

So the gloves are off. The phoney war is over, party political sleeves are being rolled up and you and I will be bombarded with argument, information, rhetoric and spin to encourage us to place our votes in a particular box on Thursday 5th May. But long before the General Election was declared for 5th May, the church already had the date marked down as Ascension Day. I think the two are connected, connected quite deeply. Ascension Day marks the end of Eastertide. Just as Lent endured for 40 days (recalling the 40 days of Christ in the wilderness and the 40 years of the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai) so Eastertide lasts for 40 days of celebration and our final alleluias are uttered on Ascension Day when the church celebrates her conviction that the risen Christ ascends to fill the universe with the truth of his undying love. Ascension Day is not so much about vertical movement, and is certainly not some quaint or anachronistic celebration of Jesus, rocket-like, shooting off into the heavens, but rather Ascension Day is about the filling of our worlds with the love of God. I use the word worlds advisedly. For Ascension Day reminds us that Christ fills all those overlapping parts of our humanity, our personal world, our family world, our work world, our leisure world, our geographical world. Hence the reason that I believe it is a happy coincidence that the General Election day falls on Ascension Day. For it we are truly committed in believing that our faith in the risen Christ affects every part of our living then it must affect the way in which we live together in our community and constituency, in our country and across the globe. The Archbishop of Canterbury was surely right in his open letter to the leaders of the political parties in asking that we consider in our voting the big issues of the future of our world, of the way in which we treat the vulnerable and poor, in abandoning the politics of fear and hatred and seeking to make a substantial and sustainable difference to our global village. So I would certainly urge you to vote responsibly and prayerfully, considering what your cross on the ballot paper may do for not only yourself but for our community, our country and our globe. And perhaps it is a good sign that we use a cross on the ballot paper for it is, of course, mirroring a cross which each of us receives on our head in baptism, that there should be integrity between our faith in the crucified and risen Christ and the way we exercise our responsibility of living in a community by voting not out of habit or fear but out of a conviction guided by prayer, worship and service. Of course, General Election day being on Ascension Day also has the advantage that, if you live within the Hampton Hill ward, you will be voting in our church hall. So why not come and vote by 7.45pm and simply come into church for the celebration of parish communion at 8.00pm which will be followed by a party and fireworks in the vicarage garden marking our culmination of alleluias at the end of Eastertide and our conviction that it is right to celebrate the universal love of God just as the wine fills our glasses and the fireworks fill the sky with their light? We look forward to seeing you going into the hall to vote, coming into church to pray and into the vicarage garden to celebrate.

Brian Leathard



**St James's
Young Musicians' Recital
Sunday 8 May, 3pm
at St James's Church**



Following the success of our previous recital in October, which was hugely enjoyed by audience and participants, we have decided to make this a twice yearly event. We have a great number of talented children locally who are very enthusiastic to get together for a few rehearsals and then perform the concert. St James's is currently host to a mini-conservatoire as our ensembles now include an expanded Band which is proving a great generation equaliser as families are able to play together and the younger are usually far more practised than their elders. The Children's Choir goes from strength to strength and as we have far more junior-aged members we are beginning to tackle more exciting songs in 2 or 3 parts. The Recorder Consort led by Jackie Allen will perform for the second time and this group enables children who have stopped formal lessons to continue playing and enjoy the challenge of playing some 4 part recorder repertoire. Our String Ensemble will be a little bigger this year and we've got some fun new music to try. In addition, due to the number of proficient flautists in the neighbourhood, we are really looking forward to the debut of our latest group, the Flute Choir, under Frances Beaumont's leadership. There will also be several brave soloists, for whom this is a lovely opportunity to share the fruits of all their practice.

So do put this date in your diary, come and support our young musicians, it's great fun and you can enjoy a delicious afternoon tea afterwards!

Entry by donation



**Reflections on the Lenten Season of
Ecumenical Faith Sharing Groups**

For us in St Francis de Sales parish this was the fourth season in a Renewal programme, At Your Word, Lord, which started in Advent 2003. In Seasons I and II we explored and renewed our understanding of our faith, and in Season III, 'Evangelisation', we were challenged to share our faith with the wider community, starting to bring God to others and encouraging them to accept the gift of faith. This led us to Season IV, 'Reconciliation, Promoting deeper unity', where we invited our friends from other Christian Churches in the area to join our faith sharing groups

for the six weeks of Lent. The response to this invitation was wonderful and with 105 people from our own congregation and 50 from the other Christian churches we were able to form 16 groups.

