

Pathways

The magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford | Spring 2024 | **FREE**



30 years on

Reflections on women in the priesthood

PLUS: Focus on joy | Reaching all ages | What's your perspective?



God's call....

We read in the Bible the remarkable truth that Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, calls women and men into God's service. That call comes in many different ways: to Abraham and Sarah to leave their city; to Moses in the desert; to Isaiah in the temple; to Ruth to travel to a strange land.

In the gospels Jesus calls women and men with the simple invitation *follow me*: Matthew from his tax booth; Martha from her kitchen; Andrew from his nets; Bartimaeus from his seat by the roadside. After the resurrection the calls keep coming to discipleship and service: Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus; Lydia in Philippi; Paul on the Damascus Road.

The risen Christ calls all kinds of peoples from all kinds of backgrounds with different gifts to serve in the world and in the church.

In this edition

This year we celebrate 30 years since the first ordination of women as priests in this diocese. Read how far we have come and the powerful testimony of our sisters Bishop Olivia and the Revd Canon Liz Jackson on page 12.

We are focussing again as a diocese on how to reach all ages with fresh expressions of our faith. Page 15 explores an interesting approach to this, followed by tips on how to put your ideas into action.

Finding peace and joy amid the noise and clamour of an often overwhelming world can be challenging. Hamish Bruce looks at how to turn away from the distractions of modern life and take a different perspective (page 10). And Nnamdi Maduka takes the joy of a gospel choir into his day-to-day life, describing the restorative impact of singing praises to God when energy is low (page 18).

As I write we are preparing for Bishop Alan Wilson's memorial service, a celebration of his life and ministry. Alan was faithful to God's call and served all of his ordained ministry within our own diocese. He ordained many men and women who themselves heard God's call to service and passed the baton to the next generation.

Enjoy this edition of *Pathways* and as you read, listen. How is God calling you this day?

Bishop Steven

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We hope you enjoy reading *Pathways*. Email or write and let us know what you think. Contributor enquiries are welcome.

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Around the diocese

Ruth Hamilton-Jones



Citizens unite for the good of all

Churches from the diocese were among several organisations to “build” a new assembly in Oxford. The Oxford Citizens UK will raise awareness of and fight for community issues, pledging to “make Oxford a better place for all”.

oxford.anglican.org/citizens-unite

For regular news and updates, visit the website: oxford.anglican.org/news

Maria Skoyles

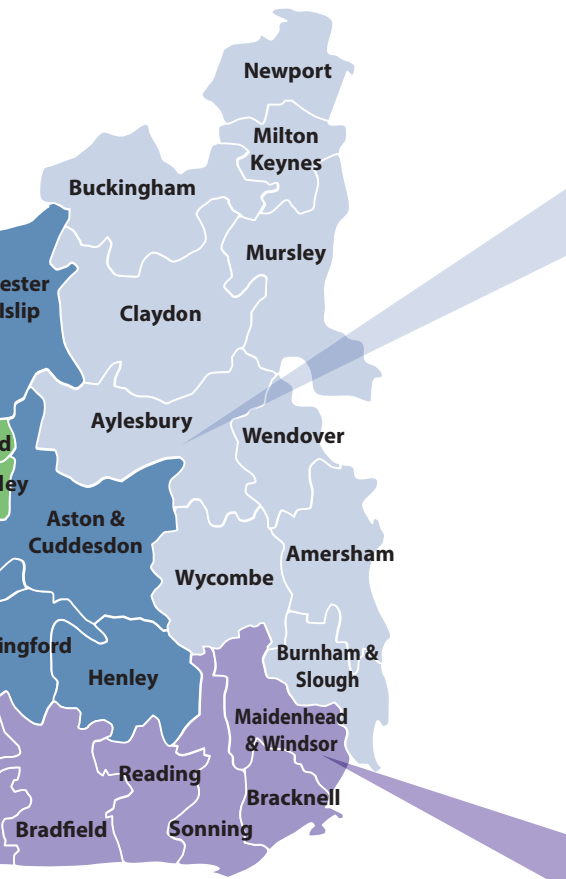


Crafters see the light

A group of friends in Ducklington created a light quilt with the help of refugees staying at a nearby hotel. The crafters gathered for fellowship as well as craft, each sewing a piece of fabric which together made a piece of art which was auctioned for charity.

oxford.anglican.org/light-quilt





Shutterstock

Growing for God

Green-fingered parishioners in Princes Risborough are planting seeds to grow for their church's floral displays. The project is part of the church's drive to be more sustainable and environmentally friendly by cutting down on plastic waste and growing flowers locally.

oxford.anglican.org/growing-for-god



The Revd Rosie Webb

Families pop in to pop-up café

A Windsor church has opened its doors to provide a space for families to rest, rejuvenate and replenish body and soul. The pop-up children's café is held monthly at St Andrew's in Clewer where children enjoy games, crafts and a tea – while their parents can relax and chat to their peers.

oxford.anglican.org/pop-up-cafe

We're on social media too. Search "Diocese of Oxford" on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

*"God provided all
that we needed..."*



Helen Kendrick

Helen Kendrick learnt over the years to listen to God's whisper and trust in his guidance. Her message? "Great is his faithfulness!"

On 11 November 1992 I arrived home from my job as a marketing production manager in a publishing company to see the headline, "Church of England votes for women priests". As I watched the six o'clock news a voice in my head whispered, "This is for you." The sheer exhilaration of that moment has never left me.

I have lived in the Diocese of Oxford since the age of five, and was brought up as a Christian. I went on to study religion with literature at the University of Bristol, with no clear idea of what I wanted to do with my life. After travelling the world for a year, and getting married, my husband Christopher and I moved to Brill in Buckinghamshire, where we started attending church together.

The Revd Canon Peter Bugg and his wife Jane were instrumental in drawing us into the life of the church and demonstrating to us what a lived-out faith in a community should be – reaching out, and loving and serving those around you.

The ordination of women in the Church of England began in March 1994. After various nudges and prompts from God through other people, including Canon Vincent Strudwick turning to me at a dinner party and asking if I had ever considered being ordained, I finally found the courage to pick up the phone to the Diocesan Director of Ordinands in 1996. I began ordination training later that year, at the same time as my husband quit his job and began a PhD. On paper it was financial foolishness, but God provided all that we needed – even an unexpected and unasked-for gift of £500 from one of my great-aunts when our car needed repairing and we had no money to pay.

Every step of the way I kept waiting to hear a "no", but it was "yes" every time, and our lives took a whole new direction. I was made a deacon in 1999 and ordained a priest in 2000; served my curacy in the Icknield Benefice; moved to my post of first responsibility in Sutton Courtenay with Appleford; became rector of the DAMASCUS Parish in 2017 when we became a single parish of five churches, and here I am! My primary calling has always been to serve as a parish priest.

In 2008 my husband and I felt called by God to become adoptive parents, and in 2009 our two children – then aged seven and eight – joined us. Life has not always been easy, but I have been sustained by "the still small voice" of God speaking into both our sorrows and our joys.

I will always be profoundly grateful for the generation of women before me who faced immense opposition in their struggle but nevertheless pushed open the doors and paved the way for others to fulfil their calling to serve God and his people. It has been my greatest privilege to be an adoptive mum and to serve as a parish priest for so long in one place – being alongside people in their life journey. 🙏

Words: The Revd Canon Helen Kendrick, Rector of DAMASCUS Benefice in Abingdon.

Photo: Rowan Lake



Watch former accountants, project managers, mothers and students, some in training and some working as parish priests, reflect on their journeys into a life of ordained ministry:

oxford.anglican.org/vocations



Minister to men

The Revd Chrissie Lacey serves in the RAF. Does her ministry have to be adapted for a largely masculine cohort?

I've been in the RAF for seven years and am amongst the 15% of women serving full time. As a padre (the affectionate nickname for chaplains in the RAF/army) this inevitably means I work with men who come to share where their head and hearts are at. So how does that look? Is it a noticeably different expression of ministry working in a predominantly male environment?

Well, in short, not really! Most people who "pop in" to see a padre start the conversation with "I've never come to see a padre before..." I think this is indicative of our society today. Not the whole faith thing, but talking about life!

Although mental health has a high profile in our society, and is particularly championed by the military, we're still in the uncomfortable shift where sharing with others makes us feel vulnerable. We're out of our depth, trying to articulate the uncharted waters of our hearts. And it's not just internally that it's uncharted. People are often going through a time where they're experiencing new feelings. Being unable to cope, experiencing being overwhelmed, lost, wobbly or shaken is new to them... so with the mix of internal and external shifting ground, often the padre is the first port of call.

Padres offer everyone a safe, impartial, confidential and non-judgemental space, which is of immense value. To hold someone in their vulnerability is sacred, particularly in the context of the people coming to see us who think they "should" be able to manage this.

Being military, we almost get put on a pedestal, perceived as "strong" (stereotypically how men are perceived). Surely then, our resilience means seeking support from others is a weakness? Plot twist! In my experience the military is intentionally fostering a culture of interdependence. A comradeship that goes further than just on the battlefield. As a padre I long to nurture this into the battlefield of our hearts and grow on the Biblical teachings of community and belonging, which produces great strength.

Yes, I do work in an organisation that is 85% male, but as chaplains we don't see gender, we see a person, made in God's image, to be loved and empowered to reach their full potential and to live life to the full. We give them a safe space where there is no judgement and no hint of how they "should" be dealing with things. We scramble up onto their pedestal, see life from their perspective and tailor our support to suit the individual's needs and personality. For me, this means seeing them through God's perspective and not how the world might perceive them. ¶

Words: The Revd (Squadron Leader) Christina Lacey
Photo: UK MOD Crown Copyright



Revd Lacey's outstanding work for the RAF was officially recognised in the Armed Forces Operational Honours and Awards: "[her] constructive impact on the RAF's contribution to Operation KIPION cannot be overstated."

raf.mod.uk/news/articles/royal-air-force-operational-honours-awards-profiles

Your perspective

How do we look at the world? And how can we transform our perspective to become more like that of Christ?

Each day we encounter so many loud voices in our social media, our communities, and our politics. How can we discern the quiet voice of God amongst the clamour of such differing opinions?

The Bible challenges us to view the world through the lens of God's grace and mercy. As it says in Romans 12.2: "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect."

The Bible itself is a story of God reaching out in love to transform our lives and help us look beyond our limited perspectives, to view the world in the light of eternity. "We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4.18)

But how can we work on transforming our perspective to become more Christ-like in our daily lives? Much of this will come through regular prayer, Bible study and worship. But it also comes through our journey with others.

My mother suffers from dementia, and her precious memories are quickly fading. However, as a woman of strong faith, she continues to read her Bible each morning and to be comforted and challenged by what she reads. She continues to remind me (many times!) that the greatest gift we can give another person is to truly listen to them,

to give them space to speak their mind and space for us to understand their perspective.

Within our church at St John and St Stephen's in Reading, we are blessed in having people from countries across the world. As we listen to their stories of life and faith, we expand our perspective and discover so much more about our wonderful God at work. Another of our local churches, St Nicolas, Earley, recently started a drop-in centre for refugees. Volunteers help individuals fill in forms, open bank accounts and learn English. Learning about the challenges they face and their hopes for the future has challenged our preconceptions and broadened our mindsets.

Are there ways we can transform our own perspective by listening to the voice of God within the different voices of those in our church and community? Perhaps as a result, our perspective will become more like that of Jesus: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2.3-5) ¶

*Words: Hamish Bruce, a Licensed Lay Minister at St John and St Stephen's Church, Reading and former Communications Manager of the United Bible Societies
Photo: Shutterstock*



If you are inspired to reach out to refugees and asylum seekers, the diocese has useful guidance:

oxford.anglican.org/refugees-asylum

*“How can we discern the
quiet voice of God?”*



How far have we come?



The Rt Revd Olivia Graham has been Bishop of Reading since 2019. She retires in September this year.

LJ: I didn't go to church until I was 20. My brother and I came to faith together. He became a priest. I was told I needed to go through the Lay Reader route. Then I had children and remained a Reader until 2008. Looking back, I see how we were both at the same stage and it went one way for him and another way for me.

+O: My third child was due to be born six weeks before my ordination. I was looking for a curacy, and wrote to my training incumbent asking to work reduced hours in the first few months. He responded in the vein that I was a typical female wanting allowances to be made. Remember, there was no maternity leave at that point – that's been a big change. A second incumbent wouldn't have me either because of concerns around what would happen if I was called out at night. In the end, I had to do a non-stipendiary first year to allow me to work from home. What has changed is that we've now got written policies. What we still haven't got is the universal change in attitude needed for younger women with dependent children to flourish.

