

COMMENT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCHES IN TRING

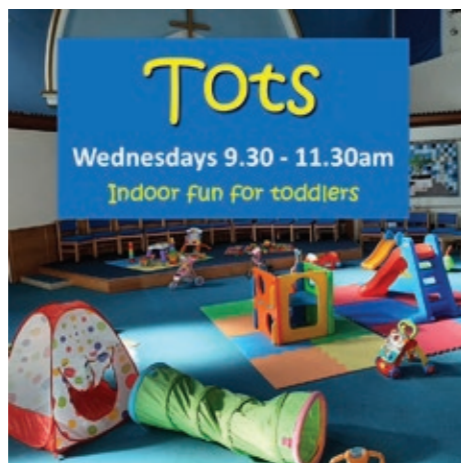


High Street Baptist Church - Tring

Growing in the message and challenge of God



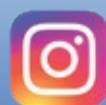
For details about our services, prayer meetings and special events visit our website.



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High Street Baptist Church

Bigger and better?



Does everything always have to be bigger and better? How many people came to church last Christmas? Oh, excellent! Three more than the year before. How many jars of marmalade did we sell at the Lent stall last year – do you think we can increase it this year?

It is so very easy to fall into this trap. We are in an unusual economic climate at the moment. Rather than getting progressively richer, we are seeing an actual fall in living standards. Rather than getting bigger and better, we are getting poorer. On one level

one might argue that this is actually a good thing – we have far too much and always wanting more is a simple recipe to destroy our planet ever more quickly. However, the real problem of not seeing affluence grow is that those at the bottom of the heap get poorer more quickly.

At the end of 2022, the Church Times reported on a poll commissioned by the Church of England. The cost-of-living crisis has driven a total of almost 40 per cent of UK adults to seek help, with food at the top of the list of needs.

Of the 2,061 adults surveyed by Savanta from 9-12 December, 38 per cent said they had sought help of some kind, and 5 per cent (the population equivalent of about 2.6 million people) had turned to churches or other

religious organisations for support. Of this group, two-thirds said that they had received free food or groceries from a foodbank or a similar provision; half had received low-cost food or groceries or hot food; 40 per cent said they had been provided with warm spaces.

As we approach Lent, we will once more be invited to think about fasting. We are seriously challenged to think about the ways in which we lead our lives, not least our natural desire to get bigger and better. In place of this we are asked to think how we place God at the centre of our lives and, through fasting and other spiritual disciplines, we are asked how we should now live in the face of climate and environmental crises.

Huw Bellis, Tring Team

'Be still, and know that I am God'

I was recently handed a copy of the 'Tring Rural Parish News'. This was the local monthly news for Long Marston, Puttenham and Wilstone. Our team vicar at the time was the Revd Paul Wilson and he wrote this piece for the August 1987 issue. I thought it stood the test of time...

Christine Rutter
St Mary's Puttenham

At this time of the year, our thoughts, not unnaturally, turn to relaxation and to fun. We all recognize how important such times are, times when we can turn aside from the busyness of our daily living to recuperate and recover from the wear and tear of the past few months.

Busyness is something we all get caught up in, isn't it? We find that we are trying to stretch ourselves around endless tasks and functions, wishing the day had many more hours in it – even if it had, we still wouldn't have enough time, would we? The trouble is, that as we go on doing this, we get overstretched; overrun; plain worn out. It's good therefore for each of us to try to make a little time each day to just be quiet; to somehow just let the stresses and strains of the past twenty-four hours drain away, to replenish our lives so that we are strengthened afresh to go on.

The trouble with our society today is that often people are considered to be idling their time away if they do just this for a minute or two – but you know that

really isn't true. Care of the whole person is essential to balanced lifestyle. If we overeat, we usually take steps to put this right. If we are overweight, we often seek to change our routines and habits to remedy this. But how often do we ignore the extremely important task of listening quietly to what is happening to the real person deep down inside us? How often do we relax our tired bodies; our taut minds; our overstretched spirits?

Many people today are frightened of silence. We are afraid to face what may come up into our conscious minds from our deep inner being. Busyness can easily become a barrier – a form of ignoring or denying what we really feel – so in the end we switch off. We deny ourselves as people – as a person, an individual, very precious person. Why is this? Can it be because we perhaps either don't like ourselves very much already, or we think that if we do look at ourselves too deeply, we may not be too enchanted with what we might discover. If we put ourselves down, it often leads to us putting others down and relationships get messed up as a consequence.

Did you know that you are a precious, special, unique person? God designed that we should be that way, and part of the way we can most fully grow into that realization is to take time out regularly to actually just listen to God. As we do that, we find that God provides the resources we need to grow and develop to all the potential and possibility that is there in us.

Today, many people are keen to try meditation, but don't know how to go about it. You may be such a person. You may not have realized that the Christian church down through the centuries has developed many ways to help us meditate. It might be that you would like help. Do speak to one of the clergy team if this is you.

May God bless each one of you.
Paul E. Wilson, now deceased

An epiphany prayer

*Gracious and all loving God,
you call to us across deep waters and dark places.
Yours is the light which guides us
and the voice which we follow.
We pray that you would reveal yourself to us as we worship you.
May those without hope be encouraged;
those who are sad, cheered;
those who are seeking, find you;
and may all things be according to your will.
In the name of your beloved Son we pray.
Amen.*

Thank you, Tring!



Thank you, Tring, for coming out in your thousands to enjoy the Tring Together Christmas Festival at the end of November. As is often the case with Tring

events, the Christmas Festival punches above its weight for the size of our town and I think we can all feel a little bit proud because everyone seems to have been involved in one way or another.

Just scanning round the 'church people' who helped make the night very special, I have a massive list of people to thank.

The churches of Tring pulled out all the stops to create a loud Christian Christmas message to cut through the candy floss and the hot dogs. THANK YOU!

There were lots of lovely dancers on the main stage, and the Julie Morton School of Dancing are the group based in the Parish Hall. If you look closely at their photo, you'll see someone in the second row who is a regular at 10.00am services. THANK YOU!



There are 120 volunteers that make the Christmas Festival happen: from delivering the event guides to every house in Tring, stewarding the car park on the night to serving mulled wine to raise money to pay for the reindeer. You know who

Tring Park School for the Performing Arts were involved in the music making, both on the main stage, but also on the Radleigh stage in Frogmore Street. THANK YOU!

The bellringers welcomed the stall holders to Tring by ringing the church bells. Surely, that must be unique to Tring? THANK YOU!

Tring School made sure that young musicians dominated the Tring Music Partnership main stage. The Swing Band and QuoteBook brought a large fan-base of followers and they have already been talent-scouted to play at the Summer Carnival in 2023. THANK YOU!

Local Primary Schools, Bishop Wood, Dundale, and Little Gaddesdon, wowed capacity audiences in St Peter & St Paul. They were part of the largest number of performers that have ever played on Xmas Festival night. THANK YOU!

All the music this year was curated by Tring Music Partnership, led by Robin Schafer and Trish Dowden. THANK YOU!

Father and Mrs Christmas were close friends of Linzi and Tim James. They were on duty in the Memorial Gardens for five hours without a break. And they didn't panic when Santa's grotto deflated on top of them. THANK YOU!



you are, and you are much appreciated. THANK YOU!

Finally, looking at the Sextet of wonderful people behind the Festival, I am chuffed to notice that four were married in St Peter & St Paul, four were baptised there, two work there and they all volunteered to help at the Queen's Jubilee. (I'll let you work out which ones did what.) I wonder if they have any plans for the Coronation?

A message from the Tring Together Event Team: 'Please put Saturday 25 November 2023 in your diaries for the 30th Birthday Christmas Festival. And, while you're there, Saturday 15 July is the date for the Summer Carnival'.

Vivianne Child
Tring Together & Tring Team Parish
Steffi Buse, Ben Cartwright, Robert Cartwright, Peter Child, Trish Dowden



The joyful environmentalist



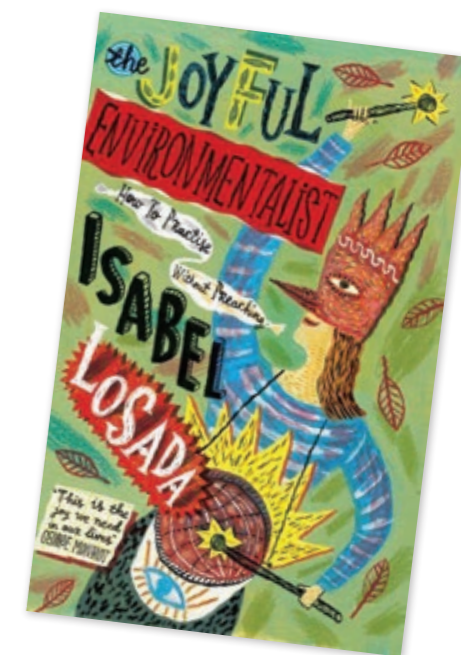
Isabel Losada is an engaging and uninhibited author; look up her 'Sensation' if you wonder what this means, and don't mind being embarrassed.

She writes what is described as narrative nonfiction and her latest book is an exploration of what an ordinary person (well, a middle-class one living in a rich country) can do about climate change. The subtitle is 'how to practise without preaching'. We (the parish book group) chose this for our session in January 2023, as a sort of sequel to the Tenants of the King course which a number of us have been following. The Tenants course left a number of its participants keen to do more, but unsure how to make a difference and whether any individual efforts are worthwhile.

'The Joyful Environmentalist' is a light-hearted but serious exploration of 'every single way that I can help

the planet'. It's not about the science (although there's a piece about the funding of climate change deniers...). It is about the whole range of possibilities for you and me to change, from cutting down on plastic use at home (literally '36 Steps for Starters') to 'When Buying New Clothes is a Good Idea' (hint, it depends where they are made, and how, and by whom). The book includes quite a long narrative of Losada's experiences joining in with an Extinction Rebellion protest, a detailed contrast with e.g. The Daily Mail's version of these interventions. She's realistic and humble too: 'An environmentalist going on a long flight halfway across the world to take a holiday in Sri Lanka just doesn't sit well'. But her account of trying to fly without using anything plastic is both funny and sad.

I'm writing this before the Book Group session and so can't say what other people have made of the book, but Isabel Losada's general approach is appealing: 'if we all live simply and don't buy rubbish we don't need, that would be a step in the right direction. We have been told that consumerism leads to happiness. We're



told it every day but we all know it isn't true.'

During Lent the book group is reading 'Dr Zhivago', and we'll be discussing it on a sunny evening in April (we hope!) – Sunday 16 April from 6.30pm in St Peter & St Paul. Get in touch for more details.

John Whiteman
Tring Team

Piano & more series

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piano-and-more.org.uk
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NEW for 2023!



In 2023, Piano & More are starting a new initiative to showcase young artists in some of the concerts.

In January we welcomed Alice Dille, a student at the Royal Academy of Music studying clarinet performance. Madeleine Murray, a cellist in Year 11 at Berkhamsted School, who is a member of the National Youth

Orchestra, will play in March.

There will be plenty of other Piano & More concerts too, as ever, and we look forward to seeing many people at these popular events!

Anna Le Hair, St Peter & St Paul

Jane Ducklin
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Help vulnerable people through the winter

Local charity DENS have launched an appeal asking for financial support this winter to help save lives.

The charity, who support local people facing homelessness and food poverty, has seen a 54% increase in the number of people needing emergency food parcels. With the rise in the cost of living, and the freezing temperatures, demand on this service will almost certainly increase.

Now more than ever, many local vulnerable people are facing difficult choices, but DENS can be there, with the help of the local community. DENS is asking for donations to help save the lives of people like Chloe, this winter.

Chloe's life was in crisis. Her desperate situation was turned around after she received a food parcel to feed herself and her mum. She was forced to flee her home with her elderly mother in order to escape a violent ex-partner. With finances stretched to the limit due to rocketing energy bills, it was impossible to make ends meet. After receiving a food parcel Chloe says, 'It's taken my life from being desperate to now feeling a sense of gratitude and that there's somewhere that will take care of us.' Your support is the reason that people like Chloe can get help.

DENS can provide emergency food parcels, temporary accommodation, and

specialist advice and support to help the community get through these difficult times.

By giving a gift today, DENS can continue to provide support for families and individuals to help them keep warm, safe and fed this winter.

Please donate now at www.dens.org.uk/winter-appeal and help rebuild the lives of vulnerable people in Dacorum.

If you are concerned about a rough sleeper in Dacorum, please call DENS on 01442 800131. Alternatively, call Dacorum Borough Council on 01442 228000 or visit www.streetlink.org.uk.

Alex Copley
DENS

Tring Sleepout 2022



Just as the weather began to get cold at the end of last year, The Tring Team Youth Café embarked on their annual Sleepout for DENS.

This year we took eight kids from Year 8 to Year 12 and we were three adults accompanying them. Sadly, it clashed with some scouting events so our numbers were a little lower. It was also

at a new location: Hobbs Hill Wood Primary School in Leverstock Green. This meant we had relative luxury, the school playground being divided into lots of different zones so we had a small flat area to ourselves. On arrival our youth disappeared inside for the silent disco. Afra and Rachel also excelled in some 'mum dancing' so I was left outside to read my book.

The kids were surprisingly calm this year and by midnight all had bedded down. Overall attendance was down by about 50% - DENS think that the

cost-of-living crisis is putting people off fundraising and asking family and friends for sponsorship.

It was blissfully dry overnight. Some of our younger members were up at 6.00am to play football but, by the time I awoke, practically every other group had left and I had to rush to get a bacon sandwich before the kitchens closed.

As ever, one remains incredibly proud of our Youth Café kids. They are an amazing group and once again raised a huge amount for DENS.

Huw Bellis, Tring Team

COMMENT

The magazine of the Churches in Tring



Please submit your article to the Editor by the 1st of the month.

Aim for 400 or 800 words and please send a head and shoulders colour photo or jpg and any other photos in high resolution.

Contact comment.magazine@gmail.com

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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

DENS supporters brave a cold night outside for the Sleepout

At the end of November, over 100 local people endured a winter's night outside on the cold, hard ground for the DENS Sponsored Sleepout.

Friends, families, businesses and groups from around the community came together at Hobbs Hill Wood Primary School, or their homes and offices, to share the experience of sleeping rough in support of the charity.

The hugely successful event has so far raised over an incredible £31,000 – with every penny helping local, vulnerable individuals and families facing homelessness and poverty.

The night kicked off in style with a screening of the England vs USA football match, before attendees had fun dancing at a glow silent disco.

Participants, wrapped up in thick layers and sleeping bags, then braved a humbling night sleeping under the stars with only cardboard boxes for shelter, kindly provided by local removal company, JamVans. Hot drinks served up by DENS' social enterprise, the Coffee Project, helped to keep participants warm.

In the morning, participants celebrated their fantastic achievement



with a well-deserved breakfast generously provided by the local Rapid Relief Team.

Imagination Technologies, the semiconductor company based in Kings Langley, kindly sponsored the event.

Nicky Maxwell-Braithwaite, Corporate & Community Fundraising Manager at DENS, said: 'Thank you to everyone who took part in the Sleepout, and all our supporters who were key in making the

event a big success. We are so grateful for the incredible total raised, which is more important than ever as our services face unprecedented demand during these difficult times.'

Donations can still be made towards the event by visiting: www.dens.org.uk/sleepout-donations.

Alex Copley
DENS



What do we do with evil?



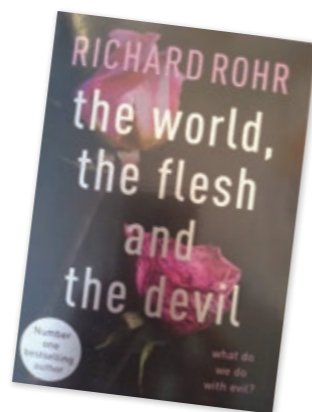
This is the engaging subtitle of a brief book by Richard Rohr. The main title is 'the world, the flesh and the devil' (all lower-case in the version I read, but never mind). Rohr's

argument is that we focus too much on 'the flesh' – personal misdemeanours as defined by our particular denomination, like regular attendance at Mass (Rohr is a Catholic). We neglect 'the world' – serious injustices built into the way we live – and have tamed 'the devil' by imagining a fairy tale red figure with horns and a tail, wielding a trident. For Rohr, evil is frequently corporate or institutional, and individuals may be trapped by the community or society in which they live. Rohr criticises evangelicals for excessive focus on personal salvation and neglect

of systematic injustices, and liberals for focusing just on those injustices in society and being in denial about personal fault.

Rohr's writings, and this book in particular, seem very relevant as we think about and discuss climate change, where powerlessness can be our frequent feeling. Some of his solutions are a bit high-flown for an analyst like me – 'third force thinking' – but he is very clear that our mission is to improve the world without losing hope because we cannot make it perfect. Rohr is a prolific writer, a Franciscan friar now based in New Mexico.

The Parish Book Group had a lively discussion of Rohr's book in a winter session (we were cosy at home, meeting via Zoom). Some of us were rather put off by what we saw as Rohr's rather verbose and pompous style; some felt that his essential message was valuable, namely that we should focus on progress



by looking at disagreements openly and arriving at a compromise; that perspective is explored in another article in *Comment*.

The Book Group doesn't meet during Lent, but we are reading our annual classic, this time 'Dr Zhivago', and we'll meet in person on Sunday 16 April. We are a friendly and informal group, often with diverse opinions about what we are reading, but pleased to learn from books and from each other. All are welcome.

**John Whiteman
Tring Team**

Books



The other day I had a realisation that scared me – I realised that I was not going to live long enough to read everything that I want to read. Even if I

stopped work, and never went out again, there would not be enough time.

Reading is one of the great joys in my life: I cannot remember learning how to read, and I have always loved it. Books, magazines, backs of cereal packets, all are there to be read. My family laugh at me as if I see a bench with a plaque on, then I have to stop to read it. I have been known to read while walking (only where there is a clear pavement – I am not a complete idiot). The pile of books by my bed waiting to be read has got so big that I now have a bookcase instead of a bedside table.

What to read next is always a big question: browsing the shelves in the library or at home or in other people's houses is always fruitful, as are book reviews. A tutor at theological college gave us the advice that looking at book reviews was always a very good way of keeping up with current trends in theology – at least you will know what has been published even if you

never get around to reading the books. Mainstream newspaper reviews are always good for a wide selection of books, and then there are the specialist papers. We have the Church Times and the Tablet, which is the Roman Catholic weekly publication and has a very international viewpoint. Both of those are great for theology, spirituality, history and poetry. They are weekly publications, and they add to the list of things to read each week, but like many magazines, they are available online if you don't want more paper cluttering up the house.

Bookclubs are also a great place, not only to read books that one might not otherwise try, and also to discuss them as well, as there is great joy in being with others who love reading as much as I do. Many people are part of book clubs, but some do work better than others at actually discussing the book. Over the last year, I have been going to a book club called The Reading Room, run by Dr Pippa Chappell, an English teacher and editor, who is wonderful at guiding us through the books, and pointing out things that we might well have missed. We have also read books in pairs, such as 'Mrs Dalloway' and 'The Hours', 'Jane Eyre' and 'The Wide Sargasso Sea'. This book club is run once a month, and there is a fee, and it is well worth it.

I still prefer reading books in paper format, but do some reading online. The library has a service called BorrowBox so that you can borrow without going into the library. It is a bit of an interesting selection of books, but very good for detective novels and mainstream fiction, along with modern autobiographies. I have also discovered Project Gutenberg, which is the most incredible source of old and more obscure literature.

The radio, of course, is also a great source of new ideas for reading, whether through review programmes, book of the week, serials etc. Lots of us will remember getting listening books out of the library on tape or CD, which has now been superseded by subscriptions such as Audible from Amazon, or streaming services such as Spotify. The fact that there are so many more ways of finding things to read just feeds my anxiety about never getting round to reading all that I want to.

I am a fan of poetry and short stories: they save me from having to remember plotlines if I can read a complete item in one go, and also work well before bedtime, when closing eyes can stop the ability to read, if not the wish.

Now, where did I put today's book...?

Jane Banister, Tring Team

A tsunami of need



Food inflation hit a record high of 16.4% in the twelve months to October 2022. The price of basic foods like milk, cheese and eggs has risen by more than 27% compared with a year

earlier (ONS).

The Resolution Foundation, a thinktank that focuses on issues affecting low- and middle-income families, said inflation was hitting the poor hardest. 'As lower-income households spend more of their budgets on energy bills and food their effective inflation rate is higher than average,' it said.

At Youth Concern, an independent charity that supports vulnerable 13-25 year olds across Aylesbury Vale, we have been aware of the effects of the rising cost of living for many months. In December 2022 we experienced a tsunami of need in the number of young people needing help.

Compared to the same quarter last year:

- 183% more 13-25 year olds are visiting our Drop-in Centre
- 983% more have asked for help with budgeting and benefits (that's a staggering 253 young people, up from 26 young people January to March 2021)
- 1027% more 13-25 year olds are eating a hot meal with us – and 880% more young people have taken food or care parcels (eg soap and sanitary products)

We have experienced a tenfold increase in the number of young people accessing our services; from emotional support to budgeting and benefits advice. And unsurprisingly we have seen the biggest increase in demand for food, both freshly cooked meals at our Drop-In Centre and food and care parcels.

To meet this increasing demand, in November we scaled up our offer to become Aylesbury Vale's first ever Youth Food Bank. Staffed Tuesday to Saturday, we will also be offering support in meal planning, food shopping and cooking, as well as food and care parcels.

Guests were moved to hear first-hand the experiences of a local young person who has been supported through tough times, including food poverty, by



Youth Concern. Ali, aged 19, has been using Youth Concern's services for a few months. He's struggling to make ends meet: 'I'm actually OK at budgeting but it's hard to make the money stretch. A homecooked meal and a food parcel to take away – it helps me get to the end of the week.'

Cllr Steve Lambert, Youth Concern's Community Ambassador said 'Youth Concern, and in particular this initiative, are deeply personal to me as I was a child growing up in food poverty, who would have benefited greatly from the support of this charity.'



Cllr Dev Dhillon, Chairman of Buckinghamshire Council, commented on how sad it was that there is such need for a youth food bank in this day and age. He expressed his gratitude to Youth Concern and all who support the vital work we do.

We would be incredibly grateful for food donations – dried goods like pasta and sauces and personal hygiene products like shower gel and toothpaste. They can be delivered to our Drop-in Centre – the home of the youth food bank – Tuesday-Saturday 12.00-5.00pm.

We are also grateful to people who support our work financially. Donations can be made here: <https://www.givey.com/youthconcern>

**Hannah Asquith, Tring resident
CEO of Youth Concern**



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100 Years of Auntie Beeb



I was very interested to read Pam Russell's piece on 100 Years of the BBC in the December edition of *Comment* which brought back many memories.

One of my earliest memories of 'the wireless' was crowding around it on 3 September 1939 to hear the announcement of war. Then, in the summer of 1940 we were on holiday in St Annes during The Battle of Britain, and everyone hurried back to the hotel to hear the One O'clock News. To this day, the ponderous notes of Big Ben preceding the News makes my stomach turn over.

On the subject of the News, the

custom of the announcer giving his name was introduced then for the first time, in the hope that listeners might spot the difference if an interloper attempted to step in. We soon recognised them all instantly, from the measured tones of Alvar Liddell and John Snagge to the homely voice of Wilfred Pickles.

I also remember Uncle Mac, though I liked him. He ended each programme by saying, 'Goodnight children, everywhere.' (In my children's time it was Blue Peter, The Wooden Tops and Andy Pandy.)

Then there was 'Itma' and 'Take it from Here' and 'Round the Horn' and 'Much-binding-in-the-Marsh' and countless other shows we were anxious not to miss. There were also the music programmes, 'Henry Hall's Guest Night',

'Albert Sandler and his Palm Court Orchestra' and 'Victor Sylvester', who taught us all to dance.

Sunday lunches wouldn't have been the same without 'Two-way Family Favourites', hosted by Cliff Michelmore in Hamburg with the British forces and Jean Metcalfe in London, the programme that led to their marrying.

Pam's mention of Tony Hatch reminds me that he and his wife Jackie Trent lived just along the road from us; and my 9-year-old daughter interviewed Jackie for a school project!

So many memories, and those only take me up to the 60s! But no doubt later ones will be shared by many readers of *Comment*. Thank you, Pam, for bringing them all back.

Anthea Fraser
St Peter & St Paul

What do we do with evil?



Richard Rohr's book 'The World, the Flesh and the Devil' was chosen for the Tring Team Parish Book Club's November 2022 discussion, which nine of us attended on Zoom as is our habit in the winter months. Fr Richard is a Franciscan priest of the New Mexico province and an internationally recognised author. You can read more about him here: <https://cac.org/about/our-teachers/richard-rohr>.

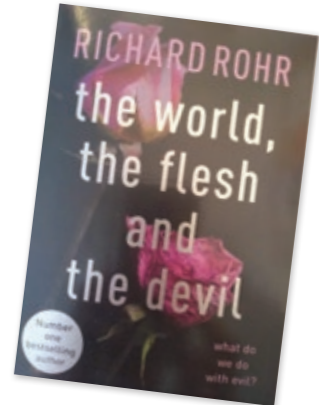
In these increasingly violent and disturbed times, I was attracted to the book by its title and hoped that it might spread more light for me on how individual Christians (and others with a peacekeeping outlook) might seek to contribute to peaceful coexistence in the world that God created and for which Jesus died.

Richard begins by offering more clarity about what we have traditionally

called 'sin'. Generally, church teaching focuses on the things the individual does that are 'sinful' but which are forgivable i.e. those that flout rules set up by the church itself about behaviour and observance. They're trivial when measured against real sin, which is evil, and prevails in the local and international organisations that we unthinkingly rely on to make things, buy things, be profitable, keep us safe and which are the foundations of governments, businesses, organisations that make this world as it is.

This worldwide sin may never be overcome, Fr Richard suggests, even at the end of time, but in the meantime, the Church and other influential organisations worldwide may lessen the impact of evil on people, populations and countries, by leading discussion on all earthlings' common needs and their solutions to achieving them to common advantage.

Fr Richard advocates a three-stage approach: Holy Affirming, which opens each new idea to investigation; Holy Denying, in which both sides accept or



reject the idea; Holy Reconciling, in which Hope, Grace, Divine Providence, Luck, Synchronicity, Chance or Timing, may cause the differing sides to move towards agreement and mutual benefit.

This may take years, decades and generations to achieve. With the grace of God and a newfound goodwill within the humanity that he created, God's vision can be achieved. Fr Richard describes 'Holy Affirming', 'Holy Denying' and 'Holy Reconciling' as the steps to be taken. I'd describe the process as 'Worldwide Benefit Through Agreed Compromise'.

Jeremy Buckman,
St Mary's, Puttenham

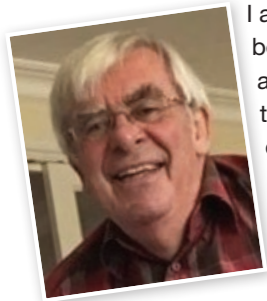
Parish registers

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

George Bateson 90
Raymond Casemore 89
Roy Tomlin 87
Andrew Yeomans 67

Pat Jackson 90
June Spark 86
Hazel Smith

Is life a chaotic unmanageable mess?



I am writing this between Christmas and new year – that time when we set out with those good intentions to redeem our spare time by doing some serious reading, taking up a new hobby and improving our fitness. You will probably be reading this article at the beginning of February, and I will present a gentle challenge and ask how those resolutions are working out in practice?

Perhaps it is timely to consider how we can use God's own words to help us start afresh and review the truths and realities of our life as we look forward to God's plan and purpose for us. We may have already given up on those resolutions which were formed from our own aspirations and expectations, rather than anything which comes from the heart of God.

And at the heart of God is the reality of those simple but profound commandments which Jesus summarised in answer to the lawyer's trick question: 'You shall love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.'

Jesus took the decalogue, the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses, as an absolute datum of the truths and realities he presents us with in our relationships with him and one another and summarised them into those two absolute commands: 'Love God and love one another.' How simple, but paradoxically, how difficult to live out that reality. The Ten Commandments shape reality. They summarize everything we could and should consider about God and the world he created for us to live in. They aren't just ten suggestions. They aren't just the most important ten things. They are the only important ten things. They are an outline of reality.

As we reflect on the Ten Commandments, we should consider how we can use them to make those plans which God has already set out for us: 'For I know the plans I have for you,

declares the lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.' (Jeremiah 29:11). As we consider God's instructions, we need to keep an open mind about the complementary statements and ask what he is requiring us to do as well as not to do. For each 'you shall not,' there is a 'you shalt' included. And for the minority 'you shall' among the decalogue, there is included the negative 'you shall not'. So, when God says, 'don't murder,' he also says, 'protect life at all costs'. When God says to rest on the seventh day, he also says don't rest on the other six.

The Ten Commandments, not often associated with annual planning, are a reliable guide for what is real. God did identify all the key elements and decisions we must make to live out true relationships with him and each other. He did this on those tablets of stone, so the decalogue serves us as a way to stand on firm foundations when other factors try to convince us that life is a chaotic unmanageable mess.

Here are some ideas to prompt your own thinking and focus your application to your own social and familial circumstances:

1. Don't worship other Gods

How are you prioritizing worship in 2023? How can you better attend to the means of grace, through spiritual discipline? Where does your church need help, help that you can provide? This might be financial or practical. Plan to grow in your worship and, if you haven't already, join a Bible study group to explore God's word.

2. Don't make a graven image

This commandment certainly means that you shouldn't build idols in your home (or should tear them down if you have). But it also governs all our use of creation. Do you use all your belongings, all of your physical self to glorify God? Are there any ways that you're using creation in idolatrous ways (addictions, unhealthy behaviour, too much time on social media, etc.)?

3. Don't take God's name in vain

Again, simple obedience would be to honour God's name. But this command covers more than that. It covers our whole use of human language. How can you use language better to glorify

God this year? Do you sing and pray to God regularly? Do you use cutting or harsh words towards others? Do you participate in gossip? What are your language goals for 2023?

4. Honour the sabbath day

If you don't rest for twenty-four hours, start. If you don't work hard for the other six, start. Even in retirement God wants us to use our skills, talents and abilities in working for his kingdom and his glory. But more than just that, the fourth commandment covers our use of all time (Ephesians 5:16). If you struggle with laziness or overwork, make a plan to walk in new obedience to the Lord in 2023.

5. Honour your father and mother

This involves the reverence due to your actual parents but also the due observance and honour to all authorities. What civic goals might you have for 2023? Serve on the local council or a community group? What about honouring your boss, or politicians who may or may not deserve it?

6. Don't murder

This includes addressing any hatred you may harbour toward others. It also includes working as hard as possible for your health and the health of others. Yes, fitness goals for 2023 fall under the sixth commandment. Also, don't kill anybody.

7. Don't commit adultery

This includes avoiding sexual sin of all kinds as well as working to fortify your and others' marriages. What are some ways you hope your marriage will be stronger in 2023? How could you encourage others to pursue stronger marriages? Pray for those who have fallen into the trap of pornography.

8. Don't steal

Stop shoplifting. But also . . . Do your taxes with integrity, create a family budget, stop frivolous spending, work hard at your vocation (or find a new one), and commit to other practices that lend toward fiscal health and the financial peace of others.

9. Don't lie

How can you practise better truth-telling in 2023? Are you in a job that regularly asks you to make unethical decisions?

Would it be right to get a new job in 2023? Is there conflict you're avoiding because you don't want to tell someone the truth? Resolve to sit down and have the conversation you need to have.

10. Don't covet

Are there any habits or indulgences on social media that tempt you to covetousness? Cut them off. Are you forming relationships that encourage you to contentment? Do you have a family budget that you live by (see also the sixth commandment)?

Apocrypha – hidden things?



Apocrypha means 'of dubious origin' and also 'hidden things' but The Apocrypha is a part of many Bibles – when I was a boy all the Bibles that I knew had

a section between the Old and New Testaments that was called The Apocrypha. Few Protestant Bibles have this nowadays. You can buy The Revised English Bible, Revised Standard Version Bible, New Revised Standard Version Bible, King James Version Bible, New Jerusalem Bible, New American Bible, Douay-Rheims American Version Bible all with the Apocrypha included. Newman University in Birmingham has detailed research that shows that Paul, in his letters, alludes to ideas and themes from books in the Apocrypha such as Wisdom, Sirach, Maccabees and Esdras.

The Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles all contain the Apocrypha. The contents of the Apocrypha vary. Protestant Bibles have fourteen books of the Apocrypha contained in an Intertestamental section. These are called '80 book Bibles'. The current Catholic Bibles contain seven Apocryphal books, Eastern Orthodox Bibles have four more. Some of these 'books' are simply extra parts of the Psalms or Daniel.

The Jewish Torah did not contain any books of the Apocrypha, which were all written between 200BC and AD70, as the Torah was drawn up before 400BC. All the Apocryphal books are found in the Greek Septuagint

This is a very cursory application of the decalogue to annual planning. These examples are only for you to get a sense of what may need examining in our own life and perspective. Maybe after running through each commandment, you notice a theme emerging, and that becomes your focus for 2023. No matter how you spend it, by God's design, 2023 will be governed by his moral law, summarized in his Ten Commandments. If you're going to plan, why not do it in light of divine reality?

version of the Old Testament which dates from around the 1st century BC. The Jews do not accept this version and so do not recognise any part of the Apocrypha.

The Apocrypha was accepted as part of the Bible by the Council of Trent in 1546 which agreed with the Augustinian canon of the Bible produced somewhere around AD200. The Council of Rome also agreed that the Apocrypha was part of the Bible canon in AD382. Martin Luther's German translation of the Bible did contain the Apocrypha. The puritans removed the Apocrypha in the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1648. The Bible Society accepts the Apocrypha as valid, and their shop sells three versions of the Bible containing the Apocrypha.



The total Apocrypha is not given the same standing as the Old Testament by Protestants, Catholics or the Eastern Orthodox Church, often being called deuterocanonical, meaning not in the formal canon of the Bible, although

Paul Boddam-Whetham, Tring Team
with acknowledgement to an article dated 26 December 2022 by Joe Holland, professor of Christian ministry and academic dean for Grimké College, found in sola ecclesia, the theological journal of Grimké Seminary
Paul Boddam-Whetham
Tring Team

three books are considered canonical by the Eastern Orthodox Church. There is no universally accepted content of the Apocrypha, and its 'standing' as scripture varies according to denomination. The lectionary (the list of Bible passages to be read at services) of the Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists all contain readings from the Apocrypha. On the whole Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians do not consider the Apocrypha to be part of the Bible.

The complete collection of all Apocryphal books including Apocryphal New Testament books, totalling fifty-four in all, is available as a publication 'The 54 Book Apocrypha 2022 Edition' (Published by Covenant Press) and in addition there are collections such as 'Apocryphal Gospels' (Published by Penguin). Theologian Tom Wright has written a book about the Gospel of Judas 'Judas and the Gospel of Jesus: Have We Missed the Truth about Christianity?' (Baker Publishing Group). There is currently quite a lot of interest in Apocryphal Gospels and Gnostic Gospels, started by the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library. This was a collection of leather-bound books discovered in a sealed jar by a farmer in Egypt in 1945; also the discovery of the Gospel of Judas found in Egypt in 1970.

I wonder how many Christians today have read any of the Apocryphal or Gnostic books. If you have not read any, then may I suggest 'The Book of Tobit' dealt with in the lovely novel 'Miss Garnet's Angel' by Salley Vickers (Publisher Fourth Estate) – reading both together is a memorable experience!

John Allan
High Street Baptist Church

Thanking Saint Paul



As I am writing this, my wife and I are on a train in Italy, travelling between Rome and Venice. The previous day, 1 November 2022, was All Saints' Day, a public holiday in Italy and a special day for us. We had attended Mass as previously arranged in the Basilica of St Paul outside the walls in Rome. The day was special for us as we had planned this holiday in Italy around the visit. We had come to the basilica to give thanks to Saint Paul for his intercession with God some two years previously which we believe led to the miracle of my recovery following three days in a coma after my cardiac arrest. We had first visited Rome in 2016. I had always wanted to come here and had asked Canon Berry, then parish priest of

Corpus Christi Church, where he thought in particular we should visit. He said words to the effect of 'Well, they have recently authenticated the remains of St Paul in Rome as being genuine, therefore it might be good to visit the basilica where he is buried'.

So, in 2016 we took Canon Berry's advice and made our way to the Basilica of St Paul outside the walls. Pope Francis had declared an extraordinary jubilee year of mercy and being a jubilee year, this meant that certain doors in many catholic churches were especially opened. The basilica of St Paul outside the walls had one such holy door which is normally bricked up and is only opened in jubilee years.



Inside the basilica we descended some stairs and knelt before the tomb of St Paul and then an extraordinary thing happened. My wife had a strange feeling all of a sudden – a hot sensation seemed to come from beneath her feet, enter her body and flow up into her head. She was suddenly overcome by a flood of tears, so much so that we had to leave the basilica whereupon the tears immediately stopped. We could not explain what had happened other than to believe that in some way St Paul was communicating with her. I myself had felt nothing.

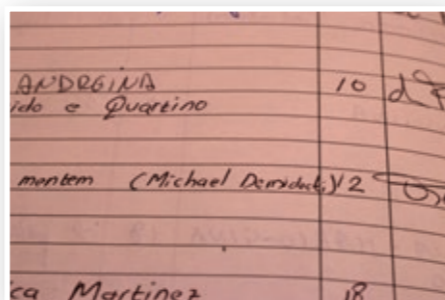
I move on now to events on 21 November 2020, a Saturday as my wife recalls, though I myself have no memory of what happened that day. I have written in *Comment* before ('The Power of Prayer', May 2021) about events as they were related to me. Anyway following my cardiac arrest I was resuscitated and taken to hospital where I spent three days in a coma, connected to a ventilator. During this time my wife prayed to St Paul to ask him to intercede with God for my recovery. She promised that if I did recover, she would take me again to the basilica in Rome so we could give thanks.

So this was the reason for our visit to the basilica in 2022. I had emailed the church before we went asking, if possible, for a Mass to be said for my intention while we were in Rome. To my



surprise an email in reply came almost straight away saying that the 12 mid-day Mass on All Saints Day, 1 November, would be put down for this intention.

It was with some trepidation that we entered the basilica that day. Funnily enough, on entering, my wife again was overcome with tears. Being All Saints Day, a public holiday in Rome, the Mass was a special one and well attended. There was a choir of more than twenty waiting by the altar and shortly before the priests (there were two) entered the sanctuary, the lights came on and lit up the beautiful frescoes in the dome above our heads. The priest mentioned my name during the Mass and afterwards we asked him if perhaps there was a written record, such as a newsletter, we might take it away with us as a memento. He invited us into the sacristy (where the priests get ready for Mass) and we were shown the basilica diary with my name clearly written down as the intention for the 12 o'clock Mass that day, and we were allowed to take a photograph for our records.



So that was the reason for our visit to Italy in 2022. As I said in my previous article, I believe the power of prayer is very great and I believe further that one should not be afraid to ask the saints to intervene for us when we face crises in our lives!

Michael Demidecki
Corpus Christi Church

God's Grandeur



The title of this sonnet makes clear the theme – the grandeur of God, likened to an electric charge – but the imagery in the first few lines is startling. The poet goes on to express his frustration at the way humanity has embraced industries and defaced Nature by ruining the landscape with factories, all without heed to the power of God. (Surely this tunes with the contemporary lament for the destruction of the world's resources?) In the second stanza Hopkins is more reassuring ('Nature is never spent'), and the 'brooding power of God', like a mother bird, will restore freshness and comfort to the 'bent world'. The use of vivid imagery and various poetic devices add to the distinctiveness of this piece.

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born in London in 1844, the eldest of nine

children. The family was artistic and had a great interest in literature and religion. He read Classics at Oxford where he began his student days as a keen socialite and a prolific poet. While at Oxford he became friends with Robert Bridges, who was an important influence on his poetry and, after Hopkins' death, was instrumental in the publication of his poems. Hopkins converted to Roman Catholicism, while a student, thereby becoming estranged from his parents, and joined the Jesuit Order. On becoming a priest he burned his early poetry as he thought poetry was incompatible with his vocation. Later

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.*
Gerard Manley Hopkins 1877
(*reck = heed, as in 'reckless')

he took up writing again but his work was so unusual and original that it was not published until thirty years after his death. He died of typhoid in Dublin in 1889 and is buried there. He is considered by some to be the most important 19th century English poet.

Kate Banister
St Julian's, St Albans

What matters most



Five years ago this month, Jon and I applied to be fosters carers for Buckinghamshire Council (no, we don't live in Hertfordshire). When we were interviewed by a panel of professionals, the Chair asked us if we didn't feel we were too old to take this on... Ageism is still alive and well in the world! Five years on, four newborn babies, a 5-year-old and a 2-year-old under our belt, five of whom went on to be adopted, we may be beginning to agree with that Chair!

But one of the pieces of training that we had sticks most in my mind because it came up more recently. We were all given a piece of paper with a grid on it of nine empty squares. We were asked to write in it each of the things that we felt mattered most to us. (Feel free to pause and think about what you would put in yours.) We didn't have to share this with anyone and the kind of things people wrote down were name, culture, home, language, possessions, family, faith, friends, books, hobbies... I suspect

food, drink, sport and astronomy might have been on Jon's list too. You may guess what happened next. First we were asked to cross through which we could live without if we had to lose one. Relatively easy. Then we had to cross through another. And then another. I can't remember at which point we all rebelled and said we couldn't choose as we reached the last few on the list. It was painful and a powerful way to make a point.

Children who come into the care system may have to give up their home and family, their friends, their school, their language, faith and culture and the foods that are familiar to them, their belongings, all they have ever known. If this is hard when you are an adult, what must it be like for a child under 5, or 8 or a teenager?

More recently, in discussion with people I care deeply about, my faith was ridiculed. I am sure others have experienced this at some point but how much it matters is affected by who is doing it. A stranger or casual acquaintance might be shrugged off, but if this is a close friend or family member – someone we love – it hurts. As I reflected on it later, I thought about why it

hurt so much.

My parents did not go to church and claimed no faith of their own. I became a Christian at 16 and have never looked back – that's (look away now) over fifty years ago. I have attended different kinds of churches in that time, several different Anglican churches of various flavours, two United Reformed Churches and a Free Independent Evangelical Church. The choice was based on how biblical those churches were, how well the gospel message was preached and how well they seemed to be living out what Jesus called us to do in the world. And, of course, whether I could serve God there and be useful. I have also worked all my life – forty-four years and counting – in Christian publishing.

I think it hurt so much because to ridicule that is to ridicule all that I am and have spent my life doing. It is to cast it aside and say it was all for nothing, that my whole life had been wasted. If my home, my family and everything I owned and loved was taken from me, my faith would still be there. My Christian faith is the bedrock of who I am.

Annette Reynolds
St Peter & St Paul

Farewell Janet

After fifty-four years in Aldbury, Revd Janet Ridgway moved to her new home in Berkhamsted in the middle of October last year. Three weeks later, to mark the ending of an era and her massive contribution to the church and the community, there was a farewell presentation to her at St John the Baptist Church during the Worship For All service, followed by a very lively tea party in the Memorial Hall. Many thanks to everyone who contributed to her gift and to the simply amazing array of cakes. Janet was clearly thrilled by the whole event.

At the service Janet introduced a painting she has just given to the church. Janet and her husband Micky, an enthusiastic and dedicated bellringer, commissioned Frank Murphy RA to paint the picture to show the casting of three new bells for the Aldbury tower in 1984. Until then there had been only three bells in use in Aldbury church tower and the casting of the extra bells in Loughborough was a hugely exciting project. Visitors to the Ridgways' home will have seen the picture hanging in their sitting room. Thank you to Janet for such an interesting gift which takes its place as a part of the history of the church. The picture is now hanging very appropriately in the belfry for all to see and enjoy. Pop in and take a look!

Summarising Janet's impact on local church and village life over more than half a century is a hard task indeed. She and Micky raised their children here, aided by a string of au pairs from Japan, while she worked in market research and as a London tour guide, making use of her fluency in German. She sang and played



cello in several amateur music groups, moving on later to Scottish country dancing. And, of course, she played an active role in the church, running the Sunday School with Caroline Ellwood, and setting up a link with Father Pavel's church in Pskov in communist Russia, before following Geoffrey Warren's advice and training for the priesthood. She was in the very first wave of women to be ordained in England in 1994 and took most church services in Aldbury through two extended interregna, including baptisms, marriages and funerals. She went on to take services for Sunnyside Church in Berkhamsted.

For our family Janet has just always been there, exuding her natural warmth and enthusiasm, but I probably first got to know her properly through producing the village magazine, Aldbury Outlook. She had joined its production committee in December 1976 and clearly hit the ground running, writing minutes and taking her turns as 'editor' and as 'rough typist'. In those days before email,

handwritten copy had to be typed, then physically cut up and arranged in pages to be typed again onto stencils and rolled through an inky duplicator. She was there for the exciting introduction of a word processor in 1990 and, soon after we had come to the village in 1994, I was welcomed into her study looking out along Trooper Road for my stints of copy-typing into her computer. Over the years we shared a lot of laughs, gossip and little production crises until she left the committee in 2015, nearly forty years after she'd joined. She made the process a lot of fun, though it must be admitted that meetings became rather shorter after she'd left! But above all, her concern for others around her would shine through.

I know Janet will welcome visitors to her new home in Berkhamsted. Please email aldbury.outlook@gmail.com if you would like her new address.

Jane Brown
St John the Baptist, Aldbury
 Photo credit Sally Bassett



Secondary Modern Jazz



"A QUARTET WITH THE
 DISTINCTIVE VOICE OF
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**RACHAEL
 BROWN**"

*Laid Back & Soulful
 Jazz Standards*

Friday February 17 2023

Tring Parish Church St Peter & St Paul HP23 5AE

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 Pay on Door £15 www.bluesbartring.co.uk



Ring for the King in Tring!



There are 38,000 bells in the British Isles but only 8,000 ringers! Tring tower needs you!

Last time I wrote, we were ringing only three bells for Sunday morning but now

we ring at least six, sometimes all eight. However, at the time of writing three ringers then depart to another church and the others go home. I appeal to the *Comment* readers to join in with this service of ringing the bells as a call to worship.

Those of us who rang to celebrate the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and then to commemorate her death, were filled

with a sense of honour, and indeed pride, at having taken part in a national activity – we look forward to the same in May, and YOU could be part of that too!

Bell ringing is listed as a Skill for the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, so let your teenagers know about it.

How to Ring for the King in Tring

Have a look at the first page of this link – <https://ringfortheKing.org/>, Ring for the King – Ringing for the King's Coronation including the video clip.

Then send me a message on tringbells@gmail.com and come along to the tower on a Tuesday at 7.00pm to 'have a go and see if you like it' during one of our weekly bell-handling lessons. If you do, then continue with these (free) lessons each week.

Anyone, of almost any age, can become a bell ringer. You just need a full range of movement in your arms and shoulders and be able to climb the spiral staircase up to the ringing chamber.

You will join a group of learners being taught basic skills on a one-to-one basis. Then comes ringing 'rounds' closely followed by 'call changes'. Finally come 'methods'. But that's for later!

Now is the time for you to learn to Ring for the King in Tring! There is of course a higher meaning to that phrase. See you in the tower.

Philip Dobson
Association of Ringing Teachers
tringbells@gmail.com



Letter from Orkney



Greetings lovely Tringlers! I often think of you, not in a homesick way but with fond pleasant memories of the place and folk that make it what it is.

Before I ramble on, I must agree with Judith Orrell on her article on how we view the Bible. Without the Bible, what have we got? I did read it cover to cover over several months and, although I can't say I remember all of it, it did give me a spiritual anchor on which to hang my life.

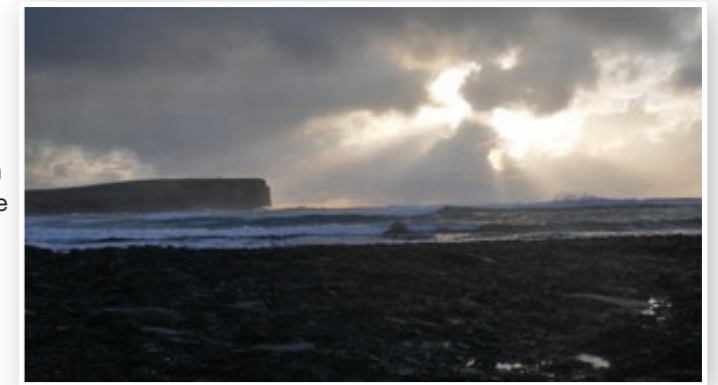
I also enjoyed Huw's article on faith and politics and absolutely agree with the final paragraph. 'I do not know what his [Rishi Sunak's] faith will bring to being prime minister, but I hope to learn about both. It is important that we open our eyes to a more diverse world and I am always confident that in doing so, it will deepen our relationship with God and our understanding of who God is.'

Back to Orkney, it is wonderful seeing all the coloured lights dotted about the hillsides. People put them up knowing it is just for them to see, not being on a road but possibly a farm track. They are expressing a personal celebration, not decorating their house because the neighbours do. The real Orkney has a fairly good Christian society with many

churches having a good congregation, not quite by Western Isles standard, where washing clothes and exercising a horse on a Sunday are frowned upon, but a more tolerant group of churchgoers.

