

† STOMP

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THE PARISH OF ST MARY & ST PAUL
HEMEL HEMPSTEAD

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COVER PICTURE

The 19th November 2020 is the 60th Anniversary of the consecration of St Paul's Church and Gordon has written more about this in his feature which starts on page 6.

It was a 'no-brainer' then to choose the subject for the front cover for this edition.

The photo was taken on my phone a few weeks into the first lockdown when an early morning walk on a beautiful May morning took me past St Paul's. The sun, although lightly covered by a thin patch of cloud was still very bright and I thought a picture of the tower against it with the blue sky as a background might make an interesting silhouette. Didn't quite work out as I'd imagined it might but getting the moon and sun in the same picture was a bonus. For the technically minded - exposure was 1/8000th sec at f1.7

JW

New Parish Web Site launched

Our new website that Brian Crawley has been working hard on for several months has now been launched:

<https://stmaryandstpaulhemel.org.uk/>

Brian would welcome any feedback to:
media@stmaryandstpaulhemel.org.uk

FROM THE EDITOR

On 11th September 2020 Swami Agnivesh died aged 80. My brief description of his epic life story features in this issue. Looking for contexts, Google led me to the UK charity Anti-Slavery International registered in 2020. The organisation describes six categories of modern Slavery.

Human trafficking

The use of violence, threats or coercion to transport, recruit or harbour people to exploit them for purposes such as forced prostitution, labour, criminality or organ removal.

Forced labour

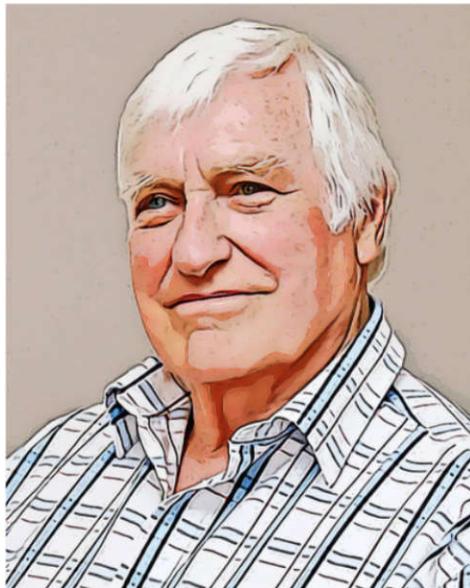
Any work or services people are forced to do against their will under threat of violence

Debt bondage/bonded labour

The world's most widespread form of slavery. People trapped in poverty borrow money and are forced to pay off the debt.

Descent-based slavery.

Most traditional form, where people are treated as property and their 'slave' status was passed down the maternal line.



Slavery of children

When a child is exploited for someone else's gain. This can include child trafficking, child soldiers, child marriage and child domestic slavery.

Forced and early marriages.

When someone is married against their will and cannot leave. Most child marriages can be considered slavery.

For half a century Swami Agnivesh, a Hindu monk in India, has led a Christ-like life in his fight against slavery.

A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP MICHAEL BISHOP OF HERTFORD

In sixteenth century Spain there lived a knight called Ignatius of Loyola. One source described him as “a fancy dresser, an expert dancer, a womanizer, sensitive to insult, and a rough punkish swordsman who used his privileged status to escape prosecution for violent crimes committed at carnival time.” Evidently quite the lad.

All this came to a halt when Ignatius’s right leg was shattered by a ricocheting cannon ball at the Siege of Pamplona in 1521. He was laid up for months as attempts were made to put his fractured limb back together. Lying in pain, Ignatius spent much of his time daydreaming. A lot of this was about him being a knight; serving the king, gaining the favours of a royal lady, renown for his valour, all that kind of thing. Ignatius had also been given books about the lives of the saints and when he wasn’t daydreaming about doing the whole knight thing, he imagined himself following in their footsteps - serving the poor, acting with charity and mercy, living a life devoted to others.

As he daydreamed, Ignatius started to notice something. When he gave his mind over to dreams about himself – his own fame and fortune, success

and glory, he always found himself feeling flat, deflated afterwards. In contrast, when he turned his thoughts to serving others, the opposite was true. He was left feeling peaceful, serene, his heart filled with joy. You may not often daydream about success as a knight.

But whether that’s the case or not, I think Ignatius has important things to say to us in the days in which we live. What he says is this. What we think about, fill our heads with, attend to matters. Right now, what’s likely to take up much of our head space is the news that surrounds us every hour of every day as we face the coronavirus outbreak.

Messages that speak to us constantly about limits and restrictions, of dangers and problems. Relentless communication that tells us that we’re all going to hell in a hand cart. ▷



St Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556)

The result is fear and anxiety, bad tempers and concern, joy driven far away.

Do we have an alternative? I think we do. We can't ignore the news, no more than Ignatius was able to ignore the pain of a fractured limb. But might our challenge be, as he did, to hold alongside it a very different imagination? One that imagines not how we might give into fear during this time, but how we might serve each other within it. One that thinks not constantly about the mess we're in but of what the world could be like when once the pandemic is brought under control.

One that imagines not the world as it's presented to us by the 24 hour media but of what the world could be

if we were to live out God's life within it. Ignatius would have called such imagining prayer. He'd have pointed us towards it as the surest route towards peace, serenity and joy just as they were for him when he lay in a bed in sixteenth century Spain, facing the prospect of orthopaedic surgery without the benefit of anaesthesia. And as Ignatius's story goes on to show, when we enter into prayer, something even more wonderful happens than the joy we experience.

