

TOGETHER

The FREE magazine from the Diocese of Rochester | Issue 9 | Spring 2021

GROW | ENRICH | RESOURCE

COVER STORY: LENT BEGINS... PAGE 8-9



LOSS: WAYS
TO HELP

SHARING
OUR FAITH

COVID
OVERSEAS



HM Government



HAVE YOU HAD YOUR COVID-19 VACCINE?

There is still a risk you could spread coronavirus, even after you have been vaccinated.

Stay home to save lives.

STAY HOME ▶ PROTECT THE NHS ▶ SAVE LIVES

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It is hard to believe that this time last year, we had little inkling of the upheaval, uncertainty, and sorrow that we were about to experience.

A year on and we have signs of hope; however there is still the loss. Our centrespread offers some simple ways we can all offer support to someone who has been bereaved.

Of course the whole world has been affected by Covid-19 and so in **Focus On**, we take a moment to learn how our brothers and sisters in the overseas dioceses with whom we share links and friendship have experienced the pandemic. (pg 10)

We also hear from three people who tell us about the difference knowing Jesus makes in their lives (pg 14) - part of our journeying with the Church of England's #Live Lent God's Story, Our Story, campaign.

In our **Everyday Faith** section we meet Giovanni, the new Estates Pioneer in Strood, and we also meet a pioneer of good safeguarding practice, who tells us about the part their faith has played in their work (pg24).

Finally, as we all continue to comprehend the impact of the virus, please share in the simple prayer for our nation that you will find on the back page.

Stay safe.

Jennifer Ross
Communications Manager

Editor: Jennifer Ross
jennifer.ross@rochester.anglican.org

In-house design:
Katerina Gerhardt

Design: CPO

Print: CPO

FIND US:

@CofERochester

@SeeofRochester

Front cover: Katerina Gerhardt

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Get in touch :
communications@rochester.anglican.org



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NEW CHURCH SCHOOL ACADEMY GETS GREEN LIGHT

Plans to build a new Church of England Academy, catering for 2,200 secondary and primary school pupils have been approved.

Alkerden C of E Academy will be built in the Ebbsfleet Garden City Development between Dartford and Gravesend.

The Academy will be part of the Alkerden Education Campus, which will also offer nursery provision and a dual-use community sports centre with external sports pitches and other facilities for the emerging local community.

The campus will be run by the Aletheia Anglican Academies Trust, which won the tender to open the new school from Kent County Council (KCC).

Stephen Carey, Chief Executive Officer of the Trust says the project is very exciting:

“The new buildings and facilities will allow us to provide a truly first-class educational and social experience for the first generation of young people

residing in the Garden City.

“We understand the existing surrounding suburban area well and will use our knowledge and experience to ensure that we fully utilise this opportunity to promote social cohesion between the new and existing communities.

The new on-site secondary school will have space for 1,680 pupils, including a sixth form and a 25-place special resource provision for autistic pupils.

It will be accompanied by a primary school with room for 446 pupils and will also cater for early years and special educational needs.

The project is the first major application to come forward in Alkerden Village, which forms part of the Eastern Quarry development where there are plans for more than 6,000 homes. It is hoped that work on the new project will begin in the summer of 2021, with the campus beginning operations in a phased programme from September 2023.



YOUNG FUNDRAISING SUPERHERO

Josh (7) has been busy in lockdown by raising money for the Living Well, a church-run charity in Bromley, that supports people with different needs, such as social isolation, debt and homelessness. Running a mile a day throughout January, his goal was to raise £250 but he’s raised an incredible £2,575! What a superhero! You can sponsor him [here](#)



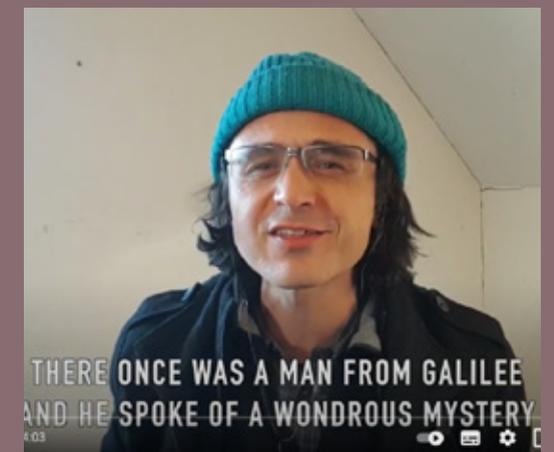
LENT LITTER PICK

Over at All Saints, Langton Green, two young church members have been enjoying the church’s daily challenges for Lent. They particularly enjoyed litter picking around the village to help out local wildlife. Mum Karen said: “The boys said they hope that the squirrels and wildlife of Langton Green will be pleased!”



