

TOGETHER

The FREE magazine from the Diocese of Rochester | Issue 16 | February - April 2023

GROW | ENRICH | RESOURCE

COVER STORY: CHURCHES OFFER WARM WELCOME THIS WINTER PAGE 8



CONTESTED
HERITAGE

LEARNING FROM
MISTAKES

FAITH AND
GAMING



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CONTENTS

This edition sees us look firmly ahead to the coming season of Lent – the six weeks of preparation before Easter.

Head to pages 16-17 where we explore how we can journey through the Season together and live with the daily ‘mess’ of life, with the Church of England’s Dust and Glory campaign.

With much concern about the practical impacts of the rising cost of living, in **Focus On** (pg 8) we discover how churches have been offering warm and welcoming spaces to address these needs as well as loneliness and isolation.

We also meet the church taking steps to understand and confront the contested heritage, quite literally upon its walls (pg 12).

Finally, we have two inspiring personal stories of faith. In our **One to One** interview (pg 24) we meet the Gospel singer developing a worshipping community in Gillingham, and in **Everyday Faith** (pg 26) the former marketing executive who has followed a calling back to the classroom.

With hope for the season ahead,

Jennifer Ross
Communications Manager

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INSIDE TRACK

4-7 Latest news

FOCUS ON

8 Offering warmth and friendship

12 Confronting contested heritage

16 Lent: Dust and Glory

BIG ISSUE

18 Gaming and Faith

HEAD SPACE

20 Resources: Inspirational reads

DON'T MISS

22 Top upcoming events

PEOPLE

24 One to One: Mayowa Oyinloye

26 Everyday Faith: Lee Kings



NEW ARCHDEACON OF BROMLEY AND BEXLEY ANNOUNCED

The Rev Allie Kerr has been appointed as the new Archdeacon of Bromley and Bexley, it was announced in January.

Bishop Jonathan Gibbs, the Bishop of Rochester, said he was, "delighted she had taken up his invitation to this strategic role in the Diocese," and that "she has a real sense of God's call upon her to join the diocesan team in Rochester, and I know she will bring a deep commitment to supporting our parishes in their mission and ministry."

Allie is currently Vicar of St Cuthbert and St Aidan in Portsmouth and comes to Rochester Diocese with a strong background in parish ministry, both urban and rural, in the Dioceses of Salisbury and Portsmouth.

Until recently she was acting Archdeacon of the Isle of

Wight. She was also area dean and associate mission development officer during her time in the Isle of Wight.

Responding to her appointment, Allie said, "I'm excited to be joining the Diocese of Rochester and getting to know the people and parishes of the Archdeaconry of Bromley and Bexley.

"I am looking forward to seeing where God is at work in the local communities and supporting churches, chaplaincies and fresh expressions, as they implement the Called Together priorities and share the love of Jesus in their context.

"Please keep my husband Adrian and I in your prayers as we prepare for this new adventure."

A service of licensing for Allie is expected to take place in late April.



LIFE-SAVING KIT

St Nicholas Church in Strood, has recently installed a Bleed Kit. "I heard about them through the BBC Breakfast TV programme," says Elaine Ford, Church Warden. The packs can save lives by providing the vital first aid needed to reduce blood loss until professional medical help arrives. "I brought it to the Standing Committee who thought that it was a great idea!"



WALKING WITH JESUS

The confirmation group at St George, Bickley has been talking about what it means to walk alongside Jesus at one of their preparation sessions with Fr Henry Everett. Prayers for their onward journey of faith.



HOSPICE CHAPLAINCY

In a first for Lay Chaplaincy in the Diocese, Claire Wells has been authorised as a Pastoral Assistant at Hospice in the Weald in Pembury, Tunbridge Wells. Claire's background has been in family ministry but, after time out to care for her ageing parents, she felt a strong call to hospice ministry. Here's Claire displaying her certificate and wearing her PA badge with pride!



BREKKIE IS BACK

St Philip and St James' Church in Walderslade was delighted to have its Men's Breakfast make a return after a few years' break. The guest speaker was Richard King, who leads Walderslade Sings! The food went down a treat too.



NEW CHURCH BUILD GETS PLANNING GO AHEAD

It's been a great start to 2023 for the congregation of St Gabriel's in Kings Hill, with news that planning permission has been approved for their new church building.

Once completed, it will be the first new Church of England church to be built within the Diocese for around 20 years.

Stephen Hoad, Property Director for the Diocese of Rochester said: "The new place of worship will be an exciting opportunity to contribute a lasting legacy to the new and growing community of Kings Hill."

Currently, without a permanent building, the congregation meets in the local Discovery School,

with other activities and outreach taking place in community venues around Kings Hill.

Reflecting on the hopes for the new build, the Rev Mark Montgomery, Vicar of St Gabriel's said: "The vision for the building is to create a place of community for all people.

"A community Hub at the heart of Kings Hill, where all ages, regardless of faith affiliation are welcomed at different times of the week, through the various community activities that we run."

