Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership

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



February 2025 Newsletter

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

Partnership News

Pastoral letter from Revd. Canon Chi 1st February 2025

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we enter February, we give thanks for the blessings of the year so far and for God's continued presence with us as we journey together. The Psalmist reminds us, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22–23). With this assurance, we look forward to what God has in store for us in the coming months.

A Time of Transition and Thanksgiving

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all our churches for their openness and willingness to adopt the new worship start times from March 2025. These changes reflect our shared commitment to ensuring that our worship is accessible and welcoming to as many people as possible.

Reflecting on January

January was a month of new beginnings, as we embraced our theme for the year, "Growing in Faith, Deepening in Love." I am deeply encouraged by the enthusiasm with which so many of you have engaged with this vision, and I pray that it will continue to inspire and shape our shared life throughout 2025.

I also want to take a moment to reflect on a deeply personal event and to thank you all for your prayers and solidarity during my father's recent kidnap. By God's grace, he as well as his driver were returned safely, and our family has been upheld by your love and support throughout this difficult time. Your kindness and prayers have been a testament to the strength of our Christian community, and we are profoundly grateful.

Looking Ahead to Lent

February also marks our preparation for Lent, a season of reflection and renewal. As we approach this holy time, let us consider how we might draw closer to God through

prayer, fasting, and acts of love. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Lent is an opportunity for us to deepen our discipleship and to remember the cost and the joy of following Christ.

In the coming weeks, we will share more details about our Lent services and activities, including opportunities for study, prayer, and outreach. I encourage you to participate fully, bringing friends and family along to experience this meaningful journey together.

A Prayer for February

"Gracious God, we thank You for leading us into this new year and for the changes that shape us for Your glory. As we prepare for Lent, help us to reflect on Your great love and to grow in faith and service. May we embrace the opportunities ahead with courage, compassion, and joy, trusting in Your quidance. In Jesus' name, Amen."

May the coming weeks be a time of blessing and growth for you and your families. I look forward to walking with you through this season and witnessing the ways in which God continues to work among us.

Yours in Christ's service,

Revd. Canon Chi Okpala Team Rector and Team Leader Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership

Notice from Rev Phil Dunning

Lent Bible Study material - a recommendation to all SEP Churches

I've been inspired by the number of separate, and inspirational, SEP Churches Bible study groups that meet at various times and in various places, live or virtually - throughout the week. Thanks to all of those who lead and coordinate these meetings consistently.

I would like to recommend that - for this new Lent season - the groups 'come together' to study the <u>same material</u> that will inspire, engage and unite us still further as Churches together.

Following a recommendation from the group at St Andrews, I would suggest we all study

'The Joy of the Gospel'

A six-week study on sharing faith, by Paula Gooder. (ISBN - 0715147315 - 2015 - Church House Publishing)

It should be only group leaders who will need to purchase the book, unless participants would like their own copy - ...it is priced at £7.99 on Amazon, or on Eden..

...churches should also reimburse this cost to leaders on request.

A reminder of the dates involved in 2025... Ash Wednesday - 5th March 2025 1st Week of Lent - beginning 10th March Lent 2 - beginning 17th March Lent 3 - beginning 24th March Lent 4 - beginning 31st March Lent 5 - beginning 7th April Holy Week - beginning 14th April

'Plenary'

I will perhaps also plan a joint and relaxed meeting 'post-Easter' - an open invitation for all friends, of any of our churches, to meet together to consider what we have studied, to pray together and encourage one another in mission.

Lent is always a significant time to reflect and review our spiritual attentiveness to God. The Lord bless you 'however' you mark the time...

Rev Phil Dunning

Message from Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

We are all different in several ways and yet we are unique and special in God's eyes. The **HOW** we view the world & do things practically is variable and different, yet **WHY** we do things is the same. We do what we do as Christians for the service and glory of God. We serve Him with all our hearts, souls, and mind.

