

A journey to eternity - The Later Years: 1982 onwards; forever upwards

By Professor Monsignor Vladimir Felzmann – aka Father Vlad.

I have divided this period of my life into five stages.

1. 1982-89 - spring: my time in Westminster Diocese after I had left Opus Dei and before Cardinal Basil Hume – to whom I shall refer as Father Basil – appointed me Chaplain to Young People and Director of Diocesan Pilgrimages.
2. 1989-99 - summer: the blissful period of my life I worked closely with Father Basil
3. 1999 -2004 - autumn: when my life started to feel uncomfortable.
4. 2004 -11 - winter: the darkest period of my time as Westminster Diocesan priest.
5. 2011- 20 + - spring: my new role, Diocesan Chaplain for Sport – and all that.

Between each set of

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Dramatis Personae

All Saints Pastoral Centre [ASPC], with its 77 acres, ASPC was a conference and retreat centre at London Colney on the southern outskirts of St Albans, Hertfordshire: AL2 1AF.

The All Saints building was designed by Leonard Stokes in 1899 and built in 1901, originally a convent for the Anglican Society of All Saints Sisters of the Poor, the buildings were acquired by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Westminster in 1973 and converted into a residential Conference/Retreat Centre.. It was sold to a property developer in 2011.

Auxiliaries of the Apostolate: women, called by the bishop to serve the local Church, live single lives in ordinary everyday circumstances and do not form a group, such as a Religious congregation or secular institute. Thanks to the Belgian Cardinal Mercier (1851 – 1926), their vocation has existed since 1917.

Robert Hugh Benson KCSG KGCHS, founder of Nusteel Structures Ltd, erstwhile Lieutenant of The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in the UK, died 2018, aged 94. I took his funeral.

Louis de Wet - wife Gabriella Drake - artist, born 1930 in South Africa; in 1983 moved to Wenlock Abbey, in Shropshire. Died at home on September 8, 2018.

Dr. Jack Dominian (1930- 2014) a psychiatrist and lay Roman Catholic theologian who put loving relationships at the heart of his work and in 1971 founded ‘One Plus One’, an independent marriage research centre now funded by the state. Through his 25 years of clinical work with the NHS until his retirement in 1988, he became increasingly aware of the emotional, psychological and economic costs of relationship breakdown.

Olly Donnelly, whom I met for the first time while leading a Year 11 residential retreat at St Mary's Ascot in 1995. The following year, she came with us to Lourdes on our Diocesan Pilgrimage. After I had helped the Order of Malta Volunteers (OMV) I was a guest at their "White Nights Ball" organised by Olly their Secretary in January 97, 98 and 99.

I prepared her and her bridegroom George Belcher for their Farm Street Wedding, 5.12.09. They moved from their Radley Mews House – which had a staircase dangerous to toddlers – to Richmond in August 2013. I baptised their son Bertie, born 28.4.11 at Farm Street, their daughter Beatrice, born 21.7.13 at St Thomas's, Ham and their baby boy Barnie, born 12.2.17 at St Elizabeth's, Richmond. It was there that – finally after a number of postponements due to Covid, I enabled Bertie and Beatrice – with their cousin Aurora Parker and friend Jamie Woodford – to celebrate their First Holy Communion on the evening of 3rd November 2020 – a day before the second Lockdown.

Niall William Arthur FitzGerald, KBE: Chairman and CEO Unilever 1996 - 2004. Past Chairman of The British Museum, Reuters, Hakluyt, the Nelson Mandela Legacy Trust and currently still chair of The Leverhulme Trust.

Canon Peter Gilbert (1926 – 2017) Electrical, GPO engineer, ordained 1968; PP, Our Lady of Grace (OLG) Chiswick, 1976-89, where I served as Curate/Assistant Priest 1983-85.

Peter Hebblethwaite (1930-1994) had been a Jesuit priest. After leaving the priesthood, he became an editor, journalist and biographer.

Sir Mike Heron (1934 – 2014) After attending St Joseph's School, Blackheath – and Oxford - Mike joined Unilever 1956, ending up as Global Head of HR then went on to be Chairman of the Post Office.

Colm Hickey, Head-teacher, St Thomas More Catholic School, Wood Green, 2004-10; John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport, [JP2F4S] Director of Education 2011-19.

John & Cath Hickman. John very successfully ran Kingston-estates. Cath was -and still is – Father Basil's niece. Cath and John first met each other at Lourdes and - invited by Father Basil to come with their children to Lourdes - were a massive help with fund-raising for Lourdes Pilgrimage – and much else. As real friendships never die, the whole family - Alex, George, Caroline, Julia, Fran and Claire-spider - are still close.

The Hon. Greville Howard (1909 – 1987) Lt. Commander RNVR, 1945 when he married Mary Ridehalgh. They had one daughter, Caroline.

A Conservative and National Liberal politician, member of Westminster City Council, he served as Mayor of Westminster from 1946 to 1947. It was during this tenure that he befriended my father, then First Secretary at the Czechoslovak Embassy in London. He served as Member of Parliament for St Ives and the Scilly Isles, 1950 – 1966. In 1948, my father resigned and we became refugees. Greville took us under his wing. He was a loyal and very generous benefactor of our family.

When Greville and Mary witnessed a fatal motorbike accident, he said I was to give up riding my scooter – and bought me a brand-new VW Beetle. After four years he replaced it with a small Renault! Soon after his retirement, Greville and Mary - for tax purposes – moved to

Luxembourg. There, in the early years, when I used to visit them, I was surprised to see the tiny the Luxembourg airport. How that changed once the EU voted to accommodate its Secretariat in Luxembourg.

Cardinal George Basil Hume OSB OM (1923 – 17 June 1999)

a monk and priest of Ampleforth Abbey and its abbot for 13 years until his appointment as Archbishop of Westminster and then also Cardinal in 1976. From 1979, he served as President of the [Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales](#) until his death from cancer in 1999. “Uncle George” to his family – of which I became an honorary member. “Father Basil” to his friends. A beautiful human being.

Paul & Diana Leonard, friends of John and Cath Hickman, I got to know on our Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage. Until he retired, Paul was a senior partner at Freshfields solicitors, Bishopsgate. Diana & Paul became my very warm and generous friends.

Patrick and Anna McMahon – who became great friends whom I married - and baptised four of their children and was Godfather to their son Marco – and then took the weddings of Francesca – to Jahrad “Jazz” Haq on the 28th October 2006 at Ealing Abbey; and Nicole - to Robert Gibson. Ever since she qualified and still in 2020 Francesca is - my pro-bono - and brilliant - dentist.

I celebrated the baptisms of Lorenzo and Annabella Haq, as well as Angus and Ronan Gibson.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols [born 8 November 1945] ; General Secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW), 1984 to 1993. On 5 November 1991, Nichols was appointed Auxiliary bishop of Westminster. On 15 February 2000, the eighth Archbishop of Birmingham. Then on 3 April 2009, the eleventh Archbishop of Westminster, installed on 21 May 2009.

John Noulton (1939 - 2017) school friend; Civil Servant, then Eurotunnel's director of public affairs.

Cormac Murphy-O'Connor (1932 – 2017) Came to Westminster 22.3.2000 as Bishop of Arundel and Brighton. Created Cardinal by Pope John Paul II in 2001, he submitted his resignation as Archbishop on reaching his 75th birthday in 2007; Pope Benedict XVI accepted it on 3 April 2009. After his surprise appointment, he faced sustained and highly damaging criticism for his handling of the case of a paedophile priest in the 1980s.(4)

My Family – a rainbow with a warm glow - in that wintertime.

Our family Christmas gatherings – used to be carrouselled around Robert’s, Catherine’s and Julia’s homes – now they are always at Richmond, where Jarmila can stay at Robert and Alex’s home. All of my two nephews, two nieces and two cousins – Anne-Marie and Patricia -with their partners and children - other friends and relatives, have wonderfully emotionally-warm afternoons. For me, our family unity is a joy. A blessing.

(4) While he kept on saying that he had done nothing illegal or wrong, he was hounded by the media. Then John Noulton invited me to a breakfast at Charing Cross station. He told me that Cormac had to admit he had made a mistake and apologise. I passed that onto his Private Secretary and told him where the advice came from. Cormac accepted that advice. The Media lost interest.

Jiří Veltruský - aka Paul Barton – my older sister Jarmila's husband, died May 31st, 1994. A week later, I took his funeral - followed by his cremation at the Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris. For me, a unique experience. We sat for an hour or so before the warm jar containing his ashes was handed over to Jarmila.

Depending on his audience Jiri became Paul. In 1962 Jiri and Jarmila moved to New York City. There Paul worked as a representative of the Brussels-based 'International Confederation of Free Trade Unions'.

After 1968, when he returned to Paris to run the AFL-CIO's European office, he resumed his career as a philosopher, and thereafter led a double life. By day, he was Paul Barton, trade union activist. Nights and weekends, he was Jiří Veltruský, a highly respected and much-published scholar in the field of semiotics and theatre. Few in the labour movement ever learned of this second life. Many a quizzical look on faces as at his funeral the Address revealed his dual personality.

Soon after his death, Jarmila became a very committed and highly respected member of her local parish of Saint-Pierre de Montrouge, 75014 Paris, France.

Nowadays, whenever I stay with Jarmila, it is there that I concelebrate the early morning Mass, after which we take coffee in always the same local bar – typically with a few of her friendly congregation.

In 2003 I was back in Czechia, this time in Jindrichuv Hradec where, on 10th May, I celebrated the wedding of my niece Julia Moffet to Steve Wilson in the church where my parents had been married way back in 1936. The splendid reception that followed - held in the castle with fine food and wine and a delightful band - was far cheaper than anything decent in the UK.

I baptised both their daughters at St Pancras Church, Lewes; Georgina "Georgie" on 6.5.07 [my birthday!] and Catherine "Katie" postponed, due to swine flu that had been around, on 10.7.10.

Jarmila – resident in Paris - came over so she and I were able to attend my nephew-godson Robert "Rob" Moffet's civil partnership to Alex Doig on Saturday 19th April 2008 at the Registrar's Office, 1 Spring Terrace, Richmond. We then all came back to their home at 29 Old Deer Park Gardens for the wedding breakfast. The evening event, at The Kew Bridge Steam Museum, was something else. There was Lebanese food, a belly dancer and Lady Imelda the Filipino Drag Queen.

Rob and Alex chose the date because it was exactly ten years to the day when they first started going out together. They ‘upgraded’ to a full marriage certificate (simple process on line) on 19th April 2018 – which was automatically backdated to 2008.

My Health.

In early 1959, thanks to some clumsy lifting an eight out of the Thames at the Imperial College Boat Club on the Putney hard, I suffered a slipped disk. To distract me from my right leg pain, I remember going into a Putney cinema. On the menu was “THE WAGES OF FEAR [*LE SALAIRE DE LA PEUR*]” with Yves Montand. Under stress in Opus Dei, that sciatica down my right leg returned while I was teaching at The Vaughan in the 70s. Getting out of bed in the mornings, I fainted a few times. Therefore, until the pain faded, I kept myself going some six months by daily doses of Valium and Distalgesic that a Numerary doctor supplied. Somehow, I still managed to get decent exam results. [Maybe it’s a sign of immaturity, but I am proud that in all the years at The Vaughan I never missed a single day of teaching.]

Apart from two kidney stones – both left side, one in 1997 - a fine stag-horn specimen - and another on 4th January 2008 - hitherto, I have been blessed with good health. My back carries two key-hole surgery scars, the first I acquired in The Princess Grace, London, the second at The Lister, Stevenage – where I shared a ward with three others who broadcast an unforgettable symphony of snores throughout each night.

However, in March 2018, I had another sciatica attack. This time it was down my left leg. The analgesics I obtained from my GP were as effective as a shotgun on a tank. I tried two courses of massage – to no avail.

Providentially, the following week, I was due to attend a Genesis trustees meeting chaired by Studz at his Berkeley Square Blackstone office. When John saw my crippled state, not only did he get his driver to take me back to Vaughan House, but he gave me the name of his private doctor; a lovely man in Chelsea. He did a thorough job. While X-rayed standing - first time I experienced this procedure - it was clear that my left leg is 7mm shorter than my right. Hence the problem and the pain. However, John’s doctor gave me a prescription for Co Codamol that did the trick. Though uncomfortable, the pain became bearable. I could work.

Then, two nights later, at 1.15 in the morning, turning in bed, I felt the nerve slip free. The pain had gone. I just carry a numb left heel and occasionally – in bed - slightly itchy toes; now on both feet where the sciatic nerves end.

It probably had no causality, but soon after, I developed arthritis in my right little finger. Rapidly it deteriorated until shaking hands – unless I forced my palm right up tight, - was excruciating. Then I remembered that my Goddaughter Kate had a friend who was into alternative medicine.

Having spoken with Kate on the phone, within a couple of days a parcel arrived on my Vaughan House desk. It contained a copper bracelet from Rosian & Levine and bottles of Turmeric, Vitamin D3, Omega 3 Fish oil and a Magnesium spray. Magic. Little finger is back to its original size and pain-free. I can shake hands, no problem. At Holland & Barrett, 86 Victoria Street, I keep my supply topped up. My left-hand little finger knuckle is still a bit

swollen but as I am no longer a Boy Scout – and no longer shake left-handed - I can live with that.

John & Sarah Osborne. I married them at Ely Place and then baptised all their children, bar one: Toby, my godson.

John and Mary Redvers. In 1970, John came to see me at Netherhall House. Living just down the road near Finchley Road underground station, he said he had time on his hands as Mary was “being tidied up” after giving birth to their son, David. While painting portraits in Spain, John had heard about Opus Dei. He wanted to find out more. We started to go for weekly walks around Regents Park – whose post-script was always a pint in a Finchley Road pub. We became friends; I, Godfather to their daughter Kate.

St Mary’s University, Twickenham (SMU) Founded in 1850, it is generally acknowledged to be the oldest Roman Catholic university in the United Kingdom. Formerly called St Mary’s University College, it was granted full university title by the Privy Council on 23 January 2014. Since July 2019, the university has hosted the *Mater Ecclesiae College*, whose Ecclesiastical faculties, enshrined since 2013 in the "Bellarmino Institute", was brought in after the closure of Heythrop College, University of London earlier in 2019.

Sir Sigmund Sternberg (1921 -2016), Co-founder of Three Faiths Forum [now the ‘Faith and Belief Forum’].

John Studzinski, CBE. Born 19 March 1956, working for Morgan Stanley, moved to London 1984. In 1985 I met him at The Passage. Founder of The Genesis Foundation in 2001. From Morgan Stanley John moved to HSBC and since September 2018, he is Managing Director and Vice-Chairman of the global investment-management firm PIMCO.

Dr. Vladimir Svoboda – born 1930 in Czechoslovakia – was a consultant radiotherapist. I was given his UK contacts in 1969 by Mgr. Vladimir Boublik, the moderator of my Lateran University doctorate. Soon after I returned to London in 1970, we established contact – and remained close ever since. In 1972, he and his wife Rose with their children Lucie and Marek moved first to Waterlooville then in 1980 to Petersfield. After leaving Opus Dei in 1982, I enjoyed frequent over-nights at both of their homes.

I took Lucie’s marriage to Harry Pounds in 1988, baptised their three daughters – Georgina “Georgie”, Olivia “Oli” and Victoria “Tori”, and became Godfather to their son Harry. Then, after her death due to cancer on 12th August in 2004, very sadly, officiated at Lucie’s funeral and her burial at St Mary’s, East Lavant, just down the road from her home.

Anne Watts, nee Arnold, ex-Numerary with whom I had lost contact, had moved to Sutton-in-the Isle, Cambridgeshire. We reconnected there in August 2006 thanks to a Trinidadian ex-Numerary Fay Rodrigues who had come back to this country to sort out her teacher’s pension. She had kept in touch with Anne and thus knew her address. As she wanted to see Anne, I drove her there.

I had celebrated Anne Arnold’s wedding to Andrew Wattson 26th May 1990 at the parish church of the Arnold family - that I had known since 1970 - The Sacred Heart at Nayland, Suffolk (now deconsecrated). Then our paths through life diverged. Once we reconnected, I found out that they had two children: Sian, 1988 and Joshua, known as Josh, 1991. Having

fallen in love with a member of the Sutton parish choir, Andrew left her – and the house - on 4th July 2004. The divorce was finalised in Autumn 2006.

Thanks to my DIY skills I was able to exercise during my occasional visits– and some funding I was able to supply - her home improved hugely. She showed great interest in my writings and agreed not only to store the printouts of my taped homilies and talks but to become my Literary Executor.

As the Church of England Vicar said he had to take the vows, I was able to just preach at her daughter Sian’s wedding to Jesse Barrett on 21st August 2010 at St. Peter’s Church, Yoxford, Suffolk.

Prior to the service in the Anglican church, I had been able to celebrate a house Mass at the Groom’s parents’ house for Anne’s large Arnold family – with their 13 children - I had got to know way back in 1970. Anne’s parents were Opus Dei. In the early 70s – before I started teaching at The Cardinal Vaughan School - I used to take days of recollection they organised near where they lived in Nayland.

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Stage 1. Spring 1982 - 89

God has a sense of humour. What a day to free me from Opus Dei! Cardinal Basil Hume had invited me to come to Archbishop’s House on Thursday 1st April 1982. There, just before lunch – no April Fool’s leg-pull - in his first-floor private chapel, having promised obedience to him and his successors, I was incardinated into Westminster Diocese. To celebrate, he invited me to take lunch with his ‘Archbishop’s Council’ in his dining room.

After lunch – and its many ‘congratulations’ and ‘welcome on board’ - with my heart smiling, I returned to Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School [CVMS] where I had set up and was running a “Vocations week at CVMS”; a follow-up on the previous year’s “CVMS week for disabled people”.

My future, an opaque mystery, weighed heavily on my heart. I knew that Father Basil had serious reservations about how Opus Dei recruited young people and had given it four clear recommendations. (5) However, what was he thinking about someone who had left? Might he be wondering how my philosophy, theology and ecclesiology – shaped by 22 years in that far-right, conservative ethos – would impact on my work in his diocese? Time would tell. I believed – and still do, ever more strongly – that OIB: *omnia in bonum*: “All things work together for good to those who love God.” [Romans 8,28]

I am delighted that, in 1984, thanks to my chaplaincy role at CVMS - and seeing the need - I became Founder-Chairman, National Association of School Chaplains [NASC] - now ACCE. In 1991 - in line with my policy of ‘never doing things others can do so I can be free to do things they can’t’ - having got the show on the road - and to enable me to concentrate on our diocesan young people - I resigned. During my tenure, the national chaplaincy scene dramatically changed. In 1984, throughout the whole England and Wales, there was just one chaplain not a priest: a nun in Liverpool diocese. By 1991, the majority were lay.

The NASC conferences - to help school chaplains to share best-practice and network nationally – for which I formed a team to organise, were an education. Hitherto, I had not appreciated how varied the Catholic ethos was around the country.

(5) The four recommendations are as follows:

No person under eighteen years of age should be allowed to take any vow or long-term commitment in association with Opus Dei.

It is essential that young people who wish to join Opus Dei should first discuss the matter with their parents or legal guardians. If there are, by exception, good reasons for not approaching their families, these reasons should, in every case, be discussed with the local bishop or his delegate.

While it is accepted that those who join Opus Dei take on the proper duties and responsibilities of membership, care must be taken to respect the freedom of the individual: first, the freedom of the individual to join or to leave the organization without undue pressure being exerted; secondly, the freedom of the individual at any stage to choose his or her own spiritual director, whether or not the director is a member of Opus Dei.

Initiatives and activities of Opus Dei, within the diocese of Westminster, should carry a clear indication of their sponsorship and management.

At our meeting in the erstwhile, massive St. Joseph's Seminary, Upholland – probably 1989 - two statements still stay above the mists of memory loss.

From the north it was: “Whenever I take a RE lesson, I make sure the non-Catholics go to the library to study.”

From London, it was: “I can’t wait to see the RE department - indeed the whole school - run by a non-Catholic.”

Governors – and above all Head Teachers – are very influential in prioritising the Catholicity of their establishment. The huge variation in time set aside for worship and prayer and the quality and quantity of space committed to chapel and chaplaincy work – as well as the variety of salaries and status given to a chaplain – were, and still are, eye-watering.

Until 1988, when the Dominican run Spode House Retreat and Conference Centre, Rugeley WS15 1PU, closed, the NASC used to meet there for our annual conferences. In 1987, just before the Dominicans left, I invited Father Basil to be our keynote speaker. As the conference ended, I found out why he was so ready to take up the offer.

He had almost become a Dominican. He used to tell young people who asked him about his vocation that as a young altar server - he was born 2.3.23 (easy date to remember!) - he would accompany the Parish Priest of the Dominican parish in Newcastle on his rounds to visit families in the early 1930s. Bear in mind, this was the Depression.

“The joy on the faces of the family as he came in through the front door, and the smile on his face as we left, moved me to want to become like him when I grew up.” It is thought that a Dominican, Dalmatius Houtmann OP, a keen supporter of Newcastle United (founded in

1892) gave the nascent team their first strips; the Dominican colours of black and white! Not surprisingly, Basil was an avid Newcastle United supporter right up to his birth into divine eternity.

After the delegates left, he said: “Could you give me 20 minutes so I can wander round these grounds?” He told me how, when he was trying to discover God’s will, he had come to Spode to speak with their vocation’s director. When those – in fact 25 minutes had passed - he returned to the car, I drove him to the Rugeley station where he picked up his train for Euston, London.

As we know, in the event, having studied at Ampleforth Abbey, he decided to become a Benedictine.

Talking of Benedictines, as he attended our NASC conferences, I thought I had got to know Dom Piers Grant-Ferris OSB of Ampleforth. What a shock – to my heart and ecclesiological/liturgical mind - when he was jailed in 2006 over 20 counts of indecently abusing boys. All those Masses, all those hours of Chapel worshipping, yet this could happen! (6)

Just before Christmas 1981, I let Bishop David Konstant know that I was leaving Opus Dei. I had become friendly with David, as not only was he living next to the old building of The Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School, but because he was head of our diocesan education service, we had spent many conference hours together.

He suggested I could move into the large presbytery of Our Lady of Victories (OLV), Kensington. That was to be my home for just over a year. Mgr. Canon Maurice Kelleher, the Parish Priest who welcomed me, watched his expenditure like a hawk. My bedroom had no heating.

As winter approached, at night my balding head started to suffer from the cold. So, plucking up my courage, I knocked on his door. I asked him if it might be possible to have an electric fire in my bedroom. Without a word, he went to a drawer, pulled out one of those Victorian pointed nightcaps – the one with a fluffy knob on top - and said, “this will keep your head warm.” As no fire was ever forthcoming, that nightcap became a close companion of my pillow.

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In 1982, Louis de Wet, whom I had met years earlier was moving house. To help him store some of his belongings before the move – and to enjoy their beauty – I offered to store his set of magnificent renaissance chairs in my rather large living room.

The following year I helped Louis and his wife Gabriella move into Wenlock Abbey, a 15th century Cluniac priory. For many years, whenever I could, I drove there and relaxed in that wonderful building that Louis was bringing back to life.

However, once I became responsible for my own set of buildings at All Saints, my visits become more sporadic. Then ceased. I had dreamt that together - as we had mooted - we would set up a centre where leading artists, scientists, musicians, doctors, philosophers, politicians – even athletes – who would come together to generate ideas that far outstripped each of their individual disciplines.

Louis taught me a great deal about art, history and philosophy. However, it became ever clearer that he - always the centre of his galaxy - would never be able to attract top minds. Apart from anything else, the Spartan accommodation he chose to create, would have prevented any of them returning for a second stay.

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With hindsight, I realised it was ASPC that released my own sense of adult identity. Thanks to my friendship with Basil Hume – who always treated me as an adult - and then my appointment to All Saints, I finally became an adult. I was in charge.

As a late developer – though as I write this, while my chronological age is 81, my biological age is 53 – it took me time before I realised that I was an individual, auto-cephalic adult.

At last, I had outgrown my childish, father-figure relationships with first Jose-Maria Escriva and then his successor Alvaro del Portillo, the bosses of Opus Dei who, I had been instructed,

(6) Child abuse by priests from Ampleforth, Downside and Ealing – who appeared so ‘normal’ and I thought I had got to know - prompted me to develop the “Land of The Heart” model set out in my “Life Squared” book.

were the conduits of God’s will for me and thus had to be uncritically obeyed. Now I outgrew my father-child relationship with ‘de Wet’ [as Gabriella - not me - called him]. I was free.

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St Mary Abbot's Hospital, Marloes Road - 1871 to 1992 – was covered for its RC spiritual needs by OLV. One Saturday afternoon a call came through. A man had suddenly taken a turn for the worse. Could a priest please come? Of course. Taking the oils, off I went. A nurse took me to the single-bedded ward and left. I sat down on the chair by the side of the bed and as the man with his oxygen mask on was certainly not awake, I started to unscrew the cap of the OLEUM INFIRMORUM. My fingers slipped. The cap rolled under the bed.

As I got under it to retrieve the cap, I saw that the hose had slipped out of the oxygen bottle. Even before I picked up the cap, I slipped the hose back onto the bottle. By the time I sat down again, the purple face of our unconscious patient had started to turn pink. Having anointed him, I showed myself out.

