I am writing this in the middle of the holiday season, while many people are undertaking journeys both here and around the world. The journey is a common motif in stories, poems and dramas, not least those with religious and spiritual themes, like John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress, Geoffrey Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales, and Journey of the Magi, by T.S. Eliot.

The Scriptures of various faiths tell of people on the move. Our Judaeo-Christian tradition includes (among many others): Abraham, who ‘...set out, not knowing where he was going’ (Hebrews 11:8); the Hebrew people’s long sojourn in the wilderness, from slavery in Egypt towards liberation and the Promised Land; their later deportation into exile in Babylon, where ‘...we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion’ (Psalm 137) - and their eventual return.

In the New Testament, Jesus’s story abounds with journeys: the flight into Egypt to escape Herod’s brutality; a significant journey to Jerusalem, and the Temple, as a boy; a journey into the wilderness after his baptism; entering Jerusalem on a donkey and, eventually, the Way of the Cross towards ‘the place of a skull’.

Add to all that the mesmerising story of the two travellers from Jerusalem heading towards Emmaus, after Jesus’s death, and the mysterious fellow-traveller who joins them on the road; Paul’s dramatic conversion while on the road to Damascus; his and the apostles’ missionary journeys all over the Roman Empire; and the earliest description of Jesus’s followers as people of ‘The Way’.

Here we are, centuries later, inspired by those who have travelled before us, while pursuing our own journey of life and of faith. We may find inspiration in some of our most resonant liturgies that involve ‘travel’ - among them the Advent journey from darkness to light; the Candlemas and Palm Sunday processions; and the Stations of the Cross - and also in many of the hymns we sing that focus on journeying: Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us; Guide me, O thou great redeemer; Lead, kindly...

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On 23 June a party from RTM, led by the Revd Anne Crawford, took part in the Alban Pilgrimage, which, with an annual procession through the city streets of St Albans and services in the Cathedral there, commemorates the life and martyrdom of St Alban. A Romano-British pagan living in the 3rd century, Alban gave shelter to a Christian priest, Amphibilus, fleeing from persecution by the Roman authorities. Influenced by the priest’s prayers and teachings, Alban became a Christian himself and exchanged clothes with the priest to enable him to escape. Alban was then caught, was tried and executed, becoming the first British martyr and saint.

Our group of pilgrims assembled at Richmond station, said together the Pilgrims’ Prayer and were each given a red rose, a symbol of the pilgrimage – ‘Among the roses of the martyrs, brightly shines Saint Alban.’ Of our nine pilgrims, three had close connections with the city and it was nice to see it again. The journey there by rail was straightforward and we walked from the station into the city centre with time to have a coffee in the cafe attached to the Museum of St Albans, recently reopened. Then we stood in an ideal spot on the main street and watched the procession. Twelve foot tall puppets of St Alban, Amphibilus, the Magistrate, Centurions and others, constructed by craftspeople from the Notting Hill Carnival, passed by and also two large and slightly bloodshot eyeballs! These were to remind people that when St Albans was executed, the first executioner declined to kill him, having been converted himself by seeing Alban’s faith and courage. A replacement executioner then stepped in and executed St Albans, but immediately afterwards the executioner’s eyeballs fell out of his head. (All the figures in the procession were afterwards placed in the Cathedral and it was a little disconcerting later on, whilst in the Cathedral Shop, to look up at the gallery and see the eyeballs propped against the wall.)

Children play an important part in the procession so many were mini-Roman legionaries, and others were in bright swirling costumes representing the stream of water that sprang up miraculously as St Alban went to his execution, and also red roses. Finally came pilgrims from parishes far and wide and we joined this part of the procession and walked down to the Cathedral, gathering at the West Front where St Albans’s execution was re-enacted.

Just afterwards at noon we walked through the West Door for the Festival Eucharist, attended by no less than 900 pilgrims, with the address being given by our own Dean of Southwark, the Very Revd Andrew Nunn. Afterwards we split up for lunch, to explore the Cathedral and the park around, before reuniting for Evensong at 4.00 pm. There had also been an Orthodox service at St Albans Shrine at 2 pm. The Cathedral is a very welcoming place in ecumenical terms, hosting Roman Catholic and Orthodox services once a week and German Lutheran and Free Church services once a month.

