

# COMMENT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCHES IN TRING



# Services in May in Tring Team Parish

## Sunday 1st May

**6am** May Day Madrigals from the tower followed by full breakfast **Puttenham**  
**8am** Holy Communion traditional language **Tring**  
**8am** Holy Communion traditional language **Aldbury**  
**10am** \*\* Holy Communion with Sunday Club **Tring**  
**10am** Worship for All **Aldbury**  
**10am** Holy Communion **Long Marston**

## Sunday 15th May

**8am** Holy Communion traditional language **Tring**  
**10am** \*\* Holy Communion and Sunday Club **Tring**  
**10am** Holy Communion **Aldbury**  
**10am** Worship for All **Long Marston**

## Lots more going on in the parish

**Tuesdays 2pm-4pm** Craft and a Cuppa **Tring**  
**Wednesdays 10am -12noon** Baby/toddler/carer drop-in **Tring**  
**Social Coffee** Fridays, Saturdays 10am -12 noon and after Sunday, Tuesday & Thursday services **Tring**,  
Tuesdays 10.30 -12noon **Wilstone**  
Tuesdays 10.30-12noon **Aldbury**

## Mid-week Services in the Parish

**9.15am Tuesdays** Holy Communion **Tring**  
**10am Tuesdays** Alternates weekly either Holy Communion or Morning Worship **Wilstone**  
**10am Thursdays** Holy Communion in traditional language **Tring**

## Worship for All and Communion Together

At these services we all worship together but there is more provision for children, however they are for everyone. Worship for All doesn't have Holy Communion, Communion Together does.

They are a more relaxed style of worship and are a bit shorter.

## Holy Communion with Sunday Club in Tring

There are also times when it is important to have age related worship. We all worship in different ways so we have a Sunday Club in Tring. The children (0 - 11 years old) go upstairs during the first hymn to have activities then re-join the wider congregation to take communion.

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

## Sunday 8th May

**8am** \*\*Holy Communion traditional language **Tring**  
**10am** Worship for all **Tring**  
**10am** Holy Communion **Aldbury**  
**3pm** Piano and More Concert **Tring**  
**6pm** Celtic Evening Prayer **Long Marston**

## Sunday 22nd May

**8am** \*\* Holy Communion traditional language **Tring**  
**10am** Communion Together **Tring**  
**10am** Holy Communion **Aldbury**  
**3.30pm** Team Parish Evensong traditional language **Puttenham**  
**6pm** Holy Communion **Long Marston**

## Sunday 29th May

**8am** Holy Communion traditional language **Tring**  
**10am** \*\* Holy Communion and Sunday Club **Tring**  
**10am** Holy Communion **Aldbury**  
**10am** Holy Communion **Long Marston**  
\*\* Denotes streamed service on our website or YouTube Channel

## Living generous lives



For many of us, May is the month of Christian Aid. Growing up I was always involved in a Christian Aid sponsored walk during Christian Aid Week.

In recent years, the Tring Team Parish has moved its Mega Stick Sunday walk to be in Christian Aid Week and it has become our major fundraising event of the year, consistently raising more than £10K to help the world's poorest people. If you would like to sponsor someone or get involved in the walk this year, please contact me or Annette – the editor of *Comment*. You are also invited by Christian Aid to embark on your own Challenge – to walk 300,000 steps in the month of May as a fundraiser. I am very confident that the readers of *Comment* will show their usual amazing generosity this May.

Another area where we have seen this

generosity in response to need is with the Ukrainian conflict. Many people have offered to open their homes to refugees. This is very much in line with the values of Christian Aid, which was originally set up in response to the massive refugee crisis at the end of the Second World War. While it is unimaginable that we face another refugee crisis in the face of a European conflict, our loving response shows what humanity really believes. Sadly, there seems to be a divide between the generous response from our communities and the willingness of the government to issue visas. Bishop Michael is the Diocesan lead on the invasion of Ukraine. However, despite many people offering to house refugees, few are being allowed in.

Bishop Michael has written to say: 'As it stands, the UK system is of only minimal help in helping Ukrainians in need from coming to our country. Any Ukrainian wishing to flee the war would be much better to go direct to a country in Europe whose visa requirements are

much simpler and speedier than ours. It would seem that unless Ukrainians already have friends/family here, there is little chance of them being able to come'.

Please don't let this government intransigence stand in the way of your loving response. May is the month of Christian Aid. As we continue to celebrate the resurrection, let us find ways of living generous lives.

**Huw Bellis, Tring Team**



## Editorial



By the time you are reading this edition of *Comment*, I will no longer be working in an office over the funeral parlour in Tring High Street and will return to working from home – the way I started out in my current job thirty-three years ago. I have found it hard to feel my job was 'real' when not surrounded by the trappings of my profession (so much 'stuff') and it seems to be a ridiculous truth that, as soon as I no longer have something I haven't referred to for years, I have reason to need it. I am not retiring yet, though I will gain some new colleagues. I don't like change and I will miss all that I am losing; I hope I am not too old to learn some new tricks...

It has not been easy for me to clear filing cabinets holding records of meetings held when I was still a new mother yet trying to make contracts with publishers to make our new business work. There are letters from people I barely remember now who worked with me for a while and then

moved on. There is so much personal history as well as work that must have taken months to complete that I am now consigning to the recycling pile. I am reminded of the book of Ecclesiastes: 'What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labour under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless and a chasing after wind.' Read it through if it's not familiar to you – it's still remarkably apt! But if you are looking for the meaning of life, 'Here is the conclusion of the matter:

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.' I have been fortunate to enjoy my work (most of the time) but there does come a point when you realise your life has gone by in a moment and you wonder what was really important in all that time.

There have been some articles in recent editions of *Comment* about retirement and finding out what God wants us to do at different stages of our lives. If you have something you would like to contribute on those times of change in your own life, please do let me have them to print in future editions.

Maybe that was parenthood or a new job or vocation; a complete change of direction or place of work or retirement or being a grandparent...

We have also had lots of contributions on 'Living in Love and Faith' and the meaning of identity. While that has been specifically about gender identity, it's also true that work can be a defining part of our identity. For years I accompanied my husband to events where no one asked what I did because I was, after all, his wife (yes, I am of that generation) – being a wife was supposed to be my identity. Yet even now there are few supplementary questions if I say I am a Publisher – whereas saying I am a Foster Carer opens up a huge range of conversation gambits! When we no longer have work, either because we are unemployed or retire from work, are we suddenly less ourselves? Do we become invisible? I am not ready to find that out, but I have colleagues who have asked or are asking that question now. If that is your experience, we would love to hear from you.

**The Editor**

## A warm welcome and a house of hospitality



It is one of the best aspects of human behaviour – across all cultures – to welcome and entertain friends in our homes; to give them a special dinner and the best we can offer to show our appreciation and love.

It is not very often that you get such 'normal' social events chronicled in the scriptures, but on the fifth Sunday of Lent the Lectionary Gospel from John 12 described an occasion – a rare occasion – when 'Jesus came to dinner'.

He went to the home of his friends Lazarus, Mary and Martha and they gave him a special meal and offered him their very best hospitality. Martha cooked and Mary graced Jesus with a rare and costly ointment as a sign of just how special he was to them. This painting by Bassano, which is in the Uffizi collection, chronicles the occasion beautifully: hospitality and warm friendship.



This painting by Bassano shows Jesus being welcomed for dinner by Martha, Mary and Lazarus

Hospitality is, and always has been, a vital component of our faith. Isaiah enjoined the faithful to 'Share with the Lord's people who are in need – offer hospitality'; Paul often writes about how important it was in the early church to 'offer hospitality to one another without grumbling'. And so it is today.

Hospitality and a warm welcome into our homes is as central to the practice of our faith as the familiar liturgies and the comfortable rhythm of the seasons. But it is more than just a part of what we give to those we know and what we offer to familiar friends; it is the essential bridge that joins us to the rest of humanity and welcomes the stranger as a friend.

### A beacon of hope

During the first lockdown, one of the most significant stories of outreach that was celebrated on many news channels and in the papers was the co-operation between the different churches in Burnley. There, every night, the vicar and the priest and their helpers would go out into the community and feed the destitute and the homeless (and the just plain hungry). They were taking hospitality and sustenance to those who needed it most. It was a perfect example of Christ's love in action: 'If you love me, feed my sheep'.

That beacon of hope continues and other churches up and down the land have done likewise; and not just churches. Many different communities, both secular and religious, have set up processes that are feeding and sheltering those most in need. The voluntary sector and community initiatives are bringing health and comfort where it is most needed and many of them develop into long-term sustainable enterprises that turn that temporary support into a firm threshold for a new start and a better life for the needy.

DENS is a perfect example of such an initiative: the Foodbanks and distribution schemes; the collections of food and clothing for refugees; the deliveries of essential equipment to those in dangerous situations; the heartfelt offering of refuge and a fresh beginning to those fleeing in terror. Alongside these 'emergency responses' we have a warm web of support operating with pastoral visits, different gatherings offering

sustenance and good company and regular group meetings for discussions, hobbies and other pastimes. All these, and many more, are examples of the natural warmth of humanity to be helpful and hospitable.

Governments can do much but individual humans gathering together can do so much more. It is individuals and families who are offering to open their doors and welcome the strangers – whether refugees from the Ukraine or Syria or little children who need a warm-hearted home and the security of family life.

We should be proud of those in our community who have already done so

much and we should also, I think, be ready to face the challenge of doing more. It not only does good for others but it also does us good to be helpful and give of our resources. 'How good it is when God's people live together in unity' (Psalm 133) is just as important a truth as 'True religion is this – to help widows and orphans in their distress' (James 1:27).

### We can do more

Elsewhere in this edition of *Comment* there is an article about 'Tring's Green Heart – an Oasis for Living' which aims at starting a debate among the different segments in our community which can work together to make this a better place for all to share. We have wonderful resources and have shown more than once in the past that we can work together to use those resources to support those in need and make them feel truly welcome and valued...

Surely the time is right to build on that and make this place truly a centre of warmth and hospitality that is a joy for us all to be a part of.

There is a wonderful poem by Samuel Walter Foss which was something of an inspiration to many in times of great depression and hardship. It was inspired by a line from Homer about 'A friend to Man, who lived in a House by the Side of the Road'.

*Let me live in a house by the side of the road,  
Where the race of men go by –  
The men who are good and the men who are bad,  
As good and bad as I...  
Let me live in a house by the side of the road  
And be a friend to Man...*

### A great opportunity

We live in a 'House by the side of the road'. We live in a time when there are many, many who need 'Friends to Man'.

Would it not be a wonderful thing if we could embrace the challenges of our times and become a 'centre of warmth and hospitality' – open and available with a warm welcome waiting? If not now, when?

The choice is ours.

**Grahame Senior**  
**St Peter & St Paul**  
**The Friends of Tring Church Heritage**

# 25 x "THANK YOU'S!"

## CHILDREN'S SOCIETY BOX-OPENING GARDEN DAY

The Children's Society

No child should feel alone

Over many years we have been privileged to hold a garden day for the loyal band of box holders and friends who have done so much to support the Children's Society each summer. In lockdown year we had to miss out completely. Last year we managed to squeeze in a day on 17th July once things became a little more relaxed.

**This year we are planning our 25th Children's Society Garden Day to say 25 thank you's to all who have done so much to help.**

## GREENWAYS • 88 GROVE ROAD

### 11AM - 2PM SATURDAY 18TH JUNE 2022



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## PLEASE COME AND JOIN US

**We shall be open from 11am until 2pm offering coffee and cakes, wine and a ploughman's lunch. There will be a combined stall with bring & buy items, homemade cakes and preserves and a few garden plants, most of all there will be good company to enjoy.**

We'd like to thank everyone who supports the Children's Society whether or not you have a box. Please feel free to offer a donation which can be collected on the day if you haven't had the chance to use your box (coins are in short supply!)

The Children's Society needs all our support in this challenging time.

## ALL ARE VERY WELCOME

If you need any further information, please call Prue or Grahame Senior on 01442 822 770

# I don't want to leave but...



Time sure does fly by when you're having fun!

