

MINISTER'S LETTER

Already half way through Lent, Easter will soon be upon us once again. Time marches on so quickly that Holy Week, when we reach it, can be a bit of a blur. Why not then take some time out *now* to reflect on the events of that week, that we might be better prepared to more fully appreciate the significance of the days we are remembering and journeying through?



Little can be said with any degree of certainty, of course, about the last days leading up to Jesus' death - the Gospels either vary as to the order of events or fail to give us any pointers as to the day on which they take place. Tradition has us mark the various stages of Jesus' journey to the cross on particular days - we have the entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday and the Crucifixion on Good Friday – with betrayal, arrest and trial in between. But what can else we say with any certainty about the events of those days that we now know as Holy Week?

We know that the tide was at least beginning to turn against Jesus if indeed it had not turned already. We are aware that shouts of 'Hosanna' will soon become cries of 'Crucify him.' We can safely predict then that darkness was closing in on Jesus. After all, we have reports of Jesus' clashes with the religious authorities and a story in which wicked tenants kill the landowner's son. We also know that the Pharisees are trying to entrap Jesus, that the chief priests and the scribes are plotting to kill him. All of these things lead to a sense of foreboding. Jesus' own lament over Jerusalem and his prediction of its destruction hardly ease our concerns. We can say with some confidence, I think, that, as the week progresses, the storm clouds are gathering and a thick darkness begins to descend and enfold Jesus and his followers. Jesus' death is becoming inevitable and his attempts to prepare himself and his followers for it begin to intensify.

Brian Keenan went to Beirut in 1985 for a change of scene from his native Belfast. He became headline news when he was kidnapped by fundamentalist Shi'ite militiamen and held in the suburbs of Beirut for the next four and a half years. For much of that time he was shut off from all news and contact with anyone other than his jailers. He too was surrounded by darkness.

In *An Evil Cradling*, his remarkable reflection on the experiences that he was forced to endure during these difficult and painful years, he recalls a day when

the darkness of his room was transformed by the unexpected presence of a bowl of fruit. In the account that follows he describes how the colour of the fruit pierced his darkness and lit the room. For Brian Keenan, the fruit in the bowl spoke of life and it succeeded in breathing life into him. In that moment, he is uplifted by its presence and doesn't want the feeling to fade. So he doesn't eat the fruit. But of course, the moment can't last forever and, in time, the fruit becomes soft and over ripe. Keenan fears losing the fruit because he comes to depend on it. Its presence sustains him through dark and difficult times and gives him hope for the future.

We can equally assume that Jesus' followers feared losing him. They were aware that the storm clouds were gathering and must have feared him being taken from them. His presence had turned their world upside down. He had transformed their lives and sustained them. He had given them hope and a purpose. Now it seemed that they might lose him. But Jesus' message to them remains one of hope. Jesus uses a grain of wheat as analogy (John 12: 24) but he could equally have taken fruit as an example: fruit like Brian Keenan's. The grain of wheat must die if it is to bear fruit. Death will be followed by new life. But death is first necessary.

As we approach and journey through Holy Week again this year, we might not be able to say with any degree of certainty exactly what happened all those years ago. But we can be fairly sure that darkness was descending and that darkness would soon overcome Jesus and his followers. Whatever stage of the journey we find ourselves at this Lent and Holy Week, let us always remember that Jesus assured his followers that they could enter that darkness with hope.

Let's not grasp too quickly for Easter Day. The darkness has to be endured before the glorious light can be embraced. So let's move tentatively forward: walking with the light while we still can, full of fear maybe, but also full of hope.

With every blessing

Paul

Extreme Grace

Taken from: Extreme devotion, the voice of the martyrs from the co-authors of Jesus freaks. Serious followers of Jesus pay a price, and extreme followers often pay the ultimate price. Each story is true.

Kenya: A widow

“Before we finish this funeral service,” her words rang out clearly to the thousand people in attendance, “I want to tell you what my husband told me before dying. He asked me to tell all his murderers that he goes to heaven loving wholeheartedly everybody, including his assassins. He has forgiven all for what they have done because Jesus loves and will also forgive them.”

