

PLOUGHSHARE

June/July 2009

Volume 17, No 4



St Thomas' Brampton St Peter's, Holymoorside

Share the love of Jesus

*We aim to become more like Jesus every day
as we respond to His love for us and
as we share the good news of Him with others*



**What's been happening?
Bernard Blanksby and
Ian Wright retire from being
Church Wardens
and
Sam and Gemma
-well see page 17!**



60p per copy (£3 per year)

Monthly Pattern of Sunday Services

There is a variety of services each Sunday in both our churches. Details are set out below. Please note that changes may occasionally occur at short notice. For the latest up to date information please check the weekly notice sheet or st-thomas-brampton.org/diary.html

St Thomas'

Sermon themes and readings are available in church or at st-thomas-brampton.org/services.html

Recordings of the sermons and readings are available at st-thomas-brampton.org/podcast_index.html

For those who enjoy tradition:

9am A service of Parish Communion (*Morning Prayer once a month*) using 'Common Worship' and with the choir and organ.

For those with families:

11am An informal service that's 'family friendly'. Sung worship led by the worship band. Weekly crèche (0-3's) and children's groups (3-10 plus years old).

1 st Sunday	Family Worship
2 nd Sunday	Holy Communion
3 rd , 4 th (and 5 th) Sunday	Morning Worship

For those looking for something more:

6pm A relaxed service with in-depth teaching and extended worship led by the music team.

1 st Sunday	Informal Communion
2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th (and 5 th) Sunday	Evening Worship

4.30pm 'energize -1' for 10-14 year olds

8pm 'energize -2' for 14-18 year olds

Advanced Notice:

During August at St Thomas' there will be only one morning service at 10.30am. The evening service will be as normal at 6pm.

St Peter's

9.30am A traditional service of Holy Communion every Sunday using 'Common Worship' and 'Mission Praise' accompanied by the organ. There is Sunday Club (3 years old to school year 9) and a crèche.

6pm A traditional service of Evening Prayer using the '1662 Service' and 'Mission Praise' accompanied by the organ.
(Note: the evening service on the 4th Sunday of the month is usually held at Holymoorside Methodist Church -please check notice sheet to confirm.)



From the Rector

Dear Friends,

Welcome to another packed edition of *Ploughshare*.

Have you heard the expression 'a curate's egg'? Nowadays it's a saying that means something that has a mix of good and bad qualities. The phrase dates back to 1895 and is derived from a cartoon in the humorous British magazine *Punch*. Drawn by George du Maurier and entitled '*True Humility*', it pictured a timid-looking curate taking

breakfast in his bishop's house. The bishop says, "I'm afraid you've got a bad egg, Mr Jones." The curate replies, "Oh, no, my Lord, I assure you that parts of it are excellent!"

So if that's what a 'curate's egg' is; what's a curate? A curate is an assistant minister who, after their initial academic training, is ordained and sent to a parish to gain the practical skills necessary to have sole responsibility for running their own parish.

Ruth Turner will be arriving in Chesterfield at the beginning of July to begin four years as our new Curate. Ruth, who is a trained teacher and musician, is currently finishing her theological training in Ridley Hall, Cambridge. During her time with us Ruth will be doing all the things that you would expect of a minister, for instance leading services, preaching, conducting weddings, baptisms and funerals as well as learning how to run an Anglican church.



Please make Ruth feel really at home as she comes to work amongst us.

You are especially welcome to meet her on her first full Sunday in the parish, **12th July**. There will be receptions after each of our three services at St Thomas' (**9am, 11am and 6pm**) to properly welcome her to the parish. Do join us if you can.

Matt Barnes (Rev), Rector

From the Editor

On behalf of all our readers, I would like to add our welcome to Ruth when she comes to join us as our new Curate. We look forward to getting to know Ruth through the pages of Ploughshare.

Again, on your behalf I would like to thank Ian Wright and Bernard Blanksby for their service as they retire as wardens of St Peter's and St Thomas' (and the Parish) respectively.

