

Wye Brooks Group

Update for 31st January

Epiphany 4/Candlemas

LECTIONARY READINGS

We are celebrating Candlemas, so
Malachi 3:1-5
Ps 24
Hebrews 2:14-end
Luke 2:22-40

FROM THE VICAR

Greetings folks! I want to have three weeks on the **Diocesan Shared Priorities**, the things we need to be doing as a church, writing one article on each. Here they are.

DIOCESEAN SHARED PRIORITIES

1. **SPIRITUAL AND NUMERICAL GROWTH**
2. **Engaging in transforming communities**
3. **Reimagining ministry**

Covid is grim news - 100,000 deaths and counting. But there is unrelated grimmer news for the Church of England. We are dying. You can check some of the gory details on <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.html>

Since 1980 the UK population has risen by about 20%, but church attendance has more than halved. Only 13% of babes are now baptised, well under 25% have a church wedding and only 13% have a church funeral. The UK ranks 29th in Europe for religious commitment.

All of the major British Christian denominations (CofE, RC, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian) have been shrinking for a long time. There are growing churches - Eastern Orthodox (because of immigration), Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostal and the new independent evangelical and charismatic churches (because they tend to be biblically conservative and pretty lively), but the Church of England is declining faster than any other religious denomination. According to The Spectator it is on track to disappear altogether by about 2033—that's only 12 years away, well within the expected lifetime of most of us (we'll see!).

From 2011 to 2016 the number of practising Muslims in the UK grew by about 8% and in the 10 years to 2011 the number of non-religious people in the UK grew from 11% to 25%. Also, at least 25% describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious'.

Statistics can of course lie, but we know Sunday by Sunday that no one comes to church apart from the faithful few, most of whom are elderly. There is no-

one waiting to replace them: we have no teenagers in our benefice churches, only a couple of children and no young adults. We are typical, I'm afraid. Small wonder that the diocese puts Spiritual and Numerical Growth as the first of its shared priorities. Bums on seats are really important and simple arithmetic says that if we lose more than we gain, we disappear.

We often give ourselves a bit of hope by pointing to occasional attendees - people who come only for carol services or harvest, or to fundraising events. But what is actually going on, it seems to me, is that though they want us there for the building or the graveyard, they will not commit more an hour or two in the year - a bare minimum, fulfilling a duty if you like. It won't change, because society is hedonistic, digital, individualistic, materialistic, rapidly evolving and secular. To survive, we have to have what trumps or matches all of those, something that grabs.

So the clue is in the Shared Priority—*Spiritual and Numerical Growth*. In this kind of society, we have no chance at all, of getting the second of those until we have the first as top priority in church. We have to get the gospel of Christ itself, prayer, study, fellowship, commitment, witnessing to our faith, the abundant life that Christ himself promised, as higher priorities than the fabric and the fundraising. And this is a challenge to all of us, not just clergy. Remember - people will not normally notice a fireplace, but they will put themselves *close* to a fire.

The projected death of our Church is not primarily a challenge to our energy or our creativity, it's a challenge to our *faith*. Thinking about that first shared priority I would like you to ask yourself, "How are we growing our faith in such a way that people will want to know what it is about?" Top it up with - "How real is Jesus to us?" "How well do we keep our *daily* time with God?" "Who are we praying for *right now*?" Who are we fellowshiping with *right now*?" What are we learning in our Bible *right now*?" "How is God blessing us *right now*?" What Christian activities *outside* Sunday worship are we attending *right now*?" "What is *our own individual* ministry in the Church?"

Spiritual growth is essential to get numerical growth.

CHURCHES OPEN

Our churches are open for private prayer as follows:

Goodrich	7.15am-7pm every day
Marstow	Open daily 9.30—4.00pm
Llangarron	Sunday only 10.00am-4.00pm
Llangrove	Every day 10.00am—4.00pm
Welsh Newton	24/7

Please, if you do visit churches

- Wear a mask
- Use available hand sanitiser
- Avoid touching things like service books
- Sign any register of attendees.

CHURCH SERVICES

There will be no physical benefice church services before 21st February at the earliest.

RULES FOR CHURCH EVENTS

Nothing has changed since last week. We are permitted to hold church services, but in the current climate the big question is about whether we should do so, and we have decided not to. Here is what we are *allowed* to do.

Services

Permitted (strictly speaking), but with strict social distancing. No congregational hymn singing.

Funerals

Permitted. No more than 30 people inside OR outside.

Weddings

No more than 6 people

Baptisms

As for Services (above)



LIGHT BITE THEMES

31 Jan	Candlemas
7 Feb	Jesus who? (1)
14 Feb	Jesus who (2)
21 Feb	Lent 1
28 Feb	Lent 2

TODAY'S WORSHIP & LEARNING

Local

Our own 'Light Bite' for Candlemas. Go to <https://youtu.be/8PPKACYfaB0>

4.00 Our own Zoom Christingle service for Candlemas. Drop Wendy Price a line if you want to come—wendyllangrove@gmail.com

Our Diocese

The Bishop's message on **Faithful Pastoral Care.** Go to comms@hereford.anglican.org

Around the Country—Lively.

10.30 or 6.30 St Nick's Bristol on <https://www.stnicholasbristol.org/online>

9.30, 11.30 and 5.30 All Souls Langham Place on <https://allsouls.org/Groups/337797/Watch/Watch.aspx>

St Andrew the Great in Cambridge (stag.org)
Holy Trinity Combe Down (htcd.church)

Traditional

A choice of over 80 traditional services <https://www.pbs.org.uk/churches-and-services/-1>

The National Church of England - at 9am.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/church-online>

Songs of Praise, is at 1.15pm on **BBC 1** this week. Gospel Singer of the Year semi final.



THIS SECTION

I'm conscious that in this worship section normally only three change from week to week. If you find a service online which you think might appeal to us, please do let me know.

REGULAR GROUPS TO HELP YOU GROW AS A CHRISTIAN.

HOUSE GROUP

Led by Ben
Tues 10am
Zoom invitation issued automatically each week.

HOUSE GROUP

Led by Sue Evans on Zoom
Saturday every fortnight, 10.00am
Details from
suejayeans@googlemail.com

MEDITATION GROUP

Led by Sue Evans on Zoom
Monday each week, 2.00pm
Details from
suejayeans@googlemail.com

PRAYER GROUP

Led by Ben
Tues 7.30pm
Zoom invitation issued automatically each week.

MINI BIBLE STUDY

BE THOU MY VISION

I decided to interrupt our series of Bible studies when I found this, based on the lovely hymn Be thou my vision. It illustrates how closely the hymn writers rely on their bibles. Don't expect exact verbal agreement. Do expect agreement of ideas.

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart; Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art. Thou my best Thought, by day or by night, Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.	Love the Lord your God... (Matt. 22:37-40) Jesus declared. "For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'" (Matthew 4:10) My soul yearns for you in the night (Isa. 26:9) In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17)
Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word; I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord; Thou my great Father, I Thy true son; Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.	True wisdom is hidden from the worldly wise. (Matt. 11:25-30) Even there your hand will lead me Be thou with me, be I with thee. (Ps. 139:7-10) I will be his God, he will be my son (Rev. 21:7) See what love the Father has given to us that we should be called the children of God(1 Jn. 3:1-2)
Be Thou my battle Shield, Sword for the fight; Be Thou my Dignity, Thou my Delight; Thou my soul's Shelter, Thou my high Tow'r: Raise Thou me heav'nward, O Pow'r of my pow'r.	Put on the whole armour of God (Eph. 6:10-17) You are God's Temple, and God's Spirit dwells in you. (1 Cor. 3:16) God provides for all our needs (Matt. 6:25-34) The sight of God's angelic army (2 Kings 6:17)
Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise, Thou mine Inheritance, now and always: Thou and Thou only, first in my heart, High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art.	The love of money is the root of all evil. (1 Timothy 6:10) The Lord is my portion (Ps. 16:5-6) Love the Lord your God with all your heart/soul/might (Deut 6:5) All authority ... (Matthew 28:18)
High King of Heaven, my victory won, May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heav'n's Sun! Heart of my own heart, whatever befall, Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.	I saw the Lord, sitting on a throne, high and lifted up... (Isaiah 6:1) Our resurrection body, (1 Corinthians 15:35-49) God has granted us a place in his Kingdom(Col. 1:13) Even doubt... (1 Jn. 3:20) A doxology (1 Tim. 1:17)

BOOK OF THE BIBLE PHILIPPIANS

The letter to the Philippians is golden, truly golden and it really is worth getting to grips with. It's only four chapters long and not as full of theological vocabulary as other letters. It was written by St Paul, from prison, to the Church at Philippi. Paul might have been in jail, but the letter is overwhelmingly positive. He praises the Church folk for their faith, sometimes in difficult circumstances, and rejoices in his own faith.

Philippians contains plenty of familiar material, not least the early hymn about Christ, "Though he was in very nature God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant..."

Go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=RDCMUCVfwh9XpX2Y_tQfjeln9QA&v=oE9qqW1-BkU&feature=emb_rel_end if you want to watch a really good little diagrammatic study of Philippians. I recommend it.



I've no hesitation in promoting this. The Meaningful Chocolate Company sells Fairtrade Easter eggs which have a booklet telling the Easter story.

