



KINGS NORTON
TEAM PARISH

THE MAGAZINE
FOR CHURCH & COMMUNITY

December 2017

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A Church of England Team Parish serving all in Kings Norton and Druids Heath through the Parish Church of St Nicolas and the District Churches of Hawkesley and Immanuel
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Have you ever had the experience of being unable to see something that was right under your nose? Not because you lost your glasses, but because you were expecting it to look quite different?

The discovery that God chose to reveal himself in human form and through human relationships can be so surprising that it can take us a while to refocus our expectations. We are looking for something else, so we fail to see what is there. If we presume that God is elsewhere or otherwise, we may, after some fruitless searching, conclude that He doesn't exist at all. Fortunately, we have Christmas to remind us of where to look.

When he grew up, the boy on this month's front cover taught His followers about the unconditional love of God and encouraged them to make it visible to others by serving their needs, particularly those of "the least". This is why the church must always be preoccupied with the concerns of those who have drawn the shortest straws in life.

But not only the church. As you read your way through this bumper edition, the many ways in which the people of Kings Norton (and beyond) are serving the needs of their neighbours will, I hope, reassure you that the Christmas spirit, the Spirit of love and service, is alive and active right across our community, from Fairway to Foodbank, through fun and fundraising and, yes, in the many church services later this month when, together, we return to the roots of The Story of Hope.

Wishing you an expectant Advent and a very happy Christmas!

The Editor

FROM THE RECTOR

A Dickens of a Christmas

Christmas festivities in Britain are mainly a Victorian invention. The Christmas tree, trimmings, numerous gifts, a secret figure arriving in the night to deliver presents to children, carol singing etc. All these have their origins in the 19th century and though some have roots in more ancient traditions, the Victorians popularised and commercialised them as the masses flocked to the expanding industrialised cities of their age. Charles Dickens played a major role in romanticising Christmas through his books and articles, especially *A Christmas Carol*. A new film about Dickens' life is shortly to be released called *The Man Who Invented Christmas*.

There is a strong Birmingham connection with Charles Dickens. He came here on at least three occasions between the 1840s and 1870s. In 1853 he held an audience of nearly 2,000 spellbound by his dramatic reading of *A Christmas Carol*. The Birmingham Journal of that time reported:

"No party this Christmas had such a treat in storytelling. And it was a long story too. For full three hours and a quarter [Mr Dickens] kept the party amused, melted with pathos; or tickled into laughter – not quite genteel combinations; but full of lusty roars, that



came warm from the heart; or stimulated to ringing cheers by the homely kindly moral teachings of the tale. But Mr Dickens did not only read the story, he acted it too. Everybody was charmed by the way in which the story was told. How Mr Dickens twirled his moustache, or played with his paper knife, or laid down his book, or lent forward confidentially, or stuffed his hands in his pockets, or twinkled his eyes as if he enjoyed the whole affair immensely, and as if the story was told

for his own especial pleasure, and delight."

The story of the transformation and redemption of Ebenezer Scrooge from a miserly, reclusive killjoy to a warm-hearted, generous and joyful benefactor through the mysterious intervention of spirits, representing the past, present and future, is an enduring tale delighting young and old. It is in parts witty, homely and poignant and although Dickens was a sentimentalist, his stories also carried a deeply-felt message of moral indignation at the way working families and the poor were treated and exploited. He was a supporter of moral reform generally and better conditions for the poor specifically, raising funds and giving generously of his own means to many causes.

One of the reasons he came to Birmingham was to raise funds for a new educational establishment for working people. It became the *Birmingham and Midland Institute* (still going strong at bmi.org.uk) and a fine bust of their literary benefactor can be seen in the foyer. Dickens believed education should be universal and non-sectarian. He was a champion of working people and one of his readings of *A Christmas Carol* in Birmingham was publicised as only for working people and free.

Embedded in the story are references to the true nature of Christmas; its ability to lift us out of the demands and distractions of everyday living or coping and to point us to other realities, which

in turn refresh our perceptions of the world. At best, Christmas is a time of shared celebrations, renewed hope and a season when charity abounds. Scrooge's nephew captures the essence of the special power of Christmas in his explanation to his miserly uncle of why his faith in it is undiminished.

"'There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say,' returned the nephew. 'Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!'"

