



Autumn 2011

Southwark Diaconal Newsletter

Vol. 6 No. 1

Welcome to Southwark Diaconal News.

In this issue Deacon John Letley brings us up to date on Faith on the Inside, prison chaplaincy. Please consider very seriously his invitation to help with this apostolate and respond if circumstances permit.

In the summer our brother, Deacon Bill Eason (Pembury) departed this life after over 23 years service in the diaconate. We hope to include an appreciation in our next issue. May he rest in peace.

If you or someone you know is experiencing difficulty in receiving the Newsletter please contact Deacon Michael Dale michael.dale21@gmail.com

On-going Formation (OGF)

Our OGF programme this year commenced at St Anselm's Dartford in the new Parish Centre. Bernard Farrell-Roberts of the Maryvale Institute gave the lectures and led some often lively discussions on Pastoral Healthcare and Ethics. Bernard is the Director at Maryvale of Diaconal Formation and a member of the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross, now established in the Spanish Diocese of Tarragona to minister to the many English-speaking communities now living there. See www.brotherhoodholycross.com The power-point presentation of the Day's lectures will shortly be available on our diocesan web site.

In the absence of Fr Peter Edwards on the Day for health reasons, Fr Christopher Pearson of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham kindly came to celebrate our midday Mass. Following lunch this gave us the opportunity to hear directly from him briefly about the origins of the Ordinariate and its development.

Our March Day in Merton will be given by Fr Ian Kerr, the well known biographer of Blessed John Henry Newman. Interest in his talks is likely to extend beyond the diaconal community. Many priests, in particular, might like to attend. They are in any case always welcome at our Days, but you might care to draw this occasion to their attention. There is no reason, too, why lay people with an interest in and devotion to Blessed Newman should not attend. The only condition is that priests and people book in advance (and pay) rather than simply turn up unexpected!

Our third Day at the Cathedral in May is in preparation now. We plan to continue and pick up, on some of themes of the Dartford Day on pastoral care of the sick and the elderly.

Next year, 2011-12, we plan to take a serious look, as deacons, at Schools, Education and the Church. Most deacons are or have been involved in this, one way or another, as parents, grandparents, school governors or teachers. Many are involved in school chaplaincy. We shall be looking for input to plan a helpful programme. Ideas please to the usual address.

Diocesan Diaconal Days this year:

Saturday 3rd March 2012 – Saint John Fisher, Merton. Father Ian Kerr on Blessed John Henry Newman.

Saturday 5th May 2012 – Cathedral.

Inside Faith – the view of a Prison Chaplain

by Reverend John Letley

There is now – and in my opinion more than ever before – a need for faith in our prisons. The men and women who are held in custody have the same physical, emotional and spiritual needs as everyone else, as well as a legal right to practise their faith whilst in prison. The Church has always had a unique place in our prisons. However, it is fair to say that its role has significantly changed as the attitude of society towards crime and punishment has also developed.

The first official chaplaincy appointments were made in 1773 when clergy were employed to care for the sick and those about to be executed. Thank goodness we have moved on since those draconian days.

During the harsh regime of the penitentiaries in the 19th century chaplains were promoted to the equivalent status of governors – indeed in some cases to replace the governor!

In modern times the structures have changed but the call for spiritual values remains a constant challenge; the Catholic prison ministry has a key role to play in the multi-faith chaplaincy teams that are at the heart of the prison system helping both prisoners and the staff who look after them to face up to the challenge of imprisonment.

For two years after being ordained I felt called to do something positive in the Church. I came into ministry with the idea of working with people who were on either the fringes of the Church or society. And you do meet both species in prison! I think I ministered in a practical sense to more people in my first two months as a prison chaplain than in the first two years after my ordination.

I have found it very humbling and rewarding to work with men who often cannot even look themselves in the eye because of what they have done and where they find themselves.

A prisoner once said to me, “I sought sanctuary in your Chapel. I have always found it a relaxing place with people to talk to. It is a very nice and welcoming place to come to.”

So what do I spend my time doing on a daily basis? There are the statutory duties which include meeting all new prisoners to the jail within 24 hours of arrival, visiting those in the Healthcare Centre and Segregation Unit and those prisoners who have specifically asked to see me.

In addition as Catholic chaplain I lead regular services and prayer groups such as Benediction, Rosary and Stations of the Cross as well as arrange for religious instruction for those who wish to explore or deepen their faith. I actually run an RCIA group in my prison.

One of the most difficult and challenging parts of my work is the breaking of bad news to prisoners: perhaps a death in the family or the like.

Like everything a job is never done until the paperwork is completed. And that applies to the work of a chaplain. We must look after the ‘business’ side of things: for example, all documentation, records and reports must be kept up to date.

As a chaplain you have responsibility for the whole prison both prisoners and staff.

Prison staff have a difficult, demanding and responsible job especially in these days of Government cuts from which we are not immune; chaplains have the opportunity to listen to staff problems and offer care and support to them wherever possible.

It is essential to give the prisoners a taste of life that they would find in the Church on the outside and so that is how the Catholic programme is structured and follows the Liturgical year.

