



COWLEY ST JOHN PARISH MAGAZINE

£1

Christmas 2016



PARISH DIRECTORY

The Ministry Team

The Revd. Phil Ritchie
07590514884 (preferred)
philipsj68@gmail.com

01865 242396



The Revd. Ben Williams
07540784156
hishtafel@hotmail.com



The Revd. Dr Sabina Alkire (Associate Priest): 07792505847
The Revd. Susannah Reide (Associate Priest): 01865 401439
Mrs. Janet Proudman (Licensed Lay Minister): 01865 723764
Mrs. Petronella Spivey (Licensed Lay Minister): 01865 724430

Churchwardens:

- Mrs. Rosy Handcock (St. Mary & St. John): 01865 242957, rosyhancock@hotmail.com
- Mrs. Zoe Randall (St. Alban): 07818066685, zoej.randall@btopenworld.com

Sacristans:

- Miss Verona Harris (St. Mary & St. John): 01865 723090
- Mrs. Zoe Randall (St. Alban): see contacts above

Music Directors:

- Hilary Davan Wetton (St. Mary & St. John): 07932150822, hdw@btinternet.com
- Susanna Gimson (St. Alban): 01865 793008, susanna.gimson@ntlworld.com

Parish Treasurer and Administrator:

- Mr. Alan Baker (Office in St. Mary & St. John Church)
- Office Hours: Tuesday – Thursday, 9:30am – 2:30pm
- Tel: 01865 792717
- Email: cowleysaintjohn@btinternet.com

Websites for Cowley St. John Parish:

- **Main website:** www.cowleystjohn.co.uk
- **Facebook Group:**
<https://www.facebook.com/cowleystjohn.parish/>
- **St. Mary & St. John Churchyard Project:**
www.ssmjchurchyard.org.uk
- **‘Home’, an experimental Christian Community in Oxford:**
www.home-online.org

Church Street Addresses:

- **St. Mary & St. John Church**, 271 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 2AJ
- **St Alban the Martyr**, Charles Street, Oxford, OX4 3AH
- **Bartlemas Chapel**, Cowley Road, Oxford, (turn down the lane next to the vicarage at 271 Cowley Road, OX4 2AJ, and you will reach the chapel at the heart of Bartlemas Village).

REGULAR SERVICES

Sunday:

- **8:00am** Said Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John
- **9:15am** Sung Eucharist at St. Alban
- **10:45am** Sung Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John
- **6:15pm** Said Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John

Monday to Thursday:

- **8:00am** Morning Prayer at St. Mary & St. John
- **5:00pm** Evening Prayer at St. Mary & St. John

Wednesday:

- **12:00pm** Silence and stillness at Bethlehem Chapel, All Saints Convent* (during warmer months at Bartlemas Chapel).

Thursday:

- **10:30am** Said Eucharist at St. Mary & St. John

Friday:

- **8:30am** Morning Prayer at St. Alban
- **9:00am** Said Eucharist at St. Alban

* All Saints 15A Magdalen Road Oxford OX4 4EN (<http://allsaintssistersofthepoor.co.uk/>)

CHRISTMAS SERVICES

11th December - Christingle for Carnival:

- **3:30pm**, St. Mary & St. John. In aid of the Cowley Road Carnival. Mulled wine and minced pies after.

18th December - Traditional Carol Service:

- **5:30pm**, St. Mary & St. John. Sung by the Intermezzo Choir, Oxfordshire Harmony West Gallery Singers and our parish choir.

24th December at St. Mary & St. John:

- **Crib Service: 4pm**, followed by refreshments.
- **Midnight Mass: 11:30pm**. The heart of Christmas, we gather this night to give thanks for Christ's birth.

25th December, Christmas Day Eucharists:

- **9:15am** at St. Alban
- **10:45am** at St. Mary & St. John

If for any reason you are unable to get to church but would like a visit from one of our clergy, please contact us. We could bring Holy Communion or simply come and pray with you.

SOME REGULAR EVENTS IN RICHARD BENSON HALL (Next to St. Mary & St. John Church)

Alice's Mad Hatter Tea Parties:

Held on the 2nd Tuesday of every month, 3-4:30pm, a friendly place where people who have experienced mental health issues in their lives can relax and just enjoy a cuppa, cake and a chat.

A Place to Be:

Held on the 4th Tuesday of every month, 12-2pm, a friendly monthly lunch for people with dementia, their family, carers and friends. Next meeting is on 25th January 2017.

Marhaba:

Held on the last Tuesday of the month, 7pm, a collaboration between various Oxford groups that sets up a platform for sharing music between communities.

*To find out about other events, please see the Parish
website www.cowleystjohn.co.uk
Or visit the church*

CONTENTS

	Page
Father Phil's Welcome	8
'On Dying' by Robert Jeffery	10
'Tales from an African Parish:1' by Edward Walker	12
'What it feels like' by Bridget Newman	13
'Advent Poetry?' by Peter McCullough	14
'World Mental Health Sunday' by Margaret Coombs	16
'Some Arithmetical Reflections' by Daniel Emlyn-Jones	18
'Faith & Health' by Janet Mccrae	19
'A recent visit to Taizé' by Mary Hardwick	21
'In the Churchyard...' by Janet Mccrae	25
'An Interview with Carol' by Daniel Emlyn-Jones	28
'Another Newbie at SSMJ' by Lorna Thomas	30
'Gleanings' by John Purves	33
Prayer Calendars	35

*

CHRISTMAS AND GOD'S MISSION

by **Father Phil**

“Following the Norman invasion of 1066, *thou* was used to express intimacy, familiarity or even disrespect, while another pronoun, *you*, the oblique/objective form of *ye*, was used for formal circumstances. In the 17th century, *thou* fell into disuse in the standard language, oft regarded as impolite, but persisted, sometimes in an altered form, in regional dialects of England and Scotland, as well as in the language of such religious groups as the Society of Friends. The use of the pronoun is also still present in poetry.”



Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia

*

“O Lord, thou hast searched me out, and known me, thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine up-rising; thou understandest my thoughts long before.”

Psalm 139

*

I was being reminded last week of how the Book of Common Prayer, had the distinction in intimacy between *thou* and *you*. That distinction is still present in French (*Tu/Vous*) but lost in Common Worship (*You/You*). ‘*Thou*’ has an intimacy which ‘*you*’ lacks but the distinction is lost to us now. This almost happened in Swedish, too, but in the 1960s, there was a popular campaign to bring back the Swedish word *du*, which corresponds to the English word *thou*. People wore campaign buttons that said, “Call me *du*.” The movement succeeded, so today, the

pronoun du has been completely rehabilitated! I'm not suggesting that we immediately return to the Book of Common Prayer, but part of our journey into the love of God must surely be about an emotional and spiritual language which allows room for intimacy, for trust and for loving kindness?

What the Christmas story captures, through the birth narratives is the 'Thou' intimacy of the relationship God calls us into. 'Thou' was the way we used to address our friend, our brother or sister, our dog or our pig! That's why it became the way we addressed God, because of its everyday intimacy.

In the Church we are sometimes nervous of the word 'Mission' because we fear it is something we do to other people, the very un-English imposition of our beliefs on others. However, God's mission was the sending of his son to reveal to us the fullness of his love for us. When our language lacks intimacy, it fails to speak of the things of God, it fails to be a vehicle for God's love. When following the baptism of Jesus, we hear the voice of God saying "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" we are immediately aware of the closeness, the intimacy of this relationship.

As we celebrate the unfolding of God's mission in the birth of Jesus this Christmas, let us also sense our calling into the closeness of a friendship in which we can call each other 'thou'.

*

ON DYING

by **Robert Jeffery**

Having been a priest in the Anglican Church for nearly 60 years I have had the usual amount of experience dealing with the pastoral care of the sick and the dying. My approach to this was conditioned by one of my first encounters which was with a 23year old man, a scoutmaster who was dying of cancer, in a back street in Sunderland. What was very remarkable about him was that everyone who visited came away impressed and peaceful. He expressed no resentment and it was as if he absorbed all the sickness around him and turned it into peace and acceptance. It was an experience that has lived with me ever since.

Now that I am dying of cancer, as the treatment I have had has totally failed, it has left me reflecting further on the matter. Some weeks ago, one night I was unable to sleep I took from my book shelf a book I had written in 1994, which was a series of meditations on the prayer *The Anima Christi* and I re-read in there what I had written about death.

Here is the passage:

'We discover that God is ever calling us to himself. God yearns for us and all our life is a call into union with God.' (Teilhard de Chardin in *Le Milieu Divin*). *We are all in the process of divination as God calls us to himself, but we find it difficult to let go. We have to loose all footholds within ourselves and the great agent of that transformation is death. "Teach me" he prays "to treat my death as an act of communion". God will not let us go. As we go through life resisting the call of God, we forget that God holds the final trump card. Death is the assurance of God's ultimate victory over our wilfulness and lack of love. "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit" and the "consummatum est" - the triumphant "it is finished" are one. No doubt Pope Pius XII was repeating the Anima Christi at his death because it was familiar*

to him and he had used it for many years. The use of familiar prayers at the time of death is a useful pastoral practice for the clergy and indeed for anyone ministering to the dying. The development of frequently said prayers is highly therapeutic. Jesus seems to have prayed Psalm 22.

My observation as a human being and as someone who has ministered to dying people is that people die as they have lived. Those habit-forming patterns of behaviour and attitudes of mind, which we have built up during our lifetime condition the way we die. How we have each developed as a person reveals itself at the time of death. Those who have fought carry on fighting; those who have grabbed and grasped at life continue to cling to it; those who have learned to accept life accept death; those who have learned the art of surrender find themselves able to surrender to death. The way we have learned to pray, the way we have used the sacraments, the way we think become part of our dying. The inner life, which we have formed, at the point of death, forms us.

(R Jeffery. *Anima Christi*. Darton Longman and Todd 1994 pp81-82)

The other week I had another 5 days in hospital and was talking to my neighbour in the next bed. He had recovered from cancer with the help of radiotherapy. I told him I was very happy just to let go and die. He was horrified. "No" he said "you must fight it all the way". But that is not my style and is the last thing I want to do. I do not want to pass judgment on his views. It is just not the way I see it.

30th October 2016

TALES FROM AN AFRICAN PARISH: 1

By Edward Walker

One Sunday last month we sang the hymn ‘We love the place, O God’. Each time I’ve sung it in the last fifty years I’ve found myself chuckling, more particularly when it comes to the verse ‘We love the sacred font/ For there the holy Dove/ To pour is ever wont/ His blessing from above.’ It is not the Victorian doggerel of those words, however, that starts me chuckling.

During the first half of the sixties I was priest in charge of a parish that stretched from Botswana (then Bechuanaland) in the West, to Mozambique in the East, from the Limpopo River in the North to the Tropic of Capricorn in the South. Under the Apartheid Government’s Group Areas Act in force at the time, black and white people had to live in separate areas; my African friend and colleague Joseph therefore had to live in the ‘black’ part of the town, while I had to live in the ‘white’. There was a small Anglican church in my part of the town, but none in Joseph’s, so we set to work to build one there.

