

St Mary's News

September 2022



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Challenges are also Great Opportunities

Many years ago, a friend of mine invited me to join a work party for his church, which had recently acquired some land on an old airstrip with the intention of building a new school. The purpose of the work party was to demolish some outbuildings on the land. I have to say it was one of the most chaotic and frightening things I have ever witnessed: numerous young males with too much testosterone wielding sledgehammers, knocking seven bells out of the brickwork. I suspect for many it was a satisfying way of venting one's frustrations.

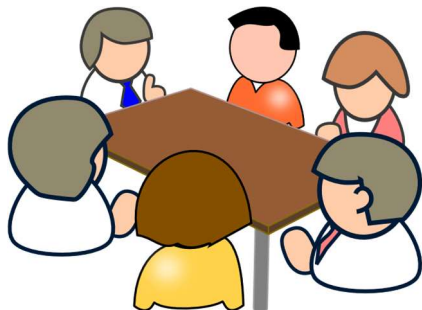
There had been an impressive response to the appeal for help and amongst those who had turned up was an elderly and rather frail looking gentleman who tottered around holding a tiny saw



that resembled something out of a child's tool kit. That gentleman could have easily excused himself and stayed at home with his feet up watching the television. I rather suspect he may have gone home at the end of the evening wishing he had. He may well have wondered what use he had been with all these fit young men pounding the brickwork with their sledgehammers. Yet that man was responsible for melting the heart of a rather cynical and embittered young man, and it was not long after that I gave my life to the Lord.

Nearly forty years later I can still picture that elderly man, and I still carry with me the greatest respect for what he did that day. As I say it would have been so easy for him to have excused himself claiming to be too old or too weak or not able to be of any use. Yet he turned up, he responded to the appeal for help, he believed in the vision (who knows he may have been praying for that school for years) and although he may not have thought he was of much use, God took what he brought and used it in a very special way.

The other day I hosted a meeting of those who help with preaching and leading of worship. This time I was aware of the absence of both Cath and Josh as they move to pastures new, but I was also aware of those who have joined the group. In fact, of the six who were present only two of them were part of St. Mary's when I came as vicar nearly 10 years ago.



It is good to see that group thrive and those who have left the group have invariably left for good reasons, perhaps they have moved away from Watford or indeed in many cases they have gone off to train for ordination. It is a group with a very healthy flow in and out. I am mindful of many other people who have also moved on from St. Mary's and, in the majority of cases, for very good reasons, perhaps retirement or to pursue their career elsewhere. Always, they have gone with our love and our blessing with a hope that where they go, they will be a blessing to their community and especially their local church. Indeed, we have received similar blessings ourselves.

Whenever someone moves away their loss is felt by us all, but this often tempered with others joining St. Mary's, and the preaching group is a good example of that. In other areas of church activity, it hasn't been quite as obvious and there are gaps in some key areas such as our mothers and toddlers' group, Sunday school, our welcome team on Sunday mornings; it would be great to have more people present in church throughout the week to welcome the many visitors who come into St. Mary's; it would be lovely to strengthen our finance committee or buildings group; we need more helpers on the sound desk or helping with the audio/visual system. Those who are willing to come and clean and tidy up the church are very much appreciated, as is anyone who plays a part in the life of our church, even when their work goes under the radar or like with the elderly man, it doesn't always seem so obvious how God is using you.

You will see in this month's magazine an article from Marcus Jones where he reflects on the looming cost of living crisis. No doubt the cost of living will affect our church in many ways. The church as a whole and individuals, are likely to struggle to cope with rising costs and limited resources, and especially at a time when we lose two key members of staff such as Cath and Josh. It probably sounds as though I am asking a lot, and whilst this may be true, what I am really wanting to see is for us to become a deeply caring and compassionate community: one where everyone is valued, and everyone has a part to play.

One of the best illustrations in the Bible describing how a church should function is relating the church to a human body. The church is one body, the Body of Christ and it is made up of many parts. If the church is to flourish, then every member has to



function well. Understandably, we often focus on the vital organs such as the heart and the lungs, kidneys, liver etc. Truth be told, for us to be really healthy, every part needs to function well. I may not give much thought to my little toe but gosh when it gets crushed, or a blister appears and there is pain, I am only too aware of the discomfort and in some cases, it can cause a distraction, meaning I don't function well.

I think there are some big challenges ahead of us, but as is often the case such challenges are also great opportunities. There is an invitation for us to go deeper with God, to grow deeper in our faith. There is an invitation to use more fully our gifts and resources and to give generously to God. Above all there is an opportunity to value each other and to be valued as we journey together and work together and in doing so become an outward looking community that is resilient and one where we can ride the impending storm and be a lifesaver to others.

