

# PARISH BULLETIN 2006/4

## OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

### European parish

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Ut unum sint.....

That they may be one.....

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### SCHEDULE OF MASSES:

Saturday: 19.00 at St. Alphonse, 32 rue des Capucins

Sunday: 11.00 at SS. Peter and Paul, Hollerich

### CONFESSIONS

Every Saturday evening from 17.30 to 18.00 in St. Alphonse. Also any time at 34 rue des Capucins, by appointment (ring 47 00 39)

### BAPTISMS:

On Saturdays at 12. 15 and on Sundays at 15.00 in St. Alphonse. Saturdays and Sundays at 15.30 in Hollerich. It is essential to contact me well in advance about baptisms, so that (a) we can meet and prepare for the baptism (b) check out the availability of the church on the day you would like to have the baptism. Please remember that neither St. Alphonse nor Hollerich may be available on the day you might prefer.

### WEDDINGS

If you are thinking of getting married, please contact me well in advance ( 6 months or so). There are documents to be got and a matrimonial dossier to be drawn up. If you are getting married outside Luxembourg, the dossier will have to be sent to the diocese in which you are getting married. Many dioceses insist on having the documentation sent to them three months or so in advance of the wedding.

## 1. LITURGICAL CALENDAR FOR CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR

Dec. 3 <sup>rd</sup> :	First Sunday of Advent (Year C)	Luke 21, 25-28. 34- 36
Dec. 10 <sup>th</sup>	Second Sunday of Advent (C)	Luke 3, 1-6
	The 11.00 a.m. Mass will be a 'Children's Mass'	
Dec. 17 <sup>th</sup>	Third Sunday of Advent (C)	
	'Gaudete' Sunday	Luke 3, 10-18
Dec. 24 <sup>th</sup>	Fourth Sunday of Advent	Luke 1, 57-66
Dec. 24 <sup>th</sup> :	<b>Christmas 'Midnight' Mass at 10.00 p.m. in Hollerich</b>	
Dec. 25 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Christmas Day Mass at 11.00 a.m. in Hollerich</b>	
Dec. 31 <sup>st</sup>	Feast of the Holy Family	Luke 2, 41-52
Jan 7 <sup>th</sup>	Feast of the Epiphany	Matt. 2,1-12

**NB There will be no Saturday evening Mass on December 30th.**

## 3. CHRISTMAS AND HOLIDAY SERVICES

You will have noticed above that the last Sunday of Advent happens also to be Christmas Eve. That means that along with the normal Sunday Mass at 11.00 a.m., there will be the **Mass for the Vigil of Christmas at 10.00 p.m.** To complicate matters still more - or, if you prefer, to make the day liturgically richer - **THE TRADITIONAL CHRISTINGLE SERVICE** will be held in the Centre Convikt at 4.00 p.m. on Christmas Eve.

This is a service for children under nine years of age, with their parents, and has been a delightful Anglican/R. Catholic joint prayer and praise service for some years past. The purpose is to combine carol-singing and prayer with good works. Everyone brings an envelope enclosing a donation for the Children's society - an English organization which helps homeless children. Each child receives a 'Christingle' i.e. an orange with a candle inside it. The Christmas story is told and acted out and we sing well-known Christmas carols. So do come along and join our Anglican friends at 4.00 p.m. on Christmas Eve at the Anglican Chapel in the Centre Convikt on Ave Marie-Thérèse.

Our own Christmas Day Mass will be as usual at 11. 00 a.m. in Hollerich. I will be leaving for a holiday in Ireland and mass on the following Sunday, December 31<sup>st</sup>, will be said by Fr. Alexis Pauly. I will be back again for the Mass of the Epiphany on January 7<sup>th</sup>.

**There will be no Saturday evening mass on January 6th.**

### 3 WHO OR WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

Instead of an Advent or Christmas reflection, I thought of offering something more general and more comprehensive this time. Nothing hugely original or world-shaking - just an attempt to restate what I think it means to be a Christian. Let's deal first with what I think are two *inadequate answers* to the question.

#### **A. Being a Christian is all about keeping the commandments**

Forty or more years ago - especially if you grew up (as I did) in a predominately Christian/Catholic country - if you were asked: what is a Christian? you might have answered: 'well, you're a Christian if you do your duty by God and your neighbour, if you believe what the Church teaches and go to the sacraments regularly and keep the commandments and are a good neighbour'. It's not altogether a bad answer - but it has two basic weaknesses. (1) it puts all the emphasis on **you**, on your doing **your** duty, on **your** keeping the commandments etc. (2) God is, as it were, on the sideline - a spectator. You're the one on the pitch, doing what you're supposed to do, playing the game by the rules, and God is (like a referee) watching the play, watching your performance.

