

Burning the candle at both ends

There is a priest friend of mine, now retired, which you will probably decide is a good thing when I tell you about his decision to celebrate the Feast of St Blaise (3 February).

For reasons which now escape me, St Blaise is the patron saint of people with sore throats and throat problems of all kinds and the rubrics for his Feast Day include, wait for it... the Blessing of Throats.

How is the priest supposed to carry out this sacred act?

Well, he takes a pair of candles specially twisted into a sort of 'Y' shape for the purpose and places them around the throats of the faithful such that the two ends of the 'Y' protrude under the ears.

Now I know some of you think I do weird and wonderful stuff but I am a mere novice compared to my friend, for he once attempted to bless the throats of his people with said candles still alight thus causing his parishioners to repair immediately to whoever happens to be the patron saint of burnt hair or singed ears.

It is perhaps weird, even unsafe in the hands of some, to be using candles in the 21st century for anything other than power cuts. Have we not got all sorts of more sophisticated, and indeed effective, ways of providing light? Indeed we have, but somehow the Church still insists on light-

ing bits of string bound up in wax. Indeed a whole industry exists to keep us well supplied with candles of all sizes; yes, if you so wish, even the strange 'Y' shaped examples for good old St Blaise.

We may not be using candles on 3 February this year, or any other, but we shall be using them the day before, because

Sunday 2 February is, of course, Candlemas, so-called because it celebrates old Simeon giving thanks for Christ 'the light to lighten the Gentiles'.

And we shall be using them at 'both ends' of the day, morning and evening, as we celebrate this event and recall our duty to be lights each in

our own way to enlighten those 'Gentiles' among whom we live. This day marks the real end of the Christmas/Epiphany season, the white and gold vestments and hangings are put away until Easter and in heart and mind we now 'turn towards the Passion', as our service booklets for the next few weeks will remind us.

So if you come to Evensong on that day, as well you might, you'll find the service has a peculiarly unfinished feel to it for the last thing we do is have half a procession to the font after which there follows no comforting blessing but a sending out among 'the Gentiles' for the never-ending work of mission.

You see we may not want burning wicks stuck round our ears, but we do need to take the Light of Christ out into the world.

Fr Stephen Mitchell



Will I go through with my application?

In the second of two articles about a conference that covered what it takes to become a priest, Paul Baker finds that it's tougher than he expected

With an interest in what was necessary to be selected as a priest, in 2012 I attended a conference in Oxford. Last month I outlined the objectives of the three-day conference and the events of the opening day, Friday.

On Saturday morning breakfast was followed by the opening session: 'Practicalities of Selection' by the Senior Selection Secretary of the Church of England who explained the Bishops Advisory Panel and how the Diocesan Director of Ordinands (DDO) acted as the initial gatekeeper of the whole process.

Some 700 potential Church of England priests present themselves every year in England, more than all the other churches. For stipendiary priests, those want to be incumbents, age was a barrier, but each diocese is different. We were told that a priest must satisfy nine criteria: vocation, ministry within the Church of England, spirituality, personality and character, relationships, leadership and collaboration, faith, mission and evangelism and, finally, quality of mind. All these are explored along the way before an applicant can be recommended for training.

The next session about Spirituality was given by the Provincial Master of the Society of the Holy Cross (SSC), in which we

were told about the necessity of routine, such as the daily offices and the need for meditation and reflection and the occasional retreat.

After lunch there was exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, within the framework of a holy hour, followed by Benediction. A number of delegates made their confession, for me it was my first time after 64 years of sin.

At Pusey House – founded in 1884 as a centre of prayer, theological study and pastoral care – workshops on Sector Ministry were held. I found myself on a session on Religious Life (i.e. monastic life

such as the Community of the Resurrection) and one on Self Supporting Ministry, largely dealing with non-stipendiary work.

Sunday morning after Morning Prayers and breakfast we had one of the more enlightening sessions

theologically entitled 'Priest as Leader and Evangelist'. With many of us scared of the term "evangelism" the talk by the Vice Principal of St Stephen's House exploded the myth. We are probably all evangelists but don't really realise it – in what we say, in what we do, how we act in the spirit of God. We don't have to stand in shopping centres putting the fear of God into everyone – it's much more gentle than that.

After a winding up session, including brief discussions about women bishops and homosexual clergy, the conference concluded with a moving sung Eucharist celebrated by the Bishop of Richborough.

I do not know whether the conference brought me closer to whether I wish to try to be a priest or deacon. My own circumstances and age suggest I will not go through with it.



Away Giving at St Peter & St Paul

One of the aims of the Parochial Church Committee at Edenbridge Parish Church is to provide financial support for organisations, mission societies and other groups – local, national and international – who work for the relief of want and suffering or are engaged in evangelism and church mission.

A measure of the importance of Away Giving is shown by the total the PPC approved in 2013: almost £7,600, or 6.6 per cent of our expenditure.

