

In this issue:

PCC meeting 7 th Feb 2022.....	1
FASTING AND PRAYING – <i>Rev. Canon Dele Agbelusi</i>	2
Sermons at Christ Church.....	3
Book Review: ‘How (Not) To Read The Bible’ – <i>reviewed by Paul Bailey</i>	4
Open Doors World Watch List Launch to Parliament.....	6
and ‘The Forgotten Women’ Campaign – <i>Paul Bailey</i>	6
Caring for Creation.....	6
News from Mission Direct.....	8

Items for >imprint< no. 102: **Mon. 28th March 2022**, please, by email at editor@ccstalbans.org.uk. *Peter Young (Ed.)*

PCC meeting 7th Feb 2022

At the February meeting the PCC discussed the proposal to install automatic sensors to the entrance to the church, to allow easier access for visitors who may be unfamiliar with the current touch-pad system and also to include the ability for lone workers in the office to open doors remotely when the entrance doors are locked. Quotations will be sought from the company who currently service our current system. Information was also given on the replacement photocopier, which has a number of useful features.

An update was given on the transition to the new Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) bank account, noting that donations to the new account were already beginning to arrive following the recent sermon series on giving and information provided on ways to give to Christ Church. There had also been developments on the management of the church accounts, which now use online cloud-based software.

The draft Christ Church Climate Change Declaration/Recognition which Jeremy introduced to the church on Sunday 7th Nov 2021 and which had also been published via the news-sheet and >imprint< no.99 (December 2021) was also discussed. It had been due for consideration at the January PCC meeting, but had to be postponed because of the very full agenda. Meanwhile Christ Church Caring for Creation (C4) had also discussed it at one of their meetings and suggested minor amendments to the order of points and clarification of responsibilities. The PCC approved the updated declaration for publication and display in the church and it was agreed that C4 can also assist in providing practical advice to the church membership, particularly on the lifestyle commitments advocated. Information on C4’s proposals for our church’s participation in the Sustainable St Albans Festival (SustFest21) at the end of May was also given. It is also hoped that an Eco Policy for the church, which will be targeted at all church users, will be available soon.

The PCC examined a draft of a revised Mission Action Plan (MAP), to which they had input over

a number of recent meetings. The MAP was approved, acknowledging that it will be a working document, thus subject to review and revision, if required, over its 3-5 year period of effect.

The PCC learnt that membership of a Working Party has now been agreed and terms of reference drafted, to look at all aspects of the proposed replacement of the defective roof over the original (1980) church building. This will be done holistically, initially over a period of six, approximately monthly, meetings, looking at past proposals and developing new ones and considering the entire Christ Church plant, including the envisaged purpose of the building. The PCC endorsed the Working Party and its terms of reference.

The next meeting, the final one for the current PCC before the APCM, will be on March 7th 2022.

FASTING AND PRAYING – *Rev. Canon Dele Agbelusi*

One of the greatest preachers of the first thousand years of the Christian Church was John Chrysostom, the bishop of Constantinople in the fourth century. I mention him because he has left us one of the most sweeping statements about the value of fasting. On fasting he said: *Fasting is, as much as lies in us, an imitation of the angels...a school of prayer, a nourishment of the soul, a bridle of the mouth...: it mollifies rage, it appeases anger, it calms the tempests of nature, it excites reason, it clears the mind, it disburdens the flesh...it frees from head-ache. By fasting, a man gets composed behaviour, free utterance of his tongue, right apprehensions of his mind.*

Not all of those accolades are true for everyone in every time of fasting. For example, for some, fasting will cause a headache rather than take it away. But I want you to hear Chrysostom and the thousands of saints who have proved the value of the Lord's prophecy: when the Bridegroom is taken away, then the disciples will fast (Matthew 9:15).

So, how do we explain prayer and fasting? Prayer and fasting can be defined as voluntarily going without food in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with God. This is a way of denying yourself in order to focus on God and rely on him for the strength, provision and the wisdom you need.

The power of prayer and fasting is quite evident in the life and ministry of Jesus. The lengthy time Jesus spent in the wilderness was not without purpose. It produced a dimension of power he could not get in other ways. Jesus was ready for every occasion of life and ministry because, He developed a lifestyle of Fasting and Prayer.

Some Christians will say why not just pray? What difference does fasting make?

