

Services April 2022			
3 rd April Lent 5 Passion Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Isaiah 43 vv 16-21 p729 Philippians 3 vv 1-14 p1180 John 12 vv 1-8 p1079	
10 th April Palm Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton (Procession from church hall) 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Philippians 2 vv 5-11 p1179 Matthew 27 vv 1-54 p998	
14 th April Maundy Thursday	9.30 Holy Communion Halling. (Please ask if you want me to do an evening service at Cuxton.)	I Corinthians 11 vv 17-34 Luke 23 vv 1-49 p1059	
15 th April Good Friday	9.30 Family Service 11.00 Ante-Communion Halling	Hebrews 10 vv 1-25 p1208 John 19 vv 1-37 p1087	
17 th April Easter Day	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Colossians 3 vv 1-7 p1184 John 20 vv 1-10 p1089	
24 th April Easter 1 / 2	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Acts 5 vv 27-32 p1097 John 20 vv 19-31 p1089	
31 st April Easter 2 / 3	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Acts 9 vv 1-6 p1102 John 21 vv 1-19 p1090	
Holy Communion Cuxton Wednesdays 9.30		Holy Communion Halling Thursdays 9.30	
6 th April	Jeremiah 33 vv 1-13 John 13 vv 1-11	7 th April	Jeremiah 33 vv 14-26 John 13 vv 12-20
Holy Week			
13 th April	Hebrews 9 vv 16-28 Luke 22 vv 1-71	14 th April Maundy Thursday	I Corinthians 11 vv 17-34 Luke 23 vv 1-49
Easter			
20 th April	Exodus 13 vv 1-16 Matthew 28 vv 16-20	21 st April	Song of Solomon 2 vv 8-17 Mark 16 vv 1-20
27 th April	Exodus 17 vv 1-16 John 20 vv 24-31	28 th April	Exodus 18 vv 1-12 John 21 vv 1-14

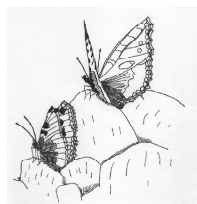
Copy Date May Magazine 8th April 8.30 am Rectory

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St John's Draw (February): £10 each Mrs Bridges (41) & Mrs Hayward (80)
Church Hall Draw (March): winners Mrs Fenton-Scott, Mrs Crundwell, Mrs Streets



Why I'm a Christian

Why I'm a Christian was going to be my title for this month's message from the Rector, but it isn't. When I came to think about it, *Why I'm a Christian* is the wrong title for this letter for at least two reasons. I am not a Christian because I chose to be. I didn't choose God. He chose me. And that's true of all you Christians out there. You did not become Christians because you were so wonderfully perceptive that you worked out the Truth of God for yourself. It was He Who made Himself known to you. It wasn't because you were so virtuous or so clever that you recognised the Truth when He stood in front of you. You accepted Jesus into your life because He invited

you to do so, because He forgave your sins and because He knows your every weakness and still loves you just as you are. Jesus says to us, *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.* (John 15¹⁶). And that explains all the circumstances which led you to Christ – the influence of other people, sermons you may have heard, discussions you may have had, any religious experiences you may have been granted. I don't think of myself as special. I'm not vain because Christ called me to be one of His people. He called me in spite of the fact that I in no way deserve His Love. How many other people are chosen? Who else is chosen? Is everybody eventually chosen? I don't know. I'm not God. *Who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him*

that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?
That's Romans 9²⁰. I struggle with Romans 9.

That's one reason why *Why I'm a Christian* would be a bad title for this epistle. God only knows why I'm a Christian. And the same thought applies to you too! So, if you want other people to become Christians, you need to pray to God that He will give them the grace to discern the Truth.

The other reason I can't use that title is because it smacks of the slightly disreputable Pascal's wager. That goes something like this. You calculate whether to believe in God on the basis of the risks and benefits involved in believing or not believing. If you do believe in God, you have all the advantages of religious faith here on earth and ultimately you have no fear of death. If it turns out that you are right, you spend eternity in heaven. If it were to turn out that there is no God, you'd never find that out, because you would cease to exist when you died. So you wouldn't experience disappointment. If, on the other hand, you don't believe in God, you miss out on the benefits of religious faith here on earth, and if you are right, you never find out because you cease to exist when you die, whereas, if you're wrong and God does exist after all, you face His wrath in all eternity. So it's smart to wager that God exists. If it turns out that He does, you gain everything. If it turned out that He didn't exist, there would be nothing to lose and you wouldn't know that you'd lost it anyway.

