

# SHINE

A composite image featuring a wooden plank path leading from a dark cave entrance towards three crosses on a rocky hill under a golden sunset sky. The path is made of reddish-brown planks and leads the eye from the dark foreground into the bright, hazy landscape. The three crosses are silhouetted against the glowing horizon. The overall mood is one of hope and spiritual journey.

He is Risen!



## COMMUNITY OF MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD

The parishes of  
Our Lady and the Apostles, St Ambrose, St. Bernadette, St. Joseph,  
St Peter, St. Philip and St Vincent de Paul  
in Stockport

A Local Missionary Area in the Diocese of Shrewsbury

## LITTLE WAY HEALING MINISTRIES LOCAL MISSIONARY AREA HEALING MISSION

WITH

FR LAURENCE BRASSILL OSA, MRS PAULINE EDWARDS AND TEAM



**Thursday 30 May – Sunday 2 June 2019**

**Our Lady & the Apostles  
Shaw Heath, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 8BQ**

**Experience the healing power of Jesus**

**All are welcome!**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT**  
**Julie Williams (juliewilliams10@ymail.com)**  
**or Rowena Nield (rowena.nield@sky.com)**

*Jesus promised: "Lay your hands on the sick and they will be healed".*

**Come and see**



### FROM THE PARISH PRIEST

*Somebody was saying to me the other day how quickly time flies by these days. How true. It only seems like yesterday that we were looking through the Christmas issue of 'Shine' and here we are already at Easter and looking forward to another bumper magazine. There is so much going on and so much to look forward to in the coming months that I think the summer issue might be just as big as this one.*

*I would like to mention and thank Margaret Gresty who has recently retired from her post as parish secretary. Margaret has worked for some time in the office here and has contributed immensely to the smooth running of the 'business' side of things as well as being the welcoming voice on the phone or the welcoming face at the front door. We hope that her health improves and she enjoys a richly deserved retirement.*

*After Easter we shall be in the First Communion 'season'; we have youngsters preparing for Confirmation and there is the Bible Weekend to look forward to, the Healing Mission and don't forget the next Alpha programme that starts at the beginning of May. After all that I should be due another little break! Have a good spring.*

Happy Easter

Fr Peter

*News from the parish communities of  
St Peter's, Hazel Grove and  
St Philip's, Offerton.*

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## Where we are . . .

**St Peter's Church and presbytery**

16 Green Lane, Hazel Grove,  
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**St Philip's Church**

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Stockport SK2 5LB

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Our joint website is [www.stpeterscatholic.church](http://www.stpeterscatholic.church)



# Shining a light on our parish communities

## Bereavement group success

**Helen Lyons** explains about this support group

We started St Peter's Bereavement Group in November 2017. At first there were only a few people, some recently bereaved and others who had lost loved ones a few years ago. Now in our second year, we have many more members.

Some of the people who attend are from surrounding parishes and we have a few members who are not Catholics, which is a lovely way of reaching out to the community.

We meet on the third Friday of the month for a social activity, usually involving food. Over the past sixteen months we have had some wonderful evenings and afternoons which have included suppers, Sunday lunch, a night out in the pub, chippy



teas, wreath making evenings at Christmas, a night out at Turquoise, afternoon tea and making cards.

On a more important and serious side we have wonderful talks and services which help people to remember their loved ones in a religious and spiritual way. Yes there are tears and sad moments, which is all part of grieving, but there is always a friendly person there for you to talk to or just get a hug from. One of the most positive comments that I heard was "it is so nice to be able to talk freely to other people who are in the same or similar situation as myself". Even on our night out at Turquoise the conversation got around to our loved ones.

If you have been bereaved recently or some time ago, please do come and join us. If you know anyone who might benefit from being part of our group, suggest it to them or bring them along. It has been described as the happiest group in the parish.

Please contact Helen on 07854 928072 or Rachel on 07724 749217 if you'd like more information..



## St Peter's choirs at Hazel Grove musical festival

St Peter's school choir, despite singing at only half strength, came third in their class at the recent music festival. Our junior choir delighted the audience (and the adjudicator!) with their singing. They were awarded a high distinction mark of 89 and won the William Byrd plaque.

In the afternoon there was a wonderful feast of choral music from seven choirs from the north west and Wales. Our St Peter's adult choir sang very well, gaining high praise from the adjudicator although they didn't manage to come in the top three.

The church choirs are always looking for new members. Why don't you come along and give us a try? Details of practice times are in the parish newsletter.

## Farewells and welcomes

Since our last issue in December, the following parishioners have gone to their rest:

Ella Rose Heath (baby)	Keith O'Hara
Thomas Hazeley	Matthew (Mattie) Byrne
Catherine Ryan	Geoff Lee
Stanley Bernard MacGlashan	Michael Mullen
Colin John Hyde	Kathryn Grace
James Patrick Turner	Neil Lynsdale
Bernard Donlan	

May they rest in peace.

We have welcomed the following people into the church through baptism:

Michalska Inka, Rory McCumesky and Donnacha Conaill Meade



Thanks to all who supported our fundraiser at Teas and Coffees for The Good Shepherd. This was part of our school Geography project for which we had to set up a small business and raise some money for charity. We raised £155 on Sunday at church and we're going to keep selling at school this week! Thank you everyone for all your support!

Mary McKay

## Celebrating missions and not a Red Box in sight

**Margaret King** has championed Missio, the Red Boxes mission appeal in St Peter's parish for many years

This is the photo (courtesy of Rosemary Jones) taken after Fr Dermot Byrne's appeal in January when we met together in the parish centre for a spot of lunch.

He was really impressed by the welcome and the support received from St Peter's parishioners. This is all down to the generosity of the people and the dedication of the promoters who empty the Red Boxes year in, year out. Some have been doing it for around 20 years, surpassed by Cath Brett who's been involved for 33 years, only to be overtaken by Nora Waring and Eamonn



Munnelly who have each notched up 40 years. You may feel your contribution is not much, but every time a coin is dropped in, you momentarily think of the missions/missionaries and it becomes a prayer. So, keep those 'arrow' prayers coming – and of course

the coins. On a sombre note, mission is dangerous and there have been many martyrs in the past as well as today. Fr Dermot knew some of them. While the Christmas tree in our church may have looked fine, there was a serious thread running through it, in the form of the



decoration of red beads representing the martyrs' blood. On a lighter note, one lady used to put a pound in the box whenever Manchester United won, 50p for a draw and zero if they lost.

The missionaries and their flocks are very grateful for your past support, which hopefully will continue.

If you'd like a Red Box in your home – whichever team you support, and especially if you are a Stockport County fan these days! – see the Missio contact details on the outside back cover of this issue, under the section Outreaching in the community.



## Eileen champions her man

Of course, I have always known that Eric is a model husband.

Even so, I was surprised when Anne-Marie and Phil Bailey told me that he was moonlighting as a model and he could be seen in the front window of the mobility shop in Great Moor.

That Eric is about nine feet tall – my Eric is that in the affection of all who know him!

Eileen Wilcock





Readers may remember learning of **Tom Small's** role in the Alpha organisation this time last year (Shine Issue 4). Now he's back on home soil and offers his insight into our new Youth Alpha programme.



Youth Alpha team led by Tom Small (top right)



An empty chair left in memory of those who we have lost

# Leading Youth Alpha **at St Peter's**

On 20 January 2019 young people and adults from St Peter's organised and facilitated a Youth Alpha for our parish and for the youth in our area. I had a great team of young adults who were raring to go and see lives changed! My team included Charlotte Dwight, Niall Devlin, Lucy McKay, Tom Mercer, James Walker, Libby Morris, Henry Brookbanks, Phil Kok-Shun and Ciara Hogan.

This bunch of wonderful people helped me so much in organising Alpha and running it as well. Participants arrived and were greeted at the sign-in desk where they received a name badge from the young leaders. Then the participants had time to eat food, catch up with friends and relax. We then spent time playing games led by the young leaders. Once all the participants were excited and ready, we would jump into the videos where we had great discussions about faith.

The team split up into pairs, leading a group each for the entirety of the course! The young people were fantastic and really responsive to the videos. All of the young leaders and I really enjoyed learning about all the participants and journeying with them through the course.

It was so interesting to hear so many different viewpoints and questions about faith.

The young leaders were a vital part in making plans for each session, taking responsibility and executing them well. They ran countless fantastic games for the participants and helped guide them through each session. Running Alpha was so much fun! There were challenges we faced but on the whole we all had an absolute blast leading it for all the participants and we hope that they have a new view on faith and a better understanding about God and what he has in store for them.

It's been an absolute blessing for all of us to be part of each of the young people's lives for the past few weeks. We hope that they have learnt something new and take that step into unknown waters and experience God's love in a spectacular way.

On a personal note the team that helped in every aspect of Youth Alpha are an absolute blessing and have played a vital role in making Youth Alpha run smoothly and I could not have done it without them all! Here is some of the feedback we received from the participants.



Youth Alpha presenters Jason and Ben

"Youth Alpha is really good because at the start of the sessions we are able to chat with friends, we play lots of fun games and because Alpha is about growing our relationship with God. We are in groups and we watch a 20-minute video and then we discuss the questions that are on the video. The best thing that I enjoyed doing during Youth Alpha was the retreat at Savio House.

On the retreat we played games like football and basketball, we had a bonfire, we had a walk up to the milk bottle (White Nancy), we watched the Alpha talks on the Holy Spirit and we had our own reflective time.

I think by doing Youth Alpha it has made me closer to God and it has made me realise that there are millions of people that try to grow in their relationship with God.

I think that Youth Alpha has really helped me make a decision about whether I want to be confirmed or not because it's been a really fun and exciting way to continue my faith journey. The young leaders really helped us each session because they approach us in a kind and fun manner and not in a way like in school. They have made a big impact on how I can worship God plus they have put a lot of time and effort into making this happen".

**Matthew Haines, aged 12**



## Alpha Day at Savio House

"The Youth Alpha day was at Savio House in Bollington and it was really good. We went on a walk to White Nancy and we watched the Alpha videos. It was great when we all played football with Terry and during the afternoon, we had prayer. Tom Small shared his faith story with us; everyone was listening and it was really inspiring. There were different prayer stations that we could go to and reflect on and, if we wanted, we could have prayer with the youth leaders. We sang songs around the campfire in the evening and ate toasted marshmallows. The Alpha day was excellent and I would love to go back."

Mary McKay, aged 12



End of the day campfire



Prayer stations

## Other comments on the day

"I liked the videos and content on Alpha. I found the prayer thing yesterday at Savio super relaxing"

"It was pretty neat – the food was the best part"

"I enjoyed the prayer journey because I did feel close to Jesus and I did feel something. The Alpha sessions were very crisp and straight to the point. The campfire on the Alpha day was a nice way to end the day"

"Alpha is lit. Love the food. Love the talks. Jason and Ben are pretty narly speakers. The prayer session at Savio was coooooo!"

"Alpha's incredible and fantastic!"

"On the Alpha away day I felt as if I became closer to God. It was a very peaceful time"

"The walk went well and I enjoyed spending time with friends"

"I really enjoy Alpha and the retreat as well. I enjoyed the walk, games, prayer stations and playing football"

"I enjoyed it so much. It was fun. I enjoyed being prayed over"

"I love Alpha! It is cool!"

"The Alpha day was really good. I hope we could go back"

"I think it was great. You can socialise very well and I can express myself better and feel better about myself. It also answered a lot of questions and made me feel closer to God"

"Loved it! Hope it happens next year!"

