

# Sydenham Life

April 2024

In and around the parish of St Bartholomew

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## What's in a Name? A reflection from the incoming curate

In s04e03 of *The Simpsons*: 'Homer the Heretic.' Homer and Rev'd Lovejoy are arguing at a meal:

**Lovejoy:** Homer, I'd like you to remember Matthew 7:26, the foolish man who built his house on sand.

**Homer** (pointing): And you remember... Matthew... 21:17

**Lovejoy:** "and went out of the city into Bethany and he lodged there?"

**Homer:** Yeah... Think about it.

My mother gave me the first name 'Bethany' for two reasons: it's a nice name and it appears in the Bible. I wonder if that is how it sounds when I introduce myself, what connotations it brings up for them. Maybe they think it sounds nice, or maybe they remember it as the place where Jesus stayed with friends. Maybe they remember a friend or a relative called Bethany and wonder if I'm like them in any way. Maybe they know their Hebrew or Aramaic and think about a 'house of figs' or a 'house of affliction.'

My father gave me the surname 'Austin' somewhat automatically, as it is the name he was given and the name he gave to my mother and to me and to my sibling. In my hometown of Widnes, it marks me as a granddaughter of Keith 'Aus' Austin, but perhaps in other places people wonder more about my connections to automobiles, Augustinian monks and nuns, and million-dollar men.

I gave myself the middle name 'Emily' for two reasons: it's a nice name and I share it with my best friend. Middle names don't get used very often, but I like to think of my friend and to hear the nice cadence of my name in my head when I fill in official forms.

I was given the nickname 'Bea' by my friends. My initials meant that email address at theological college was 'bea25@

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cam.ac.uk', so a couple of my fellow Ridley Hall ordinands independently started calling me Bea. It has rather stuck, and is how I am known by most people at Liverpool Cathedral and Emmanuel Theological College. It is quite a difficult name to spell from hearing, though. I've been written to as B, Bee, and even Be! I wonder how this name sounds when I introduce myself. Maybe they think of a hard-working insect. Maybe they remember a friend or relative called Beatrice. Maybe they know their Latin and think about a blessing.

I will be given the style 'The Rev'd' by the Bishop of Southwark in June this year the day before I begin my service as assistant curate in the Parish of St. Bartholomew, Sydenham. I wonder how this will hit people's ears when they hear it. Maybe they will think of Jim, or other religious leaders they have met. Maybe they know that this indicates that I am a deacon, a servant of the church. Maybe they know their *Simpsons* will think of Rev'd Lovejoy.



So when your new neighbour, The Rev'd Bethany 'Bea' Austin, arrives at the end of June, what on earth will you think of her? I hope you will say hello and tell me your names and their stories and meanings, because you might have noticed I'm a bit obsessed with names! I hope that meeting me will bear out the thoughts of the Bethany where Christ lodged, and not so much of Stone Cold Steve Austin. I hope that you will know me as a Bea who can serve like a bee, and also one who can serve by just be-ing. Most of all, I hope that you will get to know me as I am, and that I can join in with all that is good and beautiful in this community.

*The Rev'd Bethany 'Bea' Austin*

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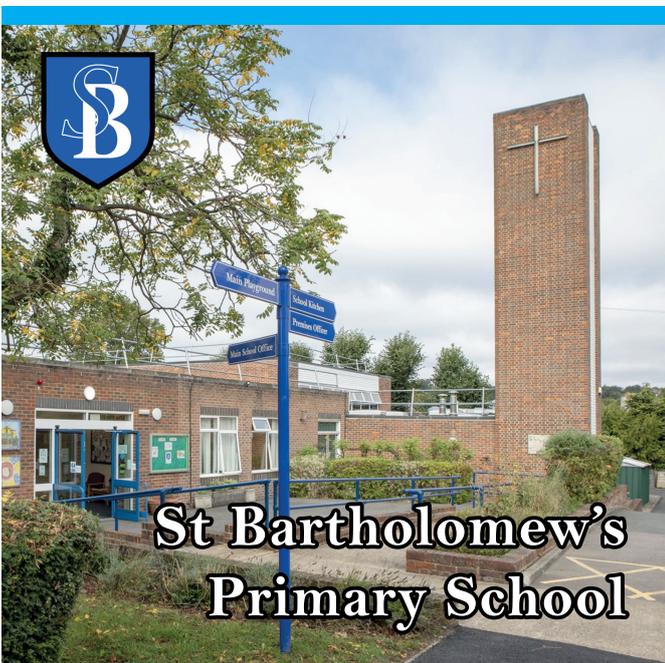
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# From the Editor

