

CONCORD ~ February 2012

Prayer for the Month ...

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
who gave marriage to be a source of blessing for mankind,
and the basis of human community and society,
we thank you for the blessings of family life,
just as we acknowledge its strains and demands;
May we know your presence and peace in our homes,
your wisdom and understanding in our relationships;
fill them with your love, and use them for your glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Northenden Rectory, Ford Lane.
0161 998 2615

Dear Friends,

I want to write a few pieces about marriage this month, given that St.Valentine's day is there in the middle of it, and (for the romantically minded feminist, there is Leap-year day too.) But I must be careful. Please don't think that because I write positively about marriage, I am therefore critical of something else. If I give a warning about some pitfall or problem, please don't immediately think I am condemning it, or the people who might fall into it.

So, first of all, can I issue an invitation to anyone who got married in St.Wilfrid's in the past, or is planning to get married here or at least thinking about it, to join us for the 10.30am morning service on Sunday 12th Feb. Readings, hymns, &c. will echo those which seem popular at weddings; our prayers will focus around marriage, and family life, and I plan to speak about it in the address. And please feel free to invite friends and family to come too. So, read on!

Greg Forster (Rector)

And on a personal note, Sue and I received a number of hand delivered Christmas presents from church members which have been much appreciated, but we have been unable to thank the givers properly because the gift-tag was either missing or got separated from the present by the time it were rounded up and taken to the Rectory. Sorry, and thanks! GSF, SDF.

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

South Manchester Meeting

There is a meeting for worship

at the Friends' Meeting House, Wythenshawe Rd.,

at 10.30am every Sunday.

Children welcome. *Details from Roger Hensman, 980-5158.

The main hall and smaller rooms are available for hire;

~ contact Peter Todhunter (Meeting House Warden) 834-5797

Encounters with Fair Trade producers in Peru

Presentation by John Ling, March 6

7pm Quaker Meeting House, 82 Wythenshawe Road

Northenden (with corn fritters!)

The South Manchester Quakers are hosting this talk. We are keen to invite other Church groups who support Fair Trade.

I believe in Marriage...

I

GSF

This is the warning note that I hinted at in my opening letter. I know many people feel they do not want the state or the law interfering in the beauty of their relationship, or simply they cannot see what business authority has with their personal affairs. I sympathise. When things are going well that is OK, but it is for when things are difficult that a legal framework is helpful. People don't want to think about when things might be difficult.

In England there is no such thing as "Common Law Marriage". There is now a little bit of case law which protects partners if there is a death or a break up, but people are still vulnerable. In recent years I have taken funerals where I have heard that the surviving unmarried partner was forced to give up his home of many years and move out because it belonged outright to the deceased, and her family were claiming it. Marriage would have given the security he deserved. Alternative: an expensive trip to a lawyer. The same applies if a couple split ~ who gets what if it is not amicable? Marriage, and divorce law, give some protection in sad situations like this. It may not prevent problems, but it offers a framework for dealing with them. At least, if you reject marriage, talk to a lawyer about the alternatives before it becomes urgent!

Northenden Methodist Church

Minister: The Revd. David Bown,
5 Kenworthy Lane, Northenden, M 22
0161 – 998-2158

Sunday Services.

1st Sunday every month

Family worship ~ Sunday breakfast club ~ MESSY CHURCH
All start off with breakfast** together at 9.00am, then do activities with your child(ren) followed by a story, songs, and prayer based on the activities ~ finishes about 10.30am.

**Currently £1 per person.

For details contact Amy Carline, 07816 888 704

Feb. 5 th	9.00am	Messy Church
	11.00am	Mr. Duncan Rutter
	6.30pm	United Service at St. Wilfrid's
12 th	11.00am	Mr. Nic Harding.
19 th	11.00am	The Revd. David Bown ~ Holy Communion
26 th	11.00am	The Revd. Malcolm Purdy
Mar. 4 th	9.00am	Messy Church
	11.00am	Morning Worship #
	6.30pm	United Evening Service @ Methodists
11 th	11.00am	Morning Worship #

Details of preachers not available as we go to press.

