



St Augustine of Canterbury, Belvedere 'GUS'S GOSSIP'

Welcome to the fourth edition of *Gus's Gossip*, a fortnightly newsletter to keep us all in touch with what is happening within our church family during this unprecedented time.

From Fr Clive...

Some of you will know that I worked in insurance broking before ordination. EIG (Ecclesiastical Insurance) provide a good home insurance package and from personal experience are speedy with claims. They also give the parish a grant if you take out a policy!

<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/individuals/home-insurance/>

Benenden Healthcare is discretionary healthcare complimenting the NHS. They are a Mutual Friendly Society and the premium is 11.50 per month regardless of age or infirmity. At a time when NHS waiting lists are likely to get longer this may well be for you.

www.benenden.co.uk

Window Cleaning - I recently engaged Scott Dillnutt who I met many years ago when chaplain of Trinity School. He did a great job on the vicarage windows 07780 439436 e: scottdillnutt@yahoo.co.uk

<https://www.churchunion.co.uk/fullposts.php?id=174>

More devotional resources from the Church Union on this link

Gilbert Rd Service Station (opposite church) has re-opened for servicing and MOTs....they sponsor our mass sheet so do support them. They service my car and have always proved efficient and reliable.

The Bookstore Café in Erith is now offering a delivery service, a home cooked nutritious meal for £5 including delivery and are freezable. 01322 341144 or via deliveroo.

From Leroy Thomas: My Testimony on my Family and Me.

Hello to all at St. Augustine's of Canterbury Church Belvedere, my name is Leroy Femi Thomas, I am 30 years old and I have lived in Belvedere throughout my life. My whole family originate from Sierra Leone both my mum and Dad's side of the family, my dad emmigrated to England from what I know in 1967, and my mum came to England in 1979.

My family have always been devoted Christians, bringing their Christian faith and upbringing with them when left home Sierra-Leone and came to England. We still as a family uphold our African teachings and prayers and heritage, which I feel is important for me. My mum when I was young had a prayer altar in her room, and every day before we went to school or going out in the mornings we would kneel down and pray for a long time, my mum usually sings prayer songs throughout the house. When I was young I never understood why, but as I got older; I think my mum because she is a devout Christian and in Africa, God is the centre of everything religion is very important there, I think it was very important in my mother's upbringing from my grandmother and grandfather back home in Sierra Leone.

I have grown up in St. Augustine's Of Canterbury Church Belvedere since I was 6 months old when I was baptised. Gloria and Harry in fact came to my baptism as she gave my mother and father a Children Holy Bible, so as you can imagine that's how long I have known Gloria and Harry

As from then when I turned age 4 up until age 9, I was in cubs then graduated up to scouts, which I really loved because it developed my Cristian teachings in the faith and learning of Jesus Christ at a young age. Then age 10

I was altar boy with the thurible, I didn't understand it at first when I was new to the role, but through guidance and help from the priest, I picked it up, then at age 14 to now. The reading of the Holy Bible in Church I really like, because when I was new to it at age 14 I was nervous at the time because I had never read in front of a huge congregation before, but I was upbeat and raring to go, and ever since then I've been comfortable with reading the Holy Bible up in Church to the congregation.

Blessings,

Leroy Femi Thomas

From Barbara Russell

I have enjoyed reading 'Gus's Gossip' especially last time when Mary wrote about her 'foxy experience' as I too, have had one.

One morning I looked up the garden and could not believe my eyes - it looked like five tiny puppies playing, jumping and chasing - they were enchanting and, of course, fox cubs. They came every day for about two to three weeks, only once with mum (no dad), and as time went by, getting bigger, braver and exploring further down the garden - and then suddenly NOTHING - have not seen them now for about a month.

I now have another family visiting frequently - magpies; mum dad and three youngsters who kick up a mighty din around the bird bath. I have also noticed an increase in sparrows but have not seen any starlings at all.

It has been very lonely during lockdown in spite of being well supported by my family, church and neighbours - all really great and I thank them all. I have mainly been baking and gardening, growing some plants from seed.

Recently I was given an early birthday present from my family - an iPad - which I love but of course and still in the elementary stages!! I think that comes under 'modern technology' (back page of *Gus's Gossip*) doesn't it?