I was on my way home on the overground from West Croydon on 7 March 2024 when I remembered that there was a Lewisham mayoral election. I remembered that I needed to have some form of identification and as I did not want to return home and then go to the polling station, I looked at the appropriate website and found that my Oyster card with a photo would be satisfactory.

When I reached the polling station I saw a young couple and their child leaving. I was surprised at that time to be the only person in the polling station. I did not think anything of it as possibly there was heavier voting earlier on.

I forgot about it until Saturday morning when I looked up the results. I was surprised to see that there was a turnout of only 20.74% and that Brenda Dacres had become the first black woman to serve as a directly elected mayor in the UK. She received 21576 votes which was 51.5% of votes cast. I had to do a double take because it did not seem like a lot of votes to be elected mayor.

Running a borough cannot be an easy job and as I walk around Croydon, where I work, I see the consequences of a borough that has made decisions that have resulted in boarded up shops and shopping arcades. The Whitgift Centre is a shadow of its former self with a decrease in foot fall and the closure of one of the oldest Sainsbury's in the country. Thank goodness that Marks and Spencer are still there and a manager said to me that they were not going anywhere and I can confirm that it is always busy.

I think that no matter what party you support it's important to go and vote. There have been times in history where people have died in order for the right to vote and we should not forget that. It's the major way that things change in a democracy.

Geoffrey Cave, Sydenham Life Editor

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# Once More, Israel and Gaza

In the November issue of *Sydenham Life* Michael Kingston gave an excellent, concise summary of the basic factors in the Israel-Palestine conflict under the title ‘A Bloody Mess’. Since then the constant news stories of air strikes on apartment buildings in Gaza, with the death-toll rising daily—now 31,000—have overwhelmed in public consciousness the initial horror at the unacceptable atrocities of Hamas’ initial attack on Israel, and the plight of the remaining hostages. The refusal of Israel, and reluctance of Western leaders, to listen to calls for a ceasefire has had far-reaching repercussions within the UK—increased anti-Semitic and Islamophobic attacks, increased political volatility, increasingly extreme pronouncements.

I have been asked to offer an update perspective. As I write there are reports of a pending limited ceasefire. What follows here is a summary of factors that continue to affect any short-term settlement for cessation of this war.

## Cafes and buses

Before that, let me state my credentials for writing this piece. I have had a dual relationship with Israel/Palestine for nearly 40 years. My first visit was for an academic conference which took place during the first Intifada (the ‘Uprising’ of 1987-88). During the conference I was hosted by scholars in top Israeli universities; the rest of the time I was hosted by members of my (Arab Israeli) church in Jerusalem and Nazareth. My first experience was trying to escape the turmoil of Friday Prayers in Jerusalem by going to Bethlehem only to arrive amidst high tensions in Nativity Square; soldiers were welding shut the shutters of shops that had closed for a day of protest, and worshippers streamed out of the mosque into the square. It was tense. I was in Jerusalem in 2004 during the second Intifada, watching the ‘security’ wall seal off Bethlehem and much of East Jerusalem; avoiding street cafes because of potential suicide bombers (I regularly passed the location of the former Sbarro pizzeria where 16 died in 2001); and waking to the sound of just such a bomb on the Number 19 Egged (Israeli) bus full of students heading to university, killing 10 and wounding dozens. In 2016 I had pastoral oversight of a church on the Nablus/Shechem Road during the so-called Knife Intifada, also called ‘suicide by soldier’. In one week alone five teenagers launched themselves with kitchen knives or scissors at the fully armed and armoured security forces by the Damascus Gate, despairing of hope for their future. This was on my parish, where I walked every day.

