

TOGETHER

The FREE magazine from the Diocese of Rochester | Issue 19 | November 2023 - January 2024

GROW | ENRICH | RESOURCE

COVER STORY: WHEN 'GOING GREEN' MEANS GOLD PAGE 8



'LIVE IN HOPE
NOT FEAR',
SAYS BISHOP

BLACK
HISTORY AND
REMEMBRANCE

CHRISTMAS
RESOURCES
FOR YOU

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called together

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This edition of Together has a strong theme of God working through in people's lives.

In our **Inside Track** (pg 4), we report on the ordinations that took place in September, while in **Everyday Faith** (pg 26) we meet Irene, who has felt particularly called to her role as her parish's Safeguarding Officer.

In **Focus On** (pg 12), Black History Month and Remembrance meet for one member of our clergy, who has felt God's hand leading her involvement in poignant commemorations for the sacrifice of Caribbean soldiers in the First World War.

The scourge of domestic abuse is the focus of our **Centrespread** (pg 14) as we highlight the Mother's Union's RISE UP campaign ahead of the Global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based violence at the end of November.

Finally, as we journey towards the season of Advent, where we watch and wait for the birth of Jesus at Christmas, we could be forgiven for feeling overwhelmed right now by all the struggles and difficulties facing us individually and as a world.

In response, Bishop Jonathan shares a message as to how the hope at the heart of the Christian message can help us focus on what we can do, rather than what we cannot (pg 18).

If you need more Advent and Christmas inspiration, please check out our selection of seasonal resources (pg 20).

Wishing you peace and hope this Advent and Christmas

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ORDINATION JOY

A qualified rugby referee, a former journalist, and a mental health care professional are among the seventeen men and women ordained either deacon or priest at Rochester Cathedral in September.

The ordination service is the start of someone's public ministry and often follows a long journey of exploring their calling, having their calling tested by the Church, and several years of training.

Led by Bishop Jonathan Gibbs, the Bishop of Rochester, both services were livestreamed and are still available on the Diocese's YouTube channel.

For those being ordained deacon, the service marked a special moment when they were given the title 'the Reverend' and could wear a clerical collar.

Five years ago, newly ordained deacon, the Rev

Rob Byrne was a trainee journalist. Before long, he discovered that his true vocation wasn't to report on people's stories – it was to bring Jesus into their stories.

"God has bestowed gifts on each and every one of us. Whether you are frontline staff, a teacher, a doctor, an engineer. God has plans for you.

"I would encourage everyone to think about what that plan might be for them."

Each deacon now begins a period of three or four years working as a curate in a church with an experienced priest.

Explore how God may be calling you. Visit www.rochester.anglican.org/everyday-faith/gods-plan-for-you/



BIBLEATHON

St Mary's Church, Hadlow was delighted to complete a mammoth sponsored read of the entire Bible in October. Taking place over 72 hours, people from across the church community came to read sections of the Bible out loud, starting at Genesis and working through to Revelation. All the money raised will go to good causes including the church and Christians Against Poverty.



DEMENTIA CAFÉ CELEBRATES

The Dementia Café at St Peter and St Paul, Aylesford has celebrated its first anniversary! Well done to all the helpers for their enthusiasm and dedication. Taking place every first Wednesday, 2pm-4pm, in the Brassey Centre, it is one of many churches across the Diocese working to ensure the spiritual and social needs of older people, and those with dementia are met.



BUILDING WORKS GET BLESSING AT GRAIN

The first phase of construction has begun on a building project at St James, Isle of Grain to make it easier to offer welcome and hospitality. Following some years of fundraising, the Rev Christine Allen was delighted to bless the ground before digging began on work which will include the putting in of running water and an accessible toilet.



NOT QUITE 5,000 FED AT MESSY CHURCH

The Kent Downs and Malling team had a great time at its first ever "Messy Church" event for primary school-age children and their parents. A good crowd of children and adults had lots of fun learning about the feeding of the 5,000 with the help of some yummy, if fishy looking, biscuits!



FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

A recent grant of £2.3million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) is the latest exciting step for the reopened St John's, Chatham.

A church that until 2017 had stood closed for around 25 years, St John's is now open and engaging in transformative outreach into the community.

"This latest funding is not just good news for the local community but for the wider Diocesan family too," says Matthew Girt, Diocesan Secretary "St John's, Chatham is indicative of the wider plan and vision we have for growth and outreach across the Diocese.

"It proves to partners what can be done by the Church, and what is possible by working in collaboration with others as part of a bigger plan."

This latest funding means that, since 2018, diocesan support has helped draw in over £8m of external funding - funding that has directly supported mission and ministry across all areas of the diocese at parish level.