When we pray, God answers our prayers in us. If we ask God to enable us to serve others – we'll end up doing so. If our prayer sets alight a fire within us to change the world – we'll set about transforming it. If we ask God's life to fill ours – God will fill it and with a joy that knows no end.

So let's reset our thinking, our imagination during this extraordinarily difficult time. Let's imagine the world from a different perspective – God's view. A view that will bring light in our darkness, joy in our sorrow. Amen.

*Teach us, good Lord,
to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost;
to fight and not to heed the wounds;
to toil and not to seek for rest;
to labour and not to ask for any reward,
save that of knowing that we do your will.*

St. Ignatius of Loyola



ST PAUL'S HIGHFIELD AN HISTORICAL NOTE

St Paul's Church now part of the Parish of St Mary and St Paul is centrally located in the New Town neighbourhood of Highfield. This new church was consecrated by the Bishop of St Albans on 19 November 1960 and was the first stop for Princess Margaret in her visit to Hemel Hempstead the following 6 April. Amid some controversy it had replaced the 90 year - old church of St Paul's located on Queensway, a decision based on demography and finance.

It was to be the new Anglican Church serving a rapidly expanding population, a neighbourhood with over 6,000 people. 60 years later St Paul's remains proudly in its space alongside the Nicky Line cutting and is being carefully renovated.

The first Vicar of St Paul's, the Venerable Malcolm Lesiter (Vicar 1966-1973) and his wife Caroline have just written:-

Life Expectancy Exploded

'We never know what the future holds. When we came to St Paul's Highfield in 1966, the building was 6 years old and its predicted life span was 25 years. That prediction was wrong! It underestimated the love, care and imagination that would be put into the building over the years by Church Wardens and members of the congregation. The building has been cherished, maintained and upgraded, and the congregation are rightly proud of it. This 60-year old is in good shape. May God bless it'

In 1960 St Paul's immediately, in addition to a place of worship, became a vital social and service centre whilst the local infrastructure developed, for example in the early days serving both as a doctor's surgery and dental practice. Boys' and Girls' Brigades, Sunday Schools and Toddlers' Group were important to children and parents in this rapidly, growing young community. ▷

St Paul's remains a focus for worship and is a much - used facility for social events and caring groups. For example, recently as the pandemic restrictions eased off Tiny Tots, Slimming World, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Keep Fit have been using the Hall. Three further groups wait to return, NHS Step 2 for Children and Teenagers with Learning Difficulties, Families Need Fathers, and bereavement counselling.

The Congregation has seen itself to be in the Anglican liberal catholic tradition and has been well served by a succession of Vicars, most serving for a minimum of seven years. It is proud to have played a leading role in the local movement to ordain women priests, as confirmed by the appointment of a succession of three women priests to be the vicar during a 20 year period. Additionally, for nearly four decades St Paul's had an important and friendly sharing agreement with the Roman Catholics.

The Congregation over the years has been, and remains, very involved with outreach. This is best illustrated by three continuing contributions.

DENS, the local initiative for the homeless started as an idea in 1997 and for four winters, St Paul's was one of seven churches providing in daily rotation supper and a bed and breakfast and since then it has continued to give support to this highly successful operation

For the last 21 years St Paul's has given financial support to the Christian Aid projects in Nicaragua.

In July 2011 42 people met in the church hall for the foundation meeting of the UK Langa Township Pre-School Trust, which has strong support from both St Paul's and St Mary's people, and now is supporting 500 children in six pre-schools in Cape Town.

In conclusion: recently, preparing for this piece, members of the congregation were asked to reflect on what St Paul's has meant and means to them, indicating when they joined the church and their thoughts follow.

Gordon Gaddes



DEAR ST PAUL'S . . .

Parishoners write of their memories of St Paul's



My most abiding experience of St Paul's was in 2003 shortly after the loss of my dear wife, Gloria. Feeling down and depressed I received a visit from Wendy Patchell who was the Vicar of St Paul's at that time. She came in and we had a chat and she continued to visit me once a week for several weeks and we prayed together each visit. After a while she invited me to start attending Sunday morning services where I found everybody so friendly and helpful. After a period of time I got more involved and started to help with teas, welcoming, gardening, maintenance and social activities, even setting up a bereavement group. Gradually I felt better and it was a great help to assist me on with my life. So I will always be grateful to Wendy and St Paul's for that reason.

Geoff Cottrell



I started visiting St. Paul's on a regular basis in 1968 at Revd. Malcolm Lesiter's Toddler Church on Wednesday afternoons with a son of three and a baby. This was a warm, welcoming service and within a few weeks, I was attending Sunday service and I still do. I was confirmed in 1971 at St. Peters, Gadebridge (sadly now demolished).

The love, friendship and support from the congregation has been wonderful and visitors always comment on this culture which St Paul's has always had. My special memories include, great Patronal parties, home grown entertainment and lovely suppers, Maundy Thursday suppers and the great 50th birthday for church which Revd Chandy organised.

We shared the church building with local Catholic friends and a moving service was when Cardinal Basil Hume visited us one Sunday. When the Catholics left us in November 2008 we had another memorable service.

A moving service for me personally, was the new Acolyte candle installation when the new candles and stands (made by Les Harding) was processed to the altar by my son Richard (14) and his friend Mark.

Many happy years were spent as an officer in the The Boys' Brigade. A new organist came to us in 2003 and the joyous memory is when we married in 2010.