Not available in supermarkets due to knock on effect from the virus. Order online now.

Don't delay, they run out quite quickly.

<https://meaningfulchocolate.co.uk/collections/real-easter-egg>

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

The UK

- Pray for all aspects of the running of our country in these unique times.
- Pray for those badly affected by floods

Coronavirus.

Please continue to pray about

- Those who have lost loved ones or watched them suffer.
- The rollout of the vaccines
- The chaos in the Eu
- Those on the front line—the medical profession especially.
- Those who flout rules and endanger others.
- Those who find themselves isolated, and especially those without access to a computer.

World

- The US: the new President, Joe Biden, and Vice-President, Kamala Harris, and the changes the US will face.
- The migrant issue across Europe and here
- Our new relationship with Europe
- Violent places in the world
- Ongoing violent persecution of Christians worldwide, usually by Islamic militants.
- Climate change

Our churches and clergy

- Clergy—for energy, wisdom, faithfulness, courage.
- Churches—role in the community, finances, adaptability, digital presence.
- The future. What kind of Church is necessary?
- The weekly services, Light Bites, the Updates, the lay-led services, the Zoom Prayer meeting, the Physical and Zoom house groups, the Tech working party, the lay worship leading group, the meditation group.

Our villages

Pray for local businesses

Pray for people

- Brenda, in poor health, and husband Graham
- Martin—recovering from an operation
- Doris, living with dementia, in a nursing home
- Rosie, who is not in a good place generally
- Joyce - coming home after several weeks—damage to one wrist and the other shoulder in a fall.
- Margaret— still recovering after operations
- James, a young man with long term illness
- Carol, very ill, and husband Ray, unable to visit her because of Covid.
- Bernie - gall bladder issues, waiting for an operation.
- Mike - undergoing a course of chemo
- Ivor - at home, trying to regain mobility
- Jo—fighting illness
- The loved ones of the late Margaret Kelly, Stephen Borthwick, Marjorie Young Harris and Jan Sheldon.
- Others

READING THIS ON SATURDAY?

SEE BELOW



FOOD & DRINK

Our local eateries are important, and without our patronage they risk not being able to survive, especially in this climate.

Llangrove - The Royal Arms

Open for take away food only,

The phone number is **01989 770267**

Goodrich - The Hostelrie

No current information

The phone number is **01600 890241**

Goodrich - The Cross Keys

No current information

The phone number is **01600 890692**

REGULARS

THESE ITEMS DON'T CHANGE FROM WEEK TO WEEK

THE DAILY HOPE LINE

0800 804 8044

If you haven't done already, this is information to be passed on to those who don't have access to the Internet. It's a freephone number to a Church of England initiative, where there are recorded hymns, messages and prayers.

PARISH GIVING SCHEME

We are pushing the Parish Giving Scheme because it is the best way of giving to your Church, not just because of *how little hassle* it is to you, but also because of *how safe* and *tax efficient* it is, *how easy it is for treasurers to administer* and how it usually does actually *drive the income of churches up*. And GOOD NEWS—you don't even have to fill in a form. You can set it up by phone. By all means ring your church treasurer for details and fill in a form, or call the number below.

PARISH GIVING SCHEME

Tel 0333 002 1271

Church	<u>Parish Ref</u>	Church	<u>Parish Ref</u>
Goodrich	180618231	Marstow	180618241
Llangarron	180618239	Llangrove	180618240
Welsh Newton	180618256		

THE BORDER NEWS

Not currently available as a hard copy.

To get the online Border News:

- Go to wyereaches.org
- Click the What's On tab.

CONTACT

Revd Ben 01989 770454. Day off—Monday.

Email : benbentham@yahoo.co.uk .

Please tell me if you want to unsubscribe

Please tell me if you have ideas for improving this update.



ALLAGE CHURCH

Thanks once again to Sue Evans for her material aimed at youngsters. This is an attachment to the main email.

WHEN I NEEDED A NEIGHBOUR...

The nation feels very fed up at the moment. Some people, especially those without access to computers and the Internet, may be very vulnerable. Please keep an eye out for them. If you are concerned do phone me on 01989 770454.



The Llangrove Milk Shed at the Village Hall, For farm fresh milk and a few other things like butter and cakes



Goodrich Village Hall

Fish and Chip Van

Take Away

Saturday 30th January

from 5.00pm to 7.00pm

Pre-ordering is NOT available as Ben is working alone (Covid restrictions). Sorry!

