



Notes from the Riverbank

The newsletter for St Thomas of Canterbury Church in Goring,
St Mary's Church in Streatley and St Andrew's Church in South Stoke

March 2017 – 36th edition

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● Welcome to the thirty-sixth edition of "Notes from the Riverbank."

All contributions should be sent to Toria, the editor, by the 17th of each month at the usual email address webcontent.thomandmary@gmail.com. The on-line versions of the calendars are maintained by Glenn Cooke using the same email address. Bookings for the church or Canterbury Room should be made by contacting the UB Parish Secretary Jenny Hall at jandjh2@btinternet.com. We aim to produce the on-line and printed versions of each issue by the 25th of each month.



Pastoral Letter

The days are getting longer, Spring is approaching, and so Lent is at hand. Does this fill you with dread or rejoicing? Indeed, it begins on March 1st, Ash Wednesday, when there is a service of Holy Communion at St Thomas' at 8.00pm. The most common question I hear is "what are you giving up for Lent?"

Giving up chocolate or wine for its own sake, for example, may fill us with self-satisfaction or complacency if we succeed, but by itself does little for us spiritually. It might help us to break with bad habits and get us into good ones for our health (and our pockets), but do little for our souls. But this has very little to do with the purpose of Lent, and nothing to do with what is meant by "taking up our cross," which, I believe, is about suffering for the sake of the Gospel.

So what is Lent about? Some of us will remember the days when our houses were heated by solid fuel boilers in winter, which resulted in a need for spring cleaning to remove the dust and dirt that would get everywhere in the house, and would be shown up in the bright sunlight of spring. We all need regular spring cleaning, we need times when we particularly seek to draw closer to God and let Him shine His searchlight into our lives. Whilst we can do this at any time, we so easily put it off, so a set time, such as Lent, can help us to do so. We can be encouraged by others, perhaps prayer partners, who are doing it at the same time.

Giving something up needs to be purposeful. We might decide to give up a meal on certain days to give us more time to spend with God. We may cut out some of the time we spend watching TV, surfing the internet, looking at Facebook, or reading novels. Our aim is to seek God and let Him shine His searchlight into our lives, to reveal the things that are wrong and attitudes that need to be changed, to bring repentance. God does not overwhelm us with more than we are ready for. It may be painful but the wonderful thing is that when we come to God in repentance, He

promises to forgive us and cleanse us from all past sin, yes, even the most obstinate stains, and to give us a completely fresh start. This brings joy. It may also be a time of seeking God's guidance for the future, and for His equipping.

We do this by prayer, listening to God, and speaking to Him, but also by reading Scripture, for which we might find it helpful to find a special place where we are undisturbed. There are a number of devotional books which can help us, taking us through themes or passages for each day of Lent. But we may need to read a challenging book, such as Justin Welby's *Dethroning Mammon*, a book that brings us up sharp concerning our attitude to money and possessions. Joining one of the ecumenical Lent groups or joining the Alpha course, for which there are still seven sessions left, may be helpful as we meet together with others.

The good news is that Lent leads up to Good Friday when we remember that Jesus died on the Cross to cleanse us from all our sin. This is followed by Easter Day which is meaningless without Good Friday, and is a guarantee that His sacrifice for us is accepted by God, and that we will rise with Him. May I wish you a happy Lent!



Judith Hogg



Marking Lent, Holy Week and Easter together

At whatever stage of development you feel you are in your relationship with God, may I commend to you the normal Christian practice of living through the whole of Lent, Holy Week and Easter and particularly of joining in worship every day from Maundy Thursday to Easter Day. To help you to do this, you may find it helpful to mark some dates into your diary, now, so that other things don't overwhelm this opportunity to deepen your Christian faith:



Ash Wednesday 1st March at 8pm: We all meet together at St Thomas' to mark the beginning of Lent, by committing ourselves to grow in devotion to God through keeping a Holy Lent.



Maundy Thursday 13th April at 8pm: We all meet at St Mary's to mark Jesus' last supper with his disciples and to listen to the account of his last hours with them before he was arrested and tried.



