

FEBRUARY 2025 £2.00

COMMENT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCHES IN TRING



What's on in February in Tring Church

Services at Tring Church

Sunday 2nd February

8am Holy Communion traditional language
10am Holy Communion with craft activity **
6.30pm Candlemas Festive Choral Evensong

Sunday 9th February

8am Holy Communion traditional language**
10am Worship for all
3pm Piano and More concert

Sunday 16th February

8am Holy Communion traditional language
10am Holy Communion with craft activity **

Sunday 23rd February

8am Holy Communion traditional language
10am Holy Communion with craft activity **

** Streamed service on our website and YouTube

Mid-week Services in Tring

9.15am Tuesdays

Holy Communion

10am Thursdays

Holy Communion in traditional language

Lots more going on



Mondays 3.30pm - 5pm

Youth Café in term time - toast, chat etc for secondary school kids

Food Bank

Monday to Friday

10am - 12noon.

Drop-off donations and collect food



Tuesdays 2pm - 4pm

Craft and a Cuppa

Drop in for chat, cuppa and bring a craft to do if you would like to

Social Coffee

Fridays, Saturdays

10am - 12 noon,

and after Sunday, Tuesday

& Thursday services



Piano & more series



Sunday February 9th

3pm for an hour's concert of music followed by refreshments.

Free but collection for church and piano expenses

What is church?



We are very fortunate in the Tring Team that four out of our five churches are open every day, and they are all used, whether for shelter, coffee mornings, or a bit of space or a chance to light a candle and say a prayer. Alongside that we have the regular services, on Sundays and weekdays, the wonderfully named 'occasional offices' (baptisms, marriages and funerals), and, of course, the festivals. And if you asked most people what they thought 'church' was, all those things would probably come on the list. They are vital to the life of the church, but they should not be all that we do. Sometimes we can attach our faith and belief too much to the building.

One of our new initiatives is the series of regular Quiet Days at St Mary's in Puttenham. They offer a chance to spend time away from the usual routine to pray and listen, and while they are rooted in the building and the place, the main aim is to strengthen and grow faith. The Quiet Days are there to give us a chance

to think about what we believe and not just to fall into routines that answer some of our spiritual needs, but are often too easy.

The other area of growth that we are concentrating on this year is that of house-groups. These are often seen as an initiative that is confined to particular traditions in the church, but that is far too narrow a view. They are there to offer support and challenge, but to do so in the context of a smaller group than a congregation, and one where relationships can be built up, and honest conversations be held in a way that everyone is heard, and questions asked.

Like anything worth doing, house-groups (or prayer groups or any other name that you prefer) can take time to get going. As always, the practical issues have to be right for them to work – at a time that suits people, and a regularity which can mean weekly or monthly, and they do seem to work very effectively when the host and the leader (or convener) are not the same person. There is a value in sharing out the responsibilities, as well as recognizing and using our different skills and talents.

I would also say that there is value in

being in a group where there is a variety of views and experiences, even if that just means different ages. As with any group, there can be a danger of it turning into what modern culture calls an echo chamber, where we only hear the same opinions as our own; but one of the great values of a supportive house group is that they are places where we can share our questions and our fears, where we admit our lack of knowledge, rather than show off what we believe we know.

Some of you will already be in house-groups in the Tring Team or one of the other churches in Tring or the villages. I would urge you to sing their praises – to talk to others of how they help your faith and what they have brought you. Some of you may have spent years avoiding joining one: maybe now is the time to start thinking about them, to talk to others about their experience.

*Lord of the deep waters,
you call us from the safety of the shore
to an adventure of the spirit:
open wide our arms to embrace the world
you dare to serve;
through Jesus Christ, who gives life in
abundance. Amen.*

Jane Banister, Tring Team

Bluebell carpet

All my life I have enjoyed walking in Ashridge woods with my family. I remember being so amazed the first time I saw a carpet of bluebells covering the ground in the woods. I still consider it to be a wonderful sight and it would be so sad if the time came when we would never see it again.

I knitted my bluebell carpet and sunset sky using wool that I had left over from previous projects. The silhouetted tree trunks are made from ribbon that I saved from gifts (and even cake!).

Pippa Wright, St Peter & St Paul



Piano & more series *An hour of music on Sunday afternoons*

Leon Bosch *conductor*

Helen Godbolt *cello*

Orchestra led by Marion Garrett

Haydn *Symphony No 22: The Philosopher*

Sperger *Symphony Concertante No.29*

with obbligato cello

Sunday 9th February

at 3pm

followed by tea and refreshments

Tring Parish Church HP23 5AE

Free admission; donations to expenses welcome

For further details see:

piano-and-more.org.uk
or Google "Piano and more, Tring"

Everyone is welcome to join us at any of our church services and activities.

Corpus Christi Christmas Party



On Saturday 21 December after 5.00pm Evening Mass, parishioners and friends were invited to the hall to celebrate Christmas together. The

evening began with the prayer from Fr John, who welcomed everyone and demonstrated his talent for being a 'stand-up comedian'.

About forty-five parishioners attended to enjoy a sumptuous savoury buffet prepared by Theresa Fernandez, Fr John's PA, with puddings prepared by parishioners. As usual the hall was noisy with people catching up with old friends and making new ones.

We held a prize draw for two large food hampers that were raffled to raise money to buy a defibrillator for the

church. The winner of first prize was Pat Cleary, a parishioner, who was at that time on pilgrimage to Our Lady's shrine at Knock. Many thought that divine intervention was at play in this win. The second prize remains to be claimed as many ticket holders had already gone away for Christmas.

We played four rounds of 'Crimbo Bingo', a fun game to win prizes of chocolates. For some parishioners it was the first time they had ever played Bingo. They did brilliantly to keep up with the fast pace of number calling.

It was a fun evening with great food and conversation. It finished reasonably early at 9.00pm when everyone left with big smiles on their faces, ready for the busy Christmas schedule in the following week.

Margaret Donnelly
Corpus Christi Catholic Church



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ALMSHOUSES IN TRING

From time to time, one and two-bedroom bungalows become available to let, for people who currently live in Aldbury, Long Marston, Marsworth, Pitstone, Puttenham, Tring, Wigginton or Wilstone.

Applicants, one of whom must be aged 55 or over, must not own their own home or have significant savings.

Applicants will be asked to supply personal financial information to prove their beneficial status.

The average weekly maintenance contribution (equivalent to "rent" for housing benefit purposes) is £107 for a one bedroom property and £126 for a two bedroom property.

If you would like to be considered for the Waiting List, please telephone Elaine Winter, Secretary to the Trustees, on **01442 827913** (weekday office hours only), for an application form or email **info@tringcharities.co.uk**

Thank you, from the Tring Team Rector

Our churches are a hub of activity in the weeks leading up to Christmas and a huge amount of work is put into getting them ready including: cleaning and decorating; serving mince pies and mulled wine; welcoming folk; keeping folk safe; putting up additional lighting; finding people to read the Bible passages; providing music – and so much more.

In terms of numbers, we had well over 3,500 attending various schools services in our churches, around 600 at our church carol services and 500 at our two Crib services. For Christmas communions, we had three Midnight Masses, one Book of Common Prayer

Communion service and three Common Worship celebrations. We were a church of all ages with newborn babies at one end of the scale and it was great to welcome Beth Scraggs (approaching her 100th birthday) back with us.

On the downside, we also had one medical emergency. We are very grateful for the support of Tom Winter (a policeman) and Chris Hartley (a paramedic) who were in the congregation to be our first responders. I am delighted to say that Barry Anscombe is doing well and had a pacemaker fitted shortly afterwards, enabling him to make a full recovery.

Barbara and Barry (who deliver

Comment magazine to many of our Tring residents) are grateful for all the prayers and support they have received.

In many ways, this is Christmas. We come together as a community and all of our hopes and fears are met ('in thee tonight').

Huw Bellis
Tring Team

And a big THANK YOU to the clergy in all our churches for making themselves available to the whole community, to welcome the Christ child and to celebrate the mystery of the incarnation. Ed.

An Unexpected Christmas



Our Christmas did not go quite as planned...

During the year, my husband, Barry had been having breathless periods; after tests at High Wycombe cardio unit, he was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation (his heart chambers are not beating in the correct rhythm), and put on the waiting list for a pacemaker to be fitted.

As we had missed Midnight Mass in 2023, we were both looking forward to the service at this special time and joined in quite happily, loving the familiar words and melodies. But at the start of the communion prayer, Barry suddenly sat down and started to look rather white and flopped against me. After a minute he appeared to recover and spoke a little, then suddenly lost consciousness and went very grey and sweaty.

Someone came and sat next to us, introducing himself as Chris, a paramedic, and started going through the FAST steps, asking Barry to smile, lift his arm and say how he felt. Barry merely mumbled. I recognised Elaine Winter's voice as she asked me Barry's date of birth and I heard the word ambulance. Rather rudely, I asked another young man who appeared who he was, to find he was a policeman who had telephoned the ambulance service to try to speed up their arrival. He turned out to be Elaine's son, Tom.

As we waited, Chris said to me, 'I couldn't decide whether to attend Midnight Mass or the Christmas Day

service, but something made me come tonight'. Thank you, Lord!

I don't know how long it actually took, but two ambulance paramedics with equipment arrived and Chris gave them a professional hand over. By then, Barry had started to talk and adjust his position. This was good because my arm was going numb!

I had been aware of Jane Banister saying the communion prayer, then saying that there was a medical emergency; Cliff Brown was playing gentle music in the background. I heard Jane say that as a result of the incident, the congregation would miss the last carol and the service would end then. Many people kindly said their best wishes as they left and volunteered to help, if needed. As Barry was being wheeled out to the ambulance for the journey to Watford, Roy Hargreaves and Huw Bellis told me to ring when I needed to come home.

'But it's early morning,' I said.

'Just ring!!' they replied.

After initial assessment in Watford, Barry was told he would be staying in for observation and to see a cardio consultant on Boxing Day. The area felt quite peaceful, despite the sounds of many monitors; the staff were very calm. Knowing there was nothing more I could do and Barry was in the best hands, I telephoned Roy at approximately 4.30am, who got up and drove to Watford to bring me home. Marvellous!

Later, on Christmas Day, I actually saw myself that Barry was having dizzy spells when his blood pressure would drop dangerously low, even though he was just lying in the bed. This seems

to have been the cause of his collapse. However, he must have been feeling better, because he was already getting bored!

Because we had letters showing that Barry was already on the waiting list, the operation to insert a pacemaker was performed the day after Boxing Day. Afterwards he was observed for two-three hours and, though tired and with dramatic bruises on the left of his chest, was discharged. We were home by 6.30pm.

So, it wasn't the Christmas we had envisaged and not the Midnight Mass service that so many people wished for. We owe a big apology to those present for the swift end of the service.

Huge thanks to Jane and Huw for their consideration, during and after the service, and to Roy for getting out of bed at 'silly o'clock' to bring me home. We cannot thank Chris Hartley and Tom and Elaine Winter enough for their immediate actions. When they appeared, I know I calmed down, accepting their support and knowledge. All the Watford Hospital staff were caring of both Barry and myself. We have both been overwhelmed by the love and comments from so many friends and of the church community, who have taken time to telephone, email or message their support. Christmas is a time when we all try to gather with our families. Barry and I certainly felt that family love and support from so many people this year. Thank you.

Now we look forward to a New Year without dramatic medical issues. We send our best wishes to you all for a happy and peaceful 2025.

Barbara Anscombe
St Peter & St Paul

Sleepout: the beginning



'Sleepout' started in the mid-1990s at St Alban's Abbey and was organised by the Diocese. It brought together charities across the diocese who were addressing the problem of homelessness. Each charity would seek their own participants and sponsors with receipts from any uncommitted participants being shared across the charities. Participants would 'sleep' in the Abbey churchyard. Refreshments were provided throughout the night by members of the Mothers Union. Most sensible people tried to find shelter from the wind blowing up the hill from Verulam Park by getting close to the Abbey walls. Those who arrived too late to get near the walls looked for a nice large gravestone. DENS was established as a charity in 2003 and participated in the Sleepout from that date. Their aim is not just to provide a safe place to sleep but also to provide professional support to help individuals address the issues which caused them to be homeless. As a volunteer in DENS fundraising, I can remember the excitement when, in 2009, the money coming to DENS topped £5000. Sleepout continued to be held in the Abbey churchyard up to 2016. However, the Welcome area was then developed and the building work meant the Sleepout could not take place the following year. DENS decided that they would run

their own Sleepout in 2017, using the grounds of Hemel Hempstead School. Although this significantly increased the organisational effort required, it did also attract more participants supporting DENS, and the associated fundraising. Apart from the mandatory Covid-19 break, it has continued to be run in Hemel though the venue has changed a few times. There have also been other changes with 'silent discos' starting the evening and bacon rolls on hand from early morning. In 2021 the income generated was an amazing £50,000. Numbers of participants were regularly more than 100.

