

WINTER 2010



CHRIST CHURCH

WEST WIMBLEDON



Parish Magazine

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Dear Everyone...

For the past couple of weeks a brave few of us have been preparing for Christmas by meeting to discuss the ideas and issues raised by 'Revealed' – an Advent course using the two films 'The Full Monty' and 'Calendar Girls'. The theme that connects these two films is nakedness!

You will be pleased to hear from me that no nudity was involved! We're not THAT liberal at Christ Church... In both films, nakedness is the trigger for many other kinds of revelation. An unemployed man turned would-be stripper confronts his poor self image;

another discovers his son's loyalty. A woman has a mad idea for a calendar and discovers the price of failure and the cost of success. A husband comes to tell his wife the truth; middle class ladies are jolted out of comfy, dull routine. We looked at ways in which we can benefit from opening ourselves to each other, to our communities, to God and indeed to ourselves. We saw how, at Christmas, God reveals himself, exposes himself, vulnerable and at risk, to us and to the world.

What we were mostly concerned about was what it means to be fully human in relationship with the God who loves all of who and what we are. Not angels, not necessarily very physically beautiful but unique individuals with quirks, flaws, lumps, bumps,

passions and hopes. We are called by God to grow, to move, to change in the warmth and light of that love.

At Christmas, God comes to share our full humanity and to redeem this poor mortal flesh. He comes to celebrate it, to love it and to call it, us to fullness of life.

Outside our windows the world can seem a cold, hard place with lots of anger, suffering, division and narrow mindedness.

This Christmas let us all look at ourselves in love, maybe even with our clothes off. Look at ourselves remembering that despite our weaknesses, failures and inadequacies, we are God's treasure and we are loved. Christmas is all about the giving of a gift by the lover to the beloved. The gift is God's own self because, as the otherwise awful saying goes, 'we're worth it'. We are



worth it and so are our enemies, our opponents, and those who make us angry or afraid. All receive the gift of God's love because God sees through all of our coverings and disguises to see us revealed; our true selves.

If we, then, are so loved when God sees us, so ought we therefore to try at least to love in return.

To love who or what though? A vague nebulous idea of a God beyond? A spirit floating in the ether? First let us recognize the incarnate God within humanity. Within friends and family but also, hard though it might be to accept, within those we find it hardest to like let alone love. God is there too as surely as he is here with us. At Christmas, let us try to live as though we see the revealed God everywhere.

*'We are called
by God to grow,
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Charitable Giving Update

Jenny Tomlinson on the causes Christ Church supports at Christmas

The charities we are supporting with collections at the main Christmas services this year are different from last year and all have local connections...

● **The collection at the Crib Service will appropriately support Home-Start Merton** which offers regular support, friendship and practical help to vulnerable families in Merton with at least one child under five.

The support is given by volunteers in the family home with the aim of working in partnership with parents through what can, for many different reasons, be difficult early years of family life.

Last year 93 families from a whole range of ethnic groups were supported. Of the 216 children in those families 156 were under five years who, with Home-Start's help in preventing family breakdown, could look forward to a better start in their lives.

Home-Start's befriending is

carried out by 64 volunteers, but there is also a small permanent staff co-ordinating the work, training volunteers and supporting them.

Home-Start receives a grant from Merton Council but still relies on donations to carry its help to as many families as possible.

● **St Raphael's Hospice, which will share the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day collections,** is well known locally. Since it opened in 1987 it has been caring for people in the boroughs of Merton and Sutton facing life-threatening illnesses, primarily but not exclusively cancer. The medical staff and volunteers seek to relieve pain and to sustain quality of life in an atmosphere of peace and comfort. Care is provided in the Hospice, in the palliative care centre and also in the patient's home.

There is also a day centre offering social contact and creative opportunities. Support for family, children and friends is also offered

to ensure that they can find a sympathetic ear for their worries and concerns at all times. Counselling and spiritual support are available when needed.

All this is provided free of charge. A quarter of the Hospice's running costs are covered by a grant from Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust, but for the rest the Hospice relies upon donations and fundraising especially from the local community.

● **Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness, the other recipient of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day collections,** is probably less well known. It was set up by 55 churches in the Kingston area to demonstrate Christian concern and support for those who find themselves homeless.

