

**Rev'd Amanda would appreciate it if anyone knowing of illness or any other trouble in the Parish would notify her as soon as possible on 020 3940 1897 so that she, or a member of the Church, can call without delay.**

**If you have any enquiry about baptism, marriage or another service, or if there is something else you would like to discuss with a member of the team, please make an appointment, through the Church Office (020 8462 1373) or by emailing:**

**[info@stmaryshayeskent.co.uk](mailto:info@stmaryshayeskent.co.uk)**

## **IN THE BLEAK MID-WINTER?**

As we begin the month of January we are still in the midst of Christmas as the Christian year moves then towards the season of Epiphany. On Twelfth Night, the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, traditionally the decorations are packed away, the cards taken down, the streets are no longer festooned with lights and cheery wreaths are removed from front doors.

But Epiphany extends from the 6<sup>th</sup> of January to Candlemas on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, providing a time to think about what Christmas can mean for each of us; the reality of God among us and how this reality can work through all of our lives.

There are the whole series of events during the season of Epiphany. Following on from Christmas and the revelation of the angels to the shepherds, we move to the visit of the Wise Men from the east. But there are more revelations to come, the further revelations as Jesus is baptised by John the Baptist in the river Jordan, accompanied by the heavenly voice, proclaiming Jesus as God the Father's beloved, with whom God is well pleased. There is the turning of water into wine at the wedding of Cana, the power of healing and restoration and the astounding gift of the forgiveness of sins.

The gift of Christmas has not ended; this is just the beginning!

Jesus is the true gift, and the theme of gifts continue through Epiphany with the Wise Men's visit, bringing their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, all pointing to Jesus' and His ministry in the world.

Gold is a gift fit for a king. It recognized that Jesus was a great king, the king of the world.

Frankincense is a special kind of fragrance that was used by a priest.

Myrrh was a sweet-smelling liquid that was rubbed gently into the skin of someone who had died, indicating that Jesus' death would be important.

Remembering Christmas and the presents received; those that were special to us, not necessarily expensive, but something really wanted, useful or a thoughtful gift from a special person.

Although the visit from the wise men was so different from the shepherds in wealth and status, God wanted both the wise men and the shepherds to see the baby Jesus. This can show us that God wants everyone to see Jesus.

In God's eyes, it doesn't matter if we are rich or poor or where we come from, or what gift we can bring. We are called, in response to the gift of Jesus into the world, to give of our gifts. They are all important and all can be used to serve God.

So may this time of Epiphany, the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the wise men in Matthew 2:1–12, be a time of great revelation or realization of how we can share our gifts. May we share them in our community and may it be revealed how St Mary's can serve to bring hope, peace, joy, and love of Christ, so needed in our world at this time, into the lives of all.

**Rev'd Amanda**



## **CHILDREN'S SOCIETY**

Thank you to all the kind people who continue to support the Children's Society. Our box collection this year amounted to £422.38. It is amazing how our loose change amounts to this sort of money, plus some of you kindly put in a note, as one gets very little change these days. Thank you very much.

Also thank you to all those people who bought Children's Society Christmas cards from me, and also at the Charity Fair. I sold £331.25 worth of cards.

Thank you very much.

**Pauline Muggridge**

# Mothers' UNION

Christian care for families

May the New Year bring you blessings in abundance of love, joy, health and peace. I look forward to the year ahead and that we might grow in faith and fellowship together.

2023 was a tough year for everyone, with the pandemic ongoing, fuel and economic crisis and the continuing impact of climate change, as well as conflict in so many parts of the world. However, throughout was the resilience shown by so many, and the continuing focus of MU members, whatever challenges we have been facing ourselves, to support those in their communities in greatest need. Especially during Advent, we heard so many stories of help provided by MU members – for instance, to foodbanks, love and care for prisoners and their families and those in refuges – to name just a few.

As we look to the start of this fresh year, 2024, whilst challenges remain, there is so much that gives us hope!

As we begin the countdown to our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2026, there was never a better time to really move forward in our journey of Transformation! Lord, who makes all things new, we thank you for this New Year. To make a fresh start in our lives, trusting in your presence through all.

The theme for Mothers' Union 2024 is TRANSFORMATION. The theme of the week of prayer for 2024 is 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbour as yourself' *Luke 10:27*.

On Monday 11th December members of Mothers' Union Hayes branch attended a festive lunch at the New Inn.





