

SOLIHULL PARISH NEWS

800
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IN SOLIHULL
2020

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SERVICE TIMES IN ALL THE TEAM CHURCHES

St ALPHEGE - The Square, Solihull B91 3RQ



SUNDAYS 10.30am Parish Eucharist in church

To book call the Parish Office 0121 705 5350
or email office@solihullparish.co.uk

*The Church is open daily 9.30am-12 noon for private prayer.
(Access for 10 people at a time)*

St HELEN - St Helen's Road, Solihull B91 2DA

SUNDAYS 10.00am Eucharist or Morning Prayer (said)
6.00pm Eucharist or Evening Prayer (said)

Please book online: <https://www.trybooking.com/uk/eventlist/sthelenseucharist>
or phone Beryl Moppet on 0121 705 0337



The Church is open on weekdays 2.00-3.30pm for private prayer.

St MICHAEL - Bryanston Road, Solihull B91 1BS and Sharmans Cross School, Solihull B91 1PH

The St Michael congregation is currently worshipping jointly with the St Helen congregation at St Helen's Church on Sundays at 10.00am and 6.00pm. Booking arrangements are shown above.

St Michael's Chapel is open on Wednesdays 9.30-12 noon for private prayer.



ONLINE - www.solihullparish.org.uk

SUNDAYS	10.00am / 10.30am	One of our main Sunday morning services will be streamed live online - see website for details.
	6.30pm	Sung Evensong, streamed live from St Michael's Chapel
DAILY	12 noon	Midday prayer (not Sundays),
FRIDAYS	9.30am	Praise & Play

Recordings of past recitals and services are also available via the website or social media channels.

WEDDING AND BAPTISM ENQUIRIES

Please contact the Parish Office:

office@solihullparish.org.uk

0121 705 5350 / 0121 270 9740

If you need help of any kind, please do phone the pastoral care helpline: 0121 661 6343.

One of us is on duty each day.

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THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

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Want to email the Editor?

parishnews@solihullparish.org.uk

Cover picture

'St Michael'

Icon in St Michael's Chapel,
written by Fr John de Wit

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Editorial

September 29th sees the feast of St Michael and All Angels; we remember on that day in particular the clergy and congregation at St Michael's church here in this parish.

There are many references to angels throughout the Bible. They include Michael, the captain of the heavenly host, Gabriel the bringer of God's will and purpose to humankind, Raphael the healer, and the shadowy figure of Uriel, who among other things explained to Enoch the names and movements of the stars. The Bible tells us that angels act as God's agents, messengers and intermediaries; they transmit revelation to the prophets and act as guardians over God's people; sometimes they come to earth in disguise and may act so as to test people.

In modern times, there has been a tendency to reject all in the scriptures that arguably belongs to the realm of myth. And angels have sometimes been relegated to this realm, not to be taken seriously.

But angels are mentioned so frequently in the Bible that we must take them seriously. They reflect the theme that God, who is transcendent and unknowable, sometimes deals with humanity through created agents, whether visible or invisible beings. If we believe, as we must as Christians, that God intervenes in human history, then it is not for us to exclude the existence of such intermediaries, whatever their form.

We should also remember that the Bible talks of good and bad angels. Some regard evil simply as the absence of good, the product of humanity's imperfect nature. But the Bible tends to take a different view. It sees a constant battle between the forces of spiritual goodness and spiritual wickedness, which reached its climax in the victory of the cross on Easter Day and whose final consummation will come at the end of the ages.

Looking at the track record of human history or indeed at the state of the world today, it is not difficult to perceive spiritual evil as a reality. I think of tyrannical rulers who oppress their people with injustice and violent repression, of kleptocracies, societies riddled with corruption by a thieving governing class. And I also think of those who care nothing for the welfare of others and of future generations and are happy to plunder and pollute the earth's resources for their own profit. When I think of these examples, then I find myself saying that yes, spiritual evil does really exist in the world today and that it seems to have a dynamic of its own, not just the absence of good.

If spiritual evil exists as part of God's creation, then out of symmetry it is not unreasonable to suppose that spiritual good also exists as part of that creation. And the Bible tells us that angels belong to that part of the created order, of things that are invisible.

Angels continue to feature widely in Christian devotion. Look at Coventry Cathedral with its massive sculpture of St Michael conquering the chained Lucifer, or at the beautiful Gethsemane Chapel where the feathery angel with the cup brings Jesus strength in his hour of testing. Countless generations of Christians have drawn inspiration and comfort from such images throughout the centuries.

So, let us this month with a clear conscience remember the feast of St Michael and all the angels. And let us echo the words of the hymn we repeat at every eucharist:

*'Holy, Holy, Holy Lord,
God of power and might
Heaven and earth are full of your glory
Hosanna in the Highest!'*

Stephen Linstead



On going to Church

In tribute to worshippers at St Alphege Parish Church, Solihull, over 800 years

In coming to the House of God:

You enter the healing calm of a special place set aside for worship
You inwardly foster a sense of the spiritual

You engage with others of similar dedication and outlook
You are mindful of the faithful attending that place in former times
You focus upon the words, works and wonder of Christ
You are lifted out of yourself in shared and imaginative devotion
You are blessed with sacramental grace

You leave with a sharpened readiness for service to others
You are recharged for constructive work and enriched relationships
You are in solidarity with the mission of God's Church world-wide

*Revd John Bradford
St Swithin, 2020*

800th Prayer

Gracious God,
we praise you for eight centuries of good news
for the people of Solihull;
inspire our hearts and ready our hands,
that together we may continually proclaim in word and deed
the gospel of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Hello Again and Goodbye

Hello Again

On 19th July, on a bright sunny morning, we were at last able to open the doors of St Alphege church to welcome people to a service of Holy Communion, presided over by Sam Gibson. Due to social distancing and infection control restrictions we were limited to 30 in the congregation, booked in advance by email or phone through the parish office. The service was streamed for the benefit of the many who were unable to attend in person.



Goodbye

The service was a bitter-sweet occasion: as well as being the first service in church for four months, it was also Sam's last Sunday with us before he moves to St George's, Edgbaston. After the service, Sam and Charlotte spent over an hour in the churchyard, chatting to people and saying their farewells.

We shall miss the Gibson family very much indeed, and send our very best wishes to them. We hope that the experience Sam and Charlotte have gained here in Solihull will be helpful in their future ministries. Later in the year we will be inviting the Gibsons back to Solihull so that a suitable presentation may be made.

Susan Gomm

A Message from Sam

I am due to be licensed as Vicar of St George's Edgbaston on Friday 4th September, 7.30pm. This is the first batch of real-life (non-Zoom!) licensings since lockdown so numbers are very limited, probably about 30 including the Bishop of Aston, Archdeacon, Area Dean, myself and family.

I would have loved to welcome you all to a bigger service, but given the circumstances I'm just glad we can be in church at all. I have asked Canon Jane to represent the parish, and will contact each church in the team asking if they'd like to send a representative.

