TOGETHER

The FREE magazine from the Diocese of Rochester | Issue 31 | November 2026 - January 2027

CHANGE | SERVE | GROW

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‘YOU ARE NOT ALONE’ A SURVIVOR’S MESSAGE

CELEBRATE THE REAL GIFT OF CHRISTMAS

BISHOP SIMON: AI: FRIEND OR FOE?

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There is much taking place across the Diocese to celebrate and give thanks for, which we do in this edition of Together.

Head to **Focus On** to discover some of the early signs of the growth and impact happening on the ground in parishes, thanks to investment through the Called Together vision, for parish Community Pioneers and new colleagues available to offer support to parishes (pg 12).

In Chatham, we meet the church seeing faith deepen in their community by simply listening and saying 'yes' to what God is calling them to.

Plus, we meet the Children and Families minister in Bromley helping churches offer welcome to those with autism and other neurodiversity. (pg 16)

Offering welcome in church includes how we pay attention to keeping people safe and responding well to those who are victims and survivors of abuse. Our **Everyday Faith** (pg26) shares the powerful and brave testimony of one survivor of church abuse who has chosen to engage with Rochester Diocese to encourage others to find help and support.

Please take care of yourself as you read this and if you need support, visit the Safeguarding pages of the Diocesan website.

We also look ahead to the seasons of Advent and Christmas, with lots of resources (pg 20) and ideas for how you can get ready to experience the real gift of Christmas (**centerspread**) this year.

Go well.

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ECO CONFERENCE OFFERS PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR PARISHES

The Dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester's joint Eco Conference took place at Rochester Cathedral in September.

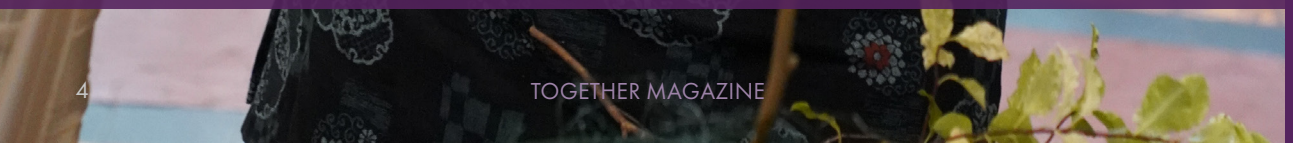
Over 120 people from across both dioceses came together to learn, share and connect on how to care for God's creation.

Organised by the Diocesan Net Zero Team, the packed half-day took place during Creationtide, a season in the Church calendar during September, that offers a time to see, reflect, and respond to God's call in our lives to care for his beautiful creation.

Speakers included Dr Canon Ruth Valerio, climate activist and theologian, who talked about the themes in her new book, *How to survive a world in crisis.*

The morning also offered a wide range of interactive workshops including sustainable floristry, compassionate farming, caring for creation in your church setting, and two interactive workshops led by some of the Diocese's young people.

Find out more about the diocese's commitment to the environment. Search, Creation on the Diocese of Rochester website.





CATHEDRAL WELLBEING GARDENS

Rochester Cathedral has opened a new Community Wellbeing Garden, with two people appointed as Garden and Music Wellbeing Coordinators. Three acres of hidden gardens have been transformed and are already being used by the community, including veterans, a dementia group, a baby loss charity, and a local care home who use the space for singing and simply being out in nature.



CELEBRATING PRAYER MINISTRY

St Giles the Abbot, Farnborough, has celebrated the dedication of their Pastoral Visitors with a special service. The Pastoral Visitors play an important role in the life of the church by offering friendship, a listening ear and support to members of the church and wider community. The church is incredibly grateful to them for giving their time, care and kindness to others.



PILGRIMAGE FOR WARM WELCOME

Twenty-one members of St Paul, Beckenham undertook a pilgrimage along the Way of St Augustine. The two-day 19-mile pilgrimage, from Ramsgate to Canterbury Cathedral, brought not only a time of spiritual nourishment, but raised funds for the national Warm Welcome Campaign, which encourages churches to set up spaces where people can enjoy a cuppa, connect with others, and make new friends.



HARVEST LUNCH SHOWS OFF NEW SPACE

St Peter, Bredhurst, Gillingham enjoyed a Harvest lunch with all profits going to the Diocesan Poverty and Hope Appeal. It took place in the church's recently reconfigured pew area at the rear of the church, alongside a new small kitchen. Larger groups from the school can now be accommodated, and the church is better suited for social activities, meetings, as well as worship.



ANNUAL DIOCESAN APPEAL LAUNCHES WITH FOCUS ON EDUCATION

The Diocese of Rochester's Annual Poverty and Hope Appeal for 2026 to 2027 has launched, as it celebrates its 50th anniversary.

