



A Fond Farewell to Fr Neil

On the 17th Sunday after Trinity on 9 October at 10.30am, a Team Eucharist was held at St John the Divine to mark the retirement of the Reverend Neil Summers. Fr Neil was wearing a cope in blue, green and gold from St John's magnificent collection of vintage vestments (see photo overleaf), all of which had been very recently restored and had arrived back in time for the service. The church was full for this memorable occasion.

In his sermon Neil linked the first reading (Second Book of Kings 5.1-3 and 7-15) and also the Gospel (Luke 17.11-19) which both concerned people with leprosy, their difficult lives and the difference that the curing of the condition brought to them. In the Gospel it was the outsider, the Samaritan, who returned to thank Jesus, who had given him power back over his life. What a gift for a man who had been so shunned by society. Neil said that in our present lives, we who are more fortunate yet live in a society of 'Me First', self-interest and cynicism need to be grateful for all that is good and the many ways in which we are rich beyond measure.

Following the Eucharist, Canon Wilma Roest, speaking to the congregation said that Neil had been connected with St John the Divine for 37 ½ years, firstly as a worshipper, then joining church committees and the choir. In 1997 he was called to the vocation of priesthood and then three years later became a non-stipendiary minister at St John's finally becoming the Team Vicar there eight years ago. It was not just his role within St John's and the Team Ministry that was important but he was also a crucial part of the Richmond scene looking after the wider community in various ways. Wilma referred to Neil's wisdom, calmness and kindness and said how lucky we were that Neil had been such a special part of St John the Divine and of the Team Ministry.

A presentation of gifts to Neil and Graham Hunton followed, including a book compiled of messages and photographs from people across the Team. A gift of garden items including a scented jasmine plant reflected new growth, new beginnings,

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The light in the church

Jill Steed

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A Fond Farewell to Fr Neil - continued



The restored vintage vestments. For the service Fr Neil was wearing the cope at the bottom Fiona Morgan

and the love of everyone as they embarked on their retirement.

At the end of the service, Neil symbolically laid down his vestments on the altar and walked last in the procession to the narthex where many many people said their individual goodbyes to him. Refreshments were served in the hall and Neil cut the first slice of a splendid cake with the message 'Farewell Fr Neil and Thank you!'. It had been a very special service for a very special priest and friend.

and two life memberships of the National Trust would enable them to explore the riches of our country. Also there was a further envelope whose contents were for Neil and Graham to spend as they wished. After the presentation of gifts there was prolonged applause and cheering from the congregation – a standing ovation.

Responding, Neil said that he was completely overwhelmed by everyone's generosity, love and prayers. St John the Divine had been a wonderful place in which to minister and every time he entered the church he was inspired anew by the interior and by the light shining into the church – a spotlight from Heaven. Neil was very grateful to have been a part of this special church and the Team Ministry and it had been so important in his journey of faith, a journey which would continue. Finally, Wilma gave Neil and Graham a special blessing



Fr Neil processes out for the last time

Reflections on Fr Neil and his Ministry by Members of the Congregation at St John the Divine

Being Churchwarden - Mary

I have enjoyed serving as churchwarden alongside Fr Neil for some years. As we know, he has so many wonderful qualities all of which contribute to his being a brilliant and supportive colleague. Not the least of these is his vast and detailed knowledge of our church, and indeed, of the mysterious workings of the diocese and the Church of England itself. His wisdom and his patience are so important when we are faced with a tricky situation. And he has taught me a lot about diplomacy.

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Reflections on Fr Neil and his Ministry by Members of the Congregation at St John the Divine - continued

Theology of place and presence - Fiona

Fr Neil, early on in his ministry at SJD, made the decision to base his office at the church. This practical decision enabled a whole ethos and theology to be central to his ministry and the life of the church. By being present and open, Neil made it clear that visitors were welcome to the church, not just to say a prayer, light a candle, admire the art and architecture or to find peace and stillness, but also to find a friendly listening ear in the form of the vicar. Fr Neil's quiet and unassuming presence has enabled passers-by to share their worries and to have their questions thoughtfully answered. The church has become known for being open, a place for people to bring their concerns in their lunch hour or while on their way to the homelessness hostel, to come for a chat with a priest, with no pressure to attend services or commit to God, but to receive love, welcome and understanding - the very heart of outreach and mission.

