



Anglican Diocese of Christchurch

Anglican Life e-Magazine (Read here)

Christmas Message from Bishop Peter Carrell

Dear Friends,

There is a fine line between buying great presents for loved ones and putting on a memorable Christmas meal and overspending to the detriment of how we live the other 364 days of the year. There is also a fine line between celebrating the joy of Christmas – that God loved us so much that in Jesus of Nazareth, God the Son became a human being, lived, died and rose again for our sakes – and acknowledging the reality of continuing human pain and suffering. Most if not all of us engage with the challenge described in the first sentence. Every preacher and column writer engages with the challenge in the second sentence. This year that second challenge feels especially acute as daily we read of death and destruction in Gaza, recall the 7 October 2023 atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel and do not forget other wars and calamities around the world. Many of us will also bear sorrows closer to home as we enter the Christmas season without loved family members and friends. Where is the "peace and goodwill among people" that the angels sang about to the shepherds in Luke 2:14?

The answer to this question is not found in the Christmas stories narrated by Matthew and Luke. We need to take in their larger narratives – the whole of the gospels they wrote as well as the whole sweep of the New Testament. Peace and goodwill among people is God's will for humanity. Working with God for peace and goodwill is our calling as followers of Jesus. "Blessed are the peacemakers," Jesus said (Matthew 5:9). In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul describes the good news of Jesus in terms of "peace" – news of the peace Jesus achieved through his death on the cross, news of peace to be proclaimed to all humanity. Paul even says, "For he is our peace" (2:14). In a world shattered by war, in individual lives disrupted by sorrow and suffering, our continuing task – the ongoing follow up to the angels' song - is that we continue to make peace, proclaim peace, work for peace – the peace which is centred on Christ and his work on the cross, reconciling humanity to God and divided humanity into "one new humanity" (2:15).

May Christ the Prince of Peace be born again in each of our hearts this Christmas.

Arohanui,

+Peter





A note from the Editor

Welcome to the Anglican Life e-Magazine.

Kia ora

As we welcome summer, the season of Advent ushers in a flurry of activities and festivities.

In our very first electronic edition of Anglican Life, we have a collection of articles that reflect on the Peace that surpasses all understanding in the form of Jesus Christ and feature some 2023 events within the Diocese. You will also find ideas for

possible Christmas gifts and unusual decorations.

The Anglican Life e-Magazine will be published online regularly, also available on the [Anglican Life website](#).

In 2024, we will publish a printed Easter Anglican Life Magazine.

Wishing you a joyful Christmas and a happy new year,
Yvette

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Anglican Life e-Magazine reserves the right to edit or refuse any or all submissions.



God the Incarnate

An advent reflection by The Very Reverend Ben Truman, Dean of the Christ Church Cathedral.

Kia ora e te whānau a te Karaiti,

Let me introduce myself - I'm Ben Truman, newly appointed Dean of Christ Church Cathedral. I'm the husband of Dr Johannah, and father of Edward (almost 5), Toby (almost 3) and Thomas (16 months).

The image on the front cover is Edward as the archangel Gabriel recounting the nativity story to a surprisingly calm and engaged Thomas as the manger-bound Jesus last year.

Greymouth was my home growing up, before moving to Dunedin for university, then Christchurch to teach Drama and Social Studies at Burnside High. I arrived in January 2011, just in time for a rather rocky February.

My curacy was with the beautiful people of Lincoln (incl. Rolleston, Greenpark, Springston, and Tai Tapu) and for the last six years I've been blessed to be the Vicar of the Parish of Opawa-St Martins, including St Mark's School.

Theologically, I put myself in the Broad Church camp. I'm a prayer-book-using, psalm-singing, chasuble-wearing, lectionary-following, real-presence-of-Jesus-believing, Pākehā Anglican priest. I believe that beauty of architecture, vestments and liturgy can be a doorway to the divine. I also believe that excessive fussiness in ritual puts us at risk of becoming Pharisees and providing stumbling blocks for those who wish to see Jesus. I delight in affirming the orthodox faith as expressed in the Church's creeds, and see space for plenty of grace in the margins. I believe in Jesus as the Word of God, with all scripture pointing to Him who is God made flesh. I also believe that an overly literalist interpretation of scripture does a disservice to the wise and spirit-inspired minds that wrote and collated it.

The role of Dean is not something I aspired to, but I fortuitously found myself on study leave when the vacancy opened which gave me space to pray and think and discuss and discern. I adore the Cathedral, having spent seven years as a Canon on the Cathedral Chapter. In the words of Acts 15, 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to me', and so I applied.

I'm excited to be coming into the Cathedral at this time of hope. The gargantuan task of reinstating the Cathedral is progressing well. It is now structurally safe, and work has begun on preparing the foundations for the 66 base isolators (a fitting number with 66 books in the Bible!).

The mission at the Cardboard Cathedral remains the same – to be a symbol of the presence of God in the heart of the city. And, more than a symbol, to be a tangible source of God's love through welcome and worship, silence and service, creativity and care.

And as I reflect on all of this, I keep coming back to the word of this season – incarnation. The word was made flesh and dwelt among us; or the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood.

It is among my favourite characteristics of God; our God always makes the first move.

God is moved to create, to communicate, to covenant, and finally, to come. Incarnation is at the core of God's nature. God forever binds humanity and divinity together, redeeming the latter, and making the former more accessible. And if incarnation is at the core of God's nature, that means it should probably be part of the nature of our churches and ourselves too. We are called to be a reflection of the image of God in our communities, or workplaces, and our homes. We are called to be salt, light, yeast, living stones and living sacrifices.

If I'm honest, that can feel a little overwhelming at times. But there's grace too, because God doesn't call us to be anything other than ourselves. The mission of God is advanced by you being truly you and me being truly me and us being truly engaged with where God has placed us. That is my goal for the Cathedral – to be incarnational.

Please pray for my family and me, that we're able to live authentically and incarnationally in the role. And pray for the Cathedral, that it may be an incarnational gift to the city, a sign of the presence of God, a place of welcome, peace, beauty and love that points people to God.

The Very Rev'd Ben Truman
Dean of Christchurch



Behold the miracle, embrace the mystery

Rev'd Dr Meg Harvey, Vicar of Amberley Parish writes about the mystery of Christ's birth.

As a priest I, quite rightly, am often asked to explain my faith and Christianity. On occasion, I am asked about the faith and Christianity of the entire Anglican Church! When explaining who we are and how we do Church I will always bring in the

three-legged stool of Anglicanism – scripture, tradition and reason.

In my previous life, I was a scientist. The orderliness and conclusiveness of science is a comfort and motivation to me. That is why I am very happy our three-legged stool includes reason. I think there are lots of parts of the Christmas story that are explained by science or reason. The painting of the nativity here (see picture below) is so compelling to me because it shows the raw humanity of the nativity – Mary slumped exhausted after the experience of giving birth.

But. But, there is an awful lot about Christmas that cannot be explained by science or reason. The conception of Jesus the Christ would be the most obvious one. I know a lot of people in the Church and the world get stuck on this and sometimes conclude that there, in fact, was no immaculate conception.

This is where I choose to leave reason behind and allow space for the mystery of Christmas and the nativity. One of my favourite singers is Josh Groban and in one of his songs there is the line, "Isn't faith believing all power can't be seen?" I think this is such a real and valuable truth that I have it on the wall in my house. Be it the nativity or the resurrection we must, *we must*, allow space in our faith for trusting in the mystery of God. We may never know the totality of God's story and power. We cannot say what will be revealed to us after this life. A faith that seeks to have an answer to every question or relies totally on reason or science is not a faith that accepts God as He is. Our faith must allow space for uncertainty and mystery – that's why it's called faith!

And so, we come to Advent. In our similar preparation time for Easter of Lent we are better at dwelling with the mystery of God and the miracles that make up the Easter story. In Advent, we seem to focus more on the definitive story of Christmas. It's no surprise that we do. Thanks to our Gospels we have a

very detailed telling of the story of the birth of Christ. It's easy to forget how much mystery there is to the story too. Why Mary? Why Joseph? Why then in human history? Why shepherds being the first to see Emmanuel?

In our preparations for Christmas through Advent we can get too busy to take time to dwell with the mystery of God at this awesome time. Yes, shopping and parties are a plenty during Advent, but also our readings through Advent focus on very real, reasonable aspects of the story. There is little space left to dwell with the mystery of this whole season.

I try in Advent, somehow, somewhere, to offer to our parish and our community a time of Advent meditation. It is a simple time of peace and quiet when we dwell with the magnificence of the approaching Christmas day. It is a time to settle minds from all the seasonal busyness and in the quiet seek the still, small, voice of God. It is a time to allow space in our minds and hearts for that which we cannot explain.

Perhaps you too can try and find time this Advent to sit with the mystery of God in the holiday season. Maybe your Christmas can be illuminated by sitting with the mystery of God. There are plenty of resources and studies to follow through Advent to fully prepare for the wonder of the birth of Jesus the Christ, but I wonder how many of them allow space for the mystery of who and how Jesus was too?

My belief is that we are better Christians, truer children of God when we accept and acknowledge that we don't have all the answers and cannot explain every part of the glory of God. He is who he is. This is a truth I will sit with this Advent. As well as leading a corporate time of meditation I will also work hard through the services to be prepared, the functions to attend and the sermons to write to sit with God and His glorious and life changing mystery. I believe it will make for a richer Christmas day as well as a deepened faith.

Merry Christmas to you all.

Rev'd Dr Meg Harvey
Vicar of Amberley Parish



Sweet Pagan Baby Jesus?

The Reverend Bosco Peters, who was most recently Acting Dean of the Transitional Cathedral reflects on the origins of Christmas. He is married to Helen.

Is Christmas simply a pagan festival misappropriated by Christians? Is it little more than cooing over a placid new-born baby? Is there something deeper to Christmas than advertising's constant capitalist capitalising on envy and greed?

Each year, there are people who rail against the celebration of Christmas, arguing that it originates from a pagan winter festival. To be clear, I would have no problem should the dating of Christmas, 25 December, have been drawn from a non-Christian festival. We have no real idea what date Jesus of Nazareth was born.

Fear of tainting the holiness of Christian celebrations led the Puritan-dominated Parliament of England in 1644 to ban all Christmas activities as being unchristian. The Puritans of New England followed suit.

But there may be quite a different explanation of the origin of Christmas Day as 25 December. There is an ancient understanding that great events are linked to a particular date in the year. In this viewpoint, creation, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, the incarnation, and the crucifixion all happened on the same day of the year. And in the West, the calculation of the crucifixion came up with 25 March; in the East 6 April (the West would have started from the Hebrew Calendar of 14 Nisan; the East from 14 Artemisios in the Greek Calendar). So, 25 March (and 6 April) would have also been understood as the date of the Incarnation, the conception of Jesus. Calculate 9 perfect months forward, and you have a birth in the West on 25 December, and in the East on 6 January.

There are even scholars who argue that the pagan celebrations at Northern Winter Solstice (the longest night of the year, falling towards the end of December) are based on Christian Christmas. They assert that the Roman Emperor Aurelian, hostile to Christianity, instituted the pagan festival of the "Birth of the Unconquered Sun" on 25 December 274 and co-opted the Christian celebration in the process.

Whatever the source of our dating of Christmas, what are we Christians celebrating in this season? A good place to start is the Christmas-time collect that we have been praying for at least one and a half millennia:

O God,
you wonderfully created,
and yet more wonderfully, restored
the dignity of human nature;
grant that we may share the divine life
of your Son Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.
Amen.

The celebration of Christmas is more than rejoicing in the birth of an enchanting, no-crying-he-makes baby, lovely as that is. The delightful baby can be a hook that draws us into the deeper gift of Christmas – but it is unfortunate if people stop at the baby and do not explore what this babe is offering.

The early church emphasised (and the Eastern half of the church still stresses) that "God became as we are so that we might become as God is". This is called "divinisation" or "theosis". Divinisation and theosis are mentioned little in contemporary Western Christianity. In fact, the idea is sometimes avoided as being suspicious, confused with the sin of trying to make ourselves equal to God.

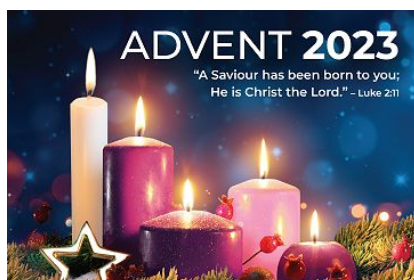
But the wonder of the Incarnation, the wonder of Christmas, is that God isn't relating to us as someone might relate to a pet goldfish. The wonder of the Incarnation is that, in Christ, God is raising us into God's own divine life.

The great Christmas-time Gospel reading, the Prologue of John (John 1:1-14), highlights, "to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12). Christ, God's Child by nature, makes each of us a child of God by grace. "God became as we are so that we might become as God is".

When we are baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we are not just baptised on behalf of God (that's what doing something in someone's name means). It also means that we are baptised, immersed into the very life and nature of God ("name" is also a biblical term for nature). We are Christened – made to be Christ-like.

At Christmas time, let us rejoice at the sublime, exalted, sacred being you are, and that each person is and is called to be. And let us allow God to work through us so that, made in God's image as we are, we grow more, through this celebration, into God's likeness, and increasingly recognise this image in every other person.

Rev'd Bosco Peters



Welcome to Advent 2023,
celebrating the birth of our
Saviour Jesus Christ.

We invite you to join **cbm** NZ
(Christian Blind Mission) online
to celebrate the **hope, peace, joy**
and **love** of Christmas, with **cbm's**
special four week Advent series.

advent.org.nz

more.

Join cbm New Zealand in celebrating Advent in 2023!

"A Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord." – Luke 2:11

[Join **cbm** NZ \(Christian Blind Mission\) online](http://advent.org.nz) from the first week in December for Advent 2023 to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas. Invite others and spread the good news!

The free online four-week Advent series will be sent to you weekly. You can share this online Advent series with family, friends, or neighbours, some of whom may not attend church. By registering online, at advent.org.nz, you will have access to a personalised webpage, where you'll find suggested scriptures for prayer and reflection during the week, **cbm** stories of lives transformed, crafts, colouring-in activities for younger children, meaningful gift ideas for Christmas and

One of the stories of hope **cbm** will share is of Sabina, a courageous, and determined 9-year-old girl, who lives with her mother Devi and grandmother Mangali in Nepal.

They are from Nepal's lowest caste. Sabina's father died from typhoid when she was just a baby. Devi works hard, but her wages hardly feed them. Sabina loves school, but now cannot see. Cataracts have blinded her eyes. Unable to go to school, her future has faded as badly as her vision.

But there is hope for Sabina. Join [cbm's advent series](#) to hear more.

During this season, stories like Sabina's and videos about **cbm's** ministry to bring Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love to people with disabilities in the world's poorest places, will warm your heart. It will give you hope in difficult times and fill your house with peace.

Bring joy to the creative among your family with the Advent colouring-in templates and check out the guide on making your own Advent wreath.

Designed to create special moments at home, you can enjoy and deepen your experience of '[Advent at Home](#)' or share these thoughtful online activities with your Home Group.