The day came for its consecration. The bishop came up from Pretoria – cope, mitre, staff, the full Monty. The service began, and the bishop started to process round the new building, starting at the font, hand outstretched, ready to bless. We all turned round. Oh dear: there was a concrete plinth, but no font. What was the holy Dove, what was the bishop to do?

Africans are brilliant at improvisation. The verse had hardly begun when I noticed out of the corner of my eye some signalling going on between someone at the front and someone at the back – rather like the tic-tac men at the races. Within seconds a red plastic bowl appeared, passed from hand to hand, and landed on the concrete plinth. To his credit, the bishop (not over-endowed with a sense of humour) did not flinch. The red plastic bowl got its blessing; the holy Dove could relax.

The rest of the service rather passed me by. I just couldn't stop chuckling.

*

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

By Bridget Newman

Anxiety is a feature which commonly occurs in accounts of dementia. For the sufferer, the only appropriate response to this increase of fear and anxiety is for others to develop a sensitivity to the reality of their emotional experiences, and their inability to understand the changes that are happening to them.

To the person concerned it is not confusion, but an episodic mixture of forgetfulness over recent events, absent mindedness and internal preoccupations with thoughts and day dreams. There is a difficulty in making decisions, even about what to eat and wear, and in relating to people in terms of remembering about their lives and recent events.

The social repertoire is one of the skills retained longest, including politeness, being agreeable to strangers and putting on a good presentation of self. Memory failure can be masked by confabulation or ploys of activity. There is a distinction between the cognitive self, which is effected by memory loss, and the experiencing, feeling self which may be less impaired but hampered by the incapacity to verbalise. Creating and maintaining trust is one way of holding on to someone going through this frightening process. The fluctuating pattern, with good days and bad days shows that steady irreversible decline is somewhat rare and that some behaviour is a response to recent events or anxieties.

Elderly person to social worker:

"I am so terrified I cannot think clearly or get my words out right. Are you another one they have sent to stop me going home? I'm so confused I can't get my words out to defend myself..."

*

ADVENT POETRY?

By Peter McCullough

A couple of weeks ago, my College chaplain was putting together our annual service of Advent lessons and carols. Thinking that she might vary the readings a bit, she asked me for suggestions of ‘any good Advent poetry’. Now, that one got me, because I couldn’t think of any. I was not only ashamed of my ignorance as an English tutor, but also chastened because I’ve always professed that Advent is, bar none, my favourite liturgical season. (Passiontide is a close second – you can see where that puts me on certain spectrums, ecclesiastical and otherwise.) On top of that, it is Advent that has provided us some of our greatest hymnody. No Advent Sunday could be complete, could it, without Charles Wesley’s ‘Lo He Comes With Clouds Descending’? (It is so much my favourite that at the 10.45 on Advent Sunday this year I was in such a reverie over it that I forgot to cense the altar party and congregation - apologies!) But what about Advent poems *per se*? Christmas gets most of the seasonal poetic attention, even in the age to which we usually turn for religious poetry, the seventeenth century. We find nativity poems from George Herbert (‘Unfold thy face, unmask thy ray, / Shine forth, bright sun, double the day’ – I know, not his best I’m afraid), John Donne (‘Immensity, cloister’d in thy dear womb / Now leaves his well-beloved imprisonment’ – which is a corker if there ever was one), and Milton, being Milton, made his poetic debut (aged 21) with his magniloquent ‘Ode: On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’ (‘This is the month, and this the happy Morn / Wherein the Son of

Heav'ns eternal King . . . our great redemption from above did bring.').
But no Advent.

Maybe darker times are better as prompts for the longing themes of Advent. For it is the mid-twentieth century, the early-1940s in fact, at the depth of the worst war ever known, that Advent found its greatest poetic spokesman – W H Auden. It comes, I must admit, in a huge, little known, oratorio for Christmas, called *For the Time Being*, but – being a good catholic Anglican – Auden knew that you can't have Christmas without Advent, so he devotes a long first part to it. It doesn't shy away from its immediate place in history, achieving as it does much of its foreboding darkness by alluding to the bitter Allied losses in the early 1940s. But it was also written at the moment when Auden, self-exiled in New York City, found the love of his life, Chester Kallman. As such, the poem finds a way to articulate how sometimes only the darkest circumstances can throw us back into the arms of God's love, and force us to acknowledge the mystery that love is most supremely manifested to us in flesh – in love that is Incarnate. The world, Auden knew, hates this kind of love. So Auden's Herod – that spokesman of secular power - explains that he has to hunt down and kill the Christ-child, otherwise, 'The Rough Diamond, the Consumptive Whore, the bandit who is good to his mother, the epileptic girl who has a way with animals . . . will be the heroes and heroines of the New Tragedy'. But Herod's tragedy is of course love's and Christ's triumph. Which is why the Christian voice of Advent must say this:

We who must die demand a miracle.

How could the Eternal do a temporal act,

The Infinite become a finite fact?

Nothing can save us that is possible:

We who must die demand a miracle.