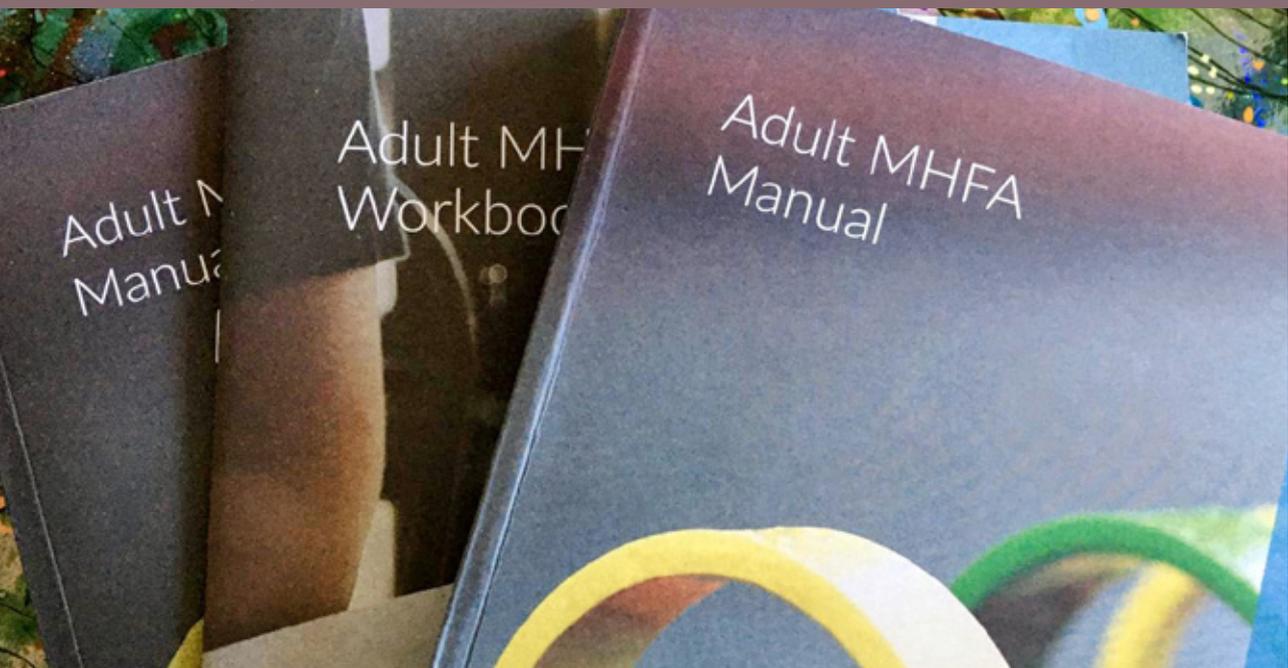
COOKING UP A ZOOM

Families have been enjoying a weekly online cooking session at St Francis, Strood, with a local professional chef who has volunteered their time. It’s one of a number of new outreach initiatives that have got underway helped by funding from the Diocesan CYP Fund and the efforts of their new Estates Pioneer minister. *Meet Giovanni in our One to One interview on page 24.*



GOSPEL SEA SHANTY

Eden Parris, Worship Leader at St Paul, Crofton, Orpington has joined the sea shanty phenomenon and written a Christian version of the Tik Tok sensation the Wellerman. It seems to be going down a storm with land lubbers and ol’ sea dogs alike! Have a listen [here](#)



CHURCH LEADERS SIGN UP FOR MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING

Awareness of issues around mental health and well-being has grown significantly during the pandemic.

Seeing the growing mental health crisis that was developing, the Community Engagement Social Action team began working with Mid-Kent MIND to deliver the England Mental Health First Aid Course (MHFA) to clergy and lay leaders and volunteers across the Diocese.

The aim was to help them better support their communities and individuals.

The course accredits people as Mental Health First Aiders and gives them an in-depth understanding of mental health and the factors that can affect wellbeing as well as practical skills to spot the triggers and signs of mental health issues.

So far over 100 clergy and lay people have been trained. Caroline Clarke, Community Engagement and Social Action Team lead said:

“Leaders and volunteers within churches are often on the front line of offering care and support to people,

whether that is through community outreach initiatives or just being a listening ear when they’re with others.

“Because of this, and also listening to experts referring to a national mental health crisis caused by the pandemic, we knew it was important for us to offer this training, to prepare and equip people to better care for each other and ourselves, and especially for those experiencing poor mental health who are often welcomed into our community hubs and churches.”

Bishop Simon Burton Jones is one of those who is taking the course; “I am so pleased to have started the Mental Health First Aid course. A good recovery from the pandemic surely means better attention to such needs. I hope more and more clergy might consider it.”

Some churches are supporting their Church Community Volunteers to take this course; the Archdeacons are also funding some Clergy places in each Archdeaconry; and the CESA Team has funded further places for Community Volunteer Leaders.

SLOW COOKER PROJECT OFFERS RECIPE FOR HOPE



Winter Grant Fund, has seen £5,000 put towards the creation of a set of slow cooker packs that can be issued to struggling families.

Keith Berry, Community Engagement Adviser for Tonbridge Archdeaconry said: “Slow cookers are very energy efficient and produce nutritious and tasty meals with little effort. Alongside the cookers, we are including slow cooker recipe books, slow cooker mixes, and food vouchers to enable the best possible start to using the cooker. We’ll also share information and links to the NHS healthy eating resources.”

Over 50 families across Tonbridge and Malling are set to benefit from healthy eating and reduced utility bills thanks to the Slow Cooker Project, supported by local churches.

As the grant criteria also included ways to reduce utility costs, CESA have added sets of low energy bulbs as well.

A successful bid by the Diocese’s Community Engagement and Social Action (CESA) team to Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council’s Covid

Packs will be stored at and distributed from St John’s Church Centre, Hildenborough, in February and March to nine other organisations, including local churches, foodbanks, and debt charities.