I wonder whether the nurse might have put down the sudden improvement of his state to the Sacrament. I have used this event to illustrate my conviction that mistakes can have positive outcomes.

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Psychologists know that changing jobs, losing a significant other and moving house are the three most stressful events in anyone’s life. Not surprisingly, for many, leaving Opus Dei was the perfect emotional storm; especially for women who had held internal roles. With no real friends outside Opus Dei, they found the rupture of their emotional relationships – as well as sudden financial problems – particularly hard.

I was one of the lucky ones. A wonderfully affirming hand of help arrived in the shape of Peter Hebblethwaite whom I had met at Loreto while I was the chaplain to the Schola Cantorum Cardinal Vaughan as it attended the Loreto Music Festival. Peter was researching his biography of Pope John XXIII whose erstwhile secretary had moved to that city. Peter and I hit it off. He and his wife Margaret became friends. Peter had left the Jesuits so he

could sympathise. Until he died, I used to stay an occasional night or two at his house in Headington, Oxford – where Margaret had created a little prayer room in the under-stairs cupboard.

Staying on at The Vaughan, I had a job with an income more than adequate for my own needs. I also had seven families I had known while in Opus Dei: The Howards, McMahons, Osbornes, Redvers, Reynolds, Steeles and Svobodas. These, together with two ex-Opus Dei Numeraries, Gillie Andrews and Ann Grain - whom I was able to help financially - made my transition into normal life much smoother than those of many others.

John and Mary Redvers – with whom I had connected in 1970 and became their first daughter Kate’s Godfather – moved to Fife in 1974. There, in 1977 I baptised Diana, their third child. In 1979 they came back to England, to Mary’s mothers’ house in Hartpury, Gloucestershire where I often stayed for lengthy visits – and exercised my DIY skills. Being able to bring electricity to Mary’s horse-boxes - and building solid jumps - made me feel very proud.

It was only many years later that Kate admitted that every time I drove back to London, she cried.

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Nick – the brother of Stephen, a numerary member of Opus Dei - and Meg were the first couple at whose wedding in England I officiated. Nick remembers how after the wedding at Corpus Christi church in Tonbridge of October 23rd, 1971, as they drove off in Nick’s green Mini, I popped my head through the window and said, “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do”. Eventually they had six children - whom I baptised - so my advice must not have been accepted.

They had moved from Ealing to Ropley in 1975 and after I left Opus Dei in 1982, I often spent night-overs in their home. The children remember how I used to bring copious supplies of Smarties to keep them happy while Meg, Nick and I set the world to order and discussed faith and the life of the church.

Eventually, cancer killed Meg. Her funeral, attended by over 300 – including a number of Officers from Winchester Prison where she had worked as chaplain – took place at St Gregory’s, Arlesford on 22nd of June 2006. Stephen Reynolds, now a priest, and I concelebrated.

In 2009, Nick married Lis in St Peter’s Winchester. Stephen and I were there again. In August 2010, Lis and Nick moved to Twickenham, where I have always been most welcome – again for overnights.

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In the late summer of 1981, Gillie Andrews received a letter from an ex-Opus Dei numerary, Marylyn Harrison, who informed Gillie that I had left OD and gave her my contact details. Gillie then phoned me. Ann had left OD on 14 Sept 1980; Gillie on 5 April 1981. They had moved to 10 Brackenbury Gardens, London W6, in May 1981 where, soon after I moved to OLV in 1982, they invited me to dinner.

On the way there, I realised I needed to bring a gift. A bottle seemed better than flowers. So, I entered an off-licence. While in Opus Dei, I had never bought a bottle of wine. What should I bring? A bottle of ‘Blue Nun Liebfraumilch’ caught my eye. ‘Beloved lady’s milk’ - in reference to the Virgin Mary perhaps? - seemed a safe bet. So, I took that.

Gillie and Ann were very fine cooks and generous hosts. I was often there for a meal. As it was easy to sense they were short of cash, I started to pick up and pocket any invoice I saw lying around. As they were never chased up to pay, they soon realised what was happening. And were grateful.

In May 1983, they moved to 29 Batoum Gardens, W6, where I laid the kitchen floor for them. They still remember that to save my trousers, I wore shorts. Until then, they had seen me only in my clericals!

I taught Ann to drive. She got her driving license in 1982. I bought her a pink, second-hand Hillman Imp: 'Rosie'. In 1983, after I had moved to Chiswick, late at night I received a telephone call. Rosie had broken on the A29. Could I help? So, being a gent, off I drove with my toolbox in the boot, down the A29. Even though there was no moon, pink Rosie was easy to spot. My torch soon spotted the problem. A little rubber disk – probably from the petrol cap - had drifted across the petrol tank exit pipe. I managed to extract it. So off they went on their way to Arundel; I back to Our Lady of Grace, Chiswick.

On 7 November 1987, at Ealing Abbey, I celebrated Gillie's marriage to Tim la Haye; and in 1989 baptised their son Nicholas (known then - and for many years thereafter- as Binkie).

Ann moved to Horsham in July 1990; Gillie moved to New Malden on 8 January 1990. In 2011, preparing to launch the John Paul 2 Foundation for Sport (JP2F4S) charity, I brought Ann on board to design our website and produce publicity. She was a huge help until – in 2018 - our Trustees decided we could no longer afford her premier services.

Gillie started working the Bowen Technique in 1996 and helped me wonderfully with my physical welfare until she and Tim moved to Chichester in May 27, 2014. Too far for me!

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Conversations with ex-Numeraries from the Women's Section, confirmed my views that Opus Dei's 'family life' was a sham. As soon as a numerary moved to another house of Opus Dei, contact with her 'sisters' with whom they had lived - sometimes for many years - had to cease. "Particular friendships" were anathema. And, of course, all contacts with anyone who left Opus Dei were severed. Ex-members ceased to exist. They said they felt like pieces of Lego, their feelings and conditions of life ignored. Just one example.

A menopausal Numerary was told to leave Manchester, go to London and find herself a job. She spoke of her pain and distress with her Directress. To no avail. She suffered a breakdown.

One day, she packed her suitcase and walked out of the empty house. As she stood by the bus stop, terrified someone would return home early and see her there, a kindly stranger pulled up. Through the open window she said, "You look like you could do with a lift." She could. She did. She got to the station and took the train to her parents' flat.

Having worked internally for many years, she had missed decades of National Insurance contributions. Her autumn and winter years looked bleak as her extended family – whose weddings and baptisms she had missed out of obedience - now cold-shouldered her.

Caring for people like her, made my own pain feel much lighter. Trivial.

As part of my survival- bereavement strategy, I poured into them the majority of my teacher's salary: paying bills, buying cars, paying for holidays, teaching them to drive and spending time with them – often on DIY projects where they lived.

The inspiration behind Opus Dei – wherever it in fact came from - is brilliant. The idea I found – and still find – attractive.

On its website, you can read that it is “a new way of sanctification in the middle of the world, through the exercise of ordinary daily work and the fulfilment of family, social and personal obligation.” My only quibble with that is the word ‘new’.

‘New’? What about ‘The Elixir’ of George Herbert, born on April 3, 1593?

TEACH me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for Thee.

Not rudely, as a beast,
To run into action ;
But still to make Thee prepossess,
And give it his perfection.

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye,
Or, if he please, through it pass,
And then the heavens espy.

All may of Thee partake ;
Nothing can be so mean
Which with his tincture (for Thy sake)
Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine :
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,
Makes that and that' action fine.

This is the famous stone
That turrets all to gold ;
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.

In 2000, during my first set of lectures in Lourdes, I learned that Escrivá - who founded Opus Dei in Madrid in 1928 - and since 2002 is now Saint Josemaría - had met Tilla Volhopp; a founder-member of Cardinal Mercier’s “Auxiliaries of the Apostolate” years earlier. This Archbishop of Mechelen–Brussels had set up this lay organisation in 1922. Apparently, when Tilla told him that the Auxiliaries - staying mainstream laity - took no vows, he said that without these, discipline in the organisation would not be possible.

However, from everything I experienced in Lourdes, there is absolutely no disciplinary problem in the Auxiliaries. They have no need of vows. I believe that it is their patent love of God that underpins their exemplary discipline.

The “Auxiliaries of the Apostolate”, in reality as in Canon Law, are ordinary laywomen, who commit themselves to serving God without joining anything. Their ‘Local Ordinary’ renders God’s presence and through his requests, God’s will. Around them, there is no boundary other than their Baptism. When I joined Opus Dei by writing my letter to Mgr. Escriva, The Founder, I became a member of a specific sub-section of the Church. I had been told that joining Opus Dei was like becoming a member of the RAC or AA. I leave you to work that one out.

John and Sarah Osborne – whose wedding I had celebrated – lived in Chiswick. My DIY skills came in handy – and brought us closer. Baptising five of their children and becoming Godfather to Toby gave me great emotional support in those tricky times after 1981.

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In 1982, Denis Cochrane, Choirmaster at Our Lady of Grace (OLG), Chiswick and builder of the CVMS organs – which he played at services - while chatting in the staff room mentioned that as one of the OLG curates, Fr O. – known as Ozzy - Flueck– was away in Switzerland. Peter Gilbert, the Parish Priest, was looking for a priest to – temporarily - step into his shoes.

Denis suggested I might be able to help. I answered “indeed I could”- and went to see Peter. He said it would be a great help if I could cover the early morning masses at the Comboni Sisters Convent, Chiswick Lane. That suited me fine. I could drive to The Vaughan in time for start of school.

In the summer of 1983, as he was working on the ‘Autumn Manoeuvres’ (priestly appointments)], Mgr. John Crowley, VG – the Vicar general - invited me for an interview in Archbishop’s House. After the usual pleasantries, he asked me what I was up to. Having put him in the picture, John informed me that he had put me down as going to Watford. However, as I had got to know Peter and the parish, Chiswick would be fine. A huge relief. Chiswick was far closer to The Vaughan than Holy Rood, Watford. So, it came to pass, that full-time at The Vaughan, I was – in partnership with Fr. Normal Wrigley - also full-time Assistant Priest, OLG, Chiswick, 1983-85. When Ozzy returned, he was there as ‘Priest in Residence.’

I had to restruct my ‘days-off’. Typically, as you may already know, priests take one day-off each week. Given my OLG and Vaughan duties, this was not on. In the event, I worked seven days a week and then, at half-term, took five days off. As this gave me opportunities to stay with friends outside London, it suited me fine. Though while at The Cathedral, 85-89, I had to revert to the one day-off-a-week, as soon as at All Saints I was master of my timetable, I reverted to my monthly five-days-away slots with which I continued until, in October 2020, I was retired.

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In early September 1983 the workers, who had been renovating the Georgian OLG Presbytery, finally cleared out. Neither Peter – nor any of the others - had yet moved in. Alone in the house, with only a bed, a chair wedged against the bedroom door, my clothes stacked neatly on the virgin-clean floor, and – to give me a sense of safety - a hammer by my bed, I slept fine. Within a few days, the others had moved in.

The parish had a rich mix of communities: foreign diplomats, English - some civil servants (including a spy); Irish, some poor, some wealthy; and a sprinkling of other nationalities from around the world. Our congregation also included a few celebrities.

There was Eamon Andrews who, to avoid being mobbed, always arrived late for Mass and left early. There was Cyril Cusack, the great actor who, on his way back to Eire, came to say goodbye and was gracious enough to inform me how much he had appreciated my preaching.

In those days, visiting parishioners at their home was a part of the job. A late afternoon cup of tea in each, with perhaps a wee dram towards the end of the round, made it imperative to move fast - back home - for a comfort break.

Although many Eucharistic ministers helped, priests also did their communion rounds. Some flats carried a combination-locked key box by the front door. Being suspicious of my memory, I had written the numbers in my diary.

I will never forget coming into one small, single-bedded, studio flat where there was no table. The man lay in his bed. I sat down on the single chair, opened the corporal on my thigh, gave communion to the old gentleman and stayed with him for a little chat. As soon as I returned to the presbytery, I had to change my trousers and y-fronts. They both stank of the urine that had seeped into that chair.

Peter Gilbert, a wonderfully pastoral priest had wanted to bring as many of his parishioners into running the parish. To attract volunteers, he gave the impression that he was always strapped for time. Walking fast, carrying a clipboard or exercise book, he gave the impression he was under serious stress. In fact, because so many were doing so much, he – who had been a GPO engineer - could spend many a long, afternoon hour in the presbytery playing with his electrics. That strategy struck me as Ubuntu: great for the actively committed parishioners, great for Peter who was able to relax - and avoid burn-out.

I learned a great deal from Peter about the ups and downs (we got burgled) of parish life. I watched how he organised liturgies and lead volunteers and paid staff. All this was massively helpful when, in 1991, I took over running the All Saints Pastoral Centre in Hertfordshire.

During the Parish Summer Fete on Chiswick Common I had helped to organise, we had a donkey derby. A group of Irish parishioners challenged me to take part. So, I did! Thanks to flapping the reins on my donkey's back – something the other competitors had neglected to do - I became "The Sulky Derby Champion, Chiswick, 1983".

That summer, John Redvers, a professional portrait painter I had met in 1970, had time on his hands. Intrigued by the contrast between my ascetical-thin face and workmanlike hands, he said he would like to draw me. Draw me in pastel he did; a full-length, cassock-clad cleric leaning against a chair.

When I told Greville and Mary Howard, they – typically – suggested my mother might like it. She was thrilled. They paid John the full price of £1,000.

Until she died, that portrait filled – almost from floor to ceiling - one wall of her dining room. After her death, I took it to SPEC where, until the Diocese sold ASPC, it hung on the topflight of stairs – out of sight of most guests.

Then, in my Bow Road flat, it leant covered by a yellow vest against a wall until on 13th July 2020, DHL took this 7 x 80 x 120cm, 16 kg picture to Jindřichuv Hradec. While celebrating my 80th birthday and golden priesthood jubilee in August 2019, Jarmila and I had measured up a space on our cousin Honza Pokorny's wall inside his "Renaissance sgraffito house" on the main town square. There, it would fit in nicely.

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Though they lived in Grove Park just across the A4, Patrick "Pat" Austin – the Headmaster of St Thomas More School, Chelsea - his wife and six children were parishioners of Our Lady of Grace, Chiswick. The boys were at CVMS, girls at Sacred Heart, Hammersmith. In part, because when I was a dinner guest the children were at their best behaviour, in part because I helped Pat with his DIY improvements in their newly occupied home, we became close friends. In 1983, they invited me to come with them on their summer holiday to Spain. Two cars would transport all the family.

As you will read in my "Life Squared – a guide to life in an accelerating world", one morning, sitting under an umbrella high up on the beach at Sitges, south of Barcelona, I spotted a young lad – 4 or 5 - trying to make a sandcastle. And failing time and time again.

I noticed his father watching him. Utter concentration. When finally, the lad succeeded, the father roared with laughter and clapped his hands.

That it how I see God looking at me.... messing up so many of my sandcastles. That is why my favourite Psalm is 139 with its, "Lord, you examine me and know me. You know when I sit, when I rise. You understand my thoughts from afar... You watch me when I walk or lie down...."

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1985 turned out to be a rather pivotal year for me. I never discovered why (1) but in the Summer of '84, Cardinal Basil Hume decided he wanted me to come to help run The Cathedral as Sub-Administrator, Rector of the College of Chaplains. However, Bishop David Konstant – head of Westminster Education – informed him that I had to give the school a term's notice. So, I stayed on at The Vaughan and OLG until Christmas, moving into Clergy House, 42 Francis Street on January 6th the Epiphany, 1985: a gift from the Wise Men to Westminster Cathedral.

Mary Quinn, secretary to the Administrator, Canon Oliver Kelly, greeted me and showed me around Clergy House. What made the biggest impression on me was the telephone system. It was like something from a film, set before the Second World War.

In Clergy House reception there was large wooden structure attached to the wall. Round jacks had to be plugged into sockets, and then a handle turned to ring the targeted telephone. There was one on each floor's corridor. I soon discovered that the daily duty priest needed to keep an ear open to pick up any emergency calls day and night.

Providentially, I befriended a lady from Scotland who had just moved from Dumfries and Galloway into her Pimlico flat. Pamela Hill – a novelist with more than 30 titles on bookshelves around the country - owned a Citroen 2CV *Deux Chevaux* car. Now, living in London, she said it was surplus to her requirements. So, she gave it to me as a present. As

time passed, I realised this was typical Pamela: mega generous in so many ways. (We shall return to Pamela in the 1990s).

Not needing another car – though it was fun to drive - I put it on the market and obtained a good price. Pamela was happy with that. I then checked out the cost of installing a modern wanted me to come to help run The Cathedral as Sub-Administrator, Rector of the College of Chaplains. However, Bishop David Konstant – head of Westminster Education – having told him that I had to give the school a term's notice, I was allowed to stay on at The Vaughan and 247 High Road, Chiswick until Christmas, moving into Clergy House, 42 Francis Street on January 6th the Epiphany, 1985: a gift from the Wise Men to Westminster Cathedral.

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(1) I imagined it was because the mother of his Private Secretary, Gladstone Liddle – a parishioner at Chiswick - had made favourable comments about this 'new curate' there.

and then a handle had to be turned to ring the targeted telephone. There was one on the corridor of each floor. Duty priests, when not down in Reception, needed to keep an ear open to pick up their day calls and - when in bed - night emergencies.

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Not needing another car – though it was fun to drive - I put it on the market and obtained a good price. Pamela was happy with that. I then checked out the cost of installing a modern telephone system around the Cathedral complex; connecting every room in Clergy House with rooms in Archbishop House, The Choir School and the Cathedral. Providentially the sale on the *Deux Chevaux* covered the quote for the job. Just.

There being no financial implications for his budget, Canon Olly - as he was universally known - agreed to my proposal. So, it came to pass that Westminster Cathedral, Archbishop's House, Clergy House and Choir School were interconnected by a state-of-the-art telephone system: with a phone in each room.

Pamela had a huge, golden heart. Having seen how a woman slept in the car park next to Clergy House, she invited her into her flat and offered her own bed. She would sleep on the sofa. Big mistake. The woman was doubly incontinent. Therefore, after a few weeks, Pamela had to ask her to leave – and needed to ask the Council to dispose of her mattress. After she had paid a cleaning company to deep clean her bedroom, she had to buy a new bed.

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My room, number 7, top floor, was next to Fr William – always known as Willy - Kahle, a charming German-born, eccentric. In the corridor, outside his door he had what I imagined was a small fridge. Imagining that Willy would not mind – there was plenty of room therein, one day, I placed a bottle of white wine – luckily German with its sloping shape - into that container. Next evening, as I opened the container door to take the bottle to a family for my invited evening meal, I saw that its cork had been pushed out. It was there, sitting on the top of some two inches of ice. That fridge was, in fact, a freezer. The wine was fine, just slightly stronger than its label claimed.

Willy enjoyed midnight cooking especially in summer when, thanks to the aromas wafting from his room through our adjacent open windows, I could guess what he was going to enjoy.

Later that year, as soon as Fr Pat O 'Donoghue – POD to his friends – had moved on to be Rector of Allen Hall Seminary, I took over as Sub-Administrator; a post I occupied until 1989.

While still a mere Cathedral Chaplain – albeit with the responsibility of weekly winding up the clocks in Clergy House, The Long Corridor and The Sacristy, given my Civil Engineering background, I was introduced to Sir Alan Harris, a great structural engineer and his wife Mathé. Living in Ambrosden Avenue and worshipping at Westminster Cathedral, Alan, Mathé became good friends.

A few years down the line, Alan invited to me to take Grace at a Worshipful Company of Engineers dinner in Guildhall whose Guest of Honour was Prince Philip. An unforgettable event due to the fact that after Grace, I was directed to the end of the Top Table. My solitary neighbour made monosyllabic replies to anything I said, so, after the first course, he and I both ate on in silence; an encouragement to examine carefully the architecture and décor of that fine space.

Alan introduced me to the magazine “New Civil Engineer”. Outcome? A photograph of me, standing in front of the West Doors of The Cathedral – in cassock and cotta with red stole, graced its front cover on 15th October 1987.

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In 1966, having taken a mini-bus full of boys to Brent Eleigh, I had met – very briefly – Mary Playfair. In 1985, ensconced in Clergy House, I was attending a meeting of the Friends of Westminster Cathedral. There she was. She turned round and recognised me immediately.

She and Julian Barran had divorced and having remarried, she was now Mary Padfield. We reconnected. I would baptise their son Sam in 1988 and become Godfather to their younger son Jo. Later, I baptised their daughter Pia.

When I asked Mary for help with this book, she wrote:

“Vlad

I met him in about 1966-7 at Brent Eleigh Hall, my parents-in law's house when he was giving a retreat. I was 18 and captivated by him, totally unreligious (how things have changed!) and when I asked what a young good-looking man was doing shutting himself away as a priest, he just said “I love God more than anything else, and because I love him so much I want to serve him”. He had the most beautiful sparkling eyes, and I will never forget what he said then.

A few years later I met him at Westminster Cathedral, marriage in trouble, and in that unerring way he has, he said "What is wrong, how can I help?". Thus, a long and enduring friendship started.

He went to Lourdes with my eldest daughter when she was 17, she didn't know anyone but Vlad, so they went together, and thus began another long friendship and for her it was the first of many, many visits to Lourdes.

I married again and he baptised our three children at the Cathedral, and conducted their first communions, also at the Cathedral.

Our fourth and youngest child was born dead prematurely, and Vlad was there for that. It was his 50th birthday and his family had prepared a tea party for him, but he stayed until the baby was born, blessed him, arranged for him to be transferred to his local funeral directors and eventually arrived very late at his birthday party. He conducted a special and beautiful service for him at the Cathedral in the chapel in Clergy House, conducted the burial and comforted me for many, many months of despair. He named him Ben, "the youngest and the smallest".

He has been there for every single event, sad or glad, and finally was there for my daughter Tabitha's (she of the Lourdes trip) miracle of a son's baptism, born when she was 46 very unexpectedly, having met her husband at Lourdes after many prayers from all of us including Vlad.

Whenever any of our friends have needed spiritual help, or just help and support at a difficult time he has immediately gone to them even though he didn't at first know them, and when my godson died tragically young at 27 he was there throughout, at the hospital, at his death, and thereafter for the whole family, whom he knew well and had married his parents, and baptised all of their children. He co-conducted his funeral and his memorial service, rather reluctantly on the part of the Church of England vicar who was surprised, and a bit put out when Vlad managed to slip in a Hail Mary, enthusiastically supported by all the many Catholics in the congregation.

He once found a horse for us, for our youngest son who is also Vlad's godson. The horse had just come over from Ireland aged 4, and unknown to us, and presumably her as well, she was really quite pregnant, and shortly thereafter she gave birth to a boy foal during the Archers one evening, who is still working and being ridden by my daughter Tabitha. The mother, called Molly, was the most useless horse we ever had, but we loved her, she was lame for 25 years and died last year after happily eating us out of house and home for all that time, but never ridden for more than two years. She had one more girl foal who was even more useless than her mother. Thanks Vlad!

One night he spent four hours praying in our daughter's bedroom where a crying baby ghost had been worrying us all for many years, not because it was a distressing cry, but more that we felt that the baby needed comforting in some way, and the next-door neighbours had heard it over the baby alarm. After that four hour, the baby was never heard again. Vlad told us that he thought the baby was a perfectly happy child but that he or she needed his help to be on their way.

Another time one of our sons brought home a flea-ridden kitten after school. We didn't know what on earth we were going to do with it, since we are more dog and horse than cat lovers.

Vlad was coming to supper, and I don't know what on earth he did, but he took it away with him which was a great relief for all of us although not perhaps for our son Ned.

I think I have missed out a lot of occasions, but the fact is that Vlad has always been there for all of us, every single member of the family and a great many of our friends. Always there, always the same, the most comforting, loving and holy man I will ever know."

Mary's best friend was and is Christina. When I first met her, she was married to Peter Shiach. I have known Christina in times that for her have been good and some very hard.

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Pamy Shiach, Allan and Peter's sister, in 1986 was working at More House School on Pont Street where I used to take days of prayer, confessions and even some RE lessons. She informed me of Peter's condition. He had inoperable terminal cancer. I visited him in St Thomas' Hospital where – though he had ceased to liturgically worship God in his teens - we spoke of death and God.

Peter Shiach, soon after he had been formally received back into the church and taken holy communion from Father Maurus OSB, died 22nd April 1980 in his Scottish home.

Christina (nee Dolan) Shiach, Peter's widow, married Mark Lakin on 26 November 1988 at Much Hadham in the 'shared' church of St Andrew and Holy Cross where I officiated. (1) We kept in frequent contact – and overnights - as they moved from Much Hadham first to Duns Tew and then on to Over Worton in Oxfordshire, as well as many an overnight in their Chelsea home. I baptised their three children; Patrick – known at home as Patch, - born 30.5.89, then Henry born on 23.4.91 and finally Molly whose birthday was on 20.5.93.

