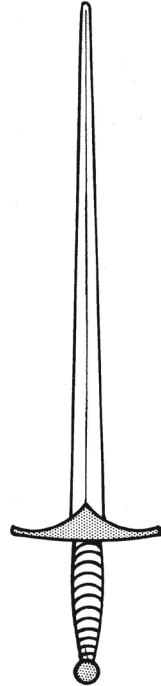


**PARISH CHURCH OF S ALBAN AND S PATRICK  
HIGHGATE, BIRMINGHAM 12**



# **THE SWORD**



**February  
2014  
60p**

“...St Alban’s people will not wonder at St Alban’s defects and shortcomings, when they know how long it had to struggle to maintain its life ... at what great hazard we have maintained such helps to reverence, and such ways of honouring God as we now enjoy. And no sane person will wonder that those who guide the work at St Alban’s feel the duty of preserving a consistent and unaltered course. May the Mission never suffer loss or be wrecked by any change in this respect!”

James S. Pollock (1890). *Vaughton’s Hole: Twenty-five years in it*. Chapter I.

## *From Fr Nicholas*

### **Being Community**

Some time ago I was listening on Radio 4 to an interview to a government minister of a certain foreign power over a certain crisis in another country. The minister kept reiterating that his country and its allies would not accept that international borders be redesigned through acts of war. The interviewer kept asking, “Or else?” with the intention of making the point that the only effective means of persuasion among nations are dictated by the use of force. I found it disturbing that the journalist should not be aware of the irony of his own position: how could he justify his opposition to the instrument of war as a tool for the obtainment of political gains — such as the re-designing of international borders — when he did not even have enough imagination to conceive an alternative to war to prove his point and make a case for a community of civilised nations that abhors and rejects war?

Over these past few months it has been my privilege to serve as Priest-in-charge at this church. However, I have not been here long enough already to know much of “the nature of the beast,” as it were, of the ethos and personality of this Parish of ours. Of two things I am rather sure: a) that being made up of men and women this is a human institution liable to suffer

from the all so human tendency to generate factions and therefore divisions within itself; b) that in the Name of Christ Whom we endeavour to follow



this is a community, redeemed therefore in Christ, and capable of defeating temptations of division. A community where authority is exerted in the service of one another — especially of the weakest! — and of our neighbours: especially the weakest among them and the poorest!

Which reminds me of a famous fresco by the 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian artist Giotto, called “The Dream of Pope Innocent III.” Based on an anecdote taken from the life of St Francis of Assisi, the fresco shows the Pope asleep on his bed all dressed up in his most solemn attires, dreaming of St Francis, in his characteristic sackcloth, the dress of the poorest, holding up on his shoulders the weight of a falling church.

Pride is the ruin of every human society and of every individual human soul. Pride is the cause of division that if unfettered will destroy the Church and threaten the existence of a Christian community such as this. Its antidote, Jesus teaches us in the Gospel, is a spirit of service that

is concerned with the welfare of all, and especially of the weak.

Allow me to conclude with a quotation from a famous document that the US Catholic Bishops conference issued when I was studying there in the 80s, amongst much acclaim: “The fundamental moral criterion — the Bishops said — for

all economic decisions, policies, and institutions is this: They must be at the service of all people, especially the poor.” (Economic Justice for All, 1986, 24).

*Fr Nicholas*

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## Through The Safety Net

*Extracts from an article by Cathy Corcoran OBE (chief executive of the Cardinal Hume Centre) in The Tablet magazine of December 14<sup>th</sup> 2013, page 8. Reproduced with permission of the Publisher. Website address: <http://www.thetablet.co.uk>.*

In my job, running the Cardinal Hume Centre in London, I hear different people’s stories all the time. Some of them break your heart and some of them are heart-warming, but it is the heartbreaking ones that are on the rise.

If you walk down Victoria Street in the evening these days, you may well see the sort of conditions that made Cardinal Hume set up the centre 27 years ago. That was in the mid-1980s, when the level of street homelessness was at a high. Outside Westminster Cathedral, halfway down Victoria Street, he saw more and more people, including young people, sleeping on the streets.

