

TOGETHER

The FREE magazine from the Diocese of Rochester | Issue 23 | November 2024 - January 2025

CHANGE | SERVE | GROW

COVER STORY: ORDINATIONS AT ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL PAGE 4



FIND STILLNESS
THIS
CHRISTMAS

EVERYDAY FAITH:
A FARMER'S
STORY

GOD'S PLAN
FOR YOU

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Diocese of *Rochester*
called together



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With the days shortening and a chill in the air, it seems right to take a moment to stop and reflect.

The national church's Calm and Bright Advent and Christmas campaign encourages just that by inviting us to find moments of stillness in the busyness of the season – find out more in our **Centre-spread**.

Our Everyday Faith (pg 26) contribution also picks up on the theme of stillness and waiting as Richard, a farmer in the Weald of Kent, talks about how patience in the Lord is at the heart of his faith and work.

In the UK, many of our young people are experiencing long waits for treatment for a mental health issue. In **Focus On** (pg 16) we meet the Christian charity in Bromley working to building resilience among children at the local church school.

Plus, we meet the Taekwondo instructor (pg 12) who believes God is waiting for each of us to notice how he is calling us to live out our faith day to day.

Finally, in our **Big Issue** (pg 18), Bishop Simon asks how much longer we need to wait for men to call out male violence and misogyny against women.

Go well.

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SUPPORT THE POVERTY AND HOPE APPEAL 2024-2025

Help tackle the causes and effects of poverty in different parts of the world.



For more information visit:
www.rochester.anglican.org and search for Poverty and Hope



ORDINATION JOY

A former investment banker, and a Taekwondo instructor, were among the sixteen people ordained deacon or priest in Rochester Cathedral on 28 September.

Friends, family, and supporters of the candidates gathered in the Cathedral - and online - to offer their

prayers and good wishes for those being ordained, all of whom have spent many years exploring, discerning, and testing God's call in their lives.

Next year the ordinations will take place in June during a season in the Church called Pentecost.

Meet some of new deacons on page 12



NEW SENSORY CHURCH AT SLADE GREEN

In an exciting new development, St Augustine's Parish Church, Slade Green has launched a new Sensory Church. Designed to include children with neurodiverse abilities, it offers them, their families, and siblings, a relaxed, non-judgmental environment. Taking place one Thursday a month, from 3.15pm to 5.15pm, visitors are free to come and go during those times, adding to its informal nature.



NEW EXTENSION FOR ST MARGARET

For the first time in its 700-year history, St Margaret's Church in Horsmonden is enjoying running water, as it celebrates the opening of its new kitchen and toilet extension. The improvements mean the Grade I listed church has the modern facilities it needs to allow the church team to extend more easily welcome and hospitality to the community and visitors.



BISHOP BLESSES NEW SCHOOL EXTENSION IN STROOD

Bishop Simon Burton-Jones, the Bishop of Tonbridge and Chair of the Rochester Diocesan Board of Education, was delighted to join pupils and staff at St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, Strood, for the opening and blessing of their new extension. The new building marks the final stage in the school's transition from an infant into a primary school.



LIFESAVING ADDITION TO GREENHITHE

St Mary, Greenhithe is delighted to have obtained a public defibrillator on its site. The lifesaving equipment has been made possible thanks to generous support from the Dartford Lions Club, the KCC Combined Members Grant, Greenhithe Brownies and many individuals who have contributed financially.



BISHOP VISITS FORMER HISTORIC HOME

In an historic visit, Bishop Jonathan Gibbs, the Bishop of Rochester, returned to the former Bishop's Palace in Bromley as a new future for the Civic Centre site continues to progress.

Bishop Jonathan was received at Bishop's Palace by the Mayor and Mayoress of Bromley.

The visit explored the history of Bromley and particularly of the Grade II listed Palace, which was once home to former bishops of Rochester.

The bishops' connection to Bromley dates back to the eighth century and is mentioned in the Domesday

Book of 1086, which includes an entry citing the Bishop when there were around 200 residents in the area.

Following the visit, Bishop Jonathan said:

"There was much fascinating local history discussed and I am pleased that we could spend some time reflecting on the importance of this."

"The Diocese of Rochester remains as committed as ever to supporting the communities in the Borough of Bromley and we value our partnership with the Council very highly."

COURSE SUPPORTS VOLUNTEERS IN THEIR MINISTRY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Fourteen people have graduated from a course to equip and inspire them in their ministry with young people.

