

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.

Through the eyes of children

Has anyone else noticed that the older one gets, the faster time and the years fly by?

When I was much (much!) younger, time dragged on and on. It took FOREVER to get to Christmas, the next birthday, holidays, summer vacation, etc., etc. Now it seems to me that the 1990s were just scant weeks ago (or months at the most)!

Adulthood has so much "responsibility baggage" attached to it and we often reach a point where we forget about (or refuse to make the time for) wide-eyed wonder and fun.

My next-door neighbour, nine-year-old Katie who lives at the house at the end of my farm lane, is my enthusiastic farmer's apprentice this year. We've planted a ¼ acre pumpkin patch in the small field right next to her small backyard and she has been appointed full steward of the pumpkin patch (her three-year-old brother has strict orders to keep out of the patch).

The pumpkin seeds were planted ages ago and showed no sign for weeks that anything was going to sprout there other than weeds. And, there was the distinct worry that the guinea fowl from a neighbouring farm would demolish the pumpkin crop as that marauding flock had done to the sweet corn Katie and I had planted there last year.

In May, Katie and I weekly checked the field for pumpkin seeds that may have been washed out by



rainfall or plucked out by a guinea fowl. In mid-June, we hauled jugs of water and pulled weeds when sprouts started to show up.

This morning, we walked "Katie's Patch" pulling more weeds, looking for signs of pest damage (and found loads of deer track) and identifying a large bare area where this evening we'll plant decorative gourds.

Katie does not come from a farming background. The back-breaking work to bring in a crop is an adventure to her and she's looking forward to working the farmers' market stand with me this summer. And, she noted specific areas of the patch that need particular extra attention, in terms of invasive weeds, drainage problems and delayed daylight.

I've also had the joy in recent months of several infusions of youthful enthusiasm with three of my granddaughters visiting. It would have been so easy to claim "gram is old and tired", but the girls piled into the big bed with me for reading, drawing

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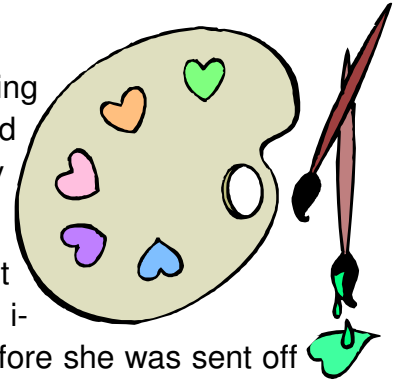
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Next Issue will be published on Friday August 3rd.

or just girl gossip.

Or we gathered on the front porch for a messy time with paints or decorating walking sticks for tromps in the forest. Then later in the front yard for a mad game of croquet on an un-mowed lumpy lawn at twilight. Or singing silly songs at the top of our lungs and dancing.

In Live Chat after one of the services on Sunday, those in attendance got the opportunity to "meet" the young daughter of one of our fellow i-churchers. It was a delight to chat with her (with mum right there) and, before she was sent off to bed we learned that i-church was determined to be "cool".



There's really something to the phrase "you're only as old as you feel". The youngsters help remind me that every time. And every time they remind me, they teach me something new.

Paula



Articles for i-church

Phil Wright

The number of people sending items for inclusion in i-church is slowly increasing, which is great news! Literally! The broader the range of articles we are able to publish the more interesting we can make The NET as a read. Also, it relieves the pressure from your hard working Editorial Team, who otherwise have to scrape up something from their own limited repertoire of life experiences.

So, what's involved in becoming a top reporter or correspondent for The NET? In practice all you need is something to write about and something to write it down on. Since all our readers either have a computer or have access to a computer, the best way is to email us the text of what you want to write and leave the rest to us. Most people create their masterpiece in a program like Word or Works, but others simply write it as a personal message and send to one of the team.

What about size and fonts I hear you ask? Again, leave all that to us. We receive items in all sorts of shapes and sizes and one of the tasks we undertake is to standardise everything to get a smooth look and feel to the newspaper. Almost the last thing we do is insert illustrations into the text, to both make the page more visually appealing and to fill up any empty space left between items. We also have access to lots of filler items - those one or two liners that can fill up any space at the bottom of a page - and at the same time say something meaningful or funny.

Occasionally we might have to edit something we receive - but we take great care not to change the sense of the original text. We also standardise on English English; so American spellings are anglicised, and punctuation is corrected. So, if you see a grammatical mistake in The NET it is the fault of the editors not the authors!

What can you write about? A flip through the back issues will quickly tell you the answer is pretty well anything that takes your fancy. Just remember that the readership of The NET is wider than just i-church members, and the newspaper is published on our external website. For this reason we will remove any personal details apart from your name. If people want to get in touch they can do so through formal channels and we'll pass any messages along to you.

That about covers it - fancy a go yourself? You can email us at editor@i-church.org or you can send a personal message to Jayne Tite who is our general point of contact. See you in print!

Pastor's Letter

Russell Dewhurst



As most of you know, this will be my last pastor's letter as Web Pastor of i-church. It was an incredibly difficult decision to make, but eventually I realised that moving on was the right thing to do. God is calling me to do some new things, just as he will call someone new to become Web Pastor of i-church.

"God calls..." "God is calling me..." It's difficult, using language like that, isn't it? We hesitate because it can be difficult to believe that God has a direct part to play in our lives, calling us to play some part in his plan. And, even if he is, how can we hope to figure out what God's call is in our messy world? How can we know if we're doing the right thing? How can we frail creatures hope to build God's kingdom?

Well, we can't, by our own efforts, know God's plan. We can't find God - God finds us. The God revealed to us in the Scriptures doesn't wait for us to look for him. He doesn't wait for "man's religious quest" to turn our eyes up towards heaven. God comes to meet us.

Before we can seek God, God seeks us out and finds us. The initiative is his.

Cowardly Gideon wasn't seeking God: but he was chosen by the Lord, and became a "mighty man of valour". Moses, the rootless outlaw, wasn't on any spiritual quest when God accosted him from out of the burning bush: his life became a quest to set God's people free. Saul was a great persecutor of Christians before he was called by God on the Damascus Way, and became Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles.

