



ECHO



DECEMBER 2023 EDITION



THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ECUMENICAL CHURCH OF OCCITANIE

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CHURCH OF ENGLAND AUTHORISES THE BLESSING OF SAME SEX COUPLES



There were gasps at the meeting of the General Synod of the Church of England in London on 14 November when, by a single vote amongst the representatives of the laity, the Synod authorised the beginning of a trial period during which stand-alone services for the blessing of same-sex couples will be performed in selected Anglican churches, possibly beginning before Christmas.

After 2 days of debate, a proposal by the Bishop of Oxford to conduct a trial of services of blessing for same-sex couples was passed when the lay members voted 99-98 to approve it. As a simple majority in all three 'houses' of the Synod was all that was required, the proposal was approved.

One leading campaigner for same-sex marriage, Jayne Ozanne, announced her resignation from the Synod directly after the Synod closed, alleging that Archbishop Justin Welby had compared her to a terrorist leader in a meeting. This allegation will be the subject of an independent safeguarding investigation.

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HUGE CROWDS WELCOME THE NEW BISHOP OF PAMIERS



On 26th November, Mgr Benoît Gschwind was installed as the new Bishop of Pamiers, Mirepoix and Couserans
See page 2 for more details



WELCOMING THE NEW BISHOP OF PAMIERS

....continued from Front Page

On Sunday 26th November, hundreds of people gathered in Mirepoix Cathedral to welcome Mgr Benoît Gschwind, the new Catholic Bishop of Pamiers, Mirepoix and Couserans as he was 'ordained' by Mgr Guy de Kerimel, the Archbishop of Toulouse and Mgr Norbert Turini, Archbishop of Montpellier in the presence of many other bishops and also Mgr Celestino Migliore, the Papal Nuncio (the Pope's representative) in France. Outside the Cathedral, which was full to capacity, many more people watched the service on large video screens, warmed in the chilly sunshine by glasses of vin chaud.



With so many dignitaries gathered in one place, the Gendarmerie and the anti-terrorism brigade Les Vigipirates launched a major security operation to ensure that the event took place in tranquility.

Coaches brought former parishioners of Mrg Gschwind from his parish in Montpellier, while the service was also broadcast via YouTube for those unable to be present in person. At the time of writing, the video of the service has been watched more than 12,000 times.

The ceremony contained many ancient rituals, from the displaying of the letter of appointment by Pope Francis to those assembled, to the laying on of hands by the Archbishops and Bishops, the anointing of Mgr Gschwind with holy oil and his being commissioned while kneeling under a copy of the Bible.

ECO wish Mgr Gschwind a long and fulfilling ministry in his new diocese and look forward to working with him.



CHURCH OF ENGLAND SYNOD NARROW MAJORITY

....continued from Front Page

The meeting of the Synod was very tense, with strong opinions being expressed both in favour and against the proposals.

Some speakers in favour of LLF were reduced to tears as they recounted personal stories of harassment and bullying by other members of their churches because of their sexual orientation. Speakers opposed to the proposals spoke of the proposers as being 'blasphemers' and 'heretics'.

One suggestion by a Synod Member to hold a referendum on LLF among all congregation members was roundly rejected by all sides.

When the results of the vote were announced, there was heckling from members of the public who had come to Synod to lobby against LLF and who were sitting in the Public Gallery. This led to the Chair of the debate, retired judge Geoffrey Tattersall KC, adopting the very British solution of adjourning the meeting for a cup of tea !

There were immediate strong reactions from those members of the Church of England who are opposed to the same-sex blessings approved by General Synod in February 2023. A change in Church Law requires a majority of 2/3rds in all three 'Houses', and this is unlikely to be achieved in the near future.

The approval of a 'trial', however, sidesteps this obstacle since it has been adopted without time- or geographical restrictions and so could continue for many years where churches wish to do so.

Some churches had already announced that they would cease to pay money to the Church of England to fund its operations. The Church of England's Evangelical Council, which is opposed to the Living In Love and Faith (LLF) proposals, has announced a new "Ephesian Fund" to which churches can pay money rather than sending it to their Dioceses. Such money will only be used to fund churches which are opposed to LLF.

In February 2024, at their next meeting, the General Synod members hope to be presented with a document entitled "The Pastoral Principles", which will be written by the College of Bishops and will contain the behaviour expected of clergy and those wishing to be ordained. At present, these forbid same-sex marriages for clergy. New guidelines will be required as a result of the LLF vote.