But offering your life to Jesus can't simply be based on a calculation. A proposition is true or it is not. You don't believe it because the truth makes you feel better about yourself and the world. You believe it because it is true. It's building your house on sand if you believe in comforting falsehoods. Moreover, we sometimes have to face the fact that the Truth may be uncongenial. For example, Jesus tells us that we must love our enemies.

Hopefully, you've indulged me in letting me tell you about the two letters I didn't write for this month and why I didn't write them. Now let me have a go at a title for the message I do want to write. *What Being a Christian Means To Me* might cover it. As we're coming up to Easter, let me cite this Easter chorus.

He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives
today!

He walks with me and talks with me
along life's narrow way.

He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart!

You ask me how I know He lives?

He lives within my heart.

Being a Christian means that I know that Jesus is always with me. I know that I can trust God for myself, for my family, for the Church, for the world, for the universe, for day to day living, for all the details of our earthly lives and for the whole of eternity.

Finally, the world makes sense. There is meaning and purpose in creation. Things happen for a reason, whether on the celestial, international, national or personal level. God is in control and His purposes are good, even though we may not understand them. It will all work out. *God is working His purposes out.*

My life makes sense. I'm here for a reason. We're not just here by chance. We're not just here for our own selfish purposes. We're not just here to live out our days and then to die. We don't inhabit an impersonal, uncaring universe. God loves every one of us. Things don't just happen. God is in control. Matthew 10^{28ff}: *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

God has a plan for my life. The time, talents, opportunities, resources and gifts He has given me, He has given me in order that I should be able to fulfil His purpose for my life, to do all the good works He has prepared for me to walk in. The same is true of you. Let go and let God.

I can talk to God and He hears me. I can discuss all life's problems with Him. I confess my sins, knowing that He forgives every sinner for Jesus' sake. I give Him thanks and praise for all the good things He has given me. I keep seeing in the *self help* pages in newspapers that one of the keys

to a happy life is to be thankful. I don't know how people can be thankful if they don't know Whom to thank for all the blessings we have all received.

God talks to me in many, many ways, including the words of the Bible, my conscience, my experience of prayer, in the voices of other people, through literature, in the wonders of nature. The Bible tells me how I ought to live, the way I should behave. It teaches me what to believe about God. It reveals His promises to me. The Bible shows us how to live, how to act in relation to God and to other people. It points the way to an understanding of the deepest of mysteries. We find in the Bible the words of eternal life, the story of Jesus, the Word made flesh, the One Who is the Resurrection and the Life.

Jesus makes Himself known to me and to all who come to His table in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. I was going to write that He reveals Himself to those who come to His table in faith, which He does. But He is also present to those who come to Holy Communion but not in faith and hope and love. To them He comes in judgment. That is why it is so important to come to Holy Communion in the right spirit, repenting

of our sins, forgiving those who have wronged us, mindful of all that Christ has done for us and anticipating His Presence now and in all eternity.

In Christ, I have the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life. So I have no fear for my loved ones who have died in Him. I am confident that I shall see them again. While I'm in no hurry to die and I'm sorry to admit that I would be afraid of a painful or an undignified death, ultimately I'm not scared of dying, believing that something far better awaits us in the hereafter than even the very best of anything we can enjoy on earth.

So these are some of the many wonderful blessings which I receive through being a Christian. I'm sure other readers have many similar things for which they also are thankful. If you don't believe yet, may my sharing of my experience of God be used by Him to lead you to faith so that you can experience these blessings for yourself.

Happy Easter,
Roger.



Looking Back to Christmas

On 14th December last year, some members of St Michael's Choir with a couple of congregation members, very kindly visited the Galton Day Unit at Medway Hospital to sing some carols. Originally, we were going to be outside but the nurses arranged for us to sing in the entrance porch where it was warmer. We sang well-known carols for around fifty minutes and the nurses stopped by to listen whenever they could. We couldn't see everyone in the waiting room from where we were standing, but there was one lady waiting to have her chemotherapy, who was sitting near the door. She appeared to be enjoying herself very much, singing along with us!

I think it was a very special time and spread some happiness. The nurses would love to have us all back this Christmas and said that we may be able to sing inside next time! It would be lovely if we could go back there to sing again. I believe it is very much appreciated. Thank you once more to everyone who came along to sing. Dawn Gates.