Today, Westminster City Council makes good provision for homeless young people... But for people who are over 21, it is often a different story. We are in danger of returning to the homeless levels of the mid-1980s and we are also seeing an increase in the numbers of homeless families being placed in temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Most ordinary people do not have a lot in reserve but they manage just about

by budgeting and being wise. But with the rising costs of food, clothes, rent and heating, and cuts to benefits that came into force on April 1<sup>st</sup> this year, more vulnerable households have been pushed over the edge. It is then often quite a quick descent into real poverty and potentially homelessness.

Street homelessness is only the visible end of a far more subtle, encroaching poverty. A lot of the people we are seeing are in work. They were making ends meet before rising costs and the latest cuts in benefits began to take effect, but not any more. Many people are only one wage slip away from falling into that kind of spiral. They are not profligate, they are not scroungers, nor skivers, they are ordinary people you sit next to at work or on the bus.

Earlier this week, I was in our main advice office and a staff member was working with a young couple with a three-month-old baby. They had nothing with which to buy food or nappies or clothes for their child despite all their efforts to earn a living. Another adviser was negotiating

with the local council about getting some kind of allowance for fuel because a client had now got a flat but had no means of heating it. And a third staff member was worrying about someone who having got into work with help from the centre had just lost her job after having a baby.

We are seeing many more people who earn a reasonable wage but who are getting into debt, or others recently made redundant. Our local Citizens Advice Bureau, to which people could have turned, was closed recently because of cuts to its funding, and the nearest one now is several miles away in Paddington. Even our local Jobcentre refers some people to us jobseekers who the advisers fear may get caught by the new regime of sanctions.

Benefits such as jobseekers' allowance can be temporarily suspended for missing an appointment, for not applying for a job, or for not being deemed to be actively looking for work. Recently a client was sanctioned for missing an appointment — she had to collect her daughter from school and there was no one else who could do it. Because people are afraid of losing their benefits, they are applying for jobs that are totally unsuitable: we have single mums applying for shift work and Saturday jobs...

We have also begun to see the effect of the benefits cap, which was rolled out nationally last October and which limits the total benefits that people of working age can claim to £500 a week for families with children, and £350 for individuals.

The figures include housing benefit, which doesn't then take the reality of living in London into account.

One of our clients could no longer afford the rent for her home in London, where she has been living since before her children were born, because of the cap. She was moved to Birmingham, where she has no connections at all. She has two sets of twins, aged seven and three. And she will probably be alone at Christmas, away from her support network, as she will not be able to afford the fare home to her family.

The welfare state was created to provide a safety net for those people who are vulnerable for whatever reason, but I now see that safety net being taken away. I fully accept that the welfare system needed reforming: it was complicated, over-systematised and was not consistently applied. But it makes no financial sense to leave people unable to contribute to the economy, at risk of becoming homeless and therefore a drain on resources...

Expenditure is bound to increase elsewhere as the safety net is removed: health-related costs at accident and emergency wards and emergency housing costs, for example. I know of at least one council that has already used up its emergency funding for this tax year on housing homeless families, to whom they have a legal duty of care, by providing bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

...I suspect that, this year, the anxiety and fear felt by many clients may well outweigh any sense of seasonal joy.

## A Christian View On Prophethood

*This is the address given by Fr Nicholas at The Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri mosque in Clifton Rd, Balsall Heath, Birmingham, on the occasion of the commemoration of the birth of Muhammad on Saturday January 18<sup>th</sup> 2014. For this issue of The Sword this address replaces the customary session of the series "Introduction to the Scriptures."*

Shukran. Thank you indeed for this opportunity — further to the kind invitation by Shaykh Muhammad Amin Evans — to address your congregation and to take part in the concluding celebrations of the Milad un-Nabi. I have joined you this evening with some representatives of my own congregation of the Parish Church of S Alban the Martyr in Highgate, where I serve as a Church of England priest. It goes to your credit that you should receive on such an occasion a speaker who will try to share with you some brief thoughts on a Christian view on prophethood. I am sure I express also the feelings of my brothers and sisters from S Alban's when I say that we come here among you with a deep sense of being on sacred ground, not only physically because we stand and sit in a place where worship is given every day to the One God, but also spiritually in the awareness that what you believe and celebrate here informs your life and your whole existence, and is therefore sacred.

As Muslims and Christians we share of course not only the belief in the existence of the One God, but also in God's "angels", in (God's) revealed books, ...in the day of judgment, in that everything... comes from (God), and in the life hereafter [from the Muslim creed Iman al-Mufassal]. Together we also believe in and uphold the values of peace, justice, truth and mercy. We also believe in prophets.

In a religious context a prophet, the Oxford dictionary explains, is "a person... who speaks in a visionary way" or "who predicts the future". In fact — the dictionary goes on to illustrate — the etymology of the word shows that it is composed of two parts, one deriving from the Greek preposition pro for before, the other from the Greek verb phenai, to speak. However, I think that the Oxford definition is quite a reductive one, both in the context of a Muslim understanding of prophethood, and of a Christian one.

Of the 25 prophets mentioned by name in the Holy Qur'an, 21 are named also in the Bible, although not all in the rôle of prophets. Of course, those who are called prophets in English in the Qur'an are either rusul or anbya', the former being the only five entrusted with a revealed book.

But what is the Christian understanding of who a prophet is? Allow me to begin with an illustration. In October 2010, in Chile, 33 miners trapped underground for over two months were finally rescued when engineers managed to dig two tunnels that allowed rescue teams to reach them. The second one to emerge was the 40-year-old electrician Mario Sepulveda who released to the press the following statement that immediately circulated around the globe: "I was with God and with the devil. They fought over me and God won. He took me by my hand. I held on to Him. I never thought

for one minute that God wouldn't get me out of there." Who saved Mario from the pit? Some would suggest that Mario was wrong in believing that God had saved him: engineers and other rescuers had. Others would be of the opinion that what Mario said after the rescue operation by the engineers was nothing more than a theological reading of what factually happened. In Christianity prophets are those that not only may or may not speak in a visionary way, and may or may not predict the future but, more importantly, they are men and women — Miriam and Deborah are conferred the title of prophet in the Bible — who read reality, who read the unfolding of events in history, who look at the world and at life with the eyes of God, and therefore, like Mario — who is not a prophet — did in his own limited way, they are able to interpret theologically what takes place factually. Furthermore, prophets are able to provide guidance and to challenge the ways of the people of God so that they may conform to the will of God.

Elicited by some form of mystical experience, the prophetic utterance is both for the present and for the future. However, it does not end there: the prophet, making manifest to others the mind of God and in response to a sense of "call," also speaks up, in threat or in consolation and always in a way that challenges the status quo and requires obedience and a return to God. This sense of "call" is in itself a mystical experience.

Such an understanding of the mystical nature of the prophetic call is something that we share with Islam, where the Prophet Muhammad receives his mandate not in consequence of an intellectual reflection — as western

scholars often tried to explain, especially in the past — but in the context instead of a mystical experience, the hearing of a voice that compels, "Iqra, bismi Rabbika alladhi khalafa." (Al-'Alaq 96:1), "Qum fa andhir." (Al-Muddaththir 74:2) — [Translation: Read, in the name of your Lord the Creator! Rise and warn!].

Obviously Christianity shares its Old Testament prophets with Judaism and it is important to emphasize the fact that in Judaism as well as in Christianity the word uttered by the canonical prophets of the Old Testament is traditionally understood as being Word of God.

There are different types of prophets in the Old Testament. Vogels, in *Le prophète, un homme de Dieu* [1973] distinguishes, among others, the "Yes-sir" type, the "Yes, but..." type, the "Send me" type and the "Speak, I am listening" type.

The "Yes-sir" type is realised when the prophet's relationship with God and with the prophetic mission is characterized by direct commands such as "Go and proclaim!" (as in Jonah 1: 2; 3: 2; Amos 7: 15; Hosea 1: 2; Elijah in 1Kings 19: 15, 19) and by execution of the orders without discussion (Jonah 3: 3, 4) as between a soldier and a commanding officer. It has a model in Abraham's own relationship with God (Genesis 12: 1, 4).

The "Yes, but..." type is a dialogical model as between a master and a servant. To give you an example, in Jeremiah 1: 5 we have the call ("I appointed you as a prophet to the nations"), in 1: 6 we have the prophet's objection ("I don't know how to speak, I am only young"), in 1: 7 the rejection of the objection ("Do not say I am only young") followed by a renewed command ("You must go and say

whatever I command you”). This type has a model in the call of Moses in the book of Exodus (3: 4b - 12).

The “Send me” type is modeled on the relationship between a king and his adviser, as in the example of Isaiah 6 where we have God’s request of a volunteer, the offer of himself by Moses who replies, “Here am I, send me” and then God’s command that sends him off on his prophetic mission. Notice that although the prophet volunteers himself with enthusiasm, however the initiative remains with God Who sends him.

The “Speak, I am listening” type is modeled instead on the relationship between a teacher and her/his disciple, the latter being engaged in a steep learning curve. An example is Samuel, where God calls the prophet by name at night and Samuel replies, “Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening” (1Samuel 3: 4 - 18).

These dialogues between the prophet and God may or may not be legitimately read in their literal sense: this is not relevant. What is relevant is the fact that the prophets are attuned with God and able to perceive reality in ways often opposed to the ways of the world around them. The prophet is almost like the antenna, the channel that captures and transmits the otherwise hidden irruption of the divine into the unfolding of the human narrative.

Moses is the first to be called “prophet” in the Bible (e.g., in Exodus 7: 1) but, apart from the great canonical prophets whose names, utterances and ministry are recorded often in great detail, the Biblical Scriptures — especially in the historical books — make many a reference to large numbers of other prophets who

often seem to be organised in some sort of guilds or fraternities and who are not always depicted in a favourable light, some even being accused of not speaking in the name of the true God (e.g., Zechariah 13: 2 - 6). However, the canonical, authentic prophets were probably never members of these fraternities and were often characterised by being singled out by God for a specific mission. Some of the other prophets were court dignitaries that would prophecy in order to please or appease the sovereign. On the contrary, canonical prophets were usually critical of the actions of the ruler and openly so even to the point of suffering persecution at his hands.

Some of the canonical prophets we may also define as literary prophets, in that the Bible contains books entirely dedicated to their ministry and message. These are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and 15 more. Others, such as Elijah, Elisha his disciple, Nathan at the time of David, Miriam and Deborah, are not given such honour although their ministry and message are considered authentic.

The political implications that the ministry of the biblical prophets had for the ruling class went beyond the confines of the immediate historical contingencies of the day: monarchy and political alliances with foreign powers, internal upheavals or external interference and military conquest. At times their message possessed a messianic and eschatological dimension. However, the Old Testament prophet does not really know what will happen in the future, s/he only knows in which direction history is going — given that God is in control — with the prophet being able to perceive and interpret God’s plan in history.

Christians, since immediately after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, have seen the prophets of the Old Testament pointing unknowingly to Jesus as being the realization of all the promises of God made to the people of Israel and to the whole world via the prophets. To give you but one example, we find in Isaiah 53 (2 - 9, 11) a reference to a mysterious character whose name the prophet does not mention because he does not know it. He is usually called The Servant of the Lord. Here is what the prophet says about him, "There was in Him no stately bearing to make us look at Him, nor appearance that would attract us to Him. He was spurned and avoided by people, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity, One from Whom people hide their faces, spurned, and we held Him in no esteem. Yet it was our infirmities that He bore, our sufferings that He endured, While we thought of Him as stricken, as One smitten by God and afflicted. But He was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, Upon Him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by His wounds we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, all following their own way; but the Lord laid upon Him the guilt of us all. Though He was harshly treated, He submitted and opened not His mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, He was silent and opened not His mouth. Oppressed and condemned, He was taken away, and who would have thought any more of His destiny? When He was cut off from the land of the living, and smitten for the sin of His people, a grave was assigned Him among the wicked and a burial place with evildoers, though He had done no wrong nor spoken any falsehood. Because

of His affliction He shall see the light in fullness of days; through His suffering, My Servant shall justify many, and their guilt He shall bear."