Hopefully we will all be back together soon.

Barbara.

From Edward Raymond: A policeman's lot is not a happy one.

Three weeks ago I attended a serious road traffic collision in Erith. Our attendance had a profound effect on me, as it involved four youngsters who were about the same age as my daughter Hannah.

As so often happens, the initial call gave us a little snippet of information that turned out to be slightly wide of the mark.

I was called to attend in case a pursuit started but we weren't prepared for what we saw. We made our way to the area and happened to be the second police unit to arrive on scene. We found a car that had collided with a tree with four young men very seriously hurt inside. Rescue crews from London Ambulance, London Fire Brigade and HEMS were there, working to free two of the males. The other two had been extricated and were being treated on the roadside with what appeared to be horrific injuries.

Family members were there, clearly worried about their children, and shouting at the emergency services to get their children out of the car. I knew that this was a reasonable reaction but my colleagues and I needed to give the rescue crews the space that they needed to work, so tried our best to move the family members away from the immediate area. I could truly see why they were upset. We were moving parents away from their loved ones in what could have been their final moments with them. I watched the Fire Brigade fight to free the driver. It took them over half an hour to do this. The time taken was not due to any lack of care or skill on their part, it was solely due to the state that car was in.

While I was there, I was approached by the father of one of the rear seat passengers. He was grief stricken. The sense of relief on his face when I told him that his son was the least injured, and going to be ok, was real. He went on to tell me that it had been his birthday that day, and that he had gone out with his friends despite his family asking him to stay at home for a quiet night in. How do you come to terms with that as a father?

As is usual on these calls, I sought a medical assessment from one of the attending Doctors. I was told that they were treating three of the four as having immediately life-threatening injuries. It was the doctor's roadside assessment that gave us an inkling that three of the youngsters may die. My colleagues and I had to tell three sets of already bereft parents, that their children were seriously ill and could die. Not an easy task, either mentally or emotionally.

Each time I attend one of these scenes, the thing that always strikes me is the silence after the other rescue crews have left, the parents and friends are gone, the victims have been taken away. It's often just you and your thoughts. I remember looking at the spire of nearby Christchurch, Erith, and uttering a little prayer, asking the man upstairs to take care of them. It appears that he may have heard my few words as thankfully all survived albeit with significant injuries that will affect them for the rest of their adult lives.

On first assessment it looked as though high speed was a contributory factor in this collision. It still astonishes me how some drivers don't see it as an issue.

Over the past two weeks, my colleagues and I have been targeting speed as one of our many taskings, and we have been rather busy. It seems some drivers aren't listening to guidance from HM Govt. I was sent an email earlier in the week that kept us all in the picture of our cumulative results. Last year, during the same period, we issued 191 speeding tickets. This year, during the last week in May, we issued 1890! In the last two weeks I met three drivers that I reported weeks before for the same offences. My mind is boggled. I await the complaints for claims of harassment 😊.

From working on the roads, it is clear that people believe that life is back to normal, going by the weight of traffic alone. We are still in lockdown, and we are slowly trying to get the nation back up and running however, because of the notional few, this may take longer than planned.

Please take care of yourselves and each other.

Edward

From Fr Bill Beer

Dear Gus's Gossipers,

Recently I received, from Fr. Clive, who I've known since he was assistant curate at St. Mary's, Swanley and I was Vicar of The Annunciation, Chislehurst - , your last edition of Gus's Gossip with which I was delighted - and, of course, I've been over to your lovely Parish Church on a number of occasions coming with folk from The Annunciation for your annual Patronal Festival Masses which have always been enjoyable occasions and, as a Parish, you have always been most hospitable and welcoming.

