



St Matthew with St Paul
Pilgrims on a journey



Peace at Christmas

Magazine of the Parish of St Matthew with St Paul, Winchester
December 2023/January 2024

£1.50

Services

Sunday	9.30 am Holy Communion	St Paul's
Sunday	11.15 am [BCP] Holy Communion on 1st Sunday of month	St Matthew's
Sunday	11.15 am [BCP] Mattins on all other Sundays	St Matthew's
Wednesday	11 am [BCP] Holy Communion	St Matthew's
Any time	9.30 am services available online	https://stmatthewstpaul.org/

Interested in meeting people / getting involved?

- *St Paul's Coffee Pot pop-up café*: meeting 10 am–noon in St Paul's on Wednesday 13th and Tuesday 19th December (after the animal nativity service) and Wed 10th and Fri 26 January for real coffee, homemade cakes and a chat; all welcome
- *Zoom coffee morning*: Thursdays, 10.30 am; to check frequency and for link, contact ajcero@btinternet.com
- *Have a meal on us*: Tuesdays, 5–7 pm at St Paul's; to book a space, contact 07724 142624 or hospitality@stmatthewstpaul.org; to volunteer, contact liz@thestannards.co.uk
- *Monday lunchtime prayer*: 1–1.30 pm in the Resurrection Chapel at St Paul's; just come along
- *Tuesday homegroup*: meeting first and third weeks of each month, 2.30–4 pm; new members welcome; contact James Clay, 852141
- *Meditation group*: Tuesdays, 7.30 pm; contact Kathleen, klvfreeman@aol.com
- *Thursday homegroup*: meeting 7.30 for 7.45 pm; contact Peter and Irene Casey, 808776
- *Flex & Flow*: Saturdays at St Paul's, 9–9.45 am; contact Stuart Williams, 07738 420053
- *Informal singing group*: first and third Sundays of the month at St Paul's, 7.30–8.30 pm, no ability to read music needed; contact Katie Gilbert, 07540 761852

- *Monday homegroup*: meeting alternating weeks at 18 Lynford Way for eco-themed Bible study and at The Westgate pub, for conversational prayer; all welcome; contact Rhiannon Wilmott rhiannon@stmatthewstpaul.org

Children and young people welcome

- *Sundays*: 9.30 am Holy Communion at St Paul's for all ages with activities for children and young people, and monthly children's drama
- *St Paul's @ 4 family service*: short, informal, all-age worship with craft activities, on the 2nd Sunday of the month, with refreshments afterwards; on 9 July we are turning it into a summer party, and then we will next meet in September
- *toddler group*: 0–3 years, term-time Fridays 9.30–11 am in the parish rooms and meadow, with play, crafts and songs
- *youth groups*: 5.30–7 pm one Sunday a month, for children in school years 3–6 and 7–11, with fun, games and a cooked tea
- *confirmation preparation*: for Year 6 upwards
- *baptisms*: for babies, children and adults
- *St Paul's Pre-school*: 2 years 6 months to school age, five days a week 9.15 am–3 pm in St Paul's Hall

Contact Vicki Tibbitts,
youth@stmatthewstpaul.org

Useful phone numbers

Out-of-hours medical help	111	Police non-urgent	101
St Paul's medical practice	01962 853599	To report a BT landline fault	0800 800 151
Friarsgate medical practice	01962 871730	Winchester City Council offices	01962 840222
St Clements medical practice	01962 852211	Samaritans 24-hr helpline	116123
Royal Hampshire County Hospital	01962 863535	Domestic abuse 24-hr helpline	0808 2000 247
Trinity Drop-in Day Centre, Bradbury House, Durngate	01962 842827	In need of a bed? WCC housing office, Colebrook Street	01962 840222

'Christmas starts here!' This was the message in a High Street shop in October.

So, I wonder, when and where does your Christmas start?

Is it when you hear one of the carol service readings, