

# 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.



Morning worship 

Sundays 10.30am

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Growing in the message and challenge of God.



Coffee for a cause

Tuesdays 10am-12 Noon



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

Seniors Games Afternoon

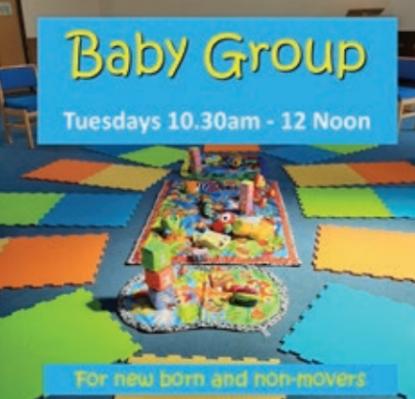
Wednesdays 2 - 4pm

High Street Baptist Church, Tring



Baby Group

Tuesdays 10.30am - 12 Noon

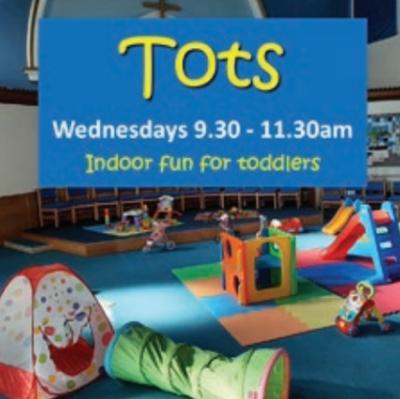


For new born and non-movers

Tots

Wednesdays 9.30 - 11.30am

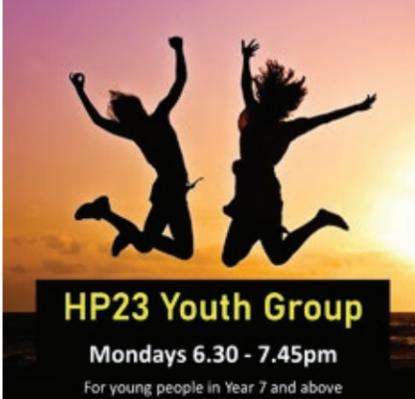
Indoor fun for toddlers



HP23 Youth Group

Mondays 6.30 - 7.45pm

For young people in Year 7 and above



Church office  
Revd Joe Egan  
Revd Ruth Egan

admin@tringbaptistchurch.co.uk  
07521 513493 or joe@tringbaptistchurch.co.uk  
07521 513494 or ruth@tringbaptistchurch.co.uk

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High Street Baptist Church

## A time of holiness and growth



Having Ash Wednesday on the same day as Valentine's is an interesting mix. I would argue that both are about showing love, but in very different ways. I have no desire to be given soft toys holding hearts, or to book a very expensive meal out, or indeed to make anyone not in a relationship feel unwanted, which seem to be how much of Valentine's Day pans out for many. Yet a service where we are reminded of our mortality, encouraged to change our bad habits and take on good ones, and to take time in prayer and contemplation, is not how some would want to spend that day.

We have had an early Lent, as Easter falls on 31 March and, as faith communities, we are continuing with our regular events – soup and bread lunches on Wednesdays to raise money for Christian Aid, and in the Tring Team we are also having our usual Sunday evening films in St John's, Aldbury, and our house groups are looking at St John's Gospel. The theme of the films this year is 'Waiting' which has come, in part, from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book, 'Tarry Awhile' by Selina Stone, which looks at the black Christian spiritual practice of tarrying, of actively waiting for an encounter with God. It is a book that draws on the history of black communities and how what they have had to endure has informed their spirituality.

Waiting, of course, can play a large part in Valentine's Day – waiting for a card or a gift, waiting for a response, waiting for a partner to get ready – but however we are having to wait in life, it is rarely seen as a positive, and this is usually because it is something imposed on us rather than a choice. We wait for late trains, we wait for dates of hospital appointments and results, we wait for others to call or to help us when we are homebound: again, none of those are seen as positives. Waiting can be seen as being about power. If you have control over your life, you do not have to wait. It is the people in positions

of responsibility and/or the wealthy, whose time is seen as too important to wait for anything: they are flown in helicopters to meetings, or use private health care, and the timetables of others are altered to fit them.

So, if you are not used to waiting and it is imposed upon you, it can be incredibly difficult to cope with; and if all you ever have to do is wait to fit in with decisions and timetables created by others, then you can lose initiative. Neither are healthy situations to be in all the time.

There are, of course, many biblical examples of waiting, whether it is of a people wandering until they can return to their land, or the disciples waiting with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and failing to stay awake. Many of the psalms also speak of how we turn our waiting into times of prayer and times of strength, and this is part of what 'Tarry Awhile' is looking at – that however we are living or having to live, we can find God in it, and with us.

So, I hope your Ash Wednesday was a day of love, and that the rest of Lent, whether you find yourself waiting or not, it is a time of holiness and growth. Psalm 27:14: 'Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.'

Jane Banister, Tring Team

*Waiting is something I do rather nervously each month as the Comment deadline comes around! Will there be enough articles? Will there be any?! If you are a regular Comment reader and have something to say – whether in response to another article or something topical or of interest to you that you would like to offer, please don't hold back. Variety is all – we need some cerebral and spiritual articles but also a few warm, amusing stories and accounts of what is happening in all the churches in Tring and round about. If the bias is towards the Anglican communities, it is only because they are the ones who send in their articles. We would love to hear more from everyone else! Please get in touch (contact details on page 30). Ed.*

### Easter 2024 at High Street Baptist Church

We extend a warm welcome to all to our special Easter activities and services.

For further information email admin@tringbaptistchurch.co.uk

Easter Day

7am Sunrise Service

at Pitstone Hill, followed by egg-rolling competition

(Bring your decorated hard-boiled eggs, prizes for best decorated and winner of rolling)



Easter Day

9.30am Breakfast

10.30am All-age Celebration



Egg-rolling Competition Rules

1. All eggs must be real chicken or duck eggs (they can be boiled).
2. One egg per person.
3. Eggs must be decorated.
4. Eggs must be rolled, not thrown.
5. Once the egg has left the competitor's hand it must not be touched again until the race is completed.

Prizes for 'best decorated egg'

The egg-rolling winner will receive the High Street Egg-cup



## 'A perfect opportunity' for anyone putting off making their Will

Local charity, DENS, have announced the return of its popular 'Make A Will Month' scheme this March.

Several solicitor firms across Dacorum are generously volunteering their time to write or update a Will in return for a donation to DENS, who support people around the borough facing homelessness, poverty and social exclusion.

The charity, which has helped rebuild lives for the past twenty years, has recently reported a significant increase in local people needing to

access their services. DENS, like many other charities, are facing a 'cost of giving crisis' with the triple threat of increased demand, increased costs and lower income.

Suggested donation amounts, starting at £175 for a single basic Will, are much lower than the standard rates for Will-writing.

Michael Morgan, a Kings Langley resident who took part in the scheme last year, said: 'We made the decision to remake our Wills and found it to be very easy. I would thoroughly recommend

it to all, whatever age, as it benefits everyone and brings peace of mind.'

Kate Rogers, Individual Giving Manager at DENS, said: 'This is a perfect opportunity to make a Will, something many adults put off, while supporting the vital work of DENS within our community.'

To find out more and book your appointment with a participating solicitor, please visit [www.dens.org.uk/mawm](http://www.dens.org.uk/mawm).

**Alex Copley**  
**DENS**

## Wassa what?



In early January, when the days are short and there is that end-of-Christmas slump, everything can feel a bit of an effort. It feels easier to stay inside with a hot drink,

the radio and a crochet project. But on Saturday 13 January at 2.00pm a group was gathering. A raggle-taggle band of musicians and costumed Morris dancers met at Church Square in the centre of Tring. They sang and danced their way round apple trees in the area and then into my own garden.

A friendlier, more joyful tribe, I cannot imagine. Despite the cold, they brought warmth and fun into the fading light of that dark January evening. They were the New Moon Morris side, come to wassail our fruit trees and gather round



the fire. There was music, poetry, strange traditions involving toast, mulled drinks and soup. There were people who knew each other well from years of dancing and playing together on hills and in pubs and people who had come along to find out what wassailing was all about. It felt welcoming, inclusive and joyful.

### What's a wassail?

Wassailing is an old English custom celebrated mainly in the cider-making areas of Somerset and Herefordshire, the idea being to protect the cider apple trees from evil spirits and to encourage a good crop in the coming season. It takes place on or around Twelfth Night. The word wassail comes from the old Anglo Saxon 'wes hal' meaning to be whole, in good health.

What generally happens is that pieces of toast, soaked in cider, are placed around the oldest or finest tree in the orchard, cider is poured around the base, then shotguns are fired into

the upper branches, buckets are beaten and a general cacophony of noise made to scare away evil spirits and wake the sleeping trees. Once the harvest has been assured, the evening continues with music, fun, cider and food. This pretty much happened in our orchard!

If you fancy seeing what it's all about, New Moon Morris practise on Tuesday evenings at 8.15pm at the Old Town Hall, Ivinghoe – follow the music! For contact details and to find out more about New Moon Morris visit: <https://www.newmoonmorris.co.uk>.

Read more about wassailing: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/discover/history/art-collections/wassailing-ritual-and-revelry>

**Polly Eaton**  
**High Street Baptist Church**

## What God is doing at New Mill



As I approach my first-year anniversary as the minister at New Mill Baptist Church, it's made me look back to see all that has happened in the year, and consider what God

has been doing amongst us.

I was inducted on 25 February 2023, and the joy of worship rang out as the church was buzzing and people even needed to use the balcony to fit in. I knew that the regular Sundays would be different, as the number of our membership was much smaller; but it's been an encouragement that, during the year, we have had new people join us, including a family with children, which has led to the reopening of the Sunday Club. The two children were dedicated in the autumn, and it was so lovely to have more visitors come to join us for that special event.

Across the year we have hosted four evenings of worship led by Josh and Florrie Bishop-Hall and those events have attracted people from other churches to join us. Linking up with other Tring



churches also occurred on Maundy Thursday and as we walked down Tring High Street for the Good Friday walk of witness. We have continued with the links for Lent Lunches and Saturday Prayer Breakfasts as well. We also initiated a 'White Christmas' service with High Street Baptist Church to support those who have recently been bereaved as they faced Christmas alone.

We had fun in late June when a team of Korean Christians come to help us knock on the doors of houses around the church to try to initiate conversations, and find out if there were areas of need that we could respond to. Loneliness is sadly a feature for many, and our Thursday Café is one way we are trying to meet that need. Recently we also opened up as a Warm Space with a simpler lunch, and tables with games, jigsaws and books to borrow. It was encouraging to see new people arrive.

Another request from the local community was that we would tidy up the graveyard. As we are small in number I used our Facebook group to ask if any locals could come and help us. We had all sorts of folk join us for two mornings, and we showed our thanks with bacon butties for all volunteers.

Within our own church we have also aimed to grow deeper in our relationship with God. We have started day and evening small groups so that we can enjoy fellowship together and study the Bible so that we can grow in our discipleship. We have also started church prayer evenings, realising afresh how dependent we are on God for ourselves, our church, the surrounding area and the world we live in.

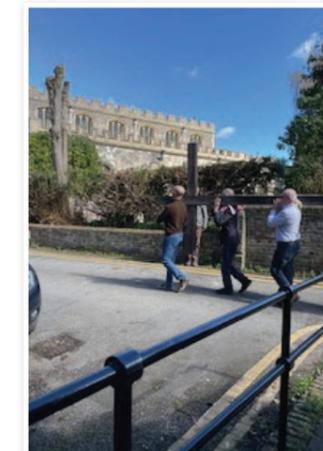


We had prayed that more people would come to us over Christmas and we were delighted when so many came along to enjoy the Nine Lessons and Carols service, with our Georgian Chapel looking so Christmassy lit with candles.

Alongside all those obvious good times, we have also sadly had more funerals than any of us would like. But life as a church means we are there for each other through the ups and downs of life. So together we look forward and pray for new opportunities to show God's love to each other, but also, very importantly, to our community of New Mill and Tring.

