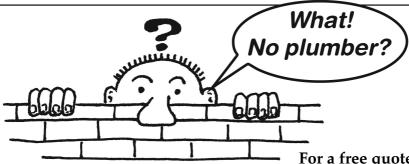
Church News

for the Parishes of Bromham, Oakley and Stagsden



September 2023



Need a plumber at any time? Today that could be a crime, But not with my competitive rates, I'll soon get you out of a state.

Need an new bathroom, or washing machine fitted?

Just call on me – I'm very well kitted.

Need central heating or just a tap washer changed?

Give me a ring and get it arranged.

For a free quote contact: P J Bartram 25 Bedford Road Clapham MK41 6EJ

Tel: 07785 716716

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Welcome to Church News in

Citatell News III

Bromham, Oakley and Stagsden

Find us at: www.bromhambenefice.org

facebook Benefice of Bromham, Oakley & Stagsden

Clergy:

Vicar: Revd Catherine Wilson 825665

vicar@bromhambenefice.org

Assistant Priest: Revd Di Harpham 918691

Curate: Revd Petra Yates - curate@bromhambenefice.org 07504 118405

Benefice Administration

Website &........ Administrator 07494 069540

organisation..}

Fees Accounts...} administrator@bromhambenefice.org

Safeguarding Officer - Judith Denyer 07981 928522

Parish News

Editor Mr Edward Jones stowensnews@btinternet.com 826551 Distribution Mrs B Cryer 825463

07767 272584

Pew Leaflet Sarah Smale, as Administrator

Who's Who in Bromham

Church Officers

Churchwardens Ms T Woodcock 340089

Mrs F Bulmer 602718

PCC Secretary Mrs Vivien Butler 407351

PCC Treasurer Mrs Emma Harrison 823121

Organist & Choirmaster Mr David P Williams

Messy Church for pre-school children (birth - 4yrs) & their carers

Mrs F Bulmer 602718

Altar Guild Mrs M Parrott 824402

Who's Who in Bromham cont....

| Children & Young \ | Carol Jones | 823307 |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--------|
| People's work }I | Rene Farquhar | 307996 |
| Electoral Roll | Mrs Rene Farquhar | 307996 |
| Ringers | Mr Robert Jones | 881741 |
| Thursday Prayer Gp | Mrs C Wisson | 306833 |
| Friends of St Owen's | www.friendsof stowens.org | |
| Secretary: | Mr David Butler | 407351 |
| • | facebook Friends of St Owens | |

Who's Who in Oakley

| Church Off | icers |
|------------|-------|
|------------|-------|

| Churchwardens | Mr G Palmer | 07710 462535 |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| | Mrs H Worley | 262166 |
| PCC Secretary | Mrs C Ord | 823477 |
| PCC Treasurer Mrs S | 823133 | |
| Organist & Choirmast | 822859 | |
| Messy Church for pre | -school children (birth - 4yrs) & their carers | |
| _ | Revd Catherine Wilson | 825665 |
| Flowers | Mrs A Rolph | 824849 |
| St Mary's Ringers | Mr Bill Sellars | 823473 |
| | | |

Who's Who in Stagsden

| Church | Officers |
|--------|----------|
|--------|----------|

| Church Officers | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|--------|
| Churchwarden | Post holders names not published | |
| PCC Treasurer | } please contact thru Revd Di Harpham | 918691 |
| PCC Secretary | Caroline Heaton | |
| Ringers | Mr Richard Brown | 823289 |
| Flowers Team | please contact thru Revd Di Harpham | 918691 |

If you know of further details for this page, or have information or articles to publish please send all material to the Editor by post or (preferably) by email - see details on page 3.

The Editor thanks Contributors and Advertisers for their material with acknowledgements to the "Parish Pump" website. Nevertheless, views expressed, and goods and services advertised are not endorsed by the PCC. Please send material for publication to the Editor by the 22nd of the month.





