

NEWSLETTER FOR JANUARY 2012

The peace and joy and hope of Christ for 2012!

For many people, 2012 will be 'challenging' (the current jargon for 'difficult') - cuts, closures, job losses or insecurity, and with the most vulnerable bearing the greatest pain. Churches want to respond to the needs, but in many places their resources too are diminished. We will need to continue to press for social justice - as our bishops are doing - and every local congregation must be alert to practical ways in which we can serve our neighbours and offer gospel hope.

Many will be looking forward to the **Olympics**, but this too will bring challenges to our patch, with huge pressures on public transport and infrastructure making normal daily life impossible, even if - please God - there are no major crises or disasters over the period. Within Tower Hamlets deanery we shall be looking carefully at the implications, and ways in which we should respond.

Our keeping of **Advent**, and our celebration of **Christmas**, went well. The four red candles gave way to the white light of Christ, shining in the darkness. The acting and singing of **St Paul's School's Christmas production** was well up to standard, with excellent costumes too: it combined the nativity story, and traditional carols, with the plight of poor Victorian child match-sellers. With Bryant and May's factory at Bow, match-making and selling is part of East End history, so the sentimental link was also an appropriate one.

After some uncertainty, **News International** held their carol service here as usual, with Wapping Great Voices (their in-house choir, for whom rehearsing has not been easy in recent months) and the choir of St Bride Fleet Street, both in fine voice - though not, this year, our schoolchildren as the revised date fell outside term. Simpler catering made it possible for everyone to get back to their desks fuelled by sausage baps, which we're assured by those who know are very much the coming thing. We are grateful to NI for providing a decorated tree, and for a generous year-end donation to the church; and we watch their future with interest and concern.

Our own **carol service** the following day was enriched by handbell ringing. Having temporarily loaned to local ringers our set of handbells (unused since they were given to the church several years ago), they came to perform for us, as well as providing a team to ring the tower bells before the service. As they rang, we all added decorations to the tree and sang carols by candlelight around it. Our thanks to them, to Lydia our organist and the 'scratch' choir, to Annadale for Christmas flowers, and to all who organised catering and helped Allan with his ingenious ivy!

Many regulars were out of town for **Christmas night and morning**, but we had a good number at the midnight service, with John Ally, the principal keyboard player of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, as an amazingly-gifted relief organist.

Celebration of Christ's incarnation continues for a few more weeks - with **Epiphany**, when the three wise men finally arrive (keep your trees and decorations going to Twelfth Night!), the feast of the **Baptism of Christ**, and culminating with **Candlemas**,

the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, on the 40th day (or thereabouts) of Christmas. This is one of the 'hinges' of the church year, as we turn from Christmas towards Lent, Holy Week and Easter. The theme of the one who was born to die for all his people runs through many of the carols, readings and prayers of this season.

During January we also observe the **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**, in the seven days leading up to St Paul's Day. Material this year - which will be circulated nearer the time - has been prepared by the churches in Poland, and for the first time with involvement by Christian Aid. They invite us to reflect with them on the ways in which the intertwined secular and ecclesiastical history of their nation has produced change and transformation, and how this is true for us also.

St Paul's School rededication

Many schools have been denied desperately-needed refurbishment or rebuilding by the cuts, despite government promises. Our own school was fortunate to get 'under the wire' with its major rebuilding programme, which was ably overseen by Ian Graham and fellow-governors with technical expertise, working with headteacher Terry Bennett in consort with London Diocesan Board for Schools and the contractors to produce a magnificent result with minimum disruption to the ongoing life of the school. All

this will be the cause of a day of celebration on Tuesday 10 January, when the Bishop of Stepney will **re-dedicate** the premises at 4pm - all are welcome to come along. During the day, there will be poetry workshops, and the writing of a school prayer, sharing the results with all the invited guests at the end of the day, and children will be offering tours of the school (something they love doing for visitors, and do with great confidence).

On Saturday 21 January **St Paul's Cathedral** celebrates its patronal festival with a diocesan service to which, as last year, they invite all schools named for St Paul in the diocese to bring banners, with the promise that this year's service will be more 'child-friendly' than last year's (which the Dean, whose resignation was the cause of great sadness for all who valued his ministry there, redeemed with a wonderful piece of improvised liturgical theatre under the tower). So we hope to be there, with our school banner: we need to devise a better way of getting it there on the bus! It looks as though the **OLX camp** will still be on the doorstep, with relations all round soured by legal action and no positive outcome in prospect: thanks to the media, the real issues have been lost sight of, and it is now a no-win situation all round.

Concerts

We're delighted to report that as a result of the concert organised on 12 November by **Marylyn Whaymand**, £485 was sent to Christian Aid's Christmas appeal: a splendid outcome to an enjoyable event.

On Friday 20 January we will be hosting a concert 'Peace Sings' by **The Brown Derbies**, an *a cappella* male choir from Brown University, Rhode Island, who combine great musicianship with good humour. Tickets are £12 (including a glass of wine), and proceeds are for the peace charity *International Alert*.

Congregational news

Welcome to the latest Ramanoop grandchild, **Aidan**, thriving and in church on Christmas morning - we look forward to the baptism! Ann Willer's husband **Harry** remains critically ill, but well cared-for in one of the new tower-block wards of the Royal London Hospital (opened on 16 December - impressive, but with miles of corridors, and complex 'core lifts': allow extra time for visits...) **Fr Ken Leech** continues to make good progress, and long-term care is now being planned (for more news, ask the Rector for updates).