

St Mark's Chaplaincy Newsletter

No 16 December 2024

*D*ear Parents and Carers,

As we journey through this academic year, there is much to be grateful for. Our Catholic life events, such as the Year 7 Family Mass, Year 7 Retreats, our wonderful Charity and other initiatives, have been moments of grace and joy for our community.

We have witnessed students growing in their faith, forming new friendships, and encountering the love of Christ in profound ways.

It was truly encouraging to see so many parents join us for these sacred moments. Your presence is a beautiful reminder that faith formation extends beyond the classroom or chapel — it is a journey we walk together as a family of faith. At the heart of our mission is a commitment to live out our faith and embrace excellence in all that we do, empowering us to fulfill our potential. Your continued support strengthens this mission, helping to nurture the spiritual, emotional, moral, and academic development of our students.

I hope you find joy and inspiration as you read through this chaplaincy newsletter.

Blessings,
Ivan

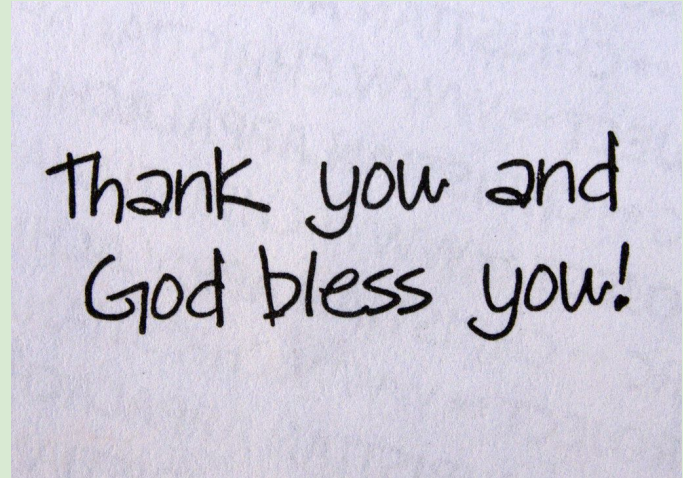
Prayer & Worship

Opening Year Staff Mass

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Fr. Terkura CSSp. for celebrating the Opening of the School Year Mass for staff on Monday, 2nd September. This was a particularly special Mass as it marked his last celebration with our school, following his move to become a Military Chaplain.

Fr. Terkura's homily offered thoughtful reflection on the call to serve, encouraging us to support and nurture our students, drawing strength and inspiration from Jesus as the ultimate model of servant leadership. His words were uplifting and set a positive tone for the year ahead.

As he embarks on this new adventure, we wish him many blessings and success in his important work as Military Chaplain.



Year 7 Family Mass

Our wonderful new Year 7 students have settled in well and are embracing life at St Mark's with faith and enthusiasm.

On Tuesday, 17th September, we gathered for a special Welcome Mass for them and their families, praying for God's blessing on their journey with us.

The theme of the Mass, "*I will be with you*" was beautifully reflected in the participation of our Year 7 choir, led by Ms Jackson. Ms. Rouse guided the students in a thoughtful Gospel drama, which enriched the liturgy. We are sincerely grateful to Fr. Damian CSSp. for celebrating with us and encouraging the students to work hard and follow Jesus in their time at St Mark's and beyond.

A memorable highlight was hearing the whole of Year 7 sing the St Mark's school song with such joy and energy — a fitting end to a wonderful celebration.



Melissa Angel De Souza First Death Anniversary Mass

It has been over a year since our beloved student, Melissa, passed away. To honour her memory, we gathered for a special Anniversary Mass on Thursday, 17th October 2024, during break time in the theatre.

