

St Peter's Parish Chest December 2014

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A monthly bulletin of all that is accomplished by and within our church's community

Suggested Contribution 30p

Letter from the Vicar

Where's Jesus?

Over the past few weeks, as I chomped my way through my muesli, I have been listening to an audio diary broadcast on the Today programme. It was made by a doctor who had volunteered to spend time in Sierra Leone. She had gone to care for those who have been infected by the Ebola virus and she was sharing her experiences, her thoughts and reflections. Eventually, after returning to the United Kingdom and sharing her final reflection she was asked why she did this. Why did she put her life on the line and go out to care for very sick and infectious people? As I listened I desperately wanted her to cite some profession of faith as a stimulus for her action. I wanted her to say something like 'well, it's what Jesus would have done' or 'I went because of my faith' but she didn't. And why should she? Why should a personal response to a human tragedy be premised by a faith in God? Why couldn't this just be a sound and wonderful humanitarian response to the need found in a neighbour? Well of course it was just that. The doctor expressed her love of her neighbour and saw a way in which she could respond to that neighbour's need. We never found out if there was a faith basis for her response and in fact that was not important.

I thought about my reaction and realised what I was looking for was a good news story showing faith and our understanding of our relationship with God in a good light. Although we have now agreed to ordain women as bishops the process we have been through over the past couple of years and the reporting on that process has not been edifying. Our position on people of different social or sexual orientations leaves a lot to be desired and leads to ridicule and questions in the wider community. Our news profile has not been brilliant of late and we could do with some good news stories.

I suppose I was thinking this way because it always seems to be the bad stuff or the difficult stuff or just the difficult to understand stuff that people latch onto. I have just finished reading a really challenging but insightful book by a comedian. Marcus Brigstocke has written a book entitled 'God Collar: are you there God? It's me, Marcus.' There's a book review later in this edition. Sufficient to say I found this a very challenging book but also frustrating. From the perspective of a believer I kept wanting to grab him by the dust cover and scream at him from time to time "YOU JUST DON'T GET IT!" or to show him something in scripture, in poetry, in creation or somewhere else that answered his questions to my satisfaction. Then I realised he was showing me what the average, intelligent 40 something parent of two is thinking today. They are looking for meaning and understanding in a very confusing world. Asking pertinent questions and not necessarily getting adequate answers.

What brings these two stories together for me is the humanity within them. The desire to support a neighbour and the longing for meaning. Christmas is coming, the story of an infant born into a dangerous and frightening world. Where infant mortality was high, where parents died young, where humanity existed on a knife edge and the whim of the powerful could mean life or death for others. The story of this infant is told differently in both Gospels that mention it. Each expressing something of the writers understanding of the infant; his humility, divinity, kingship, his ordinariness, his humanity.

Jesus is born of a woman not just for biological convenience but to express God's understanding of our human condition; the complexities of what makes up a life, of what makes us who we are. Through this earthly, grounded birth God can be part of humanity, be part of whom we are and where we are. In the brokenness of life God can be and is present.

Marcus Brigstocke may be asking questions of himself and of God. He may be asking the right or the wrong ones. But God understands he is at least asking them. God is present in the work of the doctor (whether of faith or not) and many more like her, in their care and concern for their neighbours. God is in the suffering of the Ebola victim, and continues to be in that crisis, in our humanity and ultimately in our sacrifice for our neighbour,

'For a child has been born for us, a son has been given to us; authority rests upon his shoulder; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' (Isaiah 9.6)

Fr David

Advent Tidings of Great Joy



Make a glorious start to your Advent this year by coming to **St Barnabas, Pitshanger Lane at 5pm** this evening to hear our joint choirs sing of the great good news of Christ's coming. "Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee O, Israel!"

Today is of course the Second Sunday in Advent but before we move on to news of Christmas events and plans we should report on some of our activities leading up to the festive season....

