

Week ending 21 December 2024

Connect

The bulletin for clergy, lay leaders and all who are the Church in the Diocese of Bath and Wells.

A Christmas message from Bishop Michael



In this year's Christmas message, Bishop Michael visits St Paul's Church of England Junior School in Shepton Mallet, where he spoke with children about the meaning of Christmas.

Reflecting on the carol Silent Night, Bishop Michael explores its message: "All is calm, all is bright." He asks 'was it really calm and bright for Mary and Joseph on that first Christmas?' Bishop Michael discusses how Jesus was born into chaos, stress, and uncertainty - a world much like ours today - and reminds us that even in the storms and darkness of life, Jesus is God with us, bringing His peace and light to the world.



Have your say!

Whether you are a worshipper, church volunteer, church officer, lay leader, member of clergy, or simply attend a church play group, you are invited to have your say about safeguarding in our Diocese of Bath and Wells.

The independent and confidential survey is just part of the audit being undertaken in Bath and Wells next March, as part of a nationwide Church of England review. The survey is open until 31 January 2025.

[Find out more about the survey and the audit.](#)

You can also download a poster to display in your church and encourage people where you are to share their views.

Safeguarding office closure during the Christmas period

Please note: The Safeguarding office will be closed between 23 December 2024 and 3 January 2025. During this period there will be daytime and out of hours cover for safeguarding by the out of hours provider, 31:8 on 0303 003 1111. Should any significant, urgent issues arise these should be reported to your archdeacon who can escalate the concern to one of the Safeguarding team if required.

'In the Bleak Mid-Winter'

Christmas is not always a happy time for everyone. Sally Walters, Wellbeing Adviser for Bath and Wells reflects on what for some people can be a difficult time of year.

"In the hustle and bustle of Christmas preparation and anticipation of comfort and joy, many feel considerable stress at the thought of hosting, being together with family members, cooking, let alone buying the perfect present.

"Depression can start in the winter despite opportunities to snuggle down and keep warm. The weather can have a direct influence on people's mental state, as can the darkness of loneliness, feeling overwhelmed and under pressure. Grief and despair can surface causing isolation, especially when it is thought that others are having fun.

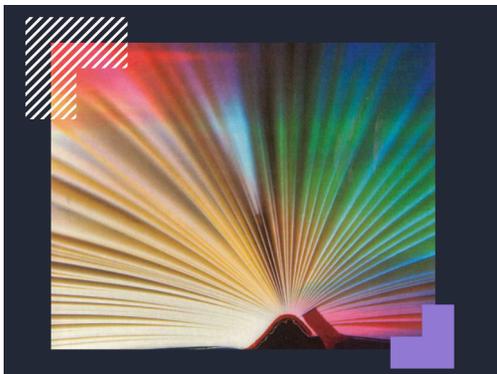
"We need to recognise warning signs, and open up conversations that can be the first step to finding paths to seek help."

The diocese has formed guidelines for anyone who observes someone in severe crisis or suicidal ideation. It is vital we all know steps to take to prevent the desperation of suicide. [You can find the guidelines on the diocesan website.](#)



12 December 2024 - Christmas Blog

Christmas is a time of joy, wonder, and reflection, and there's no better way to capture its true essence than by seeing it through the eyes of children and young people. Their perspectives on Christmas are often filled with excitement, heartfelt wishes, and what I've found to be a unique understanding of the season's deeper meaning. To some children and young people this meaning is rooted in Jesus, but to others the significance of the season lies elsewhere. This blog post shows a snapshot of what Christmas means to the children and young people in our area, drawing from a Christmas questionnaire and some great conversations. [Read more from the Christmas Blog](#)



Dwelling in the Word roundtable

Online: 10am Tuesday 18 February or 7pm Thursday 20 February 2025

A free interactive webinar on this spiritual and missional practice for anyone, whether curious or long familiar. You'll leave understanding more about its impact and ready to use it better. [Find out more and register](#) to take part in one of the sessions.



