

# Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership

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



## May 2026 Newsletter

Welcome to the May edition of the Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership Newsletter, (also see website at [www.stantonbury.net](http://www.stantonbury.net)).

Thankfully, Helen, our Administrative Assistant, will be editing the next Newsletters, please help her by sending notes for inclusion when asked. Be patient, as John is not with us to train Helen, as he was planning to do, during May and June.

## Pastoral Messages

### A Message for our Pentecost Season

*'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'*

Acts 1 v 8

The coming of Pentecost in May, at the end of Easter season, brings renewed inspiration to our lives in terms of the power of God at work in our lives - to now direct the life of our Church's with the complete Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There has been much encouragement to us over Easter, with friends and visitors into our churches - the challenge is often though to see the casual seasonal visitor become a dedicated disciple of Christ. That is where the Spirit's inspiration is needed, with this combination we see in scripture of the powerful word spoken, coupled with the more intensive work within; where Christ convicts of sin and draws people to trust in God. We will also use the Novena season (Ascension to Pentecost) this month to pray more intensively for that transformation in hearts and lives - using the *'Thy Kingdom Come'* resources - **now available in our churches.**

There is encouragement too in this season for friends dealing with suffering and grief, as the Spirit ministers to us to bring hope and joy - where often we struggle to see how our personal circumstances are part of God's plan. The reality is often through the peace that the Spirit still brings to us; to



remind us of God's profound presence in suffering, and of his guidance and hope all the way through. He never promised a life of sheer bliss, but a hope that through our consistent trust and faith we will find the power to overcome, and forever. Enjoy, and speak hope into this Pentecost season

*With every blessing*

**Phil**

**Rev Phil Dunning**

**SEP Baptist Minister and Vision Enabler**

**Acting Ministry Team Leader**

## **Easter People: Bearing Witness and Growing Together**

Dear friends in Christ,

As we continue to journey through the joyful season of Easter, I greet you with a heart full of hope and gratitude for each member of our congregation. Easter is not merely an event we mark on our calendars, but a living reality that shapes who we are and how we live. The resurrection of Jesus reminds us that light breaks through darkness, hope triumphs over despair, and life is renewed in the love of God. It is a season to be celebrated, but also a time for reflection and renewal.

We are called to be God's Easter People—those who bear witness to the risen Christ not only in word but also in deed. What does it truly mean to live as Easter People? It means embracing the promise of the resurrection every day, letting its joy and hope infuse our hearts and guide our actions. To bear witness is to make Christ known among us: in our kindness, our compassion, our willingness to forgive, and our courage to stand for what is good and true.

As Easter People, we are invited to grow in faith—not just as individuals, but as a community united in Christ. Let us seek ways to deepen our relationship with God through prayer, worship, and study. Perhaps you might join a Bible study group, take time for personal reflection, or simply reach out to a neighbour in need. Each step we take towards God becomes a blessing to those around us, strengthening the bonds of fellowship and trust.

Our faith finds its fullest expression in love and service. Christ's commandment to love one another remains at the heart of our calling. This love is not reserved for Sundays alone but is meant to be lived out in every moment—at home, at work, in our community. I encourage each of us to look for opportunities to serve others: volunteering, listening to someone who is struggling, offering practical help or a word of

encouragement. These acts, though simple, radiate the light of Christ and bring hope to the world.

As we walk forward together, let us remember that God is present among us, guiding and sustaining us every step of the way. May the joy of Easter fill your heart, may your faith continue to grow, and may you be empowered to love and serve boldly. With every blessing for your journey, I pray our church may shine ever brighter as God's Easter People.

*In prayer for our six Church families in the Partnership*

**Sam**

**Revd Dr Sam Muthuveloe**

**Minister – St Mary Magdalene, Willen & Cross & Stable, Church Downs Barn**

## **Prayer within and for the Community**

Dear brothers and sisters in the Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership,

Having now been among you for nine months, I can say with a full heart that it has been a real joy to share in the life of this community. It is a privilege to be among you — to worship together, to listen, and to walk alongside you in faith.

