

THE NET

The Newspaper of i-church
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An online Christian community based in the Diocese of Oxford, part of the Church of England.

All things new

God tells us through Isaiah (43:19) 'See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.'

The thought of new things, new ways to live our lives, New Year's resolutions, is bound to be prominent at this time of the year. We set out with high hopes of changes for the better. We eat too much at Christmas time and comfort ourselves with the thought of starting the diet and exercise in the new year. We have allowed ourselves to get caught up in the busy-ness of life and so we promise ourselves, 'This year it will be different.'

We really mean these promises to ourselves. We want to be 'better people', whatever that means and we intend to strive to achieve this. But how long do the resolutions last? We're invited out for a meal, the diet is broken and the moment is lost as the year is now underway. We find ourselves saying 'Yes' to another commitment when we meant to say 'No'. We've failed again and the tendency is to give up, to be really hard on ourselves, to view ourselves as failures.

I'm sure God doesn't look on us as failures. He offers us a new start every day—the slate wiped clean and no guilt left from what might have been. As the hymn says, quoting Lamentations, 'New every morning is the love, our waking and uprising prove.' He will do new things in our lives if we ask him. In fact he may already be doing so but we have to open our eyes of faith to perceive it. Even if we think that things about our lives resemble a desert or wasteland, without a road to tread and with no refreshment on the way, God promises he will provide what we need.

Of course it is not only individuals who find the new year a significant time. As a church, i-church has arranged to take the months of December and January to look at our vision as

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Happy New Year!

we move through our third year of existence. After offering all members an opportunity to complete a survey on what they think of i-church, we are now sharing together in more detail in our vision forum. By thinking out loud together we have a good chance of perceiving what God is doing in i-church and what he wants to do in the future.

Looking back, the year has brought many new things for us: new worship times, a new pastoral group, many more members, an individual members' pastor, a mention on Songs of Praise, The Net, an opportunity to tell the Mission to Seafarers Conference more about ourselves. Looking forward, there are still good ideas emerging and being tried as we work out what it means to be an online Christian community.

As we recall the journey of the Magi, we too are travelling. They didn't know what they would find at the end of the journey and nor do we, but like them we will have a story to tell as a result of our travels. Journeying with God is never dull!



Ailsa Wright

Pastor's Letter Joe Parrish



Yesterday Jan and I had breakfast with one of her college friends who had come into New York with her husband to show their young children all the sights and sounds of the Big Apple. They had walked nearly half the length of Manhattan island from downtown up to midtown and exclaimed how crowded the city was. They were from Atlanta. The most remarkable thing they had noted was how few people were using cell phones. How few! And I am always thinking, "How many!" But in Atlanta where they live they estimated nearly 80 percent of the people on the street are talking on cell phones. I would have to admit that a figure closer to a quarter to a third may be more realistic in Manhattan. I don't know why the difference, but maybe we are so caught up with ourselves we can't think about anyone else!

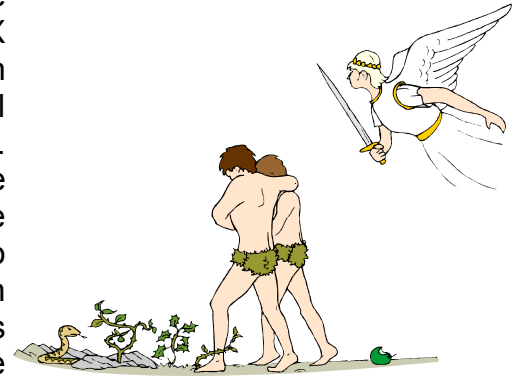
But at the restaurant I was seated between Jan and their 16 year old high school sophomore daughter, and beside her was her brother, about 12 years old and in the sixth grade. As I was contemplating the message of today's gospel, I was trying to imagine the 16 year old being Mary; then a bit to my dismay I realized that her 12 year old brother was actually probably closer to Mary's age when the angel appeared to Mary to tell her the "Holy Spirit will come upon" her so that she "would conceive in her womb and bear a son". Can you imagine a 12 year old girl having the composure to agree that she "would let be" "according to" the angel's "word"? That in and of itself is absolutely remarkable to me at least. Not that I have anything against 12 year old girls, but really, young Mary took the news quite in stride, don't you think?