Sleepout 2009 – a personal view

As a volunteer trying to persuade people to support the Sleepout, it was suggested that having a personal experience would make it easier, a suggestion made by people who hadn't done it themselves! So, I turned up at St Alban's Abbey on the first Friday in December secure in the knowledge that, although it was forecast to be very cold, there was no rain expected till 10.00am Saturday morning. As a volunteer I had been co-opted to help with registration and found that, by the time that was over, every bit of shelter was taken – so ended up on a nice open piece of grass by the West Door. At least, that was where I left my sleeping bag, an extra warm one borrowed from someone who had used it in on a trek from Chile to Argentina. I decided to settle down for the night, after the essential loo break. Unfortunately, the wind decided to relocate the sleeping bag whilst I was

away; the good news was that it only blew it in the direction of the familiar figure of John Payne Cook, who had a parish in North Hertfordshire at that time. John had a TAVR depot in his parish and they had loaned him the full winter survival kit, cold weather gear not having been an essential in St Kitts and Nevis. Whilst we were talking, two young men, who were clearly regular sleepers outside the Abbey, came looking for their favourite shelter in the churchyard. They were followed by two young police officers who told them to 'Keep going, as people like this don't want to be bothered by people like you'. John's response to the officers was that we were bothered, not by the two individuals, but by the fact that they were looking for somewhere to sleep. He then took them into the Abbey to get some soup.

After that we both settled down for the night but found ourselves complaining about how hot we both felt, and after a while it was necessary to offload some of the extra warm clothing we were wearing. Sleeping was not easy, not because of the temperature or the lumps in the ground but because of the noise coming from a group of children who were keeping warm by participating in competitive physical activity. But we did get some sleep until the 10.00am rain showers arrived, at around 4.30am.

Feeling what it was like to sleep out was something that still lives with me today; and was enough for me to keep volunteering for DENS for another twelve years.

Peter Williams
St John the Baptist, Aldbury

Winslow Benefice.

He writes: 'In 2013, I slept out at St Alban's Abbey for DENS. I went on my own and took my spot on the south side of the Abbey. While this meant I had some protection, it did mean sleeping on the hard, paved entrance outside. It rained heavily but, thanks to some large cardboard boxes, I managed to stay dry. The next morning it was bright and clear and, despite it being some eleven years later, I can still remember walking down the hill and thinking, "I am really glad I don't have to do that again tonight: looking for a decent spot, hunkering down and trying to keep the rain off."'

The following year he convinced me to bring three of our youngsters from the parish with us and our participation has grown ever since.

Huw Bellis, Tring Team

those in prison; and, of course, house the homeless.

On a very cold night in November last year, it was my privilege to accompany seven youngsters from our parish and three adults on the DENS sleep out. They were all wonderful people and great company, even when the freezing rain started at 3.30am. What was truly phenomenal, and humbling, was the amount of money that so many of you, and others from across the community, have donated to DENS. You have given over £6,000 in support of the Sleep Out. Thank you. We are not some 'institution', we are a group of pilgrims seeking to respond to Christ the King. This restores my faith.

Our recent tradition of taking the Youth Café to Sleep Out was inspired by Didier Jacquet, now part of the

A 'sleepout' first timer



Yes! I made it through the night! Boy, was I in need of that hot cup of black coffee at 6.00am on Saturday 23 November last year.

Let me backtrack a little. I received an email from Revd Huw Bellis in November, asking if any of the congregation wanted to volunteer to 'sleep out' with the Tring Youth Cafe for DENS (a local charity who help people who are homeless). I have seen this event advertised for the last couple of years. So, I took plunge by responding with a 'yes', making 2024 my first year of supporting this event.

A couple of weeks before the event, Gerry, my husband and a scout, checked out the equipment I needed: sleeping bag, cardboard boxes, survival bag, warm clothes etc. I collected two sponsor sheets and, through social media and Just Giving pages, I started touting all my social groups, friends, neighbours and family.

A week before the event, I started to get nervous. What happens if I can't do it? I spoke to Revd Jane Banister who reassured me that there is a hall you can shelter in should it be cold or wet, and a tuck shop and hot drinks available. In addition, the enclosed area is 'manned' regularly by security and first-aiders.

The day before the event, I collected my cardboard boxes from my neighbour. Gerry purchased gaffer tape and black bin liners and we started to construct a shelter at home which I could reconstruct on Friday night. It kind of looked like a cardboard coffin! We ensured that it was the correct length and I was given specific instructions on how to construct my shelter.



The time had arrived for my departure and my new challenge of sleeping rough for an evening. I hoped to complete the task and not chicken out during the night, seeking refuge in the hall.

At around 8.00pm I was the first one to arrive at St Peter & St Paul's Church where we were all meeting up. I hoped I was not going to bump into anyone I knew! I had a large blue Ikea bag with my essential sleeping bag and camping mattress, plus snacks and a thermos filled with hot Bovril!

Huw arrived promptly. At this point, most of us had arrived: seven young people and four adults. We crammed ourselves into the mini bus and made our way to Lockers Park School in Hemel Hempstead. On arrival, we had to check in and make our way to the fenced-in playground area. Many people had already arrived, building their shelters from cardboard boxes. The Tring youths gravitated towards some additional shelter in the playground, whilst Sammy and the adults chose the outside pitching option.

It took a while for me to construct my shelter initially. I thought at one point I would be sleeping on top of the boxes and not inside! After a text to Gerry, I realised I had my box upside-down! Once constructed, I was able to fit my camping mattress, sleeping bag and waterproof outer bag in. I also covered my new bedroom with bin liners to make it waterproof.

I was quite impressed with Huw, Ian and Edmund's set up – they were actually sleeping on top of the cardboard – or in Edmund's case, a camp bed in the fresh air!

Once we had our briefing, hot chocolate and sugary treats, we made our way to bed. I took my coat and boots off and snuggled down into my sleeping bag with my iPhone, audio book and ear plugs. I prayed to God, asking him to keep me safe and that I would be able stay outside overnight.

It took a while to go to sleep but I was pleasantly surprised at how warm and cosy I was. There was lots of road noise and train sounds. Every so often, I peered



outside, looking at the stars and seeing the odd aeroplane move across the darkened sky.

I think I dropped off at around 2.00am. Then I was woken by the sound of a 'pitter patter'... I just huddled up even more into my sleeping bag and shelter. The next thing I heard was muffled voices. The words bacon sandwich and coffee were uttered! I had done it! I had slept outside and raised money for DENS. I shuffled out of my snug, warm shelter, only to be greeted by a grey, drizzly day. I began to feel cold very quickly. I packed away my mattress and sleeping bag, some of which had become wet. Then I retrieved my hot coffee, which was one of the best drinks I have ever had in my life.

Sleeping out rough made me realise how much we rely on organisations such as DENS to help with homelessness, poverty and social exclusion. So part of my 2025 pledge is to do more to help this local organisation.

Joyce Miller, St Peter & St Paul



Keep on 'sleeping out'!



Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me.'

I want to say thank you. Thank you for helping restore my faith and joy in the church. The institutional failings of the Church of England have been tough reading. However, we know that the church at its best is never about the institution. It is when it has at its heart those in need. In Matthew's Gospel we read Christ's vision of the kingdom is when we visit the sick, give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty and visit

The sleepout for DENS 2010



The December sleepout for DENS has been going for many years. When it was held at St Albans Abbey, the Mothers' Union used to serve soup and hot drinks during the night and Janet Ridgway and I went over for a few years to do two-hour stints in the café. It was a wonderful thing to do. There were so many enthusiastic young people helping to raise funds for groups supporting the homeless.

In 2010, I decided that I ought to take a turn at sleeping out. As I drove over, the car temperature registered -5°C, but it was meant to get warmer during the night. I had slept out several times in a sleeping bag and bivvy bag (survival bag) when walking the Ridgeway or waiting for the sunrise on midsummer day on top of Helvellyn (it

rained!), so I wasn't concerned about the night. Because of the weather we were allowed to sleep inside the Abbey if we wanted to, but after talking to two gentlemen who had been homeless and were sleeping outside regardless, I decided to sleep outdoors as well. A few others were outside with us. Beforehand there was a service in the Abbey and a dance and drama group performing to songs about the rejection by society which people sleeping on the street experience.

At 11.30pm I ventured outside. I really was under the sky which by now was shedding light snow. I took off my boots and stuffed them in my rucksack to make a pillow and snuggled into my bed roll. Around midnight, the marshalls checked that we were dry. The nice thing about the Abbey is that the clock chimes to count the hours for you. Jesus spent the night in prayer, so I knew what to do if I didn't get to sleep, but the snowflakes gently dusting the

bivvy bag were soothing and I dropped off. Sleep was intermittent and when I woke at 3.00am, I noticed that the snow had changed to rain and several people had moved into the Abbey. Around 6.00am I heard one of the marshalls on his radio suggesting we should be woken up, but they decided to let folk sleep a little longer. However, I was awake by then and moved inside to get a warm drink and eat the banana I brought for breakfast. I was glad that the Mothers' Union ladies were still serving hot drinks.

I was fortunate that I had the equipment to sleep snugly outside, and I respect all who must sleep under the stars with less. Being so privileged, the least I can do is to donate to the organisations who support those who have hit hard times. It is good to know that members of our church still go along to the sleepout.

Jill Smith
St Peter & St Paul

Showing the good news of Jesus



I wonder how the Church of England is going to show through signs and actions the good news of Jesus this year? Whoever is going to be our new Archbishop of Canterbury (and York?) has an unenviable job. At its heart is an amazing parish system with wonderful, faithful congregations serving their communities. But take a step back and you can see we are a church which has become over centralized. We have archaic church representation rules which are no longer fit for purpose, too many buildings and too few people. What reforms need to be put in place for the good of the church as a whole? And what would your wishes for the Church of England be in 2025?

My thoughts have been crystalised by reading more about Jimmy Carter who died at the end of last year at the age of 100. He was the 39th President of the United States, a practising Christian for all of his life, and was a deacon and Bible teacher for many years. He was awarded (among other things) the Albert Schweitzer Prize for Humanitarianism in 1987 and the Nobel Peace Prize

in 2002 for work to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, advance democracy and human rights, and to promote economic and social development. He also volunteered for Habitat for Humanity, which reminded me of the Tring Team Parish's links with Kyrgyzstan a few years ago. Later in his life, Jimmy Carter came to the painful conclusion that he had to sever his ties with the Southern Baptist Convention. This was because of how people choose to interpret scripture, especially over the role of women. He writes, 'The truth is that male religious leaders have had – and still have – an option to interpret holy teachings either to exalt or to subjugate women. They have, for their own selfish ends, overwhelmingly chosen the latter'.

To me it is unconscionable that the Church of England continues to allow for discrimination. As a parish we have signed up to be an Inclusive Church. Part of that is to resist acts and systems of discrimination, no matter how unpopular that resistance might be. Hearing about Jimmy Carter makes me think that we need to stand up and be counted. I imagine it is unlikely that the 'conservative' bloc in the church will allow for a female Archbishop of Canterbury, but we should not just accept that. It is my prayer that in 2025,

maybe the church which I love will take some further small steps to remove all discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender and that we will be more fit to manifest Christ and show the good news of Jesus to our communities. The outcome of the prayer might be that we need to act as well as to pray.

Huw Bellis
Tring Team Parish

Parish registers

Baptism

We welcome this child into our church community and pray for her family.

Elsie Rennie

Funerals

We thank God for the lives of the departed and pray for comfort for those who mourn.

Jacqueline Merrison 73
Neil Dean 89
Hilary Diana Graham 79
Sylvia Miriam Riches 78
Karen Elizabeth Samson 66
Peter Roger Tye 91
Christine Wheeler
Helen Reynolds

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A duty to care or a duty to kill?

On 16 October last year, a bill was introduced to Parliament proposing a change in the law to permit assisted suicide. The debate has continued for a number of months, in society and in Parliament, before a definitive vote is held there. This puts in the spotlight crucial questions about the dignity of human life and the care and protection afforded by our society to every human being.

As this debate unfolds, there are three points I would like us to consider.

Be careful what you wish for

No doubt the bill put before Parliament will be carefully framed, providing clear and very limited circumstances in which it would become lawful to assist, directly and deliberately, in the ending of a person's life. But please remember, the evidence from every single country in which such a law has been passed is clear: that the circumstances in which the taking of a life is permitted are widened and widened, making assisted suicide and medical killing, or euthanasia, more and more available and accepted. In this country, assurances will be given that the proposed safeguards are firm and reliable. Rarely has this been the case. This proposed change in the law may be a source of relief to some. But it will bring great fear and trepidation to many, especially those who have vulnerabilities and those living with disabilities. What is now proposed will not be the end of the story. It is a story better not begun.