Principal Services in the Benefice

3rd September13th Sunday after Trinity9.00amHoly Communion (Oakley)10.30amHoly Communion (Bromham)4.30pmHarvest Songs of Praise (Stagsden)

10th September9.00am14th Sunday after TrinityHoly Communion (Stagsden)

10.30am LEP Service (Oakley) 6.00pm Evensong (Bromham)

17th September
 9.00am
 10.30am
 15th Sunday after Trinity
 Holy Communion (Stagsden)
 Holy Communion (Bromham)

4.30pm Wild Church (Bromham Scout Site)

24th September 16th Sunday after Trinity

9.00am Holy Communion (Bromham)10.30am Holy Communion (Oakley)

6.00pm No Evensong this week

Weekday Services

Mondays

11.30am Messy Church (Bromham)

Tuesdays (1st and 3rd of the month)

11.30am Holy Communion (Bromham

Fellowship Room)

Thursdays

10.00am Messy Church (Oakley)

NB 10.30 church services are streamed via Zoom for those who find it difficult to attend in person (details on website www.bromhambenefice.org)

From the Vicarage



With all the evidence of climate change across the world at the moment, I'm sure we are not the only ones to wonder what we can do to cut our carbon emissions. And so in two conversations recently we found ourselves talking about electric cars, their benefits and problems. While they run on 'green' fuel - electricity that can be generated without the use of fossil fuels,

like petrol and diesel cars, they do require regular filling, and electric charging points away from the house are still relatively few and far between. Short 'top-ups' can take care of local trips—but it's necessary to plan long journeys carefully and include a full recharge if you don't want to grind to a halt at an inconvenient moment!

Now the summer holidays are almost over and the new school year is about to begin, this got me thinking about how we recharge as humans. It may be quite a long journey ahead to the next chance for a full recharge, so we need to plan in some 'top-ups' like a day doing something different, a visit to family or friends, or some time on our own. Even activities as short and simple as taking a walk, enjoying a hobby, or phoning someone special can give us the refreshment and boost that we need.

Perhaps you know the story of the two woodcutters who had a competition to see who could cut most wood in a day. One chopped and chopped all day long, confident of victory and smiling as he heard his friend pausing frequently. He was very puzzled at the end of the day to discover his friend had

cut more wood than him. 'How did you do that – I was working constantly while you stopped every hour?'. 'Ah,' the friend replied, 'that's when I was sharpening my axe'.

Even with regular times to 'top-up' our reserves, we still need to make sure we allow ourselves opportunities for a full recharge—whether that's time away from home on holiday, or a stay-at-home break when we put aside at least some of our usual responsibilities and give ourselves some time off. Like electric cars, we are designed with warning systems to tell us when we're running on low—ignoring them can result in a complete halt!

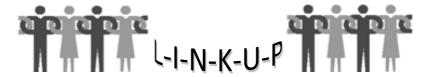
If we need extra encouragement to book in our recharging times, it's helpful to remember that God commands us to take time off. The fourth of the Ten Commandments tells us to rest and do no work every 7th day – just as God rested, or stopped, on the 7th day of creation (Exodus 20: 8-11, Genesis 2: 2-3). God wasn't tired – but we often are, and we need to rest!

So how long is it to your next opportunity to stop and be recharged, and how will you top-up before then? How about coming to the Deanery Quiet Day (Oct 4th at St Owen's) for example? However you do it, I hope it enables you to be refreshed and renewed for the journey ahead.

Catherine Wilson

Thank you to everybody that made the coffee morning and box opening in support of the Children's Society so successful. We took £155.35 at the coffee morning and counted £469.62 from the boxes. In total £624.97. Well done and thank you for your continuing support.

Anne Rooke



Next meeting - Thursday 14th September at St Owen's Fellowship Room for a fun session of 'Tin Bingo' Contact Tessa Woodcock 01234 340089

Sewing Group

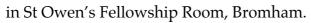


For those who wish to get together and do hand sewing, crochet or knitting. To take place on 1st and 3rd Wednesday afternoons 2pm to 4pm in the Fellowship Room at St Owen's Church.

