

The LINK

30p

January 2016



The Parish Church of St Michael Braintree
www.stmichaelsbtreetree.co.uk



My dear Friends

My attention was recently drawn to an article in *The Spectator*, written last June by Damian Thompson, one its Associate Editors (and also as it happens Editorial Director of the *Catholic Herald*). The article is provocatively titled *2067: the end of British Christianity*.

Thompson presents some thoroughly depressing statistics of decline: between 2001 and 2011 the number of Christians born in Britain fell by 5.3 million – about 10,000 a week; and the Church of England is declining faster than other denominations, so that on current trends Anglicanism will disappear from Britain in 2033 – 40 per cent of the population called themselves C of E in 1983, 29 per cent in 2004, and just 17 per cent in 2014. The last Archbishop of Canterbury but one, George Carey, famously said last May that the C of E was ‘one generation away from extinction’. The statistical trends support him.

What is there to say about all this? I think there are two aspects we need to consider, perhaps as a challenge for the year ahead.

First, we need to recover a sense of the urgency of evangelism and the priority it should have in the life of our church and every church. Years ago a friend of mine put it this way: ‘Evangelize or die!’ A Carey-ite before his time, you might say. This friend also pointed out that evangelism is the only thing we can do for God on earth that we won’t be able to do better in heaven, because there won’t be any unconverted people there. Therefore, he argued, this must be the reason why the Lord lets us remain on earth, rather than returning immediately to take us to be with him. Actually this point is clearly made in scripture itself:

The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (*2 Peter 3.9*).

In spite of these arguments for evangelism, church members don't seem very keen on it. Our Lent Course on the topic a few years ago, which was open to all Braintree churches, was poorly attended, and a course on rural evangelism which Lin Terris, our Evangelism Enabler, was planning to lay on with one of the local clergy, has had no takers at all. Is 'talking about Jesus' simply un-British, or is it that the clergy and others haven't done a very good job in teaching and building people up in their faith, so that they have no confidence in knowing *what* to say about Jesus?

Secondly, we need not just to seek ways of reaching out, but to pay heed to what is happening within. Damien Thompson talks about the catastrophic effects of 'secularisation', by which he means primarily the process of Christians thinking more and more the world's way and adopting its values and agenda, perhaps even mistaking them for 'gospel causes' (he cites anti-sexism and carbon emissions as two examples). In other words, Christians are getting sidetracked. 'Long before digital technology, social mobility was undermining... the networks of people... who believe the same thing as you do... You go away to university and suddenly almost nobody believes what you do, or did. Your siblings move to different towns, so you won't see them in church any more. Your laptop plugs you into any social network that takes your fancy... The mainstream churches can't cope with this explosion of choice.'

We who call ourselves Christians really do need to 'dare to be different' and be prepared to say so. We so easily lose our nerve and think we will encounter hostility, when often we shall actually win respect and, more importantly, commend Christ. It doesn't all have to end in 2067: as Thompson himself is happy to acknowledge, 'a projection is not the same thing as a prediction.' The statistics do, however, show us that we need to take action.

Your sincere friend and Vicar

Charles

MISSION OF THE MONTH

A Rocha

A Rocha is an international Christian conservation organisation, operating in 20 countries all over the world. A Rocha is working for the protection and restoration of the natural world. Underlying all they do is their biblical faith in the living God who made the world, loves it and entrusts it to the care of human society.

It works through practical involvement in nature conservation projects and ecological research; campaigning on biodiversity issues and engaging with churches, schools, communities and individuals.

In 1986 the first field study centre, Cruzinha, opened in Southern Portugal. The team there has been researching the wildlife and habitats of southern Portugal in order to aid their protection. In 2012 they won a legal action aimed at protecting the estuary of Ria de Alvor from inappropriate development.

In Brazil, A Rocha is working with churches to bring pressure on the government to build sustainable public policies and implement proposals that emerged at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio in 2012.

In Kenya the Mwamba field study centre on the coast next to Watamu National Marine Park has a high number of rare birds. The centre has practical conservation programmes including research, environmental education and community conservation. Two more field stations and a new field study centre in Nairobi are being established to encourage training in conservation farming.

In Lebanon, the Aammiq Marsh – the country’s last major inland wetland – has been saved from drainage and enlarged in size by A Rocha’s work mobilising the local farmers, landowners and villagers and 3000 hours of field monitoring over a 3 year period in partnership with the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon.

Much nearer home (less than 25 miles) Foxearth near Sudbury is A Rocha UK’s first nature reserve. This site is an important dragonfly area. A part time project manager has been appointed to oversee the development of the site. Well worth a visit when the warm days of summer are back!

There are success stories from all over the world, and I suggest you take a look at the excellent websites – arocha.org (for international news) and arocha.uk for UK based activities.



