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THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

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Want to email the Editor?

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Cover picture
'Peace and Solidarity'

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Editorial

Those who attended the interactive Jigsaw service at St Helen's in May heard and thought about Nicodemus who, we read in *John 3*, sought out Jesus at night. As a devoted Jew and Pharisee Nicodemus was clearly anxious about being seen in the company of this radical new teacher, yet still found a way to speak to him. The conversation was not an easy one for Nicodemus; he could not rely on his status and learning, but instead had to be open to Jesus' challenge to think in new ways about God.

This preparedness to ask questions and be open to surprising answers clearly had a profound effect on Nicodemus and his faith. In *John 7:50-51*, we read that he urged his fellow Pharisees to give Jesus a fair hearing before judging him. Finally, in John's gospel it is Nicodemus who assists Joseph of Arimathea in taking Jesus' body down from the cross and laying it in a tomb, at great risk to his safety and reputation (*John 19:39-41*). He also provided a huge amount of valuable myrrh and aloes to anoint Jesus' body. His questioning strengthened his commitment and faith.

The character and experience of Nicodemus should rightly challenge and encourage us in our Christian lives. It is good to be secure in our faith, but that security should not be reliant on cosy familiarity and certainly should not be at the expense of a willingness to ask questions and think deeply about our faith. The wonderful thing about faith is that like a carefully pruned plant, thought and questioning will cause it to grow and flourish.

Like so much that is life-giving, asking questions about our faith works best with the support and care of others, who we know well and can trust, around us. We are so fortunate in this Parish that there are a wide range of groups that can offer us just that support. At St Alphege there is the Women's Theology Group, the Second Saturday Group, the Oasis group, various fellowship groups, not forgetting the 'Just Explore' course. In St Michael and St Helen's districts there are range of Home Groups all with their own special character and all offering a warm welcome from fellow Christians who are learning more about the faith we share through prayerful questioning and exploration.

For more information about any of these why not have a look at the new Parish web site (www.solihullparish.org.uk – then click on 'Connect' for St Alphege, or the St Michael and St Helen's Church pages) or speak to one of the clergy or Readers. We would be delighted to help you find a group which will suit you as you continue to learn and grow in faith.

As you do so, I pray with Paul as he wrote to the Ephesians:

'that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.'

Helen.

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Pioneer Ministry

Growing up in the church, I was very familiar with Missionaries. My mother was secretary of our local USPG branch and we often had missionaries visiting our church and giving talks about their work. I remember a member of our congregation coming up to the front of the church to be blessed and sent out and back to Africa. I also remember being taken to a service in St Alban's Abbey in the summer of 1968 and being introduced to all sorts of Bishops from all over the Anglican Communion who were congregating in St Albans – as part of the Lambeth Conference. I collected many autographs and then nearly fell asleep when one African Bishop preached for over an hour (I was only 10 years old!). We had been invited to attend because of the many USPG links there were between many of these bishops and the Church of England. We'd get the atlas out at home and look for the country where they were working. Looking back, all this influenced my decision to serve in Africa straight after University.

I grew up with the concept that we, in England, sent missionaries to all these foreign lands far away – often where there were droughts and famines and poverty.

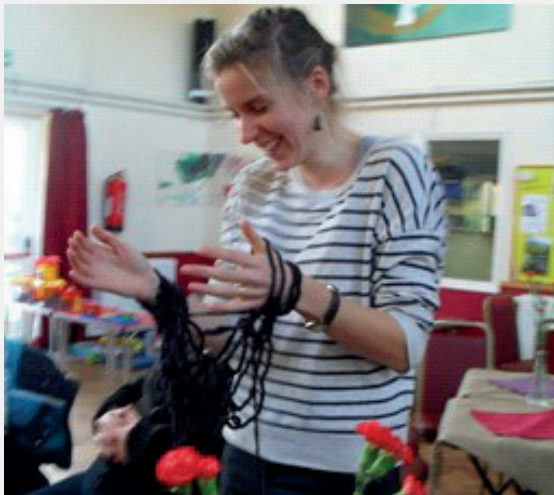
It was only about 30 years ago that the Church of England began to wake up and realise that it was all very well sending missionaries to these foreign lands, but what about re-evangelising England? There was much talk about missionaries needing to come FROM the Developing countries to England. Did England really need that? Well, "Yes" actually. But it wasn't really talked about much. In fact, even when I was a curate in 1990, evangelism wasn't talked about much – it was often thought of as a word to be feared. "We're an evangelism free zone" one Vicar was heard to declare.

But things were changing. The Decade of Evangelism (1990-2000) got evangelism on the national agenda. The Church of England couldn't just continue doing things as it had always done things: we were looking at decline in the face. What were we to do?

In 2004, a very significant book was published by the Church of England's Board of Mission, called "Mission-Shaped Church". I remember buying it and once I started reading it, I couldn't put it down – it was saying all the things I'd heard, said, thought for many years. It was talking about how we might reach all our communities with the Good News of Jesus Christ. They suggested that the parochial system worked only so far and was an essential part of the Church of England but it was no longer able to fully deliver mission. New ways needed to be found. Church planting (including Pioneer ministry and Fresh Expressions of church) had to be introduced. It recognised that in order to engage people we needed a variety of ways because there wasn't just one culture – there were many cultures.

Fifteen years after that significant report was published, Solihull Parish is hoping to appoint a Pioneer Minister. We have advertised and (as I write) I hope we will have some applications and interviews in the first week of June. Our vision is for the Pioneer minister to start working in the St Francis area of the parish as well as "gingering up" all of us.

Testimony of a Pioneer Minister, Nic Findlay



I was baptised aged sixteen. Not having a church background, I found it difficult to understand the different traditions.

For a long time God has been speaking to me about the need to engage with people outside of church settings. Not just to tell them the Good News about Jesus, but also to walk alongside them. For the practical support to be more than an add on. Part of loving someone fully is to stand with them in their joy and in their mess.

Some friends of ours had similar feelings of wanting to do church differently. Church where people were. Specifically with a heart for the poor and the broken. As we started to meet together, there was a sense of wondering what it would look like to build church where people are at, rather than expecting them to fit into a model we have created.

Together we set out to pioneer a new way of making disciples within community, which became known as Barnwell Oaks. Located in one of the poorest areas in Cambridge, it was an entirely lay led community. None of us were ordained.

In the early days we didn't really know what we were doing. There was a lot of praying and walking around and asking God what he was up to, and then gradually structures and rhythms began to form. Rhythms of meeting local families for Sunday lunch, which then became a kind of church space, and bigger gatherings of families together, which looked more like a congregation, and then in amongst that, mentoring and hanging out with individual young people and youth groups.

We did a lot of trying and experimenting. It didn't always work out well, but we were always moving forward. It was really hard, but I wouldn't have wanted to do anything else. We have since moved on to pioneer new ways of making disciples in Liverpool. It's tough going back to square one but we are confident for what the future holds!

Roundabout

What is a Pioneer Minister?

Pioneers are people called by God to work outside conventional (or inherited) church. They are called to work with those who don't come to church. They are often the first to see and creatively respond to the Holy Spirit's initiatives with those outside the church; gathering others around them as they seek to establish new contextual Christian community. It is not a case of the Pioneer minister gathering up people and pushing them into our inherited church services. This is about creating **new** Christian communities which may look quite different from what we see on Sunday mornings in our churches.

Pioneering is about firsts. Being the first to lead ministry into new places for and with others. Pioneers must be able to see a new future, and have the skills and gifts needed to make it a reality now. Pioneers connect with people outside of Church, creating new ways of doing Church together in their community.

Pioneers are leaders of innovation, with a gift for seeing what God is doing and responding creatively to it.