We would love to open a group for Toddlers. We have toys, space but not a big enough team to enable this to happen. If anyone from another church would be willing and able to help us, please do drop me a line at [nmbcminister@gmail.com](mailto:nmbcminister@gmail.com) so that we can see what we can do together. I am a strong believer in linking up wherever we can so that God's work grows where he wants it to. It's just so lovely to be in a town and community that seem to share that desire to look out for others.

**Jackie Buie**  
**New Mill Baptist Church**



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*Stephen Hearn*  
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## Our story: the new Head of Tring Park School



This almost didn't happen. I was happy in my Headship in London, running St Paul's Cathedral School and it was only because a recruiter was trying to sell me the idea of another prep school that I even looked. On the recruiter's website was also an advert for Tring Park School for the Performing Arts, and the deadline was the next day.

Do you ever have a moment when the sense of panic and excitement leaves you standing, mouth open and unable to think? It was my dream job, and I am incredibly blessed to be here.

The stars aligned. St Paul's is a Christopher Wren building, and underneath all the fabulous flamboyance of the Rothschild Mansion is another Wren structure. The church across the road is St Peter & St Paul's. I'd known my predecessor, Stefan, for years, and knew of so many performers who had trained at Tring from my own days as a dancer. And yes, as an avid radio fan, I had listened to Mark Steel's 'In Town', even before I knew the role of Principal had come up.

So here we are, my wife Dawn and I, with our loud Airedale Terrier, Parker (so sorry for his barking), who loved the treats in Metcalfe's from the near daily visits to buy bits and bobs when we first moved in. We sometimes buy fish on Friday on the High Street, have met Ben at the bookshop, joined the book club, been to an author talk, had our hair cut, bought coffees, and buns and groceries, got our shoes mended on the corner and sent parcels from the Post Office. Everywhere we've met wonderful people, who have been incredibly welcoming and keen to share their love for the town.

Before I went to London as a young dancer at the Rambert Academy, I grew up across the border in Harlow. The Playhouse Theatre was my saviour, and the local ballet club, run by Leo Kersley, was a place of disciplined magic. It was there that I also made lifelong friendships, and, like Tring alumni, we have a special bond. Dawn grew up in the north east in Middlesbrough, and works in the technology sector. Meeting her was the best thing that ever happened to me.

Let's talk about faith. I grew up among Quakers at an important time in my childhood, and to this day, some of those big ideas of the collective power of the love within us all (which some think of as God), the idea of living adventurously, and the principle of 'first seek to understand', remain powerful beacons for me. Some of the best conversations I've had about faith are with clergy, and I am always struck by the strength people find in being at peace with doubt. I had a wonderful conversation with the then Dean of St Paul's just before my appointment to its choir school. I wasn't, and am still not, a communicant member of the Church of England, and that posed some interesting questions. I remain doubtful. However, the power of community, of the church being a hub for people in joy and sorrow, has enormous power for good, and I have no difficulty subscribing to ideas of social justice that are at the heart the Christian faith. Church has a high degree of the theatrical about it, too, and having now met Huw, he clearly could have travelled in another direction!

My father was a social worker, and my mother a probation officer with a particular commitment to penal reform, and women's rights, and so that communitarian ideal to find redemption and forgiveness runs deep. Schools are microcosms of the world, and not everyone is yet convinced by my approach to dealing with young people who sometimes get things wrong. We'll get there with kindness, and understanding the often complex context of a young person's hinterland takes time. Of course, children need to know where their boundaries are, too.

I suppose what that all amounts to is a set of personal values that I hope informs both a collegiate leadership style and sense of what schools are for. Tring Park marries all that with my own commitment and belief in the power of the arts as a social good, an idea that I know is shared by my colleagues. For what are we if our only ambition is worldly goods? Performing arts at this level of excellence is not easy, either. However, for the young people drawn to this school, that burning need to perform is real and absolutely worth the effort – theirs and ours. That drive informs their identity, their sense of self, and helps



them make sense of their purpose. That may sound very grand, perhaps even overblown and pompous. I don't think it is.

Think of all this from the perspective of vocation, an idea that is viscerally understood by clergy, people in the care professions, teachers, medics and many others lucky enough to have a real sense of how they contribute to society. Dancers, actors, musicians, artists of all kinds, might have that outward show of brazen confidence at times, but it can also conceal doubts, fragilities and vulnerabilities, in part because what they do really matters to them. It should matter to us, too, because artists help us to tell stories about ourselves, to make sense of sometimes difficult things, to see different perspectives and to bring enormous joy.

Not all our young people will go on as professional performers, and many find different paths. Our aim here is to provide our young people with many future versions of themselves, and that means giving them the very best vocational training alongside great academics.

What we're talking about at school a lot at the moment is how do we become more outward in service to that aim? Connections to the creative industries are top in that conversation. To widen the horizons of possibility for young people to explore not only on-stage, but off-stage and back-stage, and all the ancillary trades and professions from writers to directors, costume and management, events and myriad other avenues. It's a big ask, and we'll soon be overrun with ideas and ways to connect.

We need to tell our story, and to help others to come along with us and make our future society even better for all. For all the woes in the world right now, it is also the most exciting time to be here.

**Simon Larter-Evans, Tring Park School**

# History without bias?



'Where will I find an unbiased history – or is that a dream?' questioned our rector, Huw Bellis, in the last edition of *Comment*. Coming at the end of a

consideration of the origins of the present Arab/Israeli conflict, it was a plea for history to somehow give us a definitive answer. There in the past was the truth if only it could be revealed without prejudice or propaganda.

Unfortunately, whilst history provides facts, for example births, deaths, wars, inventions, it is humans who then interpret those facts, assess their importance, judge them and use them as evidence for opinion. Diaries, treaties, eyewitness accounts, newspapers, artifacts, all kinds of primary sources provide evidence for the historian to consider. Indeed, even sources that are not there can still be valuable; archeological sites give clues, the wiped WhatsApp reveals intent. But whatever the source, it is how it is perceived and interpreted that gives it an importance historically.

Take 'Hansard' for example. For every session of Parliament, a record is kept of what is actually said in each debate. Every day the media selects and transforms these records into highly charged and political comment. The

historian chooses from these sources, selects what to use and who to believe. However, as the late Queen memorably said, 'Some recollections may vary'.

Whatever the source, it is how and why selections are made that is important. Any history, even a chronological list of events, is subject to selection and nowhere is this more explicit than in the way history has been used over the centuries to provide and inculcate specific messages of citizenship, morality and heritage. So, should what history is remembered (or forgotten) far from being unbiased have a purpose? Should the role of the historical narrative be to serve the nation state? Indeed, using history to re-affirm national aims and identity in many views is still a necessary part of education.

An interesting example is found in the proposed curriculum for 13-year-olds in British schools in 1904:

- Course 3 - Emigration to the Colonies (to bring out the need for and value of emigration and the dash, energy and pluck needed to carry it out)
- Course 4 - Modern government and why men go to prison
- Course 4 - The question of Imperial Defense

Further complication for the historian arises from the situation that for the far past there is not enough evidence and for the present there is too much. Ibn Khaldun, a great Arab philosopher stated that the role of history is to 'explain why

things are as they are', but our attitude to the facts changes over time. The present reaction to the history of slavery is an example. Add to this that the origin of the word 'history' is from the Greek 'to know' and there is plenty of scope for argument. Cleo, the muse of history, celebrated 'the great and glorious battles won by the Greeks'. Cleo was partial from the start and dressed in national costume and she became the handmaid of religion and colonial aspirations, political parties, and economic enterprises. Today you will find her singing patriotic songs and wearing army uniform.

Which brings us back to the present Arab/Israeli conflict, illustrating so well the difficulties for the historian of selection, propaganda, partiality and bias. Neither state has a commonly accepted narrative or a present-day agreement on events. Yet each is, in a number of ways, a mirror image of the other. Both are victims, both have an obsessive religious and national vision, both have used dubious methods and violence to achieve their aims and, most fatefully, both claim the same land. Huw may never achieve his dream of history without bias... meanwhile, we can all pray for peace.

**Caroline Ellwood**  
**St John the Baptist, Aldbury**

# Why not read...?



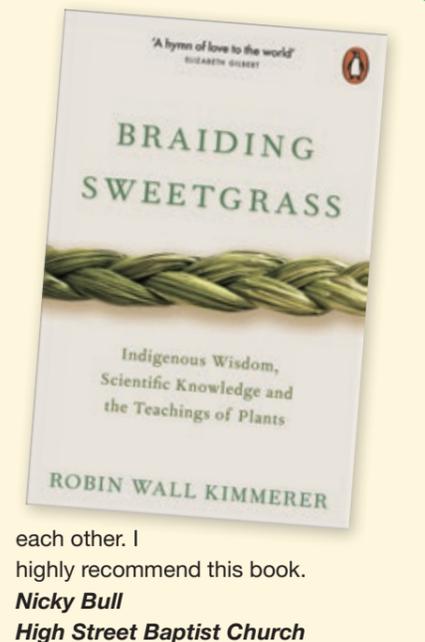
I spotted in the February issue of *Comment* that John Whiteman was asking for reading recommendations. I recently read a book that I am delighted

to see theologian and environmentalist Dr Ruth Valerio is using for a Lent book group this year.

'Braiding Sweetgrass' (Robin Wall Kimmerer) is a really wonderful book, managing to combine a great deal of science along with wisdom drawn from the knowledge and traditions of native peoples, and gently but

forcefully rebuking the consumerist and thoughtlessly destructive ways that we have all slipped into as part of the modern world. The author conveys both deep distress and lament over biodiversity loss and the effects of climate change, together with stories of hope and recovery where people have rediscovered a right relationship with the land and with the non-human creation.

Some with religious faith may perhaps have initial scepticism about aspects of this book, but I found it fascinating to see the parallels between creation stories and to recognise just how much all ancient belief systems have in common and can learn from



each other. I highly recommend this book.  
**Nicky Bull**  
**High Street Baptist Church**

# An attitude of gratitude



These thoughts start at the most challenging time of my life to date. My wonderful husband Alex died on the evening of the end of term, our Founders Day at Tring Park School.

Through all the deep shock and grief, I have been able, with the loving support of so many, to give thanks for the sixteen years we had. Sarah Marshall took the funeral and we most certainly were able to give thanks for his life and commend him to God.

My faith has propped me up. Of course, I pray through many tears. However, even when it is hard, especially when it is hard, I try to focus on things to give thanks for.

When I have felt swamped, I have had the tireless support of friends and family. They are walking beside me on this unexpected journey and I am grateful. I have discovered the amazing WAY group (Widowed and Young) due to my sister-in-law hearing of the great work that it does. There are regular virtual and in-person events and the monthly meal has been really special. In their online safe space, I have been able to share some musings and benefited a lot from the postings of others.

I chose to return to school in September. As my life had been turned upside-down so profoundly, I felt that this would help. At work, with all the usual things happening, I have had that regular

routine. It has been a good choice. I have had so much wonderful support from the Tring Park Family. I have not hidden the experience from the pupils. They were aware that we were due to go to Australia as a delayed retirement trip for Alex, after forty years in the NHS. He was a transplant pathologist, with a deep interest in cardiac cases in children and the young. Thus, to avoid any awkward questions, they were emailed before the start of term with the news. Alex had been a good friend to school, supporting me in my roles here and being at many events. I am thankful of that; I am also thankful

that, because there had been a lot of talented pupils and alumni, we were blessed to see shows such as English National Ballet's Nutcracker, Matilda, School of Rock, to name but a few.

In late January we welcomed back to school our 2023 leavers to collect their A level and GCSE certificates. In a touching ceremony, Simon, our new principal, asked them to acknowledge the support of their teachers with a round of applause, in their learning journey to many interesting universities and places of further training. We were also asked to do the same for the parents to acknowledge their key role, which was a very nice touch indeed. As many were

in the Lower School, where many of my Assemblies focused on what an attitude of gratitude looked like, I was pleased to hear this. Our speaker was alumna Rebecca Stirk. She is now an Account Director at Hanson Zandi, a creative healthcare communications agency. This is an award-winning agency that provides strategic and creative services to pharmaceutical, medical device and healthcare companies. Thus, her creative Tring Park energy has gone into this! Her reflections on her learning journey, and her advice on being a positive person, chimed in so well with the whole atmosphere of the event.

**Sarah Bell, Tring Park School**



# Unsteady in faith?



Long time no see! Though I'm not writing regularly for *Comment* anymore, I did love writing articles, so I went and started my own magazine for Tring school...