Sermons - Alyson

Neil's sermons firmly set him in our minds in the company of the gifted preachers of old depicted on our pulpit, a diverse group that includes Moses, Noah, St Francis of Assisi and St John the Divine himself. Neil is an exceptional preacher, with the rapport of a devoted teacher and pastor, able to engage the interest of a wide range of listeners, including those with no particular religious affiliation. His sermons by-pass standard religious argument and vocabulary, offering an original take on current issues and concerns in the light of a deep personal faith and wide experience. So often do they shift the conventional focus of familiar gospel passages: from the goodness of the Samaritan to the helplessness of the man who fell among



Fr Neil's farewell cake

Huw Morgan

thieves, from the concerns of Martha to the initiatives of Mary, and from the reality of the Risen Christ to the experience of that reality by the disciples on the road to Emmaus. And a subtle characteristic: the talks often come across as works in progress; questions are there but the answers may be speculative and open-ended, inviting engagement and debate. Thus we hope that he might publish a collection so we can continue to find guidance and inspiration from his profound insights and stimulating instruction.

Liturgy - Gill

I have always been inspired by Fr. Neil's profound understanding of liberal Catholic ritual and observance which has made worship a living experience for us. The meticulous care taken with preparation, and the deep insights in sermons and homilies are two of his inspiring attributes as a priest. Thoughtful devotion is shown in his style and delivery of worship. He has always encouraged a broad spectrum of lay participation, generously supporting us to achieve this. His passion



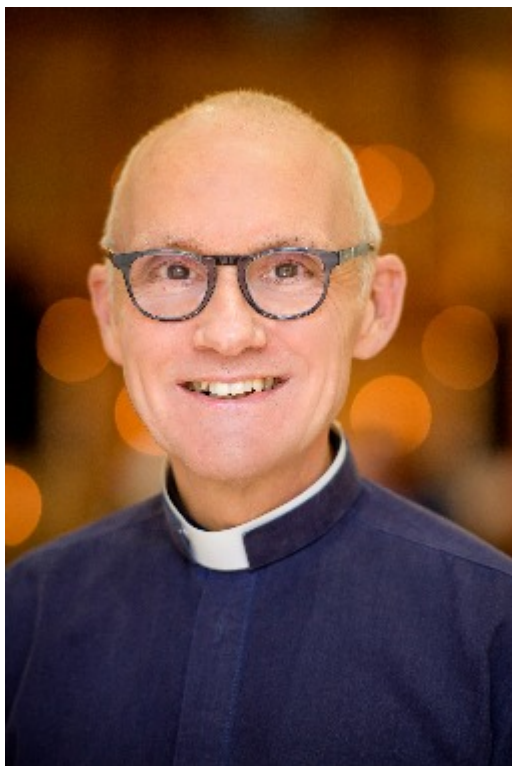
Fr Neil cuts the cake

Huw Morgan

for the fundamental importance of inclusivity in Church life is a hallmark of his ministry, and most certainly we are all treasured guests at the holy altar. Neil's use of liturgy has been a blessing in revealing the love of God to everyone during his years at St John the Divine.

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Reflections on Fr Neil and his Ministry by Members of the Congregation at St John the Divine - continued



Inclusivity and Pastoral Care - Martin

Neil's gift of assertive & compassionate pastoral care was appreciated by all who sought his calm counsel.

Neil considered pastoral care & support the priority of his ministry. This was his strength, such that congregation members of all 3 RTM churches, together with the wider Richmond community, sought his time, listening skills and wisdom.

Neil's inclusive care extended to anyone who ventured through the doors of St John's, which he had open whenever he was in church. This was his courage and his witness.

