

LITTLE S. MARY'S, CAMBRIDGE

February 2021: No. 547

NEWSLETTER



This newsletter contains:

Meet the Designers; A Personal View on ... Prayer ; In Praise of Hymns – Mrs Alexander; Reflections from Cape Town on the pandemic; The sponsored Poetry Reading event; Garden News plus the usual Vicar's letter, daily intentions for prayer and more.

From the Vicar

4th February 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

One of the oddities of this pandemic is that everything has changed and nothing has changed. I feel I should be writing to you in some earth-shattering way different from normal to indicate the gravity of our situation and the horror of it all. Yet at the same time we're all still here, more or less, and the hours and days pass by and life must be continued with. There is still air, and food and so on.

The combination of ordinariness and total change is disconcerting and puts me out of kilter. Yet one of the things I've held to throughout this past year – and not just because it's my job! – is the liturgical calendar. Keeping the daily offices and Mass, the saints and seasons, has helped to anchor me and also to lift my eyes to a wider and deeper horizon that is not just the latest infection data or whatever.

Ash Wednesday is on 17th February and so we will soon be in Lent.

You might feel that the last year has been a perpetual Lent and I'd take your point! 'Hasn't enough been sacrificed already without now looking to fasting and almsgiving for forty days?' you could ask. True enough. Yet these sacrifices have been unwilling and involuntary and Lent is about the reverse of that. These sacrifices have been unpleasant and not for a good purpose and Lent, again, is the reverse of that

More to the point, Lent is about growth in the Spirit through prayer, fasting and almsgiving. At the moment we can be feeling that nothing really has a beginning or end. Lent has both and so is an excellent time to set aside to get ourselves more in spiritual shape.

This year in particular we should use these forty days for getting ready for a return to a degree of normality. The encouraging news of vaccinations and that they seem significantly to reduce transmission means that it is no longer mindless optimism to say that we are on the final run. I don't know what churchgoing will look like in Holy Week, although I'm confident that we'll be open for public worship in Holy Week. Nonetheless things will begin to open up and for those of you who have been shielding and away

from church for almost a year, spending some time imagining being back in groups and with other people and getting used to the idea of corporate worship again, will be time well used. Praying to make the best use of our time back in church and to be open to the blessings God wishes to give us will be an important part of Lent for all of us.

I've been struck by a number of conversations – on email and over Zoom – that I've had concerning aspects of our faith and the creeds over the last year. Consequently, our Lent Book this year is Bishop Steven Croft's little book of reflections on the Creeds, one for each of the forty days of the season. So often we can mistake the Creed for a tick-list of what we must believe or a dry recitation of facts about the Faith. Yet the fact that it ends in Amen and that on Sundays – in normal times! – we sing it should remind us that this is not so. It is the church's love song and it is our prayer: more a longing for these statements to be true in our lives than a declaration of facts (although they are true). Each line of the Creeds is an invitation to go more deeply into the mystery of God's revelation of Himself and ask further questions. I hope the book and our Lent Groups (Mondays at 7.30pm on Zoom) will help to bring the Creeds alive for us.

Let me just update you on the closure of the church on Sunday mornings for Mass. We'll review as a PCC before the first Sunday of Lent and make a decision in time for then. Whatever is decided, don't forget that the church is open three times a day Monday to Saturday and you can receive Holy Communion six times a week, so don't despair!

Finally, I'm pleased to say that both Fr Nigel Hancock and Daphne Foreman are home after recent spells in hospital. Janet Nevitt is now in the Lewin rehabilitation ward at Addenbrooke's and continues to make progress. Do also keep Chris Nevitt in your prayers as these last few months have been especially difficult for him. Do know too that all of you are prayed for at Evening Prayer across the course of a month.

With love & prayers for our keeping of Lent, I am, yours
ever in the Lord,
Fr Robert

Meet the Designers: Harry Stammers 1902-1969: *by Jeremy Musson*

Little St Mary's has a significant window by the remarkable 20th-century stained glass artist, Harry Stammers (photo right, from Henry Hinchcliffe's book – reference at end)



The window is on the north side of the nave, east of the pulpit, behind the choir, depicting a pair of youthful and golden-haired archangels with wings flecked with gold; these are the Archangel Michael, in armour and framed by a green cloak, standing sword aloft on a writhing red dragon, and beside him a red-cloaked Gabriel, with a lily and a dove, and the first words uttered to the Blessed Virgin Mary in a scroll above his head.

