

Diocesan Bulletin for Christian Unity
Archdiocese of Southwark

June 2011

No. 90

80 pence



**T
O
G
E
T
H
E
R**

IN THIS ISSUE

- **Spiritual Ecumenism**
- **Ecumenical Prayer Service**
- **Ecumenical Reflections**
- **More Than Gold**
- **Winter Shelter Folkestone**

R IN CHRIST

**Together in Christ, Diocesan Bulletin for Christian Unity,
Archdiocese Southwark, Vol 29, No 90, June 2011**

CONTENTS

Page

2	The Archive	Des Miller
3	Una, My Inspiration	Gwen Chiosso
5	Spiritual Ecumenism	Sr Mary John
9	Ecumenical Prayer Service	Tom Baker
10	Ecumenical Reflections	John Richardson
13	More Than Gold	James Parker
16	Bringing God's Love	Jack Merrifield
19	Winter Shelter Folkstone	Kitty Hart

EDITORIAL

Dear supporters of TiC, I have just returned from an inspiring day with the Unity Commission at The Friars in Aylesford, Kent. We were privileged to be addressed by Sister Mary John, an Anglican Benedictine nun from nearby St Mary's Abbey, West Malling. She gave two talks based around Cardinal Walter Kasper's *The Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism*. The first is given here and the second in a later issue.

Dr Desmond Miller has been arranging the archive of TiC at the British Library. Grateful thanks to Grace Singarajah who found the lost issues to complete the set.

Kitty Hart describes the night shelter provided by the Folkestone Churches. And Tom Baker describes an unexpected outreach.

TiC is 'not for profit' and at 80 pence since at least 2003, and cost reduced in 2007 by lower or no p&p for everyone, was really great value. This year we have suffered still higher printing costs and rising postage that make an increase necessary. In 2012 the cost of a set will rise to £3 per annum (i.e. 3 issues) plus p&p @ £1 per set. For five or more annual sets delivery will remain free. Twelve or more sets to one address will be discounted back to 80p each booklet so parishes and groups don't lose out. It may tease you to take extra and save!

Michael

THE ARCHIVE

Together in Christ was first published in 1983 and copies of each Issue were deposited with the British Library. They are catalogued as follows:

YEAR 1983/1988 General Reference Collection, Shelf mark: ZK.9.A.8274

YEAR 1989/1994 General Reference Collection, Shelf mark: ZK.9.A.8274

YEAR 1983/2000 General Reference Collection, Shelf mark: ZK.9.A.8274

On 26 April 2011 the following issues were deposited with the Library.

YEAR 2001/2010 i.e. Issues No 59 – 88 from Feb 2001 to Oct 2010.

It had been hoped to have been able to check the previous Issues at this visit but it was not possible as they were in the process of being transferred to the store in Boston Spa, Yorkshire, as part of a general move and will not be available for a couple of months. So if any one wishes to consult them, the request will have to be made to the British Library some days in advance.

The Collections have been bound in hard back with a red spine leatherette material and inscribed “TOGETHER IN CHRIST” plus the date in gold lettering – very smart and all at the expense of the Library. The copies in those days were in a larger format measuring 18.5 x 22.5 cm and the newer format which is A5 was introduced with the February 2001 Issue. We are hoping that the recent deposit will be bound in due course may be as two volumes of five years each.

There was some confusion with the Numbering of the last three Issues of the year 2000 and the first Issue of the year 2001. That of Feb 2001 is numbered 62 but should be 59 according to the subsequent Issues all of which are in sequence.

At St Pancras they store high-use, high-value and fragile collection material and at Boston Spa high-use collection material and low-use collection material which is to be retained in perpetuity. They anticipate that collections will continue to grow at a rate of 12 linear km a year. At Boston Spa there is available 150 linear km of new storage space. For a very interesting account see:

www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/ccare/pubs/2004/DOlneyNPO%20Conf2004.pdf.