In the years between those eruptions of violence I witnessed the daily humiliations of Palestinians taken off buses at random and searched, bullied at border crossings, houses demolished with no notice, olive groves cut down, settlements and roads criss-crossing the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Every increase in the level of Palestinian violence has been met by an exponential increase of Israeli military and civil pressure on the Palestinian people in response.

On my last stay, taking the (Arab) bus one day from the Old City of Jerusalem along the road towards Hebron, I fell into conversation with the young man next to me.

He told me that, historically, oppressive regimes last no more than 60 years, and that the end of Israeli occupation would come soon. Regardless of the historical analysis, it was very clear to me that the constant pressure-cooker suppression felt by Palestinians could only lead to the pot exploding. And so it has. I am not a prophet; it didn’t take a prophet to see this coming.

If this description seems weighted in favour of the Palestinians it is because I was living in occupied East Jerusalem and witnessed these things. This is not to justify Hamas’ violent attack on the Israeli villages across their border, but to see it within the decades-long pattern of escalating violence. The current round of incessant bombing of Gaza requires people to take a side. But the question should not be ‘Whose side do you take?’, because choosing sides is part of the ongoing problem. It only entrenches the demands of retaliation and further violence. When we take sides, let it be the side of those who are suffering most—children and innocent civilians. There is plenty of guilt to share amongst the combatants.

## A litany of abysmal leadership.

The Palestinians have suffered under dreadful leadership from their 1948 rejection of the borders drawn at the birth of the State of Israel to the present. The PLO, now Fatah, lost to Hamas in parliamentary elections in 2006 and have not held a ballot since. Hamas played on this failure in Gaza with a social-economic network that met people’s everyday needs, and so won power. Now their leaders willingly sacrifice their own people under the onslaught of Israeli tanks and missiles while remaining safely in the comfort of their Arab host countries.

I recently read a letter by an American archaeologist in the region in the early 70s during another period of violence. He described the ‘very real threat of complete social chaos because of the idiotic “radicalism” of some Palestinian leaders with more political ambition than concern for the Palestinians’. Little difference, then.<sup>1</sup>

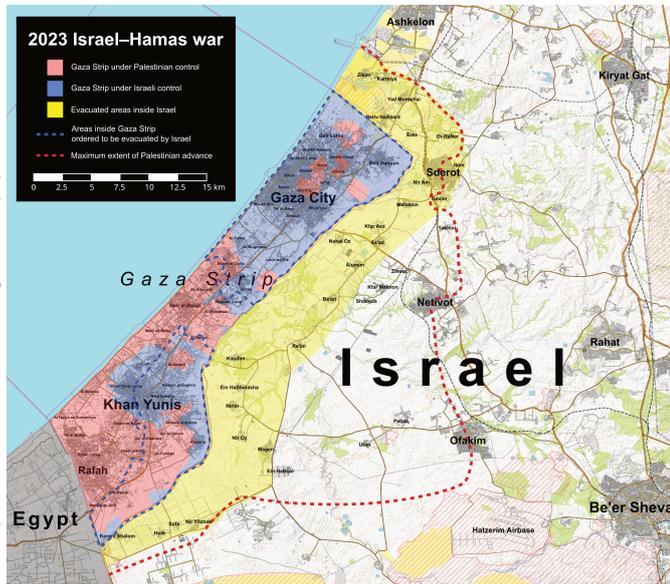
Israel’s politics has been dominated by Benjamin Netanyahu for three decades. He has been the chief driving force behind the appropriation of Palestinian land and the building of hundreds of Jewish settlements, the policy of increasing military might, and even of payrolling Hamas in order to sow division with the Palestinian Authority.<sup>2</sup> He is directly responsible for the relentless bloodshed in Gaza.