There was a buzz in the air as members happily chatted away. The three-course lunch was delicious and even though the New Inn was full with other groups meeting up for lunch, the service was excellent. Thank you to Carol, Christine and Barbara for organising the meal.

We are meeting at **the New Inn on Tuesday 23rd January**. Please join us for a coffee. Some members also take the opportunity to have lunch there as well. The next Mothers' Union at the church Meeting Room is on **Monday 26th February at 10.30am** (not the 19th February as previously advised). We hope to have a speaker on Health and Wellness. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be served. Please let me know of any speaker or topic you would like to include in our programme for this year as I am organising the programme now.

I am afraid that I am still out of action for at least another two months as my next operation is scheduled for the end of January. Thank you for all your prayers over the past few months – they have really helped and encouraged me. Can we remember in our prayers Dorothy, Jo, Faith and Hilary and other members who are unwell, and pray that Our Lord will enfold them in His healing arms.

If you are interested in joining Mothers' Union, or would like to come along to our meetings, please contact Mary-Ann Cooper. You would be most welcome.

**Avril Ashford**

## **BISHOP INTRODUCES BILL TO ALLOW HUMANITARIAN VISAS FOR THOSE SEEKING ASYLUM**

A Church of England Bishop is proposing legislation to provide a safe and legal route to the UK for those seeking asylum, as part of attempts to crack down on illegal people smuggling across the Channel in small boats.

The Bishop of Chelmsford, the Rt Rev Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, has published a Private Members' Bill in the House of Lords which would permit an annual number of humanitarian travel visas to the UK.

The visas would allow people to safely enter the UK where there is a high chance that their asylum claim will be granted. The nationalities currently most likely to travel to the UK on small boats and have their asylum claim granted are Afghan, Syrian, Iranian, Eritrean and Sudanese.

The Bill also proposes that their asylum claim would then be considered in the UK through an accelerated process.

Under the terms of the Asylum Application (Entry to the United Kingdom) Bill, up to 10,000 asylum travel visas would be granted in the first year of its operation with subsequent limits set by the Home Secretary. Nationalities eligible to apply would be named by the Home Secretary.

Bishop Guli said: "I am pleased to bring forward this Private Members Bill on the introduction of a Humanitarian Visa Scheme, which will provide a much-needed opportunity to discuss safe routes into the UK for refugees fleeing conflict, persecution and disasters.

The Bill had its first Reading in late November, and will be timetabled for a Second Reading at a later date.

*PP News      jan24*

## **HAVING A RELIGIOUS FAITH MAKES YOU HAPPIER**

People who have a religious faith are generally happier and more resilient than atheists and other non-religious people.

That is the finding of a new study, *Keep the Faith: Mental health in the UK*, which has been recently published by the Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life (IIFL).

The think tank was set up to study the part that religious faith plays in the UK. It was the first to focus exclusively on the link between

people's faith and their mental health in the UK. The survey included Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus, with nearly 70 per cent of them reporting good psychological well-being, as compared with only 49 per cent of atheists. As for happiness, just nine per cent of people with a faith said they were unhappy, as compared with nearly a quarter of atheists.

It was also found that believers feel they have more self-control, more life satisfaction, and more optimism about their future. Only nine percent of believers were pessimistic, as opposed to 30 percent of non-believers.

But it seems that practising your faith is important. Even among believers, those who regularly attend religious services are far more likely to report positive psychological wellbeing, when compared to those who rarely or never attend such services.

Overall, the IILF has concluded that the rapid secularisation of the UK has left many people with lowered resilience and lowered wellbeing. As the author of the study, Dr Rakib Ehsan, says: "while the fast-paced secularisation of the British has been cited as a form of social progress, this appears not to be the case from the perspective of mental health."

*PP News      jan24*

## **AT LEAST THE PHARISEES GOT SOMETHING RIGHT**

'This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them'. How profoundly grateful so many of us are that what the Pharisees said dismissively of Jesus is.....actually true!

It has been fascinating, as we have been working through the Gospel of Luke in our church Bible Study, to note how often eating and drinking feature in Luke's account.

Sometimes a meal simply provides the setting or backdrop for Jesus' teaching or healing. At other times the meal itself becomes part of the story line.

Early on we meet Levi, a tax collector, and a new follower of Jesus. We learn from the other Gospels that he is also called Matthew. Immediately he invites all his friends within the local tax collector fraternity, to a large dinner party to celebrate; and presumably to introduce them to this new extraordinary teacher and healer. And friend.

