

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton		
Sunday 3 rd September Trinity 12	9.30 Holy Communion	Deuteronomy 4 vv 1-9 p182 Mark 7 vv 1-23 p1010
Sunday 10 th September Trinity 13	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 35 vv 1-10 p719 James 2 vv 1-17 p1214
	3.00 Holy Baptism	Mark 7 vv 24-37 p1010
Sunday 17 th September Trinity 14	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 50 vv 4-12 p737 James 3 vv 1-12 p1214 Mark 8 vv 27-37 p1012
Sunday 24 th September Trinity 15 Preacher Gill Martin of Church Army	9.30 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 11 vv 18-20 p770 James 3 vv 13-18 p1215
	3.00 Holy Baptism	James 4 vv 1-12 p1215 Mark 9 vv 30-37 p1013
Friday 29 th September Michaelmas	7.30 pm Holy Communion	Revelation 12 vv 7-12 p1242 John 1 vv 47-51 p1064
Sunday 1 st October Trinity 16 Harvest & Dedication Festival	9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 28 vv 10-19 p30 John 10 vv 22-29 p1077
	6.30 Evening Worship	Joel 2 vv 21-27 p913 Matthew 6 vv 25-34 p971
Services at St John the Baptist Halling and the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
Sunday 3 rd September Trinity 12	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Deuteronomy 4 vv 1-9 p182 Mark 7 vv 1-23 p1010
	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	James 1 vv 17-27 p1213 Mark 7 vv 1-23 p1010
Sunday 10 th September Trinity 13	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 35 vv 1-10 p719 James 2 vv 1-17 p1214 Mark 7 vv 24-37 p1010
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Exodus 14 vv 5-31 p71 Matthew 6 vv 1-18 p970
Sunday 17 th September Trinity 14	11.00 Stop! Look! Listen!	Isaiah 50 vv 4-12 p737 James 3 vv 1-12 p1214 Mark 8 vv 27-37 p1012
Sunday 24 th September Trinity 15 Preacher Gill Martin of Church Army	11.00 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 11 vv 18-20 p770 James 3 vv 13-18 p1215 James 4 vv 1-12 p1215 Mark 9 vv 30-37 p1013
Sunday 1 st October Trinity 16 Harvest & Dedication Festival	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	James 5 vv 13-20 p1216 Mark 9 vv 38-50 p1014
	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 28 vv 10-19 p30 1 Peter 2 vv 1-10 p1218 John 10 vv 22-29 p1077

Copy Date October Magazine 8th September 8.30 am Rectory.

On Thursday afternoons we have a Mother & Toddler service at Halling at 2.00 and at Cuxton on the last Wednesday of the month at 10.45

Sunday School is at Cuxton Church Hall at 9.30 (not first Sundays).

After School Club, Thursdays @ St John's from 27th April.

<http://hometown.aol.co.uk/rogerknight/myhomepage/newsletter.html> and
<http://hometown.aol.co.uk/RogerKnight/index.htm>

Quizzical

September 23rd teams are invited from all over for the Strood Deanery Area Christian Aid Quiz. This will take place at the Church Hall, Cuxton. On October 14th, we are holding our next Parish Quiz in the Church Hall. Again, all comers welcome!



Marriage Rights Without Marriage Rites?

Sex is a very powerful force. Biologically speaking, it brings about the procreation of

children and helps to sustain a bond between a man and woman which provides for their own security and well-being as well as assisting to create an environment in which children may be brought up safely.

Most human cultures have rules about sex. Inbreeding is to be avoided both because it may lead to abnormality and because it introduces sex into family relationships where sex is not appropriate. The weaker have to be protected from abuse by the strong. Since sex leads to children, there have to be mechanisms for making sure that parents do not simply walk away from their responsibilities. When people commit to a shared home, there have to be arrangements to see that neither is left homeless or destitute if the other dies or walks out of the relationship.

So most societies have rules about sex – forms of marriage, social norms about whom one may sleep with and what obligations follow from sexual intercourse. Our marriage customs in England derive in part from the Church, in part from Roman marriage law and in part from Anglo-Saxon custom. A hundred years ago it was clear what you were supposed to do (although of course many people did not always play by the rules). You were not supposed to sleep with anyone till you had made your marriage vows. Once married you were supposed to stay married for life. Adultery was a serious matter. You had obligations to your husband or wife, to your children and to the wider family. This was the ideal, whether or not people lived up to it.