You will also hear the lovely story of Huki, a very kind man from a little village in the Goroka region of the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. He even adopted a fatherless boy.

As his cataracts grew and thickened, he could no longer work. Finally, when he was completely blind, Huki could not fend for himself at all.

Huki's heart-breaking story has an ending that will warm your heart. In **cbm's** [Advent series](#), you can celebrate God's love for Huki. And for you, your family, and your neighbours. Today and tomorrow and the days beyond that. If you feel led by the Holy Spirit, why not tell your Church Leadership about this hope-filled series. Please encourage them to join with **cbm** and other Churches in Aotearoa in celebrating Advent this year.

Previous participants say:

"...weekly PowerPoint slides were a blessing for busy clergy."

"...beautifully crafted, reflective and meaningful."

If your Church would like to view the Week One Church Advent presentation to see how it could support your Church Advent programme (including the short video), please email Elizabeth at elizabeth@cbmnz.org.nz.



Interfaith Service: St Barnabas, Fendalton

A multicultural service co-hosted by The English Language Class at St Barnabas, Fendalton and Antioch (Young Adults Service) saw unity in diversity.

On a cool Sunday evening on 29 Oct 2023, the English Language Class co-hosted a multicultural service with Antioch (Young Adults Service) at St Barnabas Anglican Church, Fendalton.

St Barnabas, Fendalton ELC Coordinator Olive Lawson, and Young Adults Minister Andy Dickson worked together with international migrants and students for a contemplative and rich interfaith service inside the church memorial building.

Throughout the service, Olive warmly welcomed each person to St Barnabas, Fendalton and invited everyone to join in prayer. Jason, one of the first ELC graduates also shared his testimony:

"My name is Jason Yen. I am from Taiwan. I have been in New Zealand for over 8 years. I started coming to St Barnabas English class probably since 2017. Off and on it has been more than 6 years. I still remember how I found this class 6 years ago. I saw a small notice paper posted at Church Corner Mall. Then, I started to come to the class.

As a non-native English speaker in New Zealand, St Barnabas English class was a good place for me to get started and to discover the Kiwi life.

I enjoy this class because the atmosphere is surrounded by cultural diversity and well-prepared lessons.

The class is divided into small groups, led by enthusiastic volunteer tutors. This can make sure all learners are able to take part in the class.

Compared to 8 years ago, my English is good enough for me to get by my daily life. I am comfortable to use English most of the time, but still, I know I need to improve my language skills as well. We all know that any language study is a boring thing and quite challenging for most of learners (new vocabularies, complicated grammar, and get frustrated by different accents). But St Barnabas English class is a place I would like to keep coming. Although I don't come to class every Thursday as I did 6 years ago, I still recommend St Barnabas English class for new friends who want to try a casual but a fun way to learn English.

Lastly, I want to say that destiny is a strange thing. You never know who you will meet in the class at St Barnabas. When you encounter some difficulties in life, someone might give you a hand in time."

We were treated to colourfully rich traditional costumes from South Korea, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Thailand, and China; we heard different languages sung and spoken; we heard the Lord's Prayer spoken in Amharic; we listened to Dave Dobbyn's song "Welcome Home", written especially for migrants to New Zealand; we greeted each other with peace, and prayed for peace by placing candles.

One of four Buddhist monks spoke. It was their very first time being inside a church and they believe that we all share a common humanity. Later, Andy Dickson echoed that we are all human beings and we are all the same.

The evening finished with light refreshment at Fendall Hall next door and it was a joyous gathering of English Language tutors with their students.

Here is the Opening Prayer we said at this moving St Barnabas, Fendalton Interfaith Service:

*'Loving God, You created all people in your image,
We thank you for the amazing variety of races and cultures in this world,
Mysterious God, never confined by culture, class or creed, thank you for
newcomers who have left the security of family and friends to come to
New Zealand to become strangers in a strange land.*

*May we embrace the gift of new migrants;
including their skills, valuing their differences.
Teach us to love and respect those who are different from us for
we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.
This we ask in Jesus' name,
Amen.'*

Yvette Koo Butcher



Light and Darkness

The Venerable Indrea Alexander, Vicar of Ashburton takes a closer look at the light of Christ that shines in darkness.

Christians are people of unlikely hope. Every Christmas we tell a simple story of a baby born in a borrowed barn, and we herald it as the Earth-changing in-breaking of our life-giving God.

Those are big claims and though Christmas points back 2,000 years, the in-breaking of God continues in hearts and lives today. That healing and renewal gives us hope for today and for the future.

Every year, in the pre-Christmas season of Advent, we hope and pray, "Come, Lord Jesus." It is a traditional, relevant, heart-felt prayer.

We pray, "Come" with those who yearned for hundreds of years for the birth of the Messiah. We pray, "Come" with those eager for this year's Christmas nativity celebrations. We pray, "Come" into people's hearts today. We pray, "Come" as we look toward the return of Christ and the restoration of God's ways "on Earth as it is in heaven".

We pray with hope because we know that Jesus changes everything for the better. We have seen and experienced the change Jesus brings in people's lives. We know God transforms relationships and communities through Christians who share Jesus' ministry of justice, reconciliation and love. We pray with hope because we trust what God has done and will do - despite evidence to the contrary in the news.

Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann wrote,

"Hope in gospel faith is not just a vague feeling that things will work out, for it is evident that things will not just work out. Rather, hope is the conviction, against a great deal of data, that God is tenacious and persistent in overcoming the deathliness of the world, that God intends joy and peace. Christians find compelling evidence, in the story of Jesus, that Jesus, with great persistence and great vulnerability, everywhere he went, turned the enmity of society toward a new possibility, turned the sadness of the world toward joy, introduced a new regime where the dead are raised, the lost are found, and the displaced are brought home again."

We have a Christ-light that shines inside of the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.

Christian writer Richard Rohr put it like this,

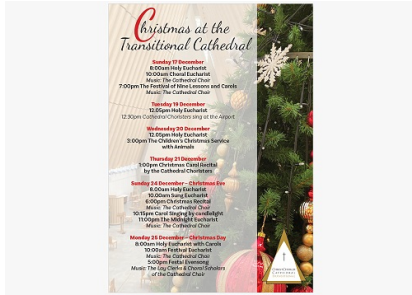
"We must all hope and work to eliminate darkness, especially in many of the great social issues of our time. We wish world hunger could be eliminated. We wish we could stop wasting the earth's resources on armaments. We wish we could stop killing people from womb to tomb. But at a certain point, we have to surrender to the fact that the darkness has always been here, and the only real question is how to receive the light and spread the light. That is not capitulation any more than the cross was capitulation. It is real transformation into the absolutely unique character and program of the risen Christ."

He calls Christians to name the darkness as darkness, and the Light as light, and to "Wait and work with hope inside of the darkness... never doubting the light that God always is - and that we are too."

Come, Lord Jesus, come. Renew us, transform us, and fill us with light and hope that spill into our communities.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)

The Venerable Indrea Alexander
Vicar of Ashburton



Christmas at the Transitional Cathedral

Come celebrate Christmas at the Transitional Cathedral.