Confirmation and Celebration



The newly confirmed shining as lights in the world

The last Sunday of the year before Advent is the celebration of Christ the King and it fell this year on **Sunday 23rd November**. Our hymns, music and readings all rejoiced in the Kingship of Christ, at the right hand of the Father and revealed in all his power and glory. It is a very suitable time of year to reflect on the life-changing power of our faith. Changing not only our own lives but the lives of all whom we meet. This was the theme the Bishop of Willesden drew out as he confirmed four candidates* from St Peter's at this service. Bishop Pete encouraged those about to be confirmed and all in the congregation to be "Ambassadors for Christ"; to live out our Christian faith in all we do, remembering that the news we have to share does not belong in churches on Sunday mornings but everywhere and with everyone. As one of the candidates for confirmation was baptised during the service, we were all able to take this very special opportunity to reaffirm our own calling in this way.

After the service we were invited to toast the newly confirmed with a glass of sparkling wine and to share in a delicious slice (or two!) of celebratory cake.



Bishop Pete leading the way!

**As we are currently reviewing our media and data protection policies no full names other than those giving their names with material to be published appear in this issue.*

Christmas Fair



Our lovely sacristan is lucky on the raffle.

"It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas..." This seasonal jingle would have appropriately gone through everyone's mind if they had been at the **Christmas Fair on Saturday 29th November**. The hall was transformed (being very careful with the beautiful new paintwork!) into a very festive scene.



A delighted visitor to the jam stall.

Fr David braved a ladder and a trip to Makro to festoon the hall with red and gold decorations. Stallholders completed the magic by dressing their stalls with lovely Christmas goods including delicious jams, homemade cakes and refreshments as well as books, gifts and Traidcraft items.



Some other lucky winners!

Roland Stumpf, our Treasurer, made sure everything added up and has sent the following message and break down of the day's excellent takings – all to our chosen charities for 2014.

Stall	Net Takings
Books; Stamps; CD's	£274.65
Unused New Items / Gifts	£250.00
Home Made Cakes	£121.34
Flowers & Bulbs	£131.60
Cubs Brownies	£61.00
Jam & Chutney	£443.10
Programme / Door [50p]	£205.10
Raffle	£164.50
Cake Raffle	£33.00
Refreshments	£310.50
Bottle Tombola	£76.96
Toys	£203.35
Childrens' activities	£88.13
Less Costs	-£116.51
	£2,246.72

Roland writes:

Please see the amounts raised by the Bazaar based on the forms you kindly completed at the end of Saturday's successful day. The total raised after costs was £2,246.72 which compares favourably to the 2013 bazaar which raised £2,191.88. The only change I have made to the totals is to transfer £40 from the door takings to refreshments to cover the cost of coffee that was included in the entry charge, which I trust is acceptable, and the cheques will be written out and posted to the relevant charities within a week. Many thanks again to everyone for your hard work!

We echo those thanks and add our thanks to Roland for all his hard work too!

In the bleak midwinter...



Spending time with winter guests (Library picture)

St Peter's hosted the **Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter** for the first time on **Thursday 27th November**. All involved- leaders, volunteers and guests- found the experience a very warm and positive one. If you would like be a part of this please speak to Fr David.

Keeping Awake and Getting Involved

Advent is traditionally the time for watching and waiting together with the worldwide church, and there are many opportunities for this offered at St Peter's this year. We may be able to join in prayers for the Night Shelter on **Thursday 18th December** at 12 noon in the Lady Chapel, followed by a simple lunch at the vicarage, or to join in the Night Reflections at 9pm on the **Mondays of 8th and 15th December**. During this time of waiting we may also though find ourselves prompted to find out more about the places and people for whom we pray. Few are perhaps more pertinent at Christmas time than the plight of Christians in the Holy Land.

If you would like to know more about this situation, please think about coming to see the film **"The Stones Cry Out"** at 7pm at the **Quaker Meeting House on Saturday 13th December**.



Keeping faith alight in the darkness.

Christians are persecuted for their faith not only in the Holy Land but across the world. Germaine Kemplay-Amow has a strong connection with the work of the **Friends of the Diocese of Iran** and has written an account of their meeting earlier this year.