Una, My Inspiration

I was pleased to see the tribute to Una Ratcliff in the last issue of *Together in Christ*, and felt I would like to add my own this time from a personal perspective.

When I first came to the Bexleyheath area back in 1978 (like Una I hail from Yorkshire) I found my way to the church of St Thomas More. There I was greeted on the door by a vicar who later discovered to be Sidney and Una Ratcliff. As a young single (at the time) I was pleased to find an 18-30 group was just starting up, which I joined. Through this I met both my future husband and Sidney and Una's daughter Helen who was to become a great friend to all my family.



Through Helen I got to know her parents quite well and was always struck by how involved they were with their church. When visiting their house they were always in the throes of preparing a monthly parish magazine or a copy of *Together in Christ*, or Una would be getting ready for a group of young people attending non-Catholic schools to come to the house for religious instruction. Sometimes there would be news of a forthcoming unity meeting Una was attending, perhaps as far away as Swanwick.

I always felt there was something very special about this couple who were thoroughly devoted to each other, to their family (daughter, son and grand-daughter) and to their church. I started attending a charismatic prayer meeting held in a local secondary school and immediately felt totally at home as I found it was none other than Una and Sidney leading it. Unfortunately the prayer meeting had to fold in the mid-1980s but those who attended always seemed to keep a special place in their hearts for the Ratcliffs.

Una's work for Christian Unity must have impressed me so when I heard about the Churches in Welling (I had moved to neighbouring Welling by then) signing a Covenant in 1990 at a special service, I was keen to attend. Una suggested I wrote an article about it for *Together in Christ*, which I willingly did. From then onwards I felt my commitment to unity took root. I have always known I could never match Una's academic skills in the field of unity as she was such an incredibly well-read expert who was able to contribute much at diocesan and national level through her membership of Ecumenical Commissions. But she was my inspiration to get involved, to start going to unity services of all kinds. Inevitably my interest was spotted and I was in time asked to attend the *Churches Together in Welling* meetings and to be their minute secretary. As many of you reading this will know, perhaps from direct experience, one involvement soon leads to another!

When a group at my church of St Stephen's, Welling, came up with the idea of a parish magazine I decided to offer my services as I knew I could get some help, if needed, from Una. The parish priest thought it wouldn't last, which I think made me all the more determined that it would. Anyway, it's now been going for over ten years, though admittedly still has a long way to go as Una kept hers going for fifty! Due to declining health she was finally forced to give up.

I know that *Together in Christ* was very important to both Una and Sidney (who passed away in 1997) as they were instrumental in starting it up back in 1983 and would have been sorry to see it fold. Michael Baldry is doing a sterling job of managing to keep it going. I expect, like me, he is keen to see it last as a tribute to dear Una who, so aptly named, was such a tireless worker for the cause of unity.

Gwen Chiosso

Archdiocese of Southwark Christian Unity Commission
Study Day on Spiritual Ecumenism with

Sister Mary John Marshall, OSB

Based on *The Handbook on Spiritual Ecumenism* by Cardinal Walter Kasper

ISBN –13 978-1-56548-263-0

Talk I. Spiritual Ecumenism and the Bible (Ch.1)

What brings us together today is surely a shared longing for a realization of our Lord's prayer 'that they all may be one'. It articulates the longing of his human and divine heart as it must for all Christians. Despite all the ecumenical discouragements of the present and past, it is imperative that we hold fast to his prayer, his desire and will for all his followers, and give thanks for the fundamentals of faith we hold in common: belief in God in Trinity, which is the pattern of unity that draws us and impels us to reflect that unity in God's world; the commitment of our lives to him in baptism; a shared love of Jesus and the awareness of the working of his Spirit in and among us.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the differences that continue to separate Western Christians since the time of the Reformation, though thank God, those differences are now far less bitter, less politically and culturally fuelled, as we've slowly learned to appreciate that many of our differing perceptions can be recognized as complementary rather than divisive. Today we are invited to explore spiritual ecumenism through the Bible and through prayer and as lay, grass-roots Christians we may discover spiritual ecumenism as our particular vocation as distinct from the vocation of trained theologians who seek to establish doctrinal common ground. For all, receiving the gift of unity that God longs to give is a matter of our growth in faith and holiness, openness to certain risks and to an ever firmer commitment to build upon the unity we have already received.

