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Alder Hey doing everything 'humanly possible' to help Alfie says Archbishop

by Christopher Lamb in Rome (/author/104/christopher-lamb-in-rome)

The Archbishop of Liverpool has told Pope Francis that Catholics in Liverpool are 'heartbroken' by the Alfie Evans case



The Archbishop of Liverpool has told Pope Francis that Catholics in Liverpool are “heartbroken” by the Alfie Evans case while telling The Tablet that the medical and chaplaincy team at the city’s Alder Hey hospital have been doing everything that is “humanly possible” to help the seriously ill toddler.

Speaking from Rome, Archbishop Malcolm McMahon explained that he saw the Pope after attending the general audience in St Peter's Square on Wednesday 25 April and had a brief discussion with Francis.

"I saw the Holy Father after the Wednesday General audience and we talked about Alfie. I was struck by his compassionate attitude to both Alfie and his parents, and he promised me he is continuing to pray for them," the archbishop said.

"I explained to him that the Catholic people of Liverpool are heartbroken for Alfie and his parents and are continuing offer support and prayers."

Alfie Evans is at the centre of a bitter legal dispute over his life-support treatment, which on Monday was switched off by Liverpool Alder's Hey hospital. The 23-month-old, who suffers from a terminal but unnamed neurological condition, has been in a coma at Liverpool's Alder Hey hospital for more than a year.

British judges have repeatedly ruled against the child's parents wish to bring Alfie to Rome to be cared for at the Holy See's Bambino Gesù hospital. Italy has now granted the child citizenship. On Wednesday evening, however, the Court of Appeal upheld an earlier ruling denying the latest legal attempt Kate James, 20, and Tom Evans, 21 to have their son transferred from Alder Hey.

The Pope and the Vatican have been following the case closely. Last week Francis met with Alfie's Father and on Monday night via Twitter

made an appeal that “the suffering of his parents may be heard and that their desire to seek new forms of treatment may be granted.”

While Francis, the Italian state and the Holy See have sought to help in what are a tragic set of circumstances, the case has also been taken up by pro-life groups, right-wing parties in Italy and parental rights campaigners. There has been fierce criticism of Alder Hey’s staff with angry protesters trying to storm inside the hospital on Monday.

The US Catholic bishops tweeted (<https://twitter.com/USCCB/status/989167178372059136>): "We urge all Catholics to join the Holy Father in praying for #AlfieEvans and his family and that their desire to seek new forms of treatment may be granted. May the dignity of Alfie’s life and all human life, especially those who are most vulnerable, be respected and upheld."

Texas Senator Ted Cruz, an evangelical Christian from a Catholic background, posted a series of tweets (<https://twitter.com/tedcruz/status/989220797611995144>) on the case. He wrote: "I urge the UK government to grant the Evans family’s request to treat their precious child in Italy. Americans strive to achieve the promise of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' for all our citizens, no matter how young or old....I encourage all my fellow Americans to join me today in praying for Alfie and his family."

Meanwhile, Merseyside Police issued a warning about some of the content being shared on social media.

Chief Inspector Chris Gibson said: “Merseyside Police has been made aware of a number of social media posts which have been made with reference to Alder Hey Hospital and the ongoing situation involving Alfie Evans. I would like to make people aware that these posts are being monitored and remind social media users that any offences including malicious communications and threatening behaviour will be investigated and where necessary will be acted upon.”

Archbishop McMahon offered his support for Alder Hey whose 2017 inspection report rated it as providing “outstanding” care while stressing hospital’s chaplaincy team have offered pastoral support to Alfie’s family and staff at the hospital since the child was admitted in December 2016.

“I am grateful for the medical and chaplaincy care which Alfie is receiving,” the archbishop said. “I know that they are doing everything that his humanly possible. And our prayer at this difficult moment is that the Lord will give everyone the spiritual strength to face the immediate future.

He added: “I am very aware of the compassion which is characteristically shown by the Italian people to those in need, and in this case Alfie. But I know that our medical and legal systems in the UK are also based on compassion and the safeguarding of the rights of the individual child.”

While the Bambino Gesu hospital have offered to help Alfie its president, Mariella Enoc, has not spelt out what new treatment, if any, it could offer. On Tuesday a judge said that all medical

experts had agreed that further treatment was futile and it would be against the child's best interests to fly him to Rome.

The high profile Christian Legal Centre are representing Alfie's parents but one of their advisers, Pavel Stroilov, a law student, was heavily criticised by a judge on Tuesday who said some of his legal advice had come close to contempt of court.

It has also been reported that a priest in the Archdiocese of Westminster, Fr Gabriele Brusco, a member of the Legionaries of the Christ, administered the sacrament (<http://magister.blogautore.espresso.repubblica.it/2018/04/23/alfie-evanss-easter-day-by-day-a-chronology/>) of the anointing of the sick to Alfie. While blessing and offering prayers for a sick child is regular pastoral practice, Canon Law states (http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P3M.HTM) that the sacrament of anointing is administered to those who have "reached the use of reason" and not in the case of a small child such as Alfie. The anointing for those who are sick or seriously ill is offered to console and help but also on the presupposition that individual has sinned in some way.

Pic: Archbishop Vincent Nichols Archbishop OF Westminster, Archbishop Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham, Archbishop Malcolm McMahon OP taken when he was Bishop of Nottingham, Cardinal Miloslav Vlk, Cardinal Archbishop Emeritus of Prague © Mazur/catholicchurch.org.uk