I wrote this article for said school magazine and thought I'd share it with you all – hope you enjoy!

Let's face it... Christianity can get something of a bad reputation amongst young people. Now, I can't pretend I'm anything of an expert on the subject, but I've done a little research, asked around a bit and I think one of the most common beliefs is that Christianity can sometimes be used as an excuse for homophobia, racism, transphobia, et cetera. And, as is the way with many elements of society, the bad news always seems to get more widely spread than the good, meaning the actions of some groups can reflect badly on the community as a whole.

I grew up going to High Street Baptist Church every Sunday, and I suppose I would have considered myself a Christian, for I believed the Bible stories we were taught, though I think it's important to note that no one else's beliefs were ever forced onto me – I was given the space and education with which to make my own decisions about faith. If you asked me now, I would say I was an atheist (someone who does not believe in any God or gods); as a multi-science A-level student, I feel that the logic and data behind the idea of an omniscient, omnipresent being who has a plan for every one of us was a little far-fetched. I still like to go to church when I can, for I love being part of the church family, being involved in all the events and hearing other people's perspectives on Christianity. I did a couple of Alpha courses (would recommend) which are designed to be done in groups, providing information and inspiration for anyone interested in learning more about Christianity and how it applies to the modern world and day-to-day life.

However, though I don't believe in all the Bible stories we were taught, there is still a part of me that wishes I did. I think there is something comforting in believing there is something out there watching over us all, who loves us irrevocably.

It's reassuring to know that no matter what happens, it is all part of God's plan for you, giving you the strength to push through the tough times.

Perhaps that is a selfish belief, to want a strong faith purely for personal reassurance. Perhaps religion as a whole is a selfish concept – one person I spoke to believed that if good deeds are done with a reward in mind, even if it is a far-off reward such as the promise of heaven after death, then the worth of the deed is instantly reduced, for how can it still count as a selfless deed?

An interesting response to this, shared by a Christian I spoke to, is that if you live your life as a 'good' Christian, doing your best to love and help others, then what does it matter if you are doing good deeds with the hope of getting to heaven? You will still have spent your life helping people, and your personal faith will have harmed no one. I love this perspective, for it allows room for people like me, unsteady in their faith, on the edge of the church but not quite fully immersed in the religion. It allows us the freedom to be a part of the church family, volunteer with the community and spend our lives trying to follow the core teachings of Jesus – loving ourselves and others, even if we don't fully accept or understand the religion yet.

I know there is nothing definitive in this article, I meant it only as an opportunity to work through my own and others' beliefs surrounding what it means to be a part of the Christian community. I'd hope that it might have helped some people see the side of religion I love, not the side that is often associated with hate and rejection of the LGBTQ+ community. Inevitably, there will always be some who believe every part of the Bible should be taken literally, when in truth many take it with a grain of salt, accepting that some of the teachings merely reflected views at the time. Please don't be

put off by the stereotypes many associate with Christianity; there is so much more to it than can ever be taught in schools or shared on social media! I hope that wherever you are in your faith journey, if you are even religious at all, you find what makes you happy and know how to reach out for guidance should you need it.

**Fern Asquith**  
**Tring School**

People don't come to faith through arguments. They come to faith because they find that they like religion – the stories, the songs, the art, the speech-forms, the culture. They might also like the intellectual side of religion, but this is mixed in with everything else. For example, I might be intellectually persuaded by something that a theologian says, but this is tied up with my wider appreciation, which is more aesthetic or emotional than rational, of the core Christian themes that he or she develops. Most apologetics overlooks this wider embedding and overstates the role of abstract rationality, and makes theology look brittle and little.

**Thoe Hobson**  
**The Spectator, 27 December 2023**



# Tweet of the month



If I didn't say it in previous tweets, last autumn was exceptional for American birds, and American Wood Warblers in particular. A Cape May Warbler found on Bryher, Isles of Scilly, on 10 November was last seen on 4 December and most people, myself included, thought that was probably it. However, on 3 January this year a Northern Waterthrush was reported in a garden in Essex. It might seem strange for an American bird to be seen on Britain's east coast, and indeed, people were sceptical and thought it a mistake. However, in these days of near-instant information dissemination, an excellent photo taken of said bird soon removed doubt.

This bird was only the eighth Northern Waterthrush recorded in Britain. The last previous record was one on the Isles of Scilly for seven months in 2011 and 2012, and the last one on the British mainland was at Portland Bill in 1996. The only one I had previously seen in Britain was the fifth British record and was on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly in August 1989. My first ever was in 1986 at Point Pelee National Park in Ontario, Canada – which is a peninsula that extends into Lake Erie and is the southernmost point of Canada. This was my first trip abroad and was memorable for so many reasons – one of which was the veritable onslaught of colour of the American Wood Warblers

migrating through this hotspot while we were there. I saw thirty different species of American Wood Warblers on that trip – most of which were brightly coloured. By contrast the Northern Waterthrush is relatively dull and confusingly similar to the Louisiana Waterthrush. We saw one of each of these Waterthrushes on this trip, but I have seen over forty Northern Waterthrushes subsequently in trips to Costa Rica, Trinidad & Tobago, Venezuela, Panama and Honduras.

Most of the American Warblers are migrants and summer visitors to USA and Canada, with some of the hardier species overwintering. The majority, however, fly south, sometimes using a great circle route over the Atlantic Ocean, to winter in Central America, the Caribbean islands or South America.

Northern Waterthrush obviously isn't a thrush, but the streaked underparts give it a thrush-like appearance and its fondness for bogs and streams in forests, both on its breeding and wintering grounds, led to its name. It breeds in Alaska, Canada and northern USA and winters in southern Florida, Mexico and further south as far as northern South America. It is called Northern because it breeds further north than Louisiana Waterthrush which breeds in eastern USA.



Northern Waterthrush is also a possibility in Colombia, but when a friend was planning to go to see it, I went with him, as it was possible to see it well, and maybe photograph it too. We picked a nice sunny day to go and we weren't disappointed on either front. I had my best views ever and got photos.

So why did I go? From experience, I know that if I do see Northern Waterthrush in Colombia it is likely to be distant, and one among over 100 species of birds seen that day, some of which are new. So, this was a chance to focus on this one bird and study it closely. It is like the difference between reading a whole book of the Bible in one go, or spending time studying a short passage and getting a better understanding of what it says to you. Both are enjoyable, but which do you learn more from doing?  
**Roy Hargreaves, St Peter & St Paul**

# Feedback



I found three articles in the February edition of *Comment* especially interesting – and such memories!

The poem of the month was by Malcolm Guite. When I first read that Malcolm had married the Editor's niece, I wondered what had happened to Maggie, his wife... We knew them both when Malcolm was at Ely and then Hertford, Huntingdon. I spoke to a

friend who knows Malcolm and Maggie and they are alive and well and living in Norfolk. Then the penny dropped! Malcolm 'married' the Editor's niece in the sense of performing the ceremony! Recently we attended the funeral of a hardworking member of our church in Biggleswade and her daughter read 'A Last Beatitude' by Malcolm Guite – it's worth a read if you haven't come across it.

Then there was the article about New Mill Scouts – thank you Erica! – and many of the names were familiar to me. I knew Mr Bob Hummer, who was

also known for his Camp Fire Circles (as Tring Guides we were invited to them) and also Peter Harrowell.

The sad news about Revd John Payne Cook also brought back memories. His wife's sister, Hilary, and I worked together at Culford School, Suffolk, and John and his family used to come for tea.

I look forward each month to receiving my copy of *Comment* – I look forward to more memories!  
**Rosamund Drake**  
**formerly St Peter & St Paul**

## Taizé services



A Taizé service is a meditative service based on words and music from the Taizé community in France. We used to have them regularly before Covid-19, mainly at one of the churches in the Tring Team Parish. The most recent was one at Puttenham on 27 January this year.

The Taizé Community is an ecumenical Christian monastic foundation in Taizé, Saône-et-Loire, Burgundy, France. Resident and non-resident brothers forming the community come from over thirty countries. Numbers vary but are around 100. Some live at the Taizé monastery, others live in small groups or singly in deprived parts of the world.

The community was started in 1940 by Brother Roger as a small house where refugees were sheltered. He was warned in 1942 that the Germans had found out about the house which had to be closed at once. Brother Roger went to Geneva where he formed the first small group of brothers who returned to Taizé when it was safe in 1944 and set up a place of refuge for children who had lost their parents in the war. Brother Roger's sister Genevieve acted as their mother. The community attracted many young people

from all over the world and has been visited by Pope John Paul II, patriarchs, metropolitans and bishops of various Orthodox churches, four Archbishops of Canterbury and many bishops and pastors from all over the world. Tragically, Brother Roger was murdered by someone with mental health problems at evening prayer in 2005.

A Taizé prayer service basically consists of meditative reflective repetitive prayer, with or without music. All the participants face the same way to show that prayer is to Christ, not to each other. The prayer space usually contains a cross, candles, an open Bible and maybe an icon and flowers. There is no set format. A song/prayer sheet may be provided and once the service starts, it normally proceeds as a continuous event without any explanations. Singing is meditative with just a short sentence or verse being repeated over and over. The Taizé Community explains 'As the words are sung over many times, this reality gradually penetrates the whole being. Meditative singing thus becomes a way of listening to God. It allows everyone to take part in a time of prayer together and to remain together in attentive waiting on God, without having to fix the length of time too exactly.'

During the service there is usually



also a read Psalm and intercessions. There may be a musical accompaniment – usually a guitar. The leader is usually in the front row facing the same way as everyone else, and will start each song.

An example of one of the official Taizé songs is: See, I am near, says the Lord. / See, I make all things new (repeated many times).

Another widely used one is: O Lord, hear my prayer, / O Lord, hear my prayer; / when I call answer me. / O Lord, hear my prayer, / O Lord, hear my prayer; / come and listen to me (repeated many times).

It is possible to visit Taizé as a family, a group of young people, or as a single or couple of adults over 30. A visit is normally a week from Sunday to Sunday – you can't just pop in for the day! Some Friday to Sunday visits are possible, but are not the norm. Details [https://www.taize.fr/en\\_rubrique2149.html](https://www.taize.fr/en_rubrique2149.html). You can watch prayer live, or on a recording, each day on [https://www.taize.fr/en\\_article28227.html](https://www.taize.fr/en_article28227.html).

**John Allan, High Street Baptist Church**

## Poem of the month



This poem, written originally in Old Irish, was traditionally attributed to the 6<sup>th</sup> century Saint Columba. However, scholars think that, like many similar works, it was probably composed in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century and might have been a note in the margin of another work. The earliest copy dates to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and is held in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

It was almost certainly written by a monk and dramatises the incessant labour of the scribes in the Scriptorium. Their work is often described as devotional but it must have been physically exhausting and trying on the

eyes and hands. The parchment or vellum had to be prepared to provide a suitable surface for writing ('plain of shining books'); the quill had to be constantly sharpened (hence the necessity for a 'pen-knife') and the inks concocted from bark ('green-skinned holly?') and different minerals to allow the writing to adhere to the skin. As a result of this, no doubt, the monk's hands were indelibly stained, the skin roughened and the muscles and joints stiffened ('fair-brown shapely hand'). Throughout his labour, the scribe was driven by the need to pass on 'the wisdom of blessed God' and produce a valuable treasure for the wealthy to buy.

This poem was set to music in 2012 by the Irish composer Sean Doherty.

*My hand is weary with writing  
My hand is weary with writing,  
My sharp quill is not steady,  
My slender-beaked pen jets forth  
A black draught of shining dark-blue ink.  
A stream of wisdom of blessed God  
Springs from my fair-brown shapely hand:  
On the page it squirts its draught  
Of ink of the green-skinned holly.  
My little dripping pen travels  
Across the plain of shining books  
Without ceasing for the wealth of the great –  
Whence my hand is weary with writing.*  
**Saint Columcille (Columba)**  
**trans. Kuno Meyer**

Kuno Meyer (1858-1919) was a German scholar who was a distinguished specialist in the field of ancient Celtic literature.

**Kate Banister**  
**St Julian's, St Albans**

## Signs, wine and miracles



Our eldest son got married in December last year. It was a joyful occasion. There were people from all over Britain and Ireland, his wife's family from Ecuador and others from Brazil, Spain, Colombia and Sicily. Despite the best efforts of the couple's friends and families, the wine did not run out.

