

FEBRUARY 2006

GOING OUT AND COMING IN

IN OUR NEW YEAR SERVICE on January 1st the theme was 'Do not be afraid'. This phrase, or similar ones occur many times in the Bible. I felt that I especially needed this message for after sixteen years at St Michael's my husband and I are moving to Warwickshire to take up a part-time job as associate ministers in the village of Tredington. For anyone, big changes in our lives bring the inevitable mix of challenge and excitement, contrasted with trepidation, loss and bereavement. As Reader and Director of Music for so long, I have been fully involved in the life of this Church, seen many changes and made many friends.

'Going out' from such a warm, wide-ranging fellowship where children, teenagers, young mums and their families, middle-aged and elderly people have meant so much to me will be a real wrench, especially as Tredington is a mainly elderly congregation. Why is it that only when we are forced to move on we realise and appreciate all we are leaving?

We are 'going out' at a time when it seems more people are 'coming in'. This Christmas St Michael's saw approximately a hundred more people coming through the doors. People seem to find it easier to come in at Christmas, perhaps because they

know what to expect. Often they are worried that the Sunday services may be less comfortable. A new-comer to St Michael's told me of her initial fears. What do people wear? Where will I sit? Will I be taking someone's place? How will I know when to sit or stand? Will I be made to feel conspicuous? Will anyone speak to me?

These are real anxieties and maybe they stop you from coming too? But just as my friend found her fears were groundless I am sure you would also.

A Beginners (Dummies) guide to the 10.30 service

If you come early to this service the Church may not look very full. It is only gradually that the pews fill up. You will be welcomed by members who will hand you hymn books and an order of service. (There are large print versions available) You can sit wherever you like. Whoever is leading the service (and it won't necessarily be the Vicar or Curate) will introduce themselves and everything will proceed according to the service sheet. There may be an organ accompanying the singing, or piano, or keyboard and instrumentalists. You might not be familiar with the songs but they are usually mixed with more traditional hymns. You will be advised when to

sit or stand. You will notice all ages represented and the children will leave to go to their own special groups after twenty minutes or so. There is amplification and a loop system for the hard of hearing. If it is a Communion service, no one will expect you to receive the Bread and the Wine but for those who do want to, stewards will guide and supervise the arrangements. There is a collection during a hymn but there is no obligation to contribute and you would notice that most people pass the bag by because they give in more systematic ways.

The service will last for approximately 75 mins, although when the children stay in on the first Sunday of the month it will be much shorter. After the service you will be encouraged to go over to the Church Hall for refreshments and to meet others.

Why not give Church a try? It may be the beginning of something really special for you.

'The Lord will preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore.'

Olive Kuhrt

John Burden

Many in the Parish may not know but will be sorry to hear that John Burden died last October. A considerable number of Blackheathans attended his funeral at Hemingford Grey on October 27th 2005.

John was an architect, a fellow of the RIBA. In addition to his substantial, secular professional work, mainly in the design and construction of hospital and medical buildings, John did a lot of voluntary work for various churches.

In the early sixties, John designed and supervised the construction of St. Michael's new church hall, much of the work being done by the voluntary labour of parishioners. At that time, in collaboration with Gordon Chittleborough, he designed a large church for Ujiji in Tanzania followed by a Cathedral for Kasulu for the newly formed Diocese of Western Tanganyika. St. Michael's helped with finance for both these buildings.

Once the foundations were laid for the Cathedral and the wood for the pillars and roof trusses had been prepared by the local church members to the specifications supplied by John, he travelled out to Kasulu with a suitcase full of nuts and bolts supplied by St. Michael's. He helped the Africans to assemble the trusses and to erect one together. He left them able to put up the rest. Some years later he travelled out again to help with the extension he had planned, at their request, when the original large building became inadequate. He helped with other buildings in Kasulu, especially with the library for the use of the Bible College and public. All this time he was involved with St. Michael's church buildings.

When John moved to the Hemingfords in the mid 80's he planned the re-organization of St. Barnabas Church in Cambridge, advised other churches with plans for re-ordering their interiors and helped St. James in Hemingford Grey to re-order their Parish Centre.

In recent years he was working on the design of a Cathedral for Tabora in Tanzania. He was also busy raising

money to help with the cost of the roof. Fortunately when he died the plan was finished and the Cathedral is now under construction in various stages as money becomes available.