Healing Gathering

Saturday 18 January 2025, 9.45 for 10am - 1pm, Flourish House, Wells

A gathering of all people interested in exploring Christian Healing - both clergy and lay; those who are exploring Christian Healing for the first time; those who are already involved and want to explore further; as well as those who want to delve deeper and are able to share their

experience. [Find out more and book your place.](#)

Clergy housing assistance during the Christmas period

The diocesan office is closed from Monday, 23 December and will re-open on Thursday, 2 January 2025.

Should you require any housing assistance during this time, the Property team has created an emergency list of contractors which may be helpful. All the contractors have generously offered to provide cover during the Christmas break and have instructions to make safe in the first instance. The list indicates when they are available as they are not all available all of the time. To access the list and for more information about the steps to follow, please refer to the [clergy housing section of the diocesan website.](#)

In brief

- Wells Cathedral is seeking a Non-Executive Member of Chapter, with experience and interest in heritage and fundraising, to join them and the wider team in developing the Cathedral's life as a place of worship and service, a heritage site of remarkable beauty, and a globally recognised destination for pilgrims and visitors. This is a voluntary role with a time commitment of about 1 day per week. More information is available [on the cathedral website.](#)
- Exploring ministerial vocations – Step Forward 2025. 8 March 2025. A day at Bishopthorpe Palace near York for anyone aged 18 to 30 considering ministry in the Church of England. [Find out more.](#)
- South West Ministry training Course (SWMC) Open Day, Saturday 18 January 2025. If you would like to attend or for more information, please email Operations Managers, Lizzy and Liz at admin@swmtc.org.
- Spiritual Walk for January with Hedgerow Chaplain, Steven Wort. 21 January 2025, starting at Croft Way Car Park, Wiveliscombe at 10am. If you have any questions about the walks, please contact Steven on, 07557 958013 01823 400232 or email stevenwort@hotmail.co.uk

If you have news to share, tag us on your social media channel or [email the Communications team.](#)

Advent and Christmas in Bath and Wells

Antiques Roadshow at Christmas

Do look out for the beautiful parish church of Ilminster on Sunday night's edition of the Antiques Roadshow, as the team follow-up the story of the Albert Medal of Arturo 'Arthur' Fanconi. Arthur gave his life in the service of our country and others during WWII and, having found out more about his Albert Medal,

Doves of peace

Flocks of Doves bearing messages of peace are to land in Keynsham this year. In an ambitious joint initiative between St John's Church and Keynsham Town Council every single person of whatever age will be able to take part.

Inspired by the exhibition created by national sculptor and artist Peter Walker and hosted by Wells Cathedral last summer, thousands of paper doves carrying messages of peace will

his relatives attended the Min annual Civic Service of Remembrance. They had the chance to meet a well-known local face, who remembers Arthur from her younger years. It was our privilege at The Minster to play a small part in facilitating this very special meeting. Tune in to BBC 1 on Sunday 22 December at 7:30pm to find out more! If you miss it you can [catch up on BBC IPlayer.](#)



An environmentally friendly Christmas

At St John the Evangelist Church, Highbridge, they've been doing all they can to reduce and limit their waste. For Christingle this year they decided to change things and cut down on the waste usually left in pews after the Christingle service. So, they introduced the almost fully edible Christingle - even the candle was made of chocolate!

The team at St John's hosted an angel themed family service emphasising angels as God's messengers. During this service, and the following Sunday service, everyone was invited to write prayers on scrolls, which were placed inside used plastic milk bottles. These bottles were then crafted into a large pair of angel wings symbolising a 'message in a bottle' to God. Each bottle also lights up.

The wings are now on display inside the church, which is open everyday 10am - 4pm where visitors are invited to 'grab a halo and strike a pose' for a photo with them.



soar above the Nave in St John's. Knitted and Crocheted Doves will hang from the Tower Roof and sit in the trees in the Churchyard. The aspiring project will begin in January, and will culminate on VE Day on the 8 May, when other celebratory events will be taking place.



'Singing in the Ring' at the farmers' Market on Exmoor

Around 300 people enjoyed the wonderful Carol Service, 'Singing in the Ring' at Cutcombe Livestock Market on Exmoor. The service brought members of the farming community, the local churches and many more to the market to celebrate together with those in the community. Joining them were the Exmoor Hill Farming Network (EHFN), the Farming Community Network (FCN) and Revd David Weir, Rector, Exmoor (Benefice). Bishop Michael was invited to preach at the service.

