

Contact Information:

The Partnership office is open:

Monday - Friday 9:00 – 12:00pm.

Tuesday 8.30 – 11.30am

The office number is 01793 874221. The office e-mail is:

wspartnershipoffice@gmail.com

To publicise any News or Events in the next edition of In Partnership covering April, please send them to the office no later than 18 March.

The address for correspondence is:

The Partnership Office, Holy Trinity Church, Shaw Village Centre, SWINDON, SN5 5PY.

The editor's e-mail address is: wspartnershipoffice@gmail.com

The Partnership web site is <http://www.wswinlyd.org.uk>

Partnership Team Minister: Revd Capt Clive Deverell

Email: clive.deverell@btinternet.com Tel: 01793 877111

Associate Minister: Revd Trevor Day

Email: Trevor.Day@btinternet.com Tel: 01793 875373 or

Mobile: 07918 125826

Partnership Youth Worker: Claire Camm

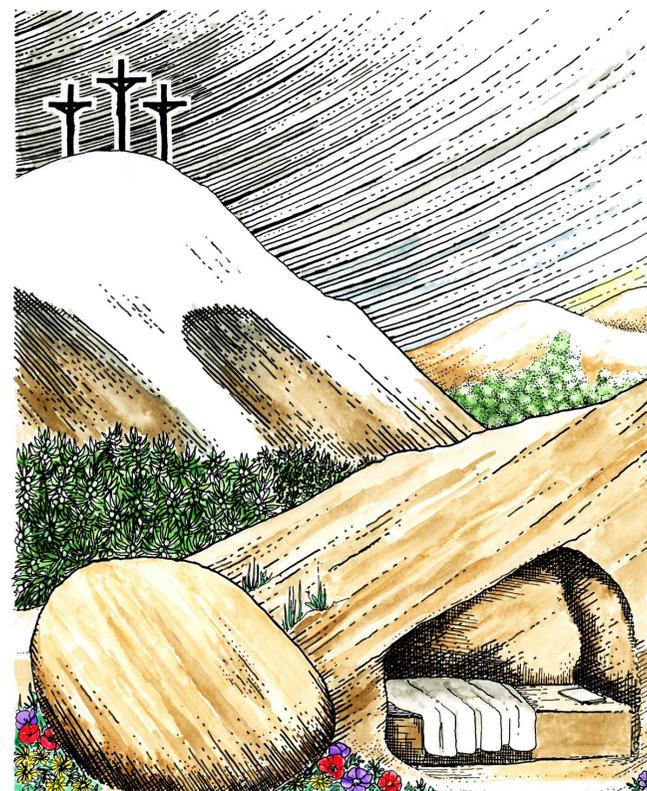
Email: clairecamm1@gmail.com Tel: 07981 951381

Partnership Primary Age Schools Worker: Gayle Bryon

Email: gayleschoolswork@gmail.com



In Partnership March 2016



“You promised me green grass, not to tell what you 'eard
Whispering grass, say you can't keep your word
Keep your word, sing Lofty!
Why do you whisper, green grass
Why tell the trees what ain't so
Whispering grass, the trees don't have to know, no, no”

I love that song reminds me of my childhood and one of my favourite comedies. “ It ain't half hot mum” starring of course Windsor Davies, Don Estelle and Melvyn Hayes. The second of two wartime comedies written by Jimmy Perry and David Croft, the first of which of course was Dad's Army. Talking of whispering!

It has always struck me as remarkable that when the writers of the four Gospels come to the most important part of the story they have to tell, they tell it in whispers. The part I mean, of course, is the part about the resurrection. The Jesus who was dead is not dead anymore. He has risen. He is here.

According to the Gospels unlike his Birth there was no choir of angels to proclaim the Resurrection. There was no sudden explosion of light in the sky. Not a single soul was around to see it happen. When Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb afterward, she thought at first that it must be a gardener standing there in the shadows, and when she saw who it really was and tried to embrace him, he told her not to, as if for fear that once she had him in her arms she would never let him go, the way I suspect that if you and I were ever to have him in our arms, we would never let him go either. Just like Peter at the Transfiguration desperate to keep the moment.

When the disciples heard he was alive again, they tended to dismiss it as too good to be true, and even when they finally saw him for themselves, Thomas still wasn't convinced until Jesus let him touch his wounds with his own hands.

Later on, when they were out fishing at daybreak, they saw him standing on the beach, and there again they failed to recognize him until he asked them to come join him at the charcoal fire he had started on the sand and cooked them breakfast.

The way the Gospel writers tell it, in other words, Jesus came back from death not in a blaze of glory, but more like a candle flame in the dark, flickering first in this place, then in that place, then in no place at all.

FROM THE REGISTERS

Baptisms

07 February 2016	Carter James Bulsen
28 February 2016	Conner Alan Livingstone
28 February 2016	Jessica Rose Frewin

Funerals

18 February 2016	Peter Leslie Chapman
------------------	----------------------

PRAYERS

Please pray for:-

a transformation of circumstances for the homeless, and souls in distress at this time. God grant us grace to share our time, touch their hearts and restore their dignity. In Jesus Christ's name. - The Salvation Army

Schools Easter activities

Easter

The miracle of Easter, so old yet ever new,
brings its special blessing of happiness to you.
And as the coming Springtime
adds new beauty to each day,
May God look down and bless you
in a very special way.