- i. Fasting adds focus to our prayers by allowing us to concentrate on God more fully.
- ii. It fuels more passionate prayer by combining a great burden with real sacrifice.
- iii. Fasting gives us strength that we miss when we just pray.
- iv. Fasting is a spiritual weapon that God expects us to use: we are in real spiritual battle and spiritual battles require spiritual weapons.
- v. Prayer with fasting enables us to see the unseen, hear the unheard, know the unknown and understand the mysteries of God. The bible becomes a living book. Dieting is not biblical fasting! Do you feel dry spiritually, powerless against the world and the enemy and in need of renewal? Fast and pray.
- vi. Fasting reminds us of our humanity. To come to God feeling a sense of helplessness is not a handicap but a head start. It makes us dependent – and oh, how most of us hate to feel dependent!
- vii. Fasting humbles us or it should do. There is a self-denial involved. We deny the physical appetites of our body for a time to humble ourselves before God, who has all the answers for our lives.

We should not misconstrue Fasting as trying to twist God's arm, but a genuine display of the earnestness of our desire. However, we must observe some salient points about how we ought to approach fasting:

1. **Fasting must not be "as the hypocrites"** (see Matthew 6:16).
2. **Fasting should be in secret** (see Matthew 6:18). On most occasions, only your partner needs to know. The exception to this rule is corporate fasting – of which there are numerous Biblical examples – times that God called His people to fast and pray.

Today, fasting is a lost practice. Since Vatican II, Catholics do not require fasting, and very few protestant Christians take fasting seriously. Whereas, the Bible takes fasting for granted as something Christians will do. Jesus twice says, "When you fast," not "if you fast," or "you should fast." Jesus fasted. Paul fasted, The Apostles fasted. Luther fasted. The Wesley brothers fasted. If fasting has been a universal practice of early Christians, there must have been a reason for it and there must have been some value to it. **Are we the losers for not fasting today?**

Lent is the traditional time to fast, though I posit that fasting should be part of our lifestyle (lent or no lent) as Christians. As we are in another season of Lent, we face the question: to fast or not to fast? How will you answer? If you say, "No," to fasting, will it be because you think that fasting is foolishness and unnecessary or will it be for health reasons? The world, for one, says that fasting is foolish, because fasting means you must be hard on yourself and deny yourself some comfort or pleasure. The world does not go along with this. The world loves comfort and ease. It is not for discipline, but for permissiveness.

The people of the world think fasting is foolish also because some of our fasting is mere tokenism. The world laughs at some of us Christians by saying, "When you fast, you give up little things that do not really matter—things like fizzy drinks, chocolate, coffee and cake. How can you say you make a real sacrifice with that kind of fasting?" I say, little is better than nothing! But if you can go the whole hog, dawn to dusk, skip breakfast or another meal, I say well done.

WHEN GOD OPPOSES FASTING

Fasting is foolishness to God when it is done without godly motives. Read Isaiah 58. God condemns the kind of fasting that can be an end in itself, an aspect of our religiosity. God points out that while the people are fasting, they engage in their usual sins: God asks, "Will you call that a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord?" You see, fasting is always connected to repentance. That is why the first day of Lent was called "Ash Wednesday." It was a special day of repentance. People went to church where they were marked with ashes while the priests remind them that they are dust and ashes and unto dust and ashes they will return.

It is possible also to use fasting as though it will earn us "brownie points". This puts us back to pre-Reformation times when all the prayers, fasting, pilgrimages, indulgences, and other good works were supposed to get one saved.

We need to be reminded that we do not get to heaven by our fasting, but only by the grace of God through faith in Christ as Saviour (Ephesians 2:8-10). When you decide to fast, it should be because you are convinced that it is the right kind of fasting that God approves. In Isaiah 58 again, God talks about fasting in terms of "loosing the bonds of wickedness, allowing the oppressed to go free, sharing one's bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your house..." From this kind of fasting comes God's blessings and answer to prayer.