That, so scripture tells us, is God's way of dealing with human beings. He doesn't wait for us to sign up: he enlists us into the company of Saints.

One of the most scriptural things about the way i-church works is the way in which, together, we try to respond to this truth: the truth that God calls every one of us. The caricature of a church-- hardly true in the bricks and mortar churches of today-- is a bus, with the priest as the driver and everyone else as passengers. i-church is, rightly, as far away from this model as we could imagine. We know that every member is an active participant in our common life, through prayer and quiet presence, through posting, messaging, chatting, and volunteering with the many aspects of i-church. In this way, we acknowledge that God calls everyone, not just the priest at the top.

If we believe that God calls us, then, how are we to know just what he's calling us to do? How can we make the difficult decisions about what to do, when to move, when to stay, what choices to make? How can we discern God's plan?

In fiction we're used to seeing the hidden hand of the story-teller, aren't we? When the TARDIS brings the Doctor and Martha to some far-flung planet, we can be sure they have been called there to right some great wrong. As we follow Frodo's progress in the Lord of the Rings, we rapidly realise he has been singled out as the hero of the day, whether he wants to be or not. "I wish I had never seen the ring," he says. "Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?"

Yes, we can see the hand of the story-teller in fiction. But not always in our own lives. Yet here on earth, we are living God's story. So we shouldn't be so shy of seeing the hand of the great story-teller, God himself.

God has chosen many, most, perhaps all of us here in i-church, for some particular task, whether we realise it or not. Think about it.

If someone asks you "why" you do something it can be hard to answer. "Why did you join i-church?" "Why did you decide to get married?" "Why did you take that job?" "Why do you bother spending time looking after old so-and-so?" "Why do you collect for Christian Aid?" "Why did you volunteer to mod *that* forum or take on that task?" It can be hard to answer. We often aren't sure of our own motivations; but, that's often because God has called us to do his work, without us even realising it. It wasn't our unaided decision-- it was God's call.

For Christians, the story of Jesus is the truest and best story ever told. And as Christians, our story becomes part of his story. We are literally called to take part in it, cast as actors in the divine drama. And this story of Jesus is not a fiction. Nor is it just a heavenly, angelic idea. It is a story of flesh and blood, of real life, with pain and sorrow as well as joy and triumph. In Christ, God begins a new creation, he tells a new story. And what is this story?

Nothing less than the transformation of all creation. But wait, you are saying, this is too much. Russell has really lost it this time. Can we really believe we are part of God's story? Are we really expected to believe that our prayers, and words, and actions, are how God is bringing about a whole new creation? We're just weak, bumbling, fallen human beings.

Well, yes, that's right, we do know one another's weaknesses, don't we, in i-church? We debate, we argue, we fall out, we make up... we support one another in our weakest moments in prayer from across the world... we try to figure out how we can have live a Godly life together in an internet community. We pray for and care for one another, as much as we can, through our keyboards and our monitors.

We know, too, from bitter experience, how easily we forget God amid all the i-church things we do. We know how easily we fall into strife and factions.

So we know that we're not superheroes. We are sinners. So how can we possibly imagine that we in i-church could participate in the building of God's kingdom? Why would God bother with us?

But, unfathomably yet wonderfully, God does call the weak and the lowly to his service. God does call people like us. Just as, long ago, he called a poor, teenage Jewish girl: probably illiterate, probably looked down upon by society at large. She didn't have any special knowledge, or special abilities: yet God chose her for the highest calling any human being has ever received. To bear the Son of God, and bring him into the world.

So if we are ever tempted to doubt our worthiness to receive God's call in our lives, let's remember the Blessed Virgin Mary. No-one could be worthy to receive such a calling as she received. But God chose her, as he chooses us. He calls each one of us, every one, to play a unique part in his story.

There are images of Mary in churches across the world, where she is not depicted as a teenage girl, but seated on a throne and crowned.



That is the end of the story, already written, waiting for us to play our parts. The script is already there, waiting for the actors to get to the final scene. God lifts up the lowly, fills the hungry, and brings joy to the downcast. On good days, God's purposes break through into our sinful world here and now. But even on the bad days, we have God's assurance that Jesus' story – our story-- has a happy ending. One day we will all, like Mary, cast our crowns before God's throne. In the mean time, we must watch, and wait, and be attentive to the God who calls us.

Amen.

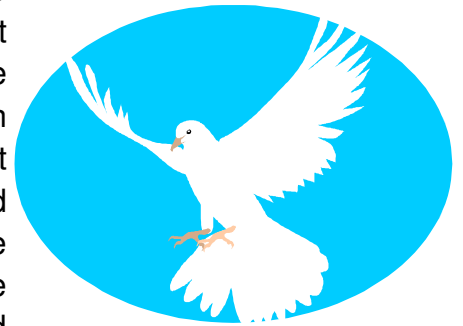
Ps & Qs

Puzzles and Quandries on the Way Richard Haggis

What's "the Filioque" all about?

This little puzzle has been one of the causes of the rift between churches in the East (Orthodox) and the West (Catholic). It refers to the Latin word in the Creed which translates into English as "and the Son" (Filius = son, -que = "and"), when we speak of the Holy Spirit "proceeding from the Father and the Son". The Orthodox maintain (with some justification) that those words were not included in the original, agreed, texts of the creed, and some Orthodox think that they are so wrong an interpretation that it counts as heresy. (How the texts were altered is another question – we simply don't know the answer, and some believe it might just have been a mistake, a sort of theological typing error!) In Western Christendom we don't really see what the fuss is about, but for Orthodox Christians it is a very lively controversy to this day.

Like so many disputes, it has to do with Biblical interpretation. The Western view is that the Holy Spirit reaches us through the Father, of course, but also through the Son. The Biblical image for this is Jesus in the New Testament promising us that the Holy Spirit will come to be our advocate. He breathes the Holy Spirit onto the disciples in John's Gospel, and in Acts the Holy Spirit descends in tongues of fire and voices. So, it stands to reason that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Or does it? What about Mary being overshadowed by the Holy Spirit at the beginning of Luke? Or the Holy Spirit we believe "spoke through the prophets"? And what about the Spirit of God that hovered over the waters at Creation? All of that was surely before the Incarnation, and suggests a different relationship between the three persons of the Trinity.