Church Hall Hire

COVID very much restricted what we could do in the church hall and we are still being cautious and avoiding lets which might pose a significant risk of infection. There have been some other changes too. We've raised our charges in line with inflation since 2019 to £10 per hour in the week and £15 at weekends – though weekend availability is very limited because of church use. The hall must be left clean and tidy after use and all rubbish taken away because we are entirely dependent on volunteers to maintain the high standards from which we all benefit. Hirers may be charged a deposit which will not be refundable in the event of damage or the hall being left in a dirty condition. Bookings should now be made by email to cuxtonchurchhall@gmail.com. There will also be the facility to pay charges online rather than in cash where appropriate.

Spring Celebration for Children and Adults

St John's Church Halling

Saturday 19th March 10.30 – 12.00

Spring Crafts for Mothering Sunday

All children welcome with parents or other cares. All free. Story, Songs, Prayer, Activities, Refreshments.

Easter Egg Hunt

Easter Monday (18th April): 2.00 pm Rectory Grounds & Church Hall

2.00 pounds to take part in hunt. Refreshments, crafts & stalls in hall.

Every Easter Monday for I don't know how many years, we've held this Easter Egg Hunt in the grounds of Cuxton Rectory, parents bringing their children now having come themselves when they were infants. We've missed two years; you can guess why. But this year, we look forward to welcoming all the village children with their parents and carers. Hunt in the garden (£2.00 to take part). Stalls, crafts & refreshments in the church hall.

Meeting of Parishioners to Elect Churchwardens (Vestry Meeting) & Annual Parochial Church Meeting

Everybody on the civil electoral roll may attend and take part in the election of churchwardens. Those on the church electoral roll only get to vote for PCC members or to stand for election. There will be reports on the life of the Church in Cuxton and Halling and opportunities to ask questions, pass comments and make suggestions. You can join the church electoral roll at 16 and stand for office immediately (though churchwardens have to be 21). If you are 18+ you can only stand for office after you have been on the roll for 6 months. Candidates for office must be confirmed members of the Church of England. More details on Church of England website and on official notices of these meetings. At this meeting, we shall have to decide whether to continue electing our whole PCC annually or to elect members for three year terms voting for one third only each year.

Percy Pigeon's Perceptions

Good day to you all. How is Spring working for you? Philippa and I have ventured back to the crazy ash tree in the rectory garden. No place like home! We are doing some repairs to the roost - plenty of useful material around after the winter storms. The ash continues to sway in the wind but it rocks us to sleep so we are not too worried.

The commemorative plates produced in vast numbers by China for the forthcoming celebrations, are tastefully engraved and gilded with the words, "Her Majesty's Platinum Jubly" so Philippa and I are wondering if residents are planning street parties for the Jubly"? We love street partiesall those sandwiches and slices of cake. All those crumbs! The Jubly isn't until June, but just to give you a nudge. If you want to close your street, the Council has to give permission. But you could just use the pavements instead, like many of you did to celebrate the anniversary of VE Day. We pigeons don't have kings or queens but some are rather imperious. We are happy to share your celebrations though Philippa and I were pleased to be included - several times - in the RSPB's bird count last month. Many of you put out extra feed so we would linger to be counted. I was once counted nine times and was quite full. It is good that you count us each year. Our friends the tits tend to take the limelight but I was pleased to see so many blackcaps around Cuxton and Halling feeding stations this year. I hope they get a mention.

Well that was one heck of a storm mid-February wasn't it. Philippa and me were quite safe though we did have some fluttering moments when the roof rattled. Poor cousin Peter wasn't so lucky. One minute he was contentedly pecking outside Snodland fish & chip shop, and then whoosh! He found himself atop the tower

of All Saints Church in Wouldham! He hunkered down until a lull in the wind gave him the chance to move but then whoosh! He found himself at Whittings Farm, fortunately close to his home.

On a personal note, Philippa and I are happy to announce the arrival of two more offspring - Pam and Patrick. They will soon be joining their older siblings at Ranscombe or Snodland. For now, stay safe. Coo coo.

Three Confessions

“In a sermon on the excellency of the liturgy of the Church of England in 1804, the Rev’d S. Crowther told the assembled congregation: ‘That the compilers of our Liturgy have established their doctrine upon *the foundations of the apostles and prophets*’, as is evident from the spirit and tendency of the whole of the Common Prayer”, and he added that it was a book inferior only to the Bible itself. (Cited in *The Rise and Fall of the Incomparable Liturgy* by Bryan D Spinks.)

