

# THIS MONTH: MARCH 2009

## RIDGEWAY METHODIST CHURCH



Dear Friends

### **Freedom of speech**

Some years ago I was playing football at right full-back for a team based in Wimbledon Park. We took our name from Tranmere Road in the London suburb of Earlsfield. Our opponents on this particular day styled themselves Putney Celtic and wore green and white hooped jerseys to match their aspirations. Needless to say most of the team came from Glasgow and had suitably impenetrable accents. I was only about 25 years old but the boy playing at left-wing that I was marking was younger still. Knowing that Scottish footballers had a reputation for rugged tackling I thought I would do my best to make him feel at home. What I did not expect was to meet his Dad running onto the pitch advising me to 'leave him alone, you great big, fat, bully!' At 6'0" I probably merited the description 'great big' but I think I might have taken that as a compliment. At a little under 13 stone, I was not accurately described as 'fat' and if the Dad thought I was bullying his little boy, the referee did not seem to think so. In short, if the Dad was trying to upset me he did not succeed.

There have been several items in the news recently that have related to the issue of freedom of speech. The whole issue is complex but it seems to me that we have to take into account not only the intention of the speaker but also the sensitivity of the hearer. The well-publicised cases relating to Prince Harry and Carol Thatcher show that it is possible to give unintentional offence to others, not necessarily the people to whom the remarks were originally made but to a much wider audience. I think most people in Britain affirm the importance of freedom of speech, but with freedom comes responsibility. Christians need to defend freedom of speech but we need to be aware of the difference between people not liking what we might say and being deliberately provocative or offensive.

The two main issues that confront Christians with orthodox views today are inter-faith relationships and matters of sexual ethics. Those of us who hold a traditional view of the Bible and of the person and nature of Jesus Christ want to affirm the Lord's teaching, 'I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, except through me' (John 14:6). People of other faith groups and of no particular faith could be offended by that teaching but I don't think that upholding it is offensive. Those of us who hold a traditional view of Christian marriage find ourselves unable to accept the increasingly popular views that 'partnerships' of both opposite and same sex couples are morally equivalent to marriage. People might be offended by that teaching but I don't think that upholding it is offensive and we must be grateful for those who are working hard to make sure that the rights of Christians to uphold and articulate traditional Christian teaching are preserved.

## **Freedom of hearing**

A related topic to freedom of speech is freedom of hearing. A common response to Christian complaints about *Jerry Springer: The Opera* was that people who were likely to be offended by it did not need to go. I don't entirely accept that because I think that as a community we ought to keep some general standards of decency and good taste, not only in the theatre and the cinema but also on television and radio. There are always those who say that if Christians do not like what is on the television they can change the channel or switch off. Again, I think we need to uphold some general standards of decency and good taste. I belong to a football supporters' website that has a message board on which anyone can contribute. Happily, sexual swearwords are forbidden on the site - but people can still use the Lord's name inappropriately without their comments being moderated. On several occasions I have written to a poster privately, asking gently if they realised that using the Lord's name in vain gave as much offence to Christians as racist language gives to all right thinking people in our society. Only one person was really angry with me. Even a practising pagan said that I had a right not to be offended. Perhaps we need to be not strident but gently assertive in our speaking and our hearing.

Yours sincerely

*John Haley*

## **Baroness Cox**

On Thursday 5 March, Baroness Cox will be giving a talk at the Guildhall entitled 'A Light in the Darkness: the privilege of making a difference'. The talk begins at 7.30; there is no charge, but seat reservation is recommended. For more information, please pick up a flier from the vestibule.

## **Tony Anthony**

Ridgeway Church has invited Tony Anthony to Plymouth on the weekend of 8 -10 May to lead evangelism training sessions and to speak at several events throughout the city.

Tony Anthony was three times World Kung Fu Champion before becoming an elite bodyguard, protecting some of the world's most powerful people. However, personal tragedy altered Tony's sense of extreme discipline and he began to use his skills for illegal ends, becoming embroiled in a world of violence, destruction and death. Eventually he was put in prison in Nicosia, Cyprus, and hit rock bottom; however, a stranger began to visit Tony, and eventually led him to Christ.

We hope that everyone will take the opportunity to come along and also bring others to hear Tony's very humbling testimony at the Guildhall on Sunday 10 May, and that all will join in our prayers for God to touch many lives through these events.