Called *Catalyst*, the course was run by the Diocese's Children and Young People Team in conjunction with Ridley Hall theological college in Cambridge.

The course was open to anyone involved in children's and youth work in their church, whether a volunteer in

a toddler group, assistant at a youth club, occasional helper at a Sunday morning children's session or a paid children's and young people's worker

Cheryl Trice, Children and Young People Mission and Ministry Team Lead for the Diocese said:

"We wish them well and congratulate them in this achievement and pray that God blesses their ministry as part of God's vision."





ANGELA SCOTT AND JULIA BURTON-JONES AT CHRIST CHURCH CHISLEHURST

TEN YEARS OF WALKING SIDE BY SIDE WITH OLDER PEOPLE IN KENT

What can we do to stop people living with dementia being excluded from church and community life? This was the question asked in 2014 sparking a project in Rochester Diocese, that has marked its 10-year anniversary this Autumn.

Called Anna Chaplaincy, this pioneering ministry works with older people of strong, little, or no faith, to ensure their spiritual and pastoral needs are met.

It also supports those with dementia and their carers to make sure they are made welcome in churches.

Rochester and Canterbury Dioceses were the first to embrace Anna Chaplaincy as a diocesan ministry and have been building teams across Kent since the first group was commissioned in 2017.

It all began in 2015 when, thanks to grant-funding, the Diocese appointed Julia Burton-Jones as Anna Chaplaincy lead. From there, Julia worked with a diocesan steering group and Anna Chaplaincy pioneer (and former broadcaster) Debbie Thrower at Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF Ministries), to establish this new ministry.

Now, 10 years on, this national ecumenical network now numbers 400 Anna Chaplains, 60 of whom are in Kent.

To celebrate the milestone and to raise awareness of the wide range of Anna Chaplaincy taking place across the Diocese, Julia set out on a mission to visit ten forms of Anna Chaplaincy in ten days throughout September.

"I just felt this would be a good way to honour the wonderful work of Anna Chaplains and reflect my role in walking side by side with them in their ministry," says Julia.

During her walk, Julia spent time with Anna Chaplains in Sevenoaks, Hoo St Werburgh, Chislehurst, Ramsgate, Romney Marsh, Downe, Rochester, Maidstone, Deal, and Darford.

Some were among the first Anna Chaplains commissioned in Kent, others began their ministry just this year.

As part of her challenge, Julia visited care homes where Anna Chaplains are supporting the entire community – staff, residents and visitors – by spending time listening to residents' stories and leading much appreciated services.

She also heard about Holiday at Home events, community cafés and lunches with a dementia inclusive focus, age-friendly midweek services, and the precious work of visiting older people in their own homes.

Many Anna Chaplains are also involved in end

"I just don't think we realise how much the older people we support will be an encouragement and a blessing to us as well."

The Rev Anne Bourne



JULIA BURTON-JONES, JOHN AND KIM CURLE WITH BROMLEY MAYOR AND MAYORESS DAVID AND ANN-MARIE JEFFERYS

of life care and funerals, which they consider a tremendous privilege.

One of the Anna Chaplains Julia met is the Rev Anne Bourne from Sevenoaks.

“My interest in this ministry was sparked by caring for my dad through his vascular dementia,” says Anne.

Her current congregation is ageing and, while many remain fit and active in their 80s and 90s, she says others live with the challenges of long-term conditions.

“I support parishioners who need full-time care and are placed many miles from home and the relatives who care for them. I find the regular services I lead in the local care homes are a highlight of my ministry.”

Continuing to speak warmly of those older people she connects with, Anne says, “I just don’t think we realise how much the older people we support will be an encouragement and a blessing to us as well’.

For many Anna Chaplains there are common

challenges facing some of the oldest and frailest people in Kent, as Julia discovered during her walk.

“Loneliness is experienced by many,” she says, “with Anna Chaplains working with other agencies, such as community wardens, social prescribers, and older people’s organisations, to reach those who were most cut off from their community”.

Loss and bereavement loom large too, and Julia reflected that her conversations with the Anna Chaplains made clear the need for a trusted companion to come alongside people expressing the fear and despair that later life can bring.

Indeed, being alongside older people at these times can be painful.

For Chislehurst-based Anna Chaplain, Angela Scott, walking through the countryside as part of Julia’s walk, she spoke of the sadness of being alongside older friends as their health declines, and her grief when they die.

“One friend asked me to pray that her life would end soon”.