At Evensong the Dean of St Albans, the Very Revd Jeffrey John, welcomed the pilgrims in a variety of languages and the sermon was given by Brother Stuart Burns OSB of Mucknell Abbey. The music at the morning service had been wonderful but the choir surpassed themselves with their rendition of George Herbert’s ‘King of Glory, King of Peace’ in a setting by
Alec Roth, commissioned by the Cathedral in celebration of the 900th Anniversary of the consecration of the Abbey Church in 1115. It was simply sublime. Finally, and this to me was the most moving part of the day, the entire congregation rose, filed in procession either side of the High Altar, and on past the shrine of St Alban, where we left our roses as an offering and thanks for his life. As we travelled home to Richmond we all felt that we had taken part in a very special day: -

'There were so many people following the procession and packing the Cathedral for those two inspiring services – it really gave me hope for a revival of Christianity in this country. I was particularly impressed by our Dean Andrew Nunn, with his imagery of dressing up and being clothed with Christ; also Stuart Burns speaking of the unfathomability of God'. Ruth Jones

'A very special day. A wonderful atmosphere in the town, some inspiring sermons at the services and a splendid welcoming address from Jeffrey John, in multiple languages. Anne did a great job looking after us all. Returning to the area from where she came she received so much love and warmth from so many people who were thrilled to see her again’ Carole and Peter Cregeen

'Highlights were the procession through the streets to the cathedral; the volume of the singing; praying and being anointed at St Alban’s shrine; and finally throwing our roses onto the shrine at the end of the afternoon service. Sunshine, prayer and fellowship made it a very special day. Join us next year!' Gill Gregorowski

As Gill says, do join the Pilgrimage next year when it will take place on Saturday 22 June 2019 which next year is St Alban’s Day itself. To find out more go to www.stalbanscathedral.org/whatson/the-alban-pilgrimage/ There are also many pictures of the Pilgrimage on the Facebook page of the Cathedral.

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Journeys - continued

light; One more step along the world I go; Through the night of doubt and sorrow; O for a closer walk with God….. Then there are pilgrimages to significant places like Iona, Holy Island, Santiago de Compostela, Assisi, Israel…..

It might sometimes feel a bit of an overworked image, but, for me, the journey is a very powerful metaphor, and I want to remain open to what might emerge as I travel. My holiday snaps invariably include tracks, pathways, trails, corridors, passageways and gateways where no final destination can be seen. In terms of faith, the adventure of the journey seems to me far more important than any notion of certainty that I have somehow ‘arrived’. I am content to leave the question of destination where it properly belongs, and to keep on travelling. It is one of my favourite poets, the Welsh priest R.S. Thomas, who reflects:

‘…………he is such a fast God, always before us and leaving as we arrive.’

('Pilgrimages').
Ronan Mulcahy, RTM’s Property & Facilities Manager in Conversation with Revd Alan Sykes

Tell us a bit about yourself:

I come originally from Ireland and after completing my business degree, I took a position in banking in the City of London. A wife & children (2 boys now aged 8 & 10) followed. My 2 boys are in primary school with the eldest about to move into secondary school. I am a keen amateur competitive cyclist. I also enjoy swimming and playing men’s doubles tennis. Goodness me, I have now been in London for 24 years, which has been magical.

What’s your professional background?

After 8 years in the City I realised that I had the passion to run my own business and started my own design & build company which I ran successfully for 17 years. I enjoyed managing multiple projects which covered high-end residential refurbishments and renovations, building good relationships with clients, colleagues, architects, structural engineers, contractors and suppliers.

How long have you been working for RTM now? Where did you see the ad? What made you apply?

I have been working at RTM for one year this September. I saw the role advertised on the Diocesan website and also when researching saw it listed on Wandsworth & Richmond Council website. After doing my research I decided to apply for the role as I was impressed with RTM’s values, care for the community, and the exciting current and future building projects. Overall, I really liked what I saw and realised with my experience, skill set and as a Christian I could deliver and grow with the wonderful team.

What’s the purpose of a property and facilities manager?

That’s a good question. I am responsible for managing the day to day running of the properties of RTM and their facilities, covering St Mary Magdalene, St Matthias, St John the Divine, the associated church halls, the vicarages, the parish office and the various investment properties let to both business and residential tenants. I am very lucky and enjoy working closely with, and help assist, our parish architect Peter. I also review maintenance, service and utility companies to ensure that RTM is getting the best value it can.