It runs the Access Project providing temporary housing for single people, who are rarely a priority for council housing and therefore have to cope with finding accommodation on their own. There are currently 10 houses shared by 44 people, each having their own bedroom. Most are men, the main group needing help, but one house is exclusively for women. Tenants are given help with claim-



ing benefits, house management, organising their financial affairs and obtaining work experience. They pay KCAH their share of rent and can stay for up to 2 years, being expected to take a lead in finding their own long term accommodation in due course. KCAH finds that each year they can only house about one third of those they would consider eligible for a shared house.

The other support KCAH offers to the homeless is Winter Night Shelters which opened again on 1 December to run to the end of February. Last year 54 'guests' were received in 14 church shelters offered on a rota basis of one night every fortnight. 200 volunteers were

trained to offer a warm welcome and a listening ear to those who were referred through KCAH, who provided a warm sleeping bag to each participant which they could take from church to church.

• Anyone who is away over Christmas and would like to support these charities can still do so using the blue envelopes and indicating to which collection (Crib or Christmas Day) the donation should be added.
• During Advent we will, as usual, be collecting for Faith in Action in support of the homeless of Merton



PCC News

Brenda Clark gives us an update of the recent work of Christ Church's PCC

Much time has been spent at recent meetings discussing eco issues, under the guidance of Alban Thurston, Chairman of the Eco Committee. An eco-questionnaire is being circulated amongst the congregation, asking for views on "green" issues, and many people have asked for information on the installation of solar panels in their homes.

The PCC has discussed the use of these on the church roof, and with possible new building developments taking place in the future, it was agreed that we will keep this topic on the agenda at all times.

On the same theme, there were many people who enjoyed the Eco Lecture, given by Professor Michael Northcott in October, as part of the Creationtide season at Christ Church.

Godfrey Banks was welcomed as the new church treasurer, and he reported that the forecast results for the full year are considerably better than anticipated in the budget, which was welcome news.

The PCC is also making plans to

encourage people to leave legacies to Christ Church in their wills. The Diocese is publishing material on this and an awareness campaign will be taking place at our church soon.

It has now become a matter of urgency that the existing lighting system is replaced and an appeal has been launched asking for donations towards a lighting fund.

Our churchwardens are responsible for the physical condition of the church, and they spend a lot of time with builders, plumbers and electricians for which the church is very grateful. There will always be repairs and work to be carried out, given the age of the building.

A new service, "Celebrating Together", was held for the first time on November 7th and it is planned to hold this service at 10a.m. on the first Sunday of each month. Those who regularly come to the 11.30a.m. Lifelines service on Sundays will be invited to worship together with those at the 10a.m. service.

Thank you to all those who work tirelessly serving the needs of the parish of Christ Church.



Social Side

Martin Evans on our church's busy social calendar

Social & fund-raising activities were stepped up in the last couple of months, with the Autumn Fair on 30th October and the Musical Evening on 20th November together raising over £1,100 for Christ Church.

Billed as "bringing the West End to West Wimbledon", the Musical Evening featured singer Fenton Gray and pianist Charles Miller who, over supper, provided an amusing selection of songs by writers including Noel Coward and Fenton's great grandfather, the Edwardian musical hall comedian Dan Crawley. The evening's entertainment was well received and we hope to persuade the talented duo to perform for us again in the future if their busy schedules permit.

Feedback from members of the congregation suggests that in today's increasingly hectic world they would value greater advance notice of forthcoming activities. This is something our Committee will strive to remedy, not least so we maximise participation and boost fund-raising. To this end we are now pleased to announce the following events planned for 2011:



Christ Church welcomed talented duo Miller & Gray in November

● **Burns Celebration Supper, Saturday 5 February 2011**

Haggis, whisky tasting, poetry recital, and a bagpiper.

● **Quiz night & supper, Saturday 7 May TBC**

● **Open Gardens, Sunday 12 June**

We would be grateful for any volunteers happy to let members of the congregation visit their gardens.

● **Auction of Promises, Sunday 25 September**

Following the success of the event in 2008, this will feature goods and services donated by members of the congregation auctioned off.

We will have other social & fund-raising activities next year, and as ever we are keen to know what kind of events you would like to see being organised. Please send your suggestions to address to come here please



Shaping Our Musical Future

The Director of Music, **Irene Clugston**, reflects on her first six months at Christ Church....

Does everyone know there's a new organist? The congregation can't see me and I can't hear them. I look forward to helping to change the latter! Sing up!!

Our musicians play a very important part in the life and worship at Christ Church. Their enthusiasm and endeavour is impressive and at once won my admiration and respect. The church should feel very proud of their devotion to duty, hard work and excellent results.

