

## Flexible approach

ITS PRACTITIONERS claim that sitting in the lotus position brings an inner peace. Yet there are those in the Church who believe that yoga – with its origins in Eastern religions – is a misleading illusion. Nevertheless Ampleforth, the Benedictine community of monks in North Yorkshire, has decided to allow yoga retreats on its premises.

The Little Yoga Company will be conducting two yoga retreats in buildings owned by the community. The group teaches yoga in the Kashmiri tradition, and promises to re-orchestrate the body's spiritual energy and "open practitioners to deeper levels of awareness".

But yoga has not always been welcome in Catholic churches. Last year, a priest in the Diocese of Portsmouth made headlines for banning yoga classes from the parish hall because he thought the practice was incompatible with the Catholic faith; and in 1989 the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote that "Eastern methods" of meditation such as yoga were incompatible with Christianity.

A spokeswoman for Ampleforth told us that it was leasing space to the local company and had nothing to do with organising the classes.

## New neighbour

ONE OF THE smaller but no doubt keenly felt crosses that the Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI had to bear when he held the office of the successor of St Peter was that he could no longer look after his beloved cats. As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, it was well known that he took in and looked after stray cats in Rome's Borgo neighbourhood. Since 2005 he has been without regular feline company, apart, of course, from his brief encounter with the Birmingham Oratory's community cat, Pushkin, whom Benedict met during his 2010 visit to Britain.

Now it seems that he could be reunited with his favoured animals. Pictured near to the Pope Emeritus' new residence in the Vatican is a black-and-white spotted cat.

The cat was photographed by *L'Observatore Romano* as the creature wandered around the area next to the Mater Ecclesiae monastery, which has been recently converted into Benedict's new home – he moved in last Thursday.

Veteran Vatican commentator John Thavis says that the Vatican Gardens are believed to have a number of stray cats roaming around them.

## Drama of two Popes

AS THE Pope Emeritus settles into his new home, the BBC has seen an opportunity in the unprecedented arrangement of a



Bishop of Rome and his successor both living in the Vatican, as is the case with Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict.

An afternoon drama on BBC Radio 4 about two successors of St Peter living in the Vatican was due to be broadcast on Friday. In *The Guest of St Peter's*, written by Irish writer Hugh Costello, a fictional Pope Paul VII (played by Andrew Sachs, best-known for his portrayal of the waiter Manuel in *Fawlty Towers*) is living in a small monastery in the grounds of the Vatican City, having resigned two years previously citing old age and illness. The new Pope, Leo XIV, has excommunicated a group of liberal American priests for offering contraceptive advice to their parishioners, but the priests have defied him. A "Cardinal Sastré", the Vatican Secretary of State, decides to visit the retired Pope in his monastery and ask him to make an intervention.

Mr Costello has written a number of afternoon dramas for BBC Radio 4. These include *Conclave* – about the papal election following the death of Pope John Paul I – and *My Dear Children of the Whole World*, on Pope Pius XII's Christmas address of 1942.

## Protest vote

GIVEN THAT all three of the main political parties support same-sex marriage, the local elections presented something of a dilemma for Catholic voters.

Some lent their support to the United Kingdom Independence Party (Ukip) which managed to secure 147 councillors and is opposed to gay marriage. But Ukip has been critical of what it calls "open door" immigration policies, a stance the Church may be more sceptical about.

Austen Ivereigh, who as Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor's press secretary helped start the annual Mass for migrants in 2006 that takes place in London every May bank holiday, said he had voted for anti-immigration party Ukip in protest at other parties' support

for gay marriage. Mr Ivereigh, a Catholic journalist and broadcaster, said: "In general elections you vote for the government, in local elections you vote to try to change government policies." But he added: "Ukip's stance on immigration and Europe is abhorrent to me as a Catholic – but its policy on same-sex marriage is exactly right." (See *News from Britain and Ireland*, page 31.)

## Monumental Passion

THEY'RE TO be found on racecourses and in the landscaped gardens of the rich and famous, but two recent sculptures by Nic Fiddian-Green have been placed in churches.

The Catholic artist is best-known for his monumental bronze horses' heads, but for 20 years he has also produced work on the theme of Christ's Passion. The biggest of these, a head of Christ bearing the Crown of Thorns, was displayed at Southwark's Anglican Cathedral during Lent.

Now the Southwark sculpture, entitled *Christ Rests in Peace*, is being offered for sale. It is cast in lead, finished in gold leaf and stands eight feet tall with thorns 18 inches long. As yet there is no price tag for the work, though it is expected to cost something in the region of £95,000. It is to be exhibited at the Sladmore Gallery, in London's Jermyn Street, from 5 June to 26 July.

The sculptor's wife, Henrietta, is the daughter of Peter and Ann Hutley, the owners of the Wintershall Estate, where the plays of the life of Christ are performed each year. Fiddian-Green oversaw the creation of Stations of the Cross on the estate and sculpted two of the Stations.

## Forms of service

A PROBATION officer, a nurse, a medical social worker. And then, at the age of 65, Dorothy McGregor, who died last Friday, decided to become a consecrated virgin.

Known as "Sr Dorothy", she lived what is known canonically as a form of eremitic or anchoritic life according to the Rule of St Benedict. At around the same time she made her vows to the bishop in 1998, Sr Dorothy, who died aged 80, decided to set up a poverty charity in Accrington, Lancashire, in the north-west of England. She was a well-known figure in the town, always wearing a home-designed habit.

The charity she founded, Maundy Relief, started by providing food parcels to the homeless and now offers counselling and housing advice. According to Lucy Hardwick, the acting manager of the charity, it has around 100 people through its doors each year.

Sr Dorothy's funeral will take place on Monday at St Anne's Catholic Church, Accrington.