LJ: Working with parishes in recruitment you do still hear, "Well, she's going to have babies" or "We want a man with two children and a wife who can be part of church life."

There is still a certain ideal of what the vicar should be. And some of the attitudes that are prevalent in society are reflected in parishes too – I was once referred to

as "the skirt" by someone who was really cross about something. Sadly, there are still people who do not think your ministry valid, and that's bewildering and challenging.

+O: The settlement we arrived at wasn't entirely satisfactory. A settlement never is. It did enable quite a large number of people to stay in the Church of England who might otherwise have left it, although if it were happening today I think far fewer would want to leave. Whether it is a provision which will prove to be healthy for the church in the long-term is not clear. It is hard living with institutionalised separateness, and I have a stern conversation with myself every morning about loving the people in the Church of England who separate themselves from me

"one way for him and another way for me"

In each edition of *Pathways*, we ask two Christians to discuss a topical issue. This time Bishop Olivia, the diocese's first female bishop, and the Revd Canon Liz Jackson reflect on the ministry of women, 30 years on from their ordination. How far has the church come, and where can we play a role in leading change in society?

because of my gender, about which I can do nothing.

LJ: I do feel quite frustrated at the inability to have a good up-to-date conversation about women in ministry, but I just get over it every day and get on with the job I am called to. There are still some very antiquated ideas around women in ministry. I have found myself having conversations about menstruation and whether I should be doing the sacramental parts of the service. I have worked with Orthodox colleagues who won't give women Communion at certain times of the month.

+O: I understand the traditional Catholic arguments and I respect them because I understand them. I simply don't understand the "headship" argument – this business about a woman having to teach under the authority of a man. A woman can only preach a sermon as long as a man has checked it out and she is doing it under his authority. Or she can teach women but not men (implying that the women are of

lesser value so it doesn't really matter what she teaches them).

LJ: This attitude is still very much alive, and it's bewildering. It doesn't seem to me that churches who don't accept the ordination of women are always being honest with their wider congregations about the position they hold. I was

working for a diocese as a youth worker, visiting a more conservative church. Before I went in, they said, "We just don't talk about the women issue, because there women could not be in leadership." It felt dishonest, and that doesn't feel very Christ-like.

+O: Also, we ought to be calling out the micro-aggressions in our churches, which we don't do. We are polite about it. Women are expected to shut up and be grateful for whatever concessions have been made.

LJ: That calling out is important because women say to us, "Tell us how to manage sexism; tell us how to work around it". That's not where we should start; we should be calling it out and changing behaviour.

*"we may
have gone
backwards"*



The Revd Canon Liz Jackson is Associate Archdeacon of Berkshire and a Bishop's Advisor for Women's Ministry in the diocese.

Continues overleaf...

+O: I think women in the church lack confidence. I don't know where that has come from, whether it is that generally women are less confident. We do have some fabulous female clergy, and a great new generation coming up. But, in general, I think we may even have gone backwards. My generation was far more comfortable being assertive than generations I see coming through. For example, I think being a parish priest as a woman is a great job if you've got young children because you can organise your time around your children's timetable. Nobody can tell an incumbent that they can't do that. You can organise your life so you're on the school gate at half past three every day.

LJ: And it's a missional opportunity!

+O: You can do some great ministry there. While your kids run around you chat to the parents.

LJ: We have to work out how we give permission for that to happen. It's very easy to get caught up in the demands of the role and the parish, and the expectations.

+O: I wonder why women feel they need permission?

LJ: Because we feel we need permission in all aspects of our lives in this world.

+O: The feminism of the 60s and 70s seems to have completely dissipated. Younger women today just don't seem to have benefited from it.

LJ: Christians are called to be a community, but the world is set up for people to be very individualistic. We need to be much better about how we nurture everybody in that community, including those who are giving birth to the next generation and nurturing them. There is quite a challenge in doing that from within an organisation that discriminates against women in some areas.

+O: If we're taking EDI [equality, diversity and inclusion] seriously, that means specific actions for specific groups.

LJ: And women in ministry also need to support one another. Some female clergy say to me, "It's not my issue because it's not affecting me." But if it's your sister's issue then it's your issue. That's what we believe, that's where we should be.

