

TOGETHER

The FREE magazine from the Diocese of Rochester | Issue 27 | November 2025 - January 2026

CHANGE | SERVE | GROW

COVER STORY: A NEW CHAPTER FOR ST JOHN'S CHATHAM PAGE 8



SHARING HOPE:
BISHOP'S
REFLECTION

'GO WITH
THE FLOW':
EVERYDAY FAITH

CHRISTMAS JOY:
BOOKS AND
PODCAST





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As we enter the last months of the year, we look ahead to the seasons of Advent and Christmas, as we wait expectantly for the birth of Jesus - God dwelling among us.

In our **Big Issue** (pg 18), Bishop Jonathan picks up the theme, by sharing his belief that at this special time in the year, all Christians have a role in helping share with others the hope given through Jesus.

A flourishing Church, where everyone can grow in relationship with God and have confidence to share their faith with others, is at the heart of the diocesan Called Together vision. You can find an update on progress in **Inside Track** (pg 4).

Then, why not head over to our **One to One** (pg 24), to meet Tia, the new Head of Programmes, helping coordinate the practical programme of work to make the vision reality.

In **Focus On**, we hear about the reopening of St John's Chatham (pg 8) – a major renovation project and plan to support faith and mission in Medway, and we celebrate the church in Edenbridge (pg 12), which is the latest to achieve the prestigious Eco Church Gold award.

Finally, our **Head Space** (pg 20) section offers ideas to help you delve deeper into the story of Christmas. All this plus much more.

I hope you enjoy reading and sharing this edition with others. Go well.

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VISION WORK GETS UNDERWAY

The launch of a wellbeing initiative, 24 church leaders in learning communities to discuss missional leadership, and recruitment of several roles to directly support parishes with matters such as the care of their buildings and work with children and young people, are just some of activities that have taken place as part of the mobilisation of the Diocese's Called Together vision.

The details were shared by the Rt Rev Dr Jonathan Gibbs, the Bishop of Rochester, in a progress update about what he says is an 'ambitious and hope-filled nine-year plan to bring about a Church where all can flourish as God intends'.

In March it was announced that the Diocese had secured nearly £11 million of funding from the National Church's Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) in support of the vision which seeks to grow missional churches with missional leaders and missional disciples.

Bishop Jonathan explained that since then the Called Together Programme Board - which will help

oversee the work - had met and details had been finalised with the National Church about expected overall outcomes, governance structures, and ongoing reporting, so that the promised funding could be drawn down and the first phases of work get underway.

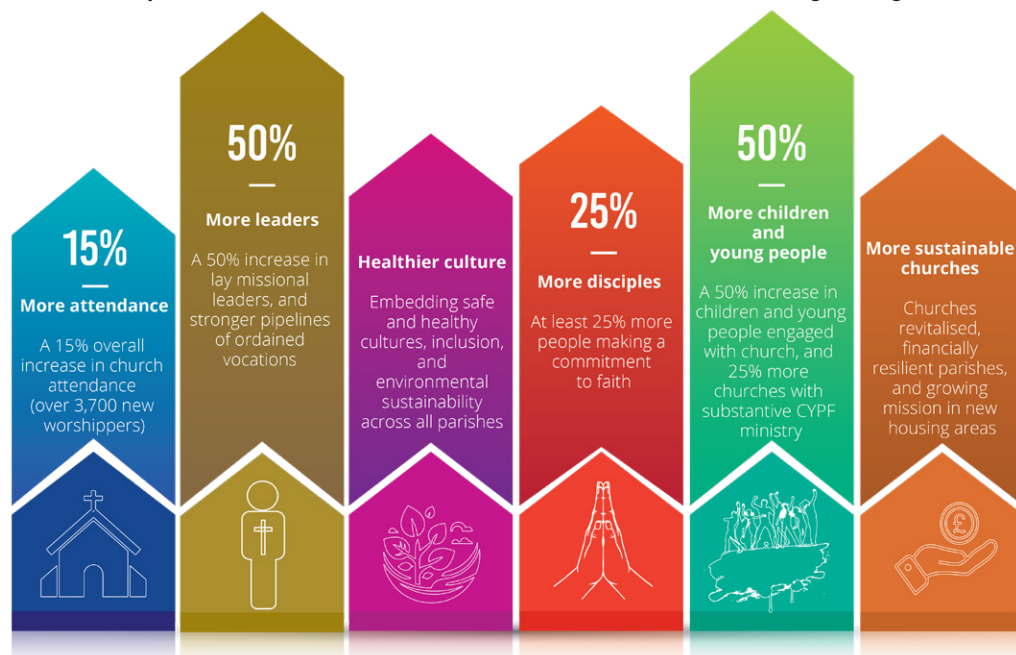
With all this in place, work has now begun in each of the four workstreams - Missional Leadership Development, Missional Development Places, Children, Young People and Families, and Revitalise.

Bishop Jonathan said he is very excited about all that is taking place and hopes others will be too, "God is at work here in the Diocese of Rochester and we all have a part to play in making this vision a reality. I am so excited by what is already happening and invite everyone to pray so that God's Church in our Diocese may flourish and grow and his name be glorified."

Scan the QR code to read the full update



By 2034, it is expected that across the Diocese there will be a renewed and growing Church with:



STOLEN PLAQUES RESTORED

The congregation of Christ Church, Luton, and the local community were devastated when two First World War memorial plaques were stolen from the church earlier in the year. Thanks to Kent Police, and the integrity of a scrap metal dealer, the two plaques - although damaged - were recovered. They have since undergone an incredible restoration project, and are now back within the church where they belong.