The failure of leadership is by no means limited to the region. There is not space to document the British and Western powers’ responsibility from the post WWI Mandate and 1948 creation of state of Israel. Today we witness an abject failure of leadership and statesmanship from the US (and its UK shadow).

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1 “No one is listening to Gaza’s pleas — including our leaders” <https://www.972mag.com/gaza-suffering-hamas-leadership/>

2 “For years, Netanyahu propped up Hamas. Now it’s blown up in our faces” <https://www.timesofisrael.com/for-years-netanyahu-propped-up-hamas-now-its-blown-up-in-our-faces/>



### The extremist end-run.

The failure has not been complete nor without occasional signs of hope. There have been numerous efforts at agreeing peace over the decades—the first being the 1978 Camp David Accords signed by Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat brokered by President Carter.

Palestinian frustration at lack of progress following Camp David led to the Intifada/Uprising of 1987 and PLO declaration of a Palestinian State in 1988—significantly simultaneously recognizing Israel’s right to exist.<sup>3</sup> Hamas responded with a more militant and nationalist policy that retained the policy of the destruction of Israel.

In September 1993 Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin signed letters of mutual recognition were signed by Arafat and Rabin laying the groundwork for the Oslo Accords of 1993-1995. For the first time a ‘road-map’ for peace via a two-state solution was in place. But in November Rabin was assassinated by a religious right-wing extremist; in 1996 Benjamin Netanyahu became prime minister for the first time; Hamas began a years-long campaign of suicide bombings. In each case, Israeli or Palestinian, moves towards even a hope of peace were violently terminated by the extremists of both sides.

### The Blighting of Youth.

Gaza is, in reality, a youth colony. At 25 miles, the length of Gaza is equivalent to the distance from Sydenham to Edgware; the width of 3.7 to 7.5 miles is a trip to Bromley, or on to Chislehurst. Within this confined space lives a population of 2.1 million, of whom 43% are under the age of 15; 75% are under 25.<sup>4</sup> To put this demographic into some sort of perspective, 25 year-old Gazans have experienced the second intifada (2000-2005), the constant conflict since Hamas’ election victory (2006), and the full-out wars of 2008-9, 2014, 2021 and now 2023-24. They and the children who comprise nearly half the population have endured a life-time of the trauma of violence that now includes 12,300 dead children and 19,000 orphans (as of 30/01/24). Are they all terrorists?

In comparison, Israel has a population of 9.3 million:

3 <https://israeled.org/resources/documents/israel-plo-mutual-recognition-letters/>  
 4 <https://www.statista.com/topics/11678/gaza-strip/>

73% Jews; 21% Arabs of whom 25% are under 15. Israeli Jewish youth (no Arabs) serve mandatory military service terms of 2 - 2½ years at the age of 18. I still find the sight of 18 year-old girls carrying Uzis unsettling. They are placed at check-points where they quickly learn the skills of humiliating Palestinians. The Israeli organization of veterans, *Breaking the Silence*, once described this as assuring the whole population becomes complicit by compliance<sup>5</sup>—every Israeli Jew has helped maintain the occupation in the name of ‘security’. The cost of such security is high indeed, and weighs heavily on the whole of society.

### The right to exist. The right to a homeland.

These are all factors that complicate agreeing ceasefires and movements towards peace. The State of Israel was created by the Western powers following WWII as a homeland for the Jews by way of the newly established UN. It was, to be clear, out of shame and guilt for the organized slaughter of over 6 million Jews in Europe. It seemed, at the time, a perfect fit, ‘a people without a land for a land without a people’; the ‘myth of the empty land’. By the law of unintended consequences, by solving one injustice another was perpetrated—loss to the Palestinians of their land and wholesale deportation of the Palestinian population.