But the Pharisees and the scribes, representing the religious establishment of the day, grumbled. Not because they hadn't been

invited, but because they didn't think that any self-respecting religious leader could possibly stoop to eat with people who were so obviously, in their thinking, beneath contempt. Jesus' reply was brilliant because at one level He was agreeing with the Pharisees: yes these tax collectors are indeed sinners. And if His mission was to call people to repent, where better to begin than a house full of tax collectors!

So at that one level Jesus' reply may not necessarily have been taken by the Pharisees as a direct rebuff. In fact a little while later we find Jesus actually invited to eat at the house of one of the Pharisees, called Simon. All was going well until a woman from the town, known for her sinful life, managed to invite herself to the party. And standing by Jesus, she anointed Him, pouring expensive perfume on His feet, while they were all enjoying dinner. A real conversation stopper, in that culture and our own!

It was clear that the Pharisees expected Jesus to immediately rebuke her. But He did not. Jesus did not rebuke her. What brought her there that day we do not know, except that what she did was a remarkable act of confession; and gratitude that at last in Jesus she had found release from the sins and life that she now accepted as wrong. In fact, Jesus defends her action, and talks gently to her. Go in peace, He says, your faith has saved you. Her tears were tears of repentance. She knew she was a sinner.

But what about Simon? He had eaten with Jesus but remained unforgiven because he could not accept that he had anything to be sorry for. As a member of the elite religious establishment he was satisfied that he was protected by a life well-lived.

Simon treated Jesus as a respected guest, but one to hold at a distance, to have at your table but not to allow to get too close; in fact, to treat as an equal. He failed to see that the one sharing his bread, was inviting him to share his life.

The Pharisees knew their scriptures by heart but refused to accept the sin in their lives that those scriptures clearly revealed. As Jesus said on another occasion to Nicodemus, also a Pharisee, they refused to accept Jesus' teaching because they loved darkness rather than light. Harsh words, really harsh words, but as Jesus said, His mission was to save the world; forgiveness was being offered to all who would accept Jesus and repent of their sins; He had not come to reinforce people in their complacency!

**David James**

## ST. MARY'S CHURCH DIARY JANUARY 2024

**Morning Prayers take place daily at 9.15am Monday to Wednesday on Zoom\* and Tuesdays to Saturdays in Church throughout the year (except Bank Holidays).**

<b>Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup></b>	10.30am-12.00noon	Coffee Morning for the bereaved and those living on their own**
	12.30-3.00pm	Warm Welcome Space**
	2.30 for 2.45pm	Hayes Men's Fellowship In OCS

### EPIPHANY

<b>Sunday 7<sup>th</sup></b>	8.00am 10.30am	Holy Communion BCP Morning Praise Sunbeams** (age 3-6)
<b>Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup></b>	12.30-3.00pm	Warm Welcome Space**

### 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY

<b>Sunday 14<sup>th</sup></b>	8.00am 10.30am	Holy Communion BCP Parish Communion CW Blaze Session** (age 6-10)
<b>Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup></b>	12.30-3.00pm	Warm Welcome Space**
<b>Friday 19<sup>th</sup></b>	10.00-11.00am	Twinkles – singing, story, snacks**

### 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY

<b>Sunday 21<sup>st</sup></b>	8.00am 9.15am 10.30am	Holy Communion BCP Fresh Start Morning Praise
<b>Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup></b>	12.30-3.00pm	Warm Welcome Space**



## PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE

<b>Sunday 28<sup>th</sup></b>	8.00am	Holy Communion BCP
	10.30am	Parish Communion CW Blaze Session** (age 6-10)
	5.00-6.00pm	Illuminate**
<b>Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup></b>	12.30-3.00pm	Warm Welcome Space**

\* for Zoom link please contact the Church office

\*\* denotes Meetings Room

The church is also open for private prayer on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10.00am to 12.00noon unless there is a wedding or funeral taking place. Details of these will be given in the weekly pew sheets.



It is now even easier to support the work of St Mary's. As well as the contactless payment device at the back of church we also have a new 'give a little' website. You can donate via the website or QR code here.



## HAYES MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

January already, and we are now into the 60th year since our Fellowship was formed way back in 1964! Later this month, our Annual Lunch at the New Inn will be an excellent way to celebrate. Full details of our programme of talks, outings and walks can be obtained from our website, [www.hayesmensfellowship.org](http://www.hayesmensfellowship.org).

