

Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership

*Six thriving and growing churches, making Christ known in
our area of Milton Keynes.*



December 2024 Newsletter

Welcome to the December edition of the Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership Newsletter, (also see website at www.stantonbury.net).

Partnership News

Pastoral letter from Revd. Canon Chi

1st December 2024

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace to you as we enter this holy season of Advent and prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ.

December is a month that invites us to slow down and reflect amidst the busyness of life. It is a time of preparation, expectation, and hope as we journey towards Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus, the Light of the World. ***“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned”*** (Isaiah 9:2). Let us hold on to this promise as we embrace the joy and wonder of the season.

Advent continues to be a season of waiting and anticipation. In our Sunday services and other gatherings, we light the Advent candles, marking the journey of hope, peace, joy, and love. Each flame reminds us that God’s promises are faithful and true. As we prepare to celebrate Christ’s birth, let us also look forward to His return, living lives that reflect His love and grace in the world.

November was a memorable month in our partnership as we came together for an **ecumenical confirmation service** at the Church of Christ the Cornerstone in Milton Keynes. It was a joy to see three candidates from our partnership confirmed by Bishop Steven Croft. This was a moment of great celebration and a reminder of the work of the Holy Spirit in drawing people closer to Christ. Let us continue to pray for those who have taken this important step in their faith journey.

However, November also brought challenges as the findings of the **Makin’s Review** led to the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. I know this has caused anxiety for many within our partnership and the wider Church, raising questions and concerns about safeguarding. Let me take this opportunity to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to safeguarding practices. We are determined to ensure that our churches remain places of safety, care, and welcome for all. As a partnership, we will continue to prioritise this responsibility and take every necessary step to build trust and confidence in our safeguarding processes.

As we approach Christmas, we rejoice in the mystery of the Incarnation—God becoming flesh to dwell among us. On **Christmas Day**, we celebrate the good news that Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, has come to dwell among us. In the midst of the festivities, it is important to remember that ***Jesus is the reason for the season***. Often, we can get carried away by the commercial aspects of Christmas—the gifts, decorations, and celebrations—yet the heart of this season is the gift of Emmanuel, God with us. John 1:14 reminds us, ***“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*** May this profound truth inspire us to focus on His love and share it with others.

We will gather for our traditional **Carol Services** across our churches, which are always a highlight of the season. These services allow us to sing familiar carols and reflect on the beautiful story of God’s love revealed through Christ. As we join together in worship, I encourage you to bring friends, neighbours, and family along to share in the joy and hope of Christmas.

On **Christmas Eve**, many of our churches will hold midnight services to welcome Christmas Day. This is a sacred moment to pause and reflect on the gift of Christ’s coming. Luke 2:11 proclaims, ***“Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”*** Let us gather in awe and gratitude, celebrating God’s gift to humanity.

As December draws to a close, we will gather as a partnership for a special **Holy Communion service on the 29th of December** at the Cross and Stable Church Downs at 11am. This will be a time to give thanks for the Lay Ministers, retired clergy, churchwardens, and volunteers who have faithfully supported our partnership throughout the year. What a fitting way to end the year by recognising the gifts of service and fellowship among us! We hope to see you all on the 29th of December.

Throughout this month, let us not lose sight of the deeper meaning of Christmas. While there is much joy in the festivities, there is also a call to respond to the message of the angels: ***“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests”*** (Luke 2:14). Let us be peacemakers, bearers of light, and voices of hope in our communities.

I encourage each of you to engage fully in the life of the church this December. Join the services, bring along your loved ones, and invite those who might need to hear the message of God’s love this season. May our churches be places of warmth, welcome, and witness to the Good News.

As we approach the end of the year, I also want to thank you all for your faithfulness and commitment to our partnership. It has been a privilege to journey with you this year, and I look forward to all that God has in store for us in 2025.

May the joy of Christ’s birth fill your hearts and homes with peace and hope. ***“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”*** (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Wishing you and your families a blessed Christmas and a joyful New Year.

Yours in Christ’s service,
The Revd. Canon Chi Okpala
Team Rector

Partnership wide services 2025 for your diaries

There will be a Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership wide service on 29th December at 11.00 at Cross and Stable church. Then there will be a Milton Keynes wide Local Ecumenical Partnership service on Tuesday evening, Tuesday 21st January 2025, at St Augustine's in Heelands, to celebrate Christian Unity Week with Churches Together.

The fifth Sundays next year are on March 30th, June 29th, August 31st and November 30th.

House for duty Anglican minister

Thank you to Church Wardens and Stewards for helping with updated photographs for our Parish Profile. We are working closely with the Oxford Diocese to hopefully have someone in post, and occupy the house at St Andrew's, by next Easter.

