January 2016

RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE

The Vicar writes:

A survey of Faith and Religion in Public Life was published in December. It was produced by the Woolf Institute in Cambridge and argued for new ways of thinking about the place of religious faith in our modern, changing society. Among its findings was the growth in the number of people who do not consider themselves religious – up from 30% to 50% of the population in the last ten years.

After celebrating Christmas this comes as a surprise. The attendance at Christmas services has been higher than ever. At Michaelhouse every seat was taken and we had people standing at the back, whilst at the University Carol Service we had to open the galleries for the first time ever. This suggests to me that it’s not that faith is declining, but that we are finding different ways to express it and live it. Conventional church patterns just don’t make sense to lots of people. So when they say they aren’t religious – I think they mean they don’t find appealing much of what goes on in church. They aren’t religious in the conventional sense.

The diocese of Ely in its mission plan is committed to what it calls a mixed economy. It wants to support and develop parish churches and traditional forms of worship, but it also wants to set up Fresh Expressions of Church alongside. A mission team has been appointed to oversee this development. We are committed to this approach. Our worshipping life remains at the heart of what we do, with parish communion, the Anglican choral tradition, Mattins and Evensong celebrated regularly.

But we also have many new ideas. Many of these are for children. The Heritage Project is bringing many hundreds of children into church for our activities and workshops – many of whom have never been in a church before; the Ark is working at an experimental approach to Eucharistic worship using play, action and worship; the church school provides a Christian-based education for over 100 children. We hope to launch a children’s serving team in the New Year; and of course the choir is so well supported that we have to turn enthusiastic young singers away.

To be a church in a changing society means we value the old but welcome the new. If we do both of these, we believe we can help many people who don’t consider themselves to be religious, to discover that perhaps they are religious after all.
**NEW FACES**

Revd Dr John Binns writes:

We have a great staff team at Great St Mary’s, each of us covering an area of ministry, but together providing that special ministry at the centre of town for the people of Cambridge. We also have many dedicated volunteers working together with our full- and part-time staff.

As we look ahead to the coming year, we will be welcoming some new faces to join the team and some familiar faces taking on new roles.

The Revd Devin McLachlan is joining us as part-time Associate Vicar. Devin has come from the diocese of Chicago in the USA, where he has been vicar of a parish and a University Chaplain. We will be sharing him with Jesus College, thus he expects to be with us most Tuesdays and Thursdays, and alternate Sundays. Some of us have noted with further excitement that he is an experienced graphic designer.

At Michaelhouse Erica Bowler is joining the chaplaincy team as a placement student. Erica has been a member of the Michaelhouse communion congregation on Thursdays and is a worship leader at Arbury Road Baptist Church on Sundays. She expects to be in Michaelhouse most days working with us to build up the chapel as a place of prayer with a worshipping life.

We know Lynn Broughton well, and are delighted that she is starting a mid-week Eucharist on Wednesdays. We’ll be serving coffee and we hope this will grow into a focus for our midweek community life, enabling people who find it hard to get to church at 9.30 on Sundays to continue to worship with us.

The Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection policy has been reviewed, and Veronica McDouall has taken on the position of advisor. Any concerns or ideas can be discussed with her in confidence, and she will offer advice and support. We also have a new PCC Secretary with Sarah de Mas offering to fill this position.

There is also a strengthened verging team; Robert Smyth is joined by Petra Birkett and Philip Hensman to make a great team to cover the growing number of visitors and events of many kinds.

Sadly, there will also be changes ahead at the school. Gill Owen has announced her retirement from being Head Teacher at the end of the school year and the governors have started the recruitment process. We will miss Gill and wish her well in the future.
**Cry of Wonder** by Gerard W Hughes

Pauline Davison writes:

The Jesuit priest, Gerard Hughes, is probably best known for his book *God of Surprises*, and for introducing countless Christians to the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order. *Cry of Wonder* is his last book, finished just before he died in 2014. It is a series of reflections in which he looks back on his 70 years as a Jesuit. Though he insists it is not an autobiography, it tells us a great deal about his life and his changing understanding of the ‘whys’ of human existence and the Christian faith.

The book is in three parts, each dealing with the most significant causes of his life - unity, peace and holiness (which he prefers to the term spirituality.) In his exploration of these themes we learn about his struggles with and rebellion against the rigidity of the Catholic church, his pilgrimages, his teaching in school and university, promoting retreats, especially those at St Beuno’s, his work with Pax Christi and CND, as well as his honest and passionate theology, his discovery of God in everyday life, the God of surprises. But this book is not just about Hughes and his ideas. In keeping with his life’s work it is also a manual for prayer. He believes that we have to engage our hearts, as well as our minds, in our faith journey and that when we acknowledge our deepest feelings, our fears and our desires, we begin to recognize the truth and are open to transformation, to the cry of wonder. In order to help us learn from our experience there are exercises at the end of each chapter.

While acknowledging that there are many ways to pray, he offers concise and useful descriptions of some traditional methods, such as Lectio Divina and the imaginative prayer of the Ignatian exercises, but emphasizes, above all, the importance of stillness. ‘It is good to begin prayer with a stillness exercise however short. If you never move on from stillness you are still praying well. In Christian belief it is God’s spirit who prays in us.’

Hughes once described himself as one of those confused or disillusioned Christians who have a love-hate relationship with the church, yet he never left it, and his work enriched the lives of many in the Catholic church and beyond. This last book, holy and practical, wise and realistic, is his final gift to us.

**Epiphany**

Sarah de Mas writes:

Epiphany recalls an important element of the Nativity story, the visit of the far-travelled magi Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar bearing gifts for the Christ child. This ancient religious festival is interpreted as the moment when Christ is made manifest to the Gentiles.

As a child in Uruguay, the eve of Epiphany was a time for fireworks, evening garden parties and putting out our shoes before bed in the hope of small gifts. In the
words of the anthem so beautifully sung by our choir at the carol service on 20 December, “In a stable by the Inn, Summer, summer doth begin” Christmas and Epiphany are in summer, so celebrations took place outside. Later in Spain, I joined the crowds in the streets watching in awe as the great Cabalgatas swept by, the three Wise Men, Reyes Magos, astride patient camels, dispensing sweets to the crowds. In Mexico, children wrote their wishes on small pieces of paper and stuffed them in multi-coloured helium filled balloons to send them heavenwards as the Mariachis filled the air with traditional nativity music.

Wherever you are this Epiphany, I wish you the very best for the year ahead with many blessings.

Ed.

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**DIARY JANUARY 2016**

**GREAT ST MARYS AND MICHAELHOUSE**

**Saturday 9 January , 7.00pm**

**Aradin Trust Epiphany Concert** to raise funds for their project aiming to establish a community centre in northern Iraq.

**Services in January**

Mondays
9.00am (GSM) Holy Communion

Tuesdays
9.00am (MH) Morning Prayer
10.30am (MH) Ark

Wednesdays
9.00am (MHFH) Morning Prayer
11.00am (GSM) Holy Communion
1.00pm (MHFH) Holy Communion

Thursdays
9.00am (GSM) Morning Prayer
1.05pm (MH) Holy Communion

**Sunday 3 January**

Welcome Devin McLaughlan at Parish Communion

**Sunday 17 January**

Choir singing Utrecht Jubilate at Matins followed by bring and share lunch at MH

**Sunday 24 January**

Rowan Williams at Michaelhouse for the ‘Week of Prayer for Christian Unity’ at 5.00pm

**Sunday 31 January**

University Sermon with Revd Lucy Winkett, Rector St James’, Piccadilly, London.