A right to die can become a duty to die

A law which prohibits an action is a clear deterrent. A law which permits

an action changes attitudes: that which is permitted is often and easily encouraged. Once assisted suicide is approved by the law, a key protection of human life falls away. Pressure mounts on those who are nearing death, from others or even from themselves, to end their life in order to take away a perceived burden of care from their family, for the avoidance of pain, or for the sake of an inheritance.

I know that, for many people, there is profound fear at the prospect of prolonged suffering and loss of dignity. Yet such suffering itself can be eased. Part of this debate, then, must be the need and duty to enhance palliative care and hospice provision, so that there can genuinely be, for all of us, the prospect of living our last days in the company of loved ones and caring medical professionals. This is truly dying with dignity. Indeed, the radical change in the law now being proposed risks bringing about for all medical professionals a slow change from a duty to care to a duty to kill.

Being forgetful of God belittles our humanity

The questions raised by this bill go to the very heart of how we understand ourselves, our lives, our humanity. For people of faith in God – the vast majority of the population of the world – the first truth is that life, ultimately, is a gift of the Creator. Our life flows from God and will find its fulfilment in God. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' (Job 1:21) To ignore or deny this truth is to separate our humanity from its origins and purpose. We are left, floating free, detached, in a sphere that lacks firm

anchors or destiny, thinking that we can create these for ourselves according to the mood of the age, or even of the day.

The clearest expression of this faith is that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God. That is the source of our dignity and it is unique to the human person. The suffering of a human being is not meaningless. It does not destroy that dignity. It is an intrinsic part of our human journey, a journey embraced by the eternal Word of God, Christ Jesus himself. He brings our humanity to its full glory precisely through the gateway of suffering and death.

We know, only too well, that suffering can bring people to a most dreadful state of mind, even driving them to take their own lives, in circumstances most often when they lack true freedom of mind and will, and so bear no culpability. But this proposed legislation is quite different. It seeks to give a person of sound will and mind the right to act in a way that is clearly contrary to a fundamental truth: our life is not our own possession, to dispose of as we feel fit. This is not a freedom of choice we can take for ourselves without undermining the foundations of trust and shared dignity on which a stable society rests.

As this debate unfolds, then, I ask you to play your part in it. Write to your MP. Have discussions with family, friends and colleagues. And pray. Please remember: be careful what you wish for; the right to die can become a duty to die; being forgetful of God belittles our humanity.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster

From your Valentine



These days there is only one thing we can be certain of as we approach Valentine's Day: the card shops will show a healthy turnover in their February accounts! Their shelves will not only be full of Valentine cards but nowadays there are heart-shaped balloons and boxes of chocolates alongside all manner of Valentine-themed gifts.

Please don't assume from this rather dismissive observation that I am sceptical about romance. I'm all for romance (a pause here while I lift my wife from the floor after she fainted). However, I doubt whether many of the punters in the card shops thoughtfully buying cards and gifts for 14 February will spare a thought for St Valentine and who he really was – and wasn't: because there is clear evidence that the saint martyred by the Romans had nothing whatsoever to do with romantic love. Geoffrey Chaucer is almost certainly responsible for the association between St Valentine and romance, but more of that later.

The name 'Valentine' was a popular one in the early church and is derived from the word valour, a characteristic which Valentine must have had, since accounts of the early martyrs agree that he was executed by the Romans because of the help he gave to persecuted Christians. He was buried outside Rome on 14 February AD269. Beyond these few details, the sources provide no consistent facts – there are possibly three different St Valentines in the early church and eleven St Valentines are commemorated in Catholic church history!

There are, however, legends of Valentine which appear to have vague links with the modern conception of Valentine's Day. Common scholarship agrees that St Valentine was a priest of Rome or Bishop of Terni, an important town in Umbria. While under house arrest by the Roman Judge Asterius, Valentine outlined his Christian faith to his captor. Asterius challenged Valentine to demonstrate the power of the faith which was causing such disruption to the Roman Empire and brought to him his blind daughter. If Valentine could restore the girl's sight, Asterius would do whatever Valentine asked. Valentine, prayed and laid his hands on the girl's

eyes and her vision was restored. Asterius was converted to Christianity, but the Romans nevertheless executed Valentine for his Christian ministry. One story maintains that the last words he wrote were in a note to Asterius' daughter. He inspired today's romantic missives by signing it, 'from your Valentine'. It is also said that Valentine cut out heart shapes from scraps of parchment and gave them as morale boosting keepsakes to persecuted Christians in his care, perhaps giving rise to the red hearts we see on Valentine's cards today.

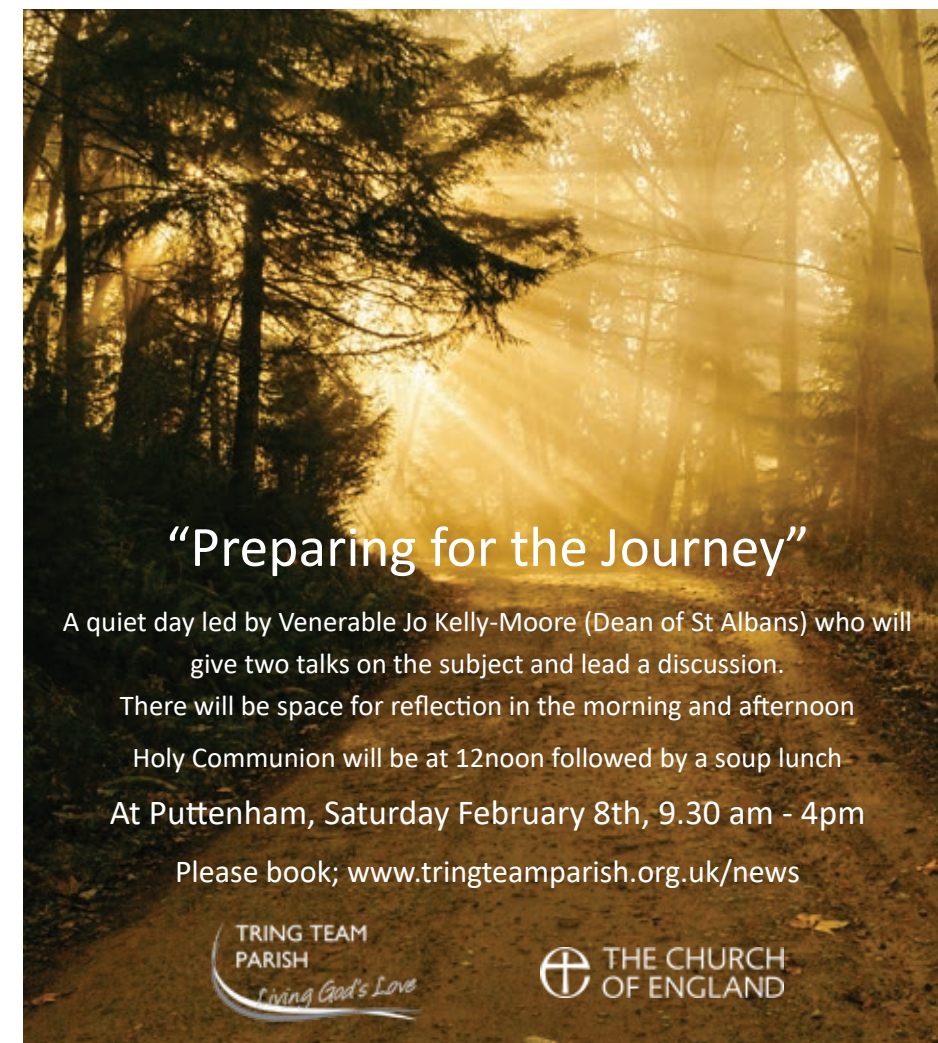
Valentine was given a saint's day on the date of his supposed execution and this was celebrated throughout Europe by the Middle Ages. So back to Chaucer – in the 14th century Chaucer wrote 'The Parliament of Fowls', a dream poem where the author falls asleep and is taken to a springtime meeting of birds. The embodied figure of Nature convenes this parliament at which the birds all choose their mates. Chaucer's enlightened plot has Nature allowing the female birds the right to choose their mates, thus emphasising free will in matrimony at

a time when many women were given no choice in selecting a life partner. The poem contains the earliest known reference to Valentine's Day as a special date for lovers. So, someone who lived around 1200 years after the real Valentine created his mythical status as the patron saint of love!

Nowadays, it would be as well for us all to remember the earliest accounts of the valourous Valentine as a Christian, bravely standing up for the oppressed and taking their part with no thought for the risk he was running. In these tragic times there is ample opportunity for demonstrating valour as a Christian in a world of oppression.

Finally, I admit that I have never sent a Valentine's card. Unsurprisingly, I have never received one either. But never say never; in a recent sermon at St Martha's we were urged to seize opportunities to play out our faith. Sending a message of support to the oppressed somewhere in the world this month might be a fitting way to celebrate the valour of Valentine on the 14th.

David Wood
St Martha's Methodist Church



"Preparing for the Journey"

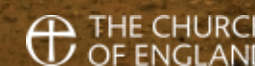
A quiet day led by Venerable Jo Kelly-Moore (Dean of St Albans) who will give two talks on the subject and lead a discussion.

There will be space for reflection in the morning and afternoon

Holy Communion will be at 12noon followed by a soup lunch

At Puttenham, Saturday February 8th, 9.30 am - 4pm

Please book; www.tringteamparish.org.uk/news



Tring's musical calendar is extended!

On Sunday 1 December we had what we hope to be the first of many concerts in Corpus Christi Church. Alces Baroque, an early music ensemble, came for a programme of Bach, Handel, Boismortier and Barrière.

We hope to return with more chamber music in 2025 – please keep an eye on the parish website (<https://parish.rcdow.org.uk/tring>) for more information about future events, or contact me directly (tmdewey@gmail.com). We have already had interest from groups including a piano trio (once we've found a piano!) and string quartet, so it looks like it will already be an exciting season. The church has a wonderful acoustic and so we hope this will be a fantastic new addition to Tring's musical calendar.

Tom Dewey, Director of Music
Corpus Christi Catholic Church



Piano & More concerts in 2024 and beyond!



2024 was another good year for the Piano and More concert series. After eighty-three concerts (including eight broadcast during Covid-19 lockdowns) it is now entering its ninth year and has been going from strength to strength!

In 2024, genres ranged from classical to jazz, and have included cello, clarinet, violin and piano recitals as well as two song recitals and five larger groups, including players from the Chiltern Sinfonietta and the Icknield Ensemble. Our occasional Young Artists Series has been continuing, and we had performances by Madeleine and Beatrice Murray who are at Berkhamsted School, as well as music students from Tring School. The year culminated in our annual Advent family concert in December. This was the seventh one we've done, and it has become very popular. This year there were around 100 people in the audience and forty-six performers, including the Tring Advent Players string group and the Tring Music Partnership Phoenix Concert Band. Nearly all the performers were local, and

ages ranged from 7 to 80, with several members of some families involved, including three generations of the same family in the Advent Players!

Details of the 2025 concerts will be posted on the Tring Parish pew sheet as well as here in *Comment* and on our website, piano-and-more.org.uk, where you can also find details of how to sign up to our mailing list. Concerts are usually on the second Sunday of the month but sometime dates vary so it's always worth checking. They run from 3.00pm to around 4.00pm, with free entry (although we always appreciate donations, which are generally split between the church and the piano fund). We supported the organ fund at our December concert and will do so again in due course.

Each concert is followed by tea and cake, which has become a very important part of the afternoon, a chance to chat to the performers as well as other audience members. However, our tea team has shrunk a little recently, and we do need



Emma Canavan with the Phoenix Concert Band

more people to help, so if you feel that this could be you, please do contact me on musicalanna@annalehair.co.uk. You don't have to commit to a regular slot, but the more people who are willing to help on an occasional basis, the merrier! Thank you!

My thanks as ever go to Huw Bellis and the ministry team for their strong continuing support, to Trish for always being there, to our wonderful tea team and to our fantastic wardens, John, Janet and Vivianne. We couldn't do it without you all!