+O: If female clergy have claimed their space and are inhabiting it confidently then they should be mentoring all the other women in their deanery.

LJ: So, it's still our issue. I think we have the will – we have got to get our act together.

+O: Sister act!

Further reading

The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth by Beth Alison Barr

Historian Beth Alison Barr shows that "biblical womanhood" isn't biblical but arose from a series of clearly definable historical moments. She presents a better way forward for the contemporary church. Barr challenges both patriarchy and complementarianism, the view that men and women have different but complementary roles and responsibilities.

Resources for women in ministry

Our three Bishop's Advisors on Women's Ministry work at a diocesan level on all areas which affect ordained women. This includes recruitment and interviews; maternity; anti-

bullying policies; wellbeing and support systems, as well as encouragement for senior roles.

They are available to offer advice to individuals and advocate for them. Events are being planned for the year ahead: do get in touch with one of the advisors and engage with the network.

oxford.anglican.org/bishops-advisor-in-womens-ministry

The Women's Continuing Ministerial Education Trust supports women with financial grants to fund their further studies.

churchofengland.org/womens-continuing-ministerial-education-trust ¶

Reaching all ages

We are all children of God, but as adults we also have a responsibility to share his love with the young people in our lives. Welcoming families into our churches is at the very heart of ministry.

Time to focus on the young

Are our churches reaching young people with the good news of Jesus? Falling numbers suggest that the answer might be "No".

Welcoming everyone

Reaching out to sections of the community who would not usually come to church can be a leap of faith – but that's what it's all about, right?

St Mary's Church in Princes Risborough set out to invite families into church, to show them it was their space too. Their ambition was clear – encourage parents and children to think of church as a place for them as much as anyone else.

A new approach

Play Café was born out of a need to provide a space for families and, more importantly, young children to socialise following years of isolation during the pandemic. From there, the hope was that a warm welcome would encourage families to join the Messy Church, have their children baptised in church and perhaps begin their own journey of faith.

Church groups for preschool-aged children are popular. It's often said that children are the future of our church, but what are we doing to attract them, to make them and their carers feel at home? At St Mary's, the children's worker set out to use Play Café as a starting point for encouraging families into church, to meet the community need for a free facility for children, but not in an overtly evangelistic way.

A comfortable space

St Mary's transformed the space inside the church because it could have been off-putting and uncomfortable for those unfamiliar with church. It became a place that was colourful and fun. It broke down the stereotypes of what goes on behind the door of church.

Soft play, rather than a preschool set up, allowed the children to roam freely, moving around different apparatus. There was also a section for little ones who were not yet mobile, away from those just trying out their new-found walking skills. This meant parents as well as children mingled rather than settling in one space; as their children engaged with one another, so did the grown-ups.

Meeting people's needs

It's true to say children born during the Covid-19 pandemic missed out on socialising, even on seeing people. And, of course, their parents missed that contact too. The Play Café created a community, groups of carers and parents who could create new networks.

Families loved it. Those who walked through the doors could not believe they were in a church. They were overwhelmed at the effort that had gone into making the church a welcoming place, somewhere they could really belong. Investing in toys and equipment meant the visitors felt really valued. So often volunteer play groups are left to rely on well-meaning donations of toys past their best. This was different, and the families felt the care that had been taken to choose things their children would love to do.

Continues overleaf...

A place for faith to grow

For some families, Play Café becomes the gateway to learning more about God. Daphne and her daughter Coral have become regular attendees at Messy Church and have joined the all-age Sunday morning service. They felt really loved and, importantly, part of the church family, even though they did not originally come to church on a Sunday.

Bible stories during the session make parents and children curious, raising questions and prompting conversations which may not have otherwise taken place.

Addressing concerns

However, not everyone could see the vision from the outset. There were concerns about the impact on the church – where would all the equipment be stored, was this a suitable use of the church building? There was much to discuss. But Play Café having reached more than 150 families since its inception two years ago speaks for itself.

As one of the volunteers, Stella, explained: “I feel passionate that if we do not share Jesus with these families they are going to be the forgotten generation. I am passionate that we love and care for these families. I feel a burden for sharing God’s love and God’s message to families who would otherwise not get to hear about it. By sharing and caring for these families, we’re doing just that.”