My confession is that I am inclined to agree with Mr Crowther! The Bible is of course the Word of God and no other book approaches it in importance or worth. However, the Book of Common Prayer does, I believe, provide us with forms of worship and prayer which not only express biblical teaching generally very well, but also do so in a manner which is both beautiful and inspirational. I use the BCP every day for my Morning and Evening Prayer and I find it a tremendous resource, offering me comfort and guidance, as well putting into appropriately wonderful words the prayers and praises, confessions and thanksgivings which it is the duty of every Christian to offer in worship to God. Much of the Bible is included verbatim in the BCP and most of the rest of the BCP is biblically informed. The BCP isn’t perfect. No human production is perfect. However, having come back to it after a twenty year hiatus, during which I used the more modern forms, I am glad to be home.

My teenage rebellion was not so much drugs, sex and rock and roll as sticking with the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and the Authorised Version of the Bible when it was the policy of the Church I belonged to to adopt revised forms of service and newer translations of the Bible. There are things to be said on both sides. I will say this, though, that if the reason for revised services and new translations of the Bible was to bring more people into the Church, it certainly hasn’t worked out that way! Some people would say, of course, that the decline in numbers would have been even steeper, had we not tried to modernise.

I was told recently, though I haven’t personally seen the evidence, that it is churches which have stuck to or reverted to the 1662 service which are growing fastest. Certainly, before COVID it was the the cathedrals which were bucking the trend and attracting larger congregations while so many parish churches were declining. Prayerbook Evensong is experiencing a tremendous revival. One theory is that people actually appreciate a reasonably traditional service with a sermon aimed at adults and the fact that you can attend a cathedral fairly anonymously if you don’t want to get caught up in parish politics and a congregation’s social life. Critics might say, however, that some (but by no means all) of those attending cathedral services are shy of committing to Christian fellowship and unconditional discipleship. You can enjoy the beautiful music and poetry of Evensong as though it were a concert and without participating yourself mentally or spiritually in the worship of the choir and congregation. Many atheists enjoy Evensong. May their experience bring them to faith!

Research in America found that the congregations which were growing in number were the ones who had music groups instead of choirs and C21 hymns instead of anthems. I would suggest that the common underlying factor in growing churches is an absolute commitment to the faith delivered to the saints. Wishy washy churches which downplay our human need to repent and believe the Gospel, watering down that biblical teaching which some people find hard and accepting a lower standard of Christian commitment than Jesus demands tend to fade away. What’s the point of belonging to a Church which asks very little of you and has nothing much to offer you which you cannot obtain from the world? Might as well shop on Sundays!

It might be too late now to say this. I'm inclined to think that our services did need revising in C20 and perhaps before that. 1662 is a very long time ago. I think, however, that the revisions should have been much less drastic, preserving the spiritual depth of the Prayer Book and the beauty of its language and retaining texts which people knew by heart and very often loved. I still get complaints (40+ years after liturgical revision) from people that we don't use the form of the Lord's Prayer they use at home. I am conscious that we have lost a lot as we have ceased to use and have forgotten the Book of Common Prayer. On the other hand, there is a lot of value in the Common Worship we mainly use now. It has become the familiar version for most people who go to church regularly. Some things in it are better and clearer than in the BCP. The multiplicity of optional material does make it possible, however, to imply a diminished sense of God (all Matey rather than Almighty) and a lack of seriousness about repentance and faith.

Relevance. One of the psalms appointed for Morning Prayer in the BCP on 10th March, the day on which we read about the bombing of the maternity hospital was this one Psalm 52:

WHY boastest thou thyself, thou tyrant : that thou canst do mischief; 2. Whereas the goodness of God : endureth yet daily? 3. Thy tongue imagineth wickedness : and with lies thou cuttest like a sharp razor. 4. Thou hast loved unrighteousness more than goodness : and to talk of lies more than righteousness. 5. Thou hast loved to speak all words that may do hurt : O thou false tongue. 6. Therefore shall God destroy thee for ever : he shall take thee, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling, and root thee out of the land of the living. 7. The righteous also shall see this, and fear : and shall laugh him to scorn; 8. Lo, this is the man that took not God for his strength : but trusted unto the multitude of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. 9. As for me, I am like a green olive-tree in the house of God : my trust is in the tender mercy of God for ever and ever. 10. I will always give thanks unto thee for that thou hast done : and I will hope in thy Name, for thy saints like it well.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

Three Pathways to Being Green

My second confession is regarding my greenery. I know that my instinctive opposition to development annoys some people. This is an article I wrote and had published in another publication in explanation – more an apologia than an apology.

