

ST. MICHAEL'S SCHOOL



Operation Philomena

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

Last December, we launched Operation Philomena, a very important fundraising campaign to help secure the longterm success of the only traditional Catholic school in England. The response has been very encouraging. Thank you to all of you who have subscribed. Some of you support us anonymously, so I am unable to thank you personally. The good Lord knows His own.

As I write these lines, a team of khaki clothed cadets troop past my window. Drums sound from the band room above my office. There is a momentary sense of drama and urgency until the drums break out of their fixed roll and the flutes pipe up. The colour and warmth of their brisk melody temper the menacing sounds of the base and snares.

Our little school is indeed a place of great drama. In a world of "muscular secularism", a valiant group of dedicated souls come together to seek mutual protection and instruction for their children. We are a place where the first chapters of life are written. Each family only has one shot at success. From the years of childhood and youth spent at St. Michael's, pupils will learn how to steer a steady course in life that will bring them to happiness and heaven.

We hope and pray that we will be up to the great task of passing on Catholic education to our children. The responsibility weighs heavily on the shoulders of priests and staff to whom the school's efficiency, growth and prosperity is entrusted. This is why we wish to share the burden with you, for alone we are not up to the task.

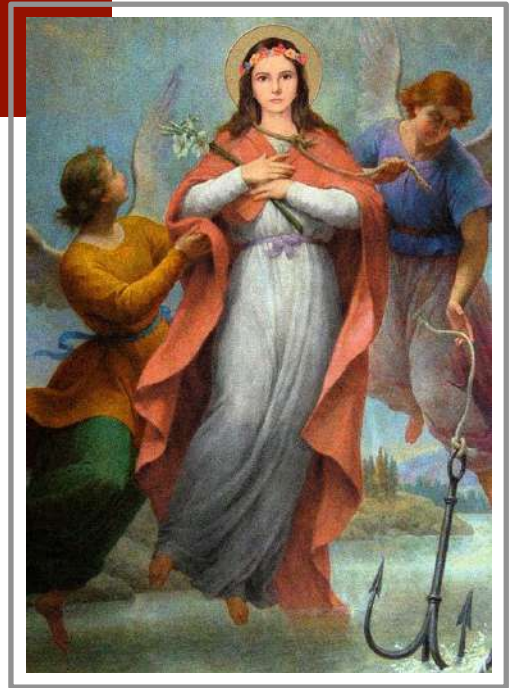
In the face of great financial and administrative challenges we have enlisted St. Philomena as a special patron and protector. The power of her intercession is described overleaf. It comes of a firm trust in her protection and care, and as a result of confidence in the efficacy of her intercession. We ask you to pray to St. Philomena for St. Michael's and to integrate her novena prayer into your daily family devotions.

We ask also that you spread her devotion, and publicise Operation Philomena so that many kind souls subscribe, thus affording us a monthly income in proportion to our needs. St. Philomena is such that she helps most often through the generosity of others.

Meanwhile, we pray and commend you all to our Lady. Thank you for your generous and kind support.

Fr. John Brucciani, Headmaster

Special Patronage



Several people have asked me why we have chosen St. Philomena as the special patron of our fundraising efforts. My only difficulty in replying is choosing which record best illustrates my own personal experience of her very powerful and very thorough intercession for those who request her help and special patronage.

Act I

My first encounter with St. Philomena was in 2008. I was assigned as principal to a small junior school in Toulouse, France, which numbered 75 students. Although I had worked for several years in secondary schools, I had no experience of young children. My confrere, Fr. Fernandez, therefore advised me to pray a novena to St. Philomena, of whom he was himself a great devotee.

I remember smiling and thinking that his advice was rather simplistic. Shame on me, my pagan habits did not then allow me to pray novenas, and even less to pray to maiden saints so popular with woman and children. The mass and the rosary were enough for me; what need had I of pious prayers printed on pretty picture cards?

I thanked my confrere in a condescending manner. He told me off for my impiety, telling me that St. Philomena was, after all, the patron saint of youth. Thus came the first miracle. Despite my pride, I thought I had nothing to lose by praying a novena. I admit that it was the first of my adult life! I dutifully took up the pretty prayer card and prayed each evening with dubious fervour.

On the eighth day, as I vested for mass, mulling over the many distractions of which every Catholic is guilty when he goes to mass, a lady popped her head through the sacristy door: "Father, are you saying today's feastday mass?" I replied that it was a ferial day. "Not at all, Father! Today is August 11th, St. Philomena's feast day!"