Find out more about the church's building plans at : www.kingshillchurch.org.uk/building

CHURCH WINS MUSICAL EXCELLENCE AWARD



St Mary's Church in West Malling has been named as one of six recipients of the inaugural, Church Choir Award by the Cathedral Music Trust and Royal School of Church Music.

The church has been recognised for its commitment to investing in children and young people through its Choral and Organ Scholarship schemes.

Coming out of Covid and lockdowns, St Mary's Choir had fallen to a low ebb with just two regular members.

Determined to get the music-making back on its feet, the vicar, the Rev David Green, the Director of Music, Richard Hammond-Hall, and the Parochial Church Council (PCC), developed the idea for a scholarship scheme to appoint four Choral Scholars and an Organ Scholar.

Thanks to generous fundraising among the congregation, and with a supporting grant from the Diocese of Rochester's Children and Young People Fund, the St Mary's Choral and Organ Scholars programme was established.

The Rev David Green said, "St Mary's has a long history of music making and choral music in particular. Not only has our scholar project been good for our worship, but it's been a wonderful tool for mission and ministry as well."

The Church Choir award from the Cathedral Music Trust comes with a cheque for £2,500 to support the ongoing musical efforts.



ST PETER AND ST PAUL, AYLESFORD

OFFERING WARMTH AND FRIENDSHIP THIS WINTER

Nearly three million adults in the UK are estimated to have sought help from churches or other religious organisations as a result of the cost of living crisis. That's according to research published by the Church of England at the end of last year. Together has visited some of the churches who have been seeking to offer a warm welcome in a variety of ways this winter.

On a cold and icy day in December, Debbie, the parish administrator at St Alban's Church in Dartford, is getting the community café ready. The Christmas music is on, the heating is on, and the bacon and sausages are being kept warm, ready for the morning's visitors.

"We never quite know how many people might come and particularly because today is so icy, some of our older visitors might not venture out," she says, "but we'll make sure we pay them a visit later."

Like many churches in the Diocese, as concern has grown about how the rising cost of energy and other daily goods will affect people, the team at East Dartford, looked to see how they could extend provision they were already offering.

They decided to increase their café opening hours and add the offer of warm food, from bacon and sausage butties, on into soup over lunchtime.

With the church facing its own struggles around rising costs, they were pleased to receive a grant from Dartford Borough Council, as well as from the Diocese's Energy Costs Support Fund, to help support the outreach.

For the Vicar, the Rev Mandy Young, the café is addressing some of the most pressing needs in the community:

"The pandemic and then the cost-of-living crisis immediately afterwards, has caused almost a pandemic of isolation and mental health needs."

Visitors to the café agree, with one lady saying that, when it first started, it was 'a real life saver', as she was heading towards depression due to being so isolated. For another, Sarah, she said she likes to come for the sausages and a chance to see some friendly faces.

There are also food and fuel poverty needs which the church is trying to meet too.

Mandy estimates that over a thousand coats have been donated and passed-on since their coat-swap initiative began in late September last year, reducing waste, saving money, and offering the practical support of warmth without questions being asked.

"The pandemic and then the cost-of-living crisis immediately afterwards, has caused almost a pandemic of isolation and mental health needs."



A VISITOR AT THE WARM SPACE, ST ALBAN, DARTFORD

“We have such wonderful people locally who donate us things; we literally take the goods in and then they are shared out again into the community.

“Our food bank has grown exponentially too, from around 15 deliveries a week during Covid, to around 30 or 40 families coming through the door now each week.”

It’s a similar situation to be found in the parish of St Peter and St Paul, Aylesford, where longer hours added to their Place of Welcome café is part of a package of warm and welcoming support which includes an established food bank and now, a new Dementia Café.

“Because of the picturesque setting of the church and old village, the fact that there is need and deprivation in the wider parish might not be immediately obvious,” says the Rev Ruth Peet.

Like Mandy, Ruth sees isolation as a key underlying issue, meaning their outreach is not just about meeting practical needs but about the church helping connect people and being a welcoming and affirming presence.

“We’ve had people donate to the food bank who then start to talk about their own problems, and it’s clear that the opportunity to do that is much appreciated.”

She continues, “We also organise a litter pick and for me, that is not just about caring for our environment, but about caring for the wellbeing of the people who live here. Litter brings people down, and if where you live feels pleasant and cared for, then you feel valued and cared for too.

“That’s why we have good quality, freshly-made cake in the café too!”

She says there is a delicate balance to be struck between letting people know that they are welcome to something like the café, without it appearing like they are receiving charity. “It’s about offering company and welcome first.”

A St Barnabas, Cray, a new choir is one of the ways the church is approaching the issue explains choir leader and parish administrator, Kayleigh Shaw.

“We do have a warm space café on Tuesday afternoon, but we also wondered, what if people need somewhere to go in the evenings, and what if they don’t recognise themselves as being ‘in need’ as such?”

Kayleigh had been wanting to offer a choir just for women for a while, and offering something they could come to in an evening which was warm, welcoming, offered companionship, but was centred around an activity, seems to have struck the right note.