Cana in Galilee, which tour guides in Israel point out to you just off a main road, was close to Nazareth. One of the Coptic Egyptian Gospels which did not make it into the New Testament tells us that Mary was the sister of the bridegroom's mother. Make of that what you will.

Galilee was a place in the time of Jesus' ministry where the Jewish people were in a minority – the Gentiles (or other nations) predominated. It was an especially fertile land and a crossroads of international travel; those two factors had attracted people from far and wide. Those of you who are familiar with the service of Nine Lessons and Carols may recall the reading from Isaiah which talks of 'Galilee of the Gentiles'. For a long time there were more 'foreigners' than Jews in Galilee. So perhaps this wedding, like Tom and Ana's, was a multi-cultural event.

Excuse me while I go into retired RE teacher mode and tell you that an orthodox Muslim is taught to respect the Injil of Jesus, that is, the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. Orthodox Muslims believe in the virgin birth and all

of the Gospel miracles except one. They don't believe in the resurrection, for Allah substituted another man for the prophet Jesus before the crucifixion as a 'great prophet' must have manifest success. The one miracle they don't believe in is the turning of water into wine, for the obvious reason that it involves alcohol. They say that this was added to the original account, because the New Testament, unlike the Qur'an, is not perfect. Enough of the RE lesson.

Those familiar with the old prayer book service for weddings will remember that the service said that Jesus 'sanctified [marriage] by the first miracle that he wrought at Cana in Galilee'. When I was an RE teacher teaching about the Gospels, one of the questions I was regularly asked was, 'Did it really happen, Sir?'. To which I would generally respond, in the spirit of non-confessional RE, 'I don't know, Tracey, I wasn't there. What do you think?'

There are people who take this story literally and those who take it symbolically. Both are welcome in the Church of England. Other denominations may differ. Personally, while acknowledging that I was not there to verify it, the idea that Jesus performed miracles does not seem impossible. I believe that the best explanation of the important question 'Why is there something in the universe rather than nothing?' is that God created the whole from nothing in a hot big bang about 13.8 billion years ago, give or take a fortnight. This understanding of creation seems in line with what scientists have discovered without being actually proved by the science. If that is the case, turning water

into wine seems pretty small beer (sorry!). If you believe what Christians down the years have thought about Jesus, that he is God made flesh, God incarnate, then the fact that he performed miracles does not seem impossible. I will skip the lecture on the descriptive rather than prescriptive nature of scientific laws as probably a bit much for an article like this. If you want more detail, I can recommend two books. The classic book dismissing miracles is David Hume's 'An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding'. The Oxford edition has a useful preface. Keith Ward defends the possibility of miracles in his 'The Big Questions in Science and Religion'.

But, as I said, 'miracle' is not the word that John uses: he calls it a 'sign'. Now signs point to things, like a bend in the road that is coming up or the fact that you are just entering the town of Tring. According to the writer of John's Gospel, this miracle points to the glory of Jesus.

What points you to the glory of Jesus? It may be that the wonderful moral teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (so hard to follow but so easy to admire) points you to the glory of Jesus? It may be that the miracles do that for you. It may be the death and resurrection of Jesus. It may be that all of those do it for you, as it does for me.

Throughout the world, millions of Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans and others repeat weekly, in the liturgy of the Communion, Mass or Lord's Supper service, the words of John the Baptist in John's Gospel, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'. That seems fairly glorious to me.

**Jon Reynolds, Tring Team**

## News from the bell tower

On Maundy Thursday the liturgical tradition is that every church bell is rung, and then all throughout our land they remain silent in deep mourning in commemoration of that most significant death of all time, the death of Jesus, crucified in Jerusalem under Roman rule nearly 2000 years ago for the redemption of the world.

The majestic sonorous bells of all cathedrals, all churches, hold their peace, silently marking the time when Jesus lay buried in a stranger's borrowed tomb until the glorious

triumph of Easter Day when they lead the shout of 'He is risen!' 'He is risen, indeed!' on Easter Sunday morning. It's always a happy milestone when a new ringer achieves that significant moment of being asked to ring prior to a Sunday service. This month we are glad to report that the writer has joined the Sunday band.

**Johanna Morgan**  
**Tring bell tower**

*Congratulations, Johanna! Ed*

## Happy Birthday, Beth!

Beth Scraggs from St Peter & St Paul celebrated her 99<sup>th</sup> birthday in February. What an achievement! We wish her many happy returns!  
**The Editor**



# Save one life, save the world



In early January, we went to the cinema to see 'One Life', the new film starring Anthony Hopkins and Helena Bonham Carter. It was the true story of

British humanitarian Nicholas Winton MBE, who helped save 669 Central European children from the Nazis on the eve of World War II. The film was based on his biography, written by his daughter Barbara.

As it happens, I wrote to Barbara shortly before her father's death in 2015, asking if she would write about him for *Comment* – but it was badly timed as she was then caring for him in his final weeks and had other, more important, things on her mind.

If you liked 'The Inn of the Sixth Happiness' (you are as old as me) or 'Schindler's List', you would enjoy this film too.

Nicholas Winton (originally Wertheim) was born in London to parents who were both from German-Jewish families. In his retirement he is urged by his wife to clear out a lifetime's accumulation of paperwork from the various charities he has supported. He clings to a scrapbook with details of the 669 Czech-Jewish children he and other humanitarians saved against incredible odds from the Nazis in the late 1930s.

Just before Christmas 1938, the young Winton has a phone call from a friend in Prague asking him to come and see what was happening there. There he meets Doreen Warriner, the volunteer head of the Prague office of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, tasked with helping refugees who had fled Sudetenland after the Munich Agreement on 29

September 1938. The crisis unfolding in Czechoslovakia became clear to Winton over the first few days as he assisted at the offices of aid agencies and visited refugee camps that surrounded the capital. Having seen the appalling conditions families were forced to endure in the camps, he felt compelled to help. 'I have seen it and I cannot unsee it.'



Distressed parents were already asking him if there was any way of their child being sent to safety in Britain and, with Doreen's encouragement, he decided to try to help. Back in the UK, he and his mother and other like-minded friends, raised huge sums of money, lobbied government departments for visas, organised foster care and arranged their own Kindertransport.

The rescue mission involved nine trainloads of children, all of which had to pass through Nazi territory on their way to Britain. The first group of children left the day before the Germans invaded the whole of the country on 15 March 1939. These are scenes of almost unbearable tension: at any moment, for any bureaucratic reason, or just for no reason at all, the Nazi soldiers suspiciously inspecting the children's papers on board the train could have turned them back. Eight trainloads got through reasonably well – but the ninth was still on the platform at Prague when news of Germany's invasion of Poland came through. Nazi soldiers swarmed into the

station and the tragedy that followed forever coloured Winton's memories.

His motto, 'If something is not impossible, then there must be a way to do it' led him to follow his own convictions and undertake an operation that others had dismissed as too difficult to attempt. He used every occasion possible to remind people of the value of living an ethical life, which he believed must include helping those in need.

You may be old enough to have seen Nicholas Winton on the BBC 'That's Life!' programme in 1988, where he finally met some of those children, then adults, or their descendants, who made up the TV audience of that event. It must have been very moving then; I cried as, in the film, the unsuspecting Anthony Hopkins turned to see the auditorium filled with people who would not have been alive had it not been for his intervention and determination to save 'just one more life'.

The film was particularly poignant to me as our son James celebrated ten years with the lovely Hannah in the same week that we saw the film. Hannah's grandfather, Ervin Kraus, was one of the 'lucky' young people whose parents sent him to the UK in 1938 suspecting darker days to come. He travelled as a teenager by train to London from the Sudetenland where he later trained and became a much-respected doctor in Wales, as his father had been in Franzenbad. Hannah's grandfather never saw his parents again or knew exactly what had happened to them.

This is now part of our family history too.

The words 'Save one life, save the world' are based on the Jewish Talmud teaching: 'Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire.'

**Annette Reynolds**  
**St Peter & St Paul**

## Sea turtle

I chose to design a panel with a sea turtle as I think they are such majestic animals. Most species are now classified as endangered due to climate change as well as poaching of both eggs and adults.

Climate change has a number of effects: the sand where the eggs are laid is getting hotter, which leads to fewer eggs hatching, and those that do hatch

are more likely to be female; warmer sea temperatures cause changes in the currents and disrupt the quantity and distribution of the turtles' food; and nesting beaches are being eroded or destroyed by extreme weather events. Plastics in the ocean are also hazardous to turtles as they can mistake plastic bags for jellyfish and try to eat them.

**Liz Terrett**



# Can we stop youth homelessness?



At the end of this article, I'm going to ask you to do two things. They will take two minutes and will make a difference to an estimated 136,000 homeless young people.

Did you know that local charity Youth Concern houses homeless young people?

It had been the charity's dream for a long time. For twelve years, under the national Nightstop scheme, Youth Concern had been matching people with spare rooms with young people in crisis. The problem was, there wasn't anywhere for those young people to go after a few nights' respite: difficult family relationships aren't healed in a few days, private rental is out of most young people's price range and, after a young person's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, local authorities – who themselves don't have enough housing stock – prioritise people with children, disabilities, living in danger etc.

When I became Chief Executive in March 2020, I walked into a building

A local philanthropist had bought a five-bed Edwardian family home in Aylesbury. Working with Volunteer It Yourself, a charity that renovates community spaces with local young people who learn trade skills,

I managed its conversion through that first Covid-19 summer. In September, I appointed a Project Manager and team and we welcomed our first young resident a week before Christmas 2020. (A week before Christmas! Homeless and 21... but that first resident is now working full-time, has a flat and no longer has a drinking issue. He credits his turnaround to living with Youth Concern.)

Fast forward to December 2023, and three years on, twenty-one young people



have lived with us. Today, every bedroom is full, the house is buzzing and young people are on their journeys from homeless to housed. This, our Next Step Project, is a physical expression of how Youth Concern delivers its vision and purpose, to improve quality of life for vulnerable 13-25-year-olds in Aylesbury Vale. The project literally turns young people's lives around.

B. had been sleeping rough, working as an apprentice and studying for Maths A level when she moved in with us. Having completed an access to higher education course

and received lots of support from Emma and her team, B. accepted one of her five university offers; last October she moved to Southampton to study Marine Biology.

This is the difference made by giving young people a roof over their head, a listening ear, an experienced manager and the wrap-around support of our Drop-in Centre (fun, projects, counselling, advice).

So, at the end of this article, please would you do two things?

Firstly, we are recruiting a three-day per week Project Worker to support our residents. You – or a contact of yours – could be part of homeless young people's journeys. Applicants don't have to have had experience of supported accommodation, though experience for working with young people is preferable. Find out more at [www.youthconcern.org.uk/about/join-us](http://www.youthconcern.org.uk/about/join-us).

Secondly, please sign the petition that calls for a national strategy to end youth homelessness <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/642986>. You may have seen full-page adverts\* about the #PlanForThe136k campaign in the Times, Telegraph, Guardian (\*pro bono). Yes, Youth Concern can work at the coal face, helping young people in crisis. But how much better to stop youth homelessness in the first place. Please sign the petition. Thank you.

Thank you for positively impacting an estimated 136,000 homeless young people across the UK – and for supporting Youth Concern's work locally.  
**Hannah Asquith**  
**High Street Baptist Church**

## Piano & more series

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# A visit to the Methodist Church in Ghana



I have worked with a colleague from Ghana for a few years and often he would say to me, you must visit Ghana. I never imagined it would happen until

a phone call in the autumn saying that a trip was being organised and they were really keen that I join.

The date 15 January saw me leaving the freezing temperatures of the UK to board a flight to Accra, the capital city of Ghana for ten very full days, carrying with me the results of a collection which would be used to buy gifts for those whom we met.

There is so much I could say: it is impossible to summarise all that happened and that we experienced, but knowing that a picture paints a thousand words, I decided to share just a few of my photos, hoping that it gives at least a bit of an insight into all we said and did.

What I think is important to say, however, is that the Ghanaians were warm, welcoming, joyful people. We met some for whom life is very hard, and yet God's love shone from them and their joy in worship was infectious. I certainly found myself challenged by all I saw, but also encouraged and particularly had a new sense of our fellowship with our brothers and sisters across the world.