How do we envisage the unity we are being called to and which we seek? There are probably many diverse understandings of what earthly form a fully united church might take: many here might regard it as a return of all Christians, East and West to the Catholic Church; Orthodox might envisage it as a return to the Eastern Church and churches of the Reformation might envisage a federation of churches that allows wide scope for faith and order. We Anglicans often regard it (as far as any generalizations can be suggested for a body as diverse as ourselves) as a journey shared by all Christians to a goal that only

God now knows. For all of us, though, a movement towards the unity of Christians must involve a far-reaching renewal and dependence on God. The Council Document on Ecumenism declares this beautifully:

Every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling... There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart. For it is from newness of attitudes, from self-denial and unstinted love, that yearnings for unity take their rise and grow toward maturity... Let all Christ's faithful remember that the more purely they strive to live according to the gospel, the more they are fostering and even practicing Christian unity. (Chap 2)

Today we are invited to explore spiritual ecumenism and the Bible: how can we share God's gift of Scripture with other Christians who may hold very divergent views of the treasure to be found there? As we all know, it was a 'discovery' of the Bible through translations into the vernacular that was at the centre of Reformation controversies; more precisely biblical interpretation. In Germany Luther, struggling to correct abuses in ecclesiastical power and deeply unsettled in himself of the reality of his salvation, perceived through his reading of St Paul that the foundation of our Christian life must be *sola fides*, faith alone, in the free gift of God of our life and salvation in Christ, even before adherence to an earthly community of faith subscribing to a Magisterium, or body of teaching by the Church. As I understand it, this embodies one of the basic differences between Catholic and Protestant temperaments: for a Catholic the gift of faith is mediated through the Church; a Protestant believes faith is received and nurtured within the individual heart. (I would welcome any challenge to this proposition later this morning.) Nevertheless the implied polarity is more apparent than actual. Faith is a gift we all struggle to appropriate and deepen more fully, and can this be truly realised by each one going it alone? Our understanding and even our conscience can so readily be skewed by sin and pride and faith itself demands a deepening consciousness of our human solidarity. We well know that our reading of the Bible can be open to many a bewildering number of interpretations; these books, the gospels themselves, are at once gloriously accessible, yet deeply probing and puzzling. We need honest, available scholarship to lead us into the depths, the truth of Scripture, we need the understanding of Church Fathers down the centuries to guide us in

the quest and above all we need to wait and to listen together for the Spirit who will lead us into all the truth.

At the same time we need to acknowledge that the Bible itself constantly contradicts our notions of the peace claimed to be found in it. It reflects too closely our human condition for such a facile assertion! Right from Genesis 3 bitter enmity claims the scene, then fratricide, wars and constant strife between families, clans and nations. Even when we at last arrive at the gospels and Jesus himself, conflict intensifies. Jesus often provokes it. Why does he have to upside the religious authorities by healing on the Sabbath, breaking rules and finally overthrowing merchants and moneychangers in the Temple, the heart of the religious life of his people? Even to his own followers he promises scorching enmity within intimate family life and persecutions from outside. Here is our Prince of Peace, a title I would never deny, but one that cannot be glibly applied.

What the Bible is revealing is our human situation under God, with its conflicts and exclusions. Yet we know that God is calling us to his way, his truth and his life, the unity of his love. Whatever ecclesial differences and prejudices divide us, we are in this respect all in the same boat and there awaits us an endless amount to discover and appropriate.

