allows one to switch off and re-engage with the world on a more spiritually focused level.

We feature the Benedictine strongholds of England – Ampleforth, Buckfast, Douai and Worth – no strangers to spiritual direction. For the Benedictines – at Buckfast or Belmont Abbey – the duty of hospitality is written into its founder's very rule. We also feature relative newcomers on the UK's retreat scene, such as Craig Lodge Family House of Prayer, Iona House of Prayer and the Society of the Sacred Heart's retreat centre in Brecon.

We pay homage to the Carmelite and Redemptorist centres across the UK, where you can find out about their Advent and Holy Week retreats, as well as visiting the Jesuits who offer the full 30-day Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola. We also explore England's Nazareth, the Catholic National Shrine and Basilica of Our Lady at Walsingham, a medieval pilgrimage site destroyed during the Reformation that has found new life in the 20th century.

Across the Atlantic we feature retreats in the Passionist and Franciscan tradition, and find that a repurposed seminary has a new life as one of the largest retreat houses in New York. We visit the Malvern Retreat House, the oldest retreat centre in the US, and see Mother Angelica's legacy living on at the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Alabama.

Below you will find inspiration, and through their websites find how to take a spiritual mini-break in 2024.



A heart in search of God: walking to deepen our faith

Phil McCarthy writes of the inspiration for his founding Pilgrim Ways, a project of walking pilgrimages in England and Wales

Over half a century ago, aged 6 or 7, sitting in the back of the family Morris Minor, I glimpsed a gaunt man striding along bearing a haversack: weather-beaten face, dishevelled white hair and beard, and long flapping coat. My father said he might be an ex-soldier, scarred by war, who had taken to the road. To me the "tramp" looked brave, independent and free. I wanted to walk like him, with nothing except what I could carry, so I pestered family and friends to hike with me.

In 2021 I retired as CEO of Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN), the domestic social action agency of the Catholic Church in England & Wales, and started to reflect on next steps. After many dead ends, I discovered that walking was what gave me energy, joy and peace, and discerned that through walking pilgrimage I could contribute to the mission of the Church.

Pilgrimage is ancient and universal, but it's always an inner journey as well as outer. On a visit to Santiago de Compostela in 2010 Pope Benedict XVI defined it beautifully: "To go on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God where he has revealed himself, where his grace has shone with particular splendour and produced rich fruits of conversion and holiness among those who believe."

In 2008 I stepped out of my usual role as a GP in Bristol to set off alone from Canterbury to Rome. I was often asked, "Is it a pilgrimage?" I obfuscated, unsure what it means to be a pilgrim in a secular age and reluctant to be pigeonholed. On the road I became a pilgrim because of how those I encountered welcomed me. I wrote a book about the journey, called *Rome Alone*. In 2015 I tramped on to Istanbul and wrote *The Dusty Roads of History*.

I discovered that walking pilgrimage is a great way of experiencing our physical environment, exercising, encountering people different from ourselves and of promoting local tourism; all much needed after the Covid-19 pandemic. In an age of global warming, walking pilgrimage in our home nations is a greener option. There is a distinctive spirituality associated with walking pilgrimage because of its closeness to the earth, the slowness of travel and the blend of solitude, fellowship and encounter with strangers it involves.

Pope Francis has said of pilgrims: "Whoever they may be – young or old, rich or poor, sick and troubled or curious

tourists – let them find due welcome, because in every person there is a heart in search of God, at times without being fully aware of it."

The phrase "heart in search of God" is the inspiration for my three-year project to promote walking pilgrimage in England and Wales by developing Pilgrim Ways in each Catholic diocese. The Ways are an opportunity for Catholics and other Christians to deepen their faith and for people of all faiths and none to share the experience of walking pilgrimage in a Catholic context.

The Ways start at the cathedral of the diocese and end at a shrine within the diocese. They take in churches and places of relevant historical interest. They are off-road as much as possible and incorporate existing pilgrim routes and long-distance footpaths.

The cathedrals, shrines and churches along each Way will be encouraged to provide a simple welcome, for example by keeping the church porch open during some daytime hours and providing a stamp for pilgrims to stamp their pilgrim passports.

In most dioceses there is no existing Way, but the Diocese of Leeds has the two-day St Wilfrid's Way, and Lancaster has the six-day St Mary's Way. In Southwark there is the Augustine Camino and in Arundel and Brighton there is an annual ecumenical walking pilgrimage: Pilgrims Live! Nationally there is the new London to Walsingham Camino and Pilgrim Cross (formerly Student Cross) to Walsingham in Holy Week. These walks provide models and inspiration for this project.

Key to the project is a new website, www.pilgrimways.org.uk, a platform for the walking guides as well as for spiritual and practical resources. There are downloadable pilgrim "passports" and certificates for pilgrims who complete the Ways. The project is supported by the Sisters of the Holy Cross CIO.

The 2025 Holy Year has the motto "Pilgrims of Hope". Why not prepare for the Jubilee by undertaking a walking pilgrimage of hope in your own diocese?

Please visit the website. I welcome your feedback, comments and advice and can be contacted at: pilgrimwaysew@gmail.com. *Buen Camino!* **CH**

Phil McCarthy is a former GP and CEO of CSAN, and is the founder of Pilgrim Ways

Not a tame pilgrimage

Julian Kwasniewski explores the spiritual and physical experience of going on adventure pilgrimages

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the fifth of CS Lewis' Narnia series, the mysterious Aslan is famously referred to as “not a tame Lion”. Aslan tells the Pevensie children at the end of the book that the point of their relationship with him in Narnia is so that they can know him better in their own world. Today, chartered buses and tour-guides often tame the experience of European pilgrimages for Catholics. Yet, like the Narnian voyage, which begins unexpectedly and involves both dangerous adventure and pleasant comradery, this need not be the case.

Chris Baker, founder and director of Altum L'alto Pilgrimages (ALP), a small Catholic pilgrimage and outdoor adventure company based in Italy, said that the seed of his business “was planted one day at Saint John Lateran when a priest was talking about how we should be finding ways to give life to others”. Chris’s goal is anything but providing a “tame pilgrimage” experience. One of my tasks working at Wyoming Catholic is keeping in touch with alumni – and so I reached out to Chris to learn more about his project.

Combining personal love of adventure and the Catholic faith as well as skills learned at Wyoming Catholic College (WCC), American Chris Baker leads adventure pilgrimages which integrate hiking, biking, kayaking, rafting and other outdoor activities with pilgrimages to holy places. Before starting ALP, Chris “had been studying in Rome and working for a study abroad programme for several years”. In his own travels, adventure was always the “preferred mode and some kind of religious site was always the destination”. Working with exchange students, however, he realised that they were getting consistently “superficial experiences of Europe” instead of the “countless incredible experiences” he knew from his own travels. “I started to offer trips for them,” he told me. “I never had any plans to start my own company until one day everything hit me at once – the idea, the mission, the name and so on.” The seed had been planted when he “started to think more and more about what form of life I could give to others from my particular life, person and situation at the time”, because of hearing a sermon on that topic in the Lateran Basilica in Rome.