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH SUNDAY AT ST MARY & ST JOHN

By Margaret Coombs

On the Sunday after World Mental Health Day (October 10th) we were reflecting on the importance of Dignity in relation to mental health. It is about respecting people in mental distress as persons in their own right and refusing to categorise them by a stigmatising diagnosis. Offering support may mean helping service users to find their own way through the pain and suffering. Catherine Lucas's book, called *Coping with a Mental Health Crisis* is based on her own experiences of mental ill health and her discovery of pathways to healing. While she recognised the need for specialist care and treatment, she wanted to empower service users to see their breakdown as an opportunity for a new way of life, even as a gift, a chance to wake up to their *true self*. Although this may seem unduly challenging to anxious relatives and friends, watching by day and night, trying their best to help, it highlights the need for those in mental distress to find ways of expressing themselves more freely and confidently, as they gradually emerge through the dark tunnel into new light.

People with direct experience of mental health services may discover healing and empowerment through art, music and singing; through dance and drama or delight in nature walks. Many others have written heart-wrenching, remarkable poems. Here, Eric, in spite of struggling through the mill of intense, long-term, psychiatric treatment, determinedly held on to his poetic gifts. In this late sonnet, *Dreams*, he sought a precarious balance between anguish and joy:

Sleep's lazy river slowly twines among

The Stygian glades, where sometimes soft light seeps

*To shine around the dreamer drawn along
Upon his drowsy raft on slumber's deeps;
Projecting varied pictures to his view:
One sheer delight, another dark distress
And painted panoramas seeming true*

*Come subtly to the drifting consciousness.
Ethereal scenes- and scenes more real than life-
Heavenward hoist the soul or hurl to hell,
Portraying answered love or anguished strife
Till sad or gladsome, waking breaks the spell*

*Ah my lost love, how sweetly sleep redeems
My waking loss, when you're re-won in dreams.*

Eric's last words were: Please remember this as a consolation. A certain amount of loneliness is essential in a balanced life – No, perhaps I should have written solitude. It is only in silence that you can hear what your own heart is saying to you and if the silence is unbearable you are in a bad way.

*

SOME ARITHMETICAL REFLECTIONS

By Daniel Emlyn-Jones

Most churches exchange signs of peace at some point during their services, but Cowley St. John must stand out for the thoroughness of these exchanges. People leave their pews to circulate, and I'm sure many must shake the hands of everyone else in the church.

Given to arithmetical reflection, I decided to do a few calculations. Assuming a congregation of fifty people, and assuming everyone exchanges a sign of peace with everyone else, that's a whopping $50 \times 50 = 2500$ handshakes (well not exactly right, but it'll do!). Assuming the time devoted to the peace is 1 min = 60 seconds, this means there is a handshake every $60/2500 = 0.024$ seconds (24 milliseconds), or 42 handshakes per second. If the handshakes could be heard, they would therefore form a continuous sound, rather like the fall of heavy rain.

Some take a second to exchange the sign of peace, while others like to prolong the encounter, perhaps to give it extra meaning. Assuming an average handshake duration of 3 seconds, this means that the handshakes take $3 \times 2500 = 7,500$ seconds, $7500/60 = 125$ minutes, or $125/60 \sim 2$ hours. In other words, if each handshake took place one after the other, the exchange of the sign of peace would take over two hours! Assuming an average hand surface area of 210cm^2 , this means that there is $210 \times 2500 = 525,000\text{ cm}^2$, or 53m^2 of skin contact. This is a large chunk of the church's floor area!

What does this all mean? I don't have a clue. If we were in a Dan Brown novel, perhaps the numbers could be translated into Aramaic, and would form a secret map to treasure hidden beneath the church floor...Ben...? Or perhaps it simply means that we can do far far more together than we could ever do apart...

FAITH AND HEALTH

Janet Mccrae

This was the subject of a conference convened by the Oxfordshire Health NHS Foundation Trust (OHFT) on Nov 2nd, organised by Dr Guy Harrison, Head of Spiritual and Pastoral care in the NHS and therefore involved with the chaplains' work in our hospitals. He is also Director of the Oxford Centre for Spirituality and Well-being. This meeting of minds was a recognition that in order for people to flourish and recover well, health-care needs to be person-centred and holistic. We all want our symptoms of illness to be addressed but we hope to be cared for with compassion and respect as a person, including acknowledgment of our spiritual and religious needs.

Scientific research has shown that a recognition of a person's spirituality or psycho-spiritual needs can be a source of support, inspiration, hope and recovery. Recently it was reported that churchgoers (and those involved in a religious community) are less likely to suffer from anxiety and depression than 'non-churchgoers'. Likewise prayer, meditation and mindfulness can be beneficial to mental and physical health, bringing peace and a feeling of well-being. Other benefits can be extended life expectancy, lower blood pressure, reduced cholesterol and reduced pain. Despite some criticism of the methods used in these studies it is now possible to show ways in which religion can function creatively in the process of facilitating healing, stabilising people in the midst of demoralising illness and creating opportunities for innovative ways of facilitating coping. Religion can in fact be both a protective and a vulnerable factor in health, so whether we like it or not religious belief has to be engaged with in health-care settings.

Despite these positive findings there is still a wariness of religion amongst some health professions. This is exacerbated on one hand by increasing numbers of people who identify themselves as agnostic or non-theistic and on the other by a rise in fundamentalist

religious groups. So this is a challenging time to open up a conversation around relationships between religion/ spirituality and health science/ human well-being: but ‘the spiritual politics of the moment make this conversation vital’ says John Swinton in the book entitled *Reason and Wonder: why science and faith need each other* SPCK 2016.

Fifty people from faith organisations and health professions, including the Chief Executive of the OHFT, attended this all day conference to explore and discuss historical and present day links between health care and faith and how people of all faiths can take this further and expand their role today. We looked at the history of health care in the UK, often rooted in the church (our Bartlemas chapel leprosy hospital being a very early example and Bedlam (the Bethlehem hospital) in London another. This reminded me also of Father Benson’s work with poor people in this neighbourhood in the nineteenth century.