Initial report from SEP Vision Enabler

Dear friends...

It is nice to greet you and to share some initial thoughts about my distinct role of 'mission and vision enabler' for the SEP Churches together. It has been my joy since September to visit the churches and share in ministry with you. There is so much to admire in terms of the numbers of dedicated people working within our churches, organising worship, sharing in leadership and maintaining the various weekly activities that you value so much in each community.

I have though come into paid ministry here on behalf of the Trustees with the remit to begin to try to coordinate some of what the churches do individually; ensuring that resources – people and premises - are better shared and mission activities promoted effectively across the whole partnership. There will always be a desire that every church has the complete range of yearly events and activities in their community, and for every age group, but sadly the reality is that none of the churches can now adequately maintain this alone, and indeed – should not think that they have to. I note the effectiveness especially of our children and young people's ministries has already been lost, with most having no children regularly attending, and those that are do not find adequate ministry that will keep them coming and that will promote effective discipleship in their young lives.

These are the reasons for this role; first identified as 'Team Midwife' in Neil Popham's 2021 SEP review presentation. I have now taken this on and intend to provide strategic leadership to those desiring more coordinated and joined up thinking and missional action in the SEP. One of the biggest parts of my role is in the establishment of a Partnership Mission, Evangelism and Discipleship Team. I intend to begin these meetings early in 2025. If you would like to be involved, please make yourself known to me. Ultimately, it would be good to have a representative from each church joining this group.

The Lord bless you for Advent, Christmas and beyond...

Rev Phil Dunning

Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership Council

Thank you all for supporting our Ministers and changing the times of our services. This is greatly appreciated. The ministerial support, whether spiritual or pastoral, can now be more meaningful, as it will be more regular. Thank you to our Ministers for offering so much support.

Volunteer Administrative Assistant

SEP Council are still looking into the possibility of employing a part time administrative assistant, with funding from the Oxford Diocese Development Fund. I am meeting with staff at Oxford Diocese on 27 November to pursue this and the Parish Giving Scheme.

Warm blessings and Merry Christmas.
Sharron, Chair of SEPC

St Mary Magdalene Willen: Hooke Heritage Project

Impressive though it is, the St Mary Magdalene Church built in Willen by Robert Hooke lacks modern amenities, which is excluding for those for whom wash room facilities are essential (families with young children, the elderly, those with access needs). The Hooke Heritage Project has been created to remove those barriers.

Having completed a feasibility assessment earlier this year and identified that re-ordering or extending the Grade 1 church is not an option, the project is now moving forward by applying for a second tranche of funding to gather the information needed by the architect to design a freestanding facility to secure the church. The Diocese of Oxford team are advising us on funding and building development, and Milton Keynes City Council officers are advising us on heritage buildings, archaeology, and ecology. In readiness, the project's governance has been formalised and the Hooke Heritage Project working party is now constituted as a formal committee reporting to Stantonbury Ecumenical Council. It has Terms of Reference and is subject to Stantonbury Ecumenical Council Operating Procedures.

Jacky Scott, Chair, Hooke Heritage Project.

jacky@thescotts.uk.com

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Our Church Services and Events

Bradwell Church, St Lawrence

Sunday 1st at 10:30 **Morning Worship**

Led by Rev Canon Chi Okpala

Sunday 8th at 10:30 **Holy Communion**

Led by Rev Chris Bull

Sunday 15th at 10:30 **Morning Worship**

Led by Maggie Prisk

Sunday 22nd at 10:30 **Holy Communion**

Led by Rev Phil Dunning



Also on 22nd at 18:00 Carol Service

Led by Rev Canon Chi Okpala

Tuesday 24th at 17:00 Crib Service

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

and at 23:30 Midnight Communion

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

Wednesday 25th at 10:00 Christmas Day Morning Worship

Led by Mike Morris

Sunday 29th No Service

See 11:00 at Cross and Stable

Services are frequently live-streamed on Facebook using the link:

<https://www.facebook.com/BradwellChurchMK>

Gardening Club goes into hibernation for the winter on Nov 27th, coming back out of dormancy on 5th March. There is a lot to do and we really need more members see Andrew and Angela.

Bell Ringing practice every Wednesday at 19:45. Beginners welcome.