So how do we approach our reading? A helpful clue here is the distinction between literal and contextual readings. A literal reading arises from the belief that every word to be found in the Bible is the unalterable, actual word of God, whereas a contextual reading strives to place what is read within its historical and literary context and ask what were the influences that shaped it into the form it now takes and how does it apply to our present situation? What is the Spirit saying to us all in any particular text? It's easy to polarize these approaches, yet necessary to bear in mind that in our time and culture we tend to seek truth from the firm ground of solid scientific facts. The ancient Hebrews communicated more readily in allusive poetry and myth. If our credulity is overstretched by trying to believe that the early chapters of Genesis are literal fact we can yet rest assured that chapters 2, 3 and 4 convey a truth about our human situation that is far more gripping than any series of propositions and principles about human psychology. So Scripture can be approached as a guide to the way we conduct our lives by providing a moral lens or it can be absorbed for its mystical, spiritual meaning. It can and needs to be read in the

knowledge that we are being presented by many different levels of meaning, and confusing as these may be, we need to have our minds open to the sometimes different interpretations our different traditions hold. If we attempt in all approaches to hold these various strands together, avoiding dogmatic positions on interpretation, but relying on the leading of the Spirit, knowing that we are constantly learning together, we shall be in a better place to draw more of the true nectar from it.

Scripture, sacrament, prayer and common life are the intertwining essentials of the monastic tradition that has nourished me for almost the whole of my life. Within this tradition *lectio divina*, the personal study and absorption of Scripture is a peculiarly monastic work. It is a slow, attentive, sometimes vocal reading of a verse or text, staying with it, listening deeply to it, engaging with it in the belief that the Spirit may well be saying something through it for me today, and often hearing from it an intimation that may surprise, challenge and hopefully change and widen my understanding. This is primarily a personal engagement, but one whose fruits can be shared not only verbally, but by the opening of hearts and minds.

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord: that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all; so we may henceforth be all of one heart, and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Book of Common Prayer

(Service for the Anniversary of Accession)

ECUMENICAL PRAYER SERVICES Tudor Court

Early this year, I received a phone-call out of the blue from our parish secretary asking me to contact a resident of the above sheltered accommodation block with a view to conducting an ecumenical prayer service there. Apparently, most other local churches had been approached with – and responded positively to – a similar request and now it was our ‘turn’. Waving aside my protests that someone senior might be more appropriate, I was given the relevant person’s telephone number and left to get on with arranging the formalities myself.

And so, one bright, sunny morning in March, I arrived at the destination, to be met by a very pleasant, smiling gentleman, who led me through to the meeting-place (actually the resident’s lounge), on the way passing the Notice-Board with my name displayed boldly under the heading: “Guest Speaker For The Day.” Gulp!

Space forbids me to go into lengthy detail about the service, but, placing myself at the Holy Spirit’s disposal, after saying a little about my role in ecumenical affairs – stimulating some lively discussion – I encouraged all to pray from the heart, especially to recognise and accept God’s blessing in our lives. We then exchanged names of various speakers who had impressed us over the years (me on behalf of the local Disabled Fellowship Group) and I departed, uncertain what sort of impression (if any) I had made.

However, this was not the end of the story. A couple of weeks later, I received a note and gift of a book on spirituality from the ‘smiling’ gentleman, followed later by a copy of *Heart to Heart*, a record of all Pope Benedict’s speeches during his recent UK visit and we now exchange cards and gifts regularly. We should never underestimate the power, patience and persistence of the Holy Spirit, who is always seeking to bind together human hearts, regardless of how dim, distant and divided they may seem.

Tom Baker,
PUC at Sidcup

CONTINUING ECUMENICAL REFLECTIONS

as presented to the *Churches Together in South London Council*
9 November 2010

I sometimes reflect that many of the hopes with which I began my ecumenical pilgrimage in the 1960s have been unfulfilled. Back then I was confident that in my lifetime there would be:

- Anglican-Methodist union
- Total agreement on baptism, eucharist and ministry
- Eucharistic hospitality across all traditions
- Single congregation local ecumenical partnerships everywhere
- A common voice from church leaders on the great social issues of our day
- Joint training for ministry

I sometimes wonder why, faced with the fact that these have not happened, or only partly done so, I have remained an ecumenical enthusiast. It could be an unwillingness to recognise the ‘failures’, or it could be the triumph of hope over experience. Or – and this is what I hope is the case – it could be because I feel that we are being led by the Spirit into new ways of thinking and working.