- **Fresh Start Pioneers:** These are classic pioneering types who start new things, love firsts, and enjoy the blank canvas. Released from the expectations of classic parish roles, they are able to minister in places where the Church is not present.
- **Parish Based Pioneers:** These are Pioneers who work from a parish base but from there develop new ways of doing things, expanding the growth and reach of the local Church. Pioneering is the main focus of their ministry and most of their time is spent with people outside the Church.

Pioneering is a big part of the Church's mission to be a growing church for all people in all places.

What are the particular characteristics of Pioneer ministers?

- **Innovation:** Pioneers should be able to respond to opportunities for mission around them, with a track record of having set up a form of Christian ministry in a new context.
- **Taking risk:** Pioneers are characterised by a courageous faith and a willingness to take risks.
- **Evangelism:** Pioneers must be able to communicate Christian faith effectively to people outside the Church, helping them grow in faith and become missional disciples.
- **Teamwork:** Pioneers need to work collaboratively in creating and working with a team, equipping others and sharing responsibility.
- **Leading by example:** Pioneers have to handle complexity and initiate change, they must be able to live with uncertainty and deal well with conflict.

Please pray that the Pioneer Minister whom God is calling to Solihull, recognises the call and we recognise that they are the one God is calling to us.

Jane

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Bellringing News

Ringling in Solidarity for Notre-Dame

On Thursday 18th April at 7pm, St Alphege Bellringers contributed to the associated performances at 1249 other Churches throughout this country in solidarity for the fire damage suffered by Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris.

This followed the requests by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York as well as the Prime Minister for bells to be rung to express support for the people of Notre-Dame. Throughout the country bells were tolled for seven minutes while others did rounds, call changes and methods.



Here at St Alphege, prior to the Maundy Thursday Service, we had general ringing followed by the Tenor Bell being tolled for 7 minutes at 7pm rounding off with a method of Grandsire triples of 364 changes. The photo shows all the available St Alphege ringers who contributed to this significant occasion.

Clive Day (Ringling Master)

131st Henry Johnson Dinner 2019 Reflections of a new St Alphege Bellringer

Each year the members of St Martins Guild of Bellringers hold a prestigious Dinner honouring the memory of a prominent Birmingham bellringer who had a great influence on the development of bellringing across the country in the late 19th Century. Henry Johnson was born in Lichfield in 1809 and came to Birmingham as part of the generation that created the Industrial Revolution. He learnt to ring at Aston Parish Church and went on to be a much respected bellringer and composer of methods. This year the dinner was attended by approximately 100 bellringers. I was one of them, together with my wife.

As a new bellringer at St Alphege and a student at the Birmingham School of Bellringing I was encouraged to attend by my teacher, Clare McArdle, who was keen for students of the School to experience this event. It was also a chance to get out our dinner jackets, black ties and posh frocks, but it turned out to be far more than that.

The event was held at the Banqueting Suite in The Council House, Birmingham, which was a venue that I had never been to before but from the little I knew it sounded very grand. And indeed it was. We entered the main building through the large double doors and ascended the marble staircase into a very large reception room decorated with marble pillars and ornate chandeliers. The room was full of many smiling faces; some familiar, and some who had travelled from other parts of the country to be with us. It was well supported by younger ringers giving a good representation across all age ranges.

After the meal the main proceedings were soon underway with toasts following a traditional format of some words about the late Henry Johnson. There were then words said by the invited Chairman, Alan Regin who had compiled the national records of all the Bellringers who had lost their lives in WW1. He spoke about the life and death of each individual St Martins Guild ringer who had died in the 1914-18 war, including our own Tom Turner, followed by The Last Post rung on hand-bells, which was a very moving tribute.

Further toasts were proposed and the responses were a chance for some light-hearted ribbing of some of the characters in the Guild and the warmth and long associations of the members of the bell ringing fraternity were evident. The history of a set of hand-bells were related, and the bells were then presented to the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing. They were then used for a perfectly struck Bristol Surprise Maximus by six members, which received a very appreciative response from the audience.

The evening concluded with some singing entertainment led by James Ramsbottom (a Birmingham Bellringer) singing a music hall rendition of three first world war songs: It's a long way to Tipperary, Pack all your troubles (in your old kit bag) and Keep the home fires burning, with the audience helping with the chorus.

The dinner is at the same venue next year and I am looking forward to it already!

Alex Ross (St Alphege Bellringer)

Good Friday Walk of Witness Churches Together in Central Solihull

The weather couldn't have been kinder for the 300 people or so who took part in the 2019 walk of witness. It began with a short act of worship outside St Augustine's and then processed slowly and in silence along the High Street to Mell Square. Leading was the cross held 'horizontally' as might have been the case two thousand years ago.



In Mell Square there was a further act of worship with an excellent address given by the Deacon from St Augustine's, Kevin O'Connor. Moving then to St Alphege church a final blessing was given followed by the opportunity for all to share fellowship over hot cross buns in the Oliver Bird Hall.

Beryl Moppett

Peace and Solidarity

Following the Easter atrocities in Sri Lanka and the earlier New Zealand shootings, and with the threat of increasing hate crimes looming in this country, members of the local Solihull Muslim community wanted to make a demonstration of peace and solidarity between Muslims



and Christians in Solihull. Rehanah Sadiq, a Muslim, contacted Jane (as well as Fr Dominic at St Augustine's RC church), offering to stand outside the church on the Sunday after Easter (28th April) and greet members of the congregation with messages of peace as they entered the church.

It was also agreed that the representatives of the Muslim community should join the congregation inside the church for the notice slot first part of the service (and the same happened later in the morning at St Augustine church). Rehanah addressed the congregation with a moving speech on peace and solidarity:



As a Muslim, I greet you with the peace greetings of Muslims all over the world, *assalamu'alaykum*, peace be to you. In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful, and for the love of God, I thank you for having me and my fellow Muslim community brothers and sisters here this morning. I am honoured to have been invited here to share a few words...

As a Muslim here in Solihull, and on behalf of the members of the Muslim community that sent their apologies for not being able to come today, we stand in solidarity and peace with our Christian brothers and sisters as we grieve with you for the loss of our brothers and sisters in the recent brutal attacks in Sri Lanka.

We grieve for their families and loved ones, of all faith backgrounds or of none, and for all the victims of oppression and violence in the world. We hold out our arms to embrace you, we offer our hearts to hold you in our love, our care, and our prayers. You are all our brothers and sisters in humanity. We are all one.

And it is so shocking, and incomprehensible, that such atrocities are done to innocent people, not only while they rest, or go about their daily business peacefully, but even as they worship in their holy places – such as we witnessed on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka, and the not-so-very long ago New Zealand killings during Muslim Friday prayers.

May our loved-ones rest in peace. And may everyone who has been affected by these terrible acts of hate, find comfort, goodness and peace through their faith, love and hope in the rest of humanity.

I pray that we may always show our support for one another, stand by one another, and offer our friendship to one another, not only in difficult times, but in good times too.

Thank you and God bless.

The following prayer was said by all:

Lord, God of Abraham, God of the Prophets, God of Love, you created us and you call us to live as brothers and sisters.

Give us the strength daily to be instruments of peace; enable us to see everyone who crosses our path as our brother or sister.

Keep alive within us the flame of hope, so that with patience and perseverance we may opt for dialogue and reconciliation. In this way may peace triumph at last, and may the words "division", "hatred" and "war" be banished from the heart of every man and woman.

Lord, defuse the violence of our tongues and our hands and come to our aid. Grant us peace, teach us peace; guide our steps in the way of peace. Renew our hearts and minds, so that the word which always brings us together will be "brother", and "sister" and our way of life will always be that of Peace. Lord God of peace, hear our prayer. Amen.

