



ECHO

MARCH 2023 EDITION



THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ECUMENICAL CHURCH OF OCCITANIE

www.ourchurch.fr

CHURCH OF ENGLAND SYNOD VOTES TO APPROVE BLESSINGS FOR SAME-SEX COUPLES

In a historic decision taken by the General Synod of the Church of England in London in February, representatives of Clergy and Laity voted to approve proposals from their Bishops to allow same-sex couples to come to a church after a civil marriage or civil partnership to give thanks, dedicate their relationship to God and receive a blessing.

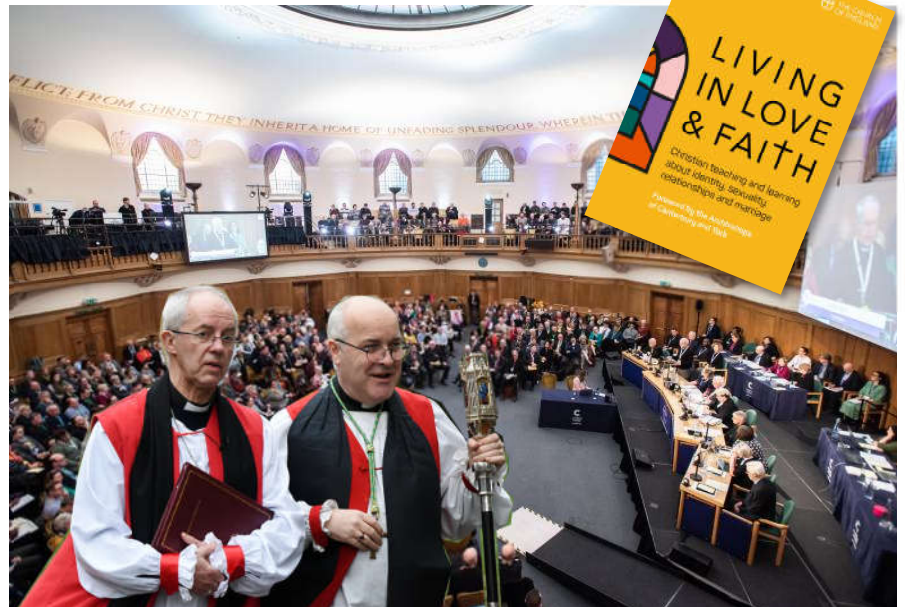
After a series of consultation sessions and a debate which extended over two days, Synod members voted by 250 to 181 to approve the proposals.

The proposals also included a formal apology from the Church of England to gay Anglicans for the bullying and discrimination they have not only suffered in the past but continue to suffer in some churches.

Draft prayers will now be finalised for use in Blessing Ceremonies and new guidance will be prepared for clergy about their expected conduct if they wish to enter into a same-sex relationship. Details will be presented to the General Synod in York in July 2023 for final approval.

The divided nature of the vote shows the level of controversy in the debate. Many amendments were proposed to the 'Measure' that the Synod was being asked to approve, almost all of which were rejected.

The debate was frequently interrupted by the need to take votes electronically on each amendment so the vote of each Synod member could be noted—and will become part of the public record.



Archbishops Justin Welby (Canterbury) and Stephen Cottrell (York) made moving speeches to Synod Members urging tolerance and moderation.



(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

A further complication arose when a member of Synod invoked a very ancient procedure known as a "Gravamen" (which dates back to at least the 15th Century) to try to record a formal grievance against the Archbishops of Canterbury and York for introducing this business under what they felt was the wrong procedure.

The effect of this was that all Lay Members of the Synod were compelled to attend an extra meeting at 8 am to vote on the Gravamen. The level of annoyance at the perceived abuse of this ancient tradition (and the need to be present at the Synod by 8am) was such that not a single person voted in favour of the Gravamen. As a result the meeting was finished in less than 10 minutes.

Although the general level of behaviour during this very stressful debate was reserved and courteous, one member of General Synod has been reported to the Police by his bishop for comments he has made opposing same-sex relationships on Twitter.