I would sum these up in ten emphases which, in my view, characterise today’s ecumenism as opposed to the ecumenism in which I was brought up.

1. The importance of friendship

This may be a ‘fluffy’ point to begin with but it is a way of saying that ecumenism is relational and that warm, trusting links between leaders of different churches and between members of different congregations are a *sine qua non* of the ecumenical movement.

2. The recognition that structures should follow purpose

I suspect we used to believe that if we got the ecumenical structures right, all would be well, which is patently not true. We now recognise that clarity of purpose – discerning obedience to

Christ in worship, fellowship, mission, service, justice etc. – is more important and structures should be developed to support what is intended.

3. The value of un-burdensome ecumenism

I have frequently commented on the need for ‘light touch’ ecumenism and I have often expressed my frustration at the hurdles Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEP) as currently established have to overcome I am glad that there is considerable work going on e.g. at Churches Together in England on how ecumenism can be light and creative but also properly responsible and accountable. My hope is that new style LEPs will emerge.

4. The possibility of untidy ecumenism

Maybe we wanted everything to be neat but this is increasingly unlikely. Churches together groups for example are now developing in all kinds of ways and with all kinds of names (Transform..., Love..., Working for ... etc.) and this has got to be welcomed.

5. We have new companions on the journey

New independent predominantly black majority churches are beginning to play a role in the ecumenical scene; also community churches that once would have regarded Anglicans as unsound and Catholics as beyond redemption are now taking the lead in ecumenical projects – another development to welcome.

6. The links between mission and unity

We present the gospel in an indifferent and increasingly hostile world and we are learning again the need to be together in witness. Churches Together in South London was glad to celebrate the centenary of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference earlier this year and to remind ourselves of joint mission projects across our patch.

7. The development of new theological approaches

Receptive ecumenism and spiritual ecumenism are two examples of the attractive new ways in which ecumenism is being reshaped. We were privileged to have presentations from our Episcopal Chair and Vice-chair – Christopher Chessun and Paul Hendricks – on these approaches and I intend to keep alive the debate on them.

8. The need for hard thought and prayer on divisive issues

Some great work is being done in bi-lateral confessional dialogues and I would like to see the process of reception more thoroughly done at local levels.

9. The significance of product champions

We need people to speak naturally, winsomely and enthusiastically about the importance of unity, both at the level of church leaders and more locally. As mentioned in my ‘activities’, I have been working on how to use ‘unity contacts’ in each Roman Catholic parish church more effectively and this could be a model for other churches.

10. The concept of multi-Christianity

This thought was mentioned in a paper by Michael Ipgrave, Archdeacon of Southwark, on mission priorities for the Southwark Diocese. It feels to me like a new way of looking at the diversity/unity tension and I would like to explore it further. Thank you as ever for indulging me and for any wisdom and experience you can bring to any of the above points.

John Richardson
*Ecumenical Officer,
Churches Together
in South London*

John is a regular contributor to TiC. His missionary wisdom and zeal for ecumenism should be contagious. Thanks John. Editor.

MORE THAN GOLD

The 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games are the first time in the history of the modern Olympics that the Catholic Church has chosen to position someone to engage on its behalf with matters relating to all aspects of the Games. James Parker is the Catholic Bishops' national coordinator for the 2012 Games and presents here some of the many opportunities being offered through engagement with the 2012 Games.

Although often perceived as merely a sporting event, past experience has shown that an event the size of the Olympic and Paralympic Games cannot help but have a significant ripple effect on communities across the country where they are hosted.

Although seen to be merely the London Games, teams of athletes and coaches from abroad will train all over the country, and Olympic events will take place from as north as Glasgow, to as west as Cardiff and as south as Weymouth. So, these really are the UK Olympic Games.