Sunday 10 December

2pm A Christmas Miscellany

Readings and Music for the Christmas Season with Philip Aldridge

The Cathedral Singers with the Cathedral Brass and with singers and instrumentalists from St Michael's School

The Cathedral Brass conducted by Adrian Dalton

The Cathedral Singers conducted by Jill Kerr

Organist - Paul Brown

Sunday 17 December

8am Holy Eucharist

10am Choral Eucharist

Music: The Cathedral Choir

7pm The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols

Music: The Cathedral Choir

Tuesday 19 December

12.05pm Holy Eucharist

12.30pm Cathedral Choristers sing at the Airport

Wednesday 20 December

12.05pm Holy Eucharist

3pm The Children's Christmas Service

with Animals

Thursday 21 December

1pm Christmas Carol Recital

by the Cathedral Choristers

Sunday 24 December ~ Christmas Eve

8.00am Holy Eucharist

10.00am Sung Eucharist

6:00pm Christmas Recital

Music: The Cathedral Choir

10.15pm Carol Singing by candlelight

11pm The Midnight Eucharist

Music: The Cathedral Choir

Monday 25 December ~ Christmas Day

8am Holy Eucharist with Carols

10am Festival Eucharist

Music: The Cathedral Choir

5pm Festal Evensong

Music: The Lay Clerks & Choral Scholars of the Cathedral Choir



Share Food this Christmas

"He has filled the hungry with good things." (Luke 1:53a)

Christian World Service is inviting people to think of people who do not have enough food during the season of Advent and Christmas. Climate change is already affecting people who have nowhere left to turn.

At the centre of this year's Christmas Appeal is the story of a brave Sri Lankan farmer. Somawathie supports herself on a tiny plot of land by growing beans, peanuts and vegetables. However, the wild elephants that used to visit her land only occasionally are coming more often. They eat more of the food that she has worked hard to grow. As temperatures warm and climate change begins to bite, she is worried about the future and how she and the elephants will survive.

Small-scale farmers like Somawathie have faced conflict, drought and economic crises, but the climate crisis promises to be much worse. They need help now so they can learn new ways to grow food for their families and deal with mounting challenges – like wild elephants that can destroy months of hard work in minutes.

This year's [Christmas Appeal](#) will support the Movement for Land Agricultural Reform and other CWS partners helping small-scale producers like Somawathie. MONLAR focuses on eco- or regenerative agriculture – compost, mulch, improving soil, managing water and intercropping. Members share seeds and sometimes equipment. Local groups run field days, farm schools and one has set up a cooperative store, selling farm produce.

Members work together on campaigns – like finding ways to better manage wild elephants or asking the government to increase the basic pay rate of the workers on the tea estates and plantations.

Some years ago when her husband was still alive, the couple found they could no longer afford to buy seeds or fertilisers. They despaired about their future until they found Monlar. Her husband attended a farm school and instead of trying to buy costly fertilisers, they learned to make their own. They saved seeds for the next crop and made a better income overall. Somawathie is a firm believer in Monlar's approach.

Although her husband is no longer alive, Somawathie can grow just enough to live on - she says she will farm until she dies.

The elephants are becoming a bigger problem. Land that once belonged to the elephants has been cleared by government, large-scale business and other interests, forcing the animals to go further in search of food. As this has happened, the conflict between elephants and farmers is increasing – last year (2022) 145 people and 433 elephants were killed in human elephant encounters. Somawathie says elephants and people have a right to live.

[The Christmas Appeal](#) was first launched by Archbishop West Watson in 1945. Through the appeal, churches have helped families improve their livelihoods and live with dignity.

Posters, prayers and videos [are](#) available.



Episcopal Visit to Western Tanganyika

Bishop Peter Carrell and Teresa Kundycki-Carrell visited the Diocese of Western Tanganyika in Tanzania, Africa in September.

Introduction

Prompted by David Close, a former NZCMS missionary in the Diocese of Western Tanganyika (DWT), the current Bishop of

that Diocese, Bishop Emmanuel Bwatta and I met at the Lambeth Conference in 2022. +Emmanuel kindly followed up that meeting with an invitation to me to visit his Diocese.

Wonderfully, through the kindness of friends, Teresa was able to travel with me and share in the experience of engaging with this part of Anglicanism in Africa. We were away from Tuesday, 26 September to Wednesday, 11 October 2023.

For the 11 days we were in the Diocese we participated in nine confirmation services, one church opening service, visits to five other parishes, a visit to St Andrew's School, Kasulu and an associated unveiling of a foundation stone at the new greenfields site for the school, visits to five churches each of which is being rebuilt as a larger church, a visit to an orphanage and unveiling foundations stones for two new vicarages and a church office. Between +Emmanuel and myself we confirmed nearly 900 people.

At the penultimate service of our visit – in St Andrew's Cathedral, Kasulu – we were able to present gifts to Bishop Emmanuel and Mrs Jesline Bwatta on behalf of the Diocese of Christchurch. For +Emmanuel, a stole designed and made by Elizabeth Kimberley and for Jesline, a pounamu pendant.

Impressions

The strongest impression made on us during our travels was the growth of the churches in DWT, observable in services filled with people, especially young adults, teenagers, children and babies - combined with seeing construction of new, larger churches completed, nearly completed, or underway.

The contrast was clear with (say) our own Diocese of Christchurch which itself is illustrative of most Western Anglicanism - some growth, some decline, increasing average age of regular worshippers.

Church growth is possible in the 21st century - I have seen it with my own eyes!

Yet, even in the midst of this growth, it was intriguing to hear some similar concerns to ones here in our Diocese: where are the men? It was quite observable that women were the majority of each congregation. This is so, despite the clergy of DWT being exclusively male, and the membership of vestries being strongly, though not exclusively, male.

How do we hold our young people as they move into adulthood - out of education and into the wider world? Both questions are our questions here in Christchurch.

Seeing church growth in a diocese such as DWT made a great impression, not only about growth in people at worship, in size of church buildings and in new church plants, but also in the self-confidence of the African church. Our experience was of an Anglican church which has the confidence of knowing it is growing, it is contributing to community cohesion, and it is controller of its own destiny.

This impression of self-confidence was also of a church which despite its origins in British/European/Australasian missionary work, has moved a long way on from dependency on a far off mother church. This was a post-colonial church developing its own style, character and engagement with Tanzanian society and culture.

Insights

The cultural situations of Tanzania and New Zealand are very different in many ways, though we share

a love of smartphones! From a church and gospel perspective I have come away from Tanzania with the realisation that churches engage with the cultural hand they are dealt, and no church is necessarily better at that engagement than another.

In my understanding, the cultural hand dealt to the Anglican church in Tanzania is one in which natural population growth offers opportunity for churches to grow naturally as children are brought up in the faith.

Further, compared to the material, social, sporting and outdoor opportunities available in a country such as New Zealand (i.e. plenty of things to do at the weekend rather than participate in church), it struck me that there were few attractive alternative social or community engagements in Tanzania to being involved in church.

Thirdly, out of various conversations, my sense is that in Tanzania, the general cultural attitude to faith (Christianity or Islam) is that this is a good and normal thing. Compare to New Zealand culture, where actual Christian commitment demonstrated by regular church involvement is often seen as a weird and strange thing. That is, the cultural hand dealt to the Anglican church, indeed all churches in Tanzania, is a pretty good hand to be dealt when aspiring to lead churches into growth.

Image

An image in my mind is that if culture is the sea and the church is a surfer with a surfboard then the wave of Western culture has crashed down on the Western church. As a result, we are discombobulated and distracted as we ask the question, 'How can we get back on our surfboard and find a new wave to ride triumphantly?'

By contrast, on this imagery, the Anglican church and other churches in Tanzania are riding the crest of a wonderful wave. May it never crash down on them!

Bishop Peter



Going to the Chapel

If buildings could talk – we can only imagine the memories we'd hear from the Christchurch City Mission's very treasured chapel in Hereford Street.

This historic wooden wonder beside the Mission's Hereford St headquarters will celebrate its 135th Christmas next month and it is still at the heart of how the Mission looks after our community.