Germaine writes:

On 13-14th September 2014, I attended the 10th FDI conference held at the London School of Theology. Our biggest news is that after 18 years of work, Elam Ministries, who are behind the new translation, have launched a complete Persian Bible on Monday 22nd September. Christianity in Iran is the third fastest growing church in the world. The established churches are closely monitored, primarily because services are conducted in "Farsie" (the Iranian language) and so could potentially convert Iranian Muslims. Any Iranian who is found to have converted to Christianity is arrested and interrogated. Women can face life imprisonment and men the death penalty. However there are a number of "House Churches", whose members have shared their faith and spoken about Jesus successfully with women who work on the streets. Most people are remarkably open to receive the message. Women are especially interested in Christianity as Jesus showed women such radical respect. There is also a Christian satellite TV channel (beamed from Cyprus) which has a huge impact on people in the Middle East. Programmes for adults and children called SAT 7 are watched by many Iranians, although the authorities try to jam the broadcasts.

Do please speak to Germaine to find out more about this important work.

Stonework Site Visit and Sightseeing!



King of the Steeple!

Allison McAllister, as well as overseeing the fundraising for stonework and supervising the works themselves, also helped make it possible for interested (and intrepid!) parishioners to visit the site where the stonemasons are hard at work. Many thanks to Allison for all she does for our beautiful building and for this report and lovely photographs (taken I think by a younger member of the family?)

Allison writes:

With the South side stonework project nearing completion we were very grateful to our stonemasons, AF Jones and Co for facilitating a visit on the morning of **Saturday 25th October** to show us the work at close quarters. As well as our regular church-goers with a head for heights, we were delighted to share this experience with some of those living in the parish who had contributed generously towards the project. After a short health and safety briefing, we ascended the scaffolding in small groups, with James and Gareth from AF Jones on hand to explain the work and answer any questions. Everyone was very impressed with the extent and quality of the workmanship. It was interesting to understand the stages involved in restoring the arches and it was wonderful to see the carved corbels in place.



All in hand – the corbels in place.

Thankfully the weather was pleasant and we had stunning views (see page 5) in all directions – giving us a completely different perspective on our parish. Fifteen people of all ages, from teenagers to ninety year olds, ascended and descended the scaffolding safely.

From the Vicar's Bookshelf...

God Collar: Are you there God? It's me, Marcus by Marcus Brigstocke

Published by Corgi Books 2012

ISBN: 978-0-552-16447-4

Fr David writes:

Marcus Brigstocke is a comedian. A man who stands up in front of huge crowds, earning his living by making them laugh using observational humour. You may have seen him on the television. He is very popular on Chanel 4. He toured in 2011 asking the question 'does God exist?' The tour was titled 'God Collar' and from that series of gigs comes this book. There are those quoted on the cover who seem to suggest this is a hilarious book. I didn't laugh once.

Now I like Marcus very much and I have often laughed at his performances and I get his social criticism, his quirky outlook on life. But with this book I think I was too close to the topic in hand. So my lack of laughter is probably not down to his writing. Marcus is trying to deal with a very serious and important subject, even in the twenty first century: does God exist? What Marcus does is share with us his own personal journey.

Marcus had an eating disorder. He was a dysfunctional child, being expelled from a number of schools. He was rebellious and difficult. He was also an atheist. As time has passed he sought therapy, calmed down, found his niche on the stage and engaged his brain. He is a bright and inquisitive chap who wants to test the boundaries. He is married and has two children and as life unfolds before him he begins to ask that basic question, there must be more than this, mustn't there? And he goes looking. He looks to atheism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity. He looks to philosophy both popular and classical. He looks at science and technology. Yet nowhere does he find an adequate answer.

I think he is looking for perfect answer. One of the important aspects of the life of faith for me is the place of doubt. Marcus doesn't like doubt. His scientific, 20th/21st century brain insists on fact. Having said that I think this is a very important book. It challenges us, pushing us out of our complacency and fronts us with important questions about faith, God and the world which we often don't look at or think to answer.

There is one little story he gives that made me smart and wince. Whilst taking his little boy cycling they passed a church. As this offered a chance of a conversation about faith Marcus shares his lack of faith with his son who replies, "You have to believe in God Dad or he'll send another flood like he did to Noah" (p.286). I shared Marcus' fury if only because is this what we are offering as a life of faith? If so, no wonder so few follow Jesus.