The Olympic Torch Relay will travel the length and breadth of the country, being within an hour of 95% of the UK population. Organisers are looking for 8,000 people to carry the torch, with half of the places being for 12 to 24 year olds, still leaving plenty available for those who are older.

The Catholic 2012 office is involved with working predominantly on ecumenical ventures. These are administered chiefly by *More Than Gold*, the umbrella Christian charity set up deliberately for the Olympic and Paralympic Games of which the Catholic Church is a global sponsor.

More Than Gold has been busy establishing around twenty programme teams. These include: Prayer and Intercession, Sports Resources, Chaplaincy, Paralympics, and the Torch Relay. The Social Justice team are considering how to address homelessness, Fairtrade, the environment, human trafficking and prostitution, and the need to bring about greater peace through the Olympic Sacred Truce. There are also teams that offer training around hosting community festivals, volunteering, and

how to use sport as an outreach tool and a fun means of inner formation. Catholics are being encouraged to get involved with one or more of these teams in their local area, and where possible to be leaders among the Christian community in serving the people in their locality during the Games.

Each church is being encouraged to have at least one parish representative, called a Gold Champion, who will be the link person between *More Than Gold* and the local Christian community. Many other churches within the boundaries of the Archdiocese of Southwark have already signed up. It is important that the Catholic community does not miss this opportunity and leave it “too late to get involved” which is what so many parishes have lamented after previous major sporting events. So, if you are a sports’ enthusiast, a school teacher, youth leader, ecumenical contact, someone involved in Justice and Peace or interfaith matters, or just someone with a heart for the good that can come from an event like the Olympic and Paralympic Games, talk to your parish priest about becoming a Gold Champion, and sign up on the *More Than Gold* website.

Following the visit of Pope Benedict XVI, we have been left with a very definite purpose: to grow in confidence and to witness to our faith, to serve others, to seek and engage in dialogue, and to point to the transcendent. It may seem strange at first glance, yet the 2012 Games offers a practical way in which we can live out and fulfil this purpose in its entirety.

The projects under preparation by *More Than Gold* invite every group and denomination within the Christian community worldwide to engage with what cannot help but be the largest ecumenical venture in the history of the Church. There is already a strong sense that Jesus’ words in John 17:21 – ‘Just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me’ – are being lived out in a wholly new and practical way in our time.

There are so many opportunities on offer for us to work, and even to play, together. This list is by no means exhaustive: hosting community festivals together as a visible witness of

unity to our communities, praying and interceding together for peace in our land and for the successful delivery of the Games, gathering groups that will welcome the Olympic Torch when it comes through our towns and villages and even to provide refreshments and entertainment on our streets, uniting as one body to stand against social injustices that can be associated with global sporting events, and so many more.

This really is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that God is offering us. The biggest event in the sporting world's global calendar will not come this way again during most of our lifetimes. However, we can learn from the Games how to work, play and pray together more effectively and to establish a blueprint for future engagement with relevant events that the UK will host in the future. Two of these are the Rugby World Cup in 2015 and the Cricket World Cup in 2019.

We know that God the Father will answer Jesus' prayer in John 17. The question we are left with is this: will we be serious enough about playing our part in seeing this materialise in the coming year and beyond?

JAMES PARKER
*Catholic Executive Coordinator
for the 2012 Games*

To find out more about what is going on,
or to get involved, visit
www.morethangold.org.uk,
www.peacelegacy.org.uk,
email: james.parker@cbcew.org.uk
Catholic2012 and MoreThanGold on Facebook.

Bringing God's Love to the Streets of Bexley

The following article is written by Jack Merrifield who lives in Erith and worships at Our Lady of the Angels. He is pictured here with his wife Dorothy, who is a fellow Street Pastor and worships at St. Paul's, Erith.