Good Friday 14th April at 2pm: We all meet at St Thomas' to reflect on the deep love of Jesus for every one of us that made him willing to be crucified for us. We also pray the evening service of Compline at South Stoke at 6pm.



Easter Eve (Saturday) 15th April at 8pm: We meet at St Mary's to be reminded of the story of God reaching out to bring eternal rescue to humanity in the Easter Vigil. **This is a dramatic service not to be missed.**



Easter Day 16th April at 9.30 or 11am: Having lived through the last supper and crucifixion together, we meet in our parish churches to celebrate the eternal life giving resurrection of Jesus.

Benefice or parish; where do we belong?

This is a relatively new question for us, isn't it? Let's explore the role of each...

The Parish: This is where, firstly, we belong to the Christian Community. This is where we make a priority of worshipping God together regularly, for most, at the main service, be that at 9.30am or at 11.15am.

The parish is where our belonging is expressed also by developing a sense of belonging to the family of God's people as we encourage each other by living Christ-like lives together. We reflect this belonging by adding our names to the membership list – the parish electoral roll. It is also the place where we express our Christian stewardship in solidarity with our Christian brothers and sisters contributing our time, abilities and wealth generously, to maintain thriving Christian ministry in the parish and the building where we worship God together, as, for many, did our forebears.

The Benefice: Although the parish is primarily where we belong, there are many things that smaller parishes, such as ours, are not able to do alone, but are able to do together; that is why we have been gathered into a Benefice. During these last three years, the churchwardens of the three parishes have been greatly encouraged as they have met regularly to work together, each working for the well-being of all. As a result, our parishes have benefited from closer relationships.

While the parishes alone are not in a position to house and employ a full-time minister, the collection of parishes in the Benefice is able to do so and furthermore, to be trusted by the Bishop with training newly ordained clergy as they begin a life of service in Christian ministry. We are delighted to have been able to welcome Steve, Lindsay and their young family in recent months and look forward to Wendy being ordained this coming summer and serving her title in the Benefice.

Another benefit that we derive from being together in days of such cultural diversity is that each parish can develop from its prevailing preference. This has led us to focus more formal styles of worship in Sreatley (with a robed choir ever week), whilst Goring tends towards the middle of the formality spectrum, occasionally breaking new ground. South Stoke is smaller and retains a more gathered sense of a separate community. It is a delight that each parish has been able to welcome new members since we took this step, enabling people to choose where they feel most comfortable.

Belonging together also enables us to share resources well. We share ministries more effectively and have been able to relish Michael's ministry through music in the two larger parishes in the Benefice, which is only possible because we chose to co-ordinate the timing of our main services, as a Benefice.

More recently we have developed ways in which we can share in and support mission and evangelism, which is the very core of our purpose as Christians. Sharing in evangelism through our first Benefice Alpha course and supporting mission through each parish having chosen to form a partnership with Steve Poulson, a young Christian man who is going with CMS to work amongst street children in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. We were delighted to welcome Steve to the Benefice morning service on Sunday 29th January, and to Christingle, both at Sreatley. Both initiatives made possible through our working together.

Do please pray and think about who you might invite to come with you to the next Alpha course, as so many people have taken a first decision to become a follower of Jesus or had their faith in God refreshed through these courses.

Something that we have struggled with as individual parishes for some years is to develop consistent ministry to children and younger people, which sees young people grow into mature adult disciples of Jesus Christ. We are trying to address this matter as a Benefice. Whilst the ministry to families with young children is mainly based in Goring, both Streatley and South Stoke make their contributions to this Benefice ministry; children and young people from all the parishes now participate. It was so encouraging to have 21 children at Goring's main morning service recently without it being a special occasion.

We can rejoice in belonging primarily to our parish but also, importantly, to the Benefice which enables us to fulfil so much of our Christian calling that, currently we could not fulfil in the separate parishes.



To what is God calling me?

The first call, which God extends to everyone, is a call to follow Him; that is, to live a Christ-like life in obedience to Christ's call to "follow me!"