My mind leaps to what her parents would have said. They have a pregnant 12 year old daughter! Note that the biblical record doesn't indicate anything about her parents. In the second century the apocryphal writing, the Proto-evangelium of James, assigned the names of Anne and Joachim to her parents, and a number of churches are named St. Anne's as a result—but fewer seem to have been named for St. Joachim, possibly because of his somewhat controversial feast day <http://www.saintpatrickdc.org/ss/0726.htm> that was first established by Pope Julius II (Pope from 1503 to 1513) early in the sixteenth century, then suppressed fifty years later by Pope Pius V (Pope from 1565-1572) in the mid-sixteenth century, and about fifty years later it was restored by Pope Gregory XV (Pope from 1621-1623) early in the seventeenth century; finally St. Joachim's feast day was joined with that of his wife, St. Anne, late in the nineteenth century--their joint feast day is July 26. The church of St. Anne, was built to enshrine her and her husband's bodies during the fourth century, possibly by the mother of Roman Emperor Constantine, St. Helena, on the site of the house of St. Joachim and St. Anne, and their tombs were honored there until the close of the ninth century, when the church was converted into a Moslem school. The crypt which formerly contained their holy tombs was rediscovered on 18 March, 1889, only 117 years ago

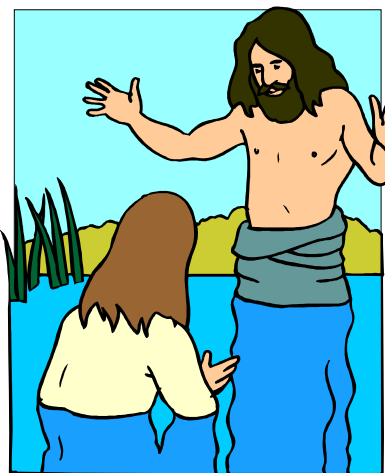
What would you have to say to your 12 year old who was found with child? Surely she told them about the angel. But to prove her story was correct, the Gospel according to Luke says she set out to find her kinswoman Elizabeth, probably the patriarch of her tribe. Mary walked some 70 miles to get to Elizabeth. Some scholars have raised questions about whether a 12 year old, or even a 16 year old would have attempted such a 70 mile journey by foot to the Judean hill country where brigands would have been lurking everywhere along roadways. But the biblical account does not indicate anything untoward happened to Mary as she made this astonishing journey.

Few moderns have spent much effort speculating what exactly happened in Mary's womb. It is just taken for granted she had a baby boy foetus. However, modern genetics clearly deny such a possibility. No female human or warm blooded animal can undergo autogenesis of a Y chromosome and the production of a fertilized egg that would have the sex of a male. It is clearly impossible, genetically, as both an X and a Y chromosome are absolutely required to form a male. Cloned female animals, such as Dolly the sheep, can only have female offspring by the duplication of their own chromosomes, an X becomes another X. But the creation of a Y chromosome is precisely what happened in the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, an amazing and miraculous

event, in case you didn't believe the virginal conception before! There is simply no way a Y chromosome could be produced from an X chromosome. So genetically at a microscopic level, the miraculous thing that happened was that a viable Y chromosome was formed inside Mary's womb. It becomes a complete reversal of what happened in the book of Genesis, when a "rib" from Adam was used to create Eve. Now the opposite has happened! The rib, possibly the piece of genetic material that makes an X become a Y chromosome, was removed in Mary's womb! In the Incarnation God has completed human 'evolution' if you will by reversing what happened in the creation of human life-forms. A male chromosome has been formed from a female chromosome, just the opposite of what happened in the beginning of human creation when a male human was used to create a female human. And the curse of God that resulted in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden has now been removed and humanity is set on its way back to the "Garden", not the physical Garden of Eden, but the spiritual garden described also as Paradise, heaven. God is bringing all humanity that will believe in God's Son back to God's eternal providential care. Jesus is the pinnacle of human existence. Jesus' birth signalled that the return of God to earth at his second coming would end this civilization of humanity as it had begun, completing its generation back to nothing as it was at the beginning. But through the work of God's Son, God would preserve those who believe in his Son.