A part of our difficulty is that we are not really comparing like with like. The Western tradition is seeing the Holy Spirit in terms of the story of the Church. Some might say it is jolly convenient for the Church if it is itself the most important manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Some might also say that it is all the more convenient for the Roman Catholic Church, whose chief bishop claims to speak (at times) infallibly, as if with the voice of the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox view things in more eternal ways. The relationships between the Holy Trinity are eternal, one does not come before another, and to speak of the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son implies to them that the Spirit is a sort of grandson to the Father, for which there can be no justification in theology.

So, we have an impasse. These things matter very much to the Orthodox, rather less to Western Christians, but I fear they would not admire us for the stand taken in the C of E's latest prayerbook, *Common Worship* – at ecumenical gatherings one option with the Creed is simply to leave out the Filioque. They must wonder what we have been arguing about all these centuries if we can drop it so lightly!

New moderator

Richard has now joined Tim as moderator or host of the Study forum. It is our policy to have two hosts for each forum to cover for absence due to holidays or other commitments. Welcome to the mods team Richard!

A Roamin' Catholic Reflection on i-church

Nick Battaglia

So why would a nice Roman Catholic boy pass up all sorts of nice Roman Catholic web resources to situate himself here among all these Anglicans? Well, I suppose it's because I'm a roamin' Catholic, that's why. I find it difficult to feel settled in traditional church settings -- including the traditional church setting of my childhood and of my ancestors back dozens of generations. I feel loyalty and commitment to my church; but it's an itchy kind of loyalty and commitment. The trajectory of my spiritual life has not been unusual in that, like so many others, I have bounced myself from pillar to post over the course of my life. I think I'm a perfect exemplar of one of the types of people that i-church is tailor-made to embrace: I'm a wanderer.



We're all familiar with our friends the "seekers" to whom so many church projects set themselves the task to minister -- think of the Alpha Course, for instance, and of the behemoth "mega-church" in your town. But I don't regard myself as a seeker; I believe that I've found my faith (or have been found a la Francis Thompson's Hound). This is post-seeker wandering I'm talking about. I am not looking for faith; I'm looking for a supportive but challenging community in which to live my Christian life. And I need that community to be hugely diverse. As Spike Lee said in an ad some years ago: "The mo' colors, the mo' better. Peace!"



I have been like a gyrovague -- that is, like the kind of monk who wanders from monastery to monastery in search of a community that suits his style (and the sort of monk, by the way, against whose self-indulgences and passions Benedict warns us). But it's not that my sort are bad folks, really; it's just that we can't (or don't or won't) settle in well. We are naturally curious, and have finally grown more comfortable with questions than with answers. Expectations of orthodoxy make us fidgety. And too large a helping of agreement on the same plate as our Christian fellowship feels vaguely dangerous and can put us off our food. It seems to me that we try to unite ourselves around too many principles and expectations. (Don't you ask yourself sometimes if Jesus would be able to even recognize what we've done with him?)

I wonder if there isn't just a single focus around which we Christian types can stand an outside chance of drawing ourselves together. I think that focus was articulated perfectly simply by Jesus in the verse that I have regarded as the hinge of our scriptures: "This I command you -- to love one another." (John 15:17, New English Translation) I have been looking for a community that is held together by that single focus and almost nothing else. And guess what I have found in i-church?

We seep apart like oil and water over just about any (every!) little thing. But at the end of the day -- and regardless of what strange utterances I may have shared recently in the fora -- I am confident that I am respected and embraced (even loved) and that so is every other i-churcher. And we embrace one another because it's how we follow Jesus, and not because we agree about anything else in particular. Heavens, no!

Running in Roman Catholic circles is, for me, frequently an exhausting and stifling exercise in seeing who can (a) recite the catechism most precisely, or (b) manage to conceal any extra-curricular thoughts at all in order to keep scandal-free and protect the peace. And for all that my

local brick-and-mortar parish is really a wonderful place with a very good pastor. I fully anticipate that I will live and die as a Roman Catholic for lots of compelling good and not-so-good reasons. It's even a bit easier for me to be Roman Catholic because I'm a member of i-church. This is a place of grace for me, with all of its disagreements and diversity and every flavour of Christian and seeker and wanderer like myself. I get to stretch a bit here. I get to try on for size lots of crazy, half-formed ideas, and I get to have the doubts that God made me to have. I get help in learning how to be myself as an adult Christian. This is a sacramental place for me where I am energized and rejuvenated by beautiful Christian diversity. "The mo' colors, the mo' better. Peace!"

Vision Progress

Ailsa Wright

In January there was a vision get together in Oxford to look at the way forward for i-church. Since then work has been going on to implement the changes.

We decided that we are more a church than a monastery so the emphasis on Benedictine spirituality has been allowed to fade. It is no longer mentioned on the outside website and the link to a commentary on the Rule is no longer there.

We wanted to form links with more organisations. Representatives have attended a Cutting Edge Conference, the Mission to Seafarers Conference and the Churches Media Council Conference. There has been some interest expressed by representatives of the armed forces about a possible link with i-church. There is still plenty of potential to link with other organisations, whether specifically Christian ones or ones for those who are deaf or partially sighted for instance.

Work is going ahead to develop the new website but much of this will be long term. A team of interested people has been gathered and ideas about the new look have been sought from the membership. A test version of the site is now in existence. No work on outside forums and worship has yet been taken forward.

The distinction between individual and community members is no longer in existence. The new membership form to complete to become a full member of i-church has been created and information for guest members has also been developed. This new system will go live very soon with existing members being asked to complete the form and new members in future joining initially as guests. Ideas for new groups have begun to be suggested by members and the first of these will soon be running. A group for developing Benedictine spirituality may be one of these in the future.

It is hoped that one day there will be a team of companions to provide extra pastoral care or spiritual direction for members who want it. Work has not yet started on creating this team.