COME INSIDE

A simple 'Come inside' idea brought new visitors from near and far to St Martin's Church, Ryarsh. To tie in with the annual Friends of Kent 'Ride and Stride' fundraiser in September, the church invited people to 'take a look inside' the church by offering clear welcome signs, an open door, refreshments to enjoy, and a treasure trail for children. Visitors came on foot, bicycle, and motorbike to enjoy some time exploring the historic building.



SOLAR POWERED MISSION

Holy Trinity, Twydall in Gillingham is delighted to have installed several solar panels on their hall roof, thanks to some initial funding through the Called Together, Missional Development Places workstream. The panels will not only reduce their annual carbon emissions by 5 tonnes, but their energy costs too, meaning the church can better focus their funds on outreach and maintaining their much-needed presence in the community.



LIGHTING UP FOR BABY LOSS

Christ Church, Beckenham, lit its windows in blue and pink during Baby Loss Awareness Week in October. The Wave of Light is an annual opportunity to join with bereaved parents, families and friends around the globe to commemorate all babies who have sadly died too soon, and to signpost to support such as SANDs - The Baby Loss Charity: www.sands.org.uk



CHURCHES COLLABORATE FOR A GREENER FUTURE

In October, the first-ever joint Eco Conference between the Dioceses of Rochester and Canterbury took place.

Hosted at St Luke's Church in Maidstone in Canterbury Diocese, this Net Zero Demonstrator Church led by example, with its warm, welcoming space heated by a new infrared system, powered by recently installed solar PV panels.

The event brought together 80 attendees (in person and online) from both dioceses, for a morning of listening, learning, and connecting around the shared commitment to caring for God's creation.

Contributions came from two A Rocha Eco Church Gold Award churches, St Mary's, Smeeth and The Holy Redeemer, Lamorbey, who offered practical inspiration as to what is possible when sustainability becomes a core part of mission. Representatives of both Rochester and Canterbury Cathedrals spoke about the unique role cathedrals can play as centres of heritage and influence, and the Next Gen youth group from St Martin, Maidstone led prayers and shared their hopes and concerns for the future of the planet.

For Kayleigh Ward, Net Zero Advisor for Rochester Diocese, the day was confirmation of the incredible commitment to climate care taking place across parishes:

"As a team we are so grateful for the way parishes are engaging with this work. In Rochester Diocese alone, 88 per cent of the churches have submitted their Energy Footprint Tool, which is an amazing achievement and gives us vital data to help support churches with next steps."

Alongside this, she says that £48,000 of Quick Wins funding secured by the team from the national church has been quickly taken up by churches for initiatives such as LED lighting and heated seat cushions, and 35 energy audits have been subsidised to help churches understand how they can reduce energy consumption and energy bills.

"The enthusiasm with which all these opportunities have been taken up by churches is so encouraging and so we want to thank every parish for their commitment, and we look forward to continuing to support them on their Net Zero journeys."

YOUNG PEOPLE SUPPORTED TO STEP INTO FAITH

In September, a group of young people from the Diocesan Youth Council gathered for a day of fun, fellowship, and learning.

The theme focused on welcoming new members from across the diocese, being present, having a voice, and building confidence to speak on Church and faith issues.

Using Bible passages from Exodus 4 and Luke 11, they explored what it means to be given what you need by God to go out, speak, and teach. These themes were woven into activities provided by the centre including archery, zip wiring, and abseiling.

Cheryl Trice, Lead Adviser for Children, Young People, and Families Mission and Ministry, said, "Looking at the group, it was hard to tell who was from where, who was new, and who had been part of the Council for a while. It's a sign of the powerful example our young people set for us all around inclusion, acceptance, and creating a space where everyone feels safe to be themselves and knows they belong."

Anyone who would like more information about the Diocesan Youth Council or how your young people can get involved, please contact the Diocesan CYPF Team at: sarah.cabella@rochester.anglican.org.





A NEW CHAPTER FOR ST JOHN'S CHATHAM

September has marked an exciting new season in the life of St John's Chatham, as the congregation have returned to their 200-year-old building for worship for the first time in two years.

The return follows an extensive programme of capital building and restoration work that has been made possible thanks to support and partnership with the Diocese of Rochester, alongside funding from the National Church, Medway Council, National Government, Rochester Bridge Trust, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, The Friends of Kent Churches, The Benefact Trust, The National Churches Trust, and The Dorothy Kerin Trust.

Now transformed into a flexible and welcoming space, watertight, insulated, with underfloor heating fed by an air-source heat pump, additional meeting rooms, kitchen, and servery area, the team is excited about all that lies ahead:

"We really believe that St John's Chatham will be a hub of hope for the community," says the Rev Luke Bacon, Bishop's Mission Order Associate Leader at St John's Chatham.

"We want it to be a place of welcome, whoever you are – so that people know that 'church' is a family of people who know and love Jesus, not just a building."

Indeed, this latest milestone is part of a long-term plan and vision to bring mission and ministry back to St John's Chatham building, which, until 2021, had been closed for around 25 years.

During their recent time out of the building, the congregation was able to continue to gather and grow thanks to the welcome and fellowship offered by the URC congregation at the Emmaus Christian Centre, where they met for worship on Sunday mornings.

