

## Children and the church

Curiosity, imagination and impossible creatures are the joys of childhood but what happens to them as we become adults? Lewis Carroll alludes to this in Alice in Wonderland. It is the adult queen and not the child Alice who is receptive to possibilities:

*Alice laughed: "There's no use trying," she said; "one can't believe impossible things." "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."*

Jordan Peterson, psychologist and controversial podcaster, says that the place of "I don't know" is a much more powerful place than "knowing all". There is no potential for movement from the latter position; energy is dissipated in proving the rightness of a position or belief.

Wise teachers of children do a lot of listening, creating opportunities to enter mystery together rather than providing explanations. They join children on expeditions of learning and faith development rather than teaching doctrine and tradition.

Perhaps the Wonderland Queen has the answer to the loss of imagination and curiosity: we simply must keep practising believing that what seems impossible or miraculous is true. Otherwise our thinking begins to atrophy into what we are prepared to believe, and we become decreasingly willing to enter a mystery that might disrupt our assurance of the way things are. The increasing physical stiffness of adult bodies is accompanied by intractable mental positioning and spiritual staleness.

In the same way that we need to keep our bodies in good order, we need to keep our minds open and receptive to new thinking and our spirits open to new experiences. We have seen how great injustice and cruel decisions can occur when those in authority lose their curiosity.

Jesus admonished his disciples for preventing children coming to him. Jesus said: let the children come to me, and he blessed them. But Jesus did something more than that: he said to the adults in the crowd, you cannot enter the mystery of the kingdom of heaven, my kingdom, unless you become like little children.

The glory and beauty of God can only be perceived by those with the wisdom of children. God is revealed to those who engage their imagination and plunge into the mysteries God has given us to discover.

*Rev Jane Kustner*



**THANK YOU** to the Guides who helped to tidy the church grounds – and prepare Christingles – in December.

### Special Services and Events

**Wednesday 14 February - Ash Wednesday**  
**10am & Holy Communion 8.00pm**

**Sunday 18 February**

**4.00pm Choral Evensong**

**Sunday 25 February**

**6.30pm God's love**

*A service led by the Music  
Group*

## Remembering John Banfield

John Banfield was born in 1938 and later enrolled as a Wolf Cub in St. Augustine's, 19th Forest Hill, followed by Boy Scouts and Seniors. He went on numerous scout camps in the 1950s and the Scouts Jamboree in Austria.

He went to Alleyns School in Dulwich, where he was in the Air Force Cadets. He shone in athletics events, particularly cross country running.

After school, John was called up for National Service in the RAF, mostly spent in Mönchengladbach in Germany, in the catering corps. He was then persuaded by his father to join the family timber yard business in Dulwich where he spent the rest of his working life until selling the business on his retirement.

He met Elizabeth at a dance: theirs was a long and happy marriage, blessed with three children and grandchildren. Together they made a loving home and their skillsets complemented each other.

John was a loyal man who always did what he thought was right. Born just prior to the war he was undoubtedly shaped by it: the family business was pivotal in the rebuilding of the area. They had their own air raid shelter in the garden and John kept his blanket from the shelter in the garage. He was never very materialistic, but the blankets meant something.

His company donated materials to make noticeboards for St Mary's – several of which are still in use in the church and hall.

John was an inspiration to many scouts: he received several long service awards from the Scout Association, was a Queens Scout, and was involved in Scout Groups in Germany, Beckenham and Bromley. This included being Assistant Cub Leader for Kim (Tuesday) Cubs in Shortlands, back in the 00s. He latterly helped to maintain Wilberforce Scout Camp near Biggin Hill.

At his funeral he was honoured by his Scouting colleagues and an inspiring message from the Chief Scout, Bear Grylls.



## Everyone welcome!

Join us at 6.30pm on Sunday 25th February for an alternative, interactive and inspirational service of worship led by St Mary's Music Group, exploring the theme of God's love.



## A hospital chaplain

As part of my training to be ordained in the Church of England I spent part of the summer as a volunteer chaplain at the Princess Royal University Hospital (PRUH). I was nervous, not having done anything similar before, but I joined a friendly team of superheroes who made me feel so welcome.

The PRUH has a large team of chaplains ranging from Anglican and Baptist to Muslim and Humanist: I spent time with them all before being let loose on my own with patients.