This figure can be broken down into donations or grants made directly from PCC funds; regular appeals or collections; special appeals for disasters and other one-off events using the black box; and the encouragement of individual giving using collection boxes.

These can be detailed as follows:

1. Direct PCC donations:

* Eden Christian Trust: in 2013 we gave £3,000 but have just agreed to increase the annual donation to £3,500 to help fund the work of ECT in outreach to young people in the parish.

* Church Mission Society: we support Ruth Radley, the link worker in Sudan, to the tune of £500 plus the annual Lent appeal raised of £101.

* Edenbridge Primary School: £522 supported the work of the Breakfast Club

* God's Hands: food and other essentials are given to local families who are in financial difficulty. We made a one off donation of £215 to help this work.

* All Saints New Cross: £200 helps support disadvantaged inner children with their annual holiday in the Isle of Man.

* Edenbridge Churches in Covenant: £100 supports its ecumenical work.

* Children's Society: Various receipts at Christmas that came to £62 on top of the

Christingle collection of £669.

* Friends of Kent Churches: £5 to help in preserving churches in use that are of architectural merit. It has been agreed to increase this to £100 for future years.

2. Appeals and collections for the following were organised:

* The Remembrance Day collection portion to the Royal British Legion: £94

* Poverty and Hope Harvest collection: £220.

* Friends of Sick Children in Malawi: £1,000 sent covering two years of donations from Wednesday Communion congregation.

* Rebuild Mexico: £286 for one-off ECT mission.

* Kent Air Ambulance: £141 from half of wedding collections.

* Friends of Edenbridge & Westerham CAB from Sunday morning coffee etc profits: £118.

* St Augustine Belvedere: £1,000 donation for wiring project.

3. Individual giving for God's Hands, the Children's Society and others totalled about £700. There were no special appeals for disasters in 2013.

Jane Cain, Treasurer

Parish Office Administrator/PA

Ss Peter & Paul Parish Church, Edenbridge requires a Parish Office Administrator/PA to assist Rev'd Stephen Mitchell in the running of the Parish Office.

Hours of work: Provisionally 16 per week, spread over four mornings (Mon, Wed, Thurs & Fri).

For more details and a full job description please contact Mrs Carole Feakes on 01732 867820

Ecumenical Lent courses for 2014

How do you normally like to mark Lent? Are you one of those people who like to 'give up' something for Lent? – whether it be chocolate, wine, or whatever.

Some people choose to do something different, both as a way of expressing their appreciation to God for His great sacrifice on Good Friday – and remarkable resurrection at Easter – and as a way of seeking to deepen their faith and response to that.

Examples of doing something different include attending some of the special services, such as on Good Friday, or Compline evening services, and a commitment to increased or more regular times of solitary prayer with God.

Another constructive way is to attend Lent Study Groups, such as those being organised again this year.

This year the groups will be held in different localities – normally the homes of a Christian couple in the town – with hosts and leaders drawn from different churches. All groups will use the same course materials – a new five-week course produced specifically for Lent 2014, entitled 'Build on the Rock' – Faith, doubt – and Jesus. This is one of many courses designed and published under the title of York Courses since 1997, the first of which was produced in York. They are designed specifically to be used ecumenically, with prominent Christian leaders from different denominations and none, contributing to the small group discussions through means of

a short 15-minute radio type recording. This course structure has been used before by the ECC and has proved both valuable and enjoyable by those who have attended. Why not give them a try yourself, this year?
Bernard Oldfield

- Look out for details of local events in **Fairtrade Fortnight** (24 February - 9 March) including a 'Come Dine with Us' evening on 3 March. Watch six local chefs make two starters, two main courses, and two desserts using Fairtrade ingredients for you to try and vote for your favourites.

Diary dates

Wednesday 5 March

Ash Wednesday, 10.30am & 8pm

Wednesday 12 March

7.45pm for 8 Lent Groups 1

Wednesday 19 March

7.45pm for 8 Lent Groups 2

Wednesday 26 March

7.45pm for 8 Lent Groups 3

Sunday 30 March

Mothering Sunday

9.30am Eucharist

Thursday 17 April

8.30pm Maundy Thursday

Friday 18 April

2.30pm Good Friday service

Sunday 20 April

6.00am Easter Vigil

9.30am Easter Sunday Eucharist

6.30pm Easter Festal Evensong

Compline services will be held at 9pm on Sat 29 March, Sat 5 April, Sat 12 April, and Mon to Wed 14-16 April

Edenbridge Parish News is published monthly by the Parish Church of St Peter & St Paul, Church Street, Edenbridge, Kent. Contact Fr Stephen Mitchell. Tel: 01732 862258. Email: ssppvicarage@hotmail.com Web site: www.edenbridgeparishchurch.com. Editor: John Nutting. Email: johnnutting47@gmail.com