

COVER STORY:
DAVID (27): “THE
JOURNEY OF FAITH
HAS BEEN INCREDIBLY
LIBERATING FOR ME.”

Issue 10 NOVEMBER - DECEMBER - JANUARY 2015

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MAKING A
DIFFERENCE:
NEW PARENT &
CHILD PLAYGROUP

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:
MEET MICHELLE
OLANIYAN

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CHRISTMAS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY AT ST AIDAN'S CHURCH

We would love for you to join us for our Christmas Celebrations. All events for December are available under Upcoming Events (page 11). Here are some special highlights and details of our Christmas services:

SAT 05/12/2015	10:00	CHRISTMAS FAIR At St Aidan's Community Hall
	14:00	CHRISTMAS CRAFT FOR CHILDREN At St Aidan's Community Hall
SUN 13/12/2015	16:00	CHRISTINGLE SERVICE
SAT 19/12/2015	19:00	COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS MEAL At St Aidan's Community Hall
SUN 20/12/2015	16:00	NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS
THU 24/12/2015	14:00	CAROL SINGING Outside Tesco's, Valley Drive
THU 24/12/2015	16:00	CRIB SERVICE
	23:30	CHRISTMAS MIDNIGHT MASS
FRI 25/12/2015	10:00	CHRISTMAS DAY FAMILY SERVICE

EDITORIAL

"You're here to be light..."

ST AIDAN'S HIGHLIGHTS



DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Please be aware, the deadline for contributions to the next issue of the magazine is Sunday 10th January and should include all dates for February, March and April 2016!



SHINE!

It was only yesterday we returned from our family holiday in Portugal and I can't believe it's already that time of year where we start preparing ourselves for Christmas.

As I am sitting behind my desk, reading through this new issue of the magazine, there's one image from our holiday that keeps on coming back to my mind. We visited a lighthouse at the most Southwestern point of continental Europe, Cape St Vincent. There was a lot of mist which covered the landscape in a mysterious gloom.

This lighthouse, guarding one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, is among the most powerful in Europe. Its two 1,000 W lamps can be seen as far as 37 miles away. The image of the lighthouse reminded me of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:14-16: "Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven."

In our main story, David challenges us to be a hands on church. I wish that while we prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas, we will be able to shine; be generous with our lives and impact the community in which we are.

Enjoy your read and have a wonderful Christmas and blessed New Year!

Mirjam Ngoy - Editor

DAVID'S CONFESSIONS: "THE JOURNEY OF FAITH HAS BEEN INCREDIBLY LIBERATING FOR ME."



27-year-old David Cadwallader studied Theology at Canterbury Christ Church University. He loves reading classic literature and philosophical texts. He has been married to Sarah for two years. They have two kittens. In his daily life he is pastoral manager at St Johns Catholic Comprehensive in Gravesend. This means he looks after the wellbeing of students and puts support structures in place if they face challenges in their personal situation.

David didn't grow up with faith and hasn't always been so passionate about theology. It was his wife Sarah who first introduced him to church. We met up over a cup of coffee to find out more about his journey.

What was it like: growing up in Gravesend?

"Gravesend has been good to me. I've grown up with lots of friends. I like the diversity of the place. I went to a good primary school. There was flexibility with teaching, and people were less isolated than it seems these days. I grew up in a nice and positive community. I was always outside. I used to be obsessed with nature, like mini beasts. I was part of a nature club and loved anything to do with animals, plants, making things and just being outdoors all the time."

How did you meet your wife Sarah?

"Sarah and I went to the same school. We had never really spoken properly before until we went to a school trip to Berlin. We got on really well. We had the same kind of humour, she challenged me, wasn't just nice. We clicked. I thought she was very beautiful. It was exciting. I still like her convictions, how positive she is, how she fights and gets passionate about fighting injustice. I like her generosity with people. She doesn't just do stuff because it is the right thing to do, she gives her all."

How do you keep your relationship fresh?

"We pray regularly, we make time every week for each other. We try to have a date night. We both would be the first to admit we don't do enough. But there is so much stuff going on in our lives and we always try to keep on talking and have time for each other."

How did you get involved with faith?