St. Paul's has been, and always will be, my other family and I thank God for this blessing.

Ann Robinson



In Easter 2003, I moved into Saturn Way Sheltered Accommodation and with that came a transition from playing the organ at the Methodist church to playing at St. Paul's at the kind invitation of the vicar, Revd Wendy Patchell. Although I found the liturgy more structured in parts of worship, in general, apart from the increased frequency of Holy Communion, it was relatively easy to embrace.

Since being made welcome and despite my shyness (which was broken down by the "key holder" Ann Biddle) I have felt able to join in on most of traditions and so after a lifetime of Methodism, I now consider St. Paul's my home church along with my new Wife Ann (see previous page - we married in 2010; surely the best outcome since making the move.

I'm proud to be a member of the national church all brought about by placing my loyalty with this spiritual home that I now know.

Michael Robinson



With Amanda I arrived from Nigeria in September 2015 to settle in England. The St Paul's family became my anchor point, my rock, my place through the rough initial time. St Paul's is my second home now, my family.

Yemi Wilde-Halim

Editor's note; Yemi comes to the church with Amanda her daughter who was confirmed at St Mary's and is joined by her brother Babs Wilde. Over the years on two long visits Yemi's parents have joined us for our services.



I arrived at St Paul's church just over thirty two years ago looking to get my daughter baptised. When I walked in on that first Sunday with a three month old baby not knowing what to expect I found something that I didn't even realise that I was looking for or that was missing from my life! The building itself is important and gives structure and a sense of belonging in the community but to me it is the people that I have met that make St Paul's, those who have guided and supported me on my journey and continue to do so. Many may not even realise that they have done so and sadly many are no longer with us but I have been very fortunate in having them in my life.

So for me to sum it all up:

S – Scaffolding and Support

T – Travelling Together

P – Personal and Perspective

A – Acceptance and Answers

U – Unique and Understanding

L – Love and Listening

S – Strength and Spiritual

Julie Pollard



I started St Paul's in 2013 after talking to Chandy at a funeral and was confirmed in October. A short while later I was accompanied by our son Nick and he was baptized, I and, a former church warden from St Mary's were his sponsors. Janet my wife also comes to Church on special occasions and to Sausage Sunday with our Grandchildren. I hope and pray that maybe Janet herself may consider being confirmed. Now I am a Crucifer and a Server, I read the lesson and lead intercessions and work extensively to help keep St Paul's going.

Malcolm Taylor



All in all St Paul's is a very special church to me.

I moved to Highfield in 1968 and my association with St Paul's started when Rev Malcolm Lesiter started a Toddler Church, which I attended with my children. My daughters Anne-Marie and Susan were baptised there respectively in 1968 and 1969. Three of my grandchildren were baptised at St Paul's by Wendy. My daughters Karen and Susan had confirmation lessons at St Paul's and were then confirmed in the Abbey. My daughters attended Brownies and Guides at Jupiter Drive School and attended the church parade at St Paul's every month, whilst my son Kevin was in The Boys' Brigade at St Paul's

At the invitation of Revd Wendy Patchell I started and alone ran a toddler church from 2003 to 2011. When Revd Chandy Perera came she changed the toddler church to Thursday mornings for mothers and children and I was helping there and also with her holiday clubs.

I'm usually around on a Saturday morning, cleaning silver and brass and elsewhere and am a welcomer and on the tea/coffee rota. Every year I've made marmalade for the annual bazaar and have helped to run the cake stall.

St Paul's keeps us busy!

Jo Whittington



At our Eucharist on 16th October 2004, with the christening of baby Rees, Rosina had lost her mother last week, yet had read the lesson and was administering the chalice. Waiting to kneel to receive communion I felt a profound and moving sense of wonder. It seemed that all life was in the moment. A lovely new baby, from a young Indian family from South Africa, was being brought into our Church and a dear Christian friend, in deep sadness with her loss, was bringing the Host to our lips. The moment seemed to embrace the whole of life from birth to death, and to hint at infinity and eternity. There was no vision of God, but the moment was transcendent and ineffable.

Gordon Gaddes





External work recently completed and costing £5,640 has been funded partly by £400 from the Hertfordshire County Council County, a donation of £500 and a generous grant from the Salisbury Fund.

The main aim has been to reduce hazards to users at two fire exits. Dangerous steps at the Vestry fire exit, at which there have been several falls, have been replaced by a ramp. The problem of steep steps without rails from the Hall fire exit leading to the Nicky Line path has been dealt with. An ugly overgrown tree stump outside the Vestry has been cleared and turf laid. Re-shingling the car park has been paid for by the donation.

Tangled and ugly vegetation in the bed at the East end of the church has been cleared and it has been transformed into a bed of roses. This cost has been covered by a grant of £400 from the Locality Budget of County Councillor Ron Tindall, the rose bed being seen as a gift to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the consecration of St Paul's on its Solway site. The rose bed has been planned and set up voluntarily by two friendly and helpful Solway neighbours, Alan Parrott and Jerry Carder. They both, with one or two other neighbours, are taking an interest in continuing to help maintain the car park and its surrounds, which will be a great help to us.



Gordon and Malcolm with (l to r) Alan, Gerry and Ron Tindall - County Councillor for Highfield.



As well as the new rose bed (L) other improvements include hand rails to make the steps at the back easier to negotiate and the re-gravelling of the car park area.