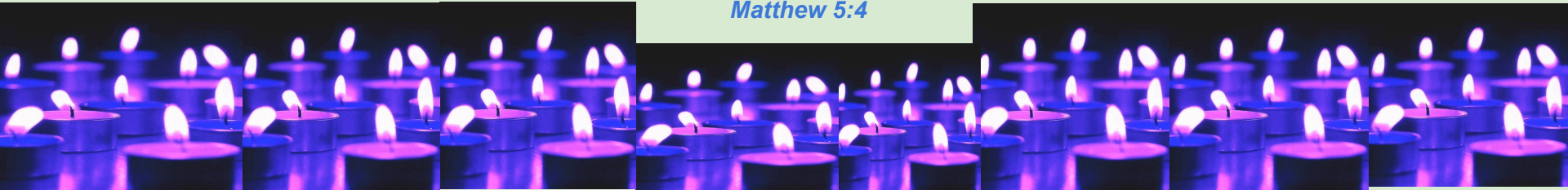
We are deeply grateful to Fr. Ignatius CSSp. for leading us in this meaningful celebration of Melissa's life, offering prayers of comfort, hope, and remembrance. May Melissa's light continue to shine in our hearts.



We love and miss you

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

Matthew 5:4



The Rosary and Culture Month



Live out our faith...

Prayer is a powerful connection shared by people of every culture. At St Mark's, as we celebrated Culture Month, we recognised how prayer unites us all. In October, we also celebrated the Month of the Rosary - a time to reflect on the life of Jesus through the prayer that has connected Catholics worldwide for centuries.

To celebrate this tradition, our Catholic Ambassadors created a video showcasing staff and students praying the Rosary in their native languages while sharing its significance. During Tutor Time, all forms watched the video and joined together in prayer, strengthening our shared faith and cultural unity.

A special thanks to Miss Joyce for leading this meaningful initiative, and to all the Catholic Ambassadors and participants who helped bring this celebration to life. Your dedication and involvement made this event a powerful expression of faith and unity. We also want to thank the Prayer warriors from the Student Chaplaincy team for leading the Rosary every Monday at lunchtime in the chapel.

All Saints Celebration of the Word



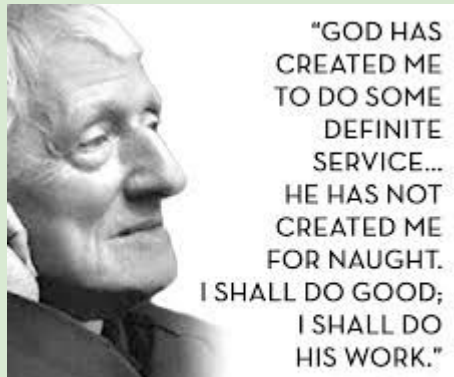
On Monday, 4th November, following our return from the half-term break, we celebrated the Feast of All Saints.

The Gospel for this feast reflects Jesus' Beatitudes, a call to live with humility, mercy, and compassion. Saints are those who lived these values, and we are challenged to do the same.

During our celebration, we reflected on the life of St. John Henry Newman, a British saint of the modern era. His powerful "*Definite Service*" prayer reminds us that each of us has a unique role in God's plan — a personal call to **holiness**.

The celebration concluded with a moment of silent reflection, accompanied by music, inviting us all to consider how we too are called to be saints in our everyday lives.

