

*The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart  
you will not despise. Psalm 51:17*

In the popular imagination Lent has earned the reputation of being a period of time when we are as miserable as possible. Some of the reasons for this may be quite apparent because we often focus on what we're going to give up, be it chocolate or alcohol, without seeing it as a positive time for preparation. Lent also allows us to reflect on our use of time and resources, with study groups, a focus on charity, personal soul-searching, or a reduction in unnecessary busy-ness. All of these things have roots in the Christian tradition.

Primarily the focus of Lent is upon the preparation for the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection in Holy Week and Easter. In the early church, the season of Lent was first observed by those preparing for baptism during the Easter liturgy. Subsequently those who had been excommunicated from the Church undertook a period of penance before being readmitted to the church's sacramental life at Easter. However, the church as a whole began to see the benefit of having an extended period of preparation before Easter. Prayer and fasting became an expression of penitence. Rather than inducing misery, such a time of preparation gives a greater sense of expectation as we approach Holy Week and Easter.

The idea that we should give things up in Lent is not something done for the sake of it, but it is part of our preparation. Lenten worship is distinctive because we omit, or give up, certain elements of our liturgy. The Gloria in Excelsus is not sung during the Eucharist; there are no flowers in church, the word Alleluia is omitted in our hymns and readings because such an expression of joy will be used to greet our risen Lord on Easter Day.

Fasting during Lent would originally involved abstaining from food until the evening of each day. The idea was that by abstaining from something we come to appreciate the real value or pleasure of it. It also focuses the mind on the things that really matter, on our spiritual life rather than physical preoccupations. Indeed the ritual of marking a cross on the forehead in ash reminds us of our own mortality, of human broken-ness; it reminds us that God is the source of our wholeness. God does not despise our frailty and shortcomings, drawing near to Him in our faith and our doubt is enough.

Alongside fasting Lent provides other opportunities for spiritual reflection, the nurturing of our relationships with God and one another. In recent years, sharing in Lent study or prayer groups has been an important dimension of this. It gives us the opportunity to come together, to focus on God's desire for our lives. This year we are invited to join with our brothers and sisters at St Francis de Sales to reflect

on the theme of reconciliation. This Lent we will also be supporting the Bishops' Lent Appeal for health care in southern Africa. This too focuses our minds on the way in which we use our own resources and live out the Gospel message. As we reflect on the purposes of God and His commandment to love one another, we will bear much fruit.

*Blessed is the man who meditates day and night on the law of the lord:  
he will yield fruit in due season. Psalm 1:3*

*Julie Gittoes*

## **TSUNAMI DISASTER IN SRI LANKA**

Anusha writes: We had just had a lovely, but rather busy, Christmas Day which included going to Church at 7.45 am! So on Boxing Day morning Pete, Dad and I had arranged to go for a swim and relax on the beach with a family friend. We were waiting for him to pick us up when we had a phone call saying there had been a tidal wave and the sea probably wasn't safe so we should stay at home. It wasn't until the afternoon that we turned on the television and realised the scale of what had happened. Colombo, where we were, had hardly been affected so we knew nothing. Once we had digested some of the information and seen the terrible pictures on the news we headed out to the shops to buy some provisions to hand in at collection points that had quickly been set up all around Colombo/ Dad was driving us around to various shops, delivering goods and transporting Mum to various meetings. Mum, naturally, put on her Christian Aid hat immediately and began work with the National Christian Council in Colombo, Christian Aid's partner. She was working all hours, what with meetings at 7.30 in the morning and conference calls and television interviews at midnight.

What follows are a few excerpts from various reports and newspaper articles written by her, explaining in more detail, the extent of the disaster.

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1*

"The tropical waters of this fabled paradise island lap its palm fringed shores. Yet in a mere 15 minutes on Sunday 26 December 2004 a calamity beyond imagination crashed into the lives of the island's coastal communities. Villagers, fishermen, tourists and local holiday makers alike experienced the terrifying strength of the tsunami which had its source off the north west coast of Sumatra.

The death toll in Sri Lanka now exceeds 20,000 with over a million people rendered homeless. It is feared that the number of deaths will increase due to the spread of disease caused by the lack of safe drinking water, sanitation and shelter.