“I think it’s raising people’s spirits and improving their well-being, as well as giving them a warm and safe place to be with others, in a non-judgemental way.”

Back at St Alban’s Church, Mandy would agree that their café – including a new Games Café launched in January - is providing a way of addressing isolation but not in a heavy-handed way, “You don’t have to say, ‘are you lonely?’, but you can say, why not come along to the café, it’s nice and warm, we have some fun.”

She adds, “Then they come along, they forget their worries for a bit, they get something nice and warm to eat, or play a game, and I think, right now, those things are priceless.”

Visit www.warmwelcome.uk to find a warm welcome space near you.



ST PETER AND ST PAUL, AYLESFORD



DEBBIE, PARISH ADMINISTRATOR AT ST ALBAN, DARTFORD



STAINED GLASS WINDOWS AT ST GEORGE'S CHURCH, BECKENHAM
DESIGNED BY THOMAS FREETH.

CONFRONTING CONTESTED HERITAGE

Racial Justice Sunday takes place in February, providing an opportunity for a collective focus on racial justice. Of course, tackling racial inequality is not just confined to one day. At St George's Church in Beckenham, where the Rector Fr Jeremy Blunden is the Bishop's Adviser for UKME/GMH Affairs, they are taking steps to ensure that their commitment to inclusion and diversity is a year-round endeavour. They are starting by looking at their past.

"We want the church to be a safe and nurturing place," says Joan Conway, Reader at St George's Church in Beckenham, "We love the diversity of our congregation, which is very mixed."

Joan is speaking as a part of a podcast exploring how St George's is taking a bold approach to raising awareness of, as well as tackling, racial injustice.

Called the Maverick Paradox Podcast, its host, Judith Germain, was struck by the refreshing approach she found at the church when she paid it an unexpected visit in October last year:

"I was early [for a meeting] and found myself outside [the church] with twenty minutes to spare. I came in and admired the stained-glass windows and was amazed to see a black Jesus in stained glass."

Judith then went on to explore the various noticeboards where she found a statement explaining the church's position on some of the memorials in the church that have a connection to slavery, as well as articles about Black History.

"While reading the articles I was approached by Joan," explains Judith, "It is clear Joan loves her church and takes the (wider) Church's contested heritage very seriously."

Indeed, the work taking place at St George's is reflective of the deep thought and discussion that has taken place in recent years about institutional racism within the Church.

It is reflection that has brought into sharp and painful relief how historically and in the current day, the Church has failed to be a place of welcome and safety for those from diverse ethnic backgrounds and heritage.

The report published in 2021 by the Archbishops' Anti-Racism Taskforce called, *From Lament to Action*, was clear that culture change in the Church is vital for its continued future.

"I came in and admired the stained-glass windows and was amazed to see a black Jesus in stained glass."



While many of the recommendations of the report are still being addressed, one early outcome was guidance to help churches and cathedrals respond to the presence of memorials and objects that are symbols of injustice or sources of pain.

Known as Contested Heritage, these memorials are often those connected to the slave trade, and at St George's, they have taken steps to understand and confront the contested heritage, quite literally upon their walls.

Following the *From Lament to Action* report, the church set up a committee to look at how Contested Heritage might affect St George's and if it did, what they could do about it.

Joan researched all the families named in the memorials in the church – many going back several hundred years.

"I discovered that some of the families hadn't been involved in the slave trade at all, while others had profited in some way. Some had been directly involved but had funded schools and hospitals, so, it was a very complex issue."

With the extent of the Contested Heritage established, the committee decided that, rather than try to remove the memorials, they would be open and transparent about their presence and use them as an opportunity for learning and to challenge injustice, as the church's statement on Contested Heritage makes clear:

'As part of our continuing commitment to diversity and inclusion, we acknowledge that some items in St George's Church commemorate people who supported and benefited from slavery and ideologies that are wrong.

'We are committed to being inclusive in all aspects of life. Artefacts may include references which allude to cultural views typical of their time. We hope to be able to help people to understand how these harmful ideas and actions had an adverse influence on society then and continue to cause distress today.'

In the regular historical tours Joan runs in the church, she now points out the memorials with a contested history, and the church's statement is available in the guidebook, on noticeboards, and on the website.

For Judith Germain, the openness she found was unexpected and she says, 'showed a church addressing its past, present and future role in the community and beyond.'

For Joan, the reason why what the church is doing is important is no in doubt:

"Jesus is Jesus for all of us. We are all God's image."

Image below shows: Monument to Peter Burrell 1692-1756, Director and Sub-Governor of the South Sea Company, which had links to the slave trade.

A bit more about...

Racial Justice Sunday – This annual event takes place on the 12 February 2023. This year, there is a particular focus on the 30th anniversary of the death of Stephen Lawrence.