On Wednesday 16th of November 2016, having taken dinner at the Holland Park home of Paul and Dian Leonard, I retired to bed for an overnight stay. Around 1.00am my mobile rang. It was Christina. "Patch has had a problem. We are in St George's Hospital. Can you come." "On my way." Throwing on my clothes without washing, I and picked up my bag and walked the short way to Holland Park Avenue. Fortuitously, a taxi was soon passing by which took me to Tooting.

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- (1) Patrick Dolan, Christian's father, said it was absurd that Westminster diocese was planning to build a new church in Much Hadham when there was very fine building there already. He made sure Westminster diocese drew up an agreement with the Church of England so that both religions could use the same building (which had been Catholic!) – just at different times.

Patch, whom I had met a couple of weeks earlier while he was working at Canary Wharf – where two weeks running, he had brought a couple of colleagues to our Tuesday 12.30 Mass - had jumped off a balcony - we know not why – and landed on his head. He was unconscious. I stayed with Christina and Mark. Around noon we had a meeting with the Consultant who said there was absolutely no chance he would ever regain consciousness. He left us for a while so we could decide whether to disconnect the machine that was keeping him alive. Together we decided it would be better to disconnect. So, Patch died on Thursday 17th November 2016. Together with the Vicar at Chelsea Old Church, I shared his funeral – preaching.

I think of him every morning as I put on one of the many, many pairs of black socks - with coloured toes and heels – that Christina and Mark gave me. They also put some funds in the John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport account. This enabled me to give schools strapped for cash reduce rates as on their booklets on which I stuck labels carrying.

This Booklet is kindly sponsored by Patrick Lakin's Family.

JP2F4S logo

Please pray for Patrick Lakin.

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Given the character and work-shy nature of the Administrator, meant that I was responsible for organising Cathedral liturgies, duty-rotas of priests and Cathedral Clergy House staff – as well as signing all the cheques for the Cathedral Book and Gift shops. Due to thousands of boring scribbles, my “Vladimir Felzmann” condensed into an untidy “VF” scrawl.

Once I had explored The Cathedral, I realised there was a wonderful space unused: the first floor Gallery around the Nave. A great place for Art Exhibitions, many of which I organised over my four years as Sub. (2)

(2) Now that space is again inert. ‘Health and Safety’ criticisms of access forced it, once again, to become redundant, inert.

I studied the history – and the architecture geology – thoroughly. It had a rewarding outcome: an annual WDP fund-raising auction prize, “Father Vlad’s Private Guided Tour – 7.00pm – you choose the day.” It became popular and raised a lot of cash.

When Mary Quinn - who had shown me around when I arrived and for many years had been the secretary to the Administrator - nowadays she would be called his PA or even PE – retired, apart from the miniscule State Pension, she had nothing. That was not going to happen on my watch.

Responsible for recruiting staff, I was on the panel that appointed David Hill’s successor, James O’Donnell, as Master of Music. I created a stir – but pushed it through – when I suggested that the young woman we appointed as his PA should have a pension.

In 1986, it was in room 7 that, as I had been working at my desk, I was wearing my glasses. Feeling something in my left eye, without taking them off, I went to the mirror over the wash basin. What a shock! I saw my face in a mirror. As I never wore glasses when I shaved, I had imagined my face to be smooth and clear. It now looked so wrinkled and lined. In that instant my self-image had aged decades. My pair of specs had trumped astigmatism which, for so many years, had been so kind.

During my first four months at Clergy House, I rarely left the Cathedral buildings. When I finally returned to Chiswick to visit a family that had befriended me, I remember that as soon as I saw their lawn, I walked out into the garden, dropped to my knees and ran my splayed fingers through the grass – repeatedly. My body – my psyche - had been suffering nature-

deprivation. Marble and mosaics – no matter how beautiful – were no substitute for living flora and its soft, natural texture.

Once I had organised my responsibilities, in 1986, I had time to accept an invitation from Libuše - Liba – Paukert. She and Felix had married in January 17th, 1959 and had their reception in our home on Alleyn Road, Dulwich. They were now living in Geneva and looking for a chaplain to the Anglophones in Geneva; many at the ILO and even more at CERN.

They paid all my expenses. I flew to Geneva and spent three days meeting people. I was cautiously tempted. However, when I spoke to Basil Hume about this offer, he begged me to stay on at The Cathedral. So, I wrote a very nice ‘thank you, but no thank you’ note to Liba.

I remember how in 1986 Father Basil went to “John & Lizzies” - John and Elizabeth Hospital - to visit Bishop Christopher Butler, his long-term friend and fellow Benedictine; pre-eminent English-speaking Council Father at the Second Vatican Council. Back in his office, Basil, shocked and sad, half-whispered to me, “he did not even recognise me.” Mental decay is – as I subsequently personally discovered - grotesquely cruel to the friends of any victim.

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To demonstrate the clergy’s appreciation of the laity and avoid aristocratic-clericalism with its implicit “we are better than the laity”, every year I was Sub I organised summer parties for Lay-Clerks on Clergy House Roof garden. I made sure their hard-working vocal cords were as well lubricated as their stomachs were satisfied. Naturally, to demonstrate that the clergy were still human, I made sure I did not lag behind their fluid intakes.

While at The Cathedral, I was able to act as a supply priest to Pentonville and Holloway prison - the biggest women's jail in western Europe - Tyburn Convent and many parishes. It was in one of these I heard the words from a teenage altar-server after mass that have stayed with me ever since. As I was de-robing, he said “you enjoy being a priest, don’t you?” “Oh yes,” said I. A joy; yet a sadness. Clearly, his Parish Priest did not give that impression. That short conversation reminded me of Frederick Nietzsche’s, “I might believe in the Redeemer if his followers looked more redeemed.”

Alternating with Fr John Arnold, recently arrived from The *Venerabile* in Rome – I launched our Advent and Lent, ‘Tuesday Lunchtime Talks’ in the Cathedral crypt [it is now a Café]. One Tuesday, while spouting my wisdom, I noticed a face that seemed familiar. As soon as I ended, “Vlad!” ... “John!”. It was John Noulton. John said that on his visit to the Cathedral the week before, he had seen an advert for the talks and thought, “There can’t be two Vladimir Felzmanns in London.”

John and I had been contemporaries at Clapham College; we never competed as he was in the ‘Alpha’, I in the ‘A’ forms. John started there in 1950. I, having been a boarder at St Peter’s Guildford until dad’s money ran out, arrived a year later.

John went on to do his National Service. As in those days engineering students had their military obligations deferred, I went straight to Imperial College to read Civil Engineering.

It was bliss to reconnect. I started staying overnight in his Ladderstile Ride house, next to Richmond Park and there met his wonderful wife Anne for the first time. John and I caught up on all those years as – while Anne worked away in the kitchen - we took their dog for long walks around Richmond Park; before returning home to enjoy his fine wines and excellent, home-cooked food.

When we reconnected, John was working in the Ministry of Transport. He then moved on to Eurotunnel while it was being built so that, having been equipped with Eurotunnel wellingtons, I was able to walk around the massive tunnel entrance and enjoy seeing the complexity of what was going on.

After he retired, John and Anne bought a simple house with a wonderful garden – and sea-view across to Cannes - in La Napoule, South of France. Until he started to feel ill and decided he needed to sell it as Anne was not fluent in French, I often spent my summer breaks there. On my first trip there – John, having picked me up at Nice Airport, hired a boat so I could visit the island of Saint-Honorat where, in the 5th century, one of my theology heroes, Vincent of Lérins, had lived.

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Mrs. Clare Barbour, whom I had got to know at Our Lady of Grace (OLG), Chiswick, where she was a catechist, I invited to come to The Cathedral as editor of “Westminster Cathedral Bulletin” - now “OREMUS. What an improvement in style and content! In it, she published our Tuesday Lunchtime Talks. Her office was in an erstwhile wooden bungalow - shared by The Friends of The Cathedral - in the courtyard behind Clergy House.

Eventually – and very generously - Clare published and funded - three sets of Booklets: One of Fr. John Arnold’s talks, two of mine: The Apostles’ Creed, 1989, Life’s Pilgrimage, 1990.

Over my time at Cathedral House, I was invited to give annually a series of lectures on theology at Cornerstone; initially in a study centre based in what is now St Paul’s Bookshop and then in the church hall on Wilfred Street; eventually sold-off to fund Vaughan House.

As with the staff, so with the Cathedral Bulletin, 1985-89 were the Cathedral’s halcyon-glorious years. The team of chaplains – full-time and part-time-semi-retired, has never been bettered. As we used to say “The money ain’t much but the craic [%] is great.”. And it was.

Clergy House hosted a delightful mix of characters and priestly personalities: John Arnold, Norman Brown, Daniel Cronin, Michael Donaghy, William Kahle, Denis Murphy, Terrence Phipps, Michael Seed, Herbert Keldany, Richard Johnson, Kevin O’Callaghan, SJ, Louis Richard, Albert Clarke, Mgr Ralph Brown, Mgr Vincent Berry. “The Golden Age of Clergy House”; unlikely ever to be repeated.

Meals around the vast – some say one of the largest in the country – dining room table were rarely less than entertaining. The meals, cooked by the Portuguese sisters, were mega yummy. The laundry they looked after, perfect.

Soon, after I settled into Clergy House, I asked Sister Arcelina, if I could borrow an iron to press my trousers. “Don’t you trust us to do that properly?” she replied. From then on, all my

pressing was done beautifully by the sisters. No problem. I still have a couple of hankies with VF sewn in by sister responsible for the laundry.

One perk of my role as Sub. stands out in my memory: a Monday evening visit to the Chelsea Flower Show. Twelve Chelsea Pensioners - some with their Great War medals on their chests - used to come to the Maundy Thursday Cathedral Mass to have their feet washed by the Cardinal, prior to taking dinner with us, the clergy. Their commanding Officer, Colonel Kelly – a good Catholic – invited me to take a tour of The Royal Hospital and stay on to enjoy the flower show after it had closed. With so few people there, I was able to take a long, slow bath in all that beauty.

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How Cathedral security has changed! In 1985, during the day, there was no lock between Victoria Station and my bedroom. Then, one day, *Père* Louis Richard, whose room was down the short corridor from my room, lost a watch he had left on his table. Enquiries were made. Yes, a stranger had been seen walking down the Long Corridor and turning left.

We imagined it must have been either someone unable to read English or a drug addict who had not been persuaded by the notice on the metal grilled door in the Lady Chapel:

STRICTLY PRIVATE

No entry
Except Authorised persons

[%] Irish for “enjoyable social activity; a good time.”

Result? Locks were put on doors and keys found for those that had been idle. Nowadays, swipe cards are required for just about every door and access is coded by responsibility and needs of access.

The London Bridge attack in 2019 – reminded me of the Midnight Mass, probably 1987, when a man ran onto the Sanctuary and before he could reach The Cardinal, I managed to tackle him to the ground until the ushers get hold of him and led him away.

As Sub, and thus responsible for Cathedral logistics, to assist in balancing the budget, I developed a broad network of volunteers to help set up the Cathedral for special services. Late into evenings, once everything was back in its normal place, we’d have serious-drink parties in the Counting Room below the main Sacristy.

In those days, Clergy and Archbishop’s Houses were a welcoming continuum. It felt like home. Basil Hume was aware of our relaxation sessions and occasionally dropped in for a wee drink – and catch up on the gossip – always ending with a large “thank you” to all.

Whenever I drove him to any event, before departing, he always made a point of going ‘back-stage’ to thank the volunteers who had helped with the catering. I enjoyed these moments as they resonated with my Director of School Chaplains contributions at many a school function: “The most important people here are the catering staff. If they get it wrong and the pupils are all off-sick, the teachers become – temporarily, I hope – redundant.”

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Five ‘Clergy House events’ are etched into my memory bank.

1. During the Big Freeze of 86, many pipes froze overnight. Alan O’Connor - now with God - lived directly above Father Basil’s bathroom. When Alan pulled out his basin plug, poor Father Basil got soaked as the used water shot up from his own basin’s plughole.

2. Tony Furness - William Anthony Furness, 2nd Viscount Furness (1929 –1995) was a regular, I seem to remember, almost a monthly guest at Clergy House Sunday lunch. Whenever Tony was with us, lunch would include - and conclude – with an excellent and broad selection of cheeses.

3. By standing inside a glass-fronted cupboard next to the Counting Room – I could see out, no one could see in - I caught a Collection Collector pocketing cash from the red collection bags prior to posting the lighter bags through the large letterbox on the steel fronted door. We had had our suspicions. I took him up to Olly’s office. We sacked him there and then.

4. During the blessing of Choir School gates – constructed to improve Choir School security – Father Basil said, “Thank you Lord Forte for your last – sorry – I mean latest gift.” ‘C F’ - The initials of Charles Forte - are wrought in its iron.

5. My last effort before retiring as Sub-Administrator, was to find a company in Birmingham able to replace the lost mini keys that, as they had been produced when Clergy House was built, people in Clergy House had said was impossible. As at that time I did not have access to the World Wide Web (WWW), I was chuffed.

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Other memories that come to mind include the Wintertime Homeless, initially - thanks to Father Basil - accommodated overnight in Cathedral Hall. Protests by a number of Ambrosden Avenue residents accelerated The Passage developing its capacities and the purchase of Passage House in Longmoore Street, Pimlico.

As in 1986 Ken Livingstone’s tenure as the Leader of the Greater London Council was ending, to get rid of surplus cash in the GLC account, he paid for the external cleaning of The Cathedral.

Having met him in Chiswick, I was chuffed to be able to organise Eamon Andrews, CBE (1922 –1987) Memorial Mass. The Cathedral was packed.

Leonard Cheshire (1917 – 1992) Baron Cheshire, VC, OM, DSO and Two Bars, DFC – who had served my Masses at my Opus Dei days of recollection I used to give in his family’s house in Cavendish, Suffolk, was a regular at Mass.

Ian Edmund Bannen (1928 – 1999) a Scottish actor, was a regular at Christmas Eve and Easter Vigil Masses. He also developed the habit of phoning me – any time of the night or day, depending on where he was filming – to seek spiritual guidance on matters that were troubling him.

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If a parish is like a frigate, The Cathedral is an aircraft- carrier on which the great and good are celebrated, buried and have their Memorial Service. My engineer’s training made things work efficiently, with minimum energy expended across my PIES- the Physical, Intellectual, Emotion and Spiritual dimensions of life.

National liturgies were exciting. Watching sniffer dogs sweep the Cathedral before a VIP arrived was interesting; and once instructional.

I remember how, when the US Attorney General - a Catholic - was coming, the Long Corridor between Clergy House and the Cathedral was heaving with US security agents equipped with their wrist phones and earpieces. They were stopping everyone but me entering the Cathedral from Clergy House. As I was about to reach the Sacristy, I passed by one of these young, tough-looking gents. “No one has questioned me.” “But you are a priest,” he said. “How do you know?” replied I. “I could have a submachine gun under this cassock.” He forced a grin but said nothing. I went on to the Confessional.

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Soon after I arrived at the Cathedral, my friends used to ask me whether I was nervous preaching at the Cathedral. I used to say that it was not as scary as standing in front of a tiered-chemistry Cardinal Vaughan demonstration-lab, full of sixth-formers who had been told they could ask anything. Not being a politician, I answered every question as best as I could. (The answers improved as the years went by!) Mind you, those sessions cristalised my spiritual feelings into words, clarified my theology and taught me how – occasionally – to admit my ignorance.

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Then, one day, double-yellow lines had appeared down Ambrosden Avenue. Soon, while a coffin was being carried down the nave towards the West door, the hearse was clamped. The clamp would not be removed until the Director wrote a cheque. From then on – until the hearses could drive onto the Piazza and park on the strip that belonged to the Cathedral – we used to keep one of the Funeral team, standing by the hearse. The sight of a hearse with a dark suited man standing by, managed to keep those vultures away.

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Over my four years at Sub, many times, I represented The Cardinal at Westminster Abbey events. I used to introduce myself as “The RC Disappointment” before I said, “I am here to represent The Cardinal who is unable to attend.”

During my tenure, I attended The Buckingham Palace Garden Party – twice.

As a Council Member of the Friends of Westminster Cathedral 1985-97, I met many interesting people, quite a few of them became friends, or at least allies-in-life, and were there among the 200 guests on 24th October 2019 when I celebrated my 80th Birthday and Golden Priesthood Jubilee at The Cathedral.

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In 1989, there was trouble at The Vaughan. To have ‘has man’ there on the Board of Governors, Father Basil appointed me a Foundation Governor of the CVMS; a position I held until 1992.

Kathleen O’Gorman, the diocesan Director of Education, in order to support the reorganisation of the Catholic education system within the Archdiocese with its planned Sixth Form College on St Charles’s Square, wanted to strip CVMS and The Sacred Heart, Hammersmith, of their sixth forms; increasing their intakes by another form-of-entry. She persuaded Father Basil that it would be a walk in the park. It turned out to be more like civil war.

CVMS – and especially its head Tony Pellegrini, resented this idea –and opposed it vehemently. My role was to enable the Diocese to have its way. In the event, the Vaughan took the Cardinal to court and the plan had to be dropped. Kathleen resigned. I missed her. We got on fine and she valued my teaching experience and took me with her a couple of times when invited to assess RC schools around the country.

Subsequently, a close friend of mine – who shall remain anonymous - informed me that Tony, with whom I had worked closely on his appointment as Head during my years at The Vaughan, referred to me as “That rat Felzmann.” He took a calculated risk. On the one hand he knew I knew where skeletons could be found. However, he also knew I was a gent and was not likely to talk. He was right. So, no more on that here.

In 1970, when I came on board CVMS, Tony was Deputy Head. As soon as he became Head, he took me into his confidence as he shaped his strategy. I remember ‘saving his skin’ one morning. Just as he was about to step onto the stage to take Morning Assembly, I spotted his flies were undone. Tony managed to address this issue before the lads had noticed anything.

For Tony there were two classes of priest: pro-Vaughan and pro-Diocesan. Clearly, in my role as Foundation Governor, on the side of the Cardinal, I had ceased to belong to the first category. (5)

In the event, St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College came on stream in 1990 and has, since then, thrived.

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Given my background, as soon as I arrived in Victoria, I was appointed.

a) In 1985, Diocesan Director of School Chaplains [later called ‘coordinator’] a role – recruiting, inducting, training and supporting school chaplains - I had until, in 2009, I was deemed too old for that job and asked to resign so as to “give a young man a chance to shine.”

Thanks to my role as director of School Chaplains, I was able to help Mary Richardson, head from 1985 to 1999, to turn-round the Convent of Jesus and Mary Language College in Brent, from failing to outstanding. Hence her DBE in 1999, the year she was recruited by HSBC to set up and be Chief Executive of HSBC Global Education Trust - we have kept in touch. An outstanding example of so many cases of Ubuntu in my life. (&)

b) Chaplain, to Westminster Diocese Education Service [WDES] 1985-92

3.) *Ex officio*, I was appointed Vice Chairman, the Passage Management Committee 1985-92. I soon discovered that its main oven was well past its sell-by-date. So, I contacted the office of Lord Charles Forte. Within a week we had a new, barely used oven which, according to the gentleman from Trust House Forte, was surplus to his company’s requirements.

As we shall see, The Passage turned out to have a massive, beneficial effect on my life for one 1985 evening I met John Studzinski – ‘Studz’ to many of his friends - then working for Morgan Stanley, in Canary Wharf. While still in New York, he had been involved in helping the homeless and, having heard of The Passage, came to suss it out. Swiftly we became friends. Frequently, I attended his very fine dinners at his Carlyle Mansions, Cheyne Walk flat; a gentle, half-hour stroll from Clergy House. Over time, we get to know each other rather well.

I returned to the Passage as Trustee in 2002, as Chair of its Fund-Raising Committee, 2011-17 and as I write in 2020, I am still there on the Board.

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In 1985, the Chaplain to the Papal Knights – based at Clergy House - had trouble with The Law and – for a few months - disappeared from Victoria. I was invited to take on the role. In those days that meant celebrating a requiem Mass in St Gregory’s Chapel, for every deceased dame or knight.

(5) Soon after he retired as Headmaster, Tony applied to join the priesthood. In 2004, he was ordained for Westminster. Over dinner, way back in the late 70’s, Tony had mused on the fact that Church of England Heads – in order to maintain their status in society - often took the cloth. As I write, our relationship is cordial.

Eventually, as attendance – especially for those outside London became very sparse – these were condensed into one annual mass where - prior to the annual dinner - the names of that year’s deceased were read out.

When I took on the role (which I still have!) the masses used to be at Our Lady of the Assumption and St Gregory, Warwick Street; with dinner thereafter at The Cafe Royal which, thanks to the generosity of its owner Lord Forte, came at a reduced price.

After Trust House Forte group was taken over by Granada – and our reduced rate evaporated - the Mass moved to St Anselm and St Cecilia, Lincoln’s Inn Fields with its entrance on Kingsway, followed by dinner at Kingsway Hall Hotel.

Until John Gibbs moved the Annual Mass to Westminster Cathedral, my role was to confect the Order of Service and book The Cardinal Vaughan Schola to sing the Mass.

Many years ago, the Guest-of-Honour Prelate, while celebrating Mass before the dinner - at which he gave an interesting after-dinner speech - went on and on with what seemed an interminable homily. Consequently, given my fame for short and to-the-point homilies, I was persuaded to preach, from then on, the homily at every annual Mass.

Since 2018, when John Gibbs took over Chairman, apart from celebrating Mass in Westminster Cathedral Crypt prior to the Papal Knights Association committee meetings in the Lower Library along the Long Corridor, all I must do is preach that homily.

It is a challenge, a gentle challenge, to address the more-or-less same congregation. However, as the knights and dames tend to be of a certain age - an age where memories are not its strongest suite - I can, every three years or so, take the same theme for the same Gospel – and still get praised by the congregation as it walks toward dinner.

Until John took over, the Committee Meetings - preceded by mass - were held in the homes of - during my tenure, - Sir Harold Hood, Sir Paul Wright, Sir High Rossi and Sir Swynton Thomas.

To bring the Papal Knight Association into the centre of The Church, John made the Friday 5.30pm Cathedral mass ours; followed by - in 2018 - dinner in Cathedral Hall. However, that roll-our-own evening generated massive logistical problems. So, in 2019 the dinner was translated to The Horticultural Hall on Vincent Square.

There, having just prayed the Grace and before I had taken a mouthful of food, I noticed a commotion in the foyer just outside the dining room door. Bishop Michael Campbell, our Celebrant – who was due to give the after-dinner speech - had taken ill. Seeing the problem, I called out , “is there a doctor in the house?” There was. Instantly, he realised the problem. Michael, a diabetic, had not eaten anything since lunch. A quick intake of sugar and some water helped him recover. I went into the damp street, hailed a Taxi and took him home to St Augustine’ Presbytery, Hammersmith. Then home, hungry.

Due to Covid 19, in 2020 there was no Annual Mass.

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In the summer of 1985, Cardinal Basil Hume invited some hundred individuals - both young and not so young – interested in and committed to young people to a ‘youth provision blue-sky thinking weekend’ at the erstwhile diocesan All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney (ASPC). He wanted to tap into their ideas on how best to develop the Diocesan Youth and Young Adults provision. As I drove up its drive, I said to myself, “This place I do not like” – little knowing how events would pan out.

During one of the breakout sessions, Reg Dunkling, an Allen Hall Seminarian, and I, got into a huddle. We came up with a hybrid idea. Reg loved Lourdes. I valued retreats. Result? A Young Adults Retreat Pilgrimage to Lourdes. When I suggested to Father Basil that the

diocese could organise a Retreat Pilgrimage to Lourdes for young adults: no *malades* – as sick and disabled pilgrims are known in Lourdes - just Vith Formers and older, Father Basil said: ‘Good idea, Vlad. Please organise it’.

Reg knew Lourdes very well. I not at all. My learning curve had to be very steep. The time chosen was the Autumn Half-term holiday: last week in October. The benefit of this date was that it came at the end of the Lourdes ‘season’ hotels at bargain price, weather not too bad, the Lourdes Domaine still operational.

Gradually the Pilgrimage took shape. To generate a sense of solidarity, we would depart from Archbishop’s House, Ambrosden Avenue after the Sunday evening Cathedral Mass.

Until 1998, when John Osborne – at whose marriage I had officiated – gave me an Amstrad for my WDP organising, I had no computer. All had to be done by typewriter and fingers.

Bearing in mind individual requests and getting a gender balance, we - I and Berenice Roetheli - shaped the groups of ten by confecting pink and blue name-slips on the large table in Archbishop’s House Throne Room. Each group had its balanced number of genders. Ten seemed a handy number for control of discipline and discussions. In the event, it worked.

I learned how nick names can trip you up. Placing a Pat with a John in the Hotel – when Pat was in fact a girl – caused an extra bit of room arranging in October 1986.

That year, four groups lead by their Group Leaders boarded each one of the six Tangney Tours coaches. The Cardinal, Area Bishops, clergy, nurses, speakers and guests, took up the final ten seats.

As we drove down Vauxhall Bridge Road on our way to Dover, sitting next to the driver in the front coach, I suddenly felt my heart flutter. My dream at ASPC had become reality. We were on our way.