Christ Church, Stantonbury

Sunday 1st at 10:30 Morning Worship

Led by John Boxwell

Sunday 8th at 10:30 Morning Worship

Led by Helen Rouse LLM

Sunday 15th at 10:30 Carol Service

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

Sunday 22nd at 10:30 Morning Worship with Communion

Led by Rev Stephanie Hibberd

Tuesday 24th at 21:00 Midnight in Bethlehem

Led by Maggie Prisk

Wednesday 25th at 10:30 Christmas Day Morning Worship

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

Sunday 29th No Service

See 11:00 at Cross and Stable



All Sunday services are live-streamed to Christ Church's Facebook page, using the link below. You don't need to belong to Facebook in order to follow the service.

Streaming starts from 10.25 <https://www.facebook.com/christchurchmk/>

There is also a Christ Church website at www.christchurchmk.org.uk which has the service details on it, and which is updated each week

Saturday 14th at 09:30 Coffee and cake morning

all donations received go to Christ Church coffee money charity.

Morning Drop-In every Wednesday 10.00 – 11.30.

Meets at Church, refreshments and a quiz are available.

Under 5's meet every Thursday in **Term time only** from 10:00 to 11:30 in the Hall.

Cross and Stable, Downs Barn

Sunday 1st at 11:00 **Signed Holy Communion**

Led by Rev Peter Green

Sunday 8th at 11:00 **Morning Worship**

Led by Stephen Fletcher LLM

Sunday 15th at 11:00 **Holy Communion**

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe

Thursday 19th at 19:00 **Signed Carol Service**

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe

Sunday 22nd at 11:00 **Carol Service**

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe

Tuesday 24th at 23:30 **Midnight Service**

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe

Wednesday 25th at 11:00 **Family Service with Communion for Christmas Day**

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe

Sunday 29th at 11:00 **SEP wide Thanksgiving service + Holy Communion**

Led by Rev Canon Chi Okpala



Services are live-streamed on Zoom at

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85922248518?pwd=Tm4vd00wancwVk52cCtqNm5tMWRZdz09>

Meeting ID: 859 2224 8518 **Passcode: 830413**

Friday at 2:00 pm - **Prayer time & Bible reflection on Zoom**

This lasts around 45 mins - do join us from wherever you are on Zoom!

Please contact Sue Baines for the Link on suejbaines@gmail.com

Chatterbox MK every Wednesday from 10:30 to 12:30. All Welcome - tea - coffee - cakes - meet and chat. Come and meet others. **Chatterbox Christmas Party on Wednesday 18th** at the usual time.

Please pray for the **Care Homes in Neath Hill & Downs Barn** as we have Carol singing on **Sunday 22nd at 3.00pm and 4.00pm** respectively. Remember the frail, elderly, the caring staff & the concerned families as we minister God's love and grace.

St. Andrews', Great Linford

Sunday 1st at 11:00 **Open Door**

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

Wednesday 4th at 10:00 **1st Wednesday Communion**

Led by Rev Prof John Beazley

Sunday 8th at 11:00 **Holy Communion**

Led by Rev Prof John Beazley

Sunday 15th at 11:00 **TBA**

Led by Rev Stephanie Hibberd

Sunday 22nd at 11:00 **Holy Communion**

Led by Rev Dave Haseldine

and at 18:00 **Carol Service**

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

Tuesday 24th at 16:00 **Crib Service**

Led by Rev Dave Haseldine

and at 23:00 **Midnight Communion**

Led by Rev Canon Chi Okpala



Wednesday 25th at 11:00 Holy Communion for Christmas Day

Led by Rev Canon Chi Okpala

Sunday 29th at 09:30 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Canon Chi Okpala

Morning Services are live-streamed on Facebook using this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/StAndrewsGL>

Morning Worship every Wednesday at 08:30 in Church. All are welcome to attend in church or on our Facebook page.

St Andrews 1st Wednesday Seminar Group

You would be most welcome to join us on the first Wednesday of each month and participate in the discussion, which usually starts at about 11am. Please email greatlinford@gmail.com if you would like information on the current study topic. **John Beazley**

5 WAYS CAFÉ at St. Andrews' Church

11.00am to 1.00pm on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of each month

Join us to enjoy good company, refreshments, a selection of board games, Pete on the piano and, for those wanting a bit of exercise, an accompanied walk in Great Linford Manor Park. In addition on the 2nd Tuesday of each month local artist Jane Charles will be leading 'Coffee & Craft - accessible art for everyone', this is a joint venture between 5Ways, Friends of Great Linford Manor Park and the Parks Trust, so come along and see what you can do! All are welcome to 5Ways - we aim to be dementia friendly.