Ann Mahood

THANK YOU

Greg and Margrit thank you so much for all your prayers and support during the last few challenging months. It means a lot to us!

Many thanks too for the lovely Christmas cards and kind messages we have received.

Greg is on the second cycle of a new chemotherapy treatment, which we hope and pray will make an impact on his tumour. Sadly treatment makes life very difficult for him.

We hope you all have a peaceful Christmas and wish you God’s rich blessing in 2016.

With our love

Greg and Margrit Strathearn

PCC Meeting 12 November

Moe Aung led a time of prayer.

David Henfrey presented the **Treasurer's Report**. So far £8,775 had been raised towards the Gift Day target of £15,000. We discussed PCC giving, and decided to leave most of last year's figures unchanged, as to both amount and recipients. There would be a small saving on the giving budget after the small overspend in 2014.



We agreed the purchase of a further supply of **artificial candles**, to enable some to be fixed rather than held, and so that the flower arrangers could illuminate their displays.

Lin Terris gave the **Evangelism Group** report, mentioning the recent Tea Party and Film Afternoon, and upcoming events such as Experience Christmas, to be made available to the public as well as John Ray School. We also planned to mark the weekend of the **Queen's 90th Birthday** celebrations with some special events.

Charles reported on the **CHIP Group**, announcing plans for improved follow-up. The Electoral Roll would soon be displayed in church – few people had chosen to opt out.

We chose the church's **Verse of the Year 2016**, which you will find overleaf.

Chris Jones reported on the **Deanery Synod**, at which Bishop Roger had given examples of the practical outworking of

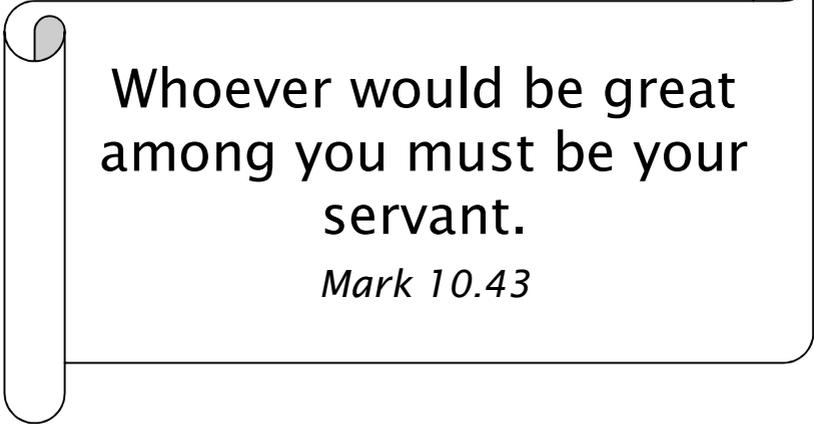
Transforming Presence and answered some questions.

Charles read out a letter from Lea Williams, expressing his appreciation of our support, and telling the exciting news that he would be serving his curacy not far from Braintree.

The next scheduled PCC meeting is on 7 January.

Charles Mason

Verse of the Year 2016



Whoever would be great
among you must be your
servant.

Mark 10.43

CONFIRMATION

Confirmation is the normal way in which the Church of England receives people into full membership, including those baptized as adults. It is the right thing for those who were baptized as infants and now wish to profess the Christian faith for themselves. It is also available to those who have the background of a different denomination but have now decided to 'make their home' in the C of E and wish to mark that decision formally.

This year Bishop Roger (Colchester) will be coming to conduct a Confirmation service on **Tuesday 3 May**, and we may have the pleasure of welcoming candidates from other parishes as well as our own.

If you are interested in joining a preparation course (which does not commit you to being confirmed), please let us know as soon as possible, and certainly **by the end of January**. Under 18s should speak to Andy Carter, over 18s to the Vicar. Contact details at the back of LINK.

LADIES GROUP

We enjoyed our annual Christmas meal in December. We started with smoked mackerel pâté and then had roast turkey, potatoes and parsnips accompanied by runner beans and carrots. Dessert was a choice of cheesecake or trifle, followed by mince pies and tea or coffee. Shirley then gave us a seasonal reading and we sang four carols.

Joel Wicks, our Children and Families Worker, will be with us in January to tell us a little of his life and work.

Helen Kemp

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

Thank-you very much for all shoeboxes, fillers and cash received for this year's campaign. 90 boxes have been taken to the Chelmsford warehouse, a brilliant total. We used some of the excellent fillers and cash to create, and pay transport costs for 18 of these boxes. A special thanks to those who helped move the boxes and fillers from the church and created these extra boxes. All the other fillers will be used in the warehouse to supplement other boxes and the cash to assist with transport costs.

There was a delay in finding a suitable warehouse this year, so after a late start, everyone is busy with the essential tasks to ensure the boxes are sent to their destination as soon as possible. We thank God that he has provided a suitable building for checking to take place, and people to do the work.