Jane

St Basil's Sleepout

On Friday 12th April, 22 members of Solihull Parish youth did an overnight sleepout at St Helens Church (including me). We made 'houses' from cardboard boxes and slept in them.



All of us got really cold, but it was quite fun, and we had loads of snacks. My tent group stayed up quite late, it was too freezing to sleep (but I did sleep for a few hours). Unfortunately I got a cold from staying outside all night

From the sleepout we have so far raised over £600 which all goes to St Basils for helping homeless people aged 16-25. Donations can still be made in person to the youth room or online at <https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/solihullparishyouth>

Annie Lan

Music Recitals : St Alphege Church at 1:10pm

- 5th June - Nick Drew (Tenor): A programme of works for voice and organ, to include Kenneth Leighton's "These are Thy Wonders"
- 12th June - Dominic O'Sullivan and Rory Anderson (bassoon/piano)
Repertoire including Elgar, Tansman and Grovlez
- 19th June Daniel Pett and Alex Dakin (Viola)
A recital of contemporary works for viola and piano.
- 26th June Alex Woodrow (Organ)
All six of Bach's Trio Sonatas for Organ will be performed, with Numbers One to Three at 1.10pm, then Four to Six at 4.30pm.

Light refreshments from 12.30pm Recital ends 2.00pm
Any voluntary donations to Friends of St Alphege Music

From the St Alphege Register

Baptisms

5th May	Jacob Ethan Lane Isabella Sophie Parr	Lara Eve Hunt
12th May	Clara Cupitt Elliot John Harrison Isabella Rossi Gibbins	Alexander Joseph Cupitt Lara Grace Isla Burrows

Weddings

22nd April	Ian Robert Wilson and Claire Louise Fooks
25th April	Samuel Clive Peace and Nicola Emily Knight

Funerals

3rd May	Beryl Lavinia Bowman
10th May	Margaret Patricia Tennet
16th May	Millicent Winch

Memorials

none

Names taken from the Chantry Book for Remembrance in June

Colin Price	Henry Raymond Hall	George Sabbagh
Ross Harper	Jordan Page	Muriel Greasley
Doris Starbuck	John Sawle	June Hale
Michael Hartley	Harry Pinfold	Albert Clark

OLIVER BIRD HALL BOOKINGS

Enquiries are welcome for the use of the Hall for social gatherings, christenings, anniversaries, meetings, etc.

Vernon Adams at obhbookings@solihullparish.org.uk

or telephone Monday to Friday before 7pm only 07772 633134.

Existing bookings and available times can be viewed online, and booking requests made, at www.solihullparish.org.uk/obh

Worship Notes for June 2019

Saturday 1st June

9:30am: The monthly Requiem Eucharist at St Alphege will mark the feast of Justin, martyred in the reign of Marcus Aurelius after refusing to offer a sacrifice to the gods.

Sunday 2nd June

Today is 7th Sunday of Easter, but also the Sunday after Ascension (Ascension Day was on 30th May). Churches across the Parish will remember Jesus being taken up into heaven.

Wednesday 5th June

The feast of Boniface. The weekly Eucharist will take place in St Michael's Chapel at 10:00am. Choral Evensong takes place at 6:30pm at St Alphege (this service takes place each Wednesday evening during term time.)

Friday 7th June

3:00pm: Forget me not teas. An opportunity for those living with dementia and their carers worship together using familiar prayers and hymns followed by afternoon tea. This takes place at St Helen's Church.

Sunday 9th June

Today is Pentecost Sunday when we commemorate and celebrate of the receiving of the Holy Spirit by the apostles. This day is often referred to as the birthday of the Church. Do take this opportunity to join us at one of the services across the Parish. The 9:15am service at St Alphege and the 10:30am St Michael's service at Sharmans Cross School will be All-Age services.

Friday 14th June

4:00pm: Messy Church is an opportunity for families to learn, worship and share a hot (child friendly) meal together at St Helen's. Today we will be thinking about the 'fruits of the spirit'.

Sunday 16th June

Today is Trinity Sunday when we think about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A representative of Barnabas Fund, which seeks to bring hope and aid to the persecuted church, will be speaking at the 9:15am service at St Alphege. Details of the Barnabas fund can be found on the flyer overleaf.

At St Helen's Jigsaw takes place starting at 4:00pm. In this interactive service for all ages with a variety of activities followed by a sandwich, fruit and cake tea.

Thursday 20th June

The Mothers' Union Corporate Eucharist takes place at 10:30am at St Alphege.

Sunday 23rd June

On this 1st Sunday after Trinity the church enters Ordinary Time. These weeks between Trinity Sunday and the preparation for Advent are called "ordinary" not because they are common or unimportant but simply because the weeks of Ordinary Time are numbered. The Latin word *ordinalis*, which refers to numbers in a series, stems from the Latin word *ordo*, from which we get the English word order. The church is not in a time of festival or penance but in watchfulness and expectation of the Second Coming of Christ.

Corpus Christi is being kept this Sunday at St Alphege, including Solemn Evensong and Benediction at 6:30pm

Monday 24th June

The festival of the Birth of John the Baptist will be celebrated at the 9:30am Eucharist at St Alphege.

Saturday 29th June

Today we remember Peter and Paul, the Apostles. This is an 'Ember Day'. When prayer takes place for vocations to ministry. This is often the day when deacons and priests are ordained.

Sunday 30th June

As well as our usual services across the parish the 11:00am service at St Alphege will be a Civic Service.

St Alphege Pre-School

We welcome you to apply for a Pre-School place for children who will turn 3 in the academic year beginning September 2020. The closing date for applications is 31st January 2020. Application Form and Admissions Policy are available online (paper copies can be requested). St. Alphege Pre-School offers highly experienced and qualified staff. The last Ofsted Inspection result rated us 'Outstanding'.

Little Treasures (baby, toddler and pre-school age)

Wednesday afternoons in the OBH : 1.15pm until 2.30pm. Children accompanied by parent/carer. Drop-in session, no need to book, just turn up!

2's Group (in the term a child reaches age two)

Monday mornings (3 in 4 per month) in the OBH : 10.00am until 11.30am. Children accompanied by parent/carer. Drop-in session, no need to book, just turn up! Activities aimed at children who are 2 years old or who will be approaching 2 years old.

Further information available : www.stalphege-preschool.org.uk or email Pre-School Manager, Meryl Homer : manager@stalphege-preschool.org.uk

Hope and Aid for the Persecuted Church

*... as we have opportunity,
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especially to those who belong
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Galatians 6:10

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The Guardians of St Alphege Parish Church

FLOODLIGHTING

The Guardian's Floodlighting Scheme is available for anyone who would wish to celebrate or mark an occasion, or to commemorate a date.

The cost is £8.00 for 2 hours; £14.00 for 4 hours. Please give 14 days' notice. Forms are available from the Guardians notice boards in St Alphege Church or in the Oliver Bird Hall.

Names are displayed on monthly lists on these notice boards and also in the Parish magazine and acknowledged with a card sent to the donor.

For further information please contact the Scheme organiser:-

Sheila Payne, 0121 706 0520; or email sheilaepayne@aol.com

The Church was floodlit to remember the following:

2 nd May	In loving memory of Tony Davies.
4 th May	In loving memory of Norman and Freda Rolfe, married this day in 1935.
24 th May	In loving memory of Bill Stirling on his birthday.

Court Circular

The "Court Circular" column in the national papers on 22nd April contained the news that "the Queen has been pleased to appoint ... the Reverend Canon Adrian Hughes to be Chaplain to Her Majesty...". This may be of interest to readers of the Parish News who remember Canon Adrian as Team Vicar at St Helen's church between 1986 and 1990.