[Based on the New American Bible]

If you are at all familiar with the accounts of the Gospels you will recognize here many elements that naturally remind the reader of the sufferings that Jesus underwent before the crucifixion, when He took upon Himself the sinfulness and the suffering of the whole of humanity.

If Jesus is for Christians the ultimate realization of the prophecies of the Old Testament, early Christian communities also called prophets some of their members (1 Corinthians 12 - 14) but with a different understanding of their rôle: no longer their utterances point to the universal realization of the plan of God in Christ, but are given by the Spirit of God a word for the sustenance of the Christian community: words tending to comfort, to encourage, to reprimand and correct, to give guidance to the Christians in prayer and in their fellowship.

Regardless of the profound differences between the OT and the NT prophets, two elements seem to be shared in common: the character of the prophetic stance and the nature of prophethood itself. The former is characterized by a message that empowers the weak, comforts the afflicted and sustains the bold, but that also reprimands the wrongdoers and unmasks the falsity of the liars, shedding light over all that is maliciously hidden in the dark. The latter can be summarized in a statement: authentic prophethood is exercised with the authority of the Spirit of God.

In light of this, I dare make a statement that not all Christians may subscribe to,



but I know that many do. I personally believe that whenever a prophetic stance is made by a holy book, or by an individual or by an entire community, a stance that inspires life, light, truth, peace and justice, there the Spirit of God is, and that prophetic stance is authentic.

It is for this reason — and here I conclude this brief reflection on a Christian understanding of prophethood — that I look forward with expectation to further prophetic stances of the Muslim and Christian communities in this city

of Birmingham each time that a culture of death, of darkness, of confrontation, of discrimination and injustice needs to be denounced and opposed, because I believe that if we did that together, in both of us the Spirit of the One God, the same God Who inspired and sent all our prophets of old, will reside and will make our ministry authentic.

In sha' Allah. Wa shukran.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VygBMz1XP0>

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*A Letter from the Revd John Goodman*

## **The St Alban's School Trust The St Patrick's School Trust**

For many years past the Trustees of S Alban's School, now the Academy, and the Trustees of S Patrick's School, have provided Grants of money to bodies within the ecclesiastical parish boundary of S Alban and S Patrick.

From time to time the question arises as to when and how these Trustees acquired their funds, and on what conditions they make their Grants.

The Trusts are separate and have quite different histories, but their Trustees are identical.

S Alban's funds were given to the Trust by the Diocesan Board of Education shortly after the time of the closure of the old school buildings on the corner of Leopold/Dymoke Street, and the completion of the new one in Angelina Street. The Trustees then arranged for a Scheme approved by the Charity Commission setting out the terms under which they might disburse Grants in the future. The wording of the Scheme was

made by John Crowder, a solicitor and a very good friend of S Alban's.

S Patrick's funds came from the proceeds of the sale of the school shortly after it was sold. John Crowder was the sole survivor (or sole active person) of their Trustees, and S Alban's Trustees welcomed his suggestion that they as a body might succeed him and become S Patrick's new Trustees. Another Scheme was drawn up and approved by the Charity Commission. It was similar to the one that had been used by the Trustees of S Alban's for the previous ten years.

S Alban's Scheme is dated September 4<sup>th</sup> 1975 and S Patrick's November 25<sup>th</sup> 1985, and both include the clause **“Application of income.** The Trustees of the Charity shall apply the clear income thereof in furthering the religious and other charitable work of the Church of England in the Ecclesiastical Parish of S Alban and S Patrick, Bordesley, in the City of Birmingham.”