For those who decide to respond to this call on their life, the Bible includes many encouragements about how we live such as Colossians 3, v 23 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord and not for people" as well as giving us much guidance for Christ-like living such as the Ten Commandments (which I have heard misrepresented as the ten suggestions!).

Sometimes Christians have a sense that God may be calling them to a particular role, and when we sense that to be the case we need help to explore God's particular call on our life (vocation).

For many people, God's call is to be a Christ-like example in their daily, secular work; others he calls into church leadership or ordination. We are very fortunate to be part of a Diocese which is so helpful to people who want to explore whether this is what God is calling them to. If you would like to know a little more do look at the Diocesan website: <http://www.oxford.anglican.org/mission-ministry/vocations/>

Lent is such a good time to be listening especially carefully to our heavenly Father so that we don't find ourselves merely "doing things for God" (whether he wants us to do those things or not), but rather that with attentive ears, we learn afresh to do all that we do "with God."



Paul, Your Vicar



A letter from our Bishop: "A wealth of generosity..."

People often ask me what the differences are between the Diocese of Oxford and Diocese of Sheffield (where I was bishop for more than seven years). One of them is Christian giving.

The Diocese of Sheffield serves one of the poorest regions of the country. In the league table of income per head of population by diocese it comes third from bottom. But Sheffield is the most generous diocese in the country in terms of giving. For many years, the Church of England has commended that we give 5% of our income to and through the Church (leaving plenty of space to give to charities and other good causes). The average giving in the Diocese of Sheffield is now over 4.5%.

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I am grateful to those faithful congregation members who donate to their churches, week after week, month after month and year after year. However, we still have some way to go in Oxford to match the level of generous giving that takes place in Sheffield. I hope and pray we will try over the coming years.

St Paul does not shrink from reminding the Christians in Corinth about the generosity of other churches. He writes in 2 Corinthians 8: "We want you to know brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the church of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part." Paul goes on to write that the main reason we give to God and to others is because of God's generous gifts to us: "For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich."

God has given so much to us. In this matter of giving then, Paul urges us, let us turn our good intentions into a generous and joyful and disciplined reality. God's work in this Diocese is in need of resources as we seek to support and extend all that we are doing in the coming years.

Please take some time at the beginning of the year to give thanks to God for all you have been given. Please take some time to review your giving in the light of all that God has given you.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift in Jesus Christ.



The Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford

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Bishop's visit – a date for your diary

The Bishop of Dorchester, the Rt Revd Colin Fletcher will be visiting on Sunday 23rd April. He will be preaching in two of our churches and it is still to be decided what sort of special services will take place – watch this space for further information.



Brenda Kerr Muir



Easter flowers at St Thomas'

A lily donated in memory of a relative or friend is a tangible and lovely way of remembering them at Easter. St Thomas' filled with the scent and beauty of flowers brings pleasure to us all at this joyful time. If you would like to donate a lily, please do get in touch with me.



Jenny Boyd 872109



Church Membership

If you have been confirmed, attend church regularly and consider yourself to be part of the church family, but your name is not on the Electoral Roll of the church you attend, then now is the time to consider becoming a member as the Annual Parochial Church Meetings are held in April. The application form can be obtained from the Electoral Roll Officer in your parish:

- St Thomas of Canterbury Church, Goring – Judith Aguda
- St Mary's Church, Streatley – Graham Harvey
- St Andrew's Church, South Stoke – Maureen Palmer

To be eligible to vote at your church's annual church meeting you must return your application form by the date stated on it or on the notice on your church's noticeboard. Existing members do not need to complete a form this year, but it would be helpful if those who have moved house or changed telephone number could let their Electoral Roll Officer know.

It is important that the Electoral Roll is an accurate reflection of the number of members of the church family who attend regularly but, because it affects our share of central costs, it would be helpful if your name appears on only one of the three Electoral Rolls in the United Benefice.



Judith Aguda


Come and Sing Evensong St Thomas' Church at 4pm on Sunday 5th March

Director of Music: Michael Howell
Organist: Bryan Almond

Introit: O Salutaris Hostia – Elgar
Responses: Smith
Canticles: Wood in Eb no. 2
Anthem: The Spirit of the Lord – Elgar

Practices: 7pm-7.45pm Friday 17th February
7pm-7.45pm Friday 24th February
7pm-7.45pm Friday 3rd March
2pm-3.30pm Sunday 5th March followed by tea and cake before Evensong



More details from Elizabeth Parkinson 872020 or parkinsonfamily1@btinternet.com


Andrew James Johnson Concert at St Mary's on Saturday 4th February

Andrew James Johnson, composer and pianist, gave a truly phenomenal concert at St Mary's on Saturday. The audience were enraptured throughout as he performed both well-loved classical pieces and his own compositions.

Andrew James Johnson is renowned for his melodically inspired and elegantly crafted solo piano works and we were treated to five of his own compositions: *Echoes of Love*, *Moonlight Shadows*, *Out of Solitude*, *Elysian Dreams* and *Winter's Heart*.

Despite a busy schedule teaching and composing for a variety of projects Andrew has always been passionate about exploring the solo piano oeuvre as a means of expression drawing inspiration from musical heroes like Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, Liszt and Debussy, and he also played pieces from these five composers. His virtuosity as a pianist made even the very well-known pieces sound fresh and new. We are very happy that Andrew also enjoyed the evening so much he has promised to come and play for us again next year.



Stella



United Benefice of Goring & Streatley with South Stoke



Benefice Calendar - March 2017

		<u>Goring</u>	<u>Streatley</u>	<u>South Stoke</u>
We. 1 st	Midweek Holy Communion followed by coffee	10.30		
	Ash Wednesday Holy Communion with ashing	20:00		
Th. 2 nd	Alpha Course in the Canterbury Room	19:30		
Fr. 3 rd	Women's World Day of Prayer		13:30	
Su. 5 th	Lent 1 Holy Communion	8.00	11:15	
	Family Service	9.30		11.15
	Come and Sing Evensong practice from 2pm	16.00		
	Discoverers	17.00		
Mo. 6 th	Ecumenical Lent groups start - see sign up sheets in church			
Tu 7 th	South Stoke Prayer meeting 2.30pm @ Crossways			
We. 8 th	Midweek Holy Communion	10.30		
	Streatley PCC Meeting 8pm @ Gatehampton Manor			
Th. 9 th	Alpha Course in the Canterbury Room	19:30		
Sa. 11 th	Prayer Breakfast in the Canterbury Room	8:30		
	Alpha Away Day please contact Steve Johnson for more details			
Su. 12 th	Stewardship Launch		8.00	
	Lent 2 Holy Communion	9.30	11:15	11.15
	Stillness on Sunday		17.30	
We. 15 th	Midweek Holy Communion	10.30		
	South Stoke Coffee Morning			10.30
	South Stoke PCC Meeting 8pm @ Crossways			
Th. 16 th	Pick-a-Flick & Lunch showing 'The man who knew infinity'	10.00		
	Alpha Course in the Canterbury Room	19:30		
Su. 19 th	Lent 3 Holy Communion	8.00	11:15	
	Good News Service	9.30		
	Matins			11.15
	Discoverers	17.00		
	Palmer Ensemble concert followed by tea in the Morrell Room		17:00	
We. 22 nd	Midweek Holy Communion	10.30		
	Goring PCC Meeting 7:30pm in the Canterbury room			
Th. 23 rd	Alpha Course in the Canterbury Room	19:30		
Fr. 24 th	'Come on Board' Scrabble and tea in the Canterbury Room	15:00		
Sa. 25 th	Coffee & Cake in the Canterbury Room	10.30		
Su. 26 th	Gift Day			
	Lent 4 Holy Communion		8.00	11:15
	Mothering Sunday service	9.30	11.15	
We. 29 th	Midweek Holy Communion	10.30		
Th. 30 th	Alpha Course in the Canterbury Room	19:30		

Morning Prayer: South Stoke@9.30am every Friday; Goring@9.15am on 9th and 23rd March. The ministry team pray the service of Morning Prayer together three times each week on Monday, Thursday and Friday at 8am during term time, and 8:30am during school holidays.