In the weekend before Christmas Day, the chapel will be decorated and filled with presents, Father Christmas, several elves and they will bring joy to hundreds of happy excited young children who will receive gifts their parents could never afford to give them.

The City Mission has distributed presents to the city's children since its very beginnings. Now the chapel has become the distribution point and filling its old walls with the joy of children seems so right. Every Christmas, Christchurch people, organisations, schools, church groups donate presents to the City Mission to give to children facing a Christmas with nothing.

City Missioner, Corinne Haines remembers doing exactly that when she was a child.

"We used to bus into the city with big excitement to visit the Cathedral in the Square, with presents in hand to place under the tree, and to look with wonder at the Nativity Scene on display. It was a special time of choosing a present that we would like to receive ourselves, but that we would offer as a gift to those less fortunate than ourselves. I continued that routine that with my children in their early years."

The City Mission will find 500 children from among its regular clients – families it knows need this gift with parents who will be relieved their children can share in Christmas excitement like all the others. Presents for at least another 250 children will go out to other agencies around the city who have children who need some Christmas joy and depend on the Mission to help in this way.

This is just the latest chapter in the chapel's long, long story but it might be one of the most heartwarming, its role moving from end of life to beginning of life.

The chapel is a Heritage listed building and was built in 1888 (in early English Gothic style) to serve as the Lower Heathcote Church of England Cemetery's funeral chapel, just in time to be consecrated before that year's Christmas. Only a few blocks away the Jubilee Home in the St John's parish was also opened – this was for "the care and housing of the destitute and infirm" – an interesting coincidence given its home with us now.

In 1949, the chapel moved to the Jubilee Home where it was used for regular services as well as funeral services. In 1991, the chapel was moved to the City Mission site in Hereford Street and in 2014 it crossed the road to arrive at the present location next to the headquarters building.

Now it fulfils a spiritual role and a place where St Luke's Inner City Chaplain, Chris Orczy can connect with the City Mission community and where he plans to give regular Sunday services.

Of course, the presents for children are only a tiny part of the huge effort the City Mission will be making this Christmas to support the hardest hit individuals and families in our community.

The foodbank will go into overdrive during the last week before Christmas and will provide 1,800 special Christmas food parcels for our regular clients. This a huge task for us because in a regular week there are about 350 parcels supplied. In one week, we will give at least 6,000 people – many of them children – the food they wouldn't have for a Christmas celebration at home.

Meanwhile, our other services, our addiction counsellors, our social workers, our housing navigators, our community development workers, our financial mentors, our day programme staff, our emergency night shelter staff, our medical staff will give everything to support the people who come to us for help and who find the Christmas season so stressful, lonely and expensive.

On Christmas Day itself, up to 50 people living with us on our site will have Christmas dinner with us. They will be our guests in our men's and women's emergency shelters for homeless people, residents in our transitional housing building and in our live-in detox unit. They will be our family and know their community cares and that they belong.

If you would like to know more about the City Mission, or support it this Christmas, please visit at citymission.org.nz.

Ewan Sargent



mainly music turns 20 in Fendalton

Liz Yeoh, mainly music Coordinator at St Barnabas, Fendalton shares about the 20th celebration, a testimony, and the ethos of mainly music.

"Kanikani! Takahia! Pakipaki!"

Children dancing, stomping their feet, clapping their hands, families laughing in a room filled with such joy! So much fun

can be had at mainly music sessions from tapping claves, catching bean bags, waving parachutes, reaching in and out, high and low, learning about God's love and how we are special from head to toe!

These are just some of the things that occur at mainly music sessions across churches in Christchurch, throughout New Zealand, and around the world. St Barnabas Anglican Church, Fendalton recently celebrated their 20th birthday of running mainly music. It was great to have some photos taken that truly capture the essence of a session, portraying the five values of mainly music - generosity, connection, creativity, celebration and honour!

Each week St Barnabas, Fendalton has a dedicated team of volunteers who willingly and enthusiastically come to help set up and run the session. From placing hand-written name tags on the welcome table, starting up the computer, Powerpoint and sound system, laying out streamers on the mat for our welcome song, handing out and collecting in props, like parachutes and clave sticks, getting toys out, shifting tables and serving morning tea (with baking provided by additional volunteers) and

talking with young families. In addition to planning the music programme and various craft activities, there are so many roles that one can partake in on the day, and all are valuable in ensuring a smooth-running session - despite the odd hiccup with tech going haywire, of course!

As part of our 20th year celebration which took place recently at our regular Friday session, we also incorporated it into the following Sunday and heard from Dot Brown:

"... I took my own three children 25 years ago in Dunedin and now I'm taking my 18-month granddaughter, Zoe, to mainly music at St Barnabas, Fendalton. First, we enjoy going because it is fun! Singing about monkeys jumping on the bed and hot potatoes but the bean song beats them all...green beans, jelly beans and runner beans. We go on train journeys and come back again. We join the foot bone to the ankle bone, the leg bone to the hip bone and the back bone to the head bone. Anatomy hasn't changed much over the years even if train journeys have become more scarce! In this world of polarised views, greed and hate, mainly music is a safe place from all of that, which makes it refreshing and fun."

"More importantly to me, mainly music has integrity. It is a church-based programme for the community. Thirty minutes of singing followed by morning tea is such a simple model but it has been so successful at St Barnabas because it is true to the Christian faith. We sing about Jesus loving you on your birthday, we pray for you on your birthday (if you are under six!) and we sing grace. We bring Jesus into some of our songs. The culture in mainly music is unapologetically Christian. A wonderful part that speaks to this culture is the morning tea supplied and served by St Barnabas people, week in, week out for the term with volunteers who are warm and welcoming. Today, the group stands on the shoulders of the church people who started it 20 years ago. I get the impression they created the mainly music culture from the beginning and I'm sure this is the reason it has lasted the distance and is thriving. It is this integrity that brought me back to the church and I am starting to go to the Lifestream service on Sundays where I find the same friendly warm welcome and real Christian faith."

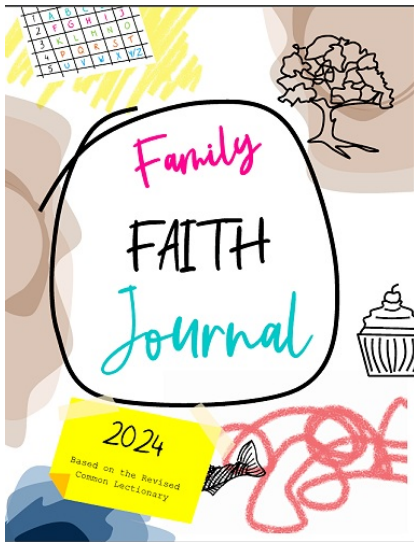
There are many groups that run throughout the week all over Christchurch. Each mainly music group has their own style and flair, and builds on the connections made over time from previous volunteers; songs that have been sung, props and crafts that have been handmade, people who have been honoured and milestones that have been celebrated. Many a gift given, either handmade or bought, for special occasions like Easter, Mother's and Father's Days, Matariki and Christmas! It's a lot of fun planning the parties and making those sessions extra special.

1 Corinthians 12:12 says, "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ." Just so with mainly music with all the helpers involved.

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10). We couldn't run a mainly music session without the help of volunteers, the generosity of St Barnabas, Fendalton, and also the families who attend! *He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata he tangata he tangata!* (What is the most important thing? It is people, it is people, it is people!)

Te Aroha, te whakapono, me te rangimarie, tatou tatou e!
Love, Faith and Peace to us all!

Liz Yeoh



Journal and books for gifts

Emma Tovey, our Diocesan Children's Ministry Developer shares some of her favourite reading materials.