"The walk was really inspiring to go on. The campfire too was really good. Would prefer if it was an overnight stay, maybe three days, two nights"

"The day was filled with enjoyable activities and I learnt a lot from the Alpha day – it was relaxing, fun trip – it was a good day!"

## Being a young leader on Youth Alpha

"At Youth Alpha I felt that I learnt a lot of new things especially from the young people who were in my group. It was an amazing experience! I really enjoyed the retreat where we walked up to White Nancy."

Libby Morris, aged 16



Red



Purple



Green



White

# The Garments of Gethsemane

**Barbara Goodier** shares her unexpectedly inspirational encounter with some unusual garments in an assortment of textiles which powerfully illustrate pain, suffering, hope and renewal.

The Garments of Gethsemane were four larger-than-life-sized, symbolical robes made by the Rev Peter Provett, an Anglican priest from Leominster. I first came across these extraordinary garments in July 2003. They were on display in the lovely old church of All Saints, Hereford during the Three Choirs Festival week. Placed in the very spacious chancel, visitors were invited to get close, to touch and handle the exhibits, to read the Biblical texts printed, painted or embroidered on them and to meditate.

Overwhelmed and fascinated, I went down every morning for a week to do just that. Every day brought new discoveries too. I think the verger was a bit suspicious at first and seemed to be always checking that all was still as it should be. Eventually he got used to me being there, taking photographs, writing and wondering. I became almost part of the furniture!

Months later I met the Garments again and this time here at St Peter's! They had been borrowed for an Advent day of prayer. So, for that Saturday, they were on stands in the parish meeting room. There would not have been space to display the Garments in the church but I think it was a pity that a lot of people must have missed their short visit.

The sheer height of the robes was the first thing to strike you. It inspired an effect of great dignity, even God-like majesty. There was a strange sense of 'presence'.

The **Red Garment** represented the world's pain. It had rips, patchwork, wound-like holes adorned with embroidery and beadwork, and raw, piercing texts.

Moving on to the **Purple Garment** with a heavy heart, for there was no respite, little tears of pearl expressed the feelings and emotions invoked by suffering. The Old Testament words seemed to cry out to God, all over again, today. They spoke for all who have 'disappeared', are forced into submission, beaten, confined in inhuman conditions, rendered homeless, exiled, enslaved, abused or murdered.

At last, the **Green Garment** brought relief with promises of hope and renewal. There was much decoration of delicate, natural patterns and texts. Some texts were written on leaf shapes. It was necessary to lift up some of the strips to read further words hidden underneath.

Like life, the first three robes were fragile, yet each in its own way was beautiful. In stark contrast, the **White Linen Robe** with a scarf of blunted nails conveyed strength and power. It was the Garment of Resurrection, restoration and forgiveness after pain and suffering. The White Robe was even larger than the others, for they were meant to be able to fit inside it, showing their close connection.

Whether we look at these Garments as a mirror of our own lives or of the world in which we live, they speak to all people at all seasons.



*We launched Footsteps in September 2018 in the parish – it's a series of talks by various people who can help us as we journey in our Christian faith.*

# Footsteps running for the rest of 2019

Readers may recall the amazing coincidences we discovered that three of our speakers all had a twin brother: Mary Hardiman, Fr Eamonn Mulcahy and Fr Pat Deegan. Well, we broke the mould on that one when James Gallogly was our speaker on 5 March. He definitely had no twin brother, nor twin sister – and he was a first for another reason too. He was the first of our speakers to actually walk to the parish centre. So, what are you thinking... fitness fanatic? His car wouldn't start? He's taking Footsteps absolutely literally?

When the audience learnt that he'd walked to the venue that night, they immediately gave him a round of applause, they were so impressed. Then they learnt he only lives a few hundred yards away! That all proved, if ever there were doubt, that Footsteps brings people from well beyond the parish bounds, in fact from all over the borough of Stockport and beyond.

On the opening night of 2019, on 29 January, snow had started falling as Fr Eamonn was talking. Indeed, the first group of people through the doors that night, an hour early, had come from Glossop and had set off early to be sure they didn't get snowed in – in Glossop – and miss the talk.

It's good to witness that level of enthusiasm. And it's good to see the number of people who appreciate the opportunity that's offered to listen to a variety of people from all walks of life, who come to share their experience and their spiritual insight.

## All Lent and no Easter

Fr Eamonn is a Spiritan Father, originally from Levenshulme, Manchester. He travels all over the world to share his insight and faith. He shares his humour too, beginning his January talk by sharing his practical maxim: the mind can only take what the bottom can endure!

Fr Eamonn suggested no Christian should ever look as though they've just come from a funeral, like their faces are pickled in vinegar! Pope Francis, he said, suggested that some Christians can unfortunately "look like they're all Lent and no Easter". Talking about the church he likened it to a field hospital, attending to the immediate needs and wounds of people. He gave us much to ponder about how our mission begins with God.

James Gallogly, from our own parish (as you now know) is a former head teacher and education professional who now works as a Chaplain at HM Prison Manchester. (We tried to avoid stating the obvious line: that God works in strange ways... and failed!!) His talk was deliberately scheduled for Shrove Tuesday, the eve of the start of Lent and his talk was about "Time to reflect". James gave us many ideas and some great insight into the nature of his work and how he walks alongside the men in prison. He said that it's crisis that brings his men to reflection. "What brings you to reflection?", was his next question. He concluded with sharing the thought that we are all just one mistake away from prison.

The number of people coming to Footsteps has been wonderful. We've been quite bowled over by the response and it really is great to welcome so many. We were averaging about 100 until the March event when we stopped counting at 140. We almost ran out of chairs in the parish centre; we definitely ran out of tables.

There's a team of people who work hard together to provide a setting that is informal, like a café, with small tables full of nibbles, grapes and plenty hot drinks. We'd like to think it's open house and where people can kick off their shoes and relax! If you haven't been yet, you still can, because we've been encouraged to run a second series.



We almost ran out of chairs. We definitely ran out of tables!

## Footsteps

Footsteps is a series of presentations by invited speakers who can help us as we journey in our Christian faith.

All are welcome to come to each informal, friendly occasion to listen, chat, reflect on and drink in whatever spiritual and actual refreshment is on offer each night.

We provide a café-style setting in our large parish centre, serving light refreshments and nibbles along with a good sprinkling of humour. There's no charge, plenty free parking and good wheelchair access.

**For the rest of 2019**  
Come and follow in the footsteps of these special people

Tuesday 14 May at 7.30pm	Mary Hardiman presents "Finding God in unexpected places"
Tuesday 18 June at 7.30pm	Fr John Boles reflects on "The God of liberation: Christian perspectives from Latin America"
Thursday 26 September at 7.30pm	David O'Neill explores the Christian tradition of learned ignorance about God as he considers "...not knowing God"
Thursday 31 October at 7.30pm	Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal from Leeds talk about "For love alone"

Be inspired, relax, be spiritually nudged!  
You'll be very welcome. Come and follow our Footsteps.  
St Peter's Parish Centre, Green Lane, Hazel Grove SK7 4EA

## A note about our speakers

Each one of our speakers has great spiritual insight, deep conviction – and a sense of humour. They have wide experience in many different walks of life and are inspiring presenters. Here's a little of their individual backgrounds.

**Mary Hardiman** a former high school teacher, is a person-centred counsellor and Head of Wellbeing at a Pupil Health Referral Unit in Salford for teenagers with mental health problems. She has written many articles and is in demand as a speaker at parish, diocesan and professional events. Mary has a great gift for unwrapping the Scriptures and presenting them in ways that are inspiring, practical and thought provoking.

**Fr John Boles** was born in Stockport in 1953; he started work as a Town Planning Officer. Aged 30 he served as a Lay Missionary in Nicaragua for four years then joined the Columban Fathers in 1989 to work in Latin America for the next 25 years. He's currently home from Peru and will explain about his work and experiences, referencing Christian thought and practice – and the gospels.

**David O'Neill** studied theology and has taught religion, theology and philosophy to all ages from primary school to adults. He is now retired and lives in Stockport.

**The Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal** are sending two Sisters from their base in Leeds to talk about their calling, their ministry and their simple life working with the poor and homeless as well as their evangelisation work. This order of Sisters was formed just over 30 years ago and they have enjoyed real growth, in contrast to other religious communities. The maximum age for becoming a Sister is 35. They have been described as Sisters who are "joyful, engaging, funny and fit the description of the New Evangelisation to a T."

## On a practical note

Footsteps began in 2018 and has been very well attended since the first event and so we are encouraged to offer this second series. We have tried to offer both Tuesday and Thursday evenings – in case on one particular night you already have a regular commitment.

Keep your eye on our parish newsletter which is always available in the NEWS section of our website: [www.stpeterscatholic.church](http://www.stpeterscatholic.church)  
We hope to see you soon. Come and follow our Footsteps.

*Our next talk is on 14 May 2019 with Mary Hardiman who presents "Finding God in unexpected places"*

*See Mary Hardiman's article on page 30 and David O'Neill's on page 36.*



***Clair and Yakubu Gadzama** have raised our awareness of the plight of people in Lassa, Nigeria over recent years. Here Clair gives her moving account of the fruits of so many people's involvement and support.*

# Remarkable gifts



*Yakubu at the front of the new school building*

**18 December 2018 will never be forgotten. It was the date we left as a family for Nigeria after a ten year gap. All five of us and our 11 suitcases departed in the evening for the overnight flight to the Nigerian capital, Abuja. Arriving to the dusty sunrise and the 30 degree temperature, with the sound of the muslim call to prayer, was dreamlike. We were soon in the embrace of our relatives, all laughing and hugging. So began two weeks of joy!**

In those ten years our three had become young adults, as had their cousins! Many advances in the country were obvious but there had been a cost. Fanatic islamic terrorists called Boko Haram had de-stabilised the north east state of Borno where our home lay. Our lovely village of Lassa, targeted because it is Christian, was decimated. It is still in ruins and the story is one of loss: lost lives, homes, schools, churches and communities. However, the Nigerian spirit is positive and strong. People, strengthened by their faith, are rebuilding, determined to hold onto their futures. A four hour car journey the next day was itself an experience. So many armed military checkpoints reminded us of the tense security situation. We were travelling to Jos, Plateau state, where ethnic, land and religious clashes were breaking out between farmers and cattle herders. Climate change seems responsible for the loss of grazing for the Fulani

herdsmen, driving them south towards cultivated land. Killings and displacement are the result with children becoming orphans, living in camps without schools or amenities. However, all along the route, particularly at junctions was evidence of the colour, ingenuity and creativity of Nigerians. Roadside sellers were not missing any opportunity to market their goods!

We were heading to Jos, where our extended family was gathering for the traditional Margi wedding of our niece, Nubwa and her German fiancé, Julian. Now, weddings are massive in Nigeria and this was no exception. Following all the awfulness, we were going to celebrate life! Five hundred people had been invited and they all had to be seated, fed, watered and entertained on the day, not to mention accommodating all the relatives! Strict observation of the tribal rites and customs was required, so months of preparation had been put into this amazing event. We all had our roles too and we were not going to let the side down! it was a privilege and a pleasure. Rites over, the party began. Food had been prepared overnight outside by our family. Quite a miracle to feed so many so deliciously! Being Africa, the drums came out and the dancing started and continued until all our feet could take no more! What a happy day. A special memory to treasure: one of love, healing and coming together – a remarkable gift!