In the last thirty or so years, this neat template has seemed less necessary. Effective contraception at least in theory allows people to experience the joy of sex without worrying about the possibility of starting a family. The greater economic independence of women makes them less reliant financially on a husband. As we have dissociated sex from reproduction, we have become much tolerant of relationships which are not intended or could not possibly lead to the

procreation of children – including homosexual ones.

Marriage laws and customs are not necessarily religious. From a secular point of view, the point of marriage law is to protect people from exploitation, to avoid or at least to deal with the consequences of abandonment, to ensure the well-being of any children and the just division of any property. Roman secular marriage law was a form of contract, attempting to deal with such issues as these.

When the Church became responsible for marriage, certain other insights were brought to bear. God is love and human beings are made in His image. We are made for love! God loves us unconditionally. We reject God but He still loves us and sends Jesus. Those who accept God's love in Jesus repent of their sins, put their faith in Him and are baptised. In baptism we are made one with Christ and we promise Him what He already gives us – eternal and unconditional love. If we love Jesus and keep His commandments, then we love God with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves.

The Church sees marriage in these terms. It is because of the way that God has made us that we are capable of love, that we can fall in love with another person. Marriage is like Baptism in that we become one with the other person. We promise to love our wife or husband unconditionally for ever. If our love for our husband or wife is authentic divine love, our love overflows into love for our children and the rest of the family, for our neighbours and for other people. A truly loving relationship is like a pebble in a pond; the ripples reach out to include the distant as well as the near.

The Church blesses marriage because we believe that human beings are made by God for that kind of unconditional deep love. Christian marriage is not just for super saints. It is for the ordinary couples who come to our altars week after week. God's grace is for ordinary people and it is there for everyone who comes in faith, no matter how ordinary they may be.

Nearly 200 years ago, the British state made civil marriage ceremonies available to those who, for

one reason or another, wanted to get married without the implications of the Church of England marriage service. The commitment is the same – for better, for worse, for richer, etc, till death us do part. A civil wedding still implies a life-long and unconditional commitment, but it does not put the relationship in the context of the divine. There is no reference to the Bible, no prayers or blessing.

I believe that any human life lived without the context of the divine is diminished. We are made in the image of God and without God in our lives we are not living up to our human potential.

The reality of human beings is of course that we all fail to live up to the ideal. We are not yet Christ-like people. That only comes when we get to heaven. Divorce happens when we find ourselves unable to live up to the ideals to which God invites us to aspire. Divorce then raises questions like how soon do we give up trying to make a relationship work; how do we ensure that all parties, including especially the children, have a home and security; is it possible to make a new beginning with somebody else? These are theological, ethical, emotional and even economic questions.

Things are even more complicated if people live together without getting married. Many believe that co-habiting couples have the same legal rights as married people. This is simply not so and, if things go wrong, people may find themselves with limited rights regarding their own children, with little say in the medical treatment or funeral arrangements of a loved one and without a home, pension or share in what they had imagined was common property.

Civil partnerships for same sex couples are designed to remove some of these anomalies. In the event of a death, the survivor arranges the funeral and keeps the house. In the event of separation, both parties have rights as a divorcing couple would. It seems to me that these rights should be available to everyone who commits to sharing a life and a home with someone. You might be relatives or friends of either sex who decide to set up home together for all sorts of reasons without any implication of a sexual relationship. It seems to me that people who enter into such relationships should have legal

rights to a home and perhaps to a say in medical treatment etc before those of distant family members who have taken no interest in the person concerned until there is the prospect of an inheritance.

Unfortunately, civil partnerships got caught up in the debate about “gay marriage” and the assumption underlying most civil partnerships is that there is a sexual component to the relationship. This seems to me unnecessary and unfair to those who choose to share a home with a frail relative in order to provide care or two friends who, for economic reasons, share a house but not a bed.

Anyway, the question now is whether cohabiting couples should have rights similar to those of married couples. There are three possible approaches.

