

## St Andrew's Advent Appeal

As Christmas approaches we try to support and help people less fortunate than ourselves. In 2010 St Andrew's wants to support a very special group of Anglicans within our own Nordic and Baltic Deanery. These Anglicans come from the Sudan and live as refugees in western Finland, having escaped violence and suffering in their home country. They come together for worship as the White Nile Congregation in Vaasa, Oulu and Kokkola, led by Fr Amos Manga (himself a refugee from the Sudan). There are several hundred families who gather from wide distances, with the church community being a vital support both spiritually and practically.

With elections in Sudan on 9 January 2011 to decide whether Southern Sudan will eventually become an independent nation, the Anglican community of Sudanese Christians in Finland wants to be ready for the future and

prepare its young people now. At present they speak Finnish in school and Arabic at home, whilst English will be the official language of the new South Sudan. The White Nile Congregation is asking for our support this Advent to set up an educational project so that the congregation can organise an English language project – by paying for books, materials, transport and tutors. In this way the Advent Appeal will help one of our congregations with a specific practical need, and also contribute to the building of a potential new nation.

At the recent Nordic and Baltic Deanery Synod, it was suggested that all of our Nordic and Baltic congregations should make a Christmas appeal for this very special group of suffering Anglicans. Please give generously, with joy and thanksgiving, so that we can support this very deserving community.

*Nancy Fjällbrant*

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# St. Andrew's

December 2010 — February 2011



Magazine of the English speaking church in Gothenburg

**NB/OBS! Have you renewed your subscription**

Annual donation of 50:- for the church magazine would be appreciated to pay for printing and postage. If you collect your copy in church you will save us money. Payments can be made into our giro account 42 15 63 - 8 or directly to Gisela Barnard or one of the Churchwardens.



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## Lottery 2010

The following organisations or shops have very kindly given us their support:

Anni's Fair Trade  
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 Ekholmens Pensionat, Vessigebro  
 Folkteatern  
 Govindas Vegetarian Restaurant, Karl Johansg.  
 Gunnebo slott o trädgårdar  
 Göteborgs Operan  
 Göteborgs-Posten  
 Göteborgs symfoniker  
 Hagabadet  
 Hotell Gästis, Varberg  
 Hudspecialisten Mila Jamshdi  
 Jane's Place  
 Josefssons  
 Lindbergs Kött&chark  
 Lorick, smed Vessigebro  
 Majornas Te och Kaffe  
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 Marrakechdesign, Kaserntorget  
 Musik utan Gränser  
 Restaurang Marsala, Chapmans Torg  
 Salong Moulin Rouge  
 Stadsteatern  
 Stena Line – 60 "skraplotter"  
 Thai Wok Sweden  
 The Gothenburg Drama Group  
 Västra Hälsokost

In addition, some members of the congregation have generously donated glass, new books and other objects.

**Göteborgs  
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**S  
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 Tel 0340-180 50

**GP**

The Anglo-Swedish Society Program  
 is now on-line: [www.angloswedish.se](http://www.angloswedish.se)

Members of St. Andrew's community are invited to apply for membership of the British Club.

Membership is open to all British and Commonwealth citizens and spouses of citizens and others with strong British connections.



[www.britishclub.se](http://www.britishclub.se)

Membership benefits include an active social programme, generous travel concessions as well as a lively quarterly magazine.

The annual fee per family is 100.00 SEK. Anyone interested should contact Gisela Barnard (031 147101) or Monica Edholm (031 293040)

## Letter from the Chaplain

My heart sank when I saw the song sheet at the University Chaplains' conference. Out of 19 hymns – 7 in English and 12 in Swedish – I knew just 4: two Taizé chants and two from Svenska Psalmboken. But that wasn't the problem; I like learning new songs – provided they rhyme and scan and make sense, and most of these did not. It didn't help that the musical accompaniment was two guitars and a drum. Fortunately, all three musicians had good voices, and I found after a bit that the best way of entering into the spirit of the worship was not to try to sing, but just listen.

This experience made me grateful for our own choir and our mainly shared taste in hymns. But it also made me more sympathetic to visitors from a different musical background, to whom the *Ancient and Modern* tradition which our *Common Worship* books have brought up to date are just as alien as the worship songs at the conference were to me.

