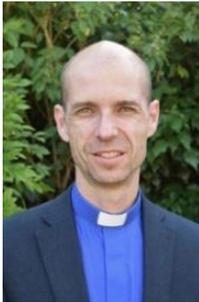

THE MINISTER WRITES ...



Dear All,

“When Jesus saw the crowd harassed and dejected like sheep without a shepherd, he felt with them in the centre of his being... He became lost with the lost, hungry with the hungry, and sick with the sick. In him all suffering was sensed with a perfect sensitivity. The great mystery revealed to us in this is that Jesus...chose in total freedom to suffer fully our pains and needs.” Henri Nouwen

In these words of reflection on Matthew 9:36, Catholic Priest, Professor and writer Henri Nouwen invites us to see the heart of Christ as we journey through Lent. Jesus does not merely notice the crowd’s distress; he feels it *‘in the centre of his being’*. Here, we are not thinking about some kind of distant pity but profound solidarity. Jesus becomes lost with the lost, hungry with the hungry, sick with the sick. In him, God does not stand apart from suffering but enters it fully.

Lent reminds us that this was not a random event in history or some kind of accident but was actually a choice of love. Christ freely embraced our vulnerability, our confusion, our pain. The cross, towards which we now walk, reveals a God who would rather share our suffering than remain safely beyond it. That truth comforts us in our own weariness and calls us to deeper compassion. As a church, we are invited to follow this pattern. To walk through Lent is to allow our hearts to be softened - to see those who suffer around us and to feel their pain. In doing so, we reflect the tender, courageous love of Christ himself.

So, in a world harassed by injustice, inequality, displacement, and despair, we are invited to embody this same courageous compassion. In our prayers during Lent, we do not, and never will, pray to somehow escape the world, rather, we seek to be sent back into it more sensitive, attentive and active. As we journey towards the cross, we remember: God's power is revealed, not in domination, but in compassion that refuses to turn away and enters into suffering; friends, let us be those who always choose the way of love.

With much love,

Neil

PASTORAL NEWS

We thank God for all those recovering from surgery. We pray that they continue to make good progress.

We continue to pray for those who are unwell and those recently bereaved.

We pray that as our Services go out on Sundays, they will continue to be a blessing to all who are unable to join us in person at the moment.

LEPROSY MISSION SERVICE AND LUNCH

On 1st February we held a Café style Sunday worship for our Leprosy Mission service which was enjoyed by everyone. Matt Henderson, the Leprosy Mission area representative, led us in worship. This year the TLM focus is on children to prevent disability and stop leprosy in its tracks far earlier. These children are denied education, abandoned by their friends and often suffer in silence.

This year, for the first time, the children's resources encouraged children to write and decorate greetings cards to be distributed by TLM to children affected by leprosy across Africa and India. Members of our Junior Church were very happy to take part and completed 12 cards with love and greetings from Christ Church, Ipswich. Some of the adults really enjoyed taking part in this project too!

The Church Life team worked very hard and produced a wonderful lunch for us all which was much appreciated. As a result of this Leprosy Sunday, I am delighted to let you know that the total number of donations for TLM amounted to £796.50. Thank you to everyone for your amazing generosity.

Netty (TLM Representative for Christ Church)

TRANSFORM TRADE BIG BREW

We will be holding a Big Brew on Saturday 14th March from 10am to 12.30pm, to celebrate 40 years of Transform Trade, formerly known as the Traidcraft Exchange. You and your friends are invited to come along and enjoy a Fairtrade tea or coffee with a Fairtrade cookie or cake. There will be a cake stall and Fairtrade stall from the Fairtrade Shop in Upper Brook Street.

Our baking competition this year is chocolate brownies. If you would like to enter, please submit your brownies, along with a list of ingredients highlighting those which are fairtrade, by 10.30am.

Jane Sago from the WI is once again coming to judge the entries. If you are able to provide a cake for the cake stall it would be most welcome.



As it is a special year, the 40th anniversary of Transform Trade and the year Ipswich has to renew its status as a Fairtrade Town, our MP, the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councillors have been invited. All the money raised will go to Transform Trade, working tirelessly to support our friends in the developing world who not only continue to battle unfair trading practices but are also facing additional problems caused by climate change and the erratic weather conditions this brings.

We look forward to seeing you.