1. The Government might introduce legislation which effectively treats cohabiting couples as married whether the couples themselves choose to marry or not. So you would have a right to a share in your partner’s pension, house, children, medical treatment, funeral arrangements, etc, whether you were married or not. This would effectively take away people’s choice to live in uncommitted relationships. There would also be the question of how much cohabiting would be necessary before you were effectively treated as married (what people even now imagine to be common law marriage)? Would a one night stand make you legally the same as man and wife? Would living together for a year? Ten years? Would the relationship have to be sexual? Would the local council send out snoopers to check that you were sleeping together? Imagine a situation where a woman tried to claim the rights of a common law wife on the grounds of cohabitation and the man insisted that they had lived together but had not shared a bed!
2. Heterosexual couples could be allowed to enter into a life-long civil partnership in the same way as same sex couples. In reality this would be a registry office wedding by another name, but it might

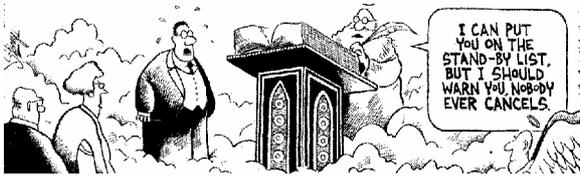
make people happier if it is the word "marriage" they object to.

3. People could be allowed to enter into contracts for cohabitation with more limited terms than current weddings or civil partnership ceremonies. That is an intriguing idea. What limitations in terms might the state be prepared to accept? If we feel that the individuals concerned ought to make what terms they want (rather than the state), why not just cohabit? Why bring the state into it at all?

I think these are the issues that we ought to be considering before changing the law to give marriage rights to people who have chosen to reject marriage rites. I am not sure how far an increasingly secular state can be expected to base its laws on Christian principles. As a Christian, however, my witness is this. God made us man and woman with the intention that those not

called to celibacy should marry if they so desire and create a new entity, a couple, a home, in which children may be born and nurtured as Christians, in which all members of the family can expect unconditional love and care, and to form a building block of a wider community in which God's Kingdom of justice mercy and love is proclaimed and effected. People who wish to enter such relationships should do so publicly and before God, seeking His Blessing, His Sacramental confirming of their union and their love. Other relationships are no doubt possible and bring some benefits to society and to those involved in them, but the only two truly satisfactory ways of living are: a single life dedicated to God and the love of other people; and Christian marriage, in which a couple are united in love, dedicated to God and committed to taking their part in the life of the community.

Roger.



Correction

The Quiz Evening in support of Christian Aid will now take place in our Church Hall at Cuxton on 23rd September. All comers welcome.

News from Cuxton Community Infant School

Dear Friends of our School,

This has been a long two terms since the Easter break and now almost at the end of the academic year, I will tell you some of the things we have been up to! The 5'o club have enjoyed their lunchtime visits on a Wednesday, as have the staff and Children. I hope these visits will continue next term. The food is delicious, thanks to our cook Sharon, the only trouble is we all feel like a little snooze in the afternoon! Our Dads certainly enjoyed sampling Sharon's cooking as we had many come into school for Father's Day Lunch!

The centenary celebrations have been going well, but I was sorry to have missed the open afternoon with the Deputy Mayor and other visitors, due to illness. However, all enjoyed the celebration cakes made by Mr Beaney and also folk took great interest in looking around the school and seeing the changes in the buildings and styles of teaching and technology available and also browsing through the log, admission and punishment books! Medway archives provided the children with workshops and have left us with a lovely display of Cuxton memorabilia.

Doody the clown visited and the children had a day of splendid workshops and learnt so many new skills! He was brilliant and no doubt will come back hopefully next year! We had a fantastic sports morning of old fashioned sports and so many folk said how nice it was to 'rekindle' some of those old races - wheelbarrow, egg and spoon, and sack! Kenko the African group visited and Sonny played the drums, and we had a percussion duo come into school and the children were involved playing various instruments.

This last week has been science week, and the children have had a great time investigating colour, light, magnets, electricity and making circuits, senses, healthy living and sand and water! It was lovely to see the children so active and vocal in the agghhhs and urghhhhs! when they touched rice, cold

pasta, wet clay, and gloop!! One of the highlights of the week was the falconry display. Again some squeals of delight as birds of prey flew over the children's heads and landed in odd places around our hall! Needless to say our decorated hoops had come down for the occasion! The staff were not so keen and some of us hid, myself included!

Now we look forward to two days of school trips to Reculver Bay near Herne Bay. For those of you who have not been a worthwhile visit to see some lovely wildlife, but make sure the tides are out!

The Friends of Cuxton, once again organised a super Fayre this year which raised both schools £ 1600, with your help of course. I know I speak for the Headteacher of the junior school also in thanking all of you who came along and spent some pennies. The monies go to worthwhile resources for the children.