During the Synod, MP Mr Ben Bradshaw, and former Church Commissioner Sir Tony Baldry addressed a meeting of Synod members in which they warned that Members of Parliament were watching the debate closely and might decide that if General Synod were seen to be behaving in a discriminatory fashion against same-sex relationships, Parliament might decide to intervene and introduce laws to compel the Church to change its approach or to allow priests to act as they wished irrespective of the rules of the Church. They would, however, be extremely reluctant to take such an action.

Archbishop Justin Welby travelled directly from the General Synod to preside over a meeting of the international Anglican Consultative Council (ACC 18) in Accra where he told his fellow-bishops that he had been threatened with parliamentary action to introduce 'equal marriage'. His remarks were subsequently strongly condemned by MP's. Ben Bradshaw MP told the Daily Telegraph that Archbishop Welby

"seems to be claiming to the conservative African churches that the baby steps taken last week to tackle homophobia in the Church of England are being forced on him by Parliament, while telling Anglicans here, the majority of whom support same-sex marriage in church, that he and his fellow Bishops can't go further because it would alienate the Africans.

"He also appears to blame the pressure to stop discriminating against gay and lesbian Anglicans on the 'secularisation of the West' when it is people of faith within the Church of England who are leading the calls for change.

I wish the Archbishop would say what he really

believed and stick to it, rather than saying different things to different audiences."

Here in France, the issue for the Anglican Church is less acute, because all marriages are performed by the French State, and churches only offer blessings - for which the Church of England is preparing services to be used and which will be available within a few months.

There will be no compulsion on any Anglican priest to offer such a blessing if it would be against their religious beliefs to do.

Difficulties might arise, however, were the ceremony to be proposed to be performed in a church premises belonging to a different religious denomination which did not permit the blessing of same-sex relationships.

Since ECO was created, its ministry team have always affirmed their willingness to pronounce God's blessing on any marriage or civil partnership recognised by the French State without discrimination. And unlike the Church of England, which charges many hundreds of Euros to conduct blessings, ECO ministers will provide such blessings without charging any fee (apart from travel costs based on official French-Government approved rates).

In the UK, churches who are opposed to the blessing of same-sex relationships are contemplating a range of responses, from breaking away completely from the Church of England, to withholding all payments to the Church or to seeking to transfer from the supervision of their local bishop to another one, possibly based in another country, who would support their opposition to same-sex relationships.

An organisation called the Anglican Network in Europe (ANIe), created by GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference) has invited Anglicans who are opposed to the Synod's vote on Living in Love and Faith to break away from the Church of England and join with them. Their Bishop, Andy Lines, is offering pastoral oversight to any church which leaves the Church of England.

Amidst the controversies, however, there was a lighter and happier moment during the debate. One Synod member who has been for many years a leading campaigner for the recognition of same-sex marriage within the Church of England, Jayne Ozanne, while making a speech, and knowing that her partner would be watching the debate as it was broadcast live on the internet, took the opportunity to propose marriage to her from the rostrum in the Synod chamber. (We don't know if she said 'Yes')

Historians have confirmed that this was a unique event in the history of the General Synod !

ECHO will carry a further report in our August edition reporting the outcome of the next set of discussions following the meeting of the General Synod in York during July.



March 1 is St David's Day

Margaret Cross considers the life of the Patron Saint of Wales

Saint David [Dewi Sant] Patron Saint of Wales is said to have been of royal lineage. His father, Sant, was the son of Ceredig, who was prince of Ceredigion, a region in South-West Wales.

His mother, Non, was the daughter of a local chieftain. Legend has it that Non was also a niece of King Arthur. During her pregnancy, a preacher was apparently unable to preach in front of her and her unborn child, which led many to believe that the child born would be an incredible preacher himself. This resulted in calls to find and kill this child.