A fundamental part of my ministry during this time has been to create space: space to meet, to listen, and to pray together — and to foster a place where we may feel safe to open our hearts before God and one another. In those conversations, across our churches and in many different settings, one theme has come up time and again: we are a praying people, and there is a deep desire to pray more, especially for our children and families.

Many of you have asked whether we might gather in this way, as mothers, fathers, grandparents, and all who carry family on their hearts. I want to say how much that has meant to me. It speaks of a living faith, rooted in love and care for one another.

Prayer has long been at the centre of my own life. I owe much to the faithful prayers of my mother and those who prayed alongside her. In both the joyful and the most difficult moments of my life, it was often the quiet, steadfast prayers of others that sustained me. I first gave my life to Jesus as a young child at a Mothers' Union service, and ever since, I have known the deep gift of being held within a praying community.

Over the years, I have prayed with people in many places — in homes, hospitals, prisons, churches, and beyond — and one truth remains constant: whenever we open our hearts together in prayer, God is present and attentive.

Prayer is not simply something we do out of duty; it is how we remain connected to God and to one another. Jesus himself showed us that the life of faith is rooted in prayer. And while there are many ways to pray — in silence or aloud, through words, writing, or stillness — there is something deeply special about coming together, as the body of Christ, and sharing that space.

We are living in times where many are carrying heavy burdens — emotionally, financially, and mentally — and we see this especially among younger generations. In such times, gathering to pray is not a small thing; it is a way of standing together, holding one another in hope, and entrusting our cares to God.

Helen and I have also been richly blessed over many years by the friendship and prayers of Lucille and Bishop Tony Potter. They have been a steady and faithful presence in our lives, and we have often leaned on their support. It is my hope that we, as a church family, might grow into that same kind of presence for one another.

The life and growth of the Church are not measured simply by numbers, but by the depth of our love, our care, and our prayer. It is through prayer that we begin to see God moving among us — in our lives, in our families, and in our communities.

So I warmly invite you: whether you are a parent, grandparent, godparent, aunt, uncle, brother or sister, if you feel a call to pray for your family and for the children and young people in our community, please do come and join us.

*Events with Bishop Tony (SEP 'Sports' Breakfast) and his wife Lucille (Afternoon Prayer Gathering) are advertised below*

**Peterson**

**Revd Peterson Feital**

**Minister – St Andrew's Great Linford & St James', New Bradwell**

## Partnership wide services and other events

### **Ascension Day - Thursday 14th May 2026**

***A special service of Celebration - 7.30pm at Christ Church, Stantonbury***

The moment of Ascension is such a powerful image of the Risen Christ returning to receive his glory. It should mark for each one of us that time when we will join him in the presence of God, and forever.

Join Phil and Peterson for worship, thoughts and celebration of Ascension.

(Note this is not a Communion service.)

### **Partnership-wide Service**

The next Partnership-wide Service will be held on 31<sup>st</sup> May at Cross and Stable and will be a celebration of the work done by volunteers in congregations and in the Partnership. The service will be a Methodist Order of Holy Communion led by Revd Kofi Tekyi-Ansah.

### **SEP MED Group – ‘Mission, Evangelism, Discipleship’**

The latest notes for the last MED group meeting are available in all our churches and from Phil (please contact directly) and reflect the themes we discussed and prayed for on 19th January. These included...

- ‘Partnership Pilgrimage’ - Summer 2026
- Christmas Youth Gospel Choir
- Lent Course - ‘World Church Lent Reflections’
- Enhancing Social media input and use
- Bishop’s visit in January
- ‘Being with’ - new discipleship course
- Holy Week meditations

The next meeting will be held on Monday 18th May - at Christchurch, Stantonbury. (LIVE and online.)

### **SEP ‘Sports Breakfast’**

Saturday 23rd May - 9.00-11.00am at Wolverton House Carvery Pub, Stratford Road, Wolverton. MK12 5NZ.