Court Circular

21 April 2019

Appendix To Court Circular

The Queen has been pleased to appoint the Reverend Canon Robert White and the Reverend Canon Adrian Hughes to be Chaplains to Her Majesty in succession to the Reverend Canon Paul Miller and the Reverend Prebendary Kathleen Gartick.

After leaving St Helen's, Canon Adrian moved to the Diocese of Newcastle in Northumberland. He was vicar at Kirknewton, Wooler and subsequently vicar at Belford in Northumberland. He has been vicar at St George's church, Cullercoats, North Shields since 2006.

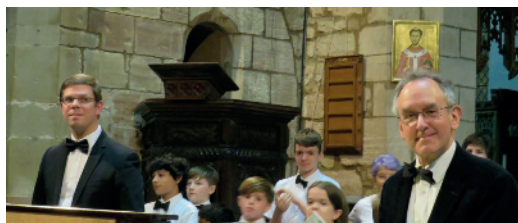
David Foster-Smith

Music Matters



On Friday 17th May, we hosted an amazing concert at St Alphege Church, where our massed choirs joined forces with St Alphege CE Junior School SongSquad to put on a full concert performance of Carmina Burana.

The first half of the concert featured some of each choir's favourite sacred music, interestingly, all of which was written by composers who are still alive today. The second half was filled with Carmina Burana, Carl Orff's dramatic cantata written in 1936. Orff was well known for his work in music education and this project with its rhythmic energy and the repetition of short melodic phrases has been very popular with the children (and adults) of



the choir, as indeed it is with the public. The work begins and ends with a powerful hymn to the goddess Fortuna popularised by a well-known TV commercial and the X Factor.

The choirs were accompanied by two pianists (Alex Woodrow and Stephen Perrins) and a team of five percussionists

from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. The special children's chorus parts were sung by SongSquad, and we had Allison Taylor multitasking both as director of SongSquad and as our soprano soloist. It was an amazing experience for everyone involved and thanks should be offered to Joe Cooper for directing the whole project.

Looking ahead to June, we have the Gin and Jazz Festival in the Oliver Bird Hall on Saturday 1st June, starting at 12 noon, and continuing until 10.30pm. We have a fantastic line up of musicians for the afternoon and evening – individuals, small groups and larger bands, and a great selection of gins, including a number from local distilleries. There will be hot food on sale, as well as snacks, and alternative drinks will be available for anyone who isn't keen on gin. We hope to see you there.

Our regular Wednesday lunchtime recitals continue, with a rather special 'double bill' on Wednesday 26th June, when our own organist Alex Woodrow will play all six of Bach's Trio Sonatas for organ, with one recital at 1.10pm, and a second at 4.30pm. These works are considered to be amongst Bach's greatest compositions, and also his most challenging!

Finally, during the first weekend of July, we will hold our festival weekend, where we combine social events with music and fellowship throughout the weekend. On Friday evening, we are holding a joint concert with Julian Smith, saxophonist and runner up in Britain's Got Talent a few years ago. On Saturday 6th July, we invite you to bring a picnic and join us for 'Music for a Summer's Evening'. On Sunday 7th July, we will recognise our choristers' achievements throughout the year, and join together for a bring and share lunch followed by an early Choral Evensong at 3.30pm – everyone would be very welcome to attend any of the weekend's events and services.



Isabel Baumber

SOLIHULL'S GOT TALENT



Friday 5 July, 7.30pm
St Alphege
Church

Come and hear the award-winning and nationally-recognised St Alphege Church Choirs perform a summer concert with soprano saxophonist Julian Smith and special guest Hercules Smith. Julian Smith is best known for coming third in Britain's Got Talent, one place behind Susan Boyle in 2009, and continues to travel the world playing easy listening music, with his incredibly beautiful and unique sound on soprano saxophone. With 700,000 telephone votes on BGT followed by millions of YouTube views, Julian's music appeals to all generations. Hercules Smith, originally from South Africa, but now living in the UK, appeared in Gary Barlow's show 'Let it shine' in 2017 and literally blows audiences away with his powerful vocal performances all over the country. On this very special night the two 'Smiths' will perform as solo artists and together and you will also be treated to a fantastic performance from St Alphege Church Choirs and a finale where everyone will come together as one.

Early bird tickets £12.50, standard tickets £15, available from TicketSource, accessible from www.stalphegemusic.org.uk or directly at <https://tinyurl.com/y44jbbxx>.

St Helen

We were delighted that our Easter services were well received and in particular that the Tenebrae service on Good Friday evening and the Eucharist on Easter day morning were virtually 'full house'

We continue to pursue 'greening' our church. We have carried out an energy audit of the building finding that installing solar panel reduced our electricity consumption by about 35% and hope to identify a further reduction now that we have introduced either LED or low energy lighting wherever possible across the building. As a further means of reducing our energy consumption we hope to encourage all the Hall users to turn off the heating an hour before they are due to leave the building. And of course NOT to leave the lights on!

All the toilets in the building are now 'toilet twinned' and proudly display certificates to this effect.

We took part in the 'Great British Spring Clean' and littered in Coldlands Wood (at the back of St Helen's church) just before Easter. It is not an area that acquires much litter but by carefully searching under the brambles we were surprised by how much litter had been accumulated over time.



We are encouraging the use of Fair Trade products by individual members of the congregation but in particular when used at events and in the production of the meals that are serviced at St Helen's.

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It's also your opportunity to say farewell to our conductor, John Bayley, who leaves us at the end of the tour.

John Bayley, Conductor
Stephen Perrins, Organ

Saturday 27 July

Shirley Methodist Church

7.30 pm

Tickets £10: Under 18 Free

available from choir members, call
01564 779962, or online at
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St Michael

Sad News

Towards the end of April, we said goodbye to one of our stalwarts, Bob Wright. He was a founder member of St Michael's, being part of that original select group, who started meeting in people's houses in 1965. Subsequently, meetings moved to Sharmans Cross Junior School where the school hall was hired and Sunday services continue to be held there.



He was a prime mover in obtaining the first Vicarage, which was in Cheltondale Road. His wife, Betty, ran the Sunday Club for many years. They were both very regular attendees and had a strong influence in St Michael's affairs. Bob served on the DCC and various fund-raising committees, as well as being a Warden. He was always thoughtful and full of wisdom.

During the Second World War, he served in the Army, eventually becoming a Sergeant and subsequently became attached to MI6 (about which he kept quiet for many years). Apparently, at some point in his Army career, he came into contact with a certain Bombardier S. Milligan (who became better known as one of The Goons). Thereafter he trained as a Metallurgist, but in his last years he had been in poor health. Nevertheless, he retained his mischievous sense of fun. This is illustrated by the music – at his request – following the Committal at his funeral was the Ying Tong song by the Goons. Everybody left with a smile. We send our condolences to his son, John, and daughter, Cathy, and their families.

Easter Services

During Lent, we held additional services at the Chapel on a Tuesday evening. Rather than the usual format, these services were based on the Taizé form of reflective service and chants. These services were a new venture for us, but a successful one, which was well received by the congregation.

On Maundy Thursday, a dramatic presentation of the Easter events was held in the garden of Oak Cottage Vicarage, but this was no ordinary service. Much to the delight of those attending, the service included a series of enactments of scenes from the life of Jesus, such as Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane or Peter's three denials. They were set in various parts of the Vicarage garden, which enhanced the impact of the relevant scene. Members of the St Michael's congregation played the various parts, ably assisted by some from the other churches. It was followed by The Watch and ended with the Night Prayer in the Chapel.