Prof McManus gave his thoughts on a Christian perspective - that health as fullness of life means a relationship with God and with others. We feel for and care for, those who are sick or suffering. We are called to be good Samaritans. He gave examples of the care Christians give on a personal level (in terms of reaching out to another human’s need), ‘*holding*’ people with long term issues, connecting people with hospital care, being a bridge between hospital and community, and providing chaplains to help staff address spiritual needs and providing insights on faith and life - not just dealing with death and dying .

We heard about a number of examples of care given by people of other faiths, for example a Sikh initiated scheme for providing integrated health-services for all faiths under one roof in Birmingham and also how Archway Foundation reaches isolated and lonely people through social groups, communal activities and building confidence and a positive approach to life.

We were given an opportunity to discuss the implications for our own organisations and communities. What could promoting health in

our church and community mean and what might our priorities be? What do we as a congregation do already (e.g. provide 'A Place to be' for those with dementia, Alice's tea parties for those with mental health issues) and what resources do we have? (space, time, people with ideas). That is a question for all of us so please send in your views to the Editor.

*

A RECENT VISIT TO TAIZÉ

By Mary Hardwick

I recently spent a week at the Taizé community in France; it was my 4th visit there but my first for more than 20 years and so I was a bit apprehensive going back wondering whether it had changed or whether I would feel that I had 'grown out of it'. I was, however, very happy to find that very little has changed, except, unfortunately, the state of my knees (and the fact that I was now classed as an 'older adult' whereas on my previous visits I had been a 'young adult') but it was wonderful to be back there again.

What is Taizé? Taizé is an ecumenical community made up of more than 100 brothers (from both Roman Catholic and various Protestant backgrounds) coming from over 30 different countries. Taizé was founded by a Swiss Lutheran, Frère Roger, on a Burgundy hilltop where he initially welcomed and sheltered Jews during the 2nd world war and then German prisoners of war. Frère Roger wanted to form something that was 'a parable of community' that would be a sign of reconciliation between divided Christians and between separated peoples. Taizé now attracts tens of thousands of pilgrims, mainly young people, every year. As is stated on its website coming to Taizé *is to be invited to search for communion with God through community prayer, song, silence, personal reflection and sharing. A stay in Taizé can help*

one step back from daily life, to meet a wide variety of people and consider one's commitment in the Church and in society.

It was wonderful to arrive in the dark by bus, along with a gentle Dutch man and 4 Peruvian teachers, late on a Sunday evening, to find young people waiting to welcome us, give us food and show us where to sleep. I slept in one of the 'barracks' (dormitories with bunk beds), but others camp and people with disabilities or poor mobility can be housed in the guest house. The organisation is done by the young volunteers from all over the world who have decided to stay on in Taizé for some months to help to welcome pilgrims. Brother Matthew, the Yorkshire born brother with a dry sense of humour, who did the bible introductions with the older adults the week I was there, said that there were three pillars to the life at Taizé; prayer together, community life and reflections on the word of God. The day is still punctuated by the bells reminding you of the routine of the day: morning prayer; breakfast (still hot chocolate out of plastic bowls); bible introduction followed by a time of silence; midday prayers, lunch, time for a walk or a think, group discussion, tea, free time, supper, evening prayers, and then maybe a glass of wine at the café.

Pilgrims are encouraged to come for a week, from Sunday to Sunday, with the week leading up to prayers around the cross on Friday night and a celebration of the resurrection on Saturday night. It is of course the services in the Church of Reconciliation that are the core of Taizé life and that draw people back. They are so beautiful and simple; just made up of a short bible reading, silences and the famous Taizé chants repeated over and over. The church is also very simple and functional, lit by candles, and people sit or kneel on the floor (or on the steps or benches around the church for those, like me, whose knees are not up to it) and it is humbling to see young people choosing to stay on in the church after evening prayers singing and praying until late into the night.

Taizé is really aimed at young adults and therefore the number of over 30s pilgrims is limited and certain weeks in the summer are reserved for young people only. We older adults had our own area to sleep, eat and meet in groups although everyone meets together for tea and, of course, in the church.

After the first bible introduction on Monday morning Brother Matthew got us into groups based on language. To be honest I was rather dreading the group discussion part of it as I've always avoided this kind of thing, in both my working and personal life. I had even contemplated the option of spending the week in silence, but I am so grateful that I didn't as I ended up in a wonderful group of 12 people, from eight different countries. I was humbled not only by their willingness to speak English but also their willingness to be painfully honest and open in our discussions and very supportive of each other. During the week we became very close and ended up eating together and even on the last day praying together in the church. All groups are given a task with our group washing up after supper.

The community accepts no donations, living solely by their work (there is a gallery and gift shop where their work is displayed) and any personal inheritances the brothers receive are given to the poor. Pilgrims are asked to make a donation towards their stay based on what you can afford (you are given a recommended range depending on the affluence of the country you are coming from).

Highlights of my week included seeing a pilgrim arriving with a dusty donkey and a young woman who had been walking past massaging the donkey's legs much to its obvious delight. Another highlight was visiting Frere Roger's simple grave at the village's beautiful Romanesque church very early the morning. On the day I left I heard someone playing a recorder in the empty church as their morning prayers. I went to the bus stop only to find that 3 members of my group had got up early to see me off.