An e-mail to [secretary@hayesmensfellowship.org](mailto:secretary@hayesmensfellowship.org) will put you in direct contact with us and perhaps set up a friendly chat or even see you at our next meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> January in the new Hall of the Old Church Schools (at 2.30pm for 2.45pm). That meeting is the deadline to sign up and pay for the lunch mentioned above. A further inducement is that our speaker happens to be Nigel Farage's mother!

Our November outing was to the Imperial War Museum at Duxford in Cambridgeshire. The air base there was built in 1917 and used as a training station by the RAF. In World War II it was first used as a fighter base and played an important role in the Battle of Britain. Later it was home to the American 78th Fighter Group which provided air cover for the D Day Landings.

As a Museum, Duxford is now largely organised in a series of hangars on an extensive site. These include:

- AirSpace – an interactive gallery with a focus on British aviation. It included many famous aircraft such as the Avro Lancaster of Dam Busters fame, the more recent nuclear bombers, the Vickers Valiant and the Handley Page Victor as well as the Anglo-French Concord, 54 years on still the fastest airliner ever. This hangar also has a side gallery marking the remarkable history of the Airborne Regiments.
- Air and Sea – The varied exhibits included an X-Craft midgeet submarine, and a Westland Wasp helicopter which was embarked on the frigate HMS Apollo during the Falklands War.
- Battle of Britain – This included the Battle of Britain itself, focusing on Britain's air defence with examples of fire service vehicles, a downed Messerschmitt Bf 109E and a V-1 "Doodlebug" on its launch rail. The other half of the hangar included air defence aircraft from World War I to the Cold War. This ranged from the Royal Aircraft Factory B.E.2 from 1912 which we were told was designed by a certain Geoffrey de Havilland who went on to have a big influence on British aviation. Amongst others there were the beautifully styled Hawker Hunter and the Soviet bloc MIG-21 (the most-produced supersonic aircraft according to the Guinness Book of Records).
- Conservation in action – This was a giant workshop with aircraft in pieces everywhere and giant racks around the walls holding spare

parts especially engines. Working on the aircraft were a mixture of professional and volunteers – some of the HMF members wish they lived closer to be able to volunteer!

- American Air Museum - This landmark building was designed by Sir Norman Foster to showcase American involvement in World War II – with its direct link to Duxford itself – as well as later developments in military aviation.

- Land warfare – A hall rather than a hangar, this has a viewing balcony that runs for most of the length, providing views over vehicles, tanks and artillery that run chronologically from the First World War to the present day and are displayed in operational settings. This Hall also accommodates the Royal Anglian Regiment Museum.

On the apron near the hangars was a lineup of post war British civilian aircraft including the Bristol Britannia and the Vickers VC-10. Many of the buildings on the site are themselves historical items of architectural significance and over thirty have listed building status.

Overall, this was an excellent outing.

This was followed by our November walk in the Petts Wood area. From the car park in Tent Peg Lane the seven walkers made their way to Petts Wood NT, pausing for a photo next to a stone monument. They moved onwards to Park Wood and Scadbury Park Nature Reserve where they admired Scadbury Moated House – a property in need of some TLC. Then on to a good lunch provided by “The Tigers Head” in Chislehurst. The total distance walked was 6 miles, including a 0.2 mile accidental diversion that the walkers were too busy talking to notice! Oops!

And then on to our final Meeting of the calendar year in December when we had another visit from the popular Bob Ogley with a lively talk about “*The Great Storm of 1987*”.

Bob lives at Toy’s Hill in Kent and, on the fateful evening of 15 October, walked through the woods to his local pub, the Fox and Hounds. The publican there suggested that he did not walk back the same way as there had been a dramatic drop in barometric pressure and said Bob should ignore what Michael Fish had said on the TV. He did walk through the woods, getting home perfectly safely.

But later that night it sounded as if an express train was going through his bedroom. The sky outside seemed to be lit up. On closer inspection this seemed to be caused by uprooted trees flying through the air and hitting power lines. He stepped outside (you have to wonder why!) only to be overtaken by a large rabbit hutch!