To every coach I had appointed a Coach Marshall, whose essential role – apart from making sure the DVDs we had brought were played - was to make sure all passengers were back on after every comfort stop on the AutoRoute services. As it turned out, during the ten years I ran the show, they had a 98% success rate. Chapeau!

Whenever one of the 2% Yapper had been left behind (no mobile phones in 86!) it took a long round-trip to pick him or her up – with the looming-possibility of missing the Ferry at Calais. A nightmare! No wonder I am bald!

YAP – as swiftly the pilgrimage became known – and its pilgrims became Yappers - left Lourdes Friday night, arriving Saturday morning at The Cathedral.

The shape of each day? Mass with a decent-length homily at the Grotto, in the City of the Poor or in a church on our one-day trip to Gavarnie. There, high up in the Pyrenees, some enjoyed donkey rides, some the red-hot crepe suzettes. One teatime, distracted by the antics of a lad who slipped into the stream, I burned my mouth.

At one of the Masses I preached - I can’t remember where - I said that “The Church is more a hospital for sinners than a museum of saints”. I was chuffed to hear Father Basil use that phrase (without quoting its source!) at a Cathedral Mass a few months later.

Sometime during the day, there was a talk by an inspiring speaker. When it ended, each Yapper was given a sheet with the questions to be discussed. After a prayerful-ten-minute-silence to give them a chance to ponder the questions, they took part in a thirty-minute group discussion - moderated by the Group leader, with a secretary appointed to take notes to feedback the ideas to Father Basil in a plenary session. Having heard all the inputs, Father Basil would then summarise the conclusions; his input – as always - recorded by Heather Crauford, his faithful amanuensis.

One evening, a couple of the coach drivers asked whether The Cardinal and I would like to see what it took to drive a coach. So off we went, Father Basil and I – to the coach park and spent a jolly half-hour or so driving – and reversing two coaches. On the way back to The Med we decided we were both happy not to be coach drivers.

Later in the day, there was a third event. Either a Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, renewal of Baptismal Promises, High Stations of the Cross or that Trip to Gavarnie. Finally, Evening Prayer: followed, on Thursday night, by a Social; with Groups, together with Clergy - of all ranks - performing their chosen specialty.

Initially, in the Autumn of '85 - there were priests who said that taking young people to Lourdes - without their time being occupied taking care of the sick - was a recipe for disaster. Thank God, they were wrong. By the end of the Millennium many of our schools had at least one Ex-Yapper on their RE Team or Staff.

The YAPS showed Father Basil that I got on well with young people and could launch and run a new initiative.

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In 1985, Sir Sigmund Sternberg – Sigi to his friends – who had been working hard in promoting inter-faith dialogue, was appointed a Papal Knight Commander of the Order of St. Gregory the Great (KCSG) by Pope John Paul II.

Sigi, delighting in the idea that he - a Jew - had a Catholic Chaplain, made me his close companion on many of his endeavours. He took me to the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICJ) conferences in Fribourg, 1987; Montreal 1988 and Lille 1989.

It was in Lille that a female delegate, a Professor at Tel Aviv University, could not believe I did not possess Jewish blood. “Well then, from where then you got your brain?” An unusual – and unique, some might even say racist – compliment.

When in 1988 Colin Luke – a school friend with whom I played in Clapham College 1st XI for three years - heard I was flying across ‘The Pond’ to Montreal, he invited me to take a ‘wee detour’ and stay with him for a week. Thus, it was, that I was able to explore Grand Cayman. It did not take long. In spite of its name, it’s not very big. However, it gave me a chance to swim with sting rays, experience the massive benefits of air conditioning and enjoy the taste of late-night barbecues of top-quality beef – with fine drinks.

I also learned about the legend how Grand Cayman became a tax haven. The story goes that it comes from the Wreck of the Ten Sail, when a British prince was supposedly involved in a shipwreck off the north coast of Grand Cayman. Luckily, a local spotted the shipwreck and swam to their help, rescuing the Prince and his crew. Since that day the Prince – the son of George III - declared that in gratitude for his help, the citizens of the country of the Cayman

Islands would never pay tax. *Ben trovato?* Absolutely. *Vero?* There is no written evidence to back up this myth.

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Sigi, one of its co-founders, invited me to join the Executive Committee of Three Faiths Forum. A role I enjoyed 1998- 2002. Thanks to her hosting The Three Faiths Forum receptions, I met HM The Queen on two occasions.

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In January 1989, as soon as he returned to Archbishop's House from his Christmas break at Hare Street and I had come up into his office to welcome him with the usual banalities and jokes about his time away, Father Basil suddenly said: "Have you a moment, Vlad." "For you, of course." And I sat down next his desk – right hand side.

The words he came up with etched themselves into me memory: "Vlad, we have to do something to help young people find God in their lives. I don't know what it is. But would you do it?"

Having been an Abbot, he knew how to butter people up to make sure he got his ways. So, he continued, "I can think of someone to run the Cathedral, the Seminary, the University Chaplaincy but I cannot think of anyone but you to do this." So, of course, I said "yes."

Father Basil then added, "I would love to have our own diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes. I am sure you could also organise our Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes." I said, "of course". At that time, Westminster was – with Brentwood and Plymouth dioceses – still a part of "The National" from which all other dioceses had hived themselves off years ago.

Basil asked me what I would need. I said a budget, a PA with an office in Archbishop's House and a car. Thanks to Paul Forsdick, head of Personnel, I soon had the use of a brand-new diocesan car: a Vauxhall Astra. The Pilgrimage Office - with my Secretary, Annette Keating - was allocated in what is now the Waiting Room opposite the Communications Office. My own "Young People's" office was in the basement; currently - 2020 - Brenda Robert's Chancery Office.

One morning, when I was talking with Annette in her office, Father Basil dashed in and closed the door. He did not wish to meet the visitor coming up the stairs from Reception. I left the room and came back when the coast was clear.

As ex-officio member of the Senate of Priests, I broadened and deepened my knowledge of Westminster Diocese.

I started regularly to attend Father Basil's 'Saturday evenings with young people' in Archbishop's house. In these, he was in his element – and very patient. He just smiled when, having asked if there were any questions, a young man blurted out, "Why doesn't the Church listen to young people?" His mate muttered something like, "you wally. The Cardinal is listening to you!"

Thanks to his time as Ampleforth Abbot, Basil Hume, keen to develop a sense of warm community around the Cathedral complex, made sure that A/B House was accessible from Clergy House. Cathedral Chaplains could come to see him or use ABH Meeting Rooms. In those days, the Finance Office was on Ground Floor as all five Area Bishops lived in - and had their offices – in their Area.

I was welcome at Archbishop's House – had a front-door key – and became a part of Basil's household: watching TV - with an occasional drink. [Basil enjoyed his Trinity: Gin and dry and sweet Vermouth.]

I enjoyed staying with him in his office. He might read out a lecture or a homily he had to give and ask for my thoughts. One of the most inspiring and touching experiences was watching Father Basil and Mgr. George Leonard - Personal Assistant for Non-Diocesan Affairs, 1978-84; Director for Communications for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW)1984-88 - work.

Basil would sketch out his ideas. George would withdraw and soon reappear with a text. George knew Basil so well, that only a word or two would be changed. It felt a privilege to witness how two minds that had got to know each other well could resonate to work so effortlessly, economically and effectively.

After a serious contribution to a debate, as he opened his letters – which personally he always did as he did not want anyone to sanitise the truth for his benefit – he would say that, as he had been attacked by both wings of the Church – he had probably got it right. “My role is to throw no one out; but to keep everyone in.” “Those in front shout ‘faster’, those behind ‘slow down’, my task is to reflect on how I can keep them all together.”

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Therefore, until 2004 when Cardinal Cormac decided to place youth provision under The Agency for Evangelisation – not only ‘Episcopal Vicar for Young People’ soon changed to ‘Chaplain to Young People’ [My choice of title. Basil agreed that “Young People’ = youth (up to 16) + Young Adults (16-27)]”, but Diocesan Director of Pilgrimages as well as Director of School Chaplains. Once ‘Director of All Saints Pastoral Centre’ was added in 1991, I had an embarrassing number of entries in the Diocesan Yearbook.

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Back to our Lourdes Pilgrimage. To learn the ropes, I booked myself onto “The National” and – thanks to their Director Stephen Macklow-Smith - the “OMV- Order of Malta Volunteers” pilgrimages to Lourdes that year. The National travelled to Lourdes by chartered train – carriages that had been used in the Great War to transport the wounded. That year, the SNCF forgot there was this charter train travelling overnight and as there were planned engineering works on the line, we woke up in Paris, at *Gare Austerlitz*. “Isn't that a concentration Camp?” one of the pilgrims enquired. Due to the hold up, we arrived late in Lourdes and all missed our Sunday Mass. (4)

The wife of Mark Barragry – a past pupil of mine at CVMS, was a design artist, very happy to - pro-bono - design our Pilgrim Badge based on Basil Hume's motto, *pax inter spinas*. [Peace though surrounded by thorns.]

Having done a great job, on the advice of John Tangney, our Tour Operator, we had the badges produced in the Philippines.

As several parishes had been running their own pilgrimages with their own events, I decided to market our diocesan as a Westminster Federated Pilgrimage. Parishes would come together just for the Mass, the Blessed Sacrament and Torchlight processions. The rest of the day was up to each parish to arrange.

In Lourdes, around the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, 11th February, the Lourdes authorities organise for the pilgrimage directors and the *Hospitalities* to 'Le Planning'. At this, the Rector of The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes or 'the Domaine' - as it is most commonly known -finalises the shape of the proposals they had sent months before.

An eye opener. Size – and Cardinals matter. The bigger the pilgrimage and the more senior – or just created - a Cardinal, gives a pilgrimage priority in leading the processions and getting their requested timetable approved. Some dioceses – no names, no pack drill – enhance their real number [Shades of President Trump's alternative truths] to improve their priority.

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On May 1st, 1990, I celebrated my mother's 80th birthday with a Westminster cathedral mass. The parabola of life was bringing her slowly but inexorably down to the ground. We remembered how I used to be called *dadilinek*; how I was rewarded with some chocolate in '44 for learning to pronounce 'Ř' by playing with my tongue between 'R' and 'Z' [a sort of

(4) During the Papal Mass at The World Youth Day in Czestochowa – 1991, the block of some 150 priests where I was situated, though given the host, never received the chalice so those 150 masses were technically, if not invalid, certainly illicit. [I am NOT a Canon Lawyer.] Oh, the price of striving to be devout!

cross between 'sh' and 'j' as in 'jelly] and how, very early on, all my nouns were feminine as daddy was away most of the week in Prague.

++++

Given that in 1990 ours was our first - and we had the Cardinal - we got everything I requested.

To cut a long story short, travelling by bus, train – a few cars - and plane, Westminster Diocese arrived in Lourdes – in the last week in July – with over 1,300 pilgrims. Just before the start of our first Mass, chief-celebrant The Cardinal, I felt a surge of joy and pride. "Without me, these would not be here." Now Westminster had two pilgrimages to Lourdes: WDP in July, YAP in October.

Though it meant a lengthy walk to The Grotto, Uncle George was happy to stay at the *Hôtel Méditerranée* that had hosted YAP. While I ran the show, that was our HQ, where all the clergy met every day to sort out any issues. There we were very warmly welcome and looked

after admirably. Every evening as I approached the Bar, the barman – I cannot image why – produced a glass of Armagnac.

Our Pilgrims were accommodated in some thirty hotels. To keep them informed and create a sense of community, Berenice Roetheli – every year - produced and distributed a daily Newsletter. A labour of love that was hugely appreciated.

To avoid the National feeling under threat, we decided that for the first three years we would take no Hospital *Malades*, just those who could - with help – be adequately accommodated in hotels.

To look after them, I formed - and we trained - a team of helpers we called Red Caps - as, to identify themselves, they would wear Red baseball caps emblazoned with the Pilgrimage logo.

The following year, there were many young people - nothing to do with Westminster - wearing red caps. To avoid our *malades* asking strangers for help, the next year, still called Red Caps, we issued them with red tabards – carrying the Diocesan Coat of Arms back and front.

I was able to repay the OMV for hosting my educational trip. In the past they were not recognised as a bona fide pilgrimage and thus did not have a seat at *Le Planning*. I took them under our wing. For a few years they were the “Westminster Young”. Eventually, as the authorities began to trust me [trust takes time to grow!] I was able to convince The Rector that though - in the evenings - they did indeed celebrate hard, at the Cafe des Brancardiers – known by us Brits as The Bronx - OMV were outstanding in the care and commitment to their *malades*; well worthy of being auto-cephalic. Stephen got his seat at *Le Planning*.

In 1993, we started taking hospital *malades*. We needed wheelchairs. Providentially, Nick Gompels – husband of Barbara, sister of Anne Moloney and Fiona [Now Bogle] who had been Founder-Yappers – ran a company in Wiltshire supplying wheelchairs. These he offered us at cost price: just £100 each. People were happy to sponsor these. Within a couple of years, we had 100 – stored, when not in use, in a cellar of the Alba Hotel.

Once we had hospital *malades*, it was vital to set up a fund-raising committee. We used to meet at 27 Argyll Road, the home of the Hickman family. Catherine – happy to be called Cath, NEVER Cathy! – the niece of Basil Hume – Uncle George to the family. Recitals, concerts, garden parties, sponsored walks – as well as me convincing wealthy folk to use their money well – raised thousands of pounds every year.

I will never forget the look on the face of a recently graduated photographer who had spent the afternoon taking pictures on a fund-raiser around Hyde Park finding out - when she opened her camera to take out the film – that was not there. I suspect for the rest of her career she will never repeat that mistake of neglecting to slip in a roll.

As John Tangney had looked after YAP, I decided to appoint Tangney Tours [TT] as our Tour Operator. Though reliable – and excellent whenever there was an emergency - TT were pricey – their costs accelerating year on year. Parish priests were becoming unhappy. One or two decided to travel on their own – with their own smaller tour operator.

So, naively, I decided I would give it a try to go it alone. To that end - and it took a lot of time and meetings – I obtained an ATOL license. However, as it turned out to be impossible to fill all the empty legs – the return flights from Lourdes - the endeavour did not turn out to be economical. There being no competition for our size of pilgrimage, we had to revert to TT. C'est la vie.

How life changes. Not always for the better. Until 9/11, airport security was user-friendly. No problem for a Pilgrimage Director to walk airside to a plane. We were able to create a warm, homely feel to loading the *malades* onto - and off – the planes. Alas, no more.

To entertain the *malades* and their helpers at the End of Pilgrimage Party, Paul Leonard – an exceedingly fine guitarist – and I, got together.

Here are the words of our duet with Paul on the guitar and me, in my straw hat pulled down over my eyes, moving in a mysterious, threatening way around the floor!

It was part Vlad and part Elvis based on his song “Trouble”

“If you’re looking for trouble you’ve come to the right place
If you’re looking for trouble then look right in his face
He was born standing up and talking back
Like all the really hard men he is always dressed in black

CHORUS. Because he’s evil
You mess with him he’ll make you sad
Oh yes he’s evil
So don’t you mess around with Vlad

He never looked for trouble but he never ran
Don’t take no orders from no kind of man
He’s only made of flesh skin and bone
But if you’re gonna start a rumble don’t you try it on your own

CHORUS. Because he’s evil etc.

When reporting for duty you better not be late
If you’re pushing those wheelchairs don’t forget the brake
And if you’ve washed down those bathrooms and left the slightest smell of pee
The man you’ll have to deal with is - Monsignor V!

CHORUS. And he is evil etc,

a hardy – and very popular - annual for many years.
Those were the days, my friend!

++++ In 1993 I started to take fifth form [year 11] and upper sixth annual retreats at St Mary's School, Ascot. Subsequently, I have officiated at several weddings of past pupils of St Mary's. One of my better ploys was to encourage Basil Hume to appoint Father Dermot as its school's chaplain. My last retreats there were in 2012; given the London Games, that year I was Guest of Honour and Giver of Prizes at its Open Day.

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During Father Basil's lifetime, the Pilgrimage office was in Archbishop's House. Soon, I was invited to watch with him BBC Television's 'Dad's Army' and 'Allo, Allo'! In addition, of course, sports.

Whenever Basil and his Private Secretary were out of town, I was given the role of Nun-Sitter and stayed the night at ABH. Ever since the house had been burgled, the sisters were nervous being alone in the house at night.

DOK - as the Duchess of Kent was known by the Lourdes Pilgrimage that she attended while Cardinal Basil was around – was very keen on Father Basil and would decorate his office for Christmas – frequently became a part of the Sunday congregation.

As honorary member of Basil's family, I had been put in charge of looking after the younger members at Basil's 'whole-family Christmas parties.' For me, Advent 1998 felt ominous – and uncomfortable. During that Family Celebration at ABH, I heard – for the first time – Uncle George - as Father Basil was always called by his family - ask his grandniece Caroline Hickman to put out her cigarette. He muttered that the smoke made him feel uncomfortable. Maybe, not being in top form myself, I sensed it sinister. He might be unwell. It turned out he was. Concerned, I left that celebration early and drove back to All Saints Pastoral Centre – my home from 1991 to 2011. I felt increasingly unwell. Next day I was *hors de combat*. Flu. Genuine flu. For three days I was unable to leave my bed.

Having recovered in time for Christmas, in January, Father Basil asked me to take on the role of Chaplain, Ascent Movement, 1999-2003. In Lent, he would be diagnosed with cancer which, he wrote, was not in its early stages. Before he had made the fact public, he contacted a few his Ampleforth Monks. One burst into tears. Another said "You lucky bastard. You're going to get there before me." By the end of 17th June 1999, he was dead. Before he was taken away at St John and Elizabeth Hospital, I was able to kiss his still warm forehead.

++++

In 1999, to help me cope with my grief, I did two things.

Even before Basil died – and of course keeping schtum - I approached Robert Benson. He agreed to fund my setting up of 'The Friends of Bethlehem University' as a registered charity and become a Trustee. I had heard that the university were planning to launch a Religious

Studies Department. I wanted that to be “The Cardinal Basil Hume Religious Department” so that his name would be there, where it all had begun two thousand years ago.

Over time – and much effort and generosity from my friends, allies-in-life and contacts - by 2017 we managed to raise the \$500,000 that would fund that chair of Religious Studies in perpetuity. Having achieved my aim, in 2017 I resigned as Trustee.

Driving to Robert’s flat and staying overnight in Folkestone was always a joy even though, for the last years of his life Robert, who had lost the use of his legs, was unable to stand. To be taken up to bed, he had to be lifted out of his chair. Very brave, never complaining. A great and good man.

Secondly, I set up and ran the ‘Medical 3 Faiths Forum’ in Vaughan House. The experience reinforced my conviction that for there to be peace among different faith-traditions, people needed to realise – and to admit - that there is clear water between objective reality and subjective perceptions.

After some three years, we ran out of topics to discuss and that group of doctors - Jews, Muslims, C of E and RCs - went their separate ways. Fascinating to see how views on topics from abortions, organ transplants and plastic surgery differed – and on topics such as euthanasia, they coalesced.

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Jeanne Wilkins, the best friend of Father Basil’s sister Madeleine, married to John Hunt, shared my birthday. The four of us celebrated our twin birthdays at The Hurlingham Club, Fulham . This always offered us a free glass of celebratory bubbly - until first John - we were down to three - and then Madeleine died. Jeanne and I continued the tradition while she was still physically fit enough.

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We suffered a spate of break-ins emptying collection boxes. To put a stop to that, I and the Chief Superintendent at Horseferry Road Police Station who was RC, sat out a number of nights in the Cathedral. Eventually, we caught the culprit as he came in via a window he had broken.

Stage 2. Summer 1989 -99

On the site where Vaughan House now stands, there used to be a Victorian double-garage below a flat, where - in the days before it was part of the Private Secretary’s role to drive the Archbishop to his engagements - the Cardinal’s chauffeur used to live. In 1989, Harry Murphy, who while living in the flat had worked as Receptionist at Archbishop House, retired. The building stood vacant.

For reasons no one could fathom, it was a listed building. Of no great architectural merit, it had seen better days. After complex and at times, contentious discussions with the government department responsible, the building was delisted, and a planning application drawn up and submitted for approval.

There were objections raised almost immediately by several residents in Morpeth Terrace, led by Lavender, Chris Patten's wife. They claimed that the proposed building would be too high, they would be over-looked.

Given this hold-up, I went to Father Basil and said that to avoid squatters moving in – whom he would find very hard to shift - he had to get someone to live in the Garage Flat. He replied, “Why not you?” So, in I moved. I called it ‘The Hermitage’. I was tickled pink to live in - apart from Buckingham Palace - the only detached house in the area.

The flat needed a bit of attention: a couple of sockets for my computer and one in the bathroom for my shaver. However, the electrician said it would be far cheaper to buy a cordless shaver than to wire up the bathroom. So, with diocesan funds, a cordless shaver I bought – and still use.

Providentially, a member of the Cathedral congregation was working in the government office that dealt with such applications and became aware that letters, in substantial numbers, were being sent to ministers, objecting to the planning proposals.

This was mentioned in the course of a conversation with Father Basil who, to his great credit, took the information straight to John Gibbs, Financial Secretary. Though somewhat reluctant to take action, given that he had already had lengthy discussions with all those who would have had an interest in the proposals, John did the job. Friends of The Cathedral and local parishioners - including the late, great Sir George Solti - were encouraged to write to the department in support of the proposals.

Whether these letters of support for the new-build offices for the diocesan administration proposals helped the decision is an unknown quantity, but the application - though with modifications – was approved. To lower the skyline, the lift does not go up to the top, third floor; good for exercising those who work up there. (As I did, 2011-19). So, now, instead of the scruffy garage, its flat and car park - which is now below the Choir School playground - the Diocese has a rather splendid building: Vaughan House – opened and blessed in 1993.

Whenever, for the first time I meet people there for spiritual guidance/mentoring, confessions and marriage preparations, I explain that it is Westminster Diocese’s Whitehall; housing Caritas, communications, data protection, education, finance, human resources, ICT, inter-faith, metropolitan tribunal, parish support team, safeguarding services, sport – that’s me - and the Agency for Evangelisation.

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My role as Diocesan Director World Youth Days (WYD) took me to Czestochowa, 1991 where – having been warned of shortages, we took our own toilet paper and bottled water - I experienced palpable poverty. Being a pessimist in detail, I can be an optimist in outcome.

Providentially I checked all the telephone numbers I had received in Poland – in case parents needed to contact their children. None of the numbers worked. I made enquiries and eventually we obtained the real deal.

Studz, given his family's Polish background, came with Father Basil and some 45 young people on the coach across Germany to Czestochowa.

Later, he invited me to Santiago de Compostela, introduced me to the von Hurter Family – who became great friends and I their Family Chaplain - and Marcia Soldatos, who was such a great help when I was setting up a younger non-residential sibling of SPEC in Wapping, East London. Hence its name SPECeast. (More on this below)

That WYD is memorable for many things. The most powerful-unforgettable experience was our visit to Auschwitz, the largest of the German Nazi concentration-extermination centres, where some 1.1 million men, women and children - mainly Jews - lost their lives.

We slept on a school hall floor. Toilet doors we held closed by a piece of string wound round a nail in the door frame. Etched into me memory was seeing – while waiting for the groups of four to arrive back to the coach before we departed for home - a car whose brakes must have been totally worn, gliding slowly down the slope until, having run gently into the car ahead, it stopped. It seemed a metaphor for the end of Polish communism.

Inspired by the Israeli army's methods, I had split our young people into groups of four – and told them to always stay together. I still feel the sigh of relief when – just after seeing that car - they all returned safely, and our coach could pull out of Czestochowa on our way back to Blighty.

1993 World Youth Day (WYD) was held in Denver, Colorado. With its 'mile high stadium' it took a while to get acclimatised. After our first restaurant meal together, Fr Pat Browne and I decided to share one plate; half a portion was far more than enough. No wonder there were so many massive buttocks wandering around the place.

It was there that I came up against the extreme right wing, pro-life, US Catholics. Straight after Father Basil had given his 40-minute lecture, two of them came up and growled "Why did you not speak up about pro-life, Cardinal?" "But I did," replied Father Basil "Yes! But you mentioned it only four times!"

In 1997, Journée Mondiale de la Jeunesse (JMJ) was held in Paris. The World Youth Day authorities expected a low number to attend the Papal Mass. In the event, twice the number expected turned up at Longchamp, the Paris horse racetrack. Overnight, toilets overflowed and the group from Birmingham Diocese had to leave before the final Mass to get cleaned up. (1)

As our diocesan contingent was boarding our two coaches, we realised that we were one lad short. Panic. Making sure the young people stayed with the coaches, my adult helpers fanned out. We went to various possible places. I even phoned Jarmila asking her to telephone the JMJ offices. Finally, our lost lad turned up. Driving fast, we just arrived in time to board the Calais- Dover Ferry before the gates were closed.

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Meanwhile, 'back at the ranch'. I had spent a couple of years hunting round the diocese for a home for my dream of centre for young people. To "help young people find God in their lives" I wanted to set up a centre that would replicate – in some way – the YAP experiences at Lourdes: a residential peer-education centre where young people could learn how to

acquire the virtues, they would need to make the best fist of their lives; to fulfil their God-given potential.