Neil gave of his time to those of all faiths and none & developed the diverse & inclusive congregation that St John's has become known for and complimented upon. A real testament to Neil is that many of the St John's congregation are here because of Neil. His presence is greatly missed.

Music – Ben

Fr Neil is a deeply musical man. It is apparent that music is profoundly important to him as part of and a means to enhancing worship. Neil sang bass in the SJD choir before ordination and also hides a refined alto voice under a bushel. As organist at SJD for the

last 2.5 years, my experience of Fr Neil has been one of gentle but firm guidance as well as consistent encouragement in the ministry of the music at SJD. His musical direction has, however, never been overbearing. Fr Neil's musical taste is eclectic. Twentieth century French organ and choral music often draws positive attention. His passion for psalms sung to Anglican chant is one which I share. However, Fr Neil enjoys everything from plainsong to Howard Goodall. The combination of the late German romanticism of Brahms with the simple conservative style of the Victorian composer and priest, Ouseley, at Neil's final service was telling. The music at SJD has benefited hugely from Neil's ministry and, as organist, I have benefited hugely from his kind encouragement and counsel.

Gift of Time - Alyson

Neil's generous gift to us of that most precious of all possessions was a significant feature of his ministry at St John's. To Neil, his was not an occupation with a job description and set hours, he simply devoted all his time, as well as his talents, to it - and that would have included his day off had Graham not put his foot down. Whether it was arriving two hours early to prepare for a service; sweeping the forecourt on a Saturday morning; talking to all who came through the door as he worked at his desk in the narthex; steering committees, study groups, pastoral visits, all had his full attention. You never got the brush-off from Neil, he listened with kindness, and you had an answer, no matter how tiresome or trivial your preoccupations might be. Thus in this most practical of ways he reflected what he preached: the Holy Spirit's ever-presence.

Marriage preparation journey - Francesca

I have been blessed to see various aspects of Neil's ministry over the years and with my husband, William over the last eight years. When my husband and I got engaged we decided to go through the Church training and were thrilled when we learned Neil and Wilma were running it. A lot of thought and preparation had been poured into that day and they worked very well together.

There was a lot about how we could incorporate God and prayer in our daily married life, but they were both very open about the realities of married life and what obstacles might lie alongside the wonderful times ahead. I recall him even saying "we enter these relationships and start these chapters with the best intentions, and sometimes love and prayer isn't enough and you have to try other solutions."

It was a very Neil thing to say and chimed with his weekly homilies, where he embeds the Word of the Lord in one's everyday life to make it more tangible and palatable. William has always found Neil pragmatic and "pleasantly cerebral".

On that day he provided us with the best foundations. The icing on the cake was that he made us the honour of celebrating our marriage and that was just amazing.

Children & Young People's Ministry in School

by Revd Anne Crawford

Advent is a time when our churches prepare to welcome school children of all ages in to our sacred spaces, some of them stepping in to church for the first time in their lives. The school carol services and nativity plays add their own festive sparkle and charm to the season, and it's wonderful to have our churches filled to the brim with expectant children, their teachers and proud parents.

But welcoming school children to church doesn't just happen at Christmas, it happens all year round. Schools ask to come to church throughout the year so that they can help their children explore the basics of the Christian faith as part of the RE curriculum. Some may come to think about the church building as a place of Christian worship, or perhaps they would like to know more about the place of Pilgrimage in the life of faith. Some of the younger children come to explore Baptism as part of their RE syllabus, or they might want to know more about a church wedding and what happens when a couple tie the knot. It's a privilege and a joy to welcome school children to church; it's a vital part of the church's ministry and outreach.