Elizabeth signals the acceptance of faithful humanity of God's will, as her own foetus, John Baptist, responds to the proximity of his kinsman and superior, Jesus, the foetal Messiah. And Elizabeth blesses Mary for Elizabeth is the first outsider to experience the grace and redemption of God in God's Son Jesus the Christ. The bearer of God, Mary, has sought Elizabeth out among all other



women, and the blessing Mary has received has been spread to another, simply by her faithful belief of what the angel had told her about her being favoured by God. It was a gift bestowed upon her by God, and the gift of this miracle child would be known to all humanity by Mary's faithfulness in bowing to God's wish for God's Son to be born by her. What an awesome responsibility for a 12 year old! Indeed Mary probably urgently needed the confirmation of this most unexpected proclamation and was self-compelled to seek out the patriarch Elizabeth who herself had been blessed by God's gift of the forerunner of the Messiah. The two boys' lives were inextricably joined. One would be the far lesser, not even worthy of tying his kinsman's shoe, but designated as the key figure in baptizing Jesus in the Jordan, setting the messianic promise in motion in the world.

Think back to when you were 12, or 14, or 16. Would you have had the courage of saying "Yes" to God's messenger?

God didn't pick a thoroughly schooled well-bred woman, God picked a peasant girl from a nowhere place called Nazareth. Mary's parents were so insignificant as not to be named by any New Testament writer. Her only claim to fame was that her kinsman Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, had taken one rota in the sacrificial Jerusalem Temple rites. Otherwise Mary was a complete nobody. God had indeed raised up the lowly. And when the famous priest Zechariah disbelieved the angel's message that his wife could bear a child in her old age, the great priest was brought low; he was stuck mute until his forerunner son, John, was born. Zechariah, the powerful had been brought low; and Mary the lowly had been raised up to be honoured among all women while she was only barely in her womanhood.

God is able from stones to raise up ones to praise him. God is able to raise up any who do not vaunt themselves but who depend always and constantly on God. And God is indeed able to do great things for those who are humble and put their trust in God and in God's mighty and eternal deliverance.

PG27

Ailsa Wright

Pastoral Group 27 started its life on 18th June 2006. It was quite daunting for me to finally become the leader of a PG. I had been approved by the Trustees in January and so it had seemed quite a long wait. Then 5 months later I suddenly found myself with an empty forum and a handful of people wishing to join. I had spent a long time working on the group ethos statement so now it was time to see if it worked.

The group grew steadily and the forum filled up with topics of interest to members. Three regular features have been there from the beginning. We have a topic where members post their prayer requests; we have the Rule of Benedict reading posted each day; we have The Chatterbox where we share what is going on in our lives, jokes, stories etc. These topics are renewed every two months. As there is an emphasis in the group on our Rule of Life there is a topic all about this. There is also an area where members can introduce themselves to help others get to know them. Prayer needs from the prayer thread are gathered in a list for ease of reference and we have a weekly cycle of prayer for members.

By October the group had grown to 17 members and it was becoming apparent that all members didn't know one another very well. I made the decision to close the group to new members until the beginning of December. I think it was good to have a time of stability. Since the group reopened we have welcomed one new member. It is a quiet time in i-church with it being a holiday period so I didn't anticipate a lot of applications to join. Things may change in the next few weeks.

At the end of September we started our first study as a group. We had spent some time discussing what we should study and decided to follow 'The Purpose Driven Life' by Rick Warren. The study was led by two group members. We aimed to read a section a day as recommended and shared comments in a forum thread. Each week we arranged to meet in Live Chat to discuss the week's readings and answer questions together. The sessions in Live Chat were not well attended but transcripts of the discussion were posted for others to read. Having had a go at a group study, which only some members decided to join, we are now discussing another one. We have

thought about several possible books and are going to decide shortly which to use. Our options are: Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict by Esther de Waal.

The Lost Message of Jesus By Steve Chalke and Alan Mann.

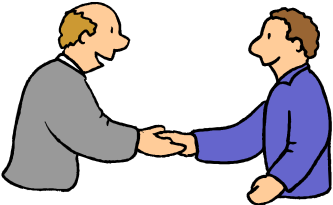
Finding Sanctuary-Monastic Steps for Everyday Life by Christopher Jamison.

The Emmaus course.

Tim launched a creativity project for i-church in the summer and we decided as a group to create items based on the text 'Be still and know that I am God'. Once again not all members felt able to take part but those who did had their contributions gathered on web space so that others could enjoy them. We had poetry, powerpoint, photos and drawings.

There has been an emphasis on vision recently in i-church generally. In October I launched a thread on vision in PG27 and many very good ideas were generated. I shall list these so that they can go before the meeting of Trustees, Council and other leaders at the end of January when they discuss our way forward as a church.