*Teacher and children seated at their new school desks*

Our other reason for going to Nigeria was to try to make the journey to our village Lassa to see the school that St Peter's parish has supported so generously. Wedding over, Yakubu and our boys Mele and Madu climbed into a van with cousins and uncles and set off on the 14 hour road trip over rough, gruelling terrain. The dry, dusty savannah landscape was hot and all were exhausted when they arrived in the dark of Lassa. Torches were needed to reach a new house built by Yakubu's brother, Musa following the destruction and subsequent clearing out of Boko Haram by the military. Here was somewhere safe and solid with a roof and light, electricity coming from a diesel generator. The comforts of England were suddenly appreciated.

The following morning, Yakubu, as a surgeon, was eager to call in at the small village hospital. The first Christian missionaries to Nigeria's remote north had built this hospital in the 1920s. Some of their number sadly paid the ultimate price: they gave their lives, dying of Lassa fever. What an awful shock awaited Yakubu. Boko Haram had totally trashed the hospital; staff were now valiantly trying to tend the sick. Picture their delight when in walked Yakubu with boxes of first aid supplies and operating theatre instruments! All this had been donated by a Manchester hospital, to our immense gratitude. Surely, an answer to prayers.

The Lassa school is doing well with 700 children in total. 200 are 11-14 and these have lessons in the new purpose built six classrooms. The funding, a stunning £4,000, was raised here in 2017 from Yakubu's sponsored Manchester 10 km run. There is a fetching photo of Yakubu in running gear on the back page of an older edition of Shine! The primary age children are taught in temporary structures and the nursery is held sitting on mats under the trees! Raising the money to pay the teachers each month is a reminder of the ongoing challenges to keep the school going. It is only through God's providence and human generosity that this is possible. Unfortunately, government agencies are not functioning, so these people are forgotten, neglected and voiceless. Thanks to your help the children and their families are being given hope every day! We can only try to convey their enthusiasm for coming to the school. It is joyful and infectious!

The teachers gathered, despite the holiday, and were thrilled with the contents of our many suitcases – sports equipment, laptops and all sorts of goodies for the school. Totally unexpected Christmas gifts. Beaming smiles and their enormous gratitude are their gifts to each and every member of St Peter's! On Christmas Day after the church service the children came to play in and support a celebratory football match at school. Sporting their Hazel Grove strips, they all looked very professional. Our boys





*Mike O' 'Melle' toilet block built with Mike's fundraising*



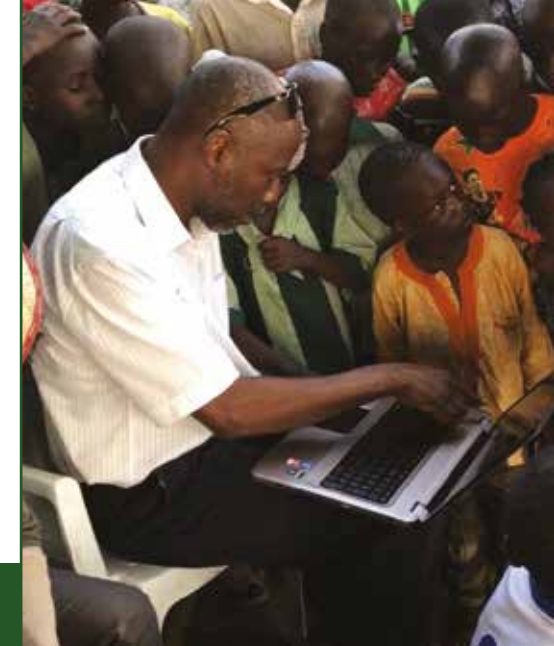
*Mike O'Malley who did a sponsored pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela*



*The borehole well being repaired*



*Teachers with Yakubu in front of the new school*



*Yakubu showing the children the internet*



*Football shirts donated by a Hazel Grove football team*



*The toilet blocks being built*



*Nubwa and her German husband Julian*



*Nubwa and Julian invited orphaned children to their wedding*

were the captains of the opposing teams and luckily for family harmony, it was a draw!

Meanwhile Yakubu and Musa, an engineer, spent the day fixing the village boreholes. All three boreholes had stopped working in the last couple of years because of lack of maintenance. Unclean water was being fetched again from the local river with all the health risks. Imagine the amazement and delight of everyone when clean fresh water was flowing from the ground source. Another Christmas Day gift.

The next issue on our "to do" list was trying to tackle an issue which was disrupting the school timetable: the fact that every time anyone needed to go to the toilet a trip into the bush was needed. The school had shockingly not one toilet. This had to be rectified. Now, if you recall our own Michael O'Malley had done a sponsored pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain to raise money for the

school. With his permission, his magnificent £1,800 built two toilet blocks.

Ten toilets in total were unveiled in Mike's honour in time for the start of the new term. In less than a week the heavy digging and manual labour in the blistering sun had been done to help the school. We are very proud of everyone's efforts and eternally grateful Mike. The short time in Lassa had passed with much achieved and before we knew it, we were back on a plane to chilly England. Reflecting on the remarkable visit full of joy, fun, laughter and love I can only confirm that God lives! His blessings, faithfulness and loving care were with us every step of the way, in every family gathering and in the smiles of the lovely Lassa children, so full of energy and potential.

On our return, Fr Peter handed the Advent appeal cheque to me.... you gave an incredible £5,000 for the school! Thank you so much and a huge shout out to the Justice and Peace

group who proposed the school! This is going to make the school really come alive. A library with personal study areas complete with laptops will be constructed for the older children.

This will prepare them more adequately for the world beyond the village. It is our dream that these children will be able to access further education, progressing to colleges and technical schools in the cities. Ultimately, we hope they will find work to contribute to their families and communities and reduce poverty.

Already, work has started with designs done for the bookshelves and furniture, wood sourced and carpenters found, contracts negotiated. Everything has to be done from scratch – there's no Ikea down the road! Work can be slow in this environment but it is progressing well so it will be "watch this space" to see the St Peter's Library.

*All that is left for me is to say another  
THANK YOU ALL for your generous  
outpouring of prayers, support, love  
and money over the last three years  
to help a small, forgotten Christian  
community so far from Hazel Grove!  
We can all do life changing things for  
others when we realise we are God's  
hands, feet and voice here and now.  
GOD BLESS YOU ALL.*



# St James' Caritas Ambassadors put their faith into action

*With God all things are possible*  
*Matthew 19:26*

In January, a small group of Year 7 students came together to start the Faith in Action Award, which is the CYMFED National Catholic Award Scheme. The purpose of the programme is to allow our young people the opportunity to explore scripture and then translate this into action. Active service is encouraged, so students are required to find ways to serve both their school community and their local parish community.

During January, the group reflected on Jesus' commandment to "love one another" and Pope Francis' words: "service is the rejection of indifference, it is to do for others". In very practical terms, this led the group into supporting a local parish in their annual appeal during Poverty and Homelessness Action Week. The group collected for the DePaul Trust who work with young people aged 16-25, and who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

In response to this, **Rosie** wrote the following prayer:

*Dear God, care for those who care for me and help those who point me to you to always find the right words. Lead those who lead me to you to root all their decisions in you. Carry the weak, the poor and the vulnerable so they always stay in the palm of your hand. For me, all I ask is that you love me, Lord. Amen.*

On Saturday, 9 March the group volunteered to complete a day of voluntary service at St Peter's. The parish was hosting a retreat day for Year 3 students who are due to receive the First Sacraments this year. The day began at 10am and finished at 4pm and the young Caritas Ambassadors from St James' were asked to support the children in a range of fun activities throughout the day. See p 18.

*Class teacher **Alison McGarr** explains how various pupils from St James' school have been living out the school values of Faith, Family and Excellence.*



**Rodrigo**

**Rodrigo** said that he enjoyed helping the children by linking religion through play and helping them prepare for their First Communion. He went on to reflect that at the end of the day he felt tired but was very proud that he had given up his spare time for others. On his return to school, he was asked to consider how his faith had shaped what he had done and he said, "I accomplished something for Jesus. I felt that I had made them feel cared for".

**Heather** particularly enjoyed meeting new people and singing 'We want to see Jesus lifted high'. She was glad that she had played an important part in the faith lives of others.

**Qiyi** said that he enjoyed painting the Easter story and at the end of the day he felt a sense of achievement that he had helped to make their day run smoothly.

**Jack** got the opportunity to reflect on the resurrection when he used a digestive biscuit, a jammy dodger, a Cadbury's mini egg, some green icing sugar and a big pile of hundreds and thousands to make his own version of the empty tomb! In helping children as young as 5 and 6 to do the same task, he also got the opportunity to understand Pope Francis' words that love for others is "a total challenge to creativity!" As the class teacher responsible for the group, I enjoyed seeing our young



**Jakob and Heather**

Ambassadors living out the St James' values of Faith, Family and Excellence. They threw themselves into the day and embraced every opportunity to help and support everyone involved. This was epitomised by **Jakob** dressing up as an angel in the drama that we presented to all the parents in the church at the end of the day. In his role as the angel supporting Jesus on His way to the cross, Jakob recognised that while he was helping the young children of the parish to understand their faith and the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, he was also getting the opportunity to help our local Christian family and put his own faith into action.



**Qiyi, Jakob and Jack**



**Rosie**



# The Easter Story of Love and Forgiveness

# DEAD or ALIVE?

Saturday 9 March



Bible Detective  
Inspector Terry



The young  
team leaders  
give final  
instructions for  
the day



Team skyblue  
dressing up



The main  
characters are  
asked questions

"Helping out facilitating was a really good experience and was so much fun with the children as it reminded me of when I was one of them. We had so much fun and games, and teaching the kids a new song with actions was quite intriguing. The best part (obviously) was going home to get a good rest but seeing the younger ones with smiles and twinkles in their eyes when they left was a good reminder to me that they also had a really great time".

*Kiri Lee Walker, aged 16  
Young Leader of team skyblue*



Painting the tomb

# The case of the empty TOMB!



Who's the  
best dressed!



The garden the  
children made  
for the day



Lunchtime



The adults join in  
the fun in church



Outside games time

## A DAY WITH JESUS

- "It was the most amazing day ever!"
- "We learnt about love and forgiveness"
- "We played lots of games together"
- "We learnt how Jesus Christ died on the cross for us"
- "We met new children that are also doing their holy communion"
- "We were detectives for one day, wondering how Jesus Christ died"
- "We even baked a tomb to eat!"

*Hannah Jose, aged 11 and Olivia Jose, aged 8*





# St Philip's school choir *perform* for care home residents

Teacher **Alex Jones** from one of our parish schools shares the joy of giving.



Choir and teacher perform



The school Christmas choir outside Davenport Manor care home

**St Philip's Catholic Primary School spread the Christmas spirit last December by sending the school's Christmas choir out into the community. The children went carol singing to the residents of local care homes.**

The children, led by music teacher Emily Davies, gave up their own time to be members of the choir, spending their Friday lunchtimes throughout November and December rehearsing. After several successful performances in school, they took things even further by giving performances in the local community.

The choir, who visited both Bruce Lodge (a purpose-built dementia care home) and Davenport Manor care home, walked to and from both venues. At each care home they delivered a repertoire of Christmas classics, some of which they sang

alone before residents joined in some of the festive favourites including 'Away in a Manger' and 'We Wish you a Merry Christmas'.

Year 4 teacher Alex Jones, who co-ordinated and led the choir visits said, "It has been a fantastic opportunity for the children to put their weeks of hard work and rehearsals into real life context and to deliver their performances to an actual audience. It has also given the children a real sense of happiness to serve others in the local community – a quality that we hope will become instilled in the children throughout their time at St Philip's and beyond."