Further information from Frances on 07470 032296

First Friday Coffee Mornings

Next coffee morning on Fri 1st Sept 11am- 1pm



Please contact Frances for more information (602718 or francesbulmer@btinternet.com)

Date for your Diary:

St Owen's Bazaar and Grand Draw

Saturday 25th November 2023

12 noon to 4pm

Stalls, Grand Draw and refreshments of light lunch of ploughman's and tea, cake etc.

ST OWEN'S ALTAR GUILD

Decorating St Owens Church for Harvest will take place on Saturday 30 September from 10am. Anyone who would like to help will be most welcome. Donations for the purchase of flowers will be gratefully received by Margaret Parrott 18 Tudor Close.

From the Registers

Baptisms:

6th August Harrison Kirk Groves (Bromham)

20th August Javier Antonio Gonzalez Hoccom

(Stagsden)

20th August Spencer Leo Parsons (Bromham)

Weddings:

4th August Chloe Dixon & Ashley Keech (Oakley) 26th August Charlotte Collins & Benjamin Walker

(Bromham)

Burial:

31st August Pauline Topham (Oakley)

Crematorium Services:

10th August Margaret Comolly (Oakley)

31ST August Amanda Brandon (Bromham)



Bishop of St Albans Rt Revd Dr Alan Smith

Cracking Food Poverty Together

Dear Friends,

I am delighted that this year's Bishop's Harvest Appeal is being run in partnership with Mission Direct.

The project will provide families in Uganda with chickens. These will produce eggs for food, which will help to alleviate food poverty and malnutrition. An important part of the project is that the first hatchlings will be given back to the scheme so that they can be passed on to another family, thus spreading the benefits.

There is huge scope for involving people of all ages but especially young people and children. We are providing a range of resources with ideas and suggestions for local involvement.

This is a programme richly deserving of our time and commitment and I commend it you.

So, please give your imagination free range, and let's get cracking!

+Alan St Albans

See next page

Mission Direct is Hertfordshire-based Christian mission organisation that focuses on demonstrating the love of Jesus to materially poor areas of the world. Together with our Christian partners in these communities, we support long-lasting and sustainable change.



In addition to providing our expertise and sending financial

resources, we also invite volunteers to experience two weeks of short-term mission as part of achieving the longer term help in these communities.

For more information contact Mission Direct at one of the following: info@missiondirect.org or 01582 720 056 or www.missiondirect.org

This year all donations are being made direct to Mission Direct, who will keep a record of the transactions for Bishop Alan to see, and will ensure that a thank you and receipt is sent.

For instructions for the various ways that you can donate, please go to:

www.missiondirect.org/bishops-harvest-appeal-2023 or scan the QR code.

Spiritual Disciplines: Service

'Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.' (John 13: 14-15).

We are all familiar with those requests for more to 'serve on a team' at church, whether the coffee rota or with the children. However, these can hinder our understanding of the spiritual discipline of service.

The discipline of service involves learning from Jesus' example, when He washed the disciples' feet. Like His disciples, we are all called to take the place of a servant and be willing to serve those around us. Richard Foster in 'Celebration of Discipline' contrasts 'self-righteous service', human effort wanting to impress others and be rewarded, with 'true service', which is rooted in our relationship with Jesus and delights in the service itself.

In his book, Richard Foster highlights the value of small, everyday sacrificial acts of service which flow from the place of being a servant: 'service is not a list of things to do, though in it we discover things to do. It is not a code of ethics, but a way of living.' He goes on to highlight a number of acts of service, including: hiddenness (working behind the scenes); small acts of service; guarding the reputation of others; being willing to be served ourselves; practising hospitality; listening and bearing the burdens of each other. We need to pray for wisdom and discernment, so that we know when to say 'yes' and 'no' to serving. If we say 'yes' too much we can easily find ourselves becoming bitter or burned out!

Why not make it your prayer each morning: 'Lord Jesus, if it would please You, bring me someone today who I can serve?'