I was surprised to receive another e-mail asking if I would write two or three paragraphs for Gus's Gossip's next edition and Fr. Clive suggested that it might be a story about one of my many pilgrimages. So here goes. "The year must have been about 1977 when I was the first Vicar of the then brand new parish of St. Benedict, Camp Hill, Northampton in the Diocese of Peterborough. I was taking a group, to Seville and Southern Portugal. We had a lovely time in Seville and Cordoba with their wonderful churches and scenery and being allowed to celebrate Mass in both of the great Cathedrals and then it was time to go off to Southern Portugal. We set off from the station early in the morning and made our way, slowly but uneventfully to the little border town of Ayamonte where we took the little ferry across the River Guadiana to the Portuguese frontier town of Villa Real de Santo Antonio only to find, at the railway station, that there was a strike

on! Anyway, we managed to get a bus to Faro and then another to Quatera and then took taxis to the Diocesan Retreat House where we were staying for four nights before going on to Lisbon. Of course, we were late and we had gone for winter sun. At Quatera we noticed that the street light were out only to find that the electricity workers were on strike too! We got four taxis to take us up a country road to the Faro Diocesan Retreat House where we were greeted by Mother and a Sister with candles to show us to our rooms and then we went straight to the chapel to say Mass in thanksgiving for our safe arrival. - all, of course, by candlelight.

"Four nuns sat in on our Mass and what I thought was a priest was also present. Being late the sisters were anxious that we got on with supper, which was delicious and by the time the pudding was served, the usual Portuguese "Flan", the lights came on and conversation became quite animated. The four nuns were Mother-General, Mother-Provincial, Sister Superior and the Guestmistress/chef! The priest was, in fact, His Excellency Ernesto Goncalves da Costa, OFM, the Bishop of Faro and also a Franciscan Friar. He said to me, "Father, I shared in your Mass and I want you to say Mass for my Sister here for the next four days since their chaplain has had a nervous breakdown and has been sent to hospital. You say the whole Mass in English, Sister-Superior will read the scriptures in Portuguese and do the intercessions." I responded, "But Bishop, surely you know that I am an Anglican priest and not in communion with Rome - how would the Vatican react?" He smiled and said, "I and the Sisters have the problem not the Vatican - that is over the Alps. I am asking you to say Mass for the Sisters until you leave on Friday for Lisboa. I must get back to Faro this evening." He gave us all a blessing and that is how we carried on for our four lovely days with the Sister in the middle of a beautiful nowhere. The rest of our time was spent in lovely Lisbon with a Day Pilgrimage to Fatima.

"On returning home to Northampton there was an ecumenical gathering at the RC Cathedral so during the evening I related the story. The then very conservative Bishop of Northampton was not happy and made the comment that he would have to `....report by Brother of Faro to the Holy See.` This was, of course, the penultimate year of Pope Paul VI - now Pope St. Paul VI`s, life here on earth. He had been a great friend to Anglicans and had referred to the Anglican Communion as "Our younger sister-Church" in conversation with the late Archbishop Michael Ramsey."

I hope you like the little story and I pray and hope that relations between our two Churches will truly improve and so seek to fulfil our Saviour`s prayer, `that they all may be one.`

With prayers and best wishes and with fond remembrance of you all.

Fr. Bill Beer

From Simon Wilson: The Tale of Two Cities

To put this article in perspective you should be aware that the writer whilst spiritually aware would not consider himself a Christian, so this is something of a neutral view. I was brought up on bible stories at Sunday School but in recent years the source of knowledge about Jerusalem and Bethlehem has been the news reports showing the continual carnage and death in the area.

It's obvious that a city, so very beautiful as Jerusalem, will be wanted by many. I guess it's like when I was at school and everybody wanted to go out with the prettiest girl and certainly Jerusalem fits this bill. Three of the world's greatest religions merge in this city and it too often ends up in blood shed. But what is Jerusalem like? Well it's certainly very hilly, which has stopped it becoming a huge industrial conurbation like Tel Aviv. The City is divided into quarters and claimed by both the Israelis and Palestinians as their capital. At the centre is the walled old town, which is simply amazing to explore.

The narrow cobbled streets and souks are everything that you can imagine. If you took away the people on their mobile phones then I have no doubt the scenes that confronted Jesus on his torturous route 2000 years ago would have been similar.

I am not going to bang on about the sites of Jerusalem as they are well documented but the question I often get asked is could I 'feel the atmosphere', as I climbed the Via Dolorosa or I stood where Jesus walked. Well the answer is yes on many grounds. Jerusalem is everything you can imagine and more. Like I said, I am not a Christian but this place is fantastic. I could feel the history it as I wove through the streets with my guide book. This is a special city and whilst I understand why people are forever fighting over it, I feel it belongs to the world not just one country.

