

25th January 2009

The Conversion Of Saint Paul

St. MARY'S Newsletter



Sunday Worship

10.30am Parish Communion	Readings	Della
	Drinks	Dolly

You are most welcome to St Marys this morning. Forty or so of our regular congregation are in York to join in with the inauguration consecration of the new Bishop of Sheffield, Dr Stephen Croft.

Collect For Today

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence:
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Today Today Taize Prayer



Taize Prayer:

Discovering inner life
through simple sung prayer.

7.30pm this evening in church.

6.30pm for singing practice.

This Week At St Marys

Toddler Group	Wednesday 9.30-11.30
Music Group Practice	This Thursday 7.30pm in church. See Yo for details.

Archdeacon's Letter

The Bishop's letter is written this month by the Archdeacon of Doncaster, Bob Fitzharris:

I want to tell you a story – it is true and I write it as a cease-fire has been announced between Israel and Gaza.

In my study I have a photograph that I took in Gaza City some years ago. It shows a smiling 11 year old girl, wearing a bright red sweatshirt and a white scarf, standing proudly in her beautiful classroom. Behind her through the window you can see an orange tree. The scene that my camera captured was one of beauty and peace in the middle of a chaotic part of the world. The girl herself was deaf and the photograph was taken in the Atfaluna School for Deaf Children in the middle of Gaza City.

"Atfaluna" means "Our Children" in Arabic. It was founded in 1992 by Geraldine (Gerry) Shawa, an American Christian who has lived in Gaza since 1971. Gerry was driven by a deep belief that Jesus taught that it was those at and beyond the margins of society who needed the most love.

In Gaza, for a variety of reasons, there were many, many children who were deaf and found themselves in a prison of silence, isolated from even their own families because they could not communicate with words or hear family stories.. Unable even to avail themselves of the rudimentary education that was available, they found themselves isolated even within their own families.

It was such children Gerry determined to help. Against the odds Gerry's dream took shape and Atfaluna grew and developed. Starting from a position of respect the children were taught how to communicate using sign language. Those who could were helped by recycled hearing aids sent from all over the world – including our own diocese. The children were taught to read and write. They were taught trade and other skills that were needed in their community and were enabled to become valued members of gazan society.

In early 2008 Atfaluna was helping 275 students aged from four to seventeen and 88 older students. In April Gerry was forced to close the school because there was no way to transport the children to school. At the same time restrictions on imports

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Vicar: Julian Sullivan 0114 272 4987

into Gaza meant that the supply of hearing aids for refurbishment and the batteries to power them stopped completely. Life for those who had got used to using a hearing aid reverted to the frightening, old world of silence. Gerry retired in October 2008 and handed the baton over to Mohamed Elsharif as Executive Director.

The school reopened in the summer but closed again on 30 December 2008 because of intense, daily and nightly air raids. Thank God that it did close because on 7th January 2009 the school was severely damaged by a bomb dropped from the air.

I now have on my desk a picture sent on 14th January from Gaza of the classroom where I met the children and photographed the girl in the red sweatshirt and white scarf. The classroom is no longer beautiful. The windows are blown out; the ceiling is hanging in tatters and there is no orange tree - even when things settle down in that part of the Middle East it will cost hundreds of thousands of pounds to rebuild the beautiful, peaceful school that was a haven for marginalised children. That is if they can find the money.

I hold no brief for the people of violence. I deplore the actions the people who fire "Grad" rockets from Gaza or Lebanon in to Israel. I also deplore the actions of the State of Israel for its disproportionate response to such provocation.

Reliable sources say that over 400 children have been killed in Gaza since Christmas. We must all learn from the wisdom of those who have gone before....

A Hasidic story tells of a conversation between Moses and God after the Children of Israel had been delivered to safety through the waters of the Red Sea:

Moses says, "Thank you Lord for such a wonderful victory over the Egyptians, they are defeated and drowned! We are so, so happy, thank you again! - but Lord, why are you crying?" And God replies, "Moses, I am crying for my children, the Egyptians..."

In the Genesis Chapter 1 verse 27 we read that all men women and children are created in the image of God. I and many others have wept at the Holocaust Museum, Yad Veshem, and I and many others have wept in Gaza. Many of us know and love people in both places. Please pray that we all may see each other with the eyes of our Creator. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem and pray for the peace of Gaza. Pray for the lasting peace that will come when we see each other with the eyes of God. Pray that, by God's grace, our eyes may be opened - for Christ's sake.

Bob Fitzharris

Iona News

If you are joining the group travelling to Iona, would you like to start saving towards the cost? Cash, or cheques to St Marys Bramall Lane PCC, can be given to Church Treasurer Margaret I on any Sunday.

There are just 24 Sundays left to save on!

Dave Bilborough At St Marys

On the evening of **Saturday 7th March**, please put in your diaries that there will be an acoustic gig here at St Marys with renowned singer-songwriter Dave Bilborough, plus two excellent support artists. Tickets will be available soon at £8 / £5 (limited number available). This event is being supported by many local churches as well as St Marys.

Beverage And Refreshment Ministries

The BARM team (also known as the people who make drinks for us after the service) are urgently looking for some new members.

I'm sure we all appreciate the work that goes into providing drinks for us. Especially, we'd like to say a big thankyou to Jean M. who has faithfully helped, mostly behind the scenes with preparing and clearing up the tea thinks. Thank you Jean.

This is a really important part of what happens at St Marys. The duty involves preparing a trolley, and making sure everything's ready just before the service, along with making and serving the drinks at the end, plus helping with the washing up. If you are often late and couldn't do the whole thing, don't let that put you off - perhaps you could help serve and someone else could do the setting up. Even just washing up would be a big help.

Please speak to Julian, Elaine, or Jon, if you might be able to help. Thank you.

Next Sunday – 1st February

Epiphany 4 / Presentation

10.30am Parish Communion

People with jobs to do next Sunday: Michael K (readings); Steve or Yo (prayers); Margaret A (drinks); Margaret A & Penny B (Communion assistants); John & Margaret (stewards); Steve, Yo, Ortrude, Jess (music)

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