However, the service will be live-streamed so that anyone can watch from home if you'd like to. I'll make sure the details are made available to all of you!



Thanks again for your prayers, gifts and cards

Sam Gibson

A fuller article, with coverage of Sam's institution, is planned for the October edition of the Parish News.

Roundabout

St Alphege CE Schools Notice

Proposal for variation to the admissions arrangements for September 2021

As Chair of Governors, I write to notify you that by Chair's Action, the Governing Body of this school resolve to propose an in-year variation to our Admissions Policy for the year 2021-22, in respect of the oversubscription criteria relating to church attendance. This will affect admissions to Nursery, Reception and Y3 in September 2021 and beyond. The closure of churches as a result of Covid-19 has raised the issue of clergy being able to verify an applicant's level of church attendance in order to meet governors' admissions requirements. Clearly it will not be possible for clergy to verify a level of attendance in line with schools' admissions policies during the next admissions application round for the academic year 2021/22 and as a result we are intending to amend our admissions policy over subscription criteria to reflect this. This proposal is based on advice received and after consulting the Office of the Schools Adjudicator.

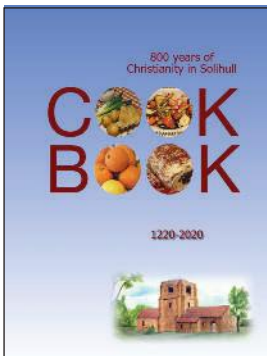
The proposed variation agreed with the OSA is as follows:

"In the event that during the period specified for attendance at worship the church has been closed for public worship and has not provided alternative premises for that worship, the requirements of these admissions arrangements in relation to attendance will only apply to the period when the church or alternative premises have been available for public worship".

All other aspects of our admissions policy remain unchanged.

Pam Price

(Chair of Governors, The Federation of St Alphege CE Schools)



800 Year Cookbook

Publication of the Cookbook has been postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic. We'll keep you informed of any future developments.

Philip & Susan Leach - 0121 270 6132

Sue's Licensing

We are delighted to welcome Rev Sue Chandler as Associate Priest to Solihull Parish. Sue was due to have her licensing service at St Alphege on Sunday 29th March – which unfortunately couldn't happen due to the lockdown. Instead, Sue was licensed by Bishop Anne in a special online service on Zoom on 15th July. We used our social media channels to make parishioners aware that



Sue's licensing service was happening at the time and asked people to join in prayer at 7pm to support Sue. We also included the anthem our choirs were planning to sing at Sue's licensing service in March, Os Justi by Bruckner.



In Sue's words:

"It was not quite the licensing that I had envisaged, but in its own way it was lovely. Just a few people 'attended' via Zoom. There was lots of laughter as we all made predictions about whether anyone's internet would 'drop out'. Someone's did – mine! Apparently the Bishop had her eyes closed listening to Linda Hicks give a beautiful rendition of my favourite reading (1 Corinthians 13), which is also Bishop Anne's favourite reading. Bishop Anne said "I had my eyes closed, and when I opened them, you were gone"! After some frantic texting and button pressing I managed to re-join the group, and was duly licensed according to church law.

The vows and declarations which are made during a licensing are incredibly moving, meaningful and heartfelt. They are at the very heart of the service, and whether in front of a large congregation or via an app in front of a few people, meant a great deal to me. It was an intimate service, and very emotional, and those who attended it all thought that it was quite lovely, if somewhat different.

I am so sorry that I have not been able to meet most of you, but do so hope that, at some time in the future, I will be able to celebrate with all of you, this beginning of my new ministry amongst you."

This was the Collect for the service:

*God our Father, Lord of all the world,
through your Son you have called us into the fellowship of your universal Church:
hear our prayer for your faithful people
that in your vocation and ministry each may be an instrument of your love,
and give to your servant Sue, now to be licensed, the needful gifts of grace;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

Amen.



Face Coverings

Pat Marshall has offered to organise making face coverings for anyone who wants one. They are made from fabric and have a pocket for a filter. An adjustable wire over the top of the nose makes a good seal and the coverings are washable and re-useable.

If you can help with the sewing, or can supply fabric and elastic, please contact Pat Marshall on 0121 705 8761.

MU Products

Elaine Diskin has a number of Autumn catalogues showing Christmas cards, birthday cards, gifts, books and other lovely items. She is happy to deliver a catalogue to anyone who would like one. Email or telephone her for a copy:

elainediskin@hotmail.co.uk
0121 705 3265

She will be taking orders for 2021 diaries as usual - let's hope this one will be able to have more entries!

Half Marathon Fundraising

Elaine had planned to take part in the Birmingham half-marathon (13.1 miles) on Sunday 11th October.

This has now been cancelled but she is going to run her own half-marathon, around that date to raise money for Mothers' Union. So we hope our members will support her. There will be details in the next MU Newsletter about sponsorship.

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 2021. 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)

Every Wednesday in term time in the OBH : 1pm until 2.30pm. Children accompanied by parent/carer. Drop-in session, no need to book, just turn up!

Little Movers (in the academic year the child turns two)

Every Monday in term time in the OBH : 9.30am until 11am. Children accompanied by parent/carer. Drop-in session, no need to book, just turn up! The activities are aimed at children who are approaching 2 years old and is an ideal opportunity for them to develop their physical, social and language skills.

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

From the St Alphege Register

Due to the coronavirus lock-down, there have been no baptisms, weddings, funerals, memorials or interments in the past month.

Names taken from the Chantry Book for Remembrance in September

Geoffrey John Day
Peggy Oswald
Wendy Patterson
Alison Peat
Harry Pilkington

Vernon Cecil Davis
Noreen Porter
Alice Shirley
Nigel Paul Ladbroke
Colin Pittaway

Reginald Bernard Aston
Sue Hewitt
Eileen Rivers

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Worship Notes September 2020

Main Feast Days

The following are the main feasts that are observed during the month:

September 8th – Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary

September 14th – Holy Cross day

September 21st – Matthew, Apostle and evangelist

September 29th – Michael and all Angels

Services in Church

The pattern of services established in August will be continued throughout September, except that the evening service at St Helen's is moving to Sundays rather than Wednesdays from the start of September:

Sundays 10.30am	St Alphege church	Holy Eucharist
Sundays 10.00am	St Helen's church	Eucharist or Morning Prayer
Sundays 6.00pm	St Helen's church	Eucharist or Evening Prayer

Attendance at these services requires pre-booking as numbers are restricted during the pandemic. However, a Sunday morning service is streamed online for those unable to attend in person.

To book for the St Alphege service, please call the Parish Office on 0121 705 5350, or send an e-mail to office@solihullparish.co.uk.

To book for the joint St Michael's and St Helen's services at St Helen's church, please book online (<https://www.trybooking.com/uk/eventlist/sthelenseucharist>), or phone Beryl Moppet on 0121 705 0337.

