Tackling Knife Crime

Elspeth Fearn

In the year to March 2018 there were 41,000 knife crimes in the UK. 36% took place in London. Within our Diocesan area the Borough of Southwark had 860 knife crimes compared to 126 in Richmond upon Thames. Since 2018 the rate of knife crime has continued to rise, the almost daily stabbings and murders are even more shocking because of the very young age of many victims and perpetrators – 13, 15, 17. We will never know how the talents that those who lost their lives or those who had lost their way would have developed.

Our churches, in the middle of these communities, have a very important role to play to improve matters. In July 2019 General Synod passed a unanimous motion which called on the church's national bodies, Dioceses and education bodies to take practical steps to help prevent violence such as knife crime and to support those affected. In her remarks introducing the General Synod debate and the paper she had put forward, Canon Rosemarie Mallett, Vicar of St John the Evangelist, Angell Town, Brixton and Director of the Justice, Peace and Integrity Department in the Diocese said her 12 years in an inner-city parish had been 'bookended and punctuated by the deaths of young people, their lives often steeped in tragedy before ending tragically. I have conducted the funerals of too many young people,'

So what can be done? A time of great danger when many incidents occur is when young people come out of school so for the hours from 4pm until 7 or 8pm when parents or guardians are home from work, after-school clubs, pizza clubs, homework clubs take place in churches or church halls or sometimes in parents' own houses to provide safe spaces. The number of such safe spaces needs to be increased. The provision of knife bins in churches can also encourage young people to dispose of knives and cut the risk of injury and death. Young men who have no father figure can be offered positive role models and learn to understand how to deal with anger. In addition schools should...
Blue Christmas Service

For some people, Christmas is not a time of joy and festivity, but a painful time of sadness and loneliness. They may have experienced bereavement during the year and this is the first Christmas without a loved one. There are others for whom their single status is accentuated at Christmas, because they are unmarried or have no partner, maybe have no close relatives, a relationship has broken up, or there are impaired family relationships. Others may just find the relentless (and perhaps forced) jollity of Christmas celebrations overwhelming.

Each year, for the last four years, a Team Service, the Blue Christmas service, has been held at St John the Divine for parishioners and anyone in the wider community who might need it. RTM knew of similar services being held in other parishes and decided to offer it here.

The service, which lasts about 45 minutes and is typically attended by some 10 -12 people, is a small-scale, quiet and reflective gathering - not gloomy or miserable, but standing in some contrast to the larger and more celebratory services many people attend at Christmas. It consists of various elements - readings from Scripture, including the psalms, poems, short extracts from philosophical writing, and other liturgical resources, singing a few verses from carols, piano music, the lighting of candles, and the symbolic act of using salt and water to represent both human and divine tears. Importantly, there are also a few brief spaces for silent contemplation.

In the middle of their own personal darkness, people are being met through this service with light and hope. As Revd Neil Summers explains, 'Those who attend often remark on how being at the service has helped them. People tend to come for very specific reasons, which is why the make-up of the congregation mostly changes from year to year. It is something people feel they can safely participate in, given its relative smallness, sitting in a circle with a candle in the centre as a focal point, without the demands of being part of ‘a larger gathering’.

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be supported through church youth workers and ministers to reduce the number of exclusions, exclusion being a important factor in street and knife crime.

Our own Diocese is working with the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education to provide training on safeguarding and vulnerability to knife crime in Diocesan schools. A ten school pilot scheme for this training begins this month. The Diocese is also a partner of the Synergy Network (https://www.ascensiontrust.org.uk/synergy-network/) which is a growing coalition of clergy, Christian agencies and organisations working to end serious youth violence. There will be a Synergy event ‘Expo’ on 22 February at which a new website will be launched coordinating information on what is being done. The Diocese also supports churches with small seed funding (around £300) to set up safe spaces and welcomes initiatives by churches or groups of churches. Our deanery of Richmond and Barnes is in the process of funding a knife bin to go in church grounds in either Lambeth or Southwark. The bin and its five year maintenance will be paid for by individual churches in the deanery including RTM. Combatting the violence will take many years and will need short, medium and long term approaches but churches and other organisations are working very hard to reduce this pointless taking of so many young lives.
Richmond & Barnes Deanery Synod

This April at our Annual Church Meetings we will be electing lay representatives, from the three churches, to attend on our behalf, the Richmond and Barnes Deanery Synod, for the period 2020-2023. As well as lay members, the Synod includes the clergy licensed to a benefice in the Deanery.