Apologies for beginning with a cliché, but it couldn't feel any truer to myself and my family.

Since arriving in Tring three years ago, a lot has happened to me, my husband Chris and our two boys, Samuel and Noah.

We always knew that when we came to Tring, we'd only be here for three years before moving on to a more permanent home (such is the life of a curate in the Church of England!). As a curate you generally spend three years training at theological college and another three learning the ropes 'on the job' as a curate in a parish, before embarking on a more long-term post, usually as a vicar of your own church.

This is the case for me too. Sometime in the next two or three months, I shall be leaving Tring Team Parish to become Vicar of St Martins, Shenley, in the parish of Radlett, Aldenham and Shenley.

My children are particularly delighted at the move because the Watford and Arsenal training grounds are in our parish too, so obviously they'll be expecting me to get down there and make contacts!

Whilst, of course, I am hugely excited about this adventure, I am also torn

with a sense of grief leaving a parish we have come to adore. There's so much we will miss, I almost don't know where to start, but I shall try.

What struck me when we arrived was the sense of community here – it really is like no other. If you've lived here all your life, then you may not realise how unique and what a gift this is. People greeting each other in the street is like a scene from days gone by; how the community joins together to drive and support a cause, whether that's donations to the foodbank, lockdown shopping needs, Ukrainian refugee campaigns (to name the most obvious), they really do rally around and make it happen.

We'll miss the beautiful countryside, the walks around the reservoirs, Tring Park and up around Ivinghoe Beacon. Commuting to my 'office' is something I couldn't have imagined so close to London, cycling or driving through picturesque scenes and rolling fields – breathtaking.

Then there are the stunning parish churches and their communities, Aldbury, Long Marston, Wilstone and Puttenham, churches that served the people of

this parish for centuries: the history they contain is remarkable.

The people. The people I have got to know over this time has been incredible. For those who know me, I'm sure it comes as no surprise when I say that I love to have a good old chat! Hearing the stories of the people in this community has been hugely enriching; listening to the challenges individuals have faced in their lives, and celebrating their joys, has been an absolute blessing.

I would love to mention names, but I fear there are far too many and no doubt I'd unintentionally leave someone off the list; however, I will mention the wonderful clergy team



I've had the honour to work alongside. Revds Huw, Jane and Michelle have been supportive beyond measure: their love, wisdom, support and humour has been essential in my development as a Priest. Their calming words, guidance and dedication to the people in this parish has truly role modelled to me what it is to unlock God's love in the community. Most of all, Tring has been the place where my faith has deepened, where being with people to share in their most profound experiences has impacted me on a level I never thought possible. During these three years, I was ordained Deacon, ordained Priest, presided over my first communion, led my first funeral, baptised my first child and conducted my first wedding.

Yes, my time in Tring will for ever be somewhere incredibly special to me.

So, on to Shenley we go (well, not quite yet), and there are lots of things to do before we leave. Therefore, if I could be cheeky, I would greatly appreciate your prayers for a smooth transition for the children as they leave the Tring schools they love, to join new schools near Shenley. Both boys (and husband), have been hugely supportive of my calling in faith and are happy to go where I go, but this is no easy thing for them. Prayers that they will be happy in their new surroundings would be wonderful.

**Sarah Marshall, Tring Team**



**St. Peter & St. Paul, Tring.**  
Saturday, 7th May 2022, 7.30 p.m.

## Spring Concert

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serious and light-hearted,  
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[www.ridgewaychorale.org.uk](http://www.ridgewaychorale.org.uk)

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**Colin Stevens - Accompanist**

**Guest Soloists**

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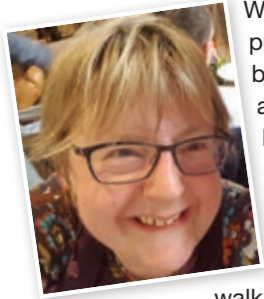
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# News from Tring Park



We're proud of our pupils who have been fundraising for all those affected by the conflict in Ukraine. Our students and staff began collectively attempting to walk, run, skip or crawl 2,476km – the distance from the UK to Ukraine.

A 1km route was set out around the school grounds for everyone to follow. After just five days we completed 2,707km! This put us well above our target and it's been wonderful to observe the spirit of our school with so many people getting involved.

Congratulations to our top contributors: Rosie in 6<sup>th</sup> Form (40km), Mr Hoskins, co-ordinator of this project (100.5km), Sixth Form (1,384km). We are fundraising for Unicef UK through



JustGiving and are delighted to have raised over £3,000 so far.

Meanwhile Caroline, Head of our Dance Pianists, and I felt we could do a staff bakesale to raise even more funds for our UNICEF appeal. As a school it does feel important to be able to reach out to other children who are always the innocent victims of conflict. Staff responded beautifully with glorious cakes and generous donations. £200 was raised in a morning break and brought our staff family together. Huge thanks to Mantas, our Catering Manager, and his team for allowing us to borrow the Dining Hall.

Ahead of Easter, in recognition of the need that others might have, we are very proud of our pupils for helping sort the generous donations for Aylesbury Food Bank we collected in February.



We are extremely grateful that Dame Monica Mason, former ballet dancer, teacher, and artistic director of The Royal Ballet, visited the school to award two

scholarships from the Cecchetti Society. Maestro Enrico Cecchetti (pronounced 'checketty') was one of the greatest dancers and educators of his time (1850-1928). His legacy, the Cecchetti Method, is a highly-regarded dance training method of today and is taught around the globe.

We have also benefited from the insights of former pupils. Alumnus Joe Griffiths-Brown returned to Tring Park to give workshops to our Performance Foundation Junior, Performance Foundation and Musical Theatre students. Since leaving Tring Park, Joe went straight into 'Hamilton' and landed the role as Man 1/Charles Lee. He has also featured in 'Death on the Nile', a feature film directed by Sir Kenneth Branagh. Joe is currently starring in 'Frozen' as part of the original West End cast.

As part of Racial Awareness Week, our pupils were asked each to make a pledge to end racial inequality in the workplace as part of the 'Big Promise' initiative. Our 6<sup>th</sup> Form are on the cusp of leaving school and entering further training, higher education and the world of work. Thus, this sort of initiative helps increase their awareness.

Our Year 8 pupils have been making Easter cards to brighten the day of a



resident at St Joseph's, as part of an initiative that has service before self as its focus.

Our Year 7 pupils have created cross bookmarks as a gift for the church family with uplifting messages. The aim of this project was to help create a level of understanding about how faith can be uplifting and transformative for people. To help understand the impact that faith can have, they have been deeply impressed by hearing Stormzy's 'Blinded By Your Grace'.

*Lord I've been broken  
Although I'm not worthy  
You fixed me  
I'm Blinded By Your Grace  
You came and saved me*

In March, because it was Women's History Month, we had an Assembly that touched on the lives of the Founders

of Tring Park School. Olive Ripman and Grace Cone joined their two performing arts schools in 1939 to become the basis of what Tring Park is today. From various accounts of people who knew them, their leadership was phenomenal; they were trailblazers. In 1977 Grace Cone was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Jubilee Birthday Honours List. Generations of performers are in their debt.

Movingly, on the day that she died, the Year 9 pupils were starting to learn more about the Kindertransport, via the story of Vera Gissing. She was a Czech-born literary translator who was one of the 669 children saved by Sir Nicholas Winton. We were able to see the part of an episode of 'That's Life' in February 1988, whereby the presenter, Esther Rantzen, thumbed through a scrapbook listing hundreds of children, mainly Jewish, who in 1939 had been brought to Britain. One of them was Vera Diamant, a ten-year-old girl who had arrived with her older sister, Eva. Vera, by then Vera Gissing, was in the studio audience. As the camera panned to her, viewers noticed an elderly man next to her. Neither knew that they had been 'set



Olive Ripman



Grace Cone

up' by the producers. Amid gasps from the audience, Rantzen announced that the man was Nicholas Winton and that 49 years earlier he had been instrumental in saving her life. Rantzen then asked for those in the audience who had also been one of the 669 to stand; several dozen did, and then she asked for those who existed because their parents or grandparents were rescued, and the rest of the audience got to their feet. This is well worth trying to find on the Internet as testimony to the power of love.

**Sarah Bell, Tring Park**



## When I needed a neighbour, were you there?



Like many others, our family has been horrified by the atrocities going on in Ukraine and wanted to do something to help. The impact of war was brought home to me, when speaking to an ex-work colleague recently who is part-Russian and part-Ukrainian. Normally he is quite a stoical character, but even he was moved to tears when he was telling me about some of his family who have lost their homes and have been trapped by the fighting in eastern Ukraine.

We wanted to do more than just donate money or food, and we received an email from Revd Jane Banister who has been working with the Diocese of St Albans to coordinate help and support including hosting refugee families.

Since we have a suitable spare room, we immediately offered to help. Straight away we were matched with a mother and two children from a Ukrainian family who were fleeing from the fighting in Kiev and who already had a connection with one of the schools in Tring.

We have been in contact with them several times since, as they made their way westwards and away from the fighting. We have been helping them

complete some rather complicated visa forms for their stay in the UK with us, which we hope will not delay their onward travel too much.

Whilst there will be some adjustments to our family life that we will need to make, we are happy to do that and feel we are doing our bit to help some others in their time of need. We are looking forward to the opportunity to make some new friends and enjoy a culturally enriching experience as we host them. We also know we are not alone, and are grateful to others in the church, who have offered their support and help.

**Andrew Kinsey  
St Peter & St Paul**

# Life and times of St John's, Rugby



I was brought up in a working-class area of an industrial town in the Midlands. Every evening at 5.18 the hooter would sound at the BTH, a heavy electrical manufacturing factory, and the workers would pour out, many on bikes, quite a few on buses to take them to surrounding towns. My dad was one of those cyclists, working as a gear cutter (making power station equipment) – my mum had worked there during the war. We, like many of the workers' families, lived in one of the streets of terraced houses built in the early 1900s.

We, and most of our neighbours, belonged to St John's Church, two streets away from home. Outside school, most of my life revolved around St John's. I went to Sunday school, was in the choir, became an altar server, was a wolf cub, and then a boy scout, joined the church youth club, and was confirmed by the Bishop of Coventry in May 1964. I lived through the hopes and disappointments of my teenage years in that community.

I left Rugby to go to university when I was 18, but already the demography of our locale was changing; the first Caribbean migrants came in the early 1960s ('darkies', my mother called them, meaning no disrespect). I went back to St John's from time to time while at uni, most memorably to my own father's funeral when he died suddenly in his early 60s.

I then graduated, moved abroad and gained a family of my own. By the early 1990s my home area had changed almost completely, being mostly south Asian, whether Sikh, Muslim, or Hindu. St John's Church was no longer viable as a separate congregation. So it was merged with St Peter's, a church which felt a long way away when I was a child but in fact was a quarter of a mile distant. In a very emotional ceremony in 1992, we said farewell to the old building, removed the reredos and installed it in a niche in what became St Peter and St John's Church.

The last time I passed the old building, it was a Pakistani community centre. That's not good for my nostalgia, but good for the people who now live close to it. While I have so many memories associated with that building,

in reality they are of the people – Mr Cowhan, who ran the choir for many years; Mr Collier, the Sunday school superintendent; Akela, the wolf cub leader; Martin Turner, the curate; and the girls I was attracted to as a teenager. Like me, they have all moved on, one way or another. I am so grateful for all that the folks of St John's gave for me (and aware that I gave little back), but I have to accept that buildings can lose the relevance that they had, and the time comes to leave them behind. St John's was built to meet a need in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and closed when it was no longer needed at the end of that century.

The Anglican church has sustained its Christian mission for centuries by adapting to changing circumstances.



The need to adapt in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been made starker and more urgent by the impact of pandemic, war and climate change. Together we shall be exploring what that means in the Team Parish and beyond.