Our new children had their fourth and final visit last week to spend time in their new class. It was lovely to see them each week grow in confidence as they came through the doors and left their mums and dads, in fact the parents will be the ones that need the tissues next term on that first day! Both Beehive and Mayday playgroups along with ourselves have worked hard at 'keeping in touch' this year. Both playgroups have ventured into school and used the hall for PE/movement sessions on a weekly basis and they have both come to class assemblies. We hope to keep this good liaison going next year as it can only benefit the children and both settings! We also had a marvellous fun morning with both groups joining our Foundation children for many different activities! So 90 children and about twenty adults! What entertainment! We all had a great time even if we were a little greyer by the end!

We have also continued to work with the junior school and my thanks to them for welcoming our children to the buddy sessions once again this year. My hope is that in September our children will move to year 3 confidently on that first day, knowing a little of what is to be expected. I look forward to working with the Junior staff once again next year.

Well as I close, I wish you and your families a very happy, healthy and safe Summer holiday, and I am sure next term we will have more news to tell, especially as in September 43 little ones join us!

From us all at the Infant School, Sandra Jones, Head teacher.



Halling WI

We were a bit thin on the ground, member wise, at our July meeting, holidays and the weather taking their toll, but the few dedicated members who did turn up didn't lack enthusiasm and sung Jerusalem with gusto. A birthday free month, so it was straight down to business. After the minutes of the May meeting, Ann Hayward went through the correspondence, quite a lot from the National Federation and a challenge from Janet Jones, our County chairman. She would like every W.I. in Kent West Kent to produce a scrapbook of all their "doings" in 2007. You'd be surprised at what some of our members get up too. Financially we are O.K. and until Betty recently paid the County Federation nearly £700 for various outings and meetings it looked as if we had won the lottery.

Our speaker for the evening was a young man who insisted that Mary called him Nat (I never did catch his surname) from Medway Council, his subject, Recycling. Oh dear! W.I. ladies are

nearly all recycled out and he sure was preaching to the converted, especially when he got on to "disposable nappies - to use or not to use?". Most of his audience have long since moved away from that subject. In the W.I. we have had so many discussions and at least one resolution on that subject. We did learn at least one thing. Some of us have been too diligent, recycling things into our blue boxes that they can't recycle yet. Nat was more used to talking to school children so it must have been a daunting experience for him. After our refreshments we continued with the business. District wise, a forthcoming walk at Knowle Park, a quiz evening at West Malling, and our own Public Affairs and International evening in August, which looks like being a sell out. We have a Ploughman's lunch in Mrs Vi Head's garden to look forward too, it is always very much enjoyed. Nat judged our competitions, letter F for Fruit. Evelyn Low was the winner with her collection of pretty bird feathers.

Flower of the Month was won by Ann Heaseman with a very unusual coloured Gallardia.

Next month, Victorian Women Doctors with Toni Mount, the competition letter, G for Giraffe. There is a lovely baby one at Port Lymne. Come and spend a couple of hours with us, third Tuesday in the month at the Jubilee Hall. You will be most welcome.

Phyllis.



Cuxton WI

Not much to report this month so far. Most of the WI events for August are still to come. The meeting went well with two visitors, whom we were pleased to see, and only one birthday this month, Pam Hayes. One of our members, Val Shaw, celebrated her Golden Wedding Anniversary with her husband Mike at the end of July. Our speaker Bob Ogley, who is well known for his books *The Hurricane* and *Biggin on the Bump* about Biggin Hill Aerodrome etc, gave a fascinating talk on Kent in C20 entitled *Spirit of Invicta*. We learnt so many interesting facts about people, authors, sportsmen, pilots and some celebrities, all of whom had connections with Kent. He had obviously done a lot of research, mainly from reading old newspaper copy, and some of his stories were very amusing. Everyone enjoyed his talk very

much and, after close of meeting, his books were on sale.

Arrangements are in hand for the District Home Economics Outing to Canterbury in November, which this year falls to us to organise.

The Walking Group walked from the *Malta*, along the river to Maidstone on a very hot day. After refreshing ourselves with tea and cold drinks, we crossed the river to the Bishop's Palace to get the boat back to Allington. After a short delay due to engine trouble, we had a cool, leisurely trip along the river, looking forward to lunch at the *Malta*. However, we were pretty annoyed to discover that everything on the Bar Menu was sold out, even sandwiches! We would have to wait an hour to get a table at the restaurant. So off we went to the Harvester (the old *Running Horse*) and were made so welcome and had a superb lunch. We would not recommend the *Malta*, at least not at lunch time in the hot weather. No air conditioning. Probably no food. Our next walk is around Ranscombe Farm and lunch is provided by our leader at her house.