John had three children, Martin, Caroline and Sue with his first wife Jean who, sadly, died in 1970. In 1974 he married Janet and, with their son Jonathan, moved from Blackheath to the Hemingfords in 1985. We thank God for his extensive work for the Kingdom of God and offer our sincere condolences to his wife and family.

Unkeepable Promises

At my rather old-fashioned school we went to Holy Communion every week – *Book of Common Prayer*-style – and I was always puzzled by the words “Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins ... and intend to lead a new life following the commandments of God ...”. What was the point of incanting this if it was there printed in the book, and we would be back again next week saying exactly the same thing? Why “bemoan our manifold sins and wickedness” and declare that we will not repeat them if the service dooms us to return and say that we broke last week's promise?

Some years later, as friends and acquaintances married, one heard them vow to “forsake all others” when national statistics indicated that many of them would not do so.

Is there any virtue in making a promise which one knows that one definitely or possibly will not be able to keep? Yes, of course there is. How could it be wrong to promise to do what is good? This is not the hypocrisy of offering charity which one does not deliver or love which one withholds.

Jonathan Swift's famous remark, “Promises, like pie-crusts, are made to be broken” has reached cliché status largely because people do not read what that highly-religious man (he was after all a Dean) actually said: it is not “Promises are made to be broken (they are like pie-crust)” but “Promises are like pie-crust, and so made to be broken”. The point of

his observation is the crust, not the promise. It serves the useful purpose of keeping the pie together until the last moment when that purpose is no longer needed, and would obstruct eating if it were not broken. Just the same with promises: they must be kept for as long as they are serving their purpose.

The promise to God appears in every Christian service in some form.

Its purposes are many: if we could keep it permanently then we would have achieved what God wants for us, and we would be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect. Keeping our promise as long as we can helps us on the way, it helps the world that God wants to come into being. It is not just for ourselves that we do this, and sometimes when all seems bleakest and most forlorn that we achieve the most. And as Arthur Hugh Clough in 1849 put it in “Say not the struggle nought availeth” the moment when “The enemy faints not, nor faileth,

And as things have been, things remain” is the very moment when unseen colleagues may be about to be victorious, but may be overcome for our own lack of resolve. The struggle always does avail. In 2005 Alexander McCall Smith put it similarly (in *Friends, Lovers, Chocolate*), that good people were “worthy of note, of course, because they *battled* and that battle was a great story, whereas the evil were evil because of moral laziness, or weakness, and that was ultimately a dull and uninteresting affair”.

The battle is always worth fighting. Church militant imagery is deeply out of fashion, but the old hymn-writers knew what they were about when they called on us to “Fight the good fight” (drawn from *2 Tim. 4: 7*) and “Put on the armour of God” (*Eph. 6: 13*). Clover-hoofed devils facing up to Christian soldiers may now strike us as ludicrous, but it is only the metaphor which is outdated: the substance remains, that to be evil is lazy and to be good needs work, discipline and, often, suffering and loss.

There is the reason for the weekly reminder. Immorality and evil need no spur: they will come soon enough. No-one promises to be bad. But if they did, it would be an easy promise to keep.

The hub of the universe?

The navel of the earth? The eye of the storm? Not Boston, not Delphi, but a haven in a busy life here in our own corner of Blackheath.

We are thinking about St Michael's church halls, and all that goes on there. It is a true community resource, as envisioned in the late 1960s when a number of local people built what we now call our main hall, kitchen, entrance and Musa Room. They came faithfully Saturday by Saturday, leaving their Monday to Friday offices to work with their hands providing the bulk of the labour force, led by a few qualified building tradesmen. By the late 1980s we needed to expand, and a further suite of rooms was built. The architects were our own neighbours: John Burden and Bill Lowe.

Musa Room

The Musa Room was named for Bishop Musa of the diocese of Western Tanganyika with which the parish has had close links since its creation nearly forty years ago. The other rooms also reflect our Christian history, being named for William Tyndale and John Bunyan.