The Richmond and Barnes Deanery follows the south bank of the Thames from Hammersmith Bridge to Ham and consists of 15 churches in Barnes, Kew, Mortlake and East Sheen, Richmond (south of the Thames) and Ham. Meetings are held in January, June and October each year and the individual churches takes turns to host the meetings. Deanery Synods act as a bridge between the parishes and the wider church, and their lay members can elect the Deanery’s lay representatives to the next level – the Diocesan Synod - and also the Diocese’s members of the House of Laity in General Synod, the latter being the National Assembly of the Church of England.

The Deanery Synod has a website richmondandbarnesdeanery.org.uk which includes minutes from all the Synod meetings, news and events about the Deanery churches, prayers and also campaigns including on preventing knife crime.

Anna Khan of St Mary Magdalene says of her experience as a Deanery Synod lay representative ‘I have learnt so much about how churches in our Deanery reach out to the local community. I think it vital that we work together so that we can co-ordinate our approach to make the biggest impact. On a personal note I have enjoyed the opportunity to meet and reconnect with other members of the wider Anglican community (some of whom I’ve known through living and working locally over the last twenty years) and having the chance to visit so many beautiful and local churches and to bring this learning back to the congregation I represent.’

The Posada
by Helen Williams

Every year I am wonderfully surprised by the response from ‘the Posada’, the travelling Crib. Throughout Advent a box with knitted Mary, Joseph and Donkey travels around the Parish – a different home every night. There are special words (liturgy) to be shared between ‘The Pilgrims’ (those delivering the box) and ‘The Innkeepers’ (those receiving the box), which closes with asking for blessing on the home. Prayers are said and the Advent Candle lit and refreshments enjoyed together. A surprisingly simple activity and yet the feedback, from all ages, is great. There have been some moving and tangibly holy moments. For some friendships have been made, while others have been reconnected with people they have not seen for years. People have found they attend the same nursery, live in the same street, have similar interests they formerly knew nothing about and our community grows. Younger and older, single people, families and whole ‘gatherings’. Some merit one to one, others have a party. All is acceptable, all is valid, all feels helpful in its own way, Posada kind of way. Why not participate next year. We’d love you to be part of it.
The Richmond Vicars
by Derek Robinson

The recent Museum of Richmond exhibition 'Celebrating 800 years of St Mary Magdalene' was supported by considerable research by volunteers. Derek Robinson, part of the Project Working Group, researched the various vicars of Richmond and has published a book on them. Team Talk recently put the following questions to him:

When did you decide to put the research into book form?

It became clear that only a small part of my researches on the vicars would be used in the exhibition itself. Such was the wealth of information – by turns fascinating, often quite moving and sometimes very funny – that I knew it needed to be permanently recorded, hence the book.

How did you decide who to cover?

Initially my intention was to cover all the vicars up to the end of the 19th century. However, I decided at a late stage that I needed to take the story right through to the Revd Wilma Roest. I am so pleased that I did as there is a lot of very interesting material in the 20th century. It was a delight to have such full cooperation from all the recent vicars, from the Revd John Oates onwards. The end result is a book containing biographies of all twenty three vicars at St Mary Magdalene since the beginning of the 17th century. Knowing about all these people and their time at St Mary's gives one a closer feel for the spirit and history of the church.

Would it be fair to say that the Richmond vicars especially in the 17th and earlier 18th centuries were extremely interesting people, well connected and often mavericks?

They are a fascinating bunch from the saintly Thomas Wakefield (1776-1806) to William Comer (1746-1766), who was sometimes too far gone in drink to accurately maintain the register of marriages and births. Richard Coleire (1720-1746) was the model for Gulliver's Travels. There were two vicars who had their licences revoked because they found themselves on the wrong side for the politics of the day. Nicholas Brady (1696-1720), perhaps our star vicar over the centuries, for his many and varied achievements. And then there are the curates, including scandal-prone young men that could step straight into a Wodehouse novel – they already merit a separate book.

This is an invidious question with such a wealth of characters to choose from, but do you have a favourite?

This is a hard one. If pushed I would have to say Samuel Gandy (1817-1851). As a vicar he does not begin to compare with the best from past centuries such as Thomas Wakefield or Harry Depuis (1852-1867). Indeed some were quite rude about him – unfairly in my view. One of his curates Edward Hoare, wrote in later years that Gandy 'seemed so occupied with heavenly views that he was unfitted for the practical business of this lower world'. However Samuel Gandy was the vicar I most enjoyed writing about and I warmed to him as a man. As the most likeable, I would plump for Max Binney (1900-1917).