We are different in our ages, ethnicity, life's experiences, resources, skills, abilities etc. We bring all these talents and gifts to Jesus, who takes us in his hands, blesses us, breaks us and gives them back to us to serve the multitude as was mentioned at the Covenant Service.

As a Church, we move forward in all our activities using our God given abilities for the Glory of God. Let not our humanity and frailties –the **How**, trump our desire to build God's Church on earth - the **Why**.

Sam Muthuveloe- 16/01/25

Partnership wide services 2025 for your diaries

Thank you to everyone who supported the Milton Keynes wide Local Ecumenical Partnerships service, to celebrate Christian Unity Week with Churches Together. It was good to see Rev Tim Norwood again.

The fifth Sundays next year are on March 30th, June 29th, August 31st, November 30th. We will use the same system as last time, where individual congregations choose to open or leave a welcomer. March 30th is Mothering Sunday and the 11.00 service at St Andrew's will be led by the Baptist denomination and will include the whole ecumenical partnership. Please let Revd. Chi, Revd. Phil or Church Warden, Stephen Hutchings know if you want to take part in the service.

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 in a previous 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

Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership Council

Thank you all for supporting our Partnership by attending these meetings, once every two months. The minutes of these meetings are on the website.

The Council voted to remain a member of Churches Together in Milton Keynes for a further year.

Administrative Assistant

SEP Council agreed to move forward to advertise for a part time administrative assistant, even though we will not get funding from the Oxford Diocese. We hope Joshua, from Oxford Diocese will come and talk to us at our Church Meeting AGM, about taking on the Parish Giving Scheme.

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

New Membership List

Every six years the SEP updates its membership register in full (including the Church of England Electoral Roll but also covering all members from all denominations). Every member wishing to continue in membership of the SEP and specifically their local congregation needs to complete a membership form by 30th April 2025 at the latest but preferably before your local Annual Congregational Meeting. Forms are available from your Membership Secretary and should be returned to them. The information will be kept on your congregation's local list and the SEP membership register.

Please note that electronic signatures are permitted on application forms, so it is sufficient for application forms to have a typed name where a signature is required if sending this back from a personal email address.

St Mary Magdalene Willen: Hooke Heritage Project

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St Mary Magdalene Leadership Team is currently developing an operational business plan for operating the combined church and new building, testing and evidencing the extent to which the new partnership facility building will contribute to the conservation of the existing church, and identifying the scale and function of the new building.

It is a strategic business plan created to enable those with operational and governance responsibilities, and potential stakeholders, partners and donors, to envisage and understand the future, and see how potential outcomes and risks will be managed, and successful change will be safely and sustainably delivered.

Jacky Scott, Chair, Hooke Heritage Project

jacky@thescotts.uk.com

01908 605473

The Chair of the Hooke Heritage Project at Willen Church has been talking with the Chief Executive of MK College which, in addition to secondary curriculum also delivers undergraduate STEM courses in partnership with Cranfield University https://southcentraliot.ac.uk/ https://mkcollege.ac.uk/.

She has an ambition to connect students to their local community and inspire her teaching staff, and it seems our project might have potential to deliver to that by providing live case study material.

As Rev Chi is ambitious to involve young people in the church, and as the opportunity seemed a good one regardless of whether the building project proceeds, we proposed creative, curriculum suggestions for her 25/26 academic year. She's now confirmed she wants to explore this collaboration further.

A retired CEO of MK College has confirmed she will be our college connector (managing the larger proportion of implementation), but we need a link from our congregations with whom she can connect. As the student work will be creative and conceptual, I wondered if any of you might enjoy getting involved. What do you think? Please get in touch with me if you want to know more. Sharron

Our Church Services and Events

Bradwell Church, St Lawrence

Sunday 2nd at 10:30 Morning Worship

Led by Rev Esther Squire

Sunday 9th at 10:30 Morning Worship

Led by Helen Rouse LLM

Sunday 16th at 10:30 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Jenny Boxwell

Sunday 23rd at 10:30 Morning Worship

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

Most Sunday services are live streamed to You Tube. Simply go to You Tube, search for Bradwell Church Milton Keynes and click the red live button just before the service begins.