Future events include a Quiz Night at West Malling, Frindsbury Open Day and lunch with our West Tilbury WI friends.

Ann Harris.

Nature Notes July 2006

The first day of the month was bright with sunshine and easterly winds, which kept humidity away. In the morning I watched a robin bathing in the pond. The evening was balmy with clear skies. The weather was extremely hot; so short evening walks were all we could manage. On the 3rd, in the late afternoon, we took Murphy to Trosley Country Park where we walked in the welcome shade of the trees. We saw four beautiful honey coloured Labradors, all youngsters. Along the roadside verges, I saw ragwort, mallow and goats rue. It was even hotter the following day and as the afternoon progressed, grey cloud covered the skies and there were a few drops of rain accompanied by rumbles of thunder. Eventually the skies cleared and the sun shone again. During the afternoon, I watched a chaffinch as it sang from a branch of a dead elm. In the evening, I walked to the village then along the lower path of Six acre Wood where I found enchanters nightshade. Ripe wild cherries and green hazelnuts were to be seen in the lower field. At the top of the field, field woundwort bloomed among the nettles along with hogweed and red deadnettle. Cows grazed in Church Fields where mallow and white clover

bloomed and birds sang. The next day, when I cut the grass at the front of the house, I was aware of grasshoppers jumping all over the place.

On the morning of the 8th, I walked across Church Fields where I viewed the meandering river glinting in the sunlight. Elder berries and haws were green and some hawthorn leaves had turned yellow. It was quite dark in Mays Wood where hogweed stood tall. At the top of Dean Valley I found field scabious then as I walked down the hill, pink clover, St Johns wort, bedstraw and Lucerne filled my gaze. Swyre Shaw was overgrown in places, and then going down to Purty's Shaw, I scrambled through high oilseed rape plants. Poppies bloomed and the field was ablaze with ragwort and rosebay willow herb spikes. Tall grasses swayed in the breeze. As I returned home along the road, I noticed that the creamy privet flowers had turned brown. Temperatures rose so daytime walks did not occur and so most of my observations were in the garden. On the 11th I watched ants scurrying busily along the edge of the wall then a grasshopper perched on a blade of grass near the

heathers. I listened to the melodious song of a blackcap perched on a dead elm branch. The 14th was an ideal day for a walk as a northerly wind blew bringing freshness to the air. As I went up to Church Fields a fledgling blackbird watched me without any fear. The wind blew through the trees and sighed through the rapeseed plants. A fox, the same colour as Murphy, disappeared from the path in Six acre Wood and into low-lying ivy branches. Red admiral and tortoiseshell butterflies have been visiting the garden while on the 18th, an oak eggar moth, a beautiful creature, perched on one of the living room blinds. Temperatures continued to soar then there was some rain in the early hours of the 22nd and rumbles of thunder accompanied this. Another elm tree on the

embankment beyond the garden has died. On the 24th we took Murphy to Addington where trees are definitely suffering from the drought for leaves are becoming yellow and brown. Green finches have taken up residence and call loudly from the conifer tree and the TV aerials. The last day of the month was breezy with sunshine and at midday there was a heavy shower and this I enjoyed as I stood at the back door watching it and breathing in the freshness of the foliage. The greenfinches called from the trees during the day and in the evening, I watched a hen blackbird foraging at the base of the lilac tree. The drought continues.

Elizabeth Summers

From the Registers

Baptisms:

23 rd July	Jamie Paul Reynolds	The Street
23 rd July	Hayley Claire Reynolds	The Street
30 th July	Hannah Sonya Daniels	High Street
6 th August	Abigail Francesca Joy	Lambarde Close
6 th August	Charles Henry Bugg	High Street
6 th August	James Anthony Salter	Howlsmere Close

Wedding:

5 th August	Kerri Bates & Terri Oakley	Cuxton
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Funeral:

26th July	Dennis John Thomas Wentworth	Rochester
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Thanks

Julia and Matthew Wells and family would like to thank all our friends in Cuxton for their overwhelming support and kindness during Julia's mother's illness and in the weeks after she passed away at the end of June. Thank you to everyone who prayed for her and for us. Every prayer, card and kind word was greatly appreciated and helped us through a very difficult time.

