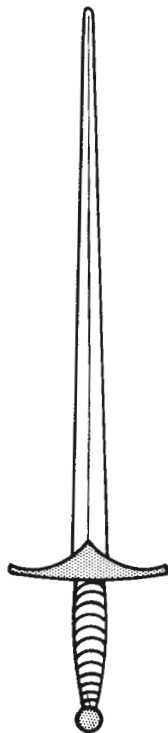


PARISH CHURCH OF S ALBAN AND S PATRICK
HIGHGATE, BIRMINGHAM 12



THE SWORD



January

2012

60p

Pastoral Letter

Dear sisters and brothers,

May the Peace of Christ Jesus be with you all.

I would like to begin with a big thankyou for your good wishes at Christmas for me and my family. This was our first Christmas at S Alban's Church with you, and let me say that it was really wonderful. The sense of worship and honour to God in all aspects of liturgical seriousness is tangibly evident at S Alban's. I wish more people in our city and around would value this distinctiveness of our Church and parish. We are now in the season of Epiphany, which is a reminder that Christ is also known and venerated outside Church circles. My monthly article focuses on this aspect of Christology in this magazine.

The highlights of December include:

Edward and I visited Calthorpe School, Highgate, on December 1st. I have never seen such a large number of children of different ages from infancy to adolescence at one place in the care of professionals, men and women with the same commitment and sense of service to those who need them. Abnormality can happen to anyone at any time, therefore the acts of solidarity with those who are not well physically, mentally or otherwise, is a great virtue. We would like to encourage the leadership of the school by offering any service from our end at any time. Birmingham City Council is also to be praised for their sponsorship of Calthorpe School as without their help a place like this could not run.

The same school held their annual Carol Singing in our Church on December 15th. Again, it was awesome to see everybody from the school in hundreds, children and teachers. Children in wheelchairs were

involved in carol singing. It looked great that everybody sang carols in the praise of the birth of Christ the



Lord. It was good to see the Lord Mayor of Birmingham present and encouraging the Calthorpe School for their progress and development. It is our prayer that God may bless everyone at the school in the year 2012.

The closing assembly of S Alban's Academy took place in our Church on December 16th. Divided into two parts, the whole academy met by way of two assemblies from 9.00 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. The ever cheerful gathering of pupils, teachers, Principal and governors, and some parents and visitors, gave great colour to the day. The sounds of instruments, the voices of the choirs and the classical and modern carols made a great impact on the audience. The instrumental presentations were also of high standard. It is our joy at S Alban's Church to see the Academy progressing and developing in all aspects, especially in the religious commitment. Both the Assemblies were closed with the priest's blessings. And we wish and pray for our Academy of S Alban and like to share with it that in fact we pray every Sunday, and also during the week, for the welfare of the Academy.

Both the Carol Service of Calthorpe School and the closing ceremony of S Alban's Academy were considered as S Alban's Church's own events and we like to maintain the spirit of mutual support to the institutions, and vice versa.

Advent reflections started on November 27th and finished on December 18th in our Church. On December 4th we met at

Highgate Baptist Church and on December 11th we went to S Anne's Church for the same. The reflections based on the Old Testament reading of the day were carefully prepared and presented with great joy and commitment by the priests and pastor of the churches involved. It was nice to see that a good number of people from our parish participated in these fellowship meetings cheerfully and contributed to the discussions actively. Thanks to Rachel Smith who coordinated the Ecumenical relations committee at our end. Thanks to Revd Paul and Fr Pat for honouring us with their presence for these events.

Our Parish Council and sub-committees for liturgy and ecumenical relations met during the month and resolved matters for immediate attention, and matters related with the special events of the months. Again, my appreciation is due to all those who contributed to any event in terms of monetary, physical and moral help.

It was a great spiritual experience when we set up the Crib on December 22nd. It was very meaningful to have the regular Thursday Mass followed by a light lunch, and then for 8 men of our congregation to set up the Crib in the body of Our Lady Chapel. The commitment of our parish to Crib, Christmas tree and High Mass is greatly valued by all of us. May the Lord

continue his blessings for all the families who take part actively in our church.

A few home visits took place this month. We are getting to know more people now and it has been a great joy to meet a few of you in your homes.

This month we had a distinguished friend from Paris, the Revd George Hobson, a former Canon theologian of the Anglican Cathedral in Paris. He stayed in our home for one night. He was just astounded to see the inside of the church. He just kept saying 'it is handsome'. At the end he said that he really liked this Victorian church. Thank you George for your visit and your appreciation of our church and my work here in Birmingham.