Anne

CHRISTIAN AID WEEK

Our Christian Aid Celebration will take place on Saturday 16th May from 10.30am to 2pm. We will be holding a plant sale on the front lawn. The church will be open for cakes and refreshments and there will be a barbecue outside at lunch time between 12pm and 2pm. More details to follow in the May Comment. With Spring just around the corner, when you start planting seeds or taking cuttings, please think of the Christian Aid event and plant a few extra for the plant sale. Thank you in anticipation. *Church Life Committee*



Thursday
at Christ Church
Tacket Street **Forum**
(next to Cox Lane car park)

Thursday Lunchtimes
Refreshments at low cost 12 noon - 1.00 pm
A short talk 1.10 - 1.50 pm
You are welcome to either or both



We had a good month of talks in February, although some people had to give in to the wet and cold weather. Those who braved the elements were treated to a wealth of different talks and entertainment. We heard about Tudor Life from Phil Roberts, then we learnt how to ‘look slowly’ at

paintings, discovering an incredible amount just from one piece of art. Ellie Hart of Ipswich Libraries has done a lot of research on the history of local libraries and we followed the development of libraries from the earliest ones 5000 years ago in Mesopotamia, to the plans for a new renovated central library which is under consideration and awaiting confirmed funding. Andy Malcolm spoke about the Fishermen’s Mission, an essential service for our maritime county.

March’s scope is equally grand: The Windrush generation celebrate their heritage – and consequently ours. Then we find out about birds from RSPB’s Paul Hetherington who specialises in birds on the Deben estuary. Suffolk Family Carers is a vital local charity, which is worth learning more about, and, at the end of March, we hear about Offshore Radio – in particular Radio Caroline, which broadcast from just off our coast and many have memories of that time.

Counting up the number of people involved in putting on Forum, I got to 25. It's wonderful that teamwork can achieve such a worthwhile service. If you would like to help and be involved yourself, speak to Neil or me. We can always do with cooks, cooks' assistants, greeters, or people helping to clear away afterwards. We're always glad of suggestions for speakers or entertainers, so please get in touch.

Ann

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

This used to be the Women's World Day of Prayer. Each year a different country is highlighted and the Christians in that country prepare a service. This year it is the turn of Nigeria. The nearest service in our area is at Rushmere Baptist Church, the Street Rushmere, on Friday 6th March at 2pm. See also wwdp.org.uk.

OVER THE GARDEN WALL

... from our neighbours at St Pancras



Dear Friends

I am writing on the first Sunday of Lent. On Ash Wednesday it was a joy, at the 10am Mass at Holy Family Church, Kesgrave to see an almost full church, including children on half term holiday. This year, so many Lenten meditations have suggested that we might 'give up for Lent' some of our internet use. It makes a change from chocolate! It used to be a suggestion that we do something extra, but I can see if you spend six hours a day on the internet, as many apparently do, then it could be a good idea. Personally, I like to go to a weekly Bible study or discussion group. They've not been on offer in our two biggest parishes in recent years so I've joined the town centre ecumenical one by zoom, in the evening. This year's book is written by a very modern nun and already we

can see challenging topics for discussion, with varying views amongst the group. I value talking with others on our response to current issues.

I receive a weekly email from Oxford Oratory, which was founded in 1990 by three young priests from Birmingham that I know well. A couple of weeks ago it had a photograph of 34 people who had just been received into church membership, and a notice of a new group preparing people for commitment as Catholics. This caused me to look at our diocesan statistics. Last year 30 were received in Cambridge and 10 in Norwich. Both have well established universities, and strong chaplaincy provision. In contrast, across our five Ipswich churches there were just 6 new members, 4 of them being from one parish, on the outskirts of town. We too have a university, only recently established. It led me to wonder what sort of chaplaincy is available from the variety of churches across town. Whilst the Bible Society conclusion that many young people in our country are becoming Christian has been contested, it does seem true in well-established University cities. The Anglican Church in Ipswich has also seen an increase in numbers over the last five years. This is all good news. Let us thank God, and if we are able to introduce young folk to the joys of our Faith, let us do what we are able and pray for more initiatives to interest our young people in the Faith that we hold and cherish.

Your Catholic friend,
Jean

PRAYER CALENDAR FOR MARCH

1st March: It is the beginning of Spring. As we see green shoots emerging, flowers blooming and tree buds swelling, we thank God for the beauty around us. Let us also give thanks for those exploring faith and pray they may find friendship, fellowship and nurture within your church.

8th March: We come together on the 14th for the Big Brew coffee morning in support of Transfer Trade when we will again sell Fairly Traded products. Remember in prayer all the organisations which employ people and pay fairly for the items they produce, enabling them to have a better standard of living.