Silver Jubilee

I should like to thank everyone who attended the service on the 25th Anniversary of my Ordination to the Priesthood on the 12th July. I should also like to thank you for the cards and presents and the generous collection. I have not yet decided how to spend the money! It was a tremendous occasion and it meant so much to me that I was able to share it with so many people from all walks of life. I do not think you can imagine what a privilege it is to be a priest, to preside at Holy Communion for a congregation and a community, to preach God's Word and to have a particular position in the pastoral and evangelistic work of the Church. I am sure that all Christians have their vocation and I hope that you are all as happy in yours as I am in mine. Can I express my only sorrow – the fact that Christian people feel able to absent themselves from the Lord's Table on the Lord's Day? Very little can matter more.

Roger.

Church Hall Draw: £40 to Mrs. G. Bogg, drawn by Mr Ray Maisey.

St John's: £5 each to Mrs Knott (44), Mr Pratt (98), Miss Bourne (110), Mr Dance (129) & Mrs Clark (180) – drawn by Mrs Crundwell & Mrs Garland.

Should Women Be Bishops?

Should anyone be a bishop, or a priest, come to that? Most religions have holy people set apart for spiritual purposes. The list includes not only priests and prophets, but also shamans and witchdoctors, sibyls and soothsayers, vestal virgins and temple prostitutes. The thought is that some people are set apart. That is what the word “holy” means, set apart, set apart for God. Holy people mediate between God and ordinary common humanity. They intercede. They bless. They curse. They deliver oracles. They offer sacrifice. They dream dreams. They advise in the light of divine counsel. They issue the judgments of God.

The thought is that human beings need to relate to God but that most people do not have the ability to do so directly. It may be that they are too sinful, too dull in their perceptions, too timid even, but the thought is that people can only come to God through intermediaries – special people set apart for the purpose. Such people may have been specially chosen. They might come from priestly families. There might well be rites of initiation and a long apprenticeship. However it works, certain people are set apart, regarded as holy, in order to act as intermediaries between God and ordinary humanity.

We are probably most familiar with the model in the Old Testament. Only those of the tribe of Levi are ministers. Within the tribe of Levi, only the descendants of Aaron, Moses’ brother, are priests. The high priests are Aaron’s direct descendants. Priests offer the people’s sacrifices. They approach God directly on behalf of the people. They intercede. They pronounce God’s blessing on the faithful and curses on God’s enemies. Using the insights they receive from God, the priests have both medical and legal functions. The only person ever allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, the presence of God, is the high priest and he goes in only once a year, offering sacrifices to atone both for himself and for the people.

Nevertheless the whole people of Israel are considered to be holy. At Mount Sinai, immediately after the Exodus, Israel is described as a royal priesthood, a holy nation. As well as priests of Aaron’s line, God calls men to be prophets and kings. He pours out His Holy Spirit on craftsmen and artists engaged in creating objects for worship. Potentially, the Holy Spirit is available to all God’s people.

In principle, every Israelite man, woman and child stands before God. In a sense the whole of Israel mediates between God and the rest of the world.

This limitation of priesthood to authorised ministers has a number of functions. God is holy and should always be approached with reverence and awe, with a fear that matures into sublime love. Like marriage, God’s presence is not to be entered into *unadvisedly, lightly or wantonly* to satisfy ourselves and our own desires, but *reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly and in the fear of God*. Moreover, religion is a very powerful force. Some of the most appalling atrocities committed by human beings have been done in the name of religion. Priestly power is all too easily abused. Wrong ideas about religion give us suicide bombers, human sacrifice, the Inquisition, Crusades, etc etc. Human society without God is pretty dreadful. Witness Stalin’s Russia, Mao’s China and Hitler’s Germany. Where religion is misdirected, we can go just as wrong. So the idea of having a separate priestly caste is to try to create conditions in which only those who approach God with due reverence enter into His presence and that the power and influence which come from communion with the divine are used to His glory and for the benefit of the human race, not for those diabolical purposes for which religion is so often abused.

Christianity is different. We believe that God is so holy that only one human being is worthy to enter into His presence. The rest of us are too defiled by sin to stand in the presence of the thrice holy God. Only Jesus may enter into the sanctuary. He intercedes for us. He blesses us. He pours out the Holy Spirit on all believers. He judges all those who rebel against God. He offers sacrifice on behalf of us all. The only sacrifice capable of reconciling God and creation, the only true Atonement, is the one perfect sacrifice, the sacrifice whose effect is eternal and therefore unrepeatable, the sacrifice which Jesus Himself offers, the sacrifice of Himself offered on the Cross.