Looking to the future

A motion at our recent Diocesan Synod calling for our parishes to increase their engagement with children, young people, families and schools was met with unanimous support. The reality – we are not reaching this section of our community as much as we could – is not a cause for despair. Rather, it’s an inspiration to reset our focus for the sake of tens of thousands of children, young people and families, that they may come to know God’s love and his kingdom.



Find out about our Amplify project, actively listening to the voices of children and young people and partnering with them to transform their concerns, dreams and aspirations into concrete actions.

[oxford.anglican.org/amplify](https://www.oxford.anglican.org/amplify)



Welcome families

1

Dream big – whatever the vision is that God is giving you, do not waver. See beyond what you normally see on a Sunday.

2

Create a good team – it's important to have clearly defined roles, so everyone knows what is expected and how they contribute.

3

Partner with others – bring people with you on your journey. Rather than looking inwards, become part of the community.

4

Invest in your idea – aim for excellence in everything you do; it's important you believe in your vision enough to incur the cost.

5

Listen to everyone – give children, young people and families the space they need to share their thoughts and ideas.

6

Use social media – find out where the people you want to reach are and join them there; social media is a great way to spread the word.

7

Set clear objectives – your intentions for how this activity will meet your vision for God's love to be known in your community.

8

Make it free – asking for donations for entry can help to cover the costs of resources and makes events accessible for everyone.

9

Give a warm welcome – both at the door and by making families feel at home with an age-appropriate environment.

Joy

What expresses joy better than a gospel choir? **Nnamdi Maduka** takes that joy into his everyday life. His prayer is that we will all be singing when the evening comes.

As I was about to write this, the breaking news was that Klopp, Liverpool Football Club manager, announced his resignation. His reason? "I'm running out of energy." What do we do when we feel drained, when we run out of steam? For me it is the time to sing praises to God. I see God in a different way when I sing, even when it seems there is no reason to be joyful. Joy overflows to all around me, whether I am singing alone or with a choir.

I have had many challenges in my life, but the joy of the Lord has sustained me. I derive this joy more from singing gospel music – it transforms and revives me as the joy of heaven is released on me. It takes me to "high heaven" where I am lost in wonder, unbounded love and praise to my Saviour, who loves me unconditionally.

This very nature of joy makes nonsense of our common distinction between having and wanting. My eyes are opened to the numerous blessings I take for granted, and this evokes gratitude in me. God's spirit breaks out, breaking down the walls around me, as my heaven comes down.

For me, each moment of life is a miracle and mystery. This has greatly improved my mental health and contentment.

Nothing moves the hands of God more than sincere praise from a humble heart. It is my weapon of

warfare: 2 Chronicles 20:22–3 (NLT) says "At the very moment they began to sing and give praise, the Lord caused the armies of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir to start fighting among themselves."

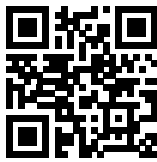
*"the joy of
heaven is released
on me"*

One can pray amiss but can never praise amiss. The beautiful thing about praise is that you do not need to be in the right key to praise God.

We should not overlook the power of praise in our prayers. Praises and prayers go hand and hand, and we can reap from both when we understand that the lyrics of gospel songs are prayers. When we sing them into our lives in faith they trigger joy that flows from the depth of God's love to us.

Singing is part of my family life; my wife's voice can melt a stone. During the baptism of our fourth child, my family sang from the depth of our hearts to thank God for healing our premature child of a catalogue of complications. As we were pouring our hearts out in praise to our God for healing our miracle baby, we all experienced a feeling of floating in the air. It seemed as if the church was covered with smoke-sweet smelling savour. After the service people said they experienced being covered with goose pimples, being taken to a higher realm. To God be the glory. 🙌

*Words: The Revd Nnamdi Maduka,
Associate Minister, St Mary's, Denham
Photo: Emma Thompson*



Focus your phone camera over this QR code to listen to Nnamdi's family singing.

Compare how the translation of Philippians 4:8-9 has changed over time. The translations below are from 1611, 1971 and 1993.

⁸ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. ⁹ Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

Authorised (King James) Version of the Bible

⁸ And now, brothers, as I close this letter, let me say this one more thing: Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about. ⁹ Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.

The Living Bible

⁸⁻⁹ Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious – the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

The Message

Dwelling in the Word

Christians want to hear what the Bible has to say about God and about our lives. But how does the translation affect what we hear?