How much of your work is bureaucracy and how much is hands on?

I would say it is a 50/50 split, which is great. I like to lead from the front and am happy when needed to roll up my sleeves to get the job done.

You’re our first property and facilities manager. To what extent did you have to invent the job when you arrived?

I took time for the first 2/3 months to listen, get out and meet as many of the RTM team members and wider community as possible to best understand my job purpose and the key responsibilities required for RTM. To assist me in keeping all of this on track I do a personal review every 6 months on goals & targets. I was very appreciative of the help and guidance that came from Wilma and the team.

What have been the main pleasures and the main challenges?

I enjoy the vision and ethos of RTM, I enjoy working collaboratively as part of the team. On occasions managing multiple sites can stretch you a bit. Nevertheless, I am mindful of the views of others and I put my head down and make things happen in the hope of making everybody happy.

Coming from a Catholic background, how did you find working for an Anglican parish?

I found it similar to my parish as there is a great sense of community, similar values and I’m part of a bigger team. It’s very refreshing.

You live in Tooting. Is there any advice on commuting that you’d like to offer?

It can be challenging on occasions. I’m prepared for the unexpected. I take time to reflect and plan for the day ahead, and sometimes I cycle, which is a 35 kilometre round trip.
Hello, my name is Fiona Morgan and I worship at St John the Divine, with my family. We have been coming to St John’s for nearly 25 years!

I work for the charity Me too & Co, which supports families who have children with additional needs and disabilities. Me too & Co was one of the charities that was very helpful for us as a family when our son Benedict was first diagnosed as being profoundly deaf. We received support when applying for DLA, legal advice on getting him into the right school and lots of friendship and emotional support too. I am pleased to run this charity now and to be able to offer a supporting hand to other parents of children with a wide range of additional needs but going on a similar journey.

Me too & Co operates drop-in sessions twice a week at the Crossway Centre, just behind St Stephens Church in Twickenham, for children with disabilities, their parents and their siblings. Our sessions are on Tuesday afternoons from 2.30 to 5.00pm and on Friday mornings from 9.30am to 12.00noon in term time. We also offer occasional activities at other times away from our usual venue.

We have a play room for the children, with activities such as sensory art and music sessions provided by Tim West and Singing Hands, and music therapy provided by the Otakar Kraus Music Trust. We also offer children drama, karate, developmental yoga, haircuts, cookery, hydrotherapy, learn to cycle courses, nature walks and much more!

For parents and carers we offer support and a wide range of workshops, therapies and training, such as disability awareness courses, legal advice, support groups, counselling, benefits advice and Relax and Recharge mornings.

Perhaps most important of all we provide tea, coffee, a sympathetic listening ear and a community of people going through similar experiences, so that parents don’t feel alone.

We have set up separate support groups for parents of girls with autism (who are often undiagnosed), parents of children who are not in formal education (there is a growing problem with school refusal and exclusions among children with SEND). We have also established a link with Welcare, the Southwark charity led by Anna Khan who worships at St Mary Magdalene’s and through them we are able to offer independent support on social care issues to families from a wide area.
We rely on a team of volunteers who lead art activities, make coffee, put away toys, run our reception desk, offer alternative therapies, help with sewing, cycling or cookery, talk to parents and play with children; we always welcome new volunteers, young and old and everywhere in between!

Me too & Co is there for the whole family and there are no geographical or borough boundaries to where our families live, which means that some of our families travel a long way from other parts of London where there is not so much support available.

We employ 4 part-time staff who are all parents of children with additional needs and have various different experiences which we can use to support families along similar journeys.

Most of our services are offered free of charge to families, as having a child with a disability puts a strain on families’ finances. We are an independent charity, with no statutory funding, which enables us to react quickly to need, to be flexible and to support parents to challenge decisions made by local authorities when needed.

We receive grants from BBC Children in Need, Richmond Parish Lands Charity, Hampton Fuel Allotment Charity and Richmond Team Ministry among others. We also do many fundraising events, such as the Richmond May Fair and are very grateful for the support we receive from many community groups, schools, PTA’s and special events. And we are fortunate that our Patron, the actress Sally Philips often raises money for us by appearing on television quiz shows!

We were fortunate to be chosen by the Mayor of Richmond, Cllr Lisa Blakemore, as one of her 3 charities for the year 2017-18 and with her attended many community events over the past year. Lisa is also an independent educational psychologist specialising in autism and ABA therapy, so we will be continuing to work with her in the future.