You may have noticed a slight change to Ploughshare –the pages 'feel' different, the type looks slightly different and there are more pages in colour. This is because we are printing the magazine 'in house'. By doing this we can improve the quality and keep the price the same.

There is a lot going on in the next few months in our churches -I look forward to receiving some reports to put in the next edition of Ploughshare.

Mark Hoare -Editor

Ran the Race

In last month's magazine Mark Torkington gave his testimony and told us why he was running in this year's London Marathon. The article was entitled 'Run the Race'. He now writes...

Many thanks to everyone. I greatly appreciated your prayer support. I had Mandy on my shirt, on my ipod (she used to be in a band) and in my heart. My injuries held up and I am sure that God was behind everything -as usual! At times we lose sight of that, but I am very blessed and pleased to have raised the money for Oxfam.

For the record I completed the race in 4hr:34m:36s.

Mark Torkington

(Mark was running in memory of his sister Mandy who was killed in a road accident. Mandy was an active supporter of Oxfam. -Editor)



Read Mark's testimony in the April/May 2009 edition or at st-thomas-brampton.org/aboutpeople1.html#19

Diary Dates

Thursday 4 June	Rendezvous Coach Tour
Thursday 11 June	Visit to the National Arboretum
Sunday 28 June	Mission Sunday, St Thomas'
Sunday 12 July	Ruth Turner's first Sunday (see the Rector's letter)
Sunday 19 July	Church Cricket Match
August 6 and 7	Summer Rendezvous
Saturday 8 August	St Peter's outing to Chester

More information on these and other events on the weekly news sheet or st-thomas-brampton.org

Dadfest 09, Friday 19 to Sunday 21 June (Father's Day)

A celebration of men, dads and kids helping fathers be better dads. Want

- to do some fun things with your kids?
- some time to have fun yourself (wine tasting!) with other dads?
- some great tips on how you can be a better father?
- to worship together as a family and learn about the Father heart of God?

YES? Then Dadfest is for you! Pick up a leaflet from St Thomas' or see st-thomas-brampton.org/news.html

Thank You Ian

Adrian Marsden-Jones pays tribute to Ian Wright on his retirement after 21 years service as Warden of St Peter's Church.

These 21 years have been witness to a remarkable period of change at St Peters, of which Ian has been a quiet but integral part.

Ian and his wife Betty are from local farming stock and also ran a pub at one time; both these occupations are highly significant in his own personal role as Church Warden. How come you might ask? Well I will endeavour to 'paint the picture' for you.

I first linked up with Ian when we both were appointed as wardens in 1988 when Rev. Peter Allen was our Minister in Charge. St Peter's was a tiny church occupying what was originally the schoolroom to the adjacent Cotton Mill, nevertheless this gave it a very intimate character, greatly loved by the congregation.

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Ian and I soon built up a relationship that has stood the test of time. I would be the 'up front man' and he would be busy with the many other duties. Ian knows nearly everybody, not just in church but family relationships throughout the wider community. This asset contributed greatly to our church life and at funerals. He took great pride and responsibility for the churchyard that entailed a large amount of maintenance and administration.

At this time there existed a huge growth of rhododendrons alongside Rose Cottage. A working party on Thursday evenings undertook the job of clearing these, with Ian in charge. After weeks of work they were cleared to our great relief, only for Ian to insist we also dug out the roots! I have a picture of Ian, stripped to the waist with only his head and shoulders visible!

By 1997 it was clear that we could no longer put off extending the capacity of our tiny church and with the clear vision and skills of Tom Stockton and many discussions with the Diocese we were able to celebrate the extension of our church in November 1999. This was a team effort with gangs of volunteers painting throughout from ceiling to floor, with Ian a key player. Painting the roof trusses with Roger Key, our then new warden, and descending a homemade scaffolding to move it along, they both forgot the tin of black paint above. Poor Roger was covered from head to foot!

Proud of his church Ian would personally see that all windows were cleaned and was regularly found in the kitchen with sleeves rolled up when we had social events in the village. However, he illustrated his independence by regularly finding urgent jobs to do in the churchyard during the sermon; much to Judith Henderson's annoyance!

