

St Swithun's Church Newsletter

For information and inspiration

September 2011

New Starts



As a child I was always excited about the start of a new academic year. It wasn't simply the opportunity to catch up with friends, to share news and experiences of the

summer, and to get immersed in lessons, but also the new pencil case, the new folders and the brand new array of pens that I had in my school bag!

There is something important about new starts, new beginnings. The beginning of an academic year offers a new start to all those in education, but I think they are important to all of us, at whatever stage of life we may be. It is easy to become burdened with the failings of our lives, the recognition of our weaknesses and inabilities, the times we have let God, or others or indeed ourselves down. It

is easy to feel trapped by the past, by the mistakes or poor decisions we have made, and to fear that there is no way to change difficult situations.

But the Good News is that God offers us a new start whenever we need one. He promises a burden that is light and easy to carry; forgiveness and acceptance in place of the sin and the guilt that can weigh us down.

Our Saviour kneels down and gazes upon the darkest acts of our lives. But rather than recoil in horror, he reaches out in kindness and says, 'I can clean that if you want!'
(Max Lucado)

Perhaps this September we can somehow find the courage to ask God for a new start, confident in his grace, which means his answer will always be 'Yes'.

Em Coley



A day in the life of Martin Hull



conquers the world'. This involves getting all of us onto the 08:35 bus. Four minutes prior to the arrival of the 09:13 from Radley to Didcot, there is a scene of complete anarchy. Ben is strapped into half of the buggy on platform 2, Sam and I carry the rest of the buggy over the bridge, leaving a forgotten bag of bananas looking rather dejected on platform 1. It is usually around this point that some kind soul takes pity on us and helps.

My 'typical' days divide between looking after our boys, and those spent working for Viva (www.viva.org). Here's a flavour of both:

If Sam and Ben were asked to draw a mental map of their world, it would probably include 'The Brown Church' (St Swithun's), 'Toddler Group' (the Village Hall), the 'Echo Bridge' (on the way to Nursery on Thursdays), the inside of an Intercity 125 train and various beaches in South Wales. Before becoming a parent I identified my three greatest trepidations as: organic mess, sleep deprivation and loss of solitude. Now I realise that a different concern has played heavily on my parenthood – the fear of an under-used day. During the summer break – which both parents and children alike see as stretching off into infinity, though for entirely different reasons – I try to take the boys on an adventure one day a week.

Key to an adventure day is getting Sam, Ben, our baggage and a double buggy onto platform 2 of Radley Station. As I am sure someone important once said – 'He who conquers platform 2 of Radley Station

As a result I have had more interesting conversations with strangers on the 09:13 from Radley to Didcot than in any other place. In fact some have become good friends.

Things then usually get easier, as we get into the swing of station lifts and the best places to stash buggies on Intercity 125 trains (west end of coach C). Those who think I am mad to do this may not have savoured the sheer joy that a one-year-old and a three-year-old will derive from trains. As with all the best things in life, the journey is just as important as the destination – though some sunshine on the beach does make for a sweeter experience. Unlike a car, the train is not there to sedate a child but instead is a source of fascination. If we use a family railcard, and string together a series of day returns, we can get the three of us to the beach for less than the cost of putting just one of them in Nursery for half a day. However, wherever we go, we must be back for bath time.

I don't assume any moments of solitude on these journeys, but being a hopeful

character I will always take a book with me just in case. My current read is *The Secret Message of Christ* – a Brian McLaren work that delves into why Jesus’ riddles and parables made his message so accessible to the poor, and so opaque to those in power. But I find that some of my most spiritual moments come from watching the world go by – and from talking with strangers.

My other parenting day usually involves trying to juggle housework with stimulation for the boys. On Tuesdays you could see me rattling the shutters to the Village Centre to open Toddler Group – where I may later find myself in idle banter with Brian Baggott. I’ll sometimes take the boys out in the bike trailer to look for playgrounds in surrounding villages – occasionally asking myself why I can’t just settle with Abbey Meadows like everyone else.

My Viva world, which occupies three days of my week, is as remote as my parenting is hands-on. My role is monitoring and evaluation: refining Viva’s understanding of its 34 partner networks in 20 countries around the world – along with the programmes that they run on our behalf. Each of these networks is made up of churches and Christian agencies devoted to the needs of children at risk. One of the factors behind Viva’s success has been our carefully honed model of network development. Using this as a benchmark, we measure the strengths and weaknesses of each network – to see what sort of help they most need over the year ahead. It is my job to refine this model, and to design/maintain the online system that our network consultants use to assess the health of each network. Hence you may find me discussing network strategy, or you may find me upgrading parts of the Network Health Check system. On the way home I will try to regain my sanity by collecting firewood for our wood-burning stove.

Pause for Prayer



Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4 v 6

Pray for...

- Children and young people returning to school or starting a new school
 - People in our community who contemplate change as a result of difficult economic circumstances
 - The development of the idea of a community cafe in Kennington
 - Homeless people as winter approaches
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We have been praying for Paul Shyvers for a few months now. He is a very good friend of ours and Jack's godfather. He has stomach cancer, and is have an operation week beginning 20 September. He needs the operation to be a success if he is to survive beyond Christmas. Please pray for him, for his wife Julia, and for his sons George (5) and Archie (3). Thank you.