Canon Paul Hardingham

Parish Pump website

St Owen's Church, Bromham

Saturday 14th October 7.30pm at

The Church in the Park

MK43 8LL

Ouse Valley Singers

Make a welcome return with an

Autumn Concert

Tickets: Adult £10 Child under 16 Free

Price includes glass of wine/squash & 'nibbles' Pay at the door (cash or card) Reservations Line - 01234 826551 You are invited to the

Sharnbrook Deanery

Quiet Day

A time of rest and spiritual renewal, on the theme of

The Kingdom of God



Wednesday 4 October 2023 9.30-3.30 St Owen's Church off Village Road, Bromham MK43 8LL

image: Christ Pantocrator, mosaic from Hagia Sophia, Istanbul (Dianelos Georgoudis)

See details on next page

'Thy kingdom come'

(Matthew 6.10)

Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask for God's kingdom to come. But what did Jesus mean by the 'kingdom of God' (sometimes called 'the kingdom of heaven')? What should it mean for us today? And in the future?

Led by Revd Nick Munday and Mrs Jane Templeman, the day will start at 9.30 with tea/coffee from 9.00, include a Communion service followed by a simple lunch, and finish with tea at 3.30. We will look at the Biblical sources for the kingdom and examine some relevant art, music and poetry. It will be a relaxed day, with quiet time and opportunities for conversation and fellowship – a similar format to last year's Quiet Day on The Resurrection.

The cost (including lunch and refreshments) is £5 payable on the day. For catering purposes, please book your place in advance by Sunday 1 October by texting/phoning 07966 377108 or emailing n.j.munday@btinternet.com

Revd Nick was a teacher and deputy head. After ordination he was Rector of a parish of eleven rural churches in Lincolnshire. Now retired, he lives in Felmersham and is Assistant Rural Dean of Sharnbrook Deanery. Jane was also a teacher and is a Lay Leader of Worship. She has worshipped for many years at St Mary's Felmersham.

God in the Arts

Editor: Michael Burgess continues his look at great works of Christian art. You can see the image described by searching on line for 'Vase of Flowers' by Jan Davidsz de Heem.

'He gave us eyes to see them': Flowers – the beauty of the Lord

In this month of September, we give thanks for God's blessings in all that the earth yields us. Those blessings are focused in this wonderful painting of Jan Davidsz de Heem. He was born in Utrecht in Holland in 1606 and studied art under his father's guidance. De Heem then moved to Antwerp, where for the rest of his life he created paintings of such beauty and depth that one of them – a portrait of Prince William III surrounded by blossoms and fruits - received the highest price ever paid for a painting at that time.

the 'Vase In Flowers' de Heem has gathered together a bouquet of variegated flowers and plants for our delight. Time still stands his in painting in two ways. First, these thirty-one blooms could never have flowered at the time. same through the magical touch of the artist, they do for us. Caught on canvas, they are as fresh and vibrant as



the day they were painted in 1645.

But there are signs that the gifts of nature do wither and die, as we look closely and see on the marble slab a snail. Nearby is a salamander eyeing his next meal as a spider hangs on a thread from one of the flowers. In the centre, another snail looks at his food, the beautiful and rare red and white tulips. Yet we look again and see also signs of new life: the reeds of wheat are symbols of the Eucharistic bread; the caterpillar and butterfly on the striking white poppy at the top are signs of resurrection; and the peas in their pod and the blackberries mark out the fruitfulness of creation.

The artist shows us a glorious range of flowers - some well-known, others more exotic and brought back to Holland through the colonial expansion of the 16th century. Tulips and poppies dominate, but to the left are some small-scented roses. Each is a testimony to the beauty and goodness of the world we live in.

A 100 years later, Christopher Smart wrote in 'Jubilate Agno': 'For the flowers are great blessings...for the flower glorifies God...for the flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ.'

And 200 years later Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote: 'I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it.'

And we, in our own century, can echo poet and painter as we praise God, the author of such flowers and plants that make up a world of 'all things bright and beautiful.'