Author unknown

Spring Harvest 2016

Theme this year is Gamechangers

God is the ultimate Game Changer. We want to create space to encounter him. Through that encounter we become a team of game changers in our society, transforming communities in the name of Jesus. God is at work, constantly doing new things by the power of his Spirit. The exciting question is: do we want to join him? In every circle of our influence, his presence makes us game changers. Together, we can change the world.

Butlins Minehead 28 March – 10 April

Butlins Skegness 28 March – 01 April

Book [online](http://springharvest.org/book/) at <http://springharvest.org/book/> or over the phone.

Call 0330 100 9330 to book or if you have any questions. There are still some spaces left.

An evening with Stuart Townend

Tuesday 19 April 2016

St. Joseph's Catholic College

On Tuesday the 19th April, leading Christian singer/songwriter and recording artist, Stuart Townend, will be visiting Swindon as a part of his Spring Tour.

His modern hymns such as "In Christ alone", "How deep the Father's love" and "The power of the cross" are sung in churches around the world and this is a fantastic opportunity to hear him close to home. Aside from writing, Stuart travels around the UK and abroad, leading worship at events and performing concerts on his own or with his band. An accomplished musician, arranger and producer, he also has years of experience in teaching and training musicians who serve in local church worship. His latest worship album, "The Paths of Grace", came out in May 2014.

He will be performing with his band at St. Joseph's Catholic College, Swindon at 7.30pm on the 19th April. Tickets are available from the Lighthouse Bookshop, Highworth, the Rainbow bookshop, Swindon, or to buy online (booking fees apply), at www.shrivenhammethodistchurch.co.uk.

For further information and updates, please go to the Facebook page - Stuart Townend in Swindon.

If they had been making the whole thing up for the purpose of converting the world, presumably they would have described it more the way the book of Revelation describes how he will come back again at the end of time with "the armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen, white and pure" and his eyes "like a flame of fire, and on his head many diadems" (19:14, 12). But that is not the way the Gospels tell it.

They are not trying to describe it as convincingly as they can. They are trying to describe it as truthfully as they can. It was the most extraordinary thing they believed had ever happened, and yet they tell it so quietly that you have to lean close to be sure what they are telling.

They tell it as softly as a secret, as something so precious, and holy, and fragile, and unbelievable, and true, that to tell it any other way would be somehow to dishonour it. To proclaim the resurrection the way they do, you would have to say it in **whispers**: "Christ has risen." whispering like the green grass.

Actually whether you shout it, whisper it, sign it, we all can share that most precious unbelievable truth with our neighbour, friend or work colleague throughout the year, but as a minimum let's whisper "Christ has Risen", try it today.

Even in this act, it might put you in mind of those persecuted Christians all over the world who literally also have to whisper "Christ is Risen".

May God bless you all this Eastertide.

Clive

Might There be More to Easter?

Various authors, Bible Society, £1.99

Easter conjures up chocolate eggs, bunny rabbits, a long holiday weekend – but might there be more to Easter? After all, Easter is a major celebration in the Christian calendar. But how well do we understand what it's all about? Why do we celebrate Easter? Who was Jesus? Why did He die? Did He really come back to life?

This brief introduction is ideal for those new to church and those with questions about Christianity and faith. The booklet tackles key questions about Jesus.



Regular activities

2nd Sunday each month

Messy Church **13 March**
4-5:30pm @ Shaw

Every Monday

After School Youth Group **3:30 – 6:00pm @ Holy Trinity Shaw**
Contact Claire Camm 07981951381

Every Tuesday

Coffee Stop **1:30 – 3:00pm @ Holy Trinity Shaw**

Bell Ringing **7-9pm St Mary's Bell Tower**

Remix Youth Group **6:30 – 8:45pm @ Holy Trinity Shaw**

Contact Claire Camm 07981951381

4th Tuesday each month

Lunch Bunch **22 March**
Noon @Toothill

2nd Wednesday of each month

Mothers Union **09 March**
Contact Doreen Henderson 07434377587 **2pm @ St Mary's Stable Room**

Every Thursday

Toothill Tinies **10-11:30am @ Toothill**

The Real Easter Egg

This year the real Easter Egg range has had a makeover and each single boxed egg includes a unique copy of the Easter Story in the shape of a pull out 37cm high cross illustrated by Helen Cann.

The Special Edition egg this year comes with an olive wood holding cross keyring from Bethlehem and an orange milk chocolate bar. The Real Easter Egg remains the only Fairtrade chocolate Easter egg to have an Easter story booklet in the box and to make a charitable donation from sales.

Visit www.realeasteregg.co.uk for more information and to order.

Core Skills Training Day for Children & Youth Workers

Highworth Methodist Church
Saturday 5th March
10.00am – 4.00pm

Training day will be provided by the Church of England and Methodist Church. Although it is being provided by these denominations it is suitable for anyone working with children and young people whatever their background or tradition. All are most welcome to attend. Please contact me for further information and a programme for the day.

Thanks and God bless.

Paul Taylor

Families Worker

Highworth & Blunsdon Methodist Churches

Home: 01793 950930

Office: 01793 764544

Mobile/Text: 07514 741994

Part Time Church Administrator

Christ Church with St Mary's, Old Town, Swindon: We are looking for a warm and friendly person, with great administrative and computer skills, to support the day to day running of the church office. No previous experience of working in a church context is necessary, and we very much look forward to meeting you. The position is 20 hours per week, over 5 mornings 9am-1pm (some flexibility on hours possible), £20k pro-rata, and a closing date of Friday 11th March. For more information and how to apply, then please either visit www.christchurchswindon.co.uk or contact parishoffice@christchurchswindon.co.uk tel: 01793 522832.

