

THE OLD CHURCH NEWS

O P E N T O A L L - O P E N T O G O D

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VICAR'S VOICE

Being connected to other people is so much the basic stuff of life that it's almost the air that we breathe. It is how we become more fully human and it's how our identities are formed and shaped. To connect is to discover our place in the world and our sense of meaning. But I guess, for those of us who have been brought up in an individualistic society, we will most acutely experience this sense of connection with those in our immediate circle.

The social psychologist Stanley Milgram, however, set about proving that it is not just those we know well, and those who live close by, that we are connected to. The 'Six Degrees of Separation Theory' he developed suggests that everybody in the world is linked to everybody else by six, or fewer, steps. If I know you, and you know someone else, and we follow that process through six stages, we will find that the web of connection is complete.

I'm no mathematician so I have no way of proving if, or how, this works. But some have attempted to through various follow-up studies and, although the number of required links has differed from study to study, it has consistently been found to be small. So it would appear that everyone is, indeed, connected to everyone else.

On April 18th I attended the event 'A Good Society Conversation' which was hosted by Smethwick CAN in the build up to the General Election. The

event began with a café style conversation on six topics; children and young people, poverty, justice and fairness, housing and homelessness, community well-being and the environment. Feedback and questions were put to the four parliamentary candidates and the one party representative who had been invited to attend.

The thing that struck me most about this process was how the people of Smethwick, who attended the event, had a heart for the whole community and a vision for what a good society would look like for all, not just for some. There was a strong sense of connectedness that stretched way beyond one's immediate circle.

In church we have just come through a season in which we have been reminded, once more, of Jesus' command to love one another. This command challenges us, like Milgram's theory, to think big when it comes to our connectedness to other people. And May this year gives us the opportunity to do just that, to think big.

This is the month in which we are challenged to think about what a 'good society' should look like and, the way we answer this challenge, will inform how we vote on May 7th. And May is the month in which we are challenged to think about what a 'good world' should look like as we engage with Christian Aid week.

So, let us not be afraid to think big!

LAST MONTH'S NEWS

At the beginning of April we marked the dramatic events of Holy Week with Holy Communion and Foot Washing on Maundy Thursday. On Good Friday there was a March of Witness beginning at Regent Street Baptist Church, a service of prayer and reflection 'At the Foot of the Cross' in Old Church and then 'Meditations on the Cross' at St Matthew's church.

The glorious events of Easter day began with a 'Service of Light' with Holy Communion at 6am. This was followed by an excellent breakfast of bacon and sausage sandwiches, croissants, tea and coffee at the vicarage.

The later service of Holy Communion with Baptism was very well attended and the congregation was treated to mini chocolate Easter eggs at the end of the service. The services at Old Church have been "enlightened" by the floral arrangements, the Easter garden in front of the altar and a colourful banner draped from the balcony.

The first of our 'Sunday Strolls' enjoyed by some of our members followed an 'up and down' route in Waseley Country Park. More strolls are planned and it is hoped that others will come along to enjoy a bit of gentle exercise and some pleasant company in the open air.

WATCH - WOMEN AND THE CHURCH

Affirming: Campaigning: Transforming

WATCH (Women and the Church) is a national organisation with a vision of the Church of England as a community of God's people where, regardless of their gender, justice and equality prevail. It grew and developed from MOW (the Movement for the Ordination of Women) following the ordination of women to the priesthood in 1994. The past 15 years or so have been focussed on the crucial work of campaigning for women to be appointed bishops, which is so important to the future of the Church and to women in and beyond the Church. Following the consecration of Right Rev'd Libby Lane as Bishop of Stockport on 26th January in York Minster, WATCH now has the space to broaden the agenda and look again at women and the church, beyond the episcopate.

The WATCH Committee has been actively working on 'What next for WATCH?', to which many members have contributed their thoughts. We have nine more aims to achieve, and are focusing our work on resourcing churches with gender-inclusive liturgy and writing that explains and explores feminist approaches to theology and spirituality. We will continue to campaign for ordained women to have full opportunity to use their gifts.

The most significant shift in thinking is in focusing more time and energy on the laywomen of the Church, rather than those called to ordination. A fully gender-inclusive church must listen to laywomen's experience. In what ways does the Church enable or hinder their being the hands, feet, ears and eyes of Christ? That is work for 2015 and beyond.

If anyone would like more information about WATCH, how to become a member, get involved in our work, I would be delighted to have a conversation as I am passionate about it, as you might be able to tell from this short article!

Gill Gould (Secretary of national WATCH Committee and Convenor of Laity Task Force)



MAY

- 10th **Fellowship Walk** - for further details speak to Paul Martin
- 14th **ASCENSION DAY**
7.30 pm Service of Holy Communion
- 18th 7.30 pm **PCC Meeting** at the DPC
- 21st 6.45 pm at Old Church - **The Archdeacon's Visitation**
- 26th 7.30 pm **Lay Pastoral Ministry Team** meeting at the Vicarage
- 27th 6.00 pm - 8.00 pm **Soul Space**
- 28th 2.30 pm meet for **Prayers** in The Old Church (see Rosemary for details)

Christian Aid is a Christian organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.



They work globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality. They are part of a wider movement for social justice.

They provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes.

Their vision

Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives. Christian Aid has a vision - an end to poverty - and we believe that vision can become a reality.

There are many ways that we can get involved in Christian Aid Week, including giving a donation. There will be donation envelopes available in church from May 10th.