The window was installed in 1948. Harry Stammers was recommended for the work in 1945, possibly his first independent commission, by Eric Milner-White, then Dean of King's College (whose advice had been sought by the Ely Diocesan Advisory Committee). Milner-White had spotted a design by Stammers exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1938.

This is an early work for Stammers, and his work evolved considerably in the 1950s, and while always informed by the work of Renaissance masters, drew increasingly on inspiration from more recent figures such as Eric Gill and Henry Moore. He strove to express the artistic values both of the tradition of stained glass and of the spirit of the times in which he lived.

His early LSM window is clearly in the late 19th-century and early 20th-century tradition in which he had been trained, but also honours the emerging mid 20th-century style of the preceding windows on the south aisle by F.C. Eden, where Renaissance-inspired figures are surrounded by plain glass, so that they appear to float in mid-air. The graphic work is also strong.

Stammers was one of the most outstanding figures of stained glass art in 20th-century Britain. He was born in Limehouse in London in 1902 and worked briefly in a raincoat factory. In 1918, at the age of 16, he began working for James Powell & Sons of Whitefriars, stained glass manufacturers and church furnishers, attending classes at St Martin's School of Art and training under James Hogan (Powell's leading designer who had joined Powell's in 1888 and trained under Christopher Whall). Stammers remained with them until 1943 when he went to work for J. Wippell & Co of Exeter, a firm supplying church furnishings and stained glass. Two years later, he founded his own studio in Exeter.

As noted above, in 1938 he had come to the attention of the famous Eric Milner-White, and in 1947 Milner-White, by now Dean of York, invited Stammers and his assistant, Harry Harvey, to move to the city and establish a new stained glass workshop, reviving the tradition of the York School of Glass Painting. In 1954, Milner-White wrote a typical recommendation of Stammers to a Norfolk cleric, observing that 'He has a medieval mind, which rejoices in fantastic Renaissance surroundings' and also describing him as 'an extremely gentle and modest person'.

Examples of Stammers' work in York include windows for St Olave's Church, St Martin le Grand Church in Coney Street and the chapel of the York College for Girls in Petergate. Further afield, Stammers' work included windows for St Anselm's Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral, and the famous 'Airmen's Memorial' windows at Lincoln Cathedral.

Stammers moved to Bradwell near Milton Keynes in 1960, continued working through the early 1960s, and died in 1969. A deeply religious man, he was also an assistant organist and conducted a ladies' choir in York. He drew inspiration from medieval and Renaissance masters, and more recent figures such as William Morris and Eric Gill. Henry Hinchcliffe's enjoyable book on his glass (available as a PDF) is highly

recommended, and includes accounts of his career, a gazetteer of his known work and an account of how stained glass is made.

Some eagle-eyed readers will have spotted that the LSM guidebook attributes the 1963 window of *Christ Found in the Temple* at the northwest window to Stammers, also that the *Archangels* window discussed above was previously attributed to William Bucknall who worked with Ninian Comper, but following the recent published scholarship of Mr Hinchcliffe, this appears to have been a mix-up. Perhaps the confusion was caused because the *Christ Found in the Temple* bears the strawberry leaf signature used by Comper and Bucknall, but both had died by 1963, so this must be the work of a surviving member of the Bucknall-Comper studio. More will follow when we can look at archives again.

Further Reading:

Henry Hinchcliffe, *The Stained Glass Windows of Harry Stammers*, 2016

<http://stainedglass.llgc.org.uk/person/49>

<https://borthcat.york.ac.uk/index.php/hsta>



A Personal View on ...Prayer

by Litsa Biggs

When I was at school, I had a friend who was a fabulist. She told stories – fantastical stories about what she would do when she ‘grew up’ (as if any of us do), and fanciful tales about her everyday life. I never felt as if she was trying to mislead or to deceive – just that for her, imagination was a different kind of truth, further along the spectrum of reality than its visible manifestations. Though I didn’t realise it at the time, her storytelling required boldness, and confidence – whilst I loved her company and was not disturbed by the uncertainty of never knowing quite which of the things that she said, to believe - few others in our class felt the same, and they tended to avoid her.