St. James', New Bradwell

Sunday 1st at 10:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Duncan Barnes

and at 16:00 Café Carols

Led by Jean Stratford and Helen Rouse LLM

Sunday 8th at 10:00 Open Door Service

Led by The Open Door Team with Rev Phil Dunning

Sunday 15th at 10:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Canon Chi Okpala

Sunday 22nd at 10:00 Morning Worship

Led by Helen Rouse LLM

and at 18:00 Carol Service

Led by Rev Duncan Barnes and Helen Rouse LLM

Tuesday 24th at 16:00 Crib Service

Led by Rev Duncan Barnes

Please note there will be no Midnight Service at St James', New Bradwell.

Wednesday 25th at 10:00 Holy Communion for Christmas Day

Led by Rev Duncan Barnes

Sunday 29th at 10:00 Morning Worship

Led by Helen Rouse LLM

Services are live-streamed most weeks to St James' Facebook page at [St James Church NB | Facebook](#)

Every Saturday from 10:00 to 12:00 St James' hosts a Coffee Morning.

Visit St James' website at www.stjamesnewbradwell.org.uk for more information.



St. Mary Magdalene, Willen

Sunday 1st at 09:30 All Age Morning Worship

Led by Margaret Moakes LLM

Sunday 8th at 09:30 Morning Worship

Led by Stephen Fletcher LLM

Sunday 17th at 09:30 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe

and at 17:00 Carol Service with Quorum

Led by Rev Canon Chi Okpala

Sunday 22nd at 09:30 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe

Tuesday 24th at 15:00 Children's Crib Service with Christingles

Led by Rev Canon Chi Okpala

Please note there will be no Midnight Service at St. Mary Magdalene, Willen.

Wednesday 25th at 09:30 Family Christmas Communion Service

Led by Rev Canon Chi Okpala

Sunday 29th at 09:30 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Hannah Akibo-Betts



The monthly communion service at **Oaktree Court, Portland Drive** will be at **2.45 pm on November 5th**. Anyone who would like to join us, and stay for a cup of tea afterwards, would be welcome. Please speak to Margaret Moakes.

Volunteer Gardening and **T.T.T.T** (Third Tuesday at Twelve Thirty) at St Mary Magdalene Church has finished for the year. A big **THANK YOU** to all the volunteers for all their great work in delivering **T.T.T.T** and also in maintaining and upgrading the churchyard in 2024.

Role Huddles

Across the Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership there are groups of people with shared interests, abilities, knowledge or talents building links between our six congregations.

These role huddles include those with an interest in:

- ❖ Eco-church
- ❖ IT, sound systems, live-streaming
- ❖ Providing music for services
- ❖ Communication, social media
- ❖ Pastoral Care
- ❖ Care of our church buildings

These are very informal groups, only meeting if needed, but able to offer support.

If you are interested in finding out more, if you feel your congregation needs help with any of these, or if you could offer help, please contact me and I will put you in touch with the group.

Many thanks,

Irene

irene@tfarr.plus.com

External Ecumenical News

We want to plan for our future in faith and church and ministry. If anyone reading this is thinking their future may lie in any level of ministry, please speak to your minister or drop me a line.

News from Diocese of Oxford

27 November 2024



Downing Street have announced that the Revd Canon Mary Gregory has been nominated as the next Bishop of Reading and the Revd Canon Dave Bull has been nominated as the next Bishop of Buckingham.

Mary is currently Canon for Reconciliation and the Arts at Coventry Cathedral. Dave is Team Rector of Marlow and Area Dean of Wycombe.

Full details of both candidates are now on our [diocesan website](#). Mary and Dave will each be travelling across the diocese today meeting with clergy and civic leaders and many others.

Thank you to all who have prayed for the appointments process and were involved in any way in the consultations. Please continue to pray for Mary and Dave as they prepare to take up these new ministries at the end of February.

From The Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford

News from the Regional Central Baptist Union

Nationwide Christmas campaign 'Shine Your Light' seeks 1,000 churches this year

[Shine Your Light](#), a united initiative of denominations, prayer networks and streams (including Baptists Together), is seeking 1,000 churches to share their vision of taking carol services, nativity and other Christmas events from within church buildings out into shopping centres, village greens, community centres – anywhere where the public will gather this December.

While the focus of the four-nation evangelistic campaign is aimed for the weekend of 13-15 December, any church can register, and benefit from a range of free resources to help them spread the Christian message throughout December.

News from the Methodist Circuit

There will be news on last week's Methodist Stationing Visit in the next newsletter.

News from The United Reformed Church

Advent: A vision of hope in testing times

In November, the Revd Dr Simon Cross was one of ten new ministers. Now Minister of the Hull Area Team, Simon reflects on what will be his first Advent;

As Advent approaches, I find that I am hopeful. Despite all the desolation, despite the challenges faced by so many in my community and beyond, I still, somehow, remain hopeful.