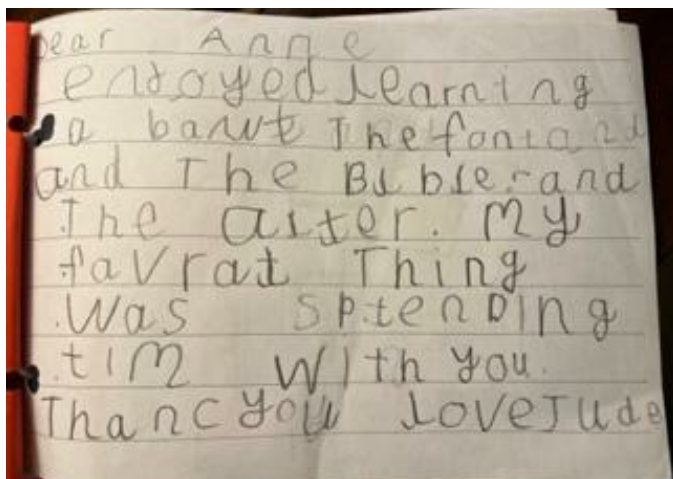
One such visit took place at St Matthias recently when two classes of Year 1 children (5-6 year olds) came to explore the building as a place of Christian worship. The visit began before they took their first step in to church, as we looked at the building from the outside and wondered why it was so different to the other buildings on Richmond Hill, ie it's the biggest building, with a giant steeple pointing heavenwards which when it's illuminated at night makes the church visible for miles around. What might all this say to the children about the building's importance and relevance to the community?

And when the children walk through the doors and are confronted by the vast nave with it's beautiful painted ceiling – like a ship turned upside down – they look in awe, eyes wide open. And so much of their visit is about awe and wonder, about letting the building speak to them of the 'otherness' of God. We spend time wondering why people might come here? Some children remember their visit last Christmas, and told me that perhaps people come to church to see baby Jesus.....many of them had never thought about that little Christmas baby growing up, had not considered that there might be an adult Jesus who changed the world forever. The visit to church is in many ways a gentle invitation for these little children to come and see the grown up Jesus for themselves, and wonder a little more.



Lighting Candles

Revd Anne Crawford



Thank you letter

Revd Anne Crawford

The children are invited to sit quietly and look around them..... what can they see? We have a look at the strange but important pieces of furniture Christians use in worship: the lectern where the Bible is read; the beautiful stained glass windows where the Bible is brought to life in picture form for people unable to read (and the image of St Matthias with the axe was of course the most interesting of all!); the pulpit where the preacher explains a little bit more about the Bible, and teaches in ways (hopefully) that people can understand and be helped to notice where God is at work in the world.

With Remembrance Sunday fresh in the boys' minds, the children noticed the poppies on the flower stand, and someone offered the thought that people came to church to remember those who had died. Which then prompted

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Aspects of Lay Ministry

by Ruth Martin

Quite a few years ago I was asked by somebody in this parish whether there was any chance I could take their funeral when the time came! I couldn't, I wasn't trained but I discovered that Licensed Lay Ministers could, with additional training on top of the three year training programme. It made me start to think and that journey of reflection and discernment led me on to train to be a lay minister, licensed by the Bishop, called a Reader. Readers do read! but it is primarily a teaching and preaching ministry and many Readers also have some pastoral responsibilities. I never did finish the additional training to be able to take a funeral as I have been in such busy roles in my working career but I have been a Reader for more than 12 years in this parish having trained for three years which you supported. Thank you. Because of my different work roles I have had opportunities to preach in a wide number of parishes and our Team Rector Wilma generously enables me to spend time in one of the poorer estates of inner London at a church where I had a placement 14 years ago - and I support the priest there about once a month through preaching at the Eucharist and generally supporting ministry in what is a deprived area.



Ruth Martin

Being a Lay Reader is part of my walk with God, and I feel enormously privileged to serve God in this way, to 'ponder anew' the scriptures in our own times and try to connect our life here in church with our discipleship outside the walls of the church and share it with you and also around the team. In my working role I have introduced regular morning prayer, and a monthly Eucharist in the workplace so that people at work can stop and pray together and celebrate God's great goodness in His Son. Earlier in the year we had the Season of Lay Ministry for four weeks and I was asked to preach at each of those weeks including a service at Wandsworth Prison where I preached the same sermon three times for prisoners taking turns to attend the chapel.