GIVING



Riding home after church one Sunday morning, a mother commented, 'The choir was awful this morning.' And the father said, 'I thought the sermon was far too long.' Their cheeky 7-year old daughter piped up from the back seat, 'You have to admit though, it was a pretty good morning out for a pound.'

Did you smile at the quote above? Sadly, it reflects the attitude some people have to churchgoing and church giving. How did you decide on the amount you currently give to your church each week?

When did you last really think about how much you choose to put in the weekly collection envelope, or in the basket, or in the standing order?

And more importantly, why do you choose to donate anything at all? No-one makes you pay anything to attend church. You are welcome to go every week and no one would demand that you pay even a £1, as the family above did. But think for a moment of all that God provides for us - life, family, friends, health, the riches of nature, music, beauty, art, and even his own Son to die for our sins on the cross and rise again to give us everlasting life. Yes, God gives freely, even abundantly, so isn't it reasonable to ask how should we respond to his generosity?

Each church is where it is because, in the past, people have given generously. Many people would see the building as the church, but in reality it is all the people who worship in it that are the 'real' church; a community gathered in the love of God, seeking to share the good news of that love. Part of our worship is to give thanks to God for all he has done for us. And in response we can give our time, and our skills, but also a regular gift of money. The church needs all of these to function properly. It is often said that people only value what they pay for, so isn't it reasonable for us to think of the value of what God has done for us?

Surely we can't argue with this quote from the Bible:

'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'

AUTUMN GARDENING

We are so fortunate in this country to have the seasons to look forward to throughout the year, summer into autumn, winter into spring for example. This autumn has been exceptional for colour.

In my garden the *Acer dissectum* turned a bright golden yellow and *Acer dissectum* *Atropurpureum* a vivid red. *Ginkgo biloba* the Maiden hair tree a bright yellow and *Cornus florida* Tricolour with its multi-colours of oranges and reds on the same leaf.

Autumn is a time for shutting down, having a clear up and carrying out essential maintenance and planting in the garden. Shutting down, in the form of protecting, those tender plants that need protecting from the cold winter weather. One example is the Tree fern. The centre of the crown needs to be covered with straw and then wrapped around with fleece and tied securely.

Clear up all those leaves and compost them, these make valuable mulch when composted, do not throw them out or burn them. You can put them in black refuse sacks and leave for up to 12 months to rot down.

Now is the time to plant trees, shrubs and herbaceous perennials. They are all coming into dormancy and so will not be disturbed. Root growth will develop through the winter months giving the plant a much better start in the spring when the top growth emerges. ▷

This is also the time for lawn maintenance. I have had a dreadful time this autumn with badgers digging up parts of my main lawn. It is looking like a football field after a heavy match! I had to fill in all the holes with sieved top soil and replace the divots, firming them in with my heel. The normal lawn maintenance would be scarification, aeration and top dressing. Scarification is using a wire rake in opposite directions or you can hire a mechanical scarifier for larger areas. This process removes dead grass, thatch and moss and so encourages the grass to thicken up and knit together.

Aeration, using a fork or aerator breaks up the compaction which prevents good root growth and enables a cavity to open up for top dressing to get down to the roots. Grass seed can also be added to top dressing but make sure you choose the correct seed for your lawn. There are several to choose from, fine grass for ornamental lawns, hard wearing where young children are likely to play and shade mix for under trees.

Although the season are good to look out for they are changing. When I was younger, autumn began the end of September and continued through October finishing now in the beginning of November. This year we picked out last runner beans in the first week of November and at the same time recorded our first Primroses out in flower.

What a strange world we are in now but at least our gardens are our saviours.

Roger Sygrave



Looks like the sexton went to Spain after all and is still in quarantine.



Letters & Comments



I wanted to say, as I have done to Jeff, what a wonderful edition of STOMP we have just received.

Having the colour made such a difference and the lovely photo on the front really lifted our spirits.

I particularly wanted to thank you for the article about John Hick. When I was studying for ordination, we were recommended to read his book. " Evil and the God of Love". I was very impressed with it, as it seemed to have the most comprehensive answers to the many questions I had on the topic. I remember using his book when I found myself preaching after the dreadful tsunami that occurred on Boxing Day, I think. I had to change the sermon that I had prepared as it was on everyone's minds. He believed that everyone has a chance of eternal life in God's good time and that life after death is still a journey.

Lovely to have the interview with Marion who is such an inspiration to us all.

Revd Diana Spink



What a splendid Summer edition. It must be the most interesting parish magazine in the country! We both enjoyed it very much.

Caroline Lesiter



Thank you for your letter of the 15th September explaining your reason for changing how I receive Stomp. Sending 'Stomp' by email

is fine. Although not a member of your Church, I go to Holy Trinity Leverstock Green, my connection was with David Clarke whom I worked for as Secretary, so joined him at many of his Fabric Committee meetings in that capacity. I enjoyed being involved with many of their projects, and attending Church events with Jill and David I got to know many of your members, so enjoy reading your magazine. I remember Marion Smith; so good to read her life story in the recent edition.

Lesley Hawtin

Thank you for the copy of STOMP which we received; we are looking forward to reading it to try to keep abreast of the goings on in HH!

We would welcome receiving our future copies by email. Like many other communications, I do seem to get them this way at times and at other times, they come as a nostalgic and welcomed paper copy. I think Robin enjoys that more as to read the electronic one I need to just f/w it to him to read on his computer!

Revd Jenny Hill

Dear Gordon,



It was very enjoyable to be interviewed by you and the result was a rounded history. However, afterwards I found myself questioning the picture you and Jeff painted of me.