We had hoped that all groups would contain a mixture of people from the different Christian communities in the area, but eventually the content of the groups was dictated mainly by the availability of each individual. Most of the original 11 groups from our own parish were augmented by some members of other churches, and 5 new groups were formed which contained a cross section of people from the participating churches.

So at the beginning of Lent we started on our six week pilgrimage, our journey towards a deeper understanding of each other and of the gifts which each Church has to bring to the fullness of unity we are ultimately seeking. During this time we were challenged to recognise the divisions which we have generated as individuals, communities and churches, to acknowledge these in a spirit of reconciliation, and to begin the process of working towards the unity to which Christ calls us.

We were equipped with a handbook for the season which guided us each week through a balance of prayer, describing our own experience, exploring Scripture, reflecting, sharing, and talking about how we are living our faith. I was fortunate enough to be involved with several groups during the season, either regularly or standing in for other leaders, and I found that the material was considered generally to be excellent: beautifully laid out, clear, thought provoking, sometimes challenging, but always supportive of our efforts to explain our beliefs and to reach out towards each other.

I must admit that, having never taken part in any ecumenical sharing before, I was little anxious about leading a group whose members were mainly from other Christian communities. At our first meeting I asked if people had been involved in ecumenical faith sharing before, at which point everyone except the Catholics nodded! This did not help my confidence at all, but my fears were unfounded. By the end of that first session we were very comfortable with each other. This spirit of friendliness and ease continued and grew through the six weeks, and was the experience of other groups as well. As Catholics we were grateful for the generous spirit in which our fellow Christians had joined us, while they in their turn were happy to have the opportunity.

In Week 1 we considered 'What Christians have in Common'. Our discussions covered many aspects of our faith lives. We were able to explain something of our tradition, and we had a lot of questions for each other! We found that we had a lot in common, both in our approach, our traditions, and our view of our responsibilities as Christians.

Week 2 took us on to 'Repentance'. Recognising that we are all firm in our own beliefs and proud of our histories, we considered how difficult it might be to come to full unity within a common Christianity. We discovered that we had all had to discard some things already which were originally precious to us, for instance the Latin mass for Catholics, the King James version of the Bible for Anglicans. We discussed how much easier it is to understand God's word when it is in simple

language, so we saw that even difficult change may be worth it in the long run. We recognised that although we might always look back with love and perhaps a little regret, this did not stop us from accepting productive change and looking forward with hope.

Unfortunately I was away during Week 3, 'Respect for all Peoples', so missed this session. We were asked that week to look beyond our Christian horizon and to be open to a better and more informed understanding of the beliefs of people of all faiths. I think I was not alone in wishing we had had more time to concentrate on getting to know more about our different traditions and to discuss how we might become closer, but from this point we moved on to consider our common responsibilities as Christians, which after all gives our hopes for unity purpose.

Week 4 took us to 'Being freed from that which divides us'. We were asked to recognise the call to love all people regardless of their different faiths, and to reflect on the challenge of overcoming the prejudices and insecurities which divide us from people who follow other faiths. This led us to consider the power of love in our world, how Jesus' message of love teaches us the value and worth of all, and how difficult it is to follow that teaching. We agreed that our own actions could teach people quite a lot about the Christian way of life.

In Week 5 we considered 'God's presence in the Human Family'. We were asked to think about people in today's world who are made to feel like outcasts, to reflect on our response to Christ's challenge to see the world with new sight, and to hear the call of those in need. We considered many categories of people who might be outcasts, e.g. refugees, the old, the mentally or physically infirm, the poor, the disadvantaged, but eventually agreed that anyone who is not valued by society, because they are considered to have nothing to offer, is in effect an outcast. We had a long discussion about the difficulty of recognising the value of human suffering. We also discussed with some honesty how the poor, strangers and outcasts might make us feel, whether these feelings were valid, and what we might do to change. We recognised how our own prejudices and biases could prevent us from recognising the Messiah as he walks in our midst.