Finances will continue to be an issue. The i-church shop has been launched, member giving is increasing and grant applications for funding have begun.

It is hoped that we will soon have a technical lead person to help with the technical aspects of i-church. This will free up any future web pastor to fulfil their pastoral role. We will also need someone to look after the outside website.

A publicity group is now in existence and one day we will need a press officer.

All in all we are making good progress with the changes and developments but I doubt if we will ever finish growing and changing.



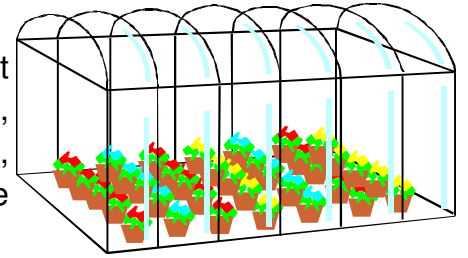
Scrambled Seasons

By Paula Franke

The life of a farmer is rarely boring.

Every day is a new adventure: too hot, too cold, drought, flooding rains, pests, wildlife, and always never enough hours in the day.

On my farm in eastern Kentucky, winter-time workload is a bit easier, but there's still firewood to cut, new kids in the goat barn, milking twice a day and pruning fruit trees. Come late winter, there's ploughing fields, planning crop rotations and getting the greenhouse up and running.



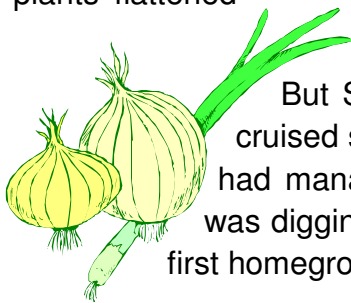
Spring planting spans three or four months. Harvesting runs from June until the first frost (usually in late October).

There's flexibility in the year-long scheduling of farm chores but sometimes Mother Nature throws several spanners into the works. And it happened this year.

Winter was unusually frigid. The greenhouse operation was delayed two months. Spring arrived right on time according to the calendar. The orchard, strawberries and blueberries bloomed beautifully. Then, in mid-April, we found ourselves suddenly back in the grip of winter with five days of below freezing temperatures. We looked with much regret at the loss of all this year's fruit crop, but the early planted potatoes, onion, garlic and herbs made a brave recovery.

The month of May was generally wet so field preparation was hit or miss and often we found ourselves transplanting starts from the greenhouse by hand in muddy fields. June was a drought, the likes of which hasn't been seen since weather records had been kept. We have a simple irrigation system and were able to coax our crops to thrive. But the drought still forced wildlife (mostly rabbits and whitetail deer) to move out of the surrounding forest to feast on the smorgasbord of tasty delights like green beans and leaf lettuces.

You've heard the saying "be careful what you wish/pray for?" At the very end of June, the sky opened and dumped more than four inches of rain in two days. Fields were flooded, roads scoured, plants flattened to ground by the forces of driving rain and high winds. Half the year already past and it was becoming a very easy matter to despair.



But Saturday afternoon, June 30, I arrive back home from a day in town and cruised slowly past my muddy fields. Pumpkins were perky, peppers and tomatillos had managed to right themselves, and tomatoes were ripening. And my husband was digging new potatoes, pulling garlic and onions, and picking squash for our very first homegrown harvest supper.

As I took a stroll through one of our vegetable patches, my eye was caught by one particular row of leafy green: the mustards. I planted some mustard several years ago, but never since. However, every year, at least one "volunteer" mustard plant pops up in that particular field.

This year dozens sprouted and, despite every imaginable affliction thrown at them, each mustard plant has rebounded to become better and better following every instance of adversity. Matthew, Mark and Luke each mention having the faith of a mustard seed. For me, I have that physical reminder.

And today I noticed some of the mustard plants bolting toward the sky, producing flowers and seed pods, to come back again as the seasons turn. No matter how scrambled the seasons may be.

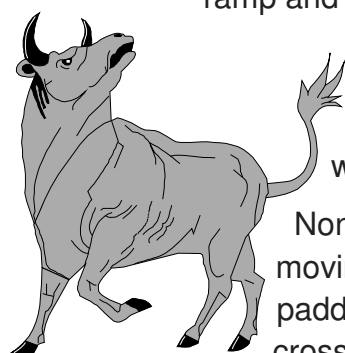
A Load of Bull

Jayne Tite

Well a load of four bulls, actually. Four year olds, each about the size of a mini bus. Michael had asked me if I could be here to receive them and, once the truck had left, put them in with the yearling heifers. 'No problem' sez I. Duly, at 3.30, the truck arrives and all is quiet inside, a good sign, 'cos it means that they are not upset. Back up to the ramp, and doors open. In goes the driver and opens the pen they are in and shoos them out. Well they didn't want to be shoosed, and just stood there, all calm and lazy like.

So he prods and yells at them and eventually, reluctantly, they move to the back of the truck and the first head appears through the door. A long pause while sir takes in the local scenery. Now I had set up a small holding area for them while the truck beats its retreat, with the intention of letting them out into the holding pens paddock while I go and open the gates for the wee girls to come through to meet their new boy friends. All well organised and about half an hour's work in total.

The panorama that sir had taken in must have included the holding set up, which, it transpired, was not given his seal of approval. With a convulsive heave he starts to move. Fast. Down the ramp and like a prize hurdler over the gate. The next two were not quite so fast, didn't



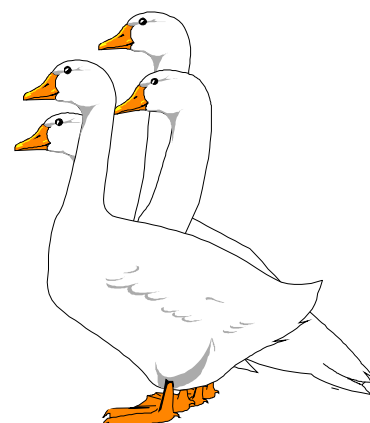
quite make the leap and landing on top of the gate, ripped the wire mesh from the holding chain and swung the gate open. Number four kind'a sauntered down the ramp along the chute and out the gate. Why jump when you can get others to open the gate for you?