*John Goodman*

## A Joyful Occasion

*Last summer we welcomed into the church a couple living in the parish who needed to fulfil their legal obligation of having their Banns of Marriage called in the church.*

*I was delighted to receive the following letter, together with a few pictures of their wedding in Hartford, Cheshire, in October. As they had received such a warm welcome from the congregation of S Alban's, they wished for this message to be published here for all to share.*

*E.J.F.*

Evening Edward,

Just a short note to say thankyou to yourself and the congregation at S Alban's for all your help and assistance as part of reading our banns of marriage in September last year.

I am delighted to confirm that Nicola and I were married as planned at S John's parish church in Hartford, Cheshire on October 5<sup>th</sup> 2013. We are pleased to say we had a great day and the rain held off all day which was great!

I promised to send a few photos from the wedding day in case you would like to see them. Please find attached a few pictures which hopefully open ok on your computer.

We were both very touched by the kind welcome we received from everyone at S Alban's and it was very interesting to talk with a number of your congregation. We would be grateful if you would pass on our thanks to Father Nicholas and the congregation there for your welcome and for your prayers. We really appreciated both.

As I may have mentioned, we are now living up in Manchester. This is due to my job now being up here in the north west. Also, we are helping to set up a church plant here starting in the autumn. This is the website in case you are interested:

<http://www.citychurchmanchester.org/>

Thanks again and every blessing,



*Stuart and Nicola Witts*

## Food Bank Update

**B**Y now the United Highgate Food Bank is settling into a fairly regular pattern, and we are currently providing 24 individuals with food every week, thanks to the enormous generosity of all those who contribute.



of four). The bags are marked simply 'Stanhope Hall Couple 1' or 'S Basil's Young Person 2', and are passed on by Father Nicholas and others to Stanhope Hall or other centres entirely anonymously, so that the recipients can keep

Many of you will have seen the custom-built shelves in the south porch at the church (paid for by the Friends) that house our supplies. Food is being contributed not only by members of S Alban's own congregation and by the congregations of S Anne's Roman Catholic Church and Highgate Baptist Church but also, uniquely we believe, by the members of Birmingham Central Mosque and Birmingham Central Synagogue. The most moving experience was to see a train of pupils from the Academy bringing over box after box of goodies to add to the stores at the end of last term. Highgate really does seem to be united in seeking to tackle the acute poverty that a number of people are experiencing at present.

Volunteers help to sort the food and to fill the bags each week after the Sunday morning Mass (mostly for singles, but with three couples (one vegan) and one family

their dignity rather than having to queue publicly for a hand-out. At Christmas everyone received a pack of mince pies!

With so many mouths to feed each week it is important that we keep up a good stock of basics such as tinned goods (especially baked beans, soups, tomatoes, meat and fish), pasta and sauces, cereals and milk, tea and coffee. As I said before, many of the bags are for individuals, so we will find twenty regular tins of beans more easy to deal with usefully than five huge ones. UHT milk seems to be in constant short supply, as are cereals. Sell-by dates should of course be as long as possible. If you would like guidance on what commodities we are running short of, do please ask the bagging brigade after church — and if you can help with the bagging sometimes, you will be more than welcome. Thank you!

*A.M.*

### Smile

#### Did I mean what I just said?...

The following are genuine notes left for milkmen. You know what they mean, but...?!

- Dear Milkman: I've just had a baby, please leave another one.
- Please don't leave any more milk. All they do is drink it.
- Please close the gate behind you because the birds keep pecking the tops of the milk.
- Please cancel the milk. I have nothing coming into the house except two sons on the dole.
- Please do not leave milk at no. 14 as he is dead until further notice.

