

St Swithun's Church Newsletter

For information and inspiration

January 2011

God's agents

I'm a bit of a fan of heart-warming reality shows that build homes for people. I used to watch America's 'Extreme Makeover, Home Edition', where deserving people who gave a lot of their time to other people were offered a 'home makeover.' However, in wonderful American style, this was taken to the extreme and the old house was demolished while a new house that met all of the family's needs, and about eight times the size of the old one, was built in its place. It was then kitted out with the latest technology and mod-cons, and the returning families were met with something beyond their wildest dreams. And the programme always managed to make me cry!

The British version is a little bit tamer, but the DIY SOS programmes that have been on recently have had a similar feel – Nick Knowles and his team have gone to the aid of families who have, through no fault of their own, found themselves living in homes that look more like building sites. The programme's emphasis is on the help of local tradesmen and communities who work with the DIY SOS team to make a home makeover possible in just seven days.

At the end of the programme Nick makes the comment to camera that the project was only made possible by the members of

the community helping out, and the most recent programme's comments were especially memorable. He said something to the effect of: 'life has its ups and downs, and in the dark moments we can often feel that there is no light at the end of the tunnel. But there is. And it's these people. It's people in the community who work together to show they care and to help someone in need.'



Profound words indeed. And I think they apply both to our church community and to the wider community of Kennington that we seek to serve. And so I wonder, as we start this new year, whether we can start it with one another in mind. Can we be mindful of the needs of those around us and the ways in which our input – our company, our practical help, our prayers – can make a difference? And perhaps a good starting point is the prayer of St Francis of Assisi (printed in full on the prayer bookmark) as we seek to be God's agents of peace, love, pardon, faith, light and joy.

Em Coley



A Day in the Life of Jackie Smith

If my cat hasn't already woken me up, my alarm goes off at 7am. I don't need to leave until 8.30, but I don't like rushing in the morning, because this can be when I'm at my best. I take my time over breakfast (always a banana), catching the news on Radio 4. I usually cycle to work unless the weather is terrible or I'm feeling tired. I like the exercise, and it's lovely taking the river route in the summer when it's not so muddy.

I work for the University, in the Department of International Development. I am Communications and Outreach Officer for a research institute focusing on international migration. I love this job, which I started in May 2010, because the department is really friendly and has a lively buzz. I work with great people, using my gifts of writing, editing, design, and project management. I used to work for Oxfam as an editor, and was sad to leave when they made me redundant, but the new job is just as good if not better.

I usually take my own lunch and eat with colleagues, or sometimes meet friends who work in town. During term-times we have a cafe run by the Vaults and Gardens staff, with lovely veggie food. Fresh seasonal local food is really important to me, so this is a real perk! I cook in the evenings using ingredients from the box delivered to me from Riverford Organics. I enjoy growing a few vegetables in my garden too. A favourite pastime at the weekend is baking cakes and inviting friends round to help me eat them.

Although I live on my own I'm lucky enough to own a ground-floor flat in a building full of my friends! Martin and Jane Hull and their boys live in the flat upstairs and a mutual friend has recently bought the flat next to mine. It's really the best of both worlds to be in the midst of this little

thriving community but also to have my own space when I need to retreat.

I love my flat and I have created just the kind of homely calm space that I need. This year I aim to spend 15 minutes in silent reflection every day, using a device called the 'Examen', which is an ancient practice to help people contemplate life and what brings them 'consolation' and 'desolation'. The idea is simply to relax in God's love, to look back at each day and to think about the moment that brought you most life, and the moment when you felt most drained of life. I'm not at all good at traditional 'quiet times' or praying and reading the bible, so the revival of celtic spirituality and silent contemplative traditions has been very helpful to me.

I am most relaxed when I'm doing something that grounds me in the present moment, and this can be during the kind of meditation I've described above, or at my weekly yoga class, or when I'm painting, cycling, chopping wood for the stove, reading, gardening, baking or walking. Just writing that last sentence has made me realise that I count myself blessed to have so many options!

Jackie Smith



Home Group

An excellent and very thought-provoking Lent study course last year, entitled 'Tales from the Madhouse', was the inspiration for a number of us to initiate some regular theological discussion in the village. After a slightly hesitant start during the summer, a new home group began to meet fortnightly at my house on Wednesday evenings from 8.00 to 9.30pm.

Our desire for the group was to have time to discuss more in-depth issues about our faith in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. To help us structure our discussions, we used some notes entitled 'Great Prayers of the Bible'.

Over a series of seven sessions we looked at the nature of prayer and engagement with God from a number of different perspectives. We developed a deeper and broader understanding of what prayer is really about, and it has made a real personal impact on our faith in God.