Amongst all his other duties Ian retains a keen interest in cricket and for many years kept the peace as umpire in our annual parish cricket match.

Throughout this time we must not forget the huge support that Betty has given to Ian and the church. It is fitting that Ian should have remained in his post, despite failing health, to see the rebuilding of the vestry completed.

Thank you Ian, we have all greatly valued your dedication and fellowship.

Adrian Marsden-Jones

Diana Hinchliffe has been elected to succeed Ian as Warden at St Peter's.

A few pictures of Ian during his time as Warden at St Peter's.



Ian with Harry Martin and Dorothy Marsden-Jones on catering duties -note the rolled up sleeves



Danger! Man at work!



Ian with Roger Key (also Warden), Judith Henderson (then Minister at St Peter's) and David Garnett (Archdeacon)



Sunday 3 May 2009

Nancy Sturdy presents a token of thanks to Ian and Betty to mark Ian's retirement watched by Audrey Smith (current minister at St Peter's)

St Thomas' Easter Vigil Outside Derby Cathedral

On the Saturday evening before Easter Sunday, Gemma Machin, Steve Willis, Kat Witham, Sam Wheeler and Vicky Wood went to Derby Cathedral for the Easter Vigil Service.

In previous years, the Easter Vigil service had started at 11.30pm with the Cathedral almost in darkness and very quiet. At midnight the Cathedral was flooded with light and the sound of singing and celebrating as Easter Day was welcomed in. Gemma described it as an amazing service and her favourite of the year.

However, when they arrived this year the Cathedral was locked up and completely in darkness –there was obviously no service! What was to be done –eat their Easter Eggs and go home? No, Gemma, Steve, Kat, Sam and Vicky decided to hold their own vigil to celebrate Easter and experience the power and passion of the Resurrection!

They sat outside the Cathedral whilst everyone else who was going round town walked past them. They hastily obtained some cigarette lighters to use as candles and downloaded onto their i-pods the vigil liturgy. As they started singing and praying, some street evangelists from a New Life Church in Derby joined them.

Gemma, Steve, Kat, Sam and Vicky describe what was most special about the experience for them.

“It was awesome. Living out Christianity in church is quite easy and nice but living it out on the street it felt so real.”

“The impromptu worship was great –people looked at us but it didn’t really matter.”

“The Bible reading from the liturgy described how the disciples sat behind locked doors and Jesus came and stood in their midst. We were sat outside the massive locked doors of the Cathedral and Jesus came in *our* midst. Jesus was with the disciples when they went out from behind the locked doors into the world. You don’t have to be in a church building to worship Jesus – you can do it anywhere.”

“We were determined to have the vigil even if there wasn’t [an ‘official’] one. We were going to worship God even if others weren’t. We got a few stares and comments –especially when we shouted out “Halleluiah” at the top of our voices but that didn’t matter. Some people did stop and listen for quite a while. We may have said something to them.”

“We were sat outside this locked up grandiose Cathedral –but that building wasn’t the Church. The Church really is the people and that night we were the Church. The bells did not even chime midnight –that’s how useless the building was as a church at that time!”

Gemma then set down a challenge. “If something crazy crosses your mind to do for God just do it. Don’t think “Oh people will stare at me, people might say this or that”. Just do it because it’s real and can make a difference. Some of those people that walked past us did stop and did listen. And although they walked away they would not have seen or heard us if we had been inside the Cathedral or if we hadn’t been there at all.”

Listen to Gemma, Steve, Kat, Sam and Vicky speaking about their vigil at the Easter Day evening service at:
st-thomas-brampton.org/podcast2009.html#16

Note: The Easter Eve Service at the Cathedral was at 8pm this year. It included Baptism and Confirmation.

Gifts of the Spirit

Pentecost Sunday this year is on the 31 May, the publication date of this edition of the magazine. This is an abridged version of a sermon Peter Rolfe gave last year.