It's a funny thing, reading the Bible. We read it because we want to hear God speak and yet we can find it hard to listen. Familiarity can breed that sense of knowing a passage so well that it falls into the "I know this stuff" category rather than into the "What is God saying to me through this passage?" category. We make ourselves comfortable and spiritually snooze our way through the words of text.

Using a different translation of the Bible can wake us up and make us think through how God is speaking to us through the Bible. My first experience of this was when I was ten years old. I was reading the Bible cover to cover as I had just got confirmed and thought I ought to find out what I had signed up for. I had been brought up largely on the Authorised Version, the New International Version and the *Good News Bible*. I was reading *The Living Bible* as a godparent had given me a copy as a confirmation present. It did have one or two slightly loose translations here and there, but the language was informal and fresh and made me read the Bible as if I were having a conversation with friends. This helped me to relate what I was reading to life as I experienced it.

It made me ask, "What might God be saying to me here?" and made it easier to answer that question. The passage opposite is a case in point. The Authorised Version to my ears (then at ten

and now at 56) sounds so rhythmic and poetic that I can get lost in its beauty and forget to examine what exactly does go through my mind in the average day, and how much of it really honours God. The Living Bible offers a translation which helped me to avoid ignoring the challenge. I got the meaning really clearly and so had to turn to the kind of prayer and self-examination that made me put my life before God and ask two basic questions of faith: "What are you asking of me, Lord?" and "Will you please give me the strength to do this, as I cannot do it on my own?" This helped the Bible to leap off the page and become much more the living word in my life.

People can have concerns about whether a translation is accurate. This is a valid concern, and part of the reason I read the New Revised Standard Version. That said, the NRSV is not a perfect translation and is sometimes less accurate than the Authorised Version. (The real answer for anyone who is concerned about what might be lost in translation is to invest in a good Bible commentary.) What is of absolute importance is that the translation we use is one which makes us sit up and ask, "What is God saying to me today?" ¶

Words: The Revd Dr Andy Angel, Director of Formation for Ministry



The Bible Gateway website provides a description of each translation – see what it says about The Message version: [biblegateway.com/versions](https://www.biblegateway.com/versions)



Remembering Bishop Alan

Such a sad and untimely loss to his family and friends, the church and everyone who opposes injustice of all kinds in this world. He had a wicked sense of humour, and my abiding memory of him at the last annual gathering for lay ministers at his home was his T-shirt quoting Monty Python's *Life of Brian!* *Marilyn Gooch*

Bishop Alan was an inspirational and deeply committed leader in the world of education.

For well over a decade, as chair of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education, he oversaw the mission and ministry of the diocese to hundreds of thousands of children and young people. He did so with integrity, vision and commitment. *Tony Wilson*

I saw in Alan Wilson an extraordinary ministry of caring that went far beyond expectation, never one to shy away from challenge and difficulty, but always one to reach out with the purest of love, the wonder of knowledge – and often topped with an awesome sense of humour. *The Revd Canon Val Plumb*

We will miss your wisdom, your independent thinking, your courage to name everything as much as we will miss your kindness, pastoral love, your humour, your friendship and, of course, your leadership. *Poli Shajko*

Bishop Alan was never afraid to stand up for those on the margins, those that felt they were being ignored by the church. He was a man of prophetic spirit, reaching out where he saw injustice and speaking up where he witnessed the abuse of power. *The Most Revd Justin Welby*



A lovely, lovely man. I remember him thundering down the road (late!) with a foil-covered plate of beans on toast. He'd forgotten he was due to take our confirmation class, and he was so comical. Rest in peace +Alan. *Teresa Howard*

Bishop Alan, we miss you a lot. So sad to hear. Rest in peace. He has built and supported a good partnership between Nandyal Diocese and the Diocese of Oxford to develop education as well as spirituality. We cannot forget. *Bishop Pushpa Lalitha Eggoni*

Alan was a dear friend and colleague, he was a bishop who prioritised the parishes and clergy in his care above everything else and served the people of Buckinghamshire with devotion over a long and demanding ministry. I will miss him as a friend and colleague. The Church has lost a wise, pastoral and prophetic bishop. *The Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft*

Photos: Steven Buckley

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