There is also a 6.30pm Sung Evensong service on Sundays, which is streamed live from St Michael's Chapel, although unfortunately the chapel is only able to accommodate those directly involved with the service at present.

We hope to increase the number of services in church once it becomes possible.

Online Services

Regular services continue to be made available online – on our website, YouTube channel and Facebook (www.facebook.com/SolihullParish).

The current pattern for these is:

- Live-streaming on Facebook of one of the Sunday morning services (at 10.00am or 10.30am). Later in the day the service will be accessible via a link on the home page of the Parish website.
- Live-streaming of the Sung Evensong service at 6.30pm on Facebook and YouTube.
- A short Midday Prayer posted at 12 noon on weekdays (Mondays to Saturdays).
- 'Praise & Play' at 9.30am on Fridays.

For up to date details, please visit the parish website www.solihullparish.org.uk.



The Guardians of St Alphege Parish Church

EVENTS & NEWS

Dear Guardians'

This is my first message to you in a while and I do hope you are all in good health. We have all been through a very difficult time with the Covid 19 outbreak and although we are not over it yet, we are hopeful that life will start to resemble some sort of normality soon.

Unfortunately for The Guardians, it has meant that we have been unable to organise any social events for our members, or to take part in the Parish celebrations which were planned throughout this year. We have however organised a Christmas Luncheon (with limited numbers and alternative seating arrangements) for Friday 27th November at Olton Golf Club. So please, pencil this event in your diaries and we'll all keep our fingers crossed that it can go ahead!

Our AGM is usually held within the next few months. At the moment, it does look as though this will be postponed, in the hope that we'll all be able to attend this meeting in the Spring.

With warm wishes to you all,

Ruth Morton (Guardians Committee)

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:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 17 th August | Remembering James Frangou a much loved father and husband who is dearly missed. Diana and Barbara Frangou |
| 19 th August | In loving memory of Adrian Paul Cripps on his 57 th birthday. |
| 23 rd August | Gordon Mitchell. Remembered with great affection on this your birthday. |
| 29 th August | Alan Wilson. In loving memory of a dear father. |

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Music Matters

I hope that all readers of the Parish News remain safe and well in these changing times – it has been nice to see some of you at church if you are able to attend, and hopefully the situation will allow more people to get out and about over time.

The choirs have had a well-deserved summer break since the last issue of the parish magazine. I would normally at this point be telling you about a summer residence at a cathedral, but unfortunately, as with so many things, this has not been possible. This year, we had planned a trip to Madrid just after Easter, followed by a weekend at Bath Abbey at the end of the summer term. Hopefully it won't be too long before we can safely plan trips again.

Summer school

Instead of the normal routine of online choir practices, over recent weeks we have been running a summer school. Just before the end of term, we ran a day of online auditions, which we had publicised via local schools and social media. The auditions ran smoothly and we made full use of some of the functionality of Zoom such as breakout rooms where senior choristers helped visiting children to warm up and prepare for their audition, before they moved to another breakout room for Joe and Pam to listen to them. Children had been asked to prepare 'Somewhere over the Rainbow' and Joe was very impressed with the work that had been put in ahead of the auditions.

The summer school has consisted of weekly group sessions looking at music theory, singing technique, choral repertoire and some film and musical theatre songs. We have had three groups all meeting on Zoom, of children of different ages, both visitors and our own choristers. The children have been a delight to work with – they have participated well and learnt a lot. Our senior choristers have supported the sessions with singing demonstrations and preparing games and quizzes – it has been great to have their help and involvement.



Return to Live Worship

At the time of writing, we are about to try having a solo chorister singing at Sunday morning services at St Alphege. We are following government and Church of England guidance extremely carefully and hope that this musical offer will enhance the worship for members of the congregation, but will not compromise anyone's safety. We have also started live-streaming evensong on Sunday evenings from St Michael's Chapel – again, this has been carefully planned to ensure risk is minimised, and we hope that people are enjoying this service from their homes.



Online Activities

We are looking forward to the new term and to seeing how we can continue to safely develop our activities and support worship despite the challenges. We will be holding Zoom sessions on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays each week. We welcome boys and girls from Year 3 upwards, and ladies and men of any age. If you want to find out how to get involved and the music we will be working on, please send me an e-mail (isabel@solihullparish.org.uk).

Please also send me an e-mail if you have queries about any of the parish online services, and I will do my best to help.

Isabel Baumber

Music Recitals : Wednesdays at 1:10pm

We are investigating whether it might be possible to safely restart live recitals before too long.

Please keep an eye on our social media channels for updates:
www.facebook.com/FriendsofStAlphegeMusic and Twitter @StAlphegeMusic

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A highlight during August at St Helen's has undoubtedly been our regathering for worship with members of St Michael's congregation on Sunday mornings at 10am and Wednesday evenings at 6pm. A great deal of preparation and planning went into enabling this to happen in a safe and socially distanced way. The resulting services really highlighted the essence of St Helen's as a vibrant and committed community.

I am very grateful to all those who gave their time, energy and expertise so willingly. My concern that the practicalities of booking to attend and then coping with the necessary restrictions would get in the way of our purpose, to worship God and pray as His body in this place, however the flexibility and good humour of all who attended meant that this concern was completely unfounded. I would like to extend thanks to all those who have given feedback and suggestions on the services. Thanks also needs to go to the Wardens and congregation of St Michael's for all they have done and to Rev'd Roger Chamberlain who has taken services during Fr Simon's and my holidays.

An often unseen, yet vital member of our community at St Helen's is our cleaner Hughie who has worked throughout lockdown and as we have reopened has coped with the very complex cleaning issues, which he has carried out with great calm and often exceeded his brief.

Of course at this time gathering in St Helen's for worship is only part of life as God's people. Many are unable to do this yet and so it has been really important to keep contact with and support these important members of our Christian family. We have again been reminded of the value of the home groups over the last few months. Early in the lockdown we were in touch with each other through occasional emails and phone calls but we have now had 3 meetings via Zoom. It has been good to share and look at Bible passages together, to pray



together and to see each other on our screens - with smiles not face masks! We have in our studies been thinking about what it is to be a Christian Community which we have found to be very relevant.

Prayer, of course underpins our life as Christians and we have recently begun an important initiative, proposed and led by Les Prescott to pray for the life of our church, particularly as we move through these challenging times and look to God's guidance for the future. Communicating through email (and paper copies, delivered by volunteers for those who cannot receive email) encouragement to pray and guidance on particular issues are regularly shared to the congregation. This wonderfully complements our Tuesday Prayer Group with continues to share and pray through regular phone calls, led by Barbara Sears.

If you would like to attend one of the services at St Helen's please book via the following link <https://www.trybooking.com/uk/book/search?keyword=St%20Helen%20Eucharist>, or contact Beryl Moppet on 0121 705 0337 or beryl.moppett@virginmedia.com

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It is a delight to be able to return to church and worship with Christian friends. During July, the restrictions were eased to allow worship in a church under the now routine safety precautions. We are in a different situation as we are dependent on Sharmans Cross School allowing us to use their building. Although we cannot for the foreseeable future be worshipping in our usual venue, the school seem to be happy to let us resume our use of the school as soon as this is allowed by Government and local authority. We have no idea when this will be.