'The Richmond Vicars by Derek Robinson ISBN 978-0-9518549-2-1 price £10 is published by the Museum of Richmond. Copies are available from the Museum and also direct from Derek, email address oldpalace17@btinternet.com
Offering Spiritual Care to People in Later Life
by Revd Anne Crawford

Over the last year it has been my absolute pleasure and privilege to offer the Church’s ministry to the residents, staff and families of Greville House, a residential care home in Queens Road. Once a week I lead a very simple act of worship in the home, and our little congregation is slowly growing as family members join in. Just before Christmas we held our first Carol Service at St Matthias for this special community; the singing was gloriously heart-felt and the memories which being in church evoked for the residents were a joy to share. And on Christmas Day itself some of the residents came back with their carers and joined us for worship. There was something very profound about celebrating the incarnation alongside people whose mental and physical capabilities are severely challenged by dementia and other life-changing diseases: their presence made us whole.

I am writing this piece for Team Talk as we prepare to celebrate Candlemas and the end of our Christmas celebrations (2nd February). We remember the widow Anna *, the prophet who had lived to the age of 84 years, and who appears with Simeon in Luke’s gospel. Anna and Simeon had been waiting faithfully for the Messiah to appear, and as Mary and Joseph arrive in the Temple with the infant Jesus, they both recognise his presence and praise God that they have lived to see this great day of salvation. Candlemas is the day we celebrate the faith of older people, a day when we can give thanks for all that the older generation have given to the Church through their long years of faithful witness and dedication.

The longer I am in ministry and the more I am involved in caring for older people, including my own parents, the more I realise the need to appreciate, nourish and care for those of riper years. As people grow more infirm, as health deteriorates, there is a need for the Church to provide ministry in a very particular way. People may no longer be able to come to church and the loss of contact with other church-goers can be akin to bereavement for many. It’s too easy for people to become out-of-sight and out-of-mind.

The Anna Chaplaincy

To enable and support churches who want to include and minister to older people with a little more energy and commitment a new initiative has been born: The Anna Chaplaincy (named after that 84 year old prophet Anna in Luke’s Gospel), has been created specifically to meet the spiritual needs of the older person. The vision of the Bible Reading Fellowship who came up with the idea of this new Chaplaincy, is to see Anna Chaplains working in every community in the country, supporting older people in their spiritual journey, offering spiritual support so that older people may live more peacefully in their last years and prepare to face the end of their earthly lives. Chaplains are trained to act as an advocate for the needs of older people in church and in the wider community, helping families and professional carers to understand more fully the spiritual issues that older people face in the latter stages of their lives. Anna Chaplains also work to inform and coordinate the church’s work with older people, helping to identify, recognise and appreciate the valuable contribution with older people can make to church life, and supporting the provision of more accessible worship and to enable better communication between the housebound and those who are in danger of being forgotten about. For more information about Anna Chaplains then why not take a look at the website at annachaplaincy.org.uk and if you feel that God may be calling you to ministry I’d love to hear from you.

* The Anna Chaplaincy

Prayer Table Display at Greville House Candlemas Service
Revd Anne Crawford

Faithful God, you have promised in Christ to be with us to the end of time.
Come close to those who have lived long and experienced much.
Help them to continue to be faithful and, within the all age kingdom of God,
to find ways to go on giving and receiving your grace, day by day.
For your glory and your kingdom.
Amen
I was fortunate to attend a series of training sessions at the Diocese, headed up by inspiring and engaging speaker Ronni Lamont (Priest, specialist in children’s spirituality and author). So much to take from these sessions, not least encouragement and a reminder of the value and importance of children’s ministry and the wider church family.

**The Empty Chair**

I look for you
But you’re not there.
Instead,
there’s just an Empty Chair.

As people laugh –
you would have too,
But you’re not here.
And I miss you.