Em Coley



A Community Venture Against the Odds

Kennington is planning to re-open its Youth Club, for ages 11-14, on Monday 12 September. We are doing this against the odds, because in times of restraint we can expect no help from the Youth Service and must resource ourselves through volunteers.

Opening is therefore a venture into the unknown, and the word venture is significant. As at least one member of the congregation can testify, when in the war the club first opened it was a 'venture club' to integrate girl evacuees and residents. Venture still appears in the official club title, but the purpose today is to give village young people one night a week to meet and socialise together.

St Swithun's Church has for many years had a tenuous relationship with the youth club, input coming from Harold and Mary Bennett, Doreen (Johnny) Kirby, Margaret Simpson and others. The connection continues today with those of us who are currently part of club organisation, though soon we will retire due to age.

We think it important for this church-community relationship to continue, and we hope others in the congregation might agree. If you do there is no better time to test that interest.

On Saturday 10 September from 12-2pm, the club is staging a barbecue and open time for everyone to see the refurbishments. There will be opportunity to meet Alice Dore the leader, and see the ways that help is essential if she is to run a successful club. Without commitment or pressure you can look around, ask any questions that occur, and think about ways you might help if you can. Oh! and partake of the barbecue too!

Barbara Boyne and Roy King

Who is rich?...One who rejoices in what he has

What links Sukkit, Ponai, Cerelia and Chung Ch`ui? They are all festivals - harvest festivals in Judaism, India, ancient Rome and China. It is autumn, the leaves are turning several colours, we can smell wood-smoke in the air and on 2 October it is Harvest Festival at St Swithun's.

Celebrating harvest dates back to Pagan times when people offered corn to the gods of fertility to pave the way for a good harvest the following year. Harvest comes from the Anglo-Saxon *haverfest*, meaning autumn. In the Middle Ages the church had a festival called Lammas, meaning 'loaf mass', which was celebrated on 1 August. Groups of farmers took one sheaf of corn, turned it into flour and baked a huge loaf which was taken to the local church to be used for Communion bread. The festival died out and there was little mention of harvest even in Cranmer's prayer book. Then in 1843, the Reverend Robert Hawker invited parishioners to a special service in his church in Morwestrow in Cornwall. The Reverend Piers Cloughton in 1854 held a harvest service in Elton and then the Victorians took it up with gusto. Church congregations sang 'We plough the fields and scatter' and 'Come ye thankful people come'. They decorated their churches and corn dollies were made from the last sheaf harvested.

Most people today think about harvest back in time when they were children, when people brought gifts of vegetables and fruit to church which were later distributed among the sick and poor of the parish. My father had a heated greenhouse in which he grew grapes just for the harvest festival in church - I never did get to taste one!

But why bother to celebrate harvest these days as it is an enigma in the Church

calendar? First, because it is good to be thankful to God for his generosity; it is also good to recognise the labour of others - farmers, teachers, builders, doctors and all those on whom we rely for our 'daily bread'. We should also remember the needs of others, the poor, especially those overseas and all who help them through Fair Trade and Christian Aid. Harvest really is a good time to remind us of the spirituality of the world in which we live and our place in it.

So, harvest is about giving back as well as giving out. It is a wake-up call when we can re-evaluate our gifts and talents and how we use them. In our increasingly commercial world it also gives us a spiritual discipline which we all need as we say a simple 'thank you' to God for our lives, our families and all our bounties. It reminds us who we are, that we are valued for what we are, and not be diminished by what we do not have. 'Who is rich? Not one who has much but one who rejoices in what he has'.

Harvest is a time to give thanks for what we have enjoyed. Go on, try it and say thank you God for all the good things of the past year. It really is an easy prayer to say...

Gerry Bowen-Thomas

Harvest Service

Sunday 2 October, 9.30am

Followed by a Bring & Share Lunch



Waste Watchers Holiday Club

What we did

On Wednesday we thought about God creating the world, and making **something from nothing**. We thought about how God made the world good, but it was spoilt in places from pollution and litter and famine and climate change. We also decided we could make a difference by caring about God's world, and helping other people to care too. We played games, we made a pocket into a photo frame, and we created mobiles and large models of some of the beautiful things that God has created. We also prayed for the people and animals affected by the ways in which the world has gone wrong, and thanked God for our favourite animals and countries.

On Thursday we learnt that Jesus turned **water into wine** at a wedding in Cana. This was a great excuse to play lots of water games, so we did relays and played with water bombs, and tried to get the team leaders very wet! We thought about how Jesus could make the impossible possible, and learnt that we can ask him for help when things are difficult. Then we had a wedding feast! We decorated biscuits and cakes and made fruit kebabs and non-alcoholic cocktails and then we ate everything. Having had fun with water all day we finished the day by praying for people in countries where there is not enough water.