"I've come from a non-believing family. There was no

**"I GREW UP IN A NICE AND
POSITIVE COMMUNITY"**

religion in the house I grew up in. I came to faith when I was about eighteen. Even then, it was a very shallow faith."

"I didn't experience a massive explosive conversion where I saw a vision or something or where I just knew. It was a bit hot and cold at the start. Sarah was part of a church youth group and took me along. I first thought they were weird, but I did see something in her and her family that was different, there was something there. It felt right. It was difficult as well, because some of my close friends were very anti religion. Some were active atheists and I felt like I almost betrayed them. It was hard for me to be sure I wanted to take this path."

"There have been times when I thought: this is all incredible, and times when it was much harder. I really connected to God when I started studying Theology, through reading and writing essays. Especially reading Augustine's "Confessions" [4th Century Christian Theologian] touched me. He had a massive impact in the church and was prepared to talk about all the things that were such an important part of his journey of faith, even the difficult bits. This is now an important part of my faith too: to be very open about it and not sell a lie of perfection."

How has faith changed you?

"Faith in the Gospel has changed me massively. It has made me less self-centred. I would have probably ended up in a caring career anyway, but when you know you are created by God and everyone else is as well, it changes your perspective on people. Because



**"I BELIEVE YOU DON'T HAVE
TO BE YOUNG TO MAKE
CHANGES."**

even if you think someone is completely wrong, if they are created by the same God, they deserve our love and respect. It also makes you more aware of your own failings. I feel I've become a much more honest and open person. The journey of faith has been incredibly liberating for me."

What are your thoughts on church?

"I find church challenging, but also important, really important, it helps us grow. I struggle when people get caught up on things like relationships and gender and forget to look into issues like stewardship of creation, looking after vulnerable people, building up the community and being an extended family towards each other."

What would your perfect church look like?

"It is important to remember that a perfect church doesn't exist. In the end it is all about people living out the Gospel, whatever that means. Jesus was always moving around and I believe the church should be in motion too. It is about being a hands on church, organic and flexible and trust in the Spirit."

What brought you to St Aidan's Church?

"People were welcoming and nice. It felt like a prayerful church and a church that has an important role to play. The location is very important. It could be a real hub for the community. The fact that there are community facilities, like a computer room, showed me there is so much potential."

What is it that you bring to our community?

"For a start, I probably should turn up more regularly. Often people might think what I bring to the community is that I am young (relative to the average age of the church). But I believe you don't have to be young to make changes. A young church has little to do with age, and more to do with faith. I hope I can somehow be part of a community where we celebrate a living Spirit and don't just remember someone who died for us. I want to help people realise that no matter what they do, God loves them, unconditionally. I would also want to encourage people to read the Bible. The New Testament is a love note from God to the whole of creation. Read it. It isn't a boring thing. It is a really revolutionary message that is as important today as it was 2000 years ago. Give it a try!"

Mirjam Ngoy-Verhage

NEWS FROM THE PARISH

DAPHNE LANE CELEBRATES 60 YEARS AS A MEMBER OF ST AIDAN'S CHURCH

Not often would you come across a longstanding resident of our parish that Daphne doesn't know. She most likely met them while serving her community, first as TA at Riverview Infants School, then as Receptionist at St Gregory's Surgery

For the past sixty years Daphne has been a faithful and active member of St Aidan's church. Her first experience of church, however, was through her grandmother, a member of Zoar Baptist church in Saddington Street.

As a child she also attended Sunday school at the Salvation Army, then Christ Church. As a result of a Church Army Evangelist visit, she was baptised on 15th October 1955 by the Rev. M Perkins, Vicar of Chalk with St Aidan, and confirmed on her 17th Birthday by



Bishop Mann on 20th November 1955. Daphne was first involved with St Aidan's by assisting her mother with church fairs held in the grounds of the White Hart pub. Then, she helped Ernie run social events in the hall before they got married.

We are grateful for over sixty years of committed service to St Aidan's and the community. Congratulations Daphe. Here's to the next sixty years.