“What follows is an account of my personal progress. I was brought up from a small child to appreciate Nature – the flora and fauna we observed on country walks and the birds and other living creatures we saw in our gardens. Also to be kind to them, including the insects (except wasps). I was taught that everything was here for a reason – including wasps. I was also brought up to believe that the works of man could never compare to the works of God for beauty or for their ability to elicit the experience of wonder. No man can truly paint a sunset. In this Romantic vein, I'm apt to see a motorway constructed in a beautiful landscape as a kind of sacrilege, a quarry or a factory as an abomination, a blot on the landscape. I'm glad that most of the new housing built in Halling since I moved into the parish has been built on former industrial sites rather than in virgin countryside.

This is a bit naive. Human beings are as much part of nature as are sunsets or wasps. Our ability to make things is God-given. God has given us our talents, our skills, the materials with which we work, the time in which we do our work. We are free to use what God has given us as we choose for good or ill (and one day we shall answer for our choices) but what we do is not distinct from Nature. We are part of nature. In the strictest sense of the word, a dam made by human beings is no less natural than a dam made by beavers.

Anyway, it's hardly realistic to oppose the construction of every new road and workplace and to resist the mining and quarrying of the materials the world needs. People need to be able to travel. We have to be able to shift goods to where they are needed. People need places to live and jobs. Given that human beings are made in the image of God, isn't it a sacrilege that so many people live in poverty, lacking the basic necessities which industry and agriculture on an industrial scale provide for the rest of us?

Nevertheless, I'd still rather take a walk in the country than visit an art gallery or attend a concert. I'd sooner ride my bike than drive or fly or travel by train (unless it was a steam train on a preserved railway).

I was born in 1954. I was a teenager in the sixties and seventies. I read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring!* When I was growing up was the time that we were getting seriously worried about acid rain, rivers so polluted that nothing could live in them and high levels of lead compounds and other toxic fumes in the atmosphere. We were becoming concerned that powerful pesticides such as DDT were killing far more things than the insects they were designed to protect us against. There were increasing worries about global warming, although the evidence was much less clear then than it is now. There were quality of life issues as roads became more and more congested and our historic towns and cities were first choked and then bashed about to provide ring roads and car parks. This was the time when the stars were fading, outshone by light pollution and obscured by toxic chemicals in the air. In the eighties we discovered that the fluorocarbons which we thought of as so safe in aerosols and fridges were actually destroying the ozone layer and allowing dangerous rays from the sun to reach the earth's surface. In this respect, the first couple of weeks of the first lockdown were paradise regained.

The saying *Live simply so others may simply live* was very popular at the time. The thought was that, if those of us in the richer parts of the world consume more than our fair share of the world's resources, there must be that much less left for the poor. Similarly, we relatively rich people produce more than our share of pollution, but it is often the poorest people in the world who will face the consequences. Rubbish from western countries is shipped to poorer places to be dealt with. Much of the low-lying land threatened with flooding because of global warming is occupied by some of the poorest people in the world. This somewhat Romantic Victorian Christian became a bit of a hippy.

Again, there is a danger of naivety here. Industrial scale agriculture feeds far more people far more cheaply with much less labour than traditional peasant farming is capable of doing. We wouldn't like to live without many of the goods produced in factories and it is the prosperity generated by industry and commerce which has made possible the advances in medicine and the sciences from which we all benefit. The fact that we consume so much of what grows or is produced in poor countries – from coffee to cheap clothes – provides jobs for people in those countries and is a source of the hard currency which they need in order to invest in their own economies. There's a balance to be struck between care for the environment and anxiety about inequality on the one hand and progress towards greater prosperity for everyone on the other. I wouldn't like to say where that balance ought to fall.

Finally, there is the issue of what it is truly to be human. In the end, what really matters? Jesus said, *For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*. It's our desire for material things which is destroying the environment, using up valuable resources to acquire goods which we don't need, to travel to places we don't need to go to and to purchase services we could very well manage without. In doing so, we despoil nature both by using up raw materials and by generating pollution. And, in the end, material goods can never satisfy us. That's why we always want more. What we have is never enough. Ultimately, our needs are spiritual and we can only be fulfilled as people when our spiritual needs are met.