NEW YEAR HONOURS

Two members of the diocesan family have been delighted to receive recognition in the New Year’s Honours List.

Ann Ball, of Shoreham Parish Church, received a “wonderful surprise” when she was told she had been awarded the British Empire Medal for services to the community.

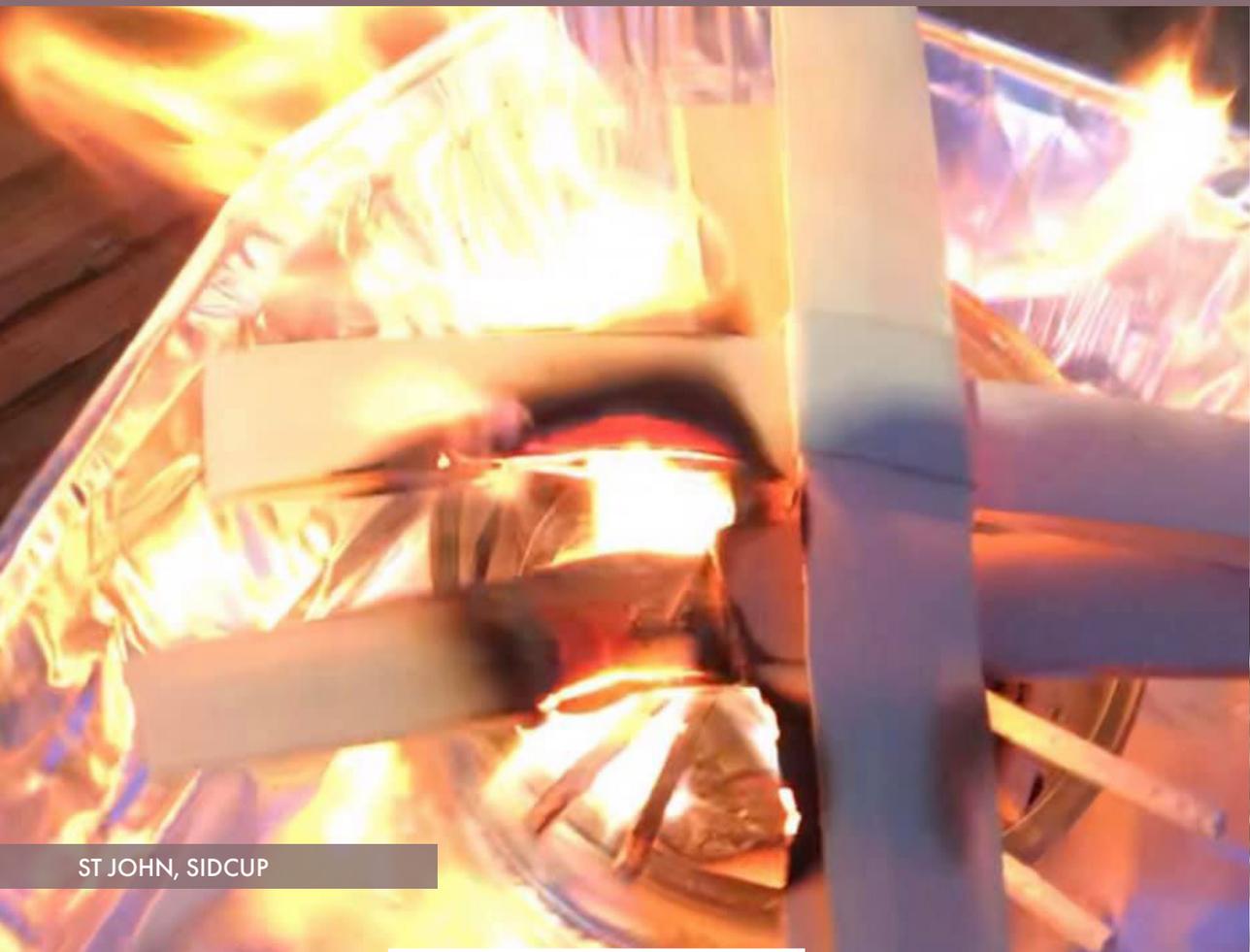
From helping restore local heritage street signs and leading efforts, when churchwarden, to create the Garden of Remembrance, to being editor of the Shoreham Gazette, Ann says she is very grateful to all the villagers who proposed her for the award.

David Pearson, a member of the congregation at St Peter’s Church, Hextable and St Paul’s Swanley Village received an MBE in recognition of his work as the founder, former CEO and trustee of the Christian safeguarding advice charity Thirtyone:eight.

David explains the role his faith plays in being a champion for good safeguarding practice within churches in our *Everyday Faith* article on page 26.



PHOTO CREDIT: HANNAH HIGGINSON



ST JOHN, SIDCUP



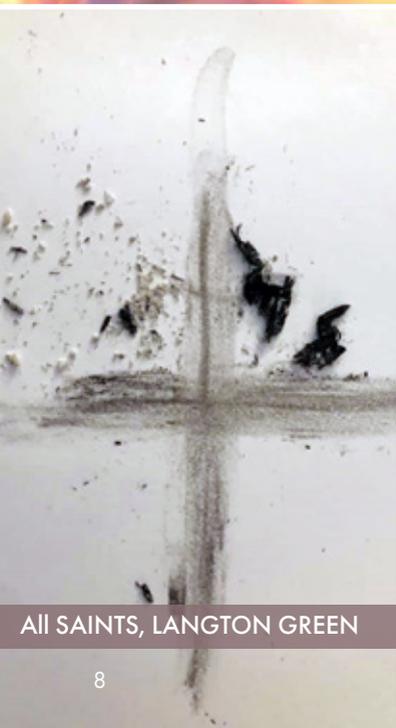
RURAL NORTH WEST GROUP CHURCHES



KINGS HILL



BEXLEY TEAM MINISTRY



ALL SAINTS, LANGTON GREEN



ST MARY, GRAVESEND



CHRIST CHURCH, DARTFORD



ST JOHN, SIDCUP

LENT BEGINS...