We had a musical treat at the end of September, when the Gustavi choir from Domkyrkan visited St Andrew's. Emma Jones is a member of both Gustavi and the St Andrew's choir, and Gustavi's director Michael Sager is a frequent visitor, so our guests had some idea what to expect. But, for the congregation, it was a surprise and a delight to discover a different way of weaving music into the liturgy, and enjoy the very spirited church march with which the service ended.

Talking of treats reminds me of our auction of Time, Talents and Treasures. We were better organized this year, which helped to make the evening a great success. Jack Packer is an excellent auctioneer, humorous and efficient at the same time. One "treasure" was a book



about the great organs of European cities, with a photograph of our own organ, which Jeanette Munro had spotted at a library sale for three kronor, but worth much more to those who love our organ. Tilak Rajeesh offered two "talents" – cleaning windows, which is one of our traditional offers, and also cleaning Windows (Microsoft Windows) or similar help with sick computers. Each of the committee had been asked to bring two guests, many of whom made appreciative comments and want to come again. "We shall know what to do next time," said one.

Time, talents, and treasures ... so many people give so much to the life of the church, and not just when it's time for the auction. We could not keep going without the time and talents that so many of our "treasures" freely give – in thanksgiving for all that we ourselves receive from God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

Barbara Moss

# Who's Who at St Andrew's

## Chaplain

Barbara Moss

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e-mail address: st.andrews.got@telia.com

Internet website: www.svenskakyrkan.se/goteborg/st.andrews

## CHURCH COMMITTEE

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Gisela Bamard 031 - 14 71 01

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### SST, Contact for Nordiska kristna rådet, Sveriges kristna råd

Tore Fjällbrant 031 - 28 49 33

### Ladies' Guild

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### British Factory Representative

Ann McKinnon 031-795 62 89

### Other Elected Members

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### Co-opted Member

Adebayo Opeoluwa 031 - 713 84 21

## OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

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### Sacristan and Magazine Editor

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and Magazine Subscriptions  
Gisela Bamard 031 - 14 71 01

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Peter Hansen 031 - 97 28 67

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and Environmental Officer  
Ron Jones 031 - 26 94 25

### Gardening Group

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### Child Protection Officer

Emma Jones 0702-756217

### Ladies' Evening Group

Ann Gustafsson 031 - 16 17 43  
Gisela Bamard 031 - 14 71 01

Chapter 2 in which we are told to live out our true natural goodness, but to not do good in order to achieve to achieve recognition and approval. The Dalai Lama was described as a person who lived out his inherent goodness, with a sense of acceptance. <http://www.dalailama.com/> Mother Teresa of Calcutta is another example of living out natural goodness, with a sense of acceptance. Sometimes people whom we encounter in our daily lives, can give us this experience.

Things can change for the better, as in South Africa. Forgiveness is not easy, but it makes the world work better. Think of how long a teenager stays in the bathroom! One outstanding example of reconciliation is the Amy Biehl Foundation in memory of Amy Elizabeth Biehl a young Stanford graduate who was brutally murdered, in 1993, by a gang of black youths in Cape Town. Her parents started the Foundation in memory of their daughter and the work she had been doing. <http://www.amybiehl.org/> Her mother described the early work with the three young men who had killed her daughter - saying "Some days I wake up and have to

forgive them all over again." An interesting book to read in this connection is *Mother to Mother* by Sindiwe Magona, (see page 15) published in 1998, and translated into Swedish as *Mödrar emellan*, in 2002. This book describes the life of the murderer as seen by his mother, who describes her despair and sorrow, in a message to Amy Beal's mother.

Mpho went on to say that we are often our own harshest critics. She said that we should accept ourselves and create an icon for ourselves saying "This is how God looks at us with love and acceptance." She concluded with:

"It's inside you - it's who you are, try to recognize it. Stop living in fear. Let your heart be open to compassion."

We have bought two copies of the book *Made for Goodness* one for the church library, and one which is currently being circulated in the Ladies' Guild.

Nancy Fjällbrant



Archbishop-emeritus KG Hammar with Mpho Tutu and Alexander MaCall Smith at Se Människan, the Swedish Church stand at the Book Fair



For more information, please call her on 0708 558650 or e-mail: [info@janesplace.se](mailto:info@janesplace.se) to join the mailing list. There is a 10% discount to all members of the English church, just quote "St. Andrews offer" when ordering. The 10% discount will then be donated to the church. Janes shop has now opened at Nordenskiöldsgatan 30 (nearest tramstop Olivedalsgatan).