*Simon Rogers*

## Women's World Day of Prayer

This year's service will be held at Ridgeway on Friday 6th March at 2.30pm. The theme of the service is 'In Christ there are many members yet one body' and has been prepared by Christian women in Papua New Guinea. We invite all the ladies to join us and the women of Papua New Guinea in this service.

*Muriel Duerden*

## March Diary

### Sunday 1:

**10.30 am**      **Revd John Haley (Holy Communion)**  
**7.00 pm**        **Mrs Kate Konrad**

### Monday 2:

7.30 pm        Minister's Bible study (7)

### Tuesday 3:

10.00 - 12.00      Patchwork Group  
7.45 pm            Ladies' Group: Eunice Halliday - Foodbank in Plymouth

### Wednesday 4:

10.00 - 12.30      Coffee followed by lunches

### Thursday 5:

2.45 pm            Women's Fellowship: Prim Skedgell  
7.30 pm            Talk by Baroness Cox at the Guildhall

### Friday 6:

2.30 pm            Service for Women's World Day of Prayer

### Saturday 7:

8.30 am            Monthly Prayer Meeting  
10.00-12.00        Oasis Coffee Bar: Outreach (Christine & Lydia)

### Sunday 8:

**10.30 am**      **Mrs Janet Dobinson**  
**7.00 pm**        **Revd John Haley (Holy Communion)**

### Monday 9:

7.30 pm        Minister's Bible Study (8)

### Tuesday 10:

10.00 - 12.00      Patchwork Group  
7.30 pm            Men's Fellowship: Mike Steel  
7.45 pm            Ladies' Group: Graham Skedgell

### Wednesday 11:

10.00 - 12.30      Coffee followed by lunches  
7.30 pm            Church Council

### Thursday 12:

2.45 pm            Women's Fellowship: Ivor Merrin

### Saturday 14:

10.00 - 12.00      Oasis Coffee Bar: Bible Society (Ann Brindley)  
7.00 pm for 7.30    Meal with a Message, with Gary Streeter MP

**Sunday 15:**

**10.30 am**      **Revd David Hull**  
**7.00 pm**      **Mr Brian Hart**

Monday 16:

7.30 pm      Minister's Bible Study (9)

Tuesday 17:

10.00 - 12.00      Patchwork Group  
2.15 pm      Service at Pocklington Rise (all welcome)  
7.45 pm      Ladies' Group: Keith Mason

Wednesday 18:

10.00 - 12.30      Coffee followed by lunches

Thursday 19:

2.45 pm      Women's Fellowship: Malc Halliday

Saturday 21:

10.00-12.00      Oasis Coffee Bar: Church Funds (Avril)

**Sunday 22:**

**10.30 am**      **Revd John Haley (All Age service for Mothering Sunday)**  
**7.00 pm**      **Mr Earle Rendle**

Monday 23:

7.30 pm      Minister's Bible Study (10)

Tuesday 24:

10.00 - 12.00      Patchwork Group  
7.45 pm      Ladies' Group: 'Candrels'

Wednesday 25:

10.00 - 12.30      Coffee followed by lunches  
7.30 pm      Circuit Meeting (Crownhill)

Thursday 26:

2.45 pm      Women's Fellowship

Saturday 28:

10.00-12.00      Oasis Coffee Bar: Youth Outreach (Miriam, Kim and Steve)

**Sunday 29:**

**10.30 am**      **Mr Andrew Maxwell**, followed by Sunday Lunch  
**7.00 pm**      **Revd John Haley**

Tuesday 31:

10.00 - 12.00      Patchwork Group  
7.30 pm      Men's Fellowship (Elburton): Len Copley  
7.45 pm      Ladies' Group: Kate Konrad

**Church office hours: Tuesday-Friday 9.30 am - 12.30 pm**

**Church telephones: 348178 (office only); 331186 (pre-school and hall)**

**Church Office:** [admin@ridgewaymethodist.org.uk](mailto:admin@ridgewaymethodist.org.uk)

**Minister: The Revd John M Haley:** [min@ridgewaymethodist.org.uk](mailto:min@ridgewaymethodist.org.uk)

**[www.ridgewaymethodist.org.uk](http://www.ridgewaymethodist.org.uk)**

Information for April's *This Month* to the office by 24 March please.