Last year's appeal raised over £20,000 from supporter parishes and individuals, enabling the Diocese to give a helping hand to seven trusted overseas partner organisations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

"We regularly support Poverty and Hope because it is a way of sharing our concern as a diocesan family for other parts of the world in a practical way" says the Rev Canon Kenneth Clark, Rector of Stone.

This year's Appeal has a focus on education, and includes three schooling projects in Myanmar, Gaza, and Tanzania, with all seven projects set to benefit, involving different forms of education and hopes for a better life.

Bishop Simon Burton-Jones, the Bishop of Tonbridge, says, "Big and small nations are rearming today, mistrustful of one another. It was Nelson Mandela who said: 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Let's give it that chance."

To donate and find out more SCAN the code or visit the Diocese of Rochester website and search Poverty and Hope.

DAY OF SPIRITUAL REFRESHMENT FOR CHURCHWARDENS

Over 30 churchwardens from across the Diocese attended a much-appreciated Churchwardens' Retreat Day at St Benedict's Centre, West Malling, in the autumn.

The day was organised as part of Cascade, the joint wellbeing project between the Diocese of Rochester and St Benedict's Centre. The purpose of Cascade is to support those on the front line of leadership with their physical, relational, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, so they can flourish in their work and ministry with others.

Those attending enjoyed encouraging and thought-provoking keynote talks from the Rev Canon John Lawson on the Gospel of John and Bishop Simon Burton-Jones, the Bishop of Tonbridge.

In his address, Bishop Simon, spoke to the churchwardens about how God valued them in their role, "Whatever led you to the office of churchwarden, behind it is the call of God."

Alongside this, there was time to network with other churchwardens, spend time in prayer and reflection, and to have space to simply enjoy the beautiful grounds and gain some much needed physical and spiritual refreshment.

The day was greatly valued, with one churchwarden saying, 'I appreciated the time to re-focus on myself, the role and all that is positive.'

For more information visit the Diocesan website and search Cascade.





SAYING 'YES' TO GOD

At St Paul with All Saints' church in Chatham, "God has been powerfully at work," says Vicar, the Rev Dr Jenny Warrington, as she describes a season that has included confirmations, baptisms, an expansion in youth ministry, and people taking new steps into lay and ordained training.

The work to nurture a culture where people are encouraged to grow in faith and ask, 'what is God's calling for me?', has been building over the last year, says Jenny.

Not through complex or expensive initiatives but mainly through simple prayer and listening.

"We have been quite intentional about listening to where God might be leading us as a church.

"We've found we have an openness to want to grow, and so we have not been afraid to listen to God, and to ask people to get involved," says Jenny. "If they say no, that is fine, but there is no harm in asking!"

This openness has included listening to the congregation too, particularly through the setting up of a church intergenerational group.

This group carried out a congregational survey, which received 84 responses. The results showed there is a strong sense of belonging in the church, with 94 per cent describing the church as welcoming and friendly.

The congregation also expressed a desire to look beyond the church walls and serve the wider community, particularly people experiencing loneliness, financial hardship, and other challenges.

Recently, the group also came together to share big ideas and a vision for 'Growing Good' in the church and community. When asked to sum up the church's key priorities in three words, the message was clear: Social Media, Outreach, and Partnership.

Jenny says the next steps are now to build on that foundation: strengthening small groups, nurturing new



VOLUNTEER CELEBRATIONS



BAPTISM SERVICE

"We've found we have an openness to want to grow, and so we have not been afraid to listen to God, and to ask people to get involved."

leaders, equipping volunteers, and creating spaces where people can continue to grow.

This is already happening, as can be seen in the recent launch of a brand-new discipleship group, in which ten members of the church now meet and follow the structure of The Bible Course, to help them grow in faith and community together.

To help develop people's sense of vocation, Jenny has also reached out to colleagues within the Mission and Ministry Development Team, based in the Diocesan Office, for support and guidance.

The team encouraged the congregation to explore God's call in their lives through the diocesan-run, "It's Your Calling" days.

As a result, four members of the congregation have signed up for the Bishop's Certificate this autumn - a course open to those who have an active involvement in their local church who want to deepen their understanding of Scripture. It can often be the first step towards Licensed Lay Ministry.

Alongside this, one member of the church has begun ordination training at St Augustine's College of Theology, following a successful Bishop's Advisory Panel earlier this year.

"We want to nurture disciples and calling just as much in our young people too," says Jenny, "So this has meant ensuring we are equipping members of the congregation to work with them."

To help, three members of the congregation and the church's Children and Young People Minister have been supported to join the free, diocesan-run, Catalyst course.

Open to anyone involved in children and youth work in their church, whether they are a volunteer or paid employee, the course aims to deepen knowledge and hone people's skills for ministry and mission with children and young people.

And children and young people's ministry is certainly thriving at the church, with regular Sunday groups, Bubble Church, holiday clubs, and residential weekends. Alongside this, the voice of young people is heard through the church's various listening opportunities.