In the midst of shock and fear Christian Aid's partner organisation, the National

Christian Council of Sri Lanka (NCCSL) bids us focus on the words of the psalmist - God is our refuge and strength.

Communities divided on the grounds of ethnicity and religion are working together to bring immediate relief to those in need throughout the country. Local churches are working with Buddhist temples, mosques and Hindu temples to co-ordinate the collection and distribution of relief items..

One young woman I met watched her two young sons of 5 and 7, her husband and her parents being sucked away by the wave before her eyes. She is numb with shock and is one of thousands who has suffered a similar fate.

The sacrificial service being rendered by Christian Aid partner organisations, countless individuals and groups is a sign of the very present help in trouble of which the psalmist speaks.”

“Years of working with the charity, Christian Aid, propelled me into autopilot mode. I was unable to sit and watch as my fellow Sri Lankans struggled to rescue the many coastal communities whose lives and livelihoods had been washed away in a mere 15 minutes. Even in the capital, the southern areas saw the tidal waters engulf coconut-thatched dwellings and destroy the livelihoods of many fisherfolk, washing up on the beaches the evidence of human life.

The courage and care exercised by so many during this tragedy has been an indication that despite our human vulnerability, transforming adversity into hope and hope into action is a real and deeply human trait.

Immediately after disaster struck I walked into the offices of the Nation Christian Council of Sri Lanka (NCCSL), a partner organisation of Christian Aid, to offer my services. An emergency task force meeting was already taking place, which I was invited to join. Through its local networks the NCCSL had already begun a relief operation in the affected areas and it is heartening to witness communities hitherto divided, putting prejudice aside and working to bring relief to those who have suffered and are in need. As always the most vulnerable are the poorest of the poor, especially children and the elderly. A Christian Aid supported partner, Thadaham, (which literally translates as “a place to quench one’s thirst”) based in the Batticaloa area in the Eastern province, stirred into action in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. “With the use of a tractor and truck bought with funds given by Christian Aid for earlier flood relief work, we were able to rescue and evacuate 1500 people and bring them to the safety of a refugee camp”, said Chandra, one of Thadaham’s co-ordinators.

Immediate relief is now in hand, due to the amazing generosity of people around the world. Unsurprisingly amid the panic and poverty, occasional looting and diversion of relief goods has happened. It is our responsibility as Sri Lankans to compel government and non-governmental agencies, along with the international community, to move from immediate relief to the greater task of rebuilding the lives of communities.

It will take a very long time for the scars to heal, but the focus has to be on sustained action so that Sri Lanka’s people can rebuild their lives, develop their communities and face the future with the full human dignity.”

## TSUNAMI DISASTER RELIEF APPEAL

Brian and Ramani were in Sri Lanka when the disaster happened, on the first leg of Brian's sabbatical. Anusha and Pete were visiting them for a few weeks. Our first contact from them came through rapidly as a text message to say that they were all safe. This was followed by e-mail messages telling us more about what was happening, including copies of messages being sent by Ramani to Christian Aid in London. The first e-mail asked for immediate local support, followed by continuing support for the relief programme through established aid agencies. The PCC Standing Committee met, for the first time ever, and decided on the action to be taken within the parish. We launched our parish appeal, to which the response has been magnificent. Within days the appeal had received over £10,000 in donations from the parish. Much of this had been given through Giftaid which enabled us to increase the donation by 28p for every pound given by UK tax payers. We sent £500 directly to Brian for immediate relief use. In ten days the appeal had topped £20,000 with money still coming in. This is being sent through Christian Aid to support its work in Sri Lanka, and as required in the longer term.

Thank you very much for your selfless generosity. The money is going, not only to immediate aid, but also to the continuing support and rebuilding of lives and of communities in some of those poorest parts of the world that have been devastated by this catastrophe of truly biblical proportions.

For millions of people this is a disaster that is for life, not just for Christmas. Please continue to remember them and those who work with them in the months and years to come.

*Rodney Taylor*

### **Prayer**

God who in creation formed wave and wind,  
oceans, land and all human life,  
we hold before you the pain of all whose lives are shattered by the  
terrifying power of this tsunami - be for them a refuge and strength in their trouble.