I think of favourite memories
So, I’ll turn
Of times we spent
Just you and me

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**Faith Formation**

I was fascinated to learn that a study of practising Christians found that 76% of people made a commitment to faith aged 18 and younger, while 40% ‘came to faith’ before the age of 5. It is also widely recognised that children have a greater openness to ‘spirituality’, compared to adults. Furthermore, Theologian John Westerhoff writes about the importance of ‘our shared life together’, of ‘being family’. The importance of relationships for children and young people is highlighted by another study into ‘Sticky Faith’ which shows the significance of children and young people connecting to ‘other adults’. For young people to stay part of their church community, they typically had five or more relationships with people outside of their immediate family, but from within the church body. These were people who showed care, who ‘knew’ them, (all ‘appropriately’; public conversations, with knowledge of parents and under no duress on either side). While on the topic of the importance of other adults, it is worth noting that many adults will discredit what they can offer, considering they are not ‘cool’ enough or ‘in tune’ with their world, or have nothing of interest to share, yet studies find that in reality what our young people seek is authenticity and a genuine interest.

**Spiritual Styles**

Another area that shed more light on faith development was the area of ‘Spiritual Styles’. As with many areas of life, we have personal preferences, and faith is no different. We have natural tendencies towards ways that help us engage most readily with God. There are four main spiritual styles/avenues identified: Word – the path of the intellect, Action – the road to justice, Symbol – the journey of mystery and Emotion – the way of the emotions. Many of us will find a mixture of these styles helpful, as we look to connect with God, while some will have a strong preference for one style or another. I wonder if acknowledging this would be helpful for adults as well – both in our own spiritual journey but also in the way that we accommodate others and their needs. The material we use for our Junior Churches takes into account this learning and we try to provide a breadth of material to help engage with all preferences.

Hoping that these brief insights will help us appreciate the value of Children’s Ministry, and also understand the positive learning this ministry can have on our own spiritual journeys and finally, why not ‘say hello’ – our nurture of the church family (of all ages) is ministry requiring all ages to participate in to support one another.
Lecture at St John the Divine:  
'Liberal Values Under Threat – Are the challenges of the 1930s reappearing?'  
by Elspeth Fearn

Wednesday 5th February saw a very well attended lecture at St John the Divine marking the 80th anniversary of the publication of 'The Religious Prospect' by the Revd V. A. Demant. St John’s was an appropriate venue as the Revd Demant had been the parish priest from 1933 to 1942 and had written the book, which is probably his most important one, during his ministry there. He later became a Canon of St Paul’s Cathedral and Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at Oxford University.

Chaired by the Bishop of Southwark, the Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, the evening began with a lecture by Bishop Peter Selby, former Bishop of Kingston and of Worcester, now an Assistant Bishop in Southwark and also Honorary Visiting Professor at King’s College London. There followed a response from the Roman Catholic social teaching perspective by Tina Beattie, Professor of Catholic Studies at Roehampton University. Finally, came questions and comments from the audience.

Bishop Peter said that in looking at our worrying modern situation it was far better to be alarmist rather than complacent. Clear thinking and sound theology were not enough to avoid extremism but we still needed them. However, the recent 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz reminded us that it would be gross to compare our 2020 challenges with the terrible wickedness of the 1930s and 1940s. Demant had written in his book that, in order to beat the totalitarianism of his day, the Church needed to recommit to its basic beliefs. It had failed to be true to itself and only a strong Anglo-Catholic orthodox Christianity, rather than liberalism, could respond to the challenges of the times. The Revd Demant's concepts of 'dogma' or 'doctrine' and 'being' or 'becoming' which formed an important part of his argument were also explained by Bishop Peter.

In response, Professor Beattie gave an outline of Roman Catholic social teaching and social justice and the role of encyclicals especially Rarum Navarum from Pope Leo XIII in 1891, which was the Church’s response to communism and capitalism. The risk of liberalism is that it brings fragmentation when individual rights come before the common good of all. It was also important that Christianity should not become a political force.

In the concluding discussion, it was agreed that although there were aspects of the Revd Demant’s beliefs where attitudes were now different e.g. sexual ethics and that it was not the case that only Anglo-Catholic orthodoxy could deal with the problems of the 1930s, that did not invalidate his starting point. Nowadays however, there was a vacuum of religious understanding and all Christian and other faiths needed to engage to change this, and to take strength from their religious convictions.

The audience which had included three grandsons of the Revd Demant, Richmond’s MP Sarah Olney, various assistant bishops, and members of the RTM congregations and beyond, then repaired for refreshments and further discussions. They were also able to look at a small exhibition, from St John’s archives, of magazines and photographs from Revd Demant’s ministry. This was a very interesting and thought provoking evening.
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Our Churches

St John the Divine  St Mary Magdalene  St Matthias