

Pilsdon at Malling Community

**Christmas
Newsletter
2010**

*Wishing you God's Blessing this
Christmas time from all at the
Pilsdon at Malling Community*



The revolutionary spirit of Advent

I have just begun reading Thomas Merton's *The Ascent to Truth*. His first words are about the need for a spiritual revolution - that Christianity, by its very nature demands such a revolution and that if Christians lived up to what they profess to believe, the revolution would happen. If Christians are to truly fulfil their Baptismal vocation, this revolutionary spirit would find expression in their desire for unworldliness, detachment and union with God which in turn would free them for really fruitful social action. Perhaps this is in part what Advent is about – we are not just passively waiting for the coming of the Christ-child, God is actually in waiting for us: for us to really turn to Him and fulfil our obligation to love and serve Him utterly, to be ready for His coming so that the spiritual revolution that will bring light and life to the world can take place.

One of the very special things about our Barn Chapel here at Pilsdon at Malling is the beauty of its ancient beams and stone walls. These seem to me to be especially beautiful when seen by candle light. Just one candle shining in the darkness lights up the cold stone and warm wood in a way that somehow brings us face to face with the generations who have used this building as a place to keep their animals and, over the past forty years, as a place of worship. Here we can almost feel the starkness, the poverty and yet also the wonder of that stable so long ago in Bethlehem. In the same way that the star led the wise men to Jesus so are we led to the place of worship by a candle that seems to express all the hope and love and life that come when we allow the Christ-child to enter our lives.

“Light and life to all he brings” – words from a well-known carol and so relevant to us as we journey through these days of Advent in the northern hemisphere. As we approach the longest day on December 21 we find that we're longing for more light. Christmas signals the turning point in these dark days. Not only do we begin the journey back to longer days and shorter nights but we celebrate the coming of the Christ-child into our world, our lives and our darkness - the light that shines in the darkness, the light that the darkness could not overcome.

May you be blessed this Christmas with peace, joy, light and life, and may we all be ready to welcome the Christ-child and let His glory live among us. — *Pam*

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In an attempt to save money—and the environment—we try to send newsletters by email to as many readers as possible. If you have email and do not already receive a digital copy of the newsletter, please drop a line to pilsdon.malling@tiscali.co.uk

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Baptism in the Barn Chapel

On Advent Sunday there was a family Baptism in the Chapel. Peter's cousin and family – some all the way from Dublin – celebrated the Baptism of three-year-old Rowan.

Rowan was very well behaved and had been practising saying his full names, when Peter asked him. After the signing of the cross with oil and baptism with water, Rowan proceeded to lead his sister and friends in a dance (run?) around the Altar in celebration, to applause from all present. Then he became serious again and received his lighted candle.



A new lease - and a heating crisis

We are pleased to announce that after more than three years of legal negotiations and technicalities with the Abbey and Diocesan solicitors we have now signed a 25-year lease, thus securing our long-term future here. However, shortly after signing a repairing lease our main boiler broke down and was found to be irreparable because of its age and asbestos gaskets. So as the cold weather came upon us, we found that we were having to use an urn for hot water in the kitchens and we had one shower instead of three bathrooms, and no heating on the ground floor, including the scriptorium (sitting room) and chapel.

We had realised that our plumbing systems were very old and inefficient and had asked for a survey and recommendations to reduce our carbon footprint but we had hoped that we could address these issues next summer, giving us time to plan and raise funds. We now had to renew our boiler and hot-water tank/system. This also required a new chimney liner, but when the chimney pot was removed the whole chimney stack nearly fell down. So we then had to have scaffolding installed and the chimney stack rebuilt, and then two feet of snow covered everything, bringing most activity in West Kent to a standstill!

After nearly two months, we now have a new condensing gas boiler and a hot water tank that can be heated in the future by renewable solar energy. Any contributions to this unexpected cost of £15,000 would be very gratefully appreciated. We have had nearly £2,000



donated so far, for which we are very grateful. The survey so far has identified that it will probably cost about £80,000 to renew all the plumbing systems in the cloisters and cottages and install some solar panels and other renewable energy systems, if the planners will allow us. We hope that the present old system will give us enough time to get the appropriate permissions and funds and grants to do this work, which is now a priority. We regret that two casualties of our heating breakdown, together with illness and bad weather, were the Hedgehog Production of "Precious Cargo" – to be re-scheduled in 2011 - and the Kings Hill WI Carol Service.