She stood over her husband’s coffin. There were tears in her eyes, but her voice was strong. The bruises on her body told the mourners that she, too, had been beaten. As Christians, she and her husband had refused to take a Kikuyu tribal oath that wasn’t consistent with their Christian faith. For this, her husband was beaten to death, and she was beaten and hospitalised.

The crowd was still, silenced by the power of the widow’s words, and her will. Many living in Kenya in 1969 had also faced harassment and attack for valuing their faith over tribal loyalties.

“I, as his widow, also tell all of you, in the presence of my dead husband, that I hate none of those who killed him. I love the killers. I forgive them, knowing that Christ has died for them too,”

No one in attendance that day would ever forget the widow’s words or her example of extreme forgiveness and grace.

Forgiveness is an extreme example of what it means to be like Christ, to extend his grace to others. No one has ever had to forgive more than Jesus Christ. Nothing can compare to the weight of an entire world’s sins on his shoulders at Calvary. Therefore, when we forgive those who hate us, we are never more like Jesus than at that moment. Forgiveness does not make the wrongs that were done to you right. Forgiveness makes you all right. Forgiveness does not mean letting your perpetrators off the hook. Forgiveness means letting yourself off the hook and getting released from the tyranny of vengeful thoughts. Forgiving others for their wrongs gives you a chance to shine for Christ like never before. Where will you shine the light of God’s forgiveness today?

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13)



'I Was A Stranger
And You Welcomed Me'



Friday
1st March
Women's
World Day
of Prayer

www.wwdp-natcomm.org

Registered Charity Number 233242



Praying for France

10:30am service:

St John Fisher Church

207 Cannon Hill Lane SW20

Speaker: Mrs Christine Eitzen

8:00pm service:

Trinity United Reformed Church

Mansel Road, SW19

All are welcome - men, women and young people

It is with great sadness that we said goodbye to Valerie Currie, who died in St Georges Hospital on Tuesday 29th January. Our thoughts and prayers go to her husband, Graham.

Valerie's funeral service was on Thursday, 14th February, 12 noon at Martin Way Methodist Church, and followed by the committal at 1.20pm at the NE Surrey Crematorium.

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Valerie Angela Currie

3/12/1945 - 29/1/2013



Every so often in life, somebody comes along, who lifts your spirits by their cheerfulness and lack of complaint, who shows an instinctive depth of caring for those alone and kindness towards everyone she meets. Generosity was Valerie's hallmark and her world was caring for others and supporting me. Valerie was totally undemanding, happy to accept the little things of life and smiling to the end. What endeared her to so many was a slight frailty in her physical make-up, but an inner determination and sense of humour, born of all her early struggles in life.

Valerie Angela was born on 3rd December 1945 to Kit and Tom Cousins in The Chelsea Hospital for Women, under Sir Charles Read, a leading gynaecologist. Her older sister, Pauline Julia, had not survived. Valerie had to struggle with Cerebral Palsy and spent all her early years in daily visits during the week to hospital, missing much of her education. With her parents help, she overcame her disabilities and in her teens she obtained qualifications in shorthand typing and speech training and eventually took up early employment as a secretary in the Path. Laboratory in St Helier Hospital.

Valerie was helped as a youngster at Martin Way by Jean Gear, nowadays her longest standing friend, and thus began a lasting family

link with this Church. These wonderful friendships have stood the test of time, particularly with Douglas and Jean Gear, Irene and Brian Goldsmith, Vida Brown, Jean and John Butland, and Bill and Betty Goodrum. Valerie taught in the Sunday School and sang in the Choir alongside Freda Hagon, Doreen Warren and Marie Sewell. She helped her mother, with The Fellowship, the Wednesday Club and Arthritis Care.