Last but not least, all four Advent Masses at our church started with lighting the Advent Wreath candles by the youngest member of the congregation present. The Christmas candle was lit with great joy and we thank God for Christmas. The High Mass at midnight for the Nativity was a great blessing followed by the morning Christmas Mass of the Day. We give praise to the Name of Our God for his many mercies and praise Christ the Lord.

I close with a prayer that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, may be with you all now and throughout 2012. Amen.

Fr Pervaiz

Pilgrimage to Walsingham

We have now had the formal request from the Shrine for the remainder of the deposit for our pilgrimage on May 4th. The total deposit per person is £30. (For those who have already paid £10 in advance only a further £20 is required.) **Please let Maureen have this by Sunday January 29th** (*cheques payable to S Alban's PCC*). If anyone has not already put their

name down and would like to join our May pilgrimage, please do so by January 29th.

Every year our pilgrimage to Walsingham proves to be a time of great physical and spiritual refreshment, and the chance to explore the glorious surroundings of the Norfolk countryside. This year will mark S Alban's 59th Parish pilgrimage since Fr Harding first began to organise them.

The True Light that gives light to every man was coming into the world *(John 1: 9)*

A reflection by the Revd Dr Pervaiz Sultan

AS we approach Epiphany, we cherish the visit of the Magi to the house where little Jesus was with his blessed mother and earthly foster father, S Joseph. The Magi took at least two years to reach Jerusalem to meet their Lord whose star they saw in the East. There is great fascination in experiencing Epiphany as the festival of Christ's manifestation to people outside the Hebrew tradition.

S John, in the prologue of his Gospel, faithfully highlighted a few most significant aspects of Christology of his time. The Logos who was with God in eternity was actually God in himself. The Logos existed in the divine person and not as an abstract idea, thought or preposition, as others thought in the first Century. This divine Logos was the True Light who was coming into the world to give light to every man and woman of this planet. This statement of S John the evangelist has a scope in itself of the universality of the person of Jesus Christ. S John has already stated that everything that existed had life owing to the fact that nothing was created without the intervention of Christ. On the basis of this belief, it is evident that Christ is the light who created the world and the same light was reaching every heart to illuminate them for God. There is an opportunity for the modern secular world to come up and be enlightened.

Secondly, this light has to do with the salvation of humankind. The evangelists mentioned that the child who was born

of Mary was actually the Saviour of the world. So, the Salvation of Christ reaches every human via preaching of the Church and administration of the Holy Eucharist and witness to the Gospel by godly deeds of committed men and women of Christian tradition. The world around the Church has this opportunity to receive the light of Christ in the footsteps of the Magi who travelled so long to see the light of Christ.

The saving message of Christ has universal implication and benefit. While recognising this aspect of the verse under discussion, many have interpreted it as a base to support a kind of pluralism that, since Christ enlightens every heart, therefore Christ is believed and understood in all different religious traditions, enabling all religious, and even secular traditions, resources to claim and provide salvation as one of the many ways to God.

This is not what the Church has believed. That Christ gives light to every heart actually declares Christ and the Church distinctive in the sense that without Christ no heart is enlightened fully, and the Church is the distinctive group, if not exclusive, which proclaims the Gospel of Christ and worships him as the Lord and author of life and salvation. Epiphany challenges the Church to keep the relation with the Lord intact and sharing the blessings of this relationship with those around. This should bring great blessings for everyone in the New Year.

Anne Elizabeth Osborne

December 11th 1950 to November 1st 2011

Our friend Anne Osborne died on November 1st age 60. She was a loved and energetic member of our congregation from 1978 until 1989. She was a member of the choir and the PCC. The following remarks are taken from the appreciation read at her funeral at S Paul's, Burton, on November 14th. We plan to hold a choral service in her memory at S Alban's in 2012.

Anne was born in Sutton Coldfield when England had a king on the throne and babies were issued with ration books. Her school days were spent at Ley Hill Junior School in Four Oaks and, after she had moved to Barton under Needwood, at John Taylor School and later Dovecliff Grammar School.

As a girl, Anne had been a keen Girl Guide, an interest she retained into adulthood. She was a member of S Paul's youth club and also loved to play hockey. One of Anne's proudest achievements was to receive her Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award at Buckingham Palace.