Originally from Louisiana, Chris spent several high-school summers at a camp in the mountains of North Carolina, and had the opportunity to study abroad in Taiwan for part of his senior year of high school. “I think those adventures really disposed me to set out for Wyoming Catholic College,” he stated. “The amount of time I was able to spend in the wilderness and the friendships I made

“We don’t always take the easiest, most efficient way. Rather, we take the way of the pilgrim which sometimes means journeying past the point of comfort and convenience to get to our destination

there” were among the most important aspects of his experience at WCC, from which he graduated in 2012. Additionally, “the BA in Liberal Arts and my time at WCC helped me in my own life’s pilgrimage. Having four years at WCC to study, pray and explore really orientated my life towards its proper goals and naturally set the journey towards achieving them in motion.”

Wanting to hear more of how Chris facilitated others’ pilgrimage and adventure experiences, I contacted a few friends from WCC who had participated in his trips. “Not only do we present our prayers on sacred ground, but we spend ourselves making the journey there,” said Grace Kirwan. “For instance, we hiked for two full days along the way of St Francis to arrive in Assisi and pray at the tombs of Ss Clare and Francis.” Pilgrimage, then, is a more holistic experience than “traveling for education”, of which I recently wrote, which can be done in an aloof way, with the mentality of a scientist observing unusual phenomena. Rather than the cool mind of a scientist, going “on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God where he has revealed himself, where his grace has shone with particular splendour and produced rich fruits of conversion and holiness among those who believe”, as Pope Benedict put it.

“One of my favorite memories from the trip was a church we stayed near that began and ended the day ringing out ‘Immaculate Mary’ from the bell tower. Although we were only there a few nights, we got to know the local priest and the cook pretty well despite the language barrier,” Maria Baron reminisced. “I could have talked myself out of going – the cost is great, the travel is unpredictable at best, and the language and food are unfamiliar,” said Grace. “I am so grateful I was able to bear these discomforts for the overwhelmingly greater privilege of embarking on this exciting journey and being immersed in something greater than I could have expected.” Grace recalled CS Lewis’s comment from *The Four Loves*: “If I am sure of anything I am sure that [Christ’s] teaching was never meant to confirm my congenital preference for safe investments and limited liabilities...” Grace said she tried to approach her pilgrimage with a similar disregard for “playing it safe”, since “Lewis goes on to ask the question whether one would choose one’s spouse or friend in this spirit of caution, and how much more we ought not let this be our attitude in our relationship with God”.

Cistercian monk and author Thomas Merton commented that “the geographical pilgrimage is the symbolic acting out



Young pilgrims taking part in adventure experiences run by Altum L'alto Pilgrimages

sometimes means journeying past the point of comfort and convenience to get to our destination. Nevertheless, while we sometimes expend our energy and strength on the way, we also replenish and refresh ourselves with good food, lively conversation and heartfelt prayer, drinking deeply of the refreshment our Lord offers all those who leave behind their lives to seek Him.”

“The way WCC kept prayer and the spiritual life at the centre of its education and formation has been an important influence on me in terms of how I attempt to structure my own life and work,” Chris commented, adding: “I would always recommend that someone goes to WCC no matter what field they are interested in pursuing.”

Altum L'alto Pilgrimages is an interesting example, then, of how planting the seed of love for adventure and beauty can blossom in apostolate; of how the liberal arts education can lead to the most versatile and unique career paths which are nonetheless orientated to the restoration of Christian culture.

Maria Baron found that “the pilgrimage served as a measure for ‘normal life’, a brief experience of the good life”. Aslan’s words in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* can also be applied to the soul’s experience of God on pilgrimage: “by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there” – in normal, everyday life. If you are looking for a journey, an adventure and an encounter with the Lion of Judah, none of which is “tame”, you might consider casting into the deep with Altum L'alto Pilgrimages. CH

Julian Kwasniewski is Assistant Music Director at Wyoming Catholic College



Walking to Walsingham

Alex Norman relates the mishaps and hilarity of a journey with old maps, bivvy bags, dried food and army flares

The plan: to recreate a medieval pilgrimage from Ely cathedral to Walsingham by eschewing highways in favour of byways and public rights of way. The execution: hampered in just the same way any medieval pilgrimage would have been – through having inadequate maps. Getting to Ely was, of course, no problem. Even without satnav, it is well signposted from a long way off and, as you draw near, the marvel that is the west tower of the cathedral, rising over 200 feet, acts as a beacon.

There were three of us, Peter, James and John, and there were mishaps and hilarity in plentiful measure. The first mishap, though, was not a bit hilarious. Having gorged ourselves on the gothic magnificence of the cathedral, been astounded that anyone could have thought it a good idea to chip the faces off the miraculous filigree statuary that adorns the walls of the Lady chapel, listened to an impromptu aria sung by a fellow-tourist and, in the case of at least one of us, prayed at St Etheldreda's shrine, it seemed a good idea to take some food at nearby market stalls.

Some hours later, Peter realised that he had lost his wallet.

In the meantime, happily ignorant of this loss, our first important decision was to dispense with our original intention to make the cathedral our starting point and, instead, to drive to Lakenheath and embark from there. This avoided some rather uninteresting terrain and positioned us better for our plan to traverse the Thetford training area. A quick circumambulation of the local parish church and we were off. We cannot have walked a full mile before we hit our first major snag. The path we were on was blocked by a barbed wire fence standing 12 feet high and observed from a platform mounting a CCTV camera: the perimeter of RAF Lakenheath's recently extended boundary.

"What year was the map published?" I wondered.

"About 1980, at a guess," replied John, to whom it belonged.

"1980! That means the survey was probably undertaken a good few years before that. We're using maps that must be at least 60 years old!"

"There may be a few discrepancies here and there. We'll just have to work with them."

I fear I may have raised my eyebrows as we set off back in the direction of the village but, within a few minutes, there came a cheerful "Here it is!" as John, in the lead, picked up the diverted path. Soon enough, we were properly on our way, headed in the direction of Thetford, the army training area where

two of the three of us had spent a week as part of our Sandhurst training. As I recalled from that earlier visit, my pack was heavier than ideally it would have been. More to the point, the intervening four decades of near total physical indolence began very quickly to assert themselves. I should have trained properly. With weights. And for months. My kit weighed 25lbs, it was 30 degrees in the shade and we were proposing to cover an average of 16 miles per day of which on this, the first of them, well over half had already passed. The other two were frequent walking companions whereas I was a blow-in. Help, St Etheldreda!