[Indescribable Kids](#) publications (also available from [Christianbook](#))

[The Garden, the Curtain and the Cross](#) (also available from [Christianbook](#))

This lectionary-based journal will help families to discover more of the Bible together. With one reading for each week, the journal includes a reading, activity, prayer, and questions for families to read together.

Please contact Emma cmd@anglicanlife.org.nz to order your Family Faith Journal copy.

Donations gratefully received.

Emma Tovey



Eco Church NZ: Nurturing Faith, Sowing Sustainability

An introduction to Eco Church NZ by James Beck, Eco Church Regional Coordinator - South Island.

Across Aotearoa New Zealand, a green revolution is taking root within the Church community, and it goes by the name of Eco Church NZ. This pioneering movement, rooted in a deep

commitment to environmental stewardship, is weaving a tapestry of faith and sustainability across our islands.

A Green Genesis:

The Eco Church movement finds its roots in a global call to action, a response to the urgent need for faith communities to engage with the ecological challenges of our time. In Aotearoa, the journey began within A Rocha, an international Christian Conservation organisation which has 40 years' worth of experience supporting Christians to engage in creation care. The movement has quickly gained momentum, and is evolving into a profound exploration of how spirituality and sustainability can harmonise.

Purpose and Ideals:

Eco Church NZ is not just a movement; it's an invitation to deeply embed the biblical imperative to care for creation. At its core, it urges churches to reflect on the environmental impact of their worship, buildings, and daily lives. The goal is to align faith with sustainable actions, transforming places of worship into hubs of ecological awareness and positive change.

The recent [Faith and Belief study and Church Life Survey](#) show that there is growing concern about the state of the environment. 37% of people who live in Aotearoa New Zealand said that the state of the planet was the main thing that they felt hopeless about when they look to the future. In the Church Life Survey, 95% of Christians said that they believed that the Church had a responsibility to act on climate issues, however on 18% of Christians had been actively involved in climate issues.

Aotearoa New Zealand needs the church to take action.

Resources for a Green Journey:

Embarking on an Eco Church journey is made easier with the wealth of resources available. The Eco Church website serves as a hub for information, offering practical guides, educational materials, and inspiring stories. From practical tips for sustainable living to liturgical resources that bridge spirituality and environmental consciousness, Eco Church equips congregations to make a meaningful impact.

In urban hubs and rural landscapes alike, Eco Church success stories are blossoming. Urban churches in Christchurch are embracing solar energy and rainwater harvesting and reducing their carbon footprint. Meanwhile, rural communities are championing regenerative agricultural practices, riparian planting and native regeneration fostering a connection between faith and the land. No church is too small to make a significant contribution to a sustainable future.

A lot of people doing a little can change a lot. It really can be small changes, especially around things that we do all of the time. Christmas is a great example!

Simple Tips for an Eco-Friendly Christmas:

Christmas tree

- Use a pot plant for a Christmas tree.
- Buy a tree from a nursery and make that your Christmas tree - then plant it after Christmas.
- Make your own Christmas tree ideas - using driftwood, using fairy lights on a wall, using sticks / dowels, books, etc.

Christmas cards

- Make your own Christmas cards.
- Use items from nature - write messages on shells and driftwood.
- Purchase cards that support a cause.
- Write a Christmas letter or email instead.

Gift Wrapping

- Reuse wrapping paper.
- Use items from the op shop as gift wrappers - fabric cut-offs, scarves, bags, baskets, jars, kete, tins, even clothes that can then be worn!
- Newspaper or magazine pages wrapping.
- Reusable gift bags.
- Decorate wrapping with leaves and flowers.

You can find more ideas at <https://www.ecochurch.org.nz/sustainable-christmas>

Join the Green Community:

Becoming a part of the Eco Church movement is a step towards a brighter, more sustainable future. Churches eager to be a part of this journey can visit the Eco Church NZ website, where a straightforward process awaits to assess, plan, and implement eco-friendly practices within their community.

The best place to start is to become an Eco Church. And it is easy. Churches do not need to be carbon neutral before they join the Eco Church network! By becoming a part of the network churches are simply making a commitment to a journey towards sustainability. The Eco Church network is supported by a team, who will help each congregation to assess their current ecological impact, set some goals and take action. It can be as small as turning off the lights and as big as planting an urban orchard.

As Eco Church NZ continues to grow, every church becomes a part of the good news as demonstrated by the partnership between faith and environmental responsibility. Through shared commitment and small, impactful changes, the Anglican Diocese can cultivate a legacy of stewardship, one that resonates with the earth and reverberates through the generations to come.

James Beck

james.beck@arocha.org



Easter Camp 2023 was Incredible!

"Although it was a potential recipe for disaster, it was one of the greatest Easter Camps I have ever attended."

This year, the youth groups of St Barnabas in Fendalton and St Timothy's in Burnside combined for Easter Camp. This extended to several youths from the West Coast. Although such a mixed combination along with the danger of Covid cancelling the event was a potential recipe for disaster, it was one of the greatest Easter Camps I have ever attended. The feedback from youth and leaders was overwhelmingly positive as connections were formed between them and with God.

Our time together began on the Wednesday. Older youths and leaders filled a truck with furniture, supplies and snacks for the long weekend. We spent much of that evening transforming our marquee into a homely space complete with fairy lights, couches, bean bags and fridge. The only thing missing was a kitchen sink!

Over the weekend, there were regular worship sets and talks at the *Big Top*. This massive tent-like structure housed thousands of youths from all over the South Island. After the *Big Top* sessions, we'd break into small groups to discuss the talk. For many, this was also a highlight in which thoughts could be shared without judgement and to discuss things that 'really matter'.

The weekend also had many moments of down time to explore or be one as a community. There were card and board games played in the marquee, inter-parish games of volleyball with Bishop Peter Carrell, Diocesan-wide Night Prayers as well as a few who 'closed their eyes' on the couches to make up for talking to their fellow campers for half the night.

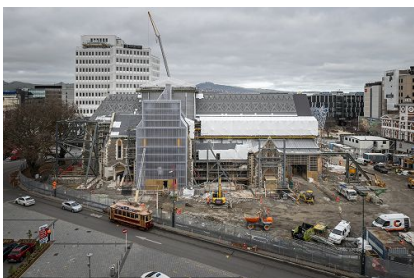
A favourite moment of mine was the second night of Easter Camp. Typically, most youth want to leave the compulsory meeting as soon as possible to explore the nightlife. However, seven of our youth and two leaders decided to stay for almost an hour later to pray and worship. One leader from St Barnabas Fendalton encountered the Holy Spirit for the first time and the youth all wanted to make commitments to God. Two nights later, one youth went from hating the compulsory *Big Top* meetings to wanting to follow Jesus.

By Sunday, it was finally time for us to explore the Nightlife because every other night we had been busy praying with youth!

Nathan Muirhead
Youth Minister

"I found Easter Camp provided a great way to deepen and strengthen friendships but also my relationship with God. I loved the atmosphere around camp. Easter Camp was so much fun and I loved it!" - Evie

"Easter Camp was a super enjoyable time for me. I especially liked the community we had established between the youth groups which allowed for great discussions and conversations with youth, camp parents, and leaders. Alongside just general good times in the marquee playing board games and hanging out, I also really enjoyed the atmosphere in the Anglican party central area, allowing us to reconnect with others, as well as meet and get to know new youth, play volleyball and come together for night prayer." - Flo



CCRL Update

A Christmas update from Mark Stewart, Chair of Christ Church Cathedral Reinstatement Ltd (CCRL).