Street Pastors started in Brixton in January 2003. Just a small group of faith-filled Christians took to the crime-ridden streets of Brixton and the rest, as they say, is history. Eight years on there are now over 5000 Street Pastors patrolling in 150 towns across the UK; Christians of every age, sex, ethnic group and denomination taking God's love into their communities.

In 2006, following an agreement between Bexley churches, the local police and council, Bexley Street Pastors hit the streets of Bexleyheath. At the time there were major problems in the Broadway on Friday and Saturday nights. For respectable people, the area around the Clock Tower was a place to avoid. Drunken mobs from rival gangs would often turn the Broadway into a battlefield, causing all sorts of trouble. It was into this environment that the original nine Bexley Street Pastors timidly set out from Trinity Baptist Church for the first patrol.

Aged between 25 and 75 these pioneers soon won over the sceptics and became greatly appreciated by the police and public alike. In those early days they were often seen separating rival gangs, comforting distressed bystanders and making sure that vulnerable youngsters got home safely.

By the time I became the first Roman Catholic, Bexley Street Pastor in 2008, the situation had improved beyond all recognition. As with many other towns where Street Pastors have been introduced, street crime has fallen considerably and Bexleyheath has been no different and is now a much safer place to go at night.

As a Christian I felt I wanted to do something to help young people who, for many social reasons, often suffer from low

self-esteem, feel undervalued and hopeless. I cannot solve the many social problems of our age by myself. But God can. If He can take our few loaves and fish and feed a multitude He can take my feeble efforts and multiply them a hundredfold. When I put on that blue uniform and step out on the street, I do so in His name, in His strength and under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. I feel His concern for these vulnerable young people and want to make sure that they get home safely.

A typical evening starts at 9pm on a Friday night when I meet up with other members of the teams and the Prayer Partners at Trinity Baptist Church. Over a cup of tea/coffee the senior Street Pastor gives out any notices and we discuss any issues that may have arisen since we last met. This is followed by prayer and worship, offering up the evening to God and asking for His anointing, protection and for Divine appointments. We also pray that the Prayer Partners are able to keep alert and aware of God's voice and direction. The Prayer Partners are a vital part of the team. Indeed we cannot go out without prayer back up. We contact them by mobile if any situations occur that require prayer cover.

At 10 o'clock we head out for the first session. One group of three head up towards the Clock Tower while another heads down towards the Drayman. We will usually have a chat with the doormen and people standing outside pubs and restaurants smoking. Some people want to know what we are doing and are amazed that we are volunteers. Others tell us about their problems (some quite disturbing). Some ask about our faith so we are always ready to give our testimony. Occasionally, they want to know more and we are able to refer them to a church. In nearly every encounter people express how much they appreciate what we are doing.

We often check out the skate park behind Asda and sometimes meet up with groups of younger people, who cannot get into the pubs or clubs, drinking or smoking cannabis. We are not there to judge but do try and warn them about the danger. We

always try to leave them with a positive thought by telling them how much God loves them and wants the best for their lives.

At about 11.15 we head back to Trinity for a break. Over another cup of tea and a biscuit, or if we are fortunate a piece of cake, we share what has happened on the street and any word received by the prayers. Recently, we came back rejoicing because two young men told us they wanted to believe in God. After we explained the Gospel message they gave us their mobile number so that a local church could contact them.

At about 11.45 we head out again. By this time the mood has changed and there are several drunks on the street. Some want to engage us in silly talk, often wanting to argue about God. It is about this time a fight might break out. We try to get between the two rival groups and calm things down. If it gets serious the police, who are usually on hand, take over, leaving us to look after anyone who has been traumatised by the incident. About a year ago there was a nasty fight in a restaurant. The police arrested the culprits; ambulances took away the injured, leaving us to deal with a teenage girl who was sitting outside on a wall with her squashed birthday cake on her lap. We waited with her until her dad came to pick her up.