15th March: Let us remember in our prayers those in areas of flooding. Winter sown crops have been lost, pasture has been damaged which will result in poor grass for cattle. Our farmers work so hard to be good stewards of their land. Climate change affects not only our farmers but those in other countries who have to cope with drought and we remember them all in prayer.

22nd March: We pray for all the young people at Christ Church and their parents and guardians. We give thanks for Junior Church, Tots, Scouting and Guiding. We pray for all those who give of their time and talents each week to help children grow and develop confidence.

29th March (Holy Week)

We remember the journey of Jesus and his disciples to Jerusalem. As we journey with other Christians on Good Friday for the walk of witness, we pray that people will be reminded of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us.

PRAYER TREE

This is a reminder that the prayer tree in the Christ Church Hall is for everyone, both church family and those visiting us to use. The prayer leaves are kept in the basket by the side of the tree and we regularly pray over them, including at our monthly prayer lunches.

BMS WORLD MISSION NEWS

Hurricane Melissa: hope in the aftermath

Rev Conrad Thomas has a phobia of hurricanes, so when he heard that Hurricane Melissa was predicted to make landfall in Jamaica last November, he began taking precautions but nothing could have prepared him for the devastation that was unleashed by the Category 5 storm.

Having lived through Hurricane Gilbert, which had killed over 300 people, Rev Thomas tried to mentally prepare himself for a disaster of that magnitude. On the morning of the hurricane, he recalls the city of Montego Bay and its surrounding communities as beautiful, peaceful, sunny and calm. Then the rain began and winds began. "I looked outside and the trees were feeling the full extent of Melissa's wrath, and then it turned on my house," he explains. "Every door was shaking and the windows were vibrating. A door flew open and my wife and I had to hold it for over three hours because the breeze broke the bolt off."

At first light, they were met with complete devastation. Rev Thomas attempted to make his way to Salt Spring Baptist Church, a member church of the Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU), where he serves as pastor. When a single lane was cleared the following day, he travelled to Salt Spring. "When I reached there, Salt Spring was flattened. The road was covered with power lines and trees, and people were just standing amazed," he said. "When I got to the church, the entire roof was gone. We lost everything inside." He reached out to as many church members as possible. Many had suffered severe losses; most had lost roofs, and those in wooden structures had lost everything.

It's estimated that around 45 people in Jamaica lost their lives to the storm. Rev Thomas is convinced it was only the mercy of God that prevented greater casualty numbers. He recounted the story of a 95-year-old woman who lives alone and lost her roof, with only one room spared. She too believes it was the Lord's protection that saved her.

Hurricane Melissa – how you responded

Your support of BMS World Mission's Disaster recovery fund allowed BMS Relief Lead Bruce Clark to swiftly agree a grant of £15,000 towards relief

efforts. Those funds have gone towards helping an estimated 3,000 people, allowing:

- The creation of distribution hubs in churches, giving out water, hygiene products and basic materials to create shelters
- The provision of psychosocial support through pastoral counselling
- Support for church members and pastors working to distribute the items and support their communities

Several weeks on, Rev Thomas is still coming to terms what's happened. "Right now, we are reeling and trying to pick up the pieces. We are without connectivity, still without light, still without water, but the resilient spirit, faith and determination to start again are there."

Since the hurricane, the Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU)'s Peace and Justice Centre has been distributing care packages through the support of the JBU and other groups and individuals. The building, made entirely out of concrete, sustained minimal damage. It was first created as an initiative to explore how a church based there could be a catalyst for positive change in a troubled community. Now it serves as a congregation, clinic and distribution centre.

The church partnered with a local doctor who returned with a team of medical professionals. "On that day, we gave care packages, clothing and water. We were able to dispense prescription items, and we served almost 300 hot meals," adds a member of the JBU.

Marline Corbett-White, who lost part of her roof during the storm, knew she needed assistance but was not sure where it would come from until the church reached out. "When I got the care package from church it was just what I needed to put us back in a good place," she shared. "I am so grateful, and I had to say, 'God, we are still in this, but you are looking out for your people!'"

Through the entire ordeal, Rev Thomas says the most heartwarming thing has been the turnout for church services. "He believes the disaster has drawn the congregation closer, fostering gratitude even amid loss. "When you listen to the singing, when you hear the testimonies, when you see

the peace on people's faces... they have lost a lot, but there is a sense of peace, and I believe this is the peace that passes all human understanding.” And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”.