Responding to the NLHF funding announcement, the Rev Martyn Saunders, Bishops Mission Order Lead for St John's Chatham said:

"We are delighted that the NLHF will be making a significant contribution towards our current capital project as well as providing funding for ongoing heritage engagement.

"We trust that as people from all backgrounds and walks of life connect with our history there is something of hope, faith and love to not just be remembered from the past but to be carried forward into the future."

Beyond building and structural work, a partnership with The Church Army – a national Christian organisation committed to tackling social deprivation, and ensuring everyone has an opportunity to encounter God – is also crucial to the regeneration taking place at St John's, Chatham.

Helen Kiralfy, the new Lead Evangelist for the Church Army Medway Centre for Mission, which runs out of St Johns, says that in the last 18 months, they have shared God's love with upward of 300 people.

"For many they find an acceptance of who they are, and come to know they are loved unconditionally, often for the first time."

NEW DIOCESAN DIRECTOR OF FINANCE APPOINTED

John Jackson has been appointed as the new Director of Finance for the Diocese of Rochester.

As Finance Director, John will play a leading role in managing the financial function and strategy of the Diocese, ensuring the Diocesan Board of Finance, other diocesan bodies, and parishes, are equipped to further mission and ministry across the areas of the Diocese, as expressed in our shared Called Together vision.

Welcoming John's appointment, Nigel Pope, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, said: 'John joins us at a time of financial challenge but also opportunity, as we work collectively as a diocesan family to respond generously, both financially and practically, to God's call for us to be a presence of hope in our communities.

'I have every confidence that John will help us in this shared endeavour through his expertise, understanding, and humility.'

John joins the Diocese following eight years as Assistant Director of Finance at the Diocese of Southwark.

A Chartered Management Accountant, he has held a number of financial positions in sectors as diverse as defence contracting, health insurance, and paper and packaging.

Commenting on his appointment, John said: 'I am looking forward to building relationships across the parishes and to exploring together how we can use our resources to best build the Kingdom across the area of the Diocese.'

ARMED FORCES COVENANT

In October, Dean Philip Hesketh and Bishop Jonathan Gibbs joined with Lieutenant General Sir Tyrone Urch KBE, Chief Royal Engineer, in signing the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Covenant confirms the commitment of both the Cathedral and the Diocese in ensuring their working practices recognise the contribution that military service personnel, both regular and reservist, veterans, cadets, and military families make to both institutions, the community and to the country.



Photo by Royal Engineers



WHEN 'GOING GREEN' MEANS GOLD

Responding to climate change is an essential part of our responsibility as Christians to safeguard God's creation. The Holy Redeemer Church in Lamorbey has become the first church within the Diocese to achieve Eco Church Gold status. Far from the end of their environmental journey, they are keen that their next steps include sharing their learning with others.

With a bold aim across the Church of England to achieve Net Zero Carbon by 2030, many churches within the Diocese are signed up to the Eco Church award scheme.

This free initiative, run by the Christian climate care charity A Rocha UK, is a way to help churches work out the steps they need to take to reduce their impact on the environment and become a positive expression of concern for God's world.

Churches can achieve a gold, silver or bronze award, based on their Eco Church journey.

Now one church in the Diocese has struck gold.

"I was asked by the inspection team on the day of our assessment, whether I was an 'Eco Vicar' before I came to Holy Redeemer, and I realised I wasn't," says the Rev Mell Jemmett, Vicar of The Holy Redeemer.

"God's calling around the environment began with a building project at the church, but the work of the Spirit in the hearts of the people I serve shaped my ministry on this special eco journey."

Indeed, Mell is clear that the church's environmental work has very much been led by the passion and belief of a team of people within the congregation, which has gone on to inspire the whole community.

"The assessment team couldn't believe we had 12

plus people, including me as Vicar, on the 'Green Team'. It's one of biggest teams they have ever seen."

That team includes Ingrid Riches, who along with others, she has been instrumental in ensuring that the church's commitment to climate care feeds into every aspect of the church's life, from its teaching and worship, the care of its building and land, to how it engages with and serves the community.

"We have to set an example in a way and show that we are taking our stewardship of creation seriously", she says, "When someone sits in our garden, which they do, they can see we care for the environment, and hopefully they are inspired too, because we all need

"It was so inspiring to meet such a creative and passionate group and it was so clear to us how embedded creation care is in the church's life."
(Eco Church assessor report)



NATURE BINGO



OUTDOOR WORSHIP

“We loved the story of the little boy who spent his pocket money on hedgehog food after hearing about protecting hedgehogs at church!”
 (Eco Church assessor report)

to be committed to this.”
 Indeed, encouraging care for creation begins from a young age, thanks to the church’s children’s work and engagement with the onsite pre-school. This has included the transformation of a disused strip of church land into an allotment, which sees children involved with planting, and enjoying being outside gardening.