We believe that if we confess our sins and are baptised we become members of Christ. We become both a royal priesthood and a living sacrifice because we are the Body of Christ. We fulfil the true destiny of ancient Israel. We are a holy nation, a royal priesthood, mediating God to the world. We have different functions, different ways of serving Him, different talents, different opportunities, but we all have the same Holy Spirit filling us with Christ’s virtues and giving us the gifts which enable us to do His work in the world. Because that is the

point. God sent Jesus because He so loves the world. Jesus sends us to complete His Mission. We are the Body of Christ and it is our task to proclaim the Good News throughout the world and to bring in God's Kingdom of justice, mercy and peace. We spoke last week about what a lot there is to do if all humanity, all human beings, are to fulfil their vocation as the children of God. We are one with Christ in Baptism. Our communion with Him is renewed and sustained in the weekly Eucharist and in daily prayer, Christian fellowship and Bible reading. Our task is huge, but it is God's work and we are called to do it, not on our own, but in Christ and Christ in us. This is the ministry of all God's people, of all the baptised. All Christians are priests in this sense. We all have access to God in Jesus Christ. We all have the Holy Spirit Who empowers us, with Jesus, to call God our Father. We are all His children, His holy children, His ministers, His servants, His friends, commissioned with the task of completing Christ's work for the world.

Within the priesthood of all believers it was soon found necessary to designate particular people with particular offices and responsibilities. There were apostles and evangelists. There were prophets and pastors and teachers. There were deacons with special responsibility to minister to the poor and sick. The early church needed leaders to make sure that the teaching was correct. They needed discipline. They needed a focus for unity. Soon, as well as deacons, there were people appointed with special responsibility for leadership. In the New Testament, in the original Greek, these are referred to as *επισκοποι* (episcopoi) and *πρεσβυτεροι* (presbyteroi). These words are conventionally translated *bishops* and *elders*. It is important, however, to realise how these offices have evolved since New Testament times and that these words have connotations today which St Paul would never have thought of.

It would appear that church government was developing during the New Testament period and there is no one pattern. However, in a very short space of time afterwards, things coalesced into more or less what we have today. The Bishop was the head of the Church under Christ in every city where there was a Christian community. He was prayerfully chosen by the community in the belief that he was also God's choice. The bishop was responsible for mission, unity, order and sound teaching. The Christian community is the Eucharistic Community. In Holy Communion we proclaim Christ's Death until he comes again. Participation in the Sacrament both symbolises and effects our union with Christ and with one another, His Body, on earth and in Heaven. In the context of Communion we hear the Bible read and preached and in penitence lament our failure to conform to its precepts, and receive grace to be better Christians, more effectively functioning as members of Christ's Body in the world. As a royal priesthood in union with Christ, the Christian Church represents His sacrifice, our atonement, and offers itself, our souls and bodies, to be a living sacrifice. For these reasons, the Bishop always presides at the Holy Communion.

As time went on and the church grew, there would be a larger number of Christian communities in a city and the surrounding area. In these parishes, the bishop, *επισκοπος* (episcopus), would delegate to his *πρεσβυτεροι* (presbyteroi) his functions of responsibility for mission, unity, order and sound teaching. On behalf of the bishop, the *πρεβυτερος* (presbyteros) would preside at the Eucharist and lead the local church and that is more or less the pattern which, much modified, has survived to the present day. It is perhaps unfortunate that English and Latin use the same word when translating *πρεβυτερος*, the New Testament co-worker with the bishop, and *ιερευς* (hierous) which is the word for the Old Testament priest. In English and Latin *πρεβυτερος* and *ιερευς* are both rendered *priest*, *sacerdos* and that does lead to a certain amount of confusion. To put it simply, Christ is our only high priest, *αρχιερευς*. In Christ all baptised Christians are priests *ιερεις* of God, commissioned to fulfil Christ's priestly ministry in the world. Within that priesthood of all believers, some are called to holy orders, to be bishops, *επισκοποι* (episcopoi), priests, *πρεβυτεροι* (presbyteroi), or deacons, *διακονοι*.

Should women, therefore, be bishops? It is clear that the ministry of bishop and priest is so closely linked that the question of women bishops is much the same as the question of women priests only, perhaps, more so. Should women, therefore, be priests in the sense of elders, *πρεσβυτεροι* (presbyteroi)? All Christian women are priests in the sense that they are *ιερεις* (hierais), just as are all Christian men.