*Continuing the theme of poverty in Great Britain, this article has been produced by the Birmingham Diocese.*

# The Growth of Hunger in the UK

*16 January 2014*

**O**VER 10 million people live in poverty in the United Kingdom, 3.5 million of these are children. Half a million people are now dependent on food aid, relying on a rapidly expanding network of food banks and support programmes. One in five mothers report regularly skipping meals to better feed their children and 5,500 people were admitted to hospital in the UK for malnutrition this year compared with 3,000 in 2008.

No one should go hungry in Britain. More and more people are just one unexpected bill away from facing bare cupboards. This is a national crisis and government must act to protect the half a million going hungry in Britain.

## **We call on the government to ensure:**

- That the welfare system provides a robust last line of defence against hunger in Britain;
- That work pays enough for working people to properly provide for their families;
- That food markets function, promoting long term sustainable and healthy diets with no one profiteering off hunger in Britain.

## **Closer to God and to my hungry neighbour**

During Lent tens of thousands of people fast as an expression of faith, to bring them closer to God and their neighbour. We invite you to join with others to declare this fast in sympathy with the half a million Brits who go hungry week to week.

## **Hunger Prayer Space**

Several Churches, deaneries, circuits, and Cathedrals have signed up to creating a Hunger Prayer Space for Lent where those who take part in a local fasting relay can spend a day in fasting and prayer.

## **Not by Bread Alone**

Bible Study notes for each day of Lent and Holy Week are available at cost (£2 per book when ten or more are ordered including p&p). These notes can be made available at foodbanks, churches and Hunger Prayer Spaces, for people to take home and use for prayer and action.

## **Breaking the Fast**

The campaign will culminate with a Vigil in London on the Wednesday of Holy Week where as many as possible will be gathered to stand in sympathy with the half a million Brits who go hungry week to week and call on government to act.

## **What we need to make this happen**

Bishops and other Church leaders to commit to a day of fasting during Lent in solidarity with the grassroots relays. Bishop Paul Butler has written to all CofE Bishops and many have responded positively.

People of faith to host Hunger Prayer Spaces and organise a rota of people to fast so that someone is fasting there every day of Lent and to manage local press interest. Already we have churches and Cathedrals signed up.

Individuals to show their support for this campaign by signing up to the website which will be launched in mid-February on [www.endhungerfast.co.uk](http://www.endhungerfast.co.uk) *Keith Hebdon*

**Friends of S Alban and S Patrick**  
**Mid-Lent Social Evening**  
**Saturday March 29th**  
Cooked Meal, Raffle  
**Talk by Eugene and Margaret Schellenberg**  
**The Ifakara Bakery Project**

This project is situated in Tanzania, a country four times the size of the United Kingdom, in East Africa just below the equator, and bordered by Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, the Congo, Zambia, and Malawi. With a population of 36 million, it consists of 120 tribes, each with its own language. The common national language is Swahili.



The country has magnificent wildlife game reserves and national parks, including the Serengeti.

Ifakara is approximately 250 miles from Dar es Salaam with a population of about 60,000 people. The temperature is usually above 30°C and is humid — ideal conditions for mosquitos. Consequently this is a high risk malarial area.

At Ifakara is the Convent of S Francis, where the sisters undertake many different jobs, some teaching, some nursing, and others farming maize. The sisters wanted a bakery to ensure that they had food all the year round, even after a poor harvest. The nearest bakery was in Morogoro, which is six hours away, or Dar es Salaam, 10 hours away.

Setting up a bakery for the town was an immense achievement, and this social event and the talk about the project should make a very interesting evening.

## **Joint Choir Rehearsal**

The second rehearsal of the Joint Choir, which is open to anyone interested, will take place at:

**S Mary's Church, Moseley.**  
**Saturday February 8th at 3.00 p.m.**

Last month the choir learnt Crux Fidelis, which proved most enjoyable. The advantages of mixing choir members from several churches, and bringing them together in a common aim, is a wonderful way of revealing the strengths and weaknesses of individuals. This month Crux Fidelis will be quickly run through as a warm-up and then the next work to be learnt will be Bairstow's Lamentations.