Very close by is Bethlehem and a greater contradiction to what I imagined was not possible. To get to Bethlehem you to travel through security gate after security gate. The walls and guard posts make Belmarsh prison look like a village green. Once through the border into Palestine we jumped into a taxi and was very excited as we approached Bethlehem. Wow-what a disappointment it was; all it needs is a bullet ridden church at the end. Yes the Church of the Nativity built at the place where Jesus was said to have been born, had clearly been used for target practice.

Bethlehem was nowhere near as nice as its close neighbour Jerusalem but definitely worth a visit. So was Jesus born here and was he crucified across the border? Without any doubt I believe he was. I guess the question is who was he and what did his life really mean?

I can't answer that but a good starting point is to come to the Holy Land. You probably won't need a bullet proof vest but you will need a good camera. More importantly you will come back with a better understanding of history and you may well find your soul has been touched.

Regards

Simon Wilson (who is an old friend and travelling companion of Fr Clive. He has visited the Holy land twice).

From Stephen Tester of Tester & Jones Funeral Services Crowborough (The Jones is Fr Clive's sister)

Since 2004, Tester & Jones has proudly helped and supported families at their time of need and we stand ready to help now. During this time of uncertainty, we have remained open and our experienced, caring staff continue to assist families. The funeral industry is considered as a 'key service' by the government which is why you will find us open during the lockdown. Having said this, the speed, breadth and depth of the Covid-19 pandemic is like nothing I have ever experienced. On a personal level, I have found the restrictions very difficult to come to terms with - especially with natural human interaction.

The hardest part of being a funeral director right now is observing the emotional distress of families who are unable to say goodbye to loved ones in the way that they want. It has been our guiding philosophy to organise anything a family would like in order to celebrate the life of their loved one (so long as it was legal) but at the moment, this is not possible. It has been something of a moving target as we try to navigate the restrictions imposed on us from the government, crematoriums and churches.

At present we are unable to offer the use of our Chapel of Rest, our limousines or allowing family pallbearers. In addition, with the current restrictions, only 10 people are allowed to attend a funeral service at the crematorium and under some circumstances it may be 5. We will be doing our very best to make funerals as special as possible and thankfully there is the facility at crematoriums to offer a live stream of the service, which many families are choosing to use for those unable to attend. On a positive note, new traditions are emerging such as memorial services for their loved ones being planned for the future, friends and families standing at their gates, applauding and acknowledging their loved one's last journey as we slowly drive the

Hearse along the street. This has been an extremely moving and uplifting show of love and respect. Although a difficult situation, the alternative of no service at all would have been unthinkable.

As ever with funerals, it's the little things that make a big difference and I miss offering that handshake or a reassuring hand on the shoulder when greeting a family which has now been replaced with a 2-metre gap. As a team, we miss being able to sit with families or friends in our office lounge over a cup of tea as we think through the best way to help them say farewell. Thankfully, our local clergy and celebrants continue to do an exceptional job of making services personal and uplifting,

I wanted to end by saying thank you to all the families we have been supporting; they have been remarkably understanding in these heart-breaking, unprecedented times.

Thank you also to our team, who have pulled together so amazingly and are working under some tough circumstances - from tracking the necessary paperwork through new and fast changing procedures, to working without a proper supply of protective clothing, such as masks, gloves and aprons.

Our prayers and thoughts go out to those affected by this virus, and to those whose lives have been changed due to the coronavirus.

With Warm Wishes,

Stephen Tester
Tester & Jones Funeral Services, Crowborough

It would be really nice to hear how you are coping with the present situation, have you learnt any new skills, rediscovered an old hobby, become more adept at modern technology? We'd love to hear from you so that we can read about your lockdown musings or you may like to contribute a longer article, maybe your memories of St Augustine's or a profile of yourself? Please email Fr Clive at frclive@tiscali.co.uk or Donna at staugustineofcanterburypa@gmail.com. The deadline for the next edition is Thursday 3rd July.



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