However, the group isn't just theological discussion. It is also an opportunity to catch up with each other, pray for and support each other, and enjoy the occasional social event together.

Because of new people wanting to join, a new group will be starting later in January, probably meeting on a Thursday evening, and for this term both groups will be studying Bishop John's book 'Living Jesus' in conjunction with the Sunday sermon series.

If you are interested, please feel free to call me on Oxford 326641, email me at martin@morse.org.uk, or speak to Em.

Martin Morse

Pause for Prayer

The faithful love of the
LORD never ends! His
mercies never cease.

Great is his faithfulness; his
mercies begin afresh each
morning.

I say to myself,
'The LORD is my
inheritance; therefore, I will
hope in him!'

Lamentations 3:22-24
(New Living Translation)



Please pray...

Lord, make me an instrument
of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me
sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, grant that I
may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to
understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we
receive,
it is in pardoning that we are
pardoned,
it is in dying that we are born
to eternal life.
Amen.

St Francis of Assisi

What is KOA?

KOA stands for Kennington Overseas Aid. I see it is an important and tangible part of our outreach as a church community. It is an informal group of people who arrange a variety of events each year, to raise funds for a project in the developing world

It all began in 1968 when the Anglican Church devised a group study programme called 'The People Next Door' and invited members of other churches to join in. Its purpose was to bring an understanding that, as well as those living near us, our neighbours were all over the world and that those in serious need deserved our help. From the discussion groups involving the three churches in Kennington came the Good Neighbours Scheme, the United Church Choir, Churches Together in Kennington and KOA.

KOA's first project was to improve irrigation and provide seed and fertilizer for Otterthotti, a village in southern India. Events were held every day for a week and KOA sent £350. Since then the programme has grown and 2011 will be our 43rd year. The money raised has supported projects in Africa, India and South America and the total raised each year has steadily increased. In 2010 over £25,000 was raised for Practical Action's project helping poor communities in the high Andes in Peru.

How do we select the project?

The projects supported are selected by the village. Each year three registered charities are invited to submit a detailed written proposal for a project that they will themselves supervise and that will cost in the region of £20,000. At a meeting, open to anyone in the village, a vote is taken as to which project will be adopted. Kennington is unique in raising funds for overseas charities in this way, and we maintain

contact with the charities we support to obtain feedback and ensure that the money is properly spent on the chosen project. Over the years we have had some very positive feedback from the projects that have been supported. For example in 2009 we raised money for Cecily's Fund which helped to train 'Peer Educators' working to prevent HIV infection in Zambia (see photo).

What do we do?

The annual programme is circulated to everyone in Kennington each spring when there is a house to house collection. It includes supper concerts, a fun run in Bagley Wood, a wine and cheese party, a brass band concert, a children's concert and so on, and for the month of August there is a charity shop. The fete is a joint effort with St Swithun's and the school and we are always open to new ideas and looking for ways to involve more people from the village, such as the café that ran in 2010.

How can you get involved?

If you have recently arrived in the village, KOA brings great opportunities for getting to know people, and you will be made very welcome. If you have lived here for some time, perhaps recently retired, and would like a new interest, KOA may be for you. There is no formal membership or fee. You will not be asked to do more than you want; perhaps you could help at the fete or the Fun Run, or do a session or two in the shop in August. It would be wonderful to see some new people coming forward. Unbelievably several of the original founders of KOA are still very active over 40 years on, but now is the time for some new younger people to get involved and bring fresh ideas.

Want to know more? Please talk to us. There are strong KOA supporters in the congregation who will be happy to talk to you. You can also have a look at our website: www.koa.org.uk. We will look forward to sharing our enthusiasm with you.

Halcyon Leonard



A White Wedding...



A Christmas wedding always has a romantic ring about it, no more so than when snow is forecast. Only, when the snow arrives in bucketloads, as it did on the morning of 18 December, the day of Richard and Rachel's wedding, it can go from being romantic to a complete nuisance!

The wedding was due to take place at noon, and by 11.00am a wonderful team of helpers was furiously clearing the church car park – first to help the florist get out, and then later so guests could get in. It was cold, hard work, but enormously appreciated by the wedding guests. The wedding had to be delayed until 1.30pm, so that guests could arrive, and those waiting enjoyed hot drinks and mince pies in the Church Hall.

Richard's dad wrote to me asking me to pass on his thanks, and this is an excerpt from his letter:

I am writing to thank you and all the parishioners who worked so hard on Saturday to make Richard and Rachel's wedding such

a memorable occasion. Without their kind efforts we would have had a dreadful time and the ceremony might not even have taken place.