The visits were mutually beneficial, with the residents thoroughly enjoying the performances, and finishing each song with a rousing round of applause, whilst the children felt delighted to

receive credit for all their hard work and to see the enjoyment they brought to others. Stuart Gibson-Shaw, aged 9, said, "It is amazing to have people from outside our school clapping us, telling us how well we have done and how happy we have made them all! It only takes an afternoon of our time, and if it gives other people something to look forward to, or makes them happy, then it's something that's definitely worth doing!"

The residents and the children have both relished the opportunity and are hoping to maintain strong connections in future, whilst the St Philip's choir is hoping to continue to perform and spread happiness beyond the festive period.

To keep up to date with the choir's progress and all other goings-on at St Philip's, follow @St\_PhilOfferton on Twitter.



A maze in the wood



Where Gerry Hughes is buried at St Beuno's cemetery

## Gerry on Gerry

**Gerry Clarke** offers a profile and poem about the priest and author Gerard Hughes after a chance encounter.

**Rev Fr Gerard W Hughes SJ was probably better known as Gerry Hughes: 56 years a priest and a very well-known, successful author. He tended to find writing a struggle in his life-long quest for answers to an authentic Christian spirituality, not just for himself but for "bewildered, confused and disillusioned Christians..."**

'God of Surprises' was an immediate best seller; it still remains one of his most successful books. It probably gave Gerry Hughes an early sense of renewal with his spiritual struggles, and also not least with many of his readers. 'God, where are you?' is a moving spiritual memoir that was to follow in due course.

Whether teaching religious education at Stoneyhurst, or saying Mass for prisoners in the notorious Maze prison near Belfast during The Troubles, or living with an Aboriginal community in the Australian desert, justice, truth and God's peace were his spiritual priorities. Not surprisingly, Gerry was also closely involved with the work of Pax Christi and Christian CND. 'Cry of Wonders' was his final book and wasn't published till near his death: it was probably more challenging as he attempted to refine his thinking, his experience as a priest and themes

of his life. Gerry Hughes died at the age of 90.

I was attending a short retreat and course entitled 'Poetry, Prayer, Silence' at St Beuno's Jesuit spirituality centre. In a beautiful part of North Wales, the hillside college overlooks the Vale of Clwyd, across to the Snowdonia range. And there, buried alongside many of his Jesuit friends, the headstone of Gerard W Hughes SJ. A personal, emotional surprise-of-surprises that I felt could not go unremembered in a poem!



Sixty steps at St Beuno's

### Gerry Hughes SJ

Sixty daisy-skirted steps, right,  
Along the white gravelly path  
To the open five-bar gate, a robin  
Standing its ground, impatiently:  
Intruder, tiptoeing respectfully by.

A change from noisy gravel to  
quiet grass  
Alongside the cared-for wood  
With an astonishing maze there:  
A huge invitation to a challenge  
And maybe, as well, a prayer?

A sudden glimpse of a crucifixion  
Over the next separating hedge:  
A melancholy, half-empty cemetery,  
Rows of cryptic printed headstones  
Recording lives of many Jesuits past:

'Orate pro anima  
Gerard W Hughes  
Sacerdotic Societas Jesu  
Natus 22 Mar 1924 Obit 4 Nov 2014'  
Nine decades of search: a better view  
of God?

By Gerry Clarke

St Beuno's, North Wales,  
Autumn 2018



# Experiencing the rewards of volunteering

**John Worth** shares his experience of running marriage preparation courses.

One day after Mass, our parish priest in Romiley asked my wife and me whether we'd be interested in joining Marriage Care to help run marriage preparation courses.

After thinking about it we said "Why not – maybe we could share some of our experiences, which engaged couples might find useful?" So, we attended a fact-finding session and interview at Stockport Marriage Care. We found our future colleagues very welcoming and encouraging so we decided to give it a go. A few weeks later, we joined other regional volunteers for training, which was held over three Saturdays. This included facilitating one or two marriage preparation sessions in front of a friendly audience of trainers and other volunteers – good experience before we were let loose on the engaged couples!

Having completed the training we were gradually involved in the actual courses – just a couple of sessions at first, going at the pace at which we felt comfortable. We were able to get feedback from more experienced facilitators and discuss any concerns we might have. After participating in a couple of courses we became full members of the team and agreed to help facilitate about three one-day courses a year. Each course is run by three volunteers, so the work is shared and there is plenty of peer support available.

Fifteen years later we are still involved in this work. What is it about marriage preparation/Marriage Care that still keeps me engaged? Firstly,



**John Worth helps run Marriage Care courses**

volunteers and staff at Marriage Care are dedicated to the work and are very supportive; I've met like-minded people and I've made some good friends. Secondly, I find it a privilege to spend a day with couples who are about to make a commitment to each other, wanting to receive the Sacrament of marriage with God being at the centre of their loving relationship.

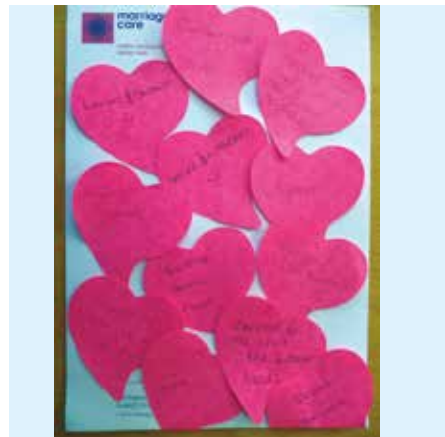
Also, they are open to learning more about their relationship and finding out new ways of growing together – taking time out from making wedding plans and life's daily routine. It is such a pleasure to feel the love and hope in the room from these couples, especially when in one exercise they describe what a stable, committed relationship feels like (see the picture of hearts above).

The couples' feedback at the end of the day reinforces the value of the course. From our most recent marriage preparation day here are some of the comments:

**"It was a good day and was interesting to have feedback from other couples"**

**"Really helpful – brings couples closer together"**

**"Really enjoyed it, found it very useful – thank you!"**



**"A valuable course – very good for thinking ahead to life after the big day"**

What is also pleasing is speaking to couples who did the course many years ago, who can still recall some 'nugget' which they took away from the day and which has stood them in good stead!

Marriage Care is a national charity which has its roots in the Catholic church. It offers marriage preparation to couples getting married in the Catholic church and relationship counselling to anyone who is experiencing difficulties in their relationship. Professionally-trained counsellors explore with the couple the struggles in their relationship and together they hope to find a different way forward. Marriage Care has been supporting couples in England and Wales for over 70 years.

**To continue to provide marriage preparation and counselling in the Stockport area, Marriage Care is currently looking for new members. If you are looking for some rewarding voluntary work and would like more information, I would be very happy to speak to you. You can ring me on 0161 494 6428. Further information about Marriage Care is on the web site: [www.marriagecare.org.uk](http://www.marriagecare.org.uk).**



**Nicky and Sila Lee who host the marriage course video sessions**

## The Marriage Course 2019 Experience

**With a feeling of apprehension and excitement we stepped inside the door. Our eyes took in the scene before us. The tables were set with colourful tablecloths, flowers and candles.**

The lights were low and the music soft. How romantic. Now, where should we sit for our candlelit dinner?

We were here because it was our first night on the Alpha Marriage Course.

We have been married for 38 years. We have a good marriage, but we were aware of the impact stress was having on our lives and felt we must not take our relationship for granted. One of those stressful events was moving house; we are relatively new to the parish having moved to the area just over 2 years ago. We saw the course advertised in the parish newsletter and felt drawn to it. Coincidentally we had been talking about doing a retreat for married couples as our faith is very important to us. We had never come across this course before. The last course we'd attended was our pre-marriage course!

We hesitated about booking on to it. We felt 'shy' about the possibility of doing group work and were concerned people might think 'something wasn't right with our marriage'. The following Sunday at Mass, a married couple

**Recent 'graduates' of this year's Alpha Marriage Course, Mary and Terry Dolan, share their experience of attending the course.**

spoke about their experiences of doing the course and that convinced us.

The course involved seven sessions over seven weeks. A lovely meal was provided at each session (thank you to all who contributed to this). A financial donation is requested on the first session towards the cost of the food. We didn't need to worry as there was no group work, each couple worked together. All presentation was done via DVD by Sila and Nicky Lee.

Sila and Nicky would introduce the topic for the evening. We would do short exercises throughout the evening and then share and discuss what each had written. We listened to couples who had done the course before talk about their experiences. Each session was followed up by doing 'homework'. One of the most important pieces of homework we learnt was to set aside two hours per week for marriage time.

We did spend time together, however the focus was always on the home and family. Now we set aside 'time for us' each week because we see it as a vital part of nurturing our relationship. We thoroughly enjoyed

the course, although it was challenging on occasions. Sometimes little things can niggle away at us and become big things, but by telling each other and forgiving, we could 'nip it in the bud'. At the end of each session we finished with a prayer and were encouraged to pray for each other.

Whilst you are committed to one another as a couple, you are still an individual and will deal with life's stresses in your own way. This course provides the opportunity to reflect and reconnect with each other. It offers ways in which we can respect one another's differences, be romantic and keep the passion alive for the long-haul. It is worth doing every ten years.

Thank you to everyone who gave their time and energy to run this course.

**The next Alpha Marriage Course is planned to start on 23 January 2020. If you are interested, please contact David and Laura Small on 01625 876752.**



# Flame CYMFED



*8,000 young people  
inspired at Wembley*



*On Saturday 2 March this year 34 of our SPY (St Peter's Youth) group journeyed down to Flame, a Youth event held at Wembley arena every two years. This is an event that is really flourishing and it was completely sold out this year. A day of inspiring talks, music, testimony and celebration of our faith, finishing with Adoration. The atmosphere of 8,000 young people from all over the UK was amazing. Here are some of the comments from the day.*



*"Wow! An amazing day from start to end. Every single person in the group was a joy to talk to. I will never forget how touched and inspired I felt by the atmosphere of the event. Amazing!"*



*"Emma Borquaye gave a talk about self-esteem and how the most important opinion of ourselves that we should be concerned with is God's! This was very moving and powerful to hear, as I feel, especially for our generation, it is easy to get caught up in caring about what everyone else thinks and limiting yourself because of it."*



*"My favourite part of Flame was the talk by Robert Madu. It showed me that comparing myself to other people is useless as we are all uniquely made in the image of God."*



*"I really enjoyed the day, especially the atmosphere whilst the music played and everyone was singing praise. It was such a great day! I also loved the talk from Guvna B and Emma as I felt that they talked about a topic which was self-esteem – everyone could relate to it. I didn't want it to end! It was such a fun time."*



*"I loved the way Robert from the USA did his speech because it was amazing! And all the songs and how all the people had come to it!"*



*"I really enjoyed the talk by Robert Madu and I enjoyed the music when they sang "Blinded by Your Grace" and "Amazing Grace."*



*"I loved everything! Thank you very much!"*



*"The event was so engaging and interesting! I learnt so much through all the different talks."*







Flame

CYMFED

*"I really liked the music and 'The Girl Got Faith.' I also thought the theatre was good."*



*"I really liked the speech by Robert Madu. I think the funny speeches would inspire people to come."*



*"Favourite was Guvna B and I loved the praise and worship songs."*



*"Flame 2019 was a most fantastic, inspirational event. There was great music from Guvna B and Tim Hughes, testimonies from a variety of speakers including Emma B (Guvna's missus!), the hosts and young volunteers who have been empowered to work all over the world by the Catenians and a beautiful interview with Jean Vanier, who at 90 is still on fire with a message of God's love. The teachings from David Wells and Robert Madu, in particular, left us with lots to think about and the odd tear too! The lasting message of this youth worker is that comparing ourselves with others takes our eyes off Jesus and distracts us from running the race and living the beautiful life that God calls us to. So let's 'stay in our lane and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. I am a MASTERPIECE!'"*