I've not been here a year yet (I took up my position at the beginning of May) but from the moment I set foot in the Church I knew it was a special place. I still love the first things I noticed then; the warmth, pure energy, unpredictability and friendliness.

Music (and the arts in general) gives us a unique opportunity not only to enrich our worship, but to examine how we can grow and invest in our future. The trick is to keep everyone on board whilst

introducing new ideas.

There are many communion "settings" and a host of different styles of hymn tunes on the market to enhance or (dare I say) ruin our worship. Now, this is where you come in. If you have ideas, if you sing, play a musical instrument, have knowledge of music in worship, please come and discuss your thoughts with me.

Many congregations believe that the music sung in their particular church is how it is everywhere. Not so; if you have knowledge of good practice and experiences, please share them with me.

In the autumn, Christ Church forged a link with St. Mary's West Hampstead in two Choral Evenings, one in each church, celebrating the music of Charles Villiers Stanford. The combined choirs excelled themselves - all who sang experienced the thrill of singing works from our great choral tradition with an enlarged choir. A disappointing fact, however, was the small size of the congregation.

Those who came (about twenty)



were extremely enthusiastic and appreciative, both services being joyous and uplifting occasions. However, as Director of Music, my task and duty to the choir and the church is to put the energy and time where it will be most effective. For instance, few would realise that the total choir rehearsal time amounted to some twenty-five hours! (This does not include the personal preparation time of the two Directors of Music). These special occasions have to be cost effective in terms of time and talent.

As I write, the season of Advent is upon us with its glorious music. Our Advent Carol Service is to be held on the evening of Advent Sunday, with Hymns and Readings full of hope, an essential spiritual

preparation for Christmas itself.

My New Year's Resolution is to seize every opportunity to expand our church choir! If you would like to join us, the door is open! The commitment can be a flexible one. Please come and talk it through.

I have found it fascinating to experience the rich diversity of worship through music at Christ Church. There really is something for everyone, including toddlers (who worship through dance at LifeLines). To help me to continue to improve the things that are most important to you, I need not only your feedback, not only your support, but also your ideas and how to implement them. Your shared experience and your input will shape our future.

Nurturing Our Relationship With God

View from the Pews

Religion' has become a 'nasty' word, associated with cultural extremism, rigid institutions and historical excess. 'Spirituality', however, has a soft image, infinitely flexible, personally tailored and threatening nobody. If we wish our contemporaries to find God, it is argued, we must simplify the structures of the church, jettison the baggage of the past and seek fresh expressions of Christianity. The commission to preach the gospel has always required Christians to interpret the message for the age, but there is real danger in thinking that somewhat flaky alternative spiritualities form secure evidence for reshaping our liturgy and doctrine.

Much more of a challenge is the secular humanism that dominates Western European belief. Unlike the strident atheistic determinism of Dawkins and his chums, such humanism is politely agnostic about private faith, though dispar-

aging about revelation. It espouses a set of principles and a way of life centred on concepts of human significance, human value and human flourishing. Such admirable and high-minded doctrine suggests that it is founded on scientific understanding and empirical evidence, but such orthodoxy is hard to prove and the result owes rather more to a lingering Christian heritage of morality than is acknowledged. Its high view of humankind has more than an echo of our being made in the image of God and it looks forward to our potential to shape our collective destiny, albeit without Christ at its centre, that would make Freud or Marx sigh at its implausibility. What Professor Terry Eagleton has described as "a continuation of God by other means" is perhaps a luxury born of affluence.

Societies less sheltered from harsh realities, communities facing tough encounters with issues that reach beyond shallow assurances

and contemporary froth, individuals up against the wire may find themselves searching for something more than either aromatherapy or pious aspirations. In times of personal and social crisis, there rises the age-old cry for eternal meaning, a need to ascribe worth and honour to something or someone way beyond ourselves. So the churches fill when the chips are down. Worship is by definition the ascription of worth. Christians believe that the bizarre objects of veneration that crowd our media and confuse our society are little short of dummies sucked for want of the real thing.

To worship the living God, the God we know as Father, Son and Spirit, is to give voice to our faith, to celebrate our hope and, above all, to express and articulate our love. It speaks of a personal and living relationship, and if it does not, as Jesus complained of the Pharisees, it is hypocrisy. But our relationships with God, like our human relationships, need working on, building up, practising by trial and error, until they become secure, weatherproof and second nature. This is why good liturgy is all important. Spontaneous worship, like young love, can be electrifyingly beautiful, but the thoughtful celebration of God's covenant love for his people is best served by being planned and savoured. In that way the relationship is nurtured and its universal significance is demonstrated.