ST AIDAN'S JOINS YEARLY SHOE BOX APPEAL

Mrs Margaret Evans (Amen Trust Area Organiser) came to talk to Aidan Ladies in October about their "Family Shoebox Appeal". Shoe boxes are sent out to Romanian families living in poverty. For



several years, St Aidan's Church has contributed to this project.

The objective is to show the love of God in action. The majority of shoeboxes are distributed through Mana Church in Sighisoara. Pastor Pilu and his team are AMEN partners and they work with them in supporting their ministry of social care and church planting into very poor communities around Sighisoara.

Other shoeboxes are distributed in Codlea through Steve Potts and Care Trust Romania. Further shoeboxes go to a special needs school in Petrosani where Tibi has a ministry. AMEN trustees and supporters travel to Romania each December at their own expense to be part of the delivery of these shoeboxes, so there is a very personal relationship with everyone involved.

If you wish to contribute toward this appeal there are leaflets in the back of the church or speak to Jenny Rawlinson on 01474 352253.

QUIZ NIGHT GREAT SUCCESS

St Aidan's Quiz Evening was held on 5th September in the Church Hall.

We had 10 teams taking part and questions ranged from "What country is Suva the capital of?" (Fiji) to "Who won this year's Women's FA Cup Final?" (Chelsea). It was a very light hearted and enjoyable evening. The winners for the second year running was a team from the University of the Third Age.



CONGRATULATIONS to our vicar Lusa who has been elected to become a member of the General Synod. This body considers and approves legislation affecting the whole of the Church of England, formulates new forms of worship and debates matters of national and international importance. We wish him all the best and Gods blessings in this new responsibility.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT FAITH THROUGH OUR NEW PILGRIM COURSE

Ever wondered what the Christian faith was all about, or just wanted to understand more about your own faith journey?

St Aidan's Church has now started running the Pilgrim course. It's a new resource from the Church of England aimed at helping people to discover and understand the Christian faith together. The key words are participation and discussion.

Over a series of short six-sessions courses exploring some of the key themes of the Christian faith, all are invited to discover both who we are and who God is. Pilgrim doesn't presume anything, but it allows participants to search and engage with the Bible in a fresh and exciting way. The clue really is in the title.

Pilgrim is about journeying together, learning from and sharing each other's experience. The first of our six-sessions course started in October. The next one resumes on Tuesday 5th January 2016.

For more information about a Pilgrim group near you, contact our Vicar, Lusa on 01474352500 or nsengangoy@btinternet.com



IGGLE PIGGLE IS SPECIAL GUEST AT HARVEST SERVICE

Every year at harvest time, we are reminded of God's generosity to us and invited to share some of it with others.

This year was no exception. St Aidan's, including children from our Nursery School, rose up to the challenge and was able to gather a great variety of food that was shared between the local Foodbank and the House of Mercy.

The occasion was also marked with Henry's baptism, a reminder that our lives are our greatest gift to God and others. Iggle Piggle, from "In The Night Garden", helped us think of that important part of our faith

J.A.M. (Jesus & Me) Zone!

Children's Page!

CHILDREN'S SUMMER HOLIDAY CLUB: A REPORT

August 2015 will be marked in Gravesend history as the time that Polar Explorers descended on Gravesend for their great expedition.

Each day began with the "Polar Explorers" theme song, and the concept that you're never too anything to be part of God's Expedition. To start with, nobody really knew the words, but the tune was quite catchy and, by day two, everyone could sing along: "Never too many mistakes, nothing we could do, nothing in this world that could take us from you..."



We then all joined in a fun keep fit routine set to music. Everybody's favourite was Bamboleo from the Gypsy Kings that was played one more time on the last day. Then two "Explorers" played a speed dressing up game. After this Sir Random Finds and Bare Feet, our two lead explorers, had a mini slapstick drama, discussing the Carbon Footprint. Each



day there would be some element relating to the day's theme.

The Bible Story was watched on a DVD, after which Sir Random Finds linked it to the day's theme: Never too anything to be part of God's Expedition:

- Monday – Peter never made too many mistakes
- Tuesday – Steven was never too ordinary
- Wednesday – Philip was never too near or too far
- Thursday – Saul was never too bad
- Friday – Timothy was never too young

There was always a fun game played to introduce the memory verse, based on Ephesians 6:15.