None of this would have been too much of a nuisance, other than time wise, moving them to where they should be, if it had not been for the fact that the paddock they choose was inhabited by fifty odd calves, many of them Hereford cross from these very bulls last year. Well all hell broke loose as with vociferous cries that sounded very much like "daddy, daddy", the calves raced to meet their sires. A bit like children who have never known their father but have been told that one day he will come and see them. And here, lo and behold were four daddies to choose from.

The big boys were not impressed at being surrounded and buffeted by this howling young mob, and took off with the little ones in hot pursuit. Now let me assure you that eight week old calves, given motivation, can move very fast, and the lumbering Hereford tanks didn't stand a chance. But then neither did I. First things first, though. Get rid of a grinning driver and his truck, before I took to him with me wee stick. Grinning! He didn't have to sort this lot out. Once he was away, close off the road access gate, close the pen gate into the holding paddock, and across to let the girls through so that they could entice the boys to come and visit them. Then the hard part, separating the sheep from the goats, and I wasn't sure which were which to start with.

No point in meeting them head on, hopefully if I could get behind them I could drive them, with, probably some of the calves, that seemed inevitable, into the pens. So I crossed into the next paddock, which has a duck pond within, enabling me to move down parallel with the bulls without them seeing me.

That's when I discovered that we had a pair of wild geese nesting by the pond. They, with twenty odd ducks, were foraging on the grass as I approached. This is the first time in three years that I have seen geese here, or so many ducks at this time of year, together with the Pukeko, a native wetlands bird, who loves wet paddocks with fresh green grass. It

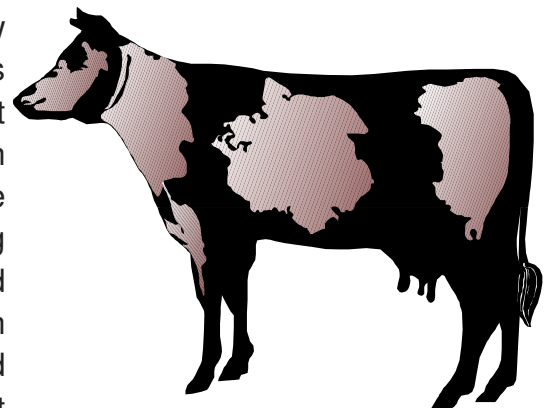


seems that my refusal to accept duck shooters is allowing some of the wild life to return to the locale. Already, this year, I have seen a lot more ducklings than normal, and they seem to be surviving reasonably well, partly, I suspect, because we don't have any local hawks in the immediate area, and the rats get well feed up around my calves.

But as usual, I digress. Ducks and geese took to the air, and the bulls were quick to spot the reason why, moving off away from where I was heading, a gate at the far corner of the paddock. But that was fine, 'cos it meant that they and the motley flock of kiddies moved up towards the pens. Once in behind them I quietly manoeuvred them in the direction I wanted, but calves are not easily manoeuvred, and took off across the paddock, taking the multiple daddies with them. And that was the game for the next half hour. I was ready to give up when the calves slowed down and let the bulls get ahead of them. Around the paddock once more, and it was obvious that I was not going to get them into the pens, so aimed for the top gate into the duck pond paddock.

By now the calves had exhausted themselves and stood in a mob in the centre of the paddock watching proceedings, disillusioned with the lack of interest, in fact down right rejection, the big boys had shown them. Having got them close to the gate I nipped over the electric fence, (what do you think I carry a six foot stick for?), and up to open the gate. Naturally the boys moved off, but they, too, were a wee bit tired and I was able to get between them and the calves and push them through the gate. Half the job done.

Next was to get them into the paddock with the lassies. Now here was a problem. I knew that if I opened the gate the girls would bowl through in double quick time, and that if I left it until I had the boys up to the gate I would not be able to open it without spooking them away from it. Still, I tried for the latter. Around the paddock we went, three of the fellas playing docile and moving as directed, while the fourth, like a good rear guard, lagged some thirty to forty yards behind, both eyes fixed firmly on me. This was the boy who enjoyed hurdling, so I was a wee bit careful not to get too close. At last, after only one turn around the duck pond they were up to the gate. Again I retreated and nipped over the power fence.



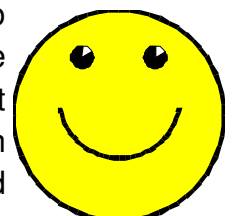
Well as I expected, even though I had a close escort of expectant ladies, the boys were not having a bar of it and retreated back to the pond, which incidentally is situated in the middle of the thirty acre paddock. So with a sigh of resignation, I opened the gate and let the girls loose. But was any interest mutual? Not a bit. As the heifers made for the pond, so the bulls made for the fence, and from that point on the twain just did not meet. So much for my plans for getting them back to their original paddock, complete with bulls.

(to be continued next month)

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Best of Luck

The self-absorbed parishioner was told by her priest to go to her community and do something kind for a needy person. Unable to bring herself to actually approach one of the local unfortunates, she scribbled, "Best of luck", on a £20 note and thrust it into the nearest hand. The next day she was startled when the same man approached his benefactor. "Nice work, lady", he said cheerfully. "Best of Luck paid ten to one."



Counselling

Ailsa Wright

'One thing leads to another' so the saying goes, and often we do the one thing with no thought of just **where** that might lead. At times, maybe that's just as well!

I joined i-church in May 2005 and found myself fairly quickly getting involved in its life. I enjoyed meeting for worship in Live Chat and chatting afterwards. I was amazed by how close it was possible to get to other people with just the use of words in a chat room. For those of you with lots of experience of such places I may be saying nothing new but for me in my naiveté it was a revelation! My only previous experience of chatting using the internet was using MSN occasionally with family members.

I was having some major difficulties in my B&M church and I found myself sharing some of what was going on. Everyone was very kind and caring. One person, Babs, took a special interest and gave me a lot of her time as I tried to work things through. I eventually joined Babs' pastoral group in i-church and got to know her better.

