

Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership

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



January 2025 Newsletter

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

Partnership News

Pastoral letter from Revd. Canon Chi

1st January 2025

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Happy New Year!

As we step into 2025, let us begin by giving thanks to God for His faithfulness and mercies that have carried us through another year. The Psalmist reminds us, **“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures for ever”** (Psalm 107:1). It is with this gratitude that we reflect on the blessings of 2024 and look forward with hope to the opportunities of 2025.

December was a wonderful month of celebration, reflection, and worship across our partnership. From the joyful Carol Services to the sacred moments of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, we gathered as a community to honour the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **The Holy Communion service on the 29th of December**, which brought the entire partnership together, was a fitting conclusion to the year as we gave thanks for the many volunteers and ministers who have supported our churches. My heartfelt thanks go to everyone who participated and served during this special season.

Our Theme for 2025

As we journey into this new year, our theme is **“Growing in Faith, Deepening in Love.”** This theme calls us to a year of spiritual growth, both as individuals and as a church community. The Apostle Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians resonates deeply: **“I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ”** (Ephesians 3:17–18).

Let us seek to grow deeper in our understanding of God’s love and extend that love to one another, making our churches vibrant places of faith, hope, and welcome.

Focus Areas for 2025

This year, we will place a special emphasis on three key areas:

1. Children and Families

Our work with children and families will be a priority. We aim to strengthen relationships with local schools, engage with parents, and create opportunities for young people to encounter the love of Christ. From children's ministry within the church to outreach in the community, we will strive to nurture the faith of the next generation. Jesus said, *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these"* (Matthew 19:14). May this inspire us to be a church that warmly welcomes and values children.

2. Visiting the Elderly

We are committed to visiting and supporting our elderly members, ensuring they feel connected and cared for. As Proverbs 16:31 reminds us, *"Grey hair is a crown of splendour; it is attained in the way of righteousness."* The wisdom and faithfulness of our older members are treasures that enrich our church community. Let us honour them by offering our time, prayers, and companionship.

3. Supporting Families

Families are the cornerstone of our communities, and we want to walk alongside them in both the joys and challenges of life. Whether through practical support, pastoral care, or simply being a listening ear, let us be a church that strengthens families, embodying the love and grace of Christ in all we do.

Looking Ahead

As we embrace the opportunities of 2025, let us do so with hope and expectation, trusting in God's guidance. Let us recommit ourselves to worship, prayer, and service, and may our churches continue to be places of welcome, joy, and transformation. I encourage you to begin this year by asking how you can contribute to our shared mission. Perhaps you feel called to volunteer in a new area, join a study group, or commit to regular prayer for our church and community. Whatever it may be, remember that each of us has a role to play in building God's Kingdom.

A Prayer for the New Year

As we step into this year, let us pray together:

"Lord, we thank You for the gift of this new year. As we journey together, may we grow in faith, deepen in love, and shine as lights in the world. Guide us in all that we do, that we may glorify You and share Your love with others. In Jesus' name, Amen."

May 2025 be a year of spiritual growth, renewed faith, and abundant blessings for you and your families. I look forward to all that God will do in and through us in the coming months.

Yours in Christ's service,

Revd. Canon Chi Okpala
Team Rector and Leader

Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership

Partnership wide services 2025 for your diaries

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

We have been informed that there will be a short term let, of 6 months, on the St Andrews house, so this post will be advertised for September 2025.

From SEP Vision Enabler

Phil writes:

You will hopefully have noted my comments in my initial report contained in the last SEP Newsletter, about the formation of the new 'MED' (...Mission, Evangelism and Discipleship) Group for the partnership in the new year - this will be my central focus in terms of the Vision enabler role that I have, going forward...

It is hoped that I can recruit at least one volunteer from every church onto this group, and I'd be grateful if Wardens could consider, ask around, and otherwise encourage their church members to consider who might be able to be involved - and pass me their contact information.

I don't necessarily want to recruit those who already work very hard in the churches, although people displaying some sort of a passion for this sort of strategic thinking are a must...- it will obviously also be another round of meetings to bring in; although I would argue perhaps this one is more important than many!!

Thanks and blessings
Rev Phil Dunning

Oxford Diocesan Synod

Rev Chi and I are on this synod and I have very recently been elected to the Oxford Diocese Board of Education. I hope to help and support the growth of Christian education in Milton Keynes Schools. Please let me know if you have any information or questions that may help me.