Finally in Week 6 our subject was the 'Uniqueness of Jesus'. We were asked in this final session to acknowledge Jesus as the turning point in human history, and to see that in him we can reach out and walk with all fellow Christians. We discussed why Jesus was unique in comparison to other great prophets or leaders, and shared our own experiences of recognising Jesus as Lord, and what effect this had had on our lives and beliefs. We also shared our positive feelings about being part of an ecumenical group.

It has not been possible in these notes to cover adequately the full extent of our faith sharing experience. I have not mentioned the prayers we shared, the gospel readings we listened to, the reflections which helped us to relate the gospel message to our own lives, the personal stories we shared, or the many laughs! I hope that I have given you at least a taste of how we shared our faith and what a heart-warming experience it was.

Mary Butlin

This Made a Difference

Seven years ago, just after finishing our mid-morning coffee, Bill, my husband of fifty years, said 'I feel odd again'. Earlier, while washing up, he had felt odd, but nothing specific and it passed. He went off to buy the paper as usual. Now, having finished his coffee, the feeling was back. Together, we tried to identify what was wrong; he adamantly refused to bother the doctor about something so trivial. Suddenly, he said 'I must get some air, I feel scared'. I hugged him, said to try not to be scared, I would phone the doctor. As I lifted the phone, Bill's faint, amazed voice called 'Babs', then came a crash. I rushed to the kitchen and found he had opened the back door a few inches, then crashed to the floor. I knew he was dead; he had no pulse. I kissed him, told him I loved him, phoned for an ambulance and gave him resuscitation.

The ambulance arrived ten minutes later. Routines were followed, we were taken to West Middlesex Hospital; death was pronounced. Two kind nurses sat with me in a private room, while I waited for family to arrive. I asked to be on my own. When they had gone, I curled into a foetal position on the sofa and willed myself to dream so I could wake up but once my eyes were closed, I knew this was the wrong way round and sat up briskly. When I got home, I went into our summer house and 'shrieked'. This must be keening.

Two of my children accompanied me to Holmes & Daughters (Bill would have called them Homes & Gardens) to arrange the funeral. I ordered the cheapest coffin and minimum embalming, saying I didn't want Bill looking better dead than alive. We had lived under St James's spire for decades and always said we would like some sort of service there, in spite of being atheists. Brian was splendid, allowing my children to arrange everything. Bill, unlike me, had always been *something* of a God seeker, so wasn't being intrusive. . . .

Now, at last, I come to my '*this made a difference*' bit. It was 'The Body'. My two granddaughters in Ireland were aghast when I said they would see their granddad's body at the funeral parlour. 'Why not at the house' they said. I explained that this wasn't done here, though it was the case in the North when I was a child. Then I thought well, why not. My daughter-in-law feared this might be traumatic for their four young children so I compromised and arranged to have the body in the summer house at the bottom of the garden, remembering how useful this bolt-hole had been for me on that horrible, horrible day.

I arranged for the funeral directors to bring Bill's body home for a day and night before the funeral. They were so helpful; on arrival, my sons and grandsons practised carrying the coffin in the garden. Once installed in the summer house, family who were present gathered around the coffin. The first to speak was my 14 year old grandson. 'Granddad looks as if he has his head on someone's knickers' We burst into comforting laughter 'Well he wouldn't have minded that' I added, but went and found a red silk scarf to cover the satin rosebuds Separately, we each crept out there and spent time with the body. My younger son,

who leans towards Buddhism, placed fruit and water on a table next to Bill. Later, my elder son told me he had ranted and railed at Bill for not taking medication for raised blood pressure. I had sat and held Bill's hand between mine until it had warmed up; this man had given me so much.

A dead body produces a silence and stillness all its own. We must give off a lot of noise, movement, heat, because the contrast is awesome. To experience the stillness, for me, emphasised the life lost. This direct contrast seemed to make death a little more real; it is so incomprehensible. I had always believed that once life had left a body, it was a mere shell, without an identity, not needed. I now know better. I had arranged to leave my body to a medical school but my family must decide; it's their funeral, not mine. . . . I may even tear up the consent form . . .