Then in 1991 Father Basil told me that John Gibbs had informed him that the VMM's - Volunteer Missionary Movement's - lease at All Saints, London Colney, was going to run out that Summer; perhaps that building could do the trick.

- (1) Rome, 2000 WYD over-compensated with toilets that stretched out into the distance. To keep us cool, there were many gentle showers we could walk through on our way around.

So, off I went to visit them. I could see the possibilities of St Raphael, originally built as an orphanage in 1908 by the Church of England All Saints Sisters of the Poor who had moved out from London in 1901. The Diocese acquired the site in 1973. Every Remembrance Sunday, as after Mass, we went there to pray for deceased servicemen and women at a memorial in the Centre's cemetery, I was reminded of the poignancy the sisters must have felt as on that Memorial Stone we read out the more than dozen names of their charges who had perished in The Great War.

When I reported my positive view to Father Basil, he said 'fine' and appointed me 'Director of All Saints'. He added that he was sure I could sort out the problem with the management of All Saints. No longer needed to house sit The Hermitage, I moved to ASPC.

Pamela Hill, born in 1920, wanted to come to my Masses. She asked me if she could stay as a paying guest at ASPC until she found a flat nearby. Some four months later, she moved into a ground floor flat in The Dell, Radlett; an eight-minute drive from All Saints. We kept in close touch until in 2016 she died. I took her funeral. Hector Grant, her nephew, his wife and I buried her at the East Finchley Cemetery.

As its Director, All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney became my home from 1991-2011: the longest spell I have ever spent anywhere.

However, I needed a name for this peer-education centre. One morning, lying on my bed in The Turner Suite – the name of the best guest-suite at ASPC where I was lodged until my permanent accommodation became available - I stared at the large mirror there on the wall. "That's it! It will be The Mirror Centre. Young people will be able to look at themselves and reflect on their lives."

However, Mirror is the name of a newspaper. Perhaps a Latin name? *Speculum Vitae* – remembering my Latin - it would be a mirror of and to life. Too long.

Then, let us call it the SPEC centre. On spec, come to SPEC.

Ah, and it will be a

Spiritual Peer Educational Centre

Supporting Pre-evangelisation, Evangelisation and Catechises.

Cool!

In 1991, I had invited Sheila O'Donnell, a director of the Upper Room Community in St Albans, to give one of keynote talks on our October YAP. The evening after her talk, having taken her to the bar for a well-deserved drink at Hotel *Méditerranée* – The Med, as we called it - that YAP always used, she asked me what I was up to. I said that I was working on setting up a residential retreat centre for young people.

What a wonderful surprise when she replied that her sister Sandra - and her husband David Satchell - had been talking of giving up working in The City to run a retreat centre for young people.

Having obtained their contacts from Sheila, on Monday late afternoon I drove to their Old Hatfield home. By Thursday of that week, they had signed a contract with the diocese.

From the Diocesan Archives I obtained copies the architectural plans of St Raphael – the name of the building that was to become SPEC. With David and Sandra, we started to work out what needed to be done to bring the building up to spec.

The draconian planning officer for St Albans, Andrew Robley, who had acquired – and as I discovered, rightly – a reputation of not allowing any changes to older buildings, blocked planning consent for an essential ground-floor toilet block at SPEC.

However, I had befriended St Alban's Councilors Dreda Gordon, Chris Flynn and Malcolm Macmillan, showed them around SPEC and explained our predicament. Consequently, while attending our second appeal meeting, I heard Malcolm say something like, "as a rule we do not override the advice from our officers. However, in this case, there is a serious pastoral need and so we will approve the planning petition." We got our toilet block.

To stay focused on the reality of peer-education, I decided never to attend national - or international - youth conferences. I suspect I was nudged to make this choice by - when I was still at The Cathedral – hearing how an outstanding Headmaster spent so much time lecturing around the world on how to make a school great, that due to his frequent absences, his school (which shall remain nameless) went down the chute. Years earlier I had read somewhere that 'the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing'. To this commitment I remained faithful while I was able to work with young people in our diocese.

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In 1992, as I wanted to concentrate on SPEC and give him a chance to take on new responsibilities, I handed YAP over to Fr. Reg Dunkling. A BIG mistake. After a couple of less-than-glorious YAPS, the initiative died.

I did not tell him that the night before every pilgrimage – both YAP and Diocesan; I had nightmares – which gradually became firm friends. I would be walking down corridors, around corners, up and down stairs – without bannisters – that ended in thin air; or a cul de sac. They may have been fortresses or castles and strange houses where corridors turned into tunnels and I was forced to crawl along crumbling roofs and battlements – until suddenly I awoke. Sweating.

Eventually they became like horror movies I had seen before. I realised they expressed the panic in my heart. It meant I would have enough adrenaline to do my job. It is only now that I am no longer responsible for the pilgrimages that I can calmly admit the facts.

Recalling the Hall of Mirrors in Prague, I obtained from hotels that were re-furbishing, dozens of mirrors. In the entrance to SPEC, I placed two of there that were almost parallel to each other. Placing their feet on the markers provided, guests, looking sideways, could see dozens of their heads – gradually fading round a bend. I placed them there to prod/nudge our guests into reflecting on how many complex characters there are within each one of us.

Ahead, there were two mirrors; one above the other, set slightly at an angle so the body and arms seem as though cut and pasted, had slipped sideways. As our visitor walked forwards, the slippage shrunk until, right up close, it disappeared. With these visuals, there was my audio voice. “Here in SPEC, as you move forward, to can pull yourself together and become more as God would like you to be. Free.”

In SPEC, I placed a copy of Hereford Cathedral’s *Mappa Mundi* to challenge our young guests as to what was at the centre of their life. I placed a picture of the Rosetta Stone to help young people think about communication and understanding others. I hung large old maps of the world with the questions, “Are you as you thought you were? Or do you see yourself as you really are?”

John Noulton - who had moved on from The Ministry of Transport to become Eurotunnel's director of public affairs – presented me with an airborne photo of the English entrance to the Channel Tunnel – with France in the clear distance. “Though separated by the marine obstacle (as Hitler discovered) if you go deep enough you can make contact.”

I placed a whole set of national flags with the text “Though their flags are the same size, how different the land mass, mineral wealth and climate of each.” Who knows the size of a heart – and the gifts within – behind a face that seems about the same size as yours.

Many of our young guests – and even Team – had lived all their lives in conurbations. Taking them for a night hike to see the stars was an eye opener. How often little hands would grip my arm as they saw how many stars there were above. Cleo from East London, one of the Team who later came back to run SPECeast, admitted that it was at SPEC that – aged seventeen - she had seen her first ever sunset.

John Gibbs, the Diocesan Financial Secretary had been a name at Lloyd’s. Due to its collapse in the early 90s, he had to sell his large Holland Park House. He very generously offered me furniture that was surplus to requirements as he moved to a smaller – still very nice! - home.

Thanks to Toni Barry - at whose Cathedral wedding I had officiated - who knew the owner, I was able to borrow a horsebox and so - at no extra cost - bring all those gifts to SPEC.

The nineties were for me akin to the sixties: blissful, creative, heady. These were the decades of the Fat Cows. Each was to be followed by very thin ones. [Gen 41, 1-4]

The early years were painful. I soon learned what Father Basil meant when he said he was sure I could sort-out the All-Saints management problems. They were of his making.

Father Basil had asked Fr Jim Brand to take on All Saints Pastoral Centre. Jim said, ok, on condition he would not have to do any admin work. So, Bob Newman-Knott was employed as Administrative Director, Jim continuing as Pastoral Director. Given the fact that he had employed Bob, Bob was prepared to obey his wishes.

However as soon as Jim departed to take on the parish of Our Lady and St Michael, Garston, in 1990, things changed. Bob ignored any wishes from Fr Michael Munnelly, the next Pastoral Director. Then, when Michael asked to be moved and went off to South Africa for a sabbatical, his successor, Joe - his full name was Lance Joseph Boward who, like Endeavour in Morse NEVER used his first Christian name – fared no better. Total breakdown in communication.

So, Errol Yates and Fr Guy Sawyer were appointed as a Management Committee: the only conduit of communication between Bob and the Pastoral Directors. After a couple of years at the job – Joe suffered a nervous breakdown. [I suspect this may have contributed to the decision taken by Basil and John Gibbs to offer me St Raphael's as a base for SPEC.]

It soon became crystal-clear that Bob was not at all pleased when Basil appointed me overall Director and thus his line-manager. Nor did he like the idea that lots of young people would be running around the grounds.

Once I had read the situation, I looked around the buildings and grounds for my new home. For the sake of my sanity, and not to get under the feet of Sandra and David as they ran SPEC, I decided I would live in the bungalow between The Main House and SPEC. I would be the bridge between Main House and SPEC. The decision turned out to have been sound.

Negative, conservative in the worst possible way, (it took me ages – and I had to buy it myself – to allow me to install a fax machine in Bob's office), resenting the presence of SPEC and thus children running around, I had to get Bob to leave. Eventually, in 1995, I managed it. Bob departed – to run a restaurant – with his male partner. As I do not enjoy confrontations, it was one of the most uncomfortable tasks I have had to do.

We were very blessed with Bob' successor, Alan Johnstone. What a difference! Positive, committed, a great team-worker I could trust. Alan enabled me to concentrate on working with young people – and my other roles. One of my life's strategy principles is “never do anything others can do, then I am free to do things they cannot.”

Alan organised our Christmas parties for the 'lonely oldies'. The food, drink and entertainments in the Great Hall were a massive success.

Alan persuaded me to do my bit. Not being able to sing, I used to tell a couple of 'funnies' – which became an appreciated annual staple. They were tied together by an unmentioned word.

The first was the “A cow eats grass. There are two possibilities. It either produces milk or it does not. If it does, there is no problem. If it does not, there are two possibilities. It off loads the product on the path or it does not. If it does not, there is no problem. If it does, there are two possibilities. You walk along that path, or you do not. If you do not, there is no problem. If you do, there are two possibilities. You either see it or you do not. If you do, there is no problem. If you don't, there are two possibilities. You either step on it or you do not. If you don't, there is no problem. If you do, there are two possibilities. You are either wearing boots

are you are not. If you are, there's no problem. If you are not, then a problem you certainly do have."

And,

"Imagine a freezing winter morning. A young woman passing through a kissing-gate spots an almost frozen bird sitting on one of the shutting posts.

On the other side of the gate there are cows. One has just moved on leaving a fine steaming deposit behind. The woman gently picks up the bird, walks towards the steaming pat, uses the heel of her right boot to create a doughnut, places the bird in its warm centre and walks on her way. The bird, as it starts to thaw out, begins to sing. A fox, passing by, hears the sound, comes forward and eats the bird.

Three lessons. Not everyone who puts you in it is an enemy. Not everyone who takes you out is a friend and when you are in it, stay shtum. Don't make a sound."

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One Christmas Eve, a lady tripped, broke an ankle and was taken to Watford General Hospital. Naively, on Boxing Day, I decided to visit her. Not having inquired whether Watford were playing at home – and their ground is next to the hospital – resulted in my sitting in the car for some 25 minutes before the last fans had entered the ground and the street was clear.

++++

I wanted David and Sandra to have operational independence. I would meet with them twice a year for an overnight at Hare Street – the Cardinal's country house – to agree on strategy. Just before the start of the academic years, once that year's team of SPEC Volunteers had arrived, I would drive up to Snowdonia to celebrate Mass and share with them my vision. I would leave Sandra to get them to underwrite the SPEC ethics and behavioural boundaries. It worked. No regrettable liaisons ever developed.

Thanks to the efforts of the SPEC Team - and the ASPC maintenance manager Steve Blackman - we managed to keep the buildings in tip-top shape. The thousands of young guests who passed through SPEC sensed they were respected. In turn, they respected the buildings. In all those years of its operation, SPEC was graffiti free.

Whenever required to celebrate Mass, hear confessions or invited to give a talk, Sandra - who ran the Team and its operations and David – in charge of the Office and Admin - were like the Master of Ceremonies at The Cathedral: in control – even when Mass was celebrated by The Cardinal.

In 1992, thanks to DIY skills honed over many years, I was able to wire up the turret at the top of the SPEC main building so that, as they came back from their night-hikes to see the stars, its residents could see it from afar.

Thanks to Julian Barron, the owner of a picture gallery – and a picture re-framer, who over the years supplied me scores of fine frames - I was able to make sure that all of the almost hundred bedrooms at ASPC had not only a crucifix but also one religious and one bucolic/ idyllic picture on its walls. Framing those pictures helped me stay creative - rather than bibulous – on many an evening.

To give the Main House guests something to do on the Days of Prayer I preached, I created a Garden Walk. On the paper they were given, was a series of questions; e.g “As you look at the front of the Main House, how many millions of years ago were the stones you see formed? What might that tree have witnessed over its lifetime? What might the pilgrims who stopped at this moated chapel - whose foundations you can see - have thought and prayed?

Typically, whenever I drove down from London Colney to Victoria - at least once a week - and went up to Father Basil’s office, he would greet me with “What intelligence from the north do you bring me?”

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It may have been 1994 or 95 that Frederick - Freddie - Forsyth’s wife Sandy, then living at Birch Green, Hertfordshire, asked our mutual friend Annunziata Asquith whether she knew a user-friendly priest who would come and exorcise one of the buildings on their estate as she felt uncomfortable there. So, I came. I did the job. Sandy was pleased. I kept in touch with Freddie and Sandy - as well as their fine wine cellar - after they moved to Seer Green, Buckinghamshire.

Freddie was full of great stories that had shaped his life. One that sticks in my mind was how at a reception in London, a man came up to him and said something like, “You owe me your life. When in Biafra I had you in my sniper sights, I decided not to pull the trigger,” made my life feel rather safe and flat; without all those peaks and troughs Freddie had passed through.

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In 1995, I launched Bright Lights (BL) a residential long-weekend festival for Young Adults set in the fields around SPEC. With liturgies, music and much more - to which we invited super speakers such as David Alton, Anthony Towey, Sheila Cassidy and Malcolm McMahon. Thanks to my role as Chaplain to The Knights of St Columba – Province 29 – I was able to recruit its members to help with security. After ASPC had been sold, BL was transferred to Aylesford Priory and – thanks to Sandra Satchell who is, still in 2020 responsible for Young People Provision in Birmingham Diocese - it is now hosted at Alton Castle.

SPEC was thriving. Occupancy high. However, there was a problem, especially at mealtimes. Primary school children did not sit well with sixth formers. I needed to find a solution.

The bereavement-loss of my sister and mother, galvanised me to work on LOFT@SPEC – a centre for 9-15year olds.

There was a large loft in the Main House above the kitchen. To convert that into accommodation, I had to work on obtaining Planning Consent. Though, as Andrew Robley was still smarting from his earlier defeat, this second Consent was trickier than the first. However, in the end, we got there.

Thanks to my membership of The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem I had befriended Gerald Murphy, an architect. Having shown him around and put him in the picture, I invited him to work out a scheme and with it a budget.

We needed just the funding. At that time the National Lottery had funds allocated to Young People. However, a bit of research showed that to obtain those funds, our application had to be spot on; using the right vocabulary. That pointed me in the direction of a gent who had worked at the Lottery and was now a consultant writing – at a price – those applications. The best £150 I ever spent.

I applied and obtained a National Lottery Grant of just under £200,000. Thanks to money left to me in the will of a lady I had been looking after for years, I added my own £50k. To cut a long construction story short, I was able to invite Basil Hume to bless LOFT@SPEC in 1998.

On the door to the LOFT@SPEC chapel there is a little photograph of a young boy cutting a ribbon as LOFT opened its doors and started to work with primary school aged children. I loved it.

It reminded me of what it took to get to that point in my life. Whenever I saw it, I thanked God, my friends and lists. To achieve anything in life, I learned the value of both Love and Lists: commitment and competence.

The SPEC experience showed that whilst a head may be educated in a classroom, for the heart to be converted and committed to God and thus the best there is in the world, a stay in a suitable place together with one's peer-group with appropriate supervision could be immensely more effective.

Prevention is far better than cure. Rather than allowing the young to become trapped in the nightmare of personal despair – and its effects of drugs, alcohol abuse and wasted lives – SPEC, complementing the work of schools and other agencies, offered a way towards an authentic sense of identity, values and roles in society, helping the young to discover answers to their underlying questions of Who am I? What am I - What is anything worth? Why am I here, to do what with myself? In a word: a helping hand to self-sufficiency, even excellence.

By the time the diocese closed it in 2011, SPEC and Loft were interfacing with some 14,000 young people a year - with another 6,000 on School Missions.

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Though the 1960s were bliss, no decade is without its pain. In 1967, aged 21, while being operated on a brain tumour, Johnny – my young brother born 1945 - died. The nineties – though delightful - were not wall-to-wall sunshine. In 1995, on the 20th of December, Georgie – my younger sister born in 1941 – eventually, thanks to a benign (I ask you) brain tumour - died. I remember her saying sometime in October, “Thank goodness I have had plenty of time to get rid of anything embarrassing in my drawers.”

When she was 49 years old, Georgie found it increasingly hard to swallow. Diagnosed with a brain tumour, the same sort that had killed Johnny when he was 21, for the doctors the penny dropped. Von Hippel-Lindau Syndrome was consistent with appearances of benign tumours in people, aged between 21 and 50.

Georgie's final months lasted longer than the palliative care prognosis had predicted. However, they kept her in St Christopher's. It was there I experienced the most sensitive and beautiful nursing I have ever soon; even better than the one Bishop Jim O'Brien - who resided at The ASPC Gate House [and kept bees] - received in the ITU at Hemel Hempstead Hospital from that Serbian nurse. (10)

Then, I suspect in part due to the loss of her second child, my mother died on February 10th, 1996. At the time, I was in Lourdes on *Le Planning*. That Saturday, I woke up feeling as though I had been run over by a bus.

(10) Bishop Jim – as he affectionately known - was responsible for the Hertfordshire Area of the Diocese. Until Cormac scrapped the Areas, its area office was based in St Anne's a building attached to the west side of the Main Building. In 2000 we were able to move in; there were handy spaces that SPEC could use both for accommodating Assistant Directors as well as teaching areas.

As soon as I returned home, I checked my voicemail. I picked up a message saying my mother had died the day before. Within two months, I had to take two family funerals, both at St Joseph's Bromley, the parish where both Georgie and Mummy had for years worshipped.

Georgie's family and friends, my sister Jarmila, my cousins Anne-Marie and Tricia and their husbands and the core – or is it corps – of my closest friends were there at both funerals. So too was Fr Jan Lang SJ, even though by now he was quite frail.

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Soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Studz invited me to St Petersburg. There I shared a room with Stephen Macklow-Smith. What a wonderful city – with a complex and at times tragic history.

Later in 1990, we met in Prague – John coming from Vienna, I flying in from London. My cousin Dagmar acted as our guide. The absurd exchange rate made everything was so cheap! Prague was at its best. No adverts, very few tourists; the only question I heard being asked was “what do we do with the guilty?”

Basil had warned Cardinal František Tomášek that I would be in Prague and would bring Basil's warmest best wishes – in person. During my interview, Tomášek pointed out three spots on the walls of his sitting room where the secret police had placed microphones. “How nice it was to be able to speak my mind here, today.”

We visited The Monument to Soviet Tank Crews (Czech: *Památník sovětských tankistů*) erected in 1945 in Kinsky Square (*Náměstí Kinských*) where I lived towards the end of WW2. A year later, it had been painted pink. Last year, it was no longer there.

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As family chaplain to the Von Hurter family – Father Francois, mother Arrelle, I celebrated the wedding of their son Felix to Sandra on 23rd June 2018 at The Theatre of Korgialenios School, on the isle of Spetses, Greece. Prior to that, there were: Roxane’s Christening: June 1995 St Thomas More Holy Redeemer; Adriana Martinez-Baca Funeral at Our Lady of Dolours, Fulham Road on October 24, 2007; “Adopted” late godparent ceremony at their home, 7, Cresswell Gardens, for Spencer Crawley May 20th, 2008.

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In 2000, to celebrate the Millennium, Berenice Roetheli produced our Lourdes Pilgrimage Calendar which John Kardus - born 3.3.1924, whom I buried in 2018 - marketed by phoning just about all our parishes. He had great anecdotes on who made decisions in which parish – and who returned his calls.

Having had my leg pulled about how many times my name appeared in the Diocesan Yearbook, as I did not want anyone to think I was building my own empire, in 2002 to enable me to concentrate on SPECeast and have one less mention in the Diocesan Yearbook, in 2002 I passed the role of Diocesan Director of Pilgrimages on to Fr Chris Vipers. I had got to know him and his abilities well. Having been a CofE clergyman, as recently ordained RC priest, he had worked at SPEC 1999 – 2002. Cardinal Cormac acquiesced to my transfer of responsibility.

In my role as co-ordinator of school chaplains, I celebrated many school Masses and took many Assemblies. Recognising the need, in 2002, I launched SPEC-SON: a free newspaper published by The Universe. Born in a Spiritual Personal Educational Community it was there to help young people realise their Creator’s presence in their own Self, in Others and in Nature. Its Editors were Mark Nicholas and Sarah Kemp.

Given free to all pupils and Staff in Westminster Diocese’s 55 Secondary Schools via delivery to each School once a Term, as well as being delivered to those Parishes who have requested it, initially – paid for by advertising - it ran with 50,000 copies. Given that the majority of these will end up in families, the total readership should be at least double that figure. From the second edition onwards, there was an insert for parents.

I saw SPEC-SON as an Evangelising outreach for the New Millennium and a paradigm for other dioceses to follow. However, all too soon, as advertising revenue dropped, it had to close.

Sandra, David and I formed the SPEC Outreach/Mission Team in 2003.

In 2002, Pat Browne handed over to Chris Vipers the role of Vocations Director. However, before he moved on to Chiswick, Chris stayed on at SPEC until 2003. I have often heard him say that what he knows of pastoral work he learned while at SPEC. (6)

I ceased going to Lourdes until, in 2015 – the 25th anniversary of launching our Diocesan Pilgrimage – the Diocese invited me to Lourdes so I could be awarded “The Honourary Chaplain to Lourdes” insignia, a heavy halter around my neck.

In 2000, Studz called me to ask me for a favour. He had a friend, John Browne, whose mother, Paula - born in 1917, a survivor of Auschwitz - had died on the 9th of July. Her Jewish family converted to Catholicism in the early 30s. However, as she did not have three generations of baptised ancestors, this did not help. Of her family, Paula was the only one to survive.

When she realised she was soon to die, she asked her son to make sure she received a Roman Catholic funeral. Would I be happy to take that? Of course, I would. After the funeral at The Holy Redeemer Church, Chelsea, we buried her at West Brompton Cemetery.

At the dinner on the eve of the funeral, I was introduced to Lady Moody-Stuart who was to take one of the readings next day – and her husband, Sir Mark, then Chairman of Shell.

It turned out they lived in Wapping – where I was planning to set up SPECeast. Having seen the protest marches, they knew St Patrick's was closing. We became friends. They showed great interest in my plans. A few months down the line, Mark who had just received a substantial bonus phoned me. "I was thinking of buying Judy a diamond necklace but we both agreed that she would not wear it. So, I will send you a cheque for SPECeast."

A couple of days later it arrived. £100,000! What a boost to the £25k I had received from Peter and Elena Marano – at whose wedding I officiated - and my own £50k which I was able to chip in after we sold my mother's house.

Emma Sergeant, whom I had prepared her on the way to becoming a Catholic and at who's wedding to Adam Zamojski I had officiated, persuaded her father to commission her to paint my portrait. This she did and gave me the money.

That charcoal picture she hung in her studio. One of her clients had seen it and decided he wanted to buy it. Within a week, quite a few extra thousands had entered SPECeast bank account.

Among the other big hitters were Bella Sunley £40k; and Charles Forte Foundation £10k. I had become good friends with Lady Irene, the wife of Lord Charles Forte. The last few years before he died on 28 February 2007, to keep her company as Charles had suffered dementia, I used to come for a weekly lunch at their Loundes House home.

Though towards the end of his life though he did not recognise his wife, his eating habits remained immaculate.

Over a dozen Lowrys on the walls downstairs, an extensive collection of ivory statues in the lounge and a set of Russian Imperial dinner plates in the dining room, were very 'pleasing to the eye' – as Father Basil would have said.

Every Easter a large Colomba Pasquale - an Italian traditional Easter cake - every Christmas a large Panettone – always accompanied by three bottles of fine Italian wine, weighed me down on my way to ASPC. Towards the end of his life, Lord Forte suffered serious dementia. To keep her company, most weeks I was guest at Lady Forte's lunch. Thanks to her generosity, most weeks SPEC enjoyed pastries – and occasional vast box of chocolates - while I took care of the liquids.

The Forte family had a Royal Opera House Box on Tuesdays; the only box that came with a bottle of chilled white wine and a plate of sandwiches. (I presumed it was in recognition of what Charles had done for The Opera House.) Whenever none of family needed that box, I was given first refusal. As a result, my ear and mind - and those of my guests - were enriched by a considerable number of evenings in that box.

