

Dear all,

### **Last Sunday in Sofia**

This was the first Sunday since Lionel and Pat's return to the UK, and Jonathan and Chris were in Greece and Australia respectively but still ten of us gathered to celebrate communion in the little Catholic chapel in Oborishte including two of our newest acquaintances from Nigeria. Afterwards we retired to an Armenian restaurant called "Egur Egur" which apparently means "Come, come". This weekend we stayed with Gino and Mira - thank you both very much - and we visited the Greek Catholic church where they were recently wed and enjoyed seeing the record of their honeymoon starting in Cairo, a three day trek with the Bedu in the Sinai desert, St. Catherine's monastery, Petra and ending with scuba diving in the Red sea! Nice work if you can get it!

### **Last Sunday in Bucharest**

John reports a lovely service and a large Sunday school on Sunday. We also welcomed newcomers who found their way to us by finding our website (more about our website later). A warm welcome to you and I hope to meet you in person soon.

### **Next Sunday**

The fifth Sunday after Trinity. **Holy Communion at 10am with Sunday school** as usual. All welcome.

### **The grand unveiling**

As John announced on Sunday the official unveiling of the new statue and drinking fountain took place at 6pm. An assortment of four Orthodox priests and deacons sang and blessed their way through a short service (they must have a song for every occasion) and they then dowsed both the statue and assorted onlookers with "Holy" water. After a quick drink they were off. Our church contribution amounted to the use of our table, apple pie and the cups. Several interesting conversations ensued afterwards, including one with a local artist who is promising to paint a picture of our church for us.

### **Our website.**

The statistics never cease to amaze me. We go from strength to strength. I remember just a few months ago when I was excited that 200 people visited us. The statistics for May show that **630** separate computers visited us and we recorded **1094** "hits". This does mean of course that the site must be continually updated to be relevant and responsive. Jo Kinberger has done a fantastic job as our webmaster - and she is perfectly happy to go on filling that role - but she will be necessarily doing the job long distance after June. Jo and Rene, and of course baby Neve, will be leaving us all too soon which will be a great loss to the church. By the wonders of modern technology, Jo will continue to keep the site updated from Vienna which means we will need to hone our communication skills even further. And now a special message for Sharon in Sofia - yes the website is a different thing from this weekly newsletter and if you are reading this now you can access the site and all its wonders by double

clicking on the following address. <http://www.churchoftheresurrection.eu> Enjoy! I think the picture galleries might be of special interest.

### **Calling all priests!**

Another enormous loss to the church of the resurrection will be the eventual departure of Dr. John Barker - more about that over the next couple of months. At a recent meeting of the church council it was decided that if at all possible Eucharistic worship should be maintained here when the chaplain is in Sofia or on holiday etc. I know that several priests read this newsletter. If you are an Anglican priest (or know someone who is) - you must also be licensed to officiate by the Diocese in Europe (which I understand can take a few weeks) and will be in Bucharest and can cover any of the dates I am about to reel off - please drop me a line and then we'll talk.

**2008:** August 17th, September 13th, October 19th, November 9th, December 14th

**2009:** January 18th, February 15th, March 15th

### **Bishop David Hope**

.....arrived yesterday evening after leaving Yorkshire at 3.30 in the morning. Some members of the Church council provided a BBQ at the house of Dieter Stanzeleit last night, and the Bishop was in good form even after a full days travelling. Bishop David is a guest of the British embassy and don't forget, he will be presiding and preaching at a Eucharist tomorrow evening (Thursday) at 6.30pm.

### **The British Garden party**

The clock is ticking down! Friday the 27th is nearly upon us. How many tickets do you need? See me on Sunday to get yours and those for your friends.

### **Thought for the day**

Sometimes the attitude of various churches towards ordinary people who fall in love with each other makes me very sad.

Whatever official reasons are put forward, what on earth do the churches think it does to two people who are legally married in law to be told that they do not qualify for God's blessing on their union in *their* precious church because one or other of the couple is not from their tribe?

They are effectively telling them that whatever society says, God is withholding his blessing from them, and does not want them to be together until one of them changes their religion. Your union is just not right in the eyes of God. Whatever religions *think* they are telling people this is exactly what people are *hearing* - there is a difference.

"God loves you my son, but hates your wife, and your marriage - go and get her to change to the right religion. If not....get lost!!"

The arrogance and pride of Christian groups who think they have bought the patent on God's love and you can only access it via their brand label is truly astounding when you think of it.

It makes me sad, but it is a real compensation to see the relief and the smiles on the faces of all these Orthodox/Catholic/Pentecostal/Anglican etc etc couples when they find out that a church will deign to bless their marriage - something that is so very important to them, even in this day and age, and yet it is routinely and callously denied to them. More and more they are finding the Anglican Church.

Exclusivity and pride rules in so many so-called Christian churches that I'm afraid to say that I love to see them fall over their neatly pressed cassocks, or trip over their big

black bibles, depending on tradition. One in their eye on behalf of all the little people they routinely hurt and destroy

There is a very unsavoury part of me I suppose that loves it when all these self righteous religious bores come a cropper. Is that called Schadenfreude in German? We all have feet of clay, and I pray that I might have the humility not to presume that I am God's bouncer - vetting at the door who is acceptable in His eyes and who isn't. I pray that I am also saved from the awful presumptuousness of organised religions who feel that it is their God-given duty to tell people that God does not and will not bless their union because of differing religious affiliation. Frankly, the Church of England would be quite flattered to be called "organised" at all, and is the most humble, loving and accepting church I know. (Did I hear the word *Christian?* - whisper it!) This is my experience and more and more is the experience of some newly-weds. There are some in our communion trying to destroy this openness of course, but I hope they will never succeed. Although I fell by accident into the Church of England, it is the happiest accident that has ever happened to me spiritually. There are now quite a few couples in Romania who are also experiencing the happy accident of finding the Anglican Church and long may that continue. There has been a catalogue of incidents and situations where I have been made to feel that I should apologise for being Anglican lately. We have absolutely *nothing* to apologise for - and a huge amount to be sincerely grateful for.

The **prayer for today** is by Thomas Ken (1637 -1711) written for St. Stephen's Walbrook, London and here appropriated for the Church of the Resurrection.

***O God, make the door of this house  
wide enough to receive all who need human love and fellowship,  
narrow enough to shut out all envy, pride and strife.  
Make its threshold smooth enough to be no stumbling block to children  
nor to straying feet,  
but rugged and strong enough to turn back the tempter's power.  
God make the door of this house the entrance to thine eternal kingdom.  
Amen.***

Love and peace

Martin