Snoring

A clergyman consulted his doctor about his wife's snoring. 'It has to STOP,' he insisted.

The doctor was intrigued: 'Does it really bother you that much?'

'Well, it's not just me,' explained the minister. 'She is bothering the whole congregation.'

Woman's World Day of Prayer

Friday 4th March 2016 10.30am
Purton Methodist Church, Play Close
Women's World Day of Prayer

Theme: "Receive Children; Receive me". 'Praying for Cuba'.
All are welcome. For further details, please contact:
Linda Tinson 01793 771282 or Gladys Legg 01793 772587

Big Fairtrade Breakfast

Saturday 5th March 8.30 – 11.30am
Abbey Meads Village Centre, Elstree Way, Swindon, SN25 4YX

Join us for our BIG Fairtrade Breakfast Event between 8.30 and 11.30am. We will be having all sorts of Fairtrade breakfast items, tea, coffee, hot chocolate to raise awareness and support farmers. Please tel 07849 238376 (leave message) or email

secretary@christtheservant.org.uk if there are any queries.

If we all chose Fairtrade every day, many more farmers and workers could feed the people they care about, all year round. Join our event to find out how and why Fairtrade makes a difference.

Easter Arty Crafty

Thursday 31st March 10.30am-12.00
Abbey Meads Village Centre, Elstree Way, Swindon, SN25 4YX

Easter Arty Crafty - We will be running another one of our popular Arty Crafty sessions during the school Easter holidays. Everyone welcome. For safeguarding purposes, children must be accompanied by an adult, and are the responsibility of that adult at all times during the session. A small charge is made to cover costs of drinks/materials. Looking forward to seeing you there! Any queries tel 07849 238376 (leave message) or email secretary@christtheservant.org.uk.

Julie Candlin
Admin and Secretary
Church of Christ the Servant

Fair Trade Big Brew Coffee Morning

Saturday 12 March
10.30am – 12.00 noon
Toothill Church

Fair Trade Big Brew Coffee Morning at Toothill Church Fair Trade Coffee/Tea and Cake for £1.50, all proceeds go to the Fair Trade Charity, Fair Trade Competition with a Fair Trade prize to be won.

We a need a new logo.

You know, the letter-head (look at the cover of this Partership News) currently has 3 elements

- the green hill with the yellow sun and the white cross in the top left hand corner,
- the green splodge in the bottom right hand corner, and
- the text at the bottom giving the Partnership's name and some subtext.

We use the design for the web site, our publications, and headed notepaper for official letters, and for compliment slips. It's probable we'll not get much printed stationery in future, but intend to print the logo materials as needed.

We'd like you to come up with a new design, please.

If we have many entries, Partnership Council will decide on a shortlist for voting at our AGM service on 10 April.

Designs to Brenda in the P.Office by Easter

Prize? Probably just the personal satisfaction and our thanks.



*My sermon today comes from
Apps Chapter 1 beginning at verse 2...*

‘Creative Church: A way to the Cross’

Saturday 5th March from 2-5pm at Holy Trinity Church.

In November a number of us involved in Children’s and Youth work met for an afternoon of Prayer and sharing. One of the outcomes of the afternoon was the idea of having a ‘creative’ session for anyone who would like to explore their creativity in terms of working with children or youth, leading worship or just for their own personal spiritual development.

God created us in his own image and therefore as we live a life of worship we are to reflect his creativity. To help us explore this in our work with children, youth and adults we hope this Creative Church afternoon will be a step on our journey to being more creative in how we engage with and reflect on God’s word.

A range of artistic stimuli such as film, artwork, photography and music will be used to get our creative thoughts and ideas flowing. We will then spend time individually and in small groups to create our own stations of the cross. We can use paint, clay, wood, material, collage, music, writing.....our only limitation is our imagination.

It should be a wonderful afternoon where together we can explore, discover and reflect on the Easter story in a different way.

The ‘creations’ we produce in the afternoon will then be used in an act of worship at the end of the afternoon. We hope that our creative expressions based on the way of the cross will bring us nearer to Jesus.

We also envisage that our creative stations could be used in any of the Churches over the Easter period.

We look forward to you joining us for a Creative afternoon.

Gayle Bryon and Claire Camm

Schools Work Easter Activities- a host of Easter Angels required

At Holy Trinity Shaw we will be running the **Easter Reflection**.

Brook Field will be bringing 60 pupils on Wednesday 16th March 9.30 – 11.30am.

Shaw Ridge will be bringing 60 pupils on Wednesday 23rd March 9.30 – 11.30am.

Church Publishes 2014 Attendance Statistics

New Church of England statistics show that just under one million people attend services each week. The survey, carried out over four weeks in October 2014, found 980,000 people attending church each week, with 830,000 adults and 150,000 children.

The statistics also show that 2.4 million attended a Church of England Church at Christmas in 2014 and 1.3 million people attended a service at Easter.

Additionally, 2.2 million people attended special Advent services for the congregation and local community, whilst 2.6 million attended special Advent services for civic organisations and schools.