In January 1965, 48 years ago, Valerie met me, a new arrival in the Church Choir. We had been born within ten days of each other at opposite ends of the country. I was a student from Lancashire in lodgings. We shared the love of singing in the Choir led by Vida, with so many welcoming friends including Brian Goldsmith. Friday night choir practices were great fun at the end of the week. Valerie was a very warm and open girl and very attractive too. Her warmth and laughter was recognisable across the largest room. She had grown into a beautiful young lady, with hardly a trace of her early childhood struggles. What she saw in me, I have never really understood, but I knew instinctively that she was the one for me. We walked home together after a disastrous choir outing in London, fell in love, and the rest is history. Our first duet (of many) was "I'm a little teapot" at a Choir concert, celebrating the life of Marie Sewell's parents.

Valerie and I were married on 17th August, 1968 here in Martin Way. Valerie not only became the home maker, but a constant and cheerful support throughout my years as a teacher and Deputy Head and into semi retirement. She was unbelievably selfless during very stressful years. I was really so lucky and could never have succeeded or survived without her. Although children never came along, we were a loving couple, looking after each other through thick and thin.

Valerie became a Doctor's Secretary and eventually a very popular School Secretary at Merton Park Primary nearby. This allowed us to share school holidays. In the early years, her main interests were shared with her work colleague, Joan Reynolds, Kit and Tom and myself, including days out to Worthing and to visit her grandmother in Essex. Valerie was content with little things in the company of those close to her. She loved painting at Merton Arts Society and had excellent voice

production to deliver poetry and monologues, often without the use of a microphone! Out of generosity, she passed on poems etc to anyone who asked. Valerie continued to use her sweet singing voice for solos and ensembles in the Choir and Happy Wanderers, (including duets with Bill Bass and myself). She enjoyed entertaining the elderly, infirm and lonely and also sang with Music Makers and Faith Folk and Harmony and narrated for the Martinets. All in all, for nearly twenty years, she sang in hundreds of concerts for charity until a thyroid operation sadly turned her, as she put it, into a "bass singer". She supported me in all my singing concerts without complaint.

Following the deaths of Tom and later Kit, Valerie spent much of her time across the road in the company of Vida Brown, while I was at work. Holidays in the West Country, and Scotland followed. We also joined Bill and Betty Goodrum in Bournemouth for many years and shared musical interests with them. As Vida became less mobile, Valerie spent increasing time looking after her and shopping for her. She loved doing this and the friendship developed into a mother and daughter bond. We had fun times and this leant meaning and purpose to all our lives. Valerie was in her element. At this stage Doreen O'Donoghue came into her life through a chance meeting on holiday. This gave Valerie an outlet to walk and shop and have a gentle female soulmate to help her. Doreen could help me too on the piano. Holidays followed in Italy, Austria, Norway and Spain, leaving our cat and house in the much appreciated care of Barbara and Ray, next door. Valerie was never happier. She was the gentle wind that blew through all our lives.

Valerie was content to leave decisions to me, but when she made up her mind, I did not argue. She told me to retire early in 1999 and she was right. This allowed us to go out together every day for twelve precious years and have more visits to Cornwall, Croatia, The Isle of Wight and Jersey together. She brought Fred Spooner, Edie and I close together over Vida's affairs over the last decade. She enjoyed her visits to Handcross and sitting in the garden or eating out together. In the same way, she loved to visit Joan Baker, Freda Hagon and take Bill Goodrum for a drive and snooze at weekends.

When Derek and Mary and Ray and Barbara were so helpful during my

illness last year, my soul objective was to be well enough to look after Valerie with her Parkinsons in the years ahead. It was not to be. It is a great comfort that all her friendships at Church and elsewhere, have sustained me as they did Valerie. Forty eight years of happiness have been shared with good people. When you met Valerie you always came away feeling better. She certainly raised me up to more than I could ever be. I have been truly blessed and will miss her dearly, her companionship and her laughter.

May God Bless Valerie and keep her in the palm of his hands.