Taizé is not inward looking: every year there are European meetings for young adults as part of the 'pilgrimage of Trust on earth' started by Frère Roger. This year it will be in Riga in Latvia at the invitation of the Orthodox church as well as the Protestant and Catholic communities. The Taizé community is also heavily involved in welcoming refugees and asylum seekers, housing some Muslim Sudanese asylum seekers in one of its buildings and is now involved in the support of unaccompanied minors moved from the Calais camps. Brothers from the Taizé community are also living and working alongside the poor in a number of countries including Bangladesh, Kenya and Brazil.

There are many opportunities to experience Taizé services in Oxford (just Google Taizé Oxford) including the monthly gathering at Greyfriars* and another one in Iffley church. I know that I will be going back to Taizé next year to recharge my spiritual batteries and it would be wonderful if one day we could have a parish pilgrimage there...

For more information visit the Taizé community website:

www.taize.fr/en

***Please Note:**

The Taizé gathering at Greyfriars is in Greyfriars Chapel, 182 Iffley Rd, 7:30pm followed by refreshments.

Next dates are 29/12/16 and 26/01/17, 23/02/17, 30/03/17, 27/04/17 & 25/05/17. All very welcome.

IN THE CHURCHYARD...

By Janet Mccrae

A ‘thankyou’ lunch

The group of volunteers who maintain the churchyard shared a celebratory pub lunch together in late November to thank Ruth Conway for her many years of dedication to this project. Despite her continued commitment, time constraints have determined her decision to bow out of some of the tasks that she undertakes for the church and community at the moment. So thank you Ruth and come and join us when you can!

Ruth has been leading the management of the Churchyard since 2000

Ruth has been involved in maintaining the churchyard since 2000 when she set up the Churchyard group of volunteers who have maintained the churchyard for us in cooperation with the City Council. The Council not only empty the litter bins but also cut the short grass areas, do some of the strimming, care for the larger trees and take away excess green waste material that can't be composted on site. Before 2000 the churchyard was a real 'no go' area. It had a high wall and was a tangle of trees and shrubs where several homeless people camped out. Soldiers from the 23 Pioneer Regiment did a massive clearance job, while at the same time the Churchyard was closed for burials. This required the City Council to take over responsibility for maintenance, but they would only do so on the understanding that the church would further restore it to a manageable state. The army agreed to clear it for us as long as the church congregation took over the maintenance of the site. Much more information about the early days can be found on the Diocesan website www.anglican.org as a churchyard case study. Ruth and a small team

started the process of getting the site in a state where wildlife could flourish and making it a safe space for local people to use and enjoy. It took hours and hours of meticulous hard physical work to clear and also involved a huge amount of writing fundraising proposals and networking – all due to Ruth’s perseverance. This has resulted in a green island where many people feel safe to pass through on their way to the Cowley Road and some to linger and enjoy the environment, birds and flowers . It has also become an important site as part of a green corridor for wildlife linked with gardens to Aston Eyot and the Kidneys Nature reserve on the banks of the Thames and in other directions to Parks nearby and Restore’s garden and the Golf course and the Lye Valley Nature Reserve. The whole area provides suitable habitats for more species than almost anywhere else in Oxfordshire according to collected records of plants, butterflies and birds over the years. It's a small contribution to maintaining trees (that absorb carbon dioxide) and reducing our carbon footprint but chiefly it enhances appreciation of the natural world and our responsibility to care for it.

Part of a network of volunteer conservation groups

Some people from the churchyard maintenance group attended a recent gathering convened by the City Council where many similar groups in the city (the ‘Friends’ of each of the parks, and Nature Reserves in the city) met with the intention of sharing experience and learning from each other. Each group gave a presentation about their green space. Ruth Ashcroft who has considerable conservation experience and expertise has been leading our team in recent years, spoke at the meeting about what the teams at Aston Eyot and our 2-acre churchyard have been trying to do to improve the habitat for wildlife. She explained how some of the older graves that have soil in them are used for planting wild flowers which has been a great success this year, and how a carefully timed cycle of strimming different areas keeps down the grasses so wild flowers can flourish in the summer and we can see the spring flowers when they appear.

Winter tasks

At present the team are trimming hedges, sweeping leaves up for leaf mould (later to be used on the ‘garden’ areas to improve the heavy clay soil), taking ivy off memorials and grass from around them so they can be accessed, read, and to protect the lettering. Strimming still goes on in areas where spring bulbs will later come up so they can be seen. Bluebells and crocus will begin to show soon after Christmas. At this time of year the compost also needs turning (a tough job) and some mulching is needed in the butterfly garden (an area planted to encourage butterflies) to keep down unwanted weeds.

Reaching out to the local community

The churchyard is a valuable space for very many people in the local community. Some people tell us how much they appreciate this relatively quiet green space. The churchyard provides opportunities for being an inclusive church. – *a church which does not discriminate, on any level, on grounds of economic power, gender, mental health, physical ability, race or sexuality.* As stated on the parish Christmas card ‘*We believe in a church which welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ*’.



Ruth enjoys her first ever burger at her ‘thankyou’ lunch

For more information on the churchyard, see the website:
www.ssmjchurchyard.org.uk

AN INTERVIEW WITH CAROL

By Daniel Emlyn-Jones

Carol Chapman recently celebrated a big birthday, so I caught up with her over a coffee to find out more about her faith and her thoughts:

Tell me about your faith?

To be honest, I find my faith challenged a great deal. Several close friends of mine have died in the last few years, and also my mother died some time ago. When they were ill I prayed and prayed for them, but they still died. This leaves me with the questions: 'Is God listening to my prayers?' or 'Does he even want them to get better?'

I'm sure many people can relate to these thoughts. What ways do you cope with these feelings?