Of course, saints don't usually work in straightforward ways and I am afraid it was nothing more elevated than the thought of looking foolish that kept me going.

Our first evening meal provided an introduction to the wonders of the Kelly Kettle. In effect a portable samovar, this venerably old piece of technology harnesses the theory of the chimney flue with the practice of the boiling vessel and requires nothing but twigs,

moss and other bits of combustible material to produce meals on the fly. What would our forebears have given for one of these! In no time, and following John's lead (not only was he vastly senior to me in rank but he spent time with special forces so this was an easy thing to do), we added the contents of various packets of dried food more or less at random. The result, not exactly appetising, nonetheless hit the spot. I don't suppose we ate either much better or much worse than your average medieval pilgrim.

Replete, we pressed on for a few more miles before nightfall bringing the total to just under 20 walked since setting off. Our chosen spot to sleep was in a slight depression in open ground and about 100 yards from the track we had been following. The sky was clear and the forecast for the following day was more of the same fine weather. This more than justified the decision to bring only bivvy bags and no tent. A tent, though, would have been better for visibility should there be any military manoeuvres taking place that night. Hitherto, we had seen no evidence of any such activity. But what was this? No sooner had I settled down when I caught sight of what surely was a parachute flare. I squinted and watched it slowly descend.

"Chaps – did anyone else see that?"

"What?"

"Shamooli."

"Just one?"

"So far."

The words were scarcely out of my mouth before the one was followed by 20 more.

"What do we do?"

"Nothing. Just hope they don't come our way," advised the senior officer.

Fortunately, they didn't and the following day dawned on a landscape as empty as on any day in the past millennium at least – empty save for some distant herds of cattle and a magnificent showing of birdlife. We

either spotted or heard, among the more usual fowl, not only cuckoos but also the much rarer grasshopper warbler.

Our target for the day was to reach Castle Acre Priory, the 11th-century Cluniac foundation lying five miles to the north of Swaffham. En route, however, we made an unscheduled detour via Houghton-on-the-Hill, a deserted medieval settlement of which only the Great Barn and St Mary's church remain. But what remains! The church, having fallen into disrepair during the 19th century came, in the late 20th, to the attention of a group of Satanists who opened a grave and stole a skull to use in their perverse rituals. Fortunately, some enterprising locals fought back and – possibly with the help of some vigilantes, who knows? – took the church in hand. After a quarter of a century's labour the building stands beautifully restored within its lovingly tended yard, home, it turned out, to a remarkable survival: a Throne of Grace, depicting the Holy Trinity, the earliest known example in this country. Though considerably damaged by overlays of paint at the time of the Reformation, this and other frescoes revealed during the restoration are a reminder of the visual richness of England's parish churches until the frenzy of iconoclasm gripped the nation during the 16th century.

The church at Houghton-on-the-Hill stands, it seems to me, as a metaphor of our own times. In a way, the iconoclasm, the rage of today's values against those of yesterday, is still with us. The past oppresses us so it must be destroyed. Yet the love and determination of a very few is all it takes to dispel the darkness and bring hope.

Following this uplifting interlude, we resumed our route to Castle Acre, arriving there in early evening having covered a satisfactory 16 miles in the day. There was still enough heat in the sun to make a dip in the adjacent stream a plausible option even

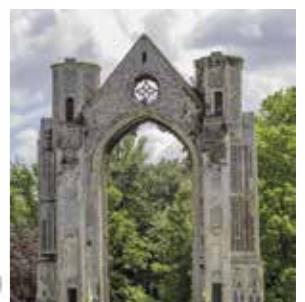
though none of us had anything much in the way of either towels or bathing costumes. We were able to dry out as we resumed our track. That evening, our meal – less appetising even than on the previous day – was enlivened by the astonishing sight of a barn owl hunting for prey on open ground just adjacent to the woods to the south of the Priory.

Day three saw us up at around 4am, meaning we were able to visit the Castle long before any other tourists and, by breakfast time, to reach the village of West Lexham with its marvellous Saxon round tower, there to buy postcards and refill our water bottles courtesy of a kind villager. We made it a habit to stop at any church on our route and this was followed with visits to those of Tittleshall, Whissonett and Raynham Park – home of the Earl of Leicester about whom modesty forbids me to say anything other than that we encountered his Lordship when buying ice creams at the local garage.

Our final church of the day was that of All Saints, Hellhoughton. By now it was almost dark and, invoking their protection, we unrolled our sleeping bags close by. Had we realised that the door was unlocked, I fear we might have spent the night inside as, emboldened by a sudden turn of cold and wet weather, we were attacked by squadrons of angry mosquitos.

After a very quick look at the church's interior we began the final leg of our journey not long after dawn so that, following a pleasant amble along the disused railway line leading from East Barsham, we arrived at the Slipper Chapel more than an hour before it was due to open, to a reception by one of the resident sisters.

At first a little frosty, when we explained that we had just completed a 100km (almost exactly) journey she gave us a smile that, I saw later, exactly recalled that of the statue of Our Lady. CH



Opposite: Ely Cathedral; above: Castle Acre Priory, the Slipper Chapel; right the shrine at Walsingham

Resting my weary feet

Mary Fisher discovers the physical and mental trials of walking the Cammino di San Benedetto

To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant" as St John Henry Newman so famously said, and I found myself up to my waist in history as I walked the Cammino di San Benedetto in Italy this summer. Whilst studying theology at Oxford during my time at St Stephen's House, before my reception into the Church, I was always struck by the depth and richness of the history of the Faith: by the monastic communities that evolved over time, from the early Desert Fathers and hermits in caves, to the formalising of a Rule by St Benedict that inspires religious communities up to the present day; and by the way these communities formed great thinkers and commissioned great works of art, all in the name of Jesus and for the greater glory of God.

Around 18 months ago, I decided I needed to make a pilgrimage. I decided not to do the famous Santiago Camino as it can be rather busy, but I had recently heard about the Cammino di San Benedetto, a 180-mile walk between Norcia, where St Benedict was born, to Monte Cassino, where he died. This walk goes through the Umbria and Lazio regions of Italy, and was said to be very peaceful and beautiful – perfect for praying. The monastery at Monte Cassino was also visited early in life by St Thomas Aquinas and St Philip Neri, two saints to whom I have a particular devotion. The route passes through Subiaco where St Benedict founded 12 monasteries, one of which remains today. Along the way, I would cross over with various other saints such as St Francis; St Felix of Cantalice, the first Capuchin saint; St Scholastica, St Benedict's twin sister; and St Rita of Cascia; not to mention the host of local saints. A walk through the Italian countryside with such a depth of history along the way, and with so many saints to accompany me, felt like a very good way to spend the start of my school summer holidays!