The statistics also highlight the other services carried out by the Church of England on a regular basis. In 2014 the Church carried out just under 1,000 weddings, 2,000 baptisms, and almost 3,000 funerals every week of the year. Some 12% of births during 2014 were marked by a Church of England infant baptism or thanksgiving service whilst 31% of deaths were marked by a Church of England funeral.

As a whole the figures represent a continuing trend which has shown a 12% decrease in attendance over the past decade, with an average decline of just over 1% a year.

Speaking on the publication of the statistics, the Bishop of Norwich, the Rt. Revd. Graham James, said: “As part of a prayerful and considered response to these trends, the Church is embarking upon the biggest renewal and reform process in over 150 years focusing our resources on prayer, evangelism, discipleship, vocations, leadership & training.

“We do not expect that trend to change imminently or immediately over the next few years due to demographics. We lose approximately 1% of our churchgoers to death each year. Given the age profile of the CofE, the next few years will continue to have downward pressure as people die or become housebound and unable to attend church.

“As a Church we are unashamedly committed to following the teachings of Jesus Christ in our worship of God, discipleship and service to the poor and the marginalised. Our confidence, resilience and service is rooted in Jesus.

“The story is not one of inevitable decline. During 2013-14 some dioceses continued to increase their attendance. In the past 12 months alone there are examples of growth and new churches across the country.”

Friends of **FLAME**

Winter Edition **FM**

1st - 28th May 2016



Organised by Swindon Churches Action for Justice (SC4J). To be recorded for broadcast. Come and be part of the audience Friday 15th April, 7pm The Friends Meeting House, Eastcott Hill. Panel to include Rob Buckland MP, and Jim Grant, Leader of the Labour Group. Free admission but tickets limited. Contact Vernon Griffiths, 2 Brecon Close, SN3 1JT with an sae or email him on v.griffiths815@btinternet.com to book yours.

Confirmed so far
 URC Regional fund £1,000
 Methodist Circuit £1,000
 Jerusalem Trust £1,000
 Plus sponsorship by Science Boffins and Wilkes Academy
 Applied for: Methodist District £1,000



Would YOU like to present a programme?
 We would love to hear from you

HELP WANTED!



Anyone wishing to get involved will be given training. So you don't have to come with the skills but you do need to come with enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the project.

Please join us
Launch Party - Sunday 1st May 3pm
Bath Road Methodist Church



Flame Friends
 We ask for your prayers for the planning and preparation of Flame FM no. 8. That it may shine with the love of Christ across our Borough.



Website: www.flamefm.co.uk Facebook & twitter links on website.
 Info: barbara@flamefm.co.uk, 01793 536815, 80 Okus Road, SN1 4JP



Peatmoor will be bringing 30 Year 3 pupils on Thursday 24th March 9.30 – 11.30am.
 Westlea school have invited us to run an Easter Journey experience at the school on Tuesday 22nd March.

I will need a minimum of 6 helpers for each Easter Reflection Session. As a helper you will be telling part of the Easter story to a group of 10 children and helping them with the reflective activity. Each morning you will tell the story 6 times as the children move round the 6 stations. It is a wonderful event to take part in and I promise you will enjoy yourself, the only thing you have to provide is enthusiasm and stamina!

Hazlewood Academy have Year 4 and 5 visiting Toothill Church on Monday 21st March to learn about Easter and why Christians are responsible for looking after the world. David and Nicky have already taken me on a walk around Toothill where photos have been taken to make an Easter Journey for the Year 4/5 Classes.
 The Year 2 children from Hazlewood Academy will be visiting on Wednesday 23rd March to focus on Jesus as a leader through the Easter story.

Oliver Tomkins have requested an Easter Experience for KS1 on Friday 18th March. This will be a fun and interactive journey through the Easter Story for younger children and it would be wonderful to have a team of 6 helpers to run these sessions for Year 1 and 2.

Please consider making some space in their diary in the two weeks before Easter to help run these important ministries to our schools and encourage others to take part.

I know some of you may be a feeling a bit nervous about volunteering and not sure about what you would have to do. I will be setting up the Easter Reflection on Saturday 12th March. It would be wonderful if everyone who is going to help with any of the Easter sessions (in school or at Shaw) could come along at 3pm on Saturday 12th March for a brief chat on how to tell the stories to the children and the language to use when talking about our faith. We can then walk through the Easter Reflection together gaining skills and confidence from those who have lead it before. Time can be taken to practice telling the story in a supportive environment.

Schools Work Easter Activities (Continued)

I envisage doing a number of Easter Gardens, little plants for gardens would be gratefully received nearer the time from those of you with green fingers. My first Easter Garden Session is on 9th March in Oliver Tomkins.

Please pray for the plans, preparations, the volunteers, and the schools.

I am looking forward to a flurry of angelic emails offering lots of help and support for these activities.

Every Blessing Gayle

Spectacular Surprises

We will be running a Partnership Easter Holiday Club on Thursday 7th April for children of our local community from 10am – 3pm. We will have a Celebration time at 3pm to which we will invite the parents and members of our Churches. This will be a wonderful opportunity to share with the families and make connections with them.

As it is after Easter we will be able to explore the 'Spectacular Surprises' that happen to the disciples. We can walk along the Emmaus Road, touch the hands of Jesus with Thomas and enjoy breakfast on the beach.

I think these stories will be wonderful to explore in drama, art, cooking, dance and music.