Where is justice to be found? However much the Palestinians may think to the contrary, this fact cannot be undone and there should be no illusions about that. Israel has the right to exist, and there can be no peace while any party wishes to expel the Jews from Israel.

But, equally, Israel must acknowledge the Palestinian right to a homeland, and that means the land they live on that is now occupied illegally by the state of Israel. Israel under Netanyahu and successive governments has prioritized the building of settlements in the Occupied Territory in order to establish ‘facts on the ground’ that cannot be reversed. None of this is recognized under international law, and cannot be accepted.

### A ‘Holy’ Land. The Role of Religions

Many, perhaps, would say that the major cause of this conflict is religion, and the role of religion cannot be ignored. At the end of my first visit to Jerusalem I stood among the olive groves of the Mount of Olives looking over the Old City, hearing the clamour of church bells, muezzin calls to prayer, and prayers of all faiths, and thought, ‘There is too much religion in this place’. This subject requires more nuance than is normally offered, and more space than can be taken here; so it must await its own treatment for now.

### Two-state solution?

Government ministers call for a ceasefire that will lead to the Two-State solution proposed in the Oslo Accords and George Bush’s ‘Road map for peace’ of 2002, meaning a Palestine within the 1948 borders. For this to happen ‘facts on the ground’ will require unpicking the intertwined geography of the two peoples, and mass migration of Jewish settlers from Palestinian territory on a scale vying

5 <https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il>

*continued on Page 6*

continued from Page 5

with that of Palestinians in 1948.<sup>6</sup> There are proposals that take into account current realities, but have gained little traction thus far, such as formation of a confederation of two states.<sup>7</sup> There is faint hope right now of any solution that can bring long-term peace, and it is clear that nothing will happen without visionary leadership and the building

6 For a map of the Palestinian Territories, [https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/976/cpsprodpb/F78D/production/\\_109737336\\_west\\_bank\\_settlements\\_oct\\_2019\\_640\\_3x-nc.png](https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/976/cpsprodpb/F78D/production/_109737336_west_bank_settlements_oct_2019_640_3x-nc.png)

7 For example, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/feb/07/israel-palestine-conflict-solution-peace>

of mutual trust, both of which are woefully absent at this time.

In the face of the obstacles there are those who are working at grass-roots level for reconciliation and peace. *B'Tselem*, a Jewish organization, *Sabeel-Kairos* and *Musalaha*, Palestinian Christian organizations, are examples of non-governmental groups who carry on even when it seems there is little to show for their efforts. Perhaps out of these the growth of peace may come.

I conclude by repeating another 'fact on the ground' that I have written elsewhere: 'There is, in fact, one truth that has to be addressed: Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Muslims and Christians, have to figure out how to live with each other.'

*Revd Dwight D Swanson, PhD*

## Courageous advocacy

In a world where the voices of children are often overlooked and at a time where there is so much competition to be heard, it is essential that we find ways to celebrate the unique perspectives, passions, and insights each child possesses. By encouraging them to speak up and advocate for causes they believe in, we not only foster their self-confidence but also cultivate a generation of compassionate and empowered individuals who will, hopefully, go on to change the world.

If the passionate children at St Bartholomew's Primary are any indication of what is to come, the world-changing promise of the next generation is significant. In school, we are developing a focus on courageous advocacy; encouraging children to speak out on behalf of others, stand up for what is right and take action to make a difference. This approach is grounded in the Church of England's aspiration for a transformative education for all children and the role schools play in developing children

to be stewards of the planet and lights in their community. Our school verse from Luke 6:31, 'do to others as you would have them do to you', epitomizes this approach and through creating the conditions for children to use their voices we are seeing increasing engagement with issues of social and climate justice.