Fortunately for David, on the day that St Non gave birth, there was a fierce storm that prevented anyone from travelling to the hilltop where he was born. The only place for miles around that was left unaffected by the storm was where Saint Non gave birth to David. Later, a chapel named after Non was built in that very spot. His birth date, however, is uncertain and suggestions range from 462 to 512 . He died on March 1st 589 and it is said that the monastery was filled with angels as Christ received his soul.

As a priest, he engaged in missionary work travelling throughout Wales, where he established several churches, and founded many monasteries, including his principal abbey in South West Wales, where the Cathedral now stands in St David's. Over 50 churches in South Wales were dedicated to him in pre-Reformation days. He also travelled to the south and west of England and Cornwall as well as Brittany.

Many miracles are ascribed to St. David, including the resurrection of a dead child and the restoration of sight to a blind man. In about the year 550, David attended a synod where his eloquence impressed his fellow monks to such a degree that he was elected primate of the region. The legend is that while he was preaching a dove descended to his shoulder and the earth rose to lift him high above the people so that he could be seen and heard.

The episcopal see was moved to Mynyw, [Mun ee oo] where he had his monastery, now called St. David's. He ruled his diocese until he had reached old age. His last words to his monks and subjects were: "Be joyful, brothers and sisters. Keep your faith, and do the little things that you have seen and heard with me."

Many stories and legends sprang up about David and his Welsh monks. Their austerity was extreme. They worked in silence without the help of animals to till the soil. Their food was limited to bread, vegetables and water. Which may indeed be one reason why the Leek became a national emblem.

It is also thought that St David, told Welsh soldiers to wear the leek on their helmets, so that they could better spot each other when in battle against the Saxons who wore similar armour. The tactic worked and secured the Welsh army a great victory.

But why are daffodils the symbol of Wales? One of the more recent Welsh symbols, it became associated with Wales in the 19th century when it started gaining popularity. By the 20th century, Prime Minister David Lloyd George, himself a Welshman, chose to wear one on St David's Day. He also made sure the flower was used in the investiture ceremony of the Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle.

Nowadays, the daffodil is considered the national flower of Wales and is traditionally worn by those who celebrate St David's Day. Daffodils are a chosen symbol as the flowers bloom early in the year just in time for St David's Day, a very important occasion in Wales. As lovely and symbolic as leeks are, you can understand why people would rather wear a daffodil.

St David's Day, as celebrated today, dates back to 1123, when Dewi was canonised by Pope Callistus II and March 1st was included in the Church calendar. Following Dewi's canonisation, many pilgrimages were made to St. David's, and it was reported that two pilgrimages there equalled one to Rome, and three pilgrimages one to Jerusalem. March 1st was celebrated until the Reformation as a holy day. Many churches are dedicated to Dewi, and some to his mother Non. St. David continues to be a very important figure to the Welsh.

Naturally, then, St. David's Day is a time of great celebration in Wales. Societies all over Wales celebrate with special meetings and events. In St. David's Hall, Cardiff, each March 1st, there will be a concert featuring a 1000-member male voice choir, especially formed for the occasion. Male voice choirs are flown to all corners of the globe to celebrate St. David's Day, and entertain Welsh communities.

Welsh is one of the oldest living European languages, and although it has been suppressed for centuries, it has refused to die and is alive and growing today.



My personal memories of St David's Day as a child in Junior school are that the girls were encouraged to dress in ancient style Welsh costume, a pais a betgwn – a petticoat and overcoat, made of Welsh flannel, and a tall beaver hat, worn over a frilled white bonnet. We had a mini Eisteddfod in the morning in which pupils sang and recited or re-enacted stories in Welsh.

The afternoon was a holiday but there was no bus service so I had to cycle. I'll leave you to imagine how I looked on my bike in my Welsh costume...fortunately in those days it never rained on Saint David's Day !

LOT House Group
lot.group@ourchurch.fr
Janet Varty

"Let us be God's Instrument of Peace Today."

