

NEWS BRIEFING

FROM BRITAIN AND IRELAND



Priest mourned

Hundreds of mourners attended a Requiem Mass in Edinburgh for **Fr Martin Xavier Vazhachira** (above), who was found dead in June on a beach in East Lothian. Fifty priests from Scotland and England, including the Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh, Leo Cushley, and representatives of the Syro-Malabar community in Scotland, of which Fr Martin Xavier was a member, concelebrated Mass at St Mary's Cathedral.

Archbishop Cushley thanked God for Fr Martin Xavier's gifts and implored him to "forgive whatever sins he may have committed in his human weakness".

The archbishop also asked for prayers for Fr Martin Xavier's family. The circumstances of the 33-year-old priest's death are not yet known. His body will be repatriated for burial in his native Kerala, India, pending a report from a public prosecutor or Procurator Fiscal.

Caritas **Anchor House**, the Catholic homeless charity, has marked the opening of a new development in Newham, east London, which includes 25 studio flats intended to aid the transition from homelessness to independent living, as part of the charity's Home and Hope Appeal. Launched in 2011, the appeal has raised £12.8 million of its £15.3 million target, allowing the charity to extend its services in the local community.

"To accomplish what we have," Mgr John Armitage, chair of trustees at the charity, said, "in what has been the most challenging of financial times in our country, has been nothing short of miraculous."

Speaking at the event, Bishop Alan Williams of Brentwood said: "This place is always welcoming, always inclusive, always accessible and that's exactly how it should be ... the good that goes on here spreads out to the wider world."

Kurdistan aid plea

The Bishop of Clifton, **Declan Lang**, has urged the UK Government to continue assisting the "hundreds of thousands" of people driven from their homes in the Kurdistan region. Bishop Lang, chair of international affairs for the Bishops' Conference, said that everyone has a "duty to help the people of Iraq build their future", and he called on Catholics to offer their support through aid agencies. He also

urged the Government to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches minority communities urgently. Earlier this month, Labour MP Mary Glendon told the House of Commons that there are one million internally displaced people in the Kurdistan region and she highlighted the prominent role played by the Catholic Church. The diocese of Erbil currently supports 70,000 people, but according to Bishop Lang, "the humanitarian need continues to escalate every day".



The belief that "combating poverty and protecting the natural world go together" is being explored at the **National Justice and Peace Network of England and Wales** annual conference this weekend in Derbyshire. The theme of the conference, run in partnership with Church Action on Poverty, CAFOD and Caritas Social Action Network, is "A Sabbath for the Earth and the Poor: The Challenge of Pope Francis". Fr

Peter Hughes, an Irish Columban priest, said Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* has "helped raise awareness of the fragility of the planet we live on". He advised: "Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and protecting nature."

Other speakers include Dr Ruth Valerio (pictured), head of global advocacy with Christian charity Tearfund.

Specialist meets Gard doctors

Doctors at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) in London have met with the US specialist who has offered to treat the terminally ill baby **Charlie Gard**. Dr Michio Hirano has discussed Charlie's condition with the boy's medical team and independent medics and has had full access to his medical records to decide whether Charlie should travel to America for experimental treatment. The visit is part of the latest stage in a court fight, brought by Charlie's parents, Connie Yates and Chris Gard. Their son has a form of mitochondrial disease, which causes progressive muscle weakness and brain damage. GOSH has said it is the unanimous view of its doctors that Charlie has "no real prospect of any quality of life".

The case is expected to resume in the High Court in London next week.

Compiled by **Tom McGrath**

