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CHURCH NEWS

JANUARY 2021

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Vol. 139 No. 1



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The Three Decker

Berkswich Parish Magazine
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DECEMBER

A Letter from our curate Rev'd David Clark



Dear Friends,

As we begin 2021 there is an understandable desire to say "good riddance" to 2020.

On the contrary, 2020 will remain with us for many years to come because it has been a life-changing, once-in-a-lifetime, and yes, a life affirming time.

There has been much fear, anxiety and suffering. Some of you reading this will have experienced bereavement related to the pandemic. Others amongst us have seen our financial position change drastically and many have experienced the loneliness of enforced isolation. It is wrong to seek to diminish or deny that pain; we should bring it to God, who in Christ, shares our suffering.

However, there has also been time to re-evaluate and reflect on what is important. For many of us there has been a deeper awareness of our community and our closest relationships. We have realised how important they are and recognised that we may have taken them for

granted. I have perceived a shared understanding that some of the other things in our busy lives that we considered to be vitally important before March, paled into insignificance when set alongside the sustaining place of relationships.

As Christians, we believe, indeed we know, that the most important relationship we can ever have is with God, incarnate in Jesus and encountered in everyone we meet, made in the image of God.

We read in the first book of Chronicles that all things come from God; that includes all of 2020 so don't be too keen to dismiss it. I urge you therefore to spend some time reflecting on the lessons God has given us, and pray for the year ahead.

Best wishes and blessings to you all for 2021.



PARISH OFFICE: For Baptisms, Marriages and other enquiries, please telephone the Parish Office on 01785 253111 (Weekdays 10 am to 12 pm except Bank Holidays) or email: parishoffice@berkswich.org.uk
Berkswich Parish Website: www.berkswich.org.uk (Closed at the present time.)

SERVICES January 2021

3rd January	10.30 am	Sung Eucharist	Holy Trinity	<i>Jeremiah 31.7-14</i>
2nd Sunday			and On Line	<i>Ps. 147. 13-end</i>
of Christmas	6.30 pm	Evening Prayer	On Line	<i>Ephesians 1. 30-14</i> <i>John 1. 10-18</i>
6th January	7.30 pm	Said Eucharist	Holy Trinity	
Epiphany			and On Line	
10th January	10.30 am	Sung Eucharist	Holy Trinity	<i>Genesis 1. 1-5, Ps. 29</i>
3rd Sunday			and On Line	<i>Acts 19. 1-7</i>
of Christmas	6.30 pm	Evening Prayer	and On Line	<i>Mark 1. 4-11</i>
13th January	8.00 pm	Compline	On Line	
17th January	10.30 am	Sung Eucharist	Holy Trinity	<i>1.Samuel 3. 1-10</i>
2nd Sunday			and On Line	<i>Ps. 139.1-5, 12-18</i>
of Epiphany	6.30 pm	Evening Prayer	On Line	<i>Revelation 5. 1-10</i> <i>John 1. 43-end</i>
20th January	8.00 pm	Compline	On Line	
24th January	10.30 am	Sung Eucharist	Holy Trinity	<i>Genesis 14.17-20, Ps. 128</i>
3rd Sunday			and On Line	<i>Revelation 19. 6-10</i>
of Epiphany	6.30 pm	Evening Prayer	On Line	<i>John 2. 1-11</i>
25th January - Conversion of St. Paul				
27th January	8.00 pm	Compline	On Line	
31st January	10.30 am	Sung Eucharist	Holy Trinity	<i>Deuteronomy 18. 15-20</i>
4th Sunday			and On Line	<i>Ps. 111</i>
of Epiphany	6.30 pm	Evening Prayer	On Line	<i>Revelation 12. 1-5a</i> <i>Mark 1. 21-28</i>
2nd February - Candlemas				
3rd February	8.00 pm	Compline	On Line	
7th February	10.30 am	Sung Eucharist	Holy Trinity	<i>Ps. 104. 26-end</i>
2nd Sunday	6.30 pm	Evening Prayer	and On Line	<i>Colossians 1. 15-20</i>
before Lent				<i>John 1.1-14</i>

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THE EPIPHANY JANUARY 6TH



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**A MESSAGE FROM OUR
WORLDWIDE PRESIDENT,
SHERAN HARPER**

“The year 2020 has been one of surviving the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, finding new ways of working and coping and recognising that our God is alive and still performs miracles. I pray that 2021 will bring with it bright new beginnings, a renewal and revival in each and every heart, home, community and nation. May 2021 be a year of prosperity as together we rebuild hope and confidence in every sphere of our lives and in our Mothers' Union.