Anna Le Hair
St Peter & St Paul

The Spiritual Railway

*The Line to Heaven by Christ was made,
With heavenly truth the Rails were laid,
From Earth to Heaven the Line extends*

*To Life Eternal where it ends.
Repentance is the Station then,
Where Passengers are taken in.
No Fee for them is there to pay
For Jesus is himself the way.
God's word is the First Engineer.
It points the way to Heaven so clear;
Through tunnels dark and dreary here
It does the way to Glory steer.*

*God's Love the Fire, his Truth the Steam,
Which drives the Engine and the Train.*

*All you who would to Glory ride,
Must come to Christ, in him abide,
In First, and Second and Third Class,
Repentance, Faith and Holiness,
You must the way to Glory gain
Or you with Christ will not remain.*

*Come then, poor Sinners, now's the time,
At any station on the Line,
If you'll repent and turn from sin,
The Train will stop and take you in.*

Anonymous

First published in Hallelujah Hymn Book 1874

Poem of the month



No polished sonnet this time – rather an example of folk-poetry, in which man's pilgrimage on earth is compared to the laying of a railway line. The words can be found on a memorial in Ely Cathedral to two men who were killed in an accident at Thetford in 1845. (The names of the men are apparently incorrectly recorded!). However, the words here printed were probably well known both sides of the Atlantic many years before and five different versions survive in different parts of the country. The author is unknown, as in most forms of ballads, but the words were probably based on versions found in 'Broadsheets', the printed pamphlets, popular from the 16th century and produced and sold in huge quantities to

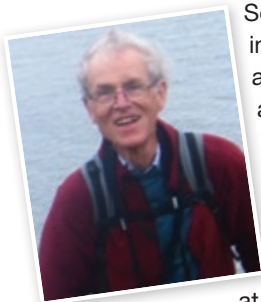
disseminate news and stories. The words of Christmas carols were frequently transmitted this way up to the early 20th century.

William Booth, the founder of the Christian Mission (renamed the Salvation Army in 1878), included it in his 'Book of Songs', hymns and songs borrowed from evangelical sources in Britain and America, often with added choruses.

The words have continual appeal – apparently they were put to music and played at Liverpool Street Station in 1886 to mark the beginning of an appeal for Norwich Cathedral.

Kate Banister
St Julian's, St Albans

St Peter & St Paul's Book Group – a new initiative



Soon after our arrival in Tring fourteen years ago, my wife Anna and I joined the Book Group at St Peter & St Paul which had recently been started, and was led by the curate at that time, Didier Jacquet. Once a month at 6.00pm on a Sunday evening, a few of us gathered in the church for a short, contemplative service. Then, for the main event, a larger number of us got together to discuss the month's chosen book. Drinks (alcoholic and otherwise!) were served, Didier would provide a brief introduction, and then we were off. The wide-ranging discussion covered an equally wide range of views and the books included novels as well as theological treatises. We all loved it! And it was a wonderful way for Anna and me, newcomers to the parish, to get to know fellow parishioners really well. Would we have known our oldest member Betty, with her wisdom and trenchantly expressed opinions, nearly so well without Book Group? I doubt it.

Of course, curates move on. Didier went on to his next parish, but John Whiteman nobly took over the organisation and we continued for another five years or so, and even had a number of on-line discussions during the

Covid-19 lockdowns. But in the way of these things, enthusiasm and numbers began to fall away, and John wisely decided that a pause was needed.

At least until now. I am not as brave or well organised as John Whiteman, but I am arranging a 'one-off' meeting of the group at 6.30pm on Sunday 16 February, which may be preceded by a short contemplative service as in the old days.

This is the story. Last year, I read a book by Marilyn Robinson called 'Reading Genesis', which had been very highly praised in reviews. I am ashamed to say that I had never heard of her before but others will know that she is an acclaimed American novelist and philosopher, winner of numerous awards including the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. 'Reading Genesis', though, is one of her non-fiction works, and yes, it consists entirely of an exegesis (to use the posh term) of the book of Genesis. Posh terms – i.e. ones I have to look up in a dictionary – are something Robinson is not afraid of using, but (dictionary at hand) I was totally gripped by the book.

Two things struck me about her approach, both of which were new to me in discussions of the Bible. One was my previous understanding of the early parts of Genesis was that it was a collection of randomly collected fables knocking around in the wider world that the writers of Genesis inhabited – stories

Book Group in the Parish Church

Sunday 16 February at 6:30pm
(possibly preceded by an optional short service)

Marilynn Robinson: **'Reading Genesis'**
EVERYONE IS WELCOME
to turn up and take part!

like the Garden of Eden, the Flood, Noah's ark and the Tower of Babel. No, says Robinson, they were not chosen randomly. On the contrary, they were carefully selected to show how God works out his purpose for the whole of humanity (not just the Jewish people), a purpose which continues despite the universal human characteristic to display a mixture of great goodness and unbelievable badness.

The other thing to strike me was that her approach is that of a novelist, interested in human behaviour and relationships; this particularly comes out in her discussion of that (as she points out!) dysfunctional family of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph; and also, of course, the way in which God uses these patriarchs to further his purposes.

I found it wonderful stuff. But I also thought how much I would have enjoyed discussing it at the old Book Group. So, I decided to organise a one-off meeting. Perhaps, in due course, someone else will be really struck by something they've read, and will organise something similar.

Edmund Booth, St Peter & St Paul

Got questions about life and the Christian faith?

'Start' will help you discover more about God, Jesus, spirituality and the journey of life.

6 sessions with discussion and time for reflection, each lasting about an hour and free to attend.

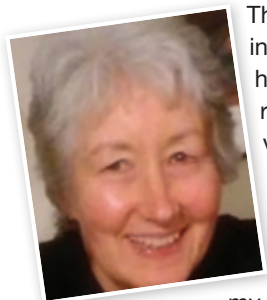
Contact Michelle for details
michelle@tringteamparish.org.uk
01442 851200

From February 2025

Start ▶

God, Jesus and the journey of life in 6 sessions

Who do I think I am?



Those who are interested in family history will probably recognise this as a variation on the title of the long-running BBC series 'Who Do You Think You Are?' I believed my answer to this to

be a very short one: there were no big names, no stories of lost inheritances, no old family Bibles with records of baptisms and marriages – in fact, there were precious few relatives: just two grandmothers, a mother, a father and a sister. That was 'my family'. Nevertheless, in my early 20s, possibly partly because I had a somewhat nomadic RAF childhood and was now beginning to put down roots, I became interested in going further. Where – and who – did I come from?

So began both a fascinating hobby but also a very frustrating search for missing members of my family tree. Some years earlier I had talked to my paternal grandmother, who had been widowed young and never remarried, and learnt a little about her late husband, her parents and her brother, the latter a senior policeman in Edinburgh. However, when I asked my mother about her father I was in for a shock.

'Well, your grandmother was never married,' she told me.

As this new piece of information sank in, I realised that the clues had been staring me in the face. There was my mother's Uncle Eric, for a start. His name was Eric Bowdidge. Yet my grandmother was Mrs Bowdidge – I now realised that this didn't fit at all: if she were a widow then her surname should have been different, yet she wore a ring and was always addressed as 'Mrs'. How had I got to my late 20s without realising that there was something awry here? Perhaps it was to do with being brought up by two 'only' children – my parents had not had fathers around when they were growing up and their teenage years had been interrupted by the Second World War. And while my grandmothers were a fixture in my childhood, my parents never spoke about their own childhoods, or about their parents; it simply didn't seem to be quite the 'done' thing.

It turned out that my mother had never known who her father was, and having had a secure childhood with her

mother and grandparents, she had never wanted to pursue a topic that was clearly out of bounds. I felt differently, though, and was very keen to find out as much as possible about this mystery. But I knew that if she had never told her daughter about my grandfather, my grandmother certainly wouldn't tell me, so for a long while I did nothing. Then came DNA testing!

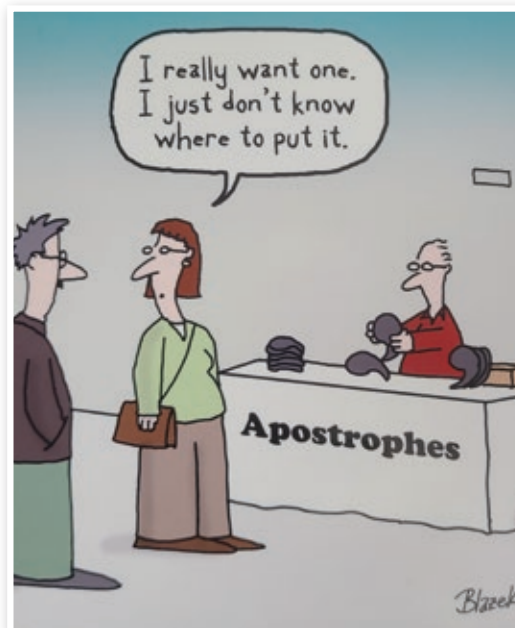
Hoping that testing might eventually lead me to discover who my unknown grandfather was – and whether I might have some half cousins somewhere – I took an Ancestry DNA test and waited expectantly. Over the years my DNA matches with distant cousins have confirmed that my extensive research into the ancestry of my two grandmothers was correct and I have enjoyed researching some fascinating people and their stories, going back hundreds of years. Only in the last couple of years, however, has it been possible to identify clearly which of my unidentified matches relate to my mother's side of the family and which to my father's. And this is where I have to put out a warning to anyone undertaking this type of research – you may uncover things that have been kept hidden and that could make for uncomfortable discoveries.

I believed that I had found a whole group of matches that were related to each other but that I couldn't place in my, by now very extensive, tree – surely these must be connected to my missing grandfather? I contacted a couple of the matches, who were very welcoming to their new-found 'cousin' and I built out a good-sized tree tracing their ancestry back a few generations to identify our most recent common ancestors. What I discovered was that this family had all been living just a few miles away from where my father had been born! I really needed to establish that these people were indeed from my mother's side of my family, so I contacted a cousin of my father's and he very kindly agreed to also do a DNA test. I had absolutely no doubts about his parentage (but that is another long story) and when his results came back it was absolutely clear. He did not match me or my sister, but he did match descendants from my paternal grandmother's husband's side of the family – people that neither my sister nor I matched at all.

I had been looking for a missing grandfather and what I discovered was that my father's father was not the man his mother was married to and who was named on his birth certificate. This was a pretty unwelcome surprise – not only had I spent a lot of time and effort researching the family whose surname I was born with, but it was now clear that this was not the family name with which I had a biological connection. That was strange and slightly unsettling at first, but I think I have a number of advantages when it comes to thinking about this. I have been a Christian for over fifty years and so, whatever genealogy throws up in the way of fascinating stories or surprising revelations, I have an identity that goes beyond surnames on pieces of paper. Also, I have been part of a church family here in Tring for over forty years and like all families, it has seen births, marriages and deaths; people have moved away and new people have arrived; but its stability as a family is grounded in the beliefs we hold in common, tolerance of differences, shared experiences and ongoing learning.

I have not given up trying to identify my two biological grandfathers and I now know that my father's father was almost certainly one of seven Reynolds' brothers [no relation to the editor as far as I know!] from Hanworth, Middlesex. As for my mother's father – my latest research suggests a link a couple of generations back with the Netherlands. As with the journey of faith, there is always more to find out.

Nicky Bull
High Street Baptist Church



Preserving the Heart of Tring for Everyone's Future

The Birth of a Campaign

from Kind Thoughts to Generous Action!

“ The Golden Cup at first was filled with really good intentions; Then doubt and fear assailed our ear and kindness came under suspension. But we struggled on against the throng and rescued that original thought; “It won't work,” some said, “the idea's dead” and our courage dwindled to nought.

Restless night after night brought no respite – then we decided to try once again. We need to heed the considerable need and our kind-heartedness we must regain. Someone must do it, so let us review it and embrace this daunting task. Our community's strong, let's move this along and for generous donations we'll ask.

The plan was agreed, there's no doubt about need to give our heritage our support. No more “to-ing and fro-ing”, let's just get going and follow the Fabric Report. The mood became bolder as the building grew older and bits began to fall off. With striking ideas we conquered our fears though some doubters continued to scoff.

As a New Year begins we are asking for wins and kind hearts for generous donations. With the aid of all Tring-ers - old hands and beginners -let's start our big preparations. Repairs just won't wait, we are now at the gate, together we'll make the task lighter. So please do join in as our appeal we begin and help to make Tring's future brighter.

There's a big job to do, but that's nothing new, for our town with its generous heart. When you see us coming, please don't start running, but help us to make a strong start. If we all pull together it won't be heavy weather, as together we make the right choice. It's our town, it's our heritage; with our community spirit we can repair, relax and rejoice!

”

2025 is the year we can all do our bit to keep our Heritage Walls strong and tall and our Heart healthy for all future generations to enjoy.

Please do your bit to support us over the coming months.



There is Only One Tring with One Unique Heritage



...NOW IT'S OUR TURN!

This is not just about religion, it is about a major community asset: it is about the heart of our town, our heritage.

It Is Our Turn to Do Our Bit for the Future!

An opportunity to show our support for Tring's Heritage Heart

It is now more than thirty years since so many good friends in Tring got together to show their whole-hearted support for the irreplaceable asset that forms the heart of our town. The medieval gem that is the Parish Church of St Peter & St Paul stands tall and strong today due to the efforts of you and countless other generous-hearted citizens over the centuries.