For a number of years, Anne was a member of S Paul's church choir and secretary to the parochial church council. It was here she met Stephen in January 1978 and here they were married later that year.

Anne's working life began at Allied Breweries here in Burton. When Stephen found work in Birmingham, Anne moved to Ansell's Brewery in Aston, where she worked for many years. From 1994 Anne was a civil servant, fulfilling a number of different rôles at Ofwat, the water regulator.

For many years, Anne sang for St Alban's choir in Birmingham, enjoying the music of Palestrina, Byrd, Britten and others in

a liturgical setting. She became a regular concertgoer at Birmingham's Symphony and Town Halls, an interest she maintained until the end of her life — her last concert was on October 2nd this year.

Early holidays had often involved camping and later sailing on her parents' boat. Later Anne and Stephen took to travelling around Europe by train. Anne also spent many happy days watching cricket, both at Edgbaston and at Trent Bridge.

Wherever Anne went she took a crochet hook and some wool. Her handwork produced everything from sweaters for teddy bears to large blankets made of many similar crocheted squares. In her last week of life, Anne completed a large cross-stitch picture and crocheted a purple scarf to keep her warm this winter.

Anne never gave up hope. Her illness, caused by an aggressive form of cancer, was quite short. Until June 1st this year Anne went to work. When she did go into hospital on June 15th, it was for the first time in over thirty years. Anne had kept herself fit and would regularly swim and use the gym. As late as May this year, she enjoyed a walk.

Weakened by cancer, in her last months Anne was unable to enjoy her apartment at Symphony Court in Central Birmingham. She had served Symphony Court's management company both as a director as well as taking minutes at board and general meetings.

Anne's husband, family, friends and colleagues will all remember her fondly as a person who gave her time and practical ability freely for others' good. She was methodical and had an eye for detail. She was creative: in the kitchen, at the computer

screen, with crochet hook or needle in her hand, and even behind a camera. Above all, Anne will be remembered for being a kind and giving person — one who would

love those around her and help bring out the best in them.

May she rest in peace.

John Turner

Third Sunday of Advent

December 18th 2011

**An address given by Revd Jim Pendorf, Previous Incumbent of S Alban's,
on the Fortieth Anniversary of His Ordination**

Exactly forty years ago on this date, although, not at this time, I was made a Priest in the Church of God by the now late Right Reverend George Rath, Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Newark. Of course, the number forty is the way a “long time” is often described in the Old Testament; however, when the Psalmist (90: 4) reminds us that “...a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by” (NIV), it means I have only been on the job about fifty-seven minutes!

That is exactly how I feel. It seems like only about an hour or so ago that I went to my first parish in Worcester, Massachusetts. Since that time, I have served in seven dioceses and some thirteen parishes, including the five in this benefice.

Being a priest and exercising that sacrament has allowed me some memorable opportunities to experience the insights of God's people. Here are just four from the last forty years.

(1) **“This is still my church.”** From 1967 until 1971, I was a seminarian at S John's, East Boston. It was up the hill in a densely packed neighbourhood cheek by jowl to Logan International Airport, then the seventh largest in the world.

Part of my work as a priest in training was to support the Rector, who had been serving that inner-city parish since 1937. Almost no one could remember a time before him, but one man did. He was in

his eighties and proudly proclaimed that he had seen clergy come and go, but it was still *his* church.

His total commitment and identification with S John's was marvellous, and without his and countless others' local loyalty the church as we know it could not survive. I will not embarrass anyone here by singling out people in our benefice, but you know who you are. You are no less than the priesthood of all believers.

(2) **“You no-ah got-ta da power.”**

Although I was interviewed for two curacies on finishing my theological training, I accepted a six-month locum at S John's, Worcester, Massachusetts. The Rector took a Sabbatical, and I had the services of a Non-Stipendiary Minister, who was a local Hospital Chaplain. He left me sufficient consecrated bread and wine for me to take as a Deacon to the local nursing homes for extended Communion.

It was my practice to offer the sacrament to everyone, but one elderly Italian woman waved me off. When I ask her why, she made it clear that I was not a Roman Catholic priest and therefore did not have proper priestly authority. I never explained to her that she was right, because even in the Episcopal Church, as a Deacon I most certainly did not have the authority of a priest in the Church of God.

What I learned from this was a high view of the priesthood. It is more than serving,

which a Deacon does. It is representational on behalf of the people to God and God to his people. It is a demanding rôle only made possible by the prayers and support of the people of God. I am sure both our Rector and I keenly feel this here in our benefice.