Over the past weeks and months, the Sunday gospel readings have led us through some of the highlights of Jesus' ministry as told by Mark, whose breathless prose hardly leaves room for anything but action. Written sometime around the fall of the Jerusalem temple in 70CE, Mark comes from a time of political turmoil and desperate speculation. Perhaps it's no surprise, then, that the writer wastes no time on concocted nativity scenarios found in the later tellings by Matthew and Luke. His prologue lasts only six sentences and then he gets right into the action. He doesn't bother with hero origin stories and just plunges the reader straight into the story of Jesus' ministry. Despite its ambiguous ending, Mark's gospel remains, for me, one of deep-seated hope. Mark's Jesus leads a social, political and spiritual revolution – encouraging the development of new communities of resistance in the heart of the Roman occupation, under the noses of the client kings and military governors. It offers a vision of hope in the most testing of circumstances, hope that outweighs even the overwhelming force of military oppression and institutional corruption; hope that doesn't rely on armies or governmental bail outs.

Even as our world goes through another period of escalating political turmoil and devastating warfare; even as lives are upended and people are ripped from their homes; even as power hungry leaders seek to dominate and their acolytes spread their own brands of hate and corruption, we are reminded not to despise the day of small things. Small things like a mustard seed, or a yeast particle, or a flickering lamp. God wasn't in the earthquake nor the fire, but in the still small voice, the whisper, a tiny baby born in a small town. Hope is still found in small things and out of the way places.

Thank you for reading this, and may I wish you a Merry (meaning 'gladness with a clear heart') Christmas'

Sharron, Chair of SEP CIO Council

News from Churches Together in Milton Keynes

Our strapline is:

One in Christ Jesus, engaged in God's mission, empowered by the Spirit.

There are far too many items on the website to list, so please take a look for yourself at: [Churches Together in Milton Keynes \(ctmk.church\)](http://ctmk.church)

News from the Partnership Green Champions

Eco tip for December

The 12 Days of a Green(er) Christmas



On the first day of Christmas

Buy a real Christmas tree from a sustainable source. After Christmas plant it, or put it in your green bin or book Willen Hospice to take it away for a small donation.

On the second day of Christmas

If you need some new Christmas lights or electrical goods don't bin the old ones, donate them or take them to your local recycling centre or to Currys. Old candles and tea lights can be recycled via <https://therecycledcandlecompany.co.uk/> – there's a collection point at the refill shop, 7-9 Friday Street, Leighton Buzzard LU7 1DU.

On the third day of Christmas

Buy recycled Christmas cards, send an e-card or make your own. Avoid glitter and foil!

On the fourth day of Christmas

There's nothing worse than smiling a grateful thanks for a present you don't really want, so give consumable presents, buy a membership or an experience day or go for a luxury meal and/or the theatre.

On the fifth day of Christmas

Are you buying presents that use batteries? If so, why not add recycled batteries and a charger?

On the sixth day of Christmas

When shopping use your LOAF

(Local — Organic — Animal friendly — Fairtrade)

On the seventh day of Christmas

Buy eco-crackers or, in the best Blue Peter tradition, make your own. all you need is a few toilet tube rolls, newspaper and some small gifts people might actually want.

On the eighth day of Christmas

Go for a walk, decorate a tree for wildlife (suet balls etc), but make sure it's where the birds can see the cat coming, or use twigs to create a 5 pointed star and find other natural things to decorate it with.

On the ninth day of Christmas

Use the wrapping paper recycling test: scrunch it up into a ball, if it stays in shape, you can recycle it. Alternatively use magazine articles the recipient will enjoy reading and they get two presents for the price of one. Try to avoid glitter and foil.

On the tenth day of Christmas

Where possible freeze leftovers rather than binning them.

On the eleventh day of Christmas

Had time to read all those magazines you subscribe to over the festive period? Why not pass them on to a friend?

On the twelfth day of Christmas

Make a New Year's Resolution to get in touch with the seasons and/or seek out local adventures. Or simply make your own eco-resolution (and keep to it!). Look out for the monthly eco-tip in the newsletter!

I hope that you have found this and previous newsletters over the year interesting and useful.

If there is anything you think would make it better or find any glaring omissions, please let your congregation's newsletter editor, Sharron or myself know.

*The deadline for information to go into January's issue is **Friday 20th December** to allow me to get it to you in time to send out before the beginning of January.*

And finally this month may I wish you a very happy, peaceful and blessed Christmas.

John

John Porter sepnewsletter9@gmail.com