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**ST PETER'S CHURCH
BRACKLEY**

"Loving God, loving each other, loving Brackley"



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How welcoming is our church?

A notice posted in Coventry Cathedral some years ago included the following: "We welcome you whether you can sing like Pavarotti or just growl quietly to yourself. You're welcome here if you're 'just browsing', just woken up or just got out of prison. We don't care if you're more Christian than the Archbishop of Canterbury or haven't been to church since Christmas ten years ago. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems, are down in the dumps and don't like organised religion. We welcome those who are inked, pierced, both or neither. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down their throat as kids or got lost and wound up here by mistake. We welcome pilgrims, tourists, seekers, doubters and YOU."

Well said.

One church leader's definition of welcome is, "Treating the outsider as an insider," and isn't that a great description of Jesus' ministry? Jesus constantly encountered people that society treated as an insider and invariably made them feel seen and accepted, welcomed and loved. The least, the last and the lost found in Jesus someone who was safe to be around. He was approachable and completely at ease in their company. He became renowned for his hospitality towards "tax collectors and sinners" (Mark 2:16). He said "when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" (Luke 12:13). When the disciples shoed away children (who were often devalued in that context), Jesus rebuked them saying, "Do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14).

In Jesus, we find the most welcoming man who ever lived. Unlike every other religion, Christianity says that living a good life isn't a prerequisite of God's love but a result of it (1 John 4:10-11). That means the

church should be the most inclusive place on earth. Yet all too often, I've heard people say something like, "I have wanted to try church, but I don't think I'd be very welcome there."

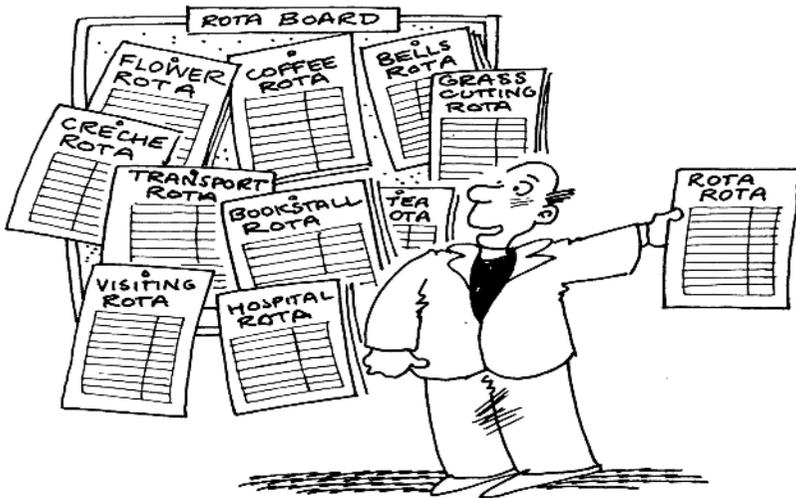
Now, wonderfully, I think St Peter's is already a more welcoming church than many others. A number of people have told me that the warmth and friendliness they experienced on their first visit was one of the main reasons why they began attending regularly. Huge thanks to all of you who are making a point of chatting to people you don't know, remembering names, not acting like you own a particular pew, staying behind for coffee, serving as sides-people and (best of all) having others round for a meal.

However, I do also hear others say that no one speaks to them at church and they struggle to get to know people. There is definitely room for improvement, and it really matters. Ray Evans, an experienced church leader, highlights three quality indicators that usually predict church growth: a church's welcome, preaching and hospitality (*Ready Steady Grow*, p.29).

Now, it's worth saying that welcome isn't all about first-timers. Some who have been attending St Peter's for decades still feel like outsiders, and a swathe of recent newcomers has meant that very few people on a Sunday will know more than half of the others in the room. Of course, it doesn't help if people whizz off straight after the service, have never served in a team or joined a group (usually the best ways to get to know people). So if that's you, why not come along to Alpha this month (7:30-9pm every Tuesday in February at the Football Club), attend the Bible discussion group on alternate Wednesday mornings, come to the prayer meeting on the 2nd Thursday of the month or volunteer to help on a rota? Nevertheless, it's incumbent upon us all to try to make everyone, old and new, feel noticed and valued at St Peter's.

We will soon be setting up a Welcome Team to help with this effort. When I arrived at St Peter's, there was already a great group of welcomers who handed out service sheets on the door, and even though we now have the screen, I want to recover that opportunity to put

people at ease as they arrive and ensure no one leaves St Peter's without speaking to another human being (introducing a weekly notice sheet should help). Let me know if you'd like to join the Welcome Team and I will invite you to a training session. More importantly though, St Peter's needs to have a culture of welcome across the board. So, if you are a churchgoer, will you accept the challenge to introduce yourself to someone you've never met next time you attend? It may not be very British but it is very Christian. Besides, you can always say it was my idea and blame the vicar!



"I'm updating the 'rota notice-board' rota, rota... do I see a hand...?"

