

Mary stands proud amid devastation as 45 escape from shattered church

A church community in Texas has been left contemplating their involvement in a miracle after a violent tornado smashed down their church – but left the hallway, where 45 of them were huddled, largely unscathed, allowing them all to escape unharmed.

The tornado smashed into St John the Evangelist Church in Emory, Texas on 30th April, one of a number of storms which swept through middle America, leaving a trail of devastation in their wake and killing 13 across Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

Parishioner Monica Hughes was running a youth ministry evening for young adults and parents when she was alerted to the approaching tornado by a friend, who said a tornado was heading straight for the heart of the small town. Fearing the worst Monica ordered all present to move to the church's hallway – 'the innermost part of the building,' she told reporters.

Thirty seconds after she had got everyone in the hallway 'my husband said, "It's hitting". He saw the roof of the sanctuary ripped off in one piece.

'We saw the doors fly open into the sanctuary space. My husband grabbed the door and he held on with everything

(he had) to the other,' Hughes said.

'What I saw was people covering each other, comforting each other – parents covering small children, teenagers huddling together. We began to pray.'

The parish's deacon, Marcelino Espinosa, was at one end of the hallway as he began a Rosary; Hughes was at the other end beginning the Divine Mercy chapel.

'We didn't have this horrible fear, we felt protected,' she told Catholic New Service. 'The whole time that we were in there and we were holding those doors, I felt that Jesus was over us ... whispering to me, "It's OK, I've got you".'

Once the storm had passed the parishioners emerged to find their church totally destroyed – except for the hallway.

'It's a miracle', the parish priest Fr Victor Hernandez, who was away from the church at the time, said.

He has vowed to rebuild the church 'bigger and better than ever before', adding that it has to be God's goal for the town.

Right, amid the rubble of the ruined St John the Evangelist Church in Emory, Texas, stands a statue of Mary

Photo: courtesy Diocese of Tyler



CARE urges sex-for-rent deals to be made illegal

Nick Benson

A Christian advocacy group has expressed its deep concern at landlords who target vulnerable people through online adverts offering sex-for-rent deals.

Christian Action Research & Education (CARE) has called for a review into online adverts offering accommodation in exchange for sex.

The call comes after Justice Secretary Liz Truss said the issue was "concerning" and agreed to look into it after facing pressure from MPs.

The deals – which are currently legal – included one man offering a room for a tenant who would pretend to be his girlfriend, while another advertised a room in exchanges for 'services', a recent BBC investigation found.

"These adverts are often targeted at vulnerable women and it is unsettling to hear from people that have been in this situation that have felt like this agreement was their only choice," Louise Gleich, CARE's Senior Policy Officer for Human Trafficking, told *The Universe*.

"An arrangement such as this puts vulnerable people at severe risk of entrapment, violence and abuse.

"CARE is deeply concerned that these adverts currently operate within the law and therefore would welcome an urgent review into adverts that are posted online which offer accommodation in exchange for sex."

Labour MP Peter Kyle (Hove) recently called for a review into the practice and demanded harsher punishments for those "exploiting extremely vulnerable" women.

Speaking during justice questions in the Commons, he told Ms Truss: "Websites such as Craigslist are being used by corrupt individuals to advertise free accommodation in return for sex.

"Will you agree that this is happening at the moment within the law and a review needs to take place so that people who are doing this and exploiting extremely vulnerable young women will face the full force of the law?"

In reply, Ms Truss said: "Well, I agree with you that this is concerning and I'm very happy to look at that issue."

Gaffney urges Johnson to tone down his aggressive rhetoric 'and be like Gandhi'

Nick Benson

The general secretary of a Catholic international peace movement has urged Boris Johnson to follow the non-violent approach Gandhi demonstrated as a leader.

Pat Gaffney, of Pax Christi, suggested that the Foreign Secretary follow the example of the leader of the Indian independence movement, "who promoted non-violent approaches at every level and cautioned against acting out of anger and revenge: 'an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind'."

