

Debate & Analysis

Ground control to Major Tom



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Last month, the unexpected nine-month mission for NASA astronauts Sunita Williams and Barry Wilmore finally came to an end.

After an unplanned extension, their initial eight-day mission turned into a prolonged stay aboard the International Space Station. On March 18, 2025, they safely returned to Earth, landing in Florida.

What was fascinating is that when there was no immediate scientific solution in sight, people turned to prayer. Communities of all faiths came together, offering prayers for the astronauts' safe return. Churches around the world held special

services, focusing on the astronauts' courage and resilience. Religious leaders highlighted their perseverance in the face of uncertainty, framing the mission as a test of faith and strength. As ground control struggled to reconnect, prayers filled the gap. It offered hope by invoking God's protection for the journey back to Earth. How the two worlds co-exist is remarkable.

Here, the phrase "ground control to Major Tom", made famous by David Bowie's 1969 song *Space Oddity*, encapsulates this moment of isolation; a moment of cosmic detachment. Not just isolation in outer space, but as an eerie metaphor for disconnection. Major Tom, the lone astronaut drifting beyond reach, speaks to a deeper human reality: feeling cut off, suspended between the familiar and the unknown. When solutions seem distant and control slips away, hope often lingers on. As in the case of Williams and Wilmore, it was more than just a scientific challenge; it became a global moment of collective hope.

And on this Easter Sunday, this message of hope resonates more powerful. Easter symbolises renewal and hope. During this time, prayers are said to have the power to offer comfort and solace in even the most try-

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ing situations. For Williams and Wilmore, prayers bridged the unknown and the hopeful, uniting people across the globe in a shared desire for their safety.

In times of uncertainty when individuals feel adrift, those moments of "floating in a most peculiar way," as Bowie so poignantly puts it, religion can serve as a vital anchor and coping mechanism for many. In effect, some sociologists examine prayer as a coping mechanism in times of stress or adversity, providing structure, meaning, and emotional resilience. Prayer can be a social resource

helping individuals to manage distress, providing a sense of control when external circumstances seem beyond their influence. Communities praying together provide social support that can ease emotional burdens and foster resilience. Prayer, in its many forms across cultures and faiths, serves as a profound way for individuals to connect with the supernatural. This connection often extends beyond the spiritual, offering hope and deeply nourishing one's emotional, mental, and even physical well-being.

This ties in neatly with the 2025 Catholic Jubilee theme, *'Pilgrims of Hope'*, which calls the faithful to Rome not merely as tourists or observers, but as spiritual sojourners seeking renewal. It is an invitation to walk together in faith during a time marked by global uncertainty, to rediscover oneself in times of disorientation, healing through mercy, fostering unity across divisions, and embracing a renewed sense of purpose rooted in the hope that transcends the present moment. Hope is manifested in our relationships with others, particularly those in need. It is through these connections, through our shared compassion and solidarity, that hope takes tangible form.

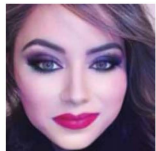
Fundraising events, like last Friday's, are transactions of

hope in action. These events stand as powerful expressions of shared collective support and purpose. While state-funded healthcare promises to provide for all members of society in need of medical care, these gatherings do not merely serve as financial complements. They go beyond simple transactions, offering the community a common moral responsibility. In doing so, they foster a collective sense of duty and lend sociological significance to the act of giving.

Easter reminds us that in uncertain times, when we feel orbiting senselessly in space, hope is never out of reach. When ground control fails, faith often sustains the believer. In this way, it strengthens the human spirit, in moments of isolation and seemingly hopeless situations. In an age of uncertainty, feeling lost is all too common. It's not just about being directionless, but about the deep sense of loneliness and losing our footing. It is here that shared compassion is key as we navigate a highly individualised society.

Wishing all readers, a blessed Easter, filled with renewed hope, compassion and grounded peace.

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DENISE DE GAETANO

In Malta's vibrant educational landscape, a growing concern has emerged: the lack of motivation among students to engage in their studies.

While the country boasts a rich cultural heritage and a commitment to educational excellence, many students face barriers that hinder their enthusiasm for learning. Addressing this motivation gap is essential for ensuring that Malta's youth are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed for future success.

Understanding the roots of low motivation
Several factors contribute to

students' declining motivation to study. Among them are the pressures of academic performance, the relevance of the curriculum, and the methods of teaching. Many students find themselves overwhelmed by expectations, leading to anxiety and disengagement. When students struggle to see the connection between their studies and real-world applications, their interest wanes, resulting in decreased motivation.

Additionally, the traditional educational model often emphasises rote memorization over critical thinking and creativity. This approach can stifle students' natural curiosity and discourage them from actively engaging in their education. To foster a genuine love for learning, Malta must re-evaluate its educational strategies and prioritize methods that inspire and engage students.

Creating relevant and engaging curriculum

To combat low motivation, it is crucial for educational institutions to develop a curriculum that resonates with students. By incorporating real-world applications, project-based learning, and interdisciplinary ap-

proaches, educators can help students connect their studies to their passions and interests. For example, integrating technology, environmental issues, and social entrepreneurship into lessons can make learning more relatable and exciting for students.

Moreover, inviting industry professionals and community leaders to share their experiences and insights can inspire students and provide them with a broader perspective on the relevance of their education. By showcasing diverse career paths and opportunities, students may be more inclined to invest in their studies and aspire to achieve their goals.

Encouraging student agency and ownership

Empowering students to take ownership of their learning can significantly boost their motivation. By providing opportunities for choice and self-directed learning, educators can encourage students to pursue their interests and passions. Initiatives such as personalized learning plans, mentorship programs, and student-led projects can foster a sense of agency and responsibility among students.

Creating a supportive learning environment that values student input and feedback is also essential. By involving students in decision-making processes related to their education, schools can cultivate a sense of community and belonging, further enhancing motivation.

Promoting mental well-being and resilience

Addressing the mental well-being of students is critical for enhancing motivation. Academic pressure and stress can take a toll on students' mental health, leading to disengagement. Schools must prioritize mental health resources, counseling services, and wellness programs that promote resilience and coping strategies.

Incorporating social-emotional learning into the curriculum can help students develop essential life skills, such as emotional regulation, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication. By nurturing these skills, students can build the resilience needed to overcome challenges and maintain motivation throughout their educational journey.

Collaboration between stakeholders

Improving student motivation requires a collective effort from educators, parents, policymakers, and the community. Collaborative initiatives that promote open dialogue and partnership can create a supportive ecosystem that values student well-being and engagement. By fostering communication between schools and families, stakeholders can work together to identify and address barriers to motivation.

Conclusion: cultivating a culture of motivation and learning

In conclusion, addressing the lack of motivation among students in Malta is essential for cultivating a culture of learning that empowers future generations. By creating relevant and engaging curricula, encouraging student agency, promoting mental well-being, and fostering collaboration, Malta can inspire its youth to embrace their educational journey with enthusiasm and determination. Together, we can unlock the potential of every student, ensuring they are equipped to succeed in an ever-changing world.

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