With my love and God's blessings as always, Sheran”

We hope it will not be too long before the Berkswich Branch are able to meet together again and as soon as it is safe to do so, our programme of events will continue. Remember, thanks to you and our members worldwide, over the last 18 months:

- 2,490 people from the UK and Ireland enjoyed one of our Away From It All breaks, to support families under stress.
- 77,988 people are currently learning to read and write in Burundi
- 1.1 million people around the world were supported to improve their livelihoods
- The BigGive Christmas appeal achieved its target for the match funding pot of £46,000 in under 24 hours.

Best wishes and thank you to our members for their continued support.

Christine Gilson



Zoom Christmas Coffee Morning and Raffle

What a fun morning we all had on Saturday 12th December; spirits were high and everyone was determined to enjoy the virtual fellowship, at the same time as raising much needed funds for the parish. We had a Christmas Quiz, a Generation Game (more about that later), a cake sale, an auction and lots of laughter. Christmas hats and jumpers were in evidence as people chatted. Fr. Graham was a genial Master of Ceremonies, ably assisted by Vicky.

Let me tell you about the Generation Game from a participant's perspective; following a phone call and the delivery of a surprise package by Fr. Graham the night before, the four of us knew nothing about what we were going to be doing during the game, except having a lot of fun.

So, at the appointed time all was revealed: David, Bob, Beryl and myself were told we needed icing sugar, a knife and a board for working on. And then it was time to open the mystery package which contained a block of fondant icing, a ball of marzipan, a few cocktail sticks and some tiny beads. The demonstration revealed that we had to make an angel in 3 minutes; if we had been given 3 hours I might have made a better job of my very squat wingless angel. The judges cast their votes and Bob Gilson was a worthy winner.

At the time of writing this fun morning has raised just over a £1000.

Huge thanks to Fr. Graham, Mary Moss and her helpers – Mary Sapsford, Julie Grymel, Sue Hatton and Bob Moore who delivered all the cakes and goods bought at auction.

MJ



The Parish Choir goes Virtual

When Fr. Graham said that he would like to have an online ‘Nine Lessons and Carols’ service most of our choir members wondered how this was going to happen. We were soon to find out...

Our final choir practice before lockdown had been to rehearse the anthems and music for Holy Week and Easter; and then on the 23rd March, churches were closed, so sadly we were unable to sing the wonderful music for this most important Christian Festival.

The next time we met as a choir was on a Zoom meeting early in November, 8 months later. Our choirmaster and organist, Roy, told us what choir carols we would be singing and on his keyboard took us through our parts; we sang along with our microphones muted. This has continued until we were ready to start recording our own voices.

This where the terror and the fun begins! We needed equipment – headphones and a special recording app had to be downloaded onto our ipads or iphones. Kerry Milan had kindly recorded a backing track for each of the parts so that we could practise, but when we recorded we had to sing to Roy’s organ accompaniment which was more difficult.

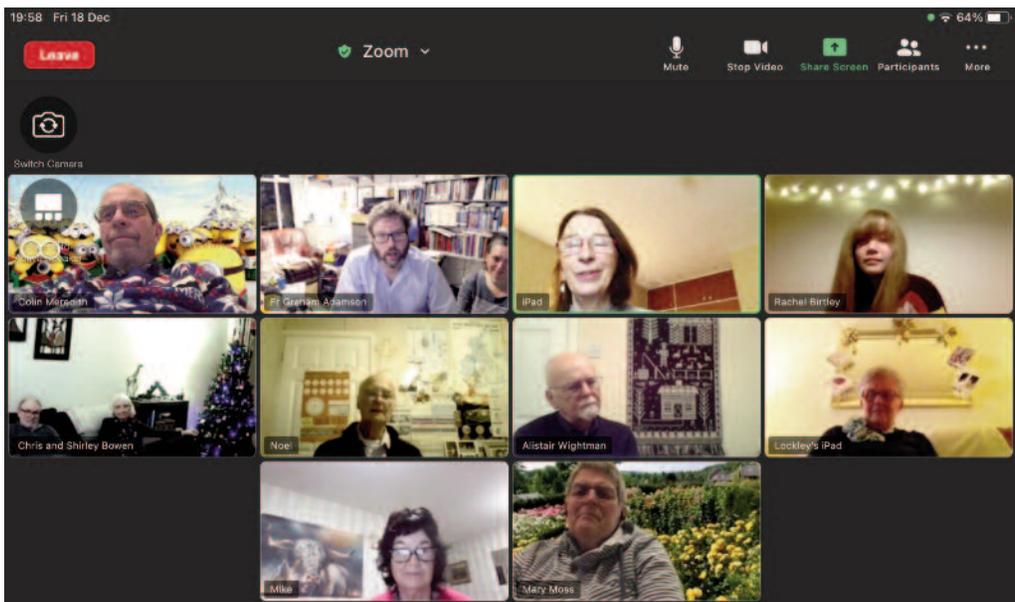
After much practice singing to Kerry’s tracks and a great deal of prevarication it was time to