Community Lunch

Wed. 8th February, 12 noon - 1.30pm ~ normal arrangements
Next lunch ~ Wed. 14th March.

Fun Bingo

Usually last Saturday of the Month (25th), 12.00 noon - 2.00pm.
(to be confirmed in weekly notices)

Northenden Players Theatre Club:

5th – 11th Feb. (not Mon. 6th) 7.30pm

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

at Northenden Methodist Hall, Victoria Rd.

St. Wilfrid's Church, Northenden.

Ford Lane, M22 4WE

Rector ~ the Revd. Greg Forster,
Northenden Rectory, Ford La., M 22 4NQ

Tel. 0161 998 – 2615

Email; gsf @ stwilfridsnorthenden . org . uk

Services:

On Sundays there will be a communion service at 8.00am;

On Thursdays at 10am there will also be a communion service.

We run "Scramblers" ~ which I mustn't call a Sunday School ~
for children from 3½ to 7 ~ in the Church Hall, ...

... and "Sunday Club" ~ for children from 7 upwards ~ in the
Rectory, both between 10.30 and 11.30am Sundays ...

... except when there is a Family Service in church ~
i.e. February 5th and March 4th, &c.

Feb. 5th 10.30am Family Communion & Parade *Joseph.*
3.00pm *Nigerian Congregation*
6.30pm United Service **at St. Wilfrid's**

12th 10.30am Holy Communion "Love and Marriage" ...
6.30pm Evening Worship. ... (for St. Valentine !)

19th 10.30am Holy Communion "Exodus"
6.30pm Evening Worship.

Wed. 22nd (Ash Wednesday) 7.30pm Holy Communion

26th 10.30am Morning Worship "Forgiveness ~ a moral issue"
6.30pm Holy Communion (1662)

March 4th 10.30am Family Communion and Parade service
3.00pm *Nigerian Congregation*
6.30pm United Evening Worship @ Methodist Church

11th 10.30am Holy Communion
6.30pm Evening Worship

NB Mothering Sunday Family Service, Sun. 18th @ 10.30am.

Jubilee

As part of the way we are honouring the Queen's diamond
jubilee as our monarch a Quarter Peal will be rung on Sunday 5th
February, starting soon after 1.15pm. A Quarter usually lasts just

under an hour, depending on which Method is being used to ring it. The 6th is, of course, the actual anniversary of her accession, but the invited ringers are not all available during the working week.

You will find that the Jubilee theme surfaces on other occasions throughout the year, so get out your red-white-and-blue glad-rags!

Drop in on St. Wilfrid's ...

On Sundays from 2.00 till dusk the church is open, for private prayer, for enquiries, or just to look around.

On 5th Feb. and 4th March the church will be open from 2 till about 2.45pm in this way, and then will be in use for a service.

In addition, the church will be open on the last Saturday of each month, from 10am till noon (in parallel with the Coffee Mornings). This is a new arrangement to compensate for the "lost" open hours on "first Sundays". If you want to visit specifically on a "first" week-end, please contact the Rector.

We open the church so that it is accessible for prayer or enquiries, but we are also bound by a contract with English Heritage, who part funded our last major renovation project but one, to make the church accessible for heritage visiting for ten years.

Dates for your Diary ~ it's all happening!



Wed. Feb 1st. 8.00pm Bible Study Rectory

Note the Farmers' (and others') Market on Sat. 4th Febr.

Mon. 6th 7.45 for 8.00pm Women's Group

Wed. 8th, Bible Study in the Rectory.

NB **No** Bible Study on 15th or 22nd Feb.

NB the St. Valentine's Service on 12th Feb. ~ 10.30am. (see panel)

... and the Ash Wednesday one at 7.30pm on 22nd.