## Mpho Tutu at the Gothenburg Book Fair

The Gothenburg Book Fair is the biggest meeting place for the book trade in the Nordic countries. In 2010 there was special focus on *Africa and African literature*. I had the good fortune to meet with, listen to and talk to Mpho Tutu and Alexander McCall Smith.



MPHO TUTU is the daughter of Desmond Tutu with whom she has written the book *Made for Goodness*. Mpho Tutu is a priest in the Episcopalian Church. She studied at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and began her ordained ministry at the historic Christ Church in Alexandria, near Washington DC. Since then Mpho Tutu has worked with vulnerable children in Worcester, Massachusetts, with rehabilitation and healing for rape victims in Grahamstown, South Africa, and with refugees, primarily from South Africa and Namibia, at the Phelps Stokes Fund in New York.

*Made for Goodness* is about goodness and the assertion that all human beings are basically programmed with the desire to create a better world. A striking characteristic of Desmond Tutu is his laughter and obvious

joy in talking to people, yet his early life experiences were extremely hard. He grew up in Munsieville during the period when South Africa was divided by the apartheid policy. He had the advantage of a loving home. His parents encouraged him to study in Johannesburg and he describes how his mother once gave him her full day's wages so that he could afford the train ticket after a visit home. He saw and experienced extreme poverty in ghettos such as Soweto. How can Desmond Tutu continue to be so joyful? The view that *human beings are made for goodness* is an essential quality of his life. He believes that a good creator created us to be good, but gave us the freedom of choice with the option of denying our goodness. Mpho Tutu has also seen and heard about many horrors, in Africa and the USA. She says that "*We are not optimists – we are prisoners of hope – we know that evil does not have the last word*"

Mpho described the work process for *Made for Goodness*, which started with a two-week retreat with Desmond Tutu where they developed the outline. She describes Desmond Tutu as being "*very concentrated in his thinking and very clear about what he wants to say.*" She commented that she didn't understand how people could work collaboratively before they had the internet and computers! She was asked if they agreed all the time and replied diplomatically "*He says that his children have educated him.*" It was not always easy to be the daughter of well-known priest. She remembered how she rebelled by falling asleep in church, and then found herself actually listening to his sermon!

Mpho Tutu then went on to describe

## Services: December – February

Sung Eucharist at 11.00 am each Sunday except where stated below.

For latest information about our church services, see GP every Saturday, or consult the web site [www.svenskakyrkan.se/goteborg/st.andrews](http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/goteborg/st.andrews) *Lay Assistants and Intercessors who are not able to attend, please arrange an exchange or replacement and notify Barbara or Alan.*

