

The beauty of Christian life

Pope Francis asks us to join him in praying that the Church might always witness to the presence of Christ, says **David Stewart SJ**



IN JANUARY 2017, the Holy Father invited everyone to, “join in the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network, which spreads the prayer intentions I propose for the Church each month. In this way, the Apostleship of Prayer moves forward and communion grows.”

Pope Francis now invites the whole people of God to pray with him for a particular intention each month. It reflects the concerns of his own heart for the challenges that humanity faces and for the spread of the Gospel.

There’s a second, “Urgent Action” intention, too, given to us on the first Sunday of each month. Check the Pope’s Global Prayer Network website or social media pages.

A further innovation, to be introduced this year and next, is a “Local Intention”

in several dioceses of England and Wales, chosen by the local bishop. Check in your own parish or diocese to see what that is each month.

“The concerns of his own heart for the challenges that humanity faces”

The First Intention for July is for **Lapsed Christians: that our brothers and sisters who have strayed from the faith, through our prayer and witness to the Gospel, may rediscover the merciful closeness of the Lord and the beauty of the Christian life.** Often people have stopped attending our churches or participating in sacramental life because what they

saw and experienced was anything but beautiful or merciful. To pray this month’s Intention, then, is to reflect on where we might have failed them and on what we need to fix.

In August, the Pope will pray, “**that artists of our time, through their ingenuity, may help everyone discover the beauty of creation**”. The history of art, and not just painting, contains countless instances of human searching for deep meaning beyond what’s immediately obvious. Our prayer with the Pope is that this may continue in our own time.

For September we pray for **our parishes: “that, animated by a missionary spirit, they may be places where faith is communicated and charity is seen**”. In his great document *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis encouraged “missionary discipleship” as a desire for the whole people of God. With a fully shared missionary spirit, there’s no limit to what our parishes might become!

October’s Intention considers **workers and unemployed people.** Pope Leo XIII’s great encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, broke new ground by discussing workers’ rights and social justice, thus launching the great tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. This month, Francis reminds us that our “throwaway culture” even affects real people who, when denied their rights, are denied their human dignity and their opportunity to contribute to the Common Good. ●

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