I have a problem with prayer. Or rather, I have a problem with certain aspects of being, which, given what Rowan Williams has said about prayer being a ‘habit of being’, translates itself into a problem with prayer. When I am struggling with something (work excepted), my instinctive response is that I must handle it alone; that I do not have a right to ask for help, and that there is no particular reason for help to be forthcoming. Sometimes, this is a good problem to have – for example, when it prevents me from sending out a plea for understanding, scattergun-style, into the impersonal void of social media, from which little in the way of heart-tending nourishment and support is ever likely to emerge. Most often however, it is not a good problem to have – and that is particularly true when it comes to God, and prayer.



After having lost contact with my friend for around twenty years, we found each other again recently and met up one Wednesday evening in pyjamas and dressing gowns – on Zoom, of course. She had lost none of her gift for telling stories, but on this occasion, there was no uncertainty about their truth. At school, she was always smiling, and but now I learned how little there was for her to smile about at home. She had found her way through significant adversity and had shown that the stories she had imagined, were true – just simply in another time,

yet to come. But what was most striking to me was that she didn’t do it alone.

My friend describes herself as spiritual rather than religious; she grew up in the Sikh tradition, but has consciously chosen a different path. She believes that there is probably something out there, that she calls ‘God’, but is fairly agnostic about what form God might take. She told me of a number of occasions in her life when she wanted to achieve something important, but struggled greatly to do so. She told me that on those occasions, she eventually reached a point when she turned to the person out there she called God, and just said ‘Right God, over to You’. She had done as much as she could, she knew she needed help, and she spoke to God and said

‘Your turn’. And God took His turn – in some of the most startling examples of answered prayer that I have heard for a long time.

Rowan Williams has said of Abbot John Chapman’s writings, that one of his key maxims was ‘the less you pray, the worse it gets’. In my case, the worse it gets, the less I pray, and then the worse it gets. This is accompanied by an almost wilful failure to remember that the belief that I must manage alone is a lie. And when I do pray, whilst I like to give thanks and to pray for others, I rarely pray for myself in anything but the most general terms. With billions of earthly and heavenly siblings despatching prayers His way, it’s hard to feel emotionally convinced that my personal requests matter very much to God. As an only child, I never had to internalise the lesson that a parent’s love and commitment simply expand with the number of children that they have, rather than contracting into ever smaller portions; that I am not less important, because I am one of many. My children will one day – I hope – have the edge on me there. And so the idea not just of asking for help, but of assuming that God will accept the request and deliver – was almost inconceivable to me. And yet – why should I not approach God in prayer with boldness and confidence? Why should I not say ‘Right God, over to You’? For one thing, there are a number of biblical examples of boldness and confidence before God - from Moses pleading with the Lord for Israel, to Bartimaeus calling ever more loudly to Jesus to be heard. For another, it seems to me now that there is a humility in accepting that I am a child of God at the same time so special and so ordinary so as to merit no particular withholding of His grace. When I approach, I do not approach with temerity, save in the sense that comes from the word’s ancient roots - the sense of sometimes walking in the dark, blindly. But not rashly, or over-confidently, or fearfully. And if I cradle an assumption of help, I do that also in the original sense of being taken up and received, rather than arrogantly, or self-importantly. I pray that I can learn to take God for granted – in the best sense of that phrase.

In her stories when we were at school, my friend boldly told me, as best she could at the time, the things she hoped for, the difference she wanted to make, and the life she wanted to cultivate. It was the same confident spirit that brought her many times over the course of the next 25 years, to a fruitful encounter with God. Listening to her stories was humbling, and she inspired me. I am so very grateful.

Having studied Physics and Philosophy and then Astrophysics, I put it all to good use by taking up a career in university administration! I work for the Clinical School on the Addenbrooke's campus, and I started coming to LSM when my elder son (I have two boys) joined the choir a few years ago. I love my garden (particularly my roses), as well as writing and reading. I tried knitting as a winter replacement for planting, but that didn't work out; cross-stitch is going better. I bought a number of online courses when the pandemic started, but DVD box sets and Netflix have got the better of me!