After Charles died, Irene invited me to go through his walk-through wardrobes and take anything I fancied. Given our different shapes, in the event I took two very fine overcoats –

and a couple of handkerchiefs. Once Charles was buried, Irene would take me to Mosimann's for lunch - until she too became bed-bound. In 2010, I buried her next to Charles at the Hampstead Cemetery.

My Christmas spirit used to take off at The Forte Pre-Christmas Loundes House party when a group of wonderful carol singers would arrive halfway through the evening. At these I got to know the children - Olga Polizzi, Irene, Portia, Marie Louise and Giancarla - quite well and ended up preparing the two oldest children – Finn and Molly – of Oliver Peyton (married to Charlotte Polizzi, daughter of Olga, granddaughter of Charles and Irene) for their first holy communion which I celebrated in the Upstairs Chapel – now a conference room – at the Jesuit Farm Street presbytery.

In 2020 – during the Lockdown, when the local parish was unable to help, Oliver who had launched “Exit Here” Funeral Directors at 277-279 Chiswick High Rd, W4 4PU – phoned me to see if I would take a couple of funerals. I said that as my biological age was 53, I would be happy to help. The second of these was at Hampstead Cemetery; where we had buried the mortal remains of Charles and Irene.

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Within five days in the summer of 2000, three events coalesced.

First, Fr Digby Samuels, PP at St Patrick’s Wapping – whom I had helped over many years to discern his vocation – phoned to say that the local Primary School – also called St Patrick’s – had been scheduled for closure. The Reception building on Reardon Street would be redundant at the start of the Summer Holidays. Empty by the following academic year.

Then Fr Fred de l’Orme, Chaplain to Bishop Challoner School the large Comprehensive school, in Tower Hamlets, called and said, “Vlad, we need SPEC here in the East. London Colney is too far – Indian territory – for the children here.”

Thirdly – and it is the third light that receives the shot (Ref 1st World War, where lighting three cigarettes attracted the attention of snipers) – Cleo and Lee, past, long-stay members of the SPEC Team, came to my cottage. “Vlad, we would love to be involved in a SPEC thing somewhere.”

That was enough. Intuitively – perhaps impulsively – I jumped to the conclusion that that was on what God wanted me to concentrate. My grief at Father Basil’s death had generated bereavement-survival energies I was going to put to creative use.

(The word ‘grief’ - from the Old English for ‘heavy’ and ‘bereavement’ from ‘being plundered’ - is dominated by ‘sur-vival’; living beyond the shock.)

Thus, next morning, I drove to Archbishop’s House to see John Gibbs, The Diocesan Financial Secretary. With him, I shared my dream. Assuming it was diocesan property, I asked him not to sell St Patrick’s. He agreed. We had worked together on WDP, SPEC and LOFT@SPEC. He knew and trusted me. SPECeast was conceived.

Conceptions are easy. Delivery and birth not quite so simple. However, as with SPEC and LOFT, I knew it would be fun. And if I failed? So what? I knew all I could do was to do my best and leave the rest to God.

I contacted Gerald Murphy, the architect who had done such a fine job with LOFT. In addition, I brought on board Derek Crampsie, (a Quantity Surveyor at whose wedding I had

officiated and whose five children – all boys! - I had baptised). We had a team. Cleo Jones and Lee Caddick would be its Directors, I it's chaplain.

Thanks to the generosity of Fr Francis van Son, PP at Commercial Road, - whom I had got to know while he looked after my mother when she was in hospital - offered me three rooms in his large presbytery: a common room/office and a bedroom each Cleo Jones and Lee Caddick. Only condition? The building of a new door to his presbytery: its cost was factored into the 'setting -up' budget of SPECeast.

They were able to work on programmes, recruit volunteers, contact schools in the area so that, once the building was opened in 2003, SPECeast hit the floor running, becoming instantly operational – and generating income.

When Paul Leonard found out I was fundraising for SPECeast, he offered me his DB6 that, he said, spent most of its time sitting in a garage. Marcia then organised a Private Raffle among my allies-in-life. As the 'Car and Mart' price was £20k, we sold 100 tickets at £200 each. To move things forward, a friend bought me two tickets.

When all had been sold, I folded the stubs, put them in a plastic bag and took them to the nuns in Archbishop's House. I asked one of the sisters to make the draw. When she opened the winning ticket – it had my name on it. I was the owner of an Aston Martin DB6.

It did not seem right for me to drive that car, and besides, it had been given to help fund SPECeast. So, I contacted Simon Daukes – at whose wedding at Farm Street I had officiated in 1982. I knew he knew cars.

Grandson of Molly and Jim Shanks, Simon came to inspect the car parked in Archbishop's House underground car-park. He said he would do his best. He did. He got me another £20k for SPECeast.

Niall ran a marathon and chipped in £70k – as well promising £10k pa for five years.

John Osborne had given me an Amstrad as I was working on my first WDP, now asked for a favour. He was fund-raising for Ampleforth. Would I be happy if he could put up for auction, "A Guided Tour of Westminster Cathedral by Father Vlad"? A pleasure, I said. Thus, it was that I met Lord Milo Parmoor, the winner of that prize. After the Tour, Milo took me and his friends out for a meal. He asked what I was up to. Result? Tens of thousands of pounds for SPECeast.

John and Sarah's oldest, James Osborne, whom I had baptised some 18 years earlier, was at Cambridge. In the Spring of 2003, my financial needs inspired him to organise Cambridge's first ever Fashion Show. What a brilliant wheeze, I thought, as he advertised for the most beautiful girls to come to him to be vetted by a selection panel of fashion professionals. Instead of him trawling the university, these bright, young beauties came to him; all to help me fund-raise for SPECeast. "*Chapeau, James.*"

A pupil of St Mary's Ascot – who had attended my 5th form and school-leavers retreats, raised thousands by getting SPECeast onto Imperial College Rag Week' charities.

Marcia Soldatos – whom I had met at Paula's funeral, was ready, willing and magnificently able to dedicate not just her money, but time, expertise, enthusiasm and energy as she prepared to start at The London Business School for a Sloan Fellowship.

I delighted in the hours of fun and laughter as we prepared publicity and fund-raising materials; accumulated furniture and equipment, much of which we accumulated in her own storage spaces. She also made a clear decision to encourage Cleo and Lee.

Marcia was my 'man-with-a-van' as she paid to transport our assets stored in her Chelsea self-storage space and at All Saints. It was her man who brought over the hundred or so chairs I had been given by Green Park Hilton Hotel as a result of my phoning London hotels.

I helped to save the planet by giving this furniture another five years of useful life until more than 4,000 young bottoms wore them out and they had to be replaced. Mind you, six armchairs served and survived in The Education Department, top-floor, Vaughan House until it moved to the 2nd floor in September 2018. They had worn well but had become well worn; so, into a skip they finally went. A salutary reminder that all material things pass away.

Thanks to the huge generosity of so many of my friends and a few wise parishes - I was able to raise the Capital Budget of £860,000. *Deo Gratias.*

Throughout the summer of 2001 as the contractors started to move out. We started to move in furniture, equipment and fittings. Though suffering from arthritis, Judy Moody-Stuart, a Quaker, took on the role our uncomplaining roustabout.

Throughout those months my prayer was, "Thank you, dear God for my friends. I thank my friends for God." After health, friends are the most precious gifts on earth. They help to sustain my hope.

August 2001 The Team moved in. That September we started work with our young guests, the majority from Bishop Challoner. Within the first year, we had interfaced with 2,000. By 2006, it was 4,000 every year.

During the 2002 Ramadan, I became the Monsignor with Mosque as the Wapping Bangladeshi Community used SPEC every evening for prayers. All we had to do was to make sure all our pictures on the ground floor were covered. We also discovered the exact East.

Our Team of Volunteers, given their age, were somewhat slack on security and left doors open, inviting locals to thief a few things. Once the lads had the taste for easy pickings, they started to use force on our PVC doors and break in. Having contacted the local police station, a nice Crime Prevention Officer came to take a look and advise. This he did. And much more.

As the financial year was ending, there was money still to be spent. Thus, at no cost to us, every ground floor found itself with a lockable steel-grill. From then on, our equipment and clothing were safe.

As we were preparing for the Official Opening of SPECeast on Saturday the 18th of October 2003 - 3.00pm for 4.00pm Ceremony - Mark Moody-Stuart volunteered to drive to the Royal Hospital and pick up – and return – the two Chelsea Pensioners, natives of Wapping, whom I had invited to open the Centre.

Soon after we came on stream, there were a few problems with the locals. We were outsiders and thus fair game. Breaking in and setting fire to the furniture we had stored in the building site seemed a fun-thing to do. The local paper tried to make out it was racially motivated. It was not. However, it did teach me that Wapping was not Hertfordshire.

When a lad who lived in the block of flats across the road from Reardon Street – aided and abetted it turned out by his mother – used his air rifle to shoot out a window by our front door, four things happened.

One, I got to know – and admire – the recently instigated Retributive Justice programme. Two, I developed a relationship with the family. Three – who knows whether that was causal – vandalism ceased. We would get burgled later. But that was something else. And four, we covered outside windows with shock-resistant – airgun bulletproof – plastic.

Thanks to Judy Moody-Stuart, who knew the gossip through her shopping, we discovered that the word on the block was that we were setting up a centre for drug-addicts or - some even thought – paedophile rehabilitation. Some of the diehard elements who resented the closure of St Patrick’s Social Club – were keen to stir things up. Therefore, CAS was born.

Judy chaired this ‘Community Advisory Committee,’ to which local residents were invited – the poster in English and Bengali – making clear that everyone was welcome. Gradually the objective truth percolated the community.

One of my aims for SPECeast was Community Cohesion. Welcoming the local Muslim community was one co-ordinate. The other was trans-age unity.

Many of the more senior members of Wapping were scared of ‘yoof’. They saw young people as a threat.

Though it took time – the divine is in the details of making sure all parties were able to be on site simultaneously – SPECeaste – SPEC trans-age-IT- education – took off in 2007.

Young people with IT skills shared their expertise with members of Wapping’s vintage generation, who were thrilled when they discovered they could email their friends and family abroad. The young teenagers said that they had realised that the ‘old-uns’ had a lot of wisdom on offer. It was - as they say - Ubuntu: good for both parties.

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In 1996 and then again in 1997 I was invited to preach retreats for Clergy at St Peter’s Seminary, Wexford. During the second of these, the seminary – with plenty of spare space (it closed a year later – Not I believe due to me!) - hosted a fair chunk of the Irish Army who were extras in the film “Saving Private Ryan”.

The D-Day scenes were shot in Ballinnesker Beach, Curracloe Strand, Ballinnesker, just east of Curracloe. I was there for a week at the start of the filming, June 27, 1997. The officers were billeted down the corridor at the end of which was my room.

It was an education to see the production line organisation, the logistics and equipment – all set up in vast tents around the seminary grounds.

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Soon after I returned and was alone in his office with Father Basil, he suddenly turned to me and said, “You know, I am not as thick as I used to think!” “You? Thick? Never.”

Having failed the Ampleforth Scholarship exam, it seems, according to enquiries I made, his mother never let him forget it. Maybe, that sense of inadequacy – and the scruples from

which he suffered – nourished his humility and keep his feet firmly on the ground even while his heart was high up there with God and he was held in Himalayan high esteem by all who knew him. The Queen called him “My Cardinal” and a week before he died awarded him her highest honour, The Order of Merit (OM).

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In 1997 Edward Roch appeared on the scene at Lourdes. From the following year until 2016, when he had cancer, he and his wife Sandie - I was at her Confirmation in St James’s, Spanish place in 2001 - were there, helping with the *malades* . Sandie and Edward become my firm friends.

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Then in 1998, a man named Vince Powell invited me to lunch. He had found sponsorship for a film he wanted to make for some time about Lourdes. Therefore, on board our pilgrimage that summer, he and his crew came. I was required to speak to camera for what seemed to be long sessions. Mind you, when it came out, I was impressed how long I could speak without stumbling and without notes or autocue.

In Lourdes, Vince met Michael Slater - a stalwart of the Catholic Stage Guild, who invited Vince to be Guest Speaker at the CSG Annual Christmas Dinner.

Knowing she loved the world of theatre; I invited Molly Steele to that dinner. Outcome? She became the Hon Sec to the CSG, utterly transforming its correspondence and Newsletter- and brought a somewhat tighter management of its Committee Meetings until, in 2020, she retired.

That 1998 July, Michael Slater who had been acting as courier to a train group, upset John Tangney our Pilgrimage Operator who said he was not prepared to work with Michael. To keep Michael actively on board, I put him in charge of our recently acquired wheelchairs with the title of “Controller of Wheelchairs”. A job he did wonderfully well while I remained Director.

Stage 3. Autumn 1999 -2004

Having heard me preaching in Lourdes, Barbara Davies invited me to teach a series of weeklong lecture courses for the Auxiliaries of the Apostolate, at their HQ, 23, Avenue Antoine Béguère, 65100, Lourdes. It forced me to open books and study; something I should have been doing anyway.

Those weeks in Lourdes – outside the Season - on The Blessed Trinity, 2000; Pneumatology, 2002; Birth of the New Testament, 2004 and Creation-Redemption - the theme of my Doctoral Thesis in Rome – 2006 turned out to be delightful week-long retreats.

Lourdes, when empty – and cold - is something special.

To prepare the lectures I read widely – including many books borrowed from students at King’s College London. Those six years shaped my theology; some of it beyond the pale for the stricter guardians of RC orthodoxy. (7)

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When Bishop Cormac Murphy-O'Connor became Archbishop of Westminster, the future looked bright. I had met him a couple of times at dinners given by Sir Paul Wright and his wife Babs. I had bumped into him at various receptions Father Basil hosted at Archbishop's House. I welcomed him warmly. He was charming and showed a courteous if lightweight interest in All Saints and its possible future purpose. I had no idea, no suspicion, how things were about to change over the following seven years.

As soon as Cormac moved into ABH, everything changed. A/B House became sealed off. Locks were changed. Offices closed. Pastoral Areas were demolished. Auxiliary Bishops – though nominally responsible for different districts - had offices in ABH which, I heard, Cormac wanted to become a mini-Vatican. "Check Point Charlie" – access to Archbishop's House from Clergy House used to be easy. Now - since Cormac Murphy-O'Connor moved in - it's like Fort Knox. The feel of Archbishop's House as a welcoming home has passed.

Naively, I had dreamt that having left Opus Dei, there would be no more mega-traumas in my life. Unknown to me, an issue was brewing up in Archbishop's House. With hindsight, I should have suspected something was afoot when a newly-appointed Canon confronted me with, "You, Vlad, are yesterday's man." I shrugged it off as a feeble-foolish joke.

To repay John Studzinski for all he had done for me, I accepted his invitation in 2000 to become a Trustee of his Genesis Foundation. It is a position I still hold for me, a powerful periscope into – for me - uncharted culture and arts in the UK.

The New Millennium got off to a promising start. Mgr. Canon Adrian Arrowsmith, who had started his ministry at London Colney, wanted to return there when he retired. Bishop Vincent Nichols - then running the Diocese - asked me to find him accommodation at ASPC.

Thanks to a grant from the Retired Priests Fund, we converted a couple of rooms into a comfortable, ground floor en-suite suite with its own door onto the carpark at the front of the building. Six months after Adrian had settled in, I met Bishop Vincent Nichols who said,

(7) In my "Life Squared" I set out the sharp differences between objective reality and subjective perception.

"Adrian is very happy at All Saints. He says that you are not nearly as hard as he had thought you were." Me? Hard? I ask you!

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I have been to Boston, USA, on two occasions: to take the funerals of Stud's father, Alfred, in September 2001 and then his mother, Jennie's in October 2009.

In 2001, waiting to board the plane at Heathrow, I suddenly heard. "Hello, Father. How are you? Where are off to?" It was Seamus, a past pupil of The Vaughan dressed in a BA uniform. "Boston." "Safe journey, Father."

Soon after I had taken my seat in economy class, a flight attendant came and asked me to come with her. "What's the problem?" I mused.

She took me up to the Business Class area of the plane and welcomed me with a smile. Seamus must have phoned through his request to help his old School Chaplain.

On the return leg, having checked in, I received a Business Class Boarding Card. Soon after take-off, I decided to sleep in the folding down, fully-flat bed. After some four hours, I woke

up and could not sleep. Therefore, I went to the economy class area and asked a woman who had been at the funeral whether she would like a bed. Instantly she agreed and off she went. I took her seat.

Thus, it came to pass that I can state, "I have shared a bed with a woman while crossing the Atlantic." Once eyebrows are raised, adding, 'in series, not parallel.'

For his mother's funeral, John had supplied me with Business Class tickets. On my way back to London, I passed through Boston airport the day before 9/11. Quite a shock seeing that place on the TV next day.

As both of John's parents had been in the military for a short spell, at both of these funerals I was impressed how well the USA looks after its veterans. A motor-cycle police escort and, at the cemetery, the firing of volley shots with a flag draping over the coffin, concluding with the folding the Stars and Stripes into a tringle and donating that to John.

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In 2001, Niall FitzGerald - Chairman of Unilever - was looking for a user-friendly priest to baptise his daughter. He asked Studz who recommended me. When asked, I said it would be an honour to celebrate Gabriela's baptism. In his generous 'thank you' letter, Niall referred to me as his *Annam Cara* and presented me with the eponymous book by John O'Donohue.

Two years later, on the 3rd September 2003, I celebrated Ingrid and Niall's wedding in the Comper Chapel of ASPC.

Since he, his wife Ingrid and Gabriela - the daughter I baptised - moved to Sussex, to escape the toxic culture for young children in Chelsea, (8) until 2020 and Covid, I have spent my Christmases - and many glorious weekends at Kenwards Farm. There I learnt how to prune and dead-head roses, to plant trees – and much wisdom.

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(8) Visiting a friend, she heard her six-year-old daughter say, "Mummy, I can't go to school. I haven't put on my make-up." In Sussex, Miss G – then Gaby – received an excellent education and as I write, is at Christ Church, Oxford.

I had been informed by Cormac that from September 1st, 2007, SPEC, LOFT@SPEC and SPECeast would come under the Agency for Evangelisation [AFE]; Fr Michael O'Boy [MOB] its director. A Diocesan Youth Chaplain as well as Youth Development Officer would be appointed. My job had suddenly become three.

SPECeast had thrived until it was transferred into the hands of Fr Michael O'Boy. Unable to attract Benefactors the Diocese closed SPECeast.

However, the Jesuits were looking for a home for their Refugee Service. Therefore, renting it from St Patrick's Parish, it metamorphosed into The Hurtado Centre. The effort – and my £50k I invested into it - was not wasted. As they say, "Man proposes. God disposes."

Though God is my best friend, I never know what lies ahead in his plans for my journey through space-time. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.” [Isaiah 55, 8]

Nevertheless, the parish, who owned the building, did lose out. The verbal agreement I had made with Tower Hamlets that the new, three-bedroomed house, sited in the car park for the Director’s family, would be funded by the Council under Section 106, evaporated. That East End London Borough could never financially support RC Evangelising. Even in those days, a three-bedroomed house would have been quite an asset.

For a couple of years - unbeknown to me - Cormac had been working on prising me away from my responsibilities with young people (Success - I was told - is all too often the parent of jealousy).

One early summer’s day in 2003, Cormac invited me for a cup of tea. As soon as we were alone and he had poured a cup, he said he wanted me to leave All Saints and SPECeast and take on a parish in East London “near Canary Wharf where there are some high-flying businessmen.”

As I hate confrontation, my answer surprised me. I said that a parish would suffocate me. I was a Pauline rather than Petrine priest. He asked me to think it over. We shook hands. I left.

I did think – and pray about it – a lot. When we met again, this time with his Private Secretary Fr Mark O’Toole in attendance, my answer was the same. To go to a parish would damage my mental health. I said, I know it would.

(6) Chris has agreed to preach the homily at my funeral Mass.

On August 4th, 2003, a letter dictated by and signed in his absence, the Cardinal wrote to me – that confidentially – Fr Antonio Ritaccio would be taking over as Director of Youth Ministry. He would be taking over that job in October.

However, there was a snag. Well, couple of snags initially – and then a third.

First, no one had asked me for my job description. When Bishop Bernard Longley – then an auxiliary at Westminster prior to becoming Archbishop of Birmingham - asked me to send him a copy, he got back to me with: “That is an eye opener.”

Second, it was clear that the new appointee did not have the skills for the job. Therefore, in the event, he was given a parish: Corpus Christi, Maiden Lane. Within a few months, he was sent off to The West Indies.

Thirdly, no one had asked any questions about the funding of SPECeast. As soon as they heard what had happened, the swathe of its benefactors unhappy – some very angry – pulled out. Support of tens of thousands of pounds a year evaporated.

Then in 2008, unable to stand any more of Fr Michael O'Boy behaviour, Cleo resigned. Due to her early childhood, emotional violence has a powerfully negative affect on her health.

My idea had been to get SPECeast integrated into the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) educational scene so that, after the first seven years of operational budget's private funding, it would survive. To that end, I had contacted the local Ward Councillors and met Christine Gilbert, then CEO, LBTH. She was a great help and opened doors and pointing me in the right directions.

Later, just before she was head-hunted for the top job in UK Education: Head of Ofsted (HMCI) also known as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills between October 2006 and 30 June 2011, she wrote me a lovely letter thanking me for teaching her

“Good, better, best
I must never let them rest
Until my good is better
And my better best.”

She said she had already used it three times in her presentations. I felt a warm glow in my heart.

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In 2004, Jindrich Strejcek, a Czech who had been on our Volunteer Team at SPEC, and was now back home, suggested I start something akin to SPEC in Czechia. So, on the 11th of January – accompanied by Vladimir Svoboda in whose Prague flat we stayed, we set about setting up SPECczech aka SPECvCR.

Though I was very happy to be its midwife, it was vital that it was launched and run by Czechs. So, Vladimir Svoboda and I visited Czechia a number of times and we made good progress. I even went to Rome to speak with the global superiors of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM)s whose Convent would be its base. However, in 2007, after a lengthy ‘consultation’ during which all my caveats were set aside, I was stripped of all responsibilities for young people. SPEC was taken out of my hands and transferred into The Agency for Evangelisation. My strategy of training future SPECczech volunteers at SPEC ceased to be possible. The whole Czechia project folded.

However, I believe, thanks to a letter sent to Cormac by a number of my friends, I was allowed to stay on as Director of ASPC – concentrating on its development.

I had time on my hands. I could spend some of it writing up my memoirs and a lot of it looking after people in the autumn and winter of their lives: The Golden and even Platinum Oldies. Lady Irene Forte, Dr Jack Dominian, Sir Mike Heron Pamela Hill, John Kardus, Molly Steele and Dr Vladimir Svoboda – to name a few – seemed to have benefitted.

Having met Liz Spencer and Mike Heron at Gabriela's baptism – Mike was her Godfather – I was often invited to dinner in their London flat off Bayswater Road. Towards the end of his life, Mike started to suffer from dementia and that flat was sold. They both moved to Liz's Churt, Farnham, Surrey home.

Frequently I was invited for a sleep-over there as, whenever Mike saw me, he perked up and was able better to communicate. It was painfully-sad to see this man, who had been so capable and energetic, grow ever weaker and mentally more distant. Eventually, I celebrated his funeral at Douai Abbey, 21.5 2014 where Niall gave a wonderfully warm eulogy. I feel blest that Liz has remained in touch and is a friend I can rely on for support and advice.

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Providence had given me time. Gradually, thanks to prayer and pondering what I had seen in my inter-faith work, witnessed in Wapping and learned from Jack Dominion, I fashioned a vision for ASPC. It could host my dream: “The Joy & Hope Centre.”

I had first met Jack when, as Director of ASPC I hosted CMAS conferences and meetings before it changed its name to Marriage Care - or Catholic Marriage Care Ltd.

Jack used to say that his wife Edith - who died in 2005 – had taught him all he knew about love. (In 2019, I invited Cate, one of his four daughters, to edit my “Life Squared” book. She did a great job.)

After his retirement, Jack and I used to spend an increasing amount of time together. Initially taking days off together, travelling by train to Marylebone Station and on by taxi to London art galleries - followed by lunch. Jack also used to invite me to the Wigmore Hall lunchtime concerts. Often sitting in seats near the front, seeing these geniuses perform was delightfully uplifting. I attended the launch of Jack’s final book: “Being Jack Dominionian - Reflections on Marriage, Sex and Love” on 19 Oct. 2007.

For a number of years – until they obtained state funding - I was asked to advise, “One Plus One”, Jack’s child, on fund-raising. At these meeting I came across the very impressive Penny Mansfield, a co-director and found out much about the problems facing married couples.

Then, once Jack lost his eyesight, sitting in his living room talking, was able to drill down to the more granular details of relationships. That knowledge - together with the multifaith work I had been doing - were the twin motivators behind my dream of the Joy & Hope Centre.

In autumn 2004, my idea came into sharper focus. All Saints would have a new role as a proactive, preventative, residential centre for adult, life-long learning in community cohesion and family life. It would be “Christ reaching out to heal society”, assuaging two of the keys ‘hot-spot’ areas of our Society: ‘communal harmony’ and ‘family integrity’. Its name “Joy & Hope” (J&H) came from “Gaudium et Spes”, the Vatican 2 document that had played an important role in my doctorate.