**John Whiteman, Tring Team**

*Photo of St John's in 1954 reproduced from the 'Our Warwickshire' website*



**Christian Aid Week 15th - 21st May**

**Mega Stick Sunday 15th May 2022**

**Walk, run, cycle, amble or scoot round Tring and/or the villages to raise money for Christian Aid.**

**You can choose what route you take - visit some or all the churches in Tring by walking or running your route.**

**You can join a group or do it on your own.**

**Celebration BBQ at Tring Church at 5pm for all supporters**



**Or challenge yourself!**

**Take on the 300,000 steps challenge this May**

**- get fit while raising vital funds.**

**- that's just 10k steps a day in May**

**To find out more, sponsor someone or to join group for the walk contact Rev Jane Banister**

**jane@tringteamparish.org.uk or 01442 822170**

**Two people are being match funded so worth double!**

# What can I do for God now?



Sitting in the sunshine, away in a distant country, retirement seems an easy time of relaxation, chatting with new acquaintances, and occasional bouts of slight physical activity in the shape of some lazy swimming.

The day-to-day reality, of course, is rather more complex than that!

I have, I suppose, been retired twice, firstly from a very busy job which I enjoyed, as a headteacher. Secondly, as 'Mrs Vicar', when my husband, Paul, took a parish in West Oxfordshire for nearly six years.

As the daughter of two teachers, I have always lived in the world of education; indeed, I can still remember my 6<sup>th</sup> birthday spent sharing my mother's desk in school (we had different school holidays). 1C sang 'Happy Birthday' to me. Later I was to follow my mother's advice when I was 16 to 'put your hair up and come and teach maths for three weeks.' When I first retired, therefore, it was to step back from a world in which I had always had a part.

As term began that first year, Paul and I went away, thus breaking my firm conviction that the new year begins in September, not in January!

Initially, I found that there was much to catch up with, many old friends to see and enjoyment in the everyday things of life that I had previously had little time for. Having worked full time with three children, and then caring for my mother as she declined in a nursing home, there had been little time for domesticity. Paul had taken early retirement in order to train for the Ministry, whilst I had continued working for three years or so. His life had changed ahead of mine, which meant that I had only my sense of identity to change, a situation which worked for us.

I had determined not to take up any voluntary work for six months in order to work out what I really wanted to do or could contribute. After that time, I was asked to continue my work at Special Educational Needs tribunals on an occasional basis. I have continued to attend such tribunals and have really enjoyed doing so. They create a link to my strong educational foundations

and allow me to keep up-to-date with modern thinking. This has led me to the conclusion that, for me, at any rate, it has been very important to maintain my previous interests and experience.

Life changed again, as we moved to West Oxfordshire, as Paul became Rector of Ducklington. This was a move rather outside my comfort zone. I had little experience of living in a village, or of adapting to a rather slower way of life, further away from London. It was very strange, in my early 60s, to go to Waitrose and meet no one I knew. I had been used to working with lots of people, near to many good friends and most importantly, near to some of my young grandchildren, whom I had seen on a weekly basis. Paul's role in the village helped, meaning a lot of people knew who I was, but I often had no idea who they were! Because this meant it was hard for me to settle initially, I would question carefully, thoughts of moving a distance away from familiarity, in retirement.

I decided, again, to wait six months before committing myself to anything. For me that was important because I knew I was different in many ways from the previous vicar's wife, and I needed to change preconceptions that 'this is what the Vicar's wife does'. I was conscious that in the eyes of my friends, I was a most peculiar and unexpected person to be cast in that role! However, after six months I wanted to engage and begin to do something useful. One or two jobs needed doing at church – the coffee rota, for instance, needed help. As I began to engage, two things became evident to me – firstly, how important it is to me, to become involved and not to just drift, sitting reading crime novels. I met lots of people whose names I had only previously known.

During this period, I had spent some time thinking about what God wanted me to do with the rest of my life. When I looked back and reviewed my time in Ducklington, I realised that God had used some talents which I had forgotten all about, and some which I had not wanted to use! For example, I was delighted to become a school governor, but did not want the preparation and commitment of working with Junior Church. But when the Junior Church leader's husband became very ill, no one else stepped forward...

Now our journey has continued as Paul has retired from full-time ministry. I

spent, and continue to spend, quite a lot of time thinking what I could do for God now? I don't have quite as much energy as once I did, and my wonky knees impede my mobility – yet it seems that God answers always.

I was delighted to be asked to be a Foundation Governor at Tring School, providing a feeling of continuity. In a sense, we have come home to Tring, near again to family and friends. I have always loved offering hospitality and I enjoy cooking, so it was good to join the cooking team for Saturday lunches, and to open our home for a House Group and to entertain friends.

My family has always been of huge importance to me and I look forward to time with my six grandkids. My father showed me in times gone past, the value of good grandparenting – my own three sons gained so much from his and my mother's time individually and jointly with them. So now, I am trying to emulate his example. It's great to get to know the grandkids individually as people, all with different interests and personalities. Sometimes I can give one or other 'me time' which is difficult for parents in the hurly burly of modern life. Unconditional love is valuable and much easier when you don't have to be disciplinarian!

Perhaps the most challenging time of my retirement, so far, was in the middle of lockdown, when I was shielded for fourteen months. What to do with my time then? The first thing I did was to learn the importance of routine to provide shape to one's day. Paul was to realise his need for that after we settled into Tring. It was also important to have something to look forward to each day – sometimes coffee and chat over Zoom, reading the grandkids a story over WhatsApp or similar. It didn't need to be anything huge, although I like planning for things. It was time to ponder rather than to rush headlong into things, time to review, reappraise what is important and time to rely on God to open up avenues which he wants you to go down – some of them unexpected! I also relied on pre-retirement hobbies, knitting six jumpers in one year, a record for me.

So far retirement has held surprises, and although I am aware I have slowed down, it has been a fulfilling time, a time to engage and one of space in which to try to grow nearer to God.

**Nicci Boddam-Whetham,  
St Peter & St Paul**

# The Green Heart of Tring



## What is it?

The green space at the heart of Tring which links the Parish Church, churchyard, extensive car parking and Tring Together's Nora Grace Hall, is a huge asset to the community. It is a precious resource of green natural space which opens up the heart of Tring and links its key meeting places in a relaxed and welcoming ambience.

## Why is it so important?

Because green space is a rare asset – particularly in town centres. Tring is happily blessed in this regard with the additional connections of the Memorial Gardens, Pound Meadow, Pond Close and the Brookside Meadows. Unlike most town centres there is plenty of space for nature to thrive. In this natural environment our heritage medieval church building is extremely well placed and it presents the best meeting / event / activity space in the whole of the town. It's a place where our community can breathe and thrive.

## In tune with the times

The events of recent years have brought more focus on events and activities closer to home in both the working and social contexts. Travelling less, doing things more locally and making the most of easy access on foot have become more important to all of us.

Remote communications activities and 'working from home' for many of us also mean that our daily routines are different. There has been a boom in 'café society' with pavement seating creating a new way of relaxed meeting and working. However, our streets are narrow and busy. The green heart of Tring presents an opportunity to extend hospitality and meeting space safely and responsibly.

## Working together for the good of the community

We already have many events which take place in and around the church and churchyard and often involve the Nora Grace Hall and the church hall as well. From celebrations of national occasions to social events like the FOTCH Family Fun Day or relaxed BBQs, there is an increasing emphasis on getting the whole

town together in a congenial space.

The strategic purpose of FOTCH focuses on ensuring that the church and the church resources are seen as valuable and relevant to all segments of the community – not just those who worship there.

The church itself is increasingly focusing on an open and inclusive welcome to all in our society. These initiatives all mean that Tring Together, Tring Team Parish and Friends of Tring Church Heritage share a common purpose in making the Green Heart of Tring the natural choice for all manner of events and activities. Exploring how we can make it more effective – and more flexible in its functions – seems a sensible way to go.

## A more flexible built environment

In parallel with this developing initiative the church is considering opening up part of its internal space to allow more flexible catering, more meetings and events as well as the usual (and growing) calendar of concerts and performances. We are also looking at improving the visitor attraction elements of the church with better displays and exhibitions – all, of course, sensitively balanced with the worshipping space.

## A living growing heart

This line of thinking is very much in tune with the way in which all the stakeholders in the centre of Tring see the importance of building stronger bonds with the community. The community itself is also growing with large new residential areas currently in progress and more planned. This is an exciting time to be working on future opportunities for Tring and we very much hope you will want to be part of it.

## A 'work in progress'...

As you can see from the logo attached to this article, we are developing a concept which attempts to bond Tring Team Parish, Tring Together and FOTCH into a single entity focusing attention on the wonderful resource of open space and community assets at the heart of our town. Describing it as 'An Oasis for Living' – a place where good things grow and good times happen – helps us locate its value for all of us who call Tring home. We are exploring working as a team to develop a better way of living and celebrating our lives here in Tring. This is very much a 'work in progress' as an organic project and we welcome all inputs and helpers to share their views and ideas with us.

## An opportunity to get involved and have your say

There are big community events coming up. The FOTCH Family Fun Day on 7 May and the Jubilee celebration on 2-4 June follow quickly on the heels of Tring Spring Fayre. Once these events are completed, we shall be holding an open day on site to talk about the plans for Tring's Green Heart and to make sure we get everyone's opinions and views. Watch this space for dates and details.

We very much hope you will want to be involved. If you would like any information in advance, please contact Vivianne Child on 01442 828 920 or Vivianne@tringtogether.org.uk or me on 01442 822 770 or gsenior@seniorpartners.co.uk.

**Grahame Senior**  
St Peter & St Paul,  
The Friends of Tring Church Heritage



# The Platinum Jubilee



On 6 February 2022 Her Majesty The Queen became the first British monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee, marking seventy years of service to the people of the United Kingdom, the

Realms and the Commonwealth. To celebrate this unprecedented anniversary, events and initiatives will take place throughout the year, culminating in a four-day UK bank holiday weekend from Thursday 2 June to Sunday 5 June. The bank holiday will provide an opportunity for communities and people throughout the United Kingdom to come together to celebrate the historic milestone.

The four days of celebrations will include public events and community activities, as well as national moments of reflection on The Queen's seventy years of service.

The highlights include:

## Thurs 2 June

**The Queen's Birthday Parade (Trooping the Colour):** Over 1,400 parading soldiers, 200 horses and 400 musicians will come together in the traditional Parade to mark The Queen's official birthday, usually held on the second Saturday in June.

**Platinum Jubilee Beacons:** Over 1,500 beacons will be lit throughout the United Kingdom, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and UK Overseas Territories. The Principal beacon will be lit in a special ceremony at Buckingham Palace.

## Friday 3 June

**Service of Thanksgiving:** A Service of Thanksgiving for The Queen's reign will be held at St Paul's Cathedral.

## Saturday 4 June

**The Derby at Epsom Downs:** Her Majesty The Queen, accompanied by members of the Royal Family, will attend the Derby.

**Platinum Party at the Palace:** The BBC will stage and broadcast a special live concert from Buckingham Palace, also broadcast on a big-screen in the grounds of Sandringham.

## Sunday 5 June

### The Big Jubilee Lunch and The Platinum Jubilee Pageant:

This London event will tell the story of The Queen's seventy-year reign in an awe-inspiring festival of creativity. The 'River of Hope' section will comprise 200 silk flags which will process down The Mall, appearing like a moving river. Primary and secondary school children are invited to create a picture of their hopes and aspirations for the planet over the next seventy years.



Further Platinum Jubilee events planned:

## The Queen's Green Canopy

As the Platinum Jubilee year begins, over 60,000 trees have already been planted in the UK through the project in the two months since the 'plant a tree for the Jubilee' planting season began. Every planting is being recorded on a digital Queen's Green Canopy map which will be presented to Her Majesty at the end of the Jubilee year.

## Royal Collection Trust

Three special displays marking significant occasions in Her Majesty's reign – the Accession, the Coronation and Jubilees – will be staged at the official royal residences from July 2022.

## The Queen's Private Estates

Celebrations will also take place on The Queen's private estates, Sandringham and Balmoral, for local residents and visitors to enjoy. The lighting of the Sandringham beacon will also take place in the Royal Parkland.