The Revd Tony Rindl



Oberammergau

Dear Friends,

As some of you may know I was very fortunate to spend time last month in Austria and Germany helping the

Bishop of Bath and Wells lead a pilgrimage. The pilgrimage was to see the Passion Play held in the small town of Oberammergau in Germany. Now I wasn't really aware of this play until I was invited on the pilgrimage, but it really is quite unique for many reasons.

The first is the local legend for why the play is performed in the first place. Back in 1633 the villagers of Oberammergau made a promise to God. At the time, they were suffering from the plague and so the legend has it that they made a vow to God that if nobody else would die of the plague they would perform a play of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus every tenth year. Since then, the villagers have kept this promise. It means the last time it was performed was back in 2010 (This year's play was delayed from 2020 due to the pandemic). It also means that this year's play was only the 42nd time the play had been put on. For such a long-standing tradition to be continued is quite remarkable.

Another reason I think the play is special is that although it has incredibly high production values the play is only performed and sung by residents of the village. They have very strict rules on this and so the main parts in the play are performed not by professional actors but by people born and raised in the village. This is the same for the large choir and for the orchestra where people have to also be residents. And being a resident gives you a right to be in the play if you choose, apparently this year the oldest resident in the play is 98! With the play being performed by so many people in the town it means that when you stay in Oberammergau many of the people serving in the restaurants or working in the hotels are in the play. In fact, John the disciple was

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PASSION PLAY
OBERAMMERGAU



the person who checked us out of the hotel! This adds to the sense of community you feel when visiting.



Finally, the play itself is quite extraordinary. Apparently around half a million people will see it this year as they do performances 5 days a week in a theatre of about five thousand people, which as the play is 5 hours long is quite remarkable. The play with its focus on the death of Jesus is deeply moving and

emotional. One of the things that made it so moving for me was seeing real people act out moments I'd read or heard so often. The play is in German so instead of focusing on the dialogue you get drawn into the emotions, reactions, and movements of the people. It struck me afresh that the Disciples, the Pharisees, the Romans they were all real people with full lives. They aren't just a few lines in the gospel here and a few lines there. Some of the disciples have very little to no actual lines of dialogue in the gospels and yet in the play there they were on stage interacting with each other. Real people, real lives, real emotions.

I have a Thought for the Week out on Monday which goes into more of what this means but personally I found the play an incredibly deep spiritual experience. A time when I was drawn afresh, in a new way, into a story I knew so well, and which is so important to me. Many of us may not have the opportunity to visit Oberammergau to see the play. After this year the next play will be in 2030 and if able, I would happily recommend you visit. But actually, we don't need the play to enter afresh into the life of Jesus, instead we just need to engage our imaginations. The Gospels are rich with story and detail but as the writer of John's gospel says if all of Jesus' life were written down the whole world would not have enough room for the books! This means there is space in the stories and moments for us. Space for us to think, reflect, pray and enter each moment, to think about who might have been there, what were they thinking, what were people's reactions.

I believe the deeper we enter the life of Jesus the deeper we are changed through him, and the more God works through us. Taking time to sit and dwell with the stories we have of Jesus helps us know his love for us more. So can I encourage you to spend time reading the Gospel's again. Pick out favourite stories and moments and imagine them being played out. Enter the moment with Jesus and see what God might reveal to you through it. The play helped me recognise again that the story of Jesus, his life, teaching, death and resurrection will never stop surprising me with how much more there is for us to learn through it. All we actually need do is spend more time with him.

God bless,

Josh



An Act of Commitment for the Care of Creation

Lord of life and giver of hope,
we pledge ourselves to care for creation,
to reduce our waste, to live sustainably,
and to value the rich diversity of life.
May your wisdom guide us,
that life in all its forms may flourish,
and we may be faithful in voicing creation's praise.
May the commitment we have made this day
be matched by our faithful living.
Amen



Creationtide or The Season of Creation

This is the period in the annual Church calendar, from 1st September to 4th October, dedicated to God as Creator and Sustainer of all life.

You can find out more on the Church of England website

Report of Parochial Church Council

Meeting of 11th July

The following report briefly covers some of the matters considered at the meeting.

The Vicar was absent owing to suspected Covid. Peter Dean chaired the meeting in his role as Vice Chair.

Scourfield Financial Review: This is now available on the St Mary's website in line with a request at the last Annual Parochial Church Meeting.