**DECEMBER 5,** 2nd in Advent  
*Peace and Justice Sunday*

**LA:** Ann Gustafsson, Gisela Barnard  
**I:** Gisela Barnard

**DECEMBER 12,** 3rd in Advent

**LA:** Alan Taylor, Ann Gustafsson  
**I:** Gillian Thylander

**DECEMBER 17,** Friday

16.00 *Carols round the crib*

**DECEMBER 19,** 4th in Advent

**LA:** Gisela Barnard, Göran Molin  
**I:** Ann Gustafsson

18.00 *Nine Lessons and Carols*

**DECEMBER 22,** Wednesday

18.00 *Nine Lessons and Carols*

**DECEMBER 25,** Christmas Day

11.00 *Family Communion*

**LA:** Ann Gustafsson, Alan Taylor

**I:** Gisela Barnard

**DECEMBER 26,** St Stephen

**LA:** Alan Taylor, Gisela Barnard

**I:** Cecilia Klevedal

**JANUARY 2,** Epiphany

11.00 *Family Communion*

**LA:** Ann Gustafsson, Jeanette Munro

**I:** Alan Taylor

**JANUARY 9,** Baptism of Christ

*Andrew Wingate preaching and presiding*

**LA:** Gisela Barnard, Alan Taylor

**I:** Gislilian Thylander

**JANUARY 16,** Epiphany 2

**LA:** Ann Gustafsson, Göran Molin

**I:** Alan Taylor

18.00 *Exploring the Bible and Jonah and Night Prayer*

**JANUARY 21,** Friday

19.00 *Service of Prayer for Christian Unity at Smyrna Church*

**JANUARY 23,** Epiphany 3

**LA:** Alan Taylor, Ann Gustafsson

**I:** Kristina Ayoade

**JANUARY 30,** Candlemas

**LA:** Gisela Barnard, Göran Molin

**I:** Ann Gustafsson

**FEBRUARY 6,** 5th before Lent

10.00 *Holy Communion*

11.00 *Family Service*

**FEBRUARY 13,** 4th before Lent

**LA:** Ann Gustafsson, Gisela Barnard

**I:** Cecilia Klevedal

18.00 *Evensong with Sermon on Ecclesiastes*

**FEBRUARY 20,** 3rd before Lent

**LA:** Alan Taylor, Ann Gustafsson

**I:** Gisela Barnard

**FEBRUARY 27,** 2nd before Lent

**LA:** Gisela Barnard, Göran Molin

**I:** Gillian Thylander

**MARCH 6,** Next before Lent

10.00 *Holy Communion*

11.00 *International Family Service*

## Chaplaincy notes

### Pilgrimage at Östra Kyrkogården

On a cold and windy but sunny late afternoon one Saturday some pilgrims from St Andrew's Church went to Östra Kyrkogård to walk around among the graves. It was the weekend of All Saints and many candles were lit on the graves as is the custom here in Sweden. As the sun went slowly down it was a beautiful sight. Barbara read a prayer.

As we made our way up to the highest point we came to the family grave of the Seaton family, a very big imposing memorial to a family once very much involved with St Andrew's Church and the British Factory. As we were looking out from the high vantage point the rays of the setting

sun were caught in some windows in the distance and reflected back on the image of the two people on the memorial. A very moving sight.

It was now getting darker. The sun made the trees appear as beautiful silhouettes against the orange coloured sky. We walked up the next incline to the Jewish Cemetery. We were struck by the little stones put along the edges of some of the graves and were wondering over the meaning. Is this a way to say: we love you, we are thinking of you? I like to think so.

With a final prayer near the entrance of Östra Kyrkogården, where there was some light, the small band of pilgrims made their way home. Bless you, Barbara, it was a wonderful experience.

*Gisela Barnard (not on photo below)*



## Remembering your Spirit



*Please, hurry!  
Take photographs of all the children, now!  
Take photos, for tomorrow they will be gone.  
Take photos! Take photos of the children  
Children who will not see thirty.  
Children who will never... grow... old.  
Never grow old.*

*Sindiwe Magone*

### These Dark Times

This time of the year is difficult for many people. This is when we need to be our Brothers' (or Sisters') Keeper by simply; making phone calls, visiting or inviting our friends, neighbours, members of our congregation, elderly people we know, especially anyone who finds it difficult to get around. We could be making their day!

It is amazing what a few minutes on the phone to someone can do!

I know, we all feel: 'I have too much to do', 'How am I going to find time?', 'I am already stressed as it is', 'I don't have the strength to deal with him/her right now, I'll do it later', but it is actually all about prioritizing.

If you knew something awful would happen to this person if you didn't call, wouldn't you call?

Maybe, if we took time to offer ourselves a bit, this world would be a better place for us all. The strange thing is you would actually feel better yourself after you've done some good.

If we didn't clean and clear all the trivial things, your guest wouldn't even notice. Then it would be easier to invite people home. Or why not meet in a cafe? That way, both of you get out.

Think about it, let's make someone's day each week these Dark Times.

*Kristina Ayoade*

Nancy Fjällbrant discovered among the African books at the book fair:

### Please, take photographs

*Go to the nearest or cheapest electronic goods store  
And there buy cameras by the score.*

*Hurry! Go! Go! Go!*

*Then go home and gather your family and*

*Take photographs of them all*

*Especially, the children; especially the young,*

*Hurry! Hurry! Take photos of them all*

*Before it is too late.*

*Take photographs of the children*

*Take photographs of them playing*

*Take photographs of them crying*

*Take photographs of them reading their best  
books*

*Or doing their chores – But –*

*Hurry! Hurry! Before it is too late.*

## Carol Services

Nine Lessons and Carols at St Andrew's: Sunday 19 and Wednesday 22 December, 18.00

Nine Lessons and Carols at Hakarp Church, Jönköping, Sunday 5 December, 18.00

Carols Round the Crib at St Andrew's, Friday 17 December, 16.00

Carol Service at Bäve Church, Uddevalla, Monday 20 December, 18.00

## Prayer for Christian Unity

New Year Ecumenical Service in Domkyrkan, Saturday 1 January, 17.00



Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 18-25 January.