Meet your Pastoral Assistant

Matthew Fairhurst

I joined Little St Mary's as the Pastoral Assistant in autumn just gone, and I'll be here until the summer. I'm originally from Gateshead, but I've been in Cambridge for four years now. I worked for a charity called Edberts House in Gateshead before coming to Cambridge to study Theology at Robinson College. My church background is non-denominational Pentecostal; as a student I joined Wesley Methodist Church, so I feel I've been on a gradual 'upwards' trajectory with regard to churchmanship!



My placement at LSM is part of the diocesan Ministry Experience Scheme, which also involves some theological study and vocational discernment. Obviously it's a strange time to be trying to get a sense of what ministry involves, since our normal patterns of life have been so severely disrupted, but I've been very grateful nonetheless for the chance to be involved in the church's life and spend some time getting to know people. As I mentioned, LSM belongs to a tradition that's rather different from what I'm used to, and I've found my time here to be very enriching for that reason. I'm looking forward to what the new year will bring, and hopefully in due course the chance for us all to see a bit more of each other!

In Praise of Hymns: the Writers of the Words Mrs Cecil Frances Alexander

by Charles Moseley

In an early *Life of St Patrick*, the saint and his companions are travelling to the court of the pagan Laoghaire mac Néill, King of Tara, High King of Ireland, descendant of Niall of the Nine Hostages, from whom the O'Neills of Ulster descend. Waiting in ambush were a band of men, henchmen of the Druids, intending to kill Patrick and his followers. But as the little band walked, they chanted a *Lorica* (breastplate) – an incantation, or spell, in druidic style for protection on a journey. Journeys were dangerous, after all, even without hidden Druids. When they passed the ambush, the would-be attackers saw only a herd of deer - hence the Irish title of the *lorica*, Fáed Fíada, ‘The Cry of the Deer’.



Hang on a minute: I have sidetracked myself completely (it often happens). This little essay is supposed to be about a lady, Mrs Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-1895), who perpetrated some verses impeccable (if dull) in their metre but deplorable in their bathos and/or banality. For example:

Within the churchyard, side by side
Are many long low graves,
And some have stones set over them;
On some the green grass waves...
So when the friends we love the best
Lie in their churchyard bed,
We must not cry too bitterly
Over the happy dead
(*Hymns Ancient & Modern* 575)

All things bright and beautiful (A&M 573, NEH 264); *Every morning the red sun / Rises warm and bright* (A&M 570) *There is a Green Hill* (A&M 332, NEH 92), and *We are but little children weak*, the concluding verse of which assures us ‘There’s not a child so small and weak / But has his little cross to take’ (A&M 331). (*Hymns Ancient & Modern* put all these in a section entitled *For the Young*: nothing like cheering the little dears up!) She is not to be blamed for *All things* ... having become the most popular hymn at funerals, apparently – though I have not recently heard sung the verse, ‘The rich man in his castle, / The poor man at his gate, / God made them high or lowly, / And order’d their estate’ (that is also in *For the Young*).

But she is worth more than a 21st-century Cambridge sneer. She also wrote *Once in Royal David’s City* (also in *For the Young*) much loved by so many, and she gave us that version of St Patrick’s *Breastplate* (which is where I came in), for which I really do rise up and bless her name. H. H. Dickinson, Dean of the Chapel Royal at Dublin Castle, suggested that she should fill a gap in the *Irish Church Hymnal* with a metrical version of St. Patrick’s *Lorica* – she was already known as a poet and hymn writer - and sent her a collation of the best prose translations. A week later, she sent him the version we now know in NEH 159, ‘I bind unto myself today / The strong name of the Trinity’.

There are several versions in Irish of Patrick’s *Lorica*. The oldest – set down long after Patrick died in the mid-5th century - is in the early 9th-century *Book of Armagh*, (MS Trinity College Dublin, 52) along with Patrick’s (probably) authentic *Confession*, and another is in the 11th-century *Liber Hymnorum*. Scholars better informed than I say its language and style is certainly a good deal older than that earliest manuscript, that its form is very similar to a Druidic incantation, and that its sentiment seems authentically “Patrician”. Personally, I see it as wonderfully elaborating Paul’s exhortation to ‘put on the whole armour of God’ (Ephesians 6:10-18) with echoes of the Song of the Three Children in Daniel 3. And I love singing it in the setting – its full version uses two traditional Irish tunes – by Charles Villiers Stanford.