It seemed to me that I was labelled WIFE, which indeed I was and very happy and proud to be so. However it was also important to me to be an independent woman and I want to reiterate my Feminist viewpoint.

So, who do I think I am, who do you think you are and what label do your readers put on themselves? Does this sort of labelling matter?

We all do it unconsciously about the people we know and meet. It is easier to put people into little boxes where you do not need to concern yourself with other aspects of their identity. If this shorthand is not recognised, it may lead to bias, prejudice and on to discriminatory action.

Although I did not join the Bra Burning Brigade I was very active with words and local action. My associates would not have labelled me 'wife' and neither did or do, the Girl Guides. Earlier in my life, everyone was referred to by their title, never their first name as now. Good or bad?

Again does it matter?

A current reaction to the world around us is 'I have no say in what happens'. I believe in the power of individuals making their opinions known if only to one or two others.

Look at the power of Twitter! Surely Christians have a message of peace and fairness which colours their views on everyday life.

Chaos Theory suggests that a butterfly fluttering its wings in Japan can be felt in some way in England, so an opinion voiced to a neighbour or printed in STOMP, can travel and be heard.

You told me that you would like some correspondence in response to the content of STOMP, so here I am, fluttering my Feminist wings, speaking up and questioning being labelled 'wife'.

It follows that I am also asking whether society has really changed its behaviour on such topics as skin colour, class or gender over the years since I was in the fray.

Marion Smith

THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE

*When the winds of change blow, some people build walls
and others build windmills ~ Chinese Proverb*



The Editor's Interview with Marion Smith in the August STOMP gives a glimpse of how society has evolved during one lifetime. And in these unusual times we are wondering what changes the future holds for us all – through and after this pandemic.

Collecting memories of World War II has now become a 'history project'. The role of women in society has expanded but the story has a long way to go. Prejudices and biases may have changed but are still strongly present – about gender, culture, ethnicity and sexuality.

Marion's life has been quite a journey – a 'Pilgrim's Progress' – as are all our lives in these fast changing times. The Pilgrim has hope and a vision to drive them on. Along the way, many people and situations are discouraging and only a few help to make the going easier. And the way itself is often unclear.

Over the past six months or more the landscape of our pilgrim way has changed. The climate and our environment are becoming more extreme. So this is a time to sharpen our vision and affirm our hope. What do we want in the so-called 'new normal' that is coming? And what sort of a world can we bequeath to the next generation – to our grandchildren? What actions should we now be taking? David Attenborough puts the avoidance of waste at the top of his list.

Marion's upbringing and education prepared her for a changing world. But women and minorities still face many obstacles to further liberation. The pandemic is a setback as the burdens of 'lockdown', family relationships, keeping house, debt, home schooling and unemployment have affected them both disproportionately. ▷

NOVEMBER



We are witnessing the headwinds being faced by children whose schooling is being interrupted; and by young people whose path to higher education and into employment is beset by uncertainties. The consequent pressures upon their mental health are becoming more apparent. Healthcare is harder to access and residential care fraught with risks. Sport and the Arts are in danger of collapse or diminishment, as are many other charities and institutions, including the Church.

Our society faces a time of danger and of decision. This is a kairos moment, a time to take stock and to change our way of life. In the New Testament it is referred to as metanoia – repentance. This will be painful for many - as change usually is. As Christian pilgrims, there is much to discourage, as the bonds that hold us together in community are disrupted. On the other hand, science and technology offer encouragement as does our belief in the ‘common good’, in human goodness and in a bountiful Creator God.

This is a time of challenge; to reassess risk and to repent. Our faith does assure us that ‘with God nothing is impossible’ but it should also disturb us and ‘discomfort the comfortable’, as the Magnificat, the Song of Mary reminds us. Thank you Marion for inspiring these reflections on today’s signs of the times.

Canon Richard Leslie

As November starts with a series of acts of remembrance to thank God for all those who have gone before us, it concludes with the excitement of Advent Sunday when Christians begin looking forward to celebrating the coming into the world of Christ.

Advent Sunday marks the start of a new liturgical year for the Christian Church, a year that we hope and pray will enable the world to come to terms with Covid-19 and enable us all not only to rebuild our local communities, but make our churches stronger and more relevant to the new world we will be serving.

Almighty God, in you alone we find safety and peace. We commend to your gracious keeping all the men and women who are working at the front line of the Covid-19 pandemic, who face danger and put their lives at risk so that others might live in safety. Defend them day by day by your heavenly power; and help them to know that they can never pass beyond the reach of your care. Keep alive in them and in us your vision of that peace which alone we must seek and serve; Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

EDITOR'S INTERVIEW

ROGER SYGRAVE

Roger is well known to us within our churches. His life-long journey in St Mary's has taken him at the age of six from afternoon Sunday School in the former St Mary's Hall, to choir boy, to marriage to Lynne at the age of 22, to Debbie and Jonathon being baptised there, and all the way on to his decades of support and leadership, as Church Warden and Chairman of the Fabric Committee and his work on the buildings and in the grounds. What is little or only known partly was revealed in my latest interview. The story relates to a person who at the age of ten knew what he wanted to do with his life, something which he has followed through for the rest of his life.