This service was exceptionally well-attended and the comments made afterwards were extremely complimentary. Yet these compliments should be directed to Fr Simon, since he wrote the script and organized the event. Thank you, Simon, for your skill in organizing this service.

A Sunrise service was held in Oak Cottage Vicarage garden on Easter Day, starting at 6.30am. The hardy band of people who attended came from all parts of the Parish and were blessed with a stunning sunrise.

After the service, breakfast was served - courtesy of Simon and Sarah. We were a little surprised at the large number of people who made the effort to get up so early that morning. The feedback we received was that it was a very elevating experience and they were very glad that they had made the effort.

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CHURCH 4 CHILDREN

June

Sunday Worship

St Alphege

At 9.15am there's a choice of:

The Junction which meets in the Oliver Bird Hall - An informal service for young families offering tailored activities for children of all ages. Or
St Alphege Kids - You are welcome at the 9.15am service for worship in our beautiful church building.

Space for all ages with dedicated activities for children.

On 9th June everyone will meet together in the church building at 9.15am for
Pentecost All age worship.

St Helen

Every Sunday in term time at 10.00 am (apart from 16th June when it's
Jigsaw at 4pm) there is worship in a modern space with a community feel with tailored activities for children.

St Michael

Every Sunday in term time at 10.30am there is worship in the school hall where a warm and welcoming space is created for all ages to worship. There is a crèche for little ones and activities for children of all ages. On 9th June everyone will worship together with activities for all ages.

Other Activities

Friday 14th June **Messy Church** St Helen's Church 4-6pm
Praise and Play Every Friday from 9.30am onwards Oliver Bird Hall

(Term time only)

Oasis Tuesdays 9.15- 10.15am Oliver Bird Hall

Little Treasures Wednesdays at 1.15pm Oliver Bird Hall



First Communion 2019



May was a special month for 20 children in the Parish.

On Sunday 12th May:

**Thomas Baumber, Libbi Booth, Isabelle Byrne,
Luke Carter, Harrison Clements, Callum Edgecombe,
Lucas Evans, Vincenzo Gladden, Edvardas Gudziunas,
Freya Hosking, Abigail Lagneau, Daniel McCormack,
Jude Newey-Keane, Harry Newmarsh,
Archie Tchakhotine, Delphine Tchakhotine,
Ella Tonge, Jacob Upton, Charlotte Wilson and
Nevaeh Wilson**

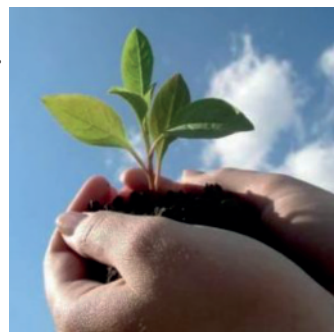
were joined by friends and family when they received
their First Communion at St Alphege.



After the service everyone shared a very special cake.



All of the children have been invited to join a Junior Growth Group to enable them to understand more about their faith and give them a good foundation in their relationship with God. The group involves a mix of games, watching film clips, looking at the bible, eating biscuits and praying. Please do pray for them as they continue on their journey of faith.





Prams to Preschool -



Praise and Play

Every Friday in the main Hall of the Oliver Bird Hall from
9.30am. A time of fun and fellowship for all.

Come along and chat, play, eat biscuits, sing action songs,
explore a bible story.



No need to book but if you want to know more ring Linda on
0121 270 7390 or 07838 670772
or e mail l.hicks@solihullparish.org.uk



It's Messy Church at St Helen's
on Friday 14th June 4-6pm. For
more information contact
Linda Hicks on 0121 270 7390 or
07838 670772 or e mail Linda at
l.hicks@solihullparish.org.uk
to book a place.

Youth Stuff

Sat June	1 st	Movie Night followed by discussion. The movie is to be confirmed	6.30pm-9.15pm in the Youth Room Bring your own snacks
Sun June	2 nd	Revive-St Michael's Breakfast Club; this time we are exploring Morocco	10.30am St Michael's
Mon June	3 rd	Relax -Our fellowship group for all year 9+	7-9pm Youth room
Wed June	5 th	Junior Refresh -Bible based activity group for years 6, 7 and 8	Group 1 - 6.30-7.30pm Group 2 - 7.30-8.30pm; In the Youth Room
Fri June	7 th	Reflect Youth Session	6pm-7.30pm Fun, Games, Pizza and Reflection. In the Youth Room
Sat June	8 th	Churchyard Tidy-Up	10am-1.30pm St Alphege Churchyard.
Sun June	9 th	Revive-Youth at St Alphege (All age)	9:15am St Alphege church
Mon June	10 th	Relax -Our fellowship group for all year 9+	7-9pm Youth Room
Wed June	12 th	Refresh -Bible based activity group for years 9+	7.30-8:45pm Youth Room
Fri June	14 th	Reflect Youth Session	6pm-7.30pm Fun, Games, Pizza and Reflection. In the Youth Room
Sun June	16 th	Revive-Youth at Junction	9.15 OBH / Youth Room
Mon June	17 th	Relax -Our fellowship group for all year 9+	7-9pm Youth room
Wed June	19 th	Junior Refresh -Bible based activity group for years 6, 7 and 8	Group 1 - 6.30-7.30pm Group 2 - 7.30-8.30pm; In the Youth Room
Fri June	21 st	Reflect Youth Session	6pm-7.30pm Fun, Games, Pizza and Reflection. In the Youth Room
Sun June	23 rd	Revive-Youth at St Helen's	10am St Helen's
Mon June	24 th	Relax -Our fellowship group for all year 9+	7-9pm Youth room
Wed June	26 th	Refresh -Bible based activity group for years 9+	7.30-8:45pm Youth Room
Fri June	28 th	Reflect Youth Session	6pm-7.30pm Fun, Games, Pizza and Reflection. In the Youth Room
Sun June	30 th	Revive-Youth at St Helen's	10am St Helen's



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Rector's Report 2019

Spot the difference

What do the differences between these two passages tell you about God's vision for his church?

1. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47 (NRSV)

2. Occasionally they spent some time listening to the apostles' teaching and, when they could, they met together for fellowship, for the breaking of bread and for prayer.

Awe came upon some of them. But there were no signs and wonders. All who believed were separated into groups and kept themselves apart in all they did; they would hoard their possessions and goods and show indifference to those in need.

Day by day, they went about their lives as individuals, only meeting weekly or fortnightly in the temple. They broke bread at home alone and ate their food with cold and empty hearts, giving token thanks to God. They were held in contempt by all the people. And day by day their numbers dwindled and it seemed that few were being saved.

From CPAS "Growing Leaders" course © CPAS

Christianity is a movement: it is not static. For too long we have assumed that people will come to us; that we come to church to receive and take and then forget the other bit of being sent out to live out and proclaim God's Good News. And we wonder why our numbers are declining; we wonder why our income is declining and we wonder what the church will be like in a generation's time.

It is the responsibility of **everyone** to grow Christians and to share their faith.

Growing Disciples, Building Community, Transforming Lives

The purpose of the churches in Solihull Parish is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed to everyone in the Parish. Or (in the words of Jesus at the end of Matthew's gospel): *to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that Jesus teaches us.*

A Missionary church will be focussed on these values:

- Worship
- Relational & hospitable
- Shaping itself to the surrounding culture
- Making disciples
- Existing to transform the local church and local community

Our vision is that the whole of the Parish will become a growing parish where all ages can come to faith in Jesus Christ and grow in that faith, receive spiritual and pastoral support and have a reputation for loving service to the local community. This is summed up in our strapline "Growing Disciples, Building Community, Transforming Lives".