Image of painting: 'Jan Davidsz de Heem, via Wikimedia Commons

AFTERNOON TEAS

at

St. Mary's Church, Oakley

Every Sunday from 11th June until 17th September 2023

3.30pm to 5.00pm

Come along and enjoy a delicious cream tea or home-made cake with plenty of tea and coffee for £3.50 per person including children aged 12 or over / £1.50 for younger children.

Cold drinks also available

PLUS on 10th and 17th September ONLY SLIDE SHOW

Featuring interesting parts of St Mary's Church that may surprise you!

This exchange was taken from a real-life Courtroom case...

Barrister: Do you recall the time when you examined the

body?

Witness: The autopsy started around 8:30 PM Barrister: And Mr Denton was dead at that time? Witness: If not, he was by the time I finished.

Curious about Faith? Come and find out more at Alpha!



- St Owen's Fellowship Room
- Monday evenings, starts Mon Oct 2nd

- 6.30pm to 8.30pm
- Enjoy a meal followed by a video
- Opportunity to share your thoughts, ask questions, listen to others
- All welcome

Why not invite a friend to come too?

Please let us know if you are hoping to join us on Oct 2nd – email Catherine: vicar@bromhambenefice.org

Youth Group

Despite the weather forecast suggesting showers and a thunderstorm, a group of 7 young people and 8 adults met at the Lesley Sell Activity Centre on a Saturday morning at the end of July.

It was a chance for members of our church families to meet

together for something a little different! They spent a couple of hours shooting arrows, going and fetching them, then shooting them again! Thank you, Gareth Jones, for being there as our qualified instructor, to keep everyone in check and oversee the session. We had a mixture of abilities from those that could only just remember doing a bit of archery a long time ago, and those that do archery competitions regularly.



Once we had organised a bow that suited each person, and arrows to match, we stepped up to the shooting line in small groups and tried our best to hit the target, hoping to get a

"Gold".

After a few tries everyone was scoring with their arrows with varying colours. There was a lot of laughter and everyone had a fun morning.





'Messy Church for All' at Oakley Methodist Church on 3rd Tuesday in the month 3.30 till 5.30pm

Contact 824504 or mcarr49@hotmail.com



"Er... vicar – does the church have a position on the donation of GM vegetables for the Harvest Festival?"

It is surprising how many people unselfishly will neglect their own work, in order to tell you how to run your affairs. - *Anon*

Sudoku -

easy

Solution on page 31

| 8 | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--------|---|---|---|---|--------|
| 7 | | 9 | 5 7 | | | 4 | 8 | |
| | 2 | | 7 | | | | 5 | |
| | | | | 1 | 6 | | | |
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| | | | | | | | | 5 6 |

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 $100 \times 100 \times 100$

FRIENDS OF ST OWEN'S 100 CLUB PRIZE WINNERS

AUGUST 2023

First Prize: Anne Tombs

Second Prize: Clair Runham

Third Prize: Elizabeth Craigen

Fourth Prize: Derek Cryer

Fifth Prize: David Butler

3 < 161 > 161 < 161 < 161 < 161 < 161 > 161 < 101 < 101 < 101 <

Chellington Residential Weekend

22nd - 24th September

Join us for a weekend at the Chellington Centre filled with games, discussions, worship and no parents.



Dates for your diary

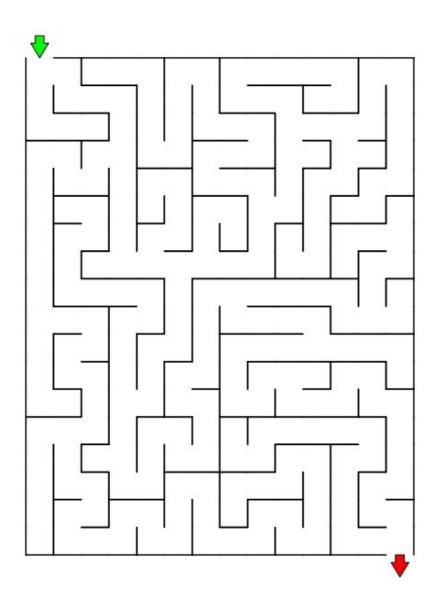
Sat 9th Sept - 5-6.30pm Fri 22nd - Sun 24th Sept Chellington Weekend Sat 14th Oct - 5-6.30pm Sat 11th Nov - 5-6.30pm Sat 9th Dec - 5-7pm