#### **B. Christianity is 'all about love'**

In the years after Vatican II, people began to talk a different language. We said: 'well no, it's not like that. Being a Christian is not just about doing your duty and fulfilling obligations to God and your neighbour, not about do's and don'ts. It's really about love'. And suddenly we all began talking like mad about love. 'All you need is love', we said with the Beatles. There were a few years in the 60's (and 70's) when you couldn't have a liturgy or a para-liturgy without hearing one of the famous pieces from St. John's letters about love. The word was flogged to death, almost. And, of course, we were all quite sure we knew what 'love' was. It was the key to a much more attractive kind of Christianity. We began to say things like: So-and-so doesn't go to church, chapel or meeting but he or she is a good Christian i.e. a loving person. Needless to say, there's a great deal of truth in all this. But again, there's a weakness. Once more it's primarily all about **us**. Being a Christian is still about something **we** do or **should be doing** - this time, loving people.

#### **C. A Christian is someone for whom God is the centre**

Let me say where I think we *should* begin - not with us at all or with what we

should or should not be doing - but with God. Putting it very simply: a

Christian is someone who **believes in God**. What does that mean? Well, that's what we'll have to unpack, but it means first and foremost, that the centre of the world is not me, but God. This is not primarily *my* world or *our* world, but *God's* world. So far from being 'on the sideline' God is at the very heart of our world. More than that, he is at the heart of each one of us. He is the very source of my being, he is the source of everything that exists. So the basic thing is not what we should be doing or not doing - that has its place, of course. The basic thing is to forget ourselves and **learn to listen, to attend, to wonder, to adore, to praise, to give thanks**. As we say in the Gloria: We worship **you**, we give **you** thanks, we praise **you** for your glory. Or as one of the Psalms says: "I thank you for the wonder of my being, for the wonders of all your creation".

#### **D. God loved us first - in Jesus Christ**

But that's only the beginning. God is not just the source of my life and yours, the source of everything that exists, keeping everything in being by his presence and infinitely gentle power. He has come even closer to us still. He has become part of our human story. He has come into this terribly messy world of ours, first of all into the history of a particular people and then in one person from among that people, Jesus of Nazareth. So the Christian is not simply someone who adores and praises the mystery of God's presence in all things. **The Christian is someone who has heard an astonishing story, who is grasped by sheer delight at that story and who lives by and out of that story**, the story, the 'good news' that in Jesus of Nazareth the living God has become one of us and has committed himself totally to us and our history.

Remember I said a moment ago that after Vatican II people began to say that being a Christian is all about loving people. Well, they were right, of course; being a Christian certainly means being loving. But not just in the sense that love is a good thing and the more of it the merrier. To believe, in the Christian sense of the word, is to live from the conviction that **God has loved us first**. "*This is the love I mean*", says St. John, "*not our love for God, but God's love for us when he sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins*" (1 Jn 4,10). John Robinson, the Anglican bishop who wrote *Honest to God*, said once that the basic difference between the good Christian and the good non-Christian or humanist is that "for the non-Christian, love is what **ought to be** the ultimate reality; for the Christian love **is the name of the ultimate reality**"

#### **E. Love is the gift of the Spirit**

But there's a further step we must make. It's not just that God creates us and came close to us in Jesus Christ and loves us first and forgives us even before we ask for forgiveness. That's marvellous, of course. But doesn't it seem to put an even greater burden on us? How could we possibly return that love? Well, the answer is: we couldn't. But God didn't just come close to us and love us 'to the end' in Jesus' life and death, and then say - 'now, get on with it'. God came even closer still. He gave himself even more deeply to all of us and to each of us, as a power and a capacity among us and within us, **enabling** us to love him in return and to go out and love others with the kind of love with which we have been loved. And that power of God within us we call the Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ. It is the Spirit that gives us the freedom to respond to God; it is the Spirit who gives us the generosity to love in return for the love that has been given us. We could never do it on our own.

#### **F. Believing that.... and believing in...**

Faith, we say, is a gift. It's a gift because life itself is a gift of God, a gift to wonder at and give praise and thanks for. It's a gift to have heard the good news. Above all it's a gift that enables us to respond in adoration, praise and love of God - the gift we call the Spirit. We can't do it ourselves. Only God can bring us to God. That's the first thing about faith. The second thing is this: when we say 'I believe', we don't simply mean: 'I believe all those things about God and Jesus Christ and the Spirit'. I do, of course, believe them. I believe they are true. But notice that we begin our Creed not with the words 'I believe **that** God is the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth', 'I believe **that** Jesus Christ came among us, suffered, died and rose again etc. but with the words: 'I believe **in** God...I believe **in** Jesus Christ.. I believe **in** the Holy Spirit'. There's a big difference between 'believing **that**' something is the case and 'believing **in**'. You can only believe **in** a person, in someone.

So, when we say: 'I believe in God', we're saying: I entrust my life to God; I base my life, my hopes and my future on him, not on myself. We're saying: this is what my life is about, this is where I stand: on God who created me, on God who loved me in Jesus Christ, on God who is Spirit and power within me. It is this God and my faith in him that gives me, again and again (1) the freedom to accept myself as a creature - not a superman or woman, not a 'god' who has to do everything!! (2) the freedom to accept myself as I am, a sinner, but a forgiven sinner - hence the freedom to live my life without basic anxiety

about the future; (3) the freedom to give myself generously in love to others; the freedom to hope and work for a better future for all; the freedom to face

failure and disappointment and even my own death with some confidence and hope.