However, we are delighted that there is a joint initiative of St Helen's and St Michael's for services at St Helens on Sunday morning at 10am and on Wednesday evening at 6pm.

St Michael's is blessed with an exceptionally talented music group and during this lockdown they have been busy recording music and hymns at a distance, and which is available to hear via the St Michael's website.

There is a new word that is fast becoming part of church liturgy and that is 'Zoom'. We like many churches are holding our DCC meetings with the help of this platform. It must be a chairman's dream, for at the touch of a computer everyone is muted! Why did no one think of this before?

Life goes on with many of our congregation making contact by whatever means is available to them, now we can even meet each other which is great, nothing beats face to face conversations (face to face always implies each face is a suitable social distance).

At our recent DCC meeting it was felt that we must somehow bring our congregation back together and to this end we have arranged a social gathering on Sunday 6th September in the garden at Oak Cottage, and also as a part celebration of St Michael's Day a bring your own lunch on Sunday 27th September. All this of course is dependent both on weather and whatever other factors might intervene!

Paul Smith

St Alphege Church of England INFANT & NURSERY, and JUNIOR SCHOOLS

Anglican parents are encouraged to consider these schools for the education of their children. The schools offer an excellent education incorporating Christian values.

For appointments to visit please contact the Head Teacher, Mr. R. Morrissey, via the school offices, 0121 705 0443 or 0121 704 2714.

For further information please consult the website.

www.stalphege.solihull.sch.uk

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Pioneer Diary

Not in the same boat, but weathering the same storm

Some years ago, my husband, David, and I were Pioneer ministers based in a coffee shop. While there we learnt something about ourselves that turned out to be quite crucial to us and to our ministry. I want to share that with you now, as I think it's relevant to how all of us have been affected by lockdown *but* affected in different ways.

We set up something in the coffee shop called 'the chill-out zone'. The idea was that people came along on a Sunday evening and they chilled for a couple of hours, before thinking about launching into the coming week. It was a successful event and the people that came along quickly took ownership of it. Generally, a good time was had by all. ☺

David and I facilitated these gatherings by being there, mixing with people, chatting, playing games with those who wanted to play games, helping to make crafts with those who wanted to make crafts, and just generally showing hospitality.

The revelation came after we got home from these evenings. We had both been doing the same things, mixing with people, showing hospitality, but when we got home, I was on a real high – I couldn't go to sleep for at least a couple of hours after – whereas David, on the other hand, would get home, collapse in a heap on the sofa and fall asleep very quickly. As we had been doing the same things all evening we realised that the effect it was having on us was not to do with the event, but it was to do with ourselves and, more specifically, *where we each got our energy from*.

Undoubtedly you will have heard the words 'extravert' and 'introvert' and, also undoubtedly, you will have attributed certain types of people to those words. For the moment I want you to suspend your current definition of those words, because I'm going to use them in another recognised but specific way. Let me explain:

Basically, I'm an extravert. Those of you who have met me are probably not surprised by that – I know I can talk the hind legs off a donkey! - but extravert, in this sense, means *I get my energy from being around people*. Hence, when I was at the chill-out zone, I was getting energised – I had people around me, I was mixing with people, I was enjoying being with people, I was helping people, I was showing people God's hospitality – people, people, people. And so I came home energised – a bit like Tigger! ☺

David, on the other hand, had had exactly the same experience and was completely drained. That's because David is an introvert, and what I mean by introvert is that he gets his energy from being on his own, doing things on his own, away from people. David's hobbies are reading, gardening, painting – all solitary things. He's even planning on walking parts of the Pennine Way by himself.

And here's why I told you to suspend your belief on what an extravert or an introvert look like: because people have said to me no end of times, 'I've met your husband, he's *not* an introvert'. Actually they are wrong. He's not a *shy* introvert, but when we're talking about introversion as in *getting your energy from being by yourself and doing things by yourself*, then he really is a true introvert. Other people have said, well I've met both of you and David's more extraverted than you and again, I am not always a loud extravert – although I'm the first to admit I can be! ☺ – I can also be quite shy, or even timid, in some circumstances. That doesn't make me any less of an extravert, *because I get my energy from being with people*.

So, what has this got to do with us now, and what can it inform us with in Solihull Parish?

Well, it has been said that 'we're all in the same boat' through the Coronavirus pandemic and lockdown. I don't believe that to be true. A more apt saying is that we are not all in the same boat, but we *are* all weathering the same storm.

Think about yourself and all of the people that you know around you, maybe your family, your friends and/or your neighbours. Think about all those people who may – or may not – be struggling during the effects of this pandemic.

We make lots of assumptions about all kinds of things, including about who is an introvert, who is an extravert, how people are coping, what people need, and so on. Instead, I believe Jesus set us the example when he met blind Bartimaeus and asked him "What do you want me to do for you?" (*Mark 10:46-52*)

So, here's a thought, and this is a pioneering thought, for now and for always: *Why not contact someone, ask them how they are, and actually listen and to their answer.* That may be all some people need but, like Jesus; you won't know what you can do for them until you ask!

In the meantime, my prayers continue to be for us all as we weather this storm together.

Keep safe and thanks for listening!

Suzette. ☺

PS: if anyone fancies a socially distanced coffee with an extravert, *let me know!* ☺

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CHURCH 4 FAMILIES DURING LOCKDOWN

Children's and Families ministry thrives on being physically present with the worshipping community in Solihull Parish and sharing God's love in ways appropriate to the different age ranges. As it became apparent that lockdown was going to happen, we realised that a physical presence was no longer going to be possible so we would have to explore different ways of being present. Armed with boxes of props and resources we settled into our home working spaces to start planning what might be possible instead! This is a flavour of what has been happening:

- As we were unable to go into St Alphege school in the usual way to teach the children how to make palm crosses Linda put together a video teaching everyone how to make a palm cross from a sheet of A4 paper. The response was wonderful with many people, both adults and children, getting involved. Lots of people sent in photos of their crosses and many displayed them in their windows alongside other symbols of hope for passers-by to see.
- Instead of coming together to explore the Easter story at the interactive service which had been scheduled to take place at 9.45am on Good Friday morning, families joined in with an online video when Linda told the Easter Story using one sheet of A4 paper (337 total views on YouTube and Facebook). It was lovely to see families posting their responses online and to receive many photos of the crosses that people made.



- First Communion preparation had to be put on hold, but the children were sent a Holy Week quiz to complete. It is hoped that it might be possible for the group to start meeting again in the Autumn term either in person or via Zoom and to explore when it might be possible for the children to receive their First Communion.