begin. With headphones in place, we heard Fr. Graham encourage us and hopefully try to relax us with a Christmas cracker joke. Then followed 4 beats; we listened to the first two and clapped to the next two, waited for the introduction and finally started to sing. Having never recorded my voice before it was terrifying to feel so exposed, every note painfully strained, breathing difficult because the recorder picked up every breath in the wrong place, rustling of paper and occasionally the telephone. Frustration sets in when having reached the final verse, a wrong line or dodgy note is sung, and you know you have to start all over again.

The recording of all the carols was done over three weeks and at our last choir practice we heard the results of our efforts. A huge thank you to Fr. Graham, Euan and Chris Bowen who have the technical expertise to stitch all our individual recordings together to form a choir.

Challenging and rewarding and definitely worth the time and effort involved. The Berkswich Parish Choir hope you enjoyed it and we can’t wait to get back together again to lead our worship and hopefully celebrate Easter with some glorious music.

MJ



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The Parish Choir goes Virtual

In the first lockdown a few of the choir joined Gareth Malone in his daily online singing practice for the Great British Home Chorus. It was very reassuring as he, like me, had no real knowledge of technology, he had to keep upping his game buying new microphones, earphones and so it continued. Then came the recording finding out how to record on our own, upload and send as a video to him, initially in a rudimentary way then Decca Records got involved and a more professional way was found. The CD produced is amazing thinking that there a thousands of remote voices pinned together.

This inspired me to research the possibility of perhaps our choir being able to record the hymns for our morning Eucharists. I asked Fr Graham if he thought it may be possible, he didn't say no but didn't say yes either. I knew Lichfield Cathedral were recording their choir members remotely and broadcasting at their Sunday services. I contacted Cathy Lamb, the wife of the choir's Musical Director Ben, as she leads some of the Diocese's RSCM courses. She informed me that Ben was fortunate and had all the necessary technology already for when they produce their CDs. Also, that it takes him hours to put it all together but to get in touch with him directly. I did, and he was very helpful and sent me what he uses, of course I could not understand the full details of the technology so passed it onto Fr Graham. He didn't think we could do it immediately but perhaps at Christmas. So, the ball was now rolling and I am amazed how he worked on producing such a professional Nine Carols and Lessons, a pleasure to watch and listen to.



On the recording side, I can now fully understand how important it is for choir members to listen to each other when singing so that it all flows together. When practising, whilst walking the dog, everything seemed relaxed and clear but once recording a croak would occur in the final verse, so back to the start. The parts in my voice range were much easier to record than when I had to hit a high note without other voices to boost me. I had a few takes I must say, if it wasn't the telephone it was the doorbell or me just messing up.

Now we have regular virtual choir practices it should become easier. Very grateful to all who made it happen, so important to have music and praise in our worship, it lifts the spirit.

The Joy of the Lone Chorister!

A task was set.

Music to make for the carols and lessons we love.

With music sheets.

TV turned off, the room as quiet as could be.
All ready just for me!

Headphones on.

Devices ready I listen to Graham's pep talk!
Instructions said off I go to record my wavering voice.

No, no!!

Doorbell chimes... The dog doth bark

My peace is truly shattered, my recording now is battered.

Deep, deep breath, recover the calm.

I put my head phones on.

Fingers crossed that when I clap no one knocks the door again.

My devices ping, then a fly buzzes by, right beside my ear.

What else can go wrong I ask myself? Oh no! I forgot to press record
I need to sing again!

Where has time gone?

It's dark outside... Hours, listening to my own voice.

Oh, never mind this version will do. I have sung it a hundred times!!

No one will hear the odd duff note or when I sang the odd wrong word.

Recording done.

Now all I need to do is send the precious thing on!!

Shirley Bowen

Poems for the New Year

NEW EVERY MORNING

Every day is a fresh beginning,
Listen my soul to the glad refrain.
And, spite of old sorrows
And older sinning,
Troubles forecasted
And possible pain,
Take heart with the day and begin again.

Susan Coolidge (1835 -1905)

THE FOURTH GIFT

The fourth gift they had was
Wisdom,
The one they needed for themselves
And the world.

Wisdom
To leave the familiar
In search of a new security
More precious than the gifts they gave.

Wisdom
To discover, in the starlit child,
A significance above
Gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Wisdom
And the eyes of faith
To receive God's showing
Of His Son.