Awaken and encourage in us actions and words to support the suffering  
and all who seek to bring relief.

In the midst of trouble we praise you for the help which is being brought  
through Christian Aid's partners and so many others in Sri Lanka.

Each deed and word of care proclaims your love which no waters can quench and no  
floods drown.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who gave everything for the sake of human  
kind. AMEN

*Brian and Ramani Leathard*

## THIS MADE A DIFFERENCE -

### A NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT

Sometimes without realising it we can alter the whole course of our lives by one apparently insignificant action. Was it purely by chance that when I was in hospital around 1972, having nothing else to do, I read all the adverts in what was then the personal column of the Times? The one that caught my eye was asking for individuals to train as volunteers with an organisation called 'New Bridge' that visited and befriended people in prison. I followed this up and enjoyed the training. At that time I had been teaching for seven years and was a deputy head of an infants' school. Whilst I loved being a class teacher I did not want to become a head and felt I needed a change of career and something that was not child-centred. However, I had no degree and felt unqualified for anything else. I thought the voluntary work would at least widen my horizons.

At the AGM of New Bridge I met a man who was a probation officer in a prison. He introduced me to my first 'client' who was coming towards the end of a sentence and who had no friends or family. I visited and wrote to him until his release and then helped him find accommodation and employment. I became more and more interested in working with offenders and my friend who worked at the prison suggested I apply for the Home Office course in probation training which existed in those days for mature students. With his encouragement I was successful. There followed over twenty years of a most fulfilling and fascinating career, all thanks to my picking up that particular newspaper. As I met some of my dearest friends in the course of that work, I have even more to be grateful for. I would never have met them had it not been for the Times. Added to which my first boss used to live in Hampton Hill of which I had never heard. On visiting her I discovered the park, the pool etc. and decided Notting Hill could not compete . . . . . so I moved here. Was my seeing that advert mere chance or part of a greater scheme? I wish I knew.

*Marion Dewey*

If you have had a life-changing experience, please do tell us about it, be it serious or frivolous, a holiday, a book, a meeting with a friend, we shall find it interesting and worth a mention in the Spire.

## Council of Christians and Jews "Festival of Foods" meeting

Our hostess for the evening was Phyllis Conway. Of course the Jewish Sabbath (or Sabbat) is Saturday and Phyllis took us through a typical week beginning on Friday night. This is when 'meat' dishes are served e.g. liver pate with onion, chicken soup and other meats would be typical. Orthodox Jews do not mix 'meat' with 'dairy' dishes at the same sitting. In fact in such households, separate utensils and, where affordable, even different dishwashers are reserved for the two categories of food, for their preparation and consumption. Typically on a Sabbath evening wine and cake would be served - fortunately there's no definitive rules about wine! Also fish can be combined with 'meat' or 'dairy'. But no shell fish is ever entertained. Phyllis then focussed on the Jewish festivals and the special foods that are prepared to commemorate them.

Purim is when Queen Ester turned the tables on the evil traitor Haman who had been plotting to overthrow her husband King Achashverosh. To recognise this event, a sweetish bread with dough made with poppy seeds and honey is served. Four weeks later, Pesach (Passover) starts commemorating and celebrating the exodus of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery. One must not eat anything leavened the week before so *Matzo* is taken i.e. flat, unleavened bread which must be cooked for 18 mins or less! This reminds Jews that Hebrew slaves had to flee Egypt so quickly that their baking bread did not have time to rise. During Passover the *Seder* table holds 5 foods that symbolically tell the story of Passover: *Betzah*, a baked egg with a twofold meaning: first, it symbolises one of the Passover sacrifices that were brought as an offering to the Holy Temple, second, it is a symbol of the wholeness and continuity of life. *Karpas*, a green vegetable, usually parsley or celery that represents springtime and renewal. From the Seder, the *karpas* is dipped into salt water (symbolic of the tears which the Hebrew slaves shed) and eaten; *Zaro'a*, a roasted shank bone which symbolises the lamb that was sacrificed as the Passover offering; *Maror*, (usually horseradish), is a reminder of the bitterness of Egyptian slavery; *Charoset*, a mixture of apples, nuts or dates, and wine which represent the mortar with which the Hebrew slaves were forced to make bricks. Phyllis offered us tastings of most of these.