‘Unlimited breakfast/hot drinks’ - £12.00 per person (lighter options are available for a cheaper rate - order on the day)

Guest Speaker - Bishop Tony Porter - former Chaplain to Manchester City FC and former National director of Christians in Sport. Tony will talk about his experiences,

bringing a lively message of how his faith has impacted his sports ministry - with the heading of '4 Managers and a funeral'.

Bring along all friends. Bookings via Eventbrite - pay on the day

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/sep-sports-breakfast-tickets-1988617433275?aff=oddtcreator>

## **Afternoon Family Prayer Gathering**

Saturday 23rd May | 2:30–4:00pm

St Andrew's, Great Linford

We will meet in a relaxed, café-style setting, with tea, coffee and cakes. Spaces are limited to around 40, so please do confirm your place by emailing Helen Eaton. A suggested donation of £5 will go towards SEP Children and Youth Work. I hope this may be the beginning of something gentle and sustaining — a shared life of prayer that will deepen and support us all.

## **'Being With' Course (Save the Dates)**

We now have dates confirmed for the beginning of the new SEP Discipleship course, using the resources provided by friends from St Martin in the Fields Church.



It is very much designed to meet and greet enquirers and new converts to Christ, offering a chance to think and ponder the presence of God in the world, and call of Christ upon their lives. Initially the course will be offered 'online' only - with evening meetings on zoom at 7.30pm. Led by Peterson and Phil.

Thursday 17th September

Thursday 24th September

Thursday 1st October

Thursday 8th October

If you are interested in joining the course please contact our Administrator: phone 01908 382458, email [sburyepadm@gmail.com](mailto:sburyepadm@gmail.com) .

## **John Porter's Funeral**

John Porter, who edited this Newsletter right up to the April edition, sadly died a few weeks ago. John's funeral is being held at St James' Church, New Bradwell on 21<sup>st</sup> May at 12pm.

## Partnership News

### Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership Council

The last SEP Council meeting was held on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026. Can all the CLT Chairs ensure the names of Officers voted on at their AGMs are sent to Anne Slee, Secretary to the Trustees. All current officers remain in place till the SEP CIO AGM on 21 May at Christ Church Stantonbury Campus. Newly elected officers won't take up their roles until the SEP CIO AGM.

As soon as you have elected Deanery Synod representatives, please let David Thom, Lay Chair of MKLEPs, know their contact details.

Swearing in of Church Wardens for our Deanery is to be held at St George's Church, Wolverton at 7.30pm on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2026.

### Partnership Leadership Team

Following the AGM, the leadership cyclical structure will be; Trustees, Partnership Leadership Team, Congregation Leadership Team, Congregation Meetings. This much simpler format, with less repetitive meetings, will hopefully encourage more members of our partnership to join in the fun.

### Administrative Support to the SEP

Helen's SEP admin. phone number is 01908 382458 (working hours only – 10am to 12pm) and her email is [sburyepadm@gmail.com](mailto:sburyepadm@gmail.com). Our hope is that Helen will remove some of the burden of administrative tasks from the shoulders of our ministers and officers. We can all help with that **by contacting Helen with any admin or bookings, in the first instance, instead of our ministers and officers**. Helen will then feedback any bookings to the Ministry Team and Church Wardens.

### Organising Our Ministry

Thank you to Revd. Phil, who is determining what support we can obtain for our June to August 2026 worship rota for the whole partnership with wider support from the Anglican, Baptist and Methodist denominations, so he can ensure a fair coverage of worship and pastoral care across our six congregations. Phil is our Team Minister and determines worship in our Partnership. Please discuss worship needs at your regular Congregation meetings and feedback to Helen Eaton. Phil and Helen, our Admin Assistant, will contact our ecumenical leaders to help where needed. Only ministers on our list of licenced and safeguard trained ministers are able to lead our six congregations. Thank you to those many ministers who have sent me their details and would the few who have still to send them please help by doing so asap.