At first light, he looked out at Toy’s Hill to find the woodland virtually gone. Instead, there were open sightlines to Gatwick Airport and

the M25 which he did not previously have. As a journalist, he wanted to get to his office to report on the night's events but driving was not an option with his car under a large tree. So he and his wife set off on foot to the Fox and Hounds before striking out for the office in Sevenoaks. En route they went through Brasted where a large tree had gone straight through a thatched house. The house owner became worried about the tree and took his family, wrapped in duvets, into the middle of a field for safety. What a good job as the tree went through the bed of his youngest daughter. On arrival in Sevenoaks, they were told that it had been reduced to one oak.

A state of emergency had been declared and Gurkhas and Royal Engineers were busy clearing fallen trees. Bob wanted to make a record of the storm damage using aerial photography. He contacted a Flying School at Biggin Hill to see if they could help. Initial reports were that all their aircraft had been damaged but one airworthy craft was found. The flight found trains stranded, around the Medway boats in gardens and at Knole Park huge oaks stripped of all their branches. The pictures made their way into his newspaper. Instead of the usual circulation of 15,000, the Great Storm edition sold 50,000 copies.

It occurred to Bob that with his photos he could put together a book to help fund the replanting. He pitched the idea to a national publisher but was turned down. By chance he drove past a local printer and popped in to see if they could help. They were busy with Christmas orders but agreed to help – only if Bob could get all the copy and photos to them within a week which, remarkably, he managed. He formed his own publishing company which printed 5,000 copies of “In the Wake of the Hurricane” about the impact on Kent - launched at Sevenoaks Library in November. They sold out rapidly and reprints took the total sold to 21,000 with the publication reaching number 6 in the book charts. This eventually raised £25,000 for the Charity led by Lord Astor to support tree replanting.

This experience changed Bob's life and he gave up journalism to focus on books. Altogether he has published 21 books to date and raised £100,000 for charity. Bob spoke eloquently with no notes whatsoever for 45 minutes on a topic that is clearly dear to his heart. This was another engaging and very interesting talk.

That's all for now, back again in February and every month. Oh yes, Happy New Year!

*Allan Evison*, HMF Chairman    *Graham Marsden*, HMF Secretary

## ON RUNNING

Back in 2019 Peter and I got into the habit of jogging (well, hobbling) round Norman Park a couple of times a week, after following the Couch to 5K programme. We used to meet our children at Park Run on Saturday morning and afterwards they would come back for breakfast and it was a very pleasant if somewhat exhausting start to the weekend. I remember Julian trying to run alongside me to urge me



on, and having to give up because it wasn't physically possible for him to run that slowly. He said afterwards that it was like browsing round a museum.

I must admit it is disheartening to be overtaken by people who are keeping up a stream of conversation as they breeze past, while I am purple in the face and gasping. If I keel over during one of these runs as seems quite likely, let no one say 'she died doing what she loved.'

Lockdown almost put paid to this 'hobby' as the park was closed and Peter and I felt a bit self-conscious plodding around the streets. It seemed quite likely that we would go from 5K to couch again in record time, but when things opened up, we resumed, if at an even slower pace.

Florence was much more dedicated than the rest of us and began to do regular 10k 'fun' runs and the occasional half marathon. One Sunday in October, I went to watch her run the Royal Parks Half Marathon. It's a 13-mile route starting at Hyde Park and going as far east as the Aldwych before winding back via Green Park, St James' and Kensington Gardens to where it began. The organisation was something to marvel at – 16 000 people were processed and sorted into holding pens, warm-up areas, and the starting line, before setting off in wave after orderly wave.

There was plenty to interest the committed people-watcher. I noticed a couple of young men limbering up with a last cigarette before the start. Several people were wearing full fancy dress – at one point Florence was overtaken by a rhino – and one woman, for reasons I couldn't even guess, was running in wellington boots. Imagine the blisters!

Once I had waved Florence off, I was able to stroll up to the café by the Serpentine and enjoy a bacon roll and a cup of tea before crossing the park to watch the front runners come past again. I must say the

thought of all those people with thirteen miles of hard pavement ahead of them while I sat in the sunshine increased my enjoyment no end. Anyway, beetling to and fro along the zig-zag route to try and give Florence some shouts of encouragement was quite enough exercise for me.

It was altogether both heart-warming and humbling to see all these thousands of people from serious athletes to enthusiastic amateurs, pushing themselves to the limit, raising money for charity, and every one of them with their own story, their own reason for being there. There was a wonderful sense of community amongst the runners and it made me think what a powerful unifying force this kind of open sporting event can be. (Florence finished in 2 hours 20 minutes, got the T-shirt and is looking forward to her next half marathon in 2024.)