Christ Church Cathedral has stood in the heart of our region for more than 142 years and, within its walls, are stories of history, faith, and community. Beyond religious ceremonies, the Cathedral has served as a communal hub bringing people from all walks of life together, celebrating the rich tapestry of

human expression.

As we approach our Christmas break, it's a fitting moment to pause and contemplate the progress we've made reinstating Christ Church Cathedral.

March of this year marked a significant milestone as, after 12 years, we gained access inside the Cathedral. This event was profoundly moving and spiritual for many. The stabilisation phase is now finished, involving the construction of a substantial steel support frame to ensure the building's safety—408 tonnes of steel now buttress the Cathedral, equivalent to the combined weight of 68 elephants!

Re-entering the Cathedral was a crucial project milestone, enabling us to conduct extensive investigations and consider the necessary work to strengthen and reinstate it. As a result of this we are now meticulously assessing our design, planned methods, programme, and costs.

Despite the challenges, the reinstatement is in capable hands. Research from last year revealed that 74 percent of residents view the Cathedral as an essential part of the city's future, with 62 percent expressing a desire for its return—a testament to our collective unity.

Our fundraising efforts persist, and we extend gratitude to all contributors. In 2024, we will launch our Anglican Campaign, led by Bishop Peter Carrell. Our focus remains on completing the reinstatement of this beautiful building.

We are also very conscious that the Cathedral represents so many different things to many people. For Anglicans the Cathedral symbolises the centre of their faith, while for others it represents the physical and symbolic heart of our region. However diverse in the meaning of the Cathedral to each of us, CCRL remain focused on completing the reinstatement of this important heritage building, and ensure that more stories of history, faith and community are shared for many years to come.

Wishing you and your whānau, Merry Christmas from all of us at CCRL.

Mark Stewart

Chair, Christ Church Cathedral Reinstatement Ltd (CCRL)



Raspberry Cheesecake recipe

Celia Quinnell, Property Manager at Church Property Trustees makes this Annabel Langbein recipe with her own interpretation. We recently had a taste of it and now know why it is a firm favourite with Celia's family at every Christmas.

This is a rich yet not overly sweet with the perfect texture of a raspberry cheesecake. Celia loves making this cheesecake ahead, storing it in the refrigerator.

Makes: 1 x 23cm cheesecake or 12-14 servings

Ingredients:

200g Arnotts shortbread fingers biscuits or Gingernuts
100g salted butter, melted and hot

Filling:

5 gelatine leaves (silver strength)

1/2 cup cold water to soak, or more as needed for gelatine leaves

250g frozen raspberries

15ml / 1 tbsp fresh lemon juice

400g Philadelphia cream cheese (room temperature)

190g / 1 cup less 2 tbsp caster sugar

3 egg yolks (size 7 eggs, room temperature)

200ml / 3/4 cup chilled cream (Westgold UHT)

Line baking paper on the bottom of the loose bottom tin (I find it really helpful when transferring the finished cake to a serving plate at the end). Mix biscuit crumbs and butter together. Press firmly and evenly into the base of a 23cm springform cake tin. Chill.

Filling: Soak gelatine leaves in cold water until soft and squeeze out excess water before using.

Place two-thirds of the raspberries in a pot with lemon juice and gelatine. Heat, swirling the pot occasionally, until berries have thawed and gelatine is melted. Do not stir and mush. (Mixture should be hot but not at boiling point). Remove from heat. Don't let it get too cold and start to set. If it does, gently warm it again.

Beat cream cheese with electric beater until smooth and lump-free. Beat in sugar and egg yolks, scraping down the sides of the bowl to evenly incorporate mixture. Gently stir in berry mixture.

Whip cream to very soft peaks and fold into cream cheese mixture along with remaining raspberries. Pour over base and chill 2-3 hours until set before adding topping.

Topping: Warm raspberry coulis and strain through a sieve, discarding seeds. Return to saucepan and add soaked gelatine, stirring over heat until dissolved. Take off heat and stand until just warm. Pour over the back of a spoon onto cheesecake and chill until set.

Cheesecake will keep 4-5 days in the fridge, sealed with plastic wrap to prevent the absorption of any fridge odours.

When ready to serve, run a hot knife around the inside of the tin to free the cheesecake before lifting off the sides of the tin.

Celia Quinnell



The Importance of Stillness and Silence in our Lives

Every day but especially these days

Because we link Christmas with summer holidays it so often comes with a mad rush as loose ends are tied up and all sorts of gatherings claim our time. We may sing carols like *Silent Night* but silence and stillness don't fit the season. Christmas is about fitting everything in, facing the crowds at the mall, stocking the freezer, and organizing the family. Spare a

thought for the vicar who also has to organise the Christmas services.

Amidst the business of his own life Jesus would often withdraw to a place of stillness and solitude where he would pray. He recognised that rush and busy-ness means we easily lose touch with our souls or God-centre. We often see prayer as speaking with God and even trying to get God to fulfil our needs. In quietness Jesus teaches us that at the core of prayer is transformation. The apostle Paul says we need to be transformed by God so we do not just fit into the world but can live to a different drum beat that is true, life giving, and encourages the authentic person God has called into being to flourish (Romans 12:2).

Our God is an inviting God who often speaks in whispers or quietly nudging our lives. God so often speaks from a deep place within inviting us into authenticity. It is therefore easy to separate our lives from God when noise and activity determine the shape of our lives.

Christmas with its invitation to allow Christ to be born again into our lives is an invitation to go beyond the busyness and activity of the season to go deeper and seek the transformational presence of Christ.

This Advent and Christmas we invite you to slow down and get contemplative in the more *unusual* spaces for stillness and silence...

While shopping or doing errands...

Use these moments, for example when you wait at the checkout... Let your waiting in line be an invitation to reflect on what we are waiting for this Christmas? How is Christ present (or not evidently present) at this moment of waiting? What are our human desires and longings that are reflected in our actions this time of year? Turn this waiting into a micro-moment of contemplation and prayer.

Turn your Christmas preparation into a Monastic activity

Hanging lights, preparing an Advent Wreath, decorating a tree and baking cookies can be highly contemplative acts as they are all acts of preparation, a truly Advent-ian activity. As you do them, be present in this moment of baking, hanging lights, arranging the greenery, etc. Contemplate your hopes

for this season. Turn those hopes into prayers as you tell God about your longings for Christmastime. And let the time of preparation be also an opportunity for listening. What is God telling you during this time of preparation?

Saint Benedict believed we should live in a way that combines the contemplative life intertwined with a life of action, expressing the importance of both. Whether you are scrubbing the floor, wrapping gifts or baking Christmas cookies, we can do so with an awareness that glorifies God.

Practice fasting...

Fasting is not only for Lent, try it this time around Christmas. One of our biggest complaints leading into Christmas is often centered on the season's consumerism. So, this Christmas... be a rebel against the commercialism of the season by fasting from something. It could be sweets, but it could also be social media, flicking through reels, or another digital pastime... And so open up a space for God, the Divine and to contemplate the great mystery that is Christmas, God becoming one of us... Go a step further and re-think your presents - try to spend as little as possible, make them yourself, up-cycle, etc.

Do Visio Divina with the images of Advent and Christmas

Our Advent and Christmas season is rich in imagery, from lights, garlands, trees, to (real and fake) greenery and much more. Let those images, colours, (even smells and sounds) speak to you. Everything can be a visual reminder of God's presence in our life if we want this to be. What do the images represent? What hopes are they speaking of? What might they tell you at this moment of time? What does God want to inspire you?

Advent Calendars...

