

Dear all,

Last Sunday in Bucharest

What a lovely and fitting farewell this was not only for both **Arnoldus** or "**Noldy**" and **Lafi**, who return home to Indonesia but also for another great friend of this church **Rolf**, husband of **Catherine** who told me this morning that he also is leaving Romania for good because he has found a job in Botswana!! We had the largest congregation for some time (about 65 people) which included **15 children**. The Sunday school room was full to bursting, but as productive as ever and treated us all to a great rendition of "He's got the whole world in his hands". Frans presented Lafi with a certificate and the textbook he is using to explore Matthew's gospel, and we asked for God's blessing on them and Rolf and Catherine (already returned to Cape Town) as they all depart for pastures new. The **produce sale** was also the **most successful** ever, both in monetary terms but also (and very pleasingly) in terms of the amount of people who contributed food - well done and thank you. Thank you also to everyone who read and to Rev. John Moore, a friend passing through Bucharest who administered the chalice.

Next Sunday in Bucharest is HARVEST THANKSGIVING

Before I left for GB I rather rashly promised a special liturgy, but at this stage of the game I think it is safer to use our usual liturgy and choose appropriate readings and hymns. We will be taking **an offering of food** during the service. Dry and tinned is best because all the food collected, together with all the clothes we have accrued will be taken to a wonderful place in the mountains - a **refuge for street children** and young vulnerable mothers and their families - an undertaking which feeds 200 (yes, 200!!!) people a day. So all food is welcome, but I can't guarantee which day I'll be able to go so nothing that will go off quickly please. This venture near Valenii de Muntii, is the brainchild of a wonderful Orthodox priest called **Fr. Tanase** (I arranged a scholarship at Mirfield for his son-in-law) and so I can guarantee that the food and clothes are going to a very worthy place.

News from Skopje

Dr. John Barker held the second service - a Harvest Thanksgiving - in Skopje and from his standing start this service drew 19 people which included eight children and a pianist! I always knew that John's personality and hard work could never fail. I'm sure that the next time he is in Bucharest John will want to avail himself of some Sunday school material for the nascent Sunday school. John and Ela are both well and John wants me to convey his greetings to Bucharest - a church he loves and misses.

Wedding blessing

We pray for **Lucian and Ioana** who will have their wedding blessed next Saturday at 1pm.

Our treasurer, Christian Dickson, is running in the Bucharest Marathon!!!

I forgot to mention this last Sunday morning, but next Sunday, while we are in church Christian will be puffing his way around Bucharest. There will be plenty of time after church to go and see this event. It starts at 9.30 and Christian tells me he may still be running at 1.30!

This inaugural Bucharest Marathon on Sunday Oct 12th. is 42 km over a 4 lap course: Palatul Parlamentului - Piata Alba Iulia - Piata Unirii - Universitate - Piata Romana - Piata Victoriei - Calea Victoriei - Splaiul Dambovitei - Opera Romana - Pod Cotroceni - Piata Unirii – Finishing at the Palatul Parlamentului

He is planning to raise money for one of the charities supported by this church.

Hospice Casa Sperantei (www.hospice.ro) provides care and medical treatment for adults and children with long term, often terminal illnesses here in Romania. They have one centre in Brasov and are looking to raise money to build another one in Bucharest.

So if would you be kind enough to sponsor him, either on a per km basis, a no finish no fee basis or some sort of Draconian performance incentive, to raise money for this very worthy cause please let him know. (dickson.c@pg.com). You can also sponsor him on-line at www.justgiving.com/christiandickson

If you fancy joining in yourself, it is not too late. Check out the website (www.romanianmarathon.com). There is a full marathon, a half-marathon, a team relay marathon (4 runners), a 4km "fun" run and a 1km kids run. Also, if you fancy watching the event and cheering the runners on then it all starts, traffic and stray dogs permitting, at 09.30am.

Concerts in church!

Later today I take delivery of three harpsichords that will be used in two concerts scheduled for our church. Details are sketchy, but this is an international ensemble and they will be giving concerts of "early music" on **Sunday 12th October at 6pm** and **Tuesday 14th October at 7pm**. I am assuming an entrance fee (we are simply providing the location for these ones) but from this evening onwards if you are interested in going I will have much more info if you would like to email.

Council Meeting

Also later on today there is our monthly council meeting in church at 7pm.

Thought for the day

I was asked by a member of the congregation on Sunday if I would preach for longer than I do. This is not the first time I have been asked to say more. This is quite flattering, needless to say, but I will now attempt to tell you why I preach for about 10 to twelve minutes and how I prepare. Preaching is a balancing act in my view, where you are constantly hoping that you don't fall off - too long, too short, too boring, too humorous, too technical, too bland, too childish, too blunt, have I kept to the point, is there any point to it at all? - all these things swirl around your mind - at least they do around my mind - as you prepare a sermon.

There are certain principles I always try to bear in mind.

* First of all there are few other jobs in the world where you have the undivided attention of a group of people who are a captive audience - and mindful of this enormous privilege I never want to appear to waste people's time. To presume upon people's time and fritter that time away with pointless waffle I think shows a lack of respect for the congregation. Therefore I try and pack in, in as potent and cogent a manner as I am capable of, as much as I can in as short a time as I can.

* I attempt never to speak theoretically. It has to be grounded somewhere in my own Christian experience - otherwise it lacks integrity.

* I never use the same sermon twice. No matter how many times you read the same pieces of scripture, in the intervening time, you should have grown, your perspectives

will have changed, your knowledge and your experiences will have changed. Just occasionally I come across stuff I wrote or preached quite a long time ago - most of it OK but some of it I look at it and cringe - did I really say that? Even the OK stuff I would now say very differently. You grow in the spirit.

* Preaching is an art form. A performance. Now purists might balk at this way of looking at it, but if the gospel is not presented in an attractive, cogent way, if a preacher cannot demonstrate joined up thinking, if he cannot provoke, cajole, or elicit some kind of response at least in *some* of the listeners it is an opportunity lost.

* The whole liturgy is a kind of balancing act where I try not to let either the word or "the sacrament of the breaking of the bread" take over the whole service. Our liturgies are word *and* sacrament. Different traditions tend to accentuate one over the other, but both are very important and complimentary parts of the service. In the sacrament we "break" the bread, but in the service of the word we "break open" the scriptures.

* You have to believe in what you say. I can imagine people saying - well of course (!) - but only if you have a passionate conviction that what you are saying is true can you deliver it convincingly. Both I and a conservative evangelical preacher will hold differing views and a sermon by either will (I hope) be delivered with integrity. I cannot for the life of me preach a literalist sermon much as they, in being true to themselves, cannot preach a liberal sermon. The rot sets in when you try to pander to interest groups or say what you imagine people *want* to hear rather than what you passionately believe they *need* to hear. It has to come from the heart.

The **prayer for today** is from the Episcopal church of the USA, and while it could be prayed by any preacher before any sermon, it is a prayer for all of us that we might "preach" the gospel in our own setting not only through what we say but most importantly through what we do - that word and deed are yoked together. In its brevity, it is a prayer that can be repeated and meditated upon for hours because within it, lie multiple essential truths about the kingdom of God.

*Jesus Christ, Son of God,
make yourself known through me
Jesus Christ, Son of God,
Speak through me to others
Amen*

Love and peace

Martin