In those years since we founded the Friends of Tring Church Heritage together we have invested more than £400,000 in projects that have kept the building sound and also improved its usefulness and flexibility for all members of the community we call home. Whilst the core function of the building in its splendid green space is a centre of spirituality and worship, it is also a greatly valued home for so many major community events and celebrations.

National Events, campaign launches, concerts and exhibitions are all celebrated in this space and the facilities are constantly being improved without compromising its historic integrity. It welcomes everyone warmly. Like all assets of great age it is in constant need of

upkeep and investment to ensure the fabric stays strong and it is a safe and welcoming space for worshippers and also for the visitors, young families and hundreds of our school children who use it throughout the year. Previous generations have done a wonderful job doing just that. Now it's our turn!

Right now we are at one of those points in its long history where we need to take pre-emptive action in order to secure the East Wall, repair and partially replace the turret and tower roof and rebuild the unstable clergy vestry. These works, which ideally need to be completed in the next two years, will cost some £150,000. They are the next part of our long-term mission to keep the building "fit for purpose" for all future activities. We have formed an appeal

Now is the Hour to do our Bit – This is **OUR** Turn! Aren't we lucky to live here? Aren't we fortunate to have been so blessed by our predecessors that we have the heritage we have?

group with the church Fabric Team and the Friends of Tring Church Heritage to plan an appeal aimed at the whole town community and are currently planning the launch in 2025. This is of course a "work in progress" but you can expect to receive letters, emails, social media messages galore and be surrounded by posters, banners and displays all giving us the same message: "Now it's our turn to do our bit in the long cavalcade of generosity and goodwill that has kept our heritage heart healthy thus far."

Here you will see some of the communications material as it currently stands. On the back cover you will see our launch poster. You can respond now and whenever it suits you. Giving via GoFundMe is available now and you can use the QR code at any time.

On Page 18 you will see a description of the urgent works that are vitally

necessary in the coming months. Like all fundraising we want to make this campaign FUN and so there will be events and social opportunities to get involved and help the cause over the year.

In June there will be a huge event at Tring Market Auction rooms to "get the party started" with hospitality, entertainment and lots of creative ways to help swell the kitty. Many thanks to Trustee Stephen Hearn for making that event happen.

This campaign is aimed at benefiting everyone who lives, works in or visits Tring and we really hope everyone will feel they want to be involved. At Family Fun Day on 10th May there will be a stall and display promoting all the information and offering creative ways to contribute. Tring is celebrated for its generosity of spirit and its responsible attitude to caring for the future of generations to come.

Family Fun Day is another great environment to connect with those generations and do our bit for the future wellbeing of the community.

If you are reading this, this is aimed at YOU. Please get involved and join in all the activities to support our future.

It's our town, it's our heritage, it's our choice.

gofundmeTM
fotch-save-our-walls



Preserving the Heart of Tring for Everyone's Future



Works to St Peter & St Paul's Church Tower



You may have noticed the scaffolding that was erected around the church tower in October 2024. A review of a preliminary repair schedule was carried out with a specialist lead contractor and masonry expert in attendance.



Scaffolding erected around the tower

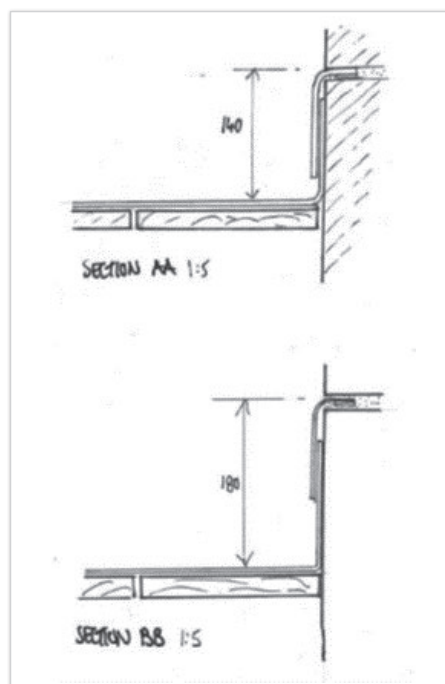
The photos below show the lead roof of the stair turret, which is beyond repair and in need of urgent renewal. Whilst the stone castellations were found to be generally structurally sound, about 20% of the joints will require lime repointing to make them safe.

The aim is to replace materials on a like-for-like basis as faithfully as possible.

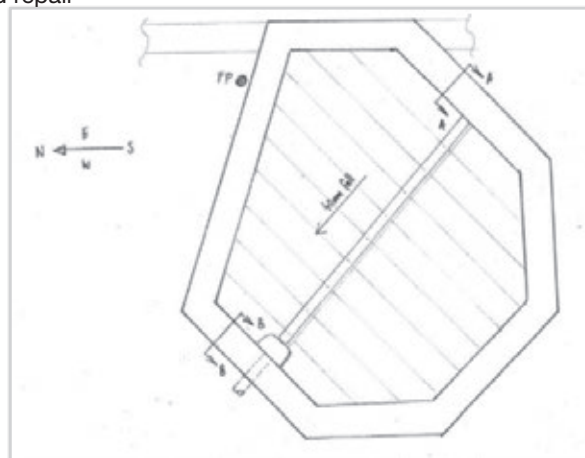
Code 6 lead sheeting will be used for the stair turret coverings. This is a heavy-duty lead sheet that is often used to protect buildings like St Peter & St Paul's that are

subject to severe weather exposure. For flashings and small lengths, Code 4 lead will be used. All leadwork will be installed to conform to the Lead Contractors Association guidelines and all lead used will conform to BS EN12588 (Lead and lead alloys. Rolled lead sheet for building purposes).

The diagrams below show the proposed sections for replacement lead flashing and plan view of the turret roof.



Proposed sections



Stair turret (tower) roof plan view 1:20 @A4

Missing mortar between stone castellations and stone to flint junctions, where there is a greater than 5mm gap, will be repointed using a 1:3 binding agent (3.5 Astier hydraulic lime) to aggregate (a well-blended mix of sharp sand, well washed and graded). Any defective pointing in the way will be removed carefully using hand tools to a minimum depth of 20mm.



The photos above illustrate some of the repairs that are needed to make the stonework safe.

Loose mortar attempting to hold the perimeter lead flashing around the parapets will be raked out and repointed using lime mortar.

Lead adjacent to the stair turret stonework will be sealed using Leadmate, a sealant designed to adhere to soft metals like lead as an alternative to mortaring.

Loose lime pointing will be removed and replaced. Cement will not be used in the repointing as this would cause frost damage to the flintwork and stonework over time. Joints that are smaller than 6mm wide will be filled with prepared lime putty.

To respect the heritage of the building, during the work all areas of the church walls, roofs and castellations will be protected and left in a good clean state of repair afterwards.

Andrew Kinsey
St Peter & St Paul



Photos of the lead roof to the turret which is in poor condition, split in places and causing leaks

A time to be born, and a time to die?



By all accounts, last year's Parliamentary Debate on Assisted Dying was an example of how debates should proceed – Parliament at its best: a sincere and informed presentation by both sides. Further, the way the result was received was exemplary – a silence, respecting the verdict after a measured debate. It was a matter of faith and belief and information, without the scoring of political points.

The issue remains with us and will long do so. There are many questions about how we humans solve such problems. There are religious, philosophical and economic considerations involved.

The heading to this article is taken from a famous passage in the book of Ecclesiastes, that enigmatic and thought-provoking book of the Old Testament. I have added the question-mark because of the way it does or does not apply to the Assisted Dying debate. Who decides the time of death? Natural causes dictate the time when we are born, unless, as more and more with Caesarean sections, the time is decided by the surgeon or medical team. But the time to die? Is this to be a matter for human decision in some cases? In this debate we are considering how we make a decision according to the desire of some to end a life at a time of their choosing in order to avoid extreme pain. It is interesting that the subject is called Assisted Dying, rather than Voluntary Suicide, or Euthanasia or Mercy Killing. For the emphasis is on the individual's choice as to when the time to die has arrived because of intense suffering.

How do we decide? Are there religious or philosophical reasons? After all, there is a strong human instinct to preserve and prolong human life. For many of us, decisions on such matters are subject to the Two Great Commandments – to love God and to love our neighbour. These are based on the Ten Commandments which include 'Thou shalt do no murder', as the Authorised Version of the Bible has it, though most other versions say 'Thou shalt not kill'. Can one murder oneself?

Certainly, one can kill oneself, though suicide has traditionally been regarded as a sin on the principle that the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Nowadays we see suicide differently – not as a revolt against God, but an inability to see a reason to live, or a mental illness. In passing we may notice only two suicides in the Bible – Ahitophel in the Old Testament, when his advice was rejected (2 Samuel 17) in David's struggle with Absalom; and, of course, there is Judas Iscariot who killed himself out of remorse for his betrayal of Jesus. But these are cases of being unable to face the future. We are considering those who feel there is no future worth having because of their pain and suffering. Can the inevitable be brought forward to save pain? Is it wrong or a kindness to help the suffering and the dying out of their pain?

While preparing this article, I could not help thinking that while we believe life is given to us by God, we humans often take the lives of others. Again, back to the Old Testament, look how soon we humans started taking life. It goes back to the beginning with Cain's killing of his brother, Abel. Anyone reading the historical books of the Bible with Christian eyes cannot but be horrified, not only by the way hundreds and, indeed thousands, are slaughtered in war, but also that this was thought to be God's will. Then, of course, there is the matter of capital punishment, which the Old Testament Laws seem to take for granted and in the New Testament is assumed to be lawful. In other words, for all our belief that at a funeral we may hear the words 'the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away', all through history humans have taken away many lives in war or as a punishment.

I find, in considering all this, it is very hard to say Assisted Dying is always wrong and sinful and therefore it should be illegal to assist the terminally ill to die. I feel I could never do it, but would never condemn those

who do. What about those born severely disabled? I remember many years ago when I worked as a hospital orderly being told by one of the sisters, who had been a midwife, of how some severely handicapped babies were sedated and allowed to die. I suspect nowadays medical advances mean extraordinary steps can be taken to keep such babies alive.

But as to the Assisted Dying Bill, there seem to be immense problems when it comes to practicalities. Doctors are not always right in their prognosis of the time of death – six months is the time specified in the new law. How easy would it be to get the agreement of two doctors and a judge? What is the cost to the Health Service and the Judiciary in terms of time, money and expertise? Do we spend enough on palliative care and hospices? Who actually decides in the end? Is there a difference between 'keeping alive' and 'helping to die'? And, probably the greatest fear of many, will the passing of the Bill put pressure on patients, staff, family members, doctors, lawyers etc?

A final point we might raise – what do we believe about death? In what sense is it the end? Does our answer to that question affect how we view Assisted Dying? I believe in one who is the Resurrection and the Life, who said 'whoso liveth and believeth in me shall never die'. I find as I get nearer to the end, it is harder to imagine what that means but I take comfort from the fact that it is not up to my imagination but to him who died and rose again for you and for me.

Martin Banister
St Albans Cathedral

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Challenges facing local young people



Between 2023 and 2024, 136,000 young people approached their council because they were homeless.

Youth Concern would like not to exist. We would prefer Aylesbury Vale's 13-25-year-olds to be living happy, healthy and fulfilling lives without our support. But sadly, that's not the case. Opportunity Bucks, the Council's flagship programme to improve opportunities for residents, focuses on ten wards across the county where people are experiencing the most hardship. Youth Concern is sited on the boundary between two wards, and our Drop-in Centre is ten minutes' walk from a third. There is huge need in Aylesbury Vale. Youth Concern is needed now more than ever.

In July 2024, Laura Kyrke-Smith MP singled out Youth Concern during her maiden speech in the House of Commons: 'My constituency of Aylesbury and villages is very diverse. I must highlight the inequalities in income and wealth. Aylesbury has high levels of deprivation: 1 in 8 children live in poverty. I pay tribute to the fantastic charities like Youth Concern which make life more manageable for those who are struggling day to day.'

Our young people face a wide range of challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted young people's education, employment prospects and social development. Post pandemic, many young people, especially those from low-income families, struggle to meet basic needs such as food and housing. Youth Concern runs Buckinghamshire's only youth food bank. We provided 44% more food parcels this year than last, averaging 23 per month. (We also provide hot meals. The number served remained similar to last year: an average of 204 every month.)

Aylesbury Vale's growing population and a shortage of social and affordable housing has caused rental costs to rise. Young adults are finding it increasingly difficult to secure stable accommodation. Our Drop-in Centre provided 325 pieces of housing advice or advocacy during the year, a huge increase of 91% on the previous year, and at the Next Step, which was full for 95% of the year, referrals increased by 32%.



The difficulty in accessing essential services, particularly for mental health, is a critical concern. Mental health issues among young people have surged, yet the resources available to support them are limited, leading to long waiting lists for counselling. At Youth Concern, between last year and this, both the number of young people receiving counselling and the number of referrals has increased by 14%.