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 2nd at 10:30 Morning Worship

Led by John and Jenny Boxwell

Sunday 9th at 10:30 Morning Worship

Led by Maggie Prisk

Sunday 16th at 10:30 Morning Worship

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

Sunday 23rd at 10:30 Morning Worship with Communion

Led by Rev David Nash

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 15th 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 2nd at 11:00 Signed Holy Communion

Led by Rev Peter Green

Sunday 9th at 11:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

Sunday 16th at 11:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe

Sunday 23rd 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=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.

Please pray for the **Care Homes in Neath Hill & Downs Barn** as we conduct a Church Service and Holy Communion on **Sunday 23rd 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 2nd at 11:00 Open Door

Led by Rev Canon Chi Okpala

Wednesday 5th at 10:00 Wednesday Communion

Led by Rev Prof John Beazley

Sunday 9th at 11:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Canon Peter Ballantine

Sunday 16th at 11:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Prof John Beazley

Sunday 23rd at 11:00 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 2nd at 10:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Phil Dunning

Sunday 9th at 10:00 Open Door

Led by The Open Door Team

Sunday 16th at 10:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Duncan Barnes

Sunday 23rd at 10:00 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Dr Mary Cotes

Services are live-streamed most weeks to St James' Facebook page at <u>St James Church</u> 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 2nd at 09:30 All Age Morning Worship

Led by Margaret Moakes LLM

Sunday 9th at 09:30 Holy Communion

Led by Rev Dr Sam Muthuveloe

Sunday 16th at 09:30 Morning Prayer

Led by Helen Rouse LLM

Sunday 23rd 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 February 6**th. 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.

The 2025 **Burns Night Supper** raised £615 for Church funds. Thank you to all who booked, the Staff and Trustees of Willen Pavilion, and the many who made the event possible - prepared food, laid tables, organized the table quiz, sold raffle tickets and cleared away afterwards. Particular thanks go to David Preston, Hilda Kirkwood, Rosemary Le Count and Lyn Coppendale who have led on the organization of this event for many years. Inspiration for future events is welcome. It was good to be joined by members of other Partnership Congregations.

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 reding this is thinking their future may lie in any level of ministry, please speak to Rev Chi or drop me a line.

News from Diocese of Oxford

Church attendance is continuing to grow.

Early estimates show that attendance at churches across the Diocese of Oxford has increased in the past 12 months, with the equivalent of 500 more people attending church each week. Smaller churches saw the greatest increases, while churches which offered new services to the community saw an average of 12 more people in church. Overall, adult attendance increased by 1.6% between October 2023 and October 2024, with child attendance slightly lower at 1.2%. Compared to the last prepandemic figures we have, for October 2019, this increase represents 84% of the total then, the same as 2023. In 2023 and 2022 we saw higher increases in attendance when compared to the previous year, which suggests we have now reached the end of the post-pandemic recovery period.

Amplify: From Whispers to Waves

As adults in the church, it's our job to actively listen to the voices of children and young people. Together, we can transform their aspirations into actions.

It's time for a change in how we work. Let's amplify the voices of children and young people and turn them from whispers into waves.

I think one of the barriers has been that we're trying to get young people into the church, but not really leading them to Jesus...

The new Bishop of Buckingham, Revd. Canon Dave Bull will be consecrated later this month at Canterbury Cathedral. There will be a special service in Milton Keynes later.

News from the Regional Central Baptist Union

BMS World Mission Day of Prayer Sun 2nd Feb

Join with other Baptists on Sunday 2nd February 2025 to spend a day praying for BMS World Mission work and for God's name to be known across the world, concentrating on Revelation 7:9-10

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...