Thur. 23rd PCC meeting in Hall, 7.30pm

Sat. 25th Coffee Morning 10.00 – 11.30am. Hall

NB **Church Open**, 10.00am till noon.

And Jumble Sale, 2.00pm ... Cancer Treatment Appeal.

Wed. 29th 8.00pm Bible Study, Rectory,

NB. Farmers' and others' Market on Palatine Rd., Sat. 3rd.

Mon. 5th March, 7.45 for 8.00pm Women's Group ~ Rectory.

Wed. 7th, 14th. ... Bible Study, Rectory, 8.00pm.

Looking further ahead, the Church's annual meeting will be on Sun. 22nd April, after the 10.30am service (i.e. approx. 11.30am)

The Parish Registers –



Baptised on Sunday January 15th.

Marcus Darren Hibbert

In Memoriam ...

Joan Bradley (West View Rd.), Renee Elliott (Brett St.),
Mary Andrews (Bucklow Dr.), Wilford Nelson (St. Luke's)

And also Tom McIntyre J.P. ~ formerly commandant of the local
army cadet force, and much else, ...

and Marion O'Neill ~ formerly School Crossing Patrol-person on
Palatine Rd. for many years, and recently transferred to Button Lane

Sunday 12th February is the nearest Sunday to **St. Valentine's Day**, so we are making something special of it for those who were married here ~ last year, last decade, last century ~ or who are planning to marry here, or even who ought to be getting married here! Join us for the 10.30am service. Bring your best man, your best woman, your bridesmaids and pages, the bride's mother, the ushers, the photographer, ... come in a horse and carriage if you've got one. Seriously, this is something to celebrate, and to think about, and thank God for, as well as looking for his help and support in difficult times, perhaps. Hymns, readings, prayers and thoughts will focus around love, partnership and marriage at this service.

CHURCHYARD.

I know this is a hardy perennial, but it still needs repeating. Wreaths placed on memorials at or before Christmas will be removed by 2nd February ~ the end of the extended Christmas cycle in the church calendar. Some could do with moving sooner: the warm weather we have had recently has meant that many are already brown and disintegrating. Please, if you lay a wreath or put flowers on a grave, arrange to tidy them before they become dead.

Overall, we aim to cut the grass over any one part of the graveyard once a year, with some areas getting closer treatment in rotation. If you would rather have your family grave trimmed more closely, you are welcome to garden it yourself, but please, no weed-killer, and no kerbs or edging. Our reasons are twofold ~ to do

more would bankrupt the church, and would eliminate the rich wild-life of the area.

I sometimes get asked why we do not use volunteer groups or job creation scheme type workers. I'm afraid my experience of these is not good. They require close supervision, tend to think in terms of Wimbledon lawns (green deserts), and even when told *not* to do something (like re-erect an unsafe gravestone, or mow and collect the grass where ashes were scattered last week) they will probably do it.

Women's Group. The next meeting will be on Monday 6th Feb., in the Rectory as usual from 7.45ish for an 8.00pm start. Programme to be announced later.

St. Wilfrid's School ...

Last month I flagged up that the school had had an inspection of its churchy side. Two out of five areas of the school's life were judged excellent, and of the other three, all classed as good, one only missed the higher grade because one clause had not been pasted over into our new, draft prospectus from the previous one, where it was there, printed loud and clear. Oops, oh, dear!

Magpie...

... Michael Gove is apparently at it again. Our beloved Minister of Education has reportedly called for improvements in schools' performances so that all children achieve better than average results. Presumably on Planet Gove normal logic does not apply, and the word average does not have its normal meaning. Perhaps he should go back to school.

... more seriously, anyone involved in education is concerned with children who either under-perform, or seem unable to make the grade. All too often the schools get the blame, and at times that may be justified. But what people are reluctant to admit ~ it's not politically correct, you know, even if it isn't rocket science ~ is that sometimes children are not clever enough to be rocket scientists, and that sometimes even bright and canny children get so little encouragement or even outright discouragement from their homes, which may for all kinds of reasons (sad or bad) be disordered, that they do not achieve what they could. What a school will try to do is give all children the best chance it can, and also create a warm, supportive and enjoyable atmosphere, so that the children's education is not just about scoring marks, but

developing as people. Having said that, once people do develop, it is quite possible that they will discover abilities and interests and achievements denied them before ~ and a good school will draw that out of them. That, literally, is what *education* means.