They don't bow to modernism much, although the Episcopalian church has accepted gay marriage. I don't think the Church of Scotland has. All of that comes back to Judith's article in the December issue. Whilst I am very keen for gay folk to enjoy a normal loving life and most definitely part of our incredibly diverse society, I find it hard to come to terms with rewriting the Bible. But then I am a black and white sort of person and have used the Bible for my answers all my life.

The nights are black here at the moment and the island sleeps. There are only six hours of daylight so the farms are pretty quiet and apart from the North Sea trawlers, not much is moving; all the cruise ships have gone, as have the tourists. One car every twelve minutes



is pure bliss. All this gave a little inspiration for a poem (please excuse the lack of metre).

Foreword to Winter Waiting (A Wife's Lament)

Sitting at my desk in the warm and comfort of home, with a view over Scapa Flow amid storm and lashing rain it caused me to think of the fisherman long ago who did not have the luxury of when to fish or not. It was a matter of food or no food so the village fleets went



out in most weathers. I noticed today there were no boats and it got me to thinking what it must've been like in the past for the wives who did not have any other support than their husbands, so if they did not return, they were in very serious difficulties.

Mac Dodge,
Milestone Community Church, Dounby

Winter Waiting (A Wife's Lament)

*The sea is cold, the night is dark
 West wind blowing, hellish high
 The moon is up, the light is stark
 The clouds, scud o'er lowering sky.*

*The sea, dashing on silver grave
 Praying, kneeling, to your God aloft
 Drum, beat on beat with endless wave
 You, huddled in stone-built Croft*

*Your man at sea, you, alone.
 Fire crackling in the open stove
 You pleading, bring him back home
 Flame-flickering light like demons drove.*

*Ghostly scenes on rock-hewn walls.
 Hear the soft crunch of booted feet.
 Outwith, yowling wind howls and calls
 Then, bang of latch, and curse so sweet*

*Father, Son, home, safe at last
 Give thanks, a day without sorrow
 Followed in by rain-strewn blast.
 He alone knows our fate tomorrow.*

I couldn't have done it without you!

I live in Pond Close. On a Monday afternoon I help run the bingo; Wednesday, Friday and Sunday afternoons, I make tea and coffee. Most weeks I make cake of some sort...

With that in mind, I suggested I would cook Christmas Dinner on the first Thursday of the month, that being 1 December 2022... I thought I would ask Nicci (she cooked for the Saturday Lunch Club) if she could help me. We had a meeting here and came up with some sort of plan. She would make two trifles, one with and one without alcohol. Then came the message that she wasn't well and had been taken into hospital... (hoping she is full recovered by the time you read this article!).

The aim was 1.00pm sit down for dinner for eight of us, a friend and one guest (who popped in to see if anything needed doing), and us Kitchen Hands.

Panic set in; who could I ask? Knowing Margaret Oram made great trifles, I phoned and got one trifle and one hour's work.

Next I asked Janet Goodyer. She apologised and said she was busy but suggested we ask at the Craft n Cuppa on 29 November.

I felt I had to have someone who was well enough to do the work so Dee Nordenhen popped into my mind. I asked if she was free on Thursday and could she help me and she said 'Yes!' Thank Goodness! Also, my eldest daughter, Sarah Holmes, said she would book her last half day's holiday.

Thursday came: Margaret and I got stuff on the go, six turkey breasts in the oven; and then a neighbour, Jean Bradding, came down and we had coffee. She wanted to be useful so she laid the tables. Margaret went and Dee came, and we swapped from oven to side and stuff to oven. Sarah arrived, then all systems go! Plates were put under the grill so they were not cold and everything on them should be hot too.

In the meantime, the music man, Dave, came to set up and start playing at 1.30pm.

A full Christmas Dinner was served about 1.00pm. Desserts were trifle, Christmas pudding, and cheesecake, then tea/coffee served with mincemeat pies. Phew! Sarah and Dee kept the washing up down and loaded the dishwasher.

The thing that most amazed me was how well my daughter and Dee got on, not knowing each other. They worked well and had a good system for serving – no problems.

A couple of quips were: 1 they all enjoyed the experience; 2 could they have more notice next time! So to these four ladies, I'm extremely grateful for their help: Margaret Oram and Jean Bradding in the first hour – thank you! Dee Nordenhen and Sarah Holmes from 11.30am till the end, about 3.30pm – thank you! Thank you again, all of you so much. I couldn't have done it without you!

Sue Gascoine, St Peter & St Paul



Commemorations



'I don't know what I would do without my diary.' So started a circular letter from a friend included with his Christmas card. How true! This started me thinking about diaries and how we use them.

There are the great and famous diarists like Samuel Pepys, Anne Frank, Captain Scott and so on – all full of information and suitable for publication. Some politicians, among others, do this to put over their own ideas and perhaps justifications for them. There are diarists who just give dates of birthdays, events, meetings and the like. Much of this sort of information, I gather, is nowadays kept on Smartphones. Sometimes you may receive a free diary as a thank you for your custom, or maybe it is just a calendar. Clergy often get these from the local undertakers! Our household benefits from receiving at Christmas calendars in which each month has a photo of the grandchildren, sometimes with a suitable quotation attached.

So how do you remember dates and commitments and so on? Do you write more than the basic essentials, what you have done each day, or are your entries primarily for future events? I wonder, too, how many readers resolve to keep a record of thoughts and events and how many maintain this in the second month of the year?

I have long used the Canterbury Church Book and Desk Diary. It is, as its name implies, appropriate for Clergy, Readers and Lay Ministers. It gives plenty of space for Sunday appointments (unlike other diaries) and treats Sundays as the first day of the week and not as the final day of the weekend. There is a lot of information about Church organisations, dioceses and the like. Its great advantage is that it gives all the readings for daily worship, both for users of the Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship. It provides the Collect and Post Communion Prayer for Sundays and Holy Days. A distinctive and appropriate characteristic is that it starts in Advent, so my present diary runs from 27 November 2022 to December 2023. We are now in the fourth month!

The Common Worship Calendar has a name or two for many days of the year.

It is interesting (at least to me) for the way in which saints are listed and described. I use the word 'saint' but some of the names are not normally prefixed in this way. Whether Anglican or not, they have been deemed worthy of commemoration by Anglicans, as the Church of England has no official way of designating a person as a saint.

This issue of *Comment* covers the beginning of Lent with Ash Wednesday falling on 22 February. Another useful feature of diaries and calendars is that of providing us both with details of movable feasts – those based on the lunar calendar, such as Easter, and those based on the solar calendar and with fixed days each month, such as Christmas.

Older Anglican readers may remember the time before the liturgical changes and before people were issued with lots of bits of paper or overhead screens were used for services. They took their own Prayer Book and were given a hymn book. This not only meant one could follow the service but it was also something to read while waiting for a sermon to end (not that that ever happened in Tring!) or to fill in time.

The Book of Common Prayer contains a lot of material before any service starts – a long Preface and much about the Services of the Church, about Ceremonies, and then it finally reaches instructions about which Psalms to have and how Scripture is to be read. All this we skip over because the Church Diary of which I write tells us all this – Calendar, Lessons and the like. There is a 'Table to find Easter Day' for which it is necessary to know the golden Number (with instructions on how to work it out) with the Day of the Month and the Sunday Letter. Thank goodness our Church Diary does all that for us! Incidentally, how to find the Sunday letter goes up to AD8500 before ending etc! Finally, one reaches The Order for Morning Prayer and all the other Services. Additionally, for those still interested in such matters, at the end come The Articles of Religion, and, finally, A Table

of Kindred and Affinity – a fascinating list of relations one is not allowed to marry, most, if not all, of whom one wouldn't think of marrying. It is worth noting how the Prayer Book Calendar for February, which contains dates fixed by solar reckoning, has only five saints' days, Ash Wednesday, Lent and Easter being fixed by lunar reckoning.

When we come up-to-date and look at the Common Worship Calendar, we find thirteen entries and that is the lowest number of entries for a month, because of Lent. In other words, more saints, people worthy of commemoration whether accorded the title 'saint' or not, are being brought to our attention. There is 2 February, the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, now called The Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas), with St Blasius (3 February) and Agatha (5 February) both now dropped. The Common Worship Calendar adds St Anskar, missionary to Denmark and Sweden, St Cyril and Methodius, missionaries to the Slavs, Janani Luwum, Archbishop of Uganda who was martyred in 1977, Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna and martyr, and George Herbert, priest and poet. These have their names in bold type as having a Collect appointed to be used on the day in worship. There are another seven in italic type as being worthy of commemoration but with no specific liturgical provision.

Back to where we started, a Calendar/Diary helps us to remember important dates, events and appointments. But if we have the sort of which I am writing, we can be reminded of what to say in worship and how to make the focus of our thoughts the contribution of many holy people to the life of the church.

Martin Banister
St Albans Cathedral

Computer & Printer Repair & Support

Friendly, patient and expert help
Telephone advice or Covid19-safe collection of your printer, laptop or p.c. available



Barry Child
barry@childassociates.co.uk
01442 826092
07879 497704

Tweet of the month



As I write this, it is almost the year's end and we are looking forward to 2023. Some people's hopes of a white Christmas were raised by a brief flurry of snow – only to be dashed by it all disappearing in a subsequent warm spell. This is typical of winters in southern Britain in recent decades.

As I walked around the reservoirs that were almost completely frozen over, people would ask me: how do birds cope with weather like this? The answer is they will have different strategies dependent on how severe the cold weather is, what species we are talking about, and the individual bird's circumstances. All of this boils down to: Is there sufficient food available for that individual bird to keep it going i.e., warm enough and with enough energy to find more food?

Obviously for some birds it is a fairly fixed strategy in that they migrate in the autumn to warmer climes. For some that means coming here from the north or east, and for others going south to southern Europe, Africa or further afield. Most of our warblers leave and our geese and duck numbers are swollen by winter visitors. Other species are more reactive and respond to cold weather

when it happens. For instance, some of the wildfowl on Tring Reservoirs moved from one reservoir to another – Wilstone Reservoir became almost deserted and the smaller reservoirs were temporarily very popular until they froze. Then some birds temporarily relocated to the ice-free water at College Lake and others went further afield – although judging from the lack of unusual wildfowl turning up locally, movement was kept to a minimum.

Some birds will try to tough it out and stay put in the hope that the cold weather doesn't last too long and others, like woodpeckers for instance, generally don't have to move much because they can still access enough of their food in trees, or suitable feeders – see Great Spotted Woodpecker in photo.

Of course, at times like this some people's urge is to help 'our little feathered friends'. This is not an unreasonable response but must be done with thought, knowledge and care, or you can actually harm the birds you are trying to help. A classic example is feeding the wildfowl at the reservoirs. Some people feed them grain as this is a very good, natural food source but it is common to see them being fed bread, which is nutritionally poor for them as it lacks vitamins and is very bulky so a bird could have a stomach full of bread and still starve.



Feeding birds in the gardens is also not always a good thing. It is thought to favour some species but can lead to declines in other species as the favoured species increase in numbers. Also, hygiene needs to be considered and having birds in large numbers in a small area can result in diseases being spread as happened with birds like Greenfinches. The RSPB has good advice on their website for anyone who wants to put food out and will cover what, when and how to do it in ways that truly benefit birds and indeed other wildlife.

As Christians we shouldn't just want to do the right thing, we should also do it in the right way and for the right reasons. Furthermore, this shouldn't just be for birds and other wildlife but should also be reflected in the way we treat other people too.

Roy Hargreaves
St Peter & St Paul

A quiet day



Life for most of us is busy and there are any number of concerns and demands that we find ourselves reacting to on a daily basis. And when I say most of us, I don't just mean those who are still in paid employment or who care for young people. When I look around our community, some of the busiest people are the retired!

Quiet Days provide space to stop for rest, refreshment and response. By carving out time to reorientate to God as the source of our being, we can reset our direction and priorities and reconnect to God's purposes for our lives and service.

We want to develop the beautiful location of St Mary's, Puttenham, as a centre for quiet days and retreats. Usually a Quiet Day will include some input (often in the form of guided prayer and reflection) but will also make space for some silence. The 'empty space' of silence enables us to learn to listen for God's voice within all the 'voices' of our daily life and circumstances. A Quiet Day will often also include time together (in the form of communal prayer and sharing) as well as time alone for personal prayer and reflection.