I am really looking forward to the year ahead. Being leader of PG27 is a huge privilege. The members are very caring and supportive of one another which is what a PG should be about I feel. I have been amazed also by how much members find they have in common with one another, but this certainly helps when it comes to mutual support.



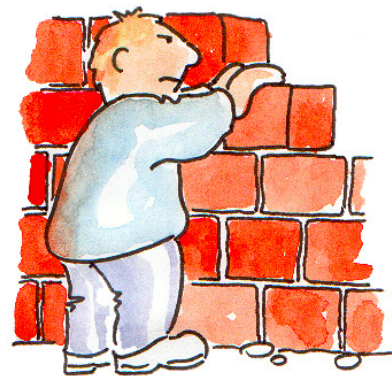
Book Review

**“Open to Others” by Bishop Colin Buchanan
Reviewed by Jayne Tite**

I write this review having had the opportunity to discuss the book with Bishop Colin when he recently visited our Parish in Gore, NZ.

As one time Bishop of Woolwich, Bishop Colin follows in a distinguished line of authors who have held that position. In his current book he takes the Church to task for its inward looking parochialism, both as a church, and as individual Christians.

He leads us through our attitudes to other denominations, the barriers we erect to protect our own territory, and on through the divisions that occur through our protective attitude towards our own types of worship, be it liturgical or evangelical. He then takes us on a journey into the territory of spiritual gifts, and how we tend to see these as purely the gift of tongues, healing, and prophecy, moves on to doctrine, bringing us to face the fact that we each have our own personal doctrine which we need to face up to. Doctrine is what separates the denominations but it also separates Christians in the Anglican Communion, and how we fail to talk to each other and discuss our differences, instead talking at each other, using fragments of scripture to hit each other with. This moves us into the sphere of communication, and the need to speak truly, rather than shaping our words to gain some kind of advantage.



Bishop Colin bases this book very much on Ephesians, and Paul's emphasis on the need for unity and obedience to the Christ and His teachings. This takes us into the realm of the wife's obedience to her husband, and the author attempts valiantly to defend and explain that particular part of Paul's theology. This discussion leads on into our lifestyle as Christians and our roles and relationships, both at the level of the individual and the denominational level of the hierarchies of the various Church groups. He ends up by urging us to don Paul's armour and to join the fight with the forces of evil.



This is a book which makes some very valid points, points that will be painful to most who read it, yet points that we need to heed with great care, even when we disagree. We live at a time when Christian influence in the world has waned to its lowest level ever, and Bishop Colin urges us to live out our faith, openly, and to align ourselves together with other Christians of all shades of doctrine, and march as one to face the problems of injustice, poverty, sickness and exclusiveness which as individuals and parishes we often see ourselves as powerless to combat.

A book to read and give much thought to.

Apart from his current position as Hon. Asst. Bishop in Bradford, following his retirement, and his time at Woolwich, Bishop Colin was vicar of St Marks Gillingham, Kent, Principle of St. John's College, Nottingham, and Bishop of Aston, Birmingham.

“Open to others”, Bishop Colin Buchanan, first published by Scripture Union, London, 1992, in the “Word for TODAY” series. 159pp £3.50 ISBN 0 86201 689 4

Recipe by Jayne

Well winter is coming for you lot in the north, so here is something that will warm those cold days. been wondering whether to throw out that old jar of partly used peanut butter? Don't!

Peanut Butter Soup.

INGREDIENTS:

1 shallot, chopped
2 stalks celery, chopped (optional, but adds flavour)
2 teaspoons butter or margarine
1 tablespoon flour (don't forget cornflower can be used)
1 cup chicken stock
3 tablespoons smooth salt-free peanut butter, (If the P/B has gone a bit dry add a couple of dessertspoons of peanut oil.)
1/2 cup low-fat milk
1/2 cup water
2 tablespoons crushed salt-free peanuts
Salt and pepper to taste.

TO PREPARE:

Saute the shallot and celery in the melted butter in a medium pan for 5 minutes. Add the flour, tossing to coat well.

Stir in half the chicken stock. Simmer for 5 minutes. Add the remaining chicken stock. Simmer for 5 minutes longer.

Strain vegetables, and keep to one side.

Blend the peanut butter and the strained liquid in a saucepan. Stir in the milk.