(3) ***“If the church were not here, would it be missed?”*** Under Any Other Business at the Annual Meeting of the second newest Mission Church in the diocese both Sharon and I were raised, confirmed, and married, the then Senior Warden always asked for his question to be recorded in the Minutes. He was concerned for S Gregory’s, Parsippany, a suburban church plant forty miles west of New York City needed to serve the whole community of 60,000 souls across twenty-six square miles if it were to survive and thrive.

It was years later that I appreciated the wisdom behind that query, as reflected in the more catholic dismissal at Communion. *The Mass is ended. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.* That is exactly what I did in my last parochial appointment. I celebrated a daily Eucharist that sustained me in the community as Chairman of the diocese’s sole secondary high school, now a successful academy; a lay member of the local Health Authority; a Chaplain with the local Police Division; a founding Director of the local Business Group; Chairman of the £100M seven year regeneration programme; and founder of the local neighbourhood action group.

Without the encouragement of the churchwardens and the bishop, not to mention my family, I doubt very much I would have achieved half as much in twice the nine years I served this deep inner-city parish. I also had the privilege of starting off a dozen or so ordinands on their vocational pilgrimage, many from the local

ecumenical theological college. They too got the point that a church must respond actively to the needs of its local community if it is truly to serve the priest of all priests, our Lord Jesus Christ.

(4) ***“God brought you to us.”*** When the then Bishop of Birmingham invited me to be the Priest-in-Charge of an Anglo-Catholic church in the centre of Birmingham, I was well aware that it was a divided congregation. Roughly half were thoroughly against women in ordained ministry; however, one of their distinguished members, who been chairman of the Consumers’ Association, came up to me during the interregnum and declared I was an answer to prayer. I quickly corrected her saying, *“Actually, it was God’s servant, the Bishop who had sent me.”*

One of my predecessors and she had been founding members of *Affirming Catholicism*, and with my immediate predecessor having left over the ordination of women to the priesthood, she had been feeling beleaguered by the active members of Forward-in-Faith in the congregation. So to her, she saw me in my priestly rôle as, at the very least, not taking sides. She never knew my personal view on women’s ordination, and years later I was accused by a Flying Bishop, now in charge of the Roman Catholic Ordinariate, of not having integrity, simply because I refused to declare myself on the issue one way or t’other. I still do not do so.

There you have it, four memorable sayings from faithful people of God. I never said to the man from East Boston that actually “his” church was in fact God’s Church. I never said to the old woman in the Nursing Home that God gives the power to his priests through His Church. I never said to the Churchwarden in Parsippany that his concern to see S Gregory’s active in the community was a bit of a tall order for most

Episcopalians in the sixties and seventies. It was at S Alban's Church, however, that my daughter helped me to focus my Theocentric view in putting words to a well-known Star Trek theme tune. Here are the lyrics to *Out of Darkness*.

Out of darkness into God's light, we truly live, we always move, strive to be and do. Out of that light into God's love, for ev'ryone, for old and young, for us. Then from God's love we grow in holy peace, perfect atonement just wonderful; so we can never go back to where we were without the light, without God's love, alone. We need to see that all our future depends really relies on God's own self; so we must

always look up to the light, for there is love, God's perfect life and us.

As a Priest in the Church of God for forty years, I still stand by that sentiment. There is another text from the Second Letter attributed to Peter. "*With the Lord a day is like a thousand years...*" (2 Peter 3: 8) That would mean my forty years is more like 14,600,000! That is indeed a long time and well worth noticing, as we do now in this special Benefice Service, for which I am most grateful.

Amen.

S Alban's Gift Day and Planned Giving

Dear Friends,

First of all, I would like to express, on behalf of the P.C.C., thanks to all who contributed through Planned Giving during 2011 or who contributed to our Gift Day or made subsequent donations.

During the year we received £16,377 net in Planned Giving for the General Fund, on which we can claim tax rebates of £3,883, as 97% is covered by Gift Aid declarations.

For Gift Day, we received twenty-two donations of all sizes, totalling £6,994 net, and we can claim a further £1,646 in tax rebates, because 94% is covered by Gift Aid declarations. This is a splendid total, showing how fortunate our parish is in having supporters who are so generous. Between the end of Gift Day and the year end we also received three more donations for the General Fund, totalling £1,095, on which we can reclaim £267 in tax rebates.