I shared my dream with Niall. We had traction. On 18.11.04 Niall FitzGerald spoke with his friend Sir Stephen Wall, GCMG, LVO - who had served as Britain's ambassador to Portugal and Permanent Representative to the European Union - who spoke with Cormac. On 19.11.05 Cormac’s Council give go-ahead for a viability study.

So, on the 11.2.05, Andrew Robley [AR], Gillian Donald, Patricia Bessey [PB] - our architect, Chris Fanning – Diocesan Building Surveyor and John Neale [JN] of English Heritage [EH] have an on-site meeting with me. JN says he sees no problem and on 8th

March sends “A Letter of Comfort from EH. No objections from EH on ‘Listed Building ‘grounds.

After a long and convoluted series of meetings, I was given a verbal assurance that we would obtain An Exceptional Enabling Development – of a few of the 70+ acres - which would save ASPC, making it a home for J&H and continuing its role as a home for SPECcentre and LOFT@SPEC and its proven 15-year peer-education in life-styles and value systems for young people.

J&H would focus on

1. Educating the educators of Family Life and their allies in this field.
2. Run courses to enable all, from all ethnic and faith communities, who strive to work for Community Cohesion to be more effective locally.

Stage 4. Winter 2004-11

In 2005, Malcolm McMillan was elected Mayor of St Albans. He chose me to be his chaplain. Great – educational – fun. Picked up by the Council car, I started each Council Meeting with prayers – which I soon converted into short homilies.

I discovered how local authorities worked. I was able to preach at St Alban’s Cathedral and accompany Malcolm as he ‘Beat the Bounds’: a ceremony dating back 700 years, to 1327. It involves walking along the 4.5mile boundary of the city and using wands made of willow to beat the ground at significant locations. In the past, the ceremony was used for people to pass on knowledge of where the boundary lay and to exert their rights as citizens.

Thanks to my Chaplain’s role, I discovered there was a group of gardening enthusiasts that – living in St Albans – had nowhere to release their horticultural energies. So, I invited them to ASPC where they were given a large area as their allotment. Their gratitude was expressed annually in some fine vegetables which I and the Main House Staff were able to enjoy.

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One fine day, Marie Burke our Receptionist told me that her friend Michael Masterson would like to have his new offices blessed. Would I be able to help? Of course. Having blessed the new offices of Masterson Holding in Atlantic House, 7 Stirling Way, Borehamwood WD6 2BT, Michael and Mona, - parents of Keith, Sean and Mickey started to worship at ASPC, became friends and generous supporters of SPEC.

In return, I celebrated the weddings of Sean and Mickey – both in Eire. Then, while still at ASPC, I baptised their children. When I had to move to London, we became disconnected. A painful loss.

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In 2006 I came across the ‘Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’ (CRPD). Clearly, ASPC needed to become wheelchair user-friendly. St Alban’s Council had to approve the construction of a ramp at the Main Entrance. Which, eventually, they did. On that brick-built slope, I had a stone carved inviting our guests to pray for my sister Georgina, who needed a wheelchair for the last couple of years of her life.

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That year, Aidan Bellenger OSB was elected Abbot of the Downside Abbey. A few times we had rubbed shoulders in Lourdes. He telephoned me. The gist of that call was: 1. For many years – if ever – the school had generated no candidates for the Abbey. 2. He thought this was due to the monks – and teachers – playing down their vocation. 3. Would I come to preach a day of recollection to the community to try to turn this round? Of course! Said I. I have no statistics whether my input had any effect, but I did get to see the splendid library that is housed – and very carefully protected – in that monastery-school.

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On 24th April 2008, on returning home after celebrating one of my many Masses at Haberdasher’s, Elstree, I picked up a voicemail. “Vlad, what I wanted you to do, I am giving one of those Thursday Lectures on the 8th of May. I was wondering whether you be, (sic) whether you would like to come to dinner afterwards because Rocco Forte is giving a dinner at Brown’s for a number of my guests and his other guests and if you would like to come you would be very, very welcome. Anyway, let me or Mark know or give me a buzz. Bye.” [Sic] It was Cardinal Cormac’s voice.

I left a voicemail with Fr Mark stating I would be there. The day before, during lunch at Lowndes House, Olga Polizzi, Lady Irene’s oldest daughter, recounted how while sitting next to Cormac a couple of weeks ago, had told him that as her mother was angry with him, she would not sponsor these lectures again. “You have treated Father Vlad really badly.” Cardinal Cormac said something to the effect that Fr Vlad had done very good work and was working at All Saints. And changed the subject.

On the 14th of April, Irene Danilovich – another of Lady Irene’s daughters – the wife of a close friend of George Bush – had been sitting next to the Cardinal at dinner. When Cormac discovered she would be sitting next to President Bush in the White House during the Papal visit to the USA, Cormac asked her to ask Bush to intervene in the support of the Dalai Lama.

Irene replied that in that case she had to speak in support of Father Vlad and asked Cormac why he had treated him so badly. Poor Cormac, apparently, he turned purple and muttered that Vlad was getting on and he wanted younger men to have a go. She retorted, “Father Vlad has more energy and enthusiasm than any priest I know.” Cormac changed the subject.

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On Tuesday 8th July MOB and rest of the group, together with Sandra Satchell and her two boys, Nathan and Daniel, took off for the 2008 Sydney WYD.

Mark Nichol – whom I had recruited as Administrator at SPECeast called. Desperate. The drains were blocked. The coast was clear.

Armed with rods and inspection-cover keys borrowed from Steve Blackman, our ASPC Maintenance Man, I arrived at SPECeast. After I had managed to clear the blockage – with my arm yucky up to the elbow – I had a nice and long ‘deep and meaningful’ conversation with Mark. He brought me up to speed.

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On Monday 14th July - Bastille Day – Vince Powell invited me to lunch at Il Posto, on Vauxhall Bridge Road, Victoria. We had met in the 90s when he came on our WDP to make his film about Lourdes. His doctor had informed him he had a growth on his lung. Would I take his funeral service? “An honour, dear Vince”. I was chuffed he had remembered me especially as he knew I knew that for many years he had not been - liturgically - practicing his faith.

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On Thursday 13 November, Mark was once again in touch. “Emergency. Help. Front door lock broken.”

Having spoken on the phone to check Mark was OK – and to make sure the coast was clear – on my way to Niall at Kenwards Farm, Sussex, I made a deviation. I passed by SPECeast. I managed to repair the lock. Mark said how tough life was under MOB. However, he would soldier on. He said, he knew not why, but MOB would not be in charge for much longer.

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While this was going on, on October 2nd, Vanessa Feltz invited me to BBC Radio London to answer questions on Josemaria Escriva who was about to be canonised. For a few years following that interview, I appeared on one of her mid-day TV programmes and then became a regular contributor to Juoké Fashola’s “Inspirit” on Sunday mornings.

Whenever Vanessa wanted an RC point of view, I was invited to the studio on Marylebone High Street or even speak on the phone.

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On 21st May 2009 Vincent Nichols became Archbishop of Westminster. Vin – as I used to know him when, as General Secretary of CBCEW most mornings he passed through Basil’s office on his way to Ecclestone Square – was invited to celebrate the Canary Wharf Ash Wednesday Mass, 2010 in Barclay Bank’s HQ main dining room. John Varley, CEO, Barclay’s, a Catholic, let the catholic community have it free.

Having been badgered by many of that 300 strong congregation, who wanted to have their own chaplain, he appointed me as Catholic Chaplain to Canary Wharf soon after. In those days, the chaplaincy team led by The Rev Fiona Stuart-Darling consisted of just her and me. Now, in 2020, we are a Multi-faith chaplaincy team, with a Rabbi Moshe Freeman and Imam Ibrahim Mogra on board.

Thanks to Niall, who had recruited him onto the British Museum Board, I was able to have a meeting with Sir George Iacobescu CBE, chairman and CEO of Canary Wharf Group. Outcome? A far larger prayer room for celebrating our Tuesday 12.30 masses and a

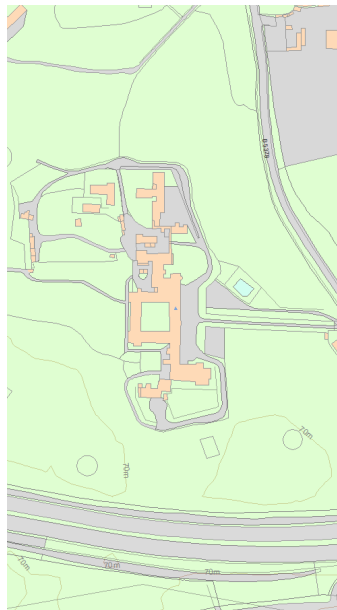
Chaplains' Meeting Room; ideal for instructions, confessions and meetings of our Canary Wharf Multifaith Chaplaincy (CWMC) Team.

Having prepared two Canary Wharfers, Damian and Elaine - born in Sri Lanka - for their marriage, on 18.2 2012 at St Mary's Church, Bambalapitiya, Colombo, I celebrated their wedding. Those two nights and three days were my first – and hitherto only - encounter with a 'Developing nation'.

An earlier wedding – well the reception after the wedding – sticks in my memory. The bridegroom's mother, with her sister, came up to me, and took me a side. She opened her fine hand-bag. In it was a small automatic pistol. "Just in case there are problems in the marriage, Father. This might give us grounds for annulment." Decades have passed. I was never contacted to give evidence so, I presume, the couple are happily married. In case you are wondering, no, she was not British; just someone from an aristocratic, European family.

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As 2011 drew to its ending, I suspect, in part due to issues with buildings such as Maryvale in Birmingham Diocese, ASPC was closed. Without any warning – to me at least - Vin decided to sell ASPC. Quite a shock - as a few months earlier the diocese had funded a heating refurb. of the Comper Chapel – to the tune of £40,000.



Once the news got out, complaints ricocheted around the St Albans, London Colney, Radlett and Shenley – and the local press. A statement was issued.

Archbishop Vincent Nichols said: "Since the Diocese of Westminster acquired All Saints Pastoral Centre in 1973, it has been a welcoming venue to many thousands of clergy, parishioners and organisations taking part in conferences, retreats and other events. It has also been the home of SPEC where children and young people from our diocese have taken part in residential programmes and retreats."

"I would like to pay tribute to the dedication of all those involved in the running of All Saints

Pastoral Centre and SPEC. Only through their hard work has it been possible to provide so much to so many."

"In particular, I would like to highlight the work of Mgr. Vladimir Felzmann whose ideas and energy have been fundamental to the All Saints Pastoral Centre's ethos of welcome and spiritual discovery. He has also made it possible for our children and young people to have a retreat centre where many of them have developed their faith."

"I also acknowledge the contribution made by Alan Johnstone who is retiring in November 2011 and whose leadership has ensured the smooth running of All Saints Pastoral Centre over the last 15 years."

"The closure and disposal is deeply regretted but it will help the diocese make better use of its resources in what is a challenging economic climate."

Clearly, God wanted me to open another chapter in my life. Whenever a door closes, I knock a hole in the wall and build another to be able to carry on helping God make this world a better place.

As soon as I was told that ASPC was being closed and sold, I suggested to Vin that I might, now that I would have spare time, be able to get involved with the 2012 Games. He invited me to Archbishop's' House for a cup of tea and appointed me – first ever - "Catholic Chaplain for Sport."

Stage 5. Spring 2011- ?

As Catholic Chaplain for Sport, in 2011, I moved into a single-bedroom, ground floor flat Apt.1, 179A Bow Road, E3 2SH – next to the Bow Parish Church of Our Lady Refuge of Sinners and St Catherine (nicely targeted with name that!) less than a mile from Stratford and the Olympic Park; as close as I could live still living in Westminster Diocese. Very handy for Canary Wharf, just six stops down the DLR from Bow Church. Not so handy for Vaughan House or after evening-meal journeys by Tube from Central London. Liquid intake has to be monitored carefully.

In 2011, during one of the 2012 Games prep. Committee meeting we used to have at Anchor House, Canning Town, I heard of SCORE that had been launched by the Baptist Union and invited myself to their Annual Conference and became a member. The following year it had changed its name to Sports Chaplaincy UK; a name that more clearly reflected its purpose.

Prior to the Papal Visit on 2010, the CBCEW thought it a good idea to commemorate the visit of the previous Pope to UK in 1982. As JP2 (we love you, I heard at four World Youth Days) was very keen on sport and the London Olympics and Paralympics were coming up, it seemed appropriate that Pope Benedict should promulgate a foundation in the memory of his predecessor. Therefore, Pope Benedict XVI launched The John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport (JP2F4S) at St Mary's University, Twickenham (SMU) in September 2010.

Preparing for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, somebody mentioned the John Paul II Foundation for Sport. I looked it up on the www. It was, in fact just a list of names, worthy names. Nothing practical had happened. A light bulb moment in my prayer.

As SPEC and all that had been taken away by Cardinal Cormac and ASPC closed by Vin, I was free to move into sport and help God with the character development of young people.

As mentioned, my philosophy chimes with Fredrick Nietzsche and his “I might believe in the redeemer if his followers looked more redeemed.” Young people – the present and future church – needed to lead what I called “Pre-evangelising lives”; making Christianity - and Catholicism in particular - more attractive.

Therefore, I contacted the Chairman of this notional entity, Professor Simon Lee. He agreed I could - if I found the funds - convert that idea into a Registered Charity. I told him about PIES and how virtues making values visible, young people would be able to discover their real IVR, their Identity, Values and Roles in life.

I hear you cry, PIES? What is that? Rather than the ‘mind, body, spirit’ - to emphasise the importance of relationships and our emotional life - I go with

PIES = The Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and Spiritual dimensions of human life

Sport Faith Inclusion Wellbeing: their relationship with God.

Thanks to the wonderful generosity of Paul Leonard, who introduced me to Bates Wells & Braithwaite, Cannon Street – and covered all the costs - JP2F4S became a Registered Charity [No.1144087] on September 2011 – with its website and ‘che-guevarad’ logo based on the picture of Pope - now St John Paul 2- in Cardiff, just before boarding his plane back to Rome.

Initially, JP2F4S Trustees, were Professor Simon Lee [Chairman], Mgr Vladimir Felzmann, Commodore Paul Docherty and Catherine Myers.

My aim for JP2F4S was - in an accelerating world - to help young people fulfil their character development across the PIES. Though in life the Physical, Intellectual Emotional and Spiritual are inexorably intertwined they can, like white light with its spectrum when passed through a prism, be examined individually. When I mentor/spiritually guide people, we look at the progress across their PIES. It gives those encounters a structure.

Exercise improves not only concentration but also the ability to absorb information, education. Sport teaches self-discipline and that getting up is far more important than falling down. It also reduces obesity and improves social cohesion.

My idea was to use sports personalities as character-educational role models for young people. They would be more likely to follow the advice of an elite sportsperson than an RE teacher of school chaplain. Our “Aim high for all Virtues Programme” (AVP) was conceived. Like any baby, it would take time before it saw the light of day.

Nevertheless, we were able to launch the JP2F4S charity at Archbishop’s House Throne room in 2011. To make the point, I performed – while talking into a microphone - 73 press ups... “You can always do one more. You can push your Personal Best – your PB across those PIES. Why 73? Answer: I had celebrated 72 birthdays, plus, 9 months in my mother’s womb.

Now, in mufti, using my self-isolating, lockdown time given to me by Covid 19, as I revise this book - AJTE 3 - in late 2020, before my morning shower, I do 83 of these on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays I do 83 full squats as I start to shave - to avoid you, dear reader pulling a face – I might add, with an electric razor. Sunday is a day of rest. Sheer bliss. No pain today.

Converting the dream of our AVP into reality took much time and effort.

Initially I went through those hundreds of Pope John Paul 2 presentations – speeches and article to see which virtues were his favourites. I identified the top 24: 8 in each of the three booklets, the first 8 repeated – as a reminder in year 9 those in The Foundation Booklet.

Our USP is the “Aim High for All Virtues Programme” [AVP]: on which Colm and I worked on for many years. I would come to his Hanwell home at 10.00am, work with him until lunch – he is excellent at scrambled eggs – then leave him to it. To earn his crust, he would trawl the internet to find suitable quotes from elite sportspersons on our virtues.

We agreed that each virtue would have a scripture quote, a picture and quote from an elite sports person, a video clip, a task and a prayer.

We road tested this 2012- 2016 in Yorkshire, Macclesfield, and Liverpool Schools. Clearly, we needed more female sports personalities. Which we managed to find. Then – when I presented our Booklets for his endorsement - Cardinal Vincent suggested we based them - not on JP2’s favourite virtues, but on the Gospel Values set out in the Eight Beatitudes, as identified in the CBCEW document “Christ at The Centre”.

So, back to the drawing board.

Four Booklets - for year 6, 7, 8, and 9 - now tackle each of the eight beatitude values with three virtues.

Underpinning our AVP - now with The Cardinal’s endorsement - is the conviction that Virtues make values visible. Ethics shape a human life.

Now if the church in UK and Western Europe is to have a future, we need a radical new approach. An education rooted in authentic gospel values orchestrated by the virtues underpinning John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport [JP2F4S] Aim high for all Virtues Programme [AVP].

AVP uses attractive role models, worthy of emulation. “If Usain Bolt says, ‘it is good to be courteous’, I will be courteous.” Courtesy is cool. Implicitly, we aim to become like those we love.

We worked on four types of JP2F4S Clubs.

1. School PETS Clubs (where PETS = PIES Education through Sport) that use our AVP.
2. After-School Clubs. These help schools with their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and bring them closer to the local community.

Having conceived the idea in January, JP2F4S was able to launch on the 12th October the first ‘2012 Legacy Club’ in the UK: 'Sports Squared', after-school club in Sion-Manning School, North Kensington, London. A school I had got to know well during my 24-year stint as Co-ordinator of school chaplains.

It grew thanks to Colm Hickey – Dr. Hickey – who came on board as a volunteer and as soon as we had the funds, we appointed him Director of Education. He will, I sincerely hope, once

we have the funding, come on board SWIFT and - as a wingman - help my ageing body keep on keeping on.

Colm, while head of St Thomas More secondary school, Haringey, worked with Tottenham Hotspurs. On condition boys did their homework and behaved, they were allowed to train at Spurs. Whether you interpret that as a carrot or a bribe, it worked. Their passion for sport controlled their temptations to skive.

3. Community-parish based Clubs. These enable young people to become peer-evangelists as they invite their non-worshipping school friends - and thus their families – to become a part of their local – worshipping – community. SS Michael & Martin, Hounslow, unites very mixed-race communities through football; thanks to St Mark school next door with its footy-cages.

Launching these is now VERY MEGA hard as PPs have been infected with CPT - Child Protection Terror: “If we have a club, things might turn nasty. Best not to risk it.”

4. Stand-alone Clubs; some initiated by JP2F4S, some supported and structured by JP2F4S, having been founded by others. These help with community-cohesion reduce crime and obesity while increasing health and wellbeing.

Guildford Goldhawks – now Goldhawks Basketball Launched 2012.

There is another Stand -Alone Club: Wessex United - thanks to Ike Offiah, currently Chair of Governors St Mary of The Angels, Bayswater.

On one particularly hot summer’s day, around 30 young people gathered for a kick about in the grounds of a school in the middle of the Westbourne Park estate, and the local community got scared. Fuelled by stereotyped media coverage and a general fear of large groups of young people, the school Governors summonsed a meeting to deal with this ‘problem’. I was called in.

Given my years of observing these young people, I argued that they had not, and were not causing any trouble, and despite pleas from the school governors for police intervention, I asked for a chance to talk to the lads and see if I could connect with them and allow them to continue their innocent goal of playing football.

Upon speaking to them, it became clear that the group of footballers were from rival estates, some of them rivals, and didn’t speak to each other away from the football pitch. Yet here, with no intervention or stewardship, they were congregating every week to play football peacefully and respectfully – they even tidied up their own litter after the game!

Encouraged by Ike, the Governors went with my instinct, and allowed the two identified ringleaders, Kerry and Anthony, to become key holders of the school pitch, to save them scaling the fence every week. Mary Wilson, the Head, even refurbished the floodlights.

So, a twice weekly kick about was born. Ike, who from his own experiences as a footballer, witnessing his two sons play junior football, saw some exceptional talent on show. He suggested that Kerry and Anthony enter football tournaments to pit their skills against other teams.

With the support of JP2F4S, Wessex FC was created, and the team played in numerous tournaments across the country, winning many trophies; currently stacked around the top of my kitchen cupboards in Bow.

The backgrounds or daily activities of the people involved in the team is unknown, nor does it matter to JP2F4S, what matters is that once they're on the pitch, they're footballers. The trust Ike developed with these young people resulted in them asking his advice about off the pitch issues, such as relationship advice, career support or help finding suitable housing.

Ike credits the virtues JP2F4S has instilled in him, and the support I had given for the success of this project. JP2F4S provided these young people with an alternative to a life of crime and violence. Sport has enabled and empowered them to walk a different path.

Before they disbanded, they were the Winners of Cup of Nations Cannes 6 a side 29.4.17. Wessex had kept in touch with *Athlétique Cannes* – who had been their hosts. They wanted to do something to show solidarity with the victims of Grenfell.

On Friday 13th July 2018 evening, having arrived from the South of France, *Athlétique* played a match - arranged by Ike Offiah and sponsored by JP2F4S - at the Paddington recreational ground on the 14th of July.

A minute's silence was held.

After the match, drinks and refreshment were held at St Mary of the Angels primary school, W2.

As at the Cannes Competition, former professional footballer Linus Primas also attended the match. The match ended *Athlétique* 4 - Wessex United 3. Wessex said that to show their gratitude they let the Frenches win.

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Until - as we shall see - it was subsumed into SMU in 2020, JP2F4S was akin to a Trade Association as it inspired, motivated, enabled and supported Sports Clubs to be conceived and grow; helping them to find funding while monitoring and mentoring their leadership to sustain the values of JP2F4S; encouraging them to communicate their achievements onto a wider stage.

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In 2012, I was invited to give a series of lectures at St Mary's University and preach a number of school retreats days of recollection. The most memorable of these was at my old School, St Peter's |Guildford. There I met Lower VIth Alex Sarama and - over the next few months - enabled him to start the JP2F4S Guildford Goldhawks, now Goldhawks Basketball (Surrey Goldhawks Basketball) – one of the biggest clubs in the UK.

It stimulated me to get sport higher up on our Church priorities. The words 'sport' was nowhere in Westminster Education's "Red Book - Our Catholic Schools, Their identity and their purpose." It made me think.

Eventually, in 2017, I went to see Vincent. I told him that The Church of England have a Chaplain for Sport: The Bishop of Sherwood, Rt Rev Tony Porter – whom I had met. The Vatican has not only Mgr. Melchor Sánchez de Toca in charge of sport at Department for Culture, who organised the Vatican’ “Sport at the service of humanity” conference in 2016 that I attended, but also Dott. Santiago Perez de Camino at the dicastery of Laity, Family and Life.

Not surprisingly, Vincent agreed that sport should come on board The Bishop’s Conference (CBCEW). Since May 2019, it is now there; in The Department of Evangelisation and Catechesis. I attend its Youth Committee meetings, chaired by Bishop Ralph Heskett of Hallam Diocese. Thanks to me - it makes me proud to have achieved something serious for the future - at long last, sport has come out of the Catholic closet!

To keep sport alive as a metaphor for life, Colm and I take turns in writing for The Catholic Times – weekly, back page until Covid 19 forced The Catholic Times to become a part of The Universe - and Kevin Flaherty was made redundant, his role as our contact was replaced by Brendan Gilligan.

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Given my age – I was born in 1939 – our JP2F4S Trustees have decided that, to ensure its sustainable future, we would be integrated into St Mary’s University, Twickenham.

Our bank account and website will remain the same; just come under the aegis of the Trustees of SWIFT, a research centre at SMU into which our activities - once Covid Protection allows - will be integrated.

We have had a relationship with St Mary’s University almost since the inception of JP2F4S. For the last 3 years or so the Charity and St Mary’s University have been in discussions as to whether some sort of merger might be possible. The purpose of such a merger would be to bring together various strands of our work on values, virtue and sport with a focus on younger people. This merger has now taken place.

As you know, I have been appointed Visiting Professor at SMU and – as long as I have the energy and mind –I will be working at SWIFT under Professor Symeon Dagkas, Dean of the Faculty of Sport, Health and Applied Science (SHAS).

To ensure its continuity/sustainability, I worked on inserting it into SMU.

2019 I was appointed Visiting Professor at St Mary’s University, Twickenham where, together with Prof Symeon Dagkas, on Monday 4th November 2019 we launched SWIFT.

My dream of enabling SWIFT to harvest statistics on sport and character education from around the UK and take AVP beyond the RC education system, meant that Colm and I produced a secular version – as yet not published. The only difference is that scripture quotes have been replaced by secular ones and the prayers by reflections.

Children – aided by parents or teachers, self-assess the quality of their virtues at the start – and then again at the end of their course. It will be interesting to see if there is a divergence across the UK, ages, genders and private versus private schools.

AVP 4 Booklets and the online interactive format – for typically years 6, 7, 8 & 9 – will generate statistics that SWIFT can harvest so that, within a few years we shall have statistics on virtue development: evidence quantifying the qualities of life.