We are going to launch this on Saturday 22 April. Our retreat leader will be Reverend Canon Alan Hodgetts. Alan is an experienced Spiritual Director. For many years he was a parish priest and then finished his time in formal ministry as

chaplain at HMP Woodhill. He will help us to explore the idea of metanoia – 'Let your minds be remade'.

Huw Bellis
Tring Team



Justice and reconciliation – the heart of the gospel



Ideas can evoke strong feelings. For many, the idea of reconciliation opens a very positive response, perhaps identifying a hope that goodness can prevail.

We are attracted to Musalaha by the relationships they build across an apparently intractable conflict. The Musalaha story links our own instinctive longing for goodness with the key ideas of reconciliation and justice that can be found at the heart of the New Testament story.

You may remember Musalaha means reconciliation in Arabic and that, for thirty years, this Jerusalem organisation has been developing grass-roots approaches. In the Autumn I wrote about three of these.



Desert Encounters for Young Adults

Five days in the Jordan Desert leading camels, training in Musalaha's Reconciliation: curriculum and hearing and responding to the 'enemy's' narrative leads to responses such as the Palestinian woman who said, 'I have never before heard an Israeli listen and feel sympathy for the pain of my people'.



Women's Groups

Following a five-day Desert Encounter, groups from across the divide meet for one year and then support each other in some action to influence their community. One woman said, 'I never thought I would be able to sit in a room with Israelis, let alone share how I feel. This has been a remarkable experience'.



Children's Summer Camps

Using Hebrew and Arabic, some eighty children came from Christian, Jewish and Muslim families, in both Israel and Palestine. Sharing accommodation, they enjoyed many fun activities and learnt together from Joseph and Jonah, biblical heroes they have in common.

Afterwards several phone calls expressed positive feedback from parents, who were surprised their children had made friends with children with Jewish or Arabic names.

In October the newly appointed Executive Director, Daniel Munayer, came to Tring as a first-hand witness of Musalaha's experience of reconciliation. He ended with a challenge: 'Had we identified our 'enemies'? He pointed us to reconciliation as our need too. An MP4 video of this meeting is available from colin.briant@hotmail.com by email request.

Churches and individuals from the UK and USA have been on tours to explore and understand both ancient and living 'stones'. Some have even engaged directly in Musalaha's activities. These experiences are deeply rewarding. Ventures of this kind thrive on active curiosity and the personal trust that grows over time. For Tring, such things are truly possible. Please be ready to 'taste and see' as opportunities arise.

Colin Briant
High Street Baptist Church

Most of us find Musalaha tricky to pronounce. Try *Moo-sa-la-har* or perhaps *Moo-sar-la-ha*.

For more information go to the websites below or email Colin or Janet Briant colin.briant@hotmail.com

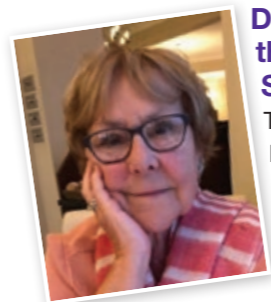
Musalaha's Jerusalem website:
<https://musalaha.org> contains many updates/reports on activities.

YouTube Musalaha Summer Camp 2021:
<https://youtu.be/lymmweDwsY4>

UK-based website:
<https://musalaha.uk>

For Tours of Israel/Palestine see:
<https://www.boundarybreakers.net/#holy-land-encounters>

The importance of light



December 21, the Winter Solstice

The shortest day. Every year I count down the days to it from October, and when it's past, I sigh, a sigh of joy. You see, I dislike short days and darkness. Winter makes me want to hibernate and if I had lived a past life, I guess I would have been a bear.

December 22

For me it's the start of a new year. Not 'The New Year' but knowing that I will get a few minutes of extra light excites me. The reawakening of the journey of our sun, as it makes a new arc with the promise of spring and longer days. Before we get to that, December still holds another promise in a different birth.

December 25

Another gift of light is ready to be celebrated. I think, then, of the stars in the night sky that announced a new prince to wise men who followed a comet to find him. And I imagine them and their entourage travelling... No tarmac roads. No Sat Nav. No streetlamps. Travelling in darkness on old tracks, over rough terrain and possibly meeting bandits. Their road map was in the heavens, following that one star, and their conviction of finding a prince was overwhelming.

In January and February, we are able to enjoy the growing light as each day stretches a little longer. Spring is on its way and we remember Jesus as a young child, wise beyond his years. His light grew and spread bringing a new message of love from his father, a light and love that was to be shared with the world; an inclusive message.

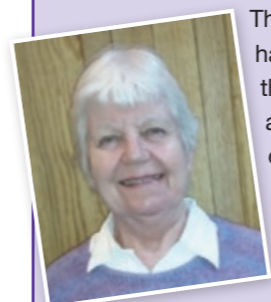
Lent comes with the memories of

bitter herbs and fasting, of a people who lost their way and spent forty years in the wilderness. We connect with the long-lost past in the forty days we spend in reflection in Lent. We remember Jesus and Palm Sunday, the ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, and the crowds calling his name. Did he know that this was the start of a different kind of birth, one in which he had to die first? The darkness of betrayal and death followed in days, but within the darkness, a new light was born, and mankind was given yet another gift of light in the resurrection.

*Without light, there is no colour.
Without light, plants would wither,
and the oceans would die.
Without light, man would suffer.
We all need the universal light from
the heavens and the light of Jesus.
Happy 2023!*

Brenda Hurley, St Peter & St Paul

World Day of Prayer



The service this year has been written by the ladies of Taiwan and it is based on the words 'I have heard about your faith'. The words are part of the reading for the service which is Ephesians 1:15-19. St Paul is giving thanks for the news that the Ephesians have found faith in Christ and he writes words of encouragement, saying how he prays for their faith to grow and remain strong. The theme of encouragement and prayer is taken up in the service.

The World Day of Prayer circles the earth for at least thirty-eight hours. It begins at dawn in Western Samoa and Tonga in the Pacific Ocean, when we would be listening to the 6.00pm news on 2 March, and ends at dusk in American Samoa about the time we would be having breakfast on 4 March. Our service is part of the middle link!

Taiwan has had a mottled history. It has been inhabited for 6000 years or more and has been under several

regimes. In the 16th century Portuguese sailors, on trading journeys, were impressed by the beauty of the islands (there are about 100 islands in the group) and called it Ilha Formosa which means 'Beautiful island'. The Dutch came ashore in 1624 in the south and, soon after, the Spanish came to the north of the islands. Invasions followed from the Great Ming Empire and the Great Qing Empire who, in 1895 ceded Taiwan to Japan. At the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, the leader of the Chinese National Party fled to Taiwan and it became known as the Republic of China. Thirty-eight years of martial law ensued. In 1971 the United Nations recognised the mainland Peoples' Republic of China as 'the only legitimate representative to the United Nations' which meant that Taiwan (the Republic of China) lost its seat at the United Nations. By 2021 only fifteen countries in the world maintained diplomatic ties with the Taiwanese government. Opposition to the Republic of China has gained momentum and Taiwan began to progress to democracy. In 1996 the first presidential

**The service this year is at
Corpus Christi Church
on Friday 3 March
at 2.30pm**

election was held, and the first peaceful transfer of power happened in 2000 when the Democratic Progressive Party won the election.

There are many religious groups in Taiwan, including popular folk religions. The main groups are worshippers of Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity, with smaller groups of Jewish and Greek Orthodox worshippers. Many newer migrants are Muslim and practise Islam. Although Christianity is adopted by 6.6% of the population, it has contributed significantly to the country's social development, including education and medical care. What a patchwork of politics and religion!

Will you come and join us at Corpus Christi on 3 March to pray with the rest of the world, sending words of encouragement to support the work done by Christians in Taiwan and elsewhere in the love of Christ? We look forward to seeing you!

Jill Smith
Local WDP organising committee

Quiet Place

Need space to contemplate?

Pop in to
St Martha's Methodist Church
Chapel Street, Park Road, Tring

Every 3rd Saturday of the month between 10.00am and 3.00pm
(circumstances may cause variations in times)



Travelling on the road to Hope (even while ‘waiting for a bus’)...



Experiencing the power of the group

Writing this article on New Year’s Day 2023 whilst sitting in Tring as the winter rain continues to fall

and the day turns to gloomy darkness at a few minutes after 4.00pm reminds me how important the rhythm of the seasons can be; not just the rhythm of the seasons themselves, but also the punctuation marks provided by cherished annual events which, in time, become traditions.

An annual pilgrimage to the true north

Every year in late September I set off on a road trip that takes me to the top corner of mainland Britain and into some very wild country on some very lonely roads. I love it. The purpose of the journey is to enjoy various aspects of country pursuits which are only available in the wilderness regions with a group of companions who, over the years (more than thirty of them now) have become firm friends.

The first part of the journey I do alone and the route I take covers 600 miles or so, starting on familiar motorways and ending in the Great Glen by Loch Ness. There our group of four or five comes together and enjoys a jolly reunion and a festive feast.

The second part of the journey on the second day is a different kind of trek through the wild country on lonely roads and tracks, ending up eventually in a ruined castle overlooking the Pentland Firth and the Orkneys. Traditionally we start by meeting for breakfast in a little café on a campsite in Lairg, which offers the warmest welcome you could possibly imagine. We then move ‘off piste’ and follow tracks and gravel roads to the Crask Inn for refreshment, the Altnaharra for more refreshment and the Craggan at Tongue for lunch. These are familiar stops on an exciting road and, over the years, they have become favourite moments for reflection as well as refreshment.

A couple of years ago we arrived in Lairg and found the café (despite a welcome notice in the window) closed. In the centre of Lairg is an imposing hotel which boasts a sign saying ‘Non-

Residents Welcome’ so we piled in out of the pouring rain, seeking a full highland breakfast. The sight that greeted us was promising – a packed room full of happy-looking highlanders all eating a hearty breakfast.

Could we join them? Please? ‘We’re not serving breakfast,’ was the stern reply.

‘Could we have some coffee, then, please?’ we quavered.

‘No, we’re waiting for a bus,’ was the remarkable response.

So we journeyed on to the Crask Inn (which is enterprisingly run by the local church) where we were treated to some fine hot coffee and the tastiest bacon-butties in the land.

(Upon reflection we worked out that what the hotel in Lairg meant by ‘We’re waiting for a bus’ was that they were expecting a coach party who had booked already so there was no room for casual itinerants from the south).

Suitably refreshed we journeyed on northwards on what has become my favourite part of the whole journey – appropriately named the Road to Hope. It is not for the faint-hearted.

An explanatory note: for those who don’t know the far Northwest of our island, I should explain. In recent times the wonderful coastal road that goes up from Fort William around the wild west coast of Sutherland, and then along the North Coast to Thurso and Wick and back down to Inverness and the South, has been grandly named the ‘North Coast 500’. It has been promoted as a major scenic treat for road-trip-lovers. As a consequence, it is now somewhat overcrowded by both Motorhome residents and hairy bikers who are two different tribes that don’t always integrate that well! Blessedly, they do not yet know the Road to Hope!

Travelling the road to Hope

For those who do know it, and respect it, this road is a rare treat. This single-track road starts at the Altnaharra and stretches some twenty-odd miles northwestwards around the stunning slopes of Ben Hope to join the main coast road near Tongue. I have never met another vehicle other than a post-van in all the years I have enjoyed it and it is a truly uplifting experience to drive it. It seems well-named to me and every year I



arrive at Hope renewed and ready for our northern adventure.

The strength of the group

The reason for this long journey is to join a group of longstanding colleagues who have become firm friends over the years on our annual adventure in the wilderness. We call ourselves ‘The Old Crusties’ and we all have silly crusty names (I am ‘Ragnar’). We walk, we talk, we shoot, we fish, we eat and drink and celebrate our lucky lives as we become refreshed and renewed by a shared experience. We are all different characters, formed by our individual journeys, but also tempered by our shared experiences and our ability to discuss and compare how we deal with all that life puts in our path.



Over the years, our many adventures on the road to Hope and other wild wanderings have created a bond that nurtures us all.

Together we are stronger

Over the years, companions and experiences such as these have taught me an important lesson. Whilst all of us have our strengths and talents and can sometimes achieve good things and withstand considerable difficulties alone, we are definitely better off and more resilient as part of a group. We humans are social animals.