## **G. The faith of the Christian community**

One last word: where did we get this faith? From God, of course. It's the gift of his Spirit. And yet we came into this faith by hearing the story of God and his love from our parents and teachers. And where did they hear it? From their parents and teachers... and all the way back to the apostles. In other words, the story we tell is a story that has been handed on; it's a tradition, the tradition of the community we call the Church, a tradition that goes back to Christ and the apostles, who were the first to tell and live out of the story... But that's a big subject and we'll have to leave it for another time.

## **4. SPECIAL SOUP LUNCH AT THE WILEY'S**

The 'alternative Christmas Party' to raise funds for World Visions' 'great gifts'.

You are invited to join us for a Soup lunch

**Thursday December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2006**

any time between 12 noon and 3 p.m.

at the Wileys

25 rue Michel Engels

(near the Maternité)

World Visioon is an international development and humanitarian aid agency dedicated to the relief of suffering and improvement in the quality of life of the world's poorest people. For more info [www.greatgifts.org](http://www.greatgifts.org).

On my 'wish list' this year:

- a HOSPITAL BED: 'give a baby the best start in life - a clean hospital bed to be born in. Your giftg will equip a new maternity ward in north west Uganda with birthing facilities, so that children can be born in a hygienic environment

- a DAIRY COW: will provide much needed milk and an income, which will help pay for school fees and provide a livelihood for orphaned children in Kisumu, Kenya'.

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Your donation can help achieve this goal.

Please come along and enjoy a stress-free 'Christmas shopping experiene',

while you enjoy a wholesome lunch! Thank you  
RSVP Eileen Wiley Tel. 26259130 or enauk [e1wiley@pt.lu](mailto:e1wiley@pt.lu)

## **5. FIVE IMPORTANT DATES TO KEEP IN MIND**

### **ADVENT PENITENTIAL RITE December 14<sup>th</sup> at 8.00 p.m. Hollerich**

This will be a service of readings and prayers, with a short homily. The whole service lasts about a half-hour or 35 minutes, at the end of which the formula of absolution will be said. There will also be an opportunity for anyone who wishes to make a brief private confession.

### **CAROLS AND READINGS with 'Intermedii' December 18<sup>th</sup>**

*Intermedii*, the choral ensemble which has been performing concerts in Luxembourg, France and Belgium since its formation in Luxembourg in 1994 will give their now traditional Christmas concert with readings in the Convict Chapel in Ave. Marie-Thérèse on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2006, starting at 18.30 This year, as well as being joined again by the Rev'd Chris Lyon and Father Eamonn Breslin who will provide the readings, *Intermedii* is delighted to perform with the Ni Ensemble, winners of the prestigious Passau Competition (as reported in the 157<sup>th</sup> edition of 352, published 23.11.2006). *Intermedii* and the Ni Ensemble, who also played to a very full house in Luxembourg on 1<sup>st</sup> November this year, will perform music by Handel Praetorius, Host, Tallis, Turner and others.

### **CONFIRMATION PREPARATION PROGRAMME : January 10<sup>th</sup>**

The first session of our Confirmation Preparation programme will take place at 34 rue des Capucins on January 10<sup>th</sup> at 7.30 p.m. It is absolutely vital that those hoping to be confirmed be present. We recommend that you be present by about 7.25, so that the session can begin punctually at 7.30 p.m.

### **ECUMENICAL BIBLICAL EXCHANGE January 23<sup>rd</sup> 8.00 p.m.**

In the context of Christian Unity Week, we hope to have an Anglican-R. Catholic exchange on a biblical theme (details to be announced later) on January 23<sup>rd</sup> at 34 rue des Capucins, led by Rev. Chris Lyon and myself. Last year there was a very good turn-out and we had quite a lively and helpful

exchange. Let's hope it's equally good this year.

**CHEESE AND WINE EVENING January 26<sup>th</sup> at 7.30 p.m.**

To launch our Lenten project for 2006, we will have a cheese and wine evening at the Maison Paroissiale in Strassen on Friday January 26<sup>th</sup> at 7.30 p.m. It's a very enjoyable evening, with good food (not simply cheese and wine), the best of company and a Tombola with excellent prizes. Do come and support our Lenten project for this coming year.

Finally, here's a Christmas poem alled **BC: AD** by U.A. Fanthorpe

This was the moment when Before  
Turned into After, and the future's  
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.

This was the moment when nothing  
Happened. Only dull peace  
Sprawled boringly over the earth.

This was the moment when even energetic Romans  
Could find nothing better to do  
That counting heads in remote provinces.

And this was the moment  
When a few farm workers and three  
Members of an obscure Persian sect

Walked haphazard by starlight straight  
Into the kingdom of heaven.

And, with that, I wish all our parishioners a very happy and blessed Christmas and may God be with you and your families throughout the new year 2007.

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Eamonn Breslin, parish priest.