The gifts we read about
Were three,
But the fourth gift they had was
Wisdom.

By Daphne Kitching

— 2 0 2 1 —

At the passing of time I'm aghast
Another New Year coming fast!
Can it be that much worse
Or more of a curse
Than this horrible year that has passed?

By Nigel Beeton

THE YEAR'S MIDNIGHT

The flown, the fallen,
The golden ones,
The deciduous dead, all gone
To ground, to dust, to sand,
Borne on the shoulders of the wind.

Listen! They are whispering
Now while the world talks,
and the ice melts,
And the seas rise.
Look at the trees!

Every leaf-scar is a bud
Expecting a future.
The earth speaks in parables.
The burning buss. The rainbow.
Promises. Promises.

*Gillian Clarke 'haphazard by starlight' by
Janet Morley*

HAPPY NEW YEAR

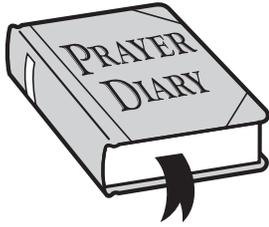
*(An acrostic poem where the first letter of
each line spells out the title of the poem)*

Heaven's gift of another year
As the old departs and the new is born,
Plans for a future and a hope
Preparing us for each new dawn.

Yesterday has gone forever,
New days and ventures lie ahead,
Even darkness turns to light
When we make the Lord our head.

Yielding to the Holy Spirit
Ever mindful that He's there,
As we live our lives before Him
Rejoicing in His loving care.

By Megan Carter



Prayer Diary

If there is one thing that last year showed us, it was that life is unpredictable. Let us therefore anchor our lives this year in our God, who not only makes all things new, but who in Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

AS A NEW YEAR BEGINS

A prayer by Karl Barth (1886 – 1968). This most prominent Protestant theologian of his time spent much of his life resisting the Nazi movement, and so knew a thing or two about entering a New Year undaunted by troubles all around him.

O Lord, our Father! At the turn of the year... our hearts are filled with sombre thoughts... our ears are deafened by the voices of the radio and the newspapers, with their numerous predictions for the coming year. Instead we want to hear Your word, Your voice, Your assurance, Your guidance. We know that You are in our midst, and are eager to give us all that we need, whether we ask or not.

... We ask for one thing only: that you collect our scattered thoughts, getting rid of the confused and defiant thoughts that may distract us, and thus enable us to concentrate on your limitless generosity to us. You were abundantly generous to us last year, and will be no less generous to us next year, and in every year to come. Fill us with gratitude to you.

A New Year's resolution-prayer Following in His footsteps

Almighty eternal, just and merciful God, grant us the desire to do only what pleases you, and the strength to do only what you command. Cleanse our souls, enlighten our minds, and inflame our hearts with your Holy Spirit, that we may follow in the footsteps of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

St Francis of Assisi (1182 – 1226)

Creator God,

by whose spirit we exist
so that we might bear fruit for you,
may we measure our lives this year
not by what we achieve or possess,
but by how much we give,
how many we love
and how often we hear
your 'well done, good and faithful servant'.

Amen

Keeper of our steps,

Keeper of our senses,
Keeper of our souls,
Keep us as the apple of your eye;
Keep us in your perfect peace;
Keep us in our going out and our coming in;
For you are the strong keep
Within the walls of our life.

Amen

Open our eyes, gracious Lord, to see the infinite value of every soul,

The supreme importance of every human life
And the unique beauty of every individual,
So that, without distraction or agenda, we might catch a glimpse

Of your likeness mirrored and your love at work
In each person with whom we spend time this day. *Amen*

Lord of all life and love,

Walk with us throughout our pilgrimage on earth,
Teaching us daily

How to bless others through service,
How to find strength in weakness
And how to experience growth by letting go,
For your name's sake. *Amen*



A Sermon preached by Rev'd Joy Bishop on the third Sunday of Advent

There is something mysterious about Advent that sometimes feels a little unsettling. From our readings we have arrows pointing in all directions almost like a firework display. We have Isaiah pointing to the future and a long-awaited promised Messiah, our calendars are pointing us to the approaching celebrations of the birth of this Messiah more than 2000 years ago. John points away from himself to Jesus at the beginning of his ministry and the New Testament reading features St. Paul pointing forward to Jesus' return. As we get closer and closer to Christmas, joy begins to surround us. It's there in our Christmas carols, and on our cards and decorations. Joy was there for John pointing to the coming ministry of Christ; it should be there for us looking to the second coming; just as it's there as we celebrate the gift of the infant Jesus so long ago.