Graham Currie

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Memories of a lovely lass - Valerie Currie

Where does one start? As the song says '*Let's start at the beginning*', basically out Church Family life of about 48 years ago.

In those early days while I was a shift worker and there was a large choir at the church, and the Church Concerts, choral works etc were well attended. One soon got to know all those entertaining and it was at such an event I became acquainted with Valerie. Many of the singers formed singing groups and Valerie, having a lovely strong contralto voice was in many of these groups. Whilst there another hidden talent of Valerie's showed itself, her reading ability, strong, descriptive and always telling a story.

At the end of my shift work I joined the choir and it was then I really got to know Valerie: she was full of encouragement, fun loving and supportive, always concerned and caring of others. Friendship grew through choral works, parties and general church life. We quite enjoyed her husbands company too, I think he goes by the name of Graham!!

Over these many past years their loving support, especially for older folk many of whom had lost that special loved one, grew not only pastoral but in real friendship and hands on help. Graham had the wheels, so outings and holidays developed. It was genuine and caring, giving both Valerie and Graham much pleasure. This has been their lives, I think Valerie was the leader with her ‘Boy’ in support. Many of us have received that wonderful support when ill or saddened and it has been great to be able to give something back to them when they had their ill health problems.

What a shock and sadness we've all been through these last weeks. We visited Valerie in St. Georges hospital, and even though she was very poorly she still wanted to give cuddles and did her very best to talk and laugh.

I think our own memories of Valerie and Graham will be from Summer time, sitting around our picnic table in the garden having enjoyed a BBQ, well fed and watered, relaxed, bright, breezy and summery.

Thanks Valerie for all you have meant to so many in love, kindness and those Charity Concerts you were part of. We will do our best to look after your ‘Boy’ who you are so proud of. Be at peace with God’s richest blessings surrounding you.

Much love Derek and Mary Heaton.

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“Street Pastors is about Christians rolling up their sleeves and getting involved in practically responding to the problems of crime and safety. They are like beacons on our streets and I want to see them shining brightly in every constituency”

David Burrowes MP

Street Pastors is an inter-denominational Church response to urban problems, engaging with people on the streets to care, listen and dialogue.

It was pioneered in London in January 2003 by Rev Les Isaac, Director of the Ascension Trust, and has seen some remarkable results, including drops in crime in areas where teams have been working. There are now

some 9000 trained volunteers in around 250 teams around the United Kingdom. It is an enormous privilege to be part of this organisation and playing a part in making a positive difference in the lives of those we meet on the streets.

When I first came to London in the early 70's, it was exciting and definitely the 'in thing' to welcome the New Year in in Trafalgar Square, culminating in the roar of the crowds as Big Ben struck midnight. On New Year's Eve, I had the opportunity to return to the year's celebrations with a total of 10 Street Pastor teams in the company of the Director, Les Isaac, now OBE, patrolling the surrounding streets of Trafalgar Square.



It was a very different experience compared to patrolling the streets of Merton. The crowds were thick, the noise deafening and the atmosphere electric. Nevertheless, we managed to get some meaningful conversations, listened to those who wanted to offload and prayed with one former heroin addict. We ran out of flip-flops and, because of the size of the crowd and the amount of alcohol that was likely consumed, our supply of water bottles too.

Not that binge drinking is not the only problem affecting young people today. Many are unemployed, homeless, are depressed and vulnerable and have taken to the streets because of helplessness. It is encouraging to see the difference in a young person when someone has listened to them and refer them to agencies that can help. They are not so determined to pick a fight with someone else when one has engaged with them and showed care towards them. It is also encouraging that 'The Church on the Street' –the church without walls is responding to the needs of the people where they are.

Why not spend a few hours with us on the street as an observer? It is very satisfying.

Gwen Wildman



**CHRISTIAN
SOLIDARITY
WORLDWIDE**
VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

A deafening Silence?

This is taken from Mervyn Thomas's blog series on the role of the Americas in combating global religious persecution.

This week I'm looking at Congressman Frank Wolf's uncompromising challenge to Church Leaders in the West.