Service of Prayer for Christian Unity at Smyrna Church, Friday 21 January at 19.00

## New Year Party

Open House at Norra Liden 15 for Barbara's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Please arrive between 19.00 and 21.00

## Pilgrimage Walks

Saturday 4 December, 10.35 boat from Saltholmen to Styrösö Skäret

The first walks of 2011 will be on Saturdays - 22 January and 19 February

## Exploring the Bible



January 16 at 18.00  
**Jonah – Paranoid Prophet?**  
(followed by Night Prayer)

February 13 at 18.00  
**Ecclesiastes – a time for everything**

## Concerts

Occasional Friday lunchtime concerts at 12.15, including

December 3 Emma Nyman (violin) and her brother (piano)

December 10 Douglas Harper  
*See our web site for details.*

## Midweek Mass

A short simple service with bible reading and songs in English and Swedish, adjourning afterwards to a local café, on the following Wednesdays at 19.30

December 8  
January 12 and 26  
February 9 and 23



The Seaton Family Grave

## Book Fair Talk



Andrew Wingate speaking in St Andrew's on *Celebrating Difference, Staying Faithful*

## Harvest Festival

Sunday September 5th was time again for our yearly event with Service, Auction and Lunch. Not only is this event much enjoyed by everybody, it also brings in well needed funds to help keep our lovely church going.



Decorations in church arranged by members of the Ladies Evening Group. These ladies even provided the lunch afterwards



Angela and Andrew Wingate together with Barbara at the Ploughman's Lunch after the service and during the sale of produce

## Auction of Time, Talents and Treasures

Friday evening on the 8th October we had another of our much needed fundraising events.



Mary Ayode's son enjoying a piece of cake



Our former chaplain John Askey on a rare visit



Our popular auctioneer Jack Packer with Barbara keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings

16) which led to the defeat of Goliath with a sling and a stone. Then, Matthew 5, and the blessings there for the peace makers, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

I remembered the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Britain, and how Churchill had become an unlikely Prime Minister before this, and how his slings and stones were the 2000 airmen and the Spitfires, which stood before Britain and invasion. I read bits of his famous broadcast about fighting on the beaches, and hills and streets etc, that Europe could be free (which has been fulfilled, thanks also to Gorbachev and 1989), and that peace should reach to the ends of the world (still far away). I also recalled the bombing of Coventry on November 14<sup>th</sup> 1940, and the destruction of its cathedral. I was brought up in Coventry some years after this, but it was remembered if it was yesterday, as the new cathedral arose from the ruins.

Blessed are the peacemakers: Here I gave the remarkable example of Aung San Suu Kyi, released that weekend from all her years of incarceration and house arrest. She has not been broken by her suffering or loneliness, and her integrity shines forth to all the world, as she moves to the next stage of the struggle to bring justice to the ordinary people of Burma. And I turned to the present war in which so many countries are involved, that in Afghanistan. I quoted from the letter of a close friend, Peter Millar, whose son has just been awarded the MBE, for his work in dismantling mines in Helmand Province, where several of his colleagues have been killed in the same work. And I referred also to the death of Linda Norgrave, mentioned also in his letter, killed as a hostage when an attempt was made to rescue her. She came from the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, but gave her life because she kept going on and on with her vocation to help poor farmers in Afghanistan, through the charity Development Alternatives.

Remembrance Day is about all those who give their lives for peace, whether in extremis, through defending freedoms through armed resistance, or through outstanding non violent action. This can be summarised in some words of Peter Millar, 'our common heart-beat connects us all.'

I end with Provost Howard's of Coventry's prayer read last Sunday, and read every Friday in the ruins of the old Cathedral, as the prayer of the Community of the Cross of Nails, the community of reconciliation throughout the world:

*We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*

*The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,*

*Father forgive.*

*The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,*

*Father forgive.*

*The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,*

*Father forgive.*

*Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,*

*Father forgive.*

*Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,*

*Father forgive.*

*The lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women and children, Father forgive. The pride which leads to trust in ourselves and not God,*