It is the highlight of my week to research a sermon when I preach and to think about those who may listen to it to try to connect God's word in scripture with lives today. I always read with anticipation not knowing how the Spirit will take me at least three different commentators on the scripture and also consult my Benedictine and Celtic prayer books which offer a wide range of material. (I am sorry you have to endure my love of George Herbert's poetry as well.)

The season of Epiphany after Christmas is when we celebrate our gifts that we bring to the infant Jesus, God's Son. Epiphany will start another season of celebrating Lay Ministry and I wonder if you might be stirred? Sue Eastaugh is also an authorised Lay Minister and her training was primarily pastoral. The purpose for both of us is to serve God in our Team Ministry parishes, to support our clergy team and lay leaders such as our Church Wardens and to seek to be Christ Centred and Outward Focussed. Our Team Ministry is full of gifted brothers and sisters and I pray that as a Team we encourage and enable each other to serve God in all we do. Please do speak to one of the clergy or to Sue or myself if you wish to think about formal lay ministry as part of your discipleship and pilgrimage on earth. Amen.

Children & Young People's Ministry in School - continued

an exploration of a very important piece of church furniture, the place where Jesus' death and resurrection is remembered – the altar, with its white linen table cloth and beautiful candle sticks. We explore the last supper which Jesus had with his disciples on the night before he died, and wondered why broken bread and wine outpoured continue to be so important a remembrance for Christians today. When you give children of any age (and their teachers) a tiny piece of bread and encourage them to eat it, they soon come to realise that once eaten the bread becomes part of them – no further teaching required!

The wondering continues at the font where we explore baptism and the making of new Christians. The boys

pour water in to the bowl and ask if this is for washing.... and one little boy notices that there is a picture of a lamb on the Easter candle which stands beside the font – is this a connection to the lamb eaten at Jesus last supper?!! Which leads us a little closer to the end of the visit, when we think a little about prayer. We light a candle, the comfort and warmth of the flickering flame a strong symbol which speaks of The Light of the World the children have come to meet in church. And I pray that through their visit, these inquisitive little human beings will feel encourage to go on discovering more about the God who loves them, and that they will want to know more about his Son, the baby Jesus who grew up to become King of earth and heaven.

Visit of the Icon Writer

by Revd Charlie Smith

Last summer in July, between a weekend of patronal celebrations and St Mary Magdalene's Feast Day, icon writer, Peter Murphy, visited St Mary's. He returned to varnish the icon which he wrote in 2020, and which lives on the wall in the South aisle of the church. The icon was one of the many joyful things which marked St Mary's 800th anniversary.

The icon itself depicts the moment in chapter 20 of John's gospel, when Mary Magdalene meets the risen Lord Jesus in the garden and realises that he is alive. It is based on an icon in the collection of the Byzantine Institute in Venice, a gallery which is attached to the Church of St George of the Greeks. That icon is known as 'Noli Me Tangere,' for the Latin translation of Jesus words to Mary, 'Touch me not'.

The original, 'Noli Me Tangere,' was written in the Cretan style during the Palaiologan Renaissance. Peter described this period as the pinnacle of Iconography. He said that Wilma's commission gave him "A great excuse to paint one of my favourite icons!"

I asked Peter about copying an existing icon. He said that one works to write a 'free copy' of the original. You certainly don't trace it and are not seeking to create an exact replica. (In this case, the original icon is huge, and St Mary's version was designed specifically to fit the space which it now occupies.) Instead, you spend time with the original, meditating on it and praying with it. You want to capture the spirit of the original, and to draw out those aspects which catch your attention. Peter spoke in particular about the



Peter working on the icon
Revd Charlie Smith



Close up of the icon

Revd Charlie Smith

critical tension between the figures of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, and how Jesus' gaze follows the line of his arm towards her.