We visited the Rafiki Methodist Satellite Village, an orphanage that began in 2007 with six children and now cares for seventy-nine, from 2 years to 18+. We were able to present them with a laptop, money to fund a child in tertiary education for a year and a suitcase full of pens, sweets and crisps.



We visited the Bethany Methodist School. The picture above is of their current computer lab. The national curriculum says that all children are examined in IT, but some have never touched a computer. It was a joy to be able to present the school with a laptop and a photocopier on behalf of Methodists in the UK.

This Boys' and Girls' Brigade band (below) had been playing with two trombones, three cornets and six drums, yet a lot more children were wanting the opportunity to play in the band. They played as we processed through what seemed to be a shanty town to the local Methodist Church where we had a service and presented them with some more instruments.



Our visit to Cape Coast Castle was a sombre one. The fort was where slaves were held while awaiting ships arrived to take them to the Caribbean. They spent three months in the dungeons, with no washing or toilet facilities, not knowing what was going to happen to them, before they went through the 'Door of No Return' to be taken to the ships. I can't even begin to imagine the horrors they went through. Yet Cape Coast Castle was also a place of hope. The plaque shows a commitment to work against injustice and on the opposite side of the 'Door of No Return' is a sign that says 'Door of Return' – remains of slaves have been brought back to Ghana, descendants of slaves have returned and slavery is now outlawed, for which we give thanks to God.



*In everlasting memory of the anguish of our ancestors. May those who have died rest in peace, may those who return find their roots. May humanity never again perpetrate such injustice against humanity. We, the living, vow to uphold this.*



In the north of Ghana we visited two villages. One has been supported for a number of years by Rev William Davis, the minister who organised the trip, while the other he has been supporting more recently. It was good to see the difference that bore holes had made and a privilege to visit the chief of each village where we were presented with Kola nuts (right), a ceremonial way of exchanging greetings (not to be recommended, they were very bitter!). They spoke of their need for a health clinic, another bore hole in the second village and the minister's wife spoke about period poverty as a real problem. We were able to present one village school with ten laptops, the churches in both villages with chairs and one of them with a drum kit. In return we were given live chickens and guinea fowl and yams. It was explained that traditionally they should provide us with a meal; practicalities meant that they weren't able to cook us a meal so instead we were given the ingredients to prepare it for ourselves.



Wesley Towers (left), the new Methodist Church Conference office in Accra including offices, guest rooms, a cafe and an auditorium. They will rent out some of the offices to help pay for running costs.



In places where the church is growing, new church buildings are needed. The church buys the land and gradually builds a bit more as the money comes in. The church is involved in schools, colleges, health clinics, start up loans, ginger farms and rubber farms.



In a different meeting we were privileged to meet the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church in Ghana, the equivalent of the President of the Methodist Church in Britain or the Archbishop of Canterbury.



Church services were always joyful and always included dancing, especially as people brought their offering. In most churches collection boxes like these were used. The idea is that you put your offering in the box related to the day of the week on which you were born.



Right was a chance meeting at Tamale airport. Twenty-five years ago Rev William was involved in organising a project in which every Methodist child in Ghana was asked to contribute to a fund for sponsoring children in education. Some were able to give just one Cedi (about 6p). TK, on the right, was one of the children to benefit from the fund. Twenty-five years later he is now educating tertiary stage students in finance and how to manage finances and is also a member of the Methodist Church, serving as a Church Steward. He spoke of how people had helped him and how he now wanted to pass that help on to others. It was an inspirational meeting and a privilege to see how God had been able to work in his life.



Roadsides were always interesting places. Here women are weaving the traditional Kente cloth of the north.



In the other photo they are selling fruit, but we also spotted roadside stalls selling furniture, gates, water tanks, washing machines, onions, snails, even coffins and lecterns.

**Rachael Hawkins**  
**St Martha's Methodist Church**



Mount Olivet Methodist Church in Accra

# Postcard from Orkney



At the time of writing, we are still in the depths of winter and the latest storm is raging outside. We have so many storms here that they don't all have the honour of being given a name, otherwise we'd probably be three times round the alphabet each winter! The snow has unusually been a significant factor and, more importantly, the wind which causes drifting making even main roads and our driveway impassable. For the first time in my life, I have been literally snowed in and it felt very much like lockdown. All options to go out are removed and we're stuck, or perhaps more accurately, safe at home. In common with most others here, we had good supplies of food ready for such an eventuality – and whisky for certain parties – and could snuggle down in our warm home and wait it out. 'Even this will pass' is a good saying.

There are, of course, those who do not have that option. Farmers have to go out to check and feed their livestock, and that was in addition to using their tractors to enable the gritters to keep the roads clear. It is agreed throughout the county that if the farmers had not been out with tractors and JCBs the gritters would not have got as far as they did, an emergency ambulance would not have reached its patient, and the county would have been at a standstill for even longer than it was.

Other heroes in the community here include care workers, power workers and, in fact, everyone who cares and supports those around them in challenging circumstances. This led me to ponder on the fact that good people are all around us. They do not necessarily come from religious communities – and of course there are



some not-so-good folk within those communities, but we won't go into that. I am just grateful to all those who step up, get out there and go above and beyond to keep the rest of us warm and safe.

Bearing in mind when this will be read (if anyone reads this!), Mac and I wish everyone in Tring and the surrounding areas a very Happy Easter when we sincerely hope Spring will be springing all around us.

**Carrie Dodge**  
Milestone Kirk, Orkney

# The Corpus Christi community



Feeling part of a community can have a positive effect on mental wellbeing. We all felt this keenly when the Covid-19 lockdowns closed all face-to-face social interaction, something that Zoom cannot quite replace.

Corpus Christi Church in Tring has a fantastic community spirit, with many newcomers to the parish mentioning the friendly, warm welcome they received from long-standing parishioners. This community spirit is strengthened by regular attendance at church services and from the social activities that happen in the church and the hall. There are several Groups that parishioners take part in.

The Crochet & Knit Group meets in the afternoon in the hall on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month. The Sewing Group meets in the hall at 2.00pm on the last Saturday of the month. Complete beginners are welcome to both groups because we have experienced crafters keen to share their skills and knowledge with others. All materials and equipment are provided, and the sessions are completely free. Both groups pooled their resources under the name, The Corpus Christi Craft Community, for a Christmas Craft Sale that raised £629 for charity.

Corpus Christi has a Gardening Group that looks after the Church's gardens. The aim is to create a garden that everyone in Tring can enjoy and is great for pollinating insects to support Tring's Bee Friendly Town status. This group also runs a Spring Plant sale in May to raise funds for the maintenance of the gardens, so look out for information on the date. It

is a great way to stock your garden with plants grown locally from seed or cuttings in peat free compost and recycled pots.

The Christian Meditation Group meets every Thursday at 8.00pm to 10.00pm in the Church's vestry. You can also join via Zoom as we have several members who are not able to attend in person.

Everyone is welcome to join any of these groups; you do not need to be parishioners of Corpus Christi.

Every Sunday after 9.00am and 10.30am masses, tea, coffee, biscuits and cakes are served in the hall. One Sunday in the month, usually the second or third Sunday, we have the very popular Sausage Sunday, which was an idea shared from High Street Baptist Church. On Sausage Sunday we serve Sausage Baps, fairtrade tea and coffee. Gluten free, dairy free and vegetarian needs are catered for. These Sunday get togethers are very well supported because parishioners love to catch up with old friends and make new ones.

For more information on the activities at Corpus Christi, please email Annabelle Haliday, Parish Administrator at [tring@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:tring@rcdow.org.uk).

**Margaret Donnelly**  
Corpus Christi Church



Sunday 10th March

**We celebrate Mothering Sunday across the Tring Team Parish.**

Please invite friends and neighbours and bring the whole family along.

**Posies are given to all.**

Tring 10am Mothering Worship for All  
Aldbury 10am Mothering Sunday Communion



TRING CHARITIES  
(Registered Charity No 207805)

## ALMSHOUSES IN TRING

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

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

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

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

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

# Jesus, the servant king



As children, through nativity plays, most of us grew up with a composite version of the nativity.

As we got older, we learned that Mark and John's Gospels have no birth narratives and that the nativity plays we took part in combined two very different accounts into one story. The shepherds and the Magi do not belong in the same tableau.

In a similar way, the evangelists have slightly different emphases in the telling of the passion and resurrection of Jesus. Just as in the synoptic Gospels, John begins his Gospel with Jesus and the disciples sharing a meal together. For John, it is not a Passover supper and there is no institution of the Last Supper. John, instead, gives us another account which is unique to him: the washing of the disciples' feet.

As this fellowship meal comes to an end in John's Gospel, we then have a unique extended set of teaching from Jesus, what are known as the Farewell Discourses, and it includes the promise of Jesus returning as the paraclete (or Holy Spirit). This term is only used by John.

In John's Gospel there is no agony at Gethsemane. Jesus is serene, seemingly in control. In Matthew, Mark and Luke's Gospels, Jesus is in agony and he is on trial. In John, it is his captors who are on trial. John's Jesus does not need any assistance: he will carry his own cross to Calvary. Finally, Mark's Gospel famously ends with almost no resurrection account, the disciples flee in fear. In John's Gospel there are numerous resurrection accounts.

## Foot washing: the central feature

All four Gospels give us an account of the anointing of Jesus' feet at Bethany. Here, Mary uses her hair to wash Jesus' feet and in John's account we are told that 'Martha served'. It is only in John's Gospel that we have the account of Jesus, the servant king, washing the disciples' feet. The setting of this 'last supper' is a meal with the disciples. John tells us clearly that it is before the Passover (in John's Gospel, Jesus is already dead before the Passover). As well as not being a Passover meal, there is no institution of Holy Communion.

The foot washing is not incidental, it is the central feature. Jesus acts out his message: in Luke 22:27, we hear 'For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.' But in John's Gospel, he acts this out. It becomes a central tenet of faith. The early Christian hymn in Philippians 2 refers to 'assuming the nature of a slave'.

At the wedding in Cana, we are told that Jesus' hour 'has not yet come'. Well, it has now. In the preceding passages, Jesus has told us twice that his hour has come, and this passage begins 'the hour has come'. The one who has been sent from the father will return to the father. Jesus' journey through the 'hour' will be a demonstration of his love for the disciples. This loving will be 'to the end'. It is ambiguous whether the end means until the death of Jesus, or with a love that surpasses all other loving. John is good at these ambiguities. He probably means both of them.



## Identity and action

Jesus rises from the table, prepares to act as a servant, and begins to wash the feet of the disciples. Jesus' knowledge, even of his betrayer, and his love for his own, are expressed through action. However, the full meaning of the passage is found at the beginning of verse 3. Jesus only 'rises' or moves into action, because he knows his origin and his destiny. Christian love (and action) stems from knowing our origin as people loved by God. We love because first we were loved. Jesus' origins and destiny are spelled out in prologue, and now the hour has come for it to be fulfilled.

Peter's objections indicate that he doesn't understand the action of service and does not agree with Jesus' motivation. This tension between Jesus and Peter intensifies as the latter refuses to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Jesus

responds that what is at stake is 'having part' with Jesus. To 'have part' with Jesus through washing means to be part of the self-giving love that will bring Jesus' life to an end.

The disciples have witnessed the foot-washing and taken part in it, but more instruction is needed so that they might correctly understand Jesus as teacher and Lord. The foot-washing is recalled as he tells them that they are to repeat among themselves what he has done for them. They are to repeat his example of the loving gift of self-giving symbolized in the foot-washing.

To be a Christian is to accept the love of God. Before we can act we need to know of our origin. Then we are able to share in Jesus' ministry.

## Loving to the end

In John's Gospel Jesus is always in control. He knows what is going to happen before it does. He says the plan is clear in scripture. Verse 18 refers to a line in Psalm 41, 'Even my bosom friend, in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me'. Jesus knows the identity of the one who will betray him. Jesus has knowingly chosen fragile, failing disciples (and he even sends Judas out on an errand). Is this what loving to the end means? He gives Judas the morsel of bread knowing that the devil will enter him. God reaches out in love even to the devil himself.

## Maundy Thursday

From earliest times, Christians observed the events of Holy Week in their worship, beginning with Maundy Thursday. It is at the heart of all that we do – even though fewer people come to any service on that day now than other arguably less-important dates in the Christian year. Why don't people come?