Find out more at: www.ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-2023-stephen-lawrence

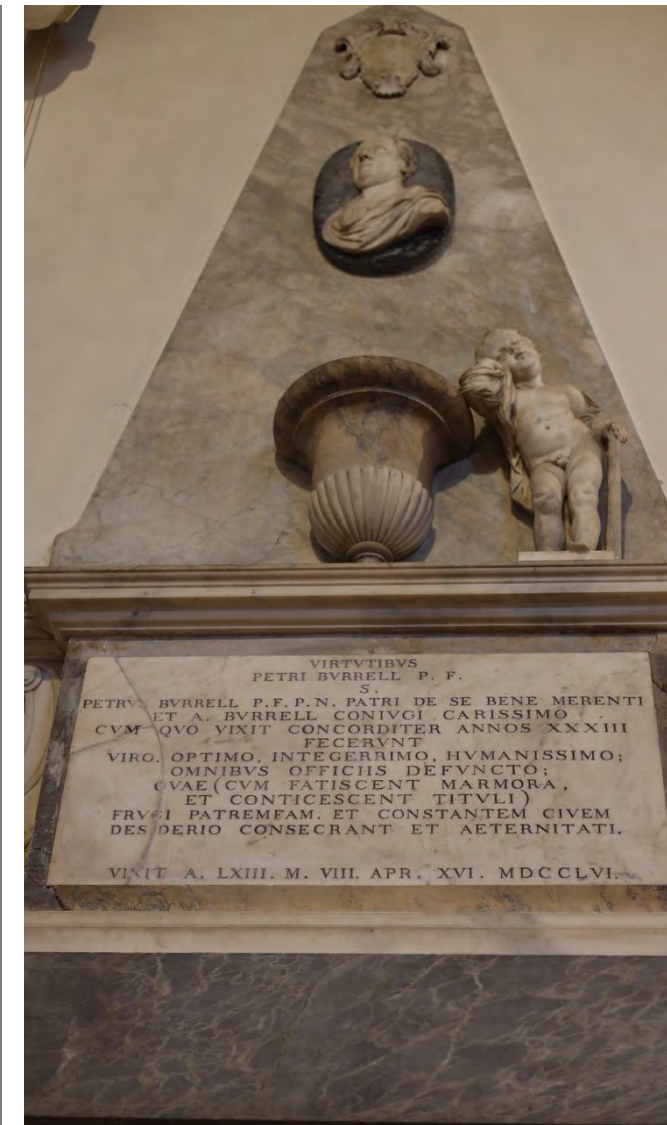
From Lament to Action - This report from The Archbishops' Anti-Racism Taskforce proposed a suite of changes to begin bringing about a change of culture in the life of the Church of England.

It set out 47 specific actions for different arms of the Church to implement across five priority areas: participation, governance, training, education and young people.

Visit www.churchofengland.org and search From Lament to Action

The Maverick Paradox Magazine and Podcast – Read and listen to Judith Germain's full conversation with Joan by visiting: www.themaverickparadox.com/contested-heritage-time-for-change/

With grateful thanks to Judith for use of quotes from her article and podcast.



EXPLORING OUR MISTAKES THIS LENT

DUST ✦ GLORY

This Lent, we are all invited to explore how we can live well with the 'mess' of everyday life with the Church of England's Dust and Glory campaign.

Every single person experiences failure. The question is what we do with it and, even more importantly, what God does with it in partnership with us.

Through a series of reflections, prayers and suggested activities, Dust and Glory encourages us to take a fresh look at the struggles and mistakes that every day brings.

To start you on your Lenten journey, why not try these 5 simple actions to help you explore how to learn from your mistakes and grow closer to God through them?

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1

SEARCH ONLINE FOR INTERESTING QUOTES ABOUT DEALING WITH SETBACKS

Famous people from sport, music, business, and politics often have a lot to say about when things have gone wrong for them on their way to achieving success

2

BE KIND TO SOMEONE WHO IS HAVING A DIFFICULT TIME

Things don't always go to plan for any of us. Who do you know who could do with an encouraging word or a smile today?

3

CLEAR UP A DRAWER OR CUPBOARD THAT'S GOT INTO A MESS

Tidying our belongings is not too hard (once we get started) - but unless we make a habit of doing so regularly, the mess soon builds up again.

4

READ OR LISTEN TO PSALM 23

This much-loved psalm reminds us that God looks out for us and stays with us in good times and hard times, like a shepherd guarding their flock.

5

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE TO MAKE BIG DECISIONS IN OUR WORLD

What any of us does can affect other people. What politicians and other leaders do can do a lot of good – or harm. Pray that they may decide wisely and fairly.

Next steps

Lent starts on the 22 February. Dust and Glory is available as a printed booklet, as an app, via a daily email, and on the Daily Hope phone-line. There is also a specific version for families and young people.

Visit: www.chpublishing.co.uk/lent to order copies or scan the code for more details.



GAMING AND FAITH – GAME OVER, OR GAME ON?

Among the much-anticipated computer game releases this year is an immersive game called 'I am Jesus Christ'. As one of the biggest industries in the world branches ever more into the world of religion, is gaming something that people of faith should see as an opportunity or an adversary? The Rev Simon Archer, Vicar of All Saints, Belvedere, and an avid gamer gives his view.



