

PARISH BULLETIN 2008/2 OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

EUROPEAN PARISH

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Ut unum sint....
That they may all be one...

SCHEDULE OF MASSES

Saturday: 19.00 at St. Alphonse, 32 rue des Capucins
Sunday: 11.00 a.m. At Ss. Peter and Paul, Hollerich

CONFESIONS

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

BAPTISMS

On Saturdays at 12. 15 and on Sundays at 14.30 or 15.00 in St. Alphonse. Also Saturdays and Sundays in Hollerich (if church is available). On account of the considerable number of baptisms in our community and the consequent difficulty of arranging pre-baptism meetings with the parents and godparents, I have decided to take groups of parents together for the pre-baptism preparation. The sessions, conducted by Mrs. Cheryl Kouba and myself, last about an hour or slightly more and are absolutely obligatory for parents (and, if possible at least one godparent) of children to be baptized. It is important therefore that we have good advance notice (several months) of upcoming baptisms. **The next pre-baptism preparation session will be on January 19th at 34 rue des Capucins, at 7.30 p.m.** It will not always be possible to have the baptism on the day that would suit you best, so do let us know well in advance if you are hoping to have your child baptized.

WEDDINGS

If you are thinking of getting married, please contact me well in advance (6 months or so). There are documents to be got (I.e. Recent baptism and confirmation certificates) 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 the marriage takes place. Many dioceses insist on having the documentation sent to them three months or so in advance of the wedding date.

1. LITURGICAL CALENDAR FOR ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

November 30th:	First Sunday of Advent (Year B)	Mark 13, 33-37
December 7th	Second Sunday of Advent (Year B)	Mark 1, 1-8
December 14th	Third Sunday of Advent (Year B)	John 1, 6-8. 19-28
December 21st	Fourth Sunday of Advent (Year B)	Luke 1, 26-38
December 24th	Christmas 'Midnight Mass' at 22.00 in Hollerich	
December 25th	Christmas Day Mass at 11.00 in Hollerich	

There will be no English masses (either in St. Alphonse or in Hollerich) on the week-ends of December 27th/28th (Feast of the Holy Family) or January 3rd/4th (Feast of the Epiphany). Over the past number of years the late Fr. Alexis Pauly O.P replaced me during my time in Ireland after Christmas. I have not been able to find another replacement and so I have to ask the parishioners to attend mass elsewhere on the two week-ends mentioned.

January 11th:	Feast of the Baptism of the Lord	Mark 1, 7-11
January 18th	Second Sunday of the Year (B)	John 1, 35-42
January 25th	Third Sunday of the Year (B)	Mark 1, 14-20

January 18th to 25th is the week of prayer for Christian Unity

2. NEWS ABOUT THE PARISH

In early October, I called a meeting of a group of parishioners to discuss the state of the parish, its future, what we need to do, what institutions we need to put in place so that our parish community may flourish and thrive. It's clear that we have, numbers-wise, a very lively and multi-cultural community. In general things work very well – e.g the readers', communion-ministers' and altar servers' rotas, the coffee rota, the liturgical music and choir, the children's liturgy and so forth. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who work tirelessly to organise and run these essential services. But we need fresh blood. Our community is growing and changing all the time. It would be a pity if all the work was left to the willing people who have been in the forefront for many years. Is there more we can or should be doing? Are we engaging enough of our parishioners? It was with these and other questions in mind that I called the meeting in early October. A number of issues were discussed and the following emerged as the most important. What follows is drawn largely from the minutes of the meeting drawn up by Colin Buckland who very generously offered to act as secretary.

(a) THE ANGLOPHONE PARISH WEBSITE

We felt that an improved website and a full database should be our first and main preoccupation, so that every actual and potential parishioner can be (1) contacted and

(2) fully informed about parish matters. This is, of course, a complex matter requiring not only the collection of information on a large scale, but also compliance with data protection law. The Anglican community have recently updated their website, so we thought we should seek their advice. Cheryl Kouba suggested that the website should have a simple and easily remembered URL and recommended a number of American parish websites we might look at.