Down on the farm ...

The recent cold weather and snow came as a shock to some of our animals: the chickens have decided to spend their days indoors and are refusing to lay eggs in these conditions, the geese and the sheep miss their fresh grass, the cats (even Cherry!) come and curl up on our laps by the fire, but George seems to enjoy the snow, and finds snowballs fun to catch and eat. At the end of November we said goodbye to the lambs and pigs, and sadly to one of the Jacob ewes, as well. They will provide full freezers for the whole year. However, we have some new arrivals: ten lively and noisy chicks have hatched from the incubator. They are growing very quickly, and show off their beautiful wing feathers to everyone who comes to see them. Hopefully, they will be joined by a few more chicks from a second hatching later in December. We hope that most of them will turn out to be hens, ready to lay eggs in the spring, although we have been surprised by what sounded like an attempt at a "cockadoodledo!" one morning.

Comings and goings at the community

The past few months have seen a number of comings and goings in addition to Himalee returning to Sri Lanka. Corrina has joined us as a short-term volunteer. She spent some time with the Othona Community at Bradwell-on-Sea in Essex before coming to us. She is visiting several communities to gain experience, with a view to establishing a therapeutic community herself. Two of our Guests have spent some time in hospital and four of our Guests have moved on to other accommodation, one returning to Finland. We have been joined by five new Guests, one a Wayfarer, another from an Emmaus Community and others have come from London and near by.

We have enjoyed having several visitors coming to stay, some of them old friends and others new to the community. In October Fr Anand and the Revd. Jessie Anand of All Saints Parish, Battersea, brought with them Bishop Jebachandran of the Diocese of Thoothukudi & Nazareth (CSI) and his Lay Secretary, Mohan, from the southern tip of India. This visit was to introduce the Bishop to the Pilsdon Communities, with a view to the possibility of establishing a "Pilsdon-like Community" in South India. So watch this space for any developments. We enjoyed having Harriet Horniman from Dorset coming to stay with us. Also Marco, who is now living with the L'Arche Community in Bognor Regis, but was formally at Pilsdon, Dorset, came to stay with us for a few days. We are only sorry that we cannot have more visitors but we remain very restricted by the number of rooms available when we have our compliment of 12 Guests.



Corrina takes in the sights on the community trip to Bruges

were so generous to us. The harvest gifts help us enormously and we enjoy the great variety of food donated, as well as enabling us to give a start-up larder to those who move on to new accommodation. The Barn Chapel also played host to a Harvest Supper, organised by the newly formed Malling Action Partnership (MAP). More than 50 people enjoyed a supper of locally produced food, prepared by Spadework, as well as topical entertainment and hymn singing by the local choir Innominata. The Barn Chapel, decorated for Harvest Festival, was an ideal setting for such an event, which we hope will be repeated next year. The Community was grateful for the proceeds of the raffle—£100.

A very tall pilgrim comes calling

Pilgrims may come in all shapes and sizes, but they always tend to be a rare species. But even Chaucer's wildest imaginings could not have prepared us for the pilgrim who came our way in late October, just in time for our bonfire night. Thomas Joachim Uhlig - who has adopted the name Elijah Maria - is an imposing seven feet tall and wears a large scallop shell—the symbol of the pilgrim—around his neck. He is on a three-and-a-half year peace pilgrimage from the Berlin Wall (in Berlin, naturally,) to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, and spent two nights at the community.

Elijah left the Friedenskirche in Sanssouci, Potsdam, on Pentecost (May 30) in 2009 and he

expects to walk 12,000 miles, visiting Nazi death camps, war memorials and holy sites throughout Europe, before reaching Jerusalem at Christmas 2012. The message that he carries with him is the breaking down of walls. As a 14-year-old boy Elijah witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany. He said: "The Berlin Wall was my school wall. The sight of the candles in the hands of demonstrating people in Leipzig, Berlin, Dresden and many other East German cities never released me and gave me the longing for peace and justice."