Though she was born in Dublin, her family was English, from Norfolk. She began writing verse as a child, and later was strongly influenced by

contacts with the Oxford Movement, and by John Keble, with whom she wrote *Hymns for Little Children*. (69 editions before 1900!) By the 1840s she was already known as a hymn writer, her verses being included in Church of Ireland hymn books. She also pseudonymously contributed narrative and lyric poems, and some translations of French poetry, to the *Dublin University Magazine*. In October 1850, to the consternation of her family, she married a man six years her junior, Rev. William Alexander, afterwards Bishop of Derry and then Archbishop of Armagh. She also published several books of poetry, of which the least forgotten today is *St. Augustine's Holiday and other Poems*.

Charitable work occupied her much. Money from her early publications helped build in Strabane the Derry & Raphoe Diocesan Institution for the Deaf and Dumb (1846). She was also involved with the Derry Home for Fallen Women, and worked to set up a district nurse service. A collection of her poems, *Poems of the late Mrs Alexander*, was published the year after she died by William Alexander. She is remembered by a stained glass window in St Columb's Cathedral, Derry, and by a blue plaque outside her birthplace. And her best hymns are sung a century and more after they were written at the beginning of Midnight Mass at Christmas, Trinity Sunday, St Patrick's Day. Many who sing them know not her name, but own her verses as part of their own sensibility. That is perhaps the most convincing, if paradoxical, of all memorials.

Oh, and what happened to St Patrick? He won, of course. He made his way towards the Hill of Tara, seat of the High King and still, even in its now deserted desuetude, where cows graze, a place resonant with ancient memory. On Holy Saturday, he lit a paschal fire on the nearby Hill of Slane, which you can see from the Hill of Tara. This was a challenge and a half to the old religion and to the sacred power of the king: for at that season, Beltane, it was pagan practice to extinguish all fires before the High King himself lit one anew on Tara's Hill. When the Druids saw the light on Slane, it is said they warned Laoghaire that he must extinguish it, or it would burn forever. Patrick was summoned to Tara; some say it is on his journey there that he chanted the *Lorica*. He warned the king that he must accept the faith, or die. After taking counsel of his people, he submitted, and was baptized. He would do that, wouldn't he?

Calendar for February

MON 1st *S. Brigid, abbess*
TUE 2nd **PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE**
WED 3rd *S. Anskar, bishop*
THU 4th *S. Gilbert of Sempringham*
FRI 5th *S. Agatha, virgin & martyr*
SAT 6th *The Martyrs of Japan*

SUN 7th 2nd SUNDAY BEFORE LENT (Sexagesima)

MON 8th
TUE 9th
WED 10th *S. Scholastica, virgin*
THU 11th *S. Radegund, abbess*
FRI 12th *of Requiem*
SAT 13th *of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

SUN 14th SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE LENT (Quinquagesima)

MON 15th *Thomas Bray, priest*
TUE 16th **Shrove Tuesday**
WED 17th **ASH WEDNESDAY**
THU 18th
FRI 19th
SAT 20th

SUN 21st 1st SUNDAY OF LENT

MON 22nd
TUE 23rd *S. Polycarp, bishop & martyr*
WED 24th *Ember Day*
THU 25th
FRI 26th *Ember Day*
SAT 27th *George Herbert, priest. Ember Day*

SUN 28th 2nd SUNDAY OF LENT

Daily Intentions & Anniversaries of death in February

Vocations to the religious life	1 st
Mental health care	2 nd
Christian renewal in Northern Europe	<i>Dennis Barnard</i> 3 rd
Those persecuted for the Faith	<i>Hazel Dunn</i> 4 th
HM the Queen	5 th
The Bishop of Ely	6 th

Our Parish & People	7 th
Medical researchers	8 th
Medaille Trust	9 th
The sick	<i>Ronald Mourhouse, Bill Thomas</i> 10 th
Jesus College & all monastic foundations	11 th
Faithful departed	<i>Margaret Webber, Enid Maycock, Elizabeth Woolveridge</i> 12 th
Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham	<i>Alich Nilsson, Brian Poulter</i> 13 th