We have six strategy areas to help us work towards this vision, which are discussed below. Each strategy group needs to refer to key documents which have been developed over the last couple of years:

- Parish Vision 2022;
- The Diocesan People and Places strategy;
- Jules Morgan's Leadership and Governance Review 2017;
- Karen Hanlon Review of our Reserves 2018 report.

What I'd like to share with you are mostly new initiatives within each of these strategy areas. We are of course continuing to build on what we are already doing and cutting out those things that have died. So if I don't mention your particular interest, don't necessarily think it's stopped! So how are we doing?

1. New disciples, deeper faith, growing leaders

There are a number of things happening in this area.

House groups: building on existing house groups across the parish, we have created some more: Saturday morning monthly Bible Study in St Alphege; Women's Theology groups. One of the house groups at St Helen's has recently split the group into two, enabling more people to join each half. Christians grow by multiplication – splitting a group might feel harsh to the members who have got to know one another well, but that is the way all our groups should be growing once they have reached a certain number of people in them.

Courses: We are running the 3D course and the Growing Leaders' course. We are continuing to build on the Just Explore course – ably led by Andrew Williams and his team – and there are plans to run the Just Explore course with the Oasis group on Tuesday mornings.

This is all adult discipleship work. Our goal is to create more Bible study groups so that all are nurtured in their faith and cared for by each other.

Children / Youth: Linda Hicks (now the Director of Children and Families) with Sue Chandler and Joe Minall (our Youth Worker) and their teams do sterling work with children and young people. 21 children were prepared for First Communion – which is a fantastic number. Junior Growth groups are flourishing. The youth groups include a lot of young people. There is overlap here between departments, and collaboration is required – because children have parents who we also wish to disciple!

Making and growing disciples is our number one priority – it undergirds everything, like it did in the early Church: they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.

2. Caring for each other and exercising hospitality

Helen Greenham has taken up the role of Director of Pastoral Ministry across the Parish. This is an oversight role and one where she enables and trains others to offer pastoral care.

St Michael's and St Helen's have good systems in place, but St Alphege remains a challenge because of the size of the congregations (plural!). Only a few weeks ago, someone complained that they had been away from church for several week because they were ill. When I followed up the complaint, the person's complaint wasn't with the clergy – it was with the members of the congregation who sit round this person week on week- no one got in touch with the person. Pastoral care of one another is the duty – I hope the joy – of everyone.

Perhaps what we do at the 9.15 – introducing one another – needs to be done at the 11am service as well – it's a way of spotting who is missing and following it up.

Stephen Linstead continues to hold together the Pastoral link team- they need more people to join them – is God calling you to that ministry of care for others? Helen is also exploring the possibility of us having a “Parish Nurse” who would be another string to the Pastoral care bow. We have held welcome lunches for new people which have been well attended and we wish to continue to do that.

3. Extending the churches’ work to new areas and new people

Christianity is a movement – not a static thing. Unfortunately, as the early church grew and became an Institution, the sense of Christianity being a movement faded. The dynamic nature of coming together to worship and then going out to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others and care for others has diminished in importance.

“Come to us” – has been the motto for centuries. The result has been a declining church. The early church spread **outwards**. They went out to others. If the church in Jerusalem had just sat there waiting for others to join it, we might not even be Christians now.

There has been much discussion about taking on a Pioneer minister. I am happy to say that the advert is out and interviews are scheduled for the first week of June. Please pray that the person God is calling to this post applies and we will recognise who God is calling.

This person will work “out there”, building up teams to build relationships with people and share the Good News of Jesus. My ultimate hope is that new communities of new Christians will grow in this parish. Those communities might not look like the church as many of us know it – but that’s what we’d expect. It will be different.

We have a **long** way to go: we estimate that we are not impacting at least 92% of this parish with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

4. Communications

Sam Gibson and Isabel Baumber with the rest of the Communications group have worked hard to get the new website launched. I hope you have had a look at it and found it easy to navigate. It is **outward**-facing; “ChurchBuilder” is the inward-facing component for us which deals with rotas and all the information we need for internal purposes.

The communications team has also produced leaflets for Christmas and Easter and for the stewardship campaigns. And great work has been done with some of the notice boards in the OBH by Emma Orlinsky.

The Parish office remains the vital hub of church life here and Paula’s replacement will be a key person in our team – just as Paula is currently. Please continue to pray that the right person is appointed – God’s person.

We have got to be ahead of the game instead of lagging behind and I’d like to pay tribute to all those who strive to get us connected to social media and other IT set-ups in order to put us out there.

5. Making the most of God’s resources

This strategy is made of various strands.

Finances: last year it became obvious to me that we kept hitting a brick wall at PCC about our investments. Cautious people wanted us to spend very conservatively – for fear of selling the family silver – while others felt God was calling us to be far more generous.

We are all aware of God’s commands not to hoard our resources, rather to have open hands and be generous. In an attempt to overcome the impasse, Ron Crowdy and I (with the PCC’s agreement) brought in Karen Hanlon, whom our Diocese recommended, to look at our

finances and suggest what we could responsibly spend. Karen gave us her report and we are operating on the basis of her recommendations.

A worrying trend in our churches is the overall decline in our giving. A significant contributory factor to this is that our major donors tend to be the older members of the congregation, and when they die they are not being replaced in numbers or quantity of giving. Thank you to all of you who do give to the church and do regularly review your giving. But this trend does make us sit up and we will have to see how we can generate other income streams.

We are at present in the process of getting a card reader – recognising that many people don't carry cash with them. That should be introduced in the next few weeks. Another potential income stream comes from our property.

Property: one way we can increase our income streams is to make better use of our buildings in terms of community use.

St Helen's does very well on this score. But St Michael's has two rooms at Oak Cottage Chapel that are often underused. And the St Alphege church building could be used a lot more **if** we had suitable and better toilet and kitchen facilities – and, of late, heating that worked!!

Vernon, who takes the OBH bookings, has many, many more enquiries than he has rooms to offer people. Improving the OBH has been on the agenda here for many years – this appears to be becoming more and more urgent. It's a vicious circle: we need to invest to improve in order to increase our income – whilst being able to serve the local community...

Staffing (on the operational side and on the ministry side): for many years, we have been blessed with many, many volunteers (and we are still blessed by many, many volunteers – thank you) who between them keep this parish running smoothly. But with new legislation and fewer volunteers we have reached the point where we will have to pay some people to do certain tasks. There are literally too many balls in the air for us to catch all the time.

You might look back and think – “well we managed in the past, why can't we manage now?” and I will respond by saying that we have many more legalities that we have to adhere to and we haven't got the volunteer capacity to deal with them all. What I'd really like us to be spending time and money on is things to do with mission, but without a robust infrastructure in place, the mission can't happen – or at best, it is seriously hampered.

Jules Morgan, in her Report, recommended that we needed to appoint a Director of Operations. This person would oversee all the HR, Data protection, administration staff, communications, IT, Volunteers, compliance, project management. At the moment, some of this is done by volunteers but we have gaps and at any point we could be found culpable for something because we haven't got enough things in place. So we are taking steps with the PCC to agree the need for such a person and move to advertise that post.

Issues arising out of the OBH and church building have led us to start thinking that we might have to consider paying someone to manage those two buildings – a Property Manager of some sort. I believe such conversations about such a post happened 9 years ago... and we've come full circle. No one has come forward to chair the OBH committee – so effectively, no one is responsible for the day to day running of it. Mike Rumball and Joe Homer save us a lot of money with all the work they do in the church building but they cannot manage all that needs to be done.

On the ministry side – we have to resolve the issue of clergy imbalance across the parish. Jules Morgan pointed to this in her Report and the Diocesan People and Places strategy has recommended how the clergy staffing should look like in this Parish. And it should look is different from how it looks at present. Curates come for limited amounts of time and when Sam leaves, we will need a second priest in St Alphege from the quota of priests we have already.