As we will be busy running the Easter Reflection before Easter I would like to propose having one planning meeting on Thursday 4th February at my home where as many of us who are able can meet to pray, have a cuppa and plan the day. Part of the planning will be sharing out the preparation of crafts, cooking, running of games etc.....so please come willing to volunteer for a particular activity that you enjoy.

It would be truly wonderful to have a team that presents the whole Partnership.

Please email me on gayleschoolwork@gmail.com to let me know you are able to join our mission venture 'Spectacular Surprises' on Thursday 7th April.

Kindest regards
Gayle



Please continue to pray for Sandylands Methodist Church & our flood recovery work!

Give thanks for;

- Those who have encouraged us and cheering us on from the side lines!
- Churches coming together and assisting one another.
- Donations that we've received and offers of help - it's truly humbling!

Philippians 4:19

- Involvement of people in the community assisting the church/wider community.
- Our church family & the patience/ togetherness that has been present.
- Opportunities to share God's love in word and deed. **1 Thess 2:8 , 1 John 4:19**
- For Laura (new administrator) and Dave (new flood relief worker). Pray for them as they settle into their new roles.
- The donation of a Ford Transit van from Lakeland Limited - now called the *Encouragement Van*.
- For our amazing volunteers who have committed to assisting in whatever ways they can.

Please pray for;

- How best to love our estate/town and serve the practical needs of those who need support in so many ways. **Isaiah 58:12**
- For our Encouragement Van and its work over the next few months. **Acts 2:45**
- For the rebuilding of structures, facilities and businesses in Kendal.
- For people's hearts to be strengthened as the long term recovery begins. **Isaiah 41:10**
- For strength for Kendal's leaders and employees who are carrying the extra workload that the floods have created. **Isaiah 40:31**
- For generosity to flow where goods and materials are needed, especially for those uninsured and the vulnerable. **Luke 10:25-37**
- That in the midst of such difficulties people will experience hope and know the love and compassion of Jesus.
- For Wendy and Jonny and the team of volunteers - for wisdom, clarity and to listen to God's leading. Pray especially for wisdom at the moment. **James 1:5**
- For us as a church - as continue to meet at Castle Park school for services and other groups that are meeting in and around the town.
- That the relationships with churches deepen and strengthen as we strive to work together. Pray for each church as they run the marathon and not a sprint. See a list of churches here - <http://together.ourchurchweb.org.uk/kendal/>

CORNERSTONE
SANDYLANDS METHODIST CHURCH

Flooding Update

The Partnership Covenant service held on 31 January 2016 at Toothill Church, raised £360 which was split equally between Sandylands Methodist Church in Kendal and Carlisle Vineyard Church for Flood relief work.

Revd Wendy Thornton and Jonny Gios sent a letter thanking the Partnership for our donation with the following update and prayer points.

FLOODING UPDATE 1st February 2016

It has now been nearly two months since storm Desmond wreaked havoc on Kendal and a lot has happened in that time. Here at Sandylands the focus has changed from the immediate relief efforts of cleaning up, emptying houses, finding emergency accommodation for families and providing hot meals to looking at how best we can support the community as lives are slowly started to be rebuilt. We are working with Red Cross and Age UK to focus our support for those affected. By working alongside these organisations we can compile a single comprehensive database of those affected and their immediate and ongoing needs, and so collaborate and coordinate our efforts to ensure considered, focussed and effective support work.

We have had wonderful support from so many churches, individuals and businesses all over the country. The plight of those who have been flooded has touched many people and the outpouring of generosity is truly humbling.

With the support we have been offered we have now been able to employ a full time administrator/support assistant and a flood support worker, both of whom will work alongside our established team of volunteers, co-ordinated by our Minister Rev Wendy Thornton and our Community Worker Rev Jonny Gios. We are delighted to welcome Laura and Dave into the team!

Our enCOURAGEment cabin is open all through the week for people to call in and chat over a drink and biscuit; fill in the various grant application forms; receive help with accessing support; talk over accommodation worries; or request help moving furniture. We have been generously loaned a transit van by Mr Sam Rayner, High Sheriff of Cumbria, which we can use to assist residents as they move furniture and possessions into their temporary homes, and of course back into their own homes when that happy day comes.

01 March St David's Day – time for daffodils

1st March is St David's Day, and it's time for the Welsh to wear daffodils or leeks. Shakespeare called this custom 'an honourable tradition begun upon an honourable request' - but nobody knows the reason. Why should anyone have ever 'requested' that the Welsh wear leeks or daffodils to honour their patron saint? It's a mystery!

We do know that David - or Dafydd - of Pembrokeshire was a monk and bishop of the 6th century. In the 12th century he was made patron of Wales, and he has the honour of being the only Welsh saint to be canonised and culted in the Western Church. Tradition has it that he was austere with himself, and generous with others - living on water and vegetables (leeks, perhaps?!) and devoting himself to works of mercy. He was much loved.

In art, St David is usually depicted in Episcopal vestments, standing on a mound with a dove at his shoulder, in memory of his share at an important Synod for the Welsh Church, the Synod of Brevi.

06 March Mothering Sunday – 4th Sunday in Lent

There is an old Jewish saying:

God could not be everywhere, and therefore He made mothers

Mother Church, Mother Earth, Mother of the Gods - our human mothers - all of them have been part of the celebration of 'Mothering Sunday' - as the fourth Sunday in Lent is affectionately known. It has been celebrated in the UK since at least the 16th century.

