

Dear friends of St Hilda's

The arrival of August is always welcome. It is a month that provides space for refreshment as the frenetic staccato beat of early summer give way to gentler and slower rhythms. It is a time to recharge batteries. May God bless you richly with moments of rest and days of grace this month, wherever you may be. In the words of a Celtic blessing:

*Deep peace of the running wave be ours,
Deep peace of the flowing air,
Deep peace of the quiet earth,
Deep peace of the shining stars,
Deep peace of the Son of peace.*

At St Hilda's this last month or so we have shared a series of upbeat and memorable occasions together as we began our anniversary celebrations. There was much to be thankful for. We were wonderfully blessed by good warm weather for all three.

Firstly, our 'outdoor-indoor' 70th Anniversary service on June 27th was both memorable and joyful and all the more so because of the sun. The Summer Fayre went so well too - thanks to all of you who supported it on July 3rd, and especially to the children from Abbey Junior School who sang so well. And finally, the outdoor Pet Service on July 11th drew together 150 adults and children and some 40 creatures of all shapes and sizes - how lovely it was to be outside (I think the church wardens were especially relieved that we were outdoors too!).

Each of these events has involved us turning inside out - going out beyond the safety of the church building to build church beyond the walls. This outward movement was something that Bishop Tom Butler reminded us about again and again in his sermon on June 27th. He came up with a phrase and a visual image which I believe are both so helpful for us and worth exploring further [Please see his sermon printed in full elsewhere in the magazine].

The phrase he used was to do with **living in the 'overlap'**. Do you remember Venn diagrams? I was not good at maths as a child, but I loved it when we came to doing Venn diagrams and exploring sets and sub-sets, areas of difference and areas held in common. I think I found the exercises pleasing because they helped to explain in visual form something I understood from a more experiential human level. And that was that we can hold things in common and yet also be very different. I discovered, as I got older, that the clue to a flourishing relationship lay in finding enough space in the overlap between me and the other to then begin to explore and understand the differences.

Another helpful thing about the idea of overlap is that it is the direct opposite of compartmentalising our lives so that different parts of us or our lives are separate.

You know how we sometimes, as English people, fall into the trap of saying that our beliefs are 'private'. But this is not how God sees us, nor how Christ teaches us to live. The you that takes part in worship on a Sunday, say, is not an isolated circle separated from the you that shops on a Monday, goes to school on a Tuesday, is in the gym on a Wednesday or watches your favourite soap on a Thursday. You and I are in fact a multiplicity of circles overlapping with many, many other circles. And in that overlap is God's grace and the space for growth in attentive love and service. None of us is an island.

By contrast, the picture Bishop Tom gave us was of a church community that was like a **Holy Island** - such as the Celtic Christian outpost of Lindisfarne. That island is attached to the mainland twice a day through its causeway and twice a day the tides and rhythms of the sea cut it off. In essence, Bishop Tom suggested St Hilda's is like that holy island. It provides us with a holy space to sustain us. But it is also the launching pad for living with the 'messy ambiguities of living out the gospel in a world of power and powerlessness'.

This autumn we are going to be exploring further what it means to be Christians living in the overlap, with rhythms of prayer and worship and lives of service and outreach. We shall be looking at how we can grow together as a community that **welcomes everyone** as well as learning how to **listen more** to the community around us.

I would like it very much if the whole congregation would take part in both of these priorities. After the rhythms of rest and recharging in August, would you be ready to take part in an invigorating and transformational four-evening course? It is called *Everybody Welcome*. It will help us in our vocation to truly be a church that welcomes. Please put in your diaries the four Wednesdays of

September 29th, October 6th, 13th and 20th. They will be held between 7.30pm and 9pm on those four evenings. There will be more information in next month's magazine.

The second challenge is learning more about the community we serve as Christians. The plan is to carry out a community profile - this does not mean going out door-knocking (can I assure you of this - I know that some have been worried about it). We are going to be helped by two wise women with great experience in teaching a congregation how to unlock the stories of the community which we already know. And it is going to be fun too! Again there will be more about this in the September magazine. So please watch this space!!

In the meantime, rest in August! Enjoy the summer. Pause a lot. Be gentle with yourself and with others. And may the deep peace of the Son of peace enfold you and all those you pray for.

Paul