- We have been able to share with our Messy Church families resources to do Messy Church at home and families have shared photos of what they have been doing. We also challenged families to take part in a Messy Church Easter Bonnet competition to be judged by West Midlands mayor, Andy Street. The challenge was to use recycled materials from home or the garden. We were thrilled to find out that one of our families was awarded the runners up prize!



- It has been a great joy to continue to share Praise and Play with families every week. While we are not able to meet in person a video goes live every Friday morning at 9.30 am where we share our usual four action songs, sing Happy Birthday, listen to a bible story and join together in prayer. A new Craft is shared each week to accompany the bible story. Many of the families watch the sessions on their smart TVs or laptops and Linda and Sue have enjoyed seeing themselves on screen in photos that families have sent in showing their children joining in with the sessions!



Praise and Play sessions will continue throughout the school summer holidays. We have received some lovely feedback, here are some examples:

"S and P loved Praise and Play this week and we chose to do it on Sunday again. They whole-heartedly participated in every song with actions and absolutely loved painting their rainbows!" "From Saturday afternoon S asked eagerly (and more than once): "Is it Praise and Play tomorrow?" It's so lovely that it is meaning so much to them, it means a lot to me too. Thank you to you and Sue for providing us with the online session."

- For several years now, every Wednesday morning during term time, the Open the Book team, which is a dedicated group of volunteers led by Sue, gather in St Alphege church at about 8.30am and accompanied by much laughter rehearse before the St Alphege infant children come into church for their weekly worship. The team share songs, reflections, prayers and of course, a bible story. The team dress up in biblical clothes and act out one of the many stories from Bob Hartman's Lion Storyteller Bible. The children absolutely love it! Open the Book is a great way for the church and school to come together as one community. Sadly, the pandemic meant that the joyful Wednesday mornings could not happen however the team went online! The team met on Zoom and put together stories, sang songs and prayed as they always did and not only for the Infant School, the Junior School were also able to see the sessions and families of children who had not returned to school. The sessions were so well received that the school asked for sessions to be recorded for the autumn term and so the Open the Book team are continuing to meet to record sessions to cover the autumn term. Pam Price in her role as Chair of Governors received a Department of Education report on Collective worship from the Diocese and said *"I have replied to say what we have done from Open the Book at St Alphege and included a link so they can see some examples. An excellent tick in the box for school and church community links! Thank you for all you have done and continue to do for our schools."* Sarah Furmage the RE coordinator at St Alphege infant school said *"Wow! Well done! It's great, thank you so much! I love the tea towels (I think it really helps) and it was great to have a song with actions in there too. I think they will love seeing your friendly faces and start to feel part of the community again."*

We received information about a children's holiday club which was being organised by the diocese, to be held over three days on the 21st -23rd July. It all sounded very exciting, so we investigated further and before we knew it, Solihull Parish was signed up and we soon had families booking in, so no turning back! It was something new, it was going to be done via the internet and lots of people were involved. What could possibly go wrong?!! Well as it turned out, nothing!! On Tuesday the 21st July Sarah Marshall, Helen Greenham, Chris Carrington and Sue Chandler, logged into the first day and before they knew it were part of an exciting and colourful experience. We heard a bible story, beautifully told, we played Listening Lions, we did silly things like trying to balance a spoon on our nose! And we learned to 'zoom around the room', and we still cannot get that song out of our heads! After some time together we were put into 'breakout' rooms. There were two groups from Solihull Parish. Chris and Sue were leaders for one group and Sarah and Helen for the other. The diocese had supplied activity packs for each day, as well as lots of suggestions for fun things to do as a family during the afternoon. Together with the children and their grown ups we had a snack and compared biscuits each day. Then we recapped the bible story. The children were great, they remembered so much. Then we did some creative work, trying to put into pictures or words what the story had meant to us, what God had said to us through it. We remembered that with paper, paints, felt tips and Lego. We made our own Filler and Spiller (two characters who accompanied us throughout the week). We jumbled up sentences from one story and then had to put them back in the right order. And we made a bible memory verse, and so much more. The children got excited, they enjoyed themselves and we had fun, lots and lots of fun. It was a delight beyond measure to be able to be back with some of our children again, and with their Mums and Dads (who entered into the learning and fun with their children). Families were given the chance to send their artwork, writing and pictures of their Lego creations into the diocese. Huge thanks goes to Emma and her team at the diocese, for their creativity, their IT skills, their hard work and their sheer courage in taking on such a huge venture! And a huge thank-you to the parents who juggled their day so that their children could take part.

Youth Stuff

Meeting Daily – Supporting Each Other

Open to young people in Year 6 and above, the Parish Youth meet every weekday between 4pm-5pm over the Zoom app. Prayer reflections, scripture analysis, games and open discussion, everyone is welcome. These sessions allow the youth to 'meet', interact and support each other during this difficult period. If you have a prayer request these can be shared anonymously with the group or prayed for by name.

Email Joe Minall (j.minall@solihullparish.org.uk) to find out times of sessions, plans for coming weeks and how to get involved. You can also find the youth on Instagram @solihullparishyouth.

Keep safe, God Bless

The Youth Team

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A Feather on the Breath of God

Later this month, the Church celebrates the life of a most remarkable woman, Hildegard of Bingen.

Hildegard was born in 1098 at Böckelheim in Germany. From her earliest years she had a powerful, visionary life, becoming a nun at the age of eighteen, much influenced by her foster-mother, Jutta, who had set up the community and whom she succeeded as Abbess in 1136.

It was then that she started writing music for the first time, for her nuns to sing as part of the Divine Office. The only music teaching Hildegard had received from Jutta was instruction in singing and the duties of a choir nun. But she had grown up hearing the chants of the Roman mass and she set her own vibrant, colourful verses to music to create antiphons, responses, sequences and hymns.

Her visions of light, which she described as "the reflection of the Living Light", deepened her understanding of God and creation, sin and redemption. They were, however, accompanied by repeated illness and physical weakness.



About twenty years later, she moved her sisters to a new Abbey at Bingen. She was a pastor and teacher, seeing herself as a "feather on the breath of God". She wrote three visionary works, a natural history, a medical compendium, and over 70 liturgical chants. And yet she prized the virtue of humility above all. Despite the apparent success of her career and life, she ever sought God's release from her own human frailty. She died on 17th September 1179.

Hildegard of Bingen is perhaps best known today for her sublime, life-affirming music which stands out from other liturgical music because of the almost improvisatory nature of her melodies: they are free, wide-ranging and elaborate. In that way, her music reflects something of the life and movement of the Holy Spirit.

Pope Benedict 16th touched on this idea when he said, "Let us always invoke the Holy Spirit, so that he may inspire in the Church holy and courageous women like Saint Hildegard of Bingen."