Well I don't really. You have to cope so you do. If someone dies or falls ill, you're not given the option of whether to cope with it or not. It has happened so you must cope with it.

What do you like about St. Mary & St. John Church?

I like the sense of community at St. Mary & St. John, the friends and the way the services are done. I also very much like all the activities and meetings the church organises. I loved the 'Exploring Prayer' meetings on Tuesday nights. We explored different ways of praying, with sacred dancing, silence, and how to find time for prayer in a busy day. I also love the lent groups. I really like the fact that the church is inclusive, and engages positively with other faiths. East Oxford is a very diverse community so I think this is very appropriate.

If you had three wishes, what would they be?

- 1) Continued good health. I love helping other people, so I'd love to keep doing these things.
- 2) I'd like my loved ones to stay healthy.
- 3) I'd like to travel more.

If you were stuck on a desert island, aside from food and water, what three things would you take with you?

- 1) A Bible.
- 2) A portable TV
- 3) A companion

A big thank-you to Carol for sharing!

If you want to be interviewed and share your thoughts, please contact Daniel.



Carol (right) at her recent birthday party in Botley.

ANOTHER NEWBIE AT SSMJ...

By Lorna Thomas

I started attending St Mary & St John Church regularly in September 2015 just before Harvest Festival. It was on a whim really and I imagined I would recognise something in the service having remembered the season from my school days. It was not quite as I had remembered – but interesting enough for me to decide to come back again the following week.

To be honest I was not fully engaged with the actual Service for the first few weeks. There just appeared to be so much to follow and do (stand, sit, turn to face the other way, kneel) to be able to relax and enjoy it. There was a choice of hymn books, service sheet and service booklet to read and follow at the correct time. I was unfamiliar with the running order of the service, terminology and generally ‘what happens next?’ However over many weeks it began to fall into place, slowly. As with any new routine or activity you need to allow yourself time for it to become a habit. The security of being able to follow confidently what was happening during the service and to be proactive in the responses and activities was a relief and pleasure.

It helped having a social event/ fundraiser - opening of Richard Benson Hall. It was interesting seeing ‘new’ faces slightly out of situ but everyone was welcoming and I didn’t feel like I did not belong either. I found the additional topical interests covered in the sermon and / or the service generally thought provoking but also modest.

The Blessing the Bibles theme and the cake making by the children are two of the activities that came to mind. I had previously attended the service for All Souls / remember the Bereaved service for the past 15 years. I always liked this service and found it soothing, simple, reflective and short (in a good way).

Attending church during my first Advent was a nice experience. It linked many pieces of long held information and interest together. I especially enjoyed the Carols for Christmas service although it was a very chilly evening especially when the lights went out (as planned) during the service. I somehow managed to stumble into the Christingle Service at St Albans (hosted by Home) and was slightly out-numbered by under 5's. Luckily Rev Phil spotted I was struggling with my 'world' model and rescued me. I had actually only popped into the church to find a leaflet!

In January 2016 I surprised myself by volunteering to join the newly expanding Servers Team. I had no idea what the tasks really entailed but from what I had seen it looked straightforward (famous last words). The Servers team have regular Server's Breakfasts which are a good chance to catch up on new duties and meet other team members who you may not see. It also provides delicious hot chocolate and choc-au-pains. Thanks Luke!

Lent started early in February. I had an overly ambitious list of things 'to do' for Lent (I may well have mixed up my lent list with my resolutions list :) I did stop adding sugar in my tea which is a small but significant achievement considering the office is fuelled on tea (and biscuits).

The Easter services were weighty, detailed, informative and interesting as expected but felt right for my knowledge level. I really liked the Good Friday Stations of the Cross walk through East Oxford before culminating back at Church (for Hot Cross Buns). There was a fair crowd of us too which did draw some positive attention – although someone did ask if we were on a political 'March'.

Any member of the congregation who has regularly attended church for 6 months is eligible to 'vote' on Church 'business' – (whatever that might be) at meetings. Exciting times. Democracy in the Church.

Springtime came and went in a flurry of gaining experience serving during the service. I ‘served’ at my first ‘Ascension Day’ celebration during May. It was an early evening service and the gentle warm light in church was amazing. It was a beautiful, delicate and intimate service with the congregation invited to worship between the Altar and High Altar. Very up close and personal community feel to it.

The joys of June were interrupted with the Brexit vote result. The feeling of growing Change in everyday life surrounding everyday people was real. People were talking about it everywhere in the office, on the street, on the bus and I think, quite rightly, it was mentioned during the Sermon. The Church offers its ‘own brand’ of reassurance and comfort particularly during periods of global change.

July brought the Cowley Road Carnival ‘into’ the Church. Literally. The church and the churchyard buzzed with performers and visitors. SSMJ held its own with the ever popular ‘climb the steps’ up the Church Tower. I volunteered for an hour and over 25 people came along within that hour. Plenty of visitors came through the church for a ‘look inside’ and also to have a quiet prayer and light a candle. The grounds were filled with performers from various acts / bands. It also became apparent that the church wall was a key place for people meeting their friends. The location was at the start of the carnival stalls and activities plus the toilets were there – so a win/ win situation for everyone.

During the August ‘holiday’ period it was refreshing to see everyone pitching into various roles within the church. The Servers rota kept the team on their toes.

Throughout the year the church has celebrated many baptisms. I was surprised to see one of my colleagues from the office (although not in the same team as myself) had her baby christened there.