The whole church family is also encouraged to take part in an annual national nature count in the church garden which, thanks to the commitment of many church members, has been thoughtfully designed and managed so as to become a haven for wildlife.
 Communicating the church’s commitment to creation care has been important too, with creative visual displays around the building explaining the eco work that is being undertaken, as well as church services that focus on global events or themes, such as water, or palm oil, and the need to protect orangutans.
 A recent building project has seen destratification fans operating successfully in order to reduce energy consumption, and water butts and the reuse of ‘grey water’ help conserve this precious water resource.
 “As we’ve worked our way through each Eco Church level, which now includes Gold, it doesn’t

make you want to stop, but to do more,” says Ingrid, “as it makes you hopeful that, if we work together, it will be possible to bring about the changes we need to in order to repair our covenant with God, as we made this mess and now we’re going to fix it!”
 Mell agrees and hopes the church’s achievements so far can assist others, whether that is through teaching, workshops, mission days and supportive fellowship, “We can all come together to love and care for Creation.”
 “I believe every church can find its own ‘green print’. I pray that Holy Redeemer can be a beacon for the Rochester Diocese and empower other green teams through our Called Together vision.”
 For more information about A Rocha UK’s award scheme for churches in England and Wales visit www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk



ALLOTMENT HARVEST



Photo by British West India Regiments Heritage Trust



BRITISH WEST INDIES REGIMENT

AN HONOUR BEYOND WORDS

For the Rev Beverley Ejimofo, taking part in poignant ceremonies in France and Belgium to honour the contribution of soldiers from the Caribbean who fought in the First World War, has been a personal journey of discovery.

“My own uncle had come from Jamaica to fight with the RAF in the Second World War but knowing people from the Caribbean had fought in the First World War, was a shocking revelation.” says the Rev Beverley Ejimofo, who served her curacy at St George and St Barnabas, Beckenham.

She is reflecting on her recent invitation to lead prayers at a commemorative event organised by the British West India Regiments Heritage Trust (BWIRHT), in collaboration with the Royal British Legion (RBL) and the National Windrush Museum, in Ypres as part of Black History Month in October.

She says the scale of the event shows how far things have come in bringing to light the contribution and sacrifice made by soldiers from the Caribbean to the British war effort in the First World War.

Beverley first became connected with the BWIRHT, when, due to a local connection, she had been asked

for some advice regarding the funeral of the Jamaican Second World War veteran, Flight Sgt Peter Brown.

There, she met Captain Paul Chambers, who chairs the BWIRHT, and he further discussed the link between Caribbean soldiers and the First World War.

“I love history and yet I had never heard of this connection before. So, I went and researched further. The more I discovered, the more I felt personally drawn to this hidden part of British history.”

As an ordinand, Beverley was selected to go to Belgium to learn more about the commemoration of soldiers who fell during World War 1. She went to the Menin Gate in Belgium. During a visit to one of the Commonwealth War Cemeteries, and after a passing comment about the involvement of soldiers from the Caribbean she was determined to find a Caribbean soldier’s grave.

“None of the guides knew where any of these graves

were located. I searched frantically. Minutes before we were due to leave the cemetery, I found a grave which mentioned a West Indian regiment. I and another clergy friend who joined me in the hunt, spontaneously sang a hymn we felt so moved to honour this soldier.

“In Poperinge, at the ‘Shot at Dawn Museum’, I was shocked to find featured the story of a Jamaican soldier who had been shot at dawn for apparent cowardice. The poor soul was clearly suffering from PTSD.”

That Jamaican soldier was 16-year-old Private Herbert Morris – he was later pardoned in 2006.

Beverley continues:

“From that small personal act of commemoration to then being involved in something as large scale as this most recent event, which included leading prayers and being asked to interview the most senior Black officer in the UK, a Brigadier, it is all just such an honour.”

Other moving tributes included in the commemoration event this October were the Last Post being played on steel pans, and the sprinkling of soil from the Caribbean over the graves of the fallen.

Beverley is now being asked to support other military projects which she says is very humbling.

“It is hard to put into words what it felt like to be part of those acts of commemoration,” says Beverley, “but I don’t believe in coincidence, and this is clearly God at work.”



Photo by British West India Regiments Heritage Trust

BEVERLEY LEADS THE PRAYERS

RISE UP

AGAINST DOMESTIC ABUSE

RISE UP is the Mothers' Union's new campaign to raise awareness about domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone from any walk of life regardless of ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality or social background.

Unfortunately, some people also hide behind Bible passages to justify their actions or to make someone feel like they should stay with an abusive partner. RISE UP is about saying, this is not ok.

November 25 sees the start of the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. Campaigns like RISE UP aim to see domestic abuse on the agenda 365 days of the year.