In May we celebrate Whitsun or as it is also called, Pentecost Sunday. This was when the small group of disciples, trying to work out what to do with their knowledge that Jesus was alive, were suddenly transformed by the Holy Spirit. The result was that they showed amazing abilities like speaking foreign languages that they had never learned and preaching confidently to the crowds. We talk of these abilities as ‘**Gifts of the Holy Spirit**’ - but just what is the Holy Spirit? – I remember being in church as a teenager and being utterly baffled by the term.



Finding out has helped me to sort out what we know about God. We know God as our Creator – the one who made this amazing universe, a creation that becomes more incredible as we discover more about it. We also know God as our Father. It can be a lovely image but one that often seems distant from us; a father so different from us that to even look on his face would destroy us - according to Moses.

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God then came and lived among us so that we could know him – that’s Jesus. We learned that Jesus is our friend but, much more than that – he is our Saviour, breaking Satan’s hold over us as he died and then rose again to a new and different life.

But God went even further than that. He wanted to be invited to live in us. Jesus had promised a messenger, who came at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit. The disciples found that he gave them gifts, wonderful gifts and these are promised for us. Now I like getting gifts! New things that I had not had before: that is the point of gifts otherwise they are not very special. It’s the same with the gifts we can get from God, from our Holy Spirit, new gifts we had not previously had.

Paul tells us about just a few of these gifts. Some of which we can understand like **‘Wisdom’**, but most of which need at least a comment.

There’s **‘Knowledge’** which is not an encyclopaedia but an understanding spiritual truth.

‘Faith’ comes in and, although we all have faith, this is more than that. It is believing that God can do amazing things. At St Thomas’ we currently have faith to build new facilities even when we cannot afford them! God can do it!



Then there is **‘Healing’**. Oh how I would love to see more of us with this gift. We have a real need to heal those we know who are sick. People are healed but not nearly often enough for me.

‘Working of Miracles’ is even rarer: it is when something extraordinary (beyond how nature usually works) takes place. And yes – it happens, but very rarely.

‘Prophecy’ is not about telling the future but speaking God’s word to his people. This often takes place.

Far rarer is **‘Distinguishing Spirits’** which is probably the ability to see when something is coming from Satan rather than God.

There is also **‘Speaking in Tongues’** and interpreting what is said, but there is no room here to expand on that fascinating gift.

All these are 'big-box' gifts but there are also others which need virtually no comment. These other gifts are ones we can readily identify with: **Serving and Leading People, Teaching and Encouraging Others, Giving Generously to those in Need** and, above all, **Showing Mercy**.

Each of us should expect – should ask for – a gift like these from the Holy Spirit. They are all intended to strengthen the church which is described as '**Jesus' Body**'. Every part of a body, whether obvious, (like our head or seemingly insignificant like, say, our toe) is just as important for the whole body to work well. If we are incomplete or divided then the body does not work properly. Our gift is needed!

Some of the gifts may seem minor compared with others but don't be deceived. The smaller ones are of equal value to the 'big-box' gifts. Who, apart from God himself, can rate whether giving a prophecy to the church is more valuable than gently encouraging someone in desperate need of a kind word and a loving hug? Eagerly seek gifts – and use them – otherwise you may finish up with none.

Paul makes an essential point by saying, in effect, 'get your priorities right'. He talks of love, a love that comes before anything else, a love which determines all we do, a caring supporting patient love. Without it everything else is useless. This love is like a fruit, not a gift; fruit comes automatically when a tree is well fed. All of us at whatever stage we are at as Christians should expect to be showing signs of fruit and above all the fruit of love.

Who benefits from us using our gifts - isn't it the church? Well yes, but what is the church? If we are Christ's body we exist, not for ourselves, but for all those who do not know Jesus. And the gifts of the Holy Spirit, backed up by love, equip us to carry out the commission Jesus has given to us.

Peter Rolfe

Listen to Peter's sermon at:
st-thomas-brampton.org/podcasts2008.html#12a

In April and May this year the 11am service and house groups at St Thomas' have been following the S.H.A.P.E course. Part of the course makes us look at and think about our Spiritual Gifts.