I was extremely surprised when she told me that she felt I had a talent for counselling and should pursue it at some time. It appeared to me that I had been on the receiving end of counselling from Babs and others (and had probably been quite selfish in the time I had taken up) rather than doing anything remotely associated with counselling myself. However, as Babs is a counsellor herself, I reckoned she must know what she was talking about. I found there was a 10 week basic course being run in our local college in January 2006 so I applied and was accepted. My reasoning was that it was only 10 weeks and that would soon pass. At the end of it I felt that I would be in a better position to know if I really did have any talent for counselling.



I found the course very interesting and challenging. It was made plain that in the process of learning how to listen to others we would actually learn a great deal about ourselves. As we became familiar with the various skills we needed, we practised on one another. One person would be the counsellor, one the client and one the observer. As a client we were asked to share a real issue with the counsellor. It couldn't be something too big as these were short sessions of counselling and we needed to avoid opening a

Pandora's box of hurt or worry that could not be resolved.

At first when we were the counsellor it seemed that there were too many things to remember at once: our body language, listening, eye contact, stopping our own thoughts, reflecting back the feelings, paraphrasing, the list went on and on. Our tutor told us it was like learning to drive a car and that one day it would be automatic. I have to say that much of it now it, but it was hard to believe at the time.

Being the observer was a challenge as we had to give honest feedback on how the counsellor had done. It was really quite difficult to be honest but not hurt someone's feelings. However, without the honesty there was no way we could learn and improve. Accepting the feedback, both good and bad, is a great challenge too. Having learnt to be open about myself in i-church when chatting I found it quite easy to share as the client. For other people this was something new, coming out from behind a well-built mask and showing themselves warts and all to other people. Scary stuff!

Each week we wrote a learning record or journal where we reflected on what we had learnt as far as skills were concerned and what we had learnt about ourselves. I found myself checking how I listened to others and making sure that I gave them full attention as we were taught in the course. I

began to notice if others didn't listen to me well, and I also began to get a bit annoyed about it. By exploring my feelings I learnt a great deal more about myself and my needs in relationships. Looking at the way that prejudice in us can damage our ability to listen really brought me up short. I had to face the prejudices that I had and begin to work to overcome them.

The ten weeks just flew by and before the course was finished we were being pointed to the next one by the tutor. By then I was enjoying myself so much and learning such a lot that I knew I had to apply to join the next course. I had by then applied to be a pastoral group leader in i-church. The first course had taught me just how much is involved in really listening to people. I knew that as a PG leader I would need to listen to others and I wanted to get it right as much as possible.

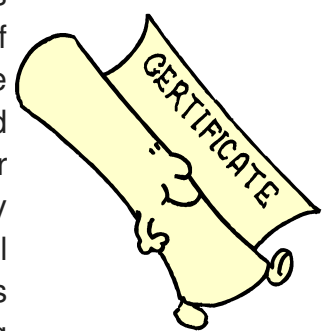
By the time I had started the second course I knew that counselling was something I really wanted to do. Those who know me, know that I do some crazy things at times and I decided to risk



applying for two Counselling Certificate courses, one Christian and one secular, knowing that they would overlap for part of the time. I thought that God would put a block in my way if it was wrong. I needed to go for interviews to both and so nothing was certain. However, I was accepted on both courses.

In September I began the 30 week course at the local college. Every Wednesday I attended from 9.45am to 1pm and then dashed back home to get ready to go to work. Every week I wrote a journal, sometimes as much as 8 pages long. I grappled with Freud, Egan, Ellis, Marlow, Rogers and many more as we studied approaches to counselling. I looked at loss, bereavement and maternal attachment as described by Kubler-Ross, Bowlby and Worden. I continued to learn about myself and to face things about my character. I discovered I could say what I was feeling without getting anxious about the reaction of others. I learnt much more about my needs. It all sounds very selfish but I think it has helped me to be less selfish. I can let things go because I am more at home with myself, more confident. I don't have to have the last word.

In January I began the Christian counselling course which involves travelling for four hours by train to study over a weekend 10 times a year. Many of the skills I need for this course have already been learnt but I am having to learn a Christian model of counselling and the Christian view of what a person is and what their core needs are. The theory says that we seek for security, self-worth and significance in other people or in things we do. Instead we should look for those from God. I'm finding applying the model quite difficult and I'm really struggling with the coursework. Currently I need to write about the Biblical character Jacob and apply the counselling model to him. The research has been very interesting and has led to me learn a lot of ancient history. Writing what I know in 2000 words is proving a challenge! (I'm starting with about 60 pages of notes).



As I write this, I know that I have passed my secular course in counselling. All I need now is the certificate to prove it. I've completed half of my Christian course and have applied to study the Christian Diploma in Counselling next year. I've had ten sessions of personal counselling which is a requirement of the Christian course. The next task is to find a place to begin to actually practise counselling as a student and so start to get on with the job.

I'm really glad that I started on this road. I think that doing even a basic counselling course is a very valuable thing for anyone. If more people were listened to properly there might be less unhappiness and loneliness in the world.

If you do sign up to do a course don't forget, one thing leads to another!

News from Australia

Stan Walden

When the power fails?

It happened recently in New South Wales, Australia, after gales and heavy rain. 200,000 homes without power. That is what the voice on the radio kept saying during every news bulletin. Preaching to all who had enough power to listen. Scintillating imaginations, and feeding them with the idea that they should be sorry and send an email of sympathy.



And that is what so many did. Sent an email full of sorrow, and 'how can we help' words that dripped like drops of sugary honey into the ether.

Doesn't take long to send an email before relaxing in comfort to watch the scenes of destruction on the telly. "Wow! Just look at that. Trees down all over the place. Nine people swept away and drowned. All those cars piled on top of each other, or scattered around the street as if they were coming and going on strange journeys that led to nowhere. How terrible!"

But what happened to those on the other end? To those without power. No heating. No way of cooking except by gathering wet twigs from the howling gale in the garden to light a fire in the garage. And certainly no light or TV or even email for at least twenty four hours. For some the power was AWOL for several days.