## The Platinum Jubilee Celebration (Windsor)

From 12-15 May the Platinum Jubilee Celebration will see over 500 horses and



1,000 performers create a 90-minute piece of arena theatre that will include actors and artists, musicians, international military displays, dancers and global equestrian displays.

## The Platinum Pudding competition

To mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee, a nationwide baking competition sets out to find a brand new pudding dedicated to The Queen.

You can read more about the National Plans here <https://www.royal.uk/platinum-jubilee-central-weekend>

## How about Tring?

Tring is keen to create a wonderful weekend of memories, right here in our corner of Hertfordshire. Plans are underway for a celebration, based in and around St Peter & St Paul's Church on Friday 3 June. There will be a church service in the late afternoon, followed by afternoon tea, music, BBQ and beer; something for everyone to enjoy and everyone is very welcome.

I'm hoping we can get the Diamond Jubilee beacon out of storage (which really means, I wonder where we put it?) and light it on the church roof at some time over the weekend.

On Sunday 5 June, we are all encouraged to host street parties in our own roads, and I know of many people who are already thinking about the art of the possible in that respect. Certainly, St Peter & St Paul will host a lunch for anyone that cannot attend a road specific party.

Tring Camera Club will want to capture the weekend for posterity. Trees will be planted. And finally, 'watch this space' for the Local History Society and Museum. I have no doubt they have a plan to involve us all in capturing Tring's history relating to Summer 2022.

**Vivianne Child, St Peter & St Paul**

## Science – a deeply religious activity



Professor Tom McLeish is a top rank scientist.

He was born on 1 May 1962, educated at Sevenoaks School in Kent and Emmanuel

College, Cambridge, gaining his PhD in 1987 for research on fluid dynamics. McLeish began his academic career as a lecturer in Physics at the University of Sheffield (1989-1993). He then moved to the University of Leeds, where he was Professor of Polymer Physics (1993-2008). He was Professor of Physics at the University of Durham (2008-2018). He was additionally Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research between 2008 and 2014.

I first heard him speak about fifteen years ago in Durham. He is currently the first Professor of Natural Philosophy at York University. Natural Philosophy is the old-fashioned name for what we now call Physics. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society, the leading and highly prestigious organisation of British and Commonwealth scientists founded in the reign of Charles II.

On 9 March Prof. McLeish gave his first lecture as Canon Scientist at St Albans Abbey. He started with a quotation from the poem 'Lamia' by John Keats:

*Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?  
There was an awful rainbow once in  
heaven:  
We know her woof, her texture; she is  
given  
In the dull catalogue of common things.  
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed  
mine —  
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made  
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into  
a shade.*

This was John Keats' mild complaint against the 'cold philosophy' of Sir Isaac Newton and other natural philosophers (the word 'scientist' wasn't coined until 1834). Keats thought that such study robbed the natural world of its beauty and mystery. Prof. McLeish did not agree with Keats and found science a surprisingly spiritual activity.

He did not mention this but a similar

sentiment is found in the following poem by Walt Whitman:

*When I heard the learn'd astronomer,  
When the proofs, the figures, were  
ranged in columns before me,  
When I was shown the charts and  
diagrams, to add, divide, and  
measure them,  
When I sitting heard the astronomer  
where he lectured with much applause  
in the lecture-room,  
How soon unaccountable I became  
tired and sick,  
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off  
by myself,  
In the mystical moist night-air, and from  
time to time,  
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.*

While there is a lot to be said for looking 'up in perfect silence at the stars', it adds more to my enjoyment and my wonder if I know a little bit about what I am seeing. In Orion, which disappears from our night skies in May, there is an area in which new stars are being made. Knowing that enhances my enjoyment of the stars.

Prof. McLeish went on to talk about his love for the Book of Job in the Old Testament. He published a book on this topic in 2014 called 'Faith and Wisdom in Science'. McLeish says that the most significant biblical book for science is Job rather than Genesis.

'Do you have wisdom to count the clouds?' asks the voice of God from the whirlwind. Tom McLeish takes a scientist's reading of this ancient text as a centrepiece to make the case for science as a deeply human and ancient activity, embedded in some of the oldest stories told about human desire to understand the natural world. Drawing on stories from the modern science of chaos and uncertainty alongside medieval, patristic, classical and biblical sources, 'Faith and Wisdom in Science' challenges much of the current 'science and religion' debate as operating with the wrong assumptions and in the wrong space. He criticises the cultural separation of sciences and humanities, suggesting an approach to science, or in its more ancient form, natural philosophy – the 'love of wisdom of natural things' – that can draw on theological and cultural roots. Following the theme of pain in human confrontation with nature, it develops a 'Theology of Science', recognising

that both scientific and theological worldviews must be involved with each other, not holding separate domains. Surprisingly, science becomes a deeply religious activity.

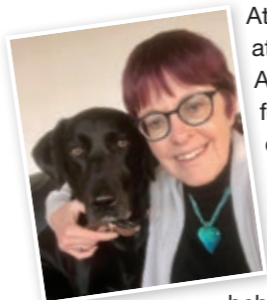
During a recent talk in a local school, I was asked by a sixth former if there were objective proof of the existence of God. I said there was no objective proof of God, just as there was no objective proof of the non-existence of God. It does, of course, depend, as Prof. Joad would have said, on what you mean by objective. (Ask your grandma about him.) If you mean 100% certain and convincing all people with half a brain cell, then neither of these positions are 100% certain.

Earlier in the talk in the school I had described the evidence for the Big Bang 13.88 billion years ago (give or take a fortnight) namely: the cosmic background radiation, the expansion of the universe according to Hubble's Law, the relative abundances of light elements and the distribution of large-scale cosmic structures. All these point to a hot Big Bang. But these are not objective or 100% certain and they did not convince Prof. Sir Fred Hoyle, Professor of Astronomy at Cambridge, who thought it sounded too much like the Christian/Jewish creation story. He and two of his colleagues came up with the Steady State Theory, now held by only a minority of scientists. Fred Hoyle held that belief till his death but modified his view on God and creation saying in 1983 that, after a lifetime of study, he concluded that the odds are too long for life to have evolved by a random process. The common idea of a lightning strike on a 'primeval soup', producing first amino acids then enzymes, is very unlikely, about as unlikely as a whirlwind passing through a junkyard containing all the parts necessary for a Boeing 747 airliner and producing a ready-to-fly aircraft. It looks like 'someone had monkeyed with the physics' to produce a universe ready for life.

Complex questions such as 'Does God exist?' or 'Is the UK better in or out of the EU?', 'Is Beethoven a better composer than Bach?' cannot be answered with 100% certainty by mere mortals; but there are reasons for these beliefs which people must examine for themselves.

**Jon Reynolds, Tring Team**

## Letter from Orkney



At the time of writing at the beginning of April (slightly late for the *Comment* deadline, sorry!) Spring is starting to show in Orkney. As usual we

are one month behind you in the south of England. There are a few tiny lambs starting to bounce around in the fields, and as is apparently traditional, the 'lambing snow' arrived yesterday. I don't know if shepherds in the south are familiar with this (Huw?) but I feel very



sorry for the wee mites sheltering next to their mums as the snow falls.

In line with new starts, we are starting to develop St Mary's Church, with a major refurbishment of the annexe where we serve coffee and home bakes after Sunday Services. As a member of the Vestry Committee and involved with the process, for me this is nearly as stressful as having building work done at home. Not surprisingly the old building has thrown up some nasty surprises which are fixable, but are going add to the costs. As we are a tiny church, funding is a constant problem, especially post Covid-19 and with cost-of-living increases horrifying everyone. No pressure there then.

However, once it's all finished, the space will be made available to the local community as a useful resource, not only raising the profile of the church, but hopefully raising much needed money. As I'm sure we've said before, the church space is a gem in the heart of Stromness. The warm and welcoming atmosphere of the place is commented on by virtually everyone who enters, even those folk who say 'I'm not religious but...' However, St Mary's is situated near the top of a fairly steep road, and snuggles



in amongst the houses around it; so even locals don't notice it. I wondered about a large neon flashing sign being erected outside advertising 'St Mary-the-Virgin Church! Come here on Sunday mornings for the Best Holy Communion Service in Orkney!'. For some reason that suggestion was vetoed by Vestry. In the meantime the building work continues and we hope will be ready to welcome everyone in early summer.

**Carrie Dodge, St Mary's, Stromness**

### 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)

## Let's welcome Spring in Tring!

Join us and many local community groups to celebrate two weeks of free events to get active and out and about enjoying our fabulous town and surrounding countryside.

Plan ahead with our online brochure:

<https://bit.ly/TTSpringFayre2022>

For the perfect start to the Spring Fayre, our launch day is on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April on Church Square, Tring.

Thank you to all the organisations that joined the Spring Fayre this year and to all the local businesses that are supporting this event – it's a Tring thing!"



23<sup>rd</sup> April – 8<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Tring Together is a not for profit charity with the remit to facilitate, plan and organise successful events and activities for associations, the business community and for Tring's residents and visitors.



# What kind of church do you want to belong to?



are former because they are growing up and have moved away from home, but maybe their faith has waned a little too. They were Lottie, Zoey and Eliza.

For many years Lottie helped run the Sunday Club. Lottie is now 23, and works in social media. Zoey, also 23, is the hero who during lockdown set up the online church provision for the Tring Team Parish and kept us worshipping! She taught us about OBS and YouTube and stuff we never thought we would need to know. She was an original member of our Youth Café. She is studying veterinary science at Cambridge University. Eliza is another former member of our Youth Café and an occasional member of St Mark's Church in Sheffield, her parish church, whilst she is studying history at the university. She is 19. We invited them to give us some insight into the 'Living in Love and Faith' debate from a 20-something point of view.

It was great having them with us. As one of the attendees emailed, 'So impressed at how intelligently entertaining the young people were'. What stood out was that these young people were fun, they were witty, they had thought deeply about their faith (or how it has changed) and they had talked about it with others. They are the product of our church, and we can be rightly proud of them. The kind of church I want to belong to has people like this in it, as well as people like you. Likewise, they all value the friendships and relationships of people like you; and they count you as part of their formation as people. Oh, and I should have said, one of them is gay, one of them is transgender and one is straight. Just like people up and down the country, they represent the diversity of our society.

In their view the Church of England has a massive PR problem. They have always found the Tring Team to be accepting and welcoming, but they found that, at both school and university, other young people would immediately associate being Christian with being

homophobic. They talked about how they had to spend a lot of time 'defending good people from things they have never said or done'. They also spoke of bad experiences in other churches when they were rejected for being gay and how this challenges their belief in God (or certainly in the Bible). The lesbian in the trio talked about how she would love to get married in St Peter & St Paul's Church (in ten years' time!) and that she feels jealous / sad when she comes back and hears other couples having their banns read. We talked about the Church of England neither allowing gay marriage or a blessing of a gay marriage. Whilst gay marriage may not be legal in church, the wider congregation present at the time were unanimous that, should she get married, she must be welcome for a blessing (irrespective of the church's teaching).

We asked what kinds of questions trouble them most about identity, sexuality, relationships, marriage and the church? They talked about how questions of sexuality and gender were of a second order when meeting people. They would find out about them first and sexuality may be raised later when they got to know them, but it was a non-issue.

There was one aspect of sexual behaviour which did bother them – the behaviour of straight men, especially when they are drunk and think they can get what they want. They talked about the false compliments they receive e.g. 'You look good for someone who is trans' or 'You are too pretty to be a lesbian'.

When asked to comment on pornography and sharing of nude images, they emphasised that for their generation consent is the key word. They referenced the tea video to explain what they mean by consent. They were all aware of people who had shared images of themselves and were then fearful of what would happen with those images, and of those who had been pressurised into sharing images. Again, the pressure in their experience always came from straight males.

In summary, we concluded that if they were to speak for their generation, they would say: (1) Relationships come first and questions of sexuality or gender later. It doesn't matter. (2) Consent is everything. (3) Straight males, especially

when drunk, can be a problem.

From the floor, someone spoke about how he had been married twice and had seen the emphasis of marriage as being faithful to one's partner. They acknowledged that polyamory was more common in the LGBTQI+ community, only because this community is already exploring their sexuality so are open to exploring polyamory too. The view was good luck to them if that is what they wanted to do, but count us out. Having seen the loving relationships of their parents, that is what they wanted. All three agreed that all of their friends were only interested in monogamous relationships.