Find out more and listen to the teaching at:
st-thomas-brampton.org/shape.html

A Pilgrims Progress

Recently the staff team went on retreat to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne. Whilst there, a number of us took a prayer walk which turned into our very own pilgrim's progress. The walk was unplanned (by us at least!).

Before we started we asked God to lead us as we walked and we thought and reflected on the things that He might have for us that day. Our walk began as we set off from our **House of Slumber** (*which was actually Marygate Retreat House where we were staying*). It represented for us a life of worldly comfort, an easy place... no place for a true pilgrim.



As we walked through the village to the shore line we became aware of all the broken and washed-up pieces of rubbish that the sea had discarded onto the beach. It became for us the **Beach of Brokenness**. Here we reflected on the brokenness in our own lives and in the life of our church. As we remembered that God would not break a bruised reed (Isaiah 42:3) we lovingly gathered all the broken pieces together and asked for the Lord's healing on all those we knew.



From here we walked to the **Lord's Strong Tower** (*actually Lindisfarne Castle*). As we drew near we ran the last section for we remembered that the righteous run into it for protection (Proverbs 18:10). Here we prayed for all that stood against the church and would seek to destroy the plans we have.

We rested in the shadow of the tower and then dropped down again into the **Shepherd's Field**. The image of the 23rd Psalm was so clear – we were able to recite the Scripture and reflect on God's care for our lives and his comfort for our church. We prayed for those in difficulties and all who 'walked through the valley of the shadow' before moving on to the **Sea of Opportunity**.



Here we were challenged to go deeper into God's will and to swim (well paddle) in the opportunities He laid before us. It was inviting at one level but cold (very cold!) and difficult underfoot. We contemplated that the plans that God had for us were not always easy to achieve and often required sacrifice on our own part to achieve them.



Dry again we set off around the peninsular to some old kiln works. For us they became the **Furnace of Refinement**. We prayed alone as we considered God's refining work in our own lives and how purity of heart only comes from yielding completely to the hot fire of God's love (Malachi 3:2). A prayer we echoed for our church.

As we walked and talked about our hopes and dreams we flew the **Kite of Hope**. As we took it in turns to fly the kite we made this simple act our prayer that all we wished for would soar high.

With our hopes lifted to heaven we eventually made it to the **Cross of Christ** where all our ambitions are realised. We were disappointed that on this occasion we were not able to reach St Cuthbert's Isle (the tide was in) but took this as a sign that although the cross was clearly real it was not yet our time to lay hold fully of that glorious reality. Our journey was not yet finished on earth, the Lord had more for us to do, our journey was not yet over but one day we would be able to cross over the



great sea that divided us from touching the Lord and we would share in his life completely.



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Then we went home for a cup of tea and cake!

You too can do a prayer walk like this – simply step out of your house asking God to lead you to things that will help you to pray. Take time to look more closely at familiar things and open your mind to imaginative prayer. Why not take a camera with you and write another Ploughshare article!

Matt Barnes

Down the Wye



Julie and Steve on the water

Twelve intrepid souls will be canoeing down the River Wye on the 14 and 15 of June -Matt and Jack Barnes; Martin, Gill, Eleanor and Alex Bailey, Tim and Sam Wheeler and Steve Eleanor, Sam and Julie Lomas. They will be doing a 26 mile stretch of the river from Hoarwithy to Symonds Yat, stopping overnight at Ross on Wye

They are looking for sponsors with all proceeds for the Living Stones Project: look out for the sponsorship form in church or contact Julie to make a pledge
01246 277448 julie-lomas@btconnect

Sermons with your Cornflakes

A number of people listen to the sermons and other recordings on the church website. As well as our church family members we know of people who listen in different parts of the UK and in other countries including Nigeria and Bulgaria. Kathryn Shemwell tells us why she listens and encourages others to listen.

Over the last 12 months God has been gently drawing me closer to Him. During this time I've become quite a prayer fanatic taking the command to "pray at all times" to the extreme! I also found the energy to attend the Lent course (and read Richard Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline*). Amazing really –I'm usually exhausted by Wednesday night!