So how did the powerless feel after power was restored?

Don't know. Were they grateful for all those email messages they were able to read when the computer started working again? Perhaps they didn't get round to doing that for a while, until all the mud and debris had been cleared away and the computer dried out, if it had survived.

But I think they would be grateful to know their friends had been thinking about them. I hope so, because I sent an email.

Recipe by Paula

Tomato Soup with Egg Dumplings

Heat tomato soup in a pot (homemade from scratch or from a tin)

For dumplings:

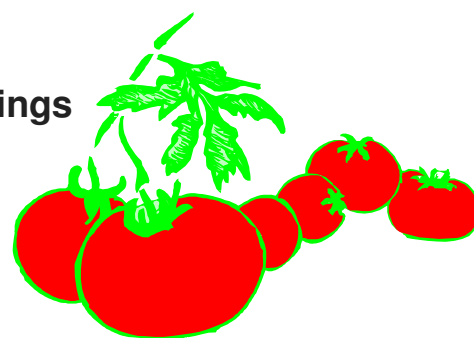
Whisk an egg or two just to thoroughly mix but not frothing.

Add seasonings to taste (finally minced onion and garlic or onion and garlic powder, parsley, thyme, basil, salt, pepper, whatever -- I usually use Mrs. Dash Garlic & Herb seasoning blend--a salt-free product available here in the States in a small shaker container) and enough flour to make a somewhat solid but still sticky dough.

Add dumpling dough by small spoonful to simmering soup (be aware the dumplings will very much plump up during cooking).

Gently stir often to keep dumplings from sticking to bottom of the soup pot.

When dumplings are all floating to the top of the soup, it should be ready to enjoy!





Churches Media Conference

Tim Hutchings

A few months ago, my friends at St Pixels passed on an interesting proposition. They were going to go tell the world about online church at a big get-together for Christians in the media, the Churches Media Conference – and the organisers had given them a whole talk series to get the word out. Would I come too? Well, sure. Armed with a box of freshly-printed i-church business cards, my best attempt at some Powerpoint slides and the blessing of the i-church Council, I set off for Derby.

The conference lasted three days. We heard talks from various important media types from radio and TV about their work getting Christian programmes on air. I heard two big messages again and again throughout the conference: 'Christian media' needs to have all the production values, good ideas and talent of non-Christian media, or it doesn't deserve to be published; and 'Christian media' should be integrated into the non-Christian, not separated from it. Put 'Christian' or 'Church' in the title, people said, and you lose most of your audience at once.

Quite a few of the people attending the conference worked online. There were two people representing 'Pray As You Go', two from St Pixels, a lady from 'i-Chaplaincy', a guy from 'reJesus', several people advertising different online resources of music, video, audio and images, a lady from the 'ChristianConnections' dating site and a few people working in online evangelism and website design. The creator of '2day.ws microportals' encouraged everyone to take up his style of online church site, an interesting attempt to put the local church at the centre of a network of sites linking a whole local community together. The Churches Advertising Network spoke about the history of their attempts to get the Christian message heard in the UK with controversial, high-tech campaigns, most recently linking with MySpace and ReJesus. I met our own Diocesan Communications Director too, quite by chance, and gathered a page or two of her thoughts on publicity, advertising and the future of i-church.

I was asked to give a talk about the history of the online church. The early years are hard to trace, but online Christian groups are recorded from the early 80s, and website-based churches from a decade later. 'The First Church of Cyberspace' launched in 1994, followed not too much later by 'WebChurch' and 'Vurch' in the UK. We popped up in 2004, the same year as Church of Fools and the first 3D churches in the Second Life world. The biggest online church out there right now is LifeChurch.tv, an American evangelical megachurch that broadcasts its services to two online congregations, 6-800/week on a website and 50/week in Second Life – but there are much bigger things to come. These are exciting times to be online!

Online Christians have a lot to teach each other, and a lot of ideas, resources and experiences to share. We're hoping to follow up as many of these links as we can, to see what we can learn to help the i-church community and its website. I'm excited by the idea of an i-church site that offers space for visitors to ask the questions they want answered, that includes high-quality, entertaining audio, text and imagery; I'd love to see what we can learn from the prayers recorded on Pray-As-You-Go and the experiences of the i-Chaplaincy. From what I heard, it sounds like a lot of people are just as interested to hear how we're building a real community, a church, online.

Thanks for sending me! I hope the connections made turn out to be useful – and I'd definitely encourage i-church to go back next year.



Book Review

Jayne Tite

Something Beautiful for God - Mother Teresa of Calcutta

I doubt I need to say much about Malcolm Muggeridge; he is well known as a philosopher, and in his latter years as a Christian, a man who started out with a belief in God, who walked away, and returned to become a Roman Catholic. Indeed his return to the faith was inspired, in part by Mother Teresa.

In his presentation of this book Muggeridge writes:

“For me, Mother Teresa of Calcutta embodies Christian Love in action. Her face shines with the Love of Christ on which her whole life is centred.”

‘Something Beautiful for God’ is an account of Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity, the order she founded. When we look at past saints we have to rely heavily on old manuscripts, written, often at third hand, but here we have the life of a modern Saint to work with, and the author does justice to his subject, taking us along Mother Teresa’s road of love, and giving us an interview he had with her, in Calcutta, in the chapter “Mother Teresa Speaks”.

Muggeridge talks about the film that this book sprang from, and he brings to life the actions of a modern St Francis for us.

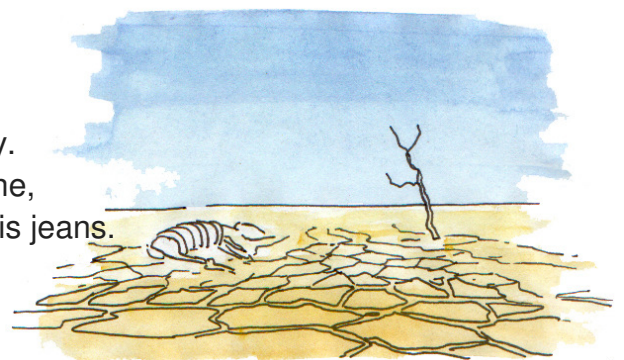
In among the written pages are a number of photographs that help us to understand the life she led, and the book ends with the Constitution of the International Association of Co-Workers of Mother Teresa, an affiliated body to the Missionaries of Charity, together with a chronological table of her life up to the time the book was first published in 1971.