This is true in many areas of life but I suspect it is especially so when it comes to matters of spirituality, faith

and religion. The church, we know, has its roots in small groups meeting in homes and shared spaces and eventually evolving into complex structures and communities. Some might observe that there are possibly times when those structures become too complex and rigid; human rules and human precepts can overshadow the simple commandments of God. I guess it was ever thus! (Romans 10:3)

These small groups still flourish throughout all our religious communities and they create a well-spring of nourishment and support so that faith can flourish and spiritual strength can develop through shared discussion and consensus.

I count myself particularly fortunate in the group I have been a part of since I started my formal ministerial training some fifteen years ago. We meet regularly several times each year. I think a recent comment from one of our founding members, which he circulated after a retreat we shared in November, is very telling: ‘We had a wonderful time together with much laughter and merriment. I have never known such unity with other

believers as we enjoy within our cohort; we provide each other with the support and encouragement we need... it was a blessing to witness how effectively each of us is using the different gifts which God has given us.’

I think that describes the power of the group to heal and affirm very well indeed: ‘Together we are stronger’.

Closer to home – but still on the road to Hope

Back here in Tring I believe we also benefit greatly from involvement in small groups that meet regularly to discuss, reflect and affirm. For over a dozen years our ‘Greenways Group’ has been meeting fortnightly throughout each year and we have grown stronger together. In a recent study/discussion we used the metaphor of a copse of trees growing together (as opposed to lone trees growing apart) to reflect on the way in which mutual support and protection can help all individuals to grow and fulfil their potential. Whilst the individual can withstand the buffeting of the winds and the weather, a group of trees growing together provides support and defence

and creates a shared space for all to flourish as well as a safe haven for strangers to join in and be nourished.

Following our discussions on Operation Noah, one of the initiatives we agreed on was to plant a copse of twelve trees to make a small contribution to carbon capture and we did this together on New Year’s Day 2023.



“The Greenways Group COPSE”

“Planted for the Planet”

January 2023

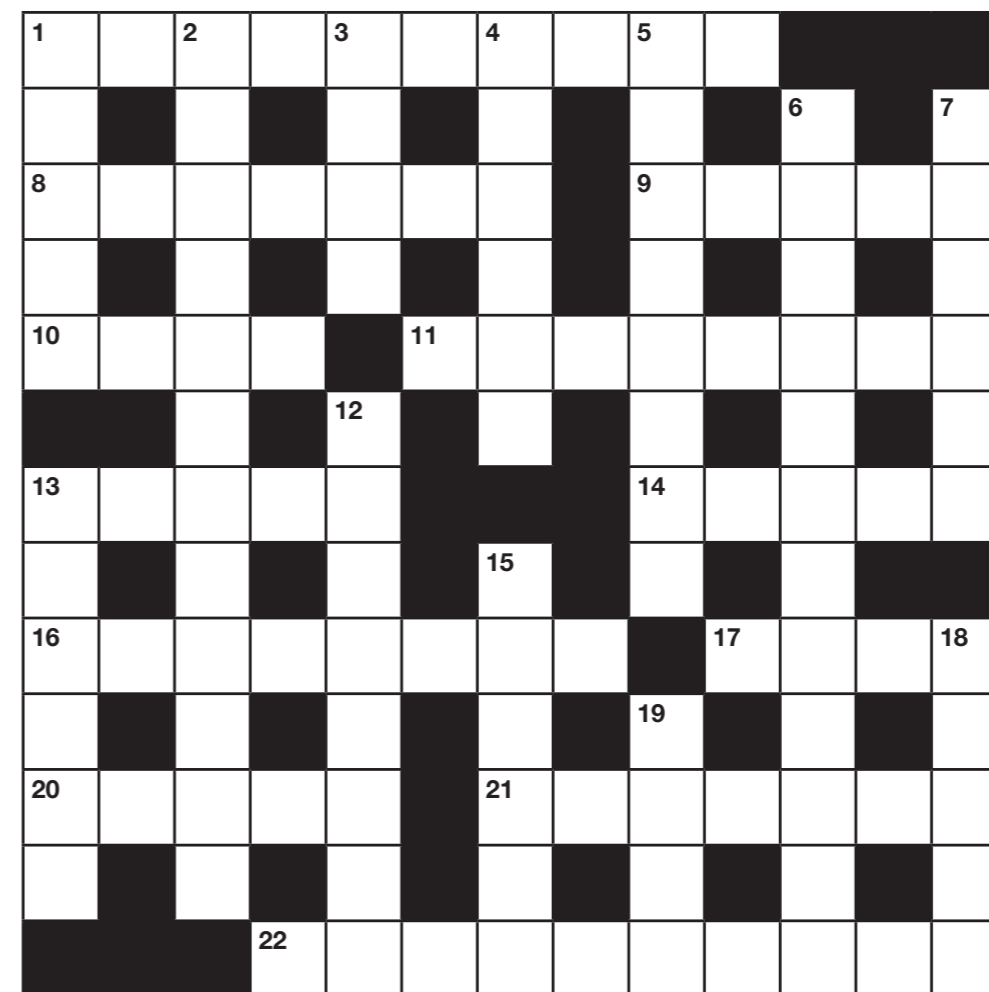
Hopefully this is another small step along the road to Hope.

We are all lucky if we have our familiar groups and I very much hope that those who have not yet found their ideal group will keep on trying until they get the perfect fit.

Together we are stronger.

Grahame Senior, Tring Team

Crossword



ACROSS

1. Blessings (10)
8. Physical strength (7)
9. Run away to marry (5)
10. First garden of the Bible (4)
11. Greatly distressed (8)
13. Food for Israelites (5)
14. Silent (5)
16. Prudent (8)
17. Part of the hand (4)
20. Type of play (6)
21. Godhead (7)
22. Self-control (10)

DOWN

1. Courageous (5)
2. Beginning of Lent (3) (9)
3. Frozen (4)
4. Treatment (6)
5. Everlasting (8)
6. Act of becoming a Christian (12)
7. Repair (4) (2)
12. Two, coming together for life (8)
13. Managed to accept it (4) (2)
15. Comfortable (4) (2)
18. Perhaps (5)
19. Rank (4)

In search of times gone by...



When have you had a spiritual experience? Did that experience have a profound effect on your life and do you keep returning to it?

One of the things I struggle with is the sense that one returns to the past to recapture that moment. The poem 'Folk Tale' by R S Thomas has this feel to it. He talks of throwing stones at a loved one's window to catch a glimpse of them and says the reasons he persists in doing it is because 'I would

have refrained long since, but that peering once through my locked fingers I thought that I detected the movement of a curtain'.

I have this same feeling with our Lent films which were for so many years fundamental in my spiritual journey. In the first year we had Lent films and watching 'Ordet' I recall a tangible sense of spiritual encounter in the room (I know Jo Wetherall felt the same and we often spoke of it) and in the same series we watched 'Jesus of Montreal' which has ever since helped my understanding of resurrection as an experience of the community.

We are currently deciding whether

we should offer Lent films again this year. If they have offered profound opportunities to engage with our spiritual life, should we continue that provision? However, I was slightly challenged by my desire to say why don't we show 'Ordet' and 'Jesus of Montreal' again and I worried that would be going back in search of times gone by.

Do you return to your previous spiritual experiences? Or do you look for new and different ways to part the curtain and to glimpse God?

Huw Bellis
Tring Team

What should the church do about sex?



The Church of England is reaching a decision point about its approach to sexuality. The bishops have been meeting during the autumn, and the General Synod

is due to debate the topic in February 2023. In our parish, some eighty of us took part in a course on 'Living in Love and Faith', which culminated in a memorable parish meeting at the beginning of April. The overwhelming (but not unanimous) view of those who took part was that the Church of England should be inclusive in its approach to human sexuality, accepting of diversity in gender and relationships. We sent off a response, both individually and collectively, and the Church of England has just published a report on the feedback received. Some 6,400 people sent in responses, and the church supplemented this with nine focus groups from among the responders, involving more than 100 people. There were also 250 submissions from people who did not take part in the course, in some cases because they did not agree with the approach.

The report, 'Listening

with Love and Faith', is quite long (nearly 100 pages) and thorough. Much of it records how participants felt about the course; this was generally very positive, people were pleased to have taken part, felt they learnt from the course, and were stimulated to examine and in some cases change their viewpoint on aspects of sexuality. All, of course, wanted the church to be welcoming to everybody, but this did not always mean accepting their sexuality as being valid; different attitudes to the Bible often lay behind different approaches to inclusivity in sexuality (as a previous *Comment* article has highlighted).

The report makes no recommendations, but does record a

strong wish among participants for the Church of England (which effectively means the bishops) to reach some clear decisions. The problem, for the bishops and all of us, is that while lots of participants want the church to be decisive in being inclusive, others want the church to be decisive in holding on to the status quo. The attached extract from the report reflects that sense of urgency, but also that dilemma.

John Whiteman
Tring Team Parish
Reproduced from 'Listening with Love and Faith' report, published for the 'Living in Love and Faith' Next Steps Group by Church House Publishing 2022 ISBN 978 0 7151 1198 7.

Dear bishops,

Be bold, brave and true
Participants in focus groups were asked what message they would pass on to the bishops, and the majority of respondents understood that, overall, the House of Bishops have a difficult but essential task, and that a decision on moving forward needs to be made soon.

Most people in the focus groups suggested that the decisions made by the House of Bishops needed to be bold, courageous, clear and honest. While some advocated strongly for change and some to maintain the Church's position on questions of sexuality, all agreed that coming to a clear decision soon is vital.

"Please be brave and tackle it. We need to deal with it and be bold and decisive. My generation and below won't be attracted to the Church if it doesn't move on this."

"If we don't get over this it will be a missiological disaster that will go on and on."

"Don't make it wishy-washy; whatever decision you make, it needs to be clear and meaningful."

"Please be honest and say what you believe, because doing one thing and saying another doesn't help."

Some had further messages they wanted to relay to the bishops.

"You are representing everybody, so I guess it's very difficult."

"I don't want you to think you have listened to everyone because you haven't."

"We need to pray for you as this may be the hardest thing you will ever have to do."

"You need to seriously listen."

"Have you all done the course, and if not, why not?"

"I need you to be people of prayer, Scripture, sacraments, and the Communion of Saints."

A response created while taking part in a focus group.

A response created while taking part in a focus group with the following commentary: "The Church of England has been upholding the Truth of God's word for nearly 500 years, but it seems to find itself at a crossroads. It is as if newer thinking of the last 50 years or so somehow makes the teaching of scripture from Genesis to Revelation outdated, no longer culturally relevant (even though LfF acknowledges that the Bible never commands other than male and female marriage). I have called it the narrow way and the broad way. There are scriptural cautions in Jeremiah to choose the old ways and in Romans to be touched by the mercies of God and do not let the world squeeze you into its mould. I do beg the deacons and Bishops to let themselves be touched by the mercies of God and the tenets of scripture rather than the attractive and fashionable ways of the world. The Bible has never been a democracy. It is the Word of the Living God."

Christmas Day BIG lunch



Just a short note to say a big thank you to those who contributed with food, gifts and time and to all our guests who made the Christmas Day Big Lunch at High Street Baptist Church

so special.

From the oldest (in their 90s) to the youngest (1) from across our community, there was a lovely family and festive feel to our afternoon together which

included a delicious three-course meal, carols on the accordion, retiring to the church to watch the King's speech on the big screen with coffee and chocolates, and, of course, much conversation and laughter across the dinner table and in the kitchen.

We also sent everyone away with mini-festive hampers and chocolates and mince pies. A true festive family feast!
Joe Egan
High Street Baptist Church



Everyone is invited!



Many years ago, I encountered a religious community called 'Chemin Neuf'. It's a Roman Catholic community, but people join from different Christian denominations, living together to witness to the God who calls each of us. Chemin Neuf is French for 'new way'. I naturally assumed that this referred to the radical new way they had chosen to live together. No, I was told – New Way was

actually the name of the road in Lyon, France, where the first Chemin Neuf Community was founded. And yet they do represent a new way. It's a way of living in community across difference and disagreement. That's why, when I became Archbishop of Canterbury, I invited them to begin a new ecumenical community at Lambeth Palace: The Community of St Anselm.

A new year is often seen as a chance to begin a new way. When the foreign Magi came to worship Jesus, the message was clear that Christ is not just for one particular group of people. He has come to save us all.

That means we are called to a new community to which everyone is invited – the only thing we need to have in common is the Christ-child. Members join the Community of St Anselm from different cultures all over the world. It's not always easy, but in serving Jesus together, they have chosen a radical new way. We can all choose that new path this year: of loving people who are different from us, of building kinder communities and of following Christ together.