At 1.00 *Pure* and *Affinity* night clubs turn out. The scene would be amusing if it was not so sad. A hundred or so skimpily attired girls (even in minus temperatures) staggering around on their high heels. Young men trying their best to make idiots of themselves in the vain belief the girls might find them attractive. The sad thing is that the girls are too drunk to notice. To meet practical needs we hand out flip flops and phone for cabs. We hang around until the area has been cleared and everyone has gone home safely. We get back to Trinity at about 1.30. After a quick debrief and final prayer we head off home for a very welcome night sleep.

It is a great shame that more Catholics have not taken up this ministry. Every time we go out we meet several young lapsed Catholics who have drifted away after receiving their Confirma-

tion. This provides a wonderful opportunity to reach these young people who otherwise might never again hear what it means to have a living faith. At the moment we have about 50 Street Pastors patrolling in Bexleyheath and Belvedere. The police and council would like this to increase to 200 so that we can also patrol on Saturdays and in other parts of the Borough, including Welling. Volunteers are expected to patrol once per month and receive comprehensive training. If you feel God is calling you into this ministry or you want to know more about becoming either a Street Pastor or a Prayer Partner, I would be delighted to hear from you (it can be lonely being the only Catholic).

Jack Merrifield



THE FOLKESTONE CHURCHES' WINTER SHELTER

December 2009 - February 2010

The Rainbow Centre was set up in 1985 to give care to families in difficulties, single mothers, those in debt, the homeless, the destitute or anyone in trouble. The volunteers provide food and comfort, counselling or contact rooms for estranged parents to see and play with their children. The Centre has many demands on its resources.

Nearly twenty years ago the *Foodstop* was initiated, giving meals to the homeless three days a week, and providing them with other necessities. Of course, the need for a hostel has been felt for many years, but various attempts at finding a property to use have come to naught. Then, last spring (2009) an event happened which triggered the most ambitious project yet: One of the vulnerable people, being helped by the Salvation Army, died. This reinforced the urgency of providing shelter for those who have none.

Following a pattern already used in Croydon for seven years, a group of people from Churches Together in Folkestone, led by Captain Matt Clifton of the Salvation Army, decided to set up a night shelter for three months in the depth of winter, from December 12th to February 28th. Very generous funding was provided by Shepway District Council, the Salvation Army, the Rotary Club and a number of other bodies and individuals, and seven churches offered their premises, empty and unused at night, to accommodate fifteen people, who had to be vetted and recommended once they had applied for a place, for an evening meal, facilities for washing, hair-cutting, and a comfortable bed for the night. The Salvation Army provided breakfast at their premises – as they do every day of the year! Two hundred and forty-three people volunteered to help, and three training sessions were held. Mattresses, bedding, duvets and pillows were bought. These items, and cleaning materials, were moved from one church to another each morning following a night of looking after the guests. The Salvation Army's big van was used.

Richard Fitzgerald and Jon Limebury organised the various teams of people to do the cooking, make the beds, talk to the guests, and see to their needs; other teams stayed overnight, keeping an eye on everything, and more set to work tidying up and packing the bedding once the night was over.

Seven hundred and twenty-nine beds were actually occupied over the twelve week period. This was an 84% take-up of the accommodation offered. 69% of those sheltered had a local connection with Folkestone; 60% of the guests had mental health problems. All sorts of things contributed to their homelessness, or lack of a proper place to live: family breakdown, loss of job, loss of housing through being unable to pay the rent, alcoholism or drug addiction, and other problems. The best part of the contact with the volunteers was that Richard and John, through their contacts with organisations like the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Council, managed to find homes or a positive outcome for thirty of the people who had previously been living on the street, on park benches or shop doorways. Friendships were formed, the volunteers met the guests on an equal footing, and the "church" barrier was broken: some of the guests had been reluctant, at the beginning, to set foot in a church, or a church hall, but they soon found out how friendly everyone was. Our hopes, last April, that the project could be repeated, came to fruition when the Rainbow Centre took up the task for the very cold winter we experienced this year. I shall report on this later on (and I hope, this time, not to lose the article for a whole year!

Kitty Hart, PUC Kent Area