Since the meeting, Joe Schmidt - assisted by Colin Buckland - has begun working on the project. To date all he has tried to do is to set up a 'skeleton' website, a bare outline in which those responsible - such as myself or those in charge of the various rotas etc. - will be able to display and update information, even if they have little IT competence. The website, when we have it finally up and running, will also allow parishioners (especially new ones) to put necessary data such as email addresses, phone-numbers etc. on record for the parish, with due regard, of course, for data protection. As I say, we are still at a preliminary stage, but we hope soon to be far enough on to give you its address, so that you, in turn, can give us your comments and reflections. In the meantime, our heartfelt thanks to Joe Schmidt for his work on a website for our community.

(b) FORMATION OF A PARISH COUNCIL

We spent a long while discussing how we should go about setting up a parish council. It was felt (1) that we should seek as diverse a representation as possible from our multinational parish (2) that while a voting democracy seems to be the least bad way to select representatives in politics, we wonder if it is the best way in a parish. It is not obvious that the skills and ambitions which motivate people to stand for government are the same as those a parish council would want most strongly to seek out. (3) we should be aware that different ages, as well as different cultures should have their contribution to make to the running of the parish.

After much discussion we felt that the best way to proceed was to invite the different groups in the Mass-attending population to propose to Fr. Breslin the name of anyone whom they felt would be a good Parish Council representative. People should not be excluded from putting forward their own names, but not limited to this. The size of the response might determine the way forward from there. Alternatively, we should seek a core group of volunteers from the different cultural groups represented at our Sunday Mass. This group would have the task of agreeing and implementing a procedure for choosing a parish council, which would then serve for a year and meet perhaps every six weeks.

Perhaps this issue of the Bulletin might be the signal to start the process. So I will welcome any names and suggestions you may wish to send to me. Clearly, we are at the beginning of a process which will take quite some time to finalize.

There were a number of other issues (the Cry-room, music in church and preparation for the sacraments, arrangement of the chairs on Sunday) which were dealt with in somewhat less detail and there is no particular need to go into them now, as some of them have been resolved. I would just call your attention to one such issue, namely

© PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENTS

Our First Communion preparation programme is up and running. I'd like to thank Denise Dunne who is overseeing the programme and those parents who have undertaken to do the teaching over the months between now and First Communion day. This year we will also have a programme of preparation for **Confirmation**. This brings to my mind one concern about preparation for the sacraments I should like to share with you, frankly and honestly. There are many people who never come to mass who nonetheless approach us and ask for the sacraments – baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage. This problem is by no means unique to our community, but I feel it's worth thinking about.

On principle, I feel that one should never refuse the sacraments to anyone who seeks them. The very fact of asking for baptism, confirmation etc. is, one hopes, a sign of faith. Yet, year after year, we have the experience of children coming for First communion who have not been inside our church since they were baptized. It's the same with those asking for Confirmation. Many have not set foot in the church since their First Communion. I have a deep-set conviction that simply to 'dispense' the sacraments without due preparation is simply wrong and near sacrilegious. I have already mentioned the more formal Baptismal Preparation sessions we have recently introduced (see p. 1 above). Preparation for First Communion has been working quite well. I am not so sure about Confirmation. This year I will be asking all those who wish to go forward for this sacrament to submit a letter, stating why they seek the sacrament and what implications it will have for their lives as Christians.

3. SOME IMPORTANT DATES TO KEEP IN MIND

(a) **Advent Penitential rite in Hollerich: Tuesday December 16th at 20.00 hrs.**

This will be a short service of readings and prayers, followed by a brief homily. The whole service lasts about 35 minutes, at the end of which the formula of absolution will be said. There will also be an opportunity for anyone wishing to make a brief private confession (not a detailed one) to do so.

(b) **'Intermedii' Concert at Convikt Centre Chapel, December 15th at 19.30**

Every year during Advent, for many years now, '*Intermedii*' – a choral ensemble of which our own Colin Buckland is a member – gives a Christmas concert of carols and

readings in the Convict Chapel on Ave. Marie-Thérèse. The readings, Scripture and some poems with a Christmas flavour, will be done by Rev. Chris Lyon and myself. A good deal of preparation is going into this year's concert, so it should be a very special occasion. The proceeds from the concert will be donated to the Manna Centre, an organization in London that provides support, advice, showers etc. for homeless people in the West End. For further information on the Manna Centre <http://www.mannasociety.org.uk/Pages/Reports/newsletter.htm> . Please come and support this good cause and enjoy a delightful evening of Christmas music.