The three of them really don't get the argument that J K Rowling makes and for them she is a stumbling block. In response to those who said they were afraid of getting things wrong, they replied it is OK to make a mistake – it was important to listen and try. However, they also find it annoying when people are deliberately obtuse and ask stupid questions. They really don't get the obsession with transgender people and toilets and the argument that it will make women vulnerable to attack. Again, the problem for them isn't transgender people attacking women, it is straight men, and they will attack you anyway, irrespective of which toilet you use. It was one of many examples relating to gender and sexuality where we are making an issue where there isn't one. In a previous edition of *Comment* John Whiteman wrote about how when homosexuality was decriminalised, he was warned that he would not be safe in public toilets. That wasn't true then either!

When asked, 'How, in practice, does your church show the radical welcome of Jesus, while upholding Christian convictions about sexual relationships?' they said it was just not worth trying to explain why gay people can't get married in church – most of her generation just could not get the argument – it is so far from what they believe. They emphasised that Christian convictions are what Christians think and do and this is divorced from the Bible. It was sad that some of their friends, who knew nothing at all about Christianity, but the one text they could quote was from Leviticus, written in a particular context before

Jesus was even born. They were all grateful for the warm reception they have always received in the Tring Team Parish.

Our church has done its best to form a new generation of Christians, or at least pave the way for them to make decisions later in their lives. Maybe they won't carry that faith onwards, but for the time being they are still discussing what it means. And, at least they still like us, the worshipping community. That is because we as a community helped form them.

However, unless the Church of England as a whole can begin to understand that our relationship with God is not affected by our gender or sexuality, then we are in serious danger of losing them and their whole generation from our churches.

We told them about Jesus. They and our Youth Café members are quite clear – Jesus would not have an issue with gay people getting married. The Jesus we told them about is loving and welcoming. Because we told them of this Jesus, they

really, really don't get why the Church of England will not marry gay people. They are embarrassed and cannot keep on defending the church. They are grateful for the welcome and acceptance they get from the local church, but if the national church doesn't change, what chance will we have of keeping them?

So, what kind of church do you want to belong to?

**Huw Bellis**  
**Tring Team**

## On angels



Here is quite a challenging composition by a Polish poet – no rhyme and no metre and the word 'angel' is never used. It takes the form of a conversation about the messages and messengers who exist at we might call the intersection of the earthly and the heavenly.

Czeslaw Milosz was born in Lithuania in 1911, to a prominent, wealthy and Roman Catholic family. His very early life was spent on the move as his father had been mobilised to build roads for the Russians. He studied law and, while a student, wrote much poetry. In 1937 he moved to Warsaw and became one of the most respected Polish poets. During the Second World War he was instrumental in helping Jews escape from Nazi occupied Poland. Later, unhappy with the Communist regime, he moved to France and then settled in America having been appointed to a chair at Berkeley University. In 1980 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. It has been said of him – 'He searched for ways to survive spiritual ruin in a ruined world'.

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

As printed in Czeslaw Milosz, *New and Collected Poems 1931- 2001*, translated by Czeslaw Milosz, The Ecco Press 2003

*All was taken away from you: white dresses,  
wings, even existence.  
yet I believe you,  
messengers.*

*There, where the world is turned inside out,  
a heavy fabric embroidered with stars and beasts,  
you stroll, inspecting the trustworthy seams.*

*Short is your stay here:  
now and then at a matinal hour, if the sky is clear,  
in a melody repeated by a bird,  
or in the smell of apples at close of day  
when the light makes the orchards magic.*

*They say somebody has invented you  
but to me this does not sound convincing  
for the humans invented themselves as well.*

*The voice –no doubt it is a valid proof,  
as it can belong only to radiant creatures,  
weightless and winged (after all why not?),  
girdled with the lightning.*

*I have heard that voice many a time when asleep  
and, what is strange, I understand more or less  
an order or an appeal in an unearthly tongue:  
day draws near  
another one  
do what you can.*

**Czeslaw Milosz**

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## Tweet of the month



Given the Tring Team's Lent course's topic this year, I thought I would talk about relationships and sex this month, in the avian world that is, before anyone gets the wrong idea!

Basically, in the bird world, the different mating strategies tend to mirror and have parallels with those adopted by humans. To the best of our knowledge, birds don't have emotions in the same way we do and so their chosen mating strategy tends to be based on what is most likely to be successful in producing offspring to perpetuate the species, rather than love or any emotional connection. Also, birds only pair up to produce offspring, so recreational sex doesn't take place among birds.

The mating strategy that birds adopt most familiar to us is that one male and one female bird remain together as mates for as long as they are both alive. This is known as monogamy and is most frequently adopted by large, long-lived birds such as bird of prey, swans and albatrosses. Obviously if either bird dies, then it is likely that the surviving bird will find a new mate to carry on producing offspring.

Next, we have serial monogamy, when a male and female bird will stay

together for a breeding season but the following year may well find a different bird to mate with; but while they are together, they won't mate with another individual. Smaller, shorter-lived birds tend to adopt this strategy – particularly if they are migratory and so the rate of mortality can be high from one breeding season to the next. So, this strategy would be favoured by birds like warblers.

Polygamy is when one male mates with more than one female. Generally, this means the males are more brightly coloured than the females. It is also often the case that the females select the male they want to mate with through a process known as lekking – yes, the female does have the final choice and is the one that has to be impressed by the male. Lekking is where the males all gather in one place and, through displaying, making noise or even dancing, they try to impress any females attending the lek when the female will pick the one they think will be the best mate. A successful male could mate with many females, but doesn't take part in rearing the young. Birds like grouse and some waders such as Ruff use lekking to select a mate.

Polyandry is much scarcer as a mating strategy in the bird world. This is the reverse of polygamy and where the female mates with more than one male. Also, the role reversal is completed by the fact that the females are more



brightly coloured and typically take little or no part in the raising of the young. This strategy is adopted by phalaropes and also Dotterel.

Polygynandry is basically Polygamy and Polyandry combined, so both male and female birds mate with more than one member of the other sex – so basically the avian equivalent of partner-swapping. The best-known species for adopting this strategy is the Dunnock (aka Hedge Sparrow or Hedge Accentor). This unobtrusive garden bird has a really wild sex life!

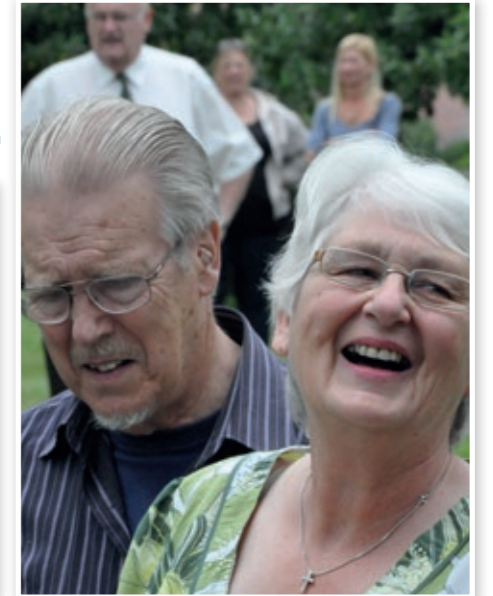
So, as Christians, what does this tell us, given that God created the birds and the rest of the animal kingdom as well as us? Unlike birds, because we know God loves us, that should change us and means we should reflect that love in our relationships, no matter what type of relationship it is.

**Roy Hargreaves**  
**St Peter & St Paul**

## Diamond Wedding Anniversary Congratulations!

Clive and Pam Russell from St Peter & St Paul's (and often the village churches too) celebrated 60 years of marriage in February this year. They were married on 17 February 1962 (a very cold day) at All Saints' Church, Hornchurch in Essex. Pam's guides and Brownies provided a Guard of Honour.

Congratulations from all  
**The Editor**



Congratulations to Michael and Rosie Sharp who celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary at the end of March!

They were married by Revd Walter Barker on 31 March 1962 at St Mark's Church,



Tollington Park, just off Hornsey Road in Islington. This was also the church where Rosie was baptised in July 1942.

Michael is standing next to his brother, Peter, in the wedding photo, who sadly died on his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday. The choir boy in front of Michael is Rosie's brother, also named Peter, who died in a hospice in Seattle at the end of last year, just before his grandson was born. The bridesmaid next to Rosie is her stepsister. The dark-haired woman on the far-left of the photo was the Choir Mistress and Organist of the first choir that Rosie belonged to, joining at the age of 16. Rosie is still a joyful member of the choir at St Peter & St Paul's today.

Michael and Rosie celebrated their 51<sup>st</sup> wedding anniversary with a visit to Seattle on 31 March 2013, which is where the more recent photo was taken.

**The Editor**

**Coffee and Chat with FREE Spring craft**  
Friday 29 April and Friday 6 May  
10am – 12 Noon  
High Street Baptist Church (opposite Tring Library)  
Hot drinks and sweet and savoury snacks are served every Friday morning. Come along and enjoy our FREE Spring-themed craft for you to make something special to take home – macramé, card making and more!

**Friendship Afternoon**  
Monday 2 May, 2-4pm  
In the garden at High Street Baptist Church (opposite Tring Library)  
Come along to the church garden to make new friends and find out more about Tring Linking Lives. Refreshments will be served.

## Parish registers

### Baptisms

We welcome into our church family all those below and pray for their parents, Godparents and families.

**Thomas Stanley**  
**Elizabeth Phillips**  
**Olivia Turner**  
**Florence Tyre**

### Weddings

We offer our congratulations and prayers to these couples as they begin their married lives together.

**Luke Michael Fowles & Jessica Louise Gibb**  
**Nathan George Moore & Martina Lane**  
**Liam Christopher O'Hara & Victoria Mary Cutting**  
**Oliver Alexander John Andrew & Emma Katryna Edmonds**  
**Alexander David Edward Lound & Jessica Amy Williams**

# Mother's Day, or is it Mothering Sunday?



For some years I have been aware that for some 'Mother's Day' has not been the great day that it is pushed as by those selling cards and gifts.

No issues with them: that is their business, but some people find it hard, especially those who have lost their mums or never knew them, or for mothers who have lost their children or never had any, or for those whose memories of parents are not good.

This year, however, I was more aware of the pain and my day started with a few tears when one of our daughters wrote about her mum, my wife Sandra, who is

suffering from dementia and no longer knows them.

My prayers go out to all but especially those for whom Mother's Day is difficult, whether mothers or children, and it's one of the reasons I always stick to it being Mothering Sunday when I celebrate all those who have mothered me, caring and supporting me, and those whom I, in turn, have cared for and supported, albeit falteringly, allowing my 'motherly side' to come out.

**Mike Watkin**  
**Tring Team**

*Today isn't a happy day for everyone, for some it's just a day to survive. For some it's a day that causes great pain. I'm lucky to be a mum, but it's a day I struggle with.*

*Mum, you may not know who I am any more, you won't understand that today should be all about you, but I hope you know how loved you are and how special you are.*

*Here it is, Mother's day rolls round again. It's the day I notice I'm not like my friends.*

*A day when I'm meant to be out with my mum, Having afternoon tea and a drink in the sun.*

*But instead it's a day where I'm forced to reflect, The memories, all in my head they are kept.*

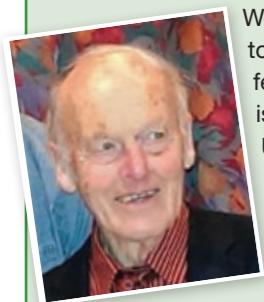
*I've spent so many hours being jealous of all, All that have mums to pick them up when they fall.*

*My mum's still alive but she isn't really mum – Not the mum I knew, it makes me feel numb.*

*I wish she knew who I'd become, I'm certain she'd be proud of how far I've come.*

**Sarah Payne**

# There are no words for the people of Ukraine



We all find it hard to express our feelings for what is going on in Ukraine: the deaths and destruction; no words are adequate. Nor are there words to express our admiration

for the selflessness of people in other countries for their help and kindness.