It soon became apparent that the walking aspect might not have been as straightforward as I had expected, so I decided to use my discomfort and sufferings in the walking and heat as a prayer. We read or hear that we are to "offer it up" when difficulties come our way in life, and I have often found this hard to hear, since it easily sounds airily pious when one is struggling. On this occasion, it seemed a lot easier to offer my physical, and in some cases mental, anguish up to the Lord for all those I wished to pray for. As a lone pilgrim, you don't have the company of others to spur you on; you are more vulnerable, exposed, which at difficult times can lead to some rather bleak thoughts. One is forced to rely upon God, to trust Him utterly with one's safety and



Above: the altar of San Girolamo della Carità, Rome. Below left to right: the town of Subiaco; cloister of Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino



with the needs of the day. I had taken with me the *Oratory Prayer Book*, which the Fathers of the Oxford Oratory have recently published, and the "Prayers before Starting a Journey" had become my daily prayer. Adapted from the traditional Roman Itinerary, they read in part: "Be our support in our leaving, our comfort on the way, our shade in the heat, our shelter in rain and cold, our rest in weariness, our fortress in danger, our staff on perilous slopes..." Whilst rain and cold were very much not a problem I encountered (though I wouldn't have minded just a little), the others very much were. I was living the prayer!

Walking in the mountains, one stumbles upon parts of nature that very few people ever really do: stunning arrays of wildflowers on mountain pastures 1,200m above sea level; turquoise lakes that shrink to sapphire puddles by the

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time you have climbed the mountain; beech trees where the sun breaks through to bathe you in a brilliant verdant light; mountain ranges like piles of sugar on the horizon. As I listened to the birds sing, the almost deafening cacophony of the cicadas, with no one at hand to exclaim to, the psalms praising God in the beauty of creation seemed to make a great deal of sense. I wondered if perhaps St Benedict had thought this as he walked to Subiaco, and if the Psalms had kept him company on the walk, too.

I often thought while walking of those holy souls who trekked across Europe to learn from the great thinkers of their time. They had no carbide-tipped walking poles, or foam-cushioned shoes, or hydration packs on their backs (though perhaps they stopped and drank from some of the same fountains that I did along the way). Some of the features of the Cammino did feel as if they would have been familiar to those walking in centuries past. I frequently came across what can only be described as a World War I-style collection of barbed wire and bits of tree held together under tension as a form of gate. My knowledge of physics and my (limited) upper body strength came in useful here as I was able to prise open the gate, pass through it and re-secure it behind me; but I did wonder if my tetanus injections were up to date. At one point I met a group of horses happily munching on the side of the path, blissfully oblivious that they were blocking my way! Some had foals, and were protectively wary of me; but I removed my mirrored sunglasses to look more human, gently raised

my hand, and spoke in the steadiest farmer's daughter's voice I could muster in Italian, trying to reassure these *cavalli*. They soon realised that I was no threat, and I just wanted to pass by, and so like the waters of the Red Sea they parted to either side.

The intention was always to make it to Monte Cassino after 16 days' walk and a rest day in Subiaco. I had been feeling confident, as I seemed to be progressing well, despite the challenging nature of the walk with the elevations covered each day and some of the rough terrain; my back, shoulders and knees all seemed to be coping well, and whilst the tendons around my ankles were sore, stretching seemed to help each day. So when I reached Subiaco, faced with soaring temperatures and ever more remote villages to journey to, to discover that the inevitable blisters on my feet were not just sore but infected, a decision had to be made. To continue would have been foolish, motivated only by pride, and so I made the difficult choice to stop at Subiaco, leaving the final six days' walk to Monte Cassino for another time. I was very grateful that I was able to join friends in Le Marche to recover in the bucolic Italian countryside and rest my weary feet. Whilst this may not have been the plan, God's ways are not our ways, and He knows best.

Disappointed as I was not to make the full pilgrimage to St Benedict and St Scholastica, it did now mean that when I reached Rome I could make a small pilgrimage to St Philip Neri, who I believe to have been instrumental in my conversion from the earliest days. On the Sunday, I went first to the church of San Girolamo della Carità, where St Philip lived when he first started his Oratory. It was then on to Mass at Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini, where he established a Confraternity to look after the many pilgrims to Rome. Once the churches had reopened after the afternoon closure, I was able to visit the church where St Philip had been rector, San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, before finally going on to visit the saint himself at the church built for his community, the Chiesa Nuova. Being able to kneel before the mortal remains of the saint and offer up prayers for those I had been asked to pray for, as well as for the Fathers, Brothers and parishioners of the Oxford Oratory was a good deal more moving than I had expected. It was a peaceful, calm experience that seemed a fitting end to my time in Italy and felt as if it was perhaps where I was really meant to end up after all.

Having returned to cooler climes, somewhat humbled by my body, and a little disappointed not to have made it all the way to Monte Cassino, I can certainly give thanks for what did pass. The Good Lord does know what is best for us: 10 days of more strenuous walking than expected, followed by an opportunity to relax for a few days before making a pilgrimage to St Philip Neri, perhaps was a more balanced pilgrimage than I had originally planned. As I recall the serenity of the valleys I walked through, valleys where one could sense the prayers of those from long ago lingering in the air, I give thanks for my Catholic faith, and the cloud of witnesses who accompanied me on the way. CH

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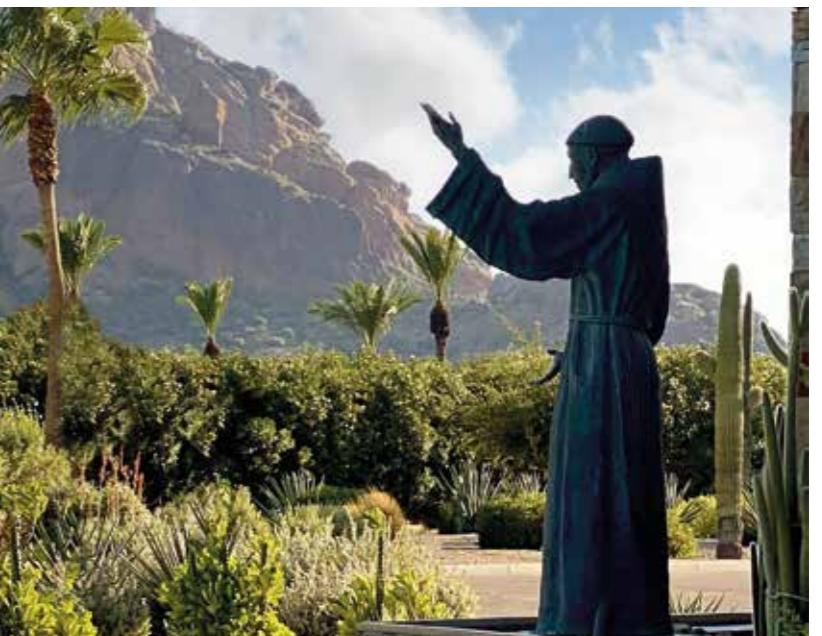