In Roman times, great festivals were held every Spring to honour Cybele, Mother of all the Gods. Other pagan festivals in honour of Mother Earth were also celebrated. With the arrival of Christianity, the festival became one honouring Mother Church.

During the Middle Ages, young people apprenticed to craftsmen or working as 'live-in' servants were allowed only one holiday a year on which to visit their families - which is how 'Mothering Sunday' got its name. This special day became a day of family rejoicing, and the Lenten fast was broken. In some places the day was called Simnel Day, because of the sweet cakes called simnel cakes traditionally eaten on that day.

In recent years the holiday has changed and in many ways now resembles the American Mothers' Day, with families going out to Sunday lunch and generally making a fuss of their mother on the day.

In the Lord's service(s)?

"Show me the way your weekend services are going and I'll tell you how your church is going"

Thus spake Bill Hybels at a recent coaching seminar. Immediately, I found myself asking, "why would he say that?" After all, you can argue that our churches are much more than simply what we get up to on Sundays for an hour and a bit. And you would be right.

So why would Bill say this?

I think there maybe a number of reasons. Firstly, the way we worship communicates what we really value. Of course we are there primarily to express something to God. The Anglo-Saxon word from which our word, 'worship' derives is the word 'weorthscipe,' which means to ascribe honour and value. Worship is how we express together what we want express in relation to our belief in God.

But I wonder if you have ever wondered what someone who might be entering your church for the first time might conclude about what you truly value?

- Organ music?
- A sing song?
- The person leading the worship?
- Being part of a well established club which is friendly for its members?
- A physical lack of warmth and comfort?
- Worship songs?

The list of course could go on. Please note that none of these things are intrinsically wrong - though being cold and uncomfortable can be a big ask – but I don't think any of us feels that any of these things are the most important components of our Sunday worship.

I wonder if it would be true to say that what we do on Sundays, in part at least, is the 'shop window' of who we are. If that has any truth then what we do and the way we do it is really important.

How well I recall when I was a child thinking that Sunday was the most boring day of the week. My family didn't go to church, the shops were shut, everything seemed closed. We were so sad that the big treat on Sunday afternoons was to go out for a ride in my Dad's car...

Easter faith

Three years after the Russian Revolution of 1917, a great anti-God rally was arranged in Kiev. The powerful orator Bukharin was sent from Moscow, and for an hour he demolished the Christian faith with argument, abuse and ridicule. At the end there was silence.

Then a man rose and asked to speak. He was a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church. He went and stood next to Bukharin. Facing the people, he raised his arms and spoke just three triumphant words: 'Christ is risen!'

At once the entire assembly rose to their feet and gave the joyful response, "He is risen indeed!" It was a devastating moment for an atheist politician, who had no answer to give to this ancient Easter liturgy. He had not realised he was simply too late: how can you convince people who have already experienced God, that He does not exist?

Jesus' appearances after his Resurrection

Mary Magdalene.....	Mark 16:9-11; John 20:10-18
Other women at the tomb.....	Matthew 28:8-10
Peter in Jerusalem.....	Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5
The two travellers on the road..	Mark 16:12,13
10 disciples behind closed doors	Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25
11 disciples WITH Thomas.....	John 20:26-31; 1 Corinthians 15:5
7 disciples while fishing.....	John 21:1-14
11 disciples on the mountain.....	Matthew 28:16-20
A crowd of 500.....	1 Corinthians 15:6
Jesus' brother – James.....	1 Corinthians 15:7
Those who saw the Ascension...	Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8

27 March Easter Day – the most joyful day of the year

Easter is the most joyful day of the year for Christians. Christ has died for our sins. We are forgiven. Christ has risen! We are redeemed! We can look forward to an eternity in his joy! Hallelujah!

The Good News of Jesus Christ is a message so simple that you can explain it to someone in a few minutes. It is so profound that for the rest of their lives they will be still be 'growing' in their Christian walk with God.

Why does the date move around so much? Because the date of Passover moves around, and according to the biblical account, Easter is tied to the Passover. Passover celebrates the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and it lasts for seven days, from the middle of the Hebrew month of Nisan, which equates to late March or early April.

Sir Isaac Newton was one of the first to use the Hebrew lunar calendar to come up with firm dates for Good Friday: Friday 7 April 30 AD or Friday 3 April, 33 AD, with Easter Day falling two days later. Modern scholars continue to think these the most likely.

Most people will tell you that Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox, which is broadly true. But the precise calculations are complicated and involve something called an 'ecclesiastical full moon', which is not the same as the moon in the sky. The earliest possible date for Easter in the West is 22 March, which last fell in 1818 and won't fall again until 2285. The latest is 25 April, which last happened in 1943 and is next due in 2038.

Why the name, 'Easter'? In almost every European language, the festival's name comes from 'Pesach', the Hebrew word for Passover. The Germanic word 'Easter', however, seems to come from Eostre, a Saxon fertility goddess mentioned by the Venerable Bede. He thought that the Saxons worshipped her in 'Eostur month', but may have confused her with the classical dawn goddesses like Eos and Aurora, whose names mean 'shining in the east'. So Easter might have meant simply 'beginning month' – a good time for starting up again after a long winter.