For Jenny, all these developments demonstrate what can happen when a church creates space for people to listen, learn, and respond to God's call.

"In the end, this is all God. We don't get everything right, of course, but I think we are learning that leadership isn't about a select few, it's about a whole community listening to the Holy Spirit and stepping out in faith.

"That's why, from our youngest voices to our most experienced, we're united in finding new ways to connect, serve, and build meaningful relationships across our church family and the neighbourhood."

"We are learning that leadership isn't about a select few, it's about a whole community. "



BUBBLE CHURCH



COMMUNITY PIONEERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

'Called Together' is the shared vision and practical plan of work for the Diocese of Rochester as it seeks to change, serve and grow.

Last year, the Diocese received nearly £11 million from the Church of England in support of the Vision, and there are early signs that this investment is bearing fruit. Through the Vision's Missional Development Places workstream, several parish-based Community Pioneer roles are now in post.

Their aim is not just to increase capacity in their immediate parish, but in surrounding parishes too, so all parishes can benefit from the extra support, energy, and learning these roles bring.

Overall, the expectation is to see the creation of up to 48 new worshipping communities, with 12 focused on Children, Young People and Families across the Diocese.

At Holy Trinity, Twydall (Gillingham), Jeni, the new Community Pioneer has begun working with children in Sunday worship.

Already the parish is reporting growing numbers of children, enthusiastic engagement, and a congregation delighted to see children contributing more visibly. Jeni has also raised the profile of the church as a potential partner for the local council's long- term plans for the community.

Meanwhile, at St Mary Church, Gravesend, the new Vicar's role is being part-funded through the Vision, making it a full-time post.

This is giving the Rev Colin Fairweather more time to work alongside lay leaders and volunteers – for instance in the church holiday club – and to develop plans to establish at least three new worshipping communities and identify and equip potential future leaders.

For a full list of Missional Development Places projects please SCAN the code.

WORKSTREAM SPOTLIGHTS

Work to fulfil the Vision is happening across four key strands. All are underpinned by a commitment to growing safe and healthy cultures. This time we focus on...



Revitalise

This workstream is about coming alongside churches facing missional or financial challenge to help them move to a place of flourishing.

"Hello, I am Iain Kitchener and I am the Revitalise Adviser. I am already working with several churches to first listen, then help them understand their challenges and opportunities. I then connect them to the support they need within the Diocesan Office Teams and externally, so they can move towards a more sustainable future. This is all about relationship and the belief that every church is precious and should be able to thrive, so they can play a full part in the lives of their communities and the wider diocesan family."



Children, Young People and Families

The recently appointed Schools Engagement Adviser is funded through the Vision and is here to help churches strengthen their relationships between schools and home.

"Hello, my name is Caroline Wells, and I am part of the Children and Young People team within the Mission and Ministry Development Team. I have been a primary school teacher for almost 20 years, working in state and private, Church of England and community schools. I have already been visiting some churches who are experiencing some success with their school connections, so I can share learning and develop resources for churches who would like some new ideas."

Find out more about the Called Together workstreams. Visit the Diocese of Rochester website and search Workstreams.

THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS

As we approach the season of Advent, and Christmas itself, the Church of England invites us to focus on the first and greatest Christmas gift of all: the gift of God being born as one of us in Jesus Christ.

'Advent' means 'arrival'. During the four weeks leading up to Christmas, we get ready to celebrate Jesus' first arrival on earth.

Through a series of reflections, audio meditations, and family activities, the Gift of Christmas campaign invites us to:

- **celebrate** the great gift God offers to each one of us in the birth of Jesus,
- **receive** that gift – and all God gives to us – with gratitude and joy, and
- **respond** to God's generosity by serving others, especially those in need.

'At Christmas we celebrate the gift God offers to each one of us in the birth of Jesus Christ. It is a gift beyond our understanding – God, who made the universe, chooses to be born as one of us so that we may know his love, healing and redemption.'

Archbishop Sarah Mullally

5 ways to get involved

1 **Countdown each day of Advent** with the help of, *Advent from A to Z – a day to day guide to Advent*. This new book unpacks a different character, place, symbol or idea related to Advent each day. Available from Church House publishing.

2 **Listen each day** by downloading the Church of England's Everyday Faith app to access Advent-inspired audio reflections and daily prayers. Available through your usual App store.