How to join i-church

Not everyone who reads The NET is a member of i-church, and if that applies to you, please read on . . . It is great to find you reading our newspaper. Hopefully reading these pages will whet your appetite to find out more about us.

If you go to our main website, www.i-church.org, you will find lots of information about i-church, what we do, when we do it etc and if this sounds like the kind of church you would like to belong to, please do ask to join.

We have members in the UK, Europe, The United States, Caribbean, South America, Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. We are very much a world wide broad church, and there is usually someone around, somewhere in the world 24 hrs a day.

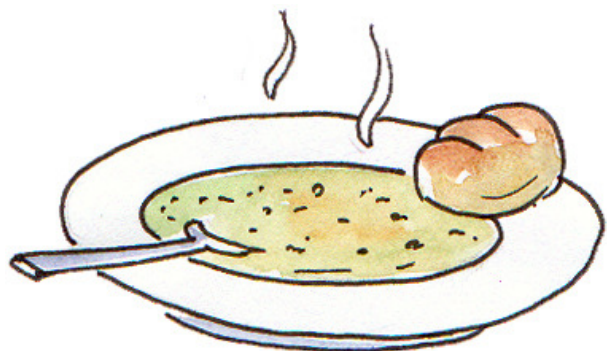
Whilst we are formally part of the Church of England, we have members of many denominations and varied churchmanship. It is our diversity which makes i-church such an interesting place to be. And you can be a member of both i-church AND a more conventional bricks and mortar church at the same time.

Combine 3/4 cup of the peanut butter, (and peanut oil if using), and stock mixture with the reserved vegetables in a blender or food processor container; process until smooth. Stir into the saucepan.

Cook until heated through, adding the water as needed for the desired consistency. Serve hot or cold, topped with the crushed peanuts and a sprig of parsley.

(And if you are a crouton fanatic, like me, make sure of a plentiful supply in a side dish.)

This is especially nice on a hot day, served chilled, followed by as generous slice of rock melon.



The Church of the Nativity

It seems appropriate at this time of year to share pictures from the place where Jesus was born. These pictures were taken in November 2006 on a recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land.



In order to get to the Church of the Nativity you have to pass through the huge wall barriers erected by the Israelis all around the city. Supposedly to keep suicide bombers out, the real effect of the barrier is to imprison Palestinians within their city; in many cases separating families from each other. As westerners, we were able to pass through easily enough, but the wall is a tragic reflection upon the continuing situation in Palestine.

Well, eventually we got there. The outside of the basilica is austere and looks like a medieval fortress. The inside reveals an ornate Greek Orthodox choir (lower picture) standing above the cave where the nativity is reputed to have taken place.

There are two entrances down into the “nativity cave”, which is about 10 metres by 3 and is lit by 48 lamps. The cave walls are dark, blackened by the residue from years of candles it would seem. In the late 19th century the walls were covered with asbestos to guard against fire—a once red protective “blanket” now soot blackened and brittle with age.

In the grotto is a 14 point silver star, set in the floor, along with the inscription “hic de Maria virgine Jesus Christus natus est” (here Jesus Christ was born of the virgin, Mary).

At a slightly lower level is the manger itself, small and rocky. It is a bit of a tight squeeze for more than half a dozen visitors at a time. In the 4th century the original cave roof was replaced by masonry.

With some imagination you can picture the scene of 2000 years ago. Take away the ornamentation of the church and you could be there, on a starry night, in a dark cave, watching a new born baby!


Phil Wright




Forum Tip

Phil Wright

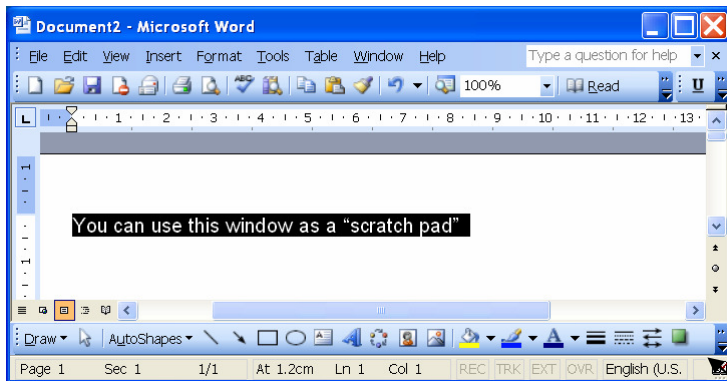
This month's tip will show you how to have two separate windows open at once on your screen; very handy when you are in the Chapel trying to follow a service sheet, or leading worship.