Parishes across the Diocese have marked the beginning of Lent – the six weeks of preparation before Easter – in even more creative ways this year. With many church buildings closed because of the pandemic, novel ways were found to carry out the traditional distribution of ashes, and many Shrove Tuesday - or Pancake Day activities - took place online. Here are a few images which capture some of what went on.

SAME STORM... DIFFERENT BOAT



STUDENTS AND LECTURERS AT ST PHILIP'S THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE IN MPWAPWA

The global storm that is Covid-19 has had a different impact in different parts of the world. It is therefore no surprise to find that the effect on those countries with whom we have a Companion Diocese Link, has varied too.

Across the world, the vibrant network of links between Anglican parishes, churches and dioceses – known as Diocesan Companion Links – has remained busy and strong throughout this time of pandemic, particularly in Rochester Diocese.

As a Diocese, we enjoy flourishing links with Anglican communities in Harare in Zimbabwe, and Kondoa and Mpwapwa in Tanzania, as well as a friendship link with the Evangelical Estonian Lutheran Church.

For Mike Fawcett, Companion Diocese Link Coordinator, these bonds have brought mutual support and comfort during this time.

“In the early days of the pandemic our sisters and brothers in our Companion Dioceses were desperately praying for us as our case numbers and fatalities grew day-by-day.”

Although countries like Estonia have not escaped the impact of the virus, Mike says the situation in Africa has been particularly concerning.

“While the anticipated impact on sub-Saharan Africa took longer to gain momentum, came it did. Our friends in Harare, and in Kondoa, and Mpwapwa, have been deeply grateful for our prayers and financial support, as they battle against this storm, but in a very different boat.”

In Harare, where there is currently a strict lockdown in place to counter a big spike in cases, the diocesan Bishop, the Rt Rev Farai Mutamiri, has recently recovered from Covid, but other members of his clergy (past and present) have not been so fortunate.

The retired Harare Bishop, the Rt Rev Jonathan Siyachitema, sadly lost his wife and two daughters in the space of a week to the virus. Even Government Ministers have not been immune - with four dying in recent weeks.

With no ‘furlough’ support and with 85% of the population relying on the ‘informal economy’, Mike says the banning of roadside trading has severely impacted incomes and the ability to feed families, and on 15 February the lockdown was extended.

Of additional concern has been a fall in church income, which has meant that diocesan clergy have lost Medical Aid cover. However, the generous support offered by two of our linked parishes here



ZIMBABWEAN WOMAN AT THE MARKET, STOCK IMAGE



in the Diocese - sending funds via the Diocese to local supermarkets - has been much appreciated.

Some good news on the horizon is that a supply of vaccines from China has been confirmed for two thirds of the population, but with no indication yet of when it might start, Mike says there are fears as to what the human cost of this delay will be.

In Tanzania, after an initial lockdown which saw churches closed, offertory giving fall, and pastors' stipends unpaid, the President called for three days of prayer to beat the virus.

He subsequently declared the country Covid-free and no official figures have been reported to the WHO since May.

Mike says there is little evidence of testing taking place and no plans for a vaccination programme:

"The Health Minister suggested recently that natural remedies are adequate protection - such as steam inhalation, herbal medicines and vegetable smoothies. It is believed that people are dying of Covid-19 but talk of such suspicions is discouraged,

with government officials attending funerals - a reminder perhaps, of the need to adhere to official policy."

In a recent development, the Catholic Church has begun to be open about an increase in funerals and has publicly warned of the need to take precautions.

However, Mike says that, despite this, the impact on both our Companion Dioceses in the country has been significant. Through the Link, churches here have done as much as they can to offer support:

"Many people well known to us from our visits to Kondoa and Mpwapwa have sadly passed away. Financial support from Friends of Kondoa saw over £15,000 sent to Bishop Given to provide food for families in Kondoa and the villages, and to pay the salaries of diocesan workers and Bible College staff.

"In Mpwapwa, generosity from the Friends of Mpwapwa here in the Diocese, have helped towards the repayment of a loan which could not otherwise have been made because of the fall in offertory collections."

For Mike, the value and importance of the Companion Link Network has become even more evident during the Covid-19 crisis:

"For all of us involved, these links have always been about more than just fundraising, but about building friendship and understanding of each other's communities and culture.

"At a time when it has been easy to feel disconnected and isolated, being in contact and sharing in this

uncertain time with others around the world, but with whom we have a common connection of faith, has shown these friendships to be more valuable and necessary than ever."

If you would like to know more about the impact of Covid-19 in our Companion Dioceses please get in touch with the Rev Canon David Kitley, Bishop's Advisor for Companion Diocese Links, email: kitley@clara.net



CHILDREN IN THE DIOCESE OF MPWAPWA DURING THE INITIAL LOCKDOWN IN EARLY SUMMER 2020



GOD'S STORY, OUR STORY, YOUR STORY

Each of us has a unique story to tell about our journey of faith. It might seem ordinary. Whatever it is, it is always worth sharing.