3 **Get colourful** – Download mindful colouring sheets for each day of Advent. Alongside a short meditation, use colouring to help you and your family pause and reflect on the gift of Jesus that is to come. Scan the code to download

4 **Pray** – Lord Jesus, thank you for the opportunity of Advent. Thank you for the anticipation and celebration of this season. Teach us to wait with you and for you in the weeks ahead. Lord Jesus, help us to meet with you as we wait today. Amen. *(Prayer taken from Advent from A to Z – a day by day guide to Advent).*

5 **Meditate on the twelve days of Christmas** - In, *The Gift of Christmas: Meditations for the Twelve Days of Christmas,* we are reminded that Christmas is not just about one day. Through a series of daily meditations, twelve people – with very different backgrounds and callings – explore how we might share the blessings received by Jesus' birth, through the welcome, hospitality, and service we offer to others. Available through Church House publishing and the Everday Faith app *(from the 25 December).*



SUPPORTING EACH PERSON'S SOUL TO THRIVE

Raising awareness and acceptance of autism and neurodiversity in churches and community groups has been a lifetime calling and passion for Kirstyn Oliver, Children and Families Minister at Christ Church, Beckenham.

According to the National Autism Society, more than one in 100 people are autistic and there are at least 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK. It is a lifelong neurodivergence and disability.

Autism influences how people experience and interact with the world. Being autistic means you may feel things and react to them differently to non-autistic people.

You may find socialising confusing or tiring, and you may become overwhelmed in loud or busy places. You may have intense interests, prefer order and routine, and use repeated movements or actions to calm yourself or express joy.

For Kirstyn Oliver, a Psychology graduate with a master's degree in Autism Studies, her passion to raise awareness and acceptance of autism is not just a professional goal but one driven by her faith too.

"I simply want to make a difference in the way we support each person's soul to thrive and connect with God in their own unique way."

To help, Kirstyn set up her initiative, Alma Autism, in 2018. 'Alma' derives from the Portuguese word 'soul'. For Kirstyn, a fluent Portuguese speaker, the word encapsulates all that she is trying to do.

Having worked as a teacher in schools, as a Christian, she also felt called to working in children and family ministry. It is there that she noticed an opportunity to help equip churches to better offer welcome to those with autism and other neurodivergences.

One of the ways she saw this could be done was by encouraging the use of the senses to help people experience Bible stories and worship.

It all began when Kirstyn was a Primary School teacher. "In the class, we would regularly use sensory play with the children and one day, we were retelling the story of the Three Little Pigs.

"We had the pigs in mud, and it was all very sensory based, and I looked at it and I thought, 'This could be the Prodigal Son story'. It was like a light bulb moment."

This 'light bulb moment' led to Kirstyn developing the Sensory Tray Bible – a simple idea which allows a Bible story to be experienced through sight, sound, texture and, if possible, taste.

Since then Kirstyn has gone on to write several Sensory Tray Bible books and takes her creative workshops around the world, as well as supporting conferences and workshops organised by the Diocese of Rochester's Children and Young People Mission and Ministry Team.

The trays are also a regular feature at Kirstyn's own church, Christ Church, Beckenham.

"Thanks to the supportive church team there, we now offer two services especially for those with neurodivergence and special needs, with many attending from outside the local church area as there is nothing similar on offer nearby."

It's work that has been recognised nationally, with Kirstyn recently winning the Entrepreneur of Excellence Award at this year's National Diversity Awards in Liverpool - a recognition of her dedication to advancing equality, diversity and inclusion, particularly around Autism in churches.

Kirstyn's work has even been featured as part of BBC One's Songs of Praise. During the programme, one parent told presenter Aled Jones, about the difference the sensory trays make with understanding Bible stories:

"It is very difficult for children to sit still and listen for a long time. With the trays, they can listen and do things with their hands at the same time...and all the different textures and colours really stimulate the senses. So, while it may not look like a lot is being taken in, it really is."

Beyond those with a particular neurodivergence, Kirstyn would like to see the senses being used in church worship more broadly, "A lot of churches rely on the spoken word, but we all have our own ways in which we prefer to learn and engage.

"I think we should use our senses more because it is not about making things childish but making the Bible accessible to everyone and helping them encounter God."



Kirstyn says that churches have become increasingly interested in her work, particularly since the end of the pandemic, as they seek to become as welcoming as possible.

For the Rev Rob Hinton, Vicar at Christ Church, Beckenham, he can see the difference Kirstyn's ministry is making:

"Four years ago, when we welcomed Kirstyn as our Families Minister, little did we know that we would also witness the beginning of a worldwide outreach in sensory teaching and play with people with special educational needs and especially autism.

"Kirstyn brings her never-ending enthusiasm, creativity, and skill to all that she does and, in doing so, she changes so many lives. We see that here every single day of every single week."

And for those churches considering how to better welcome those with additional needs? Kirstyn's message is to keep it simple:

"Don't think you have to do everything.

"Above all, build relationship first and try to understand what the particular need in your setting might be. Then, don't over promise.

"It is better to start small and try, than be overwhelmed and not start at all.'

To find out more about Alma Autism and to connect with Kirstyn visit: www.almaautism.uk.

AI – FRIEND OR FOE?

With discussion about AI an almost daily occurrence in the media, alongside apocalyptic pronouncements about its impact on humanity, Bishop Simon Burton-Jones, asks, what human agency we do we have in how it continues to develop?