Responding to Richard Foster's suggestion of a 'media –fast', I've found myself deliberately NOT reading the newspaper *every day*, not watching the TV news *every day*, and not having the radio on as often as I did. To fill these gaps, I've been listening to the podcasts on the web site: st-thomas-brampton.org/podcast/index.html

This habit then started a 'competition' between Pippa, my daughter, and me about who had heard the best sermon!

Instead of putting the TV on I'd listen to the 6pm sermons. I've also listened to several testimonies. Whilst doing the ironing I've listened to some of the 9am sermons, and revisited some of the 11am sermons I heard in church. It's quite scary to think how much I 'forget' between listening in church on Sunday and listening again on-line a few days later!

A couple of times I've even chosen to switch on the computer rather than the radio in the morning and listen while I'm having breakfast!

The Bible readings are also online and I recommend listening to them before listening to the sermon.

The value I've found in listening a 2nd or 3rd time on line is that I have the space and time to reflect on *how* God wants me to *respond* to what's being said which I guess is the very purpose of a sermon.

At St Thomas' we have been richly blessed with gifted, inspiring, encouraging and challenging preachers whose words are definitely worth a second (or third) hearing!

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Who won the 'competition' for hearing the best sermon? We had to declare a draw ... regardless of which service you attend, a high quality spiritual feast is on the menu!

Kathryn Shemwell

What's On-Line?

All the sermons since Easter 2006 are recorded. They are indexed by date, sermon series and relevant Bible passages. There are nearly eighty testimonies recorded and various other series including 'A Bird's Eye View of the Bible.'

How to Listen On-Line

Listening on-line is really very easy. Just follow these steps.

1. Enter the website address in your search bar of your web browser (www.st-thomas-brampton.org)
2. When the church home page appears scroll down the right hand side menu and left-click on 'Recordings'.
3. An index of the Podcasts appears.
4. Left-click on the item you want to listen to (anything in blue text). The next page to appear is in a table format and shows the date, subject, speaker's initials and Bible readings. Again, left-click on the item you want to hear (anything in blue print). This time a media player should open automatically and your chosen item will play.
5. The recording can be paused/restarted by left-clicking on the appropriate on-screen icon.

If you want to save the recording to your computer or mp3 player, when you get to point 4 above right click on the item and choose 'save as' and it will download. This is the best thing to do if you are on 'dial up' rather than 'broadband'.

Any problems contact Mark Hoare or a teenager! . If you do not have access to the internet the recordings can be provided as mp3 files. Again contact Mark.

Thank You Bernard

Bernard Blanksby has stood down as Church Warden after four years in the post. This is the vote of thanks Karen Riley gave Bernard at the Annual Church Meeting in April.

Bernard has had a steady hand on the running of our parish for the last four years. I know that David Mouncer, our previous Rector, greatly valued Bernard's stewardship, his considered views and sound judgement.

These gifts certainly helped to carry us through what was, at times, a difficult vacancy after David left. He took responsibility for working with St Peter's during the vacancy and I know that St Peter's folks have appreciated Bernard's involvement.



Also I would like to say thank you to Bernard for being my fellow warden for the last four years. Bernard and I couldn't be more different. I'm sure there are better analogies but we remind me of the tortoise and the hare. I rush around, talk first and think second. Bernard has let me 'sound off', listened, thought and then spoken. We have usually got to the same position in the end!

So, as well as saying thank you Bernard for your service to this parish, I'd like to say thank you for putting up with me –for my 'sounding off' phone calls when I went on and on, for my lack of organisation and for always being late. I don't just leave things to the last minute; I usually go well past it!

So may I say on behalf of everyone "God bless you Bernard and Barbara. We wish you well for the future and know that you will continue to serve God here at St Thomas'."