Our Parish & People	14 th
SPCK & USPG	15 th
Penitents & Confessors	16 th
True repentance	17 th
Our Lenten disciplines	18 th
Commitment to fasting	<i>John Lyon, pr., Audrey Sparrow</i> 19 th
Schools & FE Colleges	<i>Mary Stubbs</i> 20 th

Our Parish & People	21 st
TBA	22 nd
Those persecuted for the Faith	<i>Mary Dawson</i> 23 rd
Candidates for Holy Orders	<i>Frank Joanes, Percy Hays, Roger Benton</i> 24 th
Friends of Fulbourn Hospital	25 th
Westcott House & Ridley	<i>Arthur Peck, James Townley</i> 26 th
Our organists & choirs	27 th

Our Parish & People	28 th
--------------------------------	------------------

An A-Z of Interesting Things N is for Nunc (Dimittis)

The *Nunc Dimittis* (also known as the Song of Simeon) is a canticle taken from Luke 2, 20-32 – ‘Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace; according to Thy word’. The words are based on the presentation of Jesus at the Temple. Because of its message of fulfilment, rest and peace, it was regarded as an appropriate subject by the early church for the ending of the day and has been used, since the 4th century AD, in services such as Compline, Vespers and Evensong, alongside the Magnificat (the “Mag & Nunc”).

**Reflections
from Cape
Town on the
Pandemic
14.12.2020 –
1.2.2021**
by Mary Ward

**Daily noontide
prayer:**

*God bless the world,
give it wisdom at this
time, grant us relief and
release, be with those
who are ill, and bless the
carers fighting this
pandemic, for Jesus
Christ’s sake, Amen.*

(Archbishop Thabo Makgoba)



I have been in Cape Town since 14th December, with my family, in the heart of the historic Muslim area, Bo-Kaap, in the centre of Cape Town. Since then, the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, has addressed

the nation twice, and the situation has changed and is changing dramatically.

December 2020

As I arrived in South Africa in mid-December 2020 borders were still open and the country was on the lowest level of lockdown restrictions, Level 1. By 28th December the President had called the nation to task and reimposed stricter measures ‘to curb the spread of the infection’. He stated: ‘Infections are on the rise because, as humans, we are social beings and have a need to socialise with one another. We feel the need to visit friends and family, we attend religious services and we go to parties. But this is a time of heightened danger in the face of a global pandemic.’

The country was instantly put on the higher Level 3. The sale of alcohol was completely forbidden as ‘alcohol-related incidents and violence are putting pressure on our hospital units’. Curfew was extended from 9pm to 5am and mask wearing in public became compulsory. Public spaces including beaches were closed, reminding those who suffered under apartheid of ‘whites only beaches’. Public gatherings were forbidden, except funerals which were limited to 50 attendees. He emphasised the three Cs: that we must avoid: Closed spaces, Crowded places and Close Contact, stressing that ‘this virus takes advantage of our over-confidence.’ President Ramaphosa concluded by saying that instead of fireworks and



celebrations at the dawn of the New Year ‘Let us each light a candle in memory of those who have lost their lives, in tribute to those on the front line who are working tirelessly to protect us from harm, in appreciation of the great sacrifices that have been made this past year, and in the confidence that the year ahead will bring health, peace and hope to our people. May God Bless South Africa and protect our people.’

My granddaughter and I lit a candle together at midnight on New Year’s Eve in solidarity with the President’s call. Since then, I have been made aware just how much faith is the cornerstone of the constitution, the family and every individual life here. This is a nation where the church matters. Five times a day I hear the Muslim call to prayer, the *athaan*. Or, as it is known affectionately by the Cape Malay community here, the *Bilal*, after Bilal who was the first to call the people to their prayers in the time of Prophet Mohamed, and thus the first mu’azzin. Christmas Day of 2020 fell on a Friday, the holy day of Islam. The broadcast across the *athaan* loudspeakers in the Bo-Kaap area preached a sermon on ‘Muslims for Jesus Christ’. It explained the importance of Christ in the lives of Muslims. This was a generous acknowledgement of the significance of the birth of Christ and very much part of the way religious communities here work together. I learned that you cannot be a Muslim if you do not believe in Jesus, that Muslims believe in the Immaculate Conception, in Mary Mother of Jesus as the Holiest of all Women, in His great miracles, and in the disciples of Christ who are honoured in Islamic texts. Allah praises Christians in the Quran, and Muslims pray as Jesus prayed: ‘He (Jesus), went a little further and fell on His face and prayed’ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, in his Christmas address at Cape Town Cathedral, invited his congregation, at this time both physical and virtual, to reflect on the observation that ‘It is probably the Christmas in our lifetimes which has the strongest resonance with the first Christmas... If Christmas is the new birth, then it is being born out of the vortex of disruption, amid the cries and demands of the marginalised, the poor, the exploited, the victims, the survivors and the forgotten. It is in responding to their cries that we begin to sense the flicker of new life, the first stirrings of Christmas.’