It was wonderful to receive a warm welcome in the Hall after we had struggled through the snow. With the traffic at a complete standstill on the by-pass and the local roads, we were forced to abandon cars and taxis and to finish our journeys on foot, and some guests even made it along the river bank from the centre of Oxford. We were so grateful to have somewhere to dry out, change footwear, have a coffee and even mince pies (by then we were really hungry), and recover from our battle with the snow, all before the service.'

Rachel joined in the adventure, having abandoned hope of a wedding car she gamely put on walking boots, hoiked up her dress and walked to church!

It was a truly memorable day, and Richard and Rachel we wish you all the best for the future.

Em Coley

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Nativity Play

Pastoral Care Course

Liz Johnson will be running the Pastoral Care Course for our three parishes on Thursday evenings (27 January, 10 February, 3 March) at 8.00pm in St Swithun's Church Hall. She writes:

What is pastoral Care? Well, it is members of the church family looking after one another and those around them; it happens quietly, behind the scenes, when you cook a meal for someone who's ill, or take shopping to someone who's unable to go out in the snow; it's 'loving your neighbour as yourself.'

So why do we need a course in pastoral care, if it's already happening? I've led courses in a number of churches, focusing on listening, on responding to people in crisis, on coming alongside those suffering through bereavement or depression... I've found that the more church members learn about understanding people and are equipped with the skills to respond in different situations, the more confident they become. This pastoral care course can be a way of developing God-given gifts in individuals and enhancing the ministry of the whole church in the community.

I'm looking forward to working with you.

Rev Liz Johnson

The word 'Nativity' tends to fill me with foreboding rather than anticipation – imagining a lifeless sculpture from which the spirit has moved on, or worse still a peace-sapping commotion. However, as the two little boys who now occupy my home seem to be here to stay, I realised that sooner or later I must confront my nemesis and take Sam along to the St Swithun's Nativity Play. My quiet hope that the ice and snow, which so successfully derailed the carol service, might also postpone the play, did not reckon on the gritty determination of the Dennetts to deliver the play come hell or high water. I watched the rehearsal transfixed, as the disorderly stream of waist-high volunteers were transformed into pristinely dressed angels and shepherds, kings and refugees. Even the donkey – who seemed somewhat doubtful as to the wisdom of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem – had his own little outfit. I was most relieved to see that it all worked out in the end – and that only one shepherd had tossed his woolly bandana on the ground in a fit of disapproval – but then it was his first Nativity.

Martin Hull

Something to Say?

Please send any contributions for the St Swithun's Church newsletter to the Editor, Jackie Smith. We welcome text and/or pictures (in particular it would be good to build up a bank of pictures reflecting church life, so if you have any please do send them in).

Don't worry if writing isn't your thing – Jackie can help you with the right form of words.

Deadline for copy: 20 Jan 2011



Dates for Your Diary

Monday 17 January

3.30pm. Sing-along in Church

Tuesday 18 January

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins

Saturday 23 January

11.00am. James Barber's baptism and Unity Service

Monday 24 January

6.30pm. Catholic Mass for Christian Unity

8.00pm. PCC Meeting

Tuesday 25 January

2.30pm. Methodist Service for Christian Unity in the Methodist Church

Thursday 27 January

8.00pm. Pastoral Care Course in Church Hall

Sunday 30 January

6.00pm. Songs of Praise at Radley

Sunday 6 February

6.30pm. Refresh - a quiet service at St Swithun's Church

Thursday 10 February

8.00pm. Pastoral Care Course in Church Hall

Saturday 26 February

7.00pm Fish and Chip Supper and Quiz in Church Hall

Sunday 27 February

11.00am. Ben Hull's baptism

From the Editor



I'd like to share another R. S. Thomas poem with you that I like for its sense of well-founded hope during the winter months.

Even when things seem cold and lifeless, either in the natural world or perhaps even in ourselves, there is always a chance that 'someone is praying' through the 'hard spell of weather'.

R. S. Thomas likens this evidence of faith and hope during the dark times to the promise of spring: and I for one am looking forward to that!

Jackie Smith

The Belfry

I have seen it standing up grey,
Gaunt, as though no sunlight
Could ever thaw out the music
Of its great bell; terrible
In its own way, for religion
Is like that. There are times
When a black frost is upon
One's whole being, and the heart
In its bone belfry hangs and is dumb.

But who is to know? Always
Even in winter in the cold
Of a stone church, on his knees
Someone is praying, whose prayers fall
Steadily through the hard spell
Of weather that is between God
And himself. Perhaps they are warm rain
That brings the sun and afterwards flowers
On the raw graves and throbbing of bells.

R. S. Thomas