At the same time, a Private Members' Bill has been presented in Parliament jointly by Conservative and Labour MP's which will afford legal protection to any priest conducting same sex marriages. The return of David Cameron, the originator of the Equal Marriage Act, may increase the odds of this Bill becoming law.



UPDATE ON PROGRESS ON CHANGES IN VISA REQUIREMENTS FOR UK PASSPORT HOLDER WITH SECOND HOMES IN FRANCE

Last April, we reported on proposals put forward by French Senator Corinne Imbert for a relaxation of immigration rules for British passport holders with second homes in France who, since Brexit, had been disadvantaged by the Schengen '90/180' Rule as part of a new proposed Immigration Law.



Senator Berthet, who represents the Savoie Region

This proposed reform has now also been supported by another Senator, Martine Berthet, as well as 37 of her colleagues across all political parties, leading to the French Senate voting to approve an amendment to give British citizens greater freedom to come and go from their second homes in France, being required only to be able to prove they owned a property when they arrived here.

It is estimated that there are around 60,000 - 80,000 properties in France which are owned by non-resident British citizens, and in the words of Senator Philippe Bas "The English have been punished enough by Brexit".

A proposal to allow other countries citizens to enjoy a similar concession was rejected by the Senate, demonstrating the special relationship which the UK enjoys with France.

This proposal must now be approved by the National Assembly during a debate on the Immigration Laws during December.

Although President Macron's Renaissance Party have said that they will not support this amendment, arguing it is not necessary, they do not hold a majority in the National Assembly, and so may be defeated by other parties working together.

Many mayors are now complaining about the impact on local economies if British second home owners are not able to spend as much time as they used to in their properties.

A Facebook Group "France Visa Free" is now co-ordinating a drive to get people to write to their members of the National Assembly (known as Députés) to lobby them to vote for Senator Berthet's amendment.

We will provide an update on the progress of this proposed reform in our January 2024 edition.



ECO Christmas Services

This year we hope that you will join us for online worship at Christmas.

On Christmas Eve morning we will be broadcasting a service of Carols and Lessons which will include a new Carol "One More To Count" written by husband and wife team Alan and Eileen Simmons (Alan also wrote the opening music that ECO use for each service especially for us)

In the evening, we will broadcast a special Crib Service, which we be a more light-hearted look at the Nativity aimed at the young and the young at heart.

And then, on Christmas morning at 10:30 we will broadcast our service of Online Communion for Christmas Day.

We hope that you will be able to join us either live or later on. On Christmas Morning, our Zoom Virtual Coffee Bar will turn into a Zoom Champagne Bar in case you would like to share a Christmas Day glass of bubbles and perhaps a mince pie !

After Christmas, we will take a break until Sunday 7th January 2024 to allow us to perform some upgrades in the studio to both our hardware and also to install new versions of the software that we use to broadcast our worship.

ECO's Online Advent Calendar Returns for 2023

Last Christmas, ECO published an online Advent Calendar with a new window opening every day from the 1st to the 25th of December.

Owing to its popularity, we are repeating this feature this Christmas, but with some new, special features.

Behind each window, you will find a video prepared by Neil Batcock looking at a different painting by the 16th Century Flemish artist Pieter

Bruegel the Elder, accompanied by some music from Handel's *Messiah*. Sadly this will not be a recording of Margaret Cross' performance ! (See *Lot Group report*)

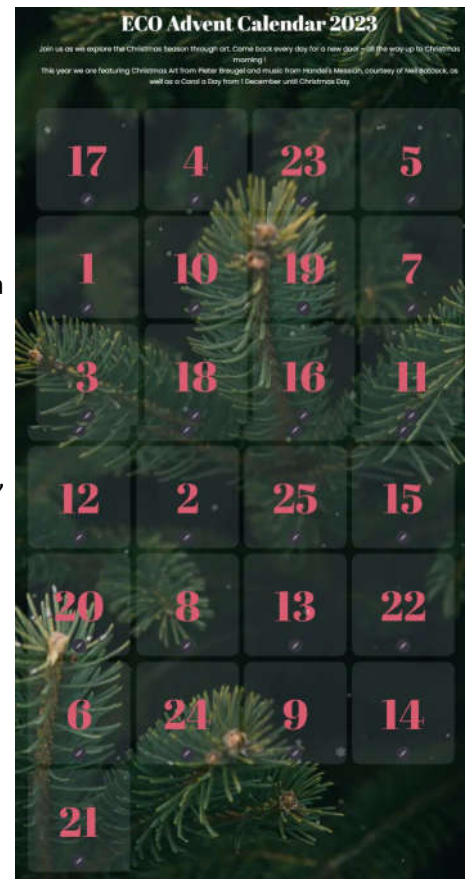
There will also be a video of a different Christmas Carol sung by the choir of King's College Cambridge each day.