One of Hildegard's works, a short, simple yet profound piece is called *O Pastor Animarum*. The title means 'Shepherd of Souls' and directly prays to Jesus, whom Hildegard names "shepherd of souls...by which we all have been created." The complete words are these:

*O, shepherd of souls,
O, first voice
by which we all have been created,
may it now please you
to consider freeing us
from our misery and our pain.*

Simon

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Lockdown Book Group

To keep us occupied during Lockdown my Book Group friends Liz, Jenny and Sue suggested meeting weekly with a cup of tea over Zoom in place of our usual monthly chat over a 3-course meal. It has been a great opportunity to read an eclectic mix of books and I thought I'd share with you what we thought about some of them:

'Sensible Shoes' by Sharon Garlough Brown

This book follows four women who meet at a retreat centre each finding themselves there for a different reason. Hannah is a church leader who has reluctantly been told to take a break not realising how tired she is, Meg is a widow whose daughter has recently gone to university, Mara is navigating a difficult marriage and Clarissa is a post graduate student constantly striving for perfection. The book interweaves the story of the lives of these four women with an exploration of different spiritual practices e.g. walking a labyrinth, lectio divina (sacred reading), praying the Examen, praying with Imagination, self-examination and confession and rules of life. The book contains a helpful Discussion Guide at the end to assist groups reading the book. We were definitely left wanting to find out more about the characters and there is plenty of opportunity for that as there are three more books in the series and accompanying study guides that include twelve weeks of daily scripture reading, prayer and reflection questions that correspond to the disciplines the women practice in the book. There are group discussion questions for each week. If anyone would be interested in being part of a group to find out more about Hannah, Meg, Mara and Clarissa, and to try out the spiritual practices explored, then do let me know.



'Blanche on the Lam' by Barbara Neely

Liz writes - **Barbara Neely died in March this year** and it was through reading her obituary that we decided to read one of her novels. She was an African American who was born in 1941 and it took her ten years to become established as an author. The works for which she is best known are four crime novels written in the 1990s, with a protagonist, **Blanche White**, a black maid turned detective in North Carolina. *Blanche on the Lam* is the first in the series. It is clear from the start that as well as entertaining her readers with a 'whodunnit', Neely has the serious purpose of opening doors upon the late 20th century experience of black people working in white people's homes in the southern United States. As she said in an interview in 2000, 'I realised the mystery genre was perfect to talk about serious subjects, and it could carry the political fiction I wanted to write.' Blanche reflects throughout the book on the relations between black people and white people and the toxic legacy of slavery. 'For many years, Blanche worried that it was fear which sometimes made her reluctant to meet white people's eyes... She'd come to understand that her desire was to avoid pain, a pain so old, so deep, its memory was carried not in her mind, but in her bones.' If you like your fiction to offer more than escapism and you want to see and feel the world through the eyes and experience of another, I would definitely encourage you to try the novels of Barbara Neely.

'Where the Crawdads Sing' by Delia Owens

This book has topped the best sellers list for months and no wonder. It's a wonderful first novel about loneliness, prejudice and injustice, an intertwined murder mystery, coming of age story and an exploration of the beautiful, haunting marshlands of North Carolina. Unsurprisingly the film rights to the book have been snapped up but I would urge you not to wait for the film but to read the book to truly capture the haunting story of Kya Clark, the so-called Marsh Girl.

'Altar on the World' by Barbara Brown Taylor

Liz writes - The full title is *An Altar in the World: finding the sacred beneath our feet and the latter is exactly what she sets out to do.* She writes of the yearning for the spiritual, the 'something more', which she hears many people speak of and the lengths to which people will go to find this treasure, perhaps believing they need to spend hours in prayer, or in travel to a holy site. 'The last place most people look is right under their feet, in the everyday activities, accidents, and encounters of their lives.' Whoever we are, and wherever we live, we already have everything we need, she argues, for we are human beings, living in the world, 'which is just waiting for (us) to notice the holiness in it'. I really value this focus, that we are invited to look for holiness in and through our human condition. For example, we live in skin. We all have bodies and if there is nothing else that we have in common, it is our bodies that connect us to everyone else in the world. Other places where heaven and earth might meet include hanging out the washing, feeling pain, getting lost, and saying no. I find this book helpful in a number of ways - for the assumption at its heart that life of all forms on this planet is really of great value; for the way it has no divide between sacred and secular; and for the recognition that often 'religious' people need as much help as anyone to find 'the More' they yearn for.

'Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race' by Renni Eddo-Lodge

Described as the essential handbook for anyone who wants to understand race relations in Britain today. The book followed from a blog post of the same title published by the writer in 2014 in which she stated that she was 'no longer engaging with white people on the topic of race. Not all white people, just the vast majority who refuse to accept the legitimacy of structural racism.' The writer states that she has turned the blog post into a book – paradoxically – to continue the conversation about race and that since writing the blog post she has spent most of her time talking to white people about race. She writes 'Every voice raised against racism chips away at its power. We can't afford to stay silent. This book is an attempt to speak.' This is not a comfortable read but a very important read. I was particularly challenged by the chapter about structural racism, a term that the writer uses instead of institutional racism to capture what goes unnoticed 'the silently raised eyebrows, the implicit biases, the snap judgements' And the exploration of the life challenges faced by black boys is very sobering indeed. Many of us I'm sure would argue that we would never discriminate against someone on the grounds of race, that we are all equal and that we just don't 'see' race but the writer argues that it is imperative that we do 'see' race in order to see who benefits from their race and in order to help to change the system. Do consider reading this book, it matters.

I'd love to hear what you've been reading. Recommendations very gratefully received!

Linda Hicks

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JACS began in 2009. It was at a time when the West Midlands had the highest rate of unemployment in the UK. This was due in part to the recession but also because the region relied heavily on industries that are vulnerable in a struggling economy such as the automotive industry.

For many people at that time it was their first experience of having to visit a Job Centre and having the somewhat daunting task of preparing a CV and possibly attending an interview after many years. JACS was able to provide support and encouragement as well as giving people confidence as they faced a 'new' future. This is still our role today.

We see ourselves as being complementary to the work of the Job Centres. We help with CVs, application forms, interview technique and practice. Importantly we operate in a very informal atmosphere with plenty of tea and coffee and biscuits and with opportunities to share stories with others in similar situations.

Over the years we have helped many to find work and what is rewarding for us is that many, now employed, keep in touch and call into see us from time to time.

JACS is run solely by volunteers and is unfunded. We are extremely grateful to Solihull URC who give us a place to meet.

Normally we operate on a 'drop in' basis but with Covid 19 we need to ask people to contact us first.

Beryl Moppett

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Are you job Hunting?

If you would like support and advice on CVs and interview techniques in an informal and friendly atmosphere, then come to JACS. It is also a great opportunity to meet and talk with others in similar circumstances.