Of course many people contribute in other ways through their time and talents, so thank you all, on behalf of the P.C.C., for all that you have given, financially and in other ways.

Over the last decade our regular income

from Planned Giving has declined, while the income from our annual Gift Day has risen. If any of those who give large annual donations on Gift Day were able to spread their giving through the year in the form of Planned Giving, it would help the cash flow of the P.C.C.; though of course some donors may have patterns of income that make an annual gift, rather than regular sums, appropriate for them.

Planned Giving — Regular Income for the P.C.C.

S Alban's Pledged Giving Scheme was started some 40 years ago as a means of ensuring a regular, predictable income. Members pledge to give a regular amount to God through his Church by means of a weekly envelope or through a banker's order. By filling envelopes for any Sundays when they are unable to attend and putting them in the collection on their next visit, or asking others to do so on their behalf, or through their banker's orders members support the Church financially whether or not they are able to attend on any given Sunday.

Regular Income — Planned Expenditure

Regular income helps the P.C.C. to make regular payments, for example for gas and electricity and towards the Diocesan Quota (Parish Share) which we contribute towards the cost of providing our Parish Priest. Today we have fourteen donors who use weekly envelopes and six who give through monthly standing orders, as well as some donors who regularly complete individual Gift Aid envelopes.

To give an idea of the importance of regular income from Planned Giving, here are the approximate weekly costs of running St Alban's Church in 2011:

£ 369	Parish Share or Diocesan Quota
£ 188	Insurance and Alarm
£ 94	Gas and Electricity
£ 76	Director of Music, Cleaner, Verger
£ 50	Vicarage costs, clergy expenses
£ 55	Other costs
£832	Total weekly cost

All of these costs are spread fairly evenly through the year except for the Insurance and Alarm for which we pay an annual premium. (Although we use most of our Gas and Electricity in the winter, we pay regular monthly amounts through the year.) However, apart from Planned Giving and the Collections, our income is irregular.

Pledged Giving

Originally, Pledged Giving donors were asked to sign formal covenants that they would pay a regular sum for a number of years, because this enabled the P.C.C. to increase the value of their donations by reclaiming tax that they had paid. Covenants are no longer needed due to the Gift Aid scheme, so now we usually refer to Planned Giving; but if you are able to pledge a weekly or monthly amount it will

help the P.C.C. to match its income and expenditure.

The amount pledged and/or given by each individual is confidential, and known only to me, as Treasurer and record keeper for reclaiming tax under Gift Aid, and potentially to Mary Goodman as Assistant Treasurer and historically Planned Giving Secretary. Of course, if your circumstances change you are free to change the amount that you give at any time, although it is helpful to let me or Mary Goodman know if you need to make a change.

How much could you give each week or month?

It might be useful to think about our giving to God, through and for the work of his Church in this parish, in the same way as we budget for our household needs and other expenditure on a weekly or monthly basis: How much do we spend on food, heating and lighting, entertainment and so on?

Gift Aid

If you pay income tax, please remember that under the Gift Aid system the P.C.C. can reclaim basic rate tax on your donations at no cost to you. This is at present worth an extra 25p per pound given. Many of the congregation have already signed a Gift Aid Declaration allowing the P.C.C. to reclaim tax on all donations that they make until further notice.

I have recently written to all our existing planned givers and to others on our electoral roll inviting members to review their contributions and others to consider joining the scheme.

If you would like to:

- Join the Pledged Giving Scheme, or
- Review your present giving, or Complete a Gift Aid declaration to cover your giving,

please complete the appropriate forms and return them, to me, either personally, or through the Treasurer's pigeon hole (in the small rack in the corridor leading to the sacristy), or by post. If you have not received a letter, but would like join the pledged giving scheme, use weekly

envelopes, contribute by banker's order or make a Gift Aid declaration, please contact me and I will supply the necessary forms and/or envelopes.

C. A. Smith

News From The Academy

At the beginning of a new calendar year, the Academy looks back on a very satisfactory twelve months in which great advances have been made. In the autumn the setting up of the Multi-faith Chaplaincy was celebrated in church and representatives of the students gave presentations on their particular faith.

It was suggested that these presentations might be printed in The Sword in order to reveal the importance of the presence of the Academy in this locality to those who would not normally realize the significance of what we really have in our midst. The intentions of the two Christian priests who founded the school 150 years ago must surely be vindicated by the way in which the school has successfully negotiated its way through troubled times to be what it is today.