We met as we approached the first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. We were responding to a call from Church and Peace and 15 other organisations who were making a stand for peace over the weekend. They were calling for non violent diplomatic initiatives on the part of the German Government, the EU and the UN for a ceasefire, peace negotiations and for the withdrawal of Russian troops. Many events were taking place in towns and cities across Europe over the weekend. Our ECO House Group members offered prayers for them using the Iona Service of Peace and Justice. In moments of silence around candles we prayed for the numbers already killed on both sides in the conflict and for those working for peace on our behalf.



Deliberately choosing a non religious peace symbol originally designed for the British disarmament movement in 1958 which is now widely known as the "peace symbol" we stand in solidarity with all who seek peace regardless of creed or culture.



Our next meeting is on Thursday 30th March.

A.R.K

Linda Trew

I love a good movie, who doesn't? But my husband and I have different ideas of what makes a good movie, he wants something full of action, loud, fast pace whereas I tend to go for those feel-good films, easy watching, light hearted and make me smile or even cry.

So, with that in mind and the title of this article being **A.R.K**, I wonder how many of you may know what film it refers to? It comes from a great scene, in the movie *Evan Almighty*, where God, played by Morgan Freeman, spells out to a career driven politician how we can all change the world by one simple Act of Random Kindness. It's a fun, silly film but I love the sentiment behind it.

'Pay it Forward' with a young Haley Joel Osment (*Sixth Sense*, *A.I.*, *Forest Gump*) is a much more intense film. Pupils are challenged at school to come up with an idea that can change the world. The students come up with all sorts of things, from everyone in China jumping at the same time to cause the world to tilt and change its axis to Haley's character 'Trevor' coming up with the idea to 'Pay it Forward'. He explained that when someone helps you out, or does something kind, instead of paying them back – if we pay that kindness forward to someone else and then that person pays it forward and they pay it forward.... You get the idea. As a child his simple idea, full of innocence is just brilliant. It's a wonderful film, I recommend it, but have the tissues to hand!

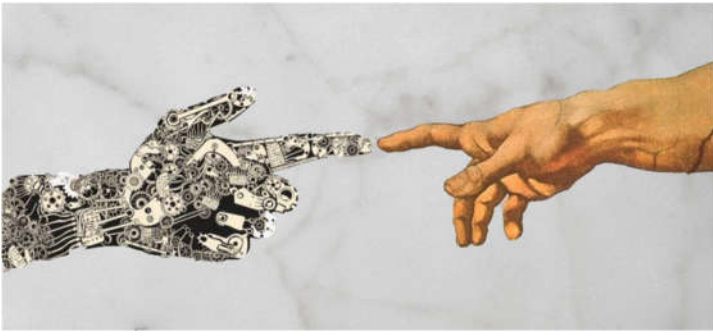
I enjoy these films as I love the heart behind the story - be kind, do something nice for others. Gestures don't have to be huge; the small things can make someone's day. We have no idea the 'baggage' that individuals carry around with them on a daily basis, the things that are weighing them down, even those of our friends and family whom we feel we know so well.

We all have concerns or issues of some kind. These problems may not be easy to resolve or may not be in our gift to do so, but a simple A.R.K could help make someone's difficult day, better. A simple smile to a stranger, offering to help a young mum struggling with the buggy on stairs, letting someone go in front of you in a queue – can brighten up that moment.

I once had a lady in a shop tell me my dress was pretty, I felt a million dollars and ended up wearing that dress to death as I felt so good in it as a result. I am sure that you too can think of when you have benefitted from a kind word or gesture.

I know I have had so many it's impossible to list them all, some have been small, but impacted me in such a big way, such as a colleague just holding my hand as I cried over the sudden death of my sister-in-law. No words were spoken, she just came over and held my hand while I cried. That was 15 years ago, but such kindness is never forgotten.

So, as you go about your day today – and your week, look out for the kindness shown to you, give thanks and think about what random acts of kindness you may be able to share with others to brighten their day.



