

COR Newsletter – 21 January 2009

Dear all,

Last Sunday in Sofia

A good congregation again minus some stalwarts for very good reasons. Prayers were said for Gino and Mira's baby boy named **Emmanuel**. (see website article below) Prayers and condolences for Chris as she mourns the death of her mother Pat. The subject of this morning's service was how do we know when God is speaking to us, and how does God make his will known to us? God can speak to us in many and various ways. *"It is not so much that all paths lead to God, but rather, there is no path that God will not go down in order to meet us"* but the primary ways for us are the worshipping community, personal prayer, attentive reading of the Bible, leading to a personal relationship with God through Jesus. The OT lesson was Eli and Samuel - and our community's now have to be Eli to our friends and families Samuel's - discerning when and how God is speaking to them and what He is saying. Thank you to Sharon for putting us up and taking me and Claire out to dinner on Saturday with Leslie, the head of the US peace corps in Bulgaria, and Sam a new recruit to the US embassy in Sofia. By the way, Steve, if you are reading this - Carol Fielding says congratulations on getting your new job!!!

And in Bucharest.....

I have been told that it was a lovely service with a decent congregation and Sunday school. Excellent.

Next Sunday in Bucharest

Holy Communion at 10am with Sunday school in the morning. Then at **4pm in the afternoon** we host the end service of the week of prayer for Christian unity. This will be an amended version of evening prayer.

Our website

Don't forget to use our great website, still wonderfully maintained by Jo Kinberger even though Jo, Rene and Neve now live in Germany!! We really do appreciate it Jo. This site is great for all upcoming events, all my communications are there as well, and there are great picture galleries. All this at <http://www.churchoftheresurrection.eu> There is a separate **Sofia** web page on the site and there is now a direct link from the Sofia page to **Gino and Mira's Blog** where you can see pictures of little (or not so little actually) **Emmanuel**.

The aforementioned programme for the **week of prayer for Christian unity** is also there as is the poster for the **Britannia Ball** - of which more in a second.

This is a wonderful resource of which we should be proud. I often get enquiries through it, the latest being a request from an Ordinand to do a placement here.

The BRITANNIA BALL. - 20th February 2009

Keep this event at the forefront of your minds. You will find the poster on the website. Things are starting to take shape, bookings are coming in, raffle and auction prizes are slowly appearing and as anyone who has planned this sort of thing before will know we are both nervous and excited. We still need everyone to pull together, to **advertise**, to get bookings, to **put tables together**, to donate **auction and raffle**

prizes and get the money in - which is what the night is all about in the final analysis.

It's a small world!! - coincidences (part two)

After the service at the Patriarchate on Monday night I was sitting on the top table (I know, I know.... I was amazed as well) with Patriarch Daniel and the Roman catholic Archbishop. I was sitting directly next to a new Armenian priest - born in the Soviet Union in Sochi, studied in Armenia, then in Jerusalem, then serving in Germany. I happened to mention that I trained with an Armenian priest at Mirfield in Yorkshire many years ago called Bagrat. It turns out that Bagrat is his best friend and he talks to him almost daily. He is now a Bishop in Canada. Then just before I left, on telling the Patriarch that I was departing for Durham diocese, he said, ah. Fr. Michael Tita, of the external relations dept. of the Patriarchate (who I know quite well) studied in Durham and loved it there. The world just gets smaller and smaller

Thought for the day

I do know that whenever I mention the USA, the many Americans that receive this communication take extra special notice. It has been hinted at before that I have an anti-American streak, but the many American friends that I have and the great admiration I have for the USA, its culture and freedom should nail that particular myth. The help, support and friendship of Americans in both Bucharest and Sofia have been welcome and invaluable. I think a distinction must be made between an irrational anti-Americanism that unfortunately does pervade a lot of European thinking (largely based on cultural snobbery), and having grave issues with certain aspects of American *foreign policy* (Iraq for example) and specific acts (Guantanamo bay for example). In making this distinction I am no different from most Americans at the moment.

The depth of the opposition to the US regarding certain issues stems in large part I think, from extreme *disappointment*. A great country with lofty ideals from which much is expected is diminished in the eyes of the world when it engages in acts and policies that we feel undermine and counter those high ideals. People want, perhaps people *need* America to live up to those ideals, which explains the wave of popular support for the US that the election of Barack Obama has engendered in people all over the world. I think this can be explained by people perceiving that Obama will regain the moral authority we feel America needs to show. Whether that works out in practice only time will tell. There is a wave of great hope and expectation in the world at the moment eager to see something different. One of Barack Obama's first acts apparently will be to issue an executive order to close Guantanamo Bay prison, and if he does, the world will breathe a collective sigh of relief as America realises that she cannot talk about freedom, democracy, human dignity, human rights, while at the same time allowing that awful place to exist, where people are held without trial for years, where torture is condoned.

In like fashion, crushed expectations - The church not living up to high expectations and lofty ideals is a major contributory factor to the decline of organised Christianity in Britain. A sense of disillusionment, of reality not matching rhetoric, is a major factor in people deciding to leave the church. This disillusionment, where it is experienced is primarily fostered through a negative experience of the local community though of course national church politics and controversies also impinge. Is there anything that we as individuals can do about this?

In the word's of Barack Obama's campaign slogan - YES WE CAN.

Openness and kindness, not showing partiality based on class, race, gender, education, or job specification helps. While "birds of a feather flock together" and it is natural to hang out and speak with like-minded people, we should also be careful that natural associations don't develop into cliques that are perceived to be exclusive. Getting to know others is an adventure that pays dividends. Strongly held theological views are good so long as there is respect for other, perhaps less sophisticated points of view. Debate, and an agreement to differ while remaining friends and in communion with someone is a lesson the national church has yet to learn but we can show the way by living this out in our own churches. Just listening to people is an essential act. The most valuable thing you can give to someone is your time because it shows people that you value them. And being valued will be a novel experience for many people who come through our doors - It will be affirming. Helping people through the service would help - as "insiders" we forget how odd and surreal some of what we do can appear at first!! And their perspectives on us and what we do are not to be derided. A fresh pair of eyes, not conditioned by what they are "supposed" to think can be very refreshing.

Treating every service as a happening, an event, a point of meeting, of refreshment and expectation rather than "just another service" to be trudged through, encourages engagement. Passion and enthusiasm are catching.

The above addresses some of the most common gripes people have about church communities that leads them to leave, so while they may appear humdrum, they are absolutely vital. They mostly hang on respect for others, and their unique experiences and their own stories. Let people know that just by being there they will enrich the church community. In being included, respected, listened to, valued, helped, we are exhibiting gospel values that will close the gap between expectation and reality, and so the disappointment and disillusionment that mars some people's experiences of church will not get a look in.

The prayer for today.

In speaking about the difference between what we say is on offer and what is sometimes experienced I was drawn to the following prayer that speaks into that similar internal dilemma that we all feel to a greater or lesser degree. We truly want to be one thingand yet ...and yet. This was written by Johann Freylinghausen (1670 - 1739), a heartfelt prayer for transformation.

*May your Spirit guide my mind
which is so often dull and empty.
Let my thoughts always be on you,
And let me see you in all things.*

*May your Spirit quicken my soul
which is so often listless and lethargic.
Let my soul be awake to your presence,
And let me know you in all things.*

*May your Spirit melt my heart,
which is so often cold and indifferent.
Let my heart be warmed by your love,
And let me feel you in all things.*

Love and peace

Martin