

The Rev'd Sarah Eynstone, RIP

Sarah Francesca Louise Eynstone was born on 14 May 1975, the Feast of St Matthias, the Apostle chosen by the drawing of lots. There is an irony here, in that much of her life – and all its beauty and brevity – can be said to have been about resisting chance, resisting circumstance.

Her childhood was in Woking, Surrey, with father Anthony, mother Geraldine, and sister Lisa, and a much-loved cat Siamese cat, Mylinda. She valued being brought up in a Christian and church-going family. She expressed her devotion already as a primary school child; her mother has found a book of her prayers and thoughts from this period, full of the passion and misspellings of childhood. Sarah studied Ancient History and Anthropology at University College London. It was weeks before her finals that she, a pedestrian, was hit by a car, as she went to hand in her dissertation. Her family kept a vigil by her bedside as she spent 48 hours in a medically induced coma, critically ill. Her long road to recovery began, supported by family, university and earlier friends, and her parish priest Fr Peter Farrell, from All Saints, Woodham, a Church in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, which Sarah over time came to make her own. And here it is that we first see her 'godly stubbornness'. As she fought for life, so again and again she would fight against the idea that this horrible incident or any of its consequences should restrict her.

Sarah was able without pretension to look back at this time as one of grace. She recalled it in her contribution to *Glimpses of God*, a CD issued by her Theological College, Westcott House (Sarah was a leader of the whole project). She meshed her thoughts with verses from Psalm 139:

It was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works; that I know very well...

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

There followed a time of helpful rehabilitation, it being at this stage quite unclear what 'recovery' might concretely mean. But 'as soon as she could' (reports her mother), Sarah left home for the big city of London again. There she had a variety of jobs, some reflecting her pastoral calling - including working at Action Disability Kensington and Chelsea - and in due course was a chaplaincy assistant at King's College London, and pastoral assistant at St Mary's Primrose Hill. During this time, she explored the possibility of a vocation to ordained ministry. Some had doubts, given her perceived uncertain health, but Sarah's godly stubbornness - and the Church's good sense - prevailed.

At Westcott House she flourished, not only in her academic courses, but also as Senior Student. This involved leading the student body through discussions, controversies and change. Sarah being Sarah, it also meant being pastorally available to her peers (personal turmoil often being a recognised part of preparation for ordination), in and out of hours. Already at college the patterns of her ministry became clear: she combined, in rare if not unique fashion, grace and calm, with a clear orientation towards fun, with an unsentimental awareness of her own vulnerability (she was, for example, unafraid of her own tears).

Her curacy, from 2005, was at St John's, Hampstead. This gave her a good grounding in the ongoing cycle of services, and the occasional offices. For a while, Sarah lived in a house in the primary school grounds, and school life too was an important part of her work. She enjoyed leading a women's study group, and a gathering of young people, facing the agonies of their age, through to confirmation. Her pastoral antennae were sensitive, of course, as she suggested a new way of offering coffee after services, to welcome newcomers more naturally. A trivial matter? Not to any who know how important making a good first impression can be to people who - sometimes with anxiety - 'give church a try'.

A highlight of this time would be Sarah's involvement in the church's amateur dramatics. Like many a priest, Sarah was an introvert who liked playing the extrovert, blending into the foreground, as it were. But the pinnacle was probably her leadership of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Rather than feigning special expertise in archaeology or contemporary politics, Sarah treated the group of pilgrims as a community in its own right, to be formed and brought together in love. This left a huge impression on those involved.

In 2010 Sarah became Minor Canon and Chaplain to St Paul's Cathedral, giving her national visibility. Minor canons are responsible for the day-to-day running of cathedrals as worshipping communities, alongside planning and taking full part in the major flagship events. The pressure is thus relentless. On Sarah's watch, the cathedral found itself absorbed in the controversy of the 'Occupy' demonstrators, on and around its steps. Rather differently, Sarah had a hand in the funeral of Margaret Thatcher. But in all truth, such publicity-generating occasions were not the heart of things for Sarah, who was always Chaplain first – to the cathedral's vast array of sometimes-overlooked employees; to those people on the fringes of church and social life who often find their way to cathedrals. She also took proper pride in overseeing an exhibition within St Paul's on the lives of those with brain injuries. It is a measure of how loved she was that members of St Paul's Consort choir were so keen to sing at her funeral.

After serving her five years at St Paul's, Sarah carved out for herself a sabbatical year. Her intention was to take stock spiritually, and make good progress on a book, which would look at the intersection between brain injury, identity and theology. She also served at St Saviour's, Pimlico, where again her calmness and kindness left their mark.

And so in 2016 Sarah came to Aldbury and to Tring. She was excited by this, and by the new challenges of rural ministry. Top of the list was, we know, learning to drive. Her firm hope was she would use 'the other half' of her time to tackle the book. She had become more ambitious about this, wanting to interview people and offer research on the lived reality of those in recovery from acquired brain injuries. Others may now, we must hope, take on this invaluable work. As you were getting to know Sarah – and her sense of fun, which was always closer to the surface than her demeanour might have suggested, whether with bassoons, baboons, balloons or buffoons – so she was getting to know you, and grow in her love of you in Christ, as the people she was called upon to be alongside, in church... and pub and school and sports ground, and in countless other places.

As befits ordained ministry, Sarah had no 'career plan'. But in the times when she mused about how things might develop, she imagined she might be the modern equivalent of an

Anglo-Catholic 'slum priest' - in gritty, urban London. Yet she in fact moved from leafy Hampstead (which is not to say easy or un-needy), to national St Paul's, and then to rural Aldbury. Each move she was convinced was right. So she was, after all, able to make her peace with chance and circumstance, within the great overarching of God's Providence. May she rest in peace, and may her memory be eternal!

The Rev'd Patrick Morrow, with kind assistance from Sarah's family.