And once again, I'm being naive. We can't live without things like food and clothes and homes to live in. We are material beings as well as spiritual and we do need a certain amount of stuff. But how much stuff do we need? We've got used to "needing" things we'd never even heard of a few years ago. I heard a couple of people on the radio complaining about the terrible shortages on the shelves of our supermarkets caused by a lack of lorry drivers. But I didn't have much sympathy for them. They weren't starving (as so many people are in the world today). They just couldn't get the brands they preferred. But I mustn't be too condemnatory. I've just been from shop to shop making sure I could get the dog biscuits my spaniel prefers. So, again a balance, but where should the balance be struck? Greta Thunberg or Henry Ford?"

Third Confession

I realise that I write far too great a proportion of this magazine. Much as I enjoy writing, it would be much more interesting to readers if there were more contributions from other people. How about giving it a go?

Any subject. Just let me have copy electronically or on paper by 8.30 am on the second Friday of the month – or sooner if you can.

Roger.

World Day of Prayer – 4th March 2022

We had a wonderful attendance from the three churches, Cuxton Community Church (URC), St. Michael's Church, Cuxton and St. John's Church, Halling for the World Day of Prayer Service which took place in St. John's Church. For many of us we have been coming together for this service for more years than we can remember, and each service has been unique in its own way. Everyone had a part to play. The singing was lovely and "thank you" to Janet Stone for playing for us. This year's theme was "I know the plans I have for you" and it was set in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Today we are a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-faith society and we are proud of our diversity and work to preserve these differences of language and culture. The seven regions of the world were reflected in the service when we lit seven candles. We used candles as a symbol of light shining through darkness and seeds as a symbol of God's hope. At the beginning of our service, we paused to say a special prayer for the people in Ukraine. Refreshments were served and everyone enjoyed a slice of Victoria Sponge. Jenny.

The Bishop of Brexit and "The Myth of the Empty Church"

First the good news. Readers will be pleased to learn, as I was, that the splendid ring of bells from the now redundant St Mary's Church Chatham found a new home in a church in Cornwall. Does any reader know which one?

Last month, I quoted a piece by Professor Robin Gill wondering about the fact that "in 1851 there were over five million Anglican attendances on a Sunday when there were just 26 bishops. Today, with 120 stipendiary bishops (and even more non-parochial archdeacons), average Sunday attendances have dropped to well under one million." You may have seen news of a leaked report to the House of Bishops acknowledging that there may well now be too many dioceses in England and suggesting that the number could be cut. You might think, as I do, that any surplus (surplice?) bishops could be redeployed as rectors and vicars, thereby saving some of the parish churches threatened with closure. As rectors are paid less than bishops, this would also free up more money for parish ministry. The leaked document, however, suggests rather that bishops no longer needed at diocesan level could be given sinecures as church spokesmen on matters of public interest. It was suggested, for example, that there could be a bishop for Brexit. I wonder whom such a bishop would represent. Polling showed that the majority of regular worshippers in C of E churches were leave voters whereas most bishops are remainers. In any case, while the Bible and two millennia of Christian tradition teach us a great deal about the principles which should govern us, they say nothing specific about the merits or otherwise of the European Union!

Back in 1993, Professor Gill published "The Myth of the Empty Church". Soon after that, he gave a presentation of his findings to a conference of the clergy of the Diocese of Rochester at Winchester. I remember it fondly. It was beautiful summer weather. I cycled both ways. Winchester is a beautiful city and the venue was the splendid King Alfred's College, which is now a university. I remember many of us sun-bathing in the grounds between sessions. Gill's point is that most churches in England were never normally full. When we remember packed services, we are really thinking of special services at Christmas or Easter or VE Day or whatever. In the Middle Ages, church building was itself an act of worship and communities built the biggest churches they could afford to the glory of God (and maybe to outdo the next parish) irrespective of the population of the village. Optimistic Victorians built churches in the expectation that the whole parish would come to their particular church. In some places, if you add together the number of seats in the Anglican, Baptist & Methodist churches, there were more places to sit than people to sit in them. They could never possibly all have been full! One early C19 vicar, on arriving in his new parish, complained that there were no male communicants and only 20 female. Two of the females stopped coming when he said he wouldn't pay them as his predecessor had! This sets us up to feel like failures. Inexperienced organisers of campaign groups book the large hall and put out 100 chairs. When 20 people turn up, everybody feels disappointed and the meeting gets off to a sad start. Experienced campaigners book

the small hall and put out 15 chairs. When 20 people turn up, it feels like success. In the same way, empty seats in church depress us before we even get started.