SWIFT will be able to harvest useful – and hitherto non-existent statistics from these AVP booklets and online endeavours. Will there be variations across the genders? North- south? Wealthy and marginalised?

Rather than stay fixated on exam results, schools are being signposted towards what JP2F4S has been doing for years. The Ofsted Draft Inspection Framework, 2019 states “Education should work towards developing pupils’ character, the set of positive personal traits, dispositions and virtues that informs their motivation and guides their conduct.”

I suspect we are all agreed that if society is to thrive, its members need to develop their life-skills, their virtues and their ethics. SWIFT will be at the forefront of this. Point in that endeavour.

Diary of key events of JP2F4S leading to SMU

On 14 Jun 2014, at 14:11, I emailed Francis Campbell, Vice-Chancellor SMU. His PE, referring to me as Mgr. Valdimir [a reminder of Vin’s “Glad” – after I had on 24th October celebrated my 80 +50] (11) arranged for us to meet on Friday 11 July, 2.30 – 4pm.

We hit it off famously. Francis showed me around - and even then, drove me to Teddington Lock. After exploratory meetings with Lorna Goodwin, Mo Glackin and Michael Ayers, Francis and I signed our “P2F4S- SMU MOU “on Wed 17.2.16. I obtained my pass on 11.4.16.

SWIFT will have contacts in Africa. Overseas Clubs are there in JP2F4S. One or two with interesting names:

Mnyakanya High School – Kwa Zulu Natal 11.4.14; The Bambisanani Partnership 1.5.14; Ntolwane Primary School South Africa 20.9.14; 12 Stars Boxing Club, Adelaide, Australia 26.4.14; The Ethiopian Catholic Sport Association 7.6.14; Dandora Dumpsite Rehabilitation Group (DADREG) 4.11.14; World Churches Football Federation (WCFF) Nigeria 18.1.15; Spitfire Leadership & Sports Academy/, Otuoke. Bayelsa State. Nigeria 6.7.15; Lugazi Soccer Academy, Uganda 1.2.19.

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On one of my visits - 29.4.2017 - to a friend incarcerated there, I bumped into the chaplain at Wandsworth HMP, Deacon Robert Wellbelove.

(11) I have an A3 sheet to which I have attached the plethora of variations on my name]

His eyes lit up. “Might you be able to come and celebrate Masses – Saturday and Sunday afternoons, here?” Always ready for a challenge – and helping God – I said yes. Celebrating Mass and hearing confessions was real Ubuntu. The inmates benefitted and so did I. A sharp learning curve into hitherto unknown territory – even though while at The Cathedral I had supplied at Holloway and Pentonville.

I remember asking one of those housed by Her Majesty when did he get into crime? “I was aged four. My dad pushed me up into a kitchen window so I could open the front door for him.” And I used to think that the lads were inside as had lacked role models at home.

Another said that, though he was in for GBH, having been burgled himself, he had stopped burgling. He had felt the nauseating pain that he had not imagined he had been causing.

After a year, the Saturday Masses were scrubbed. The single 2.00pm Sunday Mass, was replaced for two Masses 2.00pm and 3.15pm - officially though often delayed. After Grenfell, fire security was reviewed and as there was only one door to the St Peter in Chains RC Chapel, not more than 60 prisoners were allowed to be there at any time.

When I discussed thus with a Chaplain at HMP Bure in Norfolk, who had been a senior Fire Officer in his previous incarnation, he said that was foolish. (Setting aside that the place is so damp, a fire is as like as a flood in the Gobi Desert). The chapel ceiling was not only high but had ventilation slots up there so there was absolutely no risk of smoke creating problems.

In March 2020, thanks to Covid 19, masses - and my prison visits - were suspended indefinitely.

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In 2016, with QPR, I worked on our ‘Wormwood Scrubs AHFA-JP2F4S Pilot’ Programme: FA Level 1/AHFA-JP2F4S for 18-25 year old, non-serious-violence/sex offenders, with less than 12 months to discharge. However, the government pulled the plug on funds that could have been used, it came to nowt.

In the Spring of 2016, I linked up with TUFF with its Inclusion Education preparing young people – boys and girls - for university. Football games enable County folk- who have never met a Muslim, Sikh or Hindu – to meet, compete with and realise that they too bleed if cut. (Shades of the Merchant of Venice, by the Bard)

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In December 2018, Niall, Studz and I decided that I would celebrate my 80th birthday and 50 years of priesthood on Thursday 24th October 2019; summer holidays over, Christmas celebrations not yet on stream. I would celebrate the 5.30pm Mass at Westminster Cathedral. Together, they would sponsor the reception at Cathedral Hall.

Studz, typically-very generously added that to celebrate my double feast, he would commission a composer to set my favourite Psalm to music. “Which is your favourite Psalm?” Without hesitation I replied, “139”.

Having discussed it with Harry Christophers, John chose Bob Chilcott. Harriet Capaldi, Director of Genesis, set up a Vaughan House meeting in March. I explained to Bob how 139

had become my favourite after my 1983 holiday in Sitges. I also suggested, that as I come from Czechia, he might like to think of Dvorak while musing on the music.

My homily at the 5.30pm Mass, attended by some 200 of my friends and allies-in-life, was based on my Sitges experience of God's paternal character.

At the magnificent Reception – the Hall had been converted into a magical garden [eventually I discovered the massive cost! Split down the middle by John Studz and Niall] in which I heard words that would normally be expressed at my funeral – I said:

“Basil Hume said it was OK to accept praise – as long as you do not inhale.

I don't usually talk with a script, However, coming for Central Europe, I tend to be very emotional – and thus on a night like this – drown my memory in tears.

First of all, I want to thank my hosts: Niall FitzGerald and John Studzinski: whose generosity has made this celebration possible.

Then Westminster Cathedral for allowing the Mass and the use of this Hall and, of course, Bob Chilcott who - thanks to John's generosity - set my favourite Psalm 139 to wonderful music – a world premiere.

I want to thank Kate Rittson-Thomas, my Goddaughter, for her delightful singing. What a voice. What a personality!

Every year the Sunday Times produces a list of the Richest People in the UK. You won't find my name there. However, were that newspaper to publish the Richest in Friends list, I would be there in the top number one.

You are my favourite people. I wanted to bring you together. Without you, I would not have been able to do what I have done, and be here as I am. So, thank you. Each of you, in your own way, have made my life a delight.

Friend? Alter ego. Friendship? A harmony of equality.

Reflection – incarnation – sacramental presence of The Blessed Trinity.

Living by giving. I-you-we: Us.

As priest, I will end with a wee prayer. 'I pray you - and I - stay open to God's graces that come in so many ways – above all through those that love us - and that we keep on keeping on in faith, love and hope. Above all, hope - right past our final breath. Amen.'

When, eventually you leave, on the way out, please pick up a goody-bag. One per family, PLEASE! There are enough for one per family.

Now, I am going to mingle.”

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Father Basil had a great line – which I have absorbed into my life these past few weeks as people say things about me that people normally hear only at their funeral. “It's fine to accept praise – as long as you do not inhale.” What a day that turned out to be.

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Priesthood has its perks: the joy of ‘successful’ pastoral care, of bringing a person back into the worshipping church. Before she entered the Marie Curie home in Hampstead, Yvonne used to come to the 1.05 Mary Moorfield Monday Masses I celebrated.

This from her daughter soon after Yvonne’s burial.

“I am sending you much love, and I am so glad that mama had you as support, she was so scared in the beginning and so at peace at the end and you held her hand through that. Thank you. Hannah Terlingen (and Jonny) x”

And from Emma Playfair: Mary Padfield’s sister who put me in touch with Yvonne a year or so before she died so I was able to receive her back into the worshipping church.

“Dear Father Vlad,

Once again thank you so much for everything you did for Yvonne, culminating in that wonderful homily and service yesterday (&). She valued so much the time she spent with you, which really brought her peace. You were so kind calling on her at home before you even knew her, sending her material and encouraging her to attend your services. I am so glad to know that you also valued the relationship so much. I too was very happy to see more of you over this time and am sure that we will continue to meet up. Thank you again so much. As you said, Ubuntu!

Much love

Emma”

Meanwhile, having celebrated my first house mass - in Chelsea - on Sunday 8th November 2020, I became a neo-recusant priest.

(&) Clandon Wood Natural Burial Ground, Epsom Road, West Clandon, Guildford, Surrey GU4 7FN.

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The story of Fr. Clement “Clem” Orango, who calls me ‘uncle’.

I first met Clem when to gain pastoral experience, he came to SPEC. I was there for his ordination as Deacon in the Comboni Missionaries on 8th December 2002 at St Therese of Lisieux Parish in Borehamwood where I was introduced to his mother, Keremensia Kerubo Orango.

For his ordination as priest on 16th August 2003, Clem was at his village church of St Teresa in Kisii, Kenya. In celebration, his mother danced around her newly ordained son.

Treated badly – racially abused by his order – Clem contacted me. He wanted to serve as priest in the UK. I phoned the best Bishop in the UK – Malcolm McMahon OP, whom I had known as a schoolboy and kept in contact as he rose to be Provincial of the Dominicans in England – and the West Indies. He said that as I knew Clem well, he would gladly take him on. So off we went to Nottingham early December 2007. Clem was appointed as the Priest in Charge of Bourne and Deeping Parish on 27th December 2007. He could not be a PP until he had been granted permanent stay in the UK.

After Malcolm was moved to Liverpool by Pope Francis – who appreciated his ministry - Clem was transferred as PP on 8th September 2015 by Bishop Patrick McKinney to the Parishes of Divine Infant of Prague, Syston, and St Gregory's, Sileby in Leicestershire.

On my visits to Bourne and Syston, it was clear how popular Clem had become.

However, following absurd allegations from a female parishioner Clem refused to appoint to the Parish Council, he was suspended from the parish on 2nd April 2018 by Bishop Patrick. Supported by a group of Nottingham priests – and by me - he survived until the Holy See restored him to the same Parishes by Decree, dated 18th June 2020, which completely exonerated him.

Clem - together with Chris Vipers - concelebrated my ‘Golden Jubilee and 80th birthday’ Westminster Cathedral Mass on 24th October 2019.

Clem was reinstated in his parish, August 2020.

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How I ended up becoming a journo.

E,mail

“Dear Fr Vlad,

I hope this finds you well.

As you may know, from next month (June 15) *The Catholic Times* is going to be published in tabloid format, and I would like to invite the John Paul II Foundation for Sport to contribute a weekly column.

Would it be possible for you to contact a good selection of the Foundation’s members, who would be able to write each week on a Rota basis?

There’s always a sports topic that springs up every week that comes to the fore, and there’s always a Catholic angle to be found within it!

I think it would be a welcome addition to the paper, as well as giving good publicity to the Foundation.

Please let me know if you are interested in taking up this offer and we can take things from there.

Best wishes,

Kevin Flaherty,
Editor, *The Catholic Times*”

On 17 May 2018, at 12:09, Vladimir Felzmann <vladimirfelzmann@rcdow.org.uk> wrote:

“Dear Kevin,
an interesting proposal.
Thank you.

Before responding
Just three questions:

1. How many words per week?
2. What would be the financial benefit to JP2F4S?

I do not know whether you are aware
that most weeks
I contribute my ideas to the questions on sport
posed by Nick Benson of The Universe.

3. Might this be deemed a conflict of interests?

With best wishes
X
Vlad.”

“Hi Fr Vlad,

Thanks for getting back to me.

I don’t think it would be a conflict of interest as, hopefully, different members would be writing each week.

I’d be looking for about 800 words per article, but I’m unable to offer a fee – I don’t have the budget that was once available (a sign of the times).

However, it would definitely raise the profile of the Foundation.

Hope it’s still a possibility . . .

Kevin.”

Colm Hickey – who used to be Director Education at JP2F4S - and I take turns in writing weekly contributions. Now, that due to Covid 19 The Catholic Times has been subsumed into The Universe, for the back page of that publication. Every article is there under the Blog button on our JP2F4S website.

Epilogue – My concluding reflections.

I hope that this third and final part of my memoirs will, as you learn from my story, help you shape your own life.

Life, like a game of rugby, has its rules. It is up to you to decide how to respond to whatever the opposition - some call it fate, I call it providence - throws your way.

Looking back over my four-score years of life on this planet, I realise that teaching – the best way of learning – ever since my 1954 Eriskay Experience (Ref. AJTE -The Early Years), became one of the strands in the thread holding my life together.

As Assistant Scout-Master, I taught scouts life skills I had learnt from Baden Powell's 'Scouting for Boys'.

Once in Opus Dei I set about teaching young men and later my peers the art of a spiritual life.

At Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School, I taught RE – O Level and GCSE and A level Johannine writings - and Liberal Studies, concentrating on communications and relationships.

As a chaplain taking School Assemblies, I soon discovered short homilies are best. More is less, less is more in meditations, lectures and marriage prep classes. My shortest homily: "If you were arrested for being a catholic, would there be enough evidence for the CPS to take it any further? Going to church services does not count. The Mafia does that." [Time it! 13"]

Leaving Opus Dei protected me from the episcopacy (%); a grim job indeed as the past millennium drew to its end and this one opened its eyes.

In the beginning - Gen 1,1 and Jn 1,1 – God created. Now is the beginning of the rest of our life. God is creating everything now. Today, now, is the start of our new life.

Learning from the past, seeing it as a rehearsal for the present makes failure - is we see it as an opportunity to learn - can turn to success. I have learnt more from my failures than my successes.

(%) Whenever people asked Father Basil why I was not a bishop he would say "Vlad's life has been too interesting" – referring to me being in and then leaving Opus Dei. Making me rather unpopular in the Vatican where Opus Dei had considerable influence.

My life has taught me that failure and pain – chiming on a far lower volume with Paschal Mystery – may be the road to success.

Abandoning Opus Dei, offered me the chance of launching YAP. That led to becoming the mother of SPEC, LOFT and SPECeast. When these were taken from me, I was free to get into sport, launch - and together with Colm run JP2F4S and become a journo – initially at The Catholic Times and then in 2020, when due to Covid 19 The Catholic Times could not stand alone, The Universe.

Study, teaching, reflecting on life and prayer have convinced me that God is present in every atom and in the Blessed Trinity's relationship with Creation The Father sustains, The Son guides and the Holy Spirit loves: respecting and appreciating everything that is good.

As 2019 was drawing to its close, I took stock of my 50+ years of pastoral work. These encapsulate.

1. Celebrating some 20,000 masses.
2. Chaplaincy to University students then teaching – and school chaplaincy - at the Vaughan.
3. Preaching scores – probably more like a few hundred - retreats and days of prayer.
4. Preparing hundreds of couples for marriage in twelve countries: Austria, Belgium, Czechia, England, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, Spain, Sri Lanka and Switzerland. Probably my most famous bride was Claudia Schiffer who married Matthew Vaughan on May 25, 2002, at St George's Church in Shimpling, Suffolk.
5. Taking scores of funerals.
6. Baptising hundreds of babies – and a few adults.
7. Hearing thousands of confessions.
8. Being Director of All Saints, 1091-2011; launching SPEC, 1992; LOFT in 1998 and SPECeast in 2001.
9. Launching and running YAP 1986-92; and WDP 1990- 2002.
10. Spiritually guiding/ mentoring hundreds of young and not so young; including a couple of Permanent Deacons in their preparation.
11. Being Priest-in-charge, St Mary and St Michael, Commercial Road 16.10.2013-15.3.2014.
Wapping, 8.8.14 – 4.4.15 where I met Toby Stevens, his wife Anne-Louise Plowman and their three children; two of whom I subsequently prepared for their first Holy Communion on Skype.
- Took care of the Anglophone community at St Anne's Underwood Rd 1.4.16 – 3.9.17 where, following horse-drawn hearses in cars, I discovered that hearse-horses trot at 10 MPH.
12. Chaplain to Olympics & Para-Olympics 2012; Para-Athletic & Athletic World Championships 2017; a far smaller affair than the 2012 Games. However, fun anyway.

So far, I have had a very blessed life, full of God's graces: the gifts of so many wonderful people. Thanks to them I have been able to do my bit.

As you know, there are three essential questions hanging over every human head: Who am I? What am I – what is anything worth? Why am I here? Thanks to the experiences of my life, I have discovered satisfying answers to these questions of identify, value and role.

Radically, I identify myself as a white-male child of God; who has – for varying periods - lived in different countries. I feel at home in England – and when studying in Rome, I felt at home. I know I am a Czech and since 2020 have that nationality as well. Time has sloughed the skins of the identities generated by my relationships at school, Boy Scouts, university boat club, Opus Dei, national and diocesan roles as well as erstwhile friends. My current friends – and many allies-in-life - play their wonderfully-powerful supporting roles; massively contributing to the joy of my life. [For these I am - and will be - eternally grateful] Outwardly, time has moved me on; inwardly, ever deeper into God.

My values - even if, alas all too often, I do not express them through virtues - are those of my best friend - God in Jesus Christ.

I have seen my role as priest to be more of a catalyst than an authority, a friend rather than a boss; equal to though – clearly – different from women. I am saddened to see that there are still so many priests who feel they are the aristocracy, laity - especially females - their inferiors. Clericalism has done so much harm to so many. Alas. Hence my next book: “ New Evangelisation Squared”.

My overarching role has been - and still is (hence this book!) - to help God make this world a better place. This book will have given you some idea how I have tried.

A postscript appendix (In case you are wondering).

Awards?

1. Companion with Star and Badge of Religion 1st Class, Order of Orthodox Hospitallers, 1986 for my interfaith work.
2. Knight, Polonia Restituta, 1988 for my pastoral and liturgical efforts for the Polish Government in Exile.
3. Cavaliere di Merito Ecclesiastico, Constantinian Order of St George, 1990 for Multi-faith work

4. Soon after I arrived at OLG in 1983, Francis Cuss, The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, UK Lieutenant - who lived on Duke's Avenue – took a shine to my preaching and invited me to lead a Lenten Retreat for the order at St Edmund's school, Ware.

The man sitting opposite me at lunch introduced himself. As we started our third course, Nico Brenninkmeijer said, "I believe your jacket is from Mark & Spencer." "It is," said I. "It looks like it has seen better days. If on Monday you go to our shop in Oxford Street, Mr. – I can't remember his name – will give you a couple of black suits." Therefore, off I went – to C & A, in what is now Primark – and returned to Chiswick with those two suits.

Thanks to a number of days of prayer I preached I passed the vetting and was invited to join the Order. An honour that opened doors to one very important friendship; that of Robert Benson. Without Robert FOBU would not have taken off and achieved its desired goal.

In 1994, I was invested as Knight of The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, in Southwark Cathedral; up graded to Knight Commander in 2001.

Thanks to the generosity of Robert Benson, the then Lieutenant, I went on their Annual Pilgrimage to The Holy Land in 1995.

A salient impression of the Holy land was its compact size. Another impact came from the tourism fables that had developed over the early centuries ce: where Mary lived while she was studying at the Temple in Jerusalem, the two caves in which John the Baptist lived – one in the summer and the other the rest of the year; the exact spot where the Good Samaritan did his bit – and the number of Emmauses that claimed to have hosted the couple walking from Jerusalem post The Resurrection.

A year later, I was enrolled in the Order of St Lazarus:

5. To foster ecumenism, I joined the, Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem (a saint who lived within a parable!) and became its Chaplain 1995- 2001. The Duke of Westminster joined the order. So, it came to pass that in 1999, it was at Eaton Hall, that I was invested as Chaplain General (OSLJ JChIJ),

6. For continuing with multi-faith work, in 2006 I was awarded Knight 1st Class Order of Francis I.

7. In 1999, thanks to Father Basil's generous appreciation, of my efforts, The Holy Father appointed me Prelate of Honour: a Monsignor.

He did not know I was working on raising funds to endow "The Cardinal Basil Hume of Religious Studies" at Bethlehem University. I did not know what he was doing for me. It was only after he had died, in June 1999 - and we were at Lourdes - that Bishop Vincent Nichols, then an auxiliary who was interim in charge of our diocese, said after our final mass: "Before Cardinal Basil Hume died, he had asked the Holy Father to appoint Vlad a Prelate of Honour. So, Monsignor Vlad" applause. (12)

As no one had remembered to bring my Certificate, I was presented with a rolled-up I.O.U.

When the applause had died down, we processed to The Grotto. Standing there silently, thanking Mary for the pilgrimage, a Swift swooped above us and crapped on my shoulder.

Father Basil – Uncle George to his family, of which I felt I had become an honorary member - was saying, “Don’t take it too seriously, Vlad.”

A Gala Lunch, with Bishop Vin in attendance, at the Auxilium – where I had been giving bi-annual courses in theology for a decade or so to the Auxiliaries of the Apostolate. They had produced a splendid cake with the numbers 10, 30, 60 in icing on top: 10th pilgrimage, 30 years priesthood, 60 years of age. Then, as the plane I was travelling on was, full, a first - and last as security after 9/11 was draconically tightened – for me: a ride back to Stansted on the Jump Seat in the cockpit.

8. Chaplain of Honour, Lourdes, 2015 – 25th anniversary of launching WDP.

WRITINGS

Articles and Book Reviews in the Tablet, Universe and Catholic Herald
Numerous articles in Westminster Cathedral Bulletin, 1985 onwards
Pamphlets: The Apostles’ Creed, 1989 and Life’s Pilgrimage, 1990.
Fortnightly Column on Sport, the Catholic Times, then The Universe 11.6.18 -
A Journey to Eternity – the Early Years, October 2019
Life Squared, a Guide to life in an accelerating world, 2020.
A Journey to Eternity – the later years, 2020

RETREATS PREACHED

Many throughout my stay at All Saints	1991-2011
St Mary’s Ascot Yrs. 11 and 13	1986-2012
St Peter’s Seminary, Wexford	1998 & 99
<i>Venerabile Collegio Inglese, Palazzola</i>	9-10.4. 06
Permanent & Trainee Deacons: Aylesford, 2008 & 9; Maryville, France, 2010; Ashburnham Place, Battle, 2011	

Artistic Advisor.

Thanks to my membership of CaAPA [which I joined in 1987 while it was still the Catholic Stage Guild] and currently Chair of Trustees since 2008 – I was religious adviser to The Last Confession (Theatre) 2007&14; Brideshead Revisited (Film) 2007; Saint Joan (National

(12) As, in Czechia Mgr. signifies *magister*, a teaching qualification, in lieu of Mgr. on my emails, I write Mons.

Theatre), 2007; Apparitions (TV), 2007 – written by Joe Ahearne, a past pupil of mine at CVMS; and Romeo & Juliet (Regents Park Theatre), 2008.

Vlad’s pet hatreds in films.

Empty suitcases pretending to be full. Inertia gives the game away.

Lengthy sideways looks - rather than momentary glances - while pretending to drive
Women with full make-up going to or in bed.

Though many clerics – including Bishops – no longer wear clericals I do because.

1. it gives witness to the spiritual
2. given how handsome I am, it offers protection from females.
3. they are classless: beyond shop and label pigeonholing.
4. little time needed to decide what to wear.
5. offers me lightness when travelling.
6. it gives the impression I am a conservative, so my progressive/radical views are more acceptable.
7. I have had free drinks after a number of restaurant meals. Waiters with a glass of brandy on a tray, have said – while pointing -something like “That man over there told me to tell you that he likes to see priests dressed as priests”. According to Rocco his son, whenever Charles Forte spotted a priest in one of his hotel restaurants, he took care of the bill.

Intriguing why - for me - the nines have been outstanding,

I was.

Born	39
Joined Opus Dei	59
Ordained Priest	69
Given role of Chaplain to Young People & Pilgrimage Director	89
Awarded Papal ‘Prelate of Honour’ [Mgr. or Mons]	99
Appointed Visiting Professor at St Mary’s University, Twickenham	2019
My favourite Psalm is	139
With its “Lord, you have searched me and know me....”	

My Priesthood line-managers in Westminster Diocese have been:

- 1982 -99 Basil Hume OSB
- 2000- 09 Cormac Murphy O’Connor
- 2009 - Vincent Nichols

I have aimed high – across my PIES. I have dared to be different so as to be my real self and I have tried to be generous and kind. That, I believe, is the practical way of living in the Kingdom of God.

Following the promptings of the Holy Spirit And with much help from my friends I have given birth to

The National Association of School Chaplains [NASC, now ACCE]	1984
Young Adults Pilgrimage to Lourdes [YAP]	1986
Westminster Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes [WDP]	1990
Spiritual, Peer Educational Centre for young people [SPEC]	1992
Bright Lights Festival for young people [BLF] @ SPEC	1995
LOFT @ SPEC – residential centre for under 12s	1997
School Mission Team [SMT, later called SPEC Outreach]	1997
Three Faiths Medical Forum	1999
Friends of Bethlehem University [FOBU]	1999

SPECeast: Peer-educational interfaith centre, Wapping	2001
SPEC SON – free newspaper for Westminster secondary schools	2001
John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport charity [JP2F4S]	2011

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Learning about flowers, that do not see their beauty, life has taught me that being there for others is the best way of living on our journey to eternity.

Deo Gratias.

PS Were I to attain the age of 90, I plan to update this third part of my memoir. You have been warned.