We meet at Solihull United Reform Church on the Warwick Road opposite House of Fraser Mondays 10.30am-12.30pm

Currently due to Covid 19 please do not turn up without first contacting

Tim Freeman 07929 786 893

timfreeman1000@yahoo.co.uk

Calendar and Prayer Intentions for September

1	Giles of Provence, Hermit	Members of religious communities	Rowood Drive
2	Martyrs of Papua New Guinea, 1901 & 1942	Our Archdeacon, Simon Heathfield	Ryefield Close
3	Gregory the Great, Bp of Rome & Teacher, 604	Our Bishops, David & Anne	Saddlers Mews
4	Birinus, Bp of Dorchester	Fr Sam Gibson, his family & the people of St George's Edgbaston	Saintbury Drive
5	Feria	Those who work in the Touchwood Centre	Sandal Rise
6	13 th Sunday after Trinity	The people of St Alphege Church	Sandhills Crescent
7	Feria	The staff and pupils of the schools in our parish	School Lane
8	Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Those caring for children and grandchildren	Seven Star Road
9	Charles Fuge Lowder, Priest	The clergy of our parish	Sevington Close
10	Feria	Those waiting for the results of medical tests	Sharmans Cross Road
11	Feria	Those who work at the Core in Solihull	Shelsey Way
12	Feria	Those caring for a family member who is ill	Shustoke Road
13	14 th Sunday after Trinity	The people of St Helen's Church	Silhill Hall Road
14	Holy Cross Day	That we may declare our faith in Christ in word and deed	Silverbirch Road
15	Cyprian, Bp of Carthage, Martyr	Those suffering for their faith in Christ	Smiths Lane
16	Ninian, Bp of Galloway	Staff and residents of local care homes	Solihull Bypass
17	Hildegard, Abbess of Bingen & Visionary	Spiritual Directors and Confessors	Somerby Drive
18	Feria	The St Alphege bell ringers	Southey Close
19	Theodore of Tarsus, Archbp of Canterbury	Justin, Archbishop of Canterbury	Spilsbury Croft
20	15 th Sunday after Trinity	Our Parish Wardens & Deputy Wardens	St Alphege Close
21	Matthew, Apostle & Evangelist	Our Pioneer Minister, Suzette Maguire	St Bernard's Road
22	Feria	Our church treasurers	St Helen's Road
23	Feria	Those exploring religious vocations	Station Approach
24	Feria	Our church musicians	Station Road
25	Lancelot Andrewes, Bp of Winchester & Spiritual Writer	Those living in poverty	Stonebow Avenue
26	Wilson Carlile, founder of the Church Army	Our Rector, Jane	Stoneleigh Road
27	16 th Sunday after Trinity	Our part in God's mission in Solihull	Stoneythorpe Close
28	Feria	The work of our Parish Church Council	Stonor Park Road
29	St Michael & All Angels	The people of St Michael's Church	Streetsbrook Road
30	Jerome, Translator of the Scriptures & Teacher	Bible Translators	Tanwood Close

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

Let us Pray

Church of England Birmingham praying together

The Birmingham Diocese 'Praying Together' resource, which used to be printed and distributed via our churches in booklet format, is now available on-line.

The resource provides a day-by-day list of prayer topics, which we are invited to join in praying with others across the diocese.

As well as being invited to join in the prayers listed for this month, we are also invited to contribute prayers for future lists. The compilers are particularly seeking:

- items which focus on current events from local to global
- prayers of thanksgiving for the many acts of kindness we witness at this time,
- prayers for reconnecting with nature and wildlife as we focus on well-being.

Creative expressions of prayer are particularly welcome. Your prayer can be a short written expression, or you could try your hand at phone filming or recording a voice track.

As well as showing the list for the current month (including links to videos / soundtracks where appropriate), the website also contains links for a printable version of the list, and for submitting your own prayers. The prayer list can be found at:

<https://www.cofebirmingham.com/everyday-faith/being-a-christian/cofeb-praying-together/>



Prayer from Sarah Smith, Diocesan Director of Education:

Dear Lord, we pray for children we know through our church or through schools in our parish. We pray that during August they have enjoyed their break from 'school work' and enjoy the thought of being back with their friends in September.

Amen

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On behalf of Christine and APS Support UK with a great amount of help from God

I became aware of APS (Antiphospholipid Syndrome) in 2005, when my wife Christine, was diagnosed with this Syndrome, instead of Multiple Sclerosis, as had been thought 10 years previously. This new diagnosis was unfortunately 10 years too late, as in that time she had lost the use of all 4 limbs, one by one, and was totally confined to a wheelchair. This was very frustrating for a once so active woman, especially once she realised that she could no longer put her feet one in front of the other.

APS is an autoimmune condition, where the blood clots too quickly, and has catastrophic implications on all the organs of the body. APS also causes difficulty with fertility, as well as miscarriages and stillbirths.



Sadly, Christine passed away in January 2015, and it was later in that year, I decided I had to challenge myself in Christine's memory to spread awareness of APS. I had heard in the Cathedral, two comments, ***"you have to go where your God leads you"*** and ***"you must persevere"***. These two comments have given me great inspiration during the last few years.

My first decision was to attempt to walk from the Scilly Isles to the Shetland Islands, a distance of 1,400 miles. After 18 months planning, I set off to the West Country in March 2017, to find there were no planes to the Scillies due to fog. In order to keep to my accommodation schedule, I changed the plan and set off from Land's End, in alternate bouts of fog and rain. I had various adventures until disaster struck in Boscastle, when I tore a muscle in my left leg and had to return home for 7 weeks.

In June 2017, I flew to the Scillies, beautiful islands enjoying fantastic weather, until I came home in a storm. That area of the sea is where the Atlantic, English Channel and the Irish Sea all meet and it is sheer hell in a very severe storm!

July took me along Offa's Dyke, from Chepstow to Chirk, and then on to Preston, where I arrived with severe pains in my right knee. After a visit to the Knee Doctor, with an MRI scan and then a



procedure, the Doctor said, "you are walking no further!!"

So a complete change of plan was needed, and I (being a Rotarian) decided to travel by train (as a retired Railwayman, I have free travel!) around the Coast of Britain, talking about APS to Rotary, Inner Wheel Clubs and Churches en-route. This project took just under 2 years and finished just before the lockdown started. However, these journeys and the Clubs visited have also expanded to most areas of the country, meaning I have travelled around 42,000 miles.

I have been very fortunate and been made very welcome at 142 Clubs and talked to them about APS and my journeys up until lockdown. Since then technology has allowed me to speak to Clubs via the Zoom network, with the number of Clubs now at 177 and a total of 237 hopefully, by the end of the year. Monies donated so far, incredibly now at £149,000, are beyond my wildest dreams! This money has allowed the development and launching of an E-learning Module for GP's, with remainder going towards Research

My plan now is to try and speak to Women's Institute, Soroptimists, and Mother's Union groups, to take the message about the obstetric problems caused by APS to women's groups. Also to try to campaign so that NICE guidelines are brought in line with European guidelines, that investigations take place for women who have suffered two miscarriages. Currently in the UK, women are not investigated until three heart-breaking miscarriages have occurred.

Since lockdown I have been trying to keep fit, bought an Exercise Bike and Rowing Machine, and have now managed to row/cycle nearly 1,000 miles, trying to achieve the 1,400 miles I would have walked in 2017.