Some churches probably ought to close. There is a village in the North of England where it was planned to flood a valley in order to create a reservoir. The church would have been drowned. So the water company built the parish a new church on higher ground. Subsequently, it was decided not to go ahead with the reservoir and the old church was spared. Now parishioners wanted the vicar to hold services in both churches – difficult because he was also responsible for several other parishes. Some churches probably ought to close, but the closure of a church looks like the Church having failed and withdrawn from a community.

It can be very demoralising to think that our churches were formerly full and that we have therefore somehow failed. Gill's point is that it isn't as bad as it looks. However, it is still true that a much smaller proportion of the population come to Church nowadays than did so in former times. I'm afraid this is not only a loss to the Church, but also to the people who don't come and to the nation as a whole.



CHILDREN'S SOCIETY NEWS

I am very pleased to say that this year's collection for the Children's Society raised a total of £226.41. In view of the fact that people have definitely been spending less cash over the last year, I think this is an excellent amount. The charity continues to help young people whose family circumstances may have changed, in

many cases due to the pandemic, causing emotional and financial instability. As well as this practical help, the Children's Society advises the government on a range of issues affecting young people in this country today. If you would like to have a collecting box in your home please let me know and I can arrange this for you. Thank you.

Julia Wells (tel. 01634 727424).



Tommy's Talking Points

This isn't me at Ide Hill or Toys Hill in February 2022. It's Ben at Dry Hill in May 1984. Dry Hill, which I haven't so far been to, is very near to Ide Hill and Toys Hill to which I have been this very day. The scenery is similar. Ben too was a Springer spaniel. Not only was he Master's first Springer; Master had not even heard of the breed till he was presented with Ben, having asked for any medium sized male dog at the canine rescue centre. He soon discovered that Springers are good-looking, good natured, very affectionate and

indefatigable. There is a walk from Dry Hill to Ide Hill and Toys Hill which they might have been on that day with a group from the church. He thought the picture would be appropriate as we didn't take any photographs today – same scenery, similar dog, and he doesn't look a day older than when this picture was taken, though he's somehow acquired a better haircut since then. [That's three Springers Master's had since he was ordained, but not to forget Bobby who was a cross collie labrador, a faithful companion on many walks and runs - and holidays, which none of us Springers have been allowed on - and fondly remembered in the parish by all who knew him.]

The 28th February was our first real outing of the New Year, though we do go out locally every day whatever the weather – usually twice and mainly round Dean Valley and Bush Valley. The climate has been interesting. Days of rain have sometimes generated much mud. I come in filthy and the biped with a high centre of gravity and a poor sense of balance is apt to slip over despite proceeding with great caution and a snail like pace on the slippery hilly bits. Other days have been bright with frost, the air bracing, the ground frozen, and a tremendous joy in being out and about. We've had almost no snow, however, less rain than some years and it has never got very cold. Last Summer's flowers (some of them) carried on blooming through the Winter to be joined by the blooms of an early Spring – snowdrops and primroses, violets,

crocuses, lungwort and we even saw a Camellia flowering at Ide Hill. Then there was the weekend of the storm. Master was a little bit concerned that it would be like the hurricane that wasn't a hurricane in 1987 which did an enormous amount of damage, but this tempest wasn't too bad. It was awe-inspiring and very noisy and still breath taking when we went out after the worst was over, but it didn't do the damage so many people had feared it might.

Can you explain a mystery to me, please? Our afternoon walk usually concludes with Evening Prayer at St Michael's, after which he says "Let's go home. Tea for Tommy and tea for Master." T for Tommy makes sense, but shouldn't it be M for Master?

Since the stormy weekend, the weather has been quite settled. Yesterday, we took one of my favourite walks up round by the mausoleum – a bright sunny day, but really freezing cold – and we saw the alpacas and quite a lot of other dogs and people.

Today was much milder, bright at first and nice and dry all day. We had arranged with Master's friend to go on the Octavia Hill Centenary walk from Toys Hill. We were to meet at Westerham because they have both been there before and it easy to find. We could go on the M2 or M20 to the M25 and thence to Westerham. We could go on the A25. So Master took the M26 and we had a long diversion via Oxted! We did all manage to meet up, however, and travelled in convoy to Toys Hill car park.

Master was reminded of an occasion nearly 35 years ago when he cycled down from here to Toys Hill to join a group of clergy on a farm there, talking about agriculture, history, conservation and the countryside. That had been an idyllic day – cycling through rural Kent, good company, and a hospitable farmer for their host, with many interesting things to teach his clerical visitors.