Born in Hemel Hempstead in 1945 to a very long-standing local family, Roger lived with his parents in Bury Hill. This was a part of 'old Hemel' later almost obliterated to make way for the College, a large roundabout and feeder roads. In the Summer 2018 issue of SToMP Roger described in detail 'the secret garden' on Bury Hill, $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre of walled garden in the grounds of his godmother, Miss Turner's house. Here he spent many years learning about flowers, bushes and trees, this garden being part of his life as he grew up. His dad bought him his first greenhouse, an 8' x 6' at the age of nine, and a couple of years



later it was extended by 8'. Schooling involved the Heath Brow Preparatory School followed by senior years at Stanborough Park School in Watford.

Whilst his Mum wanted him to go into banking Roger was fixed on horticulture and he worked for over a year for the Borough Council, first in Gadebridge Park and then at the Council's Churchill nursery. This was followed by a one-year residential course in commercial horticulture at Secret's training centre in Milford, Surrey.

Then he attended a one-year specialist residential course at ▷



Oaklands College in St Albans. This led to the final examination of the Royal Horticultural Society, of ten three-hour examination papers over a week's period! With these Certificates and his Fellowship of the Society, Roger was ready to move on and it is no wonder that then he was to spend a lifetime working in horticulture.

In 1965 he became the Foreman for a plant nursery and garden design business on the Leighton Buzzard Road, on the site of Hilliers. When that business was sold in 1968, he worked for the new owners in developing a garden centre. Ten years later he decided to move on and was offered a post to set up a new garden centre just beyond Leverstock Green. Difficulties there led to a nadir in his career, and a month or so before Christmas to his resignation and

unemployment. That was a time when the support of his family and his Christian faith saw him through. He remembers particularly the help of David Clarke in preparing a CV, and the later sharing together their model railway hobby. In succession within a month he was offered three jobs to manage garden centres, which in retrospect happily he turned down. In the event this period was pivotal for him because the next employment was to take him into the educational field and was to last for over 30 years. He could not believe how free he was to become with such a weight taken from his shoulders.

An advert in Horticultural Week interested Roger, he applied for and was employed in a post at Oaklands College, St. Albans, involving supervision of the gardens and tuition with the students. After five years this was a stepping stone to his final full-time employer, Capel Manor Horticultural College, Enfield, this lasting for 25 years, from 1987 to 2012. First working as a horticultural instructor for three years, he then was promoted. Becoming the Gardens Manager, he found himself in a demanding managerial job with some very interesting extras! It is fascinating to list what the extras included; planning and preparation for many displays at the Chelsea Flower Show over the years and, towards the event, 19 hour working days; helping with the conversion of a church in Lambeth to become the ▷

Museum of Garden History; variously showing Princess Anne, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Edinburgh round the gardens; at the 2001 Chelsea Show, the show-stopping Salix research project, describing the reach of the willow tree from Siberia to New Zealand and its use ranging from cricket bats to aspirins, one of the two projects for which Roger won a gold medal; and planning for the Queen Mother's Centenary Garden at the College, involving links with the Head Gardeners at all HRH's properties, and later showing the centenarian Queen Mother round her tribute garden. A charming story arose from this concerning a special pink rhododendron planted on the advice of the Head Gardener at the Royal Lodge Windsor. Being shown this the Queen Mother said, 'my late husband and I planted a bed of these at the Royal Lodge and each year it gives me great pleasure when they flower.' Also, a special memory was the lunch he and Lynne had with Her Grace, the Duchess of Devonshire, at Chatsworth, following a visit to the opening of the new sensory garden designed by her grandson.

Life moved on and in a reorganisation of the College Roger's responsibilities changed and he became an Assessor of the work of students, later reducing to three days weekly. This opened another door for him – to the Royal Parks, as he was an assessor for the Three - Year Apprenticeship course for employees in the Inner and



Outer Royal Parks. Roger taking the Inner Parks. Finally, still in demand in retirement, and as a volunteer he continues to help by serving as Board member for the Royal Parks Guild.

This is a life stretching for nearly 70 years from one secret garden to another secret garden at the house on the $\frac{3}{4}$ acre plot of 14 Leverstock Green Road. Roger and Lynne have lived in this house, built by his grandfather in 1930, since 1969. The garden at the rear is a magical, colourful area of plants, bushes and trees, and birds and insects, a place of great joy for his family, Lynne, Debbie and Jonathan and friends. This story goes back 120 years at least, however. Miss Turner's father, before coming to Hemel Hempstead to take over the Six Bells Public House at the turn of the 20th Century, had worked for the Royal Horticultural Society in Chiswick Gardens, now Chiswick House and well worth a visit. Here, in Hemel Hempstead, he set up the first secret garden, which so greatly interested and enthused Roger as a boy.



I do not know how you, the reader, reflect on your life, what you have done and what you wish you could have done. For me I would like to have played cricket like Ted Dexter or played the violin like Yehudi Menuhin or gardened like Roger.

GG



*Lunch party at Chatsworth House after the opening of the new Sensory Garden designed by the grandson of the Duchess.
(R to L) Principal of Capel College, Lynne and Roger, Andrew Parker-Bowles, Her Grace The Duchess of Devonshire, with her grandson standing between the estates manager of Capel Manor and his wife.*



A tour of the gardens at Capel Manor by Roger for Prince Charles.



"I am looking for a Christmas card that contains inclusive language and yet retains the richness of 16th century English and is overtly Christian whilst being sensitive to the multi-faith patterns of our day ... any suggestions?"