On Shavuoth, a two day festival, seven Sabbaths later, dairy dishes, are eaten. Remembering the time in the wilderness when milk turned sour, typically cheese buns, cakes with raisins and Blinitz (pancakes) are served. The synagogue is highly decorated with flowers for this occasion.

The festival of Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year in September or early October. It begins a ten-day period called Aseret Y'may T'shuvah, the Ten Days of Repentance, ending in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Rosh Hashabah often begins with a festive meal at home with family and friends. the *challah* that is eaten with the meal is baked in a round shape to resemble a crown, acknowledging God as King. It is customary to eat apples dipped in honey at the beginning of the meal, symbolizing the hope for a sweet New Year. Other

dishes are Apple Strudel and Honeycake, both of which were for tasting. For savoury, carrot stew (and honey!) with meat and potato are offered.

Yom Kippur, ten days after Rosh Hashanah, is when one prepares for repentance. On the eve of Yom Kippur you have a big meal. For those who are going to fast, this is the last food until night falls the next day. Soup with meat-filled pastry triangles are included then no food or water for 25 hours!

Sukkot is a pilgrimage festival and lasts seven days. Shemini Atzeret follows on the eighth day and Simhat Torah on the ninth. Liberal Jews combine these and celebrate both on the eighth day. This holiday reminds Jews of their ancestors travelling through the desert for forty years and whenever they needed to rest they built themselves temporary huts of branches and animal skins called Sukkots. Today food is served on laurel leaves on trays to recall that period.

Finally in December comes the festival of Chanukah which celebrates the victory of the Maccabees over the forces of Antiochus and the recapture of the Temple after a three-year battle. When the Maccabees rededicated the Temple they only had one jar of oil for lighting the menorah. This only had enough oil in it to last for one night but a miracle happened, the oil lasted for eight days, the time it took to purify new oil for the Temple's needs.

Chanukah is celebrated by lighting candles on a Chanukiyah over eight days. During this time, gifts are exchanged, for Jewish children this a bit like Christmas. Deep fried food like doughnuts and potato latka cakes are served.

Thank you very much, Phyllis!

*Richard Melville*

St Francis de Sales Roman Catholic Church  
Hampton Hill

### **'RECONCILIATION'**

A LENTEN SEASON OF ECUMENICAL PRAYER  
AND DISCUSSION GROUPS

We invite members of local Christian Communities to join us

from 8<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY TO 18<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2005

- ◆ 6 weekly meetings in home-based groups of 6-12
- ◆ mornings or evenings Monday-Friday
- ◆ An opportunity to explore our common Christian heritage
- ◆ Structured programme

Further details from Rev Julie Gittoes

## **‘I was sick and you took care of me’**

This Lent parishes throughout the London Diocese are raising money for health care projects across Southern Africa. The amount raised will be put to good use on projects supported by the following church agencies - Christian Aid, the Mothers' Union, CMS, USPG and Crosslinks.

Coming so soon in the wake of the tsunami disaster may be considered unfortunate. But is it? In early January Tony Blair rightly said the tsunami tragedy was brought about "through the force of nature", but the "preventable disaster" of Africa is "through the failure of man" - adding that "there is the equivalent of a man-made preventable tsunami every week in Africa".

### **Why health care?**

Health care is an area where the church and its agencies can be of great help and influence.

### **Why Africa?**

Help for Africa is a top priority for our Government in 2005 while it holds the Presidency of both the G8 leading industrialised nations and the European Union - the latter in the second half of the year. The government appointed *Commission for Africa* will report back in April.

### **Why southern Africa?**

A crisis in health provision exists across the whole of southern Africa, with HIV/AIDS, malaria, TB and preventable illnesses taking thousands of lives daily. Health problems in Mozambique and Angola (London's link countries) are increased by cross border migration and returning refugees, so it is right and proper that our appeal supports projects across southern Africa.