You may notice that today's candle on the Advent wreath isn't purple like the other three. It's pink. The traditional colour for Advent is

purple, which is meant to represent what is royal, like the coming Prince of Peace, but also to show repentance, and the turning away from what is and towards something better.

This Sunday is called "Gaudete Sunday" which means "rejoice." And so, we light the pink candle because just as the white mixes with the purple and transforms it, we are waiting for Christ's light to break into our world and bring the joy that feels so elusive. We stand here, and we look for something better. We long for joy. And we say, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel".

What I noticed most reading the messages from Isaiah and from Paul to the Thessalonians and also from John the Baptist was their passion, their certainty about the messages they were bringing. I wish we could all operate with that kind of certainty and passion; how many more people would come to hear and believe?

Today from Isaiah." The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,



to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." We agree but do we feel passionately about it?

Who doesn't like to hear about joy this time of year? Christmas is almost here, and we are joyful.

But, what about those times when joy seems hard to find? What do we say then to the broken hearted?

Never more relevant than this year with the suffering of so many because of Covid. The ill, the separated families, the terribly lonely, the bereaved, the fearful, the ones who have lost their jobs the ones who don't know how to get enough food all across this world

All week I have been facing a blank computer screen because I knew I was supposed to preach about looking forward joyfully, but how do you talk about joy in the face of something so terrible?

I think that in the church we sometimes struggle to acknowledge the realities of the world. We do try hard to recognise the difficulties around us but we would rather be joyful. How can people come and talk about their pain and grief? How can they talk about being depressed? How can they talk about losing their job and struggling to make ends meet if we are solely determined to be joyful?

Jesus told us to bind up the broken hearted, and stay near those who suffer. Hard things happen all the time, and sometimes it might feel like there is no room for that in the Christmas season. Because some years the holidays for all of us are difficult let's make sure we can bring those difficulties into our worship.

The church has an obligation not just to acknowledge the brokenness of the world, but to also go one step forward and proclaim hope. In Advent we point to that fact, and we point with

hope to the future, and to the way Christ came into this world and will return.

Scripture doesn't promise us easy lives, or lives without pain. But it does promise us that those things do not have the last word. We proclaim, just by being together, however socially distanced, what joy really means.

We testify that the joy that comes with Christ is there in the best of times, but it's even there when times are hard. You can be a joyful person and still weep with those who weep.

Christ is the light of the world, and the worst that the world can do is still not enough to extinguish that light. And if that light cannot be extinguished, then neither can that joy.

And so, here we are, on one of the shorter days of the year. We are here because somewhere inside of us we believe that the light will always overcome the darkness. Our job as followers of Christ is to spread that light, and spread that joy. God's gift of joy is there for us all to claim, not just in the good times, but even more so in the bad. Claim it passionately because then you will then proclaim it passionately.

And so, and as we watch and wait this Advent, be witnesses to the light of Christ, and the joy it brings. Live as the people who believe that this joy, and the child who brings it, can change the world.

Remember, Paul speaking to the Thessalonians was speaking with the knowledge of Jesus' death and resurrection and all that he won for us. The victory won, the promise of eternal life, we should repent and prepare for his coming again with the same joy and passion we prepare to celebrate his birth and find the joy in both.

If you can do that, you're almost ready for Christmas. Amen.

PARISH POETS

Another lovely poem by Maddie Dudek's Mother

HANDS

God gave us hands to do his work
In many different ways
Creative hands - hard working hands
Hands folded close to pray.

Hands outstretched in greeting
A handshake firm and kind
Hands that speak and read by touch
To help the deaf and blind.

Gentle hands that soothe and heal,
Will lift us when we fall
Hands that bring us music
The sweetest sound of all.

Hands that give a blessing
With gifts from heaven above
God gave us hands to do His work
And fill the world with love.

Cynthia Shum

THE PROMISED LAND

Follow in these steps I take, unknown to me
where thou will go, in my wake the shores you'll
find, journey on with peace of mind.

Oh glorious lands we do discover, in breathless
awe transpire each other, sunlight rays through
clouds they break, delight each day as we awake.

Forest tree and mountain view, rainbow
spectrum vision true, imagine the joy and pure
delight, animals grazing, birds in flight.

Treasured moments heaven sent, thank the
Lord for what may be, all the wondrous sights to
see, let the miracle of life wash over thee.

Sweet those dreams till day ids light, the
spangle of stars throughout the night, with love
from friends that we embrace, may life live on in
eternal peace.