HELEN SANDERSON AND BRIDGET NIGHTINGALE ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL

Describing how she coped with the impact of such a conversation, Angela said:

“I really valued the support and friendship of the Bromley Anna Chaplaincy hub to help me in reflecting on, and learning from, these challenging chaplaincy encounters.”

For Margaret Hollands, Lead for Anna Chaplaincy in Rochester Archdeaconry, and based in Hoo, the way Anna Chaplaincy has and is growing, is testament to the real need in the community, and the prayer and commitment of all involved:

“Having been ‘in at the beginning’ of Rochester’s journey, it is so positive to see where we are now and how far we have come from those tentative early days.”

And Julia would agree: ‘It was inspiring to get a sense of just how much valuable work Anna Chaplains are doing in Kent to enrich the spiritual lives of older people and what is clear is that there is a great need for this chaplaincy now and into the future.’



JULIA BURTON-JONES AND THE REV CANON MANDY BROWN WITH MANAGER DEMI AT THE BRIDGE CARE HOME DARTFORD



THE REV BECKY WILLOUGHBY

GOD HAS A PLAN FOR YOU

For those who have been newly ordained into the diocese this year, working out God’s call in their lives has taken several years of exploration and testing. Now, at the start of this next phase of their vocation journey, they are encouraging everyone to think about how God may be calling them to live out their faith every day.

“I think everyone, if you’re a Christian, and you have a strong faith, you take that into the place wherever you are,” says Becky Willoughby, one of the seven women and men ordained as deacon this year.

She agrees that, while some Christians may be called to ordained ministries, or licensed lay ministry, all Christians are called to be witnesses and disciples in their own home, school, workplace and local church.

Indeed, becoming a vicar was not something Becky originally thought would be for her.

“I said, ‘I am not holy enough for all of that! It’s not for me.’”

However, she was encouraged to attend an It’s your calling day, run by the Diocese’s Vocations team, and that is when things changed.

“There was a great video, some great speakers and I just felt pinned to the back of the chair, and I came out with this strange feeling that I wanted to do something in ministry.”

Now ordained a deacon, Becky will be supporting herself during her ongoing ministry training by continuing her job as a Taekwondo instructor. Some people were surprised that the two could go together.

“I have had a couple of people recently say, so you’re going to be changing your black belt for a white collar.

“Having pondered on this I was like, well no, because a black belt isn’t something that you do and being ordained isn’t something that you do, it’s a journey and a process to becoming something.”

We all have unique gifts, talents, and life experiences that God is interested in and values. For Carol Bridge, her ordination as deacon has followed a lifetime of serving God in variety of ways:

“I’ve been on the Parochial Church Council (PCC), in the choir, been a Churchwarden, as well as a Licensed Lay Minister.

She says, despite all of this, she was still left with the question of whether there was something more she could do? The answer came one evening, when a trusted friend asked whether she had ever thought about ordination.

“It would have been so easy to have said no, don’t be silly, but when it was confirmed by an array of unsought affirmation that God was calling and had been calling me for a while, I prayed, listened and followed.

She hopes her experience can be an encouragement to others to listen out for God’s voice:

“I believe God calls everyone in a variety of ways with a variety of ministries regardless of what, who or where they come from.

She adds: “Listen to the richness of the tale and know that everything is possible. God knows each and every one of us!”

FIVE IDEAS FOR EXPLORING HOW GOD MAY BE CALLING YOU:

Pray... With an open mind and an open heart, ask God how you might become all that he intends you to be and how best you can serve him.

Reflect... On your unique gifts. What makes you special? What gifts has God given you for growing his kingdom? Are you a good listener, someone with caring skills, keen to share your faith, creative, a natural leader?

Talk... to your vicar, your family and friends. Those who know you well may be able to see how God might be calling you. They might have spotted it a long time ago and have been waiting for you to recognise it yourself.

Come... to an It’s Your Calling day. These are run by the Diocese’s team of Vocations Advisers in different venues throughout the year. You’ll have a chance to meet people on a similar quest and have time and space to reflect on what exciting plans God has in store for you. See page 22 for the next date

Explore how God may be calling you. SCAN the code to find out more



Follow The Star

CALM and BRIGHT

Follow the Star: Calm and Bright

December can feel pretty hectic, with lots of social events, Christmas presents to buy, a never-ending to-do list, and the pressure to create the 'perfect' Christmas.

Offering an opportunity to find peace during this busy time, the Church of England's Advent and Christmas theme this year is Follow the Star: Calm and Bright.