Every patient admitted to the PRUH is asked if they would like to see a Chaplain. Much of my time was spent on the stroke, cancer and palliative care wards. The patients were of all faiths and none: many asked specifically for a Church of England chaplain to visit, offer pastoral support, and pray with them.

Each day started with morning prayer before we went to see the emergency patients, those who had requested an urgent visit, or those whom the medical staff had asked us to visit as soon as we could. These patients were generally in real need of comfort and support: whilst some wards brought their challenges in being able to communicate and hear the stories, it was also a place of hope and faith.

I spent the day talking to patients, praying with and for them, there just to listen. Being alone in hospital, sometimes for a long time, is such a frightening experience. Many had left at home their partner or other family members and were worried more for them than themselves. Many at end of life wanted to talk about how they were feeling and have prayers for those they were leaving behind. We talked about sickness, and also life – the good, the bad and the real.

Being with people in their last moments on this earth to give last rites, and being with their families and those who care for them, was a gift. It was about supporting, connecting and offering ourselves as a conduit for God; being his hands and feet, speaking His words.

The whole team created a space of care and compassion through highs, lows, laughs and tears. Even in tears I felt I was in the right place, part of a team that goes beyond the hospital walls—a team that cares for the whole person.

*Stephanie Maurel*

## Following the star



On 7 January, St Mary's held a short service for families to celebrate Epiphany, with a story told by puppets. We heard Carrie the Camel's tale of taking the wise men to find Jesus in the stable. We celebrated the wise men's journey through our own procession around the church led by the children holding the gifts, following the star whilst singing We Three Kings.

This took us to the altar where we finished with prayers, thanking God for the gifts of the wise men and considering what gifts we can bring to Jesus. We hope to offer more services like this in the future at St Mary's so please keep an eye on SPAN for our next date!

## Parish News

Rev Jane Kustner retires this Easter Sunday, 31 March. Her last service will be at 10.30am, followed by a modest event. Please let the office know if you plan to come: all are welcome.

The Parochial Church Council's plan for the vacancy will be rolled out from April: more details will be shared in next month's SPAN.

## MISSION OF THE MONTH

### Mines Advisory Group

Mines Advisory Group (MAG) is a global humanitarian and advocacy organisation that finds, removes and destroys landmines, cluster munitions and unexploded bombs from places affected by conflict. Princess Diana first brought this extremely dangerous but crucial work to the attention of the world. Currently it's actor Rosamund Pike who is its ambassador, regularly visiting affected countries, updating senior politicians, and speaking at seminars.

Always ready for emergency response, MAG doesn't take sides, sending help where and to whom it's needed. Once the accreditation process has been done, senior technical experts go in and locals are then trained as de-miners. In Ukraine many are sourced locally, as their horrendous experiences of the conflict channel them towards MAG which, in so doing, aids their own healing & recovery process.

MAG has already started risk education in Gaza too: having pioneered the use of social media for this purpose in the Middle East, it has since rolled out its digital programme to many countries.

It's not only local people who work with MAG's personnel: rats and dogs are also used! Rats are trained to recognise explosives, which considerably speeds up the process and cuts out the stress involved, as the same caution must be followed for harmless metals as for the real thing. For dogs, their training enables them to trace landmines, cluster bombs, IEDs and their wires.

Now for some good news: in Laos clearance is progressing well, allowing regular harvests, and as soon as land is cleared locals begin to build on it immediately. The bad news: the Kakhovka Dam collapse in Ukraine caused hundreds of landmines to become visible, washed along in the torrent; after a tsunami in Sri Lanka, land mines were seen floating down the middle of roads.

Without proper clearance, such problems prevent access to the basics: food, water and power. Risks persist after decades: in Angola and Somalia children still suffer fatal accidents.

Do visit the website [www.maginternational.org](http://www.maginternational.org) and our display at St Mary's this month.

### Everyday faith

The period of Lent – which runs for 40 days from Ash Wednesday on 14 February until Easter – is a time of reflection and asking for forgiveness as we remember the events leading up to the death of Jesus on Good Friday – and his resurrection on Easter Day.

At St Mary's we use this opportunity to think about our faith through discussion groups meeting in church and in people's homes. These are very informal, friendly groups – no prior knowledge required and all are welcome.

This year we will be following a course called 'Everyday Faith', thinking about what it means to be a Christian in our everyday lives. There are five sessions which consider the question 'why church?' and look at what it means to be a follower of Christ everyday, through prayer and through our actions.