*A Poem from Sue Thacker published in a
book entitled 'Creative Touch'.*

A Ditty from our Roving Poet Caroline Evans

THE BAKERS OF BERKSWICH

Ye Bakers of Berkswich
Oh where have you gone
No lovely big cakes
Not even a scone

But help was at hand
It came in via Zoom
An auction with cakes
Beamed into the room

A Drizzle cake and lovely scones
Delivered to the door
Joy is mine at Christmas time
I couldn't ask for more.

*(Special thanks to Mary and to
Bob and Sue for delivery, and
it was such fun to watch!)*



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Editor: My thanks to Jacqueline Dean, Anthea's daughter in law for giving us permission to publish this article about her work and vocation as a hospital chaplain during this pandemic. Due to space, it will be published in installments.

HEARTS ON FIRE - PART 2

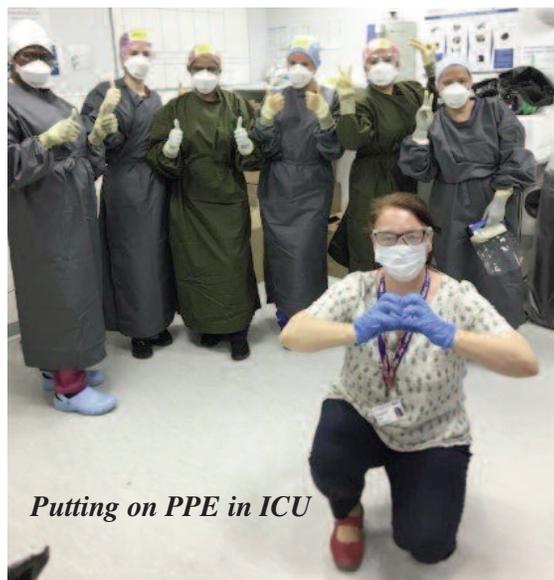
COVID-19 is such a cruel disease. It deprives us of contact and touch with those we love, limiting how we say good-bye at funerals, leaving us standing in the loneliness of our loss. Our team have been contacting families whose loved one sadly died at the hospital from coronavirus and other illnesses to offer pastoral care and support, inviting them, when we are able to gather again, to a 'Time to Remember Service'. Their stories are often heart breaking. One bereaved husband, sitting in self isolation at home, grieving the loss of his beloved wife, from whom he had never been apart for 55 years, simply said "I just want someone to hold me."

As I spoke with nursing staff it was evident that they were facing situations they had never experienced. Nursing teams drafted in from different areas of the hospital, found themselves learning to adapt to the different needs and circumstances in the face of this pandemic. The dedication of the medical staff continued to shine through despite this unprecedented situation. As a chaplaincy team we do a lot of work in the background and are called not just to be alongside patients and families but also to care for and support staff. Walking the wards in the evening, and called upon to be that listening ear, I heard the staff's stories. Some who have families who are far away in other countries. Some staff moved out of their family homes into hotels, so they could protect their families, patients. One paramedic recently confided to me that he had not been able to hold his children for two months. I saw staff anxious, often emotionally and physically exhausted, but still resiliently continuing to put their own fears, concerns, and comfort to one side, to care for others.

In fact, it was humbling to continually witness the tenderness and care that medical staff gave to patients. One of my most privileged moments was at the height of the crisis, in a ward where

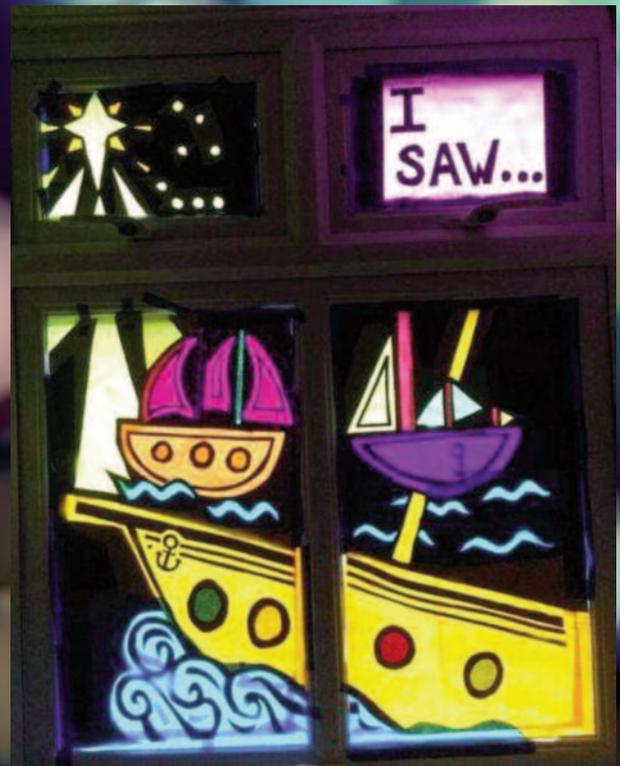
tragically many had died that day. I was sitting and praying at one bedside, and hearing the voice of a nurse speaking softly, sitting with another patient nearby... "Don't worry ... you are safe... Keep drinking in the oxygen. Do not be afraid." Then there was tragic loss of much-loved colleagues and friends among the staff. The Chapel become a haven for remembrance with condolence books to write in, candles to light, little knitted mementoes, and other tokens to place on the altar or to take away. It became a space to seek peace, and a safe place for tears to be shed.

