

Shakespeare's Church celebrates a Shakespeare anniversary



The Trinity Players perform Twelfth Night

Holy Trinity Church in Stratford is known as the church where Shakespeare was baptised and is buried, and hence a destination for a quarter of a million visitors a year. It is a constant challenge to link this with the church's mission and remind visitors that "a greater than Shakespeare is here."

The 400th anniversary of the Bard's death last year offered a unique opportunity for that.

In practical terms, revenue from contributions to those visiting Shakespeare's grave increased by some 30%. That may not sound very spiritual, but it enables the PCC not only to maintain the building for future generations, but also to increase its contribution through Parish Share to the mission of the Diocese as a whole. Moreover, the use of prayer candles increased far more, suggesting that visitors are aware of the spiritual power of this place.

On the weekend of Shakespeare's birthday, thousands of visitors flowed through – not only for the traditional Saturday morning procession offering flowers at the grave, and for the Shakespeare sermon on the Sunday, but also for a candlelit vigil on the Saturday night, following a procession from the theatre, which attracted many more than expected.

The church's own drama group, Trinity Players, made their principal contributions later in the year. A production of *Twelfth Night*, attended by hundreds, was linked with the insights of the Gospel by a memorable sermon the previous Sunday from the Revd Paul Edmondson, Head of Research and Learning at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Later, the Players presented the English premiere of Rowan Williams' new play *Shakeshafte*, imagining a confrontation between the young Shakespeare, in his supposed time as a tutor in Lancashire during his "lost years," and the Jesuit martyr Edmund Campion, and wrestling with challenging issues about the nature of faith in troubled times. The rapt attention amongst audiences, and the spirit of prayer amongst the acting company, were noticeable.

Of course, only parts of the impact of such a year can be measured, but we believe it was real, and we rejoice in it.

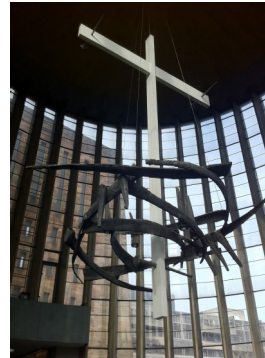
Anthony Woollard



Prayer Diary

March 2017

*Who are we? Where have we come from? Where are we going?
How, then, shall we live?*



We are stepping into the season of Lent, turning towards Jesus' passion and death. We are preparing ourselves to join the Last Supper, to wait with Christ in the Garden, to stand at the foot of the cross. Forty days to reflect in our lives Jesus' time in the wilderness: a time to dwell on who God is, what he has done and what he has called us to – and who we are before God. We begin with the sign of the cross, marked in ash on our foreheads. "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ." *Who are we? Where have we come from? Where are we going?*

This year, Ash Wednesday falls on St. David's Day. David was a monk and bishop of the sixth century. A deeply spiritual person, he is remembered for his kindness and compassion to the poor and the sick. Jesus' words in the Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday (Matthew 6.1-6 & 16-21) commend charity like David's, done in quiet humility: "when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret." Then, Jesus teaches us to pray in the same way, not as a display of piety: "go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret." *How, then, shall we live?*

Our journey with Christ to Jerusalem, Gethsemane, Golgotha and finally the tomb will lead us to face the depths of sin and suffering - and to face them down with the greatness of God's grace. What can we do in response to such loving mercy? We can walk in compassion alongside the suffering in their need, and draw closer to our saving God in our hearts. This Lent, how will you live?

Bishop Christopher

Focus on Fosse Deanery

I became Lay Chair of Fosse Deanery just last June, so need your prayers (and patience) as I learn about the role and the parishes in the towns and villages of our deanery here amongst some of Warwickshire's southern reaches.

Last year's synod meetings have provided an exchange of ideas and experiences from our fellow Anglicans, and even those of different denominations or faith. Meeting themes have included an interview conducted by the Revd Dr Christopher Lamb with Shaykh Yunus Bhayat, Muslim Chaplain at University Hospital Coventry, followed by an update on the Community of the Cross of Nails delivered by Alice Farnhill. Both items reminded us of the power of respect for others and desire for harmony even when differences appear great. Expression of a shared search for God and peace among us inescapably brought to mind the words of the late Jo Cox MP: we "have far more in common with each other than things that divide us."

A presentation by the Revd Paul Simmonds about 'Mission in the World of Work' and the part played by Christians in the workplace provoked us to consider how our own churches were linked to local workforces and how we might create or improve connections to support those employed in the parish.

'Church Buildings: burden or blessing?' was a discussion about how we might make the most of our physical facilities. It threw up fascinating ideas of congregation initiatives for fundraising, outreach, or just to remind people that their local church is still there! Barford held an outdoor event serving soup and bread under canvas in the churchyard in aid of Save the Children's appeal on behalf of Syrian refugees.

The historical significance of places within our deanery (indeed, the case with many locations across the Coventry Diocese) provided the inspiration for an exhibition about the Battle of Edgehill housed in the church at Radway. The response to another significance lent by secular history to one of our deanery's churches – in Stratford-upon-Avon - is described in one of the other articles here.



Orion Johnson
Lay Chair, Fosse Deanery

Contemplative Prayer



After I felt the touch of God's love on an Alpha course seventeen years ago, prayer seemed the most natural thing; it was an ongoing conversation with God who was always with me. Then, after a particularly busy period in church, I suddenly realised that I'd lost touch with God and prayer was flat and disconnected. This was the beginning of the first of several 'desert' periods I've had on

my faith journey. These desert periods have been times when God seemed distant or non-existent, when prayer was dry and difficult, times when I have been confused and uncertain about what I believed.

Looking back, I understand that God hadn't left me - it was me in all my busyness that had 'tuned out' from Him. Desert periods have been experienced by just about every Christian I know. They can be very rich times for growth... but when you are in the midst of them they are challenging and can seem endless.

We all have times of feeling close to God and times when we feel more distant from him. How do we maintain our walk with him in the busyness of our lives? When we are feeling broken and vulnerable, or dealing with hurt, frustration and disappointment, how do we abide in Christ and maintain that sense of peace and closeness?

I've found contemplative prayer to be a powerful help in building inner peace, strength and resilience even in the most stressful situations. Through this way of praying, scripture changes from a text to be understood, interpreted and applied, to the living word of God which speaks to, heals and nourishes our souls.

'Retreat in Daily Life' is a course in the diocese which is a great introduction to contemplative prayer. We've run an in-house version of this called 'Going Deeper with God' which has had a real impact in our congregation.

Whether you're feeling close to God, or you're struggling in a desert period, I'd recommend exploring contemplative prayer as a way of deepening your relationship with God and knowing more of his peace in your life.



Revd Barry Jackson

Fri 24

Hampton Lucy Primary School & Nursery, Hampton Lucy, Warwick.
Headteachers: Margaret Lunnon. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.
*Walter Hilton of Thurgarton, Augustinian Canon, Mystic, 1396
*Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, Martyr, 1980

Sat 25

Loxley Primary School, Loxley, Warwickshire. Head of School: Matthew Watson. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.
We pray for Diocesan Synod which meets today.

Sun 26

Mothers
Sunday

On this Mothering Sunday, we pray particularly for those who have lost their mothers, those who never knew their mothers and those who have had difficult relationships with their mothers.
*Harriet Monsell, Founder of the Community of St John the Baptist, 1883

Mon 27

St Andrew, Shotton. Clergy: James Warren, Kay Dyer. Readers: Jan Walker & Sarah Cushing. We thank God for the development of our Healing & Listening Ministry and a new outreach called 'Little Stars' ably organised by Jan Walker. Please pray for wisdom for the clergy, churchwardens & PCC as they respond to the NCD Survey.

Tue 28

We pray for all who care for and steward God's wonderful creation. At this time of spring renewal, we pray for all farmers and shepherds who are spending long hours watching over and caring for their animals as they bring forth new life. We give thanks for their skill, dedication and patience.

Wed 29

The Dasset Magna Group of Churches. Clergy: Norman Howes. Reader: John Davies. We pray for God's blessing upon the church members and the local community.
Today we pray for the Reverend Pat Townshend as she is collated as Vicar of Dunchurch St Peter by Bishop Christopher.

Thu 30

Moreton Morrell Primary School, Moreton Morrell, Warwick. Headteacher: Sarah Eadon. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.
We thank God for the work of the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE).

Fri 31

Wellesbourne Primary and Nursery School, Wellesbourne, Warwickshire. Headteacher: Lindsey Oscroft. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.
*John Donne, Priest, Poet, 1631

Cycle of Prayer - March 2017

With a focus on parishes and schools in Fosse Deanery

Wed 1

Ash
Wednesday

Today is Self-Injury Awareness Day. Raising awareness about self-injury is incredibly important. Awareness leads to understanding and empathy, banishing judgement and fear, and reducing the number of people who suffer in silence. We pray that today is successful in raising awareness.
*David, Bishop of Menevia, Patron of Wales, c.601

Thu 2

Interviews are being held this month for incumbent positions at several parishes across the diocese. Please pray for peace, wisdom and guidance for the candidates and interview panels. Also pray that the right person may be appointed for each role.
*Chad, Bishop of Lichfield, Missionary, 672

Fri 3

Mid-Fosse Parishes. Clergy: John Parker, Rachel Saum. Readers: Richard Woodfin, Gillian Jones. We thank God for the building of a new room at Morton Morrell Church. Please pray that the people of God may grow in confidence when it comes to speaking about their faith.
We pray for the Bishop's Council day conference, taking place tomorrow.

Sat 4

Barford, Sherbourne, Wasperton, Charlecote, Hampton Lucy and Loxley. Clergy: David Jessett, Neville Beamer. Readers: Ann Fawcett, Chris Farr, Duncan Fairfax-Lucy. We thank God for the faithful work of congregation members in keeping our six churches going through another year. Please pray that we will see how we can change in order to grow.

Sun 5

First Sunday of
Lent

Today Bishop John will be opening the new St Chad's Community Centre and then preaching at the Civic Service at St Chad's church, Bishop's Tachbrook. We thank God for the new opportunities the St Chad's Community Centre will bring to the village.

Mon 6

Tomorrow the Diocesan Board of Education RE coordinators are meeting at St Lawrence Primary School, Napton to plant willow crafted creations in the school grounds. We pray for this initiative.
We also pray for Bishop Christopher and Bishop John who are both attending the residential meeting of the West Midlands Bishops.

Tue 7

Kineton Primary School, Kineton, Warwickshire. Headteacher: Margaret Pollard. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.
*Perpetua, Felicity and their Companions, Martyrs at Carthage, 203

Wed 8 We pray for International Women's Day: #BeBoldForChange.
We pray for the DBE conference taking place today.
*Edward King, Bishop of Lincoln, 1910
*Felix, Bishop, Apostle to the East Angles, 647
*Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, Priest, Poet, 1929

Thu 9 We thank God for the buildings and spaces he has entrusted to as places of worship. We pray for those people and parishes who are struggling to maintain their buildings. We ask God to help us steward these spaces well. We pray for the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (DAC).

Fri 10 Walton d'Eivile with Wellesbourne. Clergy: Kate Mier, Wendy Biddington, Steve Hood. Readers: Tina Lamb, Michael Parry, Paul Gifford. We thank God for deepening people's prayer life through Breathe24 events, and for Open the Book at our Primary School. We pray that God will use our youth work to transform the lives of troubled teenagers.

Sat 11 Today Bishop John will be talking at an Away Day for Leek Wootton parish. We pray that those participating in this Away Day feel renewed and restored by the Holy Spirit.
We pray for Richard Cooke, DDO and Principal of the Diocesan Training Partnership and for all members of the DTP team.

Sun 12 Today we give thanks for retired clergy with permission to officiate who provide support and help to parishes going through interregnum. We also thank God for the Scout and Guide movements throughout the world. We pray for all those who willingly give their time and energy to lead and support local groups in Coventry and Warwickshire.

Second Sunday of Lent

Mon 13 We pray for those who are struggling financially. We remember especially those searching for work and those in need of food and shelter. We give thanks for all those seeking to meet these needs in Churches, charities, the welfare system and food banks.

Tue 14 Barford St.Peter's Primary School, Barford, Warwick. Headteacher: Annette Delaney. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.
We pray for the Glebe Committee which meets this afternoon.

Wed 15 Shottery St Andrew's Primary School, Stratford upon Avon. Headteacher: Sarah Marshall. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.
We pray for the Parsonages Committee which meets this afternoon.

Thu 16 Alveston. Clergy: Richard Williams, Mike Harris, Richard Smith. We give thanks for and remember the long ministry to our parish and the diocese of Reader Canon Lisle Sharp who sadly died in November. We pray for the continued growth and confidence of the groups leading our 'Growing in the Right Direction' initiative.

Fri 17 This month we are invited to remember women affected by Ovarian Cancer, those who care for them, and those seeking to treat the disease. We pray for greater awareness of the disease and the often 'silent' symptoms so that many more women can be treated early and successfully.
*Patrick, Bishop, Missionary, Patron of Ireland, c.460

Sat 18 The Willows Primary School, Stratford upon Avon. Headteacher: Jo Howell. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.
*Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, Teacher of the Faith, 386

Sun 19 The Edgehill Churches. Clergy: Barry Jackson, Richard Cooke. Readers: Peter Ashton, Heidi Cartledge, Alan Hill. We thank God for the the enthusiasm and commitment of our church congregations in serving our communities and for the growing number of families in our churches. Please pray for our new Curate, Alex Williams, as she prepares for ordination in July

Joseph of Nazareth

Mon 20 The Dasset Primary School, Fenny Compton, Southam. Headteacher: Alison Hine. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors.
*Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne, Missionary, 687

Tue 21 Alveston Primary School, Tiddington, Stratford upon Avon. Headteacher: Krysia Vickery. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.
We pray for the Bishop's Study morning which takes place today.
*Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Reformation Martyr, 1556

Wed 22 We pray for all the schools in the diocese as they journey through Lent and prepare to celebrate Easter.
Today we pray for Bishop John who will be at St Nicholas, Radford Semele from 7pm to give thanks for the life of Offa House and to look ahead and listen to what the Spirit may be saying to the churches.

Thu 23 Stratford upon Avon, Luddington and Clifford Chambers. Clergy: Patrick Taylor, Nicki Chatterton, Andrew Dow. Readers: Andrew Martin, Mike Milburn. We pray for God's blessing upon the church members and the local community.