



Notes from the Riverbank

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

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● Welcome to the thirty-third edition of “Notes from the Riverbank.”

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



Harvest Festival 2016

We begin this month's issue with a couple of Adrian Turner's wonderful photos of the floral decorations for Harvest Festival earlier this month.



Toria, Riverbank Editor





Pastoral Letter: Francis, the little poor man of Christ

What do the present Pope and our one-time prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, have in common? Answer: both, at the time of their election, acknowledged their indebtedness to St. Francis of Assisi. The new pontiff said he would be known in the future as Pope Francis; the first lady prime minister of the United Kingdom recited words attributed to the little poor man of Assisi by saying:

*Where there is error may there be truth.
Where there is doubt may there be faith.
Where there is despair may there be hope.*

Francis himself would have been alarmed and embarrassed by his celebrity. More than anyone else in recorded history he shunned the public stage. The man who said "preach the gospel and if necessary, use words" never sought either the prominence of the pulpit nor the acclamation of the crowds. A personal position of power and influence in church or state was never a part of his vision. Here was the man who, when confronted by a gang of robbers on a mountain road, happily gave to them more than they demanded, stripping himself of his father's borrowed robes and emptying his father's pockets. We still imagine him laughing and jumping for joy as he mischievously continued his journey.

Perhaps there was something of the showman in the young man, Francis. Even before his call to service he loved the songs of the French troubadours and he sang their songs of adventure and romance. And he did not shy away from a good fight, particularly when it promised a good punch-up with the neighbouring gang in Perugia. However, he has never been accused of personal weakness or cowardice. It took a high measure of moral courage for this son of a wealthy merchantman to renounce all riches and to commit himself to "Sister Poverty." As for those unfortunate lepers who roamed the hills of Umbria and were regarded as unwanted outcasts of society... how did they at first respond to that impetuous man who suddenly embraced one of their pock-faced colleagues and kissed him on the face? They soon learned that this was not a sudden surge of emotion, even less a wicked prank played on a helpless individual. It was the beginning of a ministry that reached out to the powerless, the diseased and impotent. And it lasted a lifetime.

The change in Francis occurred when he saw the old neglected church of San Damiano in ruins. He heard the voice of Jesus bidding him to "build my church," and as he began to build, brick by brick, he realised that this was the much greater call to rebuild the Church of Christ. He drew together a group of men (initially, only men) into a community of prayer, evangelism and service. As the Church moved into the Dark Ages, perhaps it was the light and faith of the Franciscan movement more than anything else that reminded the continent of Europe of the continuing love of God. During the centuries following Francis' death his friars seemed to arise in all sorts of places. They first came to England in 1224. They are with us today both in the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. With different hats and headdress they appear almost everywhere.

One episode in Francis' life is especially significant for us modern readers. As the crusading forces fought out their differences with their Muslim enemies, Francis endeavoured to bring peace to his troubled world with a visit to the Sultan!

Most people regarded the enterprise as naive or downright impossible and certainly very dangerous. However, after a series of adventures that would make a good Hollywood film, he managed to gain access to Melek-el- Kemel and urged him to turn to Christ. "If you are willing to become converts to Christ, you and your people, I shall be only too glad to stay with you for love of him," he is reported to have said. They seem to have got on well together but the Sultan kindly rejected the invitation of this most unusual and courageous visitor and he was escorted to the frontier in peace.

A few years ago I was pleased to serve the Anglican congregation in Assisi. Its chaplain (a friar) left to enjoy a family holiday in England. I remember sitting quietly on my own in the church of San Damiano – the very church in which St. Francis had his calling. It was early in the morning and no one else was around. It was so moving. And I remember too those warm summer evenings in the middle of the ancient village when songsters and *jongleurs* would entertain tourists and residents alike with their music and silliness. Francis would have enjoyed it and probably would have come forward to sing and dance with the best and worst of them.

What he would not understand or been able to accept was the massive basilica that has now arisen in his name at the far end of this walled city. The cathedral church, rich in silver and gold is adorned with priceless works by Giotto and Martini and others; and its extravagant structure is built upon the human remains of the little poor man of God.