*A horror of all horrors, we cannot find the words to express the personal sufferings, for half we've never heard. No words in any language can describe this total evil; the inhumanity of man inspired so subtly by the devil.*

*Those millions of the innocents enduring such affliction; the separated families, ruined homes, humiliation.*

*Their bodies hurt, their minds confused, emotions overflowing; the guns, the rockets, bombs and shells, all so overpowering.*

*Despair and hopelessness engraved, their trauma never ceases; their agony of leaving home, fine buildings smashed to pieces.*

*These days have brought great misery and national distress; attempts to end this unjust conflict have brought no success.*

*A catastrophe disastrous, we ask, 'Will it never end?' Thousands injured, many deaths, we just can't comprehend. Little children, innocent victims; no escape for the aged; so many tears and broken hearts, a situation wretched. There's danger, fear and helplessness, so many face starvation. 'Hell on earth,' 'a living death', a massive tribulation.*

*Fleeing towns and leaving homesteads makes us wonder how they cope; yet shining through this grief and sadness are words which give them hope. Friendly arms are reaching out to welcome those in need; the 'milk of human kindness' poured out in words and deeds.*

*For all who crossed the boundaries of the land they loved so much were taken in, provided for, with a welcoming touch.*

*So many words now come to mind expressing natural feelings. There's good in everyone deep down, an empathy revealing.*

*Their aim to comfort and console, a national hospitality; a home, a haven far removed from sickening brutality.*

*Kindness, generosity outflowed to strangers taken in; open homes and selflessness, arms outstretched to welcome in.*

*For everyone so torn and bruised, now in a foreign land, such thanks showed from their weary eyes for each loving, helping hand.*

*To those, bewildered, deeply hurt, the future quite unknown were helped to mend emotions deep, just made to feel at home.*

*No words can tell what's deep inside of all in dire need; no words describe the feelings of those whose hearts did bleed.*

*While the leaders of the nations seem so helpless, yet appalled, let us take heart that millions do give help when they are called.*

*No words can tell what's deep inside of all in dire need; no words describe the feelings of those whose hearts did bleed.*

**John Young**  
**Akeman Street Baptist Church**



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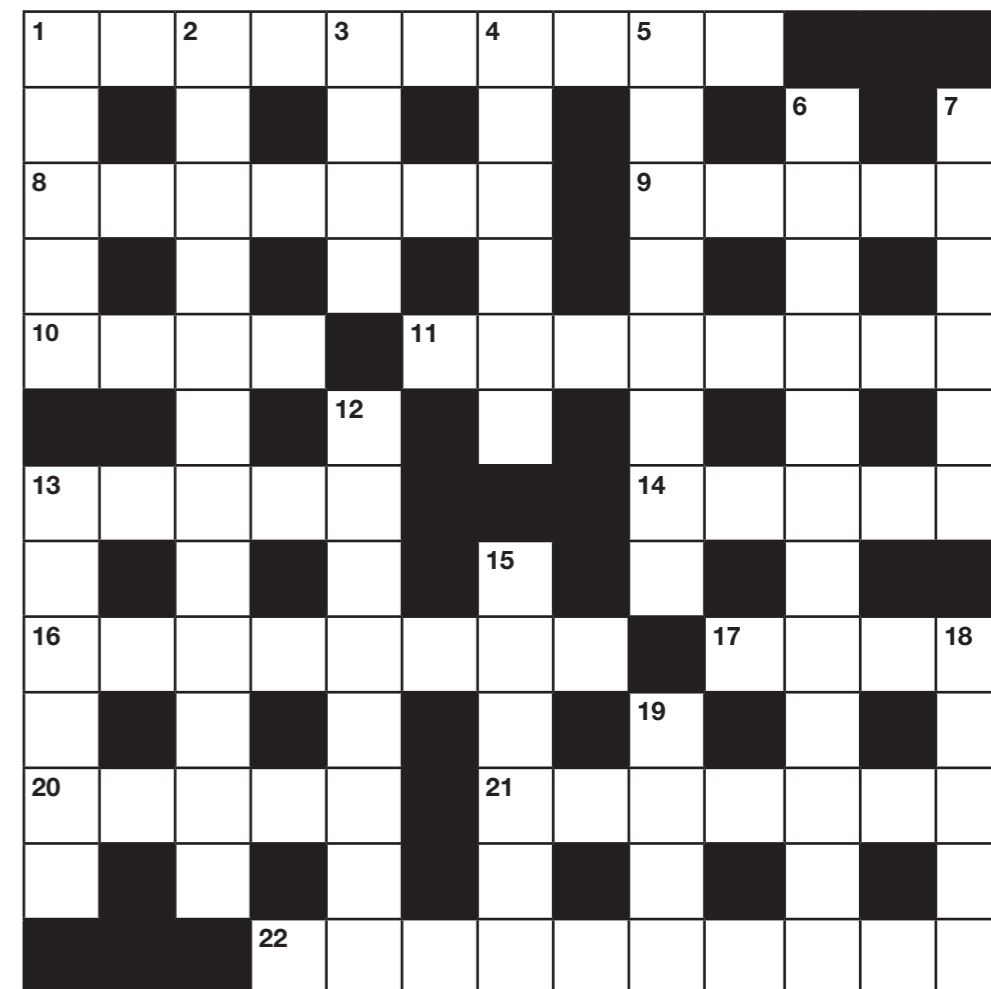
# Crossword

### ACROSS

- Prime city of the C of E (10)
- A sacred place (7)
- Lead (5)
- Site of the temple of Jerusalem (8)
- Healers of teeth (8)
- Writing but not in verse (5)
- Smell (5)
- Copies of this magazine (8)
- Smear (4)
- Site of horse racing (6)
- Producing excitement (7)
- 'Forgive us our' (10)

### DOWN

- Expenses (5)
- Sect outside the usual rules (12)
- Consumes (4)
- Over the top (6)
- The days before Ascension (8)
- Those who spread the Gospels (12)
- Vessel for producing incense
- Christ '.....' of the world (8)
- Garment storage place (6)
- Emphasise (6)
- '.....' this house (5)
- Garment of ancient Rome (4)



# Angels



What is an angel? We cannot go far in the Bible without coming across angels and, thanks to the works of artists through the ages, we have a variety of images of them in our mind's

eye. For example, from the season of Lent and Easter we note that during the forty days Jesus was in the wilderness 'the angels waited on him', and, on Maundy Thursday night, an angel from heaven strengthened Jesus in his agony in Gethsemane. In the empty tomb 'a young man dressed in a white robe' was seen (Mark), or 'two men in dazzling clothes' (Luke) or 'two angels in white' (John).

But, to begin at the beginning, we need to be reminded that ma'lak in Hebrew and angelos in Greek mean messenger, both of earthly message carriers and of divine spiritual messengers from God. There is a great variety of examples of these messengers and sometimes it is not clear whether a human or a spiritual being is meant. Then, as well as angels and archangels, there are many other spiritual beings. Some readers will be familiar with the nine ranks of angels listed in the opening verse of the hymn: 'Ye watchers and ye holy ones, / Bright Seraphs, Cherubim and Thrones ... / Cry out Dominions, Princedoms, Powers / Virtues, Archangels, Angels' choirs'.

One way of thinking of angels is that they connect us with God and watch over us as 'Watchers'. God is immortal, invisible; he has no equal. He created everything, he is everywhere. We can say such things about God, while at the same time recognizing we cannot put into words an adequate description of him. He is everywhere and yet we think of him in heaven (and where is that?). How do we connect with him?

In the Old Testament, God speaks to us 'in many and various ways by the prophets' and, then, in the New Testament 'in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son'. But, in fact, he first speaks to us through beings called angels or messengers, who are often mistaken for ordinary humans. In the story of Adam and Eve's expulsion

from the Garden of Eden, we have the first reference to any sort of angel when God placed the cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way to the Tree of Life.

Cherubim are the highest of the orders of angel and appear as God's attendants and later were represented in Solomon's Temple as winged figures overshadowing the Ark. The suggestion is that ideas of what they looked like came from winged figures in Assyria. Incidentally, the singular of cherubim in English is cherub, which nowadays has associations with babies and pretty little children!

But it is with Abraham that we find the appearance of angels in human form. Sometimes God speaks directly to him and sometimes in the form of a messenger. So, at Mamre three men ate and drank with Abraham and tell him that Sarah will have a son. Abraham then goes with them to Sodom and talks about the destruction of the city; the narrative ends 'the Lord went on his way'. Were these three men, or three angels or even the Holy Trinity as in later pious religious thought? Next, Abraham hears God tell him to sacrifice Isaac, but the instructions are continued by the angel of the Lord. Perhaps the most intriguing story is of Jacob wrestling with a man by the river Jabbok. This man asks Jacob's name and changes it to Israel 'for you have striven with God'.

But as well as messengers, God has others who form part of his heavenly court. The classic description of this, is, of course, Isaiah's vision (Isaiah chapter 6) of the Lord enthroned and worshipped by Seraphs singing 'Holy, Holy, Holy' – the Sanctus which still features in some worship. God sits on his throne with all the hosts of heaven standing beside him (I Kings 22:1-19) and at times they debate with God what to do.

When we pass to the New Testament, we start with an angel of the Lord appearing to Joseph in dreams in the Gospel of Matthew, though, more significantly, in Luke the angel of the Lord tells Zechariah Elizabeth is to have a son, John. Then we read of the angel Gabriel being sent to Mary to tell her she is to bear a son and name him Jesus.

From then on the Christian religion has angels as part of our faith in that

they are mentioned at significant points – the Nativity, the Temptation, the Resurrection – and then again they appear in the Acts of the Apostles until we end with Revelation where they are depicted doing all sorts of strange things, including defeating dragons.

Angels are part of the traditional belief of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. One aspect is the idea of Guardian Angels – each of us has one or more angels to look after us. Indeed, one survey once showed more people believed in a guardian angel than in God!

Then there is the question of angels' names – four archangels known as Michael, Gabriel and Raphael with Uriel as a non-biblical fourth. Genesis mentions a mysterious character Enoch, who gives his name to some books of the last two centuries BC which contain many revelations, names of angels and their operations. He also tells of the fall of some angels.

Another fascinating question is how to depict an angel. Do they dress in white and stand around, as in the Christmas hymn? Are they to be depicted with wings or without – and what about haloes? Are they male or female or without gender? And what about angels on gravestones or the belief that little children who die become angels? Some of you will know 'The Dream of Gerontius' by Cardinal Newman in which Gerontius's angel is described as male, but in Elgar's musical version the part is for a woman's voice! One scholar has written a book about 350 accounts of celestial visions.

To end – a quotation from the Anglican theologian Jane Williams: 'In what we think about angels, it is as though we allow ourselves access to needs that normally we would deny or suppress. Angels give us a way of expressing our longings for beings who are more powerful than ourselves, and who care for us.'

Try reading: 'Angels: A Visible and Invisible History', by Peter Stanford, Hodder & Stoughton or 'Angels' by Jane Williams.

**Martin Banister**  
**St Albans Cathedral**

# Letter from Bournemouth



As I am sure readers are aware, Bournemouth is a big town with many districts within it. We are gradually getting to know more about these districts as we

have occasion to visit them, and, a bit like London, you only know when you've entered a new patch when you see a sign telling you so.

However, having said that, we actually visit Christchurch more than the centre of Bournemouth as it is closer and has the virtue of being an old, historic town with two rivers, the Stour and the Avon, which meet at the edge of the town before flowing together to the sea.

We are also getting to know more people as life has opened up following the loosening of restrictions concerning Covid-19 – despite the fact that more people are getting it now than previously.

David regularly goes to a Bible study (and chat) group with other members of St Nicholas Church near Hengistbury

Head, and I attend the Bournemouth Quaker Meeting on alternate Sundays, still being an Anglican on the other Sundays!