MISSIONARY TALES

DEPARTURE

After 2½ years in Zimbabwe we took the decision that it was time to look for another role on the African mission field. Our visa would expire on 31st August and with the rabid Bishop Kunonga as the senior Zimbabwean bishop, was unlikely to be renewed. In any case, in the climate my churches could not really move forward with a white priest. The original intention had always been that I would be the last white priest in Chipinge and Chimanimani, so there was nothing amiss about it. We consulted Crosslinks, who said they would see what else there was for us in Africa. Back they came to us with 2 potential roles, a bible teaching post in South Africa, which they didn't think would suit me, and a parish priest post in Malawi. I investigated, alarm bells were ringing. I would be at the beck and call of an autocratic Bishop who was very publicly criticising Britain and its government for 'aid with strings attached' (which clipped the wings of those who wanted to use aid money for other purposes). Our diocesan Bishop wanted us to go to Rusape, but only for eighteen months, which would be more instability for the boys.

So, not ready to come back to the UK, I reluctantly began to cast the net wider and found a post in Chile, South America with ICS, the Intercontinental Church Society and SAMS, the South American Mission Society. I applied for it, was interviewed in Warwick, and landed it.

Nothing much happened in those final few months. We made no progress on the building of the Gaza church and indeed, Kevin was now living in Mozambique and his dad Vic was about to be kicked off his land, so even the offer of bricks was under threat. The congregation remained split as a result and there was nothing I could do about that. We did manage to get access to fuel though. The local farmers gained permission to import some themselves from South Africa—at five times the pump price.

We began to make arrangements. We would fly back to the UK on the last day of our visas' validity. We would spend six months here on missionary leave visiting supporting churches before going to Chile. Our goods - well, most of them would be kept in store in Harare and shipped to Chile at the right time. Some would come with us.

ONLY IN AFRICA!

The time came for us to move our goods to the shipping agent in Harare. It would take two trips using the Isuzu. The first one I made alone. The second, Lisa came with me.

We drove into Harare's suburbs and suddenly we found ourselves waved into a layby in the centre of the dual carriageway by police. Police radar! This was bad news - we could be off to the cells. The policeman was curt but polite - ish. "You were doing 70 (kph) in a 55 zone. The fine is \$3000 (about £5)" He handed me a piece of paper. "Go and see that officer over there."

At the side of the road was a police officer with a silver metal case. He barked at me that it would be \$3000, so I got the money out of my wallet and gave it to him. He put it in his

silver case and armed with a pad and the inevitable carbon paper, began the paperwork."

"What's your name?" he barked.

I told him.

"Where do you live?"

"Chipinge," I said, warily.

His attitude softened a little, "Chipinge. That's a long way away. Your address?"

"The Rectory, Main Street. I'm the local priest."

I thought he was going to explode. "What!!" he exclaimed loudly. And I thought I was heading off to jail and wondered what Lisa would do. Then to my astonishment he added, "It's a sin to fine a priest!"

"No, if I was breaking the law I should pay," I argued.

But he would have none of it. He tore up his paperwork, reached into his silver case and gave me my money back, despite my protests. We ended up laughing together.

So we left our goods with the shipping agents and went home. We held a local sale of those items we weren't taking, held farewell services in Chipinge and Chimanimani, paid Tendai and Phineas, our final gardener, 6 months wages, left the house - and took a driving holiday, first into Mozambique at Vilanculos (the wonderful warm Indian Ocean!) and then down to another simple resort, then down into South Africa, for four days in the Kruger National Park (wonderful, life changing!) and Tshipise (a hot springs resort in the north of the country) and finally back up through Zimbabwe to Harare. It was excellent, and the pressures of the previous 3 years seemed to melt away.

We stayed one night in Harare. Kevin wanted say goodbye in person and had driven over from his farm in Vinduzi, Mozambique. We all went out for a meal, making the most of the little time that we had left. Poor Zim was in such a miss that I remember being surprised that we could even find somewhere to eat out. But the time came for the parting. This big, burly farmer, Kevin, and I, hugged long and hard and wept on each others' shoulders, then he left. We are still in touch, and 8 years later we revisited Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

We met another set of missionaries in Harare's sad and virtually deserted airport and handed over the keys to our faithful Isuzu, paid the US\$30 each departure fee and went through the formalities. We boarded the aircraft, took off headed north. Half an hour later we were flying over Zambia and we felt a strange sense of relief. We couldn't be arrested for being white, or for criticising the government.

The next 3½ years brought rather different challenges on the continent of South America.

The postscript to this story came on a rainy day 6 months later, when we went to docks in Valparaiso, Chile, to collect our goods which had followed us from Harare. As we examined everything we realised that they had been gone through carefully and every single bit of electrical equipment, including a kettle, a toaster and a microwave which we had bought in South Africa and our elderly tv and video recorder from the UK, had been stolen. Africa's parting gift to us - the reminder to sit lightly on material things!