

ST. MARY OF NAZARETH/ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI – WEST WICKHAM

19th November 2023: Second Sunday before Advent

Hazel writes:

Christmas is coming and this week we have opportunities to engage with our **community** on Friday 24th at the **West Wickham Christmas Lights Switch-on**, when St Francis' Church will be open from 3.30pm to 6.30pm, and at the **St Mary's Christmas Market** on Saturday 25th from 10.30am to 2.30pm. Please do support both these events by coming yourself and/or telling others about them.

This week we have Holy Communion services at 8am and 9.15am in St Mary's Church and at 10.45am in St Francis' Church.

Next **Sunday 26th November**, we will have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Francis' Church, at 9.15am in St Mary's Church and at 10.45am in St Francis' Church.

We meet to **pray for growth of the Church** on Tuesday mornings between 10-11am at 130, The Avenue. Please contact Jean Pogose for more information: (dennis.pogose@ntlworld.com or 8289-5996).

Morning Prayer is held each week in St Francis' Church on Wednesday morning at 9.30am, followed by the church being **open for private prayer** from 10.30-11.30am. It is also held in St Mary's Church on Thursday morning at 9am.

Resources and updates for the week ahead – Each week our service is livestreamed on YouTube at 10am or before. All other files for this week have been combined and included in this pew sheet which will be sent on paper to those who have told us that they are not on-line.

We have a **women's event** on **Tuesday 21st November at 8pm** in St Francis' Church. We will be joined by Jane Coia who will have some wonderful jams and chutneys available to taste (with cheese and biscuits) and to purchase ready for Christmas. Lyn Eustace will be talking about Memory Box - a very successful regular group that meets locally for those suffering from memory loss and their carers. Come on your own or with a friend and enjoy some refreshment and fellowship with others.

If you are interested and can help in any way at all for **St. Mary's Christmas Market**, please contact Gifty: gifty@nortey.com. We still need the following donations which will be very much appreciated.

- Good quality bric-a-brac

- Alcoholic and Non-alcoholic bottles
- Bottles for the Wines stall
- Chocolate
- Packets of sweets
- Books
- Good quality toys
- Gifts, boxed toiletries, etc for Annie's Bazaar
- Home-made cakes, biscuits, jams, marmalades, pickles.

If anyone would like to place an order for **an advent ring**, please contact Merri Womack on 020 8777 8772.

Please sign up on the lists in the vestibule at St Mary's where you can help with this event and **advertise it** as much as possible by handing out the small flyers that are available in both churches.

Advent Calendars available. As well as being made from FAIRTRADE chocolate, they include a colourful book telling the Christmas Story. They're aimed at primary aged children, but I know from personal experience that teenagers feel neglected if they don't get one – I give them to grandchildren and great nephews and nieces. If you're interested, let me know. They cost £4.50 each. Richard Ford (richard.ford73@gmail.com; 020 8289 2432)

Our **Christmas publicity** has been finalised and is ready to print. If you would like to deliver cards in your locality, please let Hazel (hazelos58@gmail.com or 8777 5034) know how many copies you'll need and which roads you'll be covering.

Matchbox Theatre are performing The Shakespeare Codex (Nov 30th - Dec 2nd), a play by Terry Pratchett, including satire, slapstick and philosophy. It is a fast-paced romp about working together to stop humanity's enslavement and to inspire 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. You can book on-line through <https://ticketsource.co.uk/the-matchbox-theatre>, or you can telephone the box office on 0845 6804568.

Donations of biscuits and mince pies are gratefully received for the **Big Christmas Sing** which will take place on Saturday 2nd December. If you would like to help with refreshments on the day that would also be very welcome. Lists are in both churches for people to note their donation or intention to volunteer. There is a box for the donations. If you would prefer to donate money, then please give this to Gill Kehoe at St Francis' or Kay Mussard at St Mary's.

The **Guild of Church Flower Arrangers** have their next demonstration locally on Monday 4th December at West Wickham & Shirley Baptist church at 2 p.m. with entry £5. All are welcome.

We are holding a **Community Christmas Tree Festival** at St Francis Church, where we will have lots of trees to view, refreshments to enjoy and festive music to listen to. We will be raising money for Welcare in Bromley, a charity that provides practical and emotional support and advice to families in need. The church will be open at the following times:

- Saturday 9 December – 10.00am – 1.00pm
- Sunday 10 December – 12.00noon – 3.00pm
- Wednesday 13 December – 10.30am – 1.00pm
- Friday 15 December – 10.00am – 1.00pm
- Saturday 16 December (with Treasure Hunt) – 10.00am – 1.00pm

If you are able to help with being there as a volunteer at any of these times, please sign up on the sheet at the back of St Francis' Church

St. Mary's Christmas Parish Lunch is on **Wednesday 13th December** at 12.30pm in St. Mary's Hall. The cost is £10 but places must be booked through Beryl Bolton on 0208 289 8097 or berylbolton@hotmail.com by 8th December. There will be a sing-along of Christmas songs and carols after the lunch.