Geoffrey Hinton is the so-called 'Godfather of AI' and his view of the risks of 'AI getting super smart and understanding it doesn't need us' has led to lots of talk about an AI apocalypse where AI doesn't just come for your job but, like Arnie's Terminator, it comes for your clothes and your life, too.

This existential risk can't be discounted, but the impact of AI already on how we understand the world and relate to one another is a more immediate problem.

I have long thought that the defining challenge of tech in our era is how social media rewires us individually and in community. Not anymore. I think it is just preparing the way for what AI will do: John the Baptist to Jesus.

Such is the capacity of AI to explain and to problem solve in seconds, some will come to depend on it with the same trust levels reserved for Jesus, too – and pay a price.

All technological advances emerge as a mixed blessing.

The capacity of AI to do good is phenomenal, but the same issues we face with social media will become more pronounced with AI. Tech companies are profit driven, harvesting our data and selling it on; they are indisposed to code in safeguards and are keen to distract us from anything other than being online and on their platform.

We were too naïve in our embrace of social media, assuming it would only bring us together when algorithms were subversively designed to make us angry with other people because, as Silicon Valley has it: enragement = engagement. With AI, the means are different but the ends are the same.

Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT and Gemini are trained on billions of words and use these to craft responses to the questions we pose. These billions of words are found online, and so minority professional judgements can be drowned out by a cacophony of opinions expressed by people who think they know stuff but don't; who disbelieve the truth; whose default mode is attack.

It's a bit like recycled air on a plane: on one level a miracle of engineering at 40,00 feet, but passengers are breathing contaminated air that is bad for them.

Greater still is the risk posed by how we ask questions of AI in the privacy of our homes. Few people will bother to frame their questions in as unbiased a way as possible, not least because we are unaware of our biases; yet how we ask those questions will determine the kind of answer AI gives us.

This introduces the risk that LLMs will become the greatest source of confirmation bias in the world: feeding our prejudices back to us and offering us more content to reinforce our discrimination.

It mimics social media in delivering us an echo chamber where we are surrounded by information that confirms our opinions rather than challenges them, except the information won't be delivered by a human Reddit chain, but by an apparently incorruptible chatbot.

To use AI well compels us to be better at how we ask our questions; to reactivate the method of enquiry pioneered by Socrates and seen vividly in the scriptures where the questioning of elders introduces people to the story of salvation: 'what do these stones mean?' (Joshua 4: 21).

It asks for a dose of humility appealed to in the parable of the Pharisee and the sinner (Luke 18: 9-14). If we approach AI with Pharisaic self-satisfaction and the certainty of our standing, it will reinforce this. Far better to be the person who is not wise in their own eyes and has self-awareness in how they learn (Proverbs 3:7).

Software engineers work all the time to iron out glitches in technology, including round the biases learned by LLMs in training, but they will not remedy every problem and inevitably bring their own flaws to bear in design. Theo Baker wrote 'How To Rule The World', about his experiences as an undergraduate at Stanford University which is adjacent to, and the tech nursery for, Silicon Valley.

When he asked students in his IT class who 'thought ethics were important to their work', not one raised their hand. It sounds like it would be foolish to rely on the next generation of tech wizards to save us, too.

Jesus said the truth would set us free (John 8:32), and truth has become the key battleground of this developing century. In this environment, how we ask our questions should become a vital characteristic of the wisdom that comes from above, which is 'without a trace of partiality' (James 3: 17).

Bishop Simon Burton-Jones

RESOURCES – ADVENT CALENDARS

Countdown the days of Advent with the help of these faith-focused Advent calendars.



CALM AND BRIGHT ADVENT CALENDAR

Church of England

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 to 24 December, there is a door to open and a picture to reveal. On the back of each door, you will also find a daily challenge, as well as a QR code to unlock online activities to help you explore the amazing story of Jesus' birth and what it means for us today.

£2.99 (plus postage)

Available through Church House Publishing website. Search *Calm and Bright* calendar.