So change will have to happen. This will involve looking at the legal Team Schemes again to see if they are really fit for purpose in 2019.

6. Styles of worship through which we can all encounter God

We are in the fortunate position where we can offer a variety of styles of worship – and it's still not diverse enough.

For some time, there have been concerns about retaining people in the Junction. One of the reasons people leave is because their children get involved in Sunday morning activities. For many, many families, Sunday mornings are not a good time for church. So since last September, Helen and her team have organised a Parish service once a month – Jigsaw. This service is specifically designed for all ages with an emphasis on Junior School aged children. The numbers are growing and families are coming who are new to the church as well as some families who left due to Sunday morning activities.

The Junction itself has been experimenting with "All in Thing" once a term – a different style where there are different zones to help draw people closer to God. We now also have weekly choral evensong on Wednesdays which is live-streamed.

With an eye on the being more Green, we need to congratulate St Helen's for their huge efforts towards the Bronze Eco Church award. Parish-wide, we plan to run the Creation-tide season through all of September and ending with Harvest Thanksgiving to focus more strongly on Green issues.

It is important to note that these are all "come to us" worship slots. I look forward to more varying worship resulting from going out to "them".

St Alphege 800

Then lastly, I was reminded last summer about 2020 being the 800th anniversary of St Alphege building. I was asked what I was going to do about it, but of course the question that needs to be asked is: "What are **we** going to do about it?"

What I do know is that it can't be about bricks and mortar. It's got to be missional in its focus – or else, what's the point? 800 years ago, this would have been the only Christian community. So it makes sense to extend these celebrations to all the churches in Solihull.

There has been some progress made: Churches Together has suggested a weekend of celebrations over Pentecost weekend next year – the last weekend in May – in Brueton Park. The first planning meeting will happen on the evening of Thursday 9th May.

Another 800+ years: Joy, Faith, Love, Transformation

As you can see, a lot has been happening and a lot still needs to be happening.

800 years ago, a building was started on the site of St Alphege Church- a Christian community saw the Good News of Jesus Christ so important that they wanted the Solihull area to know that Good News and become followers of Jesus.

I long for that spirit and passion to still be with us today.

I dream of church communities here that are deepening in faith and joy;

I dream of church communities who want to grow in faith and numbers – but more than just want – to do something about it; that will involve us learning how to tell our faith stories to others.

I dream of church communities who are caught up with the life changing presence of Jesus Christ – so much - that they want to go out and share that Good News of God's great transforming love with others.

Much prayer is needed – to discern where God is leading us and to obey God's call on our lives.

Thank you to you all; and thanks be to God who has brought us together into this Christian community and continues to call us forward to follow him into the future he wills for this place.

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Calendar and Prayer Intentions for June

1	Justin, Marytr	Those sitting exams	Danford Lane
2	7 th Sunday of Easter	Solihull Team Clergy and Readers	Deer Park Way
3	The Martyrs of Uganda	Those persecuted for their faith	Dingle Lane
4	Petroc, Abbot 6th century	Those travelling	Dormston Close
5	Boniface (Wynfrith), bishop, martyr	The Church Army	Dovehouse Lane
6	Ini Kopuuria, Founder of Melanesian Brotherhood	Staff at Birmingham Diocesan Office	Drury Lane
7	Feria	Forget me not teas	Dunsmore Grove
8	Thomas Ken, bishop, Non-juror, hymn writer	For choirs and musicians	Eldersfield Grove
9	Pentecost Sunday	Ministry to Children and Families	Felton Grove
10	Feria	Clergy of this parish	Ferndown Road
11	Barnabas the Apostle	Our home and prayer groups	Fircroft
12	Feria	Those who are homeless	Four Stones Close
13	Feria	Rukizi School, Rwanda	Froxmere Close
14	Rchard Baxter, Puritan Divine	Messy Church	George Road
15	Evelyn Underhill, Spiritual Writer	Those who translate, print and distribute the Bible.	Gilmoretton Close
16	Trinity Sunday	Jigsaw All Age Worship at St Helen's	Glaston Drive
17	Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, Social reformers	The Town Centre Chaplaincy	Glenfield Close
18	Bernard Mizeki, martyr	Solihull Hospital	Grandborough Drive
19	Sundar Singh, Sadhu (holy man), evangelist, teacher of the faith	Our local schools	Grange Road
20	Corpus Christi (Thanksgiving for the Institution of the Holy Communion)	All involved in Pastoral Care across the Parish	Greswolde Road
21	Feria	Parish Youth Ministry	Greyhurst Croft
22	Alban, first martyr of Britain	Parish Bereavement Ministry	Grove Avenue
23	1 st Sunday after Trinity	The Junction	Grove Road
24	Birth of John the Baptist	Churches together in Central Solihull	Habberley Croft
25	Feria	The Congregation of St Michael	Hainfield Drive
26	Ember Day	God's calling on our lives	Halford Drive
27	Cyril, bishop and teacher of the faith	Baptism Families	Halstead Grove
28	Irenæus, bishop and teacher of the faith	The Children's Society	Hampton Lane
29	Peter and Paul, apostles	The congregations at St Alphege	Hartwell Close
30	2 nd Sunday after Trinity	Those with no one to pray for them.	Haseley Road

The Church prays for the community daily: please include these topics in your personal daily prayers.

Our New Confirmands

On Wednesday 22nd May, 27 candidates were confirmed at St Alphege church:

Linda, Gavin, Vivien, Sarah, Amanda, Susan, Darren, Janet, Lucy, Rosalind, Mary, Louise, James, Annabel, Bella, Paul, Maddie, Graham, Philip, Daniel, Nona, Hayley, Clair, Lydia, Jen, Greg and Avril.

At the service, a number of the candidates gave testimonies of their faith journeys so far, and a couple of these are reproduced below.

Please pray for all of these confirmands as they move forward on their journey of faith, and for their families and friends.

Avril's testimony

Whilst searching for the right words to say today I came across these words in Psalm 116: 'For you, Lord, have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living' (*Psalm 116:8-9*). This struck a chord with me. When I was ten, I was struck by lightning. My breathing stopped, my heart stopped beating and I had to be resuscitated and bought back to life.

The Church and religion wasn't part of my life growing up, we never went to church and I didn't really know much about Christianity, apart from what I loosely learnt at school. However, during this period of my life when trauma struck my family, my mother would always tell me afterwards that a guardian angel was looking down on me and saved me.

I think about the day I was struck by lightning often; I think about my life and its purpose and that there was someone looking after me and allowing me not to die. After I got married to my husband Alistair last summer, we moved from London to Solihull, where he grew up and started to come to this church on Sundays.

Sunday mornings at St Alphege, is a time to digest the week just gone by, the hymns, the sermons, the readings from scripture, it is also a time to be quiet in such a busy world. I found myself on a journey of discovery, thinking back to my accident and what it meant. I strongly believe I was touched by a miracle from God: I shouldn't have survived and there is a something more for me to do in this world. I am meant to walk in front of the Lord in the land of the living, I was saved from death.

I've found comfort in the church and the Bible, it's become the other constant in my life, other than my husband. To be welcomed into this church and to be confirmed, allowing me to take communion is something that is milestone in my Christian life, to be able to share in Jesus' meal is special and important to me. I want to give thanks to Reverend Jane for suggesting I attend Just Explore, Reverend Sam and Charlotte Gibson for their support in my spiritual journey, my husband for being there with me, for Sandy my sponsor; she was one of the first people that reached out to me and has since offered support along the way. I'm grateful for all your support and prayers and hope we'll continue to support each other.