The argument for women priests goes something like this. The only essential difference between men and women is their potential to become fathers or mothers. In every other respect, men and women are equal and equivalent and ought to have equal opportunities in their choice of career and other life choices. In many areas of life, equal opportunities between the sexes are quite rightly enforced by Law. We have male midwives and female fire-fighters. God made men and women in His own image. St Paul teaches that there is neither male nor female in Christ any more than there is Jew or Gentile, slave or free person. Jesus gave women equal

respect with men and women had important roles in supporting His ministry and as witnesses of the Resurrection. There are some very significant women leaders in the Old and New Testaments and throughout the history of the Church. If the priest takes the part of Jesus presiding at the Eucharist representing all humanity, then it is important that women as well as men should function as priests in the Church. Our failure to ordain women impairs our unity with denominations such as Methodism, which regard the ministry of women as essential to the witness of the Church. In a world in which most people regard it as a self evident truth that men and women are equal, it damages the Church's credibility if we refuse women equal rights with men in the ministry.

The argument against women priests goes something like this. The differences between men and women are more profound than the mechanics of reproduction. Common sense and experience tell us that men and women are different in lots of ways. Most human cultures have assigned different roles to men and women. How can we be so confident that we are right and they are all wrong? Maybe men and women are not equivalent and equally suited to every career. Perhaps male midwives and female fire-fighters are not such a good idea after all. The Bible certainly teaches that men and women are equally created in God's image and equally redeemed in Christ, but neither the Bible nor the Church, for most of its 2,000 year history, has deduced from that that men and women should have the same jobs and fulfil identical roles. There have been great women leaders in both the Bible and Church history, but they were always exceptions, never the rule. Jesus respected women as much as He respected men, but He assigned them different roles. He never made a woman an apostle. It was St Paul who insisted that women and men were equal in Christ and he worked closely with some very able women leaders, but he still asserted that women should not exercise the sort of authority which would come to be exercised by bishops and priests. We have to be very cautious about treating the Christian priest as an icon of Christ, even when he is presiding at the Eucharist. Insofar as the priest represents Christ, well, Christ was a man, and there is no suggestion that He does not represent women equally with men at the Throne of God. Having women priests impairs our unity with Roman Catholics and the Orthodox, who are not only more numerous than Methodists, but also much closer to us Anglicans in their understanding of ministerial priesthood generally. If the world cannot comprehend our refusal to offer equal opportunities to women and men, well, the Church sometimes has to be distinct from the world – as much for the world's sake as the Church's.

What you decide will depend on how much weight you give to these considerations. Some people incline towards the Bible and to what the Church has always taught. Others incline towards interpreting scripture and tradition in the light of modern thought. It is a continuum, a spectrum, and we are all located somewhere on that spectrum. At one extreme, no-one can live as if nothing had changed since biblical times. At the other extreme, neither can anyone claim to have anything to offer as a Christian if he writes off all that has been revealed in the past and simply derives his values from contemporary secularism. We are all located somewhere on the spectrum. We celebrate our unity as we acknowledge our differences. God has no doubt included *all sorts and conditions* in His Church for a purpose, because we are all needed.

What we must not do is to allow differences of opinion to damage the royal priesthood of all believers. We must preserve our unity with Christ and with one another. There is a desperate world out there which needs the priestly ministry of the whole people of God. So we pray for guidance for ourselves and for one another and especially for our leaders. We respect and love the people with whom we feel our integrity compels us to disagree. We patiently await God's time for the Truth to be finally revealed. And we cleave to Christ and to His Church, passionately and wholeheartedly serving God in His world by the light of the understanding that each one of us has received.

Sponsoring Deema Ismaeel



When the Bible Lands Society came to tell the Deanery about their work in Lebanon, Israel and Egypt, they told us about the possibility of sponsoring the education of a child. In many cases in the Middle-East there are no free school places and children from poor homes go without formal education. It is possible to sponsor a child for as little as £15 per month. We thought we could sponsor a child and we will be collecting at our Thursday afternoon children's services. Any other donations can be given to the Rector. If we collect more than £15 per month, I am sure Bible Lands can use the money.

Deema Ismaeel comes from a very poor Moslem family of eight. They live in a small flat about 6 miles west of Jerusalem. Deema's father is a labourer when he can get work, which he often cannot. Deema's mother is occupied full time caring for her large family. Deema is five, healthy and lively. She goes to Rawdat El-Zuhur School. We shall be able to write to her and receive letters back.