Children's & Families work: This was discussed in the light of Cath da Costa's departure following correspondence received from a church member. No firm conclusions could be reached in the Vicar's absence. It was unlikely that the Council would be able to afford to employ another Children's & Families Worker owing to St Mary's financial situation, but the Council re-iterated its commitment to this ministry and considered a number of options for the future. These included changes to Sunday services, children coming in for a part of the service and recruiting more Sunday School helpers. The need to increase the number of volunteers assisting with the children's work was particularly stressed.

Finances: Peter Dean reported that the situation was similar to last month: income was down, and it remained the case that the Council was likely to breach its reserves policy threshold around the end of the year. An appeal needed to be made to the congregation. Roger Courtney then introduced a paper which analysed the church's expenditures and showed that more than half were outside the control of the PCC. He said the church finances are in crisis and that in view of the present economic circumstances while an appeal should be made, this was unlikely to bridge the prospective gap between expenditure and income. Hence expenditure had to be reduced to minimise this year's deficit and lay the foundation for a more balanced budget next year. He proposed several actions, including that all discretionary

expenditure should cease until further notice and an urgent review of expenditure by the Standing Committee. The Council agreed these unanimously.

The Council also discussed the handling of the financial transactions connected with the Holy Land trips, which currently pass through a PCC account. While the Council welcomed the trips and noted their benefits, it was concerned to improve financial governance and transparency and reduce financial risk. Accordingly, it agreed that its account should not be used for such trips without specific prior authorisation from the Council.

Buildings: Roger Courtney reported that the finances for the floodlights had largely been obtained.

Pre-School: A new manager had been appointed following the resignation of the previous manager and assistants were being recruited.

Climate Emergency: The Council approved the terms of reference for the Climate Emergency Committee and the manner in which it will operate.

Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy: The Chaplaincy had advised the Council that it had agreed to reduce the full-time contract of its Lead Chaplain, David Scourfield, to 24 hours a week with effect from 1 September. This meant that the arrangement by which 25% of his time supported St Mary's directly would cease.

Cost of living crisis: Marcus Jones introduced a discussion paper setting out a number of possibilities for assisting less well-off members of St Mary's based on ideas from the Current Affairs Connect Group. This included setting up a discretionary fund to which better off church members might donate some or all of their energy-related grants provided by the government. The Council supported this and agreed that monies could be paid into the existing Vicar's Discretionary Fund. More about this initiative is publicised elsewhere in this issue of St Mary's News.

Marcus Jones

Congratulations to Olive Knibbs ...



... who celebrated her 100th birthday in great style with family and friends at Montrose Care Home on 28th July. The staff arranged a wonderful party for her in the garden in perfect weather including live music, lots of balloons, gifts, cards (including a special one from Her Majesty), delicious cake and drinks. She would like to thank all her friends at St. Mary's who kindly remembered her and sent messages. She made the most of her opportunity to share with everyone the good news about Jesus and to thank God for watching over her throughout her long life. After an eclectic selection of songs, we all joined in singing 'Amazing Grace'.



Cost of Living Crisis: Support for Church Members

There is an opportunity to make a real difference this winter to some of our less well-off brothers and sisters in St Mary's.

We're all being hit in the pocket by the effects of the biggest cost of living crisis in decades as food, fuel and energy prices rise. This'll bite increasingly harder over the autumn and winter months as energy prices rise even further. But the poorest will be most affected because they spend a higher proportion of their income on the essentials.

Respected voices such as *Money Programme's* Martin Lewis and from organisations across the political spectrum, including the *Institute for Fiscal Studies* and the *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, are calling on the government to act to protect the poorest, who face being unable to feed themselves or heat their homes this winter.

The government has responded so far by announcing payments of £400 for every household with additional payments for certain other groups such as pensioners and those on benefits. While these are welcome, they're nowhere near enough to cover the very steep rises in energy bills, let alone other rising costs, such as rent. Is there anything we can do as a church to support members who are struggling financially?

The early church took responsibility for its members' welfare. Acts 2.42 tells us that they didn't treat their personal wealth as their own but held it in common for the church community, giving to anyone as he had need, including a daily distribution of food to its widows (Acts 6.1).

With this model in mind, the Vicar and others have been concerned to provide help and support to poorer members of St Mary's. In July, the PCC approved a range of support based on suggestions submitted by the Current Affairs Connect Group (CACG) (See the *PCC Report* article).

The main suggestion is that better off church members might donate some or all of their energy-related grants provided by the government or their winter fuel allowance to a discretionary fund

which can be used by the Vicar to help those among us who are in need and struggling this winter e.g. to help with food or heating bills, buy a microwave oven etc. We already have a hardship fund and can use it for this purpose. Several members of the CACG have already indicated their willingness to donate to this fund and the PCC has given this approach its support.