The services in the Tring Team include foot washing. Is there something that holds you back from taking part in this service? Would you be more comfortable being the person washing the feet than the one being washed? This is the time when we cannot serve: we have to be served, like Peter.

Good 'worship for all' includes action, activity and response. It engages all of our senses and elicits a response. When you think about it, the central act of worship of the church, Holy Communion, does just that. We have symbolic action and participation.

Matthew, Mark and Luke make this

the heart of their last supper story, and in response, we do this in remembrance every Sunday (or even daily). Communion challenges us to be part of Christ by 'eating his body and drinking his blood'. John's Gospel tells that to be part of Jesus is to be washed by him. We aren't going to undo 2,000 years of Christian practice, but what would the church have looked like if our emphasis had been on foot washing and loving service and not Holy Communion?

**Huw Bellis, Tring Team**

*'Our Christian service is sometimes motivated more by anxiety than by love. Sometimes we forget that the quality of what we offer depends on what our acts of service actually communicate to others. Are we attempting to justify ourselves? Are we striving so hard to express God's love that we forget to rest in it ourselves? Jesus' example should remind us that we can give only what we have received.'*

**Angela Tilby, former BBC producer**

**Tutor and Vice-Principal of Westcott House, Cambridge**

**Vicar of St Bene't's Church, Cambridge**

**Canon at Christ Church, Oxford**

# Church hypocasts



Hypocausts, a system for underfloor heating, where the hot air from a fire is drawn in tunnels underneath the floor to heat it, were invented by the Romans. Most churches and cathedrals in the UK were unheated until Victorian times.

In Germany and Scandinavia rich worshippers brought in footwarmers with hot coals inside – but this never seemed to catch on in the UK. In some churches, the priest would have a coal-filled handwarmer to keep his hands warm for turning the pages of the service book.

In 1824 Thomas Treadgold published a book, 'The Principles of Warming and Ventilating Public Buildings, etc.' and this had detailed calculations for heating churches with steam pipes, for example:

Let us suppose a church for 1200 people, to contain 100,000 feet of space, and that the congregation in winter is, at an average, 600, and that there are 28 windows with 1000 feet of surface of glass, and that it is to be kept at 60°, when the external air is at 30°, or 30° above the external air. Here by the rule, art.68, the loss of heat from the glass will be 1500 cubic feet, Ventilation for 600 people 2400. And the escape of heated air from the windows about 300 – making the total quantity to be heated per minute 4200 cubic feet. The quantity of surface of steam-pipe that will produce this effect is 428 feet.

Joseph Bramah & Sons decided shortly after this book was published, that hot water was better than steam and churches might have had steam

or hot-water-heated pipes around the church walls, under pews or in channels in the floor with a grid on top.

Around 1842, the company of G&J Hayden took out a patent for what was, effectively, a hypocaust. This circulated hot air through ducts in the floors. Thousands of churches bought the Hayden patent warm-air ventilating stove – and many churches still have them. Some of these heating systems are complex. In 2013 it was reported in the Yorkshire Post that, 'Work has been undertaken to renovate the underfloor hypocaust heating system at Pockley Church, near Helmsley. While many churches employ a hot air heating system, the building in Pockley is unusual as it has a solid fuel boiler that is fed by an underground railway track through a tunnel leading to the outside of the premises.'

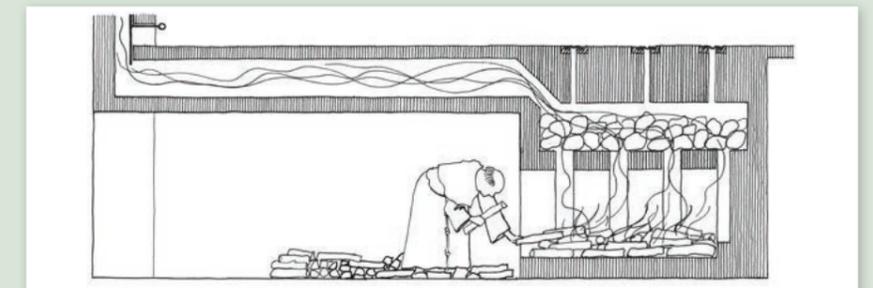
These hypocausts seem to be fairly safe as only hot air is circulated. There were more dangerous systems. St Michael's Church in Upton has recently found a patented system that uses pits in the floor that contained burning coals, the fumes were then circulated in sealed channels in the floor – similar to the Roman system. The metal plates sealing the fire pits have 'MITCHELL'S PATENT WARMING APPARATUS' stamped on them, although a search has not revealed that any patents were, in fact, obtained! There is a brickwork chimney

in a corner of the tower and all the flue ducts connect to this to expel the fumes. Fine until the system had a leak that would release carbon monoxide into the church!

Churches with such heating also needed good ventilation and there were many systems invented during the Victorian period including large air pumps. In 1900 Robert Boyle & Son published a ventilation catalogue to explain that ventilation was essential, 'The vitiated atmosphere usually found in imperfectly ventilated churches is the principal cause of the drowsiness with which many of the congregation are overcome before the service is over, and the fainting fits which so frequently occur in certain churches. This is due to a deficiency of oxygen in the air and an excess of carbonic acid gas, watery vapour, and foetid organic matter, combined, when the gas is lighted, with the poisonous products of combustion (this is a reference to the perils of illumination by gas). To the deleterious quality of the air found in so many churches is to be ascribed what is known as 'clergyman's headache,' and the feeling of lassitude and nervous irritation so commonly experienced during and after the services'.

So, all the ill effects of a sermon were down to poor ventilation.

**John Allan  
High Street Baptist Church**



# Praying for Gaza



In February's *Comment* I raised questions about rebuilding after the war: '...investing in relationship building and reconciliation is crucial to the future. Could grants from nations and other bodies have an agreed section for relationship building? Could any UK contribution include specific reference to relationship building? Such an exploration is being initiated with UK MPs.'

Following the guidance of some MPs and other professionals, an application for such funding is nearly completed and we anticipate an application will be submitted to the current UK government by the time you read this. If this fails, an application to the post-election government will be developed; and if this fails a reduced application to grant-

making bodies, churches and individuals will be created. These are complex documents that will need to satisfy both government regulations and the criteria of several organisations. Please pray that the skills and experience of Musalaha may be a resource that creates bridges and a better future. There are many variables, not least the uncertain timing of events in the Middle East.

What is at stake is very significant. The few notes below were written in *Comment* before the events of 7 October last year. They remind us that both the people and the work of Musalaha are under great pressure. As the war in Gaza continues, I think you can easily imagine the pressures such individuals and groups face. Your prayers are invited.

Meanwhile we have heard that Musalaha's reconciliation groups are continuing to function in the current chaotic conditions. 'Following the October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks, Musalaha has been one civil society organisation unusually

Leaders project has retained the majority of participants, in spite of the loss of loved ones on both sides. After noticing most medical action is provided by men in Gaza, Musalaha's women participants are planning to create First Aid workshops for mothers, equipping them as the cases of settler and military attacks are increasing daily in the West Bank.'

Read more the latest Newsletter on <https://musalaha.org>.

**Colin Briant**  
**High Street Baptist Church**  
[colin.briant@hotmail.com](mailto:colin.briant@hotmail.com)  
<https://musalaha.org>  
<https://www.musalaha.uk>

The BBC's 2-part series on the historical background is still available on iPlayer:  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001k3w3/the-holy-land-and-us-our-untold-stories-series-1-episode-1>  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001kc09/the-holy-land-and-us-our-untold-stories-series-1-episode-2>

## Musalaha's Relationship Building Work has in previous years included:



### Children's Summer Camps

Using Hebrew and Arabic, some eighty children came from Christian, Jewish and Muslim families, in both Israel and Palestine, including Gaza. 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.



### Desert Encounters for Young Adults

Five days in the Jordan Desert leading camels and training in Musalaha's Reconciliation Curriculum touched this group. One Palestinian woman 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'.

There are also Community Leaders Groups.

# Be inspired, work together



Since the pandemic, more and more people are working from home. Most people who shifted their laptop from their office to their home have not returned to 100% office-based work. Indeed, some companies are struggling to get people to return to their buildings as the flexibility and cost savings offer little motivation to do so. However, there is a backlash. While the convenience of working from home is a strong draw, something is missing. In my own organisation there are times when you can join an online Zoom and, aside from saying hello at the beginning of the session, you sit with your microphone off, camera on and work in silence on something from your to-do list. This co-working, or body doubling, can be done online or in person. There are online communities or co-working office spaces for those who seek it. The idea is that you are being held accountable

and this motivates you to complete tasks you might otherwise push to the bottom of the pile.

I find this a fascinating reflection of our changing world. We want to be productive; we want to achieve things. It matters to us that we complete tasks (especially if we are paid to do them!). Being around other people makes a difference to this.

In my job I am regularly talking to people who are doing incredible pioneering work in their church to care for the environment. However, quite often they feel alone, and struggle to keep motivated. Meeting with others, building networks and sharing ideas makes a difference. This is

one of the reasons the Great Big Green Week is such an important event in our calendar. The Great Big Green Week encourages whole communities to come together to be ready and willing to take action to tackle climate change.

Last year in Tring we saw over twenty-five community events take place: guided walks, films, chess for climate, craft, pond discovery, a guided tour of an eco-house and so much more. Great Big Green Week is the UK's biggest ever celebration of community action to tackle climate change and protect nature. Last year was Tring's first ever Great Big Green Week, and this year we want it to be even bigger and better! Events are hosted by community groups, businesses, individuals – anyone. You!

This year, Sustainable Tring and Tring Town Council have joined together to support events throughout the week. We are therefore inviting you to come along on Wednesday 6 March at 7.15pm at High Street Baptist Church to find out more. There will be information about this year's theme as well as an opportunity to meet others and get inspired. Whether making lifestyle choices at home or being part of a community group or local business, Great Big Green Week is a time to come together and be accountable.

Find out more about Great Big Green Week: [www.greatbiggreenweek.com](http://www.greatbiggreenweek.com).  
**Polly Eaton,**  
**High Street Baptist Church**

**THE GREAT BIG GREEN WEEK**  
**Save the date!**  
**8-16 June 2024**  
 A celebration of community action to tackle climate change and protect nature

**THE GREAT BIG GREEN WEEK**  
**INSPIRE**  
**8-16 June 2024**  
**Come along to find out more and get inspired!**  
**Wednesday 6 March at 7.30pm**  
 (refreshments from 7.15pm)  
**High Street Baptist Church**  
 (opposite Tring Library)



**Sustainable Tring** is an umbrella organisation for a number of local groups and projects, with the collective purpose of making Tring a more sustainable place to live. Together, we find positive and creative ways to address the challenge of climate change, live more sustainably and move towards a low-carbon economy. We take practical action, run projects and provide information to enable everyone to join in with helping to tackle the challenges our world faces. We campaign to use our collective power to help reduce harm to the environment, strengthen the local economy and seek sustainable energy solutions. Read more about Sustainable Tring: [www.sustainabletring.org.uk](http://www.sustainabletring.org.uk).

# Holy Week: from the entrance into Jerusalem to the resurrection



The above is the sub-title to volume two of 'Jesus of Nazareth' by the late Pope Benedict XVI and I have relied on this book for much of what I shall now write.

Much of what is in the book sets out a new understanding (to me at any rate) of some of the events which together make up Holy Week and lead to Easter Sunday.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday, he was accompanied by many pilgrims who had been caught up in the disciples' enthusiasm. These were not the inhabitants of Jerusalem though, who later called for his death. Indeed, the people of Jerusalem knew nothing about him.

When he entered Jerusalem he caused a stir. He went into the temple and drove out those who were buying and selling. Interestingly, neither the temple police nor the Roman cohort that stood nearby intervened. Jesus was implementing Israel's divine law in opposition to a custom which had built up. Because of this incident and his teaching in the temple, Jesus was later to be subjected to two charges – the first to do with his justification for driving out the traders and cattle from the temple. Pope Benedict tells us, 'I consider it important that it was not the cleansing of the Temple as such for which Jesus was called to account, but only the interpretation he gave to his action.' Jeremiah in his prophecy had said (7:11): 'You have made my house into a den of robbers'. Pope Benedict explains 'In the combination of worship and trade, which Jesus denounces, he evidently sees the situation of Jeremiah's time repeating itself'.