Sermons at Christ Church

You are probably aware that we have now embarked on a new sermon series on part of the life of the prophet **Elijah**, with readings from **1 Kings**, from 20th February until 27th March. A list of sermons follows – we have already had the first two at the time of compiling this edition of **>imprint<**, and you can find audio recordings of them on the Christ Church website (www.ccstalbens.org.uk) under **MEDIA > Sermons**:

20 th February	Fed by ravens	1 Kings 17:1-6	(preached by Dele)
27 th February	The Widow's son	1 Kings 17:17-24	(preached by Dawn)
6 th March	National Affairs	1 Kings 18:1-15	
13 th March	Elijah was afraid	1 Kings 19:1-9	
20 th March	Still, small voice	1 Kings 19:10-18	
27 th March	Prophets of Baal	1 Kings 18:16-46	[Mothering Sunday – all age]

3rd April [APCM]

10th April [Palm Sunday]

17th April [Easter Day]

Then, after Easter, from 24th April to 10th July, a new series of 12 sermons will begin, looking in detail at the **first letter of John**:

24 th April	Jesus the Word	1 John 1:1-4
1 st May	The Cosmic Battle	1 John 1:5 – 2:2
8 th May	An old commandment	1 John 2:3-11
15 th May	Words for men?	1 John 2:12-14
22 nd May	Not love the world	1 John 2:15-17
29 th May	Keep from straying	1 John 2:18-27
5 th June	Us and sin	1 John 2:28 – 3:10
12 th June	More about love	1 John 3:11-24
19 th June	Jesus in the flesh	1 John 4:1-6
26 th June	The love of God	1 John 4:7-21
3 rd July	Faith in Jesus	1 John 5:1-12
10 th July	Repeat after me	1 John 5:13-21

Book Review: 'How (Not) To Read The Bible' – reviewed by Paul Bailey

True or false?

- In Arizona it's illegal for a donkey to sleep in a bath tub
- In Kentucky it's illegal to carry an ice cream in your back pocket

More of that later. You may well have been challenged by a friend, relation or workmate about something in the Bible which is difficult to reconcile in this day and age. You may also have seen some of the many 'memes' on the internet like the ones below:



Whether you find them mildly amusing or offensive or perhaps both, what would you say to someone who presented such challenges? A good place to start might be 'How (Not) To Read The Bible' by Dan Kimball. The author is a pastor of a church in California and has written books on leadership, church and culture. In this book he refers to many objections to parts of the Bible which seem to be anti-science, pro-violence, anti-women, pro-slavery, anti-shrimp (!) and other bizarre sounding ideas.

He uses many of the memes referred to above (around 40) to show popular misconceptions which often go viral. Others include: Jesus riding on a dinosaur (reference to a literal interpretation of Genesis 1); 'God could have banned shrimp or slavery.....slavery, he chose slavery'; 'Unicorns are mentioned 9x in the Bible, cats are mentioned zero times'.

His first chapter is entitled 'Never read a Bible verse' by which he actually means: never read a Bible verse on its own. This is a refrain throughout the book and the key to understanding the 'crazy-sounding parts of scripture'. The authors of the memes it appears, may well be lazy and ignorant in their approach to the Bible. Probably best not to open by saying that to someone writing or sharing such memes, but a conversation may be steered towards considering such things as the context of the verse and the problems of older translations using archaic words at times.

Dan Kimball equips the reader to be clear on why such apparent aberrations appear and what they actually say and mean. It is in fact an 'apologetics' book (not apologising for the Bible or Christian faith, but defending the truth of it with rational arguments). In 1 Peter 3:15 we are told:

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect". We need to defend the Bible but as the verse says with the right attitude. Also, for the right reason – not to win an argument but to point people to Jesus, in a world where our enemy ('the father of lies') is deceiving many and seeking to take people away from the truth, particularly today through the medium of technology.

The book may also reassure you of some apparent inconsistencies and help you clarify your own thinking on some difficult verses and passages.

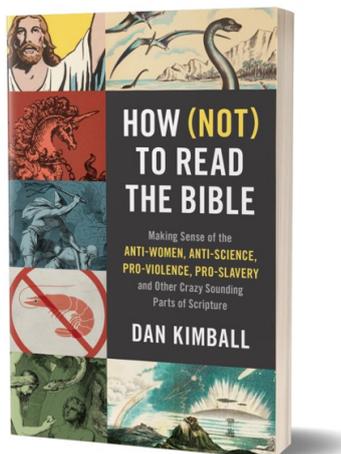
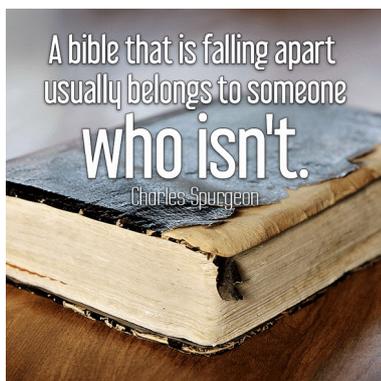
Other sources you might consider include:

'How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth' 4th ed. (Gordon D Fee & Douglas Stuart);

'[Unbelievable?](#)' – on radio / podcast / YouTube; and their 6 session course:

'[Confident Christianity](#)' which will 'help you to understand, defend and share your faith with confidence'. I've started reading the book and doing the course and find them challenging (intellectually) but very worthwhile.