At almost any time of the day or evening you will find the whole

complex a buzz of activity. A lively nursery school uses two rooms every weekday morning and afternoon, their artwork providing a vibrant backdrop to all that happens there. On Saturdays and some afternoons after school a cluster of balloons at the gate heralds a birthday party in full swing. Three mornings a week Mums and Toddlers meet for the children to share toys and games, while their mothers have coffee. Then there are children's classes: dance, music, drama, language, keep fit. And the young people's groups of Beavers, Cubs and Scouts.

Local residents' associations and other organisations hold their annual meetings here. The Blood Donation Service is based in our halls six times a year, and every four years or so the halls become a polling station.

Eleven o'clock club

On the first Wednesday in each month following coffee and a talk the Eleven O'Clock Club holds a lively and sociable lunch – organised by church members, but open to all, and drawing people from an area much wider than our own parish.

And is there ever time and space

for the church itself? Yes indeed: Sunday School teaching groups meet there during the morning church service, and afterwards there is coffee and squash for the whole church family. Then there is a prayer meeting one evening a month; a Friday morning mothers' Bible study group; parish lunches from time to time and a variety of social events: Harvest Supper, International Evening, Quiz Night, to name but a few; the regular young people's groups such as Sneakers and the 6:15 Group, and then, perhaps the highlight of the year, our stimulating and exuberant Holiday Club, held in the first week of the summer holidays when about 120 children between the ages of 5 and 11, and almost as many helpers, share songs and stories, games and crafts, teaching and FUN.

Want to know more?

If you would like to know more, about the where and when of particular activities, or to hire the halls, check our website, www.se3.org.uk, or contact our administrator, Marion Lane, by telephone on 8852 1205 (Tuesdays to Thursdays, 9.30am – 3pm) or by email at church@se3.org.uk.



February



2006

5 Feb.	10.30am	Worship Together
	6.30pm	Holy Communion
12 Feb.	10.30am	Holy Communion
	6.30pm	Evening Prayer
15 Feb.	11.00am	Holy Communion
19 Feb.	10.30am	Morning Prayer
	6.30pm	Holy Communion
26 Feb.	9.00am	Holy Communion
	10.30am	Morning Prayer
	6.30pm	Evening Prayer

QUIZ NIGHT

St Michaels' Quiz Night is on 4th February at 8:00pm in the Hall. Make a team or come and join one on the night.

ABLE COMMUNITY CARE

Abe Community Care provides long term live-in care schemes for people with high dependency needs. They publish a regular Gazette full of helpful information. Contact Angela Gifford (01603 764 567) for more information

AGE CONCERN

Age Concern Greenwich is recruiting volunteer befrienders to visit elderly people who are housebound. Some are very lonely and isolated and would love a chat and cup of tea. Contact Elaine O'Connor (020 8269 1622) for more details.

The MESSENGER

The next issue of The Messenger will have an international theme, with a contribution from the Bishop of Western Tanganyika. Copy date is 10th February.

WHO'S WHO

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J - I - C No. 75 and 76

This should be easy for anyone living in Blackheath. What does this mean: CMBDLIFBUI

What replaces x:

9, 6, 3, 0, 8, x

Solutions

808 legs and 3252 toes. Congratulations to Elizabeth Wiggans, who wins the champagne. Runner-up, Chris Westwick. [Full solution available]

FOUR CENTURIES OF THE CATOR ESTATE

A series of illustrated lectures on the history of the Cator Estate, Blackheath from the 17th century through to the present day by Neil Rhind MBE FSA, Local historian and author [kindly supported by the Blackheath Cator Estate Residents Company and Humphreys, Skitt & Co, Estate agents] at 7.30pm on February 7th & 21st and March 7th & 21st 2006 at St Michael's Church Hall. Tickets: £5 a lecture; £17.50 for all four. On the door or pre-book by sending your cheques, payable to Heathtalks, and a stamped self-addressed envelope to No 3 The Lane, Blackheath Park, London SE3 9SL

A PRAYER AS LENT BEGINS

Let me hold fast to you, beautiful Lord, whom the angels themselves yearn to look upon. Wherever you go, I will follow you. If you pass through fire, I will not flinch, I fear no evil when you are with me. You carry my griefs, because you grieve for my sake. You passed through the narrow doorway from death to life, to make it wide enough for all to follow. Nothing can ever now separate me from your love.

Bernard of Clairvaux 1090 -1153

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Look, Reg! When I suggested we 'pull out all the stops' to celebrate the Bach anniversary, I didn't mean - literally!!