Readings were given by local farmers and representatives of Exmoor Farmers Livestock Auctions and the Exmoor Rural Health Hub. Afterwards everyone was treated to a complimentary beef stew.

Revd David said, "This is a lovely opportunity to gather here in a different way and celebrate all the life that gathers round the market."

Speaking afterwards Bishop Michael said, "It's been wonderful to be together and to celebrate the life of the community."

Bringing the Christmas story to life on the farm

Four farms around our diocese have played host to Journey to Bethlehem, an interactive retelling of the Christmas story for younger primary aged children. In each location, churches worked with farmers to welcome school groups onto the farm, bringing the story of Jesus' birth to life.

Groups of children and staff were met from their coach by shepherds who told of an angel visitation and invited them to join them on their journey to Bethlehem to find out more about the 'good news' they'd heard. Meeting a variety of farm animals along the way, each group had to stop and register at the Roman census point, encountered tax collectors and a grumpy inn keeper before discovering Mary and Joseph and their baby in a stable. [Read more about the children's journey to 'Bethlehem'](#).

Shared choral worship

The Partnership Trust have shared this wonderful video of pupils from different schools taking part in a shared choral worship.

Taunton Minster hosts a special Together at Christmas service

Taunton Minster was one of just 15 locations across the country to host a special 'Together at Christmas' service supported by The Royal Foundation. The service was led by Revd Tobie Osmond, Vicar of Taunton Minster, and was attended by Bishop Michael, who concluded the event with a blessing. The choir of Trull Church of England VA Primary School had the special honour of performing Christmas hymns.

The 'Together at Christmas' service mirrored the carol service hosted by The Princess of Wales in Westminster Abbey, which emphasised the importance of supporting those experiencing hardship.

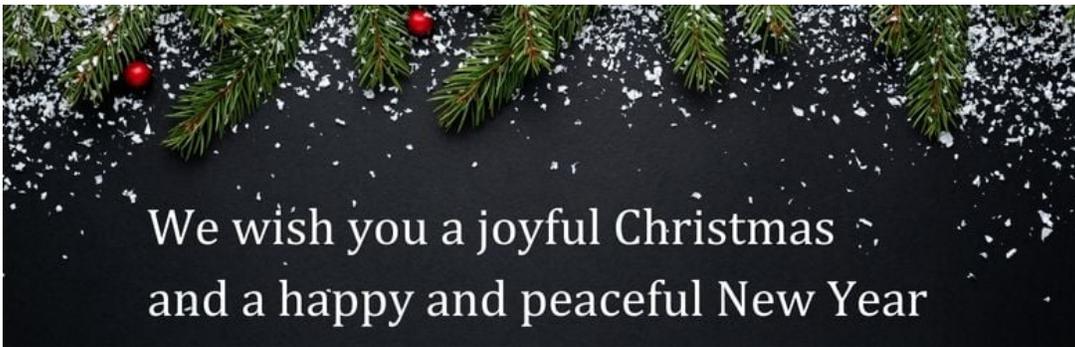
Speaking after the service Revd Tobie Osmond commented, "It was a true honour to be able to host this event at the Minster. " [Find out about the special service.](#)

"Light of the Stars" at Bath Abbey until 11 January 2025

"Light of the Stars", an installation by Andy Jupp (who exhibits with the British Council and Arts Council) is his response to conversations with Stephen Girling, the former Abbey Missioner, on the subject of contemplative prayer.

The light installation, crafted by the artisans at [Paper Starlights](#), is described as "Celebrating love, light, and the beauty of community, all under the universal theme 'Under the Same Sky of Stars.'"

"Designed to complement the Abbey's 17th-century stained-glass windows, the installation creates a striking contrast between traditional architecture and contemporary art. At its heart lies the radiant Advent Star, symbolising unity and hope as it highlights the Abbey's nativity scene. [Find out more.](#)



Diocese of Bath and Wells

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