Elijah carries only his clothes, a sleeping bag and a candle that has been blessed. He says he is walking for peace, dignity and justice for all people and for all of God's creation. As a pilgrim, he asks only for a place to sleep, something to eat, and perhaps a small donation to help him on his way. For us at the Pilsdon at Malling Community, it was a blessing to be able to give him our hospitality. If he path crosses yours, we are sure you will do the same.

Himalee Kularathna leaves us

Himalee first came as a volunteer to Pilsdon Dorset, after Peter and Mary had met her in Negombo, Sri Lanka, through their links with Fr Tissa Balasurria at the beginning of the millennium. She has remained a close friend and supporter of Pilsdon ever since, returning as a volunteer on several occasions during her legal developments as a barrister. Her last visit to us here in Kent started at the beginning of this year and ended last month, when her Father also came to visit..

Himalee has been an invaluable volunteer during the past 9 months. With several Community Members and Volunteers leaving us she has been a very reliable and constant presence in the Community and I know many Guests as well as other members of the community have been very grateful for her wise counsel and willingness to listen. Everyone at Pilsdon will remember Himalee because of her amazing smile, which often turned to a giggle and much laughter (see photo above!). We very much enjoyed her cooking, especially when it involved Sri Lankan curry. We also appreciated her legal knowledge, with which she was often able to help and advise us.



Elijah with Himalee in the kitchen at Pilsdon at Malling

We sincerely thank Himalee for the many ways she has contributed to the Community over the years, and especially this past year. She was always willing to try her hand at anything, especially if it was new or different. We have very much appreciated her Buddhist spirituality and the way she has felt able to share in our Christian traditions. We were happy to say a formal thank you and farewell to Himalee at a “Posh Nosh” dinner (four courses with two whole salmon), to which we were able to invite some old friends and also her father. We wish her well as she returns home to Colombo and practices as a barrister and also teaches law. Some of us hope we might see her again in her beautiful home country. She knows that she is always welcome here, as she has often referred to Pilsdon as her second home, which we have been privileged to make true.



Emily Barnett and Himalee Kularathna

Emily Barnett spreads her wings

Peter and Mary’s youngest daughter was a special friend of Himalee, and as Himalee returned to Sri Lanka, so Emily began her course in medicine at Southampton University. It was felt that Emily won a coveted place at Southampton not only by her hard work and good A Levels, but also with an impressive interview, which was largely about her experiences of growing up from the age of two in the Pilsdon Communities. Congratulations to Emily.

Communities consultation

Peter and Mary attended a residential consultation on Intentional Communities at the Othona Community in Essex in September. The consultation was brought together by The Revd. Dr John Vincent of the Ashram Community in Sheffield. Other communities represented included The Well, Iona, Servants of Christ the King and Anabaptist.

The purpose of our time together was to share stories and information about our communities, with a view to producing a book in 2011 describing about 12 Intentional Christian Communities. This would include information about their foundation, inspiration and ethos, and also their particular charisms, theology and ways of working as well as hopes and plans for the future. As well as describing the Pilsdon Communities, Peter has also written a short account of the history of Christian Communities from the Acts of the Apostles to the present. It is hoped that the book produced will be of interest to people who support Communities, like those who read our Newsletters (!), as well as people enquiring to consider joining or referring people to Communities. More information about this, we hope, during 2011.

Services for the Christmas season

All are welcome



- Sun Dec 19** 6.00pm Advent 4 Eucharist in Barn Chapel
6.30pm Carol Service in St Mary's Church, West Malling
- Fri Dec 24** 4.30pm Christingle & Nativity, Kings Hill Community Centre
11.30pm MIDNIGHT MASS & CAROLS
with the Bishop of Tonbridge in the Barn Chapel
- Sat Dec 25** 8.00am Christmas Eucharist with the Sisters in Abbey Chapel
- Sun Dec 26** **Feast of St Stephen**
6.00pm Eucharist in Barn Chapel
- Fri Dec 31** 11.45pm New Year Watch Service in Barn Chapel
- Sun Jan 2** **Epiphany**
6.00pm Eucharist & Epiphany Carols in Barn Chapel
- Sun Jan 9** **Baptism of Christ**
6.00pm Eucharist and Liturgy in Barn Chapel
- Sun Jan 30** **Candlemas**
6.00pm Eucharist & Liturgy in Barn Chapel