On Friday we thought about the resurrection. We had great fun dressing leaders up in



silly clothes to make them look happy. And we thought about how Mary felt when Jesus died and then came to life again. Jesus turned **sadness into joy**. We learnt that he died and rose again because he loves each one of us individually. We had fun in our teams again, playing games and doing relays, and perfected some of the songs from the week.

What the leaders thought



Isabel Baggott: 'The thing which made Waste Watchers so good was the brilliant way the children behaved. They sang enthusiastically with Sally, they listened really well to Em and Mike and they all joined in the games, shouting encouragement to their teams. They were also prepared to stand patiently waiting for their snack or for a go on the trampoline. They were just fantastic.'

Brian Baggott: 'I thought the co-operation and camaraderie of the leaders and helpers was essential in making the club a rewarding experience for the children. My favourite time was Mike's retelling of the story of the Wedding at Cana and the enthusiasm of the children in the subsequent activities - the story clearly got through to the children.'

Mary Dennett: 'We had a wonderful time with 37 sharing, caring children who joined in whole-heartedly in both sunshine and rain.'

Sally Barber: 'My favourite part was watching a sea of excited faces jumping up and down to the waste watchers chant. Singing their heads off in an effort to out-sing me - tough challenge but they did it!'

Rosey Hollinrake: "'Cute kids" sums it up for me.'

Sheila Prior: 'The best bits for me:- Seeing Em in a huge curly wig balancing a builder's hat on top of her head. Listening to the children singing their Jesus songs on the last day.'

Brenda Groth: 'It was a privilege to be a part of the experience with a great team that really worked together, taking turns with many jobs. How fortunate our children are and how well-behaved they were, and what thoughtful answers some of them gave. Hope we can carry on up the age range in future - a greater challenge! Mike as the wedding guest in Cana was really something else! Brilliant!'

Sandra Ward: 'The sheer enjoyment of the children was infectious, especially during the water games which were much enjoyed by the red team leader at the time! The attention paid and imaginative responses to the stories demonstrated how engaged the children were and how prepared they are to think about God and the careful use of His world. It is so encouraging to think that the next generation have at their core a desire to protect and renew resources, and consider how key elements such as water can be made available for the benefit of everyone.'

Linda Frankum: 'It was wonderful to see all these children and a group of adults sharing fun and friendship together for three days.'

Em Coley: 'It was indeed a responsibility and great opportunity to share our faith and have fun with these children. What a privilege to walk with them on this stage of their journey, knowing that God will continue his walk with them in years to come.'



Open Doors Retreat

You might have seen this advertised earlier in the year and wondered what it was about. Having been on it I can tell you!

It's a course of two-hour retreats, one evening a week over nine weeks, and it's aimed at people who would find it difficult to go away somewhere on a longer retreat.

You might think that retreats are for really spiritual people who find it easy to pray. When I went on the retreat we were a diverse group of men and women of different ages and from different church backgrounds, but one thing we did have in common was our willingness to admit that prayer can be difficult – but we wanted to give it a try anyway.

It's not an exaggeration to say that giving that space and time every week on the retreat and a commitment to spending 15 minutes each day quietly with God changed all our lives.

The leaders were friendly and easy to talk to and led the course very sensitively so that we could be honest. We explored different methods of prayer and as we gave ourselves the opportunity to listen to God he drew close to us, and our understanding of him and of who he made us increased. I went on the course in January and I'm still benefitting from the insights I gained and the habits of routinely spending time with God that I learnt. It served to remind me of God's love and daily care, his plans for me and of how many different ways he gives us good things.

If you're looking for comfort, guidance, a fresh injection of energy into your prayer life or would just like to take a new step on your faith journey I would highly recommend it.

Catherine Schneider

From the Editor

During a recent lunch with a friend I had a conversation about change, and how unsettling it can be. We were talking about the country's straitened financial circumstances and the trickle-down effects this is now having on our own community, as people's jobs and lifestyles are affected. Things won't stay the same.

This got me wondering why we seem to want to arrange our lives to follow a familiar secure pattern. Security and comfort would seem to be sensible human goals designed to maximise our wellbeing. But we can't escape the fact that life is fluid and in constant flux. Life is about change. Change is often confusing, unsettling, and even frightening. But it can also be exciting, life-enhancing, and enriching. What would happen if we dared to cultivate a more open attitude to change? Instead of feeling sad or afraid, perhaps we would start to notice unexpected opportunities that have the potential to broaden our horizons and develop our selves and our community.

Jacqueline Smith



Dates for Your Diary

Sunday 4 September

6.30pm Refresh

Saturday 10 September

10.00am-12.00 noon Craft Morning in Church (4-11-year-olds)

6.00pm-7.30pm Praise Party in Grove

Sunday 2 October

9.30am Harvest All Age Service, followed by a Bring and Share Lunch

6.30pm Refresh

Monday 3 October

9.30am Harvest Service for the School in Church

Saturday 14 October

10.00am-12.00 noon Craft Morning in Church (4-11-year-olds)

Saturday 29 October - Sunday 6 October

Bible Week (more details to follow)

Monday 31 October

5.00pm-7.00pm Party of Light (alternative to Halloween)

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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.

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