*Father forgive.*

*Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

Andrew Wingate

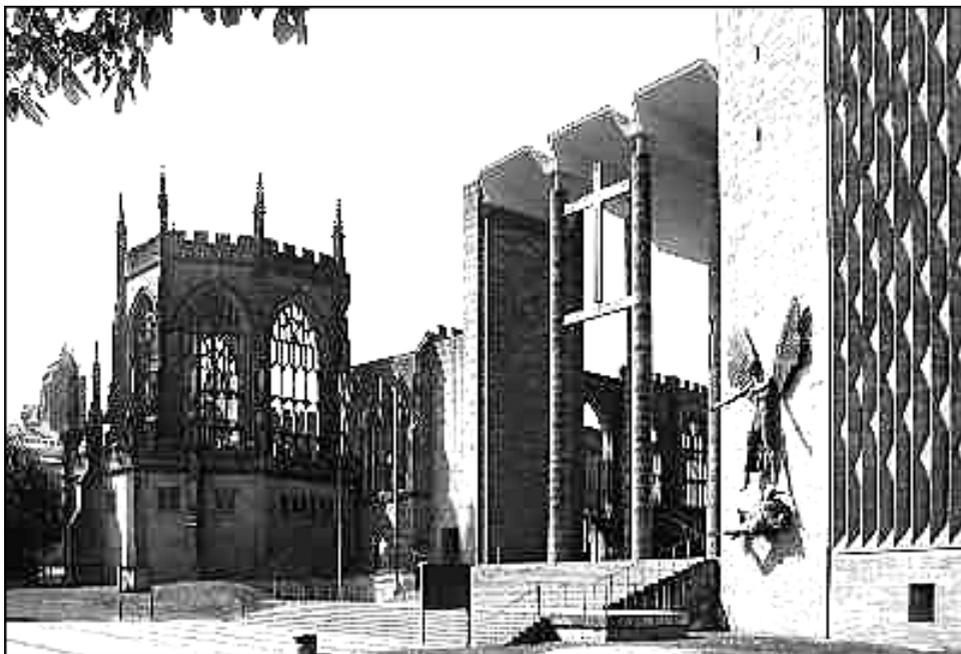
## Remembrance Sunday-

November 14th 2010

I have experienced many Remembrance Sundays, but I cannot remember one I have felt so identified with as that we celebrated at St Andrew's last Sunday. It was partly the way it was led by Barbara, and the simple gesture of remembrance with the lighting of candles rather than the reading of so many names, mostly from World War 1, which we have in our parish churches. It was partly about the variety of persons present, reminding us that the all had suffered in the world wars, from the Commonwealth, from the different parts of Europe, and from Britain, as well as those from 'the other side'. It was much about the extraordinary

ceremony at the beautiful Kviberg graveyard. Angela and I had never seen before an occasion where numerous wreaths were laid before the cross next to the British and Commonwealth graves, and then after a short procession, seeing then parallel ceremony at the German cemetery. Moving too were the different groups represented by their wreaths- the city of Gothenburg, the District of Wester Gotaland, the Swedish United Nations officer, the Canadian and French delegates, and of course the different British and German wreaths. Especially moving was the prayer from the German Pastor, which he gave us from Coventry Cathedral, with which I end this short article.

I preached using two readings, that of the call of David to be king, against the odds (1 Samuel



Seventy years ago the original Coventry Cathedral was destroyed in the 'Coventry Blitz' during the Second World War. After the war this beautiful new Cathedral was built as an act of reconciliation by a combined effort of all the countries involved in the war, including the Germans. As a final token of reconciliation Coventry is now twinned with the City of Dresden in Germany, which was similarly blitzed at the end of the war.



## Wedding

4th September 2010

STEVEN MARTIN DAY and  
AZADEH SARA MARGARETA PAHLBY

## United Nations Day

Our choir, together with the German choir, at our annual International Service at the German Church.



## St Andrew's Day



The Advent candles in church

## Another Wedding

Ann Gustafsson and Alan Taylor got married quietly on Saturday 30th October and were blessed in church on Sunday by Barbara using the following prayer:

*Blessed are you, O Lord our God, for you have created joy and gladness, pleasure and delight, love, peace and fellowship. Pour out the abundance of your blessing upon Alan and Ann in their new life together. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts and a crown upon their heads. Bless them in their work and in their companionship: awake and asleep, in joy and in sorrow, in life and in death. Finally, in your mercy, bring them to that banquet where your saints feast for ever in your heavenly home. We ask this through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*



After a beautiful service in church everyone gathered at the Haga rooms for a delicious meal and singsong, spending a happy few hours together.