"This truly is a story of faith, hope, and determination, with many people never giving up on the hope of seeing mission and ministry taking place once again at St John's Chatham" says the Rev Canon Martyn Saunders, Bishop's Mission Order Mission Leader, and one of the team who has been part of effort to reopen the church.

"I remember one particular lady, who told me that, whenever she would get to the corner of the church, she would touch the building and say, 'God's not done with you yet'."

Dave, now a member of the church, says that, before the church building was open, he would sit on its steps and read his Bible.

"I prayed for the doors to open, and a week later the doors did open, and all these beautiful people were in here...It was like I knew these people. So, they've become family ever since."

He says it is very special that the building is open once again and he knows people will find a place of warmth and welcome:

"Some churches can feel very judgmental but here

"We want it to be a place of welcome, whoever you are – so that people know that 'church', is a family of people who know and love Jesus, not just a building."



it's light, they're accepting of everyone. You come as you are. This is scriptural. This is real. Bring them in off the street no matter who you are or what you are wearing."

The process to reopen the church began back in 2017, when a small team from another local church was released to form the beginnings of a new congregation.

Due to the physical state of the building, at times their gatherings took place in all sorts of venues, including the local nightclub – during the day!

For Sue, a member of that original group, what's happening at St John's Chatham will benefit not just the local community but churches and communities further afield too:

"We want to send people out enthused about Jesus and that can only be a good thing for everyone."

Indeed, prayer and partnerships have been at the heart of making the reopening of St John's possible.

Partnerships like the one with Christian organisation Church Army, who have developed the Medway Centre for Mission, alongside St John's Chatham offering a range of outreaches. Or the church's

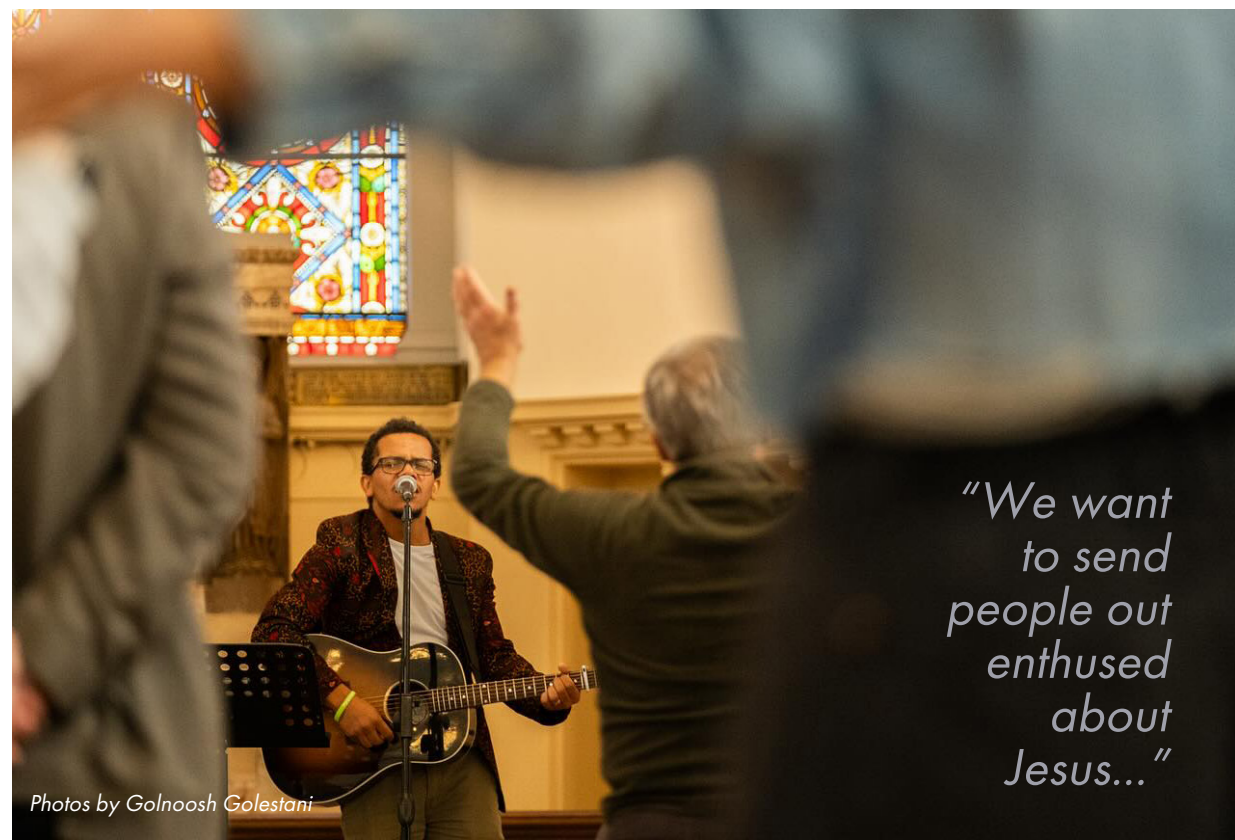
Genesis football initiative, which engages people in faith through sport.

As Luke says: "Although we have been out of the building, we have still sought to play our part in seeing lives and communities in Medway transformed by the love of God and drawn into relationship with Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit."