Barbara Withers

**THIS IS HOW YOUR DONATION CAN
MAKE A DIFFERENCE THIS
CHRISTIAN AID WEEK 15 - 22 MAY**

Christian Aid
We believe in life before death

£5 buys five chickens, helping to restore a family's livelihood in Mozambique

£6 maintains one girl at the Bridge School in India for a month, giving her a chance of education that otherwise would not be available

£66 will pay for the internet connection for a computer school for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS in the Democratic Republic of Congo. £11 will buy the network card to access the internet, so students can train in computer programming

£112 buys a water tank for a Peruvian village. This means that the villagers can get water without having to walk to the nearest stream which could be over 2km away.

When making your donation don't forget about Gift Aid, the government scheme that allows Christian Aid to claim back the tax paid on any donation made by a UK taxpayer. If you are a UK taxpayer then all you need to do is fill in the declaration on the red CAW envelope and your gift is worth 28 per cent more to Christian Aid. If everyone does this it will raise at least an extra £1 million for the world's poorest communities.

**Diocese of London Lent Appeal 2005
for health care projects across southern Africa**

Many thanks to all who have contributed to this appeal, including the Guides. In early April, the amount raised by St James was about £2600, with money still coming in. The Spire will report St James' final contribution once it is known and news of the total raised across the diocese, as soon as that information is available.



AIM HIGH



That's what I do in my work as a singing teacher. There is naturally no point in aiming high if the necessary work hasn't been done; that would be day dreaming. My first task with a new young boy is to help him to find out the satisfaction there is in hard work properly directed. This isn't easy in today's world, where the quick fix is the norm; absent too often is any sense of self discipline; these faults are soon corrected if the young person has an aim, enjoys singing, and enjoys his lessons. In singing, as in everything else, each student is an individual; it would be pointless trying to fit people into the teacher's preconceived plan. 'Aim high' isn't an abstract notion - each pupil strives his best; if he works hard and enjoys his singing, then there is no 'failure'.

With talented pupils one would be giving them a stone instead of bread, if they were not guided and encouraged to do their utmost.

My gifted boy pupils have sung as soloists, in operas which have such roles, at Covent Garden, The Coliseum, Glyndebourne, to name the most well-known. Benjamin Britten's opera, 'The Turn of the Screw' casts the boy 'Miles' in a central role, and makes great demands on him - learning a long part, singing and acting with an orchestra, following the conductor with complete precision, facing an audience of up to 2000.

This is a lot to expect of a boy who may only be ten years old. A gifted, well-trained young singer has a wonderful time on tour in such a part. One of my boys has just returned from Kiev, where he sang this part to great acclaim, featured in Ukrainian newspapers and on television.

The law states that there must at all times be a qualified chaperone with the boy; if he is absent from school for any length of time, then he must have a qualified tutor. Look to the stars, aim high! Not just in singing - what of the local Shooting Star Hospice for children? If the founder, Kate Turner, hadn't aimed high, it wouldn't have happened. There'll always be those who say 'It can't be done'. Ignore them, and enjoy life!

Stuart Ward

Brian and Ramani

Invite you to join an exciting journey to Sri Lanka
20 - 29 October 2005

Cost £980 incl. taxes, flights, half-board, transport, entrance fees

Please contact Ramani on rlathard@hotmail.com

Tel: 020 8979 2069

Open to all - tell your friends!

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

As I write this, the funeral of Pope John Paul II has yet to be held, and a new pope has yet to be elected. This election, in a world perspective, is as important as the election of any political leader. I believe this is a comment with which any fair-minded non-Christian would agree; though many might regret its truth. The potential power of the papacy throughout the world has been demonstrated by the late pope. His personal authority and charisma has influenced world affairs dramatically. The puzzle to anyone who does not share fully in his convictions, is how a man of such clear wisdom and generosity could inspire so many with his sincerity and spirituality, and yet from a standpoint of simple humanity show such inflexibility.

In 1958 Angelo Roncalli, a previously undistinguished cardinal, was elected as Pope John XXIII after a protracted electoral procedure. Perhaps it is a caricature of the proceedings by saying it was almost an election of desperation. There followed a miracle. John XXIII, in the conference Vatican II, showed his willingness to listen to the insights of junior priests and even the laity. To an outsider the Roman Catholic church became an institution which was opening its doors in welcome. A new era was beginning. It ended with John's death in 1963. We were back to the old rule book, underlined by the election of Karol Wojtyla as John Paul II in 1978. The election of the new pope is desperately important. Will he insist we fight HIV with homilies or allow real weapons? Will Catholic priests be condemned to celibacy forever? Will women be treated as equals? Will the Catholic hierarchy listen with understanding to the voices of its congregation? Will there be another miracle?