My first novena as a priest, and it ends on St. Philomena's very feast day! My confrere warned me: "Be careful! She is adopting you, you'll see. Don't disappoint her. She's a young girl and sometimes capricious."

Some weeks later the school year began. As I became acquainted with my new duties, I thought I had better look into the accounts. I knew the budget was tight, more so after the recent construction of three new classrooms and a chapel.

As I juggled the numbers I realized that things were worse than anyone had suspected. We were deep in debt. The school had borrowed heavily and there remained only two months' worth of loan payments in the accounts. The economic recession was just beginning. State taxation had increased. I was in a panic.

I promptly announced from the pulpit to a parish of 350 souls that we needed £120,000 in the next six months, and

then another £90,000 yearly for the next three years. I do not think I ever had such an attentive audience as on that Sunday! The parish was stunned.

Meanwhile, my dear confrere, Fr. Fernandez, had given me Fr. O'Sullivan's book: *St. Philomena the Wonderworker*. I read that she had a weakness for schools in financial distress, especially whenever these schools prayed and spread her devotion. I, therefore, decided to officially invest St. Philomena with the duty of sorting out our financial situation.

Before the entire parish we made the promise that if St. Philomena answered our prayers, we would take all the children and their parents to thank her at her shrine in Mugnano, near Naples in Italy. This was on condition that she paid off all our debts in three years and left sufficient money to pay for the pilgrimage to Mugnano. If she wanted us to come to her, she had to pay our way!

Parish, parents, and children all rose to the occasion. We launched a letter to benefactors. The children recorded musical stories. Every family of the school and parish set up an image of St. Philomena in their homes and prayed her novena daily.

And we waited. In due course a beautifully hand painted portrait of St. Philomena was given to the school and we hung it up in a place of honour with the inscription below: "St. Philomena, pray for our bank account." Not surprisingly (in hindsight), the very same day, the first donations began to trickle in. Our goal was five hundred good souls giving €10/month by way of recurring donations. After two years we had reached that goal. Our future was assured for years to come.

Today, ten years later, the school continues to thrive. As promised, we did arrange what was an unforgettable journey to Mugnano in southern Italy. Parents and children travelled together (expenses paid!) first to Rome then on to Mugnano to say thank you to St. Philomena.

Act II

In 2010, I was sent to Nancy, France, to open up a new priory and school there. I had no doubt under whose patronage the school would be placed. Within a year, the school opened without a hitch, and funds were sufficient to plan for the future. However, the good Lord preferred that another take the foundation into hand. After only a year I was transferred to a parish and school in Armada, Michigan, USA.

I can still remember when, jet-lagged, I stepped out of the car and saw the school and parish buildings. As much as I was excited to discover the New World, my heart nevertheless sank. The place was ramshackle, comprised of an old house, a very tired-looking church building, rotting portable classrooms and a muddy playground. It had seen over 20 years of fervent activity and was looking very worn and tired. As the months went by, a harsh winter and a sweltering summer, periodic flooding, enormous utility bills, and a hundred other headaches confirmed the opinion that we really had to relocate to a healthy, safer and more accessible location if we wished to provide for the next generation.

Alas, the problem remained the same: finance. We needed money, lots of it. The parish was already very adept in raising substantial funds annually, but these were poured into the usual operational costs of a school and parish, with nothing to spare at year end. We had to find a way to raise not money, but capital. Enter St. Philomena.

Having obtained a beautiful statue of St. Philomena, we placed it in the chapel, to mark the beginning of a new Operation Philomena. We went through the same routine as Toulouse, launching an official campaign, editing letters, distributing prayer cards and storming heaven with daily prayers. Each family adopted St. Philomena into their families and her novena prayer became the mainstay of family prayer time. Our campaign centred around persuading as many people to sign up for a monthly gift of \$10 which would be set aside in a new-building fund. Parallel to this, we began a major overhaul of operations to cut expenditure and introduce more efficient methods of administration and management.

Simple as it sounds, there were many obstacles to overcome, most of all, that of fear for the future. On the face of it, the odds were stacked against us in every way. How could a cash-strapped parish hope for a future? Our fundraising appeals were in competition with other institutions. Why would anyone who was not a parishioner be interested in our plight? Was not the parish already "tapped out" from years of urgent appeals?

Well, St. Philomena did provide, lavishly. After an initial flurry of donations sporadically renewed after each campaign newsletter, a steady trickle of small contributions began to fill our coffers. Within the first year, Operation Philomena had raised \$130 000. This came in addition to a thorough overhaul of operations which allowed the parish and academy to place funds raised into a savings account.