The teacher asked her Sunday School class to draw a picture of a Bible story with a Christmas theme. She was puzzled by Kate's picture, which showed four people on an airplane. She asked her which story it was meant to represent. 'The Flight to Egypt,' was the reply. Pointing at each figure, the teacher ventured: 'That must be Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus. But who's the fourth person?'"
'Oh,' explained Kate happily, 'that's Pontius - the pilot!'

New Year's Eve is coming soon...The inventor of the bagpipes was inspired when he saw a man carrying an indignant asthmatic pig under his arm. Unfortunately, the man-made sound never equalled the purity of the sound achieved by the pig. - Alfred Hitchcock.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY 3!



In the June edition of SToMP I wrote setting the scene on the way that the Covid 19 looked like it would be affecting the Parish finances. You may recall that I asked for those who felt able to honour their Stewardship pledges through the lockdown period. And I also asked, where it was possible, for people to help out by giving a bit more towards covering our projected losses which we estimated at that time might reach around £17,000. Norma Podmore made a similar request in the last SToMP.

Since then the world has moved on, probably in the way that we all secretly believed it would, even though we hoped and acted as if the short sharp shock would sort it all out.

We are now of course in never, never land where no end is really in sight and we are growing used to our new way of living and behaving, while feeling heartily sick of its restrictions.

At the Parish level things have changed quite a lot since June. Most importantly we are back having services in both churches, not just on line. Building work at St Mary's has produced a great looking toilet and kitchenette and at St Paul's the emergency exits, the flooding and the car park surfacing have all been addressed.

St Mary's is now open for prayer seven days a week and so paradoxically will have had its doors open for longer this year than any other year this Century, despite being completely closed for 3 months.

Hall usage is also recovering and new lettings have appeared, so the picture is not all bad. ▷



In addition you have responded really generously and honoured your monthly or weekly envelope pledges so that our Giving income has remained largely intact and we have had a number of generous donations towards our deficit. For all of this thank you, you are an inspiration.

The Diocese have also been good to us in making the adjustment to our Parish Share, resulting from Caroline's departure to Waddesdon, generously in our favour.

So while our lost income has been significant - and the guess at £17,000 may not have been too far wrong - there have been significant positives to offset this. The Government Job Retention Scheme has paid out around £4k with another £1k to go and you have given an extra £3k with tax recovery; so adding these to the residue of Norman Quail's legacy (after paying for the very special handles on the new kitchen doors) we hope to just about cover our losses.

There will be many Parishes far harder hit so thank you to each and every one of you for helping in your own way. It just shows what is possible.

PS Doesn't the world change quickly! This piece was written in October before the November lockdown was announced with its inevitable affect on our Hall bookings!

Still the Job Retention Scheme has also been extended so there is some good news, but please - if you can - keep up your giving through November. Weekly envelopes can be saved up and brought in December or dropped through a churchwardens' door! Every bit helps and as ever THANK YOU.

*Robin Woodd
Stewardship Secretary, October 2020*

GOD IN THE ARTS

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI PREACHING TO THE FISH



The Revd Michael Burgess has written a series on animals and birds as seen in art and scripture. Here he considers 'St Francis of Assisi preaching to the fish' by Luc-Olivier Merson.

On 4th October we gave thanks for one of the most loved saints in the church - Francis of Assisi. He died in 1226, but his example and witness have lived on to inspire Christians through the centuries.

His was a life focused on the crib and the cross, Lady Poverty and the stigmata, suffering and transfiguration. But also, it was a life marked by a deep love of creation: St Francis had a special nearness to all creatures great and small.

As we read the stories of Thomas of Celano, we learn how he tamed a wolf in Gubbio, how swallows would chirp and fly around his head, how lambs would come close and gaze with delight, how his faithful donkey wept as the saint approached death, and in this painting, how fish would come to the shore to hear him preach.

Thomas relates how Francis returned some fish that had been caught to the water, telling them not to be caught again. They lingered near the boat, listening to the saint until he gave them permission to leave.

The sermon to the fish is portrayed in this work by Luc-Olivier Merson, a French artist who lived from 1846 to 1920. ▷

He is better known for his work with designs for banknotes, postage stamps, and the basilica of Sacré - Coeur in Montmartre.

Here in this canvas, we see St Francis with followers young and old, a faithful dog and the fish at the water's edge.

What was the saint telling them? I think that they were loved and valued as part of the rich tapestry of God's creation, and they must return that love. It is the mood of the Benedicite where all things that move in the earth, the skies and the seas are exhorted to praise the Lord and magnify him forever. St Francis captures that mood in his own Canticle of the Sun.

In the weeks and months of lockdown many of us have had the time to look afresh at our relationship with the world of nature as we have journeyed through the seasons of spring and summer. We have learnt to wonder at the richness and variety of creation.

We need to take that lesson into the 'new normal' as restrictions are gradually relaxed. The clock and the complexity of life may easily take over again, but St Francis is inviting us to journey with him in simplicity and joy as we praise God with all His creatures:

'Let all things their Creator bless and worship Him in humbleness.'



My husband and I were delighted the day we finally bought our first house. After years of renting, it was wonderful to own our own home. Our vicar even gave us a bottle of champagne to mark the occasion. But in the hustle and bustle of getting moved in, his champagne was put in a cupboard and forgotten.

Months later, we held a Baptism party for our third child. Wine flowed until, running short, we suddenly remembered the housewarming gift of champagne. So, in front of our guests, I opened the attached card from the vicar and read it aloud: "Dave, take good care of it – this one is really yours!"



ST JAMES THE LEAST OF ALL

The Revd Dr Gary Bowness continues his tongue-in-cheek letters from Uncle Eustace.