Peter also pointed out some aspects of the icon which I had not noticed before: the cruciform division of Christ's halo, each of the three visible arms made up of three parts; the halo itself bearing the words 'Ego emi,' 'I am' in Latin; and the delicate gilded plants around the bottom of the work which you must be close to see.

He talked me through the process of building up the colours of the icon with layers and layers of egg tempera, beginning by blocking out the colours in a middle tone, and then adding lighter and darker shades in increasingly fine layers. The dramatic highlights on the creases of the fabrics and subtler facial highlights are distinctive (and helped me to recognise Peter's work at Hereford Cathedral) and are after the Cretan style.

Peter was returning to varnish the icon, having let it cure and settle in its environment for two years. There were some minor watermarks on the surface of the icon; always a risk when icons are displayed in churches, he explained.

Peter cleaned the icon carefully: breathing on the gold to leave a mist of condensation, and then rubbing it with a tissue. Then, he varnished the icon, using a modern polymer varnish. The transformation was astonishing. I am not sure whether you can see from the picture, but the colours which had settled and dulled a little were

immediately given new life – as bright as when they were first written! It was thrilling to watch the change, and to try and capture it for you. I wonder whether you can notice the difference in the icon's appearance now. I'd encourage you to get a little closer, at your next opportunity, and see what God draws out of the icon for you.

If you would like to see more of Peter's work, he has recently completed a tryptic for the Order of Knights of St George of the Holy Sepulchre, which is on display in their chapel at St George's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Southwark.

Churchwardens' Wands

by Elspeth Fearn



The St Matthias wands are identical with stylised crosses
Sally Gill

wand - a painful experience - until they went away or were handed over to constables. In the 18th and 19th centuries, a time when extremely long sermons were the norm, the wand would also be used – this time more lightly – to tap sleeping parishioners on the shoulder and wake them up.

Originally the wands were sharp pointed sticks but evolved over time to become a long wooden pole, often made of oak or sometimes ebony, topped by a finial or symbol which was frequently made of brass or silver (whether solid or plate) and thus quite expensive. This

The role of a churchwarden in a parish is an important one. The churchwardens are officers of the bishop and of the parish and amongst various duties are legally responsible for the church building and other property. A key responsibility is to maintain order and peace and command good behaviour inside the church and churchyard, at all times and particularly during services. Their badge of office is the churchwarden's wand or stave carried to demonstrate their importance and reinforce their standing. Nowadays the wands usually only appear on special occasions such as a bishop visiting the church who is escorted in procession by the wardens preceding him or her and carrying their wands. Some parishes also include the wands in Beating the Bounds ceremonies.

In the past and particularly from the 16th century onwards, the wands were in frequent use and were often referred to as 'Prodders' because people who were being riotous, rowdy, and disrespectful in the church or the churchyard would be prodded with the



St Mary Magdalene has two sets of wands, one made of painted plaster and the other set of silver. Here is one wand from each set.

Elspeth Fearn

reflected the status of churchwardens including in the wider community. One of the churchwardens would be designated the bishop's churchwarden and the other the parish churchwarden, so the finial would be a bishop's mitre for the first one and a crown for the second. Many churches retain the bishop and crown on their wands but others now have matching sets of different designs. Wands used to be left in churches permanently, and attached to the end of a pew denoting where the individual churchwarden would customarily sit but, because of the risk of theft, that is generally no longer the case. Wands are an interesting and historical feature of the Church of England and emphasise the continuity of parish organisation over the centuries.



The wands at 'St John the Divine have moulded silver finials. Here is a picture from the early days of the nineteenth century. It is a little dark but if you look carefully you will see one wand standing at the front of the left hand block of pews and the other midway down on the right hand block of pews. St John the Divine Archive

Remembrance in RTM



Censing the War Memorial at St John'

Fiona Morgan



St John's Club Memorial

Fiona Morgan



Poppies around the West Door at St Mary Magdalene
Elspeth Fearn



The War Memorial outside St Mary Magdalene which has been cleared of undergrowth and replanted in time for Remembrance Sunday. Thanks to the working party who transformed the memorial
Elspeth Fearn

From the Church of England Prayer of Commemoration for the Fallen:

Father of All, remember your holy promise and look with love on all your people, living and departed. We ask that you hold forever all who have suffered during war, those who return scarred by warfare, those who wait anxiously at home, and those who return wounded and disillusioned; those who mourned and those communities who were diminished and suffered loss.