By mid-morning, everyone was looking forward to going back to their groups for refreshments, activity booklets, completing a daily "Footprint" based on the story, and craftwork. Then there were team games, after which a presentation from each group showed everyone their "footprint". This was followed by action songs. "Our God is a great, big God" was by far everyone's favourite song. After a reminder of the memory verse, everyone returned to their groups for a final activity before going home.

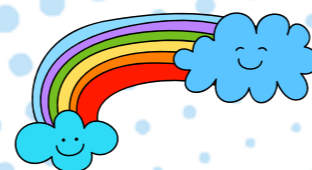
The fun-filled week ended with a BBQ in the community garden.

WORDSEARCH

Can you solve this Polar Explorers Word Search?

- BBQ
- BIBLE
- CHILDREN
- EPHESIANS
- EXPEDITION
- EXPLORERS
- FOOTPRINT
- GAMES
- HOLIDAY
- PETER
- PHILIP
- POLAR
- SAUL
- STEVEN
- TIMOTHY

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Little Rainbows



In September, St Aidan's Church opened its new parent and child playgroup 'Little Rainbows'. It is run by two ladies from our community, mum of three Elaine Jeffery (42) and mum of two Ellie Muggridge (31). The Pilot met with them over a cup of tea to find out more about their passion for children and why they are so eager to invest in their local community.

Elaine: "I've grown up in Westcourt. My youngest son is seven years old. I started attending a toddler group at Westcourt School when he was just a few months old. When the lady running it couldn't continue, I offered to take over. It was a nice and positive group. As a single parent, I needed the company and advice of other parents. I met Ellie at the school and invited her to come along. She soon started helping out."

"At some point our venue became too small. I wanted to offer more to the community but couldn't do this with the facilities we had. In the back of my mind I had always thought that St Aidan's Church & Community Hall would be the ideal place for a playgroup. So I decided to just ring the Vicar Lusa. He has been very supportive right from the start. I am really excited about working together with the local church and the help they have given so far has been great."



Ellie: "I grew up in a Christian family and used to be a server at a church. I no longer attend church now, but still have faith and am open to explore more of it."

Elaine: "I haven't got anything with faith, but I am coming out a bit more and have found the support from the church really helpful. It has given me a bit of an interest to find out more."

Ellie: "We want Little Rainbows to be a place full of laughter. Somewhere where people know there is always a happy face. We want it to be a safe place. There are so many services we want to offer. We do it because it is good for the community and for the children. Children need something around here, even if it is only simple. It



Ellie (left) and Elaine (right) want to make a positive contribution to their local community.

"WE OFFER A FRIENDLY, SUPPORTIVE NETWORK."

will hopefully set them up on the right path and help them learn to interact with others."

"I am very excited about messy play. I don't like doing it at home, but think it is great to give children the opportunity to just delve in and not be worried about mum or dad saying: you can't do this or don't touch that."

"I haven't grown up in Gravesend, I am from Portsmouth. At first, I didn't know anybody around here. It was only when my oldest daughter started going to school I really settled in the community. I love the friendship and support I have received and want to offer the same to others."

Elaine: "We offer a friendly, supportive network. A great opportunity for children to develop their social and emotional skills. I have always believed in the old fashioned: cup of tea, children playing and time out for mum, dad and grandparents."

"It is so rewarding when we witness how the group can make a difference to children and their parents. There was a girl who had a bad experience at a soft play, who through coming to Little Rainbows regained some of her confidence and started interacting with other children again. We were all very moved."

Little Rainbows runs every Wednesday (term-time), 13:00-15:00 in the Church & Community Hall. Contact Elaine (075 1590 1975) or Ellie (078 1737 8763) for more information or visit www.facebook.com/groups/littlerainbows.staidans.

Little Rainbows could still do with some helping hands, so if you would like to be a friendly face to the children or help with serving tea or clearing up, please do get in touch.

OUR COMMUNITY

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

MEET MICHELLE OLANIYAN (48)

My name is Mrs Michelle Olaniyan I am 48 years old. I am the eldest of four children to my parents of Nigerian descent. I am a mother of three children, two girls and a boy (18, 11 and 8). I work as a housing officer in Brent, was born in London but raised in Nigeria from age 10.

