

# Vicar's Pastoral Letter

**Date :** February 2010  
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**Subject :** How to listen to God

Dear Friends,

A Rabbi once asked God "How is it that people no longer hear You speaking to them?" And God answered "Because they don't bow low enough."

When I heard this I was reminded of how, when speaking with young children, we often bend or even kneel down so that we're on the same level as them. Why do we do this? We do it so that we're able to hear more clearly what they're saying. If we apply this to our conversations with God, and wonder why we don't hear Him speaking to us, it maybe because we don't get into the right position and the reason for this is that we don't really want to hear what He is telling us. It's not that God isn't speaking but that we're not listening. We don't mind listening to God as long as He's telling us things that we want to hear. It's surprising how very passionate and committed Christians often hear God speaking to them in words that fit in with their plans and schemes.

This, by the way, is my second attempt at writing this month's Pastoral Letter. I've ditched my first attempt because I thought it was too direct and challenging and might offend some people. I was frightened that some people might even stop taking the Magazine. I learned a valuable lesson about the dangers of overstepping the mark at last year's Remembrance Service and I wouldn't want to do it again. Perhaps I'm improving? But is this really the way that God wants us to be even though it suits our purpose and keeps everyone happy. We don't bend down to hear Him because we're too busy standing on high and tickling our ears with words we like to hear.

Another reason we bend down to speak with children is to avoid distractions because children speak in low voices and, usually with so much going on around, it's difficult to catch what they're saying. We need to focus on them alone. But when it comes to speaking with God I'm very content to have as many distractions as possible because I don't find prayer very easy. I'd rather be doing things, getting on with the job, than just sitting there speaking with God and so "my doing" is often a good excuse for not listening. And, of course, if we're not listening then we're not going to hear what He has to say.

And the last reason for kneeling down when speaking with children is to get on the same level and not to loom over the top of them like some two-legged mountain. Also to kneel or bow is to express humility. The period leading up to Easter, which we call Lent, is all about humbling ourselves before God and being truly sorry, indeed broken-hearted, for our wrongdoing and the injury we've caused to others. Part of The Lenten Prayer goes "a broken and contrite heart God will not despise" and so we're invited to humble ourselves before God. This, of course, is the very last thing that most of us want to do and so we continue to stand proud and tall in our self-centredness and self-delusion.

And so I encourage us all to humble ourselves before God and to bow down low enough so that we can hear Him speaking to us. It's worth remembering that there would have been no Easter had not God humbled Himself by becoming a child on earth and then being humiliated and crucified. And so, let's try and follow in His footsteps and bow our knees, like the three Kings, so that we might hear The Christ-Child speaking to us.

May God grant you and may you grant yourselves a truly blessed Lent.

*Peter*

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## **TRIBUTE TO RUPERT PATRICK**

It was with very great sadness and disbelief that we learned of the death of Rupert just before Christmas. I say disbelief because I thought he'd go on forever, he was such an integral part of this community. There have been hundreds of people over the years whose lives have been touched by the kindness, love and professionalism of this lovely gentle man. As an undertaker he met people at the most vulnerable and sad times of their lives and brought them comfort reassurance in the way he conducted the funerals of their loved ones. If Rup was involved then you knew that you were in safe, secure and loving hands. He was a man of committed Christian faith and trust in Jesus as his Lord and Saviour and over the years has been deeply involved in the life of St Mary's Church as well as the community as a whole. The Church owes him a great debt of gratitude for all that he has done as Church Warden, member of the PCC and marvellous custodian of our lovely churchyard. There wasn't a stone or area of land that Rupert didn't know and his respect for both the living and the dead was impeccable. We shall not see the like of Rupert again and the village and our lives will be poorer for it but I am sure that he will remain with us in spirit for he is now at rest and at peace in the loving arms of God and completely re-united with his son, Martin, and other loved ones in heaven. Every time, for example, we put up our Christmas tree we shall think of Rupert because year by year he took such pride and joy in acquiring it and setting it up to beautify our church and to celebrate our Saviour's birth. It was a sad honour and privilege this last year to bless and dedicate the Christmas tree in his memory. Rupert, of course, could not have done and been the man he was without the constant love and support of Freda whom he loved so much. Our thoughts and prayers are very much with Freda, Ann and Simeon at this time as we, with them, mourn the earthly passing of a wonderful man, a true professional and, above all, a dear, dear friend. Rupert, may you forever rest in the peace and love of God and inherit life eternal: Amen.

## **TRIBUTE TO DOREEN ANSTEY**

It was also very sad to hear of the death of our dear friend, Doreen Anstey who for so many years was involved in our village and in the life of our Church family at St Mary's. Doreen and Martin were, of course, very much a couple and a wonderful example of loving, mutually supportive, Christian marriage. Martin was the one who was more upfront especially with his involvement in the young people's work but he could not have achieved all that he did without the constant support, love and encouragement of Doreen. Doreen was a gentle, quiet, lovely lady but who had a real inner strength that came from God and an aura of God's light. Even over the past few years during her long and sad illness she never lost that sense of inner peace that was God's gift to her. The Church is indebted to her for all that she did here to beautify our church and to offer hospitality to everyone who came through the doors. She was also, of course, very involved in the Day Centre and was a tireless worker in taking out the truth and love of God and sharing it in her uniquely gentle and sensitive way. She will never be forgotten and will always remain a part of this church. It is, however, a comfort to know that she is now completely at peace and at rest, wholly restored and re-united with Martin whom she loved so much. We may lose our memory but God never loses His and He knows his own and that's why we can know with total assurance that Doreen is now alive in her Father's presence and that one day she will share that life with us when we meet, recognise and know each other again. Our thoughts and prayers are very much with David, Colin and Jane and all other family members and close friends at this time. Doreen, may you always rest at peace in the loving arms of our Father God and claim the inheritance of a truly beautiful life: Amen.

Peter

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