Overall I have been trying to help to spread awareness of APS in order that Christine did not suffer and die in vain, and most certainly feel that God has been with me throughout these journeys. I hope that the awareness has helped many people across the British Isles in various ways.

Phil Godfrey

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Revelation

Part 8 of “Exploring the New Testament”, by Sam Gibson

We come to the end of our quick tour through the NT with the fascinating and deeply perplexing book of Revelation. Sometimes the text is erroneously referred to as “Revelations” (plural), but is in fact simply titled *Apocalypse* in Greek. The imagined plural, however, is quite revealing of the content since the book does indeed contain a series of revelations or visions.

The word *apocalypse*, contrary to popular usage, does not refer in this case to a world-ending event, although Revelation does include several cataclysmic visions of this kind. Instead, the Greek *apokálypsis* means something like “the unveiling of hidden things”. Grasping this is important because it removes our initial bias, drawn from pop culture and church literature, that the book of Revelation must be about the “end of the world”, in the sense of the final things of the cosmos. There are passages in Revelation which seem to relate to eschatology – the final destiny of the universe, humankind, the soul and the Kingdom of God – but it isn’t a straightforward *narrative* about the end of time.

The history of the interpretation of Revelation is fraught with misunderstanding, and this is partially rooted in its origins. According to the scholar Margaret Barker, Revelation is a deposit, a collection or library, of oracles or visions, some of which come from the time of the earliest church in the first century but many of which actually pre-date the church. This makes sense of the *genre* or literary style of Revelation, which at first sight appears to be a disjointed series of images and episodes.

“Apocalyptic” is an identifiable stream of Jewish literature, which developed in the centuries before Jesus Christ. This can be encountered in the Bible most famously in the book of Daniel, and some of the prophets, especially *Isaiah chapters 24–27; 33; 34–35*, are regarded as proto-apocalyptic, anticipating later developments. Apocalyptic is a way of seeing the world as revealed by God or by a heavenly messenger (an angel), God’s servant. It identifies heavenly events as corresponding, mysteriously, to present social, religious and political events on earth. These events can be past, present or future, or contain elements of all three. What is vital is that the veil between earth and the heavens is temporarily torn aside, or made translucent, and the seer a vision of things as they really are.

Apocalyptic was a key way of interpreting the world for Jews of Jesus’ time, and there are a huge number of “Apocalypses” written in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic which are regarded as extra-canonical or outside of Scripture. The vision of hidden things is woven into the rest of the NT, albeit more subtly than in Revelation itself. Jesus famously teaches that he is the Son of Man (*Mark 14:62 et al*) coming to the Father, an image from Daniel 7, which is the immediate cause of his execution. St Paul speaks of being caught up into the third heaven (*2 Corinthians 12:2*), while other early Christian texts which didn’t make into the canon like *The Shepherd of Hermas* are strongly apocalyptic in tone and content.

What this background context shows us is that, while Revelation seems like a unique outlier in Scripture, and a confusing one at that, it is in fact deeply coherent with other texts. What Revelation does is record and transmit the various prophecies and visions received by a Jewish-Christian community in the ancient Mediterranean, perhaps in Asia Minor. These

visions are mediated via John of Patmos, the Seer, but in fact are largely traditional, or else (even more revolutionary!) are visions directly from Jesus himself.

Revelation 1:1, read literally, says “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, *which God gave unto him*, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified” (AV). It seems as though an ancient Christian community committed these oracles to writing so as to share the gospel, which interprets all times and events, in a specific way. Consequently, many of the events it describes have already come to pass, that is, God’s promises have been fulfilled through them. To try and read them all as future predictions will not be fruitful, but instead we need to see them as the author does, as Jesus’ own messages for the churches. Revelation inspires us to carefully discern the events of our own times in the Spirit, in Christ, and to be open to God’s insight where he chooses to grant it.

In the Christian East, Revelation took a long time to be accepted as part of the New Testament. To this day, it is not read in the Orthodox liturgy, and is one of the Scriptural books to come with a spiritual health warning from Orthodox theologians. In their view, it should not be read by beginners in the faith, but only by someone experienced in prayer and with the guidance of a soul-friend. Perhaps this is a wise view, since the distance between the texts and our worldview are so vast as to almost inevitably lead to misunderstanding!

In the West, Revelation was picked up more enthusiastically as the Roman empire crumbled beyond 400 A.D., especially in light of the writings of St Augustine of Hippo who resolved its apparent future-orientation by reading themes like the thousand-year rule of the saints (*Revelation 20:4-6*) as a sophisticated theological metaphor.

This didn’t stop generations of Western Christians, through the Reformation and even to the present day, trying to read the whole text as a guide to the final things. While undoubtedly Revelation grants us glimpses of the world to come, the new Jerusalem from above (*Revelation 21:2*), the tree of healing (*Revelation 22:2*) it contains much more. It is equally about struggling to live a just life in the face of oppression by empire (see the “whore of Babylon” *Revelation 17*), or the correspondence between our earthly liturgies and the worship taking place in heaven (*Revelation 4*). It is a great shame that our lectionaries and study courses are so Revelation-averse, since with good guidance and under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit Revelation has much to say to our contemporary world.

Further reading:

- Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. (Continuum, 2000).
- Judith Kowacs and Christopher Rowland, *The Apocalypse to Jesus Christ*. (Blackwell, 2004).
- Tom Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*. (SPCK, 2014).

For Your Diary



Unfortunately, the September meeting in the Oliver Bird Hall will not be able to go ahead and we are sorry that all the Corporate Eucharists are still cancelled while the social distancing measures are in force to reduce the spread of Coronavirus. We will notify all members by email or telephone as soon as we know when our next meeting can take place.

Pat Marshall has offered to make re-useable face coverings for anyone who wants one. See separate article on page 7.

We are keeping in touch with our members during this difficult time and are offering help to those of you who request it. If you need help now contact:

Elaine Diskin on 0121 705 3265

or Chris on 0121 243 4340 or Susan on 0121 270 6132.

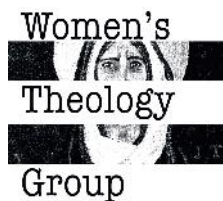
Keep safe - keep well - and please follow the Government guidance.

WIVES' FELLOWSHIP

Sadly, due to our age group, I am not sure when we will be able to meet up. I won't be writing again in the Parish News until I know about us all seeing each other again.

In the meantime, may you find rest, peace and courage in God's love.

Carol Caldicott 0121 705 3168



The Women's Theology Group are meet over Zoom every two weeks on a Wednesday at 7.30pm.

If you would like to join us but are not on the mailing list, do e-mail womenstheology@gmail.com and we will send you an invitation!

Second Saturday @ St Alphege

Due to Covid-19 restrictions our monthly Bible study sessions will now take place over Zoom and all are welcome. They will be led by Ali Welch, starting from 12th September 2020.

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