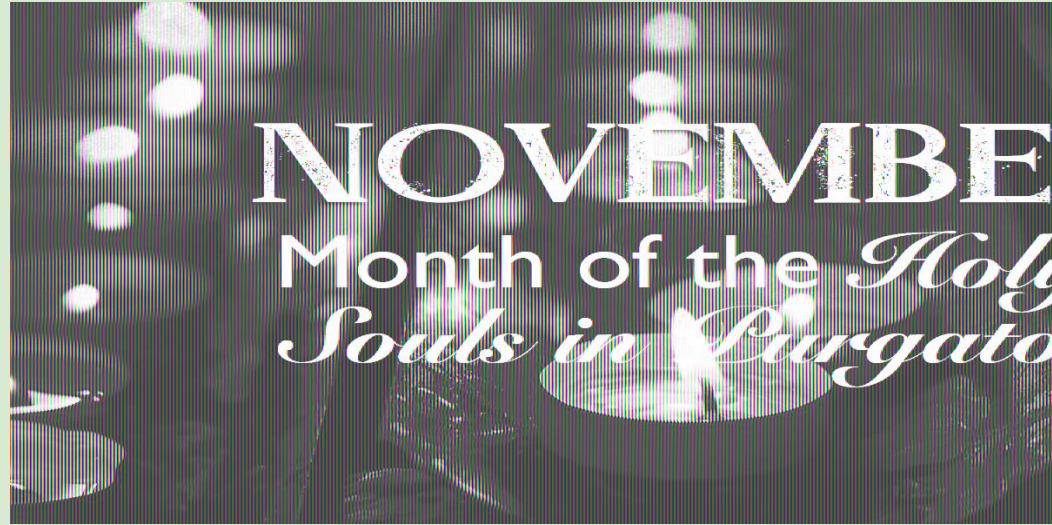
We extend our thanks to Mrs McGinty, Mr Waters and all the students from the Student Chaplaincy team, including the Youth SVP and Lectors, who were involved in this special Celebration of the Word.



November - Month of Holy Souls

In November, a month when we particularly remember and honour those who have passed away, both students and staff were invited to share the names of family members or friends they would like to offer prayers for. This act of remembrance brought our community together in a spirit of reflection and compassion.

On Thursday, 28th November, we gathered for our Bereavement Mass, a solemn occasion to pray for and remember those we have lost. We are deeply grateful to Fr. Ignatius CSSp. for celebrating this Mass with us. We also thank the Student Chaplaincy team for their help in preparing the prayer cards.



Advent Celebrations of the Word

We began Advent with a Celebration of the Word assembly, lighting the first candle on our Advent wreath — the Candle of Hope. During this time, we reflected on Scripture from the Prophet Jeremiah and considered how we can live out our faith throughout the Advent season.

In the following weeks, we continued our Celebrations of the Word, marking the second and third weeks of Advent by lighting the candles of Peace and Joy. These moments of reflection invited us to pause, pray, and prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ at Christmas.



Encounter with the person of Jesus Christ

Year 7 Retreats

Our Year 7 students participated in a spiritual retreat organised by our Lay Chaplain and RE department. The retreat focused on the theme "Called by God," giving students the opportunity to explore how they are being guided to grow in faith, trust, and self-awareness.

It was a heartwarming experience that helped them bond, reflect, and feel more at home in their new school community. We wish our Year 7s many blessings as they continue their journey here at St Mark's and beyond!

We also extend our thanks to the Retreat assistants from the Student Chaplaincy team for their help in preparing and delivering the resources.



Advent Eucharistic Adoration on Monday Lunchtimes in the chapel

During Advent, our school community had the opportunity to prepare spiritually for the celebration of Christmas through Eucharistic Adoration. Held on Monday lunchtimes in the chapel, this sacred time allowed staff and students to come together in quiet prayer and reflection before the Blessed Sacrament.



“Come to me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest.”
— Matthew 11:28



Prayer meetings with parents & carers - ADVENT

“Preparing Our Hearts for Jesus”



Thank you to all parents and carers who joined us to pray together!

Mrs McGhee and Ivan look forward to resume our prayer meetings during Lent.

The new dates will be sent out in spring term.

Parents and carers were warmly invited to join us this Advent for a time of shared prayer with and for our school community.

Use the link to join via Google Meet below:
<https://meet.google.com/eig-qfts-qoa>

Monday lunchtimes, 1.00–1.15pm

2nd Dec - Theme: Hope

9th Dec - Theme: Peace


16th Dec - Theme: Joy

Email: cizmariki@st-marks.hounslow.sch.uk for further information

Christmas Confession for Youth and Children

Our students are invited to come to the Christmas Confession for Youth & Children that will take place on Saturday 21st December in Ss Michael and Martin Church.

During the season of Advent , through our local parish, we encourage our school community to take the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation as part of their spiritual preparation for the celebration of Christmas. This sacred time allows students and staff to reflect on their lives, seek forgiveness, and renew their hearts in readiness for these important feast, deepening their relationship with God and one another.