January 2021

On 18th January my daughter reported that her Ethiopian colleagues had apologised for intermittent internet connection as it was the Ethiopian

Epiphany and families were greeting one another online. Earlier, in President Ramaphosa's Address to the Nation on 11th January, he had acknowledged the hugely significant part religious leaders have played, and he expressed his sorrow that churches must remain closed except for funerals:



‘I wish to express my appreciation to the religious community in particular for its support and understanding throughout this pandemic. Not only have faith-based organisations had to limit or adjust the nature of worship and other activities, they have also provided counselling, support, feeding schemes and other social services to communities.

‘At a time when people need both material and spiritual comfort, it is indeed unfortunate that the restrictions on religious and other gatherings have to remain. We will continue our discussions with religious leaders on how best safely to meet the desire of many of our people to worship in congregation while working together to preserve life.’

In addition, President Ramaphosa called on faith-based organisations to initiate ‘campaigns to sensitise religious leaders on patriarchy, gender-based violence and the church. This includes a programme where leaders are trained to accompany survivors of gender-based violence from the time they report the incident until they are referred for further service. Faith activists are also trained to support women through the court process.’ It is readily acknowledged how directly the pandemic has impacted on the lives of women and the lived realities of domestic violence and oppression. Here the churches must play a role to change attitudes toward women, and reflect, too, on the effects of their own patriarchy.

The Church speaks out on the ‘unequal world order

The church has also been active in speaking out against global injustice. Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya prayed in the Anglican Communion of Prayer on 14th January:



‘We repent for our negligence leading the earth to be in peril from loss of habitats and species. Help us to be caretakers of Your gifts, protecting the land from abuse, and ready to share with all in need. Amen.’

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, too, renewed a call to prayer on 7th January after the news that the coronavirus infections had reached a new high, and that ‘the second wave of Covid-19 is harsher and fiercer.’ As a response to the news of the rollout of the vaccine in certain parts of the world, he also prayed on 18th January,

in the Lambeth Conference Prayer Journey, that as we ‘seek to respond to the scourge of coronavirus, and celebrate the scientific progress the coronavirus represents, we also lament the unequal world order in which the poor and vulnerable are always left behind. We commit to Jesus’ particular concern in His heart for these, and pledge to help ensure that they are given priority as vaccines are rolled out.

‘We owe a debt to life itself’ (Nelson Mandela)

A whole generation of religious leaders has died, including several local imams, clergy from the diocese and Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya, who in 2012 became the first woman bishop in the Anglican Communion in Africa.

Our next-door neighbour here in Bo-Kaap has lost 47 friends. My daughter’s sister-in-law has suffered several family bereavements. She was given permission to visit her mother who was dying in ICU. Prayers had been said and a burial site identified. Somehow, following the visit from

her daughter, she recovered. Rachel's sister-in-law has nursed her back to health.

It has also been reported that Interfaith prayers are taking place in Cape Town for Covid patients and hospital staff outside hospitals since 18th January. Imam Sheik Isaacs said that he hoped to be able to visit both hospices and old age homes soon, and the initiative is a way to combat the terrible isolation, and to know (and see and hear) that people are there. As yet, the churches remain closed except for funerals. The land borders are shut. The President is due to address the nation again tonight (1st February). As yet, no-one has been vaccinated; however there is a plan to vaccinate front-line workers first.