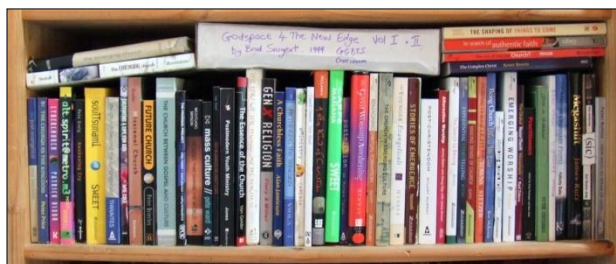
The reader has to be aware of the 'fruity' language used occasionally. But I am seriously thinking of using this as a study book one day. We may not agree with Mr Brigstocke but in a funny way I think he has done us a favour.

Do you have a book you would like to review? Please send your review, along with any other material, for the January issue of the Parish Chest by Monday 22nd December to sjpeatfield@aol.com.

St Peter's Book Club

We are not reading Marcus Brigstocke (yet...) but we are busy reading for our next supper meeting at Moira's at **7pm on Monday 12 January 2015**. Our books are *Dominion* by C J Sansom and *Nocturnes* by Kazuo Ishiguro. We meet again for a discussion evening at Linda's at **7.30pm on Monday 9th March 2015**. Details of books to be confirmed. Please email sjpeatfield@aol.com for any other information. New members always welcome!

More Reading at St Peter's



Moira writes:

For many years we have had books on display on Sundays, previously managed by Hugh and Jo who many will remember, prior to their move to Dorset. However, as we don't sell that many books, we've decided to look at alternative ways of drawing attention to religious/spiritual books.

Our plan is to have a link from our website to the Church house bookshop to enable people to see the great selection of books available and to order books direct from them. For those of you who read the Church Times there are reviews each week of new books available from the Church House bookshop.

We are aware that not everyone has access to the website, but another idea is to encourage more use of the church library (by the door from the church to the hall) and to this end we are in the process of producing a list of books held in the library which will be available in the New Year. There is a good selection of books and we will continue to purchase new books so it's well worth having a look.

So, many thanks are due to the team of volunteers who have been running the bookshop for many years for their help and support, namely, Christine and David, Erica, and Linda, who joined recently. Rosamund Rowe was also a very reliable volunteer for many years. Other people who have helped with the bookshop in recent times are Mary, the McAllister family and Carolyn so thanks to all who have been involved.

Praying with the Parish

Today we launch the new edition of the ***St Peter's Cycle of Prayer for Church and Parish***. It is still the familiar format of places and people in our parish to hold in our prayers, along with some appropriate written prayers for each day, but it has now been fully revised and updated by Margaret and Fr David. Please collect a copy from the back of the church and join your daily prayers to those of St Peter's church and parish.

St Peter's Walking Group...Best Feet Forward!

Linda Foster writes:

Our first outing on **November 9th** was a great success! Fifteen enthusiastic walkers turned up for a three hour walk, in fine weather.

It was longer than originally planned since we stopped for a welcome refreshment break in a park café. We walked to the Perivale area and then mainly followed the green spaces along the Brent River - a route that was new to everyone.

Our next walk will start again from the church car park at the slightly earlier time of 1:30 pm:

Walk 3 Sunday 14th December 1:30 to 4pm

In the New Year a monthly walk will be scheduled on either a Saturday morning or a Sunday afternoon. Please join us for some good exercise and pleasant fellowship.

If you would like to be on the mailing list for updates on walks, please email me - lindafos@aol.com

Looking Further Forward...

Churches Together in Ealing are making exciting plans for next Easter.

Revd Steve Newbold writes:

In place of our usual Churches Together Walk of Witness, an exciting, dynamic and 'unique for Ealing' event is being prepared for Good Friday 2015. If you are interested in participating in a short dramatization of the crucifixion of Christ Jesus then put the **14th January 2015** in your diary to come along and find out more about this daring opportunity.

The place: St Stephen's Church, St Stephen's Road, London W13 8HB.

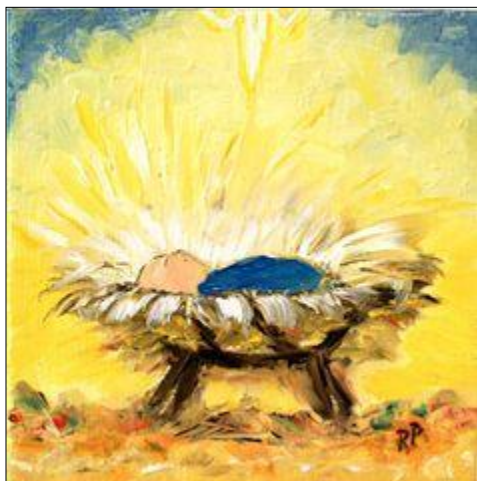
The time: 8-9.30pm.