*Confession is the sacrament of the tenderness of God, his way of embracing us.
Pope Francis*

**SATURDAY DEC 21st, 9:30am -11:00am,
Ss Michael & Martin Church, Hounslow**

**CHRISTMAS CONFESSION
for
YOUTH & CHILDREN**

Social outreach and charity work

CAFOD - Soup Lunch

Fisher House, along with our wonderful 6th form student leadership team, organised a soup lunch to raise money for CAFOD on Thursday 28th November.

It was great to see our community come together to show solidarity with those less fortunate than ourselves, and show their commitment to this month's Catholic Social Teaching- Preferential Option for the Poor.

In total we managed to raise £340, all of which has been donated to CAFOD ahead of the Christmas period.

We'd like to thank everyone who came along to join us, as well as those who made voluntary contributions to the cause.

CAFOD
Just one world

We Are
CAFOD

CAFOD
Just one world



Senior Citizens Christmas Party



On Wednesday, 4th December, our Faith in Action students hosted the annual Senior Citizens Christmas Party — one of the most joyful events of the school year. The celebration was filled with festive cheer as guests enjoyed songs, games, and delicious food.

A highlight of the event was everyone joining in to sing the St Mark's school song — including Ms. Waugh-Lucas, who was even caught on camera singing along!

A huge thank you to the RE Department and all the Faith in Action students who planned, organised, and hosted this heartwarming event. Your hard work and dedication brought joy and Christmas spirit to everyone who attended.

Advent Service and Christmas Fete

On Tuesday, 10th December, our school community gathered for a joyful Advent Celebration Evening, reflecting on how we prepare for the birth of Jesus through music, drama, and Scripture.

A huge thank you to our talented students and to Mr. Rogan (Head of Music), Ms Exon and the music department, Miss Jackson (Liturgical Choir), Ms Rouse (Head of Drama), and Mrs McGinty (Head of Catholic Life) for their hard work and dedication.

Before the celebration, our fundraising fete offered games, crafts, music, and refreshments, with all proceeds supporting our school charity, '*In This Together*,' which helps families in need within our community. Thank you to Mr Windmill and Mr Mihailovic for organising this.

Thank you to all who attended, supported, and participated in this joyful evening of reflection and celebration.



Toy Drive



A heartfelt thank you to everyone in our school community—students and their families, and staff—who generously contributed to our Toy Drive in support of Hounslow Social Services. Your kindness and generosity will bring joy to many children in need this Christmas.

A special thank you to Miss Jackson, the RE Department, and Faith in Action Sixth Form students for their hard work in organising this wonderful initiative.

We are deeply grateful to all who participated in this meaningful effort, embodying the true spirit of giving.

The Catholic Children's Society (CCS) Christmas Gifts for Families



CCS plays a vital role in bringing joy to children from families facing financial hardship who might otherwise go without gifts during the Christmas season. Through their generosity and commitment, they ensure that the true spirit of Christmas — a time of giving, love, and hope — reaches those who need it most.

This year, we are immensely grateful to CCS for their kindness and support, as they provided Christmas gifts to ten families in our school community. These gifts brought not only practical help but also hope, joy, and a sense of celebration to families who may have faced a difficult holiday season.

The impact of this generosity goes far beyond the gifts themselves — it reminds us all of the power of compassion and community in sharing Christ's love with others.

Pastoral Care



After Christmas we will again be offering a weekly peer support group for any students who have experienced a significant loss or painful experience. The organisation behind the programme is Rainbows Bereavement Support. For more information see: <https://rainbows.gb.org/>

At secondary level, the groups are called Spectrum. We are grateful to The Catholic Children's Society for the opportunity to run these programmes.

When something significant happens in a family, the entire family is affected. If a parent or sibling dies, a divorce or separation happens, or some other painful loss occurs, not only do the parents grieve, the children do also. Children and young people may find it extremely difficult to verbalise their feelings of grief because of their age and inexperience.