St Francis' Community Christmas Lunch is on **Sunday 17th December** at 12.30pm in St Francis' Church Hall. A three course Christmas lunch for £12.00 per person. If you wish to attend, please contact Barbara Goodchild on 0208 777 8782 with payment by Monday 11th December.

Two very good condition two-seater settees in grey are available for no charge (but would need to collect from an address in Shirley). If you know someone who would appreciate these, please contact Wendy Carvalho on 020 8777 7888.

It is time for the **St Francis Children's Society Boxes** to be brought into church for opening. I can arrange to open the boxes at home if this is more convenient. With many thanks, Christine Morton (020 8777 9213).

Recently we blessed the refurbished Choir Vestry at St Francis' Church and hope that it will be well used for meetings, prayer groups and other small gatherings. We would like to add a table into the space which can be used in a meeting, but which can be put to one side when the room needs to revert to being a choir vestry. Ideally a gate-leg table

that folds down. If you, or someone you know, has one of these that they are looking to donate or sell, please contact Barbara Goodchild (020 8777 8782 or goodchild854@gmail.com). Many thanks.

Some of you will know of **Terry Leggatt**, who had escorted visits to St Francis' from Bethlem Royal Hospital before he returned to prison in late 2019. He is now able to prepare for a return to living in the community, but this will be a long process. One of the things that would help him is writing to people of faith who are fully engaged with the community and dealing with transport, shopping, friendships and family relationships. If you'd like to know more about what this might involve, please speak to Hazel.

We will continue to collect items for the **Bromley Homeless Starter Pack Scheme** for those starting out in a new home with nothing. Starter packs for families in need include cutlery, crockery, duvet covers (not duvets), pillow slips, tea towels, saucepans, frying pans, bath towel, toothbrushes, etc. Please continue to bring any excess items that you have in cupboards at home.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they require tinned vegetables, hot and cold meat tins, cooking sauces, UHT milk, squash, UHT fruit juice and jam. They have plenty of pasta, cereal, tea and biscuits. Please do not bring any fresh or frozen food, or baby milk as the foodbank cannot pass this on. You can also donate financially here: <https://bromleyborough.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money>. Thank you for your continuing support.

If anyone would like a pedestal at either church in memory of a loved one or to commemorate a special anniversary etc., please contact Merri Womack (8777 8772) for St Mary's (or there is a list to sign in the vestibule at St. Mary's) or Nicky Nightingale (nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk or 8916 9855) for St Francis'.

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Beryl berylbolton@hotmail.com and items for the websites to Gifty office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk.

Collect

Heavenly Lord,
you long for the world's
salvation: stir us from
apathy, restrain us from
excess and revive in us
new hope that all
creation will one day be
healed in Jesus Christ
our Lord.

First Reading:

Ephesians 5: 8-13

⁸ For once you were
darkness, but now in the
Lord you are light. Live
as children of light—
⁹ for the fruit of the light
is found in all that is
good and right and
true. ¹⁰ Try to find out
what is pleasing to the
Lord.

¹¹ Take no part in the
unfruitful works of
darkness, but instead
expose them. ¹² For it is
shameful even to
mention what such
people do secretly;
¹³ but everything
exposed by the light
becomes visible,

Gospel Reading:

Mark 12: 28-31

²⁸ One of the scribes
came near and heard
them disputing with one
another, and seeing that
he answered them well,
he asked him, 'Which
commandment is the
first of all?'

²⁹ Jesus answered, 'The
first is, "Hear, O Israel:
the Lord our God, the
Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall
love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and
with all your soul, and
with all your mind, and
with all your strength."

³¹ The second is this,
"You shall love your
neighbour as yourself."
There is no other
commandment greater
than these.'

Post Communion Prayer

Gracious Lord, in this
holy sacrament you give
substance to our hope:
bring us at the last
to that fullness of life
for which we long;
through Jesus Christ our
Saviour.

REFLECTION – Hazel O’Sullivan

I wonder if you’ve ever been on your own in the dark. I mean real darkness. If so, I wonder how you felt. I’m going to tell you a story about being in the dark – it’s a retelling of a Native American story.

A young boy was entering into his initiation rites, as the first step into manhood. He was sent out into the forest one night and blindfolded, to pass the night alone and to confront his fears.

The night passed so very slowly. Every small sound, every rustle in the undergrowth, intensified his terror. What kind of wild creatures might be lurking all around him? Worse, the fears of the supernatural came to haunt him. What spirits might be around that he would not know how to banish? And, worst of all, an awareness of deep solitude invaded his heart and paralysed him with fear. Never in his young life had he been so alone, so defenceless, so utterly exposed.

When dawn finally broke, and one of the elders came to remove the boy’s blindfold, his relief was palpable. And the very first thing he saw, sitting there among the nearby trees, was his own father. He had been here all night, just a few yards away from his son, watching over him with a father’s love, and now he was rising and walking towards him to embrace him with a father’s pride.

