

Food For Thought

St Helena's Angels

“In Baghdad this Christmas there’s no room at the inn. In fact it’s worse than that – there’s no inn.” So runs the opening line of the Christmas Pastoral Letter for the congregation of St Helena’s Anglican Church Larnaca this year.

St Helena’s is the local community representing a worldwide Anglican Communion that includes the Church of England, the Church in Wales and the Episcopalian Church in America. Cyprus is part of the Anglican Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East. There are Anglican churches in all the main towns, throughout the whole island of Cyprus, and St Helena’s Larnaca is opposite the old hospital near the bus stops in the centre of town.

It has a cosmopolitan congregation that meets each Sunday for worship and a service of Holy Communion at 9.30am. Typically there will be long time residents, visitors to the island and seasonal ex-pats from around the world present. The style of worship is Anglican, but we make an effort to present our services in a way that will enable people from many shades and traditions to find something recognisable and worthwhile. Coffee is served after the service in the courtyard and first-time visitors usually remark on the friendliness and welcoming attitudes of the local congregation.

The church also offers an evening service on the first Sunday of each month at 6.30, and is open during the week on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10am until 12pm. There are people around the church at these times but primarily the idea is to provide a quiet space where people can come to reflect, perhaps light a candle or pray, or just find respite. In addition we have a range of special services for occasions such as harvest festival or Remembrance Sunday, as well as the main Christian festivals such as Christmas, which we are in the process of putting together a programme of spirituality events for these times during Lent.

There is also a luncheon Club, open to all, which meets on the first Wednesday of each month. Membership costs €5 and each meal is also €5.

There has been Anglican worship in Larnaca for over a hundred years. This reflects the history of the town as the main port of Cyprus and the location of foreign embassies and trade delegations in years gone by. The original St Helena’s was demolished to make way for a more modern development in the 1980s, and though it may no longer look very church-like architecturally, it certainly tries to be church-like in every other way. It provides opportunity for prayer and reflection on the big issues of the day, and the big questions of the human condition. It tries to build a sense of community and belonging, and it looks for opportunities for service. It is a place where people can learn more about the Christian faith in a non-threatening environment.

An important aspect of the Anglican Church is that it is worldwide even though each church is firmly rooted in its



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St Helena's Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf

Christmas and Pre-Christmas Event Calender

Wednesdays 30 November, 7 December and 14 December: For Advent a series of Bible studies on the theme: the first Christmas, what really happened? In the Upper Room from 3pm to 4.30pm.

Sunday 4 December: Christingle service at 6.30pm followed by Christmas Fayre with hot food and mulled wine.

18 December: The Sunday Evening service will be a service of Lessons and Carols at 6.30pm.

24 December: First Communion of Christmas service in the late evening.

25 December: Christmas Day there will be a service of Holy Communion at 9.30am.



locality. We are part of a wider diocese, the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf, which stretches from Cyprus through the Arabian Peninsula as far as Yemen, including at least ten different political jurisdictions. These connections give our congregation a valuable sense of being part of our wider community, and opportunities to know personally people who are living and working in what are at the moment, and have been throughout the ages, some of the most significant places in human history.

At the moment, St Helena's has a very personal link with these places through its chaplain, because in addition to being the chaplain I also have a role in the wider diocese, which means I travel to other countries and can bring back first hand accounts of life there. Hence the first line of our Christmas newsletter.

A few weeks ago I was in Baghdad. Our church there, St George's, is situated in one of the most bombed areas of a city which still looks, and to an extent acts like, a war zone. Security is huge. We were accompanied from the airport by pick-up trucks filled with armed guards, veering around the road from the airport to the church to avoid being too easy a target. Concrete barriers and barbed wire are everywhere, even around the church compound. Four of our guards there were killed relatively recently in a drive-by shooting. Vigilance is needed at all times.

In the compound itself the church runs a clinic. We employ four doctors and three dentists serving the local population, Christian or not. We are about to open a newly built primary school for 150 children. Every Sunday our food distribution programme gives out 500 food parcels to people for whom this is a lifeline. The church congregation has suffered huge loss of life during the last few years, but still a



capacity congregation meets each week numbering several hundred, demonstrating what it means to hang on to hope in a hopeless situation. The people there are, in a sense, members of our family and even here in Larnaca we have a special relationship with them and will be remembering them in our prayers this Christmas. ●



"Help It's Xmas"

With Christmas just around the corner we are all too aware of the cost of all the festivities that take place during this special time of year with the ever rising cost of food and drinks, the parties and presents to go to and buy, as well as the dresses and decorations for that festive look and feel. In such a time of joyous occasion, where friends and family get together to share in the fun and frolics of the Christmas celebrations can you imagine for one moment what it must be like for people who are in need.

There are people with very low income and financial hardships, the elderly and retired with the burden of ever increasing costs of living, single parents, people who are experiencing personal, family or relationship problems, adults and children who are of poor physical and mental health and the list goes on and on. All these people and more are in serious need of help and support. At this time of

year, Christmas can be a time that is especially difficult for them, but we can actually help create an enjoyable atmosphere for them over the Christmas period and long after it has finished.

Help is available; support can be found. There are people who will listen and there are people who care. There are organisations that exist in the public domain for all of us to access and contribute to. No matter how small a donation, it can really help to make a positive difference to another person's life. We can all be part of a support mechanism by making donations, providing voluntary work, helping out at different charity organisations and churches to aid them in their support efforts. We can drop in food and clothing parcels, hand in any unwanted items, go along and support different organised events and fund raisers and be a part of something wonderful. **LN**