### **Why an appeal?**

Many London parishioners are advocates for the poorest countries, urging our government to take action on debt cancellation, unfair trade rules and increased overseas aid. This year their call for action on these inter-related issues is united in a call to *Make Poverty History*.

As well as asking politicians to act, we need to take action. The 2005 Bishops' Lent Appeal for health care project in southern Africa shows the Diocese of London responding to one of the critical issues of our time.

### **What can I do?**

Look out for news of any fundraising initiative in the parish and support it. Think about what you could do, perhaps among work colleagues. Lent is after all a time of self-denial and it's surprising how quickly small amounts build up.

Pew leaflets, prayer cards and Gift Aid envelopes will be available in church throughout Lent to help each of us make our personal offering. The preferred option is for all donations to be handed in at church (using Gift Aid whenever possible) with cheques made payable to **PCC of St James Church (Lent Appeal)**.



Amongst our invalids, Monica Heaford and Marjorie Smee are both now recovering at home and, happily, both making good progress. Eve Stock is still in Kingston Hospital where she is being well looked after following a recent illness.

On another page there are details of this year's Lent groups - we have been invited to join, with other churches, our friends at St Francis de Sales for prayer and discussion. You will be most welcome - see details in the church.

Dick and Mary Wilde are enjoying a holiday in Australia where they are visiting their daughter and her family.

Do go and look at the garden newly planted at the east end of church - you'll be pleasantly surprised.

On January 29<sup>th</sup> a group shared in the quiet day with John Skinner and spent a few hours in quiet and reflection - a very welcome interlude of peace and prayer.

Finally, our thoughts and prayers are with Brian and Ramani at this time of great sadness; we are grateful that they are both safe and that they have been able to do so much relief work. They have now moved to New Zealand to continue Brian's sabbatical - they will soon return to Sri Lanka for another visit. We shall see them again with us at St James's in March.

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## OUR DOORS ARE OPEN

*When are we really opening our doors? When are we going to be shot of all these builders' materials? When are the builders going to turn up and do some work? Why did they get it wrong in the first place? What did the architects do about it? When will we have our car park back? When will we be able to see through to the new 'lawn'? Is anybody doing anything about it? Please, what is happening?*

The answer is 'yes', things are happening. But the whole process has been unbelievably difficult and required a lot of negotiation, led by the steering group. We have continued to fight rising costs, and to minimise disruption and delay. Building is expected to begin at the end of February. We are holding both the builder and the architect to this. I am writing this in early January, but by the time you read it, much building may have been done. So, if you want a progress report on how the West Porch rebuilding is getting on, and when we'll open our doors, go and have a look! We are opening our doors, our new glass doors, so that all can see into the church at any time of day or night from St James's Road. But remember our other doors are open now. St James's is alive, St James's is working, and our doors are open virtually daily throughout the week and every Sunday.

Spread the word; our doors are open now.

Rodney Taylor

## FROM THE DECEMBER REGISTERS

### FUNERALS

6	Mrs Jennifer Lloyd, Hampton Hill	63
13	Mrs Stella Walker, Sunbury	82
29	Mr Jeffrey Thomas Neesham, Hampton Hill	53

### DATES TO NOTE: February

2	Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas)
6	<b>Sunday next before Lent</b>
9	<b>Ash Wednesday</b>
13	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent</b>
20	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent</b>
27	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent</b>

## ASH WEDNESDAY

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> February, a day of penitence and fasting. The distinctive element of this service is the marking on each person's forehead of a cross in ash, made from the embers of last year's palm crosses, with the humbling words:

*Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*

*Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.*

There will be a Eucharist at 8 pm on Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> February.

All are welcome.

Details of other services during Lent, Holy Week and Easter can be found on the enclosed card.

### Pax

All that matters is to be at one with the living God,  
to be a creature in the house of the God of life.

Like a cat asleep on a chair, at peace, in peace  
and at one with the master of the house, with the mistress,  
at home, at home in the house of the living,  
sleeping on the hearth, and yawning by the fire.

Sleeping on the hearth of the living world,  
yawning at home before the fire of life  
Feeling the presence of the living God  
like a great reassurance  
a deep calm in the heart  
a presence  
as of a master sitting at the board  
in his own great being, in the house of life.

*D.H. Lawrence*