© Prayer group in Advent

Our informal prayer group will be meeting each Monday evening during Advent and we would like to invite you to join us, for one or more of these evenings. The times and places are as follows:

Monday 1st December at 20.30 in the home of Marina and Peter Calnan
242 route de Thionville, Luxembourg. Phone: 40 85 58

Monday 8th December at 2030 in the home of Elisabeth and Glenn Zasman
5 rue Haute, Clemency. Phone 26 50 01 22

Monday 15th December at 20.30 in the home of Carol and Steve McCarthy
21 rue de Luxembourg, Schrassig Phone 35 97 68

Monday 23rd December at 20.30 in the home of Elisabeth and Glenn Zasman
5 rue Haute, Clemency. Phone 26 50 01 22

For organisational reasons, it would help if you emailed us in advance if you intend to come along: Catarina Fernandes; cat_country_lu@yahoo.com
Steve McCarthy: sjmc@pt.lu

(d) 'Christingle' Service, December 24th in Convikt Chapel at 16.00 hrs

For some years now, this service for children under 9 years of age, with their parents, has been a joint Anglican/Roman Catholic prayer and praise service. We 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. During the service each child receives a 'Christingle' – an orange with a candle inside it. The Christmas story is told and acted out and we sing well-known Christmas carols. It's really a lovely occasion on which to join our Anglican brothers and sisters, so do bring your under-9 year olds along on Christmas Eve to the Anglican chapel in the Convict Centre on Ave. Marie-Thérèse.

(e) Cheese and Wine evening at Strassen on Friday January 30

To launch our Lenten project for 2009, we will have as usual a wine and cheese evening at the Salle paroissiale in Strassen on Friday, January 30th, beginning at 7.30 p.m. There will be good food (salads, meats, desserts) – as well as cheese and wine, you'll be able to meet people from the other linguistic communities of the European parish; there will be a Tombola (run by our community) and a chance to win some great prizes. If you have any spare bottles of wine/whiskey/brandy/schnaps etc., or any other articles that you would like to donate as prizes, please contact Cliodhna Dempsey some time in January. Our community has been asked to provide some cakes or buns for the tea/coffee. Volunteers for this will be very welcome.

(f) Ecumenical exchange: Tuesday January 20th at 20.00 hrs.

During the week of prayer for Christian Unity we will have our usual Anglican-Roman Catholic exchange on a biblical theme or text. As of now, the text hasn't been decided on. But the venue will be the parish offices at 34 rue des Capucins. It's always a very interesting and fruitful evening and for the last two years the turn-out has been very good. Put January 20th in your diary/agenda/calendar.

4 SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT ADVENT

What are we about during Advent? What are the liturgies of Advent telling us? (Don't forget that the liturgy is supposed to symbolize what goes on in the rest of our lives). Many people think of Advent simply as 'the run up to Christmas', our preparation for the coming or the birth of Christ. But hold a moment! Hasn't Christ already come? Is Advent then just make-believe? Not a bit of it. The fact is that Advent expresses in symbol and ritual three stages in the human story, in the Christian journey: Christ has come (the First Coming); Christ will come again (the second coming) and Christ is here now. We remember the first and celebrate it with thankfulness; we look forward to the second 'in joyful hope'; we live in the third. A word about each of these.

(a) Advent is a remembering: Isaiah speaks of the people of Israel – and, of course Israel is simply the human story writ large – as a 'People who walked in darkness, who dwelt in a land of deep darkness (Is. 9,2) He was probably thinking of their years of slavery in Egypt, but also of their exile in Babylon, and of the darkness of idolatry, arrogance and oppression of the poor into which his people often fell. We have no difficulty in identifying with this darkness; it's all around us, it's in ourselves and our relationships. The theological word for it is 'sin'. Time and again the people who walked in darkness longed for the light, hoped for Someone who would be the light and show the way out of darkness. When that light came, it was not an idea, but a human person, Jesus Christ, God from God, light from light. He said of himself: 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have

the light of life'. This was the light that dawned that first Christmas and that overcame the world's darkness at Easter. So Advent is the time of remembering and celebrating that Light coming among us as one of us: hence the Crib and the manger.