Key to me being a good chaplain is that I need to be prepared to go at least half way to meet people who may at first appear to have little time for the formalities of religion. The initial contact may well not be on overtly religious grounds but to help sort out the everyday practical problems prisoners have.

As part of a multi-faith chaplaincy I have to focus my attentions on the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the prisoners. I have learnt a lot by working with experienced prison officers from the residential units – work which requires a high level of sensitive listening skills, a non-judgemental attitude, and no-little resilience.

Also to be a successful chaplain you need to have something that everyone working in prison should have: a sense of humour!

As Catholic chaplain I am expected to work closely with chaplains from other religious traditions as well as governors, discipline staff and the many different civilian staff who now work in prisons. This calls for differing qualities such as good communication skills and a sensitive nature. Because as a chaplain I have sometimes a unique opportunity to see those aspects of an inmate's personality that no other member of staff may have seen, we may be called on to contribute towards the assessment of inmates in the form of parole or other social reports.

As a chaplain I have to be aware of the need to maintain an independent stance; for the trust of prisoners is slowly gained but lost in an instant. Small details, such as taking the trouble to call a prisoner by his first name, are significant in distinguishing chaplains as 'part but apart from' the system.

Working as a chaplain is by its nature multi-faith. It is true to say that chaplaincy can be more effective if it works well as a team.

Even as a Catholic chaplain I find myself having to facilitate the practice of non-Christian religions such as Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Paganism just to mention a few!

It is men who predominantly make up the prison population which recently hit an all-time high. However, there is a female prison population and it is generally agreed that women respond to imprisonment quite differently from men. They suffer isolation from family and society more keenly. Anyone working in prisons must have the ability to respond with sensitivity and with empathy to this suffering. Prisoners are increasingly young, unstable insecure and many foreign prisoners have only a basic grasp of English. This demands special understanding and patience on my part as a chaplain.

Finally is worth remembering that all chaplaincies contribute in many respects to the 'conscience' of the prison. It is part of the Church's mission to establish God's kingdom – or community – on earth. It needs to be concerned for the whole prison, creatively challenging its ethos.

No matter how you dress it up, a ministry as a chaplain will be challenging.

There is currently a need for Catholics with a vision, a clear message and a keen sense of vocation for Sessional posts at HMP Rochester and whilst there are no other vacancies at present there is always the opportunity to volunteer to gain experience and equally to see if you are suited to prison chaplaincy work. Chaplains have a central place in the day to day life and experience of prisoners and staff. Prison ministry places chaplains in a unique and privileged position giving open access to many who are regarded as inaccessible, but whom the Gospel holds as essential and at its very centre. "...you visited me in prison, and you came to see me (Mt 25: 36)."

If you are interested in Prison Chaplaincy please contact me and I will put you in touch with your nearest prison.



Deacon John Letley has been the full-time Roman Catholic Chaplain at HMP Swaleside on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent since November 2006

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The Permanent Diaconate in the Archdiocese of Southwark

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Retreats 2011-2012:

May 2012: Friday May 11th to Sunday May 13th at Maison d'Accueil, Merville, France.

Conducted by Fr Peter Hall, OFM. **Now Booking.**

September 2012: Friday 14th to Sunday 16th September at the Emmaus Centre, West Wickham.

Please pray for:

Our students in formation for the Permanent Diaconate:

First Year: Ian Black, Aidan McPartlan, Wayne Du Preez, Peter Sebastian and Wayne Tuckell.

Second Year: Michael Carrucan and Barry Mellish.

Third Year: Alfred Banya and Jim Coleman.

Four aspirants for the Permanent Diaconate accepted into the propaedeutic year:

Julian Burling (Wimbledon, Edge Hill), Michael Butt (Wimbledon, St Winifride),

Simon English (Tooting Bec) and Tom McCarthy (Tooting Bec).

Their wives and families.

For Fr Peter Edwards, Director of Formation for the Permanent Diaconate in our diocese who has been suffering severe sciatica and other complications which have been restricting his mobility.

Deacon Bill Eason, R.I.P., who died this summer, his widow Frances and family.

Support Groups

Croydon: Contact Deacon Vincent Morrison marycrmorrisson@yahoo.co.uk Deacons come from West Croydon, Purley, Selsdon, Norbury and occasionally Bromley. They meet at a home every three months or so on a Saturday evening to socialise and take it in turns to host a meal.

Gravesham: Contact Deacon Tom Berrie janettom@tiscali.co.uk Meet four times a year, all welcome.

Hayes / Orpington: Contact Deacon Michael Baldry michael.baldry@btinternet.com Alternate months October to June, usually second Wednesday, 8 pm at Our Lady of the Rosary, Hayes or Holy Innocents, Orpington.

Waterloo: Contact John Greenwood WJohngreenwood@aol.com Alternate months October to June, on Wednesdays, at 6.30 pm at St Patrick's Friary, Cornwall Road, SE1.

Rainham: Contact Deacon Alan Boxall alan-josie@blueyonder.co.uk Alternate months, usually five times a year October to June at St Thomas of Canterbury, London Road, Rainham.