Karen Riley, Church Warden

Bernard has agreed to continue as a Deputy Warden at St Thomas'. Mark Hoare has been elected Church Warden to succeed Bernard. -Editor

Lent and Easter at St Thomas'



Maundy Thursday agape

Hand washing at the agape



Good Friday workshop

Lent started at St Thomas' with a traditional 'Ashing' service on Ash Wednesday. During Lent we studied the book 'Celebration of Discipline' both in church and in home groups.

On Maunday Thursday there was an Agape with hand washing.

There was an Easter craft workshop for children and adults on Good Friday morning which merged into a short all age 'Hot Cross Bun' service. The children acted out the Easter story. In the afternoon there was 'An Hour at the Cross' service.

On Easter morning the church was full for a truly amazing Communion Service. Our worship was led by both the choir and the music group. A drama entitled 'A Bugs Life' was performed by Gemma Machin and Sam Wheeler. Matt preached a short sermon on 'New Life' ably assisted by Joe Dods. It involved smashing Easter Eggs with a hammer! During the service there was an Easter Egg hunt for the children.

Easter evening was a 'Songs of Praise' service and some church members gave short testimonies.

Listen again to all the above at st-thomas-brampton.org/podcast2009.html and see more pictures at st-thomas-brampton.org/gallery.html



Hot cross buns after the Good Friday Service

More pictures on the back cover

God in Parliament



We believe that Christian principles and prayer should underpin any important decisions made. Where then can these be more important than for arguably the most important decision making body in the country –Parliament?

Jeremy Paxman observes in his book *The Political Animal*: "Although politics is an intensely earthly trade, it is noticeable that religious belief seems to be much higher among members of the Houses of Parliament than in the country at large."

It is thus perhaps not surprising that life in the Palace of Westminster, which, when it is sitting has over 8000 people working in it, includes a whole plethora of church activities including worship, bible study, fellowship and prayer.

Each daily session of Parliament is opened with prayers by the Speaker's chaplain in the House of Commons and by the Bishop's Chaplain in the House of Lords. (There are no multi-faith prayers.) The practice of prayers is believed to have started in about 1558 and the present form of prayers probably dates from the reign of Charles II in the seventeenth century.



In addition there are masses, communion services and other prayer services for MPs, peers and political and house staff.

There are several Christian groups at Westminster including the Christian Socialist Movement, the Conservative Christian Fellowship and the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum. A key organisation is the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship which seeks to support and resource the diverse and numerous Christian activities to promote a stronger Christian voice in Parliament.

Prayer has an important role. In 2005 a group of Christian MPs who were on retreat together received a word of prophecy from 2 Chronicles 7:14:

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land".

In response to this a 24/7 week of round the clock prayer was organised for Parliament. This brought together many of the existing prayer meetings inside the House, as well as external activities, to pray for the government and the country. There were prayer walks, praise and worship meetings, bible studies and many other events. Local Westminster churches including Westminster Cathedral were also involved. This both created media interest and helped encourage the Church nationally to pray for politicians and government more.

The week was characterised by a sense of repentance and expectancy that God would act. This really inspired the Christian community on site. Another significant development during the week was the coming together of Christian groups from Westminster and Whitehall for the first time. This resulted in an on going relationship including the running of joint Alpha courses. The 24/7 Prayer week is now an annual event providing a focus for God's power and an inspiration for a new generation to see politics as mission and Parliament as the mission field. **This year it will be from Sunday May 31-Saturday June 6.**

As secular ideologies and political solutions continue to be exposed as lacking the capacity to address the problems and challenges in our world, it is more important than ever that we, who are followers of Jesus, pray for and speak prophetically into politics and government. The floor of the Central Lobby at Westminster is encircled with the words *"Unless the Lord builds the House, the builders labour in vain"* (Psalm 127.1). How true this is.

Some useful web links to look at:

Prayer for Parliament: prayerforparliament.com

Christians in Parliament: christiansinparliament.org.uk



More Easter Pictures



The Murray and Phillips families painting the Easter Garden picture

The finished picture



Joe Dods helping the Rector with his Easter morning sermon



Gemma Machin and Josh Wheeler acting out 'A Bugs Life'