“Have we in the West ceased to be salt and light? Has our comfort led to complacency?”

These words were still ringing in my ears when I visited Frank Wolf on Capitol Hill this week. His recent letter to hundreds of Protestant and Catholic leaders is an impassioned plea to Western churches to speak up on behalf of those millions around the world who suffer because of their faith.

“God forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians and yet did nothing to intervene.”

He quotes a story from the book *When A Nation Forgets God* by Erwin Lutzer, a German Christian. Lutzer recounted how the trains taking Jews to death camps would pass by his church every Sunday during the Holocaust. *“Their screams tormented us,”* he wrote, *“but ... what could anyone do to stop it?”*

“We knew the time the train was coming and when we heard the whistle blow we began singing hymns. By the time the train came past our church we were singing at the top of our voices. If we heard the screams, we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more.

Years have passed and no one talks about it anymore. But I still hear that train whistle in my sleep. God forgive me; forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians and yet did nothing to intervene.”

Congressman Wolf argues that Christians in the West today are all too close to those Christians who stayed silent when they knew Jews were being killed simply for being Jews. Right now, 75% of the world's population live in countries with high restrictions on religious liberty. How can we stand by in silence?

Witnessing brutal Christian persecution for the first time

Frank Wolf, a man of deep faith and a religious freedom activist has been a US Congressman for over 31 years and spent his career fighting at the highest levels for the rights of persecuted Christians and other religious minorities. He authored the International Religious Freedom Act (1998), a pioneering piece of legislation that sought to make religious freedom a foreign policy priority for the United States. Through it was created the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (IRF) as well as a State Department office and Ambassador for IRF.

My personal friendship with Frank goes back to 1985 when we were both in Romania in the days of the notorious despotic leader Nicolae Ceacescu. I remember it well because I was arrested, and threatened with deportation for visiting a dissident priest, and it was Frank Wolf who prevailed upon the Speaker of the Romanian Parliament to allow me to stay. For both of us it was the first time we had witnessed brutal Christian persecution first hand, and we both determined that in the years ahead we would do all in our power to campaign for religious freedom.

“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed for his part in the Nazi resistance during the Second World War. The German church leader famously said “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

I have been challenged and deeply moved by Frank Wolf’s reminder of Bonhoeffer’s words. I would like to ask you to read the whole of his letter, and then ask yourself what you are going to do in your church to ensure we are not guilty of standing silent in the face of suffering.

As Frank writes,

“The Church globally is under assault. Our response must not be to simply sing more loudly thereby drowning out the cries for help from our brothers and sisters. Rather we must speak out, advocate and act on their behalf.”

Be challenged not to stay silent.

Mervyn Thomas
CSW Chief Executive

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity service

I can now confirm that the delayed/rescheduled Week of Prayer for Christian Unity service - including the Dedication of the Christian Care Association Office - will now take place at 6.30pm on Sunday 28th April at Martin Way Methodist Church.

Please put this date in your diaries and advertise this fact as widely as you can.

Hopefully we will avoid the snow this time!

Paul Timmis

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On the Streets; Off the Streets

The Forum for Faith in Action, the Winter night shelter and street pastors will take place on Thursday 18 April at 7.30pm in St John Fisher Church Hall.

The three speakers have confirmed their attendance. The speaker from the winter night shelter will be John Bush. The speaker from Faith in Action is Councillor Linda Kirby and the one from street pastors is John Goddard.

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Thank You

I would like to thank everyone for their overwhelming expressions of sympathy and support and to everyone involved in Valerie's funeral service and providing the refreshments on Thursday 14th February.

That the church was full was great solace to me and testimony to the affection which people felt for Valerie.