Yes, the darkness is frightening, isn’t it? This is recognised in our first reading from Ephesians where, in verse 9, it’s the light that shows what is good and right and true. The darkness hides all this and creates fear, as that story showed.

What we, as Christians want to do, is to be light – to live as children of light as Paul puts it in verse 8. Today is all about this – how do we live as children of light, so that all those who we meet can find what is good and right and true. This is what safeguarding is all about.

I wonder what you think of when you hear the word ‘safeguarding’. Maybe you think of some of those stories of child abuse by celebrities, sports coaches and, sadly, church workers and volunteers. Maybe you think of the shame of such stories. Maybe you think of form-filling and ID checks and how these take time and seem very tedious. Maybe you remember some of the fun things that you were able to do as a child, but which aren’t possible for today’s children because of the risks identified through safeguarding. Maybe you think it’s a bit restrictive.

None of these things resonate with what safeguarding is really about - about living as children of light. Safeguarding is about being the people who shine a light, so that everyone – all ages, all abilities, all races, those who are well and those who are unwell in some way – can feel loved and respected for who they are.

In our gospel reading from Mark, chapter 12, we hear Jesus refer to the ‘most important commandment’: love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And without stopping for breath Jesus goes straight on to say the second is ‘love your neighbour as yourself’. But importantly, he then says, “There is no commandment greater than these”. Notice the grammar – Jesus does not say there are no commandments greater than these – he doesn’t use the plural; he treats both as one commandment. Jesus is saying that we cannot just choose the former without embracing the latter. In other words, for Jesus there is no divide – we can’t give our all to God, to love Him completely, worshipping him here on a Sunday, and then forget about the rest. No, Jesus ties loving God and loving our neighbour inextricably together. Our love for God is incomplete unless that spreads to loving others too.

Loving others is what is (or should be) at the heart of safeguarding for us as Christians – loving others as we love God. When you think about it, there’s so much about church that is about loving others, through guarding people’s safety. The friendly call, the pastoral visit, getting shopping, making sure the vulnerable get home safely, bereavement support, hospital visits, home communion – the list goes on. It’s all about caring for others, making sure they’re okay – loving our neighbour! Yes, that includes making sure the people that act on behalf of the church are appropriate to do so – and that’s crucial because, sadly, not everybody has God’s love as a motive. But what we do for our neighbours is about love, about making sure they’re safe – taking care of the vulnerable.

What does it mean to keep people safe? It’s about building a healthy culture within our church community that encourages honesty and openness, where, for example, each individual is respected, valued and nurtured. Where every individual is allowed to ask questions and disagree in a safe and respectful manner. This is what it means to live as children of light.

So, let’s consider that in the wider context. We are all tasked with being aware of other people’s needs and vulnerabilities. This is how we can shine as a light, so that everyone can feel that they are in a safe place. Keeping people safe isn’t about having soft cushions or locking ourselves away from the world outside. It’s about loving our

neighbour in the outside world in whatever way is most appropriate for them. It's about getting to know someone, so that they can feel welcome in the community.

We're here today to celebrate the things we're already doing to make our church a safe place, to consider what more can and must be done, but primarily to recognise how central to our faith safeguarding is. It's a responsibility of everyone to be Christ-like in our approach and this means ensuring that we take care of everyone, consider others, protect the weak and the vulnerable – and have a heart for the wellbeing of all God's creation.

And while our systems, policies and processes are an important part of this, with Kay at St Mary's and Kim at St Francis' giving great support in their role as Safeguarding Officers, it's a responsibility of everyone to be aware of what it means to live as children of light, so that we can show what is good and right and true.

This is what the young boy found when the dawn broke, and his blindfold was removed. He saw what was good and right and true – his father. This is what we want everyone to find when they come into our community – sitting there is their father, God, watching over them with a father's love. I hope that you can feel his presence with you now, whether you're here in person, on the end of the livestream, or reading this reflection at home.

Prayer Pointers

Pray for those who are divided over the approach to same sex relationships within the Church of England, so that we can live with the current disagreements, and healing can be brought to any hurt.

Pray for the countries being torn apart by war: for the people of Ukraine now facing another cold winter, for humanitarian aid to be released to those who need it so badly in Gaza and for the release of Israeli hostages.

As the COP28 conference begins at the end of this month, pray that agreement might be made to combat climate change and halt the heating of the earth.

For those children whose anxiety prevents them from going to school, especially where this is a result of bullying or violence.

Give thanks for the donations made to the Foodbanks yesterday morning and pray that they will be able to meet the demand for their services over the coming weeks.

For hope and healing to be brought to those who are ill, remembering especially Vicky Pearce, Jane Smith, Graham Stone, Rowena Griffiths, Daphne Dack, John Dack, Barbara Goodchild, Jack Bramwell, Sue Jones, and Tina Hamilton.

For those who have recently lost loved ones, especially the families of Sheila Weir, Helen Matthews and Christine Haggart.

Creator God, in this winter season help us, your children, to bring light into the lives of those around us.