And chocolate ? Yes there will also be some chocolate and other goodies from time to time.

A new door unlocks automatically each day just after midnight, so you will be able to look at a new painting each day.

The Advent Calendar is linked from the front page of our website, and Neil's videos will also be accessible from our YouTube page.

We do hope you will drop by during the Advent Season.



Church Mice

Karl Zorowski





WELCOME TO THE MULTI-FAITH BUS SHELTER

Bristol Airport's newly-unveiled religious building facility is causing much comment in the media

Parish Magazine editors dream of stories like the one which appeared on almost every news service over the weekend of 25th November when Bristol Airport proudly unveiled their newly-installed 'Multi-Faith Area' next to one of their car parks.

Howls of derision could be heard from all parts of the media as this open shelter was unfavourably compared to a bus stop (the Airport Shuttle bus stop is about 50 metres away) and a designated smoking area (that is next door and is clearly marked as such).

By the end of the weekend, this shelter had been viewed an incredible 14 MILLION times on the internet!



Seeking spiritual enlightenment, Bristol reporter Martin Booth undertook a pilgrimage to the Airport to explore this new religious building.

Initially, he was unable to locate it, since it is necessary to catch an airport parking shuttle bus to reach it. Even after arriving at the bus stop, Martin's quest was not over, since he then had to search for it (look next to the free drop-off point). Inside, to help Muslims to identify the direction of Mecca for their prayers, there is a misspelt sign marked "Qulbla" (not "Qibla"). The absence of proper weather protection means that anyone so foolish as to place a prayer mat on the floor during a Bristol winter is likely to have to wring it out afterwards.

Martin wryly observed that there would not be room to swing a Christian thurible, much less to install a Buddhist prayer wheel.

He concluded by saying that "Cambodia has Angkor Wat. Istanbul has the Blue Mosque. Barcelona has the Sagrada Familia. And now Bristol has our multi-faith area."

Time will tell if this little building one day becomes a historic religious shrine or is quietly consigned to obscurity.

ECO SAFEGUARDING SUNDAY SERVICE BREAKS ALL VIEWING RECORDS



On the 19th November, ECO, in partnership with the UK-based online church The Ordinary Office broadcast a special service for the Sunday which is designated as Safeguarding Sunday by churches in the UK. The service, which was broadcast across multiple internet channels over the weekend achieved the highest viewing figures that we have ever recorded. To date there have been almost 1,000 viewings across all channels, which means that the service has been watched by between 1,500 and 2,000 people.

The service welcomed contributions from a number of well-known campaigners for better safeguarding arrangements, including Antonia Sobocki, the founder of the Roman Catholic charity 'Loudfence', Jane Chevous, the co-founder of the survivors' support organisation 'Survivors Voices' and now Vice-Chair of the Church of England's National Safeguarding Panel, Jasvinder Sanghera, former member of the Church of England's Independent Safeguarding Board and Steve Chalke, religious broadcaster. These are only a few of the many contributors to our worship.

The service was on the theme of The Good Shepherd, and focused on the definition of Safeguarding as "protecting a person's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect" and the need for each of us to be good shepherds to one another and to care for one another.

We were also very pleased to welcome Rt Revd Martin Gorick, the Anglican Bishop of Dudley, to offer a final blessing.

This is the second service where ECO and the Ordinary Office have come together to present a joint act of worship to congregations which span the World. We are grateful to Ordinary Office organiser David Lucas for helping to co-ordinate this service and we look forward to working together again very soon.

The service remains online on the ECO website at ourchurch.fr/Special-Service-for-Safeguarding-Sunday/

Lot House Group - November 2023

lot.group@ourchurch.fr

Janet Varty

We met for worship and to consider our plans for Advent. Its the time of year when we prepare for the coming of Christ, to worship and remind ourselves of the gift from God. Our members find different opportunities to enrich lives at this time:

Margaret and I opened with an Advent retreat on 25th November. See my notes below to get a flavour.

John is singing in a Carol concert at Fauroux.(82) 8th December.