The second charge that Jesus was to face was that he had made a messianic claim which appeared to contradict the very basis of Israel's faith, that there is only one God.

Moving on now to the Last Supper (which we commemorate on Holy or Maundy Thursday) Jesus evidently took it for granted that the disciples had already bathed so that, at table, it was

only the disciples' feet that needed to be washed. During the washing of the feet of the twelve disciples, there was an atmosphere of farewell and Peter asked Jesus 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus replies, 'Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you shall follow afterward'.

The washing of the feet is followed by a great prayer that has been called the 'high priestly prayer'. Verse 3 says: 'This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent'. 'Eternal life', Pope Benedict explains, is not, as we may think, life after death, in contrast to the present life. 'Eternal life' is life itself, real life which can also be lived in the present age and is no longer challenged by physical death. Pope Benedict says further: 'Death may remove him [Man] from the biosphere, the life that reaches beyond it – real life – remains'. I have often myself thought and felt on occasions, when things are going well, that truly heaven can be experienced here on earth.

The Church, Pope Benedict says, is 'derived from the Last Supper, that is to say, from Christ's death and Resurrection, which he anticipated in the gift of his body and blood'. The words of Jesus 'This is my body which is given for you' are followed by the instruction 'Do this in remembrance of me!' The instruction is repeated in more detailed form after the words over the chalice. His instruction to repeat refers to the breaking of bread, the prayer of blessing and thanksgiving accompanied by the words of consecration of bread and wine.

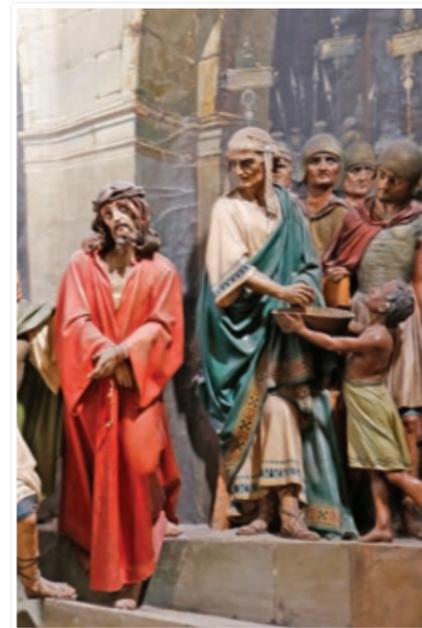
In St Paul's letter to the Hebrews, Paul says, 'It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins' (10:4). So, the old way of glorifying God by animal sacrifice in the temple has now gone. Spiritual sacrifice has replaced it: prayer, the self-opening of the human spirit to God, is true worship.

After the meal, and after praying in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was of course arrested and led to the high priest's palace, where the priests, elders and scribes (comprising the Sanhedrin) it seems, were already assembled. After the first charge relating to his reasons for driving out the traders and cattle from the temple was dismissed through lack of consistency among the witnesses as

to what Jesus had actually said, he was found guilty of blasphemy, for which the sentence is death.

The crowd accusing Jesus was made up of followers of Barabbas, and it was they who called for Jesus' crucifixion. (The followers of Jesus remained hidden out of fear.) Pope Benedict tells us that, though in St John's Gospel Barabbas is referred to as a 'robber', the Greek word for this at the time of Jesus' trial 'had also acquired the meaning of terrorist or freedom fighter'. He says, 'It is clear from Mark's account that this is the intended meaning'. So, Barabbas, it seems, was probably a terrorist or freedom fighter who had rebelled against the occupying Roman power.

Pontius Pilate asked the crowd which of the men, Jesus and Barabbas, they wished him to release. They said 'Barabbas'. So Pilate took his place on the judgement seat. He washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. Anxious to preserve the peace and also, no doubt, concerned for his career, he pronounced the death sentence on Jesus.



*Pilate washing his hands, Chapel of Condemnation, Church of Flagellation, Jerusalem*

There now follows the journey to the cross portrayed in the Stations of the Cross seen in all Roman Catholic churches today. There are fourteen stations and last year, after the Walk of

Witness in Tring, the Stations of the Cross were followed and prayed over in Corpus Christi Church.



*The Eighth Station: Jesus speaks to the women*



*The Twelfth Station: Jesus dies upon the cross*



*The Fourteenth Station: Jesus is placed in the sepulchre*

At the beginning of the crucifixion, Jesus was offered the usual anaesthetising drink to deaden the pain but he refused it, wanting to endure his suffering consciously. Jesus died at around

3.00pm, Luke giving as his final prayer a line from Psalm 31: 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' (Luke 23:46). At 3.00pm on Good Friday, the Passion of the Lord is celebrated in Corpus Christi Church. The altar is bare, without a cross, without candles and without cloths. The priest approaches the altar in silence and prostrates himself. Further on in the service the narrative of the Lord's passion is read and later there is adoration of the Holy Cross. The Cross in Corpus Christi Church, which usually hangs

high before the sanctuary, is lowered and the people come up and show reverence to the cross. After receiving Holy Communion, the people disperse quietly.

The Easter vigil on Holy Saturday in the church is the holy night when the Lord rose again. It takes place after nightfall and before dawn, and in the Roman Catholic Church is considered to be the 'mother of all vigils'. All the lights in the church are put out, the water fonts are drained and the tabernacle is empty. A fire is lit outside the church and blessed. After the blessing of the new fire, the paschal candle is brought to the priest, who cuts a cross into the candle with a stylus. Then he makes the Greek letter Alpha above the cross, the letter

*This is the night  
That with a pillar of fire  
Banished the darkness of sin*

*This is the night  
When Christ broke the prison-bar of death  
And rose victorious from the underworld.*

Readings of the Old and New Testament follow, after which there is the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Paschal Triduum of the Passion, which began with the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, closes with Vespers (Evening Prayer) of the Sunday of the Resurrection.



*Veneration of the Cross on Good Friday in Corpus Christi Church*

Omega below, and the four numerals of the current year between the arms of the cross. The paschal candle is lit from the fire and processed into the church. Everyone lights their candle from the Easter candle and the people continue in procession until the whole church is alight. The paschal candle symbolizes Christ, the light of the world.

The glorious Easter song of the Roman Catholic church, the Exultet (the Easter Proclamation) follows. It tells of man's sin, of God's mercy, and of the great love of the Redeemer for mankind. See the panel for two of the verses.

**Michael Demidecki**  
**Corpus Christi Church**

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# 'I am the way, the truth and the life'



'The opening verses of John 14 are among the most familiar and precious in our Authorised Version of the Bible'. So wrote an archbishop in his commentary

on the fourth Gospel in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Certainly, many would agree they are precious in telling us that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Further, the context in which these verses occur is very significant for they are part of the discourses which Jesus delivered to his disciples before his passion.

The fourth Gospel, as you may know, is a gospel of two halves. After the Prologue there are twelve chapters, sometimes labelled the Book of Signs, and then chapter 13 starts the account of Christ's last week with the description of the Passover and the events which followed. This section has been called the Book of Glory. It gives an account of the Last Supper discourses with the washing of feet, betrayal and so on with chapter 14 giving us the words of comfort which Jesus spoke to his disciples.

The previous 'I am' sayings (from the earlier part of the Gospel) contain the words and works of Christ's ministry to his listeners in general. Now we have words of reassurance and comfort on the eve of his passion and death. 'Do not let your hearts be troubled', the disciples are told. He is going to prepare a place for them with his father and in his father's house 'are many dwelling places' or 'many mansions' in the old translation. The word used here is not a common one – it is connected with the verb 'to stay'. It can mean staying, dwelling place, room or abode. 'Mansions' in modern English is perhaps not the best word with its association with the grand houses of the rich. Basically, it means: here is room for all.

Some have tried to suggest there are different grades in heaven, but that cannot be the way to understand this. The point is that Jesus is going to his father to prepare a place for them. It is the literal approach of Thomas, virtually asking for a route-map, that leads Jesus to assert that he is the way, the truth and the life. These are very familiar words, especially as this passage is often used at funeral services. It is obviously comforting to think Christ has prepared

a place for us. He shows us the way; he is the way. The difficulty for many comes in the words 'No one comes to the father except through me'.

What exactly does the way mean here? Is Jesus the only way? Further, how do the words way, truth and life belong together? Is it a way of saying 'I am the true, living way' or do the words truth and life have their own distinctive meanings? Is Jesus the way because he is the truth, or is he the revelation of the father to humanity? Is he the life because he lives with the father and the father lives in him? These are titles we can consider later.

'The way' is a familiar term used in everyday life – it occurs in various ways and occasions in the Old Testament. So, the Psalmist (86:11) prays 'Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth' and (119:30) 'I have chosen the way of faithfulness' and in Proverbs (15:12) we are told, 'The wise man's way leads upward to life that he may avoid Sheol below'. Of course, there are many similar examples of the way of truth. But, in John, there is not much stress on the moral aspect of the way so much as on Jesus being the way because he is God the father's revelation. In fact, of course, Jesus is the way both as a mediator of salvation but also as a norm of life. After all, in Mark 12:14, the Pharisees admit that Jesus teaches 'the way of God is truth'.

Interestingly, the Dead Sea Scrolls have shown us that the Qumran community called itself 'the way'. For them, as a strict Jewish sect, 'the way' meant the strict observance of the Law of Moses. This community tried to live the way of the Lord in the desert; John the Baptist, too, had the idea of preparing the way of the Lord in the desert.

Behind this term 'the way' we may see an idea originating in the Old Testament, modified by the way the Jewish sectarian communities at Qumran used it, and then adopted by the

Christian community. Later we find 'the way' being used as a description of the church's faith – Christianity is 'the way'. So, in Acts 24:14, Paul, defending himself before the Roman Governor, Felix, says 'But this I admit to you that, according to the way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our ancestors'.

While much more could be said about the range of meanings of the word way, 'I am the way' in John 14 makes Christ's unique claim that he is the way – the only way to God. The heart of the message of John's Gospel is the way, and the only way to God. There is in Johannine thought no compromise with non-Christian religions. In fact, there is no account taken of such.

So, we can take great comfort in the Christian hope expressed in these opening verses of John 14 as used in the Funeral Service. How comforting to know that Jesus has gone to God the father and that we 'know the way to the place' where he is going. We need to read the rest of John 14 both to be assured but also perhaps to be puzzled. Many today believe there is more than one way to God. Is this true? What is truth? Next month's article will try to offer an answer.

**Martin Banister**  
**St Alban's Cathedral**

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# John Donne, 31 March



In the south quire aisle of St Paul's Cathedral, there is a sculpture of a man perched on a funerary urn, enveloped in a shroud, with his eyes closed and his lips half smiling

through a raffish beard. The statue originally stood in the Norman church of St Paul's and, with visible scorch marks, it survived the Great Fire to be reinstated within Christopher Wren's phoenix.

I like to think that the almost perfect resurrection of his effigy from fiery misfortune would gladden John Donne, who worried dreadfully about the restoration of putrefied bodies on the Day of Judgement. Izaak Walton, a friend and biographer of Donne's, tells that from his death-bed Donne ordered an urn to be fashioned out of wood, before getting up,

*'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.'*

wrapping himself in his own winding sheet, facing east and posing for sketches, which could be used to make the memorial.

Donne was born to a prosperous London ironmonger in 1572. He attended both Oxford and Cambridge but, being Roman Catholic, he was unable to swear

the required oath of allegiance to the Protestant queen, Elizabeth, so he never gained a degree. He ruined many career options by marrying in secret against the wishes of his father-in-law, and was imprisoned for doing so. He described his married life as 'John Donne, Anne Donne, Undone', but it was a happy marriage. For the next ten years, while he

## Holy Sonnet 17

*Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt  
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,  
And her soul early into heaven ravishèd,  
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is set.  
Here the admiring her my mind did whet  
To seek thee, God; so streams do show the head;  
But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,  
A holy thirsty dropsy melts me yet.  
But why should I beg more love, whenas thou  
Dost woo my soul, for hers offering all thine:  
And dost not only fear lest I allow  
My love to saints and angels, things divine,  
But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt  
Lest the world, flesh, yea, devil put thee out.*

was financially dependent on family, he wrote and studied, producing prose on theology and canon law

and composing love poems and religious verse.