And yet we remain optimistic!

Cross-charity, in the twelve months to September 2024, we worked even more closely with other services, charities, organisations and individuals in the best interests of Aylesbury Vale's 13-25-year-olds. Together we have achieved much.

In the words of one young person who gave this poem to his Drop-in Centre key worker:

*'In a space where dreams take flight,
Youth Concern shines forever bright.
With open hearts, the team gathers near,
creating a haven, free from fear.
They listen closely, no judgment here,
for every experience they lend an ear.
Empowered voices, hand in hand,
they help us build a brighter land.
The team never gives up. Through thick
and thin,
with compassion and care, together
we'll win.'*

Drop-in Centre

Our Drop-in Centre is our charity's front door. It welcomes 13-25-year-olds who come for a variety of reasons, including fun activities like access to our music studio, gaming, table tennis and pool. We provide meals and food parcels,

access to Wi-Fi and laptops. Through small group work and 1-1 sessions, we provide independent living advice, financial guidance, housing support and healthy living resources including cooking sessions. We have appointed a Careers Youth Worker.

During the second year of our strategy, we expected to welcome 900 young people to our Drop-in Centre. Unique monthly visitors actually numbered 1,535, an increase of 23% on the previous year, and more than the 1,000 young people we expected to welcome by September 2025 and the end of our 3-year strategy.

Most young people visit multiple times per week or month. Young people attended our Drop-in Centre on 5,564 separate occasions, an increase of 28% on the previous year's attendances.

We connect young people with other services that can support their needs. During the year, on average 6 services ran weekly sessions including Brook (sexual health) and Cranstoun (substance misuse), and 12 other services delivered sessions frequently. We expanded our outreach significantly in schools, colleges and the university, with 51 separate interactions compared to 29 in the previous year.

Butterflies, our gender identity social group, has thrived since we 'rehomed' the group in January 2023. By September 2024, numbers had doubled with 20 young people being registered and an average 6 young people attending weekly.

Counselling

Demand for our counselling service increased yet again during the year.

We were able to counsel more young people (113 individual young people during the year) as a result of increased administrative resource and the launch of our new 'contract counsellor' programme.

We continued to deliver high quality support: this year counselling clients once again scored the service they received at 4.8 / 5. We received referrals from young people directly, or from adult mental health services, social care, schools, charities and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

'Youth Concern is an extremely valuable resource for young people locally. The charity has provided support to many young men and women who we have either struggled to engage, or who do not meet the criteria for ongoing support from our service, but where regular follow up within the community has been key. We pass a variety of cases to Youth Concern, feeling confident of the input young people will receive.'

Dr Eleanor Rowsell, Head of Psychological Therapies, CAMHS.

The statutory services value not only the psychological support we offer 13-25-year-olds but also our practical and holistic support. In Aylesbury Vale we are the only

agency able to respond in this way.

'It's so helpful to just release everything to someone and for them to listen to you and take in what you've said. It's so helpful to get feedback about why things happen and why you feel the way you do – and to process it all with someone else. It makes you feel like you aren't on your own when you are struggling.'

Counselling client

Homelessness prevention

Twelve young people lived with us at the Next Step, our supported accommodation project, between October 2023 and September 2024. When the 9 young men and 3 young women moved in, they were between 18 and 21 years old.

The Next Step was 95% full during the year (up from 74% on the previous year). In our third year of operation, this is largely due to referring partners now better understanding our offer and the team receiving better quality referrals.

We received 41 referrals during the year, up from 32 the previous year, from a variety of sources including our Drop-in Centre and counselling service, Buckinghamshire Council, GPs and social prescribers and other charities including Aylesbury Housing Action Group and

Connection Support.

The 4 young people who moved out during the year went into social housing or to a family member.

Last year we introduced a bursary for working residents so they're not financially worse off working whilst in supported accommodation. We're delighted that two residents accessed the bursary.

Youth Concern would not have been able to positively influence so many vulnerable 13-25-year olds' lives had it not been for our outstanding team of trustees, staff and volunteers who live our values – to put young people at the heart of all we do, care deeply, listen without judgement, never give up, empower and collaborate. Often our work is difficult. We move at young people's pace and respect that sometimes, young people choose not to engage.

Youth Concern owes its existence too to the generous charitable trusts, individuals, companies, clubs and organisations who support us – as a small charity we rely heavily on people's generosity, of time as well as money and gifts in kind. If you are able to support us as we move into 2025, thank you.

Hannah Asquith
High Street Baptist Church

New year, new activities?



Back in April 2024, I was asked by one of the handbell ringers if I would like to join the group known as the TRingers. I thought it would be a fun thing to do and might keep me out of mischief on a Monday morning.

I arrived at St Peter & St Paul's Church one damp, drizzly Monday morning, to be greeted by the Huw and the Parish Team, who pointed me in the direction of the bellringers. I was told they needed at least six bell ringers to make a quorum.

My first lesson was using one hand bell rather than two as I was still recovering from a broken wrist. My initial attempt was a disaster! I read the wrong line and rang the bell in the wrong places.

Many months have now passed. My wrist is now recovered and I am using two hand bells and – with lots of concentration – I am now around 90% accurate in ringing the bells.

Since I have started, we have had three new members join the group: Ann, Roger and Fran, all of whom seem to be more musically talented than I am (but I don't think it matters too much!). This means we can meet as a group on a regular basis should anyone not be able to make it.

In August, we were approached by Berkhamsted and Tring Stroke Association to play at their October meeting. This entailed practising a range of sing-along songs, with a smattering of classical numbers. So on 29 October, I and the rest of TRingers had our first 'gig' of the year to the Stroke Association. The event went really well. It was so lovely to see and hear people singing and tapping along to familiar tunes. The Stroke Association were very appreciative, presenting us with a cheque for £75. This will be used for repairing the bells and acquiring some new music.

The TRingers have also appeared recently at the Tring Christmas Festival and the Saturday Christmas Lunch Club.

If you are looking for a new hobby,



come and join the TRingers. We practise at St Peter & St Paul's Church every Monday morning from 9.30-10.30am. If you want to find out more, pop in and see. We are a very sociable group. There is lots of laughter, especially when we play something very badly! We always stop for coffee and natter after our 'jamming' session. New members are always welcome. We all started out as beginners so we are happy to teach others to enjoy handbell ringing.

Joyce Miller, St Peter & St Paul

Corpus Christi Ladies' Christmas Dinner



Each year the female parishioners of Corpus Christi get together for a formal Christmas Dinner. In recent years we have gone to The Kings Arms in Tring where their small function room is perfect for groups of

thirty to forty for a sit-down meal.

Our numbers were reduced this year due to illness caused by a respiratory virus that had been making the rounds amongst parishioners during December. For those well enough to attend on 18 December, they were treated to a delicious dinner prepared by the chef at The Kings Arms.

Each dinner party guest received a beautiful craft gift, handmade by

parishioner, Sheree Kerr.

The Games mistress for the night was Heather Houston who created fun activities that got everyone laughing and participating. All agreed it was a very entertaining, enjoyable evening and one they never want to miss.

Margaret Donnelly
Corpus Christi Catholic Church



How times have changed



I nearly died of measles when I was 3 or 4. My early years pre-dated the vaccine that is now given routinely to protect children from this and other such infections (such as diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, polio, hepatitis B, meningitis, septicaemia, pneumonia, rotavirus, mumps and German measles). One of my colleagues (now retired) had polio as a child. I was at school with a girl with no arms who could climb a rope in the gym when I (with both arms) absolutely could not.

I gave birth to three sons, have an adopted son, am a foster carer and have cared for twelve more babies and young children in the last six years. So it's not surprising, perhaps, that I am addicted to the series on BBC 'Call the Midwife' though I have to watch it alone in my house – it is not universally liked or appreciated! I expect all *Comment*

readers know that it is set in Poplar from 1957 and the current TV series is showing the year 1970. Watching it is heart-rending always but it also gives me a glimpse of life during the time of my childhood. My mother-in-law's family was brought up in Poplar, too, so somehow it feels as if it's giving me a glimpse of the context of their lives.

The series is written by Heidi Thomas who researches the health and social issues of the time in the British Newspaper and Medical Archives as well as having people come up to her in the street with their own childhood stories. It has covered poverty, racism, backstreet abortions, child loss and domestic abuse, babies born with birth defects because their mothers were given Thalidomide, cleft palates, fostering, adoption and Downs Syndrome... among others. It is set among people who know about neighbourliness, community, love and kindness and is centred on a faith community of nuns who are midwives and play a huge part in caring for the poorest people of East

London. The writer describes the stories as 'emotionally graphic' and I know I am not the only one who weeps at the story lines (sometimes for the good things that occur!). Even in the worst situations, there is hope and wisdom and the better side of human nature triumphs.

At the time of writing, my son James and his wife Hannah are about to become parents. Though young professionals and a far cry from my own parents and grandparents, they have been happy to receive a second-hand pram, Moses basket and many second-hand or home-knitted garments, just as their ancestors would have done. But nearly seventy years after his grandparents were born, their baby son will have more health benefits than we could have imagined. Watching 'Call the Midwife' made me realise just how fortunate our first grandchild will be, to be wanted, born into a loving family in a warm home, with all the support they will have.

Annette Reynolds
St Peter & St Paul

Tweet of the month



It is fair to say that 2024 was a quite different year for me compared to 2023. Overall, it was much better.

In 2023 I saw thirty new birds and 292 in 2024. However, in 2023 I saw eight new British birds, but in 2024 it was just one. Do I mind? No, not in the slightest. By the time I had been to Shetland and November was upon us, I really thought I wouldn't see anything new in Britain in 2024 as the likelihood tails off after October with fewer birds migrating by then. So, when a Scarlet Tanager was reported on the evening of 10 November in Shelf, West Yorkshire, I was surprised for several reasons. It was on the mainland and not on an island; it wasn't on the coast; it was in someone's garden; and, finally, it was about three weeks later than the previous latest Scarlet Tanager seen on 22 October in 2011.

Anyway, this bird generated a lot of debate due to its location and the date. Could it be a wild bird or had it escaped

from captivity? It was known to be a young male and would have to have been imported this year or born in Britain so the consensus was it was a wild bird and not an escapee. So, on the morning of 11 November, I optimistically headed to Shelf. When I got there, I decided to check out a local woodland as quite a few other people were congregating near the garden where it had been seen. After a fruitless but enjoyable walk around the woodland I returned to the favoured garden and met up with the friends I go to Shetland with. After waiting for some time, the Scarlet Tanager duly obliged and perched on top of a tree long enough for me to take photos of it. When it dropped out of sight, I headed home. Fortunately, I have seen Scarlet Tanager well in Canada and Central America and the photo is of a bird in Panama.

I was fortunate to see this bird as it was to prove elusive on subsequent days and was last seen on 13 November. This species breeds in North America and winters in Costa Rica, Panama and north-west South America; it was only the eighth to have been seen in Britain in the wild, so it could be a once-in-a-lifetime



chance for me to see one in Britain.

2023 taught me to seize opportunities to do good things when you can and not put them off without a very good reason: you don't know what's around the corner. As a Christian I feel that those things you do should include things that are good, either directly or indirectly, for other people and not just those things you enjoy yourself. Sometimes the things we do for others can give us a lot more pleasure than those we do for ourselves – so seize those chances when you can too.

Roy Hargreaves
St Peter & St Paul

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Christmas and New Year in Thailand



Thailand is primarily a Buddhist country, with around 85% of its population following the religion. As such, Christmas is not a traditional holiday in Thailand, but a working day.

The shopping areas are decked out with Christmas trees and near our hotel there was a singing Father Christmas, complete with a recording of 'winter wonderland', despite the fact that it never snows in Thailand.

Although Christmas is not recognised as a holiday here, Santa still makes a visit to all of the children. On the way back from Christmas Day English Mass at the Assumption Cathedral in Bangkok, we were surprised to see children dressed in Christmas costumes in their Buddhist school nearby, having an obviously wonderful Christmas party. It seems that children's Christmas activities in the schools are quite usual!

At the cathedral, I picked up a programme of the evening of music there had been the night before and was moved by the following uplifting piece designed to prepare our hearts and minds for the Christmas Mass:

Thankful

Some days, we forget to look around us, Some days, we can't see the joy that surrounds us.

So caught up inside ourselves, we take when we should give.

So, for tonight we pray for what we know can be.

And on this day we hope for what we still can't see.

It's up to us, to be the change, and even though we all can still do more, there's so much to be thankful for.

Look beyond ourselves, there's so much sorrow.

It's way too late to say, 'I'll cry tomorrow.' Each of us must find our truth, it's so long overdue.

So, for tonight we pray for what we know can be.

And ev'ryday we hope for what we still can't see.

It's up to us, to be the change, and even though we all can still do more, there's so much to be thankful for. Even with our differences, there is a place we're all connected.