... hears that Morrison's supermarkets are interested in the Carpet Shop at the River end of Palatine Rd. Now that would be nice. Competition in the High Street!

... was rather surprised to hear that the Council's Planning Committee, way back before Christmas, turned down the developers' second attempt to have the extra half-storey on the green dalek accepted retrospectively. Strictly they were right, given that warnings had been given, and planning law and planning committees had been flouted. It now seems likely that they will appeal to the Secretary of State; we shall have to see what Mr.Pickles' inspector makes of this pickle. It would reputedly cost about £100,000 to slice the top off the building.

... and while we are into planning decisions, the smallest house has been started ~ yes, the 14ft wide detached des. res. on Allanson Rd. Should it get a blue plaque to mark its special status as the narrowest detached house in England?

... and watch out for developments at the Spread Eagle site ~ now presumably sold for redevelopment, and the Right of Way across it blocked. If you want to see that right of way reinstated, contact the Rector, who has the appropriate forms.

... heard tell that in Cardiff there were 63 plants flowering on New Year's day. That included a cold sensitive Mediterranean grass. Well, Northenden can't quite match that, but the Rectory garden had about a dozen, including a strawberry.

... School crossings are still a cause for concern, and are subject to politicking. A recent newspaper article trumpeted the story that the Council are making the great concession of asking head teachers to agree to drawing money from the Education budget to reinstate some of the discontinued patrols. Nice one, Machiavelli! Pass the buck, pass the blame, and squeeze a different budget. How generous of the Highways people to make such a concession with someone else's money.

... after the Goosanders last month, what more? (They're still around, by the way, and well worth a visit.) Well, there are Redwing in the area, noisily squabbling over the fine crop of holly berries; there's a Blackcap ~ except *she's* got a brown cap; there's a Great Spotted Woodpecker, a Nuthatch, and maybe even a Tree

Creeper. And then, what about the Goldfinches? They're almost routine, with the Chaffinches and Greenfinches. But how lovely!

The Booth Centre ~ the Cathedral's work among the street people of Manchester ~ is hosting an "Open Mike Night" on Thursday 23rd Febr. from 7.30 – 9.30pm, at Sacred Trinity Church, Chapel St., in Salford. Tickets are free, but limited – contact Ellie at Streetwise Opera on [www . streetwiseopera . org](http://www.streetwiseopera.org) . The Rector has some more details.

Macmillan Project

The Macmillan Cancer support charity are running a project in harness with Christie Hospital in Northenden and other parts of south Manchester, hoping to establish a team of volunteers who can increase people's awareness of the signs and symptoms of breast, bowel and lung cancer. The idea is that the volunteers would be trained with enough information to break the ice and increase people's awareness about cancer and encourage them to visit their GP if they notice any changes to their body. This might be at stalls or leafleting at events. Volunteers do not need to be experts in cancer! They will receive an induction, accredited training and ongoing support. To find out more, please contact Alice on 0161 234 1426 or 07887 452 548 or [alice . munby @ nhs . net](mailto:alice.munby@nhs.net) .

I believe in Marriage ...