And they cried out in a loud voice:

'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'

Praying Together 2025

Lynn Green, our General Secretary says 'We all know that prayer is vital for our worship and mission. Fulfilling Jesus' Great Commandment and Great Commission needs to be rooted in heartfelt and persistent prayer. I am so grateful to the Lord for all the faithful prayer that is offered across Baptists Together in so many different ways. Here at the start of 2025, I want to call our movement to a continued commitment to prayer in the year ahead. I want us to be praying for our mission so that people will encounter Jesus and surrender their lives to following Him. I want us to be praying for God's coming Kingdom in our communities as we seek to be salt and light in those places. I want us to be praying that the whole Body of Christ will rise up, living and witnessing to Jesus every day and sharing the reason for the hope that we have. With this in mind I want us to continue to pray into the Project Violet research findings so that we can express our lament and through this also share our hope for a future where every believer can fully play their part in God's Kingdom purposes'.

To encourage our prayers there will be four live, online national prayer gatherings on:

- Tuesday 25th March 2025, 7:30-8pm
- Tuesday 17th June 2025
- Wednesday 8th October 2025
- Wednesday 26th November 2025

Please put these dates into your diary now! The link for these will be available on our YouTube channel here.

News from the Methodist Circuit

Following the visit of Revd Kofi Tekyi-Ansah to Milton Keynes on 16th and 17th January, the Circuit Invitations Committee met and considered very carefully all the comments received from those who were able to meet him.

The Committee was unanimous in its decision to offer an invitation to Kofi, and he has indicated his willingness to accept that invitation. Subject to ratification of the appointment by the Methodist Conference which begins on 26th June, Kofi will therefore be joining the Circuit from September 2025.

Kofi appreciates that he has a big job ahead of him. He is looking forward to getting to know us all.

Chris Linford

On behalf of the Circuit Invitations Committee

News from The United Reformed Church

A new year means a new set of dates for Synod officers and staff members to get out and about - now making their first visit to Nottinghamshire with Synod Team on Tour. Everyone is welcome to drop into Hucknall URC any time between 2.00 and 8.00pm on Tuesday 11 February, for an opportunity to discover what support is available for local churches, air questions, hear about our Talking Faith initiative and simply enjoy an informal chat over a hot drink.

Talking Faith

At the October Synod, Mission Development Officer Tom Donoghue introduced the focus of Talking Faith, a theme for two years which will begin at the March 2025 Synod, to help us be more confident in expressing our faith in natural, authentic conversation and inviting others to find out more about the Christian faith.

As part of the October Synod Talking Faith presentation, Tom Donoghue interviewed Stuart Radcliffe, Mersey Synod's Missional Discipleship Enabler who shared about their synod's experience of having a Talking Faith theme over two years. Watch the video here.

https://youtu.be/-BEGvasvFoE

Thank you for reading this.

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)

News from the Partnership Green Champions

Eco-tip February 2025

Keep recycling.

Sadly, George is closing Charity Recycling MK *partly due to his recent ill health and partly due to brands turning to supermarkets and stores to offer recycling collection points. So, as George steps down brands are stepping up with alternative recycling options for items we can't recycle in kerbside bins.

You can use the website <u>www.recyclenow.com</u> to find stores that will recycle these hard to recycle items.

For instance, I used the website to find a store that would take empty hand cream tubes. The site reports that Boots have a collection point.

Most supermarkets will take soft plastics like bags, films, sweet and crisp packets etc. Supermarkets are also extending their collections to include other items e.g. Tesco takes water filters, batteries, ink cartridges and make up. Garden Centres are recycling items e.g. B&Q takes light bulbs and plant pots.

*On his Facebook page George writes a thank you to everyone who has supported his charity: We've been going for over 12 years now and have raised more than £71,000 for Macmillan Cancer Support, Willen Hospice and MK Cat Rescue in that time, all from rubbish that would have otherwise been binned. Without your support this wouldn't have been possible and I offer my heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you – it's been a wonderful journey.

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 March's issue is **Saturday 22**nd **February** to allow me to get it to you in time to send out before the beginning of Mach.

John

John Porter sepnewsletter9@gmail.com