‘Church Action on Poverty’ as Bishop highlights homelessness

“The last Sunday before Lent, Sunday 26th February, is earmarked as Church Action on Poverty Sunday when churches are encouraged to pray and act for change. Recently, the Bishop of Bradford, Toby Howarth (pictured right, with Vicar of Manningham, Canon Alistair Helm) spent a night sleeping rough to highlight the plight of more than 250,000 people in England who are homeless. In an abridged article, he reflects on his experience.

“Homelessness is a growing issue for West Yorkshire and our nation as a whole. In 2015, double the number of people were sleeping rough than in 2010. I spent a night last month sleeping rough in the porch of a Bradford church, raising money for the Church Urban Fund’s work in the city. In the weeks leading up to and after my night in the churchyard, I talked with homeless people I came across as I went around the city.

“What I found most powerful was that, more than a cup of tea or a sandwich, they often valued the fact that someone asked their name, looked them in the eye and was interested in their story. What they found most hurtful was people walking past as if they didn’t exist or, worse, treating them like a piece of rubbish.

“I have also discovered a whole world of generosity. For a week at a time, through the ‘Inn Churches’ programme, different congregations across the diocese share their time and buildings to provide rough sleepers with a quality meal, an evening of games and company, a warm place to sleep and a hearty breakfast. There is light in the darkness!”

Urgent Tanzania drought appeal

Churches are being urged to support parishes in the Diocese of Mara, Tanzania, which is suffering from starvation due to crop failures.

The appeal has come from the Bishop of Mara, the Rt Revd George Okoth, who says that many congregations in areas like the Serengeti have not been able to grow and sell crops and support their clergy. Many of the clergy and their families are going hungry.

“Ninety-five percent of our congregations rely on subsistence farming,” he said.

Parishes are invited to “buy a bag of maize for Mara” by sending £40 cheques made payable to “Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance”, with, written on the back, “Mara bag of maize appeal”, c/o Diocese of Leeds Finance Dept., 17-19 York Place, Leeds, LS1 2EX.
Be my Valentine?

Bishop Nick Baines

Well, if Christmas was all about God turning words about love into action, then it doesn’t take long for love to get lost in romance, does it? February is the month when we continue to tell the surprising story of what happened when the baby of Bethlehem grew up and became less meek and mild.

We re-tell how he showed love to the loveless, and got into trouble with all the same people who were supposed to be welcoming him. Clearly, life doesn’t always go to plan. But, while we are re-living the story of Jesus in church, outside the church all eyes are focused on the love-fest that is Valentine’s Day - 14th February. The shops are full of more stuff to give to your loved-one, more flowers (that suddenly become more expensive for no apparent reason...), more chocolate (to keep us going until the Easter bunnies arrive), and more pink love hearts than you can shake a stick at. Marvellous... unless you are lonely or feel unloved.

The really weird thing about Valentine’s Day, however, is that it is named after a priest who was allegedly beheaded near Rome by the emperor Claudius II around 270AD for helping Christian couples to get married. So, the link between love and marriage is there to be seen. (Although this doesn’t help explain why he is also the patron saint of beekeepers and epilepsy and has a remit for sorting out plague, fainting and traveling. Or why bits of his skeleton now reside in Rome, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Scotland, England and France.)

But, a connection is surely to be made between love and cost. Christian love is represented not by a pink heart, but by a cross. So, maybe Valentine’s Day faces us with this reality - midway between the manger of Bethlehem and the cross of Easter - that romance is lovely, but love goes deeper.

+Nick
Bishop of Leeds

Deanery Wedding Fair

BRADFORD Churches in Ilkley deanery are getting together to hold their first Wedding Fair bringing together many local businesses at one location, St Margaret’s Church Ilkley, on Saturday 11th February.

Organiser Lizzie Reynolds, a reader at Burley in Wharfedale, says the aim is to showcase local churches and dispel some of the myths people have about a church wedding. “From my own conversations,” she said, “I know that many people would like a church wedding but believe they are expensive or exclusive to members of the congregation.”

Area Dean, and Vicar of St Margaret’s, the Revd Philip Gray, added, “We have some wonderful churches in Wharfedale to host weddings. In our local communities, too, there are many small businesses who provide great service to those looking to be married. The Wedding Fair will bring all these different elements together from our communities.”