St Alban's Academy Multi-faith Chaplaincy Celebration **Professions of Faith — 15.9.11**

These are the words of the students who spoke:

Jestene Allen

My faith is important to me because it is a part of who I am! For example, it's like you can't spell Jestene without a 'J' and so like my faith, I can't be Jestene without it! My faith gives me a sense of belonging and comfort. I've been a Christian from birth. I was brought up in a Christian home. So naturally, I was brought up a Christian girl, and I will continue growing in my Christian faith.

I'm the kind of person that feeds off quotations and words of wisdom. My holy book, the Bible, is full of them. One of my favourites is:

“If you reject criticism, you only harm yourself; but if you listen to correction, you grow in understanding.” (*Proverbs 15: 31 - 32.*)

Reading the Bible and learning from it brings me such joy, it's beautiful.

I'm not perfect nor sinless, no one is, but that's the amazing thing about God. No matter how imperfect I am, I know he will always love me, and you too.

My faith makes me happy. That's why I will forever be a Christian.

Mareena Khan

What is my faith? Who am I representing?

I am a Muslim representing Islam.

My faith guides me even when I do not realise.

Islam makes me feel loved because I'm a part of the unity of Muslims around the world.

I know that God is always beside me bringing proudness to my heart.

Praying for dreams to become reality answered by God without realising.

I am a Muslim. Being a Muslim helps me to go through a life of self realisation.

Amal Mohammed

Being a muslim gives me an explanation for existence and guides me to the right path, the path that's filled with love and truth.

My religion is important to me because it reminds me that whatever I do not only reflects me as a person but affects everyone around me. I put all my trust into God and with him beside me I believe I can do anything.

As a Muslim I pray 5 times a day. Not only does this show obedience but it also brings peace to the heart.

I would like to end this speech with a personal quote which I strongly believe in said by my rôle model, Prophet Mohammed:

“The world is a prison for unbelievers, but paradise for the faithful.” Now, which one will you choose?

Nageb Bakal

My name is Nageb Bakal. I and my family

come from an Islamic background. To me, Islam is important because it guides me onto a good path. Also when reciting the Quran it fills me with purity and peacefulness. I think without religion mankind would not know the way to go about living their life. Islam in Arabic means submission. Therefore I follow the Quran due to it being the direct words of Allah.

Madhur Gupta

[Madhur gave a lot of useful information about the Hindu religion finishing with the following:]

This teaching of pluralism is at the heart of Hinduism. It is very relevant in the multi-faith society we live in as it teaches how people of different religions can live with each other peacefully without feeling threatened or without having to threaten each other.

To me, my religion teaches how to respect yourself and others, always find a peaceful solution to any problems you have rather than violent solutions and not let your anger get the better of you.

These are the words of the staff members who spoke:

Nasser Mockbill

PEACE BE UPON YOU!

There is a weak argument that religion is not compatible with modern life and that it should be locked away at home and taken out once a week. This argument is only supported by our misrepresentation of our own faith and the intolerance of others.

Because, in a multi-faith and multi-cultural society, whatever faith or system you believe in, that may or may not have God in it; as well as the rituals, there will undoubtedly be rules, spiritual and moral

codes to guide you towards a prosperous, inclusive and tolerant life.

Islam is not only my faith; it is also a system by which I live every second of my life; where my responsibilities come before my rights. As a Muslim I am accountable if my faith is not compatible with modern life; and it would only be through my own eyes if other faiths are not compatible with modern life, if I condemn before I tolerate and fully understand them.

Two of the many guide-lines that I live by:

- God said in the Quran “O, Mankind You were created from male and female and made into nations and communities so that you know one another; the best amongst you are those who do good”.
- The prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) Said: “strive for ‘this life’ as if you were going to live forever and do for your ‘after life’ as if you were going to die tomorrow”.

Debbie Smyth

My faith as a Christian is important to me because I know that I have a God that is greater than any situation I may be facing and more importantly I have confidence inside that He is in control. The Bible tells us that as a follower of Jesus Christ we should live by faith. I want to express my faith through my actions, lifestyle and words, for people to see that Christianity is not something that is practised on a Sunday but Christianity should be a lifestyle that is practised wherever we go.