We received many other signs and indications of St. Philomena's patronage: prayers answered the next day, a large gift received after a night of worry, but the most memorable remains the overwhelming sense of presence and awareness I felt when we first drove by the property we were to acquire several months later. Space does not allow me to describe the series of beautifully synchronised events, but that first tangible alert was the beginning of a sequence of little miracles that brought us all the way to the solicitor's office to sign the papers. The buildings acquired were the perfect match for our needs and wonderfully located, and throughout negotiations, the price tumbled down all the way to acceptance point.

Thanks to the guaranteed recurring monthly income generated by Operation Philomena, we were able to take on the loan necessary to acquire the property. Suffice it to say that the parish today enjoys the luxury of modern facilities in which it is able to carry out its work for many generations to come.

Conclusion

Both in Toulouse and Armada, St. Philomena's patronage was astounding in its speed and efficacy. Despite the doubts, the frustration and fatigue, even despair in the face of the sheer magnitude of our undertaking, St. Philomena never wavered in her intercession and protection. I tell this story in order to engage and encourage all the support we can muster for Operation Philomena. The assurance of past blessings and the pressing need of our present endeavour will help every reader to understand the necessity and usefulness of supporting our new Operation Philomena. The Curé of Ars' favourite saint will not fail to bless us if we are faithful to her. I write this story in a spirit of immense gratitude to a saint who answers desperate prayers with overwhelming generosity, to whom I pray that our parish and school will be indebted for many years to come.



Shrine of St. Philomena, Mugnano 2011

"Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto Me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Matt.19:14

Note from a Grateful Parent

The parable of the Pearl of Great Price appears in Matthew's Gospel to illustrate the exquisite nature of paradise: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

Dear fellow parents, had St. Matthew been rearing a large family in the modern era as we do, he may have drawn a similar analogy on the price to be paid for a truly Catholic education in today's world. In our case, this precious and beautiful pearl, so rare as to almost no longer exist, and for which many of us sold all that we have, is Catholic education. The following article is an expression of gratitude that we have indeed, found our pearl of great price - a Catholic School, community & parish fortified by the one true Mass, and supported by a team of devoted religious, helpers and parents - and that this pearl is worth each and every sacrifice we've made for it.

Fr Edward Black, preaching a school retreat to us long ago as small children, once explained to us the Latin root of the word education as "educere," meaning "to lead out."

"Lead out of what, Father?" we chimed. "Darkness!" he retorted, in stern Dundonian accent. Needless to say, there were no more questions.

Although I was too young to understand, his point is an excellent one: a Catholic education is the only one which leads both soul & intellect out of darkness. How deeply grateful I feel to him, and to the other religious of St. Michael's, who have led small souls from the darkness of ignorance to the light of faith these past 20 years.

In addition to the obvious reasons to be grateful - notably that we inhabit a tiny, improbable oasis of innocence & faith set against a landscape of moral wreckage across Church and society - there are small, almost intangible

signs which occur from day to day, that inspire in me a deep sense of indebtedness to St Michael's school.

That my son is able to serve Mass with devotion, that he knows the responses, and understands what it means to be a pious altar boy.

That my daughter will remind us, in quest of an extra bonbon no doubt, that today is a first class feast day of such and such a great saint (gets me every time...)

That my children sing to many of their non-Catholic cousins, an off the cuff polyphony or chant taught by our sisters, while they look up astonished from their mobile phones.

That in their school bags can be found, along with maths jotter and a French dictionary, a rosary ring, a holy card, a miraculous medal... Deo gratias for these small, yet wonderful consolations.

Although brought up Catholic, by no means was my knowledge of the faith, or of Catholic culture, so deeply instilled in me as it has been in my own children thanks to the community and parish of like-minded parishioners which has grown around us. I am continually fortified by the heroic examples of these same families whose children shine like strings of pearls, and so thankful to count them as friends.

Pearls, however, do not come free of charge - in other words, at what cost comes the Catholic education for our children? Many brave families have already answered: at all cost. May their reward be the most profound and beautiful of unions, which is to be reunited with one's family in paradise. From thankfulness flows gratitude. From gratitude - energy. Energy leads to action; now, more than ever, St Michael's needs positive action.

A Grateful Parent.



£51,000 total support
received to date.



A Saint's Counsel

Operation Philomena:
117 registered supporters.

373 donations, of which
92 are recurring monthly.

Monthly donations total
£2871 each month.