Warm blessings and a Happy New Year.
Sharron, Chair of SEPC

St Mary Magdalene Willen: Hooke Heritage Project

This Project aims to:

- Preserve the Grade 1 listed Willen Church
- Provide discreet toilet facilities and improve accessibility
- Increase space on the Church site for education, spiritual learning and secular activities
- Provide interpretation and learning from its polymath architect, Robert Hooke

The Feasibility part of the Project has been completed to the satisfaction of the Heritage Fund and with the endorsement of the Oxford Diocesan Advisory Committee to proceed to the next stage.

The brief for the new building is yet to be developed. Meanwhile we have been identifying funding sources and their requirements. We are progressing at differing speeds on 3 fronts – construction planning, organisational development, and community learning/ engagement.

Our plans for 2025 include applying to fund significant works on the Church building; drawing up a business plan as this will be required to complete the applications for funding for the new building; arranging for an archaeological survey and arranging a biodiversity survey.

Community engagement will continue with TTTT concerts (starting on March 18th) and a full programme in September for Heritage Open Days.

If you would like further information or feel able to help us in practical ways please email: kirkwoodhilda@gmail.com or speak to someone after a church service or event. Thank you to everyone involved in the Project and for all those who have supported us this far.

Our Church Services and Events

Bradwell Church, St Lawrence

Sunday 5th at 10:30 **Morning Worship**

Led by Rev Jenny Boxwell

Sunday 12th at 10:30 **Holy Communion**

Led by Rev Stephanie Hibberd

Sunday 19th at 10:30 **Morning Worship**

Led by Maggie Prisk

Sunday 26th at 10:30 **Holy Communion**

Led by Rev Canon Chi Okpala



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 5th at 10:30 **Morning Worship with Covenant**

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

Sunday 12th at 10:30 **Morning Worship**

Led by Maggie Prisk / Rev Canon Chi Okpala

Sunday 19th at 10:30 **Morning Worship**

Led by Rev David Nash

Sunday 26th at 10:30 **Morning Worship with Communion**

Led by Rev Phil Dunning



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 18th 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 5th at 11:00 Signed Holy Communion

Led by Rev Peter Green

Sunday 12th at 11:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe

Sunday 19th at 11:00 Morning Worship

Led by Helen Rouse LLM

Sunday 26th at 11:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe



Services are live-streamed on Zoom at

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85922248518?pwd=Vm4vd00wancwVk52cCtqNm5tMWRZdz09>

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.

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 5th at 11:00 Open Door

Led by Rev David Nash

Wednesday 8th at 10:00 Wednesday Communion

Led by Rev Prof John Beazley

Sunday 12th at 11:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

Sunday 19th at 11:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Prof John Beazley

Sunday 26th at 11:00 Covenant Holy Communion

Led by Rev Dave Haseldine

Silent Reflection in the Chancel

9.30 to 10am prior to 11am Sunday Services (coffee available from 10am)

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. Coffee & Craft with local artist Jane Charles will be back again on 2nd Tuesdays from April to September and we are hopeful of further dates – you can email greatlinford@googlemail.com for the latest information. All are welcome to 5Ways - we aim to be dementia friendly

St. James', New Bradwell

Sunday 5th at 10:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Duncan Barnes

Sunday 12th at 10:00 Morning Worship

Led by Helen Rouse LLM

Sunday 19th at 10:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Duncan Barnes / Rev Canon Chi Okpala

Sunday 26th at 10:00 Covenant Holy Communion

Led by Revs Dr Mary Cotes and Duncan Barnes



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 5th at 09:30 All Age Morning Worship

Led by Margaret Moakes LLM

Sunday 12th at 09:30 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe

Sunday 19th at 09:30 Morning Prayer

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

Sunday 26th at 09:30 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe



The monthly communion service at **Oaktree Court, Portland Drive** will be at **2.45 pm on January 2nd**. 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.

Bible Study Group. The bible study group will start again in January. It will meet at the Quaker Centre, Downs Barn on the following Thursday evenings until Lent starts: 9th January, 23rd January, 6th February and 20th February. Each session will start at 7.00 pm and finish at 9.00 pm. If you wish to join, please see Margaret Moakes or e-mail margaret.moakes@btinternet.com Lifts can be arranged if needed.