Does your partner:

- isolate you from friends and family?
- deprive you of food or heating?
- monitor your time?
- check up on what you do online?
- take control over aspects of your everyday life, telling you where you can go, who you can see, what you can wear and when you can sleep?
- stop you from getting medical help or support?
- repeatedly put you down, such as saying you're worthless?
- humiliate or degrade you?
- control your money and access to your home?
- make threats or intimidate you?

You are not alone!

1 in 4 women

in England and Wales will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime.

(Refuge)

20% of children

in the UK have lived with an adult perpetrating domestic abuse.

(Refuge)

1 in 6 men

will experience domestic abuse.

(Office for National Statistics)

SIX THINGS EVERYONE CAN DO:

The letters of RISE UP stand for Respond, Inform, Support, Empower, Unite and Pray.

1

RESPOND - Make a change where you are – workplace, school, sports club – is there a domestic abuse policy? Is there a poster in the bathroom or in communal spaces on how to get help? Has anyone had domestic abuse training?

2

INFORM - Dispel myths about domestic abuse and challenge sexism – sexist attitudes to women's roles and men's role must be challenged to end domestic abuse.

3

SUPPORT - Take action, your voice counts – join campaigns for better protection of survivors to enable change. Donate goods to Women's Aid member organisations through your Local Mothers' Union.

4

EMPOWER - Learn what to say to someone experiencing abuse – understand the reasons why it may not be easy to just leave.

5

UNITE - Speak up and show we are all standing up against domestic abuse together. Campaigns like White Ribbon encourage men and boys to challenge cultures that lead to harassment.

6

PRAY - We pray for those experiencing domestic violence in their homes, where a natural haven has become a place of terror; where physical wounds have been made and emotional scars that will last longer still. May there be a lifeline today for those who are drowning in fear. Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

(Bishop Simon Burton-Jones)

For more information go to www.mothersunion.org/riseup

Help is available

Call the freephone, 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247

If you are in immediate danger, please call 999.

Scan the QR code for links to more support.



Mothers' UNION
Christian care for families

PORTRAIT REUNITES FORMER BISHOP WITH ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL



A rarely seen portrait by renowned artist Sir Joshua Reynolds is currently on display at Rochester Cathedral to mark the 300th anniversary of the painter's birth.

The portrait depicts a former Bishop of Rochester, Dr John Thomas and reunites the Bishop with his Cathedral for the first time since his death in 1793.

With the exception of a short one week viewing in London in 2016, this is the first time the portrait has been publicly displayed since 1896 in Paris.

It was painted in 1781 by Reynolds, who is regarded as the 'Father of British portraiture', and one of the greatest European painters of the 18th century.

The painting shows Thomas with Westminster Abbey in the background wearing his Order of the Bath regalia. Remarkably, parts of the regalia featured in the portrait are still in the possession of Rochester Cathedral and are also on display.

In 1768, Thomas became the Dean of Westminster Abbey and from 1774 to 1793 he also served as the Bishop of Rochester. Dr Thomas was Chaplain to both King George II and King George III and was a member of the prestigious Order of the Bath.

Thomas and Reynolds knew each other socially and appeared to have been friends. Reynolds's diary shows a number of appointments for dinner beyond the five or six sittings required for the painting.

The painting itself has had an exciting life since being painted 243 years ago. One notable owner, French politician Jacques Leon Stern, escaped from the Nazis at the outbreak of World War Two taking the painting and his art collection with him.

The portrait is currently privately owned. The owner approached Rochester Cathedral earlier this year and offered to loan the painting. He was keen to reunite the Bishop with his Cathedral and to mark the anniversary of one of Britain's greatest artists.



BATH REGALIA

Dean of Rochester, The Very Rev Dr Philip Hesketh says; "The story of how this painting came to be exhibited at the Cathedral is truly remarkable - definitely a case of divine providence. We are thrilled to have this stunning portrait on display and encourage everyone to come and see it while they can."

The portrait is on display at Rochester Cathedral now until January 2024.

Admission to Rochester Cathedral is free. Visitors are encouraged to check the Cathedral website for opening times.

LIGHT OVER DARKNESS

How as Christians can we respond to the darkness we see in the world? Bishop Jonathan Gibbs, Bishop of Rochester reflects on how the message at the heart of the Christian faith can give us the strength not to feel overwhelmed.

At the moment, I suspect that for many people our world feels a pretty scary place, what with war in Gaza, Ukraine and elsewhere, the effects of the climate crisis and concerns about how changing technology is impacting our lives all looming large on a daily basis.

So how should we as Christians react to these issues and what does our faith have to offer to us and to our world as we live through such scary times?

Well, the first thing is that we *should* be deeply concerned by what is going on.