Andrew Cooley

I am Jewish. Judaism is based on a deep and meaningful engagement with Jewish texts, values, culture and history, all of which help us to live a good life, and eventually *Gmar Chatimah Tova* — be inscribed in the book of blessings. We believe that the ills of the world are our responsibility, and that *tikkun olam* (repair of the world) is a fundamental mission for us as Jews and humanity as a whole.

But being Jewish is so much more than that: to be Jewish means I am a part of a heritage that goes back thousands of years. My Hebrew name is David ben Avraham — literally ‘son of Abraham’ who was the ancestor of Jesus and Mohammed. I was not born Jewish; in 1991, when I converted, I chose my name because in the Torah God

told Abraham to leave his father’s house for a land that God would show him, and I knew that God had led me to Judaism. David was my father’s name.

I am a Liberal Jew. I sing in my synagogue’s choir, and in Birmingham’s only Hebrew choir; I cherish the traditions and culture of being Jewish, (festivals, food and telling jokes against ourselves) and I am proud to be part of a community that is inclusive, egalitarian, open and forward-looking.

Liz Talbot

I like to take time every day to appreciate the simple beauty that is all around. This could be a few moments in the garden in the silence of early morning, or looking out through a window at the sky, with its changing clouds and light.

At home I surround myself with colour and small pieces of art collected on my travels. Each one holds a special memory, and knowledge that there is so much to see in this world if we can only find the time to stop and look.

I have been inspired by the lives of people whose main priorities are family, friends and working alongside nature and their surroundings.

So, as I follow my own path I remember that God has given us all not only special talents but also a way of being at peace with ourselves and realising what really matters. As the author John Updike said “What art offers is space... a certain breathing room for the spirit.”

Beverley Pitterson

[Beverley spoke passionately and unscripted]

I was Holy Spirit led so I haven’t got any words written down. Sorry,

God bless you,
Bev

Andrew Greener

For me, faith is not a box to be opened for a few minutes each day and a few hours on Sunday then shut tight while real life happens.

In fact, it is relevant to every part of my life, informing and shaping my actions, attitudes and responses to what life lays before me.

Revisiting the Ten Commandments with my Year 11 pupils this week I was reminded

again that of the ten, only four relate to my devotional life and my relationship with God. The other six guide and inform my relationships with others.

Faith pervades everything — my home life, my work and most importantly my relationships with others — because what I believe must guide the choices I make.

Faith is so foundational, I cannot imagine life without it.

As they do every year, on December 16th the Academy held their Christmas Assembly in church. One of the speakers was Nasser Mockbill, and the Chair of Governors and the Principal requested that he allow his presentation to be published in The Sword in order to enable those who were not present on that day to read and appreciate what was said. We therefore print in full his presentation given to members of the Academy at the Christmas Assembly.

Common Terms

Similarities between Christianity and Islam in light of the Scriptures

A Christmas Message of peace from the Muslim Community.

Written and delivered by Nasser Mockbill — December 16th 2011

At St Alban's Church of England, for the students and staff of the Academy.

There are challenges and opportunities to peace, often through being engrossed in the challenges we miss the opportunities to peace.

As uncertain as it may seem, the world is evolving and slowly becoming one Community. Cities and countries around the globe are now populated by people of different race, cultures, colour, faiths and social systems; co-existing in harmony.

This is made possible, by looking beyond the differences to celebrate the similarities. In the natural order of life, friends become best friends when they focus on the common things between them. Individuals fall in love and marry because they look for the good things in each other. Even politicians can put away their differences in their manifestoes and agendas to form coalitions

based on their similarities with the common good as the main aim, to govern a country.

The city of Birmingham reflects our evolving world, with its many communities, faiths, cultures and various occasions for celebrations.

During this season, the Christian community who are my brothers and sisters in humanity, are celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.

We Muslims are commanded by God to look for commonalities between ourselves and others. Regarding our relationship with our fellow human beings, God tells us in the Quran in chapter 49 verse 13 **“O, mankind, you were created from a male and a female and made into nations and communities, so that you might get to know each other. Verily**

the most honoured of you in the sight of God is the most righteous.”

And regarding our relationship with our fellow human beings with Holy Scriptures, God tells us not to focus on the differences; as mentioned in the Quran in Chapter 29 verse 46: **“And don’t dispute with the people of the book except with means better”**.

Rather, God tells us to invite and speak about similarities, as mentioned in the Quran in chapter 3 verse 63: **“Say, O you people of the book come to common terms as between us and you”**.

If I had an hour, it would not be enough to list the similarities between Christianity and Islam. However in the little time I have today, I will mention a few fundamentals.