Science v Religion

Janet Varty

In January I was able to represent ECO at a recent event where the subject of the “supposed” conflict between Religion and Science was considered. After a brief outline of the history of surveys and statistics about the beliefs people hold on the subject, Dr Thoko Kamwendo from St John’s College at the University of Durham spoke about being wary of the conclusions drawn. As most historic surveys focus on the USA, Canada and the UK they are remiss in global terms. Leading questions are often posed, true/false scenario imposed, measures are blunt, interviews were often “inside” bigger surveys and conflict is artificially created.

Dr Kamwendo, a researcher in the fields of history and sociology, spoke about her research on Christian Church leaders and Science. She concluded that the media plays up the conflict and lack of experience from the church leaders and generally leads them to shy away from the subject. In 2016 1,000 UK Clergy were asked if they were positive about Science as a part of **ECLAS**, (Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science). Many confirmed the reluctance to speak publicly, including one Bishop.

The author Elaine Howard Ecklund has debunked the myth that all US Scientists are atheists. She carried out large studies showing 1 in 5 of those she questioned went to worship but many of them kept their faith hidden. Of those who were atheists, only a minority were hostile to religion. Her book “Why Science and Faith Need Each Other: Eight Shared Values That Move Us Beyond Fear” concludes Science is not the major cause of un-belief. Instead, growing up in non religious families or having bad experiences in churches are more likely causes.

Dr Kamwendo proposes ways forward to include Global and International studies, equipping Christian Leadership with the tools to respond, and discursive approaches with the public:

“Let’s not assume we we know what people think when they haven’t been taught to engage with the subject”.

In 2021, 22 Churches in England and Wales were awarded funding totalling £400,000 by the ECLAS project to explore the relationship between Science and Faith.

Please visit www.eclasproject.org for more detail.



Millions of Children Starving Worldwide

More than 30 million children worldwide are suffering from “acute malnutrition” as the global food crisis persists into 2023.

That’s according to international experts, who say that the 15 countries enduring the worst of the crisis are Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen.

In 2022 the key driver of food insecurity was massive inflation, which put even staple food such as bread beyond the financial reach of many. In 2023 there are likely to be increased shortages of food, owing to a global fertiliser shortage.

Natural disasters also have a terrible impact. Seven of the worst-affected countries are East African nations that have suffered several years of failed rainy seasons and droughts.



Now the Barnabas Fund has created **food.gives** – to supply food aid to needy Christians in many lands and meet this desperate, ongoing need. Donors request an empty box which they then fill with dried and canned food and return to the Barnabas warehouse from where it is shipped to where it is needed.

If you would like to help, please visit:
<http://food.gives>

THE LENT ENCOUNTER WITH ECO

ECO's Online Lent Encounters have now begun, and will continue on each Monday evening starting at 8.00pm until Monday 3 April.

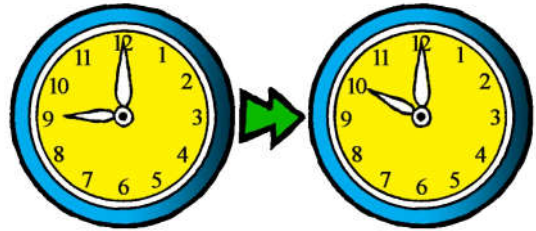
Based on the Bible Society's 'Lent Encounter' material, which this year will touch on some of the big preoccupations and concerns of our times and reminding us of how the gospel of Jesus Christ speaks hope into our situation today.

This will be a 6-week journey covering a different theme each week

- Facing the current climate
- What is the gospel?
- Worship
- The reassuring promises of God
- Having a hope-filled vision
- Taking action
- The cross and the resurrection

Each day during each week, the Bible Society will be publishing a short audio reflection on the theme of that week. We will include links to these on a dedicated page on our website for each week of Lent. When we gather on Zoom on Monday evenings, we will discuss the material and readings published by the Bible Society for about an hour. Details of the Zoom co-ordinates will appear on our website on Monday evenings by 6pm.

Each of our gatherings will be self-contained so please feel to drop in any Monday - you won't have missed anything from previous weeks.