Drawing on the world-famous carol, Silent Night, and through a range of resources, we are invited to dwell in the still centre of the Christmas story where, "All is calm, all is bright ..."

Here are five ways you can get involved:

1

Sign up to receive Advent and Christmas reflections direct to your inbox. Each daily e-mailing will offer a Bible reading, a short reflection, and a practical challenge, as well as prayers linked to weekly themes. The reflections are also available in a printed booklet. Scan the QR to find out more.



2

Download the Everyday Faith app: Read and listen to the Advent and Christmas reflections through the Everyday Faith app, the new daily devotional app from the Church of England. Scan the QR to find out more.



3

Watch Christmas episodes from the Cheeky Pandas: For those with younger children, explore the Calm and Bright theme with the Cheeky Pandas animation series, including songs and Bible stories to help you engage your children with the Christmas story. Visit: www.cheekypandas.com/cheeky-pandas-series/#specials

4

Advent calendar: The Calm and Bright Advent Calendar is designed to help children and families prepare calmly and joyfully to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas. Each day from 1 December there is a door to open and a picture to reveal. On the back of each door, you'll find a daily challenge, as well as a QR code to unlock online activities. Visit: www.chpublishing.co.uk/features/follow-the-star

5

Visit a Church near you: Whether Christmas will be a time of joy or difficulty for you this year, your local church will be delighted to welcome you to an activity or service to help you find a moment of peace and encounter with the newborn Jesus. Visit: www.achurchnearyou.com



MARYSE BRUNEAU AND BARBARA WILSON

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN BROMLEY

According to The Children’s Society, Good Childhood Report (2022), in the last three years, the likelihood of a young person having a mental health problem has increased by fifty per cent. In the face of such a mental health challenge, the Christian family support charity, Welcare - supported by local churches in Bromley – is working hard to build up the resilience of young people and their families.

“It is so important that children feel supported and that they have a voice.” Says Barbara Wilson, Child & Family Support Services Manager for the Christian charity, Welcare.

“That they learn how to understand their own feelings and develop new strategies when dealing with stress and transitions. And most importantly, it is about giving children time, attention and respect.”

She’s speaking as she prepares to lead a 10-week Welcare initiative called CapeAbility to build the emotional health and resilience of children in key stage 2 at Parish Primary School in Bromley.

The sessions allow children to work through, and build coping mechanisms for, any worries they may be having, from friendship issues to things they might be going through at home.

The aim of Welcare is to provide both practical and

emotional support to help children and their families to overcome a range of challenges that can be difficult to navigate alone.

With an extensive background in social work, Barbara sees her role as both a calling and a privilege, believing that even small steps toward change can have a profound impact.

For her, moments of transformation are deeply fulfilling, often supported by prayer and her belief in resilience for the families and children she serves.

The sense of security and empowerment offered by the sessions becomes the foundation for emotional healing and growth, helping children develop confidence and a sense of self-worth.

It’s not the first time the course has been run at this Church of England primary school, with the partnership between Welcare and school being one that Maryse Bruneau, Family Support Worker at Parish Primary School, says is invaluable.

“We get so many positive comments from parents and the children involved that they have been able to form new friendships, and are generally happier more self-confident individuals.”

She says that the mental health and wellbeing needs of pupils has become even more acute in recent years.

“There has definitely been an increase in anxiety and a decline in the resilience of our young people.

“We have seen an increase in the waiting list for a school counsellor and parents regularly asking for their children to receive support.

She adds:

“Covid and just the challenge of the modern world generally has all had a part play in this.”

The partnership with Welcare is part of a full package of support the school offers to improve the wellbeing of pupils and their families.

A weekly café morning includes talks from outside speakers on a range of parenting and welfare issues, and there is also a foodbank that people can access.

Maryse says the key is working with outside agencies.

“We are great believers in bringing outside experts like Welcare in to help us. Since COVID my workload has increased and the work Welcare does particularly is critical.

“Children that once felt isolated have, through their support, changed drastically, repaired relationships and developed their self-esteem.”

For Anna Khan, CEO of Welcare, the charity’s Christian roots and support from local Christians and churches is crucial to all they do.

“Welcare has been delivering the social mission of the Church for 130 years by striving to give children the best possible start in life.

“Many of the churches in the three deaneries of Bromley, Beckenham and Orpington support us financially and through prayer, for which we are so grateful.”

“All of this support” says, Anna, “is encouraged and nurtured by a wonderful team of volunteer Parish Reps, whose dedication provides the vital link between the work charity and churches locally.”