Something Beautiful for God - Malcolm Muggeridge - Collins, London, 1971. ISBN 0 00 215769 1

There have been several reprints of this book, and like many of Malcolm Muggeridge’s works, should be easy to find on the second-hand book shelves. It is well worth the hunt for it.

Gratitude

Today I stood at my window and cursed the pouring rain,
Today a desperate farmer prayed for his fields of grain.
My weekend plans are ruined, it almost makes me cry
While the farmer lifts his arms and blesses the clouded sky.
The alarm went off on Monday and I cursed my work routine,
Next door a laid-off mechanic feels the empty pockets of his jeans.
I can’t wait for my vacation, some time to take for me,
He doesn’t know tonight how he’ll feed his family.
I cursed my leaky roof and the grass I need to mow,
A homeless man downtown checks for change in the telephone.
I need a new car, mine is getting really old,
He huddles in a doorway, seeking shelter from the cold.
With blessings I’m surrounded, the rain, a job, a home,
Though my eyes are often blinded by the things I think I own.



Poem - Little Children

Jill Bunyan

Little children
kneeling, seeking
crying out for love
children coming
walking, running
scooped up in His arms.

Life-worn parents
loving, caring
tend those in their care
taking all that life throws at them
fraught with worry, scared
What of Jesus and His love?
Thoughts turn into prayer.



Looking at His congregation
from the pedestal
where His people placed Him
heading for a fall
Empty words from empty heart
echo round the wall.

When we're hurting
Christ is gentle
When we're weak, He's strong
He's our rock, our hiding place
In Jesus we belong.

Man's maker was made man that He,
Ruler of the stars,
might nurse at His mother's breast;
that the Bread of Heaven might hunger,
the Fountain thirst,
the Light sleep,
the Way be tired from the journey;
that the Truth might be accused by false witnesses,
the Judge of the living and the dead be judged by a mortal
judge,
Justice be sentenced by the unjust,
the Teacher be beaten with whips,
the Vine be crowned with thorns
the Foundation be suspended on wood;
that Strength might grow weak;
that the Healer might be wounded;
that Life might die.

St Augustine

Reunion 2007

Please don't forget that in October we are holding the first ever i-church reunion - where members can meet face to face. There will be a meeting in Yorkshire on the weekend of October 6th and in Oxford on the following weekend, October 13th/14th.

We were planning to meet at St Frideswide's but may now have to look for another venue with the announcement of Russell's departure as our Web pastor. Who knows, we may have a new Pastor long before October and may well be meeting him or her then as well.

Please keep an eye open for the discussion which is under "the sofa" (it's called Reunion 2007). We'd like as many people as possible to meet, and we will have i-church visitors from the USA with us on both weekends!

This is a great chance to meet friends in the flesh. Whilst it is wonderful to get to know people via our keyboards, there is nothing quite like being able to sit and chat in real life, so to speak.

The discussion forum will keep you posted about where we hope to meet - for example a trip to York Minster is on the cards sometime during that week and there will be a barbeque in Wakefield on the evening of October 6th. All welcome.



Staying in Oxford?

If you are visiting Oxford, and you need somewhere to stay then read on. i-church member Matt Clayson has fixed up a special deal at the Hotel where he works.

Double/Twin room	£90 (based on 2 sharing)
Single	£80

All prices include tax at the current rate and full English breakfast. Dinner is available for £20 extra per person in our Library Restaurant.

To book, either PM/email Matthew Clayson, check out the web site (<http://www.lintonlodge.com>), telephone +44 (0) 1865 553461 or send us a fax on +44 (0) 1865 559327.

All enquiries must be directed to Matthew Clayson or Karen in Reservations (or you won't get the special rate!). Bookings are subject to availability.

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.



Scrooge writes

You will have noticed that relatively little financial information is published in The NET, the main reason being that this is a largely public document. However, it has been agreed that from July onwards the Treasurer's Report to Council will be made more widely available to members - in a more digestible form hopefully than the report council members have to read! So, members can look out for a regular update on our finances in the forums.

For the benefit of our non members I can say that i-church was founded with grants which were designed to get i-church "off the ground" - but there was always an expectation that, like the vast majority of churches around the world, we would become self-funding. At the moment our member giving is not enough to pay our monthly bills in full, but giving is on a gentle upward trend so the outlook is looking better. At the moment, our grants will run out in the middle of next year and we have enough savings to keep us going through to the end of 2008.

As well as looking towards our membership for financial assistance we are exploring opportunities for grants. We have an active finance sub-committee exploring all the avenues to raise our levels of income so that we have a long future ahead of us. I'll keep you all posted on our progress.

If you would like to make a donation, visit <http://www.i-church.org/cms/giving>. If you are a UK tax payer please also consider signing a gift aid declaration, available on the same web page. This allows i-church to reclaim a further 28p for every pound you donate, which really boosts your giving! Thank you for your support - it is really appreciated.

Worship in i-church

Being a 24/7 church is a constant challenge. We have had several discussions about what would be good times to meet for worship and the best we can manage is always a compromise.

The compline service at 10pm each evening (UK time) has proved popular. However, it must be very strange for those in the USA to be thinking of sleep when they haven't even had their evening meal. From Sunday 8th (Saturday 7th in the USA) there will be a short compline service at 0200GMT (10pm EDT) twice a week. Do try to support this venture if you can. You might even feel able to lead the service one day!



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 Fri	08:00
Sat & Sun	09:00
Daily	20:00 & 21:00
Sun & Wed (i.e. Sat & Tue 10pm EDT)	02:00
As advertised	11:00

Open House - Tuesdays

Study	19:00
Chat	19:45
Worship	20:00

NB - These are GMT times. You can now get services in your local time on the member Home Page. Check it out.