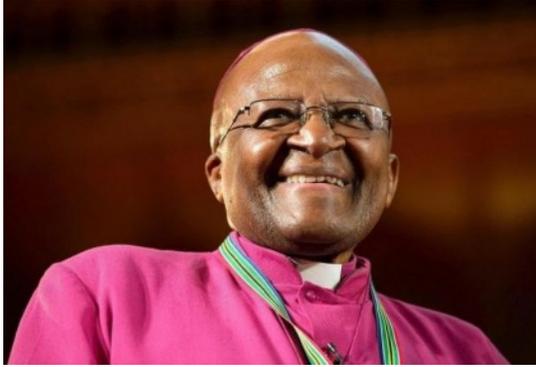
The Alpha Course

Alpha

Starts February 1st at 7.30- 9pm
and continues on 8th, 15th and 22nd

This is taking place at the Football Club

Five famous quotes from Desmond Tutu



The recent death of Archbishop Desmond Tutu was mourned around the world. Here are five of his more famous quotes, which show why he was so especially honoured for his justice and reconciliation work in South Africa.

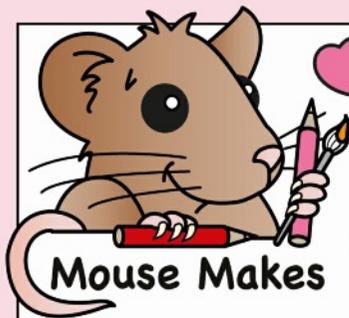
“Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

“Don't raise your voice, improve your argument. Good sense does not always lie with the loudest shouters, nor can we say that a large, unruly crowd is always the best arbiter of what is right.”

“Forgiving is not forgetting; it's actually remembering - remembering and not using your right to hit back. It's a second chance for a new beginning. And the remembering part is particularly important. Especially if you don't want to repeat what happened.”

“Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realise our need of one another.”



Mouse Makes

See what great love the Father has for us that He would call us His

1 John 1:3

Lord, you are a God who shows _____ and is _____
...You have great _____ and _____

Psalms 86:1

Love the Lord your God with all your _____

_____ with all your _____

and with all your _____

Matthew 22:37



How did God show He **loved** us?
Read 1 John 4:9



_____ is love.
Whoever lives in love lives in _____, and _____ lives in them.
1 John 4:16

Love is ..
Read 1 Cor 13:4-7

Love your _____
the same as you love _____

Matthew 22:39

Love is:
PATIENT • KIND • GRACIOUS • JUST • TRUTHFUL • TRUSTING • HOPEFUL
PERSEVERE • ENDURES • GOD

Love is not:
JEALOUS • ENVY • BOASTFUL • PROUD • SELFISH • ANGRY • RUDE • EVIL

God's love is:
LOVE • MERCIFUL • FAITHFUL • UNFAILING • ABUNDANT • COMPASSIONATE

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Thank you.

Beware bird flu this winter

If you are feeding the birds, please make sure that you keep their feeders very clean this winter. The UK is facing its worst ever outbreak of avian flu, and already there have been more than 40 cases around the country. The disease is thought to have been spread by migratory wild birds from Russia and Eastern Europe.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds said: "Everyone should take care to maintain good hygiene when feeding garden birds, regularly cleaning feeders outside with mild disinfectant, removing old bird food, spacing out feeders as much as possible and washing your hands."

Humans can catch the disease by touching infected birds or their droppings. So, the advice is to NOT approach any dead or dying birds, and to wash your hands every time you touch anything to do with your bird table.

Fortunately, avian flu mainly affects larger species than our much-loved garden birds.

Christine Middlemiss, Britain's chief vet, recently told the BBC that the disease was at a 'phenomenal level' in the UK, which in turn has 'huge human, animal and trade implications'. And meanwhile, the migratory period for birds does not end until March.



Helen's electric chasuble was the envy of everyone



"The knitting circle are playing their part in our heating efficiency programme."

60 years since we first orbited Earth

It was 60 years ago, on 20th February 1962, that John Glenn became the first American astronaut to orbit the Earth. He made three orbits in the space capsule Friendship 7, which he named himself.



The three circles of the globe - which lasted just under five hours - made the Presbyterian Christian a hero and a household name - but he was not the first man in space. He was preceded by two Russians, Yuri Gagarin and Gherman Titov, in April and August 1961.

The American launch was postponed four times because of mechanical issues and uncertain weather, and the flight was not without its frightening moments. An apparent problem with the heat shield necessitated a change in plans during the flight, but this turned out to be a relatively insignificant sensor problem.

Glenn was one of the first US astronauts - the Mercury Seven - who were immortalised in Thomas Wolfe's 1979 book, *The Right Stuff*, which became a film and more recently a TV series.

Glenn, who represented Ohio as a Democratic senator for 25 years from 1974, returned to space in 1998 aboard the space shuttle Discovery, making him the oldest person to fly in space. That mission's main aim was to study the effects of space flight on older people. He died in 2016, aged 95.

Glenn said that seeing the Earth from orbit stirred in him a tremendous sense of wonder that strengthened his faith, adding: "To look out at this kind of creation out here and not believe in God is to me impossible."