We are planning to have four groups meeting at different times and locations (including one on Zoom), and hope that everyone who wants to come will be able to make one of those times. Do sign up on the sheets in the church or call the church office to put your name down to attend.

### Marriage in church

People want to get married in church for many reasons and all of them are important. They include the beauty and atmosphere of the space, the elegance of the words of the service, making a commitment in a larger context than just them as a couple, and bringing God into the relationship as a foundation to their love.

One of the benefits of a church wedding is that most ministers of the service will strongly encourage the couple to engage with marriage preparation. This is offered in a Christian context, bringing biblical teaching into the preparation of the couple for their lives together. At St Mary's we do this by facilitating conversations about subjects that may not seem obvious to a couple who are in love with each other and whose view of the future is inevitably short term, and probably more romantic than practical.

Together with the couple, the minister aims to remove some surprises, avoid common stumbling blocks and help the couple discover each other and deepen their intimacy. We cover topics such as each other's preference for showing and receiving love, handling conflict and disagreements agreeably, setting up a support network and creating a home with Christian traditions and practices. The most fun is when a couple discuss how they will approach their wedding night: at this point the minister leaves them together!

Marriage is not easy, and the failure rate is depressingly high. One of the reasons for this may be that couples give more energy to planning the wedding day than they do to planning how they will build and strengthen their marriage. Guided marriage preparation can fill this gap. For more information, please contact the Parish Office.

*Rev Jane Kustner*

### A warm welcome



The St Mary's Community Café is a thriving community, and we welcome all visitors whether they are regular church goers or not. We offer a welcoming place for everyone with an abundance of friendship and kindness, in addition to the delicious homemade cakes and tea & coffee. The Café is run and staffed by volunteer servers and bakers (we always welcome new volunteers).

It is now tradition to celebrate milestone birthdays for our regular Café guests and in January we had three big birthdays: a 92nd, 90th and 88th. A special cake was baked for the occasion and a jolly time was had by all.

The Café is open every Wednesday from 10.30am to 12.30pm. We invite anyone in the community in need of some company to come and visit us - we look forward to welcoming you.

**The Parish Church of St. Mary, Shortlands**



Link Parish  
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Assisi, Douai, France

**WORSHIP**

**Sunday 10.30am - Holy Communion (in church)**

**Wednesday 10.00am - Holy Communion**

You can access Sunday services online at:

[www.stmarysshorthlands.org.uk](http://www.stmarysshorthlands.org.uk)

[www.facebook.com/stmarysshorthlands](http://www.facebook.com/stmarysshorthlands)

Further information about all services can be obtained from the Parish Office.

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	vicar@stmarysshorthlands.church	
Licensed Lay	Mrs C. Bingham	8460 0324
Ministers	Mrs A-M. Jefferys	8460 6030
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**PARISH OFFICE**

Telephone: 020 8460 5682

Email: [office@stmarysshorthlands.church](mailto:office@stmarysshorthlands.church)

Open 10.00am - 12.00pm weekdays.

Information regarding Baptisms and Weddings can be obtained during these hours.

**ST. MARY'S ORGANISATIONS**

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Friends of St Mary's	Mr. T. Chase	8464 6188

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Cubs (Mon)	Mr O. Swinfen	07758458077
Cubs (Tue)	Mr. J. Griffiths	07954437658
Beavers	Ms. E Hay	07932758801

For admissions to Rainbows, Brownies or Guides please go to [www.girlguiding.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk)

Guides (Tue)	Ms. E Thompson	07910340908
Guide (Fri)	Mrs. G. Dawson	8460 5884
Brownies (Mon)	Miss. K. Higgs	8462 3285
Brownies (Thu)	<a href="mailto:fourthbromleybrownies@outlook.com">fourthbromleybrownies@outlook.com</a>	
Rainbows	<a href="mailto:2ndshortlandsrainbows@gmail.com">2ndshortlandsrainbows@gmail.com</a>	
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Cllr. A. Cuthbert	Aisha.cuthbert@bromley.gov.uk
Cllr. F. Bainbridge	Felicity.Bainbridge@bromley.gov.uk
Cllr. A. Grant	Adam.Grant@bromley.gov.uk
Residents Association	8460 0395
Shortlands Safer Neighbourhood	8721 2614

**SPAN INFORMATION**

Website [www.stmarysshorthlands.org.uk](http://www.stmarysshorthlands.org.uk)

Editorial Parish Office

Distribution Mr. M. Harrison 07821 691567

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