He reflects that when the current team first arrived, all they heard was how difficult a place Chatham was to live, and there are many people struggling, but what they weren't hearing was the story of its beauty. "It's an incredibly beautiful place" he says, "and that includes the people and cultures that make up Medway, so we really want to be involved in the rediscovery of that beauty."

He says that for 200 years this place was a place of worship, of community, a place of marriages, baptisms, and funerals and it will now be that again:

"For a long time, this building wasn't able to fulfil its calling, but now we are delighted that the doors are open, it can be a place for the community to come and for us to re-learn our story, re-find our identity, not just in the past, but also the hope-filled and joyful story of our futures."



Photos by Golnoosh Golestani

"We want to send people out enthused about Jesus..."



EDENBRIDGE GAINS ECO CHURCH GOLD

St Peter and St Paul's Church, Edenbridge is celebrating achieving Gold Eco Church status.

The Eco Church scheme, organised by Christian environmental charity A Rocha UK, helps churches take practical steps to address their environmental impact across a range of areas, with Gold the highest level.

At a special service held at the end of the summer, Hilary Morgan, a Reader and member of the church's Green Team, shared the news with the congregation saying:

"We did it! We all did it. You came along with us, and that is why we have been given this highest award for our sustainability efforts."

As only the second church within the Diocese of Rochester to gain A Rocha UK's Gold award, Bishop Jonathan paid tribute to the team:

"This is truly a fantastic achievement, and I offer my sincere congratulations to all in the Green Team at Edenbridge, as well as the entire congregation for all they have, and all they are continuing to do, to live out our Christian duty to care for and steward God's beautiful creation."

He added: "The climate crisis is real and present. We only need think about the extreme weather conditions we are increasingly experiencing here in the UK as a sign of that.

"It's why all the practical steps - big and small - that churches across the Diocese are taking to reduce their environmental impact are so important, and why achievements like those of Edenbridge, serve as a huge inspiration to all of us to just keep going, as it really does make a difference."

Thanks to their small but dedicated Green Team, the church at Edenbridge has been working hard since 2016 to reduce its carbon footprint and to change people's mindset on the environment and living sustainably.

Reflecting on the journey, Jacquie Hill, Churchwarden, and a key member of the church's Green Team, says:

"The whole congregation has been so supportive of the steps we have been taking to play our part in taking care of God's planet.

"Although it has been a long journey, we feel people really do now understand why we need to change and limit the damage to our beautiful blue planet."

Despite the challenge of a 900-year-old plus building, the church has taken several steps to improve its energy efficiency, as Hilary, explains:

"We decided to stop floodlighting the church every day; we have installed light sensors in those areas where people forget to turn off the lights; and we have replaced our lightbulbs with LED light bulbs. We have also inserted a hippo into our cistern in the toilets to reduce the amount of water used, and we compost our teabags and recycle as much waste as possible."

They have also looked at the building itself, installing a secondary door on to the porch so less heat is lost.

Outside, a designated 'Eco area' in the Churchyard has been left to re-wild, becoming a haven for wildlife and plants.

Informing the congregation about the impact of such initiatives and communicating with them about environmental issues has also been vital, says Jacquie:

"We provide weekly eco-tips to the congregation and regularly talk about environmental issues at our services.

"Indeed, care of creation is a key part of our worship throughout the year, whether that is with children, young people, or older people - Hilary has even written a section of the Confirmation prep material to include the care of God's earth."

"Our next objective," says Jacquie, "is to install solar panels on the roof. It is a big project, but we know that this is the right thing to do and will enable us to become more self-sufficient."

Linda and Gill, who came from the A Rocha team to assess the efforts of the church, say they were truly impressed with what the entire team has achieved, and are confident that St Peter and Paul's eco journey won't stop with the Gold award:

"Edenbridge is clearly a church that uses people's skills, interests and talents to further the work of creation care. There is a strong global engagement in this church and a real concern for the impact of climate change, with a focus on hope and what can be achieved by human beings working together to change things."

For Helena, a young member of the parish, the need for the Church to act on climate change is clear:

"For future generations, if we don't care now, we won't



have a world to live in. And if future generations ever find another world, they need to not mess it up like this one!"

So, for those churches who may be thinking about signing up to Eco Church, Jacquie and Hilary have this encouragement:

"We would certainly encourage every church to start on this journey - small changes can make a bigger impact than people think towards a better and more sustainable Church environment."

And for those already on the journey?

"Just keep going! We know it can be tough, but it really is worth it."

TAKING ACTION ON DOMESTIC ABUSE



Each winter, the global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (25 November to 10 December) offers an opportunity for us all to:

- **learn** more about domestic abuse and the different forms it can take
- **commit** to making a stand against it
- **discover** the support available to those who are experiencing such abuse

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone from any walk of life regardless of ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality or social background. According to the charity SafeLives, **eight** women a month are killed by a current or former partner in England and Wales, and **78 per cent** of children living with domestic abuse are directly harmed by the perpetrator of the abuse.

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WAYS YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

1

GET INFORMED

As part of their #KnowSeeSpeakOut campaign, Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Partnership (KMDAP) are running free webinars throughout the 16 Days of Activism to offer insights about domestic abuse to help save lives in Kent and Medway. Find out more at:

www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk/practitioners/take-action-to-end-da/

2

LEARN FROM THOSE WHO KNOW

Beginning on 25 November, the Diocese of Rochester will be sharing content on its Facebook page and website that has been compiled by a person with lived experience of domestic abuse. They generously engage with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team as an advocate to ensure the voice and experience of victims and survivors of abuse is heard, and at the heart of all we do.