The Spectrum programme is a peer support programme which provides young people with a trusted adult and a group of their peers with whom they can work through their grief, build a stronger sense of self-esteem, and begin to accept what has taken place in the family.

Please reach out to Ivan if you would like your child to participate in the programme.

Contact email: cizmarik@st-marks.hounslow.sch.uk

Celebrating Our Outstanding CSI Inspection Results!

We are absolutely delighted to announce that St Mark's has been rated **OUTSTANDING** in all three areas of the recent Catholic Schools Inspectorate (CSI) inspection: Catholic Life and Mission, Religious Education and Collective Worship

This incredible achievement reflects the unwavering commitment, faith, and love that flow through every part of our school community. At the heart of our success are our amazing students, whose faith, compassion, and leadership embody our mission to *"live out our faith."* We are immensely proud of them all.

We give thanks to God for this blessing and for the dedication of our staff, governors, and the faithful support of Saints Michael and Martin Parish and all the priests who have been supporting our school community. Their guidance and encouragement continue to nurture the spiritual life of our school.

To our parents and carers — thank you for your ongoing support and partnership in your children's faith journey. Your involvement is vital to the life of our school, and we are truly grateful.

We invite you to read some of the most inspiring quotes from the inspection report on the next page, which highlight the strength of our Catholic Mission, Collective Worship, and the enthusiasm that defines how we live out our faith as a community.



Catholic Life and Mission

"The mission of St Mark's, 'To live out our faith,' is truly actioned by students and staff and enthusiastically embraced by the whole community."

"Student leadership groups are very popular at St Mark's, in fact 225 students applied to be Catholic ambassadors. Student led initiatives have been so successful that they have become annual events."

"We are fortunate to have teachers who care about our academic success but also our Catholic faith. We are nourished here." — Student comment

"Students take a leading role in responding to the demands of Catholic social teaching. They can clearly articulate the theology underpinning their actions."

"As part of their core religious education course, senior students put their faith into action by visiting local care homes and organising a toy drive so that every child connected to social services in Hounslow wakes up on Christmas morning with a gift."

"Leaders and governors at St Mark's place Catholic life and mission at the core of all they do."

"It is a privilege to work in a school where I am able to witness my faith to the students, and similarly, they also evangelise me through their incredible faith and reverence." — Teacher comment

Collective Worship

"Prayer is at the heart of this school."

"The quality and variety of prayer and liturgy provided by the school is outstanding."

"Students are respectful during prayer and have a genuine desire to become involved in worship." — Staff comment

"The variety of prayer and liturgy on offer includes the dramatisation of scripture, reciting the rosary at special times of the year, and opportunities to adore the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel."

"The voluntary break time Mass is very well supported, with more than 60 students and staff in attendance during the inspection."

"The recently renovated chapel is widely used and for many it is seen as a spiritual haven. "Any time we need to speak to God we can go to the chapel. It is a safe place."" — Student comment

"All form rooms have a dedicated prayer area with a display board focusing on the house saint, Catholic social teaching, and school values."

"Students highly value the school's chaplaincy provision, willingly taking leadership roles within it, including a student chaplaincy team made up of students from different year groups who were commissioned at a school Mass."

Prayer to begin Jubilee Year 2025

May the grace of the Jubilee reawaken in us,
Pilgrims of Hope, a yearning for the treasures of
heaven. May that same grace spread the joy and
peace of our Redeemer throughout the earth.
To you our God, eternally blessed, be glory and
praise for ever.

Amen



*Finally, please remember if I can
support you in any way do not hesitate
to contact me.*

*My email address is at the bottom of
this letter or you can just ring the school
and leave a message for Ivan.*

*Be assured of my constant prayers for
you and your family.*

Ivan Cizmarik

*From all of us at St. Mark's School, we
wish you a blessed and merry Christmas
filled with Christ's peace and joy.*

*School Lay Chaplain
cizmarik@st-marks.hounslow.sch.uk*