With the scale and complexity of issues facing society today, it is clear that partnership working between churches, schools and other expert organisations, like that expressed between Welcare and the school, will continue to be a vital way for Christians to respond in safe and practical ways to social issues, in order to be the ‘hands and feet’ of Jesus in their communities.

If you would like to know more about the work of Welcare and how you can support them visit:

www.welcare.org



BARBARA WILSON

DID YOU KNOW?

- Welcare was found by the former Bishop of Rochester, Randall Davidson, and his wife Edith who founded the Diocesan Association for the Care of Friendless Girls in 1894
- The charity pioneered work with young, unmarried mothers and their babies, combining social action with moral welfare work.
- Throughout the decades their work has evolved to a focus on preventative work, life skills and practical support across the South London boroughs and East Surrey.
- The Annual Service of Thanksgiving for the work of Welcare will take place at Bromley Parish Church at 11.30am on Friday 15 November 2024. Everyone is very welcome to attend

SPEAK OUT TO HELP OUT – TIME FOR MEN TO CHALLENGE SEXISM

How many of us have a memory of not challenging another person when they said something out of turn about someone else when we should have? As we approach White Ribbon Day and the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, Bishop Simon Burton-Jones, the Bishop of Tonbridge, says it's time for men to speak out about sexism against women.



It's said that nagging is the repetition of unpalatable truths. The same could be said of statistics.

In the year to March 2023, the police recorded 3,000 crimes of violence against women and girls every day. I'll do the maths for you. That's two every minute. And that's only reported crimes, which are often the tip of the iceberg.

Since 2018, there has been a 37% increase in reported crimes of violence against women and girls.

The whole thing is getting worse. A lot worse.

It isn't obvious why this is so. Thanks to social media, the online world has become utterly toxic for women with any public profile. Misogyny has found a loud hailer on social media; a concerted attempt to frighten women and drive them out of the public world. But it can't all be put down to the poison online seeping offline. Because this is real world violence.

Perhaps females are more willing to report violence against them, but if so, this advance only starts to reveal the depth of the problem. A million recorded violent crimes a year against females is a million too many.

If the culture has changed for the worse, it can also change for the better. This change can't be made quickly and it can't be left to government and law enforcement, however important that is. We have to contribute to culture change in a thousand small ways.

November 25 is White Ribbon Day, launching 16 days of global action against gender based violence. And White Ribbon has a special focus. It asks men to make a pledge to never use, excuse or remain silent about men's violence against women.

Too often, the issue of violence against women has been framed as a problem for women to solve when all the time it is men who have generated this trauma. As this year's theme says: it starts with men.

To make the White Ribbon pledge is not about men riding to the rescue of helpless women in another case of patronising chauvinism. It is about men working together to draw the poison of gender based violence and the culture of misogyny in which it is formed.

And here's the thing: maybe this White Ribbon pledge is going to cost some of us because it asks men not to

excuse or remain silent about men's violence against women. In 2024, we have seen one high profile case in which a famous and wealthy man abused his position of power to commit horrible acts of sexual violence against hundreds of women in his employment while the men around him kept quiet, presumably because it was personally advantageous for them to do so.

The pledge must have an edge if it is to cut deeply into places of male entitlement.

As Jesus' life drew to a close, his friend Mary poured some expensive perfume over his feet and wiped it with her hair. She was instantly judged by at least one man for having wasted a lot of money that could have been spent elsewhere. It was a timeless example of a woman's actions being labelled by a man as emotional and unstable – not rational.

And Jesus' response?

Leave her alone, he said.

If you're tempted to think that Jesus has nothing to say about men's demeaning attitudes and violent conduct towards women today, think again.

Leave her alone, he tells us.

If you're a man, please join with me in making the White Ribbon pledge today:

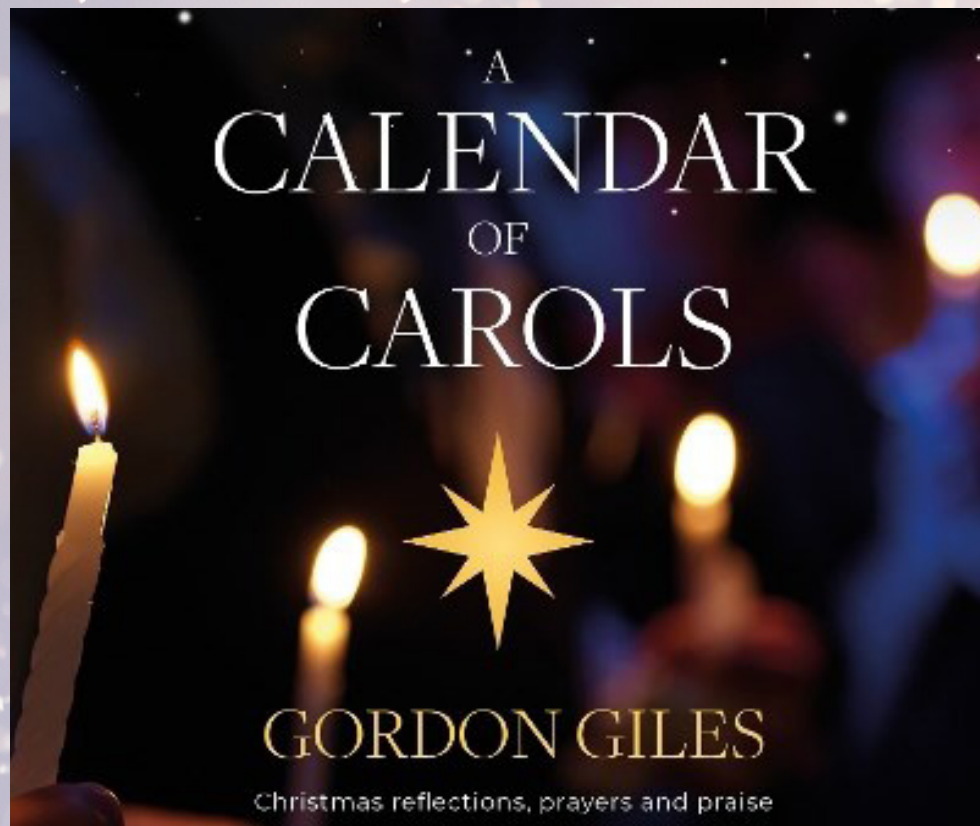
I promise to never use, excuse or remain silent about men's violence against women.

Because women are created free and in the image of God.

"Too often, the issue of violence against women has been framed as a problem for women to solve when all the time it is men who have generated this trauma."

RESOURCES – CHRISTMAS AND ADVENT

As we look ahead to the seasons of Advent and Christmas, check out these resources to help offer some fresh insight.



A CALENDAR OF CAROLS, CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS, PRAYERS AND SONGS OF PRAISE

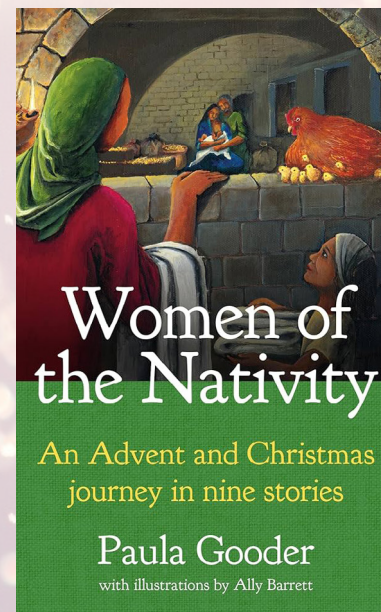
by Gordon Giles
ISBN 978 1 80039 279 3
£12.99

Carols and Christmas hymns inspire affection and capture our imagination for they often retell (or reinterpret) the gospel accounts of the incarnation – God coming in human form.

Gordon Giles is Canon Chancellor of Rochester Cathedral. In his latest book, he explores a carol or Christmas hymn each day, telling its story, explaining its resonances and background, discussing the musical and lyrical aspects and offering spiritual insights drawing on the connections among these various strands of meaning and message.

Divided into 25 short chapters, each concluding with a specially written prayer, A Calendar of Carols can be used either as an Advent calendar up to Christmas, or more flexibly over the Christmas season and into January.

It's perfect for personal use and is also a beautifully presented gift book.



WOMEN OF THE NATIVITY

An Advent and Christmas Journey in Nine Stories
ISBN 9781781404607
by Paula Gooder

Following on from her bestselling book, Women of Holy Week, Dr Paula Gooder uses her extensive biblical expertise and storytelling skills to recreate the events of the nativity; from the promise of a future people to Sarah, to the presentation in the temple and the encounter with Anna, the prophet.

The story is told from the perspective of nine women in all including Mary, Elizabeth, Rachel, and others whom scripture records or tradition has imagined, such as the innkeeper's wife.