Goal £10 000/month

In his last letter to his many benefactors, St. John Bosco wrote: *"The best way to obtain the forgiveness of sins and eternal life is to practice charity to young children. Whatsoever you do to one of these, you do to Me."*

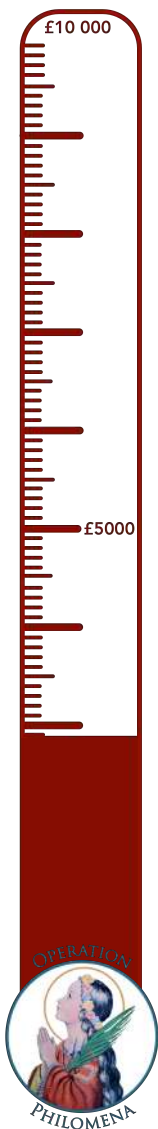
We all hope to win heaven. A saint shows us an easy way to get there. When we stand at the judgment seat of God, the demons will rage, accusing us of our many sins and claiming us as their own. But Christ will cut them short: "Yes, they sinned, but they pitied Me and helped Me, every time they gave to one of My little ones."

A school is a youngster's universe. It is a place of knowledge, grace, and happiness. It is an environment in which Christ is King. It is the fruit of so many sacrifices and so much charity. This is why God loves Catholic schools, and blesses those who help them.

St. John Bosco continues: *"With so few means available to families to help bring up their children in the faith, the Blessed Virgin Mary has appointed herself their special advocate. She thus obtains extraordinary spiritual and temporal graces for all their benefactors."*

Dear friends, may God bless your efforts and sacrifice. He wishes to act through you. Christ needs you in order to bless and protect His little ones.

The children pray daily for all their benefactors. Please send us your prayer requests. A child's prayer is a powerful means of intercession and grace. We will place our intentions on the altar, to be remembered each day at the Holy Sacrifice.



Operation Philomena Fire Emergency



A recent fire safety audit has highlighted the urgent need for new fire doors in Saint Raphael's House. These measures are immediately required by our insurance company. Failure to comply will result in the expulsion of priests and staff from Saint Raphael's House.

Each fire door costs £400 to buy and install. We need **10 kind donors to sponsor a door** to keep Saint Raphael's House open to resident staff. We sincerely ask that you seriously consider answering our prayers in this hour of urgent need.

SPONSOR FORM

I would like to help keep Saint Raphael's House open by sponsoring a fire door:

£100

£200

£300

£400

Suggested quote of encouragement:

"I am the door. By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved: and he shall go in, and go out, and shall find pastures" St. John 10:9



- ➡ We also had to fire proof the basement. **£9000 to remove asbestos!** A kind team of parents from Toulouse came and gave a week's work. Basement now fire-safe!
- ➡ OFSTED has also obliged us to **renovate the dormitory bathrooms** from top to bottom. Initial quote is for £45,000!
- ➡ We must also **redecorate the dormitories** (paint walls, install new carpets).
- ➡ All the classrooms and the refectory are long overdue for repainting.
- ➡ Lots to keep us busy during the summer months! Volunteers with skills more than welcome.

TSVP



Name : _____ Tel : _____

Address : _____ City: _____

Post Code : _____ Country: _____ Email : _____

I would like to make a one-time donation of £ _____

I am enclosing a cheque.

Gift Aid Declaration

If you are a taxpayer you can increase the value of your donation by enabling us to reclaim tax via the Gift Aid Declaration below:

I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give from the date of this declaration until I notify to the contrary.

I want the charity to treat the enclosed donation as a gift aid donation.

Please notify us if you want to cancel this declaration, change your name or home address or no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/ or capital gains.

Signature(s) : _____ Date: _____

God bless you for your kindness! Questions? Call us at 01635 278137.

Return form to: **St. Michael's School • Harts Lane • Burghclere RG20 9JW • UK** headmaster@sanctusmichael.com

*Holy Mass offered for all our benefactors on the 1st Friday of each month.
Registered Charity No. 274695 "Society of St. Pius X"*

I would like to help every month via Standing Order

Gift Amount : £10 £20 £30 £40 £50 Other Amount : £ _____

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society

Please pay Royal Bank of Scotland, Newbury Branch, 20 Market Place, Newbury, RG14 5BD on the day of each month until further notice. **Sort Code 16-26-18 Acc. Number: 10191323** for the credit of St. Michael's School.

Bank/Building Society Name : _____ To : The Manager

Address : _____

_____ Post Code _____

Name(s) of Account Holder(s) _____

Account Number :

Branch
Sort Code :

Signature(s) : _____ Date: _____

Send this part of the form to your bank

Armada, USA
Before Operation Philomena



After Operation Philomena