DON'T FORGET TO CHANGE YOUR CLOCKS ON SATURDAY 25TH MARCH

Despite a consultation exercise 4 years ago from the European Commission to consider discontinuing the use of Daylight Saving Time, to which 4.6 million European Citizens responded and overwhelmingly supported this proposal, we will still be putting our clocks forward at the end of this month.

The simple reason, according to Jakob Dalunde, a Swedish MEP involved with this project, is that Europe is currently overwhelmed with other political issues (e.g. Ukraine and rising energy prices as well as Brexit) and so has no space to deal with this.

The current 3 European Time Zones arise from the German invasion of Netherlands, Belgium and France during World War 2 when those countries were obliged to switch to German time from Greenwich Mean Time. Spain's President Franco also changed Spanish Clocks to match German time.

A number of proposals exist to create different European Time Zones related to Longitude but these would create anomalies such as N Ireland being one hour ahead of the Irish Republic and Corsica being one hour behind the rest of France.

Any renewed consideration of time-zoning and clock adjustments would take several years to put into effect owing to the need to re-plan train, bus and airline timetables, and update countless computer systems.

We are therefore likely to be Springing Forward and Falling Back for quite a few years yet....

Church Mice

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The 'Nones'

*The Venerable John Barton
considers the outcomes of the
2021 Census*

Do you know any? 'Nones' are people who, when asked what religion they belong to, say 'No Religion'. At the last Census in 2021, just over 50% of adults in England and Wales said they were 'Nones'. This compares to 33% of people in France, who were asked the same question in 2020.

Not all are atheists. More detailed delving by the research organisation, Theos, revealed that 16% of Nones believe in reincarnation, 14% in the healing power of crystals and 14% in the supernatural power of ancestors. The author G K Chesterton (1874-1936) wrote, "When people choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything." He had himself dabbled in the occult and a variety of alternatives, before becoming a committed Roman Catholic.

Recent research by historian Tom Holland convinced him that, "to live in a western country is to live in a society still utterly saturated by Christian concepts and assumptions." You'll find all this in his book, "Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World".

Even the Guardian's resident atheist, Penny Toynbee (who is vice-president of Humanists UK) admits, "I feel culturally Christian, so deeply imbued with its myths, paintings, hymns and parables". Many others who also claim atheism, often turn out to be less certain than her, and are actually agnostic, meaning 'don't know'. Many of us seem to have lost touch with our roots and contented to live our lives on the surface without asking questions, until we have to.

Actor Amanda Abbington and stuntman Jonathan Goodwin tell of how their love for each other deepened after an accident left him paralysed from the waist down. He says, "I've always been a very cynical person but since meeting Amanda I've shifted my opinion about the power of the universe. I just had this really powerful feeling that we were supposed to be together."

Does that mean 'none', or something more?

The Vicar's lost his iPad!

Nigel Beeton

The Vicar's lost his iPad –
Disaster's come to church!
His sermon's on that iPad
It's left him in the lurch!

He's been looking for that iPad
For most of half an hour,
He's searched the chancel and the nave
So now he's up the tower!

Oh! Where's he put that iPad?
He had it when he came!
He's searching high and searching low
It's driving him insane!

The angels in the hammer beams
For several hundred years
Have witnessed proper order
But now they're all in tears.

For chaos reigns below them
Upon this modern day
For everyone is searching now –
Both clergyman and lay!

The Vicar found his iPad
Tonight, we'll all be sleeping!
He sent a message from his phone
And set his iPad beeping!

And as he holds his iPad
We feel his happy glow;
But could he not have done that trick
That half-an-hour ago?

The answer comes upon us
That trick he could not do!
For, in the caverns of our church
He'd lost his smartphone, too!



"The new vicar is really cool, Dad.
Did you know that God emailed the Ten
Commandments to Moses' Tablet PC?"