As I write this note on the day following St Francis' day our new prime minister Teresa May has promised that her government will "work for ordinary working people." Pope Francis declares that he wants "a Church that is poor and for the poor." Jeremy Corbyn pleaded that "we should have a heart" about poverty. And, earlier in my lifetime, at the centre of the two events that shifted the world's political axis we find again the influence of St. Francis. Lech Wałęsa, a Polish trade union leader, was the founder of the Solidarity movement that helped to overthrow the Communist regime in eastern Europe; and Archbishop Tutu in South Africa was at the centre of change when apartheid was dismantled and the black population emerged to claim equal rights with whites. Both of these leaders are Third Order Franciscans. It is clear to me that *il poverello* continues to emerge in the most unlikely places.



Leighton Thomas

- In the Anglican Church, **The Society of St Francis** is made up of Three Orders. **The First Order** is, respectively, for men and women. Their brown habit is accompanied by a white girdle with three knots representing poverty, chastity and obedience. They are itinerant preachers not confined to one house. **The Second Order** (Sisters of St Clare) is an enclosed Community of women committed to prayer. The nearest convent is Freeland, north of Oxford. **The Third Order** is made up of men and women engaged in all kinds of secular occupations, but united in a Rule appropriate to the individual's circumstances and accepted by the Society. The Oxford Area has roughly 70 members; the Reading Area somewhat fewer. There are groups active in all parts of the UK and the world.



Ploughman's lunch in aid of Save the Children Fund

A ploughman's lunch will be held from 12.00-2.00pm on Thursday 3rd November 2016 at Oriel House, Thames Road, Goring, with Roger Selman at the piano. Everyone welcome.



Ann Moody



Ecumenical Advent Groups

Once again it is time to sign up for another one of our popular Advent Courses. This year our course is *Living in the Light* written by Canons Simon Stanley and Canon Robert Warren, and the booklet will cost £5.

The course will run for four weeks beginning on Monday 21st November and be followed by combined Epiphany Celebrations on Thursday 5th January 2017 at 11.30am until 1.30pm and 7.30pm until 9.30pm.

Please join us as we travel through Advent to Christmas and on to Epiphany, in the company of people from all the churches in the Parish and Benefice. Everyone is welcome!



Judy Crawford and Alun Hughes



Our Discipleship, God's Word

Throughout autumn we are trying to learn how to be better followers of Jesus Christ: learning how to be better disciples. We are doing this by studying David Watson's excellent book which offers us helpful guidance on how to live as a Christian. The Bible and developing our relationship with God in prayer are keys to our discipleship. The Bible tells us the story of God's deep love for us; it is God's story, but it is also our story. We can never be finished with reading God's word as there is always something new to read, hear or see. God can work in us every time we read the Bible, and allow him to speak to us through it. Below are some tools to help us open God's word; I hope they may be of use to you.



The Scripture Union produces *Daily Bread* and *Encounter with God* for adults:

www.scriptureunion.org.uk

CWR produces Topz for children, especially for the 7-11s:

www.cwr.org.uk/store/t-topz.aspx



Reflections for Daily Prayer by Church House Publishing is based on Bible readings from the lectionary; it is also available as an App and for Kindle www.chpublishing.co.uk

The Good Book produces *Engage* and *Discover* for teenagers:

www.thegoodbook.co.uk



Bible in a year

Now here's a challenge! Find someone to be accountable to and read the Bible in a year starting on 1st January! You can buy a book such as *Cover to Cover* to help, or you can look at www.bibleinoneyear.org, get the app on your phone or subscribe to a daily email.



Small groups can help to understand God's word, as we talk and pray about it together so why not join an Advent group? Let's not take having God's word for granted, but dig deeper and ask him to speak to us! Let us hunger after His word!



Steve Johnson, Assistant Curate



Happy day!

On Saturday 24th September at St Mary the Virgin in Hampstead Norreys, our former Assistant Curate Luci Heyn married Alistair Morriss in a wonderful village wedding. It was a delightful service, the church was filled with parishioners packed into the gallery, and the children's choir sang an anthem.