Beware what lurks in the church vestry...



The Rectory
St James the Least of All

My dear Nephew Darren

I am unsurprised that the cleaning lady took exception to you dismantling your motorbike in the church vestry. Clergy vestries are the final repositories of rotting hymn books, ancient cassocks with a certain aroma, buckets with holes in, which are kept “just in case” and dead animals in various states of decomposition; but they are no place for bike chains, disc brakes and inner tubes.

I will concede that vestries seem to attract all those objects no one quite knows what to do with, but which parishioners can't bear to throw away. Flower arrangers creep into my vestry, looking for space for boxes of twine. Decorators arrive with cribs and Easter gardens they are hoping to store. And even the choirmaster occasionally sidles in, trying to slip some anthems past me. I repel them all with vigour, and a firm broom.

One thing I can't keep out of the vestry are the portraits of all my predecessors, who stare down at me reproachfully. The most recent, in colour, stare smugly, knowing that I am still being compared to them, and falling short.

Earlier incumbents, in black and white, look mildly reproachful, reminding me that they all held doctorates from Oxford.

The hand-drawn portraits from pre-1870 are the worst – they all look as if they drank vinegar for breakfast and argued Pelagianism over lunch, just for fun. I am already rehearsing my own look of pained forgiveness for my leaving photo that will stare down on my own successor, and perpetually irritate him

It also seems to be a tradition that retiring clergy donate their robes for their successors, probably because it spares them a walk to the dustbin. So, a five-foot, 18 stone incumbent will leave a cassock for his six-foot, ten stone successor. There will also be a spare 1960s nylon surplice hanging on the back of the vestry door, to remind you that should you ever forget your own, then this is the horror you will be obliged to wear throughout Evensong.

Notices on the walls will tell you that marriage fees in the 1920s were seven shillings and sixpence, that Communion wine can be obtained from a shop that closed down a generation ago and there will be a copy of the prayer of thanksgiving to be used on the Relief of Mafeking.

My only advice is to remove your bike before it gets bundled up with the Scouts' tents – and lost forever in the churchwarden's shed.

Your loving uncle,

Eustace

Swami Agnivesh, champion of India's indentured labourers, died on September 11th aged 80

In Hindu culture the life stage of *sanyasa* is the last stage, taken towards the end of one's life, a sort of retirement for reflection, sometimes in a wilderness. At the age of 30, however, Vepa Shyam Rao had set aside a business and educational career to become the monk, Swami Agnivesh. He died half a century later having discarded material possessions, retaining just his robes and some books, and having worked with courage and determination to support the underprivileged and the exploited in northern India, particularly in Haryana.

He had lived his life in a saint – like way, seeing his spiritual duty to go among the poor, to help and serve them. He was widely feted in villages, where he explained 'that God had created the Sun and the Moon for

men and women alike'. Although a modest man he was garlanded with marigolds and led round on elephants. He was uncomfortable when followers would bend in respect to touch his feet.

His approach was deeply ethical yet he saw the need for religion and politics to merge to achieve change. Whilst an extremely devout Hindu, he drew intellectual support from Ghandi and Marx. What he called his 'Verdic socialism' was drawn from the Vedas, the most sacred texts of Hinduism.

He influenced the forming of unions and in this way was a pain to the establishment. His constituency included people in stone quarries, carpet workshops, silk factories, tanneries and brickfields and the unlanded in farming areas. The young children, the men and the women, all working long hours for low pay, and some facing brutal treatment, were his people.

A particular cause of exploitation was, and still is, indentured servitude. A Dalit family getting into debt to a higher-caste money lender, for example to pay for medicines or dowries, with interest rates at 40 per cent, could end up with a life time of servitude also involving children who later would have to take on the debt.

▷

He estimated that of perhaps 60 million bonded workers, a quarter were under 15 years of age.

He fought for people in the courts. He raised money to buy people from bondage. He arranged for education and training. It is estimated that he rescued around 178,000 including 26,000 children. He ensured that children were trained. He died frustrated that his mission had not been completed.

Swami Agnivesh was not popular with certain Hindu elements; he took beatings for being 'anti-Hindu'.

Effectively, he was anti the establishment of power and he was for the humble and the meek. In a world riven by inter-faith suspicion and the rise of secularism, having now left us in body, he remains with us, yet another faith beacon of light, reason and self-sacrifice to help us into the future.

*Reference source: Obituary 'Of human bondage' The Economist, 10 Oct 2020
Gordon Gaddes 27 October 2020*

A RIDE WITH A DIFFERENCE

Recently, I shared a Guy's Hospital transport ride with a devout Islamic lady whose devotions put me to shame. She reads the Koran every day and does the required prayers the full five times - a beneficial activity.

What I found most interesting from our conversations was confirmation of my hypothesis (possibly) that although her God (Allah) was just as real to her as our God is to us, we both accepted that there is only one God.

This was not a 'stand off' because all paths in religion lead to this one God. (If this is considered wrong I would accept a corrective lecture!)

I was able to pass on several biblical texts which she agreed too.

A journey not to forget.

Michael Robinson

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The Revd Richard Leslie

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**Draw takes place on Sunday 13th December
St Paul's Church Solway at 10.45am.
This will be streamed on-line via Zoom.**



Zoom meeting is open to all - how to join on the day:

Copy and paste this link into the address bar of your browser

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j84176353296?pwd=elAvMmdybERrL3MwVE45eEtIS3NsQT09>
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