Today more than ever, when memory fades so quickly from the screen, we need to tell and retell the great stories of creation, rescue and resurrection and the promises that flow from them. The reading of scripture is not a private hobby but essential to "telling out the greatness of the Lord". The Psalms prompt the memory and imagination of those in the pews, not just the musically adroit in the chancel. The celebration of the sacraments, where the life of heaven intersects with life on earth, makes sense when experienced in the context of united worship. Such shared worship will seldom be uniform. The rites of clasped hands and knees bowed in obeisance will seldom tally with the upraised arms and cries of hallelujah of different congregations but they all demonstrate that God has commanded us to worship together and to learn and to grow thereby.

The search for human renewal and fulfillment is nothing new. Today's emphases on physical expression and social involvement are rooted in our common humanity, but there is a better way. Paul told the Romans: "So, dear family... offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and appropriate worship." Our whole selves and nothing less. **Colin Holloway**



Rallying to Restore Sanity?

Wide-angle View

Just before the US mid-term elections, the TV satirist Jon Stewart organised a huge rally in Washington DC, aiming to 'restore sanity' to political debate. Stewart's target was a mass media system that has in the past decade promoted viciously partisan 'shock jocks' on radio and TV, allowing them free rein to turn news analysis into a blood sport.

Stewart spoke effectively about the need to restore reasonableness, concern for truth, and dignity to the media's coverage of America and the wider world: 'If we amplify everything, we hear nothing'. The media have traded on fear, resentment and xenophobia. For Stewart, they present a view of the USA as almost at war with itself, a view utterly at odds with the everyday reality of co-operation across political, religious and ethnic boundaries. But that image can take hold of many minds, and begin to shape reality in turn.

Stewart's rally was a self-consciously 'moderate' riposte to a 'rally to restore honour' organised by the 'shock jock' Glenn Beck.

Beck is typical in talking as if the nation is under siege from Muslims, foreign workers, environmentalists, atheists and enemies of the American Dream. Like many on the American far right, he claims to believe in God - in his case as a Mormon. Tragically, for many moderate Americans appalled by his demagoguery, 'Christian' and 'evangelical' are becoming shorthand terms for 'paranoid, xenophobic, anti-science, anti-gay, anti-women'. Such is the extremism of many on the USA's 'Christian right', and increasingly beyond America.

Our recent Richard Sandbrook lecturer Michael Northcott wrote a powerful book on the perversion of Christianity in the USA, *An Angel Directs The Storm*. He analyses the way in which a narrow-minded, apocalyptic version of Christianity has drowned out the majority of US Christians. It is marked by hardcore individualism, nationalism, hatred of 1960s values, xenophobia and lack of interest in the poor; it embraces a strange theology focussed on the Book of Revelation. There is not much here that recalls the Christ of the Gos-

pels, whose teachings are rarely quoted, still less followed.

The fault in this version of Christianity relates to Christ's saying in Matthew 22: Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's. Much more can be said about this text, but one way to understand it is as a warning against mixing things up - rendering unto Caesar that which is God's, and vice versa.

This is precisely the trouble with many US tele-evangelists and like-minded 'Christian' bodies. For all the good they may do out of genuine faith, they worship aspects of 'Caesar' (flag, founding fathers, the American Dream) and cheapen worship of God (divine favour equated with material wealth; preaching reduced to rants against demonised Others).

This matters to us in the C of E. The hi-jacking of US Christianity by the minority of extreme 'evangelicals' has damaged the faith in the eyes of those outside the churches. And the leaders in the US Episcopalian church have been ineffective in mobilising against people who have turned Christianity into a finger-jabbing creed of resentments.

Something similar has been happening across the Anglican

Communion. 'Culture wars' between the hardline reactionary and liberal progressive wings of the hierarchy over women and gay bishops have damaged the image of the entire church, and made it harder for the unchurched majority to understand us and work with us. Debates in Synod have become more bitter: the outgoing Bishop

of Fulham has said he is leaving for Rome because his more liberal C of E opponents are 'fascist' and 'vindictive' in approach over the issue of women bishops. Such ludicrous abuse of

language harms the whole church.

Everyday reality is full of peaceful Christian cooperation with fellow believers and secular bodies. But angry minority groups are trying to take over the mainstream. We can't afford to import the American culture of religious rancour. In the churches, there are many grounds for disagreement and sometimes for divorce, but not for demonisation of others. Those in leadership positions in the Church of England need to look across the Atlantic, shudder, and vow to avoid the state the States are in. **Ian Christie**



'Everyday reality is full of peaceful Christian cooperation with fellow believers'

The Big Society Opportunity or Threat?