Afterwards in the sunshine, Dr and Revd Morriss lead the way along the path past the recreation ground to the village hall for tea. The hall was decked with bunting and there were speeches, bubbles and cakes... lots of lots of cakes!



We wish Luci and Alistair many happy years of laughter together.



Brenda Kerr Muir



Christmas Fair 2016

The Christmas Fair this year is to be held in St Thomas' Church from 11am to 2pm on Saturday 26th November. Make a note in your diary now! There will be an opportunity to browse books, plants, preserves and cakes, and of course the delicious lunches will, as ever, be served. The toy stall is a chance to "recycle" those good quality toys that have been grown out-of and replace with something else. Father Christmas will be making an appearance, and there will be a children's colouring competition; Christmas gifts include cards, church mugs and tea towels. Proceeds from the Fair this year will go towards the Church Fund.

We are in need of donations for some of the stalls for the Christmas fair. In particular we require CDs, DVDs, prizes suitable for the raffle, bottles for the tombola, good quality books, nearly new children's books and good quality toys, bric-a-brac, cakes, preserves, toiletries and plants. **If you need items to be collected** contact Chris Tassell on 873280. Items can also be brought to church on Friday 25th November between 4pm and 6pm, or before the Fair starts on Saturday 26th at 11am.

Do come along and join us for a day of festive fun and fellowship!

We also need a few volunteers to help move the chairs and put up the tables. If you would like to help, come along to the church at 4pm on Friday 25th November.



Chris Tassell

Sue Ryder

The Nettlebed Hospice

The Nettlebed Hospice provides palliative care for patients with life-threatening illnesses, has annual running costs of £3.1 million. Public funding covers £800,000, but the remainder has to come from support from the local community. The collection at St Thomas' on 6th November will be donated to the Hospice; please give generously. If you have never been there, do consider visiting; the grounds are really lovely.



Alun Hughes

United Benefice of
Goring & Streatley
with South Stoke



Benefice Calendar - November 2016

		<u>Goring</u>	<u>Streatley</u>	<u>South Stoke</u>
We. 2 nd	Midweek Holy Communion followed by coffee	10.30		
Su. 6 th	Advent - 3 Holy Communion	8.00	11.15	
	Family Service	9.30		11.15
	Evensong	16.00		
We. 9 th	Midweek Holy Communion	10.30		
Su. 13 th	Advent - 2 Holy Communion		8.00	
	Remembrance Remembrance Service	10.50	10.50	10.50
	Benefice Lunch at 1pm in the Morrell Room (please sign up in advance via list in churches – everyone welcome!)			
	Sunday Discoverers	17.00		
	Stillness on Sunday		17.30	
We. 16 th	Midweek Holy Communion	10.30		
	South Stoke Coffee Morning			10.30
Th.. 17 th	Pick a Flick & lunch showing 'Mrs Brown'	10.30		
Su. 20 th	Advent - 1 Holy Communion	8.00	11.15	
	Good News Service	9.30		
Mo. 21 st	Ecumenical Advent Groups begin (please sign up via list in churches)			
We. 23 rd	Midweek Holy Communion	10.30		
Fri. 25 th	Come on Board Scrabble in the Canterbury Room	15.00		
Sa. 26 th	St. Thomas' Christmas Fair	11.00		
Su. 27 th	Advent 1 Holy Communion	9.30	8.00	11.15
	Mattins		11.15	
	Discoverers	17.00		
	Advent Carol Service		19.00	
Mo. 28 th	Mum's Out Tonight @ 8pm, 18 Wallingford Road, Goring			
We. 30 th	Midweek Holy Communion	10.30		

- Morning Prayer:** South Stoke @ 9.30am every Friday, Goring @ 9.15am on 10th and 24th November
- St. Andrew's Congregation to join with St. Mary's Congregation at 11.15am on Sunday 20th November
- For more details, call the Vicarage (875651) or look at the website www.thomandmary.org.uk