Jen's testimony

Love, family, friendship, community, kindness and strength: this is what St Alphege Church, the Church community and my faith has bought to me.

Faith and the Church have always been a part of my life; however since becoming a Mum it's become a much bigger part. With us through the happiest times and also offering strength and support through some difficult times.

Completing the Just Explore course in preparation will be something I'll treasure forever along with the friends I've made along the way. Being confirmed means so much to me in the next step of my journey throughout life.

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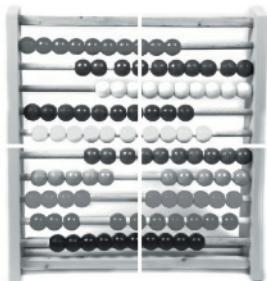
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Heads or Tails?

I came across a strip cartoon recently that I have pinned to my kitchen notice board. It shows two cartoon characters who have been discussing the existence of God. They have decided to toss a coin, and the caption on the first drawing reads "*Heads, God exists. Tails, He doesn't exist.*" They watch as the spinning coin goes high up in the air and out of sight.

The fourth picture depicts the two characters, each with a balloon question mark, as they watch with amazement not one, but two coins descending from above. The final picture has the characters each bending over a coin on the ground. One is saying "*Heads*" – the other "*Tails*". For me, this cartoon has a double effect. It makes me smile, and it also makes me ponder.

Religious tradition generally asserts that God is ineffable, that is, unknowable. God is by nature beyond all human comprehension, from our perspective total mystery. All human thought, imagination and speech fail to describe or to define God. This is why religious saints and mystics generally agree that, although we have to use speech and sound to express ourselves in worship, ultimately the only sensible response to the idea of God is silence. Words quite literally fail us.

At the same time, religious tradition has consistently asserted that some sort of relationship between human beings and God is both meaningful and necessary. Prayer, worship and sacred scriptures all play a valid part in human life and endeavour. This indicates that there is a clear and vital link between the material world of everyday human life and a non-material yet equally real spiritual dimension which we call "divine".

So the ambiguity of the two coins in the cartoon is entirely sensible. The word "exist" (exist) literally means *stand out of, as a real and tangible entity or object*. God therefore does not exist. God is "no - thing". On the other hand, there is a meaningful way in which God "exists" for the human race. Religious tradition sometimes considers God choosing to reveal his SELF in loving creativity for the sake of humanity – in creation itself and in God-like people, specifically in Jesus Christ. For our part, the only appropriate responses are awe and devotion together with a desire to incorporate as best we can the idea of loving-self-giving into our own lives.

Faith

Bishop Hugh Montefiore once pointed out that the 20th century was the first time in history that a relatively large proportion of people did not believe in God. He was referring to so-called Western society. Atheism as we know it today would have been very exceptional (possibly non-existent) before the 18th century Age of Enlightenment. Atheism gathered momentum during the 19th century and became established (with agnosticism) as a stance held by a substantial minority during the 20th century. This collapse of faith in God has three principal sources – scientific advance, the Russian revolution, and the two World Wars.

Be that as it may, my cartoon tells me that, in our 21st century, discussion about the existence of God may still be a live topic. That being so, there are two important factors

which emerge. Firstly, it is important for people who subscribe to any religion, including Christianity, that they should review very carefully what sort of God they believe in. Many of our present troubles in the world are the result of "religious" people creating a god in their own image. The ambiguity of my cartoon, heads AND tails, is very important. God save us from those who know they are right and cannot live with ambiguity or see other people's point of view! All terrorists come into this category, as well as many other people who ought to know better.

Secondly, authentic religious faith does not rule out uncertainty, even doubt. The Bible is full of both. This is why religious community and companionship are important, so that we can share our uncertainties as well as our convictions.

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For Your Diary

- Thur 6th June 1.30pm in the O.B.H. Strawberry Tea and Time to Talk. Bring a favourite item to show and talk about.
- Thur 20th June 10.30am in church. MU Corporate Eucharist followed by coffee in the vestry.
- Thur 4th July Visit to Berkswell Church and Lunch at 'The Bear'. 10.30am Eucharist at Berkswell Church followed by coffee and a tour at 11.30am. Lunch at 'The Bear' around 12.30pm. If you want to come please contact:
Niki (07970 682748) or Amanda (07971 495253).

Everyone is welcome to come to our meetings - you don't have to be a member.
Lifts are available to most events - phone 705 8761 or 270 6132

WIVES' FELLOWSHIP

We are a women's group who meet monthly at different venues.
We warmly welcome visitors at our various activities.

- Tues 11th June Fellowship walk at Hampton-in-Arden
10.30am Meet at Sports Club car park to walk in Hampton Arboretum
12.30pm Lunch at Barston Golf Club
- Tues 25th June Visit to Broadacre Garden, Dorridge
10.30am Coffee and tour of gardens (£5)
12.30pm Lunch at Railway pub

For further details contact Carol Caldicott - 0121 705 3168.

Christian Men Together

In March we had a productive and appreciated Saturday morning when a good number of us helped tidy up the Gardens at the Marie Curie Hospice. This was followed in April with an excellent breakfast when Frank Gray, introduced to us by Richard Kenchington, told us about his work in Christian World Radio which has been so effective over the past half century.

Our next event is our **Summer Walk followed by a Pub Meal** on **Friday evening 14th June** based in the Henley in Arden Area.

The next **Breakfast** is on **Saturday 22nd June**, where a University friend of mine, Rev Chris Turner, who has been Vicar of St Stephen's Selly Hill amongst other ministries, is coming to share something of his life and why he considers the Gospel of Jesus to be so important and relevant. He is a great communicator. So it will be a good opportunity to invite friends whom we would like to know more about our faith.

For more details and to book in - contact Andrew Williams - arwilliams@dial.pipex.com. Do come and join us and bring friends.

Andrew Williams

Solihull Parish 20s & 30s

The next social for the 20s & 30s group will be on Saturday 22nd June, 1-4pm. This will be a BBQ at Sam's house, 17 Church Hill Close. All are welcome, and this is particularly good for families with children! All food is provided including for any special diets, bring a drink if you wish. Email to RSVP: solihullcurate@gmail.com

Sam

Women's Theology Groups *Meeting • Discussing • Praying • Supporting*

The Women's Theology Groups are safe spaces for exploration, discussion and even disagreement! We have studied a range of passages relating to women in the Bible, and have been exploring what it means to be a woman and a disciple in our own lives. We have been praying and thinking about our own Spiritual Gifts and where we have seen God moving in our lives. It is a really exciting time to be a disciple in Solihull and I very much encourage women to contact me and join a group! We have three groups:

- Thursday 2pm, House of Fraser café
- Thursday 7.30pm, Room 5, Oliver Bird Hall
- Friday 10am, House of Fraser café

The remaining dates for the summer term are as follows:

- Thursdays – 6th June, 20th June, 4th July, 25th July
- Fridays – 7th June, 21st June, 5th July, 26th July

For more information do contact me (chachagibson@gmail.com or 0121 709 0668), I would be delighted for more people to join us!

Charlotte Gibson

Second Saturday @ St Alphege *Breakfast & Bible Study*

The Second Saturday group meets on the second Saturday of every month between 10am and 11am in St Alphege church building. We share a simple breakfast before opening up Scripture together. All ages and generations are welcome. Children are catered for with food, drink and a simple activity.

Our next meeting will be on 8th June. Why not join us? You don't need to know anything beforehand or prepare anything. For more info contact me at solihullcurate@gmail.com

Sam



9.15am

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All Age Eucharist
9th June - Pentecost

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**CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE JULY/AUGUST EDITION OF THE PARISH NEWS
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