Have a look at the top right corner of this window—you should see three buttons looking something like this.  Notice the middle of the 3 buttons. This is the “resize” button.

If you hover your mouse over this button you will see the words “Restore Down” appear in a help box. (Hover means place your mouse over a button *without* clicking button on the mouse.)

The picture above will appear when your window totally fills the screen. You can “re-size” the window by clicking on the middle box—now your window can be adjusted to any size or position you want. When in this state, the top right corner of your window will change to this.  If you hover over the button when in this state it will say “Maximise”.

So, click on the “resize” button to put you in “resize” mode (like this). I'll use a window with a word document inside to demonstrate what you can do. You will see straight away that your window no



longer fills the whole screen. If you move your mouse to hover over the bottom right hand corner, you will see a double-headed arrow appear. If you now left-click and hold your mouse you can drag the size of the window to make it larger or smaller, wider or narrower.

Alternatively, hover your mouse over one side of the window—again a double headed arrow will appear. From the top or bottom edge you

can make the window taller/shorter and from the left or right edge you can make your window wider/narrower. Have a go and make your window about half the normal width but about the normal height.

We now need to move the window to one side of the screen. To do this move your mouse to the



blue strip which contains our resize button. Now, hold down the left mouse button (left-click) and move the mouse. Your window will move with the mouse so you can position it wherever you like. Move it to the left hand side of your screen.

Now, open a brand new window on your computer. This second window might be another document like this one. It may be that you have one document in a window and have i-church in another. You could also have Live Chat open in one window and the forums of i-church in another. If you have used the technique described here to place the chapel screen onto the left side of your screen, you could open a second window and resize it/move it to the right. In this way you can have two (or more) windows side by side on your screen at the same time.

Also, you can copy text from one window and paste it into the second. This is very handy when you are using responses in worship from a posted service. If you are leading worship you can prepare your text in advance and just copy and paste or highlight, drag and drop it into the Chapel Live Chat screen. If you use the second method you will find that the text disappears from your original document. If you are careful not to save changes to the document when prompted you will retain your original text saved.

Scrooge says Thank You!



Hopefully you are all full of post Christmas cheer and not overspent at the bank. I'd just like to thank everybody who has supported i-church over the past year, but especially those who have given financial support. It has been greatly appreciated, thank you.

The year ahead promises to be no less exciting for i-church than the last. We have to get smarter in terms of fund raising in the year ahead—so if you have any bright ideas do share them with us. Don't feel limited to just fund raising ideas (even though we do need lots of them as well!), let us know if you have any suggestions where we might apply to get grants from.

Oh, and do have a happy and prosperous New Year!

The Campaign Trail

Election fever will be gripping i-church in the months ahead. OK, fever is probably a bit of an exaggeration but it won't be long before the i-church Council elections are due to be held, and certainly before the end of April. Each year three Council places become vacant but with Helen W's appointment to Individual Members' Pastor she becomes an *ex officio* member so her elected place is also vacant.

All Council business is conducted on-line, so membership is not restricted to the neighbourhood of Oxford. However, our constitution says that you do need to be a Community Member in order to stand for Council. Prospective Council members need to be nominated and seconded and if we have more nominations than vacancies there will be an election. So, if you are interested, start campaigning!



January Calendar

Birthdays as per Calendar on members forum (in January there are no less than 15 birthdays to celebrate)

January 24th Deadline for The NET

Worship in i-church

There have been some alterations in worship times in the last couple of months. The current times are shown on the right. There is always the opportunity to offer extra worship times. These need not be daily but could be weekly, fortnightly or monthly.

There are a wide range of worship styles on offer so there should be something that appeals to almost everyone. There are still opportunities for new Leaders to come forward—this is not as daunting as it may sound and a number of people have started a new ministry in worship through i-church. This really is a place where every member ministry is encouraged and flourishes.

Service Times

Keep this guide by your computer to help you remember when all the service times are. There is space for you to write in the local equivalent times:

<u>Worship</u>	GMT
Mon to Sat	09:00
Sunday	10:00
Daily	21:00
Daily	22:00
<u>Open House—Tuesdays</u>	
Study	20:00
Chat	20:30
Worship	21:00

You can now get services in your local time on the member Home Page. Check it out.