Future Events

Saturday 25th January 2025

18:00 to 21:00 Willen Burns Night Supper,

We have a tradition of offering a Burns Night Supper at Willen Pavilion with the support of the Pavilion Trustees.

We offer a 3 course supper of Scotch Broth, Haggis with neaps and tatties and the Scottish cranachan raspberry and meringue dessert. There is a chance to sample Scottish malts and a vegetarian option can be booked.

Tickets are £15 for the three course meal; children £5.

To book contact David Preston on 07538 498 061 or e-mail

davidgwpreston@gmail.com

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

For those considering adoption

Wednesday 15th January

Parents And Children Together (PACT) will be among the voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) from across the country taking part in [Big Adoption Day 2025](#), highlighting the work they do to find loving adoptive families for children waiting to be placed, and the benefits of adopting through a VAA. People in the diocese who are considering becoming a parent through adoption are invited to come and meet the PACT team at its offices in Tickford Street, Newport Pagnell, on Big Adoption Day (Wednesday 15th January) between 10am and 3pm. Please book a place by calling 0300 456 4800.

News from the Regional Central Baptist Union

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18th to 25th January 2025 theme is ...

Do you believe this?

For 2025, materials were prepared by the ecumenical community at Bose in Northern Italy.

As we celebrate 1,700 years since the Council of Nicaea, the worship service has at its heart, the Nicene Creed. Reflecting this, the scripture readings for this year focus on belief.

We are invited to reflect on the story of Martha's confession of faith in Jesus as narrated in John 11:17-27. Each is called to sit with Jesus' provocative question to Martha: "Do you believe this?"

Resources

For 2025, resources are available both as downloads and printed versions that can be ordered. The poster has been produced as a multilingual version and an English only version. Details will be included on the [resources page](#) as they become available.

[Download or order resources](#)

Dates

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed from the 18th to the 25th January – the octave of St. Peter and St. Paul.

Christian Aid

Each year Christian Aid provides the Go and Do action points for each of the daily reflections – linking into the important work of Christian Aid in the relief of poverty and advocacy of justice.

Social media

Show your support for Christian Unity by posting unity messages and details of your events to our [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Twitter wall](#)

News from the Methodist Circuit

At the start of the new year Methodists make a distinctive resolution

The covenant service, often celebrated on the first Sunday of the year, is at the heart of Methodists' devotion and discipleship, and their dedication in working for social

justice. In the service the Church joyfully celebrates God's gracious offer that "I will be their God and they shall be my people".

That relationship primarily involves the corporate life of the community of God's people. It is concerned with individuals within that group.

What God offers is a loving relationship. The Covenant is not a contract in which God and human beings agree to provide particular goods and services for each other! It is not something that we have to do to create a relationship with God. God has freely and graciously already made it possible.

Rather, the Covenant is the means of grace by which we accept the relationship and then seek to sustain it. It is therefore not so much about getting in to a relationship with God as it is about staying in it. It is not about acquiring a relationship with God, but living within the loving relationship that God has already offered us.

God's gracious offer to us is therefore simultaneously a challenge. If God is committed to us, are we prepared to accept that as reality and commit ourselves in return to God? Even if we do choose to accept it, how can we manage to live out our commitment adequately, frail and human as we are?

It is in Jesus Christ that we discover the supreme example of what it is to live in relationship with God. The New Testament suggests that as we join the group of those seeking to follow the way of Jesus, we respond to God's challenge with him and begin to share his relationship with God as Father. Within the group of disciples, this leads to his Spirit bubbling up in us as individuals, encouraging and enabling us to live out our side of the relationship (i.e. "writing God's ways on our hearts" as Jeremiah 31 describes the Covenant).

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) 2025 will mark the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi concentration camp, and the 30th anniversary of the genocide in Bosnia. We are running a competition for secondary school students to learn about the 30th anniversary of the genocide in Bosnia and mark it by designing a memorial.

We will award prizes to the top 10 memorial designs and share them on our social media and at the Holocaust Memorial Day 2025 UK Ceremony in January.

All memorial designs must be submitted digitally either as a scan or a high-quality photograph.

Download our teacher information and lesson pack below for more details.

[Download Bosnia competition pack](#)

Please email your entries to education@hmd.org.uk by **Friday 10 January 2025**.