*"This has been the best Flame conference we have been to. The challenging feedback from the synod about youth from Bishop Eamonn Martin and the amusing but motivating talks all blended well to give a truly positive message to all young people (and old!) at the conference."*



*"An epic day! Vibrant atmosphere and powerful praise. The theme of each person being significant was in every part of the day, encouraging all to be themselves and to listen to the quiet in our heart to discover the dreams and purpose God has for each of us. To focus on Jesus and ignore the negative and distracting messages of this world. By not comparing ourselves to others (particularly through social media) we can stay in our lane and fulfil the purpose God has for our lives. Affirming and inspiring for all ages!"*



*"A really profound day! The beautiful silence of 8,000 young people at Adoration was stunning! Rise theatre's performance made me cry..."*



*"Wow – what an amazing day! – not just for the youth but for adults too! The talks and music were so positive, uplifting and inspirational. The whole day really put everything into today's context, enabling everyone present to resonate with their own lives, how we should be true to our self and be the person we were born to be."*

CYMFED  
CATHOLIC YOUTH MINISTRY FEDERATION

PRAYER

## Being with God

*Joe O'Brien shares her thoughts on how prayer works in her life.*

***Prayer is supposed to be simple, isn't it? A straightforward chat with God... But it can be hard to start a prayer experience and even harder to maintain a regular practice.***

I'm no expert. I am in my 50s, a wife, mother and nurse. I don't have a degree in divinity or theology and I know a lot of people have a lot more experience in prayer than I do. I have grown up loving my God and spent my lifetime trying to get to know Him better. And what better way of getting to know anyone better than to spend time in conversation with them? Imagine having a relationship with a loved one where you both really didn't spend time together or have anything to say to each other... think how much better it would be if there was regular, meaningful contact.

Wanting to experience more and to learn to help others, I completed the "Companions for the Journey" course with Manchester diocese last year. I spent six months learning what prayer is and what it can be. There are many different approaches. Some are right for some people and not others. Some are a better fit for different times and places. There is no 'one size fits all' and the thing I learnt was to be open to try different approaches and not to make it complicated.

Our loving God created each one of us and yearns for us to seek Him out in prayer, to talk to him and to listen in return. "If you seek me, you will find me" (Jeremiah 19:3). The miracle of prayer is that God listens to each of us as we pray! Try to seek your God in a space of quiet at a regular time each day. Don't give up if you miss a

day, just pick up when you remember. Find your time. Mine is first thing in the morning after walking my dog. Yours will be different. Just find it and give yourself that precious time with your God. And remember – pray as you can, not as you can't!

A good starting point with anything is to take a look at what Jesus taught us through His words and actions. Jesus led a busy life with many demands yet His prayer involved Him finding time alone, being quiet and listening as well as talking; He directed His prayer to the Father and prayed for others. A good starting point for a week of prayer could be to spend some time reading and thinking about what He is teaching us in the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:5-14). Then find that time and place and talk to God about it.

Are there any words that stand out for you? Is there a phrase that means something special? Are there any questions that you need to ask? Tell Him your thoughts and feelings, ask Him for help and guidance and sit in His presence in silence. Feel free to relax and wait. Listen for thoughts and feelings that you may experience in that time. After the silence, thank Him for the time and ask Him for help to do it all again the next day.

### Sitting

Just in the act of sitting  
receptive and still –  
just in desiring  
to pray –  
is the moment  
of grace.  
Just in the small intention  
Given to letting go  
Is the dying itself.  
For God delights  
In my desiring  
And is content  
With my restlessness.  
God sits  
With my nothing,  
Gently loving me  
In it all.

***from Edwina Gately,  
'Growing into God'.***



**In the early to middle 1970s Canon Harrington at Our Lady and the Apostles, Shaw Heath, suggested that alongside the SVP men's conference (group), we should start a women's conference. All my working life was spent as a Secretary/PA, so I was already involved with the social club there and eventually, also the youth club.**

The initial meetings took place with the men's conference in order for myself and other women who volunteered to get to know what exactly the SVP did, and how they went about helping to care for people in need in the parish. Canon Harrington came along at first to advise and guide, and sometimes to referee as it became obvious that women, particularly as we were new to the job so to speak, had quite different views from the men. With hindsight, all of this was inevitable. The men had been running their SVP for years and

the 'undies' which she had bought with the money - perhaps a nice underskirt or slip, or she was putting it towards a new nightie. The men at the SVP objected to this but as I pointed out we couldn't force her to buy what we said. So in the end, the solution was to take her a bag of groceries each week, much more sensible - but very disappointing for Alice.

Eventually a women's conference was formed, separate from the men. I was the first President and we set up other team members to cover who visited whom, how much we could spend or give to parishioners, someone to keep the books straight and so on. Each meeting began with prayers and sometimes one of the priests from Our Lady's would join us. At our weekly meeting each member would report on who they had visited, how they were, what they were in need of, if anything, and so on. Once we had given our

the flats around York Street in Edgeley. The members who delivered there told of going up in the lifts and then having to peep out to see if there was anyone on the corridor before they could go to the flat in question to ring the bell. I know from my own experience that if you met someone whilst delivering parcels, they would quite likely ask who they were for and why they were not getting one; difficult questions to answer.

Sometimes one of the priests would ask us to visit someone and felt it would be better if we went with one of the men too. In one instance I went with the President of the men's conference to visit a lady in a part of Stockport which no longer exists, long ago demolished. When we knocked, the door was opened by her son who said she was upstairs. He called out to her, then left us and went out. We waited in the living room of this little

where the doctor's surgery is now, around Gilmore Street. When the lady opened the door the smell nearly knocked us both out.

The priest hadn't warned us that the lady kept several dogs, all of whom were in the little house with her, along with all of their droppings on the floors. We had to try to pick our way through the piles of dirt, trying not to get it on our shoes, and we were there to try to persuade her to be re-housed by the council. Whether we succeeded

or not I don't know; we did what we could, asked what help we could give and then left. We didn't have any authority to make her move; we were just trying to persuade her and offer her help with the move. Obviously she couldn't take all her dogs with her.

Some of the people that I visited regularly became firm friends until the end of their lives. One old lady who lived alone in Heaviley was quite remarkable and used to tell me of her life which I found fascinating. She had

had several children and buried three in a matter of weeks, all with scarlet fever. She used to get around her little house with a walking frame. She would boil her kettle, make a little pot of tea, then put it in a shopping bag and carry it swinging from the handle of her frame into her front room. No health and safety in those days.

In time I joined the hospital conference and used to visit Stepping Hill hospital every Sunday, but that's another story.

# Early days of the SVP women

*Sheila Devine (formerly Stavordale) looks back on her early days when she first joined the SVP (St Vincent de Paul Society) in a nearby parish.*

had their own way of doing things and we came along and, not only were we women, but the whole idea was new to us.

One of the first people that Canon Harrington asked me personally to visit, was an elderly widow who lived at the top of Hillgate behind a virtually derelict shop. Her late husband had run the shop and she had a living room and kitchen behind it. Her kitchen, to me, was like something out of Dickens: it had a shallow stone sink, a cold water tap and a gas ring but few cupboards or anywhere to store anything, and an old stone floor. At that time the policy was to give her, we'll call her Alice, £5 for groceries which I duly delivered and I used to sit and talk to and listen to her although even I couldn't cope with a cup of tea made in that kitchen with sterilised milk. Unfortunately, Alice didn't see it as we did and when I went the following week, she would show me

reports and explained what the person needed, we would discuss other people in the parish who might need our help, usually people referred to us by the clergy.

At Christmas time parcels were prepared for distribution, buying groceries and more 'frivolous' things like chocolates, Christmas puddings and so on and then came the difficult part: drawing up a list of who amongst the many in the parish were going to receive them. Both conferences and clergy would co-operate on this, suggesting people and the reasons why, until we had got it down to a manageable number. Each of us agreed to take a certain number of parcels, bearing in mind that not everyone had cars in those day - but then came the almost impossible task of delivering the parcels without upsetting others in the parish who lived near the recipients. One of the most difficult areas to deliver in was to

terraced house. In the middle of the room was a table covered in a sort of oil cloth, covered from end to end with dirty cups, plates, butter uncovered in a dish, milk in a jug, cutlery and so on - all of it covered in a fine film of what looked like soot. Against the wall was a cooker and a few cupboards; there was no separate kitchen. While we were standing waiting for her to come down, there was a movement near the cooker so we bent down to see what it was. The whole floor under the cooker was alive with cockroaches - it was like the floor was on the move. When the lady eventually came downstairs she asked us to sit down and if we'd like a cup of tea, but we both stood there close together, declining her invitation, saying we hadn't got long to stay and so on, just so we could do what we had to do and get out.

Another time I went on a visit with one of the men to a house along Shaw Heath (also long gone), more or less

## News from St Philip's SVP

St Philip's SVP Conference (group) was re-started nine years ago and we are now a group of eight members. We work quietly in the parish and beyond, visiting people in their own homes, in hospital and residential homes. Sadly, over the years many of our elderly friends have died leaving us with less people to visit. In a changing world and with, for example, Data Protection legislation, we're finding it difficult to gain information about needy, lonely and sick people in the area.

It became apparent to us over time that many of our elderly and housebound parishioners rarely get the opportunity to attend Mass and the sacraments and to meet up with old friends.

With this in mind we decided that we might better serve our elderly or housebound friends by holding a few social events for them throughout the year.

Having discussed this with our SVP central office and with their full approval, we forged ahead with our plan. These events consist of perhaps two or three tea parties at various times in the year and a festive lunch at Christmas. The events always begin with a Healing Mass followed by sandwiches, cakes etc. To keep costs to a minimum the SVP members prepare and make the food themselves.

Our Christmas celebration starts with a short Reconciliation service, followed by Mass and a Christmas lunch. For this we engage the help of

a local caterer. We end the day with Christmas carols sung by the children from St Philip's school.

It's a joy to witness how much pleasure our guests receive by coming together on these occasions and to hear comments like: "Is that Mary Brown on the next table? We used to go dancing together", or "There's Sheila Green - we used to walk to school together." Central office has congratulated us on our ability to

bring members of the community together and wished us continued success.

To fund these events, we hold a church collection about eight times a year. Our parish of St Philip's is made up of mainly a small, ageing

community, but what we lack in numbers we more than make up for in kindness, generosity and friendliness. Recently, the SVP was approached by the Trussell Trust asking if it would be possible for us to set up a Foodbank at St Philip's. We decided that it may be a good idea to get the parish involved and we were inundated with names of people volunteering to help.

Having engaged in a short training programme, our Foodbank is up and running with the help of three teams of six people working on a rota basis. We enjoy working as teams and meeting and talking with people that we might otherwise never have the opportunity to get to know.







# Mary's corner

*Pull up a chair, if you haven't already, sit down and take it easy. Settle your mind and let Mary Hardiman's thoughts on this Gospel story from St John find a place in your heart.*

## Let's go fishing!

### John 21: 1-14

**'Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going fishing," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.**

**Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus.**

**He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.**

**He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.**

**Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.**

**Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.'**



I wonder if you have ever been on a fishing boat. I have twice, once as a teenager and once as an adult. Both occasions were off the coast of Ireland and on both occasions the sea was rough and choppy and I was violently sick. I take my hat off to anyone who could do that for a living, especially if they go out and catch nothing. It's 'terra firma' all the way for me!

This last section of John's gospel is so beautiful in its simplicity. We've had all the drama of Holy Week, the arrest of Jesus, his long walk to Calvary, the desertion of his disciples, the cruel brutality of his crucifixion, followed by his mysterious resurrection. Since his resurrection Jesus has appeared to Mary Magdalene, to some of the disciples on the road to Emmaus and to Thomas.