When and why did you move to Gravesend?

I moved to Kent in July this year, I love the spacious houses, the schools and the peace and quietness. Also, people in the community seem to have a very friendly nature!

What's your favourite season of the year?

My favorite season is Winter/Christmas time and the snow. Most people are always happy during this period, which is full of giving. I am also fond of taking pictures during this time of year.

What's your favourite day of the week?

Friday. It is a day I get to rest as I don't work weekends.

If you could invite anyone for dinner, dead or alive, who would you take?

Jesus, to discuss a lot of things. For instance my position as a Christian and what I can do to improve myself.

What do you do when you cannot sleep?

The only time I can't sleep is when I am worried about something. I will pray about it and then watch television until I fall asleep.

Who do you talk to on the phone most often?

I am very close to my younger brother, Michael. We talk a lot. He is based in London, West Thamesmead.

What would you change if you were Prime Minister for one day?

Homelessness and eradicating gang crime, which is currently a major problem. The number of young people dying via gang related crimes is increasing by the day. The government could do better in dealing with this issue. I believe there is not enough policing and there should be stricter laws around being in a gang.



If you could create anything, what would it be?

A big house that could hold a lot of homeless people and can manufacture food and drink for them.

Football or Rugby?

Football, because I understand the game and it is not a rough game like Rugby.

Eating in or eating out?

I enjoy eating in as I like cooking a lot. My favourite dish to cook is a Nigerian dish: jollof rice with plantain.

What inspires you in life and why?

My faith. It makes me stronger and determined to succeed or overcome difficulties I face in my daily life.

What does it mean for you to be a Christian?

It means to be selfless, just like Jesus.

I love my church because...

It has a very warm welcoming atmosphere. The Rev and his family have a very natural way of making people feel at home.

LIFE EVENTS

BAPTISMS, FUNERALS & WEDDINGS

Baptisms:

06/08/2015 Keelan Watson
06/09/2015 Arlan Perry
04/10/2015 Henry Mead

Funerals:

05/08/2015 Peter Albert Gay (77)
11/08/2015 Doris Viola Mordue (86)
Michael Edwin Mordue (65)
15/08/2015 Pauline Roll (Burial of Ashes)
24/08/2015 Winifred Prestland (88)
03/09/2015 Frederick George Godwin (85)

FROM OUR CURATE

On Saturday 26th September I was ordained Deacon at an extremely beautiful and moving service at Rochester Cathedral. The next day I was welcomed as Curate into the East Gravesend Group of churches, at a service held at Christ Church.

Representatives from each of the churches I am serving – Christ Church, St Aidan's, Holy Family and St Margaret's Ifield – presented me with items which symbolise my role as curate. Then choir members from each of the churches came together to sing the most beautiful anthem which had me reaching for the tissues!

A wonderful sermon was given by The Rev'd Richard Martin, who linked the role of an Architect with that of a Curate, with great insight and, of course, humour! The Rev'd Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy presented the most beautiful heartfelt prayers with a sung refrain. Then The Rev'd Jacqueline Littlewood prayed, asking for God's blessing upon me, which was extremely moving. The Rev'd Sue Brewer led the service and presided at the Eucharist. It felt very special to be able to assist Sue during the service and particularly during the administration of the sacrament at Holy Communion.



After the service, there was an incredible buffet laid on by members of all of the churches. It was a wonderful atmosphere with everyone coming together to celebrate. There was a beautiful cake which, to my joy, was gluten-free and delicious!

I would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to all who were involved and to Sue, Lusa and Richard for their support and care. Thank you also to those who came to the cathedral to support me and to those who came to Christ Church to celebrate with me.

It was a weekend I will never forget!

With much love & prayers,
The Rev'd Karen Seggie



UPCOMING EVENTS

ST AIDAN'S EVENTS

NOVEMBER 2015

SUN 01/11/2015, 16:00
SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE & THANKSGIVING

TUE 03/11/2015, 19:30
PILGRIM COURSE
Held at 90 Marling Way.