I have also been doing some voluntary work with a charity which helps refugees and asylum seekers to settle in this area, or prepare to be re-located elsewhere in some cases. I go to a Homework Club which aims to help some primary school children of refugee parents to catch up with their English peers. In some cases the older ones are doing very well, and I recently found myself floundering with a practice 11+ maths paper! Luckily the child working her way through it seemed to know what she was doing with most of the questions, though another volunteer and myself needed reminding (via a mobile phone of course) about numbers being squared and cubed, or being prime numbers. Arithmetic etc. was never my strong point. I am probably better at helping a younger child with some basic reading.

Recently I attended a conversation group for women of various nationalities where they come together to practise

their English, helped by local volunteers. They were celebrating the Persian New Year 'which falls at the Spring Equinox' by enjoying a feast of foods brought by the women; we were tucking into chicken casserole soon after 11.00am, with plenty of other goodies to follow! The group is attended by mainly younger women, several of whom brought their under school-age children with them. The 'Persian New Year' is celebrated in many Middle Eastern countries and is rather like Christmas in this country. After all that is happening in the world, and especially in Ukraine, it was heartening to see the good-natured conversation and readiness to help as a team with the clearing up needed at the end of the morning.

We enjoyed the sunshine which bathed the country in the middle of March – and hope that readers of *Comment* have enjoyed it also. Greetings from the south coast!

**Margaret Whiting**  
**formerly St Peter & St Paul**

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## Certificate of baptism

Look away now if you are not a believer in infant baptism!

Do you have a certificate of your baptism? If I ever did, my parents didn't keep it safely as I don't have it now. But *Comment* reader Vicky Baldock suggested readers of *Comment* might indeed have them – or those of their relatives. We have my mother-in-law's but not my husband's. We didn't have them for our four sons on their baptism either. Are they still issued today?

If you have your own or that of a family member, do send me a photo of it and anything you know about the occasion. Maybe you have a baptism photo you could share too? I will be pleased to print it – and it might bring a smile to other readers too.

Vicky has sent her own baptism photo taken outside St Peter & St Paul in 1952. Can you identify her godmother, holding the baby? Like me, she was baptised when she was 4 months old.

Of course, those of you who were baptised as adults may also have photos and memories of the occasion. Please feel free to send those in to me too.

**The Editor**



## St John Passion



On 2 April, St Peter & St Paul's Church hosted the Tring Choral Society's Spring concert – the first since Christmas 2019! You probably saw the poster on the back of the April edition of *Comment*.

My husband, Barry, and I were acting church wardens at the concert of the St John Passion, described by Katie Hughes as 'an extremely sensitive and emotive choral work'. The soloists were superb and it was an altogether great sound with great emotions. The church has good acoustics even for those like us, sitting in the coffee area near the back! It was good to have the church full again and being used for a concert.

Sadly the conductor, Colin Stephens, who had put in so much work to make it happen, tested positive for Covid-19 just before the concert day. The concert was able to go ahead thanks to Jonathan Lee, who was the rehearsal pianist.

We are looking forward to the next Choral Society concert!

Many thanks to Elizabeth Crumpler for the photograph.

**Barbara Anscombe**  
St Peter & St Paul

## Reflecting on March



March has been a busy month in our household. It began with The World Day of Prayer. This is always a joyful occasion shared with the churches in Tring. Planning this year was minimal, no rehearsal, apart from the time I spent going through the ins and outs of the sound system at High Street Baptist Church. I was helped considerably by Mr Cutler, whose gentle encouragement over the presentation of the service enriched it a lot – thank you!

The service began with the prayer for Ukraine which was circulated by the Archbishop of Canterbury. It was a service of hope, much needed in these times. I am reminded of one of the two 'school readings' I was brought up on. It was, of course, 1 Corinthians 13, ending with the words 'And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity'. Our headmistress, in her wisdom, always added the first three words of Ch 14 'Follow after charity'. Now we use the word 'love' to replace the King James version's 'charity'.

I probably could have used 'Faith, hope and love' for my title, because the next event involves the opera 'Jenufa' by Janacek which is about love on several different levels. We saw this opera twice, done locally by Aylesbury Opera group and later in the month by the Welsh National Opera. Jenufa is expecting a baby but is not married. Briefly, her mother hides her until the child is born. The attitude of society and the shame felt by the mother causes her to kill the child by drowning. Jenufa eventually agrees to marry a good man who has loved her throughout the opera, but whom she does not initially love. On their wedding day the baby's body is discovered and Jenufa's mother confesses. The opera ends with Jenufa trying to understand why her mother took that action and she finds some forgiveness in her heart. The mother is taken away to be punished. To me the act of trying to understand rather than judging a person is an act of love – just one of the many aspects of love raised in the opera.

The influence of society on our actions is a difficult point. How much should we be subject to the demands

that society puts upon us? Jesus' words... render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's... rattle around in the brain. How can we discern what God would have us do? I try to keep an open mind and not shirk from difficult issues but look at them with what understanding God has given me and know that I do not have all the answers. Things are in God's hands. This may seem simplistic, but it is an act of faith for me – not to turn my back on awkward and difficult matters but weigh them up in a non-judgemental fashion and act as best I can.

The month also involved quite a bit of relaxation. We have visited several places. How many of you know that Sir James Clarke Ross is buried about half an hour from here at Aston Abbots? This is the man who found the north magnetic pole. He travelled in Arctic and Antarctic waters and tried to find out what had happened to the explorer Franklin when he was lost seeking for the Northwest Passage. What a brave and inspiring person! We took visitors to the village (by the way there are other interesting facts to learn about the village: did you know that it has a Grade II listed bus shelter?).

For a long time I have wanted to visit Woolsthorpe Manor, the home of Sir Isaac Newton. You may think me silly, but this is another uplifting person who has had such an influence in our lives with his equations of motion, his study of the heavens, his development in mathematics and his influence on our currency. When he was Master of the Royal Mint he stopped people shaving off bits of silver coins by introducing the milling of the edges. Yes, I spent my birthday there, learning about the social times of this famous man and doing experiments

in the Science Centre. Science moves on and Newton's theories have been shown to be inadequate to explain all situations. Science does not have explanations for everything as some people think, but it doesn't stop us trying to understand the world around us.

Talking of birthdays, it didn't matter that our grandson was a teenager, he still enjoyed the silly games played on his birthday – pass the parcel with things to do between the layers – find something that has a tongue and a toe but no body, it has a lot of sole!! Putting on mittens or large gloves and trying to pick up as many buttons from the floor one at a time during a minute. There was a lucky dip; brown paper bags containing things like crumpets, onion relish... the little treats that are unexpected and not always available when there is a large family to feed.

So March has been full of God's bounty in many ways; inspiring things to see and do, people to share them with, weighty things to think about. May we all experience the richness of God's love in our lives.

**Jill Smith, St Peter & St Paul**

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# Living in love and faith



For the last twenty or more years, the Church of England has been engaged on a long, difficult and at times agonising debate on same-sex relationships.

Four and a half years ago, and with the aim of listening well to one another and ultimately reaching a conclusion, it set in train something it calls 'Living in love and faith (LLF)', which is concerned with whether the church should change its current position (see Box 1 below) on blessings and marriage of same-sex partnerships. LLF places the debate in the wider context of examining how we view marriage, singleness and sexual relations generally. A huge range of views on these matters is held, not just within the CofE but in other Christian dominations and in other religions. Because they affect very private matters and touch some of our deepest feelings, which can sometimes be associated with a sense of guilt, these are difficult issues to talk about, and are not often discussed openly at vicarage tea parties (or elsewhere).

## Box 1 The Church of England's current position on sexual celibacy in same-sex relationships

- Marriage must be between a man and a woman.
- Celibate same-sex relationships are 'supported', including those involving civil partnership.
- Same-gender couples may remain and be recognised as married when one spouse experiences gender transition, provided that the spouses identified as opposite genders at the time of the marriage.
- No special services of blessing for married same-sex couples; however, 'more informal kinds of prayer are allowed'.
- Clergy are not allowed to enter same-sex marriages.
- Clergy of the same sex in civil partnerships may continue in active ministry, on the understanding that they will remain celibate.

For four years and more, the CofE has been assembling a large range of resources on LLF, including a 470-page book and a five-session course, on which seventy-six members of our parish, in nine house groups have been working during Lent.

The Lent house groups haven't agreed on everything, but the range of opinions has been narrower than might be expected country-wide, because like-minded people are attracted to worship at St Peter & St Paul's Church because of its 'liberal catholic' position. I thought it would be valuable to seek input from someone from a quite different church tradition so a supplementary session was arranged with Andrew Cornes, a retired priest who also happens to be my first cousin. Seven of us spent one evening in a Zoom session with Andrew, discussing three questions (Box 2). We hardly touched on the complex issues of transgender and 'gender dysphoria' (a feeling of being uncomfortable with the sex assigned at birth); in any case, Andrew said he had rather less experience of these issues.

Andrew has been married for thirty-seven years, has five children, and during his half century as a priest has been involved pastorally with those whose sexual orientation is gay. A current 'retirement' project has been writing a book entitled 'What did the New Testament know about homosexual relationships?' Andrew's deep biblical scholarship and love of the scriptures made him an ideal choice to talk to us.

And so it proved; the session was widely judged a success. Perhaps partly because of likely disagreements, Andrew was keen that we should start our session with a time of prayer (Box 3) and we finished the evening by saying the beautiful and peaceful office of Compline, which I am convinced made sure that we finished together in love and faith.

## Q1 Sexual orientation

Can someone change from being primarily attracted to same-sex relationships to ones with the other sex? Andrew noted that there is still no firm scientific consensus on whether it is environmental or inherited factors which are more important in determining sexual orientation. However, he reported that in his many years of working with same-

sex attracted males, he has found that in the majority of cases, a self-awareness of their sexual orientation developed during or before puberty, sometimes by the age of 8 or 9. Usually, that did not subsequently change, but Andrew said he knew of many cases where such men, if they remained sexually abstinent, in later life fell in love with a woman with whom they formed a lifelong, loving and successful married relationship, which produced children.

His work with such men involved many hours of careful listening to their stories; his advice to them was always that it was important to accept the parts of themselves they couldn't change and within those boundaries strive to live in obedience with the teachings of Christ. They should be open to the possibility that God might have unexpected plans for them.

In the discussion that followed, the importance was stressed of honesty and self-knowledge as crucial to the success of intimate relationships. On fluidity of sexual orientation, it was observed that teenagers are at an age where they are developing in so many ways, not just sexually, and there were dangers in deciding too early what their sexual identity was. Those who went to same-sex schools will know all about adolescent same-sex crushes, which often occur in people going on to form lifelong and successful heterosexual marriages. Today's over-emphasis on sexuality had the danger of pushing adolescents in one direction too early.

And finally, we acknowledged the widespread experience of having one reaction in logic and reason to aspects of sexual matters which were quite different from our gut reaction to such matters.

## Q2 Church and society

In 2013, the UK parliament voted by a 225-vote majority in favour of same sex marriages, and there has been no groundswell of public pressure to reverse this. However, Andrew questioned whether there was now general acceptance by the UK public of same-sex relationships; when questioned privately, people often express reservations that they are reluctant to admit to publicly. Even if there is clear evidence of the trend towards greater acceptance, should it influence the church in its decision

making? Citing the words of Jesus in John 17, Christians are to live 'in the world' but not be 'of the world'; to live in accordance with the truth of the Word of God, as expressed in his holy Gospel, and to lead sanctified, holy lives. So the church must decide two things: what is God's truth, as expressed in scripture, and what does it mean to be holy?

It was observed that marriage has changed enormously and continuously over the last two millennia, particularly for women, reflecting equally enormous changes in society. For Andrew, however, the eternal and unchanging word of God represents the basis for a holy life, and changes in society, however large, do not change that basis. So how can we live up to such demanding standards? Andrew's reply was that humans do fall short, but the Bible makes abundantly clear that God accepts everyone equally, whatever their past, when they 'turn from their wickedness and intend to lead a new life'. John's account of the woman taken in adultery illustrates this beautifully: Jesus' words to her are 'Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more'.