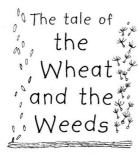
Saturday events are held at: The Fellowship Centre Clapham MK41 6ER

For more information see sharnbrookdeanery.co.uk or contact us at ourvoicetoo@gmail.com

Can you find your way from top to bottom?

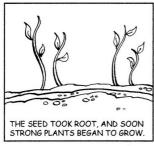


For younger readers.....





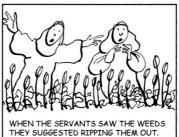












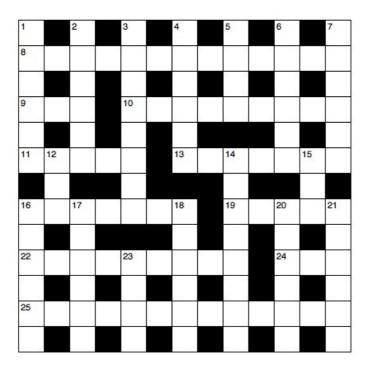








CAN KEEP SEPARATE FROM IT.



Across

- 8 Where the Ark of the Covenant was kept for 20 years (1 Samuel 7:1) (7,6)
- 9 One of the parts of the body on which blood and oil were put in the ritual cleansing from infectious skin diseases (Leviticus 14:14–17) (3)
- 10 Uncomfortable (3,2,4) 11 'Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have —' (Malachi 1:3) (5)
- 13 Where Paul said farewell to the elders of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17) (7)
- 16 'Jesus bent down and to write on the ground with his finger' (John 8:6) (7)
- 19 Prophet from Moresheth (Jeremiah 26:18) (5)
- 22 Comes between Exodus and Numbers (9)

- 24 and 2 Down 'Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the boy ministered before the Lord under the ' (1 Samuel 2:11) (3,6)
- 25 There was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:7) (4,3,6)

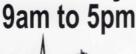
Down

- 1 Rough drawing (2 Kings 16:10) (6)
- 2 See 24 Across
- 3 Underground literature (including Christian books) circulated in the Soviet Union (8)
- 4 Lo, mash (anag.) (6)
- 5 The Bible's shortest verse: 'Jesus ' (John 11:35) (4)
- 6 'Can a mother forget the baby at her and have no compassion on the child she has borne?' (Isaiah 49:15) (6)
- 7 Can be seen in a dying fire (Psalm 102:3) (6)
- 'Send me, therefore, a man... experienced in the of engraving, to work in Judah and Jerusalem' (2 Chronicles 2:7) (3)
- 14 Second city of Cyprus (8)
- 15 United Nations Association (1,1,1)
- One of the women who first heard that Jesus had risen from the dead (Mark 16:1) (6)
- 17 Braved (anag.) (6)
- 18 of Evangelism, outreach initiative in the 1990s (6)
- 20 'Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and in their own sight' (Isaiah 5:21) (6)
- 21 'Neither nor depth... will be able to separate us from the love of God' (Romans 8:39) (6)
- 23 What Jesus shed in 5 Down (4)



Bike 'n Hike

Saturday 9 September 2023





For more information please contact:

Binny Cryer 07767 272584



- ► Have fun visiting over 600 churches and chapels
- ▶ Raise funds for your local church or chapel
- ► Help save other churches in Beds and Herts



Bike 'n Hike in association with the national Ride + Stride and with acknowledgements to THE WIXAMTREE TRUST www.b-n-h.co.uk BHHCT Registered Charity No. 1005697

The Ven John Barton considers....