Nils joins the Ecumenical Carol Service at Sacre Coeur, Cahors. (46) 10th December

Margaret is singing Handel's *Messiah* at Monflanquin and Cuzorn. (47) 16/17 Dec.

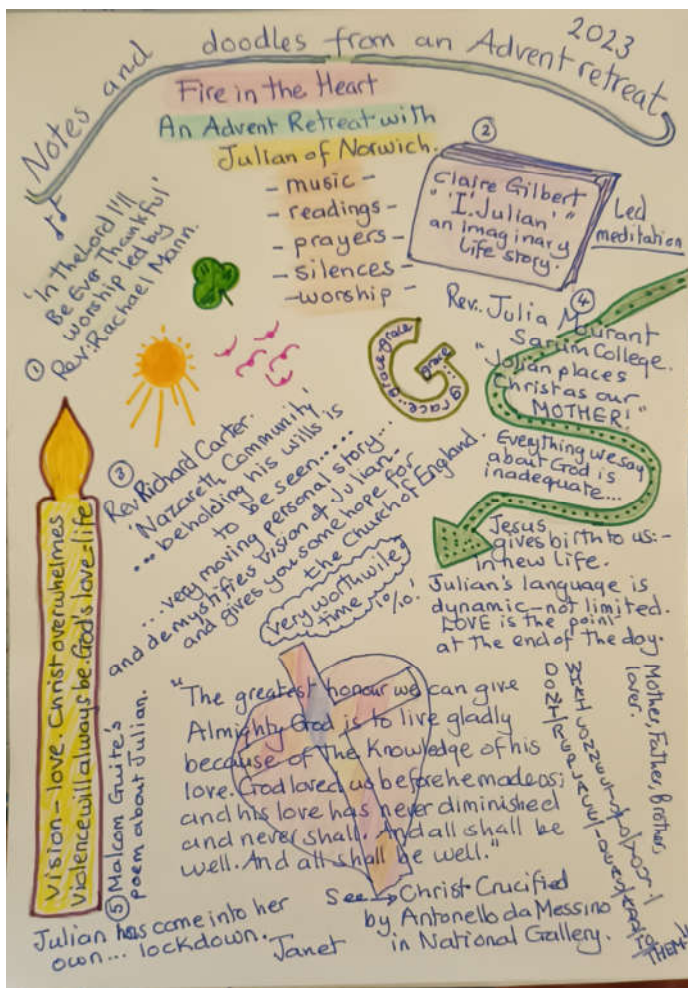
At our gathering on 30 November, Tony Varty presented Margaret with an early Christmas present, a lovely watercolour he had painted of the interior of her barn (where ECO recently held its Service of Harvest Thanksgiving and its Annual Meeting.)

We will close our season of Advent by next joining together for Carols and contemporary readings on Thursday 21st December at 3pm in Puy-l'Eveque where our group normally meets.



Christine and her colleagues at Restos du Coeur in Prayssac.(46) are planning répas for their clients early in December. Following on from the donation of goods at Harvest time ECO was asked to help provide for a variety of drinks to accompany the meal. It seemed sensible to let the organisers decide what was needed. The gifts cards will certainly help. We wish them a happy time. Thanks to friends of ECO who contributed.

If you would like to join us, or simply to get more details about us or about any of these events, then please contact me at janet@ourchurch.fr



The United Nations Announced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 75 Years Ago This Month.

Bob Carr

The traumatic events of the Second World War brought home that human rights are not always universally respected. The extermination of almost 17 million people during the war, including 6 million Jews, horrified the entire world. After the war, governments worldwide made a concerted effort to foster international peace and prevent conflict. This resulted in the establishment of the United Nations in June 1945.

In 1948, representatives from the 50 member states of the United Nations came together under the guidance of Eleanor Roosevelt (First Lady of the United States 1933-1945) to devise a list of all the human rights that everybody across the world should enjoy.

On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations announced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) - 30 rights and freedoms that belong to all of us. No member state voted against the UDHR but 8 countries abstained (Belorussia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, USSR, Ukraine and Yugoslavia). Two years later in 1950, 10th December was declared International Human Rights Day.

Eleanor Roosevelt was heavily involved in championing civil rights and social activism. She was appointed chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights which drafted the UDHR. The French jurist René Cassin was originally recognized as the principal author of the UDHR. He won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1954 for his involvement in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On the tenth anniversary of the UDHR, Eleanor gave a speech at the United Nations called 'Where Do Human Rights Begin?'. Part of her speech has become famous for capturing the reason why human rights are for every one of us, in all parts of our daily lives:

'Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.'