News from The United Reformed Church

Reflecting on Epiphany

6th January 2025 to 10th January 2025

Venue: Online – free of charge

Book via the URC Spirituality website –

https://urc-spirituality.org.uk/urcsp_event/reflecting-on-epiphany/

A series of personal reflections on Epiphany, each evening from 7.30pm until 8.45pm from across the URC and beyond:

Revd Geoffrey Clarke – East Midlands Moderator – 6th January
Revd Dr Susan Durber – European President of the World Council of Churches – 7th January
Revd Andrew Brown – Unitarian Minister from central Cambridge – 8th January
Revd Sheila Maxey – retired minister and regular Reform contributor – 9th January
Revd Timothy Meadows – GA Moderator 2024-25 on 10th January
There will be an opportunity for those who have booked, to interact with the above speakers.
Please book before 9.00pm on 5th January. A Zoom link will be sent to those who have booked shortly after that.

Thank you for reading this, and may I wish you all a Happy and healthy New Year.
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 January

Last Month's eco tip for the twelfth day of Christmas was to make an **ECO-RESOLUTION**:

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 newsletters!

At New Year it's traditional to look back on the outgoing year. Perhaps you would like to look back on what changes you have made. Every change we individually make makes a difference. On a larger scale action is being taken by governments, companies and charities internationally. See the link below for an encouraging roundup of 2024's climate action.

New Year is also a time for quizzes! There is a quiz link below for 'How well do you know your local wild life?'

[Positive climate news from 2024 | Good Energy](#)

Link to the quiz from BCN Wild Life Trust
[Interact Quiz](#)

I hope that you have found this and previous newsletters over the years 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 February's issue is **Saturday 25th January** to allow me to get it to you in time to send out before the beginning of February.*

And may I wish you a very happy, peaceful and blessed 2025.

John

John Porter sepnewsletter9@gmail.com

*The **Last Word** this month comes from Rev Dave Haseldine. If you would like an item included in this spot in future just email it to me by the deadline with the header '**Last Word**' (not more than 1½ pages please) With that I pass this edition to Dave: JP*

Dear Friends,

What was the last pantomime that you went to see? Many people have fond memories of them and families still love going to see (and join in with!) a pantomime, especially just before Christmas or up to a couple of months afterwards.

A few years ago someone re-wrote the Christmas story as pantomime. And indeed, King Herod makes a fantastic pantomime baddie, so everyone can hiss and boo and have a great time. And the nativity story has a happy ending (for Jesus and his family for a time at least) and we can all go home happy and secure. Because in many ways pantomime is deliberately *disconnected* from real life. In pantomime it is abundantly clear who are the good guys and who are the bad guys, and who are the clowns, and who are the innocent ones caught up in the plot, and crucially you know what is going happen, for the story line is pretty much fixed and no-one good is really hurt and no-one is *really* bad, not even the arch-baddy, and they all live happily ever after. In the end, it's for kids, and the adults have fun too. But it's not reality. It's an escape. And that's ok, because it is good to sometimes escape from reality for a while, because reality can be unbearably bruising and hard to face. And so we also need to take some time out to have our batteries recharged so that we can, the next day, face reality again.

But there are risks in treating the Christmas story as if it is a pantomime. Because at its heart, it is the very opposite of a pantomime: it is the reality of God breaking in to the reality of life on Earth so that we can do the same. Real life involves real people, who behave according to who they are. People are *not* cardboard cut-out characters who behave according to the narrow demands of a plot story line. Everyone is a mix of good and bad and often what we do is balanced on a knife-edge and no-

one knows for sure what they will do, or what others around them will do, or what will happen when we are all interacting together.

History has happened and it has unfolded the way it has. But at the time, as it was happening, no-one knew what would happen next at any point. That was true then, as it is now. Tyrants and self-centred leaders were real, and are real, and there was no guarantee, and there is no guarantee, that standing against them and with and for the little ones they squash, will result in a happy ending any time soon. Too often those befriending the little ones also get squashed. But time and again people in the Bible and today find that God is with them when they are getting squashed. And surprising things happen! A short time after Jesus was born, three foreign spiritual leaders turn up looking for the new King Anointed by God! What an Epiphany! What a surprising revelation! Not my Plan A! Nor King Herod's! And chaos and grief ensue! But God knows what God is doing, and come what may God persists with God's own unbreakable resolution to human beings, especially the most squashed.

So this new year, let's open our eyes to look out for surprises! For when God is with those who are being squashed. And for when God is calling us to make a new year-long resolution to be with them too.

Dave Haseldine.