We should be concerned because the world in which we live and the people and other creatures who share this planet with us were all made by God and are the focus of his love and concern. As Christians, we cannot just hunker down and mind our own business, because we are called to share in God's compassion and concern for the world around us.

But at the same time, as Christians we should not allow ourselves to feel overwhelmed by the news we see and read each day, because our faith tells us that the awful things we see and hear are not the whole story.

As Christians, we have faith in God, and we therefore have hope in the possibility of new beginnings, of an end to war, of the coming of peace, and of change leading to more sustainable ways of living.

This hope of light prevailing over darkness and of new life emerging from death is at the very heart of our Christian faith, beginning with the story of Christmas, of God entering into our world as a vulnerable child in an occupied land. He is Immanuel, which means "God with us."

God does not remain outside and far away, he draws near to us, meeting us with compassion and love. This is what we see throughout Jesus' ministry on earth, as he teaches people about the new way of living that he calls the Kingdom of God, as he brings healing and restoration to those who are sick or outcast, and as he even raises the dead, as a foretaste of the resurrection that is to come.

And this message of hope, of the victory of life over

death, is what we see revealed supremely in the death and resurrection of Jesus, as the despair of the disciples at the Crucifixion is replaced by the joy of Easter Day as they meet with the risen Lord.

Christians are people who have hope even in the face of death and disaster, and we are to be drawn by that hope into the future God has in store for us, not driven by fear because of the events going on around us.

The biggest risk I see right now is if we feel we can't make a difference. That we feel we cannot influence what is going on - because that way leads only to apathy and despair.

Rather, the message of our Christian faith is that we should be concerned about the struggles and conflicts in the world around us, and that we should focus on what we can change.

It is our faith that enables us to live not in fear but in hope, and therefore to make a difference in the world around us, starting with where we are.

So, what could you and your church community do this Christmas, to reach out to others, to show them something of the love of God and to speak of the hope that we have through Jesus Christ?

What will you do to invite others to discover who Jesus is and how he can transform their lives, bringing hope to them in the midst of our sometimes scary world?

"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." So may we let God's light shine this Christmas, bringing hope to those around us.

"It is our faith that enables us to live not in fear but in hope."

RESOURCES – ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

As we approach the four weeks of Advent and prepare for Jesus’ birth at Christmas, we have compiled some great resources to help you, your family and friends, journey through the season.



FOLLOW THE STAR ADVENT CALENDAR

Follow the star, come join in the fun! Christmas is coming, the countdown’s begun...

The Follow the Star Advent Calendar is a fun and educational way for children and their families to mark Advent and celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas.

Part of the national Church’s Follow the Star: Join the Song Christmas campaign, featuring a fold-out, stand up crib scene, stickers for every day of Advent and a rhyming Nativity story sheet, it tells the story of how – and why – Jesus came to be born in Bethlehem.

Free accompanying daily activities are also available from the Church of England via www.cofe.io/AdventCalendar

Price: £ 3.99



THE REAL ADVENT CALENDAR

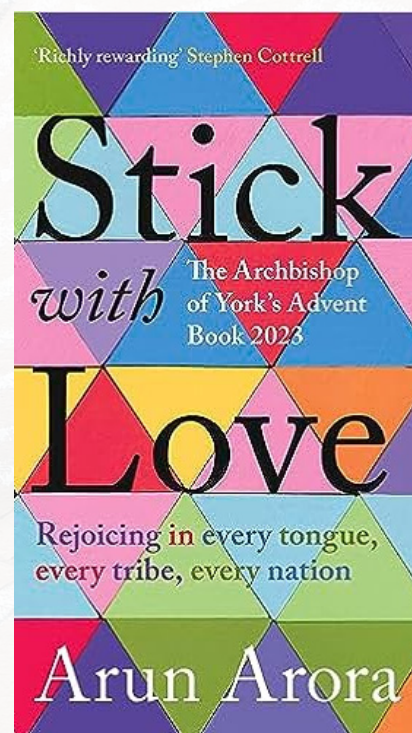
The UK’s only Fairtrade Advent calendar which comes with a free 24-page Christmas story-activity book and supports charitable causes.

With a daily Fairtrade Chocolate and a line of the Christmas story behind each of the 25 windows, the accompanying free book has a page for every day of Advent, expanding on the Christmas story and includes some fun challenges.

Palm oil free, with a recyclable box and tray, made, designed and produced in the UK, the Real Advent Calendar is a great way for parents and children to experience the Christmas story for 24 days and be challenged to do some good in the season.

Price: £4.50

www.meaningfulchocolate.co.uk/pages/real-advent-calendar



STICK WITH LOVE
Rt Rev Arun Arora
SPCK, £10.99

Written by the Rt Rev Arun Arora, Bishop of Kirkstall, ‘Stick with Love’ is the Archbishop of York’s official Advent book for 2023. Bishop Arun guides people through the season with daily readings, rich in reminders of the love of Christ that unites every tongue, tribe and nation in our diverse global church.