THE REAL ADVENT CALENDAR

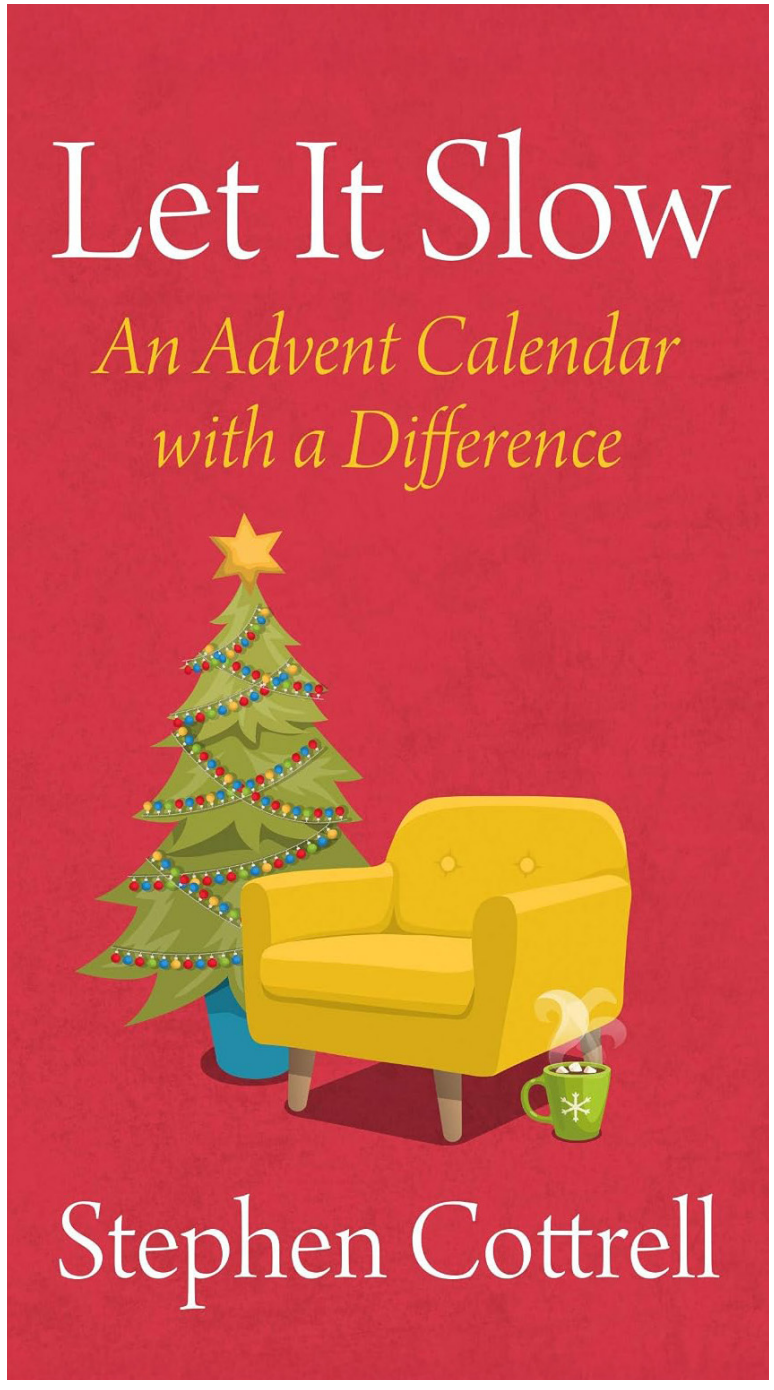
Meaningful Chocolate Company

This is the only Advent calendar with Fairtrade chocolate, a copy of the Christmas story, and which supports charitable projects.

The Real Advent Calendar is a fun way for parents, grandparents, and Godparents to share the Christmas story. The calendar comes with a free 24-page Christmas story activity book designed to be used every day in Advent. This year, the book is illustrated by award winning artist, Martina Peluso.

£5.95 (only available online).

For the full range of Advent and Christmas chocolate gifts visit: www.meaningfulchocolate.co.uk/collections/christmas



LET IT SLOW

AN ADVENT CALENDAR WITH A DIFFERENCE

Archbishop Stephen Cottrell

Christmas is one of the most joyful times of year, and it can also be one of the most stressful. It comes laden with expectations and, for many, overshadowed by difficult memories and emotions.

If every other day of the year has us running in different directions, driven by the bleeping demands of our phones and devices, Christmas makes us run faster still. This understanding and uplifting book offers another way to approach Christmas and to discover how its joys and promises can restore our lives, not add to their burdens. You are invited to take a few minutes each day during December to join in a conversation with the bestselling author, Stephen Cottrell, who offers simple reflections and practical suggestions for making your Christmas the celebration it is meant to be.

ISBN: 978-1781402092

Available through all good online book retailers.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES



GASLIGHT
at Rochester Cathedral
20 NOVEMBER, 7PM

As part of their Safeguarding Season, and in partnership with Oasis - Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse service, Rochester Cathedral is showing the classic 1940s film 'Gaslight'. This iconic film explores themes of coercive control and psychological abuse that remain highly relevant today. Support will be available for anyone who needs to talk or access support: To book visit: www.rochestercathedral.org/whatson



WHEN PEOPLE THROW STONES...
@CofE Diocese of Rochester Facebook page
25 NOVEMBER TO 10 DECEMBER

'When People Throw Stones'...catch them to make something beautiful' is a photographic series by a victim/survivor advocate engaging with Rochester Diocese, which documents her personal journey through abuse to support. One image will be shared each day on the Diocese of Rochester's Facebook page to mark the international 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based violence campaign.