## Drawing the Partnership Together & Partnership Events

Please support our drive to bring the six congregations closer together through social events over the year.

Please keep a check on your congregation news and visit the SEP website or Facebook page to keep up to date. Maybe start a WhatsApp group for your congregation members.

A **darts championship** will be organised by Jonathan at Cross and Stable and we hope lots of Luke Littlers come forward and enjoy the companionship of other Christians. Further information about this event will follow in future Newsletters.

**World Baking Day 2026**, will be held on Sunday, May 17, focusing on connecting people through the joy of baking and sharing homemade treats, with an emphasis on sustainable, "better-for-you" ingredients and simple, crowd-pleasing recipes. Key themes include reducing food waste, using local ingredients, and fostering community through the act of giving. None of the themes are looking for 'the best baker'.

### Key Baking Trends & Themes for 2026:

- **Simple & Sustainable:** Embracing easy-to-find ingredients, minimizing waste, and focusing on eco-friendly, [small-batch baking](#).
- **Global Flavors:** Incorporating international, unique combinations like ube-coconut or yuzu-shortbread.
- **Community Sharing:** The core mission remains sharing, specifically bringing people together, [teaching kids, or donating to charities](#).
- **Skill Building:** A focus on learning new techniques, such as baking, [artisan bread or delicate pastries](#).

To participate, individuals are encouraged to bake something new, share their creations at church on Sunday 17 May, and post photos using the hashtag **#WorldBakingDay and on the SEP Facebook group**. All donations for baked goods are for Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership funds, so please give generously. Let me know who is baking and which of the four themes will be used at each church via my email below. Maybe a photo of you with your creation in church, so I can share with the other congregations. Thank you and Happy baking, SEP! I'll let you know the total raised to support our partnership in the June newsletter

## Website EVENTS Diary

An Events Diary is now live on the Website. However, it's looking fairly sparse at the moment, so **please let Helen know of any events you wish to publicise**. For example. It would help our congregation members who maybe can't make the Bible Study group closest to them, but would like to go to one on a day or time better suited to them, if they could check on the website to see when and where other groups are being held.

## Churches Together in Milton Keynes

Susan Armstrong, a member of the St Mary Magdalene congregation, is the link to CTMK.

## Diocesan and Deanery Synods

The objective to have a Church of England Secondary School in Milton Keynes is now on both of their Strategic Plans. Bishop Dave and Area Dean, Paul Oxley, are supporting this plan too. If you are in contact with your local councillor and would also like to see a faith school in MK, please mention it to them. They may not realise anyone would support this plan.

## Appointment of new Bishop of Oxford

The process for this has now begun. Interviews are expected to take place late Spring and Summer, appointment in September and then handed to the government for approval. Legally Bishop from January 2027 and licenced in March 2027.

*A happy and blessed Pentecost to you and Happy Birthday to the church.*

**Sharron,**  
**Lay Chair of SEP CIO Council**  
Secchair22@gmail.com

## Our Church Services and Events

### Bradwell Church, St Lawrence

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> at 10.30am**

**Morning Worship**

*Led by Revd Phil Dunning*

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> at 10.30am**

**Holy Communion**

*Led by Revd Chris Bull*

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May at 9.30am**

**Morning Worship**

*Led by Revd Phil Dunning (note the earlier time of this service)*



**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> at 10.30am**                      **Holy Communion**

*Led by Revd Steve Barnes*

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May at 9.30am**                      **Morning Worship**

*Led by Revd Phil Dunning (note the earlier time of this service)*

Most services are live streamed to You Tube. The You Tube link is @BradwellChurch MiltonKeynes. Simply go to You Tube, search for this and click the red live button just before the service begins.

**Gardening Club** is now active and meets on Wednesdays 10am to 12pm.

**Bell Ringing** practice every Wednesday at 19:45.

There is a **coffee morning** the first Saturday each month from 10am to 12pm.