There has recently been criticism by the Archbishop of Canterbury and other senior figures in the Church of England of the “Big Society” concept and the fear that public spending cuts may be socially divisive by creating areas of deprivation. That the hope may be to get people back into work, but that there are simply not the jobs to go around. We asked Stephen Hammond, MP for Wimbledon to comment from his perspective as both a Conservative politician and a Christian, thus straddling both sides of the debate. This is his response:

I was tempted to write an article on the dangers of Bishops and Politicians commenting on each other’s domains. I have resisted this on the basis I might fall into the Archbishop’s trap of speaking about something I know little about!

Two years ago I spent some of my summer recess working with a charity for out of work young people aged 16-25. The group I joined were from Birmingham and completely defined the term NEET*. They were a diverse group of individuals bound only by having left formal education with a

collective lack of qualifications or career guidance.

Over a week the charity sought to build the sense of aspiration, self-esteem and skills needed to seek employment.

The striking feature was the lack of work ethic - not just of unemployment. This was because of the expectation and the knowledge that the “social” will provide. Unemployment has regularly blighted developed economies; however for the last fifteen years, since the end of the early 90s recessions, vacancies have always exceeded applications.

There are jobs but too often

people aren’t prepared to undertake them.

There is a moral and social case for undertaking work as much as there is an economic case**. Increased self-esteem and responsibility, increased social and family stability, and declining criminality are just some of the benefits.

As citizens, and especially as Christians, we should not be afraid to state it. Certainly the charity workers I observed in Birmingham were absolutely lucid in the despair of a life dependent on benefits and evangelical about the need to show these youngsters the benefits to them of employment.

There is no one who would argue that we should leave those in need destitute. Indeed successfully the legislation and programmes introduced by governments to ensure that ambition is met has created a welfare system with some perverse consequences.

There is a welfare cliff such that a disincentive to undertake any

‘Our programme endeavours to simplify the benefits system and to make it more advantageous to work.’

paid employment whilst receiving benefits exists rather than the more sensible possibility of a combination to support those aspiring to work.

Too many hardworking families are paying taxes supporting people who choose not to

work because the job isn’t right for them. In the new discussion of fairness and justice who is the abused and who is the ill just?

The Coalition has a programme which endeavours to do two things: to simplify the benefits system and to make it advantageous to work by turning the welfare cliff into a welfare slope!

As a Conservative politician and a Christian I believe we should offer the hope of opportunity and remove the despair of welfare dependence.

We may need to adjust and alter policies as we proceed, for to err is to be human, but not to have tried would have been unforgivable.
Stephen Hammond is a sidesman at St Mary’s, Wimbledon

*NEET = Not in Education, Employment or Training

**I would recommend Ron Heskins, Larry Mead and Frank Field – all have excellent books on the need for Welfare Reform

The Challenge of Change

Mark Adams reflects on his hopes for Christ Church

As churchwarden I have experienced firsthand the massive strengths that are consistently evident at Christ Church. We, the people, are a community that work hard, support each other and ultimately share our worship together.

Within our community there are groups that specialise, develop and progress in areas from floristry to finance, choir to catering. We are led by a proactive and forward thinking vicar who encourages vision, debate and discussion together with meditation and quiet contemplation. As a group, we enjoy the benefit of shelter, sustenance, light, warmth, music, company, worship...whilst elsewhere thousands do not.

So, what then do I think can be developed as we look beyond 2010? First on my list would be our attitude towards change. I love tradition, I love stability, I love predictability... and I am downright nervous of change. However, looking upon the past through rose tinted glasses could result in us over shadowing



any future opportunities.

I would also like to help raise the number of children and young people in our congregation and for them to be accepted as what they are – the future of our faith.

As part of this, I hope the Celebrating Together service will help encourage a re-think of our services and lead to the anticipation of a more united group of congregations.

Finally, I would like to see music, both traditional and modern, developed so that the diversity of our congregation is reflected in the songs we sing and the music we hear.

We are in the midst of an era of change, which is exciting and terrifying and I do not have all the answers. But, whether we are looking to develop buildings, ministry or swell our numbers, I welcome the opportunity of working together to make us a stronger and healthier community of faith relying on our strengths and God to guide us.

Mark has been Churchwarden since April 2007. He changed career two years ago and now teaches at St John's Primary School in Shirley.