Archbishop Justin Welby

In memory of Phillip Gordon Lawrence

Phil was born on 4 November 1934 in Costessy, a suburb of Norwich in Norfolk. His father was Chief Accountant at the Norwich Union Insurance Society, later to become Aviva, while his mother, Phyllis Philo, was a milliner from Croydon. He was educated at Norwich School and his mother wanted him to become a doctor; his father thought he should take up farming, which he considered a more lucrative occupation than accountancy! Phil, however, was always interested in photography and planned to join the forensic science team in the police. He started there in 1949.

One of his early dreams was to learn to fly a helicopter. Phil was of an age where it was compulsory to serve in one of the armed forces. After two years in the Norfolk police force, in 1952 he joined the RAF for a whole three years, much to his mother's horror, serving in the UK as a Non-Commissioned Officer testing personnel for suitability as aircrew and then a two-year tour in Germany whilst the RAF were still classed as occupation forces there and known as the 2nd Tactical Air Force. He had a very technical mind and, to achieve his forensic aims, although not with the police since he was told their pay was lousy, he graduated in the science of photography from what is now known as the University of Westminster in London in 1955.

It was here that he met Marion in 1958. Phil and Marion had three children, of whom they were immensely proud of everything that each had achieved. They went on to give them six grandchildren.

Both Marion and Phil enjoyed the opportunities they had for travel and they both took extensive photographs of the countries they visited which they used in audio visual shows they put on for local charities and societies. Both delighted in their grandchildren although the opportunities to see them were somewhat few and far between, all bar one living abroad. Phil got the best deal with his middle grandson Joel, who, because he lived in Gt Britain, whenever he came to visit always wanted to get the model railway engines out.

When Phil and Marion left college in the early 50s, they were the top photography students of their year, winning as their prizes 7s 6d each! Marion joined the British photographic company, Ilford, at the princely wage of £10 a week. Phil was head hunted by Felix Fonteyn, the brother of Margot Fonteyn, to run a photographic studio and business in South Kensington, London, to pursue the advertising,

commercial and industrial side of photography, and not to be outdone he asked for £12 a week, and got it. In those early days of course, everyone's ambition was to reach the magical annual salary of £1000 a year.



Whilst working with Felix, in order to improve the family finances, Phil returned to his old college to do part-time teaching of photography to students taking the City & Guilds photographic examinations. It was while he was running the studio for Felix that Rudolph Nureyev sought asylum and they hid him in a flat above the studio in 27 Thurloe Street, London. While he was working with Felix, many of Phil's advertising pictures or portraits were published in magazines or local media and he also had photographic exhibitions in London. His eldest son Gordon, when small, modelled for baby seats and wool; Phil himself appeared in some of his advertising pictures when the male model failed to turn up. After seven years running the studio in London, Kodak Limited in the UK made him an offer which he could not refuse so he entered a specialist technical division dealing with Customer Relations of which he soon became manager. Later he joined Public Relations and managed Kodak Corporate Communications and Events. In this latter capacity he and his wife hosted a wide variety of sporting or musical company events involving the National Trust and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, meeting many celebrities and personalities, together with members of the Royal family. He was immensely proud of being introduced to his favourite 'Royal', the Queen Mother, and escorting her around an exhibition of photographs of her life which he had curated at St Pauls Walden, her family home. He was honoured to be able to take photographs of her. Both he and Marion were privileged to be invited on two occasions to the Buckingham Palace garden parties, in recognition of their local community activities.

Having been a practising

photographer himself, in London, Phil gained the trust of many of the London professional photographers who would often call on Phil or his team when technical problems arose. On one such occasion the lab looking after Lord Snowdon's films called Phil late one evening, in a panic, requesting an urgent visit because there was a major problem with Lord Snowdon's films that he had just brought back from a tour of the Arctic, together with some portraits of Canadian ballet dancers. They were aware of Snowdon's short fuse and did not want to be blamed for something 'Kodak' or they had done! Phil took one look at the processed film negatives and pronounced, politely, that Snowdon had not used his camera carefully enough. The negatives were covered in static electricity marks, a common and well-known problem amongst professionals if the photographer did not take care and allow sufficient time for the camera and film to acclimatise when going from a very cold climate to a warm one. As expected, Lord Snowdon exploded on being blamed, blaming everyone else, especially the film manufacturers, and Phil! It ended amicably, however, with Phil receiving a letter of thanks and apology from him some days later.

Phil travelled to most of the local independent radio stations around the UK and on the BBC to talk about photographic techniques and giving shooting tips and handling 'phone-ins' on photographic questions. He had a regular spot on the Saturday morning 'Breakfast in Beds' programme in Luton with Bernard Mulhern on BBC 3 Counties Radio and later with John Pilgrim. It was during these programmes that he became well known as 'Phil the Frame' because of his exhortations to photographers to make better use of their viewfinders and get closer to their subjects! He appeared on Granada TV talking about UFOs and BBC Breakfast TV discussing photo-finishing. He occasionally wrote articles for publication in local newsletters or magazines on a variety of photographic or travel subjects.

Sadly, Phil's wife, Marion, died suddenly and unexpectedly from cancer in March 2014. Both he and his late wife ran photographic workshops in schools, charity groups and local societies teaching photography or showing audio visual programmes of the thousands of photographs taken on their travels around the world. He was frequently asked to act as a judge for photographic competitions, a role that he often filled

during his working career with Kodak.

Phil loved to watch Formula 1 motor racing. He got a great thrill when his daughter Elizabeth and his sister, Ann, for his 80th birthday, bought him the opportunity to drive an Aston Martin and a Ferrari sports racing car at the international Silverstone Race Track. He never got over the thrill of driving at 150mph down hanger straight and drifting the cars around the corners. Phil loved driving. He was taught by his colleagues when in the police, especially his beloved Range Rovers, a make of car which, because of its strength, saved both his and Marion's lives when the one they were driving in was crushed

by a falling crane jib when on the way to see Gordon who was studying for his Master's degree in Edinburgh. One of the items on his bucket list was to attend the Monte Carlo Grand Prix.

Phil retired from Kodak in 1993 after working for them for thirty years. He was a Director of the Charity 'Music for Youth' as well as being a Director of Community Action Dacorum and was Chairman of the local Tring Branch. He was also a past Chairman and latterly Vice-President of the Arts Society Tring Park. He was past Chairman of the local Red Cross Hall Management Committee. His spare time activities included travel, gardening and helping to raise money for local

charities and St Peter & St Paul's Church in Tring. In the latter case he worked for many years with others as assistant to the church treasurer, in collecting and banking the church collection funds. He enjoyed playing card games such as Bridge or Canasta, especially with his many exNHS nurse friends who had been midwives, and the various stories they would tell. He was greatly touched by the support he was given by his friends and neighbours after Marion died and he was always willing and keen to put something back into his local community when the opportunity arose.

Phil died on 21 October 2022.

God speaks through the Bible



In a recent edition of *Comment*, I wrote about an amazing reunion of father and son in China. This was a story of a faithful man of God trusting that God would care for his son even though he had to give him over to his enemy, who, as a result, became a Christian.

This time I would like to relate another true story based in the old Soviet Union showing what God can do through the Bible without any person's attempt to explain it. 'The Bible speaks for itself.'

A pastor, travelling one day by train in the Soviet Union, sat in a compartment with just one other passenger. The two men started chatting and were soon talking about religion. The Pastor listened patiently as the other man extolled the logic of atheism and criticised religious belief. The Pastor expressed his own views, even taking out his Bible and citing passages from it. But the atheist was unconvinced. As the futility of the conversation became clear, the two men lapsed into silence. The Pastor left the compartment for a few minutes, leaving his Bible on the seat. When he returned, he saw that the Bible was missing. The other man was just closing the window. He had thrown the Bible out so that neither the Pastor nor anyone else would be able to read such rubbish again. There was nothing the Pastor could do.

The journey continued in stony silence.

A few months later, a stranger came to call on the pastor. It was a man from a neighbouring village, and he announced quite bluntly that he wanted to be baptised. The pastor, who was surprised by the visit, asked what church he belonged to.

'None,' the stranger replied, 'but I have read my Bible and I know about God. I know that Jesus Christ is Lord and I want to be baptised, so that I can be counted as one of his followers.'

'A Bible?' the pastor asked, for Bibles were not plentiful in this country. 'Where could you have possibly obtained a Bible?'

'Well, it's a strange story,' the visitor began. 'I can hardly expect you to believe it, but I assure you it is true. I am a builder, and some months ago I was working on a site near a railway track when a strange thing happened. As the train went by, a book came flying from the window and landed in the dust not far from where I was standing. I walked over and picked it up. It was a Bible.'

The pastor stood there in amazement, listening to these words. He questioned the builder further and realised it must have been his own Bible the builder had found. Did the visitor have the book with him? He showed it to the pastor who recognised it immediately. The book that had served him so long and so well now served someone else. Here was a new Christian who was asking to be baptised, thanks to that Bible. When the Pastor told him how the Bible had been thrown from the train by an atheist, the builder offered to return it.

The Pastor refused. 'No,' he replied, 'I cannot accept it. This book has done such wonderful things for you that I

want you to keep it. And I pray it may do wonderful things for others too.'

The builder went away after his baptism brimming with enthusiasm to share what he had learnt from his Bible. Within a few years, many people in his village had been converted and a new Christian community emerged – all because of a Bible someone had tried to throw away.

This amazing story illustrates several things which make us think. God can, and does, work his purposes out sometimes in the most unconventional ways. It shows the power of the written word to change lives without human interference. God can speak to anyone without needing explanation from others (although this will often help later). It raises a question we should ask ourselves – when I have read God's Word, or heard it read, do I feel that God has spoken to me? In the land where this happened and where Bibles are scarce and it may be dangerous to be seen with one, God is still at work.

We, in our Tring churches, all have our Bibles freely available. We should not rely on learning more of our faith and the way God wants us to put it into practice just from sermons, group discussions or even in a one-to-one conversation, although all of these can sometimes be very helpful. We each have a Bible of our own in our own language and can read it without interference. We don't have to be academic or hold a position in church. God will open up the meaning of his truth – if we ask him. That is why prayer and the Bible are essential parts of our individual and our church lives.

John Young
Akeman Street Baptist Church

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Articles, photos and publicity 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



Services at Tring Church

Sunday 5th February

8am Holy Communion traditional language
10am Communion with Children's Activities **

6.30pm Festive Choral Evensong
for Candlemas

Sunday 12th February

8am Holy Communion traditional language **

10am Worship for all
3pm Piano and More concert

Sunday 19th February

8am Holy Communion traditional language
10am Communion with Children's Activities **

Wednesday 22nd February Ash Wednesday

10am Communion and Imposition of Ashes
7.30pm Communion and Imposition of Ashes

Sunday 26th February

8am Holy Communion traditional language
10am Communion with Children's Activities**

** Streamed service on our website and YouTube

Mid-week Services in Tring

9.15am Tuesdays

Holy Communion

10am Thursdays

Holy Communion in traditional language

What's on in February in Tring Church

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

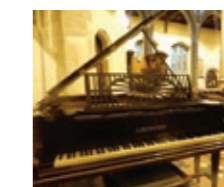


Social Coffee

Fridays, Saturdays
10am - 12 noon,
and after Sunday, Tuesday
& Thursday services



Piano & more series Sunday February 12th



3pm for an hour's concert of music followed by refreshments.
Free but collection for church and piano expenses

Friday 17th February

Secondary Modern Jazz band
Tring Church doors open 7pm
for Tring Brewery bar,
music from 8pm.



Crossword puzzle answers

From page 25

ACROSS

1. BEATITUDES
8. ATHLETE
9. ELOPE
10. EDEN
11. AGONISED
13. MANNA
14. TACIT
16. DISCREET
17. PALM
20. DRAMA
21. TRINITY
22. TEMPERANCE

DOWN

1. BRAVE
2. ASH WEDNESDAY
3. ICED
4. USEAGE
5. ETERNITY
6. CONSECRATION
7. MEND IT
12. MARRIAGE
13. MADE DO
15. FEET UP
18. MAYBE
19. TIER

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

www.tringteamparish.org.uk

Festive Choral Evensong for Candlemas

**Sunday, February 5th 2023 at 6.30pm,
St Peter and St Paul, Tring.**

**Canticles by Richard Lloyd, a beautiful
introit and a scrumptious anthem plus 3
rousing hymns.**



Retiring collection/donations for FOTCH and the Church Organ Fund.

Refreshments will be provided after the service.

Further information please contact Trish Dowden at trish@tringteamparish.org.uk or on 07720 836930.