Yet, amid all this, there were also moments of grace...where the chaplaincy team sensed the ever-present movement of the Spirit across the hospital. Receiving requests for prayer from matrons and nurses at shift handovers, setting up a spirituality resource table where we found that the free bibles, Quran's, rosaries, prayer cards constantly needed replenishing throughout the day. And there were moments of joy, giving thanks in prayer with one of our cleaners, for the birth of a grandchild - remembering the gift of life, in the midst of mortality.

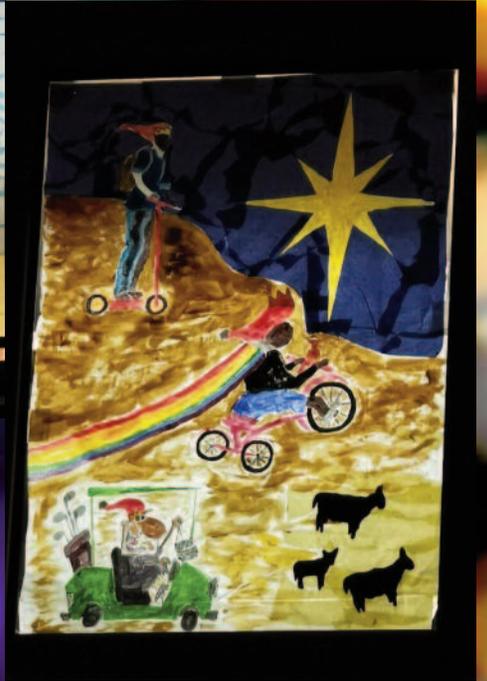


Putting on PPE in ICU

Lightup Berkswich



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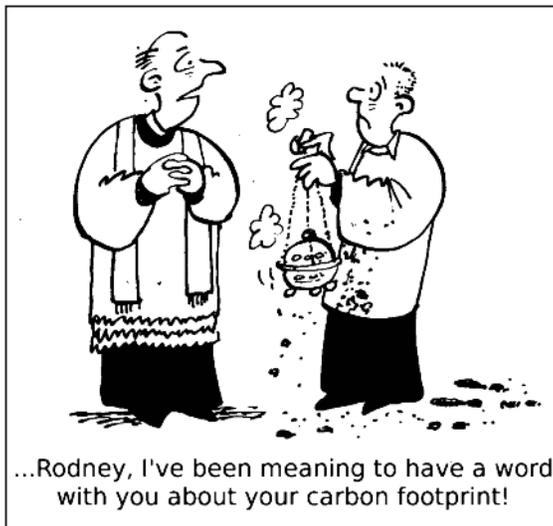
Thank you to Mark Dudek for making us smile this month with this carefully curated selection of jokes from various sources.

If a man says he will do something, he will do it. There's absolutely no need to keep reminding him every six months!

What's made of leather, a foot long, and sounds like a sneeze?
A shoe!

I'm reading a great book about anti-gravity. *I can't put it down.*

What do you call a one-eyed dinosaur?
Dyathinkhesaurus.



A man walked into a bar and said "Ouch!"
My doctor said to me "I can't find the exact cause of your problem, but I suspect it's due to drinking."
"No problem" I replied, "I'll come back when you're sober."

A man was admitted to hospital last night after swallowing a toy horse and covering himself with wood and straw.
His condition is described as stable.

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25TH JANUARY - ST PAUL, THE FIRST CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL

This month, on 25th January, the Church celebrates probably the most famous conversion of all. At least, what happened to a young man called Saul on the road to Damascus has become a byword for all instant conversions - what is known as a 'damascene' moment. Saul was a devout Jew, a Pharisee, a student of Gamaliel and a fierce critic of the followers of Jesus, then a very new sect on the religious scene.

On his way to Damascus to start a purge of Christians in that city, he was blinded by a bright light and heard a voice saying, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' He asked the identity of the voice, and was told: 'Jesus, whom you are persecuting'. Stunned by the experience, he followed further instructions which led him to a Christian man in Damascus, who prayed with him. As he did, Saul's sight was restored.