SUN 08/11/2015, 10:30
REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY SERVICE

TUE 10/11 & 24/11/2015 19:30
PILGRIM COURSE
Held at 90 Marling Way.

SUN 29/11/2015, 9:30
ADVENT LESSONS AND CAROLS WITH H.C.

DECEMBER 2015

Please see page 1 for all Christmas Services taking place at St Aidan's Church in December.

WED 02/12/15, 19:00
ADVENT COURSE
Film based course at St Aidan's Church.

SAT 05/12/15, 10:00
CHRISTMAS FAIR
At St Aidan's Community Hall.

SAT 05/12/15, 14:00
CHRISTMAS CRAFT FOR CHILDREN
At St Aidan's Community Hall.

WED 09/12/15, 19:00
ADVENT COURSE
Film based course at St Aidan's Church.

SAT 12/12/15, from 10:00 (St Aidan's 11:00-11:30)
CAROL SINGING FOR CHRISTIAN AID
At St George's Centre.

TUE 15/12/15, 19:00
CAROL SINGING IN RIVERVIEW
Carol singing and fundraising for Ellenor Hospice.

WED 16/12/15, 19:00
ADVENT COURSE
Film based course at St Aidan's Church.

THU 17/12/15, 14:30
CHRISTMAS AT ST GREGORY'S COURT
Celebrating Christmas with residents of the court.

SAT 19/12/15, 19:00
COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS MEAL
At St Aidan's Community Hall.

THU 24/12/15, 14:00
CAROL SINGING OUTSIDE TESCO, VALLEY DRIVE

JANUARY 2016

SUN 03/01/16, 10:30
EPHIPANY SERVICE
Marking the start of the year welcoming the Magi and all travellers of life.

TUE 05/01, 12/01, 19/01 & 26/01/16, 19:30
PILGRIM COURSE
At 90 Marling Way.

EVENTS IN GRAVESEND

TUE 17/11/15, 19:00
VISIT TO GRAVESEND GURDWARA
As part of InterFaith Week, Christians in Gravesend are invited to visit other places of worship.

TUE 22/12/15, time to be confirmed
CAROL SINGING AT TRAIN STATION
Churches Together in Gravesend singing Carols outside Gravesend Train Station.

SUN 17/01/16, 17:00
CHURCHES TOGETHER AGM FOLLOWED BY UNITY SERVICE
Annual meeting of Churches Together in Gravesend to mark the start of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

WEEKLY GROUPS AND MEETINGS AT ST AIDAN'S

WEDNESDAYS

PARENT & CHILD PLAYGROUP

Come and join our friendly, community based playgroup **Little Rainbows**. For all ages. Every Wednesday (term-time) from 13:00-15:00 at the Community Hall. 50p per family. Contact Elaine (075 1590 1975) or Ellie (078 1737 8763) for more information.

DRAMA AFTER SCHOOL CLUB

A club for children to learn drama, play games, do crafts, and meet old & new friends. Every Wednesday during term-time at the Church & Community Hall, 15:30-17:00 (with 45 minutes of drama). Costs £2.

MONTHLY GROUPS

1ST WEDNESDAY

COFFEE MORNING

Join us at the Powerhouse for coffee and tea right after our Wednesday communion service. There is a cake stall with delicious cakes for sale:
Wed 04/11/15 & Wed 02/12/15, 10:15

2ND WEDNESDAY

AIDAN LADIES

Group for ladies, meeting at the Powerhouse to chat, play games, do crafts or listen to stories:
Wed 11/11/15, 12:30 - Bring and Share Meal
Wed 13/01/16, 14:00 - Quiz

3RD WEDNESDAY

CRAFT CLUB

A group of us meets at the Powerhouse to do craft activities. Please feel free to join us:
Wed 18/11/15, 16/12/15 & 20/01/16, 14:00

FRIDAYS

COMMUNITY CAFE

Coffees, cakes and community, every Friday from 09:30-12:00 at the back of church.

DRAMA CLASSES

Teen and adult drama classes are held on Fridays 19:00-21:00 at the Church & Community Hall. Contact Gary Cordice on 079 8145 7667 for more information.