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The Herald's guide to the leading spiritual retreats in the UK and US

Finding God's presence in places of peace

UK RETREATS

Ampleforth Abbey

Ampleforth, Yorkshire

Ampleforth Abbey was founded in 1802 and became an abbey in 1890. It is home to the largest Benedictine community in the UK, who run a seasonal retreat programme throughout the year, providing a variety of opportunities for spiritual nourishment in the beautiful stillness of Ampleforth. The 2024 guided retreats programme promises to match and build on previous years' successes with titles such as "Monastic Experience", "Christian Meditation: Silent Retreat", Fr Chad's "Where the Saints Have Trod" and, back by popular demand, Fr Bede's "Beach Prayer Walks".

Students and university groups are particularly welcome at Ampleforth, with a number of organised retreats catering to their needs. For university groups and societies, a safe, welcoming space can be found, allowing for connection and community, with Sheffield, Lancaster, Hull, Sunderland, Leeds, York, Nottingham, Durham and Keele among many participating universities.

Independent retreat guests are also welcome, with rooms available in their three guesthouses (Archway, the Guesthouse, and the Grange) and flexible pricing and meal options to suit everyone. Guests are invited to make their stay their own, with the option to join the community in prayer, eat with other retreatants and experience meditative walks through the valley.

From Easter 2024 the newly refurbished Alban Roe House Visitor Centre will be open with Visitor Experience, Tea Room, Gift Shop and comfortable dormitory accommodation and activity spaces for school groups.

"Listening to the singing of the psalms from the assembled monks, I was entranced, physically, emotionally and spiritually. I was



Ampleforth Abbey

There is a variety of accommodation options, including the Monastery Retreat Quarters for men wishing to engage in a quiet spiritual retreat, St Petroc's Retreat House for ladies and married couples, an on-site hotel, hostel-style house for groups and self-catering houses.

buckfast.org.uk

Catholic National Shrine and Basilica of Our Lady at Walsingham

Walsingham, Norfolk

reminded of the Holy Spirit which infuses all of us. This is a rare and precious reminder of God's presence that often feels distant in (my) everyday life," said one Ampleforth Retreatant.

Enquiries and bookings can be made by contacting retreats@ampleforthabbey.org.uk or by calling 01439 766087

Buckfast Abbey

Buckfastleigh, Torquay

Situated on the edge of the stunning Dartmoor National Park, Buckfast has formally stood as an abbey since 1902 (though it had a pre-Reformation life as well), just a year before Douai and in the heyday of English Benedictine spirituality. The community has also played a crucial role in beekeeping in the UK and beyond, being home to the famous apiarist Brother Adam, who was responsible for the creation of the Buckfast Bee.

Today the abbey boasts beautiful and well-kept gardens, the immersive presentation of Benedictine monastic life, the Monastic Way Exhibition, and an impressive choral tradition with regular visiting choirs. Guests are invited to enter into the monastic way of life with Mass and the liturgy of the hours sung daily in the abbey church. The abbey offers the opportunity for individually guided retreats throughout the year.

The Shrine provides a peaceful atmosphere to ensure that a pilgrimage to Walsingham is a time of spiritual refreshment and that all those who visit return to their day-to-day lives at home and at work with their faith strengthened.

Pilgrims come to the Shrine for a variety of reasons: to celebrate and give thanks, and also in times of sadness and worry, to seek renewed graces and to draw strength from the prayers of Our Lady of Walsingham. The Sacred Liturgy is at the heart of the Shrine's life and work and the daily rhythm of prayer includes the Pilgrim Mass at noon, the Rosary, Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In 2015, Pope Francis conferred upon the Shrine the status of Minor Basilica making it one of only three in the UK. This year, Rev Dr Robert Billing, of the Diocese of Lancaster, was appointed as Rector, with a desire to bring more pilgrims to the Shrine, especially those who may never have been before.

walsingham.org.uk

Craig Lodge Family House of Prayer

Argyll, Scotland

Originally a hunting lodge, Craig Lodge underwent a transformation into a family house of prayer after its owners, the MacFarlane-Barrow family, encountered Our Lady in the small village and pilgrimage site, Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina. "This family pilgrimage changed everything," say Calum and Mary-Anne MacFarlane-Barrow. "Craig Lodge became a house of prayer. Everything that we do at Craig Lodge is in honour of Mary, the Queen of Peace."

Specialising in retreats for families and young people, Craig Lodge extends invitations to "pilgrims" or retreatants to participate in various forms of prayer, including the Rosary, Divine Office, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Praise and Worship and the Way of the Cross. Guests can either "make their own retreat" or join for specific retreat events. The grounds, which are in the heart of Glen Orchy, are surrounded by hills and mountains, with a selection of rooms, both indoor and outdoor, in which to discover God's presence.

The extensive grounds include the "Mary's Meals" shed where the famous homelessness charity was founded. Guests are encouraged to fast with the family on Wednesdays and Fridays.

craiglodge.org

Douai Abbey

Nr Thatcham, Berkshire

The Benedictine Douai Abbey has been based near Thatcham in rural Berkshire since 1903, when the monks came over from the monastery of St Edmund's in Douai, Flanders, driven away as a result of anti-clerical legislation.

Today the abbey has a very busy programme of retreats, workshops, courses and day-schools which offer the opportunity for spiritual and personal development. The focus is generally on spirituality, theology, scripture, history and ministry, and guests are welcome all year round. This year saw Karen Kilby of the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University, and Prof Clare Carlisle of King's College, London lead a writing retreat for professors of theology and philosophy.

Music is a huge part of life at the abbey and plays a part in the retreat experience. "Soul Journey with JS Bach for Easter" and "Holy is the True Light – exploring the holy in British

music" are two examples of retreats directly inspired by the monks' love and knowledge of music. Other retreats on offer include the "Monastic Experience Weekend" which is aimed at men aged 18-40, and particularly but not exclusively those considering a vocation. Day reflections cost £25 per person, while weekend retreats are £160 per person.

Douaiabbey.org.uk



Iona House of Prayer

Iona House of Prayer

Iona, Scotland

The Catholic House of Prayer, Iona, also known as Cnoc a' Chalmain, meaning "Hill of the Dove" in Gaelic, is the sole place on the island where Mass is regularly celebrated. It was officially inaugurated in 1997 on the 1400th anniversary of St Columba's death on Iona.