Follow at: www.facebook.com/CofERochester/

3

TAKE ACTION

Check out the Mothers' Union's 16 Days of Activism calendar, offering a practical idea and action that can be taken each day to make a positive impact against domestic abuse. One suggestion includes putting together a moving in pack for your local refuge.

www.mothersunion.org/campaign/rise-up/

4

SHOW SOLIDARITY

Rochester Cathedral is marking a month-long season of safeguarding this year, with a focus on domestic abuse. Opportunities include showing solidarity with victims and survivors of abuse by tying a ribbon on the Loudfence on the Cathedral railings. In the Crypt there will be an exhibition prepared by the Mothers' Union about domestic abuse. Visit: www.rochestercathedral.org/whatson

5

SIGNPOST TO SUPPORT

If you or someone you know needs help because of domestic abuse there is support available from national and local services across Kent, Medway and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley. For details, visit the Domestic Abuse Support page on the Diocese of Rochester website: www.rochester.anglican.org/safeguarding/domesticabuse/. In an emergency, please call 999.



HEAVENLY HARMONIES

How a new choral singing scheme in Sevenoaks is strengthening connection with young people.

St Luke’s Church, Sevenoaks, has recently launched an exciting new Choral Scholar Programme, designed to strengthen the church’s long-standing musical tradition while opening doors for young people in the local community to experience the joy of choral singing.

The initiative has been spearheaded by Alex Clark, Director of the Choir at St Luke, who grew up in the parish and first began singing in the church choir at the age of seven.

“St Luke’s Church has always had a long-standing musical tradition and being part of this as a child was a great experience for me,” Alex reflected.

“I went on to be a choral scholar at university myself, and choral singing has always – and continues – to bring me such joy in my life. I would really love other young people to experience that and develop their talents.”

Having taken on the role of Choir Director at the beginning of 2025, Alex was keen to reinvigorate the choral worship at St Luke’s Church.

At the same time, she was conscious that opportunities for young people to participate in choirs - whether in schools or the wider community – have become increasingly limited.

“When I began shaping the idea of the Choral Scholar Programme, I wanted to bring together two goals: firstly, to reaffirm and develop the musical tradition of St Luke, enhancing the worship of our church, and secondly, to offer young people locally the chance to experience choral singing in a sacred setting.”

Alex brought her vision to the Rev Anne Bourne, Team Vicar of the West Sevenoaks Team with pastoral responsibility for St Luke, who was quick to support

the idea. With the full backing of the Parochial Church Council (PCC), funding was secured to make the scheme possible.

The programme is open not only to young people already connected and singing with the church but also to those from the wider community thanks to external advertising.

Each scholar receives a small financial reward, regular vocal coaching, and the chance to develop core skills in choral singing and sight-reading. They commit to singing at church two Sundays a month and participate in rehearsals to broaden their repertoire.

This year, seven young people have been awarded a Choral Scholarship – three from within the church community and four from outside. Applications spanned both junior level (Years 7–9), with five applicants, and senior level (Year 10 and above), with two applicants.

The programme’s first term will see professional input, with individual coaching from Patrick Craig, professional countertenor, Vicar Choral at St Paul’s Cathedral, and an experienced choral director.

Also planned is a choral evensong workshop led by the professional vocal ensemble Sonare Choir.

The Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) Young Voices Toolkit has been a source of guidance for the scheme. It has been designed to help parishes across the country bring young singers into church choirs once more.

The scholars themselves have spoken enthusiastically about the impact of the programme so far.

“The choral scholarship is a brilliant opportunity to explore new music and take responsibility for my repertoire,” said one scholar. “It gives me a lot of confidence in the other choirs that I do, especially when sight reading!”

Another scholar added,

“I have really enjoyed singing with more people in the choir. It has also been a great opportunity to meet new people and to spend more time with God.”

The Rev Anne Bourne shared her excitement about the programme’s early success:

“The choral scholars’ programme is an amazing



opportunity for local young people to develop their choral skills in a nurturing environment, while engaging missionally with the local community.

“Our worship is being enhanced by their presence, and there is opportunity too, we pray, for seeds of faith to be grown in them and those who support them as we look for growth within our church community.”

For Alex, the motivation remains deeply personal.

“Access to musical training has fallen away for many young people, and I’m so thankful that through the support of St Luke’s Church, we can offer this opportunity for free,” she said.

“This is about passing on something that has been transformative in my life – the joy and discipline of choral singing – to the next generation.”

With the support of the parish and the wider church, the St Luke’s Choral Scholar Programme looks set not only to revitalise the church’s own musical tradition but also to nurture the talents and passions of young people across the Sevenoaks area.

PASSING ON THE FAITH

Bishop Jonathan Gibbs, the Bishop of Rochester, says he is sometimes asked on visits to schools and youth groups, 'What exactly does a bishop *do*? ' In this reflection for Together, Bishop Jonathan considers the role that all Christians – not just those in senior leadership - have in sharing the message of hope found in Jesus.

On visits to schools and young people's groups, I sometimes get asked the question (which others are perhaps too shy to ask) – What exactly does a bishop *do*? Recently, I have been reflecting on a similar question which is both personal for me and, I believe, relevant for the life of our churches. And the question is this: What on earth are bishops *for*?