In 2020 an article in this very publication talked about how I was engaging with people about Christianity and faith through the medium of computer games and live streaming. This was picked up by a local paper which, in turn, was seen by someone in the BBC who decided to do a piece about it.

By lunchtime, I was live on BBC News and being reported on a number of local TV stations. The following Sunday I had 18 radio interviews with regional BBC stations, all before presiding at a service. In the months to come I would talk about ministry, faith, and gaming to many others including CBS, appearing on the news in places like Miami, Voice of Islam Radio, and a live online interview with a major games label in front of 110,000 people.

I was soon labelled "The Gaming Vicar", a name that has really stuck.

In just about every interview I had, there was a line of questions that always came up. Are games or gaming actually bad for people? Are they dangerous, do they harm our young people? Are they a negative distraction for all ages?

The short answer is 'yes', inasmuch as anything that we become obsessed with might be bad for us. One of the things I always talk about when I game and live stream is the other things I do in my life. I spend time with my family, reading scripture, praying, walking, reading, listening to music. If I spent every minute that I'm not being a vicar playing video games, it would be very unhealthy physically, mentally, and spiritually. That would be the same, however, if I spent every waking moment being a vicar! Finding a balance is always difficult but absolutely essential to wellbeing.

With young people it's often much harder - my tip is not to start with limitations and bans but with interest and understanding. Talk to young people about the games they play, what they enjoy, who they play with. My eldest son has made friends with other young people from all over the world, recently meeting up with a couple of them from Scandinavia in real life.

In church you will often see young people's faces light up when you don't dismiss the things they are passionate about, and many will be passionate about playing video games.

With all this said, computer games are clearly a useful medium. The games industry is far bigger than Hollywood and there are many people of a surprising range of ages who engage with each other in that world.

Recently, I have even been involved with discussions with other Christians, including clergy, and a member of the House of Lords about how Sunday Schools might be brought into Virtual Reality. Interesting and exciting stuff.

Most recently I was invited to trial and stream a new game and to talk about it on BBC Radio Kent. The game is called "I Am Jesus Christ", and you literally take on the role of Jesus and live out the story of his ministry. It is both interesting and troubling in equal measure. Pretending to be Jesus? Having a power bar which is the Holy Spirit and charged up through prayer? However, the interesting bit was actually when we came to a point in the game which depicted the healing of the son of an official in John 4:46.

The viewers and I got into a discussion of the parallels between that and similar stories in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke - also known as the synoptic Gospels - and even the way the game developers had interpreted it in the storyline of the game.

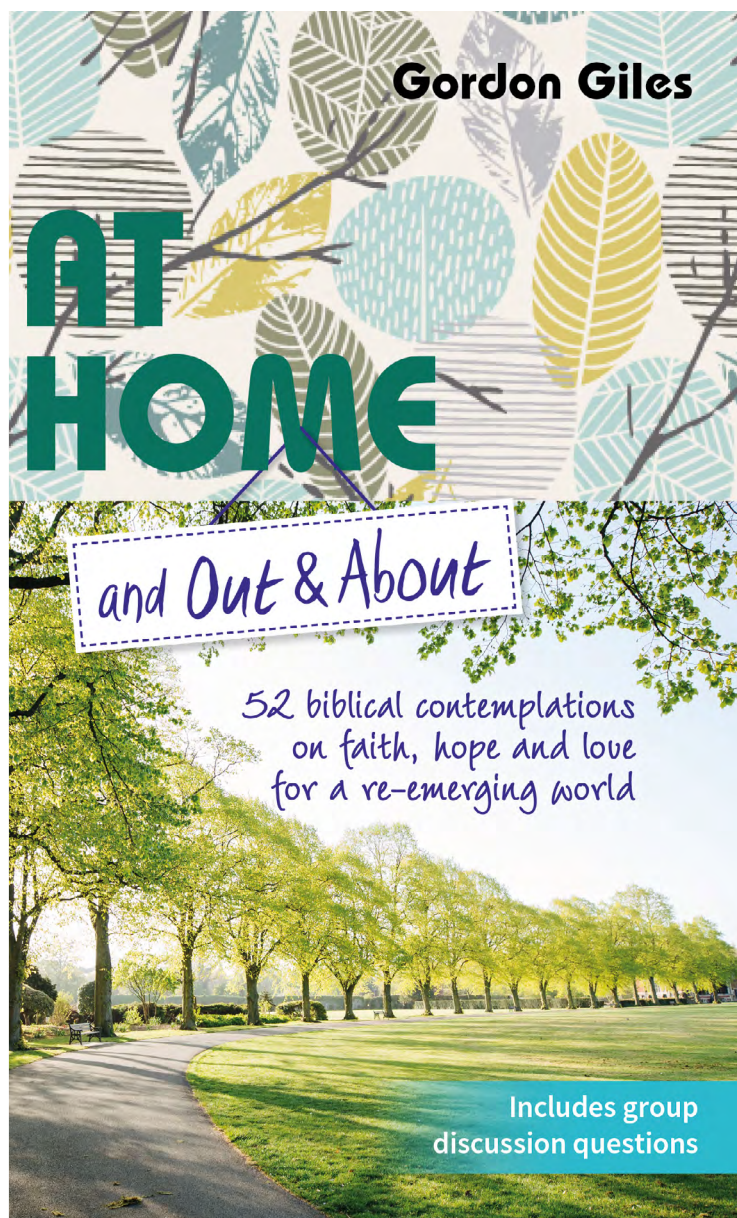
So what it did was promote discussion. It made us get our Bibles out and talk about it and debate. Real and genuine engagement with scripture - that's not bad for just a game on a computer. It makes me wonder how we might use this media in the future. The game is still being developed but a free prologue is available on Steam, a game download site, and can be played on most PCs.