I can only imagine the confusion and bewilderment of the disciples – so much to take in. First Jesus is dead and then he's alive. Then he appears to some but not to others. He seems to be coming and going, not fully present but not fully absent either. It's mystifying!

So what does Peter do? He announces he's going fishing. What do you do when you're stressed? How do you respond when faced with a conundrum that you just can't solve? A friend of mine makes jam. So often, in times of uncertainty and doubt we go back to what's familiar, to the recognisable aspects of our lives and that is exactly what Simon Peter does here. He goes back to what he knows, to where he feels comfortable and in control. These gospel characters are no different to us. These stories continue to speak to us through time and space, offering us reassurance and comfort. How comforting is that?

But their initial haul brings nothing; not one single fish was caught in a lake teeming with life. It's only when Jesus tells them to swap the nets to the other side of the boat that their efforts bear fruit, or in this case fish! The story is so rich and beautiful in its symbolism. Because what it's saying to me is that so often we look for what

we want or need in the wrong places. How many times do we seek solace in work, food, alcohol, drugs, retail therapy, meaningless activities or in unhealthy relationships? How often do we fail to see Jesus, standing by the lake of our lives, waiting to call out, longing for us to turn to him, to trust that all will be well?

We read that the net then became so full that the disciples were unable to pull it back in. Here we have a simple reminder of the generosity of Christ, like the wedding feast of Cana or the feeding of the 5,000. His bounteousness never ends; it even reaches beyond death.

What surprises me is that the disciples did not recognise Jesus straight away. How can you have spent three years in somebody's company and not realise who it was? Surely there weren't that many people on the beach? Surely the sun wasn't that bright? If they could hear him surely they could see him? It's perplexing. But I wonder if it's because they weren't looking. They weren't open to the possibility that Jesus was there alongside them, their friend? They thought they were on their own now.

How often do we lose sight of Him too? Is this classic human behaviour – to forget all about God, to think we know it all (they were experienced fishermen after all)? What help and guidance did they need? The answer is that all our lives are enriched if we are open to Jesus at all times, when we are scared and vulnerable as well as when we feel secure. We are never on our own. How reassuring is that? However challenging and disheartening the situation, Jesus is close to us.

I remember Father Eamonn Mulcahy telling us that when Jesus died, every bit of him was taken up; only the grave clothes remained. And when he appeared to Mary Magdala she didn't recognise him but thought he was the gardener. The disciples on the road to Emmaus didn't recognise him either. Jesus'

appearance was utterly transformed in and by his resurrection. But the essence of him remained. What is that essence? I believe that John, the beloved disciple recognised Jesus by his ease, his care and concern for the wellbeing of his friends, his generosity, his clear direction, his simplicity and his love. Jesus comes to find each of them in their confusion and doubt; Jesus comes to find them in their grief and in their joy; Jesus comes to find them in the ordinary, everyday business of their lives.

Not only does Jesus come to find his beloved friends, he feeds them too. How wonderful is that? He feeds them not just on the food he has brought himself, but invites them to bring their offerings along. How thoughtful is Jesus to prepare a meal for these hungry tired men? Could there be a more perfect Eucharistic breakfast? Bread and fish on a beach, cooked by Jesus himself.

153 fish were caught. Did you know that in the four gospels, a grand total of 153 people were personally touched and healed by Christ?

And despite the 153 fish, the net did not tear. For me this symbolises the strength of Christ's ministry. Jesus will never let go of you or of me.

Do you believe that Jesus cares for you as much as he cared for his beloved disciples? You are as precious to him as each one of them was. Do you know that?

I would like to end this reflection with a short passage from the spiritual writer Jean Vanier\* who writes this:

***'Why does the evangelist choose to tell us this simple, touching story? As I read the gospel of John again and again, I believe that he is telling us about the presence of the risen Jesus in our ordinary lives.***

***The evangelist wants us to remember that Jesus meets us wherever we are. We do not have to do extraordinary things, but to love and serve others in the name of the risen Jesus.'***

\* Ref: Jean Vanier (2004) *Drawn into the mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. (Darton, Longman Todd publications).

**Keep it simple!**

**And may the joy of our risen Christ be yours this Easter.**

**Mary x**



# Our visit to the Holy Land in 1967

**Carmel and Peter Dwerryhouse** travelled to the Holy Land in 1967. Carmel shared her account of the start of Holy Week in Jerusalem, in our last issue (6). We take up her diary notes now for the Triduum, Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday.

## 23 March, Thursday in Holy Week

Today was a free day, though some people went to the early morning Maundy Thursday Mass at the Holy Sepulchre. This was according to the old rite, because the Latins are only allowed the use of the Rotunda, where the Tomb is, in the morning. We went along about 9 o'clock and looked round again in detail. We visited Calvary and St Helen's Chapel as well as looking at the side chapels and the **Chapel of the Apparition**, which is beside the Rotunda. In an adjoining chapel is the pillar of the **Flagellation** which is uncovered at this time for veneration. A big crowd was around the Tomb and Mass was just ending. The procession to the Altar of Repose was formed. It was led by four men each wearing a red fez and carrying a staff adorned with silver and having a metal tip. These were banged on the ground, in unison at each step and made a terrific noise on the stone floor. Although it gave a good warning of the approach of the procession, it seemed to us an unholy noise to be heard at the same time as the singing of the Pange Lingua. The choir was excellent and alternative verses were in harmony, the trebles and altos being boys from the Franciscan orphanage, wearing red capes and cassocks. The procession went round the tomb three times and then out into

the main church and then back again to the tomb, which had quickly been re-arranged as an Altar of Repose. We left before they returned and continued our tour of the building. While we were in this area we went up to the roof and were able to go inside the Coptic chapel, which is quite ornate, with many wall paintings in an ordinary western style. We also looked into the courtyard where the Ethiopian monks live. We then wandered about for a short time and visited a few chapels that were open, such as that of the Fourth Station of the Cross and that of St Veronica at the Sixth Station. This one is up a few steps inside a convent, possibly, but there is a grating and one cannot enter the chapel. Beside the third station is a little chapel now belonging to the Polish community, which has a crypt with an altar commemorating the third fall of Jesus. We also visited the Greek Orthodox Lithostrotos which is beside the convent. There is an underground cistern and several deep prisons where it is claimed Jesus was kept on Holy Thursday night. Near the Fourth Station we looked in the Armenian church, called Our Lady of the Spasm, in the crypt of which we saw a mosaic with two feet on it.

In the afternoon we went to **St Mark's Syrian church**, where the liturgical

language is Aramaic and heard the Office being recited and saw an ancient icon of Our Lady said to have been painted by St Luke. This church is supposed to be the site of the house where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, where St Peter came to when he was let out of prison by the angel and was the house where Our Lady lived after the Ascension. Then we went to the **Armenian Cathedral of St James** – a very interesting church. In a side shrine is the place where St James was beheaded. There is an ancient chair in the sanctuary which is called St James' Chair and there are many works of art and interesting pictures to see. The floor was carpeted like a mosque and many of the pictures were covered with a curtain. Some old stones from Sinai and Tabor and the river Jordan are in one chapel, but we couldn't identify them. The ceramics looked very interesting too, although we couldn't know the symbolism on them.

In the evening at 5.30 we went to **St Stephen's** for Maundy Thursday Mass. This was beautifully done and the singing was good. Over 40 priests concelebrated, wearing plain white chasubles. Only the president had a design of crosses on his. We had a seat beside the choir stalls as the nave was full and found we could see well from here.

## 24 March, Good Friday

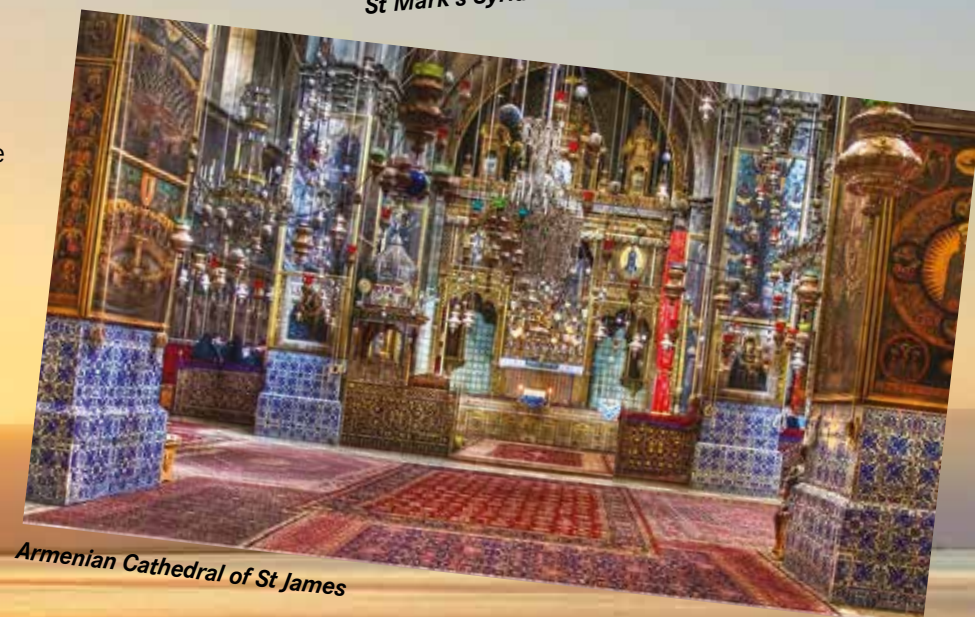
Today was a fine day again, so we went first to the Mount of Olives, going up by a different route from the Palm Sunday one. We found it steeper and rougher and the rain began again, so that we were glad to rush to the Paternoster at the top to shelter. After what seemed a long wait, we went across the road to the Benedictine convent, where we asked for Sr Maura Mary. The porter said he knew her well and a few minutes later we spoke to one of the sisters. Then we went round to the repository. It seems there is a hostel here and we spoke to a young man from France. The rain had cleared a little as we began the descent by the old and now muddy route and Peter got some pictures of the city and the convent in the morning sun.

We went in the church **Dominus Flevit**, a new building in the care of the OFMs, which is shaped like a teardrop. It is on the site of a Byzantine church and mosaics can still be seen. Further down the hill is the Russian Gethsemane and we admired the front of this beautiful church before going in to gaze at the icons and pictures. It was very neat and clean and tended by the nuns. Prince Philip's aunt is buried here.

In the afternoon we set out to go straight through the city to the **Pool of Siloam**, but we got lost and landed up in the bombed ex-Jewish quarter.