Cnoc a' Chalmain welcomes people of all faiths and none to provide a peaceful place of prayer for pilgrims in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, situated in a beautiful and serene location. It also offers visitors the opportunity to partake in the ecumenical events of the island.

Accommodation options include single and double rooms, with bed, breakfast and supper priced at £85 per person per day. Bed and breakfast only is available at £55 per person per day. The journey to Iona from Oban takes about two and a half hours, involving a ferry to Mull and then a road trip across Mull to the Iona ferry at Fionnphort.

Catholic-iona.com

Society of the Sacred Heart

Brecon, Mid-Wales

Meaning "beautiful, holy glade", Llannerchwen in the Brecon Beacons was originally a farm-holding which first became a place of silence and prayer in the 1960s when it was bought by a Rev Shapland and his wife. The couple built two alpine cottages and converted

a cowshed into a small chapel before retiring in 1979.

Members of the Society of the Sacred Heart have been at Llannerchwen ever since, having moved there after Joan Scott, one of the sisters, had a two-year experience living as a hermit, which led her to recognise "the need for a place where people from all walks of life could have the opportunity for a time of solitude and silence, receiving spiritual accompaniment if desired".

Retreats can be booked online and accommodation comprises several individual cabins as well as other retreat rooms adapted so each guest has their own self-contained space. Retreat guides are on hand to guide retreatants and talk about their experiences whilst there, particularly as they relate to times of prayer. Cabins can also be rented for the day for those wishing to spend the night elsewhere.

llannerchwen.org.uk/home



St Bueno's

St Beuno's

Denbighshire, North Wales

St Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre serves as the retreat centre for the Jesuits in Britain, nestled in rural Wales, offering panoramic views of the Vale of Clwyd and Snowdonia. Originally established in 1848 as St Beuno's College, it was built to accommodate Jesuits studying theology when Stonyhurst College, the original Jesuit college, reached its capacity.

The centre provides a diverse array of retreats and courses, attracting guests from around the world. These include individually guided retreats spanning two to eight days, as well as the comprehensive 30-day Spiritual Exercises retreat.

In 2024, the centre will host themed retreats such as "Finding God in the Garden," "Finding God In Film" and "A Journey Toward Ecological Conversion". Additionally, there are options for beginners and budget-conscious individuals.

beunos.com/retreats

St Mary's Monastery, Kinnoull Perth, Scotland

St Mary's Monastery, Kinnoull Perth, Scotland is home to the Redemptorists of Scotland, and functions as a community, ecumenical retreat house and centre of spirituality, offering a full programme of courses and retreats all year round as well as daily Mass and Confession by appointment. The impressive neo-gothic building, which has views of the Grampian mountains, was opened in 1868 when the Redemptorists first came to Scotland. The extensive grounds and woods lead on to Kinnoull Hill with panoramic views in all directions. The church is the first church in the world to be dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, and the monastery was the first to be built in Scotland since the Reformation. From the beginning it has been used extensively by the Scottish bishops for their clergy retreats. St Mary's is still very much devoted to the tradition of offering both organised and private retreats, and has been completely refurbished recently. It boasts 30 en suite bedrooms and can hold 50 day guests at a time.

Throughout the year there are programmes of organised retreats and workshops on Healing, Self Esteem, Scripture, Ecology and Prayer – all being full-board. The popular Silent Advent weekend retreat and the Holy Week retreat each year (which starts on the Monday of Holy Week and ends on the morning of Holy Saturday) attract both Religious and many lay people. The Redemptorists invite people of all faiths and none to come and enjoy the peace of their Religious house and to join them in their daily prayer and Mass. For further information please contact info@kinnoullmonastery.co.uk or call 01738 624075 kinnoullmonastery.co.uk/retreats

The Friars, Aylesford Priory Maidstone, Kent

Set in the heart of Kent, The Friars at Aylesford Priory is an ancient religious house of the Order of Carmelites, dating back to the 13th century. Large groups embark on pilgrimages from May to October to pray at the historic Shrine to Our Lady, a traditional pilgrimage site since medieval times. It is named "The Friars" because, in its origins, it provided hospitality and accommodation for travellers on their way to Canterbury. The Friars host various retreats, including a "grief and loss" weekend designed

for individuals who have experienced bereavement. During these retreats, participants "grieve, remember, hope and give thanks for our loved ones in the light of the Resurrection of Jesus". Other offerings include Easter and Advent retreats, the "Summer Silence" retreat – a four-day programme providing time to listen to the voice of God in silence – and the "Little Flower" retreat, reflecting on the love and mercy of God through the writings of St Thérèse. Additionally, there are various Lenten Talks on Saturdays during Lent. The average cost for weekend retreats is £205. Pilgrimages, parish days, and all-night vigils are regular features of life at The Friars. TheFriars.org.uk



Greenhouse Christian Centre

The Greenhouse Christian Centre Poole, Dorset

The Greenhouse Christian Centre has been a centre of Christian worship and retreat for over 60 years and is built around three key words: Restore, Equip and Connect. Situated in Poole and within a short drive of both the New Forest and beautiful south coast beaches, it is an ideal place to recharge one's spiritual battery.

Guests are welcomed as individuals or as part of a group for the day or an extended period of time, staying in the 22-bedroom villa. There is also a dynamic, all-year-round retreat schedule with titles such as Encountering the Father's Heart, Family Time Getaway and Walking on Water, with full-board catering options available. Mark Strand, the Centre Director, says: "God delights in us as we make time to enjoy His presence – come and meet with Him and enjoy great food and beautiful surroundings at The Greenhouse!" the-greenhouse.org/retreats/

Worth Abbey Retreat Centre Crawley, West Sussex

The "Open Cloister" is Worth Abbey's programme of weekend and midweek retreats, all

distinctly Benedictine in flavour, open to both men and women and people of all faiths and none. Retreats include the "Time Out" retreat, which is self-led, the "Easter Triduum" and a "Finding Stillness" retreat, which shows participants "how stillness and stability can be ways of opening up to God and living life at a deeper level". This retreat includes teachings in *lectio divina* as well as an opportunity to have a one-to-one meeting with a monk. A popular retreat is the "Young Adults Advent Retreat", offering a space to go deeper into the spiritual life and faith, as well as to explore, share, rest, learn, build community and enjoy friendship. Retreatants take up the rhythm of the monastic day, join the monks for prayer and explore the 500-acre grounds at their will. A new addition to the programme is the Tai Chi and Christian meditation retreat, making a comeback after last being run at the abbey 20 years ago. Fr Peter Williams, who runs the programme, has been a monk at Worth Abbey for 27 years, 20 of which were spent as the chaplain at Worth School. Retreats cost around £90 per night, usually lasting two nights, although guests of the "Time Out" retreats can stay for up to five days. worthabbey.net/visiting/retreats