For those who are not convinced and are still dismissive or distrustful of this gaming world, please remember, we are often called to meet with people in places which can make us uncomfortable - prisons, pubs, outside nightclubs, among the homeless. And many of these can be the very situations that can bear the most amazing fruit.

You can find Simon on Twitch, Twitter, Facebook or most other places by simply searching for TheGamingVicar. Or just Google 'The Gaming Vicar'.

RESOURCES – INSPIRATIONAL READS

Get set for the new year ahead with some inspirational reading with these books from local authors.



At home and out and about

Author: The Rev Canon Gordon Giles, Rochester Cathedral

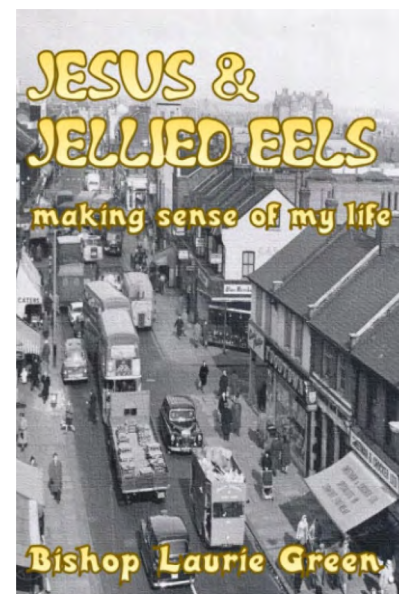
Available at: www.brfonline.org.uk

Following the success of his *At Home in Advent* and *At Home in Lent* series, Gordon Giles, the Canon Chancellor at Rochester Cathedral, spreads his post-pandemic wings with a series of 52 reflections on everyday objects and experiences, to help us reflect on faith, love, and hope in a re-emerging world.

Through meditations on the challenges and losses of the pandemic still to be processed, to musings on cinema, mobile phones, memorial benches, castles, and many more eclectic but relatable subjects, Gordon covers the entire year of seasons and Church festivals.

He brings great knowledge, lightly worn, searching theological insight, humour, and compassion to a book that is engaging, illuminating, and profound in equal measure.

He says; 'As we emerge from the traumatic and challenging period of the Covid pandemic, this book provides an opportunity to remember, relive, and reflect upon those days and to re-engage with a world that still gives us much to consider and contemplate.'



Jesus and Jellied Eels

Author: The Rt Rev Laurie Green, Honorary Assistant Bishop, Diocese of Rochester

Available on Amazon

Reviewer: *The Rev Canon Jane Winter*

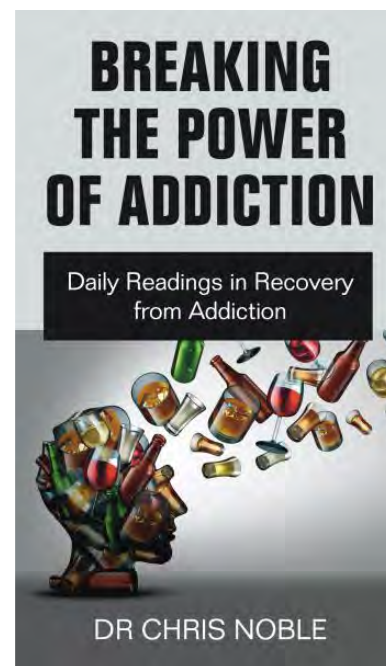
Laurie writes with deep humility, honesty and grace about the down to earth realities of growing up in the East End and continuing to grow through his insatiable desire to learn from every person and experience he encounters.

While this is an autobiography, it is less about the author and more about the encounters which shape who he is. The result is a book that invites the reader to share too in an amazing life of discovery.

He speaks openly about his frustrations with institutionalised Anglicanism while at the same time expressing deep gratitude for the Church of England.

He tells of his own struggle with the nature of faith and the often limiting concepts of God which are handed to us, and he shares fresh insights of hope.

This is not a staid story of one individual. It is the story of many communities grappling with what it means to be human together, to be Christian together, to be loved and to love through all the trials and celebrations of life.



Breaking the Power of Addiction

Dr Chris Noble, St Augustine's Theological College

New Generation Publishing

Available on Amazon

The new year is often a time when people review patterns of behaviour that have a negative impact on their lives and in *Breaking the Power of Addiction*, alcoholism is the particular focus. A Research Fellow at St Augustine's Theological College, Chris' latest research explores the role of spirituality in recovery from alcohol addiction.