St Mark's Syrian church



Armenian Cathedral of St James



Dominus Flevit church



Later, two young men showed us some more mosaics near **St Peter Gallicantu** and a further stretch of the paved street that runs down past the house of Caiphas. Then we went by a long track along the hillside, past an old Jewish cemetery until we came to the brook Kedar. This is the boundary between Jordan and Israel. Opposite us was the

25 March, Holy Saturday

We left about 8am for **Jerash and Aylown**. There were just four of us and we decided to go to Aylown first and then have more time to spend at Jerash, the best example of a Roman provincial town in the world. We took the road down to Jericho and then crossed the Jordan; we continued a good way along the road to Amman before branching off to the left in a northerly direction. Our route lay almost parallel to the Jordan and so we crossed several wadis and one big river, the Zarqua, which was the boundary between two of the tribes of Israel and nearby was the place where Jacob wrestled with the angel. Near **Aylown**, the highest mountain in Jordan, the driver had to ask his way a few times, but eventually we were on the track up the hill, all shrouded in mist and low cloud. It was impossible to see the castle of Saladin, or even the mountain we were aiming at, but eventually we reached it and went up

Field of Blood, where Judas hanged himself. Then we followed the brook along the valley until we came to the road and there on our left was the Pool of Siloam. After taking a picture we returned to the city, passing by the tombs of the Prophets, which are old monuments, but not the tomb of Absalom. In the evening

inside through many lofty rooms to the top. The wind was strong and rather cold and the clouds parted for a moment to give us a glimpse of the valley far below, but it was no use waiting so we returned to the car and went back to **Jerash**. We only had an hour to spend here, but were able to see the famous street and the amphitheatre and several of the temples. One could easily spend the whole day here but we had to be back in time for lunch. We made the return journey in two hours and were very ready for a late lunch. In the afternoon we went to the convent of the Daughters of Zion in the Via Dolorosa and were shown the plan of the **Antonia fortress** and the courtyard itself under the convent where Jesus was crowned with thorns. The Roman pavement is still to be seen and various marks are scratched on it, including those of the Game of the King. In the chapel we

we went again to St Stephen's for the Good Friday liturgy. The church was crowded, but we sat at the side again and saw everything well. Afterwards we made the Stations of the Cross privately and then venerated the cross. The public had not come up for individual veneration as in the Roman rite.

saw the arch of Hadrian when he re-built Jerusalem. Then we had to hurry as we were late for our reception by the Custos, but we managed to 'gatecrash' behind a French group. At the end the Custos came over and spoke to us in English and gave us souvenirs of Jerusalem: a rosary made of olive wood from Gethsemane, a crucifix and a copy of the Stations of the Cross. After tea we returned to the hotel for dinner. Later that evening we went to St Stephen's for the Easter Vigil. The new fire was blessed in the courtyard and a large fire was lit. The moon was shining out of a clear sky, but during Mass we heard thunder and there was a terrific downpour as we came out. We ran all the way back (a 5 min walk) and were soaked, especially our shoes, as the gutters were flowing several inches deep halfway across the road. The storm lasted for most of the night.

26 March 1967, Easter Sunday

The rain was still heavy when we set out for Mass at 7.30am in the **Chapel of the Apparitions** at the Holy Sepulchre. We got soaked again. We had to wait about ten minutes until the altar was free. Then Fr Graystones said Mass in Latin, with continuous loud opposition from the Orthodox choir nearby. The boys have rather harsh and loud voices and the chanting sounded like shouting. It was so very fitting for us on Easter Sunday morning to have Mass in the very place where Jesus appeared to Mary

Magdalene. When we came out, it was snowing hard and a blizzard was blowing. It looked as though it had set in for the day, it was no use sheltering, so we just hurried through it back to the hotel for breakfast. It seemed we would have to stay in all day, which would have been a welcome rest, but about 10 o'clock the sun came out and we thought it best to take advantage of the sunshine, so the four of us who had been to Jerash and had missed the tour of the **mosque**, decided to go there. The sun was out,

but it was very cold and the temperature was 34 degrees F. The mosque is on the site of the threshing field bought by David for his city. This is where Abraham was going to sacrifice Isaac and in the centre of the mosque there is an enormous area of bare rock. In it have been cut drainage holes to drain away the blood of the sacrifices that took place here in the Temple. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Hadrian built a temple to Jupiter, which Constantine destroyed. Then Omar planned a



The Holy Land



St Peter Gallicantu

mosque here but it was built later, in 687-91. The Crusaders converted it into a church and Saladin restored it as a mosque. It is octagonal and stands on a platform, approached by eight flights of steps leading under arches. The dome is golden and the sides are blue tiles. The windows are alabaster and the inside is very ornately gilded and looks beautiful when the dome is lit up. Underneath the rock of sacrifice is a cave where Muslims pray. They believe that Mahommad went up to heaven from this rock.

We went on to the **Wailing Wall** with its huge blocks of stone. It was still snowing and we went back to the courtyard. Then we visited the church of St Anne and the **Pool of Bethesda** with the recently excavated church above it, built in the Byzantine style. In the afternoon it was snowing still as we took the road to **Emmaus**, having some difficulty with skidding as the cars tried to ascend the hill road. There was Benediction in the church, but we didn't linger afterwards as it was so cold. Four of us were invited by our guide David to have tea at the union HQ, where we were delighted to sit in a warm room in front of a fire. We also watched a gambling game with what looked like draughts.



Antonia fortress



Jerash





St Aidan's, Bamburgh

# The Creed



*David O'Neill was moved by a leaflet he and other friends had come across. Maybe you will be too.*

## The story

Tom and Pat were in Bamburgh, Northumberland and chanced upon a leaflet that simply and powerfully told the visitor who 'we' are and what we believe. By coincidence, I came upon the same creed in the church by the beach in Aberdaron, North Wales. Chance or grace?

Any 'creed' is a simple statement of what we believe; core beliefs that draw us together and unify us; rooted in Scripture and reflecting the concerns of the age. Over the centuries the church has had many creeds. Some have become covered with the ivy of time and no longer speak to us: different language and concerns.

But this creed spoke to us – simple to understand, scripturally based, speaking a language we know and showing us the world we live in.

Please read it prayerfully and maybe we might even be able to use it one day for worship.

The leaflet begins with a welcome –

*Welcome to the casual visitor,  
to the tourist, fascinated by the beautiful, historic building  
to the believer, seeking an oasis of silence and prayer  
to the pilgrim, searching for truth  
to the traveller, hoping for healing and consolation.*

St Aidan's in Bamburgh has been a centre of Christian belief and witness over the centuries – for local people and for visitors. St Aidan founded a church on this same spot in 635 AD. Like Aidan, today we seek to follow in the steps of Christ.

Then follows an unfussy explanation of **who** the church is.

### Who do you think we are?

We are the **church** – the gathering, the community of all those who follow the way of Jesus throughout the world. The church is not so much a building as all the **people** who are confident that Jesus is the Way.

We are the **'Catholic'** church because our community embraces all kinds of people and reaches to every part of our world.

In this church of St Aidan's we **meet** together to pray to God and to celebrate the sacraments.

We **care** for one another and help each other to grow in faith.

We **are ordinary** people who are concerned for and get involved in the life of the community in which we live.

We **pray for** the needs of the poor everywhere and try to find ways of working for peace and justice for all.

We **accept** our responsibility to use our gifts and talents for the benefit of others and for caring for God's world as his stewards.

## We believe in **God our Father**

who created the world in love

who created men and women in  
his image to live with each other  
in the ways of love justice and  
forgiveness

who is to be found  
in human love,  
in the glory of nature,  
in the marvels of science,  
in the beauty of music  
and poetry

who is with us in any  
sadness, loneliness or fear  
– and in our joys and  
celebrations



who is near, not far off  
and we can come to him  
in prayer

## We believe in **Jesus Christ**



who was born and lived  
a human life in Palestine  
2000 years ago

who showed God's love to the poor,  
the outsider, the ordinary and the rich

in whose life we see what God is like –  
forgiving, accepting, healing,  
challenging

who gave his life in love, dying on a cross and  
reconciling the world to God

### who is with us always

who sent out his followers to change  
the world, taking a message of good  
news to all people

who asks his followers to keep on  
doing this today

## We believe in **The Holy Spirit**

who is the presence of God  
within each person,  
guiding us in the way of truth

who helps us realise our potential  
and become fully the person God made  
us to be

who is the invisible 'go-between'  
connecting us with God  
and other people  
– making us aware of their needs

who encourages us in gifts of  
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,  
faithfulness, gentleness, self control



who is at work  
in the church  
AND  
in the world.



# Alpha

– a personal journey with God

**Gina** shares her experience of going to Alpha.

## **What did I need to do Alpha for?**

I had seen advertisements for Alpha in our newsletters and on canvases pinned up outside different churches and public buildings, but hey! what did I need to do Alpha for? I was brought up Catholic, attended Catholic school and taught Christian values. I have heard the story of Jesus over and over; listened to his word and teachings through the Gospels; I was on track! With an assuredness and almost smugness, I considered I was 'doing my bit' to earn a place in heaven. But there were times when I questioned my faith and beliefs and even Jesus' divinity. Was I just going through the motions of Christianity, hedging my bets, just to be on the safe side? Did I truly believe? What about the sceptics and all their evidence? But if it was true, I wanted to be with the 'in crowd'.

## **What did I have to lose?**

I was invited to an Alpha and initially recoiled from it, then I started to ask myself... how well do you know Jesus? Knowing about someone is not the same as 'knowing' someone, and besides, I had lots of niggling questions and doubts it was about time I put these to rest. Maybe I would get some answers? So I decided to go along to the first session and see what it was about! After all, what did I have to lose? I went along with almost a belligerent attitude of "OK, prove this to me!"

## **It wasn't what I expected!**

I was welcomed warmly and offered a drink and a meal. I found myself surrounded by lovely people, all searching, like myself. I had expected religion and scriptures to be the topics; instead, I found it relaxing and informative. I found myself looking forward to the next session; I was quite bereft when it ended! I had formed some strong friendships with people and through our DVD discussions, had learnt so much about Jesus, 'the man'. I was taken through the historical evidence of his being and learnt about his life, death and his aspirations and love for us all. I felt like I had come to 'know Jesus.' He became less of an unavailable 'divine' entity and more of a human influence in my life. I felt like I was on a voyage of discovery! When Jesus walked, he felt happiness, love, excitement, sadness, disappointment, rejection, loneliness and pain; all our human feelings.

## **I don't have to earn God's love**

Has Alpha changed me? Em.... no, not physically; I am the same person I ever was! But I now have an understanding of God and clarity of a future with him. I believe implicitly, that our Father does have a plan for me. Don't know what it is yet, however, I feel liberated from the chaos of the world around me, and reminded of what matters most and what matters least, and this brings order to my life. My relationship with Jesus is now one of a friend. I now understand that I don't have to earn God's love, he loves me regardless of the times I fail to earn his graces. I used to feel I didn't deserve his love; not anymore!

I have met some lovely people along the way and formed what I hope will be lifelong friendships. And so now, if I was asked the 'Jesus question', "Who do you say I am?", I would say, "My closest friend."

**Life moves fast doesn't it? Every day there's so much to fit in!**

**But do you ever stop and think, "What is the point of it all?"**

**Do you ever ask yourself, "Is there more to life than this?"**

*Alpha is a series of sessions exploring life, faith and meaning. It's open to EVERYONE whatever your background or past experience in life. You're welcome, whatever faith background or denomination you come from and especially if you've not explored faith and meaning before.*

*Alpha's a space to explore the big questions in life, say what you think and listen to other points of view. First up there's food, followed by a discussion. Each talk explores an aspect of Christian faith and then in the small groups you get to say what you think. The aim of the talk is to spark conversation, each week unpacking a different question.*

*There's no obligation to say anything and there's nothing you can't say. Seriously! It's an opportunity to hear from others and contribute your own perspective in an honest, friendly and open environment. Why not try it out? It could be just what you've been searching for...*



## Pause Netflix, Try Alpha

## Alpha starts on Thursday 2nd May

at St Peter's Parish Centre, Green Lane, Hazel Grove SK7 4EA

Each evening starts with food at 7pm  
(runs for 10 weeks excluding half term).