Thanks to all of those involved. Final checking and packing finished at 2.30pm on 12 December for distribution to Belarus, Iraq, and Ukraine.

Jenny Chapman



JANUARY DIARY

2 Saturday

8-10am SuMMiT Prayer Breakfast – Church House

3 Sunday 2nd of Christmas

8.00am Holy Communion – Revd Charles Mason

10.00am Church Family Worship with Baptism –
On a journey to where? – Andy Carter

5.15pm Evening Prayer – Jesus Chapel –
Tom St John-Coleman

6.30pm Evening Worship – The God we can rely on –
Revd Charles Mason

7.30pm Focus

8.00pm Prayer Meeting – Jesus Chapel

4 Monday

7.30pm Bell Ringing

8.00pm Badminton

5 Tuesday

1.15pm Tiddlywinks

8.00pm Men's Bible Study

6 Wednesday EPIPHANY

9:45am Meeting Point Bible Study

10.00am Holy Communion – Revd Charles Mason

6.30pm 4th Braintree Cubs & Scouts

7.30pm Prayer Supper – Church House

8.30pm SuMMiT – Wagon and Horses, South Street

8.00pm Bible Study Groups: Lifebuilder, Notley Road

7 Thursday

3.30pm ASK

7.30pm PCC – Church House

8.00pm Carry on Exploring Bible Study

8 Friday

5.30pm 4th Braintree Beavers, Cubs & Scouts

10 Sunday Baptism of Christ

- 8.00am Holy Communion – Revd Stephen Bailey
10.00am Morning Worship– The best for God –
 Can. John Turton
6.30pm Holy Communion – Promises, promises –
 Revd Stephen Bailey
7.30pm Focus

11 Monday

- 12.15pm Spotlight
3.30pm Pastoral Referral Group – 10a Marshalls Road
7.30pm Bell Ringing
7.30pm Good Book College
8.00pm Badminton

12 Tuesday

- 11.00am CFW Planning Group – 10a Marshalls Road
1.15pm Tiddlywinks
8.00pm Ladies Group
8.00pm Men’s Bible Study

13 Wednesday

- 9:45am Meeting Point Bible Study
6.30pm 4th Braintree Cubs & Scouts
7.30pm Elders – Church House
8.00pm Bible Study Groups: Lifebuilder, Notley Road,
 Chestnut Grove

14 Thursday

- 2.15pm Women’s Fellowship
2.30pm Holy Communion – The Hawthorns
3.30pm ASK
7.30pm Rose Hill Bible Study
8.00pm Carry on Exploring Bible Study

15 Friday

- 5.30pm 4th Braintree Beavers, Cubs & Scouts

17 Sunday 2nd of Epiphany
8.00am Holy Communion – Revd Sarah Hayward
10.00am Holy Communion – Faithfulness to God –
Revd Stephen Bailey
6.30pm Evening Worship – Forgiveness and fragrance –
Revd Charles Mason
7.30pm Focus
8.00pm Prayer Meeting – Jesus Chapel

18 Monday
12.15pm Spotlight
7.30pm Good Book College
8.00pm Bell Ringing
8.00pm Badminton

19 Tuesday FEBUARY LINK SUBMISSION DUE
1.15pm Tiddlywinks
7.30pm Pastoral Visitors training – Church House
8.00pm Men’s Bible Study

20 Wednesday
9:45am Meeting Point Bible Study
6.30pm 4th Braintree Cubs & Scouts
8.00pm Bible Study Groups: Lifebuilder, Notley Road

21 Thursday
3.30pm ASK
7.30pm Rose Hill Bible Study
8.00pm Carry on Exploring Bible Study

22 Friday
2.30pm Bradbury House Service – Rosa Read
5.30pm 4th Braintree Beavers, Cubs & Scouts

24 Sunday 3rd of Epiphany
8.00am Holy Communion – Cyril Bamforth
10.00am Morning Worship – Just and generous? –
Roger Cooke
6.30pm Evening Worship – Things have changed! –
Can. John Turton
7.30pm Focus

25 Monday

- 12.15pm Spotlight
1.30pm CHIP Group – Church House
7.30pm Bell Ringing
7.30pm Good Book College
8.00pm Badminton

26 Tuesday

- 1.15pm Tiddlywinks
7.30pm Evangelism Group – Church House
8.00pm Men's Bible Study

27 Wednesday

- 6.30pm 4th Braintree Cubs & Scouts
7.30pm Elders – Church House
8.00pm Bible Study Groups: Lifebuilder, Notley Road,
Chestnut Grove

28 Thursday

- 2.15pm Women's Fellowship
3.30pm ASK
7.30pm Rose Hill Bible Study
8.00pm Carry on Exploring Bible Study

29 Friday

- 5.30pm 4th Braintree Beavers, Cubs & Scouts
7.30pm Flower Club

30 Saturday

- 9–3.30 Women @ St Michaels Conference –
Church House

31 Sunday 4th of Epiphany

- 8.00am Holy Communion – Can. John Turton
10.00am Holy Communion - The Day of the Lord –
Rev'd Charles Mason
6.30pm United Service at St Michaels – Children's and
Youth Work
7.30pm Focus

FROM THE REGISTERS

Weddings

- 5 December Jason Ikwuemesi and Jamie Jooste

WHERE WAS GOD?