In this book, inspired by his work as a voluntary chaplain at an alcohol and drug detox centre, Chris offers a set of daily readings that aim to inject hope and bring light to anyone seeking to break free from the darkness of destructive drinking.

Chris is himself on a life-long journey of recovery from alcohol addiction and his own experience of suffering at the hands of the bottle provides the backdrop for these daily readings.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES



IT'S YOUR CALLING

at St Andrew, Paddock Wood, 4 FEBRUARY
at Christ Church, Orpington, 29 APRIL

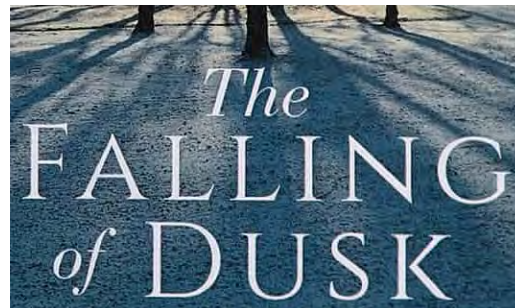
It's Your Calling is aimed at those exploring where God may be calling and looks at our journey and the gifts that God has given us, as well as the Biblical understanding of vocation. To book and for more information please visit www.rochester.anglican.org/events-and-training



LENT QUIET DAY

at St Benedict's Centre, West Malling
25 FEBRUARY, 10am to 3.30pm

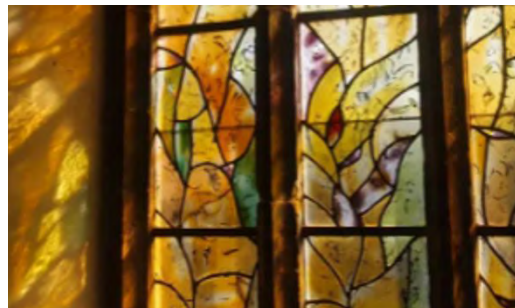
A space to reflect during the season of Lent. There will be input, time to reflect in silence and share your experience with others. The day will be facilitated by Margaret Wooding Jones. To book please email: susanecarlssons@hotmail.co.uk



LENT GROUP THE FALLING OF DUSK

at St Benedict's Centre, West Malling
MARCH 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, APRIL 5 at 10:30am

Paul Dominiak's book, *The Falling Dusk*, takes the seven last words of Jesus on the Cross, to explore how, in an age of uncertainty and suspicion, doubt can hone faith rather than stand against faith. Lent offers us the opportunity to acknowledge our doubts in the safety of God's sure and certain faithfulness. To book email: bookings@stbenedictscentre.org



OFFERING SPIRITUAL CARE TO THOSE AT THE END OF LIFE

at All Saints' Church, Tudeley
20,21 APRIL, 5,6 JUNE, 9.30am-1:pm

An interactive morning workshop led by Penny Stephans. Ideal for all involved in pastoral care, anyone with personal interest, volunteer and staff chaplains, family carers. The event fee is £10. For information and to register your place visit www.tudeley.org or email: chadmin@tudeley.org



PEACE DOVES

In February Rochester Cathedral will be transformed by 'Peace Doves' an artwork by Peter Walker Sculptor.

Bringing a message of peace and hope, the Peace Doves artwork has been created from thousands of individually hand-made paper doves. Many schools and community groups in the local area have been involved and have written messages of peace and hope onto each dove.

Together they collectively form a beautiful artwork which as a whole, reflects joining together in unity, peace and hope moving forward.

Events under Peace Doves

Enjoy one of these unique experiences under the Peace Doves installation

February 14, 2023

Valentine's Day under Peace Doves

A romantic and unique date opportunity this Valentine's Day at Rochester Cathedral.

Enjoy a glass of prosecco and experience the art installation after dark.

February 18, 2023

Jordan Ravenhill: Live music under Peace Doves

An evening of live music with up and coming local musician, Jordan Ravenhill

February 24, 2023

Evening celebration of Ukrainian culture

An evening of music, prayers and poetry celebrating Ukrainian culture under the beautiful setting.

For more information and to book, please visit www.rochestercathedral.org/peacedoves



SINGING IN PRAISE OF GOD

Since her appointment to St Mark, Gillingham as Gospel Plant Leader in October 2019, Mayowa Oyinloye, also known as MJPRAISE, has been working on some exciting initiatives. Her role has been funded by the Church Commissioners' Strategic Development Fund. We caught up with her to find out more.

Can you tell us what your role as Gospel Plant Leader involves?

The role involves starting and sustaining a "gospel style" type of service in the Gillingham community. It provides an atmosphere of worship and praise that is unhindered and expressive. An atmosphere where you can dance, sing and worship God to your heart's content without being judged or alienated.

It sounds great! Has it surprised people?

The joyous and heart-warming music draws people in, some are quite surprised - in a positive way - that the Church of England creates such an expressive atmosphere of worship which is in great contrast to the more reflective traditional worship of the Anglican Church they may be more familiar with.