More recommended retreat centres in the UK

Belmont Abbey Herefordshire

Christian Heritage Centre
Stonyhurst, Clitheroe

Urban Oasis Sisters of St Andrew, Blackheath, London

The Kairos Centre Roehampton

Minsteracres Retreat Centre
Northumberland

Minster Abbey Kent

Walsingham House Abbotswick
Brentwood

Boarbark Hall Cumbria

The Briery Retreat Centre Yorkshire

**Centre for Applied Carmelite
Spirituality** Oxford

St Augustine's Benedictine Abbey
Chilworth

St Joseph's Prayer Centre Liverpool

St Winefride's Guest House
Holywell, Norfolk

US RETREATS

Holy Family Passionist Retreat Centre

West Hartford, Connecticut

Holy Family Passionist Retreat Centre is a spiritual centre in the Passionist tradition, open to all who seek to deepen their relationship with God and one another. The centre is the largest Passionist ministry in the world and the largest parish-based Catholic retreat centre in the United States.

Retreats operate throughout the year and are generally separated between Men's Retreats and Women's Retreats with different themes annually.

This year's theme is "Only Say the Word", based on the belief that God can and will heal us, and encourages retreatants to ask for and receive God's healing.

The centre has 160 guest bedrooms with a range of conference rooms for retreatants to use. Meals are cooked from scratch on-site, with an emphasis on healthy eating.

holystfamilyretreat.org/retreats-programs-at-holy-family

Immaculate Conception is perfectly suited for retreats and conferences for groups of varying sizes with three separate chapels for private and public worship, each equipped with fully-functioning sacristies and single occupancy guestrooms each with a private bathroom.

Situated on a 216-acre estate with 200 rooms available, it is well-positioned to host large groups. Facilities include meeting spaces of varying size with A/V, a spacious dining hall, game room, fitness centre, picnic area, firepit and walking trails with beautiful waterfront vistas.

icseminary.edu



Franciscan Renewal Centre

The Franciscan Renewal Centre Scottsdale, Arizona

Founded in 1951 by the Order of Friars Minor, the Franciscan Renewal Centre remains an active religious community that offers a variety of different retreats and community outreach projects.

Affectionately known as "the Casa," the community has a reputation for providing those who attend with a tranquil and peaceful environment to become closer to the Lord in the heart of Paradise Valley.

Mountain views, desert air and warm sunshine make it an ideal location for a retreat house. It is particularly well-known for its good and wholesome food and its separate spherical Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament.

The centre is particularly well-suited for non-profit and religious groups holding conferences, as it has 22 meeting rooms and 76 bedrooms. thecasa.org

The Malvern Retreat House Malvern, Pennsylvania

As the US's oldest and largest Catholic retreat site, Malvern Retreat House is deeply rooted in a rich tradition of Marian and Eucharistic prayer. Nestled in the rolling hills of Malvern,

"Listening to the singing of the psalms from the assembled monks, I was entranced, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I was reminded of the Holy Spirit which infuses all of us

Pennsylvania, the retreat centre has served as a place of prayer, healing, joy and conversion for more than a million people. The 109-year-old centre hosts 250 events annually.

The centre caters to groups and individuals, offering a warm welcome to stay and make use of the property's 125-acre gardens and greenery, seven Marian Shrines and three chapels for private and public worship. malvernretreat.com/retreat-event-planning



Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament

Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament

Hanceville, Alabama

Founded by the formidable force for good in our world, Mother Angelica, the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament is perhaps one of the most iconic symbols of Catholic culture in the US. Built to allow for another of her outstanding projects, EWTN, more room to grow and to provide a new home for the nuns of her order to live a life more in keeping with their charism, it is situated in the picturesque Alabama countryside.

The Shrine is open to all, free of charge, and offers daily Mass and Confession, as well as the opportunity to pray the Liturgy of the Hours with the nuns of the Order of Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration.

While there is no accommodation available on-site, there are several guest houses closely situated to the Shrine.

Many different events and retreats take place throughout the year, which are advertised on their website. olamshrine.com/visit

'How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord, God of hosts.'
(Psalm 83)



Buckfast Abbey

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www.buckfast.org.uk/vocation
vocations@buckfast.org.uk