At the previous rehearsal about 27 people turned up, which was rather a tight fit in a domestic property, so this time the use of S Mary's Church should be ideal. If you are interested in singing good music just come along. The choir is directed by Jeanne Conard Jones, who has sung several times with S Alban's choir on special occasions.

## Who Are You Really Talking To?

**I**N the early 1950s a well-known department store in Birmingham wanted to extend its premises. Close by this department store in Birmingham was an ideal site. But there was a problem: it belonged to the Quakers, whose Meeting House had been there for well over two hundred years.

Still, why should a bunch of Quakers stand in the way of commerce?

So, the department store wrote to the Quakers, offering to buy the site. Very grandly, they said, “We will give you a very good price for the land. In fact, we’ll send you a blank cheque. Please fill in whatever sum of money you think appropriate and we will honour it.”

Then they sat back and waited. Weeks passed. Finally a letter arrived from the Quakers. It thanked the department store for their generous offer but declined to accept it. “Our Meeting House has been here for almost two hundred and fifty years,” they explained, “much longer than your store. We have no wish to sell our property. However, if YOU would agree to sell YOUR site to us, we are very interested in buying it. We will give you a very good price for it. Just state your selling price and we will honour it.”

The letter was signed ‘Cadbury’s’.

The department store thought they were dealing with a small, meek congregation of Quakers. Instead they were dealing with the Cadbury empire which could have bought the department store twenty times over!

Sometimes life gives us hard knocks. Problems mount up and threaten to overwhelm us. We can feel alone and very vulnerable, very weak. But we can take heart in remembering that we are never alone. God has not forgotten us. Only our dimness of vision prevents us from seeing his great presence and power and provision. We do not need to fear, but to trust God. He is bigger and more powerful than anything which tries to overwhelm us.

Whatever problems 2014 throws at us, remember, we’ve got God on our side.

An associated fact for Valentine’s Day:

In 1868 the first ‘chocolate box’ was introduced by Richard Cadbury, when he decorated a candy box with a painting of his young daughter holding a kitten in her arms.

Cadbury also invented the first Valentine’s Day candy box.



### Smile

#### Windows

A wife texted her husband on a cold winter morning: “Windows frozen.”

Her husband texted back: “Pour some lukewarm water over it.”

The wife texted back five minutes later: “Computer’s completely not working now.”

*February 10th*

## **S Paul's Shipwreck**

Not far south of the island of Sicily in the Mediterranean is the island of Malta, a country known for its many beautiful churches. One of these is the Collegiate Parish Church of S Paul's Shipwreck, a Roman Catholic parish church in the capital Valletta, and one of Valletta's oldest churches.

Although this day is not recognized in the English Church, S Paul is considered to be the spiritual father of the Maltese. The day commemorates the shipwreck of S Paul on the island in AD 60, an event recorded in the New Testament. Paul, the story says, was being taken as a prisoner aboard ship to Rome where he was to stand trial for practicing Catholicism as his religion. When storms drove the ship aground, Paul escaped and was welcomed by the "barbarous people" (meaning they were not Greco-Romans). According to legend, he drew their attention when a snake bit him on the hand but did him no harm, and he then healed people of diseases, including a sick Roman governor. Paul stayed for three months in Malta, converting people to Christianity, thus beginning the Christianisation of the island. Catholicism is still Malta's official religion and the most dominant in terms of number of affiliated members in the country.

Paul is the patron saint of Malta and snakebite victims. The day is a public holiday and is observed with family gatherings, religious ceremonies and processions. Indeed, the shipwreck of S Paul is popularly considered as the greatest event in the nation's history and



*The High Altar of the Church of S Paul's Shipwreck*

for this reason S Paul's Collegiate Church is one of the most important in Malta.

It appears to be normal practice for Maltese churches to process with large statues of their individual saints through the streets on their appropriate feast days throughout the year, and these colourful processions nearly always conclude with a very large evening firework display. The wooden statue of S Paul was carved in 1657, and it is paraded through the streets of Valletta on February 10<sup>th</sup>, usually accompanied by La Valette band and generally under heavy rainfall.