**All are welcome**

**For more information contact Rachel on  
07724 749217 or visit  
[facebook.com/alphahazeltgrove](https://facebook.com/alphahazeltgrove)**

**You're invited  
#TryAlpha**

**Alpha**





# Roamin' round **Rome**

Rome is always worth a visit, whatever the season or the excuse! When I was asked to accompany a group of Catenians and parishioners from St Philip's, it was not a difficult decision. The Hotel Cicerone was our home for six nights. Handily placed not far from the Castel Sant'Angelo and the Palace of Justice, it was a good base from which to explore the eternal city.

We had an early start the first morning so that we could be knocking on the great doors of the 'other' St Peter's at 7 am for Mass in the crypt not far from the tomb of St Paul VI. St Peter's basilica has a different feel to it before the crowds appear and we were not disappointed. Later on in the week we would visit St John Lateran, the cathedral church of Rome as well as St

*Fr Peter gives us some insight into St Philip's parish trip to the eternal city in March.*

Mary Major, Rome's church dedicated to the Blessed Mother. This is also where Pope Francis goes to pray before leaving for and on arriving back from his pastoral journeys. Between those two great basilicas is the Redemptorist church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and St Alphonsus which is Cardinal Vincent Nichol's titular church, so his coat of arms is over the front door. (All the cardinals have a church in Rome because originally they were the parish priests of Rome.)

Of course, no trip to Rome is complete without an audience with the Holy

Father and Wednesday morning saw another early start for us to get down to St Peter's Square and through the security to get a seat.

Many of us were not far from the pathway which the popemobile takes on its trip round the square before the audience. The Holy Father was giving a series of talks on the Our Father during the current Wednesday audiences and, amongst other things, he said, "The 'Our Father' is a prayer which kindles in us the same love as Jesus' love for the Father's will, a flame that spurs us to transform the world with love. The Christian does not believe in an

inescapable 'fate'. There is nothing unplanned in Christian faith. Rather, there is a salvation waiting to manifest itself in the life of each man and woman and to be fulfilled in eternity. When we pray, we believe that God can and wants to transform reality by overcoming evil with good. It makes sense to obey and to surrender oneself to this God, even at the hour of the most difficult trial."

A trip to the Colosseum for some of us was Wednesday afternoon's excursion. What a building that must have been when in full operation.

It is also good to get out of Rome and Saturday saw us heading out to Orvieto which is a couple of hours to the north of Rome. Orvieto has a magnificent church where we

celebrated Mass (in one of the side chapels) before proceeding to a local restaurant for 'a bit' of lunch!

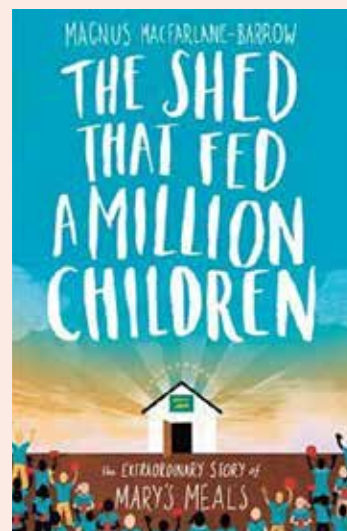
Other highlights included a trip out one evening to a restaurant where we were serenaded by opera singers in between each course. Another visitor to Rome at the same time as ourselves was the President of China. He apparently didn't get to see the Pope but he did sign some good trade deals and cause more traffic jams than are usual in Rome.

No trip is possible without good organisation and Peter Smith from St Philip's, Offerton organised the whole event superbly and we are grateful to him. The trouble with Rome is there is so much to see and we are still scratching the surface, so it looks like I shall have to go again some time!





**Helen Macdonald** reviews the latest book shared by the recently formed parish book club, which tells of the birth and growth of a charity we have all supported over many years.



***'The Shed that Fed a Million Children'***  
**by Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow**

"Inspirational", "God-driven", "a powerful story", "with vision comes provision". These are a just a few of the comments heard when we met to discuss our recent choice at St Peter's book club.

'The Shed that Fed a Million Children' by Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow tells the story of Mary's Meals. After watching a news report about the suffering of refugees in Bosnia Herzegovina, Magnus and his brother decided to take a week off work to transport relief supplies to the area. This journey, in an old Land Rover, was the beginning of a personal journey of faith, hope and dedication. The determination to alleviate suffering led Magnus to leave his job and to start his life's work. After working in Bosnia, he provided aid in Romanian orphanages and then in Liberia. In 2002 he travelled to Malawi during a time of terrible famine. Whilst there he met Edward, a 14-year-old boy, whose father had died and whose mother was dying. When questioned about what his hopes and ambitions were for the future, Edward's reply was "I would like to have enough food to eat and I would like to be able to go to school one day". This became the vision for Mary's Meals.

The charity aims to provide one meal a day in a place of education. Wherever possible they use locally sourced food and the meals are cooked and served by local volunteers. The difference this can make is astonishing. The school attendance increases because a meal is provided and the capacity to learn increases because the children are better able to concentrate when they are not chronically hungry.

Although many of us have supported Mary's Meals for several years it was fascinating to learn about the growth of the charity and to realise the extraordinary impact one person can make. The book also expresses deep gratitude for all the love and support Magnus and his family have received along the way, which has enabled over a million children to access food and education.

This is an inspiring book which has made us want to find more ways to continue supporting this amazing charity.

***If you'd like to join the book club, check out the next monthly meeting date with Alison McGarr on 07792 107152.***



"It would be beneficial if every Christian community, on one Sunday of the liturgical year, could renew its efforts to make the Sacred Scriptures better known."

Pope Francis

Misericordia et Misera, November 2017



# Bible Weekend

Catholic  
**Bible**  
School



**A mission weekend for the whole parish to come together to share food for body and soul.**



**Activities for all ages, lively and dramatic presentations, interesting workshops, reflective prayer times, opportunities to get to know each other better, fulfilling and satisfying food and input.**



**St Peter's Parish Centre**  
**Friday 17th, Saturday 18th and**  
**Sunday 19th May 2019**



# Here's a list of the parish groups and activities at St Peter's

## **Celebrating liturgy**

### **Altar linen**

Pat Tomlinson: 0161 456 7627

### **Altar servers**

Fr Peter, for now

### **Church cleaners**

Margaret King: 0161 483 4584

### **Eucharistic ministers**

#### **Housebound**

Maureen Horton: 0161 483 1590

mary.horton@ntlworld.com

#### **Church**

Tony Martin: 0161 483 7720

tony.martin@ntlworld.com

### **Flower arrangers**

Colette Christie: 0161 427 4982

colette.christie4982@hotmail.co.uk

### **Lay-led liturgy**

Rachel McKay: 0161 487 1659

mckay7897@hotmail.com

### **Adult and junior choirs**

Eileen Rigg: 01625 872948

emrigg@hotmail.co.uk

### **Folk group**

Steph Leyden: 0161 456 6285

stephleyden@icloud.com

### **Piety stall**

Denise Noon: 0161 483 0217

### **Readers**

Monica Beckett:

admin@stpetershazलगrove.org.uk

### **Welcomers**

Anne-Marie Bailey: 0161 456 2213

ambailey@cheerful.com

## **Creating social activity**

### **Book club**

Alison McGarr: 07792 107152

ajmccgarr68@outlook.com

### **Parish newsletter**

Monica Beckett

admin@stpetershazलगrove.org.uk

### **Parish noticeboards**

Outside - Julie Williams:

juliewilliams10@gmail.com

Inside - Barbara Goodier

### **Parish trips**

Fr Peter

petersharrocks@stpetershazलगrove.org.uk

### **Parish website**

Anne-Marie Bailey: ambailey@cheerful.com

### **Special events**

Helen Lyons: 07854 928072

helenlyons1957@hotmail.co.uk

### **Tea and Coffees, after Mass**

Maria Oates: mzoates@icloud.com

### **Theatre group**

Tony Martin: 0161 483 7720

tony.martin@ntlworld.com

### **Walking group**

Tony Martin: 0161 483 7720

tony.martin@ntlworld.com

## **Exploring faith**

### **Alpha**

Rachel McKay: 0161 487 1659

mckay7897@hotmail.com

### **Baptism programme**

Anne-Marie Gallogly

Karen Haines - justasec55@hotmail.com

### **Confirmation programme**

Julie Williams

juliewilliams10@gmail.com

### **First sacraments preparation**

Teresa Thiele: 07778 848709

terrythiele@hotmail.co.uk

### **Marriage preparation**

Fr Peter

### **RCIA**

Tony Martin 0161 483 7720

tony.martin@ntlworld.com

### **Vocations**

Fr Peter

*Names and contact details are correct at the time the magazine went to print, but are subject to change.*

## **Sharing faith**

### **CaFE**

Rachel McKay: 0161 487 1659

mckay7897@hotmail.com

### **Centering prayer**

Mike O'Malley: 0161 483 8296

michaeldomalley@sky.com

### **Churches Together activities**

Maureen/Phil Horton: 0161 483 1590

pjhorton@virginmedia.com

### **Guided prayer**

Mike O'Malley: 0161 483 8296

michaeldomalley@sky.com

### **Holy hour and prayer ministry**

Laura Small: 01625 876 752

lauramsmall@hotmail.com

### **Lending library**

Ann Bonner: 0161 456 6152

anntbar46@yahoo.com

### **LPA liaison**

Julie Williams: 0161 285 0244

juliewilliams10@gmail.com

### **Mothers' prayers**

Teresa Thiele: 07778 848709

terrythiele@hotmail.co.uk

### **Praise and worship**

John McKay: 0161 487 1659

mckay7897@hotmail.com

### **Rosary groups: adult and children**

Laura Small: 01625 876 752

lauramsmall@hotmail.com

### **Scripture group**

Mike O'Malley: 0161 483 8296

michaeldomalley@sky.com

## **Supporting families and youth**

### **Bereavement support**

Helen Lyons: 07854 928072

### **Childrens' liturgy**

Janice Ormerod: 0161 449 5840

### **Explorers**

Joe O'Brien: 07976 423 203

joe\_obrien@ntlworld.com

### **Little fishes**

Anne Wroe: 07763 387001

anne.wroe@sky.com

### **Marriage and family life group**

David Small: 01625 876 752

### **SPY group**

David Small: 01625 876 752

## **Outreaching in the community**

### **Hospital chaplaincy**

Chaplaincy Office: 0161 419 5889

### **Hospital Chaplaincy (Emergency)**

Hospital switchboard will bleep

0161 483 1010

### **Via St Peter's**

0161 483 3476

petersharrocks@stpeterhazलगrove.org.uk

### **Justice and peace**

Carmel O'Malley: 0161 483 8296

### **LAMBS**

Jackie Mackay: 0161 483 6348

Kath Coll: 0161 456 0881

kathcoll@btinternet.com

### **Lenten lunches**

Helen Lyons: 07854 928072

Jackie Mackay: 0161 483 6348

Kath Coll: 0161 456 0881

### **Lourdes group**

Mary Conway-Kelly: 07809 748805

### **Luncheon club**

Margaret Hulme: 07775 162694

### **Missio**

Margaret King: 0161 483 4584

Fiona Preece: 0161 456 4319

### **Refugees store**

Carmel O'Malley: 0161 483 8296

### **Schools chaplaincy**

#### **St Peter's**

Fr P Sharrocks: 0161 483 2431

0161 483 3476

#### **St Simon's**

Fr P Sharrocks: 0161 483 9696

0161 483 3476

#### **St James' High School - Via School**

0161 482 6900

office@stjamesche.org.uk

#### **Harrytown High School - Via School**

0161 430 5277

office@harrytown.stockport.sch.uk

#### **Aquinas 6th form college**

0161 483 3237

Awaiting appointment

### **SVP: adult and youth**

Lorraine Parker: 0161 456 5629

lorraineandbobparker@gmail.com