ECO WORSHIP CALENDAR MARCH 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	19:00	3
				Online Service of Prayer for Healing		4
5	10:30	6	7	19:00	8	9
Online Morning Prayer for Lent 2		20:00 Online Lent Group	Online Service of Compline		Online Service of Prayer for Healing	
12	10:30	13	14	19:00	15	16
Online Communion for Lent 3		20:00 Online Lent Group	Online Service of Compline		Online Service of Prayer for Healing	
19	10:30	20	21	19:00	22	23
Online Service for Lent 4		20:00 Online Lent Group	Online Service of Compline		Online Service of Prayer for Healing	
24	25	Clocks go forward				
26	10:30	27	28	19:00	29	30
Online Communion for Lent 5		20:00 Online Lent Group	Online Service of Compline		Online Service of Prayer for Healing also Meeting of Lot House Group	
						31

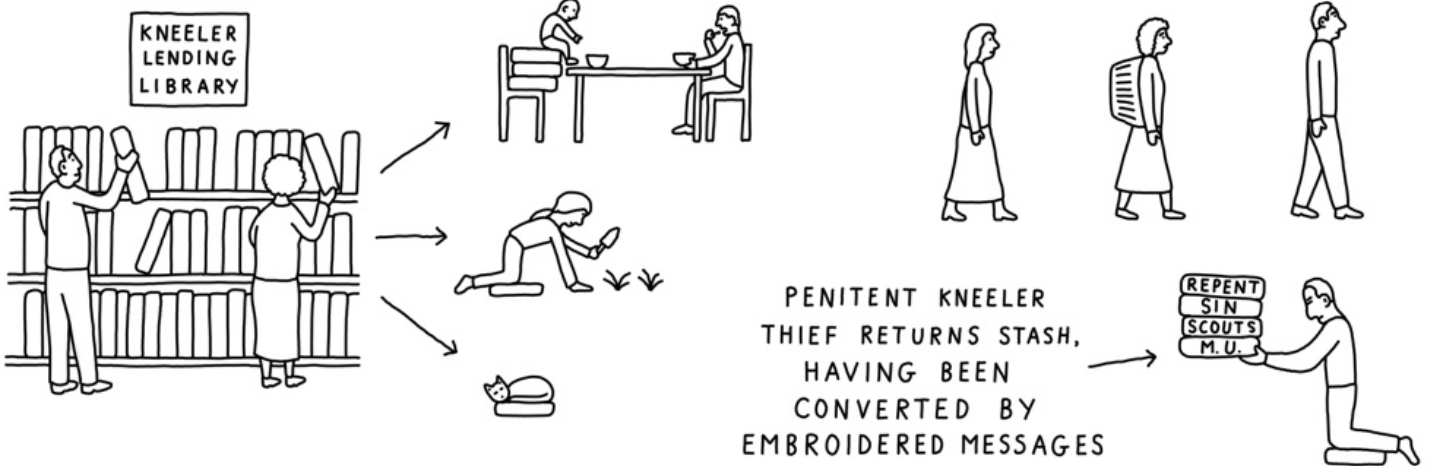
THE KNEELERS

AS AGM TIME APPROACHES THE WARDENS HAVE TO ACCOUNT FOR THE KNEELERS

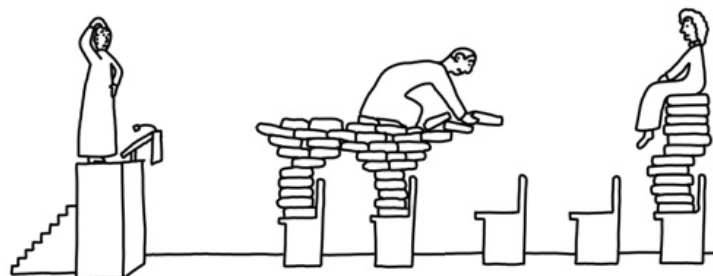
SOME WERE LOANED OUT FOR ONLINE WORSHIP

A FEW WERE PILFERED

NOTE: THIS IS HARD TO DETECT



THE CLERGY USE THE REMAINDER FOR TEAM-BUILDING EXERCISES



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