How not to be a Grumpy Old Man (or Woman)

Marvel. Marvel every time you see a child learning to walk and speak at the same time. Share in their delight. Wonder at the dawn of each new season: sunshine and shadows, falling leaves, frost, sudden new growth. You are still alive to take it all in. That's an unexpected bonus.

Appreciate. Have a look around your living room and concentrate on items designed for your comfort and entertainment, which your forbears never had. Think of someone you don't like; now ponder a couple of their good points. Try to desire their welfare more than their downfall.

Forgive. (That's a condition for being forgiven). You may have to do it over and over again for the same person. Unearth grudges which have been lying under the surface. Are they worth preserving that much? Think of the damage they are doing you.

Married or Single? Don't envy. The grass on the other side of the street isn't greener, it's just different. Count your blessings - some will be uniquely yours. Be concerned for the welfare of someone whose circumstances are unlike yours.

Deal with disappointment. If you have become grumpy it's probably caused by a deep-down dissatisfaction with yourself. Stop raking over past failures. Each morning when you wake up, say with the Psalmist, "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Change. No, it isn't too late. It will only be too late to change when you are in a coffin. In the meantime, there's still room for manoeuvre. Remember John Henry Newman's words, "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often."



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in Bromham Park

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from £12 per hour
Contact Edward on
01234 826551 or at
stowenshire@gmail.com



Here's a fool proof way to tell right from wrong: If the thought 'could I get caught?' runs through your mind, it's wrong.

Solution to puzzle on page 22

| 8 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 9 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 6 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 2 |
| 1 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 3 |
| 3 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 7 |
| 2 | 4 | 1 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 9 |
| 6 | 9 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 2 | т | 3 | 8 |
| 5 | 3 | 8 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 9 | 2 | 4 |
| 4 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 7 | 5 |
| 9 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 1 | 6 |

Solution to puzzle on page 26

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The Revd Dr Gary Bowness continues his tongue-in-cheek letters from 'Uncle Eustace'

On the absurdity of a vicar ever retiring

The Rectory
St James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

Beware of being invited by bishops to drop round for a chat. My first mistake was to answer the phone when he rang; what are answerphones for, but to avoid having to talk to anyone - ever. My second mistake was not to be able to think of a meeting I had to attend -preferably on another planet - on the day he suggested.

I therefore found myself in his study this morning, waiting for the point of the meeting while we negotiated the obligatory five minutes discussing the weather and his summer holiday in France. I made it quite clear that I had been far too busy to swan off to foreign parts – although I suspect the implication of what I said passed him by.

We then got to the point. He was toying with the thought of my retirement and linking us with the adjoining parish of St Agatha's. I patiently explained, using simple words and speaking slowly for his benefit, that at 85 and with 40 years at St James the Least of All behind me, I was just getting into my stride and that the vicar of St Agatha's, a stripling at 63, had nowhere near enough experience to organise the hymn list, let alone two parishes. This, too, seemed to drift somewhere above his head.

He had clearly done his homework. There were already plans for *my* Queen Anne rectory to be sold and *my* five acres of garden be turned into a housing estate. This news would be received by our parishioners with as much equanimity as if they were told that Buckingham Palace was to be converted into a sports centre.

The matter, I was told, was confidential – which meant that I only relayed the news to one parishioner at a time. By the end of the day everyone in the village knew, and a counter attack was being planned. Inevitably, the most outraged were those who never attend church. People do so love having a church not to go to. Congregations have soared, gardeners are being brought in to tidy the rectory grounds, and the church council is now well attended. The latter is a mixed blessing, as I always think that the time to get worried is when people start to turn up to meetings.

It may surprise our bishop, but the threat of a merger has been the greatest impetus to mission outreach we've had in years. Retirement indeed! I'm sure Zadok was never asked about his pension plans.

Your loving uncle, Eustace

Off to school

Mother to young daughter after first day at school: "Well, dear, what did they teach you today?"

Daughter: "Not much. I've got to go back again tomorrow."



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