Finally, about the donkey and the ice cream laws in the US – they both make perfect sense in context but you'll have to buy the book (or borrow my copy) to find out why!



Open Doors World Watch List Launch to Parliament and 'The Forgotten Women' Campaign – Paul Bailey

If you were in Church on 27 February or saw the service online, Dawn made reference in her sermon to a letter sent from the St Albans MP Daisy Cooper. Many of you may have received similar / identical letters which followed our Christmas Card writing activity (in November) inviting our MPs to the **World Watch List launch**, which informed MPs of the persecution of Christians around the world. If you have not received one, see ... below.

[Space constraints in this month's >imprint< means it's not possible to paste in a copy of an example of Daisy Cooper's actual reply to the cards we sent, but a summary of the content of her letter follows – Ed.]

Her reply, dated 4th February on House of Commons letterhead paper, apologises for a delayed response. She says she had intended to attend the online World Watch List launch on 19th January herself, but instead had to attend the House of Commons chamber for a debate on the Building Safety Bill. However a member of her team attended on her behalf so that she could be briefed on the issues and she also received a digital copy of the World Watch List 2022 report following the event.

She mentions that the Liberal Democrats have worked closely with Open Doors over the years and she fully supports efforts to promote the freedom of religion for all religious groups. She says the Lib Dems will continue to stand for people's human rights in the UK and across the globe, including those persecuted for their beliefs, in line with the Lib Dem 2019 General Election manifesto pledge.

It is a very positive response (I am still following up my MP to get involved and support this vital cause). It is a long term project however, with not only this campaign annually each January but other campaigns during the year.

'Forgotten Women' Campaign

Please will you pray for an event on International Women's Day on 8 March, 11:00-11:45am? Entitled "The Forgotten Women: Persecuted Women and Girls from Religious Minorities" ([click here](#) for details and to attend, if you wish), this all female online panel discussion is chaired by a BBC journalist with panel members including the PM's special envoy on FoRB [*Freedom of Religion or Belief* – Ed.], a Muslim Uighur human rights activist and Pakistani Christian. The event is organised by Open Doors and Aid to the Church in Need.

Caring for Creation

RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch (BGBW)

Three of us took part in the BGBW after church on the 30th January, surveying the rear of our church grounds for the maximum number of birds of each species seen landing at any one time. Time of day was not the best (noon to 1pm) for birdwatching, so the most we got in the hour was: 1 blackbird, 2 blue tits, 1 chaffinch, 1 house sparrow, 2 magpies, and 2 wood pigeons! Nevertheless, we have since reported our results online to RSPB and we hope to do it again next year.

A Rocha Field Notes Podcasts and Blog

Another **Field Notes** podcast has been posted since the last issue of *>imprint<*:

Episode 18, posted on 9th February, has Peter Harris and Bryony Loveless talking with **Sarah-Lan Mathez-Stiefel**, Senior Research Scientist at the Centre for Development and Environment at the University of Bern, and Senior Advisor for the Regional Hub South America of the Wyss

Academy for Nature, on 'The impact of human societies on nature'. An expert on 'ethnobiology', she speaks about the way ahead of nature, about the transformation of Indigenous knowledge, and how societies respond to nature in the 21st century.

Go to <https://www.arocha.org/en/field-notes-podcast/>, or from wherever you get your podcasts to listen to the interviews.

A Rocha International blogs: **Rev. Mark Nam**, a British-Chinese Anglican priest, in a blog entitled: "'Stewardship' or Yin-Yang? - East-Asian Theology and a Biblical Environmental Ethic", discusses the concept of 'stewardship' in common use in Christian circles to describe our relationship with the rest of creation and argues that perhaps the term may not be entirely appropriate in that it still implies a degree of separation of humankind from the rest of creation! In the most recent blog, entitled: 'Counting the cost: the emotional toll of environmental campaigning', **Bryony Loveless** recounts an interview for the Field Notes Podcast (episode 5) with Stuart Blanch, National Director of A Rocha Australia.