## **Christ Church, Stantonbury**

**Sunday 3rd at 10:30am**                      **All Age Worship**

*Led by Revds Jenny and John Boxwell*

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> at 10.30am**                      **All Age Worship**

*Led by Revd Phil Dunning*

**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> at 7.30pm**                      **Ascension Day service**

*Led by Revd Phil Dunning*

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> at 10.30am**                      **All Age Worship**

*Led by Revd Peterson Feital*

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May at 10.30am**                      **Holy Communion**

*Led by Revd Ian Suttie*

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May**



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](http://www.christchurchmk.org.uk) which has the service details on it, and which is updated each week

**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 3<sup>rd</sup> at 11am**      **Signed Holy Communion**

*Led by Revd Peter Green*

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> at 11am**      **Holy Communion**

*Led by Revd Sam Muthuveloe*

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> at 11am**      **Holy Communion**

*Led by Revd Phil Dunning*

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May at 10am**      **Family Breakfast Club**

**(followed by a short Service of the Word for adults at 11am)**

*Led by Revd Sam Muthuveloe*

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> at 11am**      **Partnership-wide Service**

*A Methodist Order of Service led by Revd Kofi Tekyi-Ansah*



Services are live-streamed on Zoom at

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

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

**Bell Ringing** practice every Friday at 19:30.

**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](mailto: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 24<sup>th</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> at 10am**

*Lay led service*

**Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May 10am**

*Led by Rev Prof John Beazley*

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> at 10am**

*Led by Revd Peterson Feital*

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> at 10am**

*Led by Rev Prof John Beazley*

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> at 10am**

**Open Door**

**Holy Communion**

**Holy Communion**

**Holy Communion**

**Holy Communion**



Led by Revd Peterson Feital. Guest preacher Bishop Tony Porter

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> at 10am No service (SEP Joint service)**

Joint SEP service being held at Cross and Stable, Down's Barn

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

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

**Bell Ringing** practice every Tuesday at 19:30.

### **St Andrews 1<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto: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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesdays through to September and we are hopeful of further dates – you can email [greatlinford@googlemail.com](mailto:greatlinford@googlemail.com) for the latest information. All are welcome to 5Ways - we aim to be dementia friendly.

## **St. James', New Bradwell**

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> May at 9.30am**

*Led by Revd Peterson Feital*

**Holy Communion**

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May at 9.30am**

*Led by Helen Rouse, LLM*

**Morning Worship**

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May at 9.30am**

*Led by Revd Hannah Akibo-Betts*

**Holy Communion**

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May at 9.30am**

*Led by Revd Phil Dunning*

**Holy Communion**

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May at 9.30am**

*Led by Revd David Nash*

**Holy Communion**



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

**Coffee morning:** held every Saturday from 10:00 to 12:00 and Wednesday from 09:30 to 11:30.

Visit St James' website at [www.stjamesnewbradwell.org.uk](http://www.stjamesnewbradwell.org.uk) for more information.

## St. Mary Magdalene, Willen

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> at 9:30am**      **All Age Morning Worship**

*Led by Margaret Moakes, LLM*

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> at 9:30am**      **Holy Communion**

*Led by Revd. Dr. Sam Muthuveloe*

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> at 9:30am**      **Holy Communion**

*Led by Revd. Dr. Sam Muthuveloe*

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> at 9:30am**      **Holy Communion**

*Led by Rev. Hannah Akibo-Betts*

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> at 9:30am**      **Holy Communion**

*Led by Rev. Steve Barnes*



The monthly communion service at **Oaktree Court**, Portland Drive will be at **2.15 pm on 7<sup>th</sup> May**. Anyone who would like to join us, would be welcome. Please contact Margaret Moakes.

### **T.T.T.T Concert (Third Tuesday at Twelve Thirty)**

Come along to St Mary Magdalene Church Willen and be entertained by Playpals on Tuesday May 19th, 12.30 - 1.15. Pop in during your lunch break walking the dog or just passing by, stay for a while or the whole 45 minutes. Complimentary cake and coffee. Donations to Church Restoration & Hooke Heritage Project.