**Clare Wickert**

## **STATEMENT FROM THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS ON THE ONGOING WAR IN GAZA**

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ this Advent, we are dismayed that the place of our saviour's birth is once again wracked by violence, death and destruction.

We grieve that innocent children have been disproportionately affected by this conflict.

Of the 1,300 people killed in the abhorrent terrorist attacks of Hamas on 7 October, 33 were children. Of the 250 hostages taken, 34 were children. In Israel's exercising its right to self-defence, more than 18,000 people have reportedly been killed, over 40 per cent of whom were children. Thousands more have been injured.

We re-affirm our position of 31 October 2023 that there is no equivalence between the atrocities of Hamas against Israeli civilians, and the right and duty of Israel to defend itself. We also want to be clear that we do not believe that the devastating loss of civilian life and humanitarian catastrophe resulting from Israel's bombardment and siege of Gaza can be morally justified.

The nature and scale of death and destruction we are witnessing across the region is horrific and is inconsistent with the obligations of international humanitarian law as affirmed most recently by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2712 (15 November 2023).

This war has claimed too many lives and destroyed too many homes. The extension of battle to Southern Gaza will only compound the existing humanitarian catastrophe. We appeal for the bloodshed and destruction to stop. An alternative strategy needs to be found that closes down on attacks on Israel from Gaza and ends the violence and blockade undertaken by Israel.

The recent truce (24-30 November 2023) provided a glimmer of hope amidst so much darkness. We were encouraged as hostage families were reunited, civilians found respite from bombardment, and some of the sick and injured found life-saving care and some supplies reached those most in need.

Intensified diplomatic efforts should seek to secure the release of all remaining hostages, the protection of civilians and full humanitarian access to Gaza, alongside steps to establish a reinvigorated political track to address the overarching conflict.

Israel's security cannot be achieved by continuing with a system of occupation that denies millions of Palestinians their rights and freedoms. The ongoing settler violence in the West Bank, which has resulted in the death to date of 8 Palestinians including one child, is a matter of grave concern as is the fact that since 7 October over 250 Palestinians, including over 60 children have been killed by Israeli security forces in the West Bank. There has been much damage to Palestinian homes, farms and schools by settlers without the necessary restraint and prosecution by the Israeli authorities.

The Israel-Palestine conflict is more than another regional conflict but one with both international and domestic resonances. The current war in Gaza risks sowing the seeds of the next several generations of vengeance and violence unless it is resolved equitably now. For this reason, we call on the British Government to appoint a dedicated Minister or Peace Envoy for the Middle East to work with other nations to focus diplomatic efforts and to signal a long term commitment to support any future peace process.

We ask that the Government, as with the US Administration, act to deny visas for travel to any one deemed to be committing acts of violence or undermining peace and security in the West Bank, particularly against Palestinians.

In our communities there is no place for either antisemitism or Islamophobia. It is unacceptable that children fear going to school because they will be spat at, shouted at and hated for no other reason than that they are Muslim or Jewish. We should not impute to children here that for which they cannot be held responsible in Israel-Palestine.

We condemn the fresh growth of antisemitism in Europe, a shameful feature of our Western Christian history that needs to be constantly rebuked. In schools, universities, on streets and in places of work and worship, antisemitism has been the root of so much racism. Once one group is allowed to be attacked, merely for religion, race or heritage it seems to open the gates of hell to all other forms of hatred.

We condemn all those hateful voices stoking prejudice against anyone, for any reason and call on the church to walk alongside those from different communities. Let us never stand silently by, but at whatever risk stand with those who suffer such hatreds.

But more than anything we ask that this Advent, parishes, chaplaincies and all places of worship pray for peace, for wisdom, for justice, and for hope as we give thanks for the birth of Jesus Christ and God coming to dwell with us amid our pain and joy. As each household or gathering comes together at Christmas, give thanks for what we have and pray for the Holy Land and for our brothers and sisters in Christ who live there.

We also warmly encourage support for the Archbishops' appeal for the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza.

## **The House of Bishops**

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**The Old Church Schools, Hayes, has 3 halls – two large and one medium, and a committee room available for hire.**

**For further information please contact Julie Clark on 07538 254508 or email [ocs.hayes@hotmail.com](mailto:ocs.hayes@hotmail.com)**

**Items for the February issue by 16<sup>th</sup> Jan please. Copy to the Editor. February magazines will be ready for distribution on 28<sup>th</sup> Jan.**

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