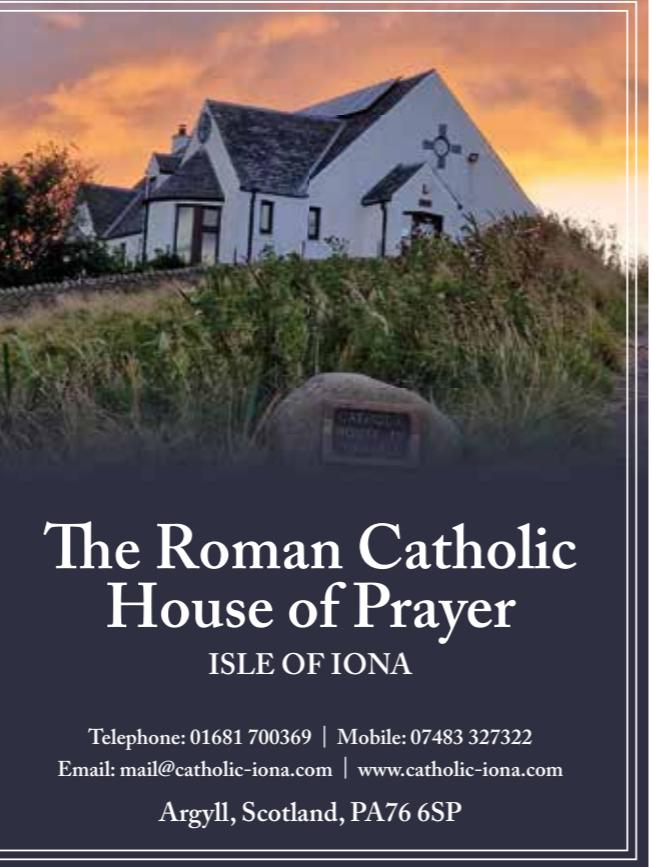
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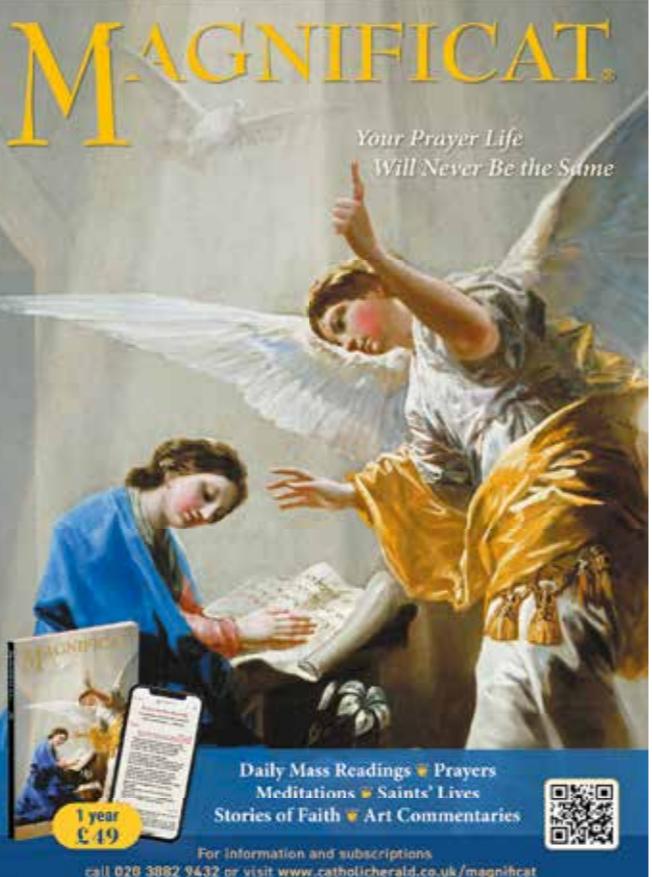
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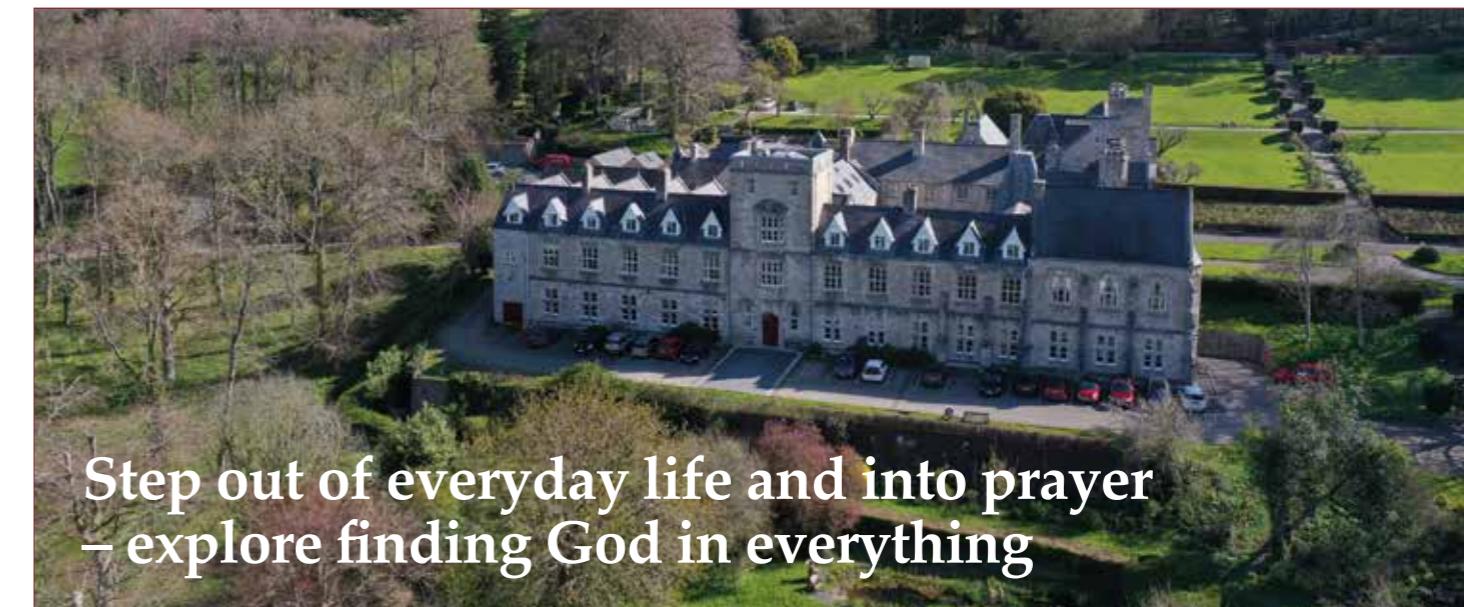
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Duncan McKechnie, Secretary to the Accueil Pilgrims,
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We welcome and facilitate for groups who wish to run their own retreat; contact us to discuss your requirements.



For further information contact Worth Abbey at retreats@worth.org.uk or call 01342 710318.

Retreat programme is available on our website at: www.worth.co.uk

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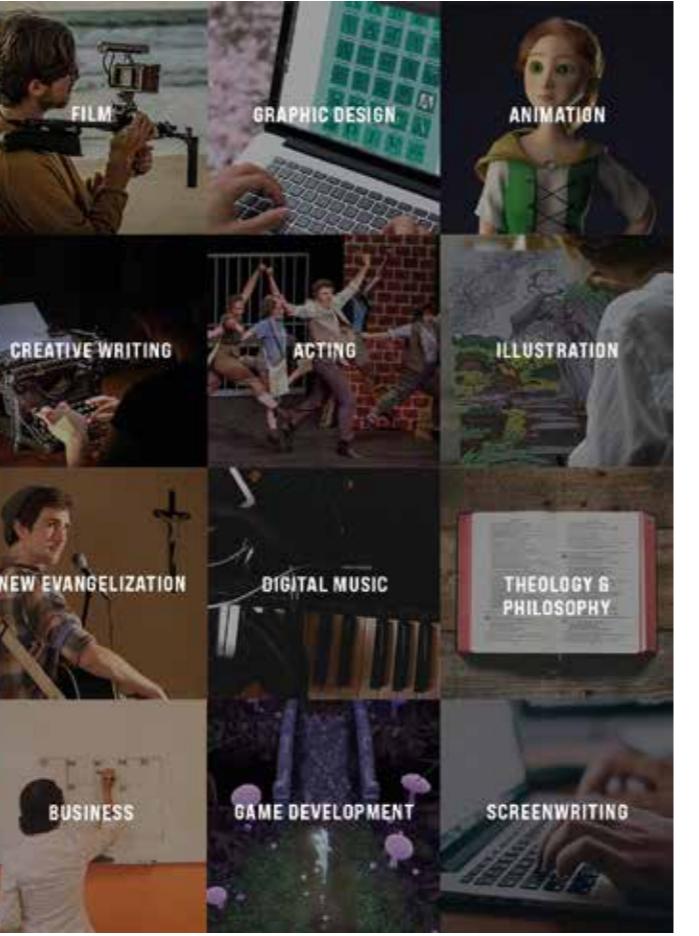


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