This Lent, the Church of England is encouraging all Christians to think about their daily calling, to discover simple ways they can share the story of their faith, and the difference Christ makes in our lives and our communities.

So, what's your story?

Jack Beaney is a member of the Diocesan Youth Council and attends St Stephen's Church in Chatham. His church youth group has been a key part of his faith journey.

Hello, I'm Jack and I'm 20 years old. I've been a Christian for pretty much the whole of my life. I always feel the closest to God when I'm worshipping as part of a community or when I'm working as an ensemble; I do a lot of drama and musical theatre and the kind of the joy and happiness that I feel through that, I also find makes me feel closer to God.

Looking at my journey, it's not been as difficult as some people's in the world, but it has definitely had its ups and downs. During my GCSEs I was always very interested in Religious Education. I was intrigued to share my own opinions on morality and faith, but it was a shame because I was often laughed at for my strength of faith.

When I was able to join my church youth group though - FOG - they were amazing, and it really helped to have that group of friends. We met up every single Sunday, we were inseparable, which has been amazing for my faith journey.

That led to a Christian youth getaway. I'll never forget all of the worship and everything that we did together working towards building my confidence as a person, and God has definitely helped me with my performances.

I feel so much stronger knowing that God is supporting me in these endeavours and these passions that I am exploring, and I hope to continue my faith through that.

The Rt Rev Dr Given Gaula is the Bishop of Kondoa in Tanzania. Kondoa is one of our Companion Diocese Links. Bishop Given had a tough start in life, but coming to know Jesus had a dramatic impact.

Jesus came to my life when I was a young man, on the night of 20 October 1980. I grew up in a painful family. My mum was blamed for only giving birth to two children, and not many children, as is an African custom. So, my mum experienced a lot of persecution from my father's family and she was left alone with her two kids.

As a result, she was a poor woman, unable even to feed her own family; for me to go two to three days without eating anything was not uncommon. This caused a lot of pain in my life; I hated my Dad and I hated my clan.

In the 1980s, the east African revival movement was still going strong in central Tanzania. One day, the preachers came to our village. That week they were preaching on the theme of Matthew 11:28-30: 'Come to me all of you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest.'

The preachers asked that if there was anybody who wanted to allow Jesus to be his or her personal saviour, they were to come forward. Well, I thought the preacher was pointing to me. I decided to come forward and, from that very moment, my life was dramatically changed. I was not the same person.

Jesus came into my life and I experienced a peace which I had never ever experienced before. I felt love, which I had never ever experienced before. From that moment, I decided to forgive my Dad. I decided to forgive those who had persecuted us, and peace came into my life.

Since then, Jesus has been my Lord and Saviour. I was later called by God to enter the ministry and I was ordained in 1995.

Becky Willoughby is a Licensed Lay Minister at St Mary, Hayes. She has seen first-hand how actions can speak louder than words when it comes to being a witness to the love of Jesus.

Being licensed as a lay minister four years ago has opened up lots of exciting opportunities to share the

love of God in my local community.

When the pandemic hit, because of the relationships we had built up with staff at the local school, we were able to set up a food bank in conjunction with them.

It's a brilliant outreach, as we've been demonstrating love in action, but it's also a fantastic witness to the wider community through local social media groups and also to the many volunteers who are not active Christians.

For example, when it began nearly a year ago, a member of the school's PTA came on board and after a couple of weeks she grew concerned about how rapidly the funding we'd secured was going down.

I said, 'don't worry God is in this. People are praying. The Lord will provide.' Two days' later, I got an email asking if we wanted to be part of a new local food partnership who were trying to make use of produce from Fareshare. The PTA member was absolutely stunned.

This has happened time and again, and now the lady looks at me and she smiles and says, 'the Lord will provide,' and I say, 'Amen!'. So, it's really great when you know you are enabling someone to see things differently from a more Kingdom perspective.

I've found this often happens outside of formal church ministry. It is in the everyday casual conversations on the school run, in the park, walking up the road, this is where opportunities arise.

When I applied for training, my incumbent wrote on the application form that I was a 'gospel gossiper'. At first, I wasn't too sure what to make of that but, do you know, I'm now actually pretty happy with it.

View more of our #LiveLent God's Story, Our Story... stories and reflections on our YouTube channel [here](#)

"Jesus came into my life and I experienced a peace which I had never ever experienced before."

WHAT CAN WE DO TO SUPPORT SOMEONE WHO IS BEREAVED?

Right now, loss and grief have come into sharp focus. Everyone knows someone who is bereaved, but often people are anxious about what to do and say.

Working with a number of bereavement charities, including ataloss.org, the Church of England has produced a few simple steps – [and a short film](#) – to help everyone feel confident that there is something they can do to support someone who is grieving, even in the current situation.



CONTACT - Get in touch. People who are bereaved need support – but we might step back for fear of not knowing what to say. Send a card, letter, message, flowers, or a gift, saying sorry about their loss and you're thinking of them.

SHARE - Perhaps if you knew the person, share what you remember about them and how they will be missed. At the end of the letter, say you don't expect them to respond. That takes the pressure off.