(b) **Advent is a looking forward in joyful hope:** But isn't the world still a dark place? Are we kidding ourselves? Where is the light that Christ brought and that Christ was? Does not the power of sin and evil still hold sway? Yes – and no. When we say that Christ overcame the sin of the world by rising from the dead, we are telling the ultimate truth about our world and our history. We are saying that, despite appearances, the Light that dawned at Christmas and was triumphant at Easter represents the only real and lasting future. That future (which is already being shaped in, among and around us) will one day be unveiled in all its glory and the world will stand amazed. That 'day' we refer to as the **Second Coming of Christ**. We do not know **when** he will come. Nor do we know **how** he will come. The New Testament gives us vivid images and symbols, e.g. he will come 'on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory'. We do not have to see this as a literal picture. Even the word 'coming' is an image. All we know is that Christ will be revealed in his glory, that human beings and human history will be seen for what it really is, that the powers of evil will be swept utterly away; that God's Kingdom will come in its eternal richness. We wait in joyful hope for that Light at the end of the tunnel, but often the tunnel seems dreadfully dark. The point is that when Scripture and liturgy speak of Christ's final coming, the emphasis is not on the when or the how, but rather on how we are preparing for his coming, how we are contributing to that future?

(b) Christ is in our midst, coming to meet us at every moment

Between the past of his first coming and the future of his final coming, Christ is not absent. He is profoundly here among us, in us by his Spirit. The light shines in the darkness... now! How do we enter the light, how does the light shine in us and through us? We enter it formally, liturgically through the sacraments, baptism, confirmation, above all, the Eucharist. And yet, these do not work by magic, automatically. That's why Paul had to urge the Romans 'Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light... put on the Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom 13, 12-14). So Advent is also a time of penitence, of examination of conscience. Does Christ radiate, shine forth from your daily life? If not, why not? Is there a dark side of you that you refuse to face? Then, there's the darkness around us. Even though the world is redeemed, it is still a dark place: Iraq, Darfur, the Congo. Mumbai recently. But Christ is here and he does flicker and and at times even shine and blaze through the lives of those who, in the midst of darkness, 'walk as children of the light'. Many of them are Christians, many are not, for the Spirit of Christ knows no boundaries. Here's a story I read somewhere: the day after Thanksgiving (30 years or so ago) the *New York Times* told of a 33-year old cabdriver whose hair was tied in a ponytail. One day this cabby 'prayed to God for guidance on how to help the forgotten people of the streets who exist in life's shadows'. As he recalls it, God said 'Make 8 pounds

of spaghetti, throw it in a pot, give it out on 103rd Street and Broadway with no conditions, and people will come'. He did, they came, and now he goes from door to door giving people food to eat.

So, make the Christ who has come a reality, a living light, in your life and in some other lives. Give of yourself..to one or other dark soul..with no conditions. Then his first coming will become present reality and prepare his coming in glory.

Normal Nicholson catches something of all this in the following poem:

The first night, the first night
The night that Christ was born,
His mother looked in his eyes and saw
Her maker in her son.

The twelfth night, the twelfth night,
After Christ was born,
The Wise Men found the child and knew
Their search had just begun.

Eleven thousand, two fifty nights,
After Christ was born,
A dead man hung in the child's light
And the sun went down at noon

Six hundred thousand or thereabout nights,
After Christ was born,
I look at you and you look at me
But the sky is too dark for us to see
And the world waits for the sun.

But the last night, the last night
Since ever Christ was born,
What his mother knew will be known again,
And what was found by the Three Wise Men,
And the sun will rise and so may we,
on the last morn, on Christmas Morn,
Umpteen hundred and eternity.

With my apologies for missing out on two bulletins this year, I wish all our parishioners a very happy and blessed Advent and Christmas season. May God bless you and your families throughout the New Year 2009