Around 1610 he broke with his Roman Catholic upbringing and won the favour of King James, who put pressure on Donne to take Anglican Orders. He eventually did so in 1615. Two years later, when Anne died giving birth to their twelfth child, Donne's grief turned him fully towards his vocation as an Anglican divine. In 1621, Donne was installed as Dean of St Paul's. He died in 1631 and the effigy was in place within eighteen months.

**Linzi James**  
**St Peter & St Paul**

# Raising the new cross at St Mary's



For more years than I know, the cross sitting atop the end of the chancel roof at St Mary's in Puttenham has been held together with black cable ties. Such was its state of decay.

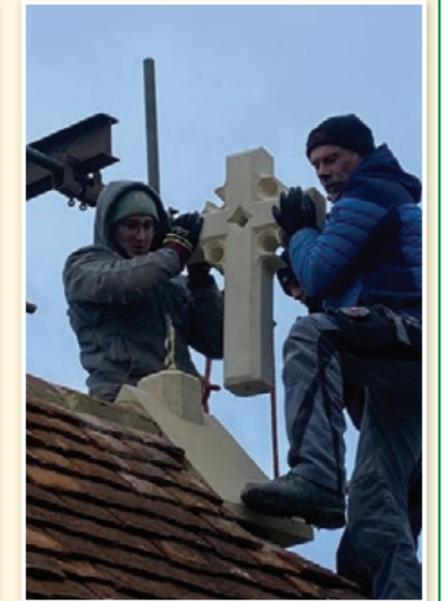
As a result of our quinquennial, we were given the option to replace the cross, which we decided to do. It was then found that the base on which it would sit was also in a poor state, and so a new base and cross were commissioned. Our thanks go, most whole-heartedly, to the Puttenham Trust who funded this exercise.

We were expecting just a regular 'cross', but the stonemason did a wonderful job and designed and made for us something very beautiful. We think you will agree, it is absolutely



stunning. Such a shame it is not nearer the ground so that we can appreciate it fully!

Next time anyone visits St Mary's, take a look up to the east end of the



chancel roof – bring a pair of binoculars to see the cross in full detail.

**Christine Rutter**  
**St Mary's, Puttenham**

# Bishop Wood Eco-Warriors



How can we make a significant difference to solving the environmental crisis? At first sight, small groups of enthusiasts who are trying to live more sustainably seem unlikely

ever to be enough to change things significantly; the heavy lifting of reducing carbon emissions has got to be done by organisations much more powerful than puny individuals. And indeed, it is essential that governments decarbonise electricity supplies, incentivise measures for house insulation, promote efficient means of transport, ensure that food production is more sustainable (a political nightmare!) and so on. As well as carrots, sticks are certainly needed too, such as banning new petrol cars and gas boilers, directing for dramatic reductions in pesticides and herbicides used for food production, placing new taxes on aviation fuel – this deeply unpopular list goes on. Commercial organisations need to change, too, in their production and investment methods, so that environmental concerns trump those of shareholder or owner interests.

So, what can we as mere individuals who care deeply about the problem actually do? I believe that small but strong and vocal groups do have an absolutely vital part to play, both in the political and commercial spheres. We have power to cast votes for politicians that share our concerns, and to spend our money with companies that act in a responsible way. Our example and witness may lead others to change their minds.

For the younger generation to be able to sort out the environmental mess we older adults have left for them, they must be given the training and tools to understand and care about the problem. Bishop Wood Junior School is an excellent example of how that is being done in our community of Tring.

In the anxious days of March 2020, as the awful realization began to dawn on what Covid-19 might mean for us all, staff at schools like Bishop Wood faced radical changes in the way they brought education to their pupils. It was hard to see what role governors could take in this emergency, other than getting out of the way. However, a school's governing body is not meant to interfere in the day-to-

day running of a school. Instead, it sets policy and checks that overall directions taken are the right ones, as well as being 'critical friends' to head teachers and their staff. Freed from the executive duties of the head, governors can work to a longer timeframe; in March 2020, that included looking forward to a time when Covid-19 no longer dominated life and it seemed to me that there was no more important direction that the school should set its sights on 'after Covid' than making environmental concerns central to the way the school was run. The school – pupils, staff and senior leadership – have taken up the idea with great enthusiasm and support; in the four years since the dark first days of lockdown, a great deal has been achieved, and there is still considerable momentum towards achieving yet more.

First, many practical measures have been undertaken. We commissioned a consultancy to prepare a 'decarbonisation' report on the school, with proposed measures prioritised and costed for the next five years. We have been given grants by St Albans Diocese (who own the buildings of this Church of England school) to improve building insulation and replace all the existing lights with LEDs, which consume far less electricity. The local organisation Sustainable Tring carried out (free of charge) a thermal imaging survey of the school, which identified areas on the outside of the building where excessive energy was leaking out; quite simple measures (think 'tube of sealant') can make a significant, low-cost difference here. We are looking forward, one day, to switch from a gas boiler to a ground source heat pump; the cost (at least a five-figure sum) would be considerable, though, and we would have to get external funding for it, probably from central government. In the meantime, there are plans to improve the heating circuits of the present system; we want to explore more effective use of thermostatic radiator valves and also (far more expensively) changing from a single circuit of radiators to multiple circuits, so one part of the building (say, the main hall and entrance at night) could be heated separately from the other parts.

Many of the pupils are aware of at least some of these developments, but a more direct involvement from the children was always seen as an essential part of the effort. There are eight classes at the school (two in each of years 3 to 6) and

each class appoints two 'eco-warriors' to form an eco-committee meeting twice a term which comes up with ideas and then discusses and prioritises them. How can the school ensure that waste is minimised? For example, ensuring lights are switched off and taps not left running. How can the school celebrate and enhance nature in the school's large and beautiful grounds? Could a bee-friendly flower bed be planted? (Yes, it could and was!) The enthusiasm and energy with which the eco-warriors conduct their discussions is always a joy to see.

The school has other initiatives on a broader environmental front. Predating Covid-19, the school has been very successful in promoting alternatives to the car for travelling to and from school. BWS has maintained a 90% and above average for children coming to school actively for over ten years. On another tack, there have been efforts to see ways in which environmental issues could be reflected in the teaching work. There are lots of direct teaching opportunities from the process of decarbonisation; for example, the thermal imaging team showed a group of pupils their infra-red cameras, explained how they worked and what could be learnt from them. Then they let the children have a go themselves: a great science lesson! There is classroom-based work, too; climate change and environmental issues can be dealt with in science, geography and ethical studies. On another tack, it's recognised that food production is a major source of greenhouse gases, and farming methods have enormous influence – good and bad – on environmental sustainability. So, should the school be thinking carefully about the food it serves at lunch and for the breakfast club in the light of these considerations? Yes, it should!

In 2021, the school was awarded Eco-School status. Unlike the Eco-church standards, Eco-School status must be re-applied for every year and is only granted again if there are improvements since the previous year; the school has always been successful. It's a fitting tribute to the enormous hard work and commitment at the school, both from staff and pupils – and an added cause for hope that rising generations will be better stewards of our earth than older ones I belong to ever were.

**Edmund Booth**  
**St Peter & St Paul**

# In memory of Rosemary Carpenter

There is a corner in St Peter & St Paul's Church that is full of toys. Among them is a teddy bear in lovingly hand-knitted garments, whose name is Teddy Horsley. There are several generations of children who know this bear well, and who, more importantly, knew Rosemary Carpenter.

With Margaret Gittins, she led the Wednesday afternoon service for babies and toddlers and children that introduced many to church. More importantly, she introduced them to church as being a place of love and care, a place where they were welcome and felt loved, and where the adults who brought them also felt the same.

There were several of us present at Rosemary's funeral in January who remembered those services and how much they meant to us, both as a time of community and sharing, a group that was non-cliquey (quite hard to find in baby groups), and encompassed by the gentle wisdom and care shown by both Rosemary and Margaret. Our children are still friends but are now adults.

Rosemary was a woman who could not help but be spiritual – it showed in every part of her life, whether in her social



work, in her ministry with her husband Bill in their parish, or whether it was in her running of the toddler service, and her presence at services. The ministry with Bill was definitely joint – by not allowing the ordination of women until it

did, the Church of England missed out on someone who would have been a very good priest. But that did not stop her exercising her ministry and using her gifts, and she was not someone who I ever remember showing anger or losing her patience.

One had no doubt when meeting Rosemary of the depth and strength of her Christian faith, and that this was someone whose prayer life was the centre of her being. She was a Tertiary Benedictine, which is a commitment to a life of prayer and spirituality while still living 'in' the world and with a family. She was professed to that on 6 June, St Barnabas Day, which became a day of great significance to her. The name Barnabas means 'son of encouragement', and the collect for the day speaks of him as the encourager. It was a skill that Rosemary possessed too, to encourage and support others with great compassion and common sense.

Rosemary lived a long life, filled with love, and we remember her with much gratitude and thanks.

**Jane Banister**  
**Tring Team**

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For further information on how you can help contact Reverend Jane Banister on 01442 822 170 or email: [jane@tringteamparish.org.uk](mailto:jane@tringteamparish.org.uk)

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Please contact Barbara Anscombe if you would like to take a subscription to *Comment*: £20.00 for 10 issues each year. The magazine can be posted to you with an additional cost for postage at current rates.

Articles, photos and publicity adverts for the next edition should arrive with the Editor no later than the 1<sup>st</sup> 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

TRING  
TEAM PARISH  
*Living God's Love*



# What's on in March in Tring Church

## Services at Tring Church

### Sunday 3rd March

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

### Mothering Sunday 10th March

8am Holy Communion traditional language\*\*  
10am Worship for all

### Sunday 17th March

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

### Palm Sunday 24th March

8am Holy Communion traditional language  
10am Communion with craft activity \*\*  
(Palm procession starts outside at the war memorial)

### Monday – Wednesday 25th - 27th March

8pm Holy Week Talk and Compline

### Maundy Thursday 28th March

10am Holy Communion traditional language  
8pm Holy Communion followed by vigil to midnight

### Good Friday 29th March

10am Worship for All  
11am CTT Walk of Witness to Tring, starts at St Marthas  
2pm Last Hour at the Cross \*\*  
7pm Good Friday evening service

### Easter Sunday 31st March

6am Dawn Service of Holy communion  
8am Holy Communion traditional language  
10am Communion with craft activity \*\*

\*\* Streamed service on our website and YouTube

### Mid-week Services in Tring

9.15am Tuesdays

Holy Communion

10am Thursdays

Holy Communion in traditional language

## Lots more going on



**Mondays 3.30pm - 5pm**

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

## Food Bank

Monday to Friday

10am - 12noon.

Drop-off donations and collect food



**Tuesdays 2pm - 4pm**

**Craft and a Cuppa**

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



## Social Coffee

Fridays, Saturdays

10am - 12 noon,

and after Sunday, Tuesday

& Thursday services



## Piano & more series

**Sunday March 10th**

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

Free but collection for church and piano expenses



## Come to our Lent Lunches! Donations welcome for Christian Aid



**Wednesday 6 March**  
New Mill Baptist Church

**Wednesday 13 March**  
St Cross, Wilstone Village Hall

**Wednesday 20 March**  
Corpus Christi Church

**Wednesday 27 March**  
St Martha's Church

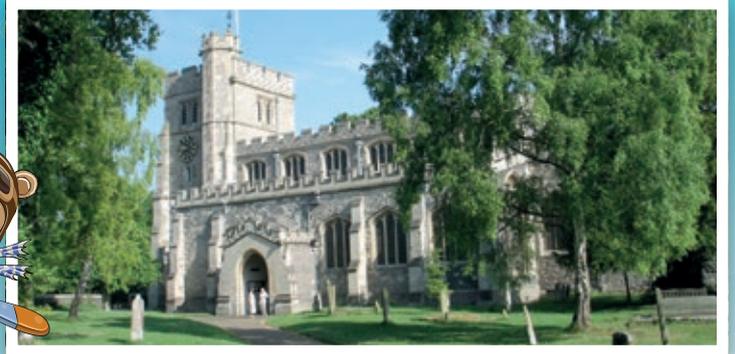
Everyone is welcome to join us at any of our church services and activities.

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For further information telephone

Grahame Senior on 01442 822770 or Trish Dowden on 07720 836930