Filled with reflections on the lives of Christians from St John of the Cross to Stormzy, George Floyd to St Lucy of Syracuse, ‘Stick With Love’ spans the centuries and countries of the world telling the stories of the everyday saints, martyrs and mystics who light our advent way.

Combining memoir and accessible theology, the book concludes with a Christmas Eve reflection on Martin Luther King who once famously declared: “I must stick with love... hate is too great a burden to bear.”

At a time which increasingly feels dark and challenging, these stories offer light and hope reflecting on the lived experience of faith, its inspiring nature and the love of neighbour and of God which underpins each of these stories.



JOIN THE SONG: CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS
Richard Carter, Associate Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, London
www.chpublishing.co.uk Price: £0.99

In the nativity story of Jesus’ birth, we read how the shepherds were astonished to find the night sky filled with angels singing God’s praise.

This Christmas, you are invited to follow the star, journey to the manger, join the song, and come into the presence of Jesus Christ.

For each day from Christmas Eve to the Eve of Epiphany (5 January), find a short reading from the Bible, a reflection challenging you to see the Christmas story afresh, an invitation to wonder what this Christmas means in your own life, and a prayer to help you treasure this story in your heart.

From the start of Advent you can also receive daily reflections straight to your inbox to help you connect with this year’s call to ‘Join the Song’.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES



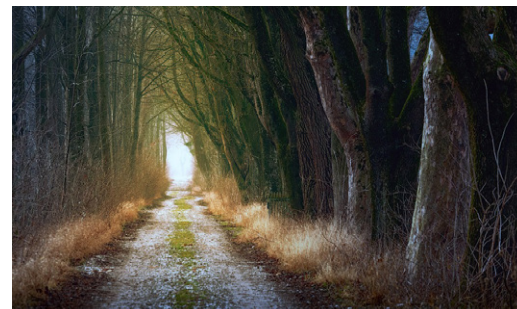
LUMINOUS MYSTERIES
at St Benedict's Centre, West Malling
6 DECEMBER, 10AM-3PM

Join Fr Michael Payne as he leads a day in which, through praying the Rosary, he helps those attending to encounter the luminous mysteries of the Advent Season. To register interest in the course please contact Chichi on bookings@stbenedictscentre.org or call on 01732 252651. Cost £25



CHRISTINGLE SERVICE
at Rochester Cathedral
9 DECEMBER, 2:30PM

A family friendly service open to all. Every child receives the gift of a Christingle with a candle to show Jesus is the light of the world. Why not make this Cathedral service part of your Christmas season? To find out more, contact Sarah Cabella on 01634 560000.



WALKING WITH JESUS
at St Benedict's Centre, West Malling
19 DECEMBER, 10AM-3PM

In preparation for Christmas, a reflective session to consider John the Baptist's proclamation of the coming Christ. Led by Margaret Wooding Jones. Cost for the day is £25.00 (pay on the day) which includes hot drinks and biscuits; please bring your own lunch. To book: bookings@stbenedictscentre.org



IT'S YOUR CALLING
at St Andrew, Paddock Wood
24 FEBRUARY 2024, 9:30am-3:30pm

It's Your Calling is aimed at those exploring where God may be calling them. It looks at the gifts that God has given us all and at the Biblical understanding of vocation. The day offers an opportunity to meet others on a similar quest and to take time to think what God's plan for you might be. For more information contact vocations@rochester.anglican.org



ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SERVICES

Advent Sunday 3 December
6:30pm Advent Carol Service and Procession

Saturday 9 December
12:30pm Christingle Service

Saturday 16 December
5:00pm Cathedral Choir Christmas Concert – Tickets online

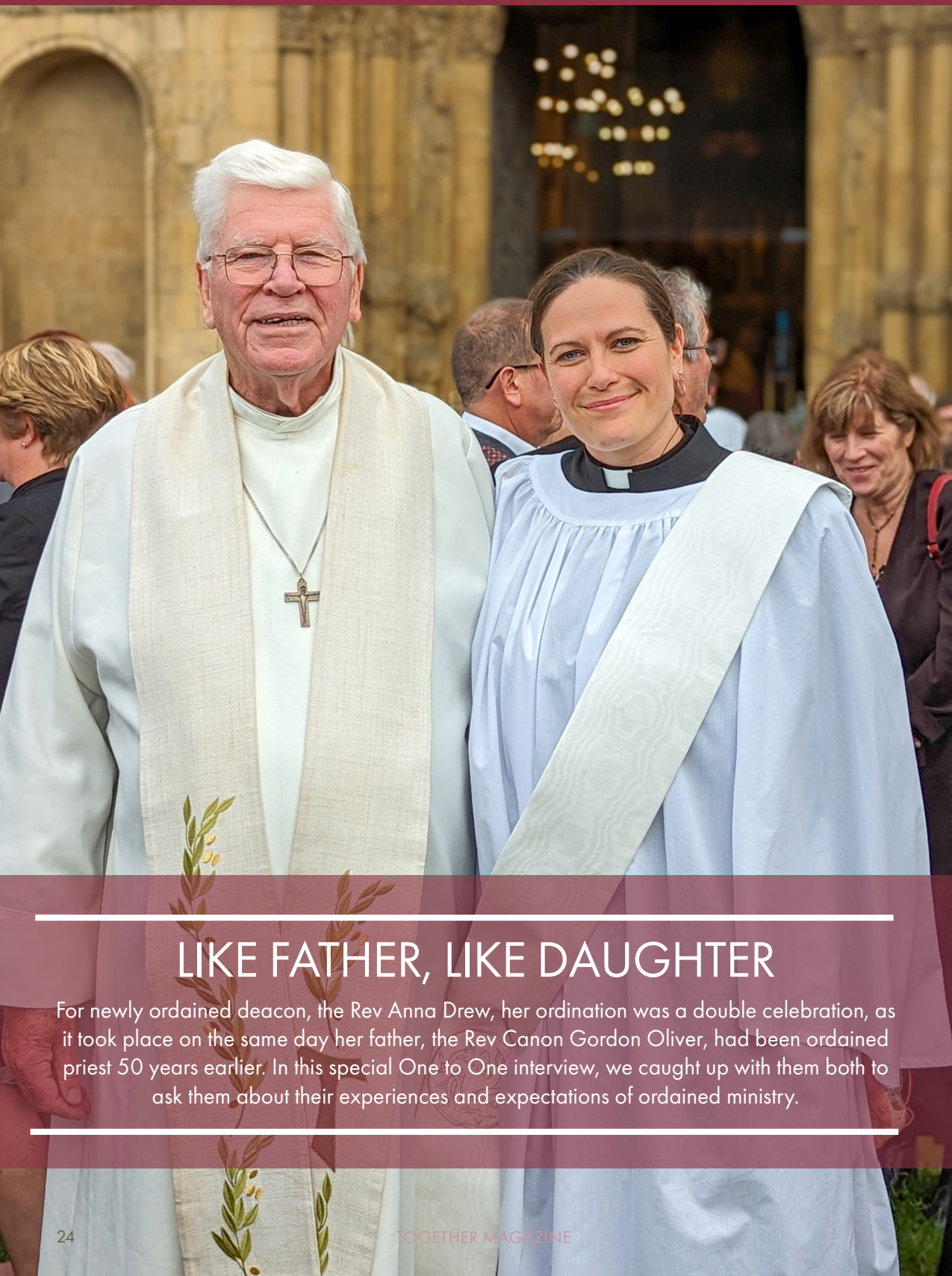
Friday 22 December
7:30pm Nine Lessons and Carols

Saturday 23 December
5:30pm Nine Lessons and Carols

Christmas Eve Sunday 24 December
3:00pm The Nativity Service
4:30pm Christmas Eve Carol Service
11:30pm The Eucharist of Christmas Night – Preacher The Dean

Christmas Day, Monday 25 December
8:00am Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer)
10:30am The Eucharist of Christmas Morning – Preacher The Bishop of Rochester

Visitors are encouraged to check the Cathedral website for opening times and any changes in the events schedule www.rochestercathedral.org



LIKE FATHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

For newly ordained deacon, the Rev Anna Drew, her ordination was a double celebration, as it took place on the same day her father, the Rev Canon Gordon Oliver, had been ordained priest 50 years earlier. In this special One to One interview, we caught up with them both to ask them about their experiences and expectations of ordained ministry.

Congratulations to you both! What did you think when you spotted the connection between the date?

Gordon – Well, I thought it was just a wonderful joyful ‘God-incidence’. It’s a lovely coming-together of our callings, and a huge surprise for me to see my 50th anniversary coming up. How on earth did that happen?

What are your memories of being a newly ordained priest?

Gordon – My first recollections were of being scared stiff! There I was, 24 years old with a brand-new dog collar, and everything seemed confusing. It was very much, ‘Help can I do this?’ Then joy in discovering that I could.

I was ordained in Bradford in 1972. I was on a large council estate. I came with a new degree in Theology and soon learned that it wasn’t much use! What was useful was learning to love people and to love the Lord at the same time, and in the same place.

Anna – I am definitely in the terror stage, yes! But excited too.

Did growing up with a dad who was a vicar help shape your faith?