## Q3 Same-sex relationships

How does God view same-sex relationships? Is it possible for a lifelong faithful same-sex partnership to receive God's blessing, transmitted by the

church? Andrew started by pointing out that strong friendships between two men has strong approval in the Bible, citing the case of David and Jonathan. Indeed, he views such (celibate) friendships as really important, and commented that women seem better at forming such strong bonds with women than men with men. It is sexually active same-sex partnerships that are contentious, noting that celibacy is strongly promoted as having a special sanctity, both by Jesus (Matthew 19:12) and Paul (1 Corinthians 7). Andrew noted that this was totally against the Graeco-Roman zeitgeist at the time of Jesus, while today, celibacy is viewed as rather weird and possibly unnatural. Addressing firstly the scriptural evidence of God's view, Andrew took us through 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and referred to the unique biblical reference in Romans 1:26-27 to lesbianism. Paul believes such sexual activity is against God's purpose, along with lying, swindling and slandering.

Secondly, church tradition is equally clear: for almost 2000 years, same-sex sexual activity, together with all sexual activity outside heterosexual marriage, has been considered wrong across all Christian traditions, and Jesus taught fellow Jews, whose tradition was also one of seeing same-sex sexually active relationships as against the will of God.

Perhaps this is why his views on the subject aren't recorded? Unlike divorce, it wasn't an issue for those he was preaching to. It is only since 1950 that parts of the Church of England have started to move away from this position. So, accepting sexually active same-sex partnerships by a church blessing, let alone marriage, would be a huge break from church tradition.

Finally, how does reason instruct us? Andrew pointed to the moral confusion and disarray of many parts of UK society, not just sexually but also in areas such as fairness, economic justice and honesty. In Andrew's view, this disarray has been steadily increasing as there is a departure from the teaching of Jesus. Some of us were unconvinced that moral standards were collapsing as rapidly as the fall in the UK of numbers identifying as Christian. However, Andrew's passionate statement enabled us to shine a much clearer light on the basis for our own positions on non-celibate same-sex relationships.

This account is too short to give justice either to Andrew's answers to our questions, or the responses it produced from us. If you would like to have a recording of the full discussion for your private use, please send an email to [edmund@booth-seismic.co.uk](mailto:edmund@booth-seismic.co.uk).

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

## Box 2 Questions posed to Andrew

- **The mutability or immutability of life as directed by the Holy Spirit**

How do we discern which parts of life are completely unchangeable and where the Holy Spirit is moving us to change? Should gender and sexual orientation be considered as 'God given' at birth? Should Christians even try to change these aspects of themselves? We note that same sex adolescent crushes are well known in people who go on to lead contented and fulfilled heterosexual lives.



- **Changes in church practice for LGBTI+ relationships**

Should the clear current views on the issues of our wider society on LGBTI+ relationships influence in any way our views as Christians?

- **Same sex blessings in church**

Extending marriage to same-sex couples would be a very radical step, involving a change to the definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman. Blessing of same-sex couples committed to life-long committed relationships appears to involve far fewer problematic issues and boil down to considering how such relationships might affect the possibility of joining the body of Christ in a church community. Please could you take us through the issues (particularly accounting for holy scripture, church tradition and reason) that you see as affecting consideration of such blessings.

## Box 3 Opening prayer

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

*Psalms 133*

## Church of England

The official Church of England position as adopted by General Synod in 2015 is that the practice of gay conversion therapy has no place in the modern world, is unethical, potentially harmful and not supported by evidence; and we call upon the Church to be sensitive to, and to listen to, contemporary expressions of gender identity.

# To empower or disempower – that is the question



At the Deanery Synod in early February, the guest speaker was the Reverend John Naudé, an associate minister in Burgess Hill, and a leading expert on disability. John was born with Spina Bifida and has worked in the field of disability, initially in the secular world, working for Christian organisations and subsequently as a minister in the Church of England. During the meeting, he agreed to host a training day at Little Gaddesden, and this article covers input from both events. He also spent four years working in Malawi with the Evangelical Baptist Church, teaching in their Bible College in Liwonde. Although his personal experience is as a wheelchair user, his professional work covers all forms of disability.

John started by stating that there were different effects of his disability depending on which part of the spine was affected. This means that some people had limited movement and others had considerable, though not unlimited, movement. He demonstrated this by showing how he could manipulate his wheelchair relatively easily. He has played wheelchair basketball for many years and at a high level. He has an amazing sense of humour and the gift of being able to

laugh at himself.

He demonstrated the ways that people talk down to a disabled person and assume they know what he/she needs. The biggest problem is not the disability but the attitude of people towards disabled people. For example, a lady said to him 'How long have you been an invalid?'. His reply was 'I haven't been in-valid for a long time'. He also pointed out that there are many hidden disabilities and that you should be careful of making assumptions.

During the training day, he made us participate in various exercises, both on paper and acting.

This is one example: Imagine you see a person on the edge of the pavement, holding a white stick. You assume that they are wanting to cross the road, go up to them, grab their arm, saying 'Let me help you,' and march them across the road. But how do you know they wanted to cross? They might have been waiting for a partner or carer and be looking anxious because they were late. It is much better to ask the person 'How can I help you?'. If they want to cross, then take their arm under the elbow and talk to them as you cross. When you reach the other side, ask if they need anything else and, if not, walk away.

John also presented three typical scenarios relative to the church. One was a 20-year-old Afro-Caribbean/English

lady who was non-verbal. She had expressed a wish to speak to one of us alone. The second was a blind 15-year-old boy who was becoming increasingly violent and had left the youth group, and the third was a young lady who suffered from epilepsy, had random seizures and wanted to join the choir. We had to say how we would help them to achieve their aims and not to make them feel undervalued and, in fact, useless. Put another way, how do we empower and not disempower them? I'll leave to you to think what you would do.

Although John has been disabled from birth and has a very positive attitude to his situation, he knows that there are things he cannot do and has frustrations and pain, but he believes that these are things that God has used to create the person he is. However, he realises that, for people who have become disabled after having led a disabled-free existence, they may have a different attitude because they know what they have lost and have to try to come to terms with their situation.

What does he hope for the future? That everybody will appreciate that disabled people are able to play an important part in society and that one day there will be disabled bishops and other leaders in the church.

**Ted Oram**  
**St Peter & St Paul**

## A special birthday!

Congratulations to Christine Rutter who celebrated her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on 3 April this year!

Christine's widowed father had married again and she was their only child. She was born in Church Lane, Kingsbury, at their doctor's house, just along the road. He had the first floor set up as a maternity unit, and the ground floor as a surgery. He and his family lived in the remaining rooms in the house.

Christine is 18 months old in the picture which was taken at Christmas 1943.



### Your baby photos

*How many Comment readers have access to their baby photos? Some years ago we printed photos of wedding couples and asked readers to guess the couple and the year. If you have a photo you can send of you as a baby or very young child, do send them to me with your full name, birth date and place and how old you are in the photo – and any other details that seem important – and we will print them next time.*

**The Editor**

# In memory of Peggy Bainbridge

Peggy Bainbridge died peacefully at her home on 31 October 2021.

We often said that her life was a triumph: a triumph over episodes of adversity and times of sorrow. We told her this.

She was warm, kind, sociable and funny. She had a terrific memory for classmates, teachers, neighbours, West Ham players, song lyrics, where she was on VE day and so much more. She was strong-willed and brave and would happily ignore convention. She liked a bet on the horses, a drive with Simon around her old haunts in London and to sit in the sunshine with her Guinness and crisps at 3 Louisa Cottages. She loved our dad, Ron Bainbridge.

Her long life began on 5 October 1930 in Hackney, East London. She was handed over to the local authority by her mother (in a basket) at 6 weeks old and an arrangement was made with Lucy and Earnest Cole of Poplar to look after this baby girl until her mum returned; her mother didn't return and so this unofficial arrangement with our Nana Cole lasted a lifetime. Change came in 1939. War was declared, Earnest Cole died, and Nana Cole had to go out to work. Mum was evacuated from Paddington Station to Wallingford in Oxfordshire.

Mum wrote in her memoir: 'Like thousands of children, my childhood was affected by war. Evacuated at 8 years old, unaccompanied, I found my love of nature and proceeded to run wild. I lived for after school when I could change my clothes and do as I wished. I taught myself to swim in a fast-flowing river – no style – but I could swim. I learnt to row and was quite good'.

At the end of the war, Mum returned to London (she had won a scholarship to the County Grammar school whilst in Wallingford but Nana Cole wanted her home), so with her education finished, she came back to Eliza Place in Hackney and went to work in a shoe factory – which she hated. She missed the countryside and was frustrated that she had not been allowed to continue with schooling.

Eventually Mum found a job she liked very much. She was good at arithmetic and worked as a book keeper for Donaldson's, a property management company based in the City. Her boss army officer Kingsley Lyll MC told her that she had 'working class common sense'. Mum was proud and amused in equal



measure and would often remind us of those words from her early days at work.

She made a great friend in Jo Chimes and the two of them would go dancing at The Hammersmith Palais. Mum met Dad at the Palais when she was 22. She wrote: 'I met Ron in October 1952 at Hammersmith Palais. I can still remember what he was wearing. He had a light grey suit, a white shirt, a burgundy tie and the most highly polished ox blood leather shoes. He was a good dancer. I wasn't, but he still saw me to the bus stop and asked if he could see me the next day.'

They married in 1955, had us two children in 1958 and 1960 and moved to Tring in 1966, living first in Buckingham Road, then Little Hoo. They had a very happy family life until 1972 when Dad died suddenly whilst playing golf. The following years were extremely difficult.

However, a turning point came for Mum when she began fundraising for Iain Rennie, now Rennie Grove. She started selling books and bric-a-brac from the market and eventually opened the first Rennie Grove shop in Tring High Street – there are now forty-four of them. She was a fundraiser extraordinaire and never missed an opportunity to make some money. When Rick Wakeman came into the shop, although Mum didn't know who he was, she saw the excitement he was causing and, with an eye towards his potential as a money spinner, was heard to say, 'Go and get his autograph and get him to write down what he does'!

Mum made many friends and her work with Rennie Grove gave her confidence and great purpose.

Mum lived at Louisa Cottages by

Tring Museum from 1993. She would often say 'I've been very happy here'. A familiar sight in the garden, she was on great terms with everyone who walked past her gate. She fed the jackdaws and sat out late watching the bats. On Fridays in wintertime, she hosted a film club from her sitting room, and in the summer of lockdown she compiled a quiz for the neighbours. The quiz was memorable because you would only know the answers if you were a Bainbridge and yet Mum looked at her neighbours' blank faces and said, 'What's the matter with all of you?' as they struggled to think who won the FA cup in 1973. (Sunderland, of course!). Mum won £250 on the match at 500/1.

In 2012 Mum was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer. Initially seen by a surgeon in Oxford, Mum was told it would be much too risky to operate to remove the tumour. This was very disappointing news, but Simon found Professor George Hanna at Imperial College. George and Mum met, and he performed life-saving surgery. George gave Mum ten more really good years. Mum gave George home-grown tomatoes whenever she went to his clinic – along with the satisfaction of knowing that sometimes you can take a punt and pull it off.

Mum loved Tring and Aldbury and the surrounding villages. She was a devoted wife, a most loving mother, grandmother and great grandmother. She was a friend to so many – a complete one off.

We love and miss her beyond measure.

**Lindsay & Simon Bainbridge**



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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

## Crossword puzzle answers From page 21

### ACROSS

1. CANTERBURY
8. SANCTUM
9. GUIDE
10. SION
11. DENTISTS
13. PROSE
14. ODOUR
16. COMMENTS
17. DAUB
20. EPSOM
21. EMOTIVE
22. TRESPASSES

### DOWN

1. COSTS
2. NONCONFORMIST
3. EATS
4. BUMPER
5. ROGATION
6. MISSIONARIES
7. CENSER
12. REDEEMER
13. POCKET
15. STRESS
18. BLESS
19. TOGA

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For information about our midweek kids' activities visit our website or

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Pass code: highstreet  
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in the church hall



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Proceeds toward BMS World Mission

Seniors Afternoon Games  
Wednesdays 2-4pm



Coffee & chat  
Fridays 10.30am - 12 Noon 

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