### **FILM SCREENING Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May at 7p.m.**

The Fountainhead film (1949), from the novel by Ayn Rand, will be shown at church. The architect in the film was an inspiration for the architectural design of Milton Keynes sixty years ago. Going further back, the character of the architect in the film was originally inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright, so you could argue he was an inspiration for MK. Tim Skeldon, a Quantity Surveyor from the MK Development Corporation, will be leading this and a follow up talk on

### **Volunteer Gardening**

The volunteer gardening group has started their weekly Saturday morning 10am-12pm work in the Garden of Remembrance. Please come along. No special skills needed. Please contact Sharron if you would like to join the Gardening Group WhatsApp.

### **Quorum News - visit to Ripon Cathedral and Castle Howard Chapel**

Quorum (a choir that practices at St Mary Magdalene and sings several services for us each year) were invited to sing the weekend services at Ripon Cathedral on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> April, singing Saturday Evensong and the Sunday morning Eucharist. Due to there being another event at Ripon Sunday afternoon, Quorum instead sang an Evensong Service in the Chapel at Castle Howard. It was a wonderful weekend for the Choir and we were warmly invited back to both venues.

The Ripon Eucharist service was live streamed on YouTube and can be seen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/4pmlpRtaYYE?si=IN1bGkZRFSIWuQUy>

Quorum would welcome new singers (particularly tenors) who are strong sight-readers (we learn new repertoire for each service/concert and have a minimal number of rehearsals before each event).

p.s. I'm a Quorum member (Helen - Editor 😊), so if you are interested contact me.

## Ripon



## Castle Howard



## 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 one of our ministers or drop me a line. Thank you Sharron

## News from Oxford Diocese

### **Cherish your churchwardens says Bishop Mary**

‘Usually, when we say that we’re ‘glad to see the back’ of someone, we’re saying that we’re relieved that, with their departure, a difficult chapter is over. Not so, for me, the view I have of churchwardens is of their backs as, wands in hand, they lead me into a licensing or confirmation service. I am then glad to see their backs; thankful to be supported by these faithful people, to receive their kindness, to know that they have prepared the way for my ministry, that they are front-footed.

Over the last few weeks I’ve witnessed churchwardens overseeing barbecues; building bonfires; wrestling tough issues with wisdom and compassion; leading communities through vacancies; planning for worship; cheering clergy on (and knowing when to caution them!); advocating for congregations; restoring buildings; moving chairs; moving mountains. All this means that they are way ahead of me, doing the work that God has called them to do; as leaders in God’s Church, surveying the horizon.

For many churches, this is the month of the Annual Meeting of Parishioners, when outgoing churchwardens are thanked for their service and their successors are elected for their next term of office. Perhaps you’re preparing to stand for election as a churchwarden or to nominate or vote for someone else. Whatever part you will play in these annual meetings, do so with huge gratitude for those who have served as churchwardens or who are offering to do so. When you’re exploring a dilemma, listen to their wisdom. When they lead through change and difficulty, thank God for their care. When they seem weighed down, help to carry their burdens. And when you see their backs, pray for them in their busyness.’

### **Bishop Dave confirms 67 teens in two services**

**A** total of 67 teenagers were recently confirmed in their Christian faith across two services in the parish of Eton, which is under the pastoral care of the Bishop of Buckingham. Nearly 1,000 people attended to witness the ceremonies, including students from Eton College and Holyport College, the state boarding and day school that has been partnered with Eton College since 2014. The confirmations were led by the Bishop of Buckingham, who spoke of the significance of the occasion both for the young people involved and for the community gathered around them. “It was a holy moment,” he said. “Each of them wrote a few sentences about why they were getting confirmed and spoke very movingly about what their connection with God through Jesus means to them.”