God tells us in the Quran in chapter 5 verse 82 regarding our relationship specifically with the Christians: **“And amongst them in love to the believers wilt thou Find those who say we are Christians Because amongst them are people who are devoted to Learning and people who have renounced the world and they are not arrogant”**.

Central to Christian belief as mentioned in the Gospels of Luke chapter 1 verse 35 and the Gospel of Mathew chapter 1 verse 16, is that Jesus was conceived miraculously without a male intervention. This is also what Muslims believe in, as God says in the Quran in chapter 19 verse 16 to 21: **Our spirit said: O, Mary I announce to you the gift of a righteous son. Mary said: how shall I have a son when no man has touched me. The angel said (so it will be): your lord said ‘It will be easy for me, and we appoint him as a Sign unto mankind and mercy from us’. It is a matter decreed.”**

Jesus is in the Bible; and in the Quran he is mentioned no less than 25 times.

In Islam we know Jesus by the Arabic name ‘Easa’ and we have to say; ‘Peace be upon him’ every time we mention his name.

In one of those times Jesus is mentioned in the Quran, God speaks to him in chapter 5 verse 110 **“God said: O, Jesus, recount my favour to you and your mother. Behold! I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, so that you preached to people while you were an infant in your cradle and in the prime of manhood; how I instructed you in the book and in wisdom in the Law and in the Gospel; how you fashioned from clay, the likeness of a bird and breathed into it and it became a living bird; how you healed the blind man and the leper; and how you restored the dead to life by my leave.”**

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is very special to Christians; and to us Muslims, she is so special, that a chapter in the Quran is named after her. Chapter number 19 in the Quran is called ‘Surat Maryam’ (Chapter of Mary). In Islam we know Mary by the Arabic name Maryam and we have to say ‘May God be pleased with her’, every time we mention her name. To us Muslims, Mary is the best woman in the seen and in the unseen world, as God tells her in the Quran in chapter 3 verse 42: **“Behold! The Angels said: “O Mary, God has chosen you and purified you and exalted you above the women of all nations”**.

Christians everywhere glorify Jesus; and outside Christianity, no one glorified Jesus more than Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

In Church, a Christian may greet you in English, with the words ‘Peace be with you’.

In a Mosque a Muslim may greet you

with the words, 'Peace be upon you'.

The same greeting in Arabic, as said by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), is: 'Assalam alaikum'.

The same greeting in the Hebrew language as said by Jesus and mentioned in the Gospel of Luke chapter 24 verse 36 is: 'Shalom alaikum'.

The Arabic language (spoken by Prophet Muhammad and which the Quran was written in); the Aramaic language and the Hebrew language (spoken by Jesus and which the Bible was originally written in) are sister languages, part of the Semitic family of languages, and sound so alike when spoken.

In the Bible Jesus speaks about doing 'God's will' and pleasing God. In the Gospel of John chapter 5 verse 30 Jesus said: **"By myself I can do nothing; I judge as I hear, and my Judgement is Just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me"**.

We Muslims also Obey God's will and seeking to please God is central to our faith

and way of life, as God commands us in the Quran in chapter 5 verse 3: **"This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, And have chosen for you Islam as your religion"** (way of life).

The term 'Islam' means: total submission to the will of God.

The term 'Muslim' means: someone who submits to the will of God.

And when we speak about a dear person we say: 'Radhi Allah anhu'; this means: 'may God be pleased with him/her'.

Islam is the only non-Christian faith that makes it an Article of faith to believe in Jesus Christ. This means that: no Muslim is a Muslim if he or she does not believe in Jesus Christ. We Muslims believe that he is one of the mightiest to ever deliver the message of God.

Finally, may I on behalf of the Muslim community wish our brothers and sisters in humanity: A very merry Christmas and to all of you a happy new year.

A Musical Evening

Liz and John Turner invite everyone to a Musical Evening
at

Valeswood, 61 Salisbury Road, Moseley, B13 8LB

in aid of the St Alban's Church Choir Fund

at

7.30 p.m on Friday January 20th 2012

On arrival there will be tea, coffee, cakes and desserts together with a raffle and gift stall. Then there will be musical entertainment provided by Tom Keogh and Friends.

The cost is £8.00 for adults and £4.00 for children including refreshments.

Sign up for tickets in Church

or contact John Turner on 0121 449 6258 or at jturner@valeswood.com.