He added, “The Fair will be a great opportunity for those thinking about and planning their weddings to see what is possible. It is going to be a very unique and special event, very appropriately just before St Valentine’s Day! Anyone is welcome.”
Lighthouse Academy

Lighthouse, a unique Christian community based at St George’s Leeds, has just celebrated the completion of the first module of their innovative discipleship course, the Lighthouse Academy. Many members of Lighthouse have suffered homelessness, addiction or mental health issues. Mission Priest, Revd Jon Swales, said, “Lighthouse reaches out to those who are battered and bruised by the storms of life, who often live chaotic lifestyles... After being baptised, many have been really hungry to learn more and deepen their faith, but for various reasons can’t access mainstream discipleship options. So we’ve started our own discipleship course. We’ve just run our first term and the participants have absolutely loved it.” If you can help support Lighthouse visit their website www.lighthousewestyorkshire.org.uk

New wheels for care centre

WAKEFIELD One of the last remaining elderly day care services in Wakefield has been awarded a new minibus from the Department of Transport.

The Day Centre, run out of St Catherine’s Church Centre, enables 100 elderly residents across the area to live in their own homes for longer, while providing respite to their carers. The new minibus will now enable the charity to reach new areas. Jonathan Williams, Project Manager who secured the vehicle said: “We had to wait a long time while the government put the contract out to tender, but Minibus Options Ltd have done an absolutely splendid job of modifying the minibus for our needs.”

Birthday party

HUDDERSFIELD Holy Trinity Church, Huddersfield, celebrated its 200th anniversary last month with three adult baptisms, and the welcome news of a £184,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to fix a leaking roof. The church was built thanks to the vision and wealth of 23 year old Benjamin Haigh Allen and, 200 years on, prayers of thanks were said for his work while hymns were sung from the original foundation-laying service in December 1816. Each member of the congregation was invited to lay their own ‘living stone’ as their act of dedication to Christ and his church.

‘Blaze of light’ as Ripon Cathedral prepares for Candlemas

RIPON Preparations for the historic service and procession for Candlemas, taking place on Thursday 2nd February at 7.30pm, will begin early at Ripon Cathedral. Ahead of the service, one of the most spectacular in the Cathedral’s calendar, thousands of candles will be placed around the ancient building by the team of vergers. The service is lit purely by the candles placed throughout the Cathedral - candles also form a spectacular cross of light in the main chancel. The Candlemas Eucharist celebrates the Presentation of the Infant Christ in the Temple, and traditionally marks the end of the Christmas season. At Ripon Cathedral it has been celebrated for hundreds of years. A visitor to the Cathedral in 1790 declared that the whole building was “one continued blaze of light all afternoon”. This year, the preacher will be the Dean of Wakefield, the Very Revd Jonathan Greener.
Two deaneries have become one under a reorganisation of the Ripon Episcopal Area which came into effect in January.

The Deanery of Bowland and Ewecross brings together seven parishes from the former Ewecross deanery with thirteen Bowland parishes.

Canon Ian Greenhalgh has been appointed as Area Dean. He said, “When we became the Diocese of Leeds both deaneries lost parishes to Carlisle and Blackburn Dioceses. Over the past three years we have been working together as deanery synods and also chapter. This has worked really well and it made sense to become legally the new Deanery of Bowland and Ewecross, the most Westerly part of the diocese - and in many ways the most beautiful!”

Cistercian monks who set out the day after Christmas, 1132 AD to found a new Cistercian monastery at Fountains on the banks of the River Skell.

The walkers were swelled in numbers at the village of Studley Royal, passing across the Studley Royal Deer Park and on to the National Trust site. Roughly 2000 pilgrims crowded into the spectacular vaulted and floodlit Abbey Cellarium, where mulled wine and mince pies were served and the pilgrimage culminated with a service of prayers and carols.

New Year, New Deanery

Boxing Day Pilgrimage returns more popular than ever

After being cancelled in 2015 because of the Christmas floods, the traditional Boxing Day Pilgrimage from Ripon Cathedral to Fountains Abbey was back, stronger and more popular than ever with an estimated 2000 people taking part. For the Bishop of Ripon, James Bell, it was a poignant day – his last co-leading the pilgrimage with Dean of Ripon, John Dobson, before his retirement in April. “Ripon has a very special place in my heart, and it was brilliant to join in this most Ripon of activities!” he commented.

In bright sunlight, hundreds of ‘pilgrims’ gathered outside the West Front of Ripon Cathedral, to be joined by those who had attended the Holy Communion service inside. Around 1200 or more walkers streamed up Ripon’s famous Kirkgate and on through the Market Square. Their route followed in the footsteps of a group of