Anna – I think faith has always been part of the picture for our family which has been lovely but in a fairly open way, where we can go, ‘Hang on a minute this doesn’t make sense...’ or ‘I don’t understand that...’. There’s been space for questions – which has been key to my exploration and growth in faith.

Gordon – I think it also means Anna has reason to be realistic about what ministry is like. It is joyful, it’s funny, it’s ridiculous, it’s sublime, it’s painful, it’s exhilarating. It’s all of those things.

Are there differences between being ordained now compared to 50 years ago?

Gordon – Well, the first and obvious difference is there were no women involved in the process at all when I was going through selection. All of the selectors and all of the ordinands were men, and there weren’t any women ordained in the Church of England for the first 15 years of my ordained ministry. Also, everybody was a lot younger. Nearly all of the men were single at the time when we went into selection and training. Now nearly everybody’s coming in midlife.

Anna – Where I trained at St Augustine’s College, at least half were training for self-supporting ministry with an expectation that they would carry on in their other commitments, whether that’s family commitments or a day job, so that’s a big change.

It means you’ve got people coming into the role having been solicitors, being teachers... and that brings with it a whole load of experience that’s very exciting and that can really enrich ministry.

So, has the nature of ministry changed a lot too?

Anna – I think our idea of the variety of ministry has changed, and that’s a positive. So, for example, a greater understanding of the role of chaplains in hospitals, and in secular workplaces like airports or shopping centres. It is quite a distinctive set of skills, but in the end, we still all need to be able to do pastoral work in parishes, lead services etc.

What have you learnt about ministry over the last five decades that you would want to pass on?

Gordon – First, I would say that this is God’s ministry not ours. We don’t minister alone we minister in fellowship with others. Some of the biggest mistakes I’ve made in ministry have been the times when I’ve tried to do it all by myself.

Also, that the centre of our ministry is the love of God in Jesus. If our ministry isn’t energized by love, it’s nothing at all because love has the capacity to bring freedom.

Anna – Yes, priests don’t save people, they don’t bring them into the Kingdom of God. God brings people into the Kingdom of God, and we’re invited to be partners and participate in that mission because God is unbelievably generous in letting us share that ministry. I think that is one of the most beautiful things about ministry.

• *Anna Drew is a communications professional who will be continuing her job as Director of Communications for the Diocese of Southwark, alongside taking up her ministry as curate at Holy Trinity Church, Twydall in Gillingham.*

• *Gordon Oliver is a retired member of clergy within Rochester Diocese. He has served in a diverse range of parishes settings, taught practical theology in seminaries, and has previously led the ministry and training department in the Diocese of Rochester.*



GOD KNOWS OUR STRENGTHS

We all have a part to play in helping create safer spaces, particularly within the church. Irene Dancer is the Parish Safeguarding Officer at St Giles' Church, Farnborough. It's a role she felt God was particularly calling her to do, based on her gifts and skills.

I've always been an educationalist at heart and will forever be a teacher, even though I'm now enjoying retirement.

I came to faith in my twenties while working in a Church of England school. Back then, I didn't know what faith was, but have subsequently come to believe that God knew where I needed to be at that particular time.

He knew I was searching for the missing puzzle piece in my life. I found it at that school, in the people who worked there and the way they lived their lives. I started to attend church and wanted to be part of a Christian community.

When I retired, I was approached to take on the role of Family and Children's Worker, including leading the Sunday school, and it didn't take me too long to decide, yes, I can do that. I knew it would give me the opportunity to use my organisational and teaching skills and experience to support families in church in the service of God.

One of the first things I asked when taking on the role was, "where's the Safeguarding Policy?" I was shown a piece of paper on a notice board but said, "OK, but where's the POLICY?"

Safeguarding just wasn't on the agenda then but, as a previous Deputy Head I knew it should be, and somehow, found myself appointed as the Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) for our two churches! Being the PSO isn't easy.

There are many challenges but my faith and the belief that this is the role God wants for me supports and sustains me. After all, what could be more important than the safety and welfare of children and vulnerable adults?

What is more important to God than our churches being places of safety and refuge? Only then can we truly be free to follow Him.

You could say, I've found my niche, in the roles I've taken on. That's true, but I don't think it's a coincidence that I've found myself doing these things. God knows us, our strengths and weaknesses, and he calls us to serve others:

"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received". (1 Peter 4:10)

In the roles I've taken on, I feel I am answering God's call.

"My faith and the belief that this is the role God wants for me supports and sustains me."



Diocese of *Rochester*
called together

A PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS

Emmanuel – God With Us

Be with us this Christmas and transform our struggles,
our hopes and our fears with the light of your love.

Amen.

Take from Follow the Star: Join the Song
12 Days of Reflections for Christmas and the New Year

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