This ethos of empowerment and advocacy is deeply ingrained in our school culture and underpinned by the warm fire of the gospel that is at the heart of everything we do. Children have recently demonstrated remarkable courage and compassion by sleeping on the playground to raise almost £8,000 for Save the Children's Gaza campaign. This event was inspired by one child's desire to do something and their persistent belief that they could make a difference. Their actions not only showcased solidarity with those in need but also highlighted the power of collective action.

Similar enthusiasm can be seen from children in the school's eco council who recently successfully secured funding to establish a refill shop in school. This initiative will be completely run by the children and will build on the work they have been doing to promote sustainability and reduce waste.

Empowering children to find and use their voices involves creating a supportive environment where their opinions are valued, providing opportunities for meaningful engagement with social and environmental issues, and instilling a sense of agency and responsibility.

One of the amazing things about courageous advocacy is that it is highly infectious in small children and, as we move through Lent, we will be thinking about different ways that we can serve others (e.g., collecting for Lewisham Food Bank's Lent Appeal) with ideas rippling through the school and out into the wider community. At this busy time, let us remember and recognize the importance of nurturing the voices of all children. Through their courage, compassion, and commitment to making a difference, they inspire us to believe in the transformative power of education. In their voices lies the potential for profound change, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure that they are heard.

*Daniel Meyer*

Headteacher at St. Bartholomew's Primary School



Children raised almost £8,000 for Save the Children's Gaza campaign

# Our ‘I Love Lucy’ Moment

For those of you unfamiliar with I Love Lucy, it was an American sitcom in the 1950s in which the comedian Lucille Ball played the wacky wife of a Cuban bandleader. Her antics were hilarious as she always seemed to have an enterprising, good intentioned idea that went awry.

Every family has an ‘I Love Lucy’ moment, and this one is ours.

One year as spring was soon be upon us, we found ourselves turning to the thought of engaging in spring housecleaning. Not something we relish doing but a necessity nonetheless.

The weather was turning nice – it was warming up. We decided it would be a perfect evening to enjoy dinner on the back deck. In addition, my other daughter Heather was in town visiting us so we would have a proper family dinner.

As we prepared the barbecue dinner, Chelsea who had taken on the assignment of self-appointed caretaker of our appliances’ maintenance, had determined it was time to delime scale our washing machine that night. Particularly because the machine was not in use that evening.

So along with preparing dinner we prepped the washing machine. It seemed quite simple. The procedure merely entailed putting soap crystals and vinegar into the washing machine additives compartment and running the machine through a cycle. Chelsea started this process while we dined outside on the back deck. We had a delicious dinner and a whole lot of fun laughing away as we exchanged stories, told jokes and humorous anecdotes.

Dinnertime over, Chelsea went upstairs to ready her daughter for bed. Shortly afterwards Heather walked into the kitchen and immediately elicited a resounding scream. I jumped up and raced into the kitchen. Upon my arrival there I immediately discovered the reason for Heather’s urgent request for my presence. The washing machine was spewing out foamy soap suds from the soap compartment in such a copious quantity that the suds were running down the front of the machine unto the floor in a puddle extending from under the machine to the kitchen island one and a half meters away from the machine and flowing outward past both sides of the machine. In total approximately a quarter of our kitchen floor was covered in soap suds. A quick examination of the situation noted not only the overflowing suds but looking at the machine door window, the machine was completely filled up with suds. Only one thing to do – call for Chelsea!

Upon her arrival and brief assessment of the situation, a quick conference determined the cleaning cycle should be abbreviated ASAP. That halted we all just stood there,



Hunker

somewhat in disbelief, for a few minutes purveying the kitchen floor. When we internalised the situation before us, there was nothing else to do but to commence on the cleanup of our ‘I Love Lucy’ moment.

*Gerri Falconer-Ferneau*

If you have any feedback on any of the articles, or if you would like to contribute one yourself, please email the Sydenham Life Editor, Geoffrey Cave, on [sydenhamlifeeditor@gmail.com](mailto:sydenhamlifeeditor@gmail.com)

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