CALL - Pick up the phone, but perhaps don't video call, not without asking first. Expect them not to pick up. Leave a message to say when you'll call again but that it's ok if they don't feel like picking up.

OFFER - Offer practical help. Where restrictions allow, offering to do their shopping, drop round a meal, walk the dog, or make calls on their behalf may be helpful. Making the first move is important.

LISTEN - We mustn't think we know – every bereavement is different. Ask about the person who has died. Ask about what happened, about feelings and issues. Listen and then ask again. The more they tell their story the more it might help them process their loss.

DON'T GIVE SOLUTIONS - Your ideas about what might make them feel better are your ideas and not theirs. Hear their problems and hear their responses. Assure them that it is all normal and acknowledge their pain. It's ok not to be ok.

BLESS - Brighten someone's day. Think about what could be said, done or given to help someone that is grieving to feel special and loved. Make sure others around you are supporting and do signpost to specialist services.

KEEP GOING - Be prepared to be in this for the long haul, especially right now. The grief journey can be long and complicated.



Have you been bereaved? We're sorry for your loss. If you would like some support with how you are feeling, the following organisations can offer advice and support:

- Ataloss: www.ataloss.org
- Cruse Bereavement Care: www.cruse.org.uk
- Hope Again - young people living after loss: www.hopeagain.org.uk



HOW CAN WE LIVE OUT THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION?

As we head towards Easter, Bishop Simon Burton-Jones, Bishop of Tonbridge asks, how can we show the truth of the resurrection in our daily lives?



John 20:18 says: Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Easter Sunday. The interface between a decaying earth and a new one. First contact with the world to come. We've had plenty of time and scriptural help to make sense of this, but for Mary Magdalene, the encounter with Jesus had nothing of this overlay. The moment was raw and strange. Wonderful, too, but chaotic and unsettling. People didn't rise from the dead then anymore than they do now.

Her first instinct was to tell the others. It was, if you like, the first piece of evangelism round the resurrection. Mary didn't hold back, but if she'd been self-conscious she would have, because her testimony as a woman simply lacked the credibility it deserved in that era.

Interesting, that our faith hinges on evidence that can't definitively be proved but can't be disproved either. We are left with a civil standard of proof: on balance of probabilities, did the resurrection happen or not?

In 1981, on the verge of taking my A levels and leaving home, I was confronted with this question. And I made a meal of it, tying myself in knots, trying to decide whether it was credible or not. Acting like the twentieth century man I was. Looking at the evidence, using logic, examining loopholes, moving in a linear way to a conclusion. Having exhausted myself trying to dodge God, I used the tract *Journey into Life* to make a personal commitment of faith, quietly, away, from the gaze of others.

Journey into Faith, the slim booklet written by Norman Warren, Archdeacon of Rochester, in the study I would come to occupy decades later because of what he wrote there. The novelistic coincidence that God sometimes uses, on a frequency specially for you.

It feels like we've become less interested in evidence in the 2020s. It's the era of assertion: it's true because I say so. No evidence needs to be provided, you only need to shout loud enough and long enough and get other people to retweet or share your story with others and, bingo: the wards

are empty, the election was stolen, the earth is flat (trust me, someone said that to my face recently).

We place a lot of emphasis on personal experience in telling our Christian story, and that's a good thing. It's authentic and real. And as it says in Revelation (12:11), the faithful overcome by the word of their testimony. But our story is rooted in his story. If we can only say, it's true because I feel it's true, we are closer to the new conspiracy theorists than is comfortable. We should call on evidence and help people face up to the logic: if the resurrection happened, it means Jesus is who he said he was and the only honest response is to turn to him. If it's not true, then we can quietly turn out the lights, close the door and go home. It is that defining a question.

This is a much neglected task of evangelism that takes us right back to that first, strange Sunday in Jerusalem.

But part of the evidence trail we leave for others is what difference the resurrection makes in our lives. Can someone see it in us? Or are we indistinguishable in an identity parade of suspects?

That may be the biggest calling of all. And it kind of makes sense. When you think about the people you know, you rarely recall the things they've said, but you remember how they make you feel. It's like we're all walking with a sandwich board around us.

The question is, what's written on that board for all to see? It pays to figure that out as we journey through Lent once again.

“Interesting, that our faith hinges on evidence that can't definitively be proved but can't be disproved either.”

As we journey through Lent and look towards to Easter, we highlight some materials that you might like to explore this season.

#LIVELENT GOD'S STORY OUR STORY

Lent may have begun, but there is still time to join the Church of England on its Lenten journey. #LiveLent: God's Story, Our Story invites each of us to reflect on our own story of God and how we might share it through our everyday lives as part of our Christian witness.

For each of the 40 days of Lent, this booklet includes a short Bible passage, a reflection and a prayer. Also available via an app, email, audio and through the Church of England's social media accounts.

Visit: www.churchofengland.org/livelent

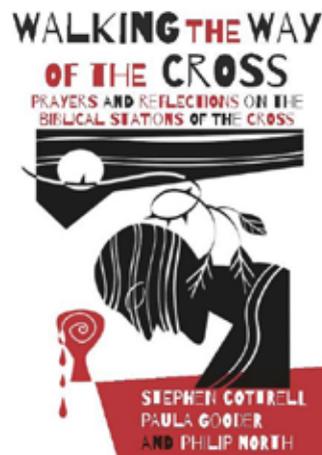


WALKING THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Walking the Way of the Cross is a series of scripture-based devotions for personal or group use in Lent and Holy Week which focus wholly on the biblical narrative of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

With contributions from three of today's very best spiritual writers (Paula Gooder, Stephen Cottrell, Philip North), it includes a set of meditations and prayers.