Each story is accompanied by a painting by the priest-artist, Ally Barrett. Dr Paula Gooder is a writer and lecturer in Biblical Studies

THE REAL ADVENT CALENDAR

£5.50
Available online and in some church shops



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

The Calendar is a fun way for parents, grandparents and Godparents to share the Christmas story.

With a new design for 2024, there is a Fairtrade Chocolate and a line of the Christmas story behind each of the 25 windows. The free book has a page for every day of Advent, expanding on the Christmas story and includes some fun challenges.

Visit the website to view the calendar, as well to explore other products in the Advent and Christmas range:
www.meaningfulchocolate.co.uk

UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

NOVEMBER

- 12** THE JAMES TAYLOR QUARTET
- 13** BBC BIG BAND
- 14** THE JASON REBELLO TRIO
- 15** LAURENCE COTTLE BIG BAND
PLAY TOWER OF POWER
- 16** TIM GARLAND'S LIGHTHOUSE TRIO
FEATURING THE BRITTEN SINFONIA STRINGS

JAZZ & BLUES FESTIVAL
at Rochester Cathedral
12-16 NOVEMBER

A week of jazz and blues music by some of the greatest musicians working today. Starring the BBC Big Band, Jason Rebello Trio, the Laurence Cottle Big Band, James Taylor Quartet, Tim Garland's Lighthouse Trio and the Britten Sinfonia. For more information visit www.rochestercathedral.org



CHRISTINGLE SERVICE
at Rochester Cathedral
14 DECEMBER, 12:30PM.

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.



ADVENT QUIET DAY
at St Benedict's Centre, West Malling
14 DECEMBER, 10AM-3PM

On this Quiet day, spend time considering hearing those words for ourselves in our own times of darkness and light. Led by the Rev Sue Smith. Suggested donation of £15-£25. For more information and how to book contact bookings@stbenedictscentre.org.



IT'S YOUR CALLING
Various venues
8 FEBRUARY and 17 MAY 2025

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

1 December 3:15pm – 4:15pm
Advent Carol Service and Procession

7-8 December 12:30pm and 3pm
Dickens Festival Carol Services

14 December 5:00pm – 7:00pm
Christmas Carol Concert (Ticketed event - charges apply)

14 December 12:30pm – 1:30pm
Christingle Service

19 December 7:15pm – 9:45pm
Handel's Messiah at Rochester Cathedral (Ticketed event - charges apply)

20 December 7:30pm – 8:30pm
A Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols

21 December 5:30pm – 7:00pm
A Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols

22 December 2:30pm – 4:00pm
Children's Nativity Service

24 December 3:15pm – 4:30pm
Christmas Eve Carol Service

24 December 11:30pm
The Eucharist of Christmas Night

25 December 8am- 8:30am
Christmas Day Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer)

25 December 10:30am – 11:30am
The Eucharist of Christmas Morning

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





TALKING MONEY: STEPHEN SMITH

The financial contribution parishes make to support the cost of mission and ministry across the area of the Diocese is vital. As the main source of income – the Church does not receive any Government funding - it's a partnership that Stephen Smith, the new Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, hugely appreciates and is looking forward to supporting.

Can you tell us a little about your role and what it involves?

My role is about supporting the senior leadership of the Diocese in advancing the shared diocesan vision to change, serve, and grow, as we seek to bring about the Kingdom of God in the communities we serve. It's also to ensure that the diocesan leadership effectively manages the finances of the Diocese, and to inspire confidence across our churches in that stewardship.

Why did you feel particularly called to this voluntary role?

I sat as a panel member on the Chote report which was commissioned by the Archbishops' Council to examine the national Church's grant programme to dioceses. The report concluded that growth is possible and so I see this role as an exciting opportunity for me to use my experience and skills to contribute to that growth here in Rochester Diocese.

What have you noticed so far?

I sense there is a real energy and vision for the Diocese among the leadership team here. Like them, I am committed to helping parishes to flourish and enable them in all they are doing on the ground. Some of the work I know that is underway in parishes to connect with their communities is phenomenal and is proving so fruitful for the local church family, as well as those they serve.

What's your experience of being a Christian in such a competitive sector like merges and acquisitions?

I agree it is a competitive sector. However, the Lord says there are two commandments: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind. And love your neighbour as you would yourself.' The extension of this is: 'Do unto others as you would have others do to you.' This is what I have always tried to apply to my work. Really, it's that my word is my bond.

Were you brought up in a Christian family?