## News from the Regional Central Baptist Union

### Faith sharing and church connections explored at sixth gathering of Bucks small church hub



This hub rotates the venues between the churches so each can host. Twenty-five people came and enjoyed fellowship over tea and cake before worshipping together. We practised listening to God and prophesying over each other before dividing into groups for discussion.

We were looking at four questions about how people come to church, what opportunities are there to explore faith, which activities are

in the church building and which are in the community. We looked at why Christians find it hard to share their faith and how this may be overcome. We finally looked at how new people are welcomed, both on their first and subsequent visits.

Before praying we looked at how the churches may connect between events:

- Leaders have a WhatsApp group so prayer or practical requests can be shared. Leaders pray together regularly – bring cohesion to the hub. Swap pulpits
- People with same gifting from churches meet to encourage each other e.g. Prophets, evangelists
- Share expertise – help with governance, worship leading, preaching, how to run a Renew Wellbeing etc.
- Socials – quiz night / meal
- Collective buying e.g. gospels, try praying booklets etc, better value in bulk. A trade card called Christian Supply Chain Buying Group  
<https://www.cscbg.org.uk/> good value from major suppliers. B&Q, Go Pak, Screw Fix

At every hub meeting, the feedback form asks what each church needs and what each church can offer. All receive the feedback, so the churches know who is offering what.

## News from Churches Together in England

**A Million Acts of Hope...on your doorstep. CTE's Principal Officer for Mission and Evangelism, Rev Dr Ben Aldous, explains why CTE are supporting A Million Acts of Hope this May.**



CTE are delighted to support the **A Million Acts of Hope campaign**. In a world increasingly shaped by enmity and violence and where the most vulnerable in society can often be scapegoats, we believe there is another story to tell. We can easily fall into the trap of believing we are a divided nation, increasingly being mistrustful and spewing hate. A Million Acts of Hope is a reminder that in reality, thousands of people across the UK show up for each other, their neighbours and their communities every single day. From litter picking in parks to donating to food banks, coaching kids' football teams to

working together to make our streets safer – acts of hope and kindness happen all the time.

We believe the local church across our nation is a key part of doing this great stuff. Creating safe places through drop ins, **Warm Welcome spaces**, friendship cafes, weekly lunches. Thousands of churches run food banks and support with debt crisis intervention. And many churches are doing this through ecumenical partnerships, both formal and informal, sharing resources, time and energy and seeing this as an outworking of their shared faith in the living God.

Last weekend, I joined 'Bread church', which is run by the Methodist and United Reformed churches in Sidmouth. Every other week, they gather to make bread together over the course of three hours (kneading, resting and baking), finishing the morning by breaking bread and eating soup around a large table. It's a relational, inclusive and welcoming space where anyone can find a home. It's an act of hope.

### **Ecumenism in a world of conflict: A witness of hope and universal love. A reflection by CTE President for the Fourth Presidency Group and Head of the Lutheran Church in Great Britain Bishop Paulina Hławiczka-Trotman.**

In a world increasingly shaped by war, nationalism, and deepening conflict, the call to ecumenism has never been more urgent. Ecumenism, the movement toward unity, mutual understanding, and cooperation among Christian traditions, increasingly a path toward interfaith dialogue, offers not only a theological vision but a practical way toward peace. At a time when division is often exploited for political and ideological gain, the visible unity of believers becomes a powerful sign that reconciliation is possible.

War, often fuelled by nationalistic worldviews, relies on narratives of exclusion: us versus them, the faithful versus the stranger, the chosen versus the rejected. Ecumenism challenges these divisions by reminding us that faith calls people into communion rather than separation. When churches and religious communities speak together instead of against one another, they weaken the forces that divide humanity along religious and cultural lines

Within this vision, the ancient theological concept of *Apocatastasis* (Greek: Ἀποκατάστασις = universal salvation for all/ restoration) offers a meaningful lens through which to understand God's love. This teaching, which I love and on which I

base all my ecumenical thinking, efforts and work, is associated with early Christian thinkers (so called Church Fathers). It expresses the hope that God's love is ultimately restorative and universal, that divine mercy seeks not eternal condemnation, but reconciliation and healing.