Eleanor Roosevelt, 1958



Eleanor Roosevelt photographed holding the UDHR in New York in 1949

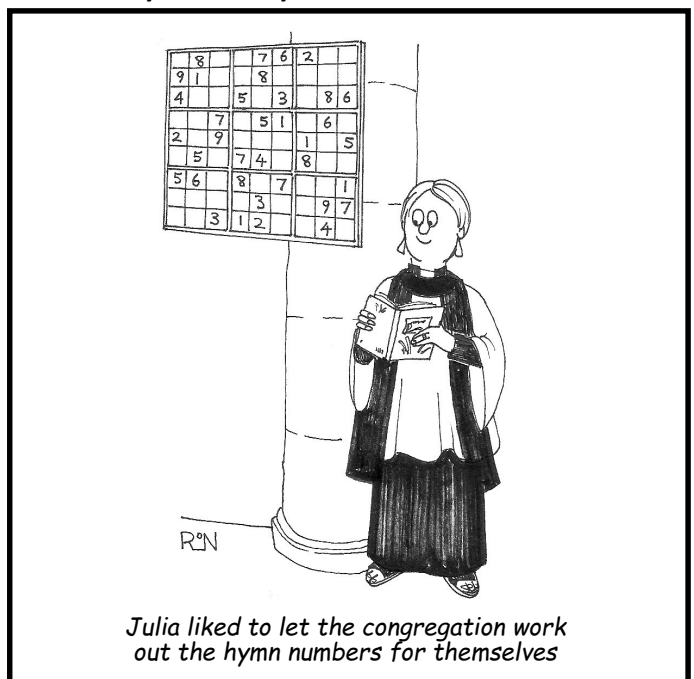
The UDHR marked an important shift by daring to say that all human beings are free and equal, regardless of colour, creed or religion. For the first time, a global agreement put human beings, not power politics, at the heart of its agenda.

The 30 rights and freedoms (Articles) set out in the UDHR include the right to asylum, the right to freedom from torture, the right to free speech and the right to education. It includes civil and political rights, like the right to life, liberty, free speech and privacy. It also includes economic, social and cultural rights, like the right to social security, health and education.

Today, the Declaration is a living document that has been accepted as a contract between a government and its people throughout the world. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, it is the most translated document in the world.

This year is the 75th anniversary of UDHR and the rights they included continue to form the basis for all international human rights law.

ECO will hold a special service to celebrate the 75th Anniversary on Sunday 10th December.



Julia liked to let the congregation work out the hymn numbers for themselves

















ECO WORSHIP CALENDAR DECEMBER 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3 10:30 Online Communion for Advent 1	4 20:00 Live Evening Worship on Zoom	5 20:00 Service of Evening Compline	6	7 20:00 Online Service of Prayer for Healing	8	9
10 10:30 Special Service of Morning Prayer to mark the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights	11 20:00 Live Evening Worship on Zoom	12 20:00 Service of Evening Compline	13	14 20:00 Online Service of Prayer for Healing	15	16
17 10:30 Online Communion for Advent 3	18 20:00 Live Evening Worship on Zoom	19 20:00 Service of Evening Compline	20	21 15:00 Lot House Group meets for Carols and Readings 20:00 Online Service of Prayer for Healing	22	23
24 CHRISTMAS EVE 10:30 Service of Carols and Lessons 18:00 Online Crib Service	25 CHRISTMAS DAY 10:30 Online Communion	26	27	28	29	30

Dave Walker's Guide to

Writing Your Christmas Newsletter

MAKE YOUR OWN BY DRAWING LINES BETWEEN THE TWO COLUMNS

	OUR SON	WON AN OSCAR	
	GRANDMA	IS TRAINING TO BE A LAWYER	
	OUR DAUGHTER	CAUGHT A MOUSE AND LEFT IT ON THE STAIRS	
	THE CAT	IS FALLING APART	
	OUR HOUSE	GOT MARRIED IN AUGUST	
	THE VICAR	HAD A MAKEOVER	
	NEXT DOOR'S DONKEY	HAD A LOVELY HOLIDAY IN THE CARIBBEAN	
	GEORGE CLOONEY	KEEPS US AWAKE BY CONSTANTLY HEE-HAWING	

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