RWW

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY

TRADE JUSTICE - DROP THE DEBT - MORE AND BETTER AID

Edinburgh - 2nd July 2005

"I call upon all people to come out in large numbers to ask their leaders to listen to the voices from the South, especially on debt, trade and aid. The answer doesn't lie anywhere else but with us, the people of the world."

Charity Musamba from Jubilee Zambia, speaking in Twickenham last October.

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY wants thousands of campaigners and members of the public to be in Edinburgh on Saturday 2 July. Can you be there? We need to show the Prime Minister and his fellow G8 leaders that the UK public cares enough about global poverty and injustice to come in person to Edinburgh - just as they did for Jubilee 2000 at the Birmingham G8 in 1998.

Website www.makepovertyhistory.org has some transport and accommodation options.. If you can't be there in person please keep the day in your prayers.



The Churchyard is looking beautiful at the moment with many spring flowers to be seen. The plants by the east end of the church are also becoming well-established. However, would dog-walkers **PLEASE** clean up after their pets so that the area remains pleasant for all to use.

We are sad to learn that Marcela den Boers, a former organist at St James's, is very ill in Canada. Please remember her and her family in your prayers.

The refurbished windows in the south aisle are looking splendid and work will begin shortly on other windows.

Congratulations to Michael Bunce and to Jean Western who recently celebrated their 70th and 88th birthdays respectively.

We send our best wishes to all our young people who will be taking examinations during May and June.

We are looking forward to Sunday 8th May when there will be another recital by our young people at 3pm (more details elsewhere in the magazine) and the following day we have our second tea party for visitors and visitees.

IN MEMORIAM

Walter Shell, one of Hampton Hill's most senior residents, who died recently, will be much missed by a very wide spectrum of people. Walter had lived in Burtons Road, with Violet, since the 1940s and was known to so many different sections of our community. He was the classic post-war insurance man who pedalled miles to collect a penny here, a tuppence there. He was a keen allotment holder and steered the members of the Bushy Park allotments for many years. He was a governor at Hampton Hill Junior School, where he was very involved in music, in listening to children read and acting in many ways as a surrogate grandfather - or even great-grandfather - to generations of children. Perhaps more than anything his amazing bicycle riding will be a feature missing from our streets. All who knew Walter admired him as a man of absolute integrity and utter honesty, a man who did what he said and in whom what you saw was what you got. He sorely missed Violet in the last five years and his own life, full and long as it was, brought joy, strength and comfort to many hundreds of other people. Whether with 7-year-olds or with 77-year-olds, Walter had a great knack of conversation and encouragement. If he didn't know the answer he knew where he might be able to find it. He was certainly never short of an encouraging remark or a smile or a hand on the shoulder. We thank God for Walter's long and full life and shall miss him greatly.

FROM THE SEPTEMBER REGISTERS

BAPTISMS

- 6 Amelia Grace Saul, Hampton
Miles Alexander Groizard, Hampton Hill
- 20 Alanna Elizabeth O'Reilly
Paige Keeley Horne
Justin Carl Horne
Daniel Snelling

WEDDINGS

- 27 Damian Russell Smith and Kirsten Elizabeth Butler

FUNERALS

- 4 Beryl Jones 81
- 18 John Richard Atkins 59

DATES TO NOTE IN MAY

- 1 **6th Sunday of Easter**
- 2 St Philip and St James, apostles, transferred
Bank Holiday
- 3 Rogation Day
- 4 English saints and martyrs of the Reformation era
- 5 **ASCENSION DAY 20.00 Parish Communion followed by fireworks and celebration**
- 8 **7th Sunday of Easter**
- 14 Matthias the apostle
- 15 **Pentecost and Sunday in Christian Aid Week**
- 19 Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury, 988
- 20 Alcuin of York, deacon and abbot of Tours, 804
- 22 **Trinity Sunday**
- 24 John and Charles Wesley, priests, poets and pastors
- 25 The Venerable Bede, monk, scholar and historian
- 26 Day of thanksgiving for Holy Communion (corpus Christi)
- 29 **First Sunday after Trinity**
- 31 Visit of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Elizabeth