Ours too was an idyllic day in the Kentish countryside. We enjoyed a circular walk, some of which was new to us and some of which we'd done before. All the scenery down there is beautiful. There are woods and open fields, tiny hamlets and villages with pretty cottages and immaculately kept gardens. Immense views open up across the Weald as far as the North and South Downs depending which way you are facing. Just after we started, we had a long sit down on a seat with just such a wonderful prospect while the two men talked. They had a lot to talk about on this trip, not having seen one another so far this year, and it took until we had had another long sit down in Ide Hill churchyard to set the world wholly to rights while they consumed their sandwiches and integrated Quantum Physics, Twentieth Century Literature, Darwinism, popular devotion across a wide spectrum of religious theory and practice, Psychology, Sociology and the Theology of the world's major religions in the context of History and Geography, with a little bit of Ethology thrown in. I slept under the seat. So I can't comment on their conclusions or lack thereof. The walk was described as dog friendly and so it proved. There were plenty of places to run free and no bossy signs demanding that we be kept on leads. We saw sheep and donkeys but not too many people or dogs. I had a glorious time, often leaving them far behind, but I always come back now when I am called. Master noticed a stone in the churchyard commemorating a clergyman. He had had a number of appointments, which were carved onto his memorial. Master commented that he himself has saved someone a lot of trouble and expense by sticking with just one job for the whole of his career as an incumbent.

We walked back past Emmetts Garden which will be beautiful with carpets of bluebells in a few weeks' time. And so to the car park where they discussed the possibilities for future outings before our ways parted and we actually made it home without either getting lost or stuck in a traffic jam! I'm looking forward to tea for Tommy!

Tommy

LIAM O'BRIAN RIP

On behalf of our family, Sheila and Colin Thompson would like to thank you all for your prayers and messages of support following the sad and sudden death of Nicola's husband Liam and father of their twin girls, Imogen and Saffron. Your support at this difficult time is much appreciated by us all.

Ukraine

The situation in Ukraine is very troubling. For most of us, all we can do at this time is to pray and donate to the charities which are trying to care for the victims of this tragic conflict. If we are in a position to do so, we are advised that it is better to give money rather than goods because goods may get held up at customs posts on the way to Ukraine. Some people might be in a position to put up refugees from the conflict. We don't yet know what arrangements there will be for this. Churches may well be involved in helping to organise accommodation. You may see advice about how you can do this in the news media or through other channels. I'll pass on any information I receive from the Church. If you are in a position to accommodate refugees and would like to give me your name, I'll let you know as soon as I hear anything.

<https://welcomechurches.org/> is one source of information.

<https://www.rochester.anglican.org/news/churches-respond-to-situation-in-ukraine.php> is another. There are many more online and in the press.

Fuel

Some people have suggested that we can help put pressure on Putin by burning less oil and gas. It is also true that, given the huge price increases in fuel, people are trying to economise anyway. Three points.

- 1) Don't let yourself get cold, especially if you are frail. Keeping warm is a high priority, up there with food, rent and taxes, when you budget. Don't risk making yourself ill. There are people who dress indoors in the Winter as if for a tropical beach in Summer and run the heating at a temperature which makes this comfortable. Don't do that. Be sensible. Wear winter clothes. But don't get cold.
- 2) Some people in this country are facing hard times with rising prices. If we're in a position to do so, we should continue to support charities such as the Foodbank and Christians Against Poverty.
- 3) The price cap ends on March 31st after which, for many people, energy prices will rise sharply. Read your meters that day if you can. Record the readings. Submit the reading on 31st March to your supplier.

An Intermittently Flowing Stream

I'm sorry that we've failed to **stream the S Michael's service** some weeks. There have been difficulties. We hope to resume as soon as possible, however, and you should be able to find our services on https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCt19Ky3DY43cyO_AJ8e-6_w

Winery

Some of you will be disappointed but a much larger number will be delighted that Medway Council Planning Committee rejected the proposal for a winery in Bush Valley by 8 votes to 5. It is possible, of course, that the developer will appeal, though I hope not. My personal view is that it ought to be inconceivable, knowing what we know now in C21, that a major commercial development, which is really nothing more than a leisure facility, should be constructed in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or that any unnecessary development should be considered which would increase levels of traffic (with concomitant pollution, congestion and safety issues) in an already congested residential area.