The experience convinced Paul that Jesus - crucified in Jerusalem four or five years earlier - was in fact the Messiah and had risen from the dead. After a period of instruction, Saul was baptised and took the name Paul. At first, some Christians were wary about the reality of his conversion, but over a period of time he was accepted and indeed eventually recognised as an 'apostle', a 'special messenger' of Jesus Christ.

His intellectual stature and leadership gifts quickly marked him out, and within a few years he became a leading figure in the emerging Christian Church, preaching and founding churches all over the Middle East, largely of Gentile converts. He was eventually martyred in Rome, probably in 65AD.

Paul was the first intellectual of the Christian Church, the man who was able to set the events of the life and teaching of Jesus, and especially His death and resurrection, into a coherent theology, with its roots very clearly in the Jewish faith of his own upbringing.

Many people think of Paul as a rather negative, narrow misogynist, but even a quick reading of his letters actually reveals a person of great warmth, who evoked enormous affection and devotion from others. 'You would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me!' he writes to the Christians at Galatia. As for the charge that Paul disliked women, even a quick read of his letters will reveal how large a role women played in his churches. In terms of the first century, St Paul was a dangerous liberal! So, all in all, the amazing Paul of Tarsus deserves a bit of celebrating on 25th January



BROCTON W.I.

2020, what a strange year this has been, hopefully never to be repeated.

The ladies of Brocton W.I., did however manage to keep in touch with one another, through afternoon tea events, held in gardens, through the summer months, always adhering to the restrictions of social distancing.

Communication has been maintained throughout, by our secretary, who has kept us informed on all matters relating to the wider Women's Institute. Friends have kept in touch, through phone calls and the internet.

As always, a Poppy Wreath was placed at The War Memorial, Weeping Cross, on Sunday 11th November; a token of our gratitude, to those who laid down their lives for our freedom.

The Committee are unable to say when our meetings and activities will resume, but are confident that they will.

In the meantime, a healthy, peaceful, Christmas and New Year, is wished to all our members, other Women's Institutes and the residents of Stafford.

Anne MacLeod

Time to prepare for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: 18th – 25th January

This year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has been prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland. The theme, "Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit", is based on John 15:1-17 and expresses Grandchamp Community's vocation to prayer, reconciliation and unity in the Church and the human family.



For 2021, the sisters are inviting churches across the world to enter into their tradition of prayer and silence that is rooted in the ancient traditions of the Church catholic.

Today the community has 50 sisters, spanning different generations, Church traditions, countries and continents. In their diversity the sisters are a living parable of communion.

Each year Christian Aid provides the 'Week of Prayer for Christian Unity' with 'Go and Do' action points for each of the daily reflections – linking into the important work of Christian Aid in the relief of poverty and advocacy of justice.

More at: <https://ctbi.org.uk/go-and-do-week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2021/>



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Five Ways to Welcome Wildlife

January is the time for new starts so why not try to make your churchyard more wildlife friendly in 2021? Here are five simple things to try, start with one or two.

1. Create a meadow - choose an area of grass in full sun, currently mown short. Leave it uncut for about 14 weeks over the spring and summer. See how many wildflowers come up naturally, you will probably be surprised. Scythe or strim the long grass, rake it up and remove it to a compost heap or use it to make hay.
2. Help your veteran trees - churchyards are fantastic for veteran trees, particularly yews. Gently clear below veteran and ancient trees, removing young saplings, piles of grass cuttings, sheds, grave spoil, old bottles and anything else that is there! Always remove ivy from yew trees but no need to do so from other trees unless advised to by an arboriculture expert.
3. Give wildlife a home - great fun for community events, how about making bird and bat boxes, bug hotels, deadwood piles and compost bays. Swift boxes can fit behind the church tower louvres. Try a range of different sized bird boxes, including open fronted ones for Spotted Flycatcher and Robin. Place a deadwood pile in a shady spot for frogs, newts, slow worm and hedgehogs to feast on the invertebrates there.
4. Be a little untidy – leave an area of tussocky grassland or scrub, perhaps against a wall or round the back. Cut and clear this every two or three years, doing a section each year. This will be fantastic shelter and great for overwintering invertebrates as well as amphibians and reptiles. Hedgehogs love places like this too.
5. Plant for pollinators – fill your flowerbeds or planters with species that are useful to insects. Include native plants and grasses as well as early and late flowering plants. How about some herbs which people can enjoy too? The wildflower Viper's Bugloss is outstanding for pollinators and very attractive too.

Enjoy watching the wildlife which will take advantage of these features and please tell us what you see.

All the best Harriet Carty,
Diocesan Churchyard Environmental Advisor
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