I would like to suggest that the answer to this question can be summed up in one short phrase – one that takes us to the heart of the matter. And that phrase is this: the principal task to which bishops are called (alongside other things, of course) is to pass on the faith.

The principal role of bishops, I would suggest, is to do that in these three ways:

- By proclaiming the faith to the world, as evangelists and prophets.
- By teaching the faith within the church, guarding the faith we have received and interpreting it in each new generation and context.
- By calling and equipping others to share in these tasks, both in the present and the future.

These, I believe, are the key priorities for the role of bishops. But more specifically, what should be our role in today's society, here in the United Kingdom, in the second quarter of the twenty-first century?

I am sure we are all deeply concerned about so many things that are going on in our world today. Just to list some of the most obvious:

- The climate crisis and its implications.
- War in the Middle East and in Ukraine – and in other places too quickly forgotten like Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- Concerns over migration and the rise of political extremism across Europe.
- The power of social media and the corruption of political discourse
- The rise of Artificial Intelligence and the potential for manipulation and disinformation – with all the threats these things bring to civil society and democracy.

Each of us can probably add more themes and make our own list!

In this context, in our generation, the role of bishops – and of all those who are called to exercise leadership in the task of passing on the faith – is to speak of the hope that is ours in Christ and of the nearness of the kingdom of God.

To speak that is of the possibility of a different way of living which can move humanity away from the self-destructive path we are on and bring us back from the brink of disaster, politically, socially and environmentally.

Of course, bishops and other leaders cannot do this on their own. That task rests with the whole people of God, with the Body of Christ, with each one of us as members of the Church.

And the coming seasons of Advent and Christmas give us all a great opportunity to do just that, by celebrating and sharing the hope that we have been given through Jesus Christ and by inviting people to discover more of who he is and what he offers to every single human being, regardless of who they are or where they have come from.

We live in a world that seems to be increasingly dominated by fear and torn apart by strife and division, whether on the world stage or in some of our own communities.

Jesus Christ and the hope that he brings are the answer and the antidote to those fears, and we need to share that hope with the people among whom we live and work day by day.

In the past few generations God has brought many of the churches in our nation to their knees, as people have drifted away, disillusioned by our failures and enticed by all that materialism has to offer. But more and more people today are looking for answers, looking for a better way, looking for an alternative.

Right now, we as Christians live in a time of both challenge and opportunity. May God give us the courage to rise to the challenge and to seize the opportunity, right across our Diocese and nation.

The Rt Rev Dr Jonathan Gibbs

RESOURCES – GET READY FOR CHRISTMAS

The Church of England’s Advent and Christmas theme for 2025 revolves round a single word: Joy! The great joy of Christmas, of course, is the good news the angel declared to the shepherds - the news of Jesus’ birth as Emmanuel (God with us).

Explore our selection of Christmas and Advent materials, great as a gift for yourself or someone you know, to help you journey deeper into the joy at the heart of the Christmas story.



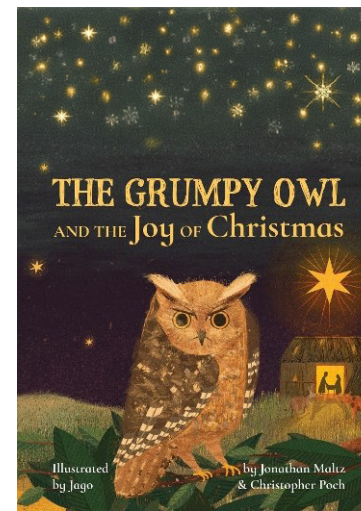
THE REAL ADVENT CALENDAR

£5.95

Created by the Meaningful Chocolate company, this is the UK’s only Fairtrade Advent calendar which comes with a free 24-page Christmas story-activity book and supports charitable causes.

With a Fairtrade Chocolate and a line of the Christmas story behind each of the 25 windows, the free book has a page for every day of Advent, expanding on the Christmas story and includes some fun challenges.

For this and other Advent and Christmas gifts visit: www.meaningfulchocolate.co.uk



THE GRUMPY OWL AND THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS

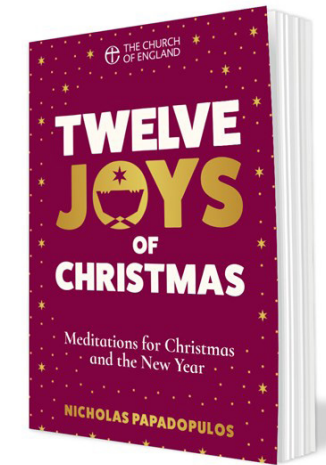
A heart-warming retelling of the Christmas story illustrated by Jago, the award-winning illustrator of The Jesus Storybook Bible.

The Grumpy Owl and the Joy of Christmas tells the story of Jesus’ birth through the eyes of an owl who seems determined to miss all the excitement.

This wonderful story from Jonathan Maltz and Christopher Poch is published as a picture book from Church House Publishing and is available now.