IT'S YOUR CALLING
at St John's, Chatham
28 NOVEMBER, 9:30AM - 3:30PM

It's Your Calling is aimed at those exploring God's plan for their life and is a space to look at the gifts that God has given us all. The day offers an opportunity to meet others on a similar quest and to take time to think about how God may be calling you. For more information contact vocations@rochester.anglican.org



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

This day gives time to reflect on the hope we have in Christ – the hope of glory that does not disappoint. It will include short presentations, times for quiet, Eucharist, and opportunities for personal conversation and prayer. Led by the Rev Canon Gordon Oliver.
Cost £25. To book and for more information email bookings@stbenedictscentre.org

Advent and Christmas at Rochester Cathedral

ADVENT CAROL SERVICE AND PROCESSION
Sunday 29th November, **15:15**

CHRISTMAS CAROL SERVICES
Saturday 5th and Sunday 6th December, **12:30** and **15:00**
Come and sing your favourite carols during the Dickensian Christmas Festival.

CHRISTINGLE SERVICE
Saturday 12th December, **12:30**

CHRISTMAS CAROL CONCERT
Saturday 12th and Sunday 13th December, **17:00**
Ticketed (£10 – £30 plus Booking Fee)

A FESTIVAL OF NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS
Friday 18th December, **19:30**
Saturday 19th December, **17:30**

CHILDREN'S NATIVITY SERVICE
Sunday 20th December, **14:30**
Performed by members of the Sunday Club.
A service for all ages!

CHRISTMAS EVE
Thursday 24th December
Christmas Eve Carol Service, 15:15
The Eucharist of Christmas Night, 23:30

CHRISTMAS DAY
Friday 25th December
Holy Communion
(Book of Common Prayer), **08:00**
The Eucharist of Christmas Morning, 10:30

EPIPHANY
Wednesday 6th January 2027
Solemn Eucharist, 17:30
Sunday 17th January 2027
Epiphany Carols and Procession, 15:15

Our Christmas services are free and open to all

Rochester CATHEDRAL
Growing in Christ since AD604

Find out more at rochestercathedral.org/christmas



INSPIRING CARE FOR CREATION

As the new volunteer Diocesan Environmental Officer, Richard Hopkinson, is passionate about inspiring the whole diocesan family to take action to care for God's creation and to understand the urgency of the climate and biodiversity crises. He'll be working closely with the Diocese's Net Zero team, as they support parishes and schools on their journey towards a more sustainable future.

Why did you want to take on the role?

We are now all very aware of the climate crisis as we are experiencing it in our own region in the form of drought and water shortages. We need to work together on this. It's not an add-on to our mission and outreach, it's central to our witness as Christians.

What experience do you bring?

I am an experienced project manager, architect and leader on our project Vision 2030 at St Mary's Church Hadlow. Working with the whole community that we serve we are planning changes to make our culture and buildings more inclusive and sustainable. As an architect I enjoyed working closely with young people, especially on my projects for the Further Education sector.

How can you help churches?

I want to help connect, support, and encourage those already in the grass roots of parishes concerned about the environment, to create a culture of care, and spread this through our communities – not just within our congregations.

What do you mean by 'with communities'?

As churches and Christians, we need to show leadership by example. By showing we care for our buildings and for the resources we consume, we can inspire others in our communities.

How is your own church thinking about climate care?

I worship at St Mary's Church, Hadlow, where I am the PCC Secretary. Thanks to everyone's commitment we have just been awarded a significant grant by the Church of England to become a Net Zero Demonstrator church within the Diocese. This means other churches can come and see first-hand some of the net zero carbon technology and ideas we'll be developing. Hopefully they can see how our approach might work or be adapted for their own church, and learn from our successes, and our mistakes!

How would you encourage anyone who is feeling overwhelmed by the scale of the climate crisis?

Every little step is worthwhile, if you are struggling to report on the Energy Foot Print Tool, or are leading on an Eco Church programme for your church, I want to help you and connect you with others who are in different stages of the same journey.

How can people get involved?

I am hoping to develop a Diocesan Creation Care Network, so we can learn from what each other is doing, inspire and encourage, and help build momentum across the Diocese around creation care. People can contact me on: Richard.Hopkinson@rochester.anglican.org

Has anyone particularly inspired you?

Firstly, my mum. She never complained about a wayward son and always set an example of kindness and care, with a passion for gardening and cooking. Several clergy, The Rev Graham Shaw, Father Jim Horton, and The Rev Dr Peter Hayler, our newly appointed Vicar, have inspired me to be active in the church, to use my skills, and to widen my appreciation of the roots of inclusiveness.

What is your idea of a perfect day?

I spent a day walking on the South Downs in May with my family as a celebration of my birthday. Beautiful weather, followed by a hearty lunch in a country pub. Walking on the hills with panoramas stretched out before me, and sharing this with those I am close to, is a wonderful gift.

Did you know?