No. I came to faith later in life through my wife who is the daughter of a vicar. Never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit! I was confirmed at 44 and, at first, I would say my faith was rather superficial. However, it has deepened. I find that the Lord is closest when you need him most.

Do you think there is a tendency for Christians to feel uncomfortable talking about money?

Yes, I do. It's understandable because the early Church and Acts is all about giving worldly goods away. However, to retain and maintain both the people and physical fabric of the Church, you need money, so we do need to talk about it.

But doesn't the Church have lots of money?

It is true that, historically, the Church has significant wealth. However, the Church - and this includes dioceses like ours - has significant obligations too in terms of sustaining clergy and other ministry, while being wholly reliant on the generosity of parishes.

Is there an answer to that?

Well, it's partly why the change, serve, grow vision that is being developed in this Diocese is so exciting. It is an ambitious, hope-filled plan that we can all get behind and, through the generosity of our giving, we can bring about God's Kingdom.

What are you reading at the moment?

'Tales of a Country Parish' by Colin Heber Percy. He started to write reflections in lock down that came to be shared with an increasingly wide circle of people. He's incredibly well-read and this is just a beautiful collection of thoughts and meditations.

Is there anyone who has particularly inspired you?

My mother. I was quite a late developer in terms of reading. She got me doing my times tables too. She never gave up on me.

How good do you think you would be on a desert island?

I would be a disaster. I am also a type 1 diabetic and so my diet is quite specific so I might not last long!

Do you have any hobbies?

Reading and watching sport – particularly cricket. I'm a Test Match Special type of guy.

What's your idea of a perfect day?

A walk with my wife over the ridge to Penshurst. When you get to the top on a summer's day, the view is stunningly beautiful.



WAITING ON THE LORD

Richard Hamlyn, along with his wife Sal, his father (80), and his son (26), live and work at Westwood Farm, in the heart of the Weald of Kent. It's been their family farm for five generations. Working in agriculture can sometimes feel like a brutal occupation and the family draw on their Christian faith to see them through.

My wife Sal, and I, have a strong Christian faith, understanding we are reliant on the Lord for our needs each day.

My day starts with a time of early prayer and bible reading ... usually at the kitchen table having my first cup of tea of the day – somewhere between 4.45 am and 5.30 am.

Days when this doesn't happen, days when I rush into the day without spending time committing the day to the Lord, those are the days when I feel stressed and anxious.

Prayer is vital. It has to underpin all we do, and without it we are lost.

There are times of the year when I'm working from 5 am until 10pm, with meals taken on the go typically sitting on a tractor, or on the phone ordering a spare part for a piece of machinery that has broken down.

August and September are the busiest months as we work hard to harvest the crops (wheat, barley, maize), and then prepare the ground for next years' crops.

As well as busyness, there is also a lot of patient, waiting required in agriculture. We've found we have to rely fully on the Lord for the gift of patience because, I can work all the hours of the day, but my crops will not flourish unless the Lord sends the sun when I need crops to ripen for harvest, or the rain when they need moisture.

When we sow next year's crops into the darkness of the ground in the Autumn, I am reminded how there

are times in life which feel dark and hopeless. As the planted seed in the ground strengthens in that dark place, germinating into a seed which then bursts through the ground into daylight... so the times in our lives which can feel bleak and incredibly difficult may also be times of blessing as we rely more deeply on God.

Times in the darkness, whilst personally never welcome, we know can be times of preparation for what is to come, times of strengthening, times of waiting on the Lord.

There was a year when the crops were failing, we had prolonged heat and no rain. I watched as a year's work withered and died in the fields. It was heart breaking.

Sal found me with my head in my hands crying at the kitchen table very early one morning. She said we needed to walk round our fields and pray over them, praying for rain. This felt a tad futile ... and a bit depressing walking round fields full of withered crops, or seeds that hadn't even germinated due to lack of rain. But we did.

We walked round the fields and we prayed. And the Lord sent rain that day ... he sent it specifically on the fields we had prayed round, miraculously those crops revived with the rain and we had a good harvest.

This doesn't always happen, but it reminded us both of the need to pray, to rely on God, and to trust him with our family, our farm, and our future.



Diocese of *Rochester*
called together

A PRAYER

As we approach Advent and Christmas, so we pray

O God of peace,
on whom our souls wait in silence;
renew in our hearts an inner stillness,
as we seek to treasure your Word
made flesh in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Prayer taken from *'Follow the Star: Calm and Bright'*,
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