Go to <https://blog.arocha.org/en/> to read these articles.

Christ Church Caring for Creation (C4)



At the group's last meeting held on 21st February, we completed our 5th session reviewing the **Eco Church** survey and a current snapshot assessment of how we are doing as a church against the five sections included in the survey. This is a work in progress and C4 will continue reviewing this and assess what actions we could take to qualify for a bronze Eco Church award in due course. We would have to reach a bronze level score, quite a modest level, in *all* of the categories in order to qualify for the bronze award. However, the award is not an end in itself. Rather what we wanted to do was to use the survey to stimulate and challenge our own thinking and praying about how we as Christians can be both caring for creation and sharing Christ with our community (linked and not separate aims...). The award is in the nature of a by-product. Here are the categories and when C4 reviewed them:

Worship & Teaching (reviewed in February)

Buildings (those of our church; reviewed last September)

Land (our church grounds; reviewed last November)

Community and Global Engagement (essentially how involved we are in environmental issues outside of our church and personal lives; reviewed in January)

Lifestyle (of our church community, individually/corporately; reviewed last December)

We are planning to provide the church with an update, proposing how we would like to proceed, and this will be covered in a forthcoming issue of *>imprint<*.

C4 is working closely with BAGAG to try to make the best use of our church grounds from an environmental perspective. As part of this, it is planned to plant 3 fruit trees initially, which, as well as making fruit in season available for our church and local community, will also help to partly screen the Garden of Remembrance from the car park. It is also planned to plant a tree, a small sessile oak, to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

C4 have been discussing plans to hold an event at Christ Church, to be held on the afternoon of Sunday 22nd May as part of the St Albans Sustainability Festival (SustFest22, 15th – 31st May). It's envisaged that this would be open to our local community and any visitors 'touring' SustFest events in the area. More information will follow.



Zambia News

February 2022



Mission Direct

Building hope, bringing change

Welcome to Zambia News, with news from our in-country partners. We are busy preparing for this summer's campaign, with teams expected to travel from July. Will you join us again? *Geoff Spiller*

More toilets for Kiine School



When Mission Direct built a toilet block at Kiine School in 2014 (left photo), the school had about 120 pupils. With the school growing rapidly in recent years to over 600 pupils, there is now a pressing need for more toilets. Work started last year on a toilet block extension, with the foundations and slab being completed. This year, our teams will work on completing the new toilets. Can you help us raise the £7,500 needed? Please visit our fundraising page: <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/ZambiaKiine2022>

Making plans for 2022? We are taking bookings for this year and for 2023 teams. Why not talk to your friends or church about coming to Zambia?

Prayer Requests & Answers:

Give thanks:

- That Covid cases are reducing in UK and Zambia, opening the prospect of MD teams travelling again;
- For the generous donations which have enabled Mission Direct to continue supporting our Partners throughout the pandemic;

Please pray for:

- Our Partners, for protection from illness and for strength and wisdom to continue their challenging work.
- The vaccination programme in Zambia, that more vaccines would be made available and more people would come forward to be vaccinated;
- Geoff and Roger as they prepare to travel to Zambia, that preparations will go smoothly and they remain in good health during their visit.

Covid-19 update in Zambia

Zambia experienced a peak in cases during January due to the Omicron variant, but cases have now fallen to less than a hundred a day. The vaccination rate though remains low, with only about 10% of the population receiving 2 doses. Travel to Zambia currently requires a negative PCR test before leaving the UK and before leaving Zambia.

A Science Lab for Crown of Life School



Work on the science laboratory at Crown of Life School, funded by Christ Church in St Albans, is nearing completion, with the building and internal fittings almost finished. Dorothy is currently drawing up a list of the equipment needed for the lab, which will greatly enhance the school's teaching of the sciences.



The visit to **Kumbaya School** is always a highlight for each team, with the feeding programme and entertainment provided by the pupils. This year, we plan to paint the new classrooms, which were built in 2021.

Geoff Spiller and Roger Aukett are planning to go to Zambia for a few weeks from late-March, to prepare for this year's campaign. Since it's over 2 years since Mission Direct last visited, we've got a lot of catching up to do with our Partners!