II

GSF

It was an American feminist who wrote, "It all begins when you sink into his arms, and ends with your arms in his sink." The lady had jaundice, I think, but maybe there are hidden truths in the quip, especially if you play around with it. "... she sinks into your arms ... your arms in her sink." perhaps! Love and romance are beautiful things, but so easily can be twisted, deliberately or thoughtlessly. And love does mean arms in sinks ~ or worse if they need unblocking ~ as well as embraces and soft violins. It is one of those words which slither over a whole mountain of meanings, because we are complicated beings, and our relationships work out in a multitude of ways. Even the sage who drew together the biblical book of Proverbs was mystified: 'who knows,' he wrote, 'the way of a young man with a maiden?' So where does marriage-love begin? It includes physical attraction, the admiration for someone's character, and the fun of being together; it includes the romance of romance, of feeling that you matter to someone, and they to you; perhaps there is the glamour of having your big day ~ which is great, but don't marry just to have a big day for yourself! No doubt

the metaphor about the right chemistry is often true literally as well as metaphorically, but if you think that human life is just bio-chemistry you are selling yourself and the human race very short.

But love, at least when you are talking about the commitment of marriage, and actually in other settings too, is more than all these. The Greeks, as they say, had a word for it ~ several words, in fact, and the one which the early Church selected to describe Christian love ~ *agape* ~, in marriage and more widely, is not all that common, and has overtones of care and support as well as just affection or family feeling. So maybe the bit about arms and sinks is not so far off after all, so long as neither presumes on the other's washing up potential. That should be a gift, not something taken for granted. And the way the early church wrote about love shows that it is a matter of moral choice, not a helpless passion. We are told to love God, to love ourselves, to love each other, to love our spouses, to care. It is our choice to accept that challenge, because we are moral as well as biochemical beings: to accept it for better in the full flood of romance, ... but also to accept it when things seem for worse, in illness, or strain, or bleakness. In a marriage service we say, 'I will' ... I am willing, and commit myself to it, to you. Not always easy, or possible, but that is what people should be aiming for and committing to as they commit matrimony. It is saying, 'I value you and cherish you enough to commit to you, publicly, before God and the company of our friends gathered here.

Now, if this kind of loving cherishing care is found in another setting, Hallelujah! Perhaps we may even dare to speak of Common Grace, if not common law. The ceremony does not in itself create this kind of love by magic or prevent its abuse, but it should be a way of voicing it, and tapping into something which is bigger than ourselves; something which at its best portrays God's love for his people; a pattern of life from which we can draw strength.

I believe in Marriage ...

III

GSF

In recent days the Prime Minister has hit the headlines for talking about gay marriage. (Or has he hit the headlines because some of his back-benchers don't like the idea, and that makes for a lively political drama which sells papers? Or is it a way of showing that, for him at least, the Conservative Party, like Labour before it, is New? *If so*, either way, it is a shame for something which is delicate and personal to be being prostituted for a cheap headline.) Anyway, the suggestion is in the air, together with the change in

regulations which can allow for Civil Partnerships to be ratified in some church buildings.

In the first of these short pieces on marriage ~ the legal bit ~ I suggested that the formal security offered by marriage is something that all partners who live together should opt into. That is a matter of fairness and justice, I believe. For that reason I am glad that gay or lesbian couples have the option of a Civil Partnership to offer the same kind of security if things go wrong for them. If this is their conscientious choice, then I respect it.

But I am not so happy for that partnership to be treated as marriage, even if it gives the same kinds of rights and protection. In introducing Civil Partnerships the last Government carefully argued that it was not marriage (even if people colloquially call it that.) That is not just playing with words (or at least, I hope it wasn't). Marriage is made up of a number of "goods" ~ i.e. good things. Support and companionship is part of it, certainly, but so, in traditional Christian thinking, is the procreation (as well as the upbringing) of children. That does not work out for every couple, for a variety of reasons which do not negate their marriage, but it is there in the background as part of the package ~ part of God's gift in marriage. Some readers may disagree with me, and wonder why I am bothering about all this; others may feel that I am being too soft and liberal, but I do want to keep the public distinction of *marriage* as the union of one man and one woman, with lifelong intention. When Jesus was asked questions about marriage he appealed to God's purpose in creation ~ "from the beginning of creation 'God made them male and female' ... and the two shall become one." (check it out in Mark, ch. 10) However else people rightly meet the needs of companionship, this should be distinct.