## Bishop's Christmas letter 2010



Not long ago I came across a Christmas meditation by Michael Stancliffe, a fine preacher whose ministry encompassed time as Speaker's Chaplain in the House of Commons, and later as Dean of Winchester. In this meditation he points out that the Christmas story is concerned with small things.

'At the heart of it is a human being at its smallest, and that newborn child is surrounded by no greatness – no palace, no pomp, no grand people. Nor had the first to join that little group anything impressive about them – shepherds on night duty don't look princely – and it was only later that more imposing personages put in an ap-

pearance. Christians believe that what happened in that small setting was of cosmic significance.'

The birth of Jesus at Bethlehem which we celebrate at Christmas is the burning glass which concentrates in the vulnerable fragility of a new-born child the immensity of the Divine Love by which all things were made and which holds the vastness of the universe in being. What is God like? God is like – indeed God is – this totally dependent, tiny bundle of life. That bundle of life grew unseen in Mary's womb, and that unseen growth to birth was also where God was. In 'Once in royal David's City' we sing of the child of Bethlehem that 'day by day like us he grew' – but like us that growth was from the moment of conception, from before being born as well as the child growing to maturity. The real Feast of the Incarnation, of God emptying himself and coming down to the lowest part of our need, is not Christmas, the Feast of the Nativity, but the Feast of the Annunciation, of God taking our human nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin. When Christians hail Mary as the *Theotokos*, 'the God-bearer', it was because it was her unique vocation to be the one in whose body God chose to dwell, to be one with us. As an ancient hymn puts it:

*How blest that Mother in whose shrine,  
The great Artificer divine,  
Whose hands did frame the earth and sky,  
Vouchsafed as in an ark to lie.*

It is because God is with us as unborn life before he is with us as the child of Bethlehem, that we rightly are concerned to reverence unborn life, and to protest at the attitudes so prevalent in our society which regards such life as disposable.

William Blake saw eternity in a grain of sand. Julian of Norwich saw all that was made as a small hazelnut. We see the love of God in this vulnerable child, and, as a wonderful prayer puts it, 'knowing the love of God made visible, we are caught up into the love of the God we cannot see.' In our human experience of love we at one and the same time know most fully the person whom we love and who loves us, and at the same time know that this is a mystery which can never be fully known, never fully expressed in words. Charles Williams, the friend of C.S.Lewis and J.R.R.Tolkien liked to say that we ought to pause over how we so easily speak of 'being in love' and remember that in saying this we are saying no less that we are held *in* love. At Christmas as we come to adore the God who reaches out to us in the weakness and humility of a child, we are in an even greater way held in love, the love which came down at Christmas and which is far greater than anything that we can imagine or express. As so often the poets point us to the heart of the matter, as Richard Crawshaw does in his *Hymn of the Nativity*:

*Welcome all wonders in our sight  
Eternity shut in a span,  
Summer in winter, day in night,  
Heaven in earth, and God in Man;  
Great little one! Whose all-embracing  
birth  
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heaven to  
earth.*

And what is this about? Christopher Smart asks 'where is this stupendous stranger?' and finds his Lord and Saviour in a manger.

*O most Mighty! O MOST HOLY!  
Far beyond the seraph's thought,  
Art thou then so mean and lowly  
As unheeded prophets taught?*

He comes at last to the truth and the mys-

tery of Bethlehem.

*God all-bounteous, all-creative,  
Whom no ills from good dissuade,  
Is incarnate, and a native  
Of the very world he made.*

As God gives himself into the world in love, so he gives himself in love into our lives, sharing his life with us in the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist, that we may be transformed into his likeness and be the bearers of his love into the world he created and sustains. A more recent Christian poet, R.S.Thomas, writes of communion at a Hill Christmas in Wales.

*They came over the snow to the bread's  
Purer snow, fumbled it in their huge  
hands, put their lips to it  
like beasts, stared into the dark chalice  
where the wine shone, felt it sharp  
on their tongue, shivered as at a sin  
remembered, and heard love cry  
momentarily in their hearts' manger.*

This Christmas, as we come to worship and adore the Child who is Emmanuel, God-with-us, and receive him in the Eucharist may his love cry in the manger of our hearts, transform our lives and strength us to live and pray for the peace of the world and the unity of the holy churches of God.

May God bless you, and may you, and all for whom you love and care, have a holy and a joyful Christmas.

GEOFFREY GIBALTAR

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