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, was asked if the attacks in Paris caused him to doubt where God is. His response was applauded by many secular pundits. He replied, “Oh God, yes”, and admitted it put “a chink in his armour”. “I was out and I was walking, I was praying and saying, “God why – why is this happening? Where are you in all this? And then engaging and talking to God. Yes I doubt!”

Jan and I met in Paris in 1961 so to us it is a much loved city to which we return for special occasions. We stayed in a hotel in Rue de la Fontaine. One evening a man was stabbed to death in the bar in our hotel when a fight broke out between rival French Algerian groups. A few days later gunmen entered a hospital and machine gunned everyone in a ward because one of the patients might betray them but they did not have time to find out which bed he was in. One evening as we walked along a black van pulled up, several policemen with machine guns jumped out and pushed everyone up against a wall. We were released when we showed them our identity cards but others were taken off. Paris is no stranger to bloody violence.

God is not against people enjoying themselves. “Eat, drink and be merry” (Eccl 8:15). Yet in the midst of revelry there is death; none of us knows the day, let alone the hour. More starkly, Jesus said of the rich man who built up treasures on earth, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you” (Luke 12: 19-20).

Clearly the assassins in Paris took their god with them that evening. His name is Satan, for he is the god of all evil. He also has another name, Lucifer, which means light-bearer. This great deceiver can fool anyone into thinking that what they do is enlightened and so many people are blinded by that wicked ‘light’

But how many of the revellers took their gods with them? The god of the football match, of the heavy metal music or simply Bacchus the god of wine? The failure of Paris is a symptom of the failure of the church. So many people still say if there was no religion there would be no wars. Religion had nothing to do with the struggles in Paris in 1961. Religion died 2000 years ago on one dark and stormy afternoon just outside Jerusalem. Three days later Jesus rose from the grave so that all might be free of the lure of Lucifer. Yet we, the church, seem to act as though nothing momentous ever happened, except when death comes on a dry November evening and we throw our hands in the air, we stand with shocked amazement on our face and doubt in our hearts. Our actions cannot be differentiated from those of people who do not know the living Saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Where was God during those dreadful events on 13 November? Almost certainly there were Christians out enjoying themselves that evening, but God is also in those who do not acknowledge Him as their God. They too were created in His image and that image is one of love and compassion for all mankind. This same question was asked in 1945 when the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. If you look closely at pictures of the aftermath you will see the burnt out remains of a church. Where was God? He was in the midst of it; in the midst of life and in the midst of death. Life does not end in death for those who believe in a risen Jesus. It was not God who failed the people of Paris but the church for not being urgent in our proclamation of grace and salvation for all, so long as they lay down their lives at the foot of that precious Cross.

Cyril Bamforth

BELFRY BULLETIN

November was chosen by the EACR Northern District for their Quarter Peal month when it is hoped to ring a Quarter Peal in all the ringable towers in the District.

At St Michaels we decided to attempt 2 Quarter Peals, one on all 10 bells and one on the back 6 bells.

To ring the 10 bell QP we asked friends from other towers to help and so for the evening service on Sunday 22 November 1296 changes in 47 mins of Plain Bob Caters was rung by Lin Ould 1, Peter Chapman 2, Linda Ranby 3, Vicky LeFevre 4, Peter Smith 5, David Hengeli 6, Matthew Bayley 7, Bradley Hill 8, Maurice Downs [c] 9, Johnathan Thompson 10.



This was the 1st in method for the ringers of 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 and 1st on 10 for the ringer of 3.

This Quarter Peal was rung to celebrate the life of Peter Young.

For the 6 bell Quarter we decided it would be good to ring it for the Experience Christmas event in church on 29 November. This was also the time the town's Christmas lights were switched on. A Sunday service band rang 1260 changes of Plain Bob Doubles in 43 mins. Gareth Davies 1, Peter Smith 2, Lin Ould 3 Maurice Downs 4, Bradley Hill 5, Richard Ould 6, Debbie Hill conductor from the side.

This was Gareth's 1st Quarter Peal, a great effort, and he received well-deserved congratulations from the entire band. Gareth achieved this milestone with great determination - well done Gareth.

Happy and blessed New Year.

Peter Smith