Children in a Buddhist temple school, Bangkok, on Christmas Day 2024

Each of us can find each other's light. So, for tonight, we pray for what we know can be.

And on this day we hope for what we still can't see.

It's up to us, to be the change, And even though this world needs so much more, there's so much to be thankful for.

Jubilee 2025

On 29 December 2024, again in the Assumption Cathedral, we were privileged to attend a Mass celebrating the opening of the Jubilee Year 2025. In the Catholic church, a Jubilee Year, also known as a Holy Year, is celebrated every twenty-five years. The 2025 Jubilee Year began, when Pope Francis officially opened this Holy Year on Christmas Eve with the rite of opening the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. The theme for the 2025 Jubilee Year is 'Pilgrims of Hope'. It will be a year of hope for a world suffering the impacts of war, the ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis. The Mass attendees in Bangkok spilled out of the cathedral – there were so many! The bishop attended, and everyone was given a flag to wave and a candle to light. At the end everyone was given a meal in a box to take away with them – delicious!

New Year 2025

On 1 January 2025 here in Thailand the date officially became BE (Buddhist Era) 2568. The first year of the Thai calendar used to begin on 1 April, but was changed to 1 January in 1941. The Thai administration uses the Buddhist calendar. So, driving licences, employment contracts, bills etc. are all therefore dated with 543 more years. The three-day period from 30 December to 1 January is a national holiday. Despite a ban on fireworks and floating lanterns in Bangkok during the New Year countdown (to prevent fires), the city still allowed firework displays at certain locations this time.

On 13 April the first day of Songkran, Thai New Year, is marked by family members pouring water into their elders'

hands. They show their respect and receive their elders' blessing. On 14 April, the second day of Songkran, National Family Day is celebrated. This is the time when the whole family gathers at home or goes to the beach to enjoy Songkran in the family circle by the water. On the 15 April, the third day of Songkran, the celebrations take to the streets. Water pistols are available in the street and everywhere there are barrels of water to reload the pistols. It is a free for all and people take great delight in shooting water at one another. Even passing cars are likely to get fired at through the open windows! On one such day, Jum and I returned to our hotel absolutely soaked! I've mentioned the family activities which take place during Songkran to show how important the family is considered to be for most Thais. There is a high level of respect bestowed upon one's parents and the elderly of society. A sense of duty and respect towards the elderly is expected and Thai children are expected to look after their parents in their old age.

Michael Demidecki
Corpus Christi Church



Waiting outside Assumption Cathedral, Bangkok, for Mass celebrating the opening of the Jubilee Year 2025

Eco matters – in every sense



Churches of all denominations, being often large buildings visited by many individuals throughout the year, are recognising that they have a duty to 'Go Green'. This

is to play their part in tackling Climate Change, and working towards Climate Justice (where those who have caused so much of the damage to the environment can make positive choices to alleviate the difficulties visited on those people who have caused least damage – and who stand, sometimes, to lose everything, because of it).

A charity called A Rocha has drawn up guidelines for churches to work towards various levels of 'Eco Church' – bronze, silver and gold. (Polly Eaton and Nicky Bull have written about them before.) I am a member of the Tring Team Parish Eco Church Group. We have been looking at the Eco Church credentials of all five of the Anglican churches in our team and trying to identify ways to improve them.

One of the tasks we set ourselves last year, was to disseminate useful 'green' information to people who visit the

church, those who read our pewsheets online and readers of *Comment*. For all of us, there is so much information available about making choices that are better for the environment, and for biodiversity, that it is sometimes difficult to pick out practical changes we can make in our lives. We can feel overwhelmed, too, by the sheer scale of the challenge. But also, sometimes, we just resist changing our familiar practices when, actually, there are alternatives that could be so much more beneficial for the environment, with wins for us individually, too.

Since March last year, we have been putting 'Eco Matters' or 'Eco Tips' in the pewsheets. These have usually been short messages making suggestions about how we can make simple changes in our ways of living, and showing how these new choices could enhance our lives as well as our environment. Have you noticed any? Have you made any changes because of them? It would be really good to know if you have found them useful.

They have ranged from energy-saving tips, or coping with condensation, to wildlife-friendly advice and ideas for gardening sustainably. Some have been about our driving decisions, or choices we make about transport. We've made links with talks or events in the

town concerning sustainable flowers in containers without oasis, using local shops or fairtrade products, visiting special exhibitions at the Natural History Museum in Tring, or just giving tips that match the season (like using reusable ribbon at Christmas instead of sticky tape on parcels; or making 'Wignests' in apple trees to encourage – yes encourage – earwigs, who keep down woolly aphids.) We championed 'Make and Mend May' and 'Plastic-Free July' as well as publicising opportunities to observe and record wildlife (plants and animals). We even gave reminders about how to ensure your green bin would be collected and how to check you were registered to vote in the General Election. Then we pointed you towards some of the suggestions for questions to be raised with potential MPs, compiled by the Justice & Peace Group in Tring, in case they were also things you might be concerned about.

After all – all is not well with the world and changes must be made. But nothing changes if nothing changes!

What will next week's Eco Tip be? If you have suggestions or comments, please contact me and I will raise them with the Eco Church Group.

Anne Nobbs
St Peter & St Paul

Love to walk – walk for love



For the last two Septembers, I've decided to go on walks to raise funds for charity. In 2023, I spent a night walking a marathon around London for Cancer Research,

because my younger brother was so very ill with the disease. As I embarked on my 2024 sponsored walk, I was struggling with my emotions as he entered the final stages of his life, but walking is always a solace for me. This time, I was helping to raise funds for DENS (Dacorum Emergency Night Shelter) – a charity close to my heart – by taking part in their 'Castle Walk'.

A bright, sunny day dawned on 14 September, with the temperature just right. The walk started at Berkhamsted Castle, but took in Ashridge (Monument and House), Aldbury and, for part of

the time, was alongside the canal. It was meant to be a 10-mile walk, but I managed to go the wrong way and did a little detour for a while, so ended up doing more. I enjoyed the day so much, though. I choose to walk, rather than run, these days – partly for preservation of my joints, but mostly because the slower pace allows more time to take in beautiful surroundings.

Along the way, I met up with others who had stories to tell, or we would just encourage each other.

And, in all, I raised £891 for DENS, some of it online, but much from friends in church and this community. If you are one of them, thank you so much for your generosity.

And – if you have never taken part in a sponsored walk, consider this one in 2025 (date not yet set). It was very well run, in an extremely picturesque area and, while you need to prepare, you can take it at your own pace.

Malcolm Nobbs, St Peter & St Paul

COMMENT

The magazine of the Churches in Tring



Please submit your article to the Editor 4 weeks before the new month begins.

Aim for 500 or 1000 words and please send a head and shoulders colour photo or jpg and any other photos in high resolution.

Contact us at:
comment.magazine@gmail.com

Janani Luwum, 17 February



I really should have read the reviews... I don't know how it happened, but when I sat down in the cinema I thought I was there to see a comedy. Two

hours later I was horrified at what I had seen. Protected at the time it was happening because I was a child, I am ashamed that by 2006, when the film was released, I had not completely caught up on modern history. The film I had seen was 'The Last King of Scotland', a fictionalised account of the reign of the Ugandan despot, Idi Amin in the 1970s.

Idi Amin came to power during a coup d'etat in 1971 in which he overthrew Milton Obote as President. He ruled until 1979 and during that period it is estimated that between 300,000 and half a million Ugandans were murdered. Political repression, ethnic persecution and extra-judicial killings were commonplace.

Janani Luwum was born in 1922 in Acoli, Uganda. He spent his early years minding goats because his family

could not afford to send him to school. He began school at the age of 10 and went on to teacher training college. While teaching, Janani discovered his vocation and went on to be ordained priest in 1956. He was consecrated Bishop of Northern Uganda in 1969 and in 1974 he became Archbishop of Uganda.

At this time Anglican and Roman Catholic Church leaders in Uganda were working together with Ugandan Muslims to denounce the killings and the violence. Luwum warned that the church should stand against 'the powers of darkness'. Amin responded by ordering



an early morning raid on the archbishop's home, ostensibly to search for weapons, since he was accused of treason.

On 16 February 1977, Janani was publicly arraigned in a show trial and accused of smuggling arms. That day he spoke with a fellow bishop, saying that he knew that Amin was about to kill him and stated that he was not afraid.

The next morning it was announced that Janani had died in a car crash with two cabinet ministers. The official story was that one of the prisoners being transported tried to seize control of the vehicle causing it to crash, killing all the passengers; but all three bodies clearly showed evidence of gunshot wounds.

Janani Luwum is among the ten sculptures of 20th century martyrs that stand above the west door of Westminster Abbey.

Linzi James
St Peter & St Paul



The van Gogh Exhibition



This exhibition at The National Gallery was billed as a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity to see the most comprehensive showing of this artist's work. In total sixty-one

pieces were on show which supports this promise, including the sketches where he explores some of his most famous creations on paper first. The Gallery's narrative writes that this careful development of his creative ideas suggests that even in his most ill periods, he had great lucid intention, deliberation and ambition in his work.

My husband Paul and I met our niece, Maria, outside the National Gallery, where she is a member, on Friday 22 November. I was full of a cold but soldiered on to see this exhibition suitably clothed in a face mask and full of paracetamol. It was a treat that she had organised for us months ago and I did not want to let her down at the last minute if I could possibly help it.

I am not very knowledgeable about art although I know and could recognise several of Vincent van Gogh's works. The vast majority of the paintings I was not familiar with, so it was a wonderful opportunity to expand my knowledge. I thought that the crowds would make getting close to the painting impossible, but the gallery did an excellent job of limiting the numbers of people inside the exhibition. Everyone had easy access to the paintings and an opportunity to study them up close. Security, needless to say, was extremely tight and all visitor bags were searched and liquids removed.

It was interesting to see how the National Gallery grouped the sixty-one works into rooms. This was accompanied by a narrative that explained what was going on in Vincent's life at the time.

The exhibition is focused on the work that Vincent created when he lived in the South of France, in Arles and Saint-Remy-de-Provence. He was inspired by the landscapes and colourful individuals he encountered there.

My impression from the Exhibition



was that Vincent van Gogh's life was full of warmth and vibrant colour, despite the mental demons that plagued him. Standing up close to the paintings you can see the tiny dabs of paint that look busy and chaotic. It is only when you stand well back from the paintings and look at the bigger picture that you see the meaning and the beauty. Is this also true of Vincent van Gogh's life?

Margaret Donnelly
Corpus Christi Catholic Church

Everyone loves a church choir...



Well, the picture may be a bit unreal, but it serves to illustrate in the context of a church that a choir is a 'group of singers who perform together'. If you

are someone who attends St Peter & St Paul's Church, then you have probably noticed that the size of that 'group' has been gradually getting smaller. This has been happening for all sorts of different reasons as people's personal circumstances change and evolve. If we are to continue to have a viable choir in the parish church, we need to increase the size of the group. That means new members are needed. Might you be one of them?

The choir sings at the Sunday morning services each week (with the exception of the second Sunday of each month), and a handful of other 'special' occasions throughout the year when a



choir is good to have.

You do not have to be an 'expert' singer to join this group. You do not necessarily have to be able to read music – although it certainly helps if you can. Enthusiasm and regular attendance are probably the most important attributes. We do not have weekly choir rehearsals although we do have a handful, on Friday

evenings, prior to major festivals (Easter and Christmas mainly) and may have an occasional one here and there if there is something important to rehearse.

So, if you would like to join or find out more, then please get in touch with me at cliff.brown@tringchurchmusic.org.uk.

Cliff Brown
St Peter & St Paul



Tring School
second-hand uniform sale
in the upstairs room of Tring Parish Hall
(behind the parish church)

Tues 14th Jan, 7-8pm
Sun 26th Jan, 1-2pm
Tues 11 Feb, 7-8pm
Sun 16 Feb, 1-2pm
Tues 11 Mar, 7-8pm
Sun 23 Mar, 1-2pm
Tues 8 April, 7-8pm

Items are only £2 an item without a school logo,
or £5 with a logo

Contact Revd. Jane for more info
jane@tringteamparish.org.uk
or 01442 822170

Quiet Days past and future



Looking back

The Quiet Day on 23 November, led by the Revd Canon David Holloway, was again an opportunity for deep spiritual refreshment and encouragement. He emphasized the importance of the Christian discipline of regular quiet time to experience the presence of God. We will then know that God is

always with us and within us in good times and in bad times (even at the dentist!); or even, in Friar Lawrence's description, in the cacophony of heat and noise and the conflicting demands of a busy kitchen, as surely as when kneeling before the blessed sacrament.