Whatever your plans for Christmas 2017, we at St Nicolas', Hawkesley and Immanuel churches wish you and your loved ones joy, peace and a renewed sense of hope for each other and our world.

Revd Larry Wright

This is NOT a FAIR WAY to treat the vulnerable!

*The Fairway Day Centre, at the western end of the parish of Kings Norton, is the **only** centre in South Birmingham which provides vital day care for people with physical and learning disabilities and older adults with dementia. It has been fulfilling that role for 40 years. For some local residents it is a vital lifeline. Despite this, Birmingham City Council intends to close it and, we believe, it has tried to do so without consulting the people most directly affected.*

*The result has been outrage, which we are now constructively channeling into a campaign led by service users, their families, friends and local representatives, to make you, the public, aware of the Council's motives and actions whilst petitioning them to change their minds. As campaigners, we have encountered considerable resistance but, at the time of writing, we are persevering in our goal to see Fairway Day Centre saved for some of the most vulnerable members of our community. **We need your support!***

Meet **Jackie***. She is 73 years old, has cerebral palsy and lives with her 94-year-old mum who is her primary carer and whose health is failing. During a lifetime of struggling with a debilitating condition, Jackie has been here before. Twice. Two previous day centres which she used to attend were closed by Birmingham City Council (BCC). "It is always very difficult to adjust to a new centre," she writes "and as I get older, it becomes more frightening." This time, however, Jackie is not facing a move to a new centre, for there are none left on this side of Birmingham.

Together with all the other regular service users of the Fairway Centre, Jackie received a letter on 9th September this year

in which BCC advised her that the centre would be closed. This was the first she or any of her friends had heard about it. Although the Council is now claiming that there was a process of consultation before the decision was taken, it is a claim which does not stand up to scrutiny, as a glance at our Facebook page, "Save Fairway Day Centre From Closure", will show. What Jackie was offered by way of compensation was a social work assessment review aimed at determining how her care needs would be met in future. A review. Nothing more.

John is 88 years old and suffers from dementia. At home, he is cared for by his daughter. During the three days a week which he spends at the Centre he enjoys



playing dominos, painting and chatting with his friends. His doctor has stated that he needs the stimulation and support which the Centre provides in order to maintain a reasonable quality of life. But it would seem that providing a life of quality for dementia sufferers in South Birmingham is not high on BCC's agenda.

At a meeting held on the Fairway on 26th September, **Melanie Brooks**, BCC's Interim Assistant Director for Adult Social Care & Health met a large number of our service users and their carers. According to the minutes of that meeting, she was asked about the lack of transparency surrounding the decision to close the Centre. Why, the distressed service users wanted to know, are there no records of the meetings at which the decision was taken? Why have no lists been published of the names of

those who took it? Ms Brooks responded that the meetings were not open to the public, but she could not explain why the decision had been taken behind closed doors, nor why there was no publicly-available record. There were, in fact, two meetings at which the Day Centre was discussed. The first was attended by the Departmental Leadership Team; the second was a Cabinet Members' Briefing. We have been unable to find any public records of either. It is not clear whether the decision went to Council for ratification before it was announced.

When Ms Brooks was asked why there had been no previous consultation with those whose lives are directly affected, she claimed that an instruction had been issued by the Council's executive officers "to carry out all necessary consultations".

Photo: Some of us campaigning on The Green, Kings Norton, 11th November 2017, including Councillor Andy Cartwright (Longbridge Ward), right, a supporter of the campaign, whom we have asked to present a 2,500 signature petition to the full Council.

Those conducting the consultation had been told to report their findings and should have been aware that councils are legally bound to conduct consultations before any closures are made. But as far as we can tell, the consultation never happened. Ms Brooks' visit to the Centre on 26th September was the first time that its users had been listened to by anyone in a position of responsibility.

Whether they were, in fact, listened to at all is a moot point. **Wendy Collymore**, the chair of our campaign, in a letter to **Councillor Paulette Hamilton**, Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care, on 29th September, reported that Ms Brooks "repeatedly stated that [...] she was not prepared to feed back to her team requests from service users to review the decision" despite the fact that, at the time she wrote the letter, she already had 70 signed statements from service users who are vehemently opposed to the closure. Councillor Hamilton was invited to come and see for herself. We have not yet had a response.