Finally, why Easter eggs? On one hand, they are an ancient symbol of birth in most European cultures. On the other hand, hens start laying regularly again each Spring. Since eggs were forbidden during Lent, it's easy to see how decorating and eating them became a practical way to celebrate Easter.

How different today. Sunday, sadly is like any other day. Shopping Malls are open and packed and if the Government has its way will be open for longer. If you have children who are into sport then most of it takes place on a Sunday morning. Theme parks and National Trust properties are open. There is much to compete for our time and attention. Here's my point. There is so much you can do on Sundays that unless Church has something authentic to offer, people will just not come. Increasingly that seems true.

Oh I know we don't want to talk about 'bums on seats', but I have never met a clergyperson or other church leader who really didn't want to see more people in church on a Sunday. That's why Christmas attendances give us some hope. I don't think we can avoid talking about numbers of worshippers – it never bothered St. Luke when he wrote Acts of the Apostles!

I can see the problem, but coming up with a cure is really tough and I suspect many of you find the same. However, I think I want to venture one suggestion as Easter comes around yet again with the amazing message, HE IS RISEN!

I think if all of us in our churches at some stage over the next few months sat down in our Church Councils and had some sort of discussion around the theme of, "how might we better express the risen life of Christ in our worship?" it might just mean that together, we could think again.

Many of my clergy colleagues tell me that many members express hostility to the idea of "changing what we have." I have often joked as someone who goes around churches that if people are celebrating the fact that Jesus is alive, their body language is extremely deceptive!

Worship really matters. It is a primary, if not **the** primary call of the Church. I think we should set the bar of at least seeking to inspire people so that they might be better motivated and equipped to go into the world and live the new life that Jesus secured for those who trust him because of the Easter message.

HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! Let's show the world that this is not a vague hope but a reality we want to live and to celebrate. And let our services reflect His new life.

+Mike

17 March St Patrick – beloved apostle to Ireland

St Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland. If you've ever been in New York on St Patrick's Day, you'd think he was the patron saint of New York as well... the flamboyant parade is full of American/Irish razzmatazz.

It's all a far cry from the hard life of this 5th century humble Christian who became in time both bishop and apostle of Ireland. Patrick was born the son of a town councillor in the west of England, between the Severn and the Clyde. But as a young man he was captured by Irish pirates, kidnapped to Ireland, and reduced to slavery. He was made to tend his master's herds.

Desolate and despairing, Patrick turned to prayer. He found God was there for him, even in such desperate circumstances. He spent much time in prayer, and his faith grew and deepened, in contrast to his earlier years, when he "knew not the true God".

Then, after six gruelling, lonely years he was told in a dream he would soon go to his own country. He either escaped or was freed, made his way to a port 200 miles away and eventually persuaded some sailors to take him with them away from Ireland. After various adventures in other lands, including near-starvation, Patrick landed on English soil at last, and returned to his family. But he was much changed. He had enjoyed his life of plenty before; now he wanted to devote the rest of his life to Christ. Patrick received some form of training for the priesthood, but not the higher education he really wanted.

But by 435, well educated or not, Patrick was badly needed. Palladius' mission to the Irish had failed, and so the Pope sent Patrick back to the land of his slavery. He set up his see at Armagh, and worked principally in the north. He urged the Irish to greater spirituality, set up a school, and made several missionary journeys.

Patrick's writings are the first literature certainly identified from the British Church. They reveal sincere simplicity and a deep pastoral care. He wanted to abolish paganism, idolatry, and was ready for imprisonment or death in the following of Christ.

Patrick remains the most popular of the Irish saints. The principal cathedral of New York is dedicated to him, as, of course, is the Anglican cathedral of Dublin.

25 March Good Friday – Jesus and the thieves on the Cross

Luke's account of the crucifixion (Luke 23:32-43) emphasises the mocking of the crowd, *'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself'* (35,37,39). In their view a Messiah does not hang on a cross and suffer. In considering the two men who were crucified with Jesus, we are also confronted with the issue of how Jesus secures salvation for us.

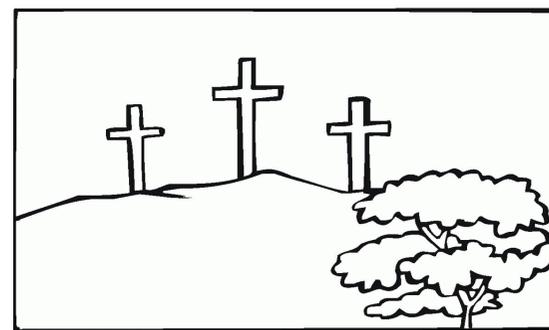
The words of one of those crucified with Jesus reflected the crowd's taunts: *'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us.'* He highlights the question of Jesus' identity: how can He save others, when He cannot save himself from death? He failed to see that the cross itself was the means of salvation.

So - what kind of Messiah was Jesus?

The other criminal's response in his last moments is a moving expression of faith. When challenging the other man, he spoke of the utter injustice of the crucifixion: *'this man has done nothing wrong.'* He perceived the truth that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. In a wonderful picture of grace, *'remember me when you come into your kingdom'*, the second thief confessed his guilt and secured Jesus' forgiveness and mercy.

In reply, Jesus promised the man life from the moment of death; *'Today you will be with me in paradise.'* Jesus used the picture of a *walled garden* to help the man understand his promise of protection and security in God's love and acceptance eternally.