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Remembrance in RTM - continued



Remembrance kneelers at St Matthias

Sally Gill



A special seat and cushion in the congregation remembering those who worshipped at St Matthias and never came back

Sally Gill



Poppy display at St Matthias

Sally Gill



War Memorial after Remembrance Service at Richmond Riverside

Elsbeth Fearn

From the Reverend John Kendall, Vicar of Richmond, writing in the Parish Magazine for December 30 1917

There is now the common feeling of sorrow throughout the land at the loss of so many of the best of our young men - a sorrow which makes us long all the war to be brought to an end lest other lives, equally precious as those that have already been sacrificed, should be added to the number, We long to save what remains lest we be bereft of all our children.

Ukrainian Saints

by Elspeth Fearn

The churches of Ukraine have been under attack along with the rest of the country's infrastructure. The faith of the people of Ukraine remains strong despite the horrific pressures of living in a country ruthlessly invaded and at war. They are inspired by their history and by the saints of Ukraine. This article is about three of these saints.

St Olga (circa 890 to 969) was married to Grand Prince Igor I of Kyiv (or Kiev) from the Kyivan Rus (Kievan Rus) people who were originally Vikings but who intermarried with the Slav people to become the first eastern Slavic state. Following the assassination of Olga's husband, she ruled as regent for her infant son Sviatoslav for many years and was a warrior queen, taking revenge on those who had killed her husband and also against various invaders. However, visiting Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire in the 950s she converted to Christianity, and was baptised by the Patriarch Theophylactus with the Emperor Constantine VII being her godfather. She also adopted the name of Elena after the mother of Emperor Constantine the



Saint Olga by Nikolai Bruni, 1901

Great, St Helena, who was supposed to have found fragments of the true cross and Jesus' tomb in Golgotha. As one of the first Kyivan Rus to become a Christian Olga encouraged others to do so, founding several churches and for this work was made a saint in 1547. She is the patron saint of widows and converts and has the honorary epithet of 'Equal to the Apostles' showing her importance in the history of Christian Ukraine.

Although Olga's son Sviatoslav never became a Christian, her grandson Volodymyr – Saint Volodymyr the Great, Grand Prince of Kyiv (c 956 - 1015) took her work forward. His earlier life was as a pagan but he seems to have come to the conclusion that adopting Christianity was the right thing to do. He ordered his pagan idols to be destroyed and ensured the conversion of the whole country, leading also to the building of many churches and the flourishing of religious art. There is, interestingly, a statue of Volodymyr in Holland Park in London, outside the Ukraine Institute, which was unveiled in May 1988 by Orthodox and Catholic churchmen (10% of Ukrainians belong to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church). The statue which was unveiled in the dying days of the Soviet Union, celebrates the 1000th anniversary of the Christianisation of Kyivan Rus.

A third saint very popular in Ukraine is strictly an archangel, St Michael the Archangel. He is the patron saint of the city of Kyiv and also Ukraine itself. Michael is a spiritual warrior in the battle of good versus evil and is often shown with a sword in his hand. In Kyiv's Independence Square there is a gold and bronze statue of him on an arch and also in the city is St Michael's Golden Domed Monastery, a national landmark restored after the Soviets destroyed many of its original building in 1935. These three saints and many others have strengthened the determination of the Ukrainian people to save and protect their country.



Statue of Saint Volodymyr at night, Holland Park

Mike Peal (www.mikepeal.net) CC-BY-SA-4.0

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St John the Divine



St Mary Magdalene



St Matthias

Our Churches