Prayer to conclude worship

Lord God, in this season of fear and uncertainty, as we face the threat of the coronavirus, grant us wisdom and determination to walk in one another's shoes, the confidence and humility to draw closer to You and to those affected; empower us to pastor those who are ill, to weep for the dead, to support the healers and to care for and love one another; and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and always. Amen (Archbishop Thabo Makgoba)

STOP PRESS:

Since I first wrote this, new measures have been announced (on 1st February) by the President of South Africa to ease the current lockdown as numbers of new infections and hospital admissions have significantly dropped. These new measures include the lifting of the curfew to 11pm to 4am, reopening of places of worship (fifty at any one time), reopening of beaches and public places, and the sale of alcohol during Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm. He reported that vaccines have been secured and a comprehensive programme is about to be rolled out.

Sponsored Poetry Reading for St Cyprian's, 28th January 2021

As an alternative fundraising event – we had hoped to have a gathering in the church as the lockdown was easing – some members of the LSM's Social Justice and Responsibility Group decided to attempt a Zoom fundraising event, with ten readers each presenting a favourite poem on the theme of love, Christian charity or giving, and each agreed to commit to getting some sponsorship in aid of St Cyprian's, Sharpeville, South Africa, to support their mission and outreach with the needy and childheaded families, (one of LSM regular links).

The event was held by Zoom and a good audience joined us, including many old friends from LSM, and other family and friends – it is difficult to gauge the numbers as the 35 guests (in addition to the readers) included several couples and family groups, and the audience kindly muted themselves and switched off their videos, to highlight the team of readers.

Hosting and compèring was by Cambridge-based author and new PCC member, Jeremy Musson; and the evening opened with words recorded especially for the event from Fr David Mahlonoko, rector of St Cyprian's. This included a moving *Kyrie eleison* from his choir, recorded in 2019, and a lovely short video of the youth choir dancing and singing at a Palm Sunday Service; Fr David spoke of the work of the parish in these difficult times, with the extra problems created by Covid, and also of hopefulness and grace in the face of adversity, and the bonds between our two churches.

The chosen poems were then read in sequence, each reader representing a different part of the church fellowship: clergy, churchwardens, PCC, Social Responsibility & Justice Group, choir, pastoral assistant and congregation, including regular lesson readers; the youngest reader, Kate, is the daughter of the parish administrator. The readers each introduced their own poems and explained why they were important to them. Mary Ward read her poem from South Africa - a translation, by Nelson Mandela, of an Afrikaans poem, which referenced an innocent

child shot by soldiers at the time of the Sharpeville massacre - sixty years ago this year:

- Fr Robert – George Herbert, *Love III (Love bade me Welcome)*
- Kate Shield – Edgar Guest, *Have you Earned Your Tomorrow?*
- Steve Siddall – William Shakespeare, *Sonnet 73* and Edward Lear, *The Owl and the Pussycat*
- Heidi Thomas – Anne Ridler, *Choosing A Name*
- Jeremy Musson – Christina Georgina Rossetti, *Birthday* and Emily Dickinson, *Hope*
- Charles Moseley –Gerard Manley Hopkins, *God's Grandeur* and George Herbert *The Pulley*
- Fiona Blake – John Newton, *Ask What Shall I Give Thee?*
- Geoffrey Howe – Thomas Hardy, *Great Things*
- Matthew Fairhurst – John Donne, *No Man is an Iland*
- Mary Ward – Ingrid Jonker, *Die Kind (The Child)*

Jeremy Musson thanked all the supporters and sponsors of the event and readers (many people have been very generous), a recorded closing prayer from Fr David was played, and the event was closed by a prayer from Fr Robert. The sponsorship collected from the evening will all go direct to St Cyprian's as soon as all the monies are collected, and the PCC Treasurer is kindly processing the donations, Gift Aid, and CAF vouchers as we write. A note of the total amount will be shared in a future Newsletter. Many audience members wrote emails to say how much they had enjoyed the event, the being together - even in the ether - and hearing familiar and loved poems and readings, and also being introduced to less well-known poems, such as those by Edgar Guest, Anne Ridler and Ingrid Jonker.

It all goes to show, LSM can get things done even under lockdown!

Garden News



Despite the cold and gloom, new life is appearing and birds are enjoying the peanuts sent by the daughter of one of our neighbours in the Lane, who kindly left money in her will to buy supplies for our bird feeders.

Christine Tipple

cstipple@gmail.com