£4.99

Visit: www.chpublishing.co.uk



TWELVE JOYS OF CHRISTMAS

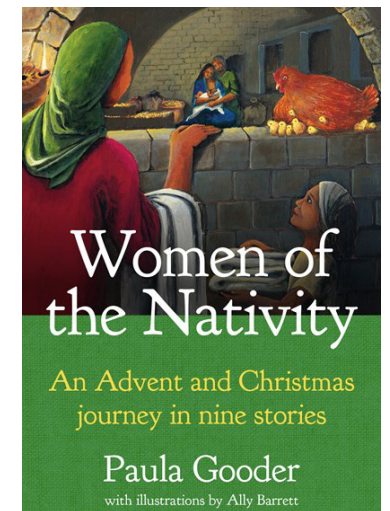
Meditations for Christmas and the New Year

Join Nicholas Papadopoulos, Dean of Salisbury Cathedral as he shares his Twelve Joys of Christmas.

From Christmas pudding to panto, amongst all the earthly ‘stuff’ he discovers what lies at the heart of our celebrations: God’s Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

Beginning on Christmas Day each day offers a theme, a short reading, a reflection, a prayer and a challenge to grow in joy and in faith.

Available through Church House Publishing www.chpublishing.co.uk



WOMEN OF THE NATIVITY PODCAST

A collection of nine imagined stories told from the perspective of women, written by Paula Gooder, recreating the events of the Nativity.

The voices of biblical characters including Mary and her cousin Elizabeth combine with those of imagined figures to tell the ancient story, as familiar scenes are visited afresh through their words, and the wonder of the incarnation and its consequences for good come to life in a new way.

The stories take the listener on a journey through the themes of Advent into the events of Christmas and beyond.

Listen at: www.churchofengland.org/fait-h-life/what-we-believe/advert-and-christmas/women-nativity

UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES



SAFEGUARDING SUNDAY
at Rochester Cathedral
23 NOVEMBER, 3:15PM

Once again Rochester Cathedral is marking a month-long season of Safeguarding this year, in which they invite everyone to reflect, up on and promote the protection of children and vulnerable adults, here in Rochester and elsewhere. The Cathedral will mark 'Safeguarding Sunday' with a special service of Choral Evensong. All are welcome.



ADVENT QUIET DAY
at St Benedict's Centre, West Malling
4 DECEMBER, 10AM-3PM

Led by Canon Dr Neville Emslie, drawing on his research, and the characters of the Infancy Narrative in the Gospel of Matthew, participants will be invited to explore emotional intelligence as a spiritual and theological resource for ministry and discipleship. For more information and how to book contact bookings@stbenedictscentre.org. The cost for the day is £25.



CHRISTINGLE SERVICE
at Rochester Cathedral
13 DECEMBER, 12:30PM

A family-friendly service open to all. Every child receives the gift of a Christingle with a candle to show Jesus is the light of the world. Why not make this Cathedral service part of your Christmas season? To find out more, contact Sarah Cabella on 01634 560000.



IT'S YOUR CALLING
Please check the diocesan website for the venue
28 FEBRUARY 2026

It's Your Calling is aimed at those exploring where God may be calling them. It looks at the gifts that God has given us all and at the biblical understanding of vocation. The day offers an opportunity to meet others on a similar quest and to take time to think what God's plan for you might be. For more information contact vocations@rochester.anglican.org

Find out more at rochestercathedral.org/christmas

Advent and Christmas

ADVENT CAROL SERVICE AND PROCESSION

Sunday 30th November, 15:15

DICKENSIAN CHRISTMAS CAROL SERVICES

Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th December
12:30 and 15:00

Come and sing your favourite carols during the Dickensian Christmas Festival.

CHRISTINGLE SERVICE

Saturday 13th December, 12:30

CHRISTMAS CAROL CONCERT*

Saturday 13th and
Sunday 14th December, 17:00

* Limited Tickets Remaining | Ticketed

A FESTIVAL OF NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS

Friday 19th December, 19:30

Saturday 20th December, 17:30

CHILDREN'S NATIVITY SERVICE

Sunday 21st December, 14:30

CHRISTMAS EVE

Wednesday 24th December

Christmas Eve Carol Service, 15:15

The Eucharist of Christmas Night, 23:30

CHRISTMAS DAY

Thursday 25th December

Holy Communion (*Book of Common Prayer*) 08:00

The Eucharist of Christmas Morning, 10:30

EPIPHANY

Tuesday 6th January 2026, 17:30

Solemn Eucharist

Sunday 11th January

Blessing of the Plough and Seed 15:15

Sunday 18th January 2026, 15:15

Epiphany Carols and Procession

Our Christmas services are free and open to all.

Rochester CATHEDRAL Growing in Christ since AD604



ACTING ON A SENSE OF CALLING

Tia Ndu, the recently appointed Head of Programmes for the Diocese of Rochester, is tasked with managing and coordinating the various workstreams of the diocesan Called Together vision. With a background in the public sector, the role and vision spoke to her own personal faith. 'Togehter' caught up with Tia to find out more about her, and how congregations might start to notice the impact of the vision.

What drew you to the role of Head of Programmes?

At the time, I was working in a different sector and discussing my next steps. I had this strong inner nudge to check the Charity Jobs website for Christian roles nearby. That is when I saw the Head of Programmes role. The Called Together vision really struck a chord with me, its focus on mission and the Great Commission felt like a return to the foundations of our faith. I knew I wanted to be part of that.

Would you even describe it as a sense of calling?

I certainly had long felt a pull to be more missionally engaged, not just on Sundays or through youth ministry that I lead, but in my everyday work. I wanted my 9-5 to reflect my faith and use the skills I had built professionally in service of the Church.

Can you tell us a little bit about your experience before this role?