If just ten better off households were to donate their £400 from the government, we would quickly have a fund of around £4,000, enough to offer some meaningful assistance to several less well-off households. We would hope under God to have even more than this as some members of CACG explained they would be receiving nearly a £1,000 pounds extra this winter, including winter fuel payments, and were happy to give away a substantial part of this.

This initiative is different from the general appeal you'll have read about in the Vicar's letter to every church member. In the general appeal the PCC is encouraging every member, if they are able, to start giving or to raise their regular giving from their salaries for the general work and ministry of the church. For this cost-of-living initiative we are suggesting better-off church members might consider donating some or all of their government energy grants as a one off payment specifically for poorer church members.

You can make a donation by bank transfer to St Mary's to the following account:

Sort Code: 20-74-09

Account: 00725927

Please add the reference *PCC of St Mary's (Hardship Fund)* to ensure that it is allocated correctly.

This is a wonderful opportunity to make a big difference to others at a very difficult time. There is great joy, blessing and freedom in living in a way that is financially counter-cultural: not keeping our money to ourselves but sharing it with others. Indeed, many of us can testify that in giving we have received an

overflowing blessing from God (Malachi 3.10-12) through his ongoing gracious provision.

The PCC also endorsed other suggestions which might be done, provided we have the necessary volunteers. These were:

- *Practical help*: This could be anything from obtaining and constructing a new bed, to help preparing for a job interview. This would require a small group of people to lead this work and either provide the particular need themselves or to find someone who can.
- *Regular church lunches*: These might be provided for everyone monthly or even fortnightly, after the Sunday service, especially during the winter months, both for fellowship and to ensure that the less well-off among us have access to free hot food. It could be a bring-and-share meal or a meal cooked by a small team, subsidised by donations.
- *A volunteer 'bank'*: Many of us have skills we might offer free of charge to those in need e.g. running a cooking class, knitting skills for baby clothes, blankets etc, financial skills to manage housekeeping or debt, hairdressing skills etc.

If you'd like to help out with any of these, please talk to Marcus Jones or the Vicar.

Additionally, large companies such as *Amazon Smile* and *Marks & Spencer* run schemes whereby they give a small percentage of the value of your purchases to a nominated local charity at no additional cost to yourself. This is a great way to help local charities like *Watford Food Bank*, *Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Partnership* and *New Hope*.

Finally, to those of us who are struggling, Christian life is about giving and receiving love. You are part of St Mary's and serve with St Mary's in Christ. You have given in various ways and St Mary's has received love and blessing from you. It is right and proper that you receive from St Mary's the practical love you now need (2 Corinthians 8.13-15). Please don't be embarrassed to ask the Vicar for help.

Marcus Jones

Churches Together in Watford

At the joint AGM of Churches Together in Central, South and West Watford with Churches Together in North Watford and Garston, on 12th July 2022 at St Luke's Church, it was agreed to amalgamate into Churches Together in Watford, CTW.

Chaired by the Revd Ian Pankhurst the meeting discussed the way forward for all Churches in Watford to seek God's purpose and mission for them, in order to support the fellowships of Christians in Watford in the years to come.

Ian reminded the meeting of the CTBI (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) "commitment by each church and denomination to develop its fellowship with the others without losing what makes each interestingly different, to work and journey with them towards a greater unity".

It was suggested that church fellowships would take it in turns to distribute a "snapshot" of 200 words and perhaps a photo, describing for example, their joys, sadness and concerns, asking for particular prayer needs. Sharing their church life and mission would help other churches to engage with empathy and love for their Christian neighbours!

It is hoped a website could be developed.

It was suggested that each church should appoint a 'champion' who would liaise with their church council to promote CTW's programme and ensure that a CTW report would regularly feature on the church council agenda.

Brian & Jackie Mee



Services

The Church is usually open each week

Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 3.00pm
and on Saturday between 12.00noon and 2.00pm

Sunday

9.00am Holy Communion (said) in church
on 1st, 3rd & 5th Sunday only each month;
10.30am Morning Service in church and via Zoom
every Sunday;
5.30pm Encounter in church
on 4th Sunday of month only
(preceded at 5.00pm with refreshments)

Wednesday

12.30pm Holy Communion in church
(for Zoom links please contact Church Office)

Thought for the Week

on our website and on Facebook - based on a bible verse or passage,
it is a short reflection by one of the leadership team
for you to think about during the week.
It can be downloaded and listened to whenever and wherever.

Please keep up to date with what is on offer
via our Facebook page
or the website www.stmaryswatford.org

Who's Who at St Mary's

Vicar

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