You will hear the vision; have the chance to ask questions; and find out what is involved. This will be a fantastic adventure as different churches in Ealing work together to create something powerful and life-changing for our community.



Birds' eye view of St Peter's

The History of the Crib



Helen Peatfield writes:

On Advent Sunday every year somewhere in the sitting room a Christmas scene begins to grow. Starting first with the stable and a few animals, then enter Mary and Joseph, shepherds and kings... all waiting for that very special infant to arrive on Christmas day. This tradition originates from Francis of Assisi, patron saint of animals and the environment, who created the first nativity scene (since the original) in 1233. This scene was however far more like nativity plays at school than the scenario we have under the altar. It was created in a grotto in Greccio, Italy and involved real people and real animals. The intention was to help people remember the true meaning of Christmas and make the story seem more closely related to the average 13th century person's own life. From these humble beginnings churches began to host nativity scenes, this time static and made of terracotta, to display all year round and remind the congregation of the birth of Christ. These terracotta scenes escalated in decadence and artisans and craftsman started to make them in wood and in wax as well as creating clothes for each character to wear. Kings and Popes' alike extolled the virtue of nativity scenes and started to collect them and personally encouraged others to do the same. Wealthy families commissioned them and poorer families created them, but to everyone it was a reminder through advent to let the infant Jesus into your sitting room (along with the sheep and a rogue ox) and not to shut them outside in the cold December nights.

Year's Mind

1 December	Malcolm Dillon (2004)
3 December	Doreen Walker (1989)
6 December	Colin Pratt (2011)
14 December	Marcel Rogers (1959)
	Carole Johnson (2008)
15 December	Jill Ford (1961)
19 December	Diana Hewlings (1990)
21 December	Beatrice Clover (1957)
23 December	Daphne Doherty (2002)
24 December	Elwyn Jones (2001)
27 December	Connie Ives (2002)
29 December	David Hewlings (1990)

Monthly Martyrs

John Peatfield writes:

St Stephen, whose saint's day is celebrated on Boxing Day, is recognised as the first martyr and his name means crown as he was the first to receive the martyr's crown. He is first mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as one of the seven deacons appointed by the Apostles to look after the poor and widowed. During his time at the church at Jerusalem, he performed many miracles and teachings, which aroused the hatred of many synagogues including the 'Synagogue of the Freedmen'. These groups had challenged Stephen's teachings, however he had humiliated them in debates and arguments. The groups, no doubt bitter, dragged him in front of the Sanhedrin – the supreme court of Jewish elders – baring false witness that he had blasphemed against Moses and God. Stephen is said to have been unperturbed, his face looking like 'that of an angel'. He made a very long speech (the longest in the Acts of the Apostles) to the Sanhedrin, detailing two major themes and ideas. Firstly that God does not inhabit one place (i.e. the Temple), and secondly that they had persecuted Jesus, saying he was subverting the laws of Moses, where in fact he was fulfilling them. One quote explaining this is "Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him." (Acts 7:51-53). Needless to say the Jewish authorities did not take this well, and decided to stone him. The men who threw the first stones took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a 'young man named Saul'...

So, St Stephen was a great crusader in recognising Jesus, and is the first martyr of the Christian Church.

Getting Ready for Christmas!



I am grateful to Mark, our Director of Music for sending me this picture of "Advent Preparations".

Dates for your December Diary

Sunday 21st December: Nine Lessons and Carols by Candlelight at 5.30pm.

Christmas Eve: Christingle at 3.30pm
Midnight Mass at 11.30pm

Christmas Day: Mass of the Holy Nativity at 10 am

Please do take a copy of the Advent and Christmas Programme where you will find more dates and details of events. Please also take a bundle of Christmas cards to deliver, all from the back of church.



Christmas

*We wish you a Happy Christmas and
Blessed New Year!*