I have spent many years delivering projects in youth development, healthcare, homelessness, education and community work, always with a focus on impact and collaboration. I have worked alongside volunteers, frontline staff, and leaders to help make a difference in people's lives.

You clearly have a passion for community and people?

Yes. Interestingly my undergraduate degree is in computing, but I later pursued a Master's in NGO and Development Management, another in Social Research, and a PhD in Human and Social Geography. Across all of these, the common thread has been a deep interest in how we learn from and serve diverse communities.

What have you enjoyed most so far about arriving in the Diocese?

It has been a real joy getting to know people across the Diocese, from my own Programmes Team to clergy, lay leaders, and parishioners. No matter who I speak to, there is a shared heart for listening to God, loving others, and sharing the hope of Christ. That sense of unity and purpose has been incredibly encouraging.

It was announced in March that the Diocese had been awarded nearly £11 million by the national Church in support of the vision. What can you tell us about it?

Called Together is the vision and practical plan for the Diocese of Rochester which sees us called as a

diocesan family to change, serve, and grow with compassion, courage, and creativity. Among the overall outcomes, by 2034, we expect to see a 50% increase in lay missional leaders and stronger pipelines of ordained vocations, a 50% increase in children and young people engaged with church, at least 25% more people making a commitment to faith, and more churches revitalised and financially resilient parishes.

Is this only about targeting funding in certain areas?

No. While there are several missional projects that will receive some specific funding, all four main workstreams of the vision include elements that support all parishes, as we're focussing on building capacity and sharing learning, that will help strengthen mission and ministry across the whole Diocese over time.

It sounds exciting?

Yes. We're just at the beginning, and as a team we have been working hard over recent months to meet certain funding requirements to officially start launching projects. Hopefully, over the coming months and years, as these projects and initiatives become embedded, people in parishes will start to feel the impact of this emphasis on growing missional leaders, missional churches, and missional disciples.

Do you have a signature dish?

A signature dish that I cook for my family is rice and peas with curry goat and a side of macaroni cheese. It is a meal that reflects my Jamaican heritage and brings a real sense of joy, togetherness and comfort to the table.

Are you a tea or a coffee person?

Tea all the way! And it has to be Yorkshire tea for a real cuppa!

What are you watching at the moment?

Right now, I am watching Celebrity Traitors on the BBC. I watch it with the family. We all scream at the TV and roll our eyes saying that if we were on the show, we would catch the traitors for sure.

What is your idea of a perfect day?

For me, the perfect day consists of a long walk, listening to a good podcast, doing some product design work (I love designing apps), and a lovely evening meal with my husband and two daughters.



GO WITH THE FLOW

The Rev Canon Penny Stephens says that we can always discover talents to use in unexpected ways to connect with others, and to enjoy. A former village vicar in Kent and in London, as well as a hospice chaplain, Penny now combines covering services across a range of parishes with writing crime novels.

I have been a crime fiction fan for years and always enjoyed relaxing with a detective novel at any available opportunity during my time working as a parish priest and then as a hospice chaplain. I didn't anticipate writing a crime fiction series of my own, but the first in my series featuring a clerical amateur sleuth has now been published! Life can hold plenty of surprises.

In 'Till Death Us Do Part', Rev Clare Brakespear and her family attend a wedding where another guest is murdered, and Clare believes that the police are homing in on the wrong suspect. In true cosy crime style, Clare sets out to discover the true perpetrator and discovers a web of complex relationships and secrets, hidden agendas and mistaken assumptions. Will the actual culprit be revealed?

I began writing the novel when I attended a crime fiction course as a hobby and things developed from there. I was very fortunate to be encouraged by supportive crime writers and readers, and then to be given a contract for two books featuring Clare.

It has been fascinating to discover this whole new world of publishing, and to work with others in producing the novels. The second in the series is due out next year; Clare is despatched to Cornwall, where a mystery develops on a retreat which she is leading.

It has been fun to write about Clare, and the purpose of the novel is to entertain, as well as to explore people's characters, motivations, and aspects of their spirituality. The series gives insights into the life of a vicar going about her everyday work, together with a sideline of sleuthing. She is another participant in this 'VicLit' genre, albeit an updated version.

It is a cliché to say that life holds surprises and, of course, some are unwelcome ones to say the least - but I am enjoying this new development. It seems right to 'go with the flow' and to get on with the work of writing fiction, and a reminder that new possibilities may be in store for us all, in unexpected ways.

God is involved in every aspect of our lives, and this new sphere of writing and the connections with others which it creates feels like a gift - but one which involves hard work, too. I had no idea how many redrafts might be involved in producing a final version of a text!

People have asked about the writing process and for me it involved getting rid of an anxious perfectionism and to be willing to write a 'bad book' and then improve it. I found reading Julia Cameron's 'The Artist's Way' very helpful in releasing some creativity, with a sense of rooting that in the gifts which God gives us, so abundantly.

Who knows what may lie in store for you, as you continue to use your varied gifts and talents?

Till Death Us Do Part is published by Quercus. Visit www.revpenystephens.com

"God is involved in every aspect of our lives, and this new sphere ... feels like a gift."



Diocese of *Rochester*
called together

JOY

**As we await christ's birth this
christmas, so we pray**

Christ born for us,
Son of God given for us:
help us to know you,
to worship and to serve you with joy,
this Christmas and always

Amen.

Prayer from Church of England, Joy of Christmas campaign