Graham Currie

**CHURCH
DIARY**



Fri	1	10.30am	Women's Day of Prayer service at St John Fisher Church
		8.00pm	Women's Day of Prayer service at Trinity United Reform Church
Sun	3	10.30am	Morning Service led by Rev Paul Timmis
Tue	5	10.30am-noon	Coffee and Chat
		8.00pm	Time for Prayer
Fri	8	12.30pm	Luncheon Club
Sat	9	10.00am	Big Brunch
Sun	10	10.30am	Mothering Sunday All Age Worship with Tony Loft
Tue	12	10.30am-noon	Coffee and Chat
		8.00 pm	Time for Prayer
Wed	13	7.30pm	Worship Leaders Course
Sun	17	10.30am	Morning Service led by Brenda Cannon
		6.30pm	Communion Service led by Rev Paul Timmis
Tue	19	10.30am-noon	Coffee and Chat
		7.30pm	Men's Supper Club - <i>Shirley Cornish</i> - Building Houses, Armenia
		8.00pm	Time for Prayer
Fri	22	12.30pm	Luncheon Club
Sun	24	10.30am	Morning Service led by Rev Paul Timmis
		12.00 noon	General Church Meeting
Mon	25	8.00pm	Easter Meditation
Tue	22	10.30am-noon	Coffee and Chat
		8.00pm	Easter Meditation

Wed 27	8.00pm	Easter Meditation
Thur 28	8.00pm	Maundy Service
Fri 29	10.30am	Good Friday United Service at Merton Park Baptist Church
Sun 31	7.00am	Sunrise Service on Cannon Hill Common followed by Breakfast at Martin Way at 8.00am
	10.30 am	Easter Day Service with Holy Communion led by Rev Paul Timmis

*Please refer to the Website (www.martinway.org.uk)
or Weekly Notice Sheet for any additional information*

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We wish all of those who celebrate a birthday
in March a very

Happy Birthday

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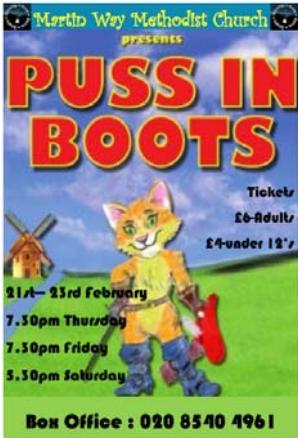
Douglas Gear

Jean Gear and her family would like to gratefully acknowledge all the cards and expressions of sympathy expressed following Douglas' passing in November.

In place of flowers, donations were politely suggested for the International Glaucoma Association (IGA). We have recently received an acknowledgement and thank you letter from IGA advising that a total of £348 had been received in memory of Douglas.

Thank you for all your kindness and thoughtfulness over this difficult time.

Jean and Anne



PUSS IN BOOTS

The long awaited and much talked about Martin Way Pantomime of Puss in Boots was played to packed houses in the latter part of February. I was lucky enough to get tickets for the First Night.

Written by Bernard Doswell and produced by Jack Pallister, this was special home grown rendition of the well know story. Great artistic work with the props by Anne Conquest and with the loan of costumes from the Parish Players, another group where Jack performs, the stage was set.

It would be unfair for me to single out individual performers as the whole cast were excellent, but I'm afraid I must. Lesedie Sepanya, playing Fairy Goodness fairly filled the room with her fantastic voice, and Abby Herring as the Queen gave such a regal performance it will be hard for me not to bow to her when we next meet. The Ogre's henchman, a man we all loved to hate and boo, was played perfectly by Jacob Passfield and the double act of Emily Bacon and Lizzie Chilcott were great. But it was the father and son team of Jack and Stephen Pallister, playing Stress and Storm, who stole the show with their ad-libbing and general mayhem.

A great time was had by all ages who made up the audience and we were made to feel part of the performance. (I will even forgive those performers who shot me with the water pistol!) The two and half hours flew past and all who were there thoroughly enjoyed themselves. To one and all who missed the show I sympathise but say 'make sure you get your tickets for the cast's next production!'

Andrew Fox

Items for the **April Newsletter** should be with Andrew Fox, (email: roife@hotmail.co.uk) by **Sunday 23rd March** at the latest