CHURCH CHOIR

If you're interested in singing, why not join our church choir. We rehearse most Fridays in church from 19:15.

THURSDAY

WOMEN'S SMALL GROUP

This is a monthly meeting for women at The Vicarage. A place to socialise and meet new friends, support each other as women, pray together and make the Bible relevant to our day to day lives:
Thu 26/11/15, 20:00-21:30 - on Gomer
Thu 17/12/15, 20:00-21:30 - Social evening
Thu 21/01/16, 20:00-21:30 - on Mary (Jesus' mother)

LAST THURSDAY

CAMEO

COME AND MEET OTHERS for a cup of tea, a piece of cake and a chat at our Church & Community Hall:
Thu 26/11/15, 14:00-16:00
Thu 28/01/16, 14:00-16:00

VICAR'S THOUGHTS

Dear friends,

Autumn is a season that increasingly fascinates me. Although I would mostly see myself as a Spring and Summer person, I have come to enjoy some of the lovely things Autumn has to offer, especially in our beautiful countryside. I love the profusion of colours; the gentle walks in the woodlands with leaves cushioning our every steps, and the joy of a guiltless hot chocolate. As someone beautifully put it, Autumn has the "right amount of sun and the right amount of cuddle weather".

For many, it is a period of planning and preparation for family celebrations: Hallowe'en and Thanksgiving for Americans, St Nicholas in the Netherlands, Belgium or Germany, Diwali for Sikhs and Hindus, Hanukkah for Jews, etc. Autumn is also the season during which our cities, towns and villages put on their coat of light; our shops and houses are beautifully decorated, presents are bought and wrapped, cards and letters are written and exchanged, all in preparation for Christmas.

Autumn is also a season of great generosity and hospitality. It is often during Autumn that many of us give generously to charities and organisations working with those least favoured, especially in provision for winter.

A few years ago, I came across a Latin American tradition called Las Posadas (the inns or shelters in Spanish) that beautifully illustrates this spirit of hospitality and generosity. In Mexico and some parts of Central and Southern America, it is traditional to hold Posadas during the nine days before Christmas, beginning 16th December and ending 24th December, symbolising the nine months of Mary's pregnancy.

Las Posadas represent Mary and Joseph's long, frustrating search for shelter en route to Bethlehem. The tradition re-enacts, with a twist, and a happy ending, the story told in Luke 2:1-7:

"A group of men, women and children stand singing at the door of a house seeking posada, or shelter. After briefly contemplating their request, the unimpressed gatekeepers refuse to open the doors and melodically inform the outsiders to keep walking. This is not an inn, keep going, we can't open up, we don't want any vagabonds here. Undeterred, the outsiders continue to plead



their case in song. The verses fly back and forth, increasing in intensity, until the insiders finally consent. The doors fly open and everyone bursts into a song of welcome and celebration as the two groups become one. Enter saintly pilgrims, welcome to these quarters."

This tradition also places the celebrations in neighbourhoods, so the peregrinos, or pilgrims, can ask for shelter at the doors of houses in the community. Each night, a candlelit procession goes to a prearranged home requesting shelter for the Holy Family. After the ritual verses are sung and responded to, the entire group is allowed into that house. A party ensues, and the visitors spend the night.

By the time the group, which increases in size each night with the addition of families that previously provided shelter, makes its way to the final house on Christmas Eve, participants enjoy the biggest party of all. Accordingly, the final posada is usually held in the largest home in the community or in the church.

Yes, I know. It is still a bit too early to be using the "C" word. But this year, I would like us to not only use the "C" word out of season, but to be actively preparing for Christmas together. The story of the Nativity is not just about a baby being born in a manger. It is the narrative of pilgrims who, once the music dies down and the party wraps up, are looking for the same things that José and Maria were, a safe place where they can be with families and communities that care for them. We learn from the Posadas that by welcoming the poor and the needy, we are welcoming Jesus in our midst.

This Christmas, may our hearts and homes be warm and cosy posadas (shelters, inns) ready to welcome fellow pilgrims on the journey of life.

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The Pilot wishes you a Happy Christmas and Blessed 2016!

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."



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