Ms Gaffney's comment came following Mr Johnson's tirade at Jeremy Corbyn, in which he claimed that electing the Labour leader as prime minister would be a threat to national security.

'The biggest risk with Jeremy Corbyn is that people just don't get what a threat he really is,' Mr Johnson wrote in *The Sun*. 'They watch his meandering and nonsensical questions and they feel a terrible twinge of human compassion. Well, they say to themselves: he may be

a mutton-headed old mugwump, but he is probably harmless.'

Mr Johnson insisted: 'It is absolutely vital for Britain's security that we have the strong, stable and decisive leadership of Theresa May.'

He questioned where Mr Corbyn stood on Russia 'interfering blatantly with Eu-



'Political leaders should be seeking the common good as a way of creating security for all'
Pat Gaffney

ropean democracies', Kim Jong Un leading a 'semi-deranged regime in North Korea, bent on getting nuclear weapons that could one day be used to strike this country' and the UK and its allies taking on an 'Islamist death cult'.

'He seems to have no grasp of the need for this country to be strong in the world,' he continued.

'Just when Kim Jong Un is on the verge of acquiring a really deadly nuclear

weapon, Britain could be on the verge of acquiring Jeremy Corbyn as prime minister – a man whose brilliant idea of a nuclear deterrent is that we should send our nuclear subs to sea with no nuclear missiles aboard.'

However, Ms Gaffney said it was 'tragic' that strong leadership is always associated with military might or the willingness of a leader to take the country into war or to intervene militarily in another country.

"Political leaders should be seeking the common good as a way of creating security for all people," she told *The Universe*. "Political leaders should be aware of our role in a global community and how we enhance the quality of life and human rights or diminish them, by the actions we take."

Ms Gaffney said she would like to see a leadership model based on dialogue and identifying the real security needs of people and the planet.

"I would like to see a model that upholds the value of international treaties and obligations as a way of building con-

fidence between countries," she added. "A model that does all it can to address domestic and international problems with wisdom and insight in order to prevent us from becoming a society governed by fear that resorts to violence to control and contain problems."

Parties should make helping homeless priority as charity praises Tory MP's bill

Nick Benson

The Cardinal Hulme Centre has insisted that all political parties should be doing more to prevent people from becoming homeless.

The centre's demand comes as charities are calling on political parties to pledge to stop rough sleeping in their manifestos ahead of the election in June.

It also follows the passing of the Homelessness Reduction Bill into law. The bill, introduced by Conservative MP Bob Blackman, aims to stem the 'rising tide' of people living on the streets by giving councils a legal duty to provide meaningful support to resolve housing issues.

It requires local authorities to provide new homelessness services to all those affected, not just those protected under existing legislation.

"This is a really significant achievement for a Private Members' bill to go on to

become law and we welcome its emphasis on preventing people from becoming homeless. Bob Blackman is to be congratulated," Cathy Cocoran, chief executive of the Cardinal Hulme Centre, told *The Universe*.

"However, although additional funding has been announced for local authorities, we are concerned that councils will have a very difficult task in meeting the obligations of the new law when they have even fewer resources to draw on," she added.

"There is still a desperate need for more affordable housing which seems to be slipping further down the agenda.

"We welcome any effective response to the increasing scandal of homelessness but urge all political parties to give a high priority to even more being done to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place."

Depaul UK CEO Martin Houghton-

Brown also welcomed the bill becoming law and paid tribute to the "selfless work of Bob Blackman MP and several charities, especially Crisis, who ensured that homelessness is today one step closer to being eradicated from our streets".

"The act gives local authorities the duty to try to find accommodation for many more homeless people and will help reduce the number of young people in the UK who are homeless," he told *The Universe*.

"Now local authorities and central government will need to work with charities such as Depaul to implement it," he added. "Our Nightstop services can provide a safe place for people to stay while they deal with problems that could result in them becoming homeless. Nightstop already works with a number of councils across the UK and we look forward to working with more local authorities to help them meet their new duties."

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