Each one of us has to choose how we react to Jesus on the cross. Do we want him to 'remember' us when He comes into his kingdom, or not? If you were to die tonight, how confident would you be of going to be with Jesus? *'For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.'* (1 Peter 3:18).



20 March Palm Sunday – Jesus at the gates of Jerusalem

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday, when the Church remembers how Jesus arrived at the gates of Jerusalem just a few days before the Passover was due to be held. He was the Messiah come to his own people in their capital city, and yet he came in humility, riding on a young donkey, not in triumph, riding on a war-horse.

As Jesus entered the city, the crowds gave him a rapturous welcome, throwing palm fronds into his path. They knew his reputation as a healer, and welcomed him. But sadly the welcome was short-lived and shallow, for Jerusalem would soon reject her Messiah, and put him to death. On this day churches worldwide will distribute little crosses made from palm fronds in memory of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem.

24 March Maundy Thursday – time to wash feet

Maundy Thursday is famous for two things. The first is one of the final acts that Jesus did before his death: the washing of his own disciples' feet. (see John 13) Jesus washed his disciples' feet for a purpose: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." His disciples were to love through service, not domination, of one another.

In Latin, the opening phrase of this sentence is 'mandatum novum do vobis'. The word 'mundy' is thus a corruption of the Latin 'mandatum' (or command). The ceremony of the 'washing of the feet' of members of the congregation came to be an important part of the liturgy (regular worship) of the medieval church, symbolising the humility of the clergy, in obedience to the example of Christ.

But Thursday was also important because it was on that night that Jesus first introduced the Lord's Supper, or what we nowadays call Holy Communion.

Jesus and his close friends had met in a secret upper room to share the Passover meal together - for the last time. And there Jesus transformed the Passover into the Lord's Supper, saying, 'this is my body' and 'this is my blood' as he, the Lamb of God, prepared to die for the sins of the whole world. John's gospel makes it clear that the Last Supper took place the evening BEFORE the regular Passover meal, and that later Jesus died at the same time that the Passover lambs were killed.

Get gardening this Spring, and beat the blues!

The gardeners among us have long known that there is nothing like an hour or two in the garden to dissolve your tension, depression, and anger, and to bolster your feelings of calm and well-being. It also helps keep you in good physical shape.

Now the scientists agree: recent research from the universities of Westminster and Essex has found that gardening (especially caring for an allotment) can prevent a range of diseases (ranging from mental illness, obesity, and cardiovascular disease to straightforward loneliness) - and thus save the NHS a good deal of time and money.

Hedgehogs in need

Only a few weeks to go, and hedgehogs will be waking up from their winter sleep. Keep an eye out for them this Spring, and do try and offer food to any that you see. For hedgehogs are in trouble: numbers have more than halved in rural Britain in the last 15 years, where intensive farming and poor hedgerow management have destroyed their habitats. In the city it can be just as bad: fenced off gardens and lawns laid to concrete can mean death to a starving hedgehog.

There are now believed to be less than a million hedgehogs left in the entire UK, according to the 'State of Britain's Hedgehogs 2015' report. So here's how to help your local hedgehog:

Cut a five-inch square hole in the bottom of your garden fence, or remove a brick or two from the base of a wall, to let hedgehogs get through. Where possible, replace fences or walls with hedges. Don't pave over your garden. Encourage insects with nectar-rich plants. Leave out meaty cat or dog food. Avoid treating your lawn with herbicide. Pile up logs to create a habitat for hedgehogs. Take care when clearing piles of leaves, in case you disturb one. And finally, please avoid using slug pellets! (Advice from Hedgehog Street)



Church Services in the Partnership St Mary's Lydiard Tregoze

Date	Time	Form
Mothering Sunday 06 March	10:00am	Morning Service followed by Baptisms
13 March	10:00am	Communion
Palm Sunday 20 March	10:00am	Family Service followed by Baptisms
Good Friday 25 March	7:00pm	Tenebrae
Easter Sunday 27 March	6:45am	Daybreak Service with Communion
27 March	10:00am	Communion
27 March	5:00pm	Partnership Prayer and Praise

Toothill

Date	Time	Form
Mothering Sunday 06 March	10:30am	All Age Parade
08 March	11:30am	Midweek Service
13 March	10:30am	Morning Service
Palm Sunday 20 March	10:30am	Communion
23 March	11:30am	Midweek Service
Good Friday 25 March	10:30am	Morning Service
Easter Sunday 27 March	10:30am	All Age Communion



Holy Trinity Shaw

Date	Time	Form
Mothering Sunday 06 March	10:30am	Communion
13 March	10:30am	Morning Service
13 March	4:00pm	Messy Church
Palm Sunday 20 March	10:30am	Morning Service
Maundy Thursday 24 March	7:30pm	Communion + washing of feet
Easter Sunday 27 March	10:30am	Communion

Westlea

Date	Time	Form
Mothering Sunday 06 March	10:00am	Morning Service
13 March	10:00am	Family Service + AGM
Palm Sunday 20 March	10:00am	Communion
Good Friday 25 March	2:00pm	Good Friday Worship
Easter Sunday 27 March	10:00am	Family Service

Partnership Prayer and Praise

Please note Summer venue and time

Sunday 27 March 2016

5.00pm

St Mary's Lydiard Tregoze

The theme will be

“EASTER He has risen”

All Welcome

This is an opportunity to Pray and Praise together