Church House Publishing:
www.chpublishing.co.uk/books/9780715123447/walking-the-way-of-the-cross



HOLY WEEK VOICES FROM THE HOLY LAND

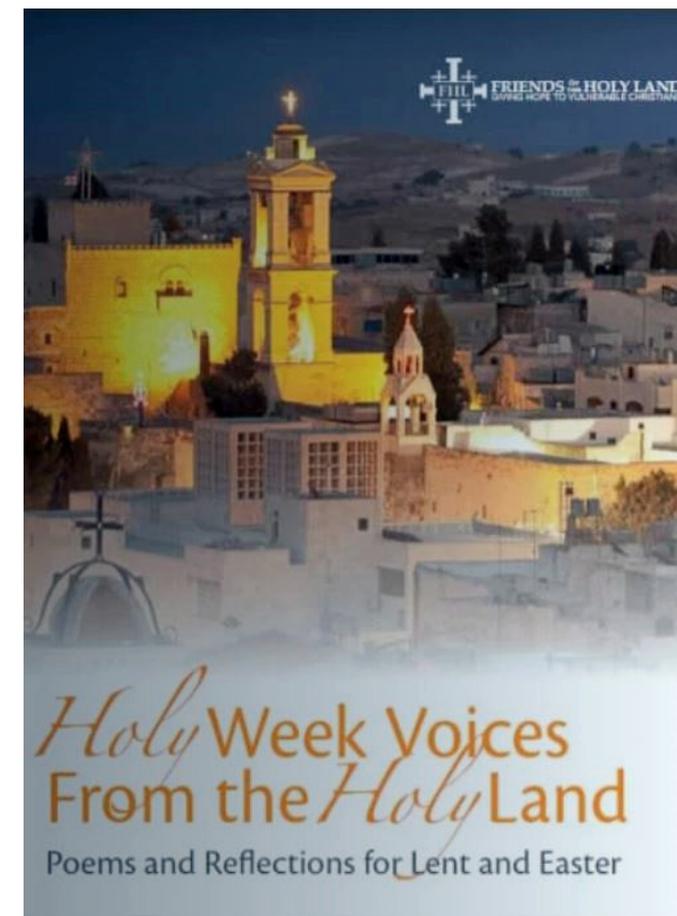
Holy Week Voices from the Holy Land is a resource for prayer and reflection, published by the Friends of the Holy Land. It is based around a series of poems accompanied by passages of Scripture and reflections from a range of people based in the Holy Land.

One of these is Bishop Hosam Naoum, known to many in the Diocese of Rochester and an Honorary Canon of Rochester Cathedral. It also includes a version of the Stations of the Cross.

Perfect for individual prayer and reflection, as well as household or similar settings.

Bishop James Langstaff, the Bishop of Rochester says: "I am pleased to commend this collection and trust that it may offer fresh perspectives on parts of the Passion and Easter narratives."

Find out more [here](#)



UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

CREATE AND DISCOVER 21

At Rochester Cathedral

Throughout 2021, Rochester Cathedral wants to take you on an online journey of discovery around the building.

Each fortnight throughout the year, they will set a creative challenge via their website and social media, inspired by something found in the Cathedral – an arty-craft inspired by an artefact!

Create and Discover '21 is open to everyone! You can take part as a family, an individual, use it as part of home learning, or just as a bit of fun. Be sure to let them see your results, by posting them online.

Visit www.rochestercathedral.org and search for CD21.

NATIONAL DAY OF REFLECTION

23 March 2021

Since the first lockdown began in 2020, hundreds of thousands of people have died. Too many lives have been cut short and millions have been bereaved.

On 23 March, the first anniversary of the first UK lockdown, join Marie Curie, the Church of England, and a host of other organisations for a National Day of Reflection to reflect on our collective loss, support those who've been bereaved, and hope for a brighter future.

Look out for prayers and resources to be shared soon.

Visit www.mariecurie.org.uk/get-involved/day-of-reflection

FIND A CHURCH NEAR YOU

While some church buildings are closed for public worship, others are still open for private prayer. Many churches are offering services, prayer and community online.

Find out what is happening at a church near you this Lent and Easter by visiting AChurchNearYou.com.

(To avoid disappointment, please always check ahead before attending an in person activity or service.)



Rochester
CATHEDRAL

The doors of Rochester Cathedral may currently be closed for private and public worship but they are still praying.

You can join them online via their website and Facebook page.

- Choral Evensong at 5.30pm on Thursdays
- Cathedral Eucharist at 11.00am on Sundays

More details about the Cathedral's plans for Holy Week and Easter will be announced soon.

The Cathedral continue to pray for everyone suffering from, affected by, or worried about the Coronavirus. Keep well, stay safe, and care for each other.

www.rochestercathedral.org /  @rochestercathedral



PIONEERING ON ESTATES

Giovanni Parrales is the new Pioneer Estates Minister at St Francis Church, Strood. His role has been funded as part of the £1.39million grant the Diocese received from the National Church's Strategic Development fund, to give creative Christian outreach a boost. We caught up with him to find out more.

Can you tell us a bit about your role at St Francis – what is a Pioneer Estates minister??