Origen of Alexandria (c. 184–253) was among the first to articulate this idea, teaching that God's justice serves a healing purpose, guiding all souls toward reconciliation.

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395) similarly emphasized God's infinite goodness, suggesting that evil, having no lasting substance, would ultimately be overcome by divine love.

Isaac of Nineveh (7th century) reflected deeply on God's boundless mercy, affirming that divine compassion continues to seek restoration rather than condemnation.

The idea of universal restoration reflects trust in the boundless nature of God's love, a love that does not abandon creation but draws all things toward renewal. Whether embraced as doctrine or Hope, this perspective encourages humility, compassion, and openness. If God's love reaches beyond human divisions, then religious and cultural boundaries cannot limit the divine will to restore and unite.

Such a vision also supports a deeper acceptance of religious diversity. God is not confined by human systems and may be revealed in ways that transcend our boundaries. Different traditions and cultures reflect humanity's varied responses to the same divine mystery. Ecumenism does not erase differences but invites mutual listening and reverence, trusting that truth is enriched when shared rather than defended in isolation.

This witness is especially important for young people. They are growing up in diverse societies but extremely polarized. When they see Christians of different traditions praying, serving, and standing together for justice and peace, they encounter faith as a force for unity rather than division. Many are deeply concerned with caring for creation, addressing climate change, and supporting the vulnerable, issues closely tied to both: biblical responsibility and human solidarity.

Young people need visible signs that cooperation is stronger than rivalry, and that faith communities can model reconciliation in a fractured world. Ecumenical partnerships show that differences need not be threats, but can become sources of mutual enrichment.

So let us move toward unity more boldly than ever. Yet we must be mindful: unity is not the same as uniformity. Unity emphasizes harmony among different elements, while uniformity imposes sameness and removes diversity. True unity allows differences to coexist and work together, fostering collaboration without erasing individuality. In a troubled world, ecumenism becomes more than an institutional effort; it becomes a testimony of Hope. Rooted in the vision of God's universal love and the restoration of all creation, it reminds us that unity is not naïve idealism, but a faithful response to God who calls all people, as one human race, into one community of peace.

*A happy and blessed Pentecost to you and Happy Birthday to the church.*

**Sharron, Lay Chair of SEP CIO Council**

## News from the Partnership Green Champions

### Eco Tip for May



(Photos from Simon Kadula and Aaron Burden on unsplash.com)

#### **Support pollinators.**

Nothing says Spring like the buzz of a bee! But these precious pollinators are declining due to habitat loss, climate change and agricultural intensification. Wednesday 20 May is World Bee Day, so look around to see how you can improve habitats for bees and other pollinators.

Read more about bees, butterflies and habitats that support them in A Rocha's Target 25 resources at [arocha.org.uk/what-we-do/target-25](http://arocha.org.uk/what-we-do/target-25).

Sow a pollinator friendly seed mix, make or buy a bee hotel, let some wild flowers grow in your garden, and don't use pesticides. Pray that our pollinator populations will increase.

For more about World Bee Day visit: [awarenessdays.com/awareness-days-calendar/world-bee-day/](http://awarenessdays.com/awareness-days-calendar/world-bee-day/)

## This and future Newsletters

Firstly, I would like to express thanks on behalf of all of us in the SEP Team for John Porter's input as previous editor of the Newsletter. John will be sadly missed.

I hope that you have found this and previous newsletters interesting and useful. If there is anything else you think would make it better or find any glaring omissions, please let your congregation's newsletter editor, Sharron or me know.

The deadline for information to go into **June's** issue is **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May**. This may be earlier than the deadline for previous Newsletters, but I'm a 'newbie' at compiling the newsletter and also have to juggle its production with my other admin duties. Please bear with me!

*Helen*

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