Looking forward

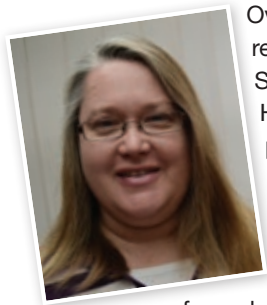
For the next Quiet Day on 8 February, we are looking forward to warmly welcoming the Very Revd Dean Jo Kelly Moore, Dean of St Albans, who will speak on 'Preparing for the Journey'. Dean Jo grew up in New Zealand and has a degree in Law. She came to England in 2017 and served in Canterbury before being appointed as our dean in 2021.

As usual, the day will open at 9.30am with the first talk at 10.00am. After a break, we will celebrate Holy Communion at 12.00 o'clock, followed by another talk in the afternoon.

You are recommended to book early for this very special day: contact.janet@tringteamparish.org.uk. All are welcome; there is no charge but donations to cover costs are invited.

Celestria Bell, St Peter & St Paul

Could we live without ‘the cloud’?



Over the summer, I read ‘The Second Sleep’ by Robert Harris. A young priest, Christopher Fairfax, must travel across the wilds of Exmoor to conduct a funeral. The blurb tells us: ‘He’s lost and he’s becoming anxious as he slowly picks his way across a countryside strewn with ancient artefacts of a civilisation that seems to have ended in cataclysm’.

The book was published in 2022 and at first glance seems to have been set in pre-industrial Britain. People ride on horseback and use candles and partake of something called ‘a second sleep’. According to research, up until the modern era, Western Europeans on most evenings experienced two major intervals of sleep. The first interval of slumber was usually referred to as ‘first sleep’, the succeeding interval was called ‘second’ or ‘morning’ sleep. Both phases lasted roughly the same length of time, with individuals waking sometime after midnight before returning to rest. During the waking time, people often rested or chatted, whilst some got up and tended to their gardens, or even did a spot of burglary.

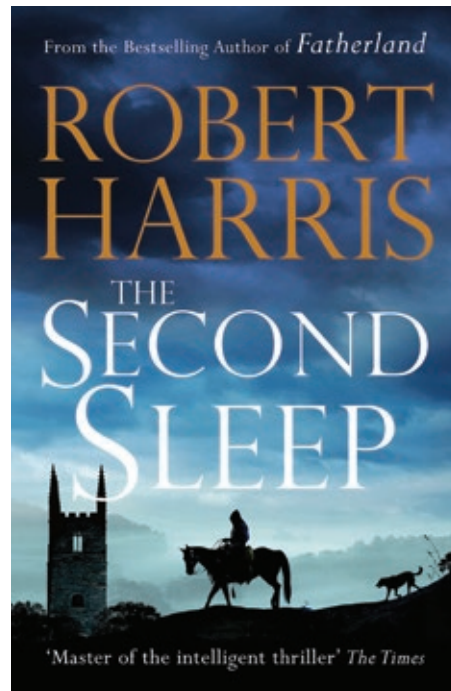
Initially, we are led to believe that the tale is set in the distant past, but by the end of the first few chapters, there are a few clues to challenge this. Fairfax discovers that some ancient artefacts are considered to be too dangerous for people to know about, and should have been destroyed – yet he finds many such artefacts in the home of the character that he has come to bury.

If you are interested in reading the book, I suggest you postpone reading the rest of the article, dash out and buy a copy, before resuming reading this, so I don’t spoil it for you.

The artefacts that Fairfax finds: ‘All of them it was illegal to possess: coins and plastic banknotes from the Elizabethan era... toy plastic bricks all fitted together of vibrant yellows and reds... and what seemed to be the pride of the collection: one of the devices used by the ancients to communicate... On the back was the ultimate symbol of the ancients’ hubris – an apple with a bite taken out of it.’

At this point, I had to flick back and

reread the previous chapters to make sense of it. Elizabethan clearly meant our modern society, as there was no plastic during the time of Elizabeth I. The other artefacts included Lego and the iPhone. It was then that I realised the book is set in 1485, but the Year of Our Risen Lord 1485. This book is set in the future, not the past.



To precis, Fairfax discovers that technology had been a significant cause of the cataclysmic event that occurred, resulting in the established church taking over, and banning anything from post-industrial society. Calendar time is reset, and the church label the year as the Year of our Risen Lord 1. 1484 years later, Fairfax makes his investigations. He discovers that there is no evidence to suggest the second coming of the Lord in the year 1, but that it was used by the established church to prevent people from knowing about their past.

Fairfax discovers that the people up to the end of 2022 (our times) suffered an issue with ‘the cloud’ and, as a result, normal society could no longer function. Society descends into chaos, into something resembling the Dark Ages, out of which the established church offers a solution, preventing any form of science so that technology cannot be invented again.

It was a real page-turner and offered much food for thought about how much we use and rely on technology. Most of us local to Tring will remember the impact of the glis glis in the summer of

2023, when the broadband cables were gnawed through, meaning around 10,000 homes and businesses had no internet for a few days. Businesses had to accept cash-only payments – how many of us carry cash nowadays?

During September 2024, the primary school where I teach suffered a loss of internet. Initially, we assumed it was ‘one of those things’ and that it would be back on again later that day, and certainly by the following day. It wasn’t. We were without the internet for eight working days.

Teaching and the systems we use have changed considerably, and whereas twenty years ago we would not have been able to check our emails or show a film clip, most of our resources would have been available. Nowadays, almost everything is online. The register, all our slide decks, resources, even our planning is often now online. We no longer use text books as it is easier and more sustainable to show a slide with key questions than it is to photocopy multiple copies of a resource in colour. At times we use Google Classroom which means the pupils can access and respond to sources digitally, saving both time and paper. Pupils have subscriptions to online resources such as maths and spelling quizzes, all accessed by their Chrome books, which rely on the internet to work.

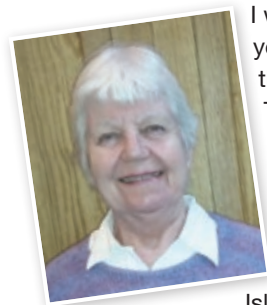
As this internet problem was localised, it meant we were able to go home and prepare and save work on a memory stick for use the following day, which helped us work around some of the issues.

We all noticed that people seemed to forget to what an extent we use the internet. Although people said they understood, they still sent emails and expected an immediate response; and those of us who were due to have online training found it difficult to make the course providers accept that no matter how many times they re-sent a link for Zoom, we would not be able to access it.

The internet is a marvellous invention and it makes life a lot easier and smoother for us in so many ways. It does make me wonder, as a society, how far away we are from not being able to function if we, too, were to suffer an issue with ‘the cloud’.

Gill Kinsey
St Peter & St Paul

The World Day of Prayer 7 March 2025



I wonder how much you know about the Cook Islands? They are a tiny island nation lying in the centre of the Polynesian Triangle between Tonga and Samoa Islands. Land mass is about two thirds of the Isle of Wight but the surrounding sea forms part of the island’s economic zone, giving an area seven times larger than New Zealand. The islands are self-governing in free association with New Zealand. The Cook

Islands had their own ancient religion prior to missionaries arriving in 1821 and, nowadays, the islanders have preserved their Polynesian heritage and blended it with their Christian faith. Approximately 84.2% of the population identify with one of the major Christian denominations in the islands.

It was to these people The World Day of Prayer committee assigned the text ‘I made you wonderful’. The service this year, therefore, is based on Psalm 139. At one point in the service, we greet each other, not with the words of the peace, but with the words ‘Kia orana! God made you wonderful!’. It is a beautiful service of

appreciation for what God has made us to be.

Many of you will know that the World Day of Prayer service is written by women but open to everyone. It tracks around the world, so that the whole day is marked by some group somewhere celebrating the theme. The service is held on 7 March, the first Friday in March. The time and place need to be confirmed, but you will know about them through posters and church notices.

I hope you will find time to come and join in to celebrate with joy that God has made each one of us all wonderful!

Jill Smith, WDP Organising Committee

What to make of Makin?



I spent a number of the grey hours of December 2024 reading the ‘Independent Learning Lessons Review – John Smyth QC’ otherwise known as the Makin review.

It’s shameful that Smyth was never brought to trial, and so the review includes a very long catalogue of allegations. It is clear from the weight of them that Smyth used his privileged position, including being a lay reader in the Church of England, to groom teenage boys for abuse. He beat them ferociously, while they (and it seems, he too) were naked, under the guise of Christian nurturing.

The real scandal is that his abuse was known about by the early 1980s and yet he was allowed (maybe encouraged) to go abroad – to Zimbabwe and then South Africa – and

continue his ministry and abuse. It took a Channel 4 programme in 2017 to focus the minds of the church; all too similar to the Post Office scandal. The Makin review, set up after Smyth’s death in 2018, has a very long list of recommendations, the key lesson being that all of us are responsible for safeguarding.

I have to wonder whether the church will really change. It seems that the root cause of the inaction about Smyth, and persistent covering up of allegations about him, is a lack of diversity. There have been too many men from the same privileged background and shared assumptions, with an inclination not to be curious about possible misdeeds by one of them. The crucial lack of diversity, of course, is the second-class status of women at all levels, even when they are designated as bishops. If there had been women in positions of responsibility in the camps – rather than just making the tea – I hope that they would have made sure that questions

were asked, and followed up, about John Smyth’s activities. It is interesting, and shameful, that only the Bishop of Newcastle, Helen-Ann Hartley, is brave enough to call for senior clerics to face up to their failings. Our own Bishop’s response seems distinctly lukewarm – ‘we must all try harder...’.

I have been inclined to think that diversity is good, in itself. It becomes ever clearer that lack of diversity leads to a dysfunctional church which fails victims of abuse. The victims deserve much better; indeed, the members of the church deserve better. It is our duty to play our part in ensuring that the Makin review does not get put on a shelf and left to collect dust.

Certainly, the most important and symbolic change which the church could affect quickly is to make the investigation of safeguarding allegations a truly independent activity.

John Whiteman
Tring Team Parish

News from the Bell Tower



Here in the Bell Tower at St Peter & St Paul’s Church, we are looking forward to another exciting year of the delightful and skilful practice of bell ringing where there’s always something new to be learnt at whatever skill level you are.

Among other things, bell ringing

marks the passage of time; and each New Year’s Eve we ring out the old year and on the stroke of midnight, we ring in the New Year, when all the bells lift up their loud, joyful voices in peals of welcome! As Alfred Lord Tennyson puts it so well:

*Ring out wild bells to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light,
The year is dying in the night
Ring out wild bells and let it die!
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.*

If you would like to come and watch the bells being rung for a Sunday morning service, you are very welcome. Just let our Tower Captain, Philip, know that you are coming via <https://tringbells.org/contact/>. He will look out for you at the foot of the tower stairs at 9.20am that day.

Happy New Year!
Johanna Morgan
Tring Bell Tower

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adverts for the next edition
should arrive with the Editor
no later than the 1st of the
previous month.

COMMENT DEADLINES

1 January
1 February
1 March
1 April
1 May
1 June
1 August
1 September
1 October
1 November

NB There is no magazine for
January or August

DENS High Needs List

Your donations can be dropped off
in the Parish Church

| | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Tinned ham | Christmas selection packs |
| Tinned corned beef | Chocolate |
| Sponge puddings | Custard |
| Tinned rice pudding | Nuts |
| Tinned fruit | Gravy (small) |
| Long life milk | Roasting trays (large) |
| Long life juice/squash | Kitchen foil |
| Tinned potatoes | Deodorants |
| Tinned vegetables | Laundry liquid/tabs/powder (small) |
| Tinned fish | |
| Biscuits | 2-in-1 shampoo |

High Street Baptist Church - Tring

Growing in the message and challenge of God



For details of our
services, junior church,
prayer meetings, and
special events visit our
website.



Sunday
MORNING WORSHIP
EVERY SUNDAY
10.30AM
IN PERSON AND
ON ZOOM
Meeting ID:
978 9592 0392
Passcode:
highstreet



Coffee for a cause
Tuesdays 10am-12 Noon

Fairtrade tea, coffee and homemade cake.
Proceeds toward BMS World Mission.

**Seniors Games
Afternoon**
Wednesdays 2 - 4pm
High Street Baptist Church, Tring

Baby Group
Tuesdays 10.30am - 12 Noon

For new born and non-movers

Tots
Wednesdays 9.30 - 11.30am
Indoor fun for toddlers

HP23 Youth Group
Mondays 6.30 - 7.45pm
For young people in Year 7 and above

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Revd Ruth Egan

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tringbaptistchurch



High Street Baptist Church



The Heart of Tring's Heritage

It's our town, it's our heritage, it's our choice.

Over the Centuries the good people of Tring have kept the splendid medieval masterpiece at the heart of our town standing tall and strong.

Right now there are urgent works we need to get done. Previous generations have generously met the challenge of constant maintenance.

Now it's our turn to build back for the future



Preserving the Heart of Tring for Everyone's Future