Can anyone come?

Yes! The congregation is diverse, with multiple age groups, ethnicity, and other religious / alternative beliefs too.

Have you always enjoyed singing?

Oh yes, I have always loved to sing. Singing and acting was my escape route as a child. I suffered lots of abuse in every ramification of the word whilst growing up, and singing was one of the things I did to escape such toxicity. Now I use my experience of passing through abuse to impact the lives of others.

When did you become aware you had a real talent for it?

Not until my early twenties, but my mum said I vowed to be a singer as young as 5 years old. I always felt drawn to anyone singing.

Are you involved in singing outside your church role?

Yes. I lead three singing groups, have received various awards and write my own songs. One of the songs God gave me the grace to compose entitled, *One Voice*, actually paved the way for me to be invited by the Royal Office to sing for King Charles and his wife Camilla early last year, 2022.

When did you know you wanted to use your talent for the praise of God?

It was before I got married, when I got to the UK some 17 years ago. I vowed to use my entirety for God and asked that anything that would take my focus from serving God would be void from my path. That is where my ministry name, MJPRAISE, stems from. Which in full means Mayowa Just Praise.

So, are Mayowa and MJPRAISE very different personalities?

Oh, definitely yes! They are totally different entities. MJPRAISE is more full of life, energy and grace, and she loves to dress up in her best when leading or ministering. Mayowa is more reserved. The main similarity between MJPRAISE and Mayowa is they both love glitter!

Can you tell us a bit about your community outreach?

Yes, all to the glory of God. I am the visionary of LET LOOSE, a free outdoor music concert which is aimed at giving a glimmer of hope to victims of abuse, which has been going for almost 9 years. I also lead a community choir, which consists of adults and kids, and we have been blessed to be invited to sing at various community, public and private events.

We hear you do some busking too.

Yes, on different high streets in a session I call *Buskiitivity* - which merges the words *Busking* and *positivity* together. I sing and share positive words, not for monetary donations. Rather, I talk about myself, which inadvertently portrays my faith, and people seem to relate to that more than me wielding a Bible or preaching.

You sound pretty busy, what do you like to do in your spare time?

Well, I like to say I am active not busy! I know it sounds corny, but I live, eat and sleep music. It is my escape, but I wind down by hiding in my room under my duvet and binge watch TV with my favourite snack. My husband is a great chef, and he spoils me silly with various delicacies.

Who has particularly inspired you?

A young lady called Ellie has been my inspiration this past year. She became wheelchair bound a few years ago due to a debilitating illness but this never stops her from inspiring others or achieving her goals. Also, my husband and children inspire me to be the best at what I do. They support and encourage me, regardless of how crazy or unrealistic my goals are.

LET LOOSE takes place on Friday 28 July, 2023 on Gillingham High Street. This community event will include various local and Gospel artists, with free refreshments available.



CALLED BACK TO SCHOOL

After a career in business, Lee Kings trained to be a teacher and now teaches Sociology and Religious Studies at Bishop Justus Church of England School in Bromley. However, he's also responded to a sense of calling to be the school's Lay Chaplain.

My career path, similar to my journey of faith, has been more of a road to Emmaus experience than a road to Damascus; a gradual realisation of what God has planned for me. Working in marketing, I enjoyed the creativity and pace, but felt something was missing.

I started volunteering as a tutor of adult basic education, teaching literacy and numeracy and then, after much prayer, I took the step to train as a secondary school teacher.

After several school roles, I again felt a clear calling to lay chaplaincy and qualified as a lay chaplain in 2021. I must say that, at many points, I pushed back and found reasons why I shouldn't change.

Thankfully faith won through, and I listened to God, trusting that He knows me better than I know myself.

Working with children and young adults is a constantly spiritual experience. I really believe it is a myth that younger generations are losing spirituality and faith.

So many times in the classroom students have made an observation or asked a question which is profound and their spiritual wisdom has often taught me something about faith.

I often wonder if adults have lost their sense of awe and wonder about the world around them and to some extent their sense of humanity.

I am frequently asked by students "But sir, why don't adults just sort it out?" Have we made adult life too remote from the truth? Should we listen to the wisdom of our young people more?

My hope and prayer as I work with students in school is that they will grow in wisdom, love and hope to make this world a better place.

Everyday Faith

Everyday Faith is about where and how we encounter God as we go about our lives. God has given us all gifts and skills to serve God and others.

Explore how God may be calling you. Visit www.rochester.anglican.org and search for 'God's plan for you'.



Diocese of *Rochester*
called together

A PRAYER FOR LENT

The six weeks of preparation before Easter begin on the 22 February. Traditionally, it is a time when we acknowledge our failure to live up to God's purpose for our lives. And yet, in the shadow of the cross and the light of the resurrection, we find hope in the God who transforms failure into glory. So, we pray:

Lord Jesus,
you spent forty days in the wilderness:
walk with us in the wilderness of Lent and life.
Hold our failures in the light of your compassion and
guide us each day in your way.

Amen.