Meet **Angela**. Angela is 50. She has Down's Syndrome and early-onset dementia and is deaf. Angela is cared for by her mum, who spent 8 years looking for a suitable day care centre for her daughter. Angela's twice-weekly visits to the Fairway are the only times when her mum gets a break. She writes, "I love the literacy group and the Health & Wellbeing group here. All the people here and the staff are like family to me. I don't want to lose my family."

One of the few local politicians who seems to be listening to Angela and her extended family is **Richard Burden M.P.**, the Labour Member of Parliament for Northfield. On

3rd October this year, Mr Burden visited the Fairway Centre and met **Councillor Carole Griffiths**, who supports the campaign. Because he was on a tight schedule, Mr Burden did not have time to meet service users one-to-one as he had said he wanted to do, but he promised to return. True to his word, he came back and spent some considerable time listening to the individual stories of people for whom the Centre is a second home.

In a public statement, he has since written, "There is little doubt in my mind that, once again, central government cuts to Birmingham are at the root of the threat to the Fairway, but that does not make the proposal to close the centre the right response. That's why I will be pressing for a rethink on the part of the Council."

Meet **Ian**. Ian is 50 and has cerebral palsy. He lives with his mum, his primary carer, and he has been attending the Fairway Centre for thirty-one years. He is there 5 times a week. His needs are so specialised that he doubts it will be possible to find an alternative. He writes, "I simply need this day centre to feel human."

According to Wendy Collymore, in a phone call between the Council and the Fairway Day Centre, a representative of Birmingham City Council actually implied that Ian and Angela, John and Jackie and the many other service users who have lent their voices to the protest in their own defence had been coerced into doing so by those who are campaigning on their behalf. We see this as a defensive reaction to an indefensible decision. We believe that it insults the intelligence and the right to self-expression of those who rely on others to make their voices heard. Is this how we

treat those who carry some of the heaviest burdens in our society?

Meanwhile, **Dr Graeme Betts**, BCC Director of Adult Social Services, has shown signs of taking a personal interest in the furore which this controversial decision is generating. He made his first visit to the Centre on 5th October and stayed for 15 minutes, during which time he was able to speak to a handful of the people present. He was also due to attend the Kings Norton Ward Committee meeting on Wednesday 8th November but instead, he sent a note explaining that he had been advised by the Council's legal department that he should not attend in case he said something which could be used against the Council in a future judicial review.

We maintain that BCC's decision to send out letters of closure was not only heartless but unlawful. We have therefore written to Cllr Paulette Hamilton and Dr Graeme Betts as follows:

"Recognising that Birmingham City Council has failed in its legal obligations to Fairway Day Centre, we, the Campaign [...] demand that you immediately rescind the letters of closure sent out [on] 8 September 2017. Further, we expect you to issue a written apology for the trauma you have inflicted on those persons who were in receipt of this unlawful letter."

We are still waiting for a response. Meanwhile, at the time of writing, the *Save the Fairway Day Centre* campaign has collected over 1,170 signatures on our online petition, 1,600 signatures on our paper petition and 66 letters from services users and their carers. Local reaction is mounting and local politicians are coming

under increasing pressure to explain their actions. **Will you help us to increase that pressure until compassion and common sense prevail?**

For further information, type "Save Fairway Centre" into Facebook's search engine or sign the online petition at **bit.ly/2zCfPqb**.

The Save The Fairway Day Centre Campaigners

From the Editor:

This is obviously a complex issue which stirs up strong emotions and whose roots lie in funding decisions which affect the whole city, not just Kings Norton. The Campaign's Facebook page includes a letter dated 10th November in which the Council sets the closure of the Fairway Centre in the context of widespread and unavoidable budget cuts which will reduce the number of day centres in Birmingham from eleven to nine. In that letter, the Council claims that the Centre is only using half of its capacity. Campaigners respond by pointing out that the Council halted all referrals to the Centre in June 2016. The Council claims that it cannot afford necessary repairs to the building. Campaigners counter that the Council cannot know what repairs would cost since the building has not been surveyed in the past 18 months. The Council offers assurances about the continued provision of care... and so the debate goes on. Having given four pages to one point of view this month, in the interests of fairness and balance this magazine would be willing to print the Council's view in a future edition should it request the opportunity.