(Philippians 4: 7.) This story was provided by Baptist World Aid and adapted for the BMS World Mission audience.

THE CEDARS OF GOD

An elegy for Lebanon

The mountain cedar is one of the great glories of Lebanon and has been prized since ancient times for its colour, fragrance and durability. The Cedars of God in the Kadisha Valley of northern Lebanon are some of the last surviving remains of the extensive forests which once stretched across this region. The trees, standing straight and aspiring to the sky, can sometimes grow to 40m and have been venerated by local people since antiquity, even to the point of placing altars among them. It is therefore little wonder that the cedar features as an emblem on the national flag.

There are many references to Lebanon in the writings of the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 3 we read of Moses pleading with God to be allowed – verse 25 “to go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan – that fine hill country and Lebanon”. But God forbids him to go and tells him to send Joshua instead. Lebanon – or more properly Phoenicia – formed part of Canaan, the land which God had promised to Moses and the Children of Israel. Phoenicia mainly comprised the narrow coastal strip of the Mediterranean with its city-states of Tyre and Sidon, which is still the geography of today’s southern Lebanon.

Tyre, lying half-way between modern Beirut and Haifa, was the largest of the Phoenician cities and had a thriving economy under their king Hiram who was contemporary with Solomon, the son of king David. The Tyrians had good ships and harbours and developed a significant reputation as commercial traders, exporting their highly prized cedar wood. Hiram provided Solomon with all the materials and craftsmen he needed for the building of the great First Temple in Jerusalem – as we learn from chapter

2 of 2 Chronicles. In verse 8 Solomon asks not only for cedar but also for pine and algum, and, in reply, (verse 16) Hiram promises to cut the logs and float them down to Joppa on rafts so that Solomon can take them up to Jerusalem. Hiram also promises to send with them his skilful carpenter and metalworker, Hiram-Abi, who will work alongside Solomon's team of builders.

The writer of Psalm 92 uses the fabulous growth and longevity of the Lebanon cedar to celebrate how the righteous will flourish in the courts of God. In verses 14 and 15 we read "they (the righteous) will still bear fruit in old age. They will stay fresh and green, proclaiming "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in Him".

When not ruling Israel with consummate wisdom and building his Temple and Palace, Solomon was also a love poet, writing the lovely Song of Songs. In chapter 3 we read of the Beloved seeing Solomon's carriage coming up from the desert - verse 9 "King Solomon made his carriage for himself from cedar wood of Lebanon" - and in the following chapter Solomon exhorts his Beloved (verse 8) to "come with me from Lebanon" as the writer refers poetically to lovely features of the landscape. In verse 11 the fragrance of the Beloved's garments is compared with that of Lebanon – perhaps an allusion to the sweet-smelling cedar or other spices.

In Jeremiah 18 we have the image of the disobedient Children of Israel set against the never changing natural wonders of Lebanon. Verse 14 - "does the snow of Lebanon ever vanish from its rocky slopes (perhaps thinking of Mt Hermon)? Do its cool waters from distant sources ever cease to flow?"

Lebanon today is a country in grave crisis. The explosion in Beirut has fallen hard on the heels of many years of civil war and economic mismanagement, with a refugee crisis and coronavirus. As we pray for its people and their future, let us remember the Cedars of God and all the country's natural beauty, that God will restore the land and its people. There are Christians in Lebanon, particularly the Maronites. Let us support them in our prayers.

Tony

DIARY DATES FOR MARCH

Thursday 12 th March	Deacons' Meeting (7.30pm)
Saturday 14 th March	Transform Trade Big Brew Coffee morning & Baking Competition (10am – 12.30pm)
Tuesday 24 th March	Prayer Lunch (midday)
Friday 27 th March	Church Life (7.30pm)

Dates for April's Comment

Copy Due Date Friday 20th March (publication 29th March)
*Please send your copy to Julie Stainer (comment@christchurch-
ipswich.org.uk)*

SERVICES FOR MARCH / EARLY APRIL

All Services will be led by our Minister, Revd Neil Coulson unless otherwise stated.

Sunday 1st March

10.45am Family Worship with Holy Communion

Sunday 8th March

10.45am Family Worship

Sunday 15th March

10.45am Mothering Sunday Family Worship

Sunday 22nd March

10.45am Family Worship

Sunday 29th March

10.45am Palm Sunday Family Worship

Sunday 5th April Easter Sunday

8.45am Easter Breakfast with informal service of Holy Communion

10.45am Easter Day All-age Family Worship