We are delighted too that our volunteers have just been nominated for and received the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service. This is equivalent to the MBE for voluntary groups and acknowledges the commitment and love that our volunteers give. Some of our volunteers will represent us at an event in the City in September at which they will be thanked by the Lord Lieutenant of Greater London. One of our volunteers is Cedric Lee, a long-term member of St John the Divine who has been part of a fantastic team manning our reception desk since autumn 2016. As part of the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service I was invited to a garden party at Buckingham Palace this summer, which was a huge honour and a very exciting event to attend – and necessitated the purchase of a very large hat!

I am so proud to be part of this fantastic charity and encourage anyone who feels drawn to us to support us with prayers, by offering to volunteer, by spreading the word to other potential volunteers, by holding a fundraising event or by mentioning us to any families who have children with (suspected) additional needs that you may meet.

For more information on what we do, please visit our website: www.metooandco.org.uk or follow us on social media:

https://facebook.com/metooandco
https://twitter.com/MetooandCo

You can also contact me directly on 07946 646 033 or email info@metooandco.org.uk

Thank you for your support.
Learning In The Cathedrals

September sees the beginning, after the summer break, of talks and events across London on a wide range of subjects. You might want to consider the autumn/winter programmes put on for the public by St Paul’s Cathedral and our own Southwark Cathedral.

At St Paul’s there are a variety of events - the programme includes Dr Jane Williams talking on ‘The Merciful Humility of God’, the Bishop of Chelmsford, the Rt Revd Stephen Cottrell on ‘What is Prayer’ and the Revd Dr Carys Walsh on ‘A Beginners Guide to Christian Spirituality’. Some of you will remember that Carys, with her husband David, led RTM’s Parish Weekend at Aylesford in 2012, focusing on the poems of R S Thomas the Welsh poet and priest. But it’s not just sitting down to listen and there are more active events. In October, for example, the Revd James Milne, Sacrist at St Paul’s, will lead two separate pilgrimages ‘From Earth to Heaven’ around the building, exploring its sacred meaning, and followed on each occasion by an act of worship.

Most events are held in the Cathedral in a meeting room in the Crypt but occasional reflective days are held at the Foundation of St Katherine in the East End. Just a three minute walk from Limehouse Station but away from the noise of the Commercial Road, the Foundation has some beautiful buildings and a chapel grouped around a peaceful grassy square and is an ideal place to hold a day exploring aspects of faith.

Some events are free and others make a charge but the Cathedral is keen that no-one should be unable to go to an event because of financial problems so a bursary scheme is available for those who can’t afford the cost.

At Southwark Cathedral there is a wide range of events coming up including a tour of historic graffiti in the Cathedral, a conversation between Bishop Richard Harries and the Dean of Southwark on modern writers and their struggle for faith, the intriguingly entitled ‘Auden, the Psalms and Me’ and a history of Watts & Co, the ecclesiastical designers and church suppliers. Many events are free to attend.

If you are in and around Southwark Cathedral, also look out for the Cathedral’s cat, the famous Doorkins Magnificat. She is often to be found curled up asleep on a chair, sometimes the Bishop’s Chair. Doorkins has met the Queen and has also been given the honour of appearing on a stone corbel on a north side wall. She has her own Twitter account, with lots of followers, and a book has been written about her - ‘Doorkins the Cathedral Cat’ which you can buy in the cathedral shop along with other Doorkins merchandise.

https://www.stpauls.co.uk/learning-faith/adult-learning

https://cathedral.southwark.anglican.org/what'son/


My soul, there is a country
Afar beyond the stars,
Where stands a winged sentry
All skilful in the wars:
There above noise and danger
Sweet Peace sits crowned with smiles,
And One born in a manger
 Commands the beauteous files.
He is thy gracious friend
And – O my soul awake!

Did in pure love descend
To die here for my sake.
If thou canst get but thither
There grows the flower of Peace,
The Rose that cannot wither,
Thy fortress and thy ease.
Leave then thy foolish ranges
For none can thee secure
But one who never changes,
Thy God, thy life, thy cure.

PEACE
by Henry Vaughan, 1621 -95, Metaphysical poet
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Our Churches

St John the Divine  
St Mary Magdalene  
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