This year, General Synod - the decision-making body of the Church of England – has approved a new feast day called Creation in Christ, to be marked on the first Sunday of each September, and a new teaching paper called Hope for All Creation.

Bishop Jonathan and Bishop Simon say,

"Both underline the importance and centrality of caring for God's world as part of our daily Christian witness. Handwringing about the climate is no longer enough. It's why we encourage every church and individual to consider the part they can play to make a positive difference."

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

An advocate for victims and survivors shares her story and experience of finding support through the Diocese of Rochester's Safeguarding Team. As a survivor of childhood abuse, an adult survivor of domestic violence, and church bullying, she's bravely using her experience to encourage others to find help and support.

Please be aware, the following contains potentially triggering content. Please be kind to yourself as you read it and be aware of any reactions you may have. Need help? See signposts to support listed at the end of the article.



Image taken from, 'When People Throw Stones...' a photographic series by a victim/survivor advocate documenting her journey from danger to safety. Visit the Top Events page for details (pg22)

I am a victim/survivor but I currently identify as a thur-river.

A thur-river to me is somebody that has gone beyond surviving. It means I'm currently feeling safe enough to engage, my life has started to blossom, and I'm feeling a lot more hopeful about my future and the future of my family.

That doesn't mean I have any judgement about people who are not in the same space as me. Whatever stage people are at in their journey is totally valid.

What I know helped me to move forward though, was being able to see examples of other people who've been able to transform their victim survivor journey to either help others or to be in a place that they are achieving or have hope.

So firstly, to my fellow victim/survivors, I would say, please know you're not alone.

It might feel that way because unfortunately, that's one of the side effects of abuse - it makes you feel like you're the problem and you're the only one in this situation and you somehow deserve the abuse. That's just what some abusers want you to feel.

It's such a vulnerable place to be in, to tell other people and to explain that you need help. It means even taking that first step to get help, you have to feel so brave.

When my family and I fled domestic abuse, I was fortunate to be supported by some health professionals, and I then became aware that there are organisations and charities that support people. It was a complete revelation to me. I didn't know about advocacy, I didn't know about refuge, or about people that would support me.

When I then experienced church bullying, I thought, well, who can I reach out to now?

I was amazed to find an organisation called Safe Spaces who really supported me and which I then went on to work for. Safe Spaces is funded by the Church of England and the Catholic Church to support victim/survivors of church-related abuse in England and Wales. While they are funded by the Churches, they're not part of them and they are managed independently.

How can they help?

You can speak to somebody and let them know what you've been experiencing. They will safeguard you. They will hear your story, what your experience is, and they will then support you with an advocate or an Independent Sexual Violence Adviser.

They can then help you talk to your church or talk to your diocese. They can make referrals to other charities, and they can walk by your side, while you decide how you'd like to go forward with your experiences.

One of the things about church-related abuse or spiritual abuse, is that it is doubly isolating because your church has been your community, it's been your heart, it's been your family. It's devastating to have that rug pulled from under your feet. It's a fact that, sadly, some survivors have come forward to have a dialogue with the Church, and it's not always been very well received. I had that experience myself. It can be re-traumatizing.

But that's not been my experience with Rochester Diocese. I did at first think, is this a good idea? Am I going to feel unsafe? There were all kinds of questions in my mind about it. In fact, it's been the opposite.

I have regained a lot of my dignity through my engagement with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team. That's why I'm advocating at the moment, I can say that with my hand on my heart. If survivors wish to engage with Rochester Diocese, not only will they be supported, but I'm already here, and your engagement will be honoured and valued. Because the more that we engage, the more we help others.

It has to be at the right time for you as a survivor, victim/survivor, thur-river, or however you are identifying, because your safety is the absolute priority. So, whilst none of us can wave any magic wands, there are ways to ease what's happened to you. There are people that can support you and find you some resources.

You are not alone. There's nothing wrong with you and you don't have to let this define who you are. You are unique.

Your voice and your experiences and your life and your family and everything that you are, you're precious and you're needed. Your voice is needed.

For Safe Spaces, visit: safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk. To report a safeguarding concern or to find support, please visit: www.rochester.anglican.org/safeguarding or SCAN the code to the right.

Diocese of Rochester
called together

As we seek to grow places that are safe and healthy for all, so we pray:

Loving God,

Help us to love each other as you love us.
Show us when people around us are lonely or sad or afraid and teach us how we can help them.

Let us remember times when we have felt lonely, sad or afraid ourselves too, and to remember what made us feel better.

Forgive us when we have not shown our care when our friends were in trouble and help us to do better in future.

Amen

Safeguarding Sunday is an annual awareness campaign led by Thirtyone:eight, a Christian, independent safeguarding charity. On 15 November, 2026 churches across the UK and in the Diocese of Rochester will once again come together to reflect and take action to build safer communities. Find out more at: www.safeguardingsunday.org/resources/

Prayer taken from Thirtyone:eight Safeguarding Sunday materials.