In September there was the annual ‘Open Door’s event and ‘Ride and Stride’ fundraiser on the same weekend. I had volunteered for

Saturday lunchtime. It was a rainy grey day and I expected a quiet hour with few visitors. However as I chatted to my fellow volunteer we realised we had a common bond. I had gone to a local primary school with his son. It turns out his son was my 'regular' Country Dancing partner! (circa mid 1970's). Talk about a small world.

Harvest this year had an added theme of 'invite a friend' to church. The friendly postcards helped the 'inviting' process and my friends/family that attended the following week enjoyed the service.

The past 12 months have given me a huge insight into all the work that goes on behind the scenes to enable a co-ordinated service. Teams of people ensure essential tasks are completed before, during and after each service week in and week out. Each week the service has a slightly different emphasis, theme, or festival. Even the embroidery on the Vicar's gowns change regularly.

I have found the year to be more interesting and engaging than expected and look forward to many more years to come.

*

GLEANINGS: A gathering of random thoughts from various sources

By John Purves

"The human race is challenged, more than ever before, to demonstrate our mastery, not of nature but of ourselves."

Rachel Carson

“Human happiness, true prosperity and joyful living can only emerge from a life of elegant simplicity.”

Satish Kumar

*

“Time should be measured in depth as well as length.”

Sister Frances Dominica

*

“Nobody can change everything, but everybody can change something.”

Monty Don

*

“Let us not permit the future to choke us in its shadow’s clasp; it cannot touch us, nor we it. The present moment’s only in our grasp.”

W. Cullingham

*

“At the Last Supper, wine was drunk, bread was broken, love was spoken.”

Roger Phipps

*

“Little remembered acts of kindness and of love.”

William Wordsworth

“What you are is God’s gift to you. What you become is your gift to God.”

Anon.

*

“Without the Lord I travel not, but stray.”

Francis Quarles 1592-1644

*

“Words which do not give the light of Christ only increase the darkness.”

Angelus Silesius

*

PRAYER CALENDAR: DECEMBER 2016

Collect for the Month: *Stir up we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen* (Book of Common Prayer).

Thur 1	West Gallery Concert at SSMJ in aid of Helen Douglas House
Fri 2	The housebound and those who are sick
Sat 3	People with disabilities
Sun 4	ADVENT II Bible Sunday
Mon 5	World Soil Day and the work of the The Soil Association
Tue 6	St. Nicholas of Myra

Wed 7	The world's children
Thur 8	Those in hospital or in care homes especially St. John's Home
Fri 9	Those in prison and prison chaplains
Sat 10	Those who work in shops
Sun 11	ADVENT III
Mon 12	Those who use our churchyard
Tue 13	St. Lucy Virgin Martyr
Wed14	The Elderly
Thur 15	Our Muslim neighbours
Fri 16	Our schools
Sat 17	Church music, choirs and organists
Sun 18	ADVENT IV our traditional carol service at SSMJ
Mon 19	All who use Richard Benson Hall
Tue 20	Our "Place to Be" project
Wed 21	St. Thomas Apostle and Martyr
Thur 22	The homeless and unemployed and the work of The Porch
Fri 23	All Christian denominations
Sat 24	Our Crib Service
Sun 25	The Nativity of Our Lord
Mon 26	St. Stephen The first Martyr
Tue 27	St. John Apostle and Evangelist

Wed 28	Holy Innocents
Thur 29	Our refuse collections
Fri 30	The 'Emmaus' charity
Sat 31	Our health centres and G.P.s

*

PRAYER CALENDAR: JANUARY 2017

Collect for the Month: *Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal. Amen* (Book of Common Prayer).

Sun 1	Circumcision of Christ
Mon 2	Libraries
Tue 3	Our rivers and water authorities
Wed 4	The 'restore' charity
Thur 5	Our parish and clergy
Fri 6	The Epiphany
Sat 7	Church Wardens and our P.C.C.
Sun 8	EPIPHANY 1, St. Lucian
Mon 9	Libraries
Tue 10	The deaf

Wed 11	Parents and grand parents
Thur 12	Elder Stubbs Charity and our allotments
Fri 13	St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers and Doctor
Sat 14	Our elected representatives local and national
Sun 15	Ephiphany II
Mon 16	Dentists
Tue 17	Anthony of Egypt, Abbot 356 AD
Wed 18	Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
Thur 19	Single persons living alone
Fri 20	Students at our two universities
Sat 21	Agnes, Roman Virgin Martyr c.304 AD
Sun 22	EPIPHANY III
Mon 23	Young families
Tue 24	The blind and RNIB
Wed 25	The people of Scotland and The conversion of St. Paul
Thur 26	Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna and Martyr c. 155AD
Fri 27	St. John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, Martyr 407AD
Sat 28	Thomas Aquinas, 1274 AD
Sun 29	EPIPHANY IV
Mon 30	The bereaved and 'Cruse' Bereavement Care
Tue 31	Teachers

*

CHILDREN'S PAGE

We are planning a children's page, where we find out what the children have been doing in Sunday School in St. Mary & St. John and in St. Albans (Florentine's idea!). Please send submissions for this page, (e.g. children's creations) to the editor.

!!!CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS!!!

Many thanks to all who wrote for this edition and all who read it. You the congregation are the ones who make this magazine happen! The deadline for the February edition is midnight, Sunday 5th February 2017. Please send submissions to me, the Editor, Daniel Emlyn-Jones, by email to daniel_ejnew@yahoo.co.uk (underscore between the 'daniel' and the 'ejnew'). If you're not a computer person, then put handwritten submissions in the Cowley St. John Parish Magazine pigeon hole by the back door of St. Mary & St. John Church and I will type them up.