That's a good question! For me, it is about identifying, leading and enabling ways to reach those who are not connected to Church, who are living in the estates of south Strood and the surrounding area of St Francis Church, through activities and events.

Another part of my role is to identify and build connections with different organisations, charities, local groups or churches that support this community and partner with them, however is appropriate, to benefit and serve this community and ultimately to make God known through the Church.

You have started in the middle of the pandemic, what has that been like?

One of my worries was not being able to be out there in the community to find out what the needs are. It has been a challenge but, thanks to modern technology, I have been able to start getting in contact with those who are already supporting this community with the various work they do.

Have you been able to get any activities off the ground?

Quite a few actually! This pandemic has shown there is a great need for creating ways to engage with families and individuals to help ease the pressures of working from home, home-schooling and isolation.

What have those activities included?

We've focused on some creative activities to help people with their wellbeing and mental health. For instance, our Click and Connect group is an opportunity for people to meet online for light conversation. Zoom into 2021 is a parent & toddler online activity with songs, story and craft. We've also just started, Cooking up a Zoom - an online cooking activity for families of all ages.

So, what are you looking forward to about this role?

I am looking forward to continuing to engage with the community of Strood, to get to know what their needs are and how as a Church we can support them. I want to help people to see that God is there for us in all our needs – physical and spiritual.

What were you doing before you joined the Diocese?

My background has always been with the Church, enabling it

to be a source of change where God has placed it in the middle of his community.

I was an officer (minister) with The Salvation Army for over 15 years. I have experience in planting churches, working with the local schools (after school clubs, sports clubs), foodbanks, and the homeless. I have also had the privilege to work on issues around immigration, by helping providing English classes or offering a place of welcome and advice.

What do you like to do to relax?

I always welcome time for exercising, whether this is at the gym or, as is more possible these days, running, walking and cycling. This pandemic has given me more opportunities to spend time on walks, and as I do, I always take the opportunity to pray and reflect on what is going on during the week.

Do you have a favourite quote?

Well, this is tricky for me as I have come across many quotes that have brought inspiration during my life. Recently however, I came across this one from St Francis of Assisi, "Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible". This is just a simple quote, but it reminds me that with God, it is possible to do the impossible and I often remind people of this.

What are you watching at the moment?

I am a big fan of the Marvel comics and recently of the movie series. At the moment, I am watching 'Wandavision'. It's the story of a woman who is undergoing a mental health crisis, having experienced the loss of someone she loved. It reminds me that we all have our own ways of coping with our mental health, and we should talk more about this. It's a real need at the moment.

What's your favourite food?

As I am from Ecuador, the English roast dinner is one of the dishes that I have learnt to love over the years, since my first time trying it over 20 years ago. It reminds me of spending time with my family in good company, and of enjoying a delicious meal.

Who would you most like to meet?

I would like to say Jesus and the reason is to ask him questions about life and how the future looks like. When will He return and what will be the impact on earth upon his return.?



GOD AS HIS STRENGTH

As the former CEO and trustee of the Christian safeguarding advice charity Thirtyone:eight, David Pearson, is a champion for good safeguarding practice within churches. A member of the congregation at St Peter's Church, Hextable and St Paul's Swanley Village, he received an MBE this year for services to safeguarding the vulnerable. He explains the role his faith has played in this work.

There are defining moments in life. Mine was the 1980s, chairing another child protection conference. As a senior Social Services manager, I had attended hundreds over the years. This one followed large-scale abuse in a church. As I concluded, someone said, 'The trouble with these Christians is that before long the guys will be forgiven, and they will be doing it again somewhere else'. I knew so often this had been so; it cut me to the bone. When would the Church learn? This chance remark birthed the 'Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service', which, with others over time, became Thirtyone:eight today.

This was years before church denominations began forming policies.

My wife, Pauline, and I were volunteer youth and children's workers in a church. Using our experience 'on the ground', coupled with the professional safeguarding experience we had acquired through our work, we developed CCPAS by spending most weekends, for over 25 years, providing training in different church settings throughout the UK. For much of that period we provided the safeguarding training for Rochester Diocese.

This training was key to our meeting and learning about the needs of survivors and workers, spurring us on to develop an independent charity that placed

the needs of the vulnerable and those seeking to serve them first, helping churches and organisations to be safer places.

It was very tough at times, especially when misunderstood by the institutional church. What inspired me to go on sometimes, despite the odds, was a verse I had on my office wall for many years: 'Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.' Galatians 6:9-10 (NIV)

I was honoured to accept my MBE award on behalf of the exceptional people from whom I have learnt so much - survivors of abuse who bravely shared their pain; the untiring efforts of leaders and workers with children and adults in churches and organisations; my Thirtyone:eight (formerly CCPAS) colleagues. I am particularly thankful to my family who have been very much part of this journey and, above all else, to God for His inspiration and strength over the years.

I have dreamed of a church that was 'ahead of the game' in safeguarding, setting standards for others to follow. There remains much to be done. Although retired now from the charity, I'm pleased that Thirtyone:eight (based on the verse in Proverbs), remains a clear voice on behalf of the vulnerable.



Loving God,
at this time of crisis
when so many are suffering,
we pray for our nation and our world.
Give our leaders wisdom,
our Health Service strength,
our people hope.
Lead us through these parched and
difficult days
to the fresh springs of joy and comfort
that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.