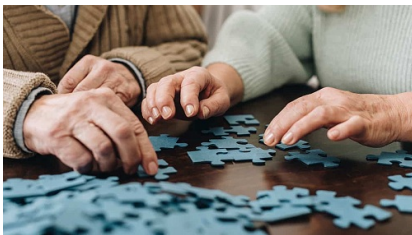
It is never too late to start your Advent Calendar. They don't necessarily have to be chocolate. Make your own or have a look at online Advent Calendars available. They give you daily inspiration for that precious time preparing and waiting for Christmas...

If you feel you want to dedicate special time for contemplation, we invite you to come to Sister Eveleen Retreat House in the new year. You could sign up for one of our guided retreats: from one day; two days; a weekend; or seven days of silent, quiet or focused on a special spirituality. Or, book in for your own self-guided overnight stay in our beautiful space in the most stunning location in Sumner.

www.sistereretreat.com

Wishing all a blessed Advent and Christmas and the courage to pause and be transformed.

Dugald Wilson (Board member), and Antje Duda (Director)



God alongside Us - Sheer Strangeness of Christianity

This Advent and Christmas celebrate the strangeness of the God who draws alongside us as one of us.

My wife Pip and I love doing puzzles. It's a challenge, it's companionable but most importantly we work alongside each other. We're both working on the same thing and there's no

competition! We have the same goal, and we can both be winners when that last piece goes in.

There's something about being alongside one another that's very satisfying. It's not a one-on-one competition – face to face – nose to nose – the winner takes it all. It's alongside – a posture of humility, cooperation and friendship.

The wars that are taking place today are an extreme example of competition. Think of the trenches in the Russia-Ukraine war – think of the battle lines in Gaza. This is not alongside but face to face confrontation.

Jesus came into a world of confrontation and extreme coercion. Judea, where he was born, was occupied by the Romans – the mightiest military power in ancient times. With the Romans there were only two options – cooperation or death. And the bodies of the crucified on the main roads into Jerusalem were a constant reminder of who was in charge and the cost of resistance.

But into this world of suffering and coercion, God sent his Son. At Advent and Christmas, we turn our thoughts to this momentous event - when God became a human being and dwelt among us. I suppose God could have come to us in any number of ways or communicated using any channel he chose. But it's fundamentally instructive and illuminating that God chose to come alongside us as a human being.

Now some find this whole idea of the incarnation a preposterous thing. Theologians have called it 'the scandal of particularity' because at first glance it seems ludicrous that the eternal God should enter human history in this very localised way – alongside us. Why should this one man, Jesus Christ, have universal significance? And doesn't focussing on a particular religion, lead to arrogance and bigotry - the one thing that the world can do without? And didn't Jesus himself epitomise the scandal when he said, "No one comes to the Father but through me?" - John 14:6.

To answer this, I invite you to take another look at Jesus. The scandal of particularity says that God loved humankind so much, that he became a human being, speaking a language understood by people. Jesus was a Jew, spoke the language of the Jews and used the thought forms of the Jews to communicate with people. God's love found local and particular expression first and then it spread out to the world. In Jesus, God drew alongside us – without coercion but with empathy, understanding and great humility.

Furthermore, God committed himself fully and permanently to our humanity through his Son Jesus Christ. The eternal entered time and the infinite entered space – alongside us. God bound himself to our humanity never again to lay it aside. He embraced our humanity with such intensity, that all of humanity is represented in this one person. And so in this way the single man Jesus, is indeed qualified to be the saviour of all.

Celebrated historian Tom Holland in his book 'Dominion' said,

"To be a Christian is to believe that God became man and suffered a death as terrible as any mortal has ever suffered. This is why the cross, that ancient implement of torture, remains what it has always been: the fitting symbol of the Christian revolution. It is the audacity of it—the audacity of finding in a twisted and defeated corpse the glory of the creator of the universe—that serves to explain, more surely than anything else, the sheer strangeness of Christianity."

Christianity is strange because of the posture of God. God drew alongside us in Jesus and draws alongside us still by his Holy Spirit. Let us celebrate and glory in our 'alongside God' this Advent and Easter. Amen.

The Ven. Canon Mark Chamberlain



What I learned at the Multifaith Breakfast

By Rev'd Dr John Fox, Senior Chaplain at University of Canterbury

Because the University of Canterbury is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, I was (very kindly) invited to consult on appropriate celebrations in "the faith space"—and I learned a lot.

The first thing I learned is that everyone is kinda muddled about the public recognition of faith. Yes, Christianity is important (Canterbury College has "ecclesiastical connections" after all, although they're carefully vague); but what shall we do about other faiths? International students? Secular people? It all gets complicated very quickly, and so it is easier for some people either to ignore faith entirely, or to reduce it to something non-threatening ("Costumes and Music of the World"). To its credit, UC acknowledges the key role played by faith in its history, and continuing partnership with faith groups, including staff and students now. So we tried to value everyone, with a Service in the Cathedral for Christians, and a multifaith event for everyone else. Good call, UC: faith matters.

Second, I learned the importance of respecting everyone's sacred values, and not doing too much. I asked Christians, Muslims, Jews, Bahai, Sikhs, Quakers and Buddhists what they'd turn up to. Everyone agreed: no interfaith service. No skating over our differences. But we all like food. And we all were willing to listen. So, "Interfaith event, TBC?" became "Breakfast in Student Union": and negotiating the demands for different religious dietary requirements, and kosher plates, and tofu eggs was totally worth it. We turned up. We ate. We listened. And we celebrated.

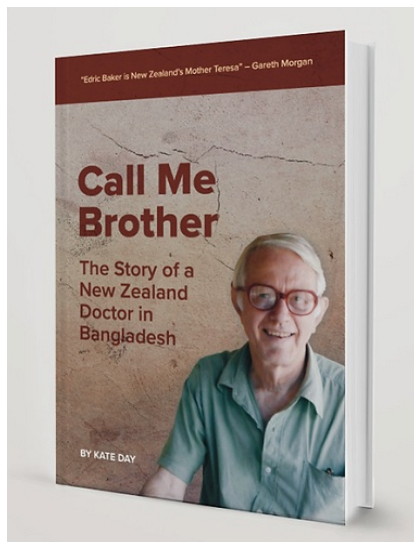
We disagree about the nature of God/the gods/the Universe. And our differences matter profoundly to life, death, and life after death. But if we took that as read, we were able to focus on the things we do agree on. The importance of spiritual values. Respect for students of faith. The value of religious

conscience. The value of family and community life, humanity and good neighbourliness. That isn't everything. But it isn't nothing either. We agree in large part on important parts of the campus we want to live in, and the mutual respect, good disagreement and honest dialogue we'd like to have.

And on the subject of honest dialogue, we had it. The Jewish representatives gave full rein to their genuine pain, sense of alienation and threat, given the brutal attacks in the Gaza Strip in October, highlighting the growing climate of anti-semitism. The Muslim students too stressed the profound importance of the Holy Land: and as one might expect, the atmosphere grew thick with ancient and profound pain. As I was throwing in an unscheduled moment of silence for peace, I reflected on two interlocking realities: we can get so far simply by treating our neighbours as truth-seeking beings made in God's image. Yet and still, we cannot heal everything, reconcile everything, or manage everything. Honest dialogue, and passionate disagreement will occur. And we should not be threatened by them.

I want all my neighbours to repent and believe the good news. I want the whole world to know the Christmas Truce that Jesus brings: God touching all men and women of goodwill. Yet and still, the fullness of that peace belongs only to Him. And as we pray "thy kingdom come", we still have to get along with our neighbours. We still have to listen to those very different than we are, and find a way of serving and bearing with one another. And we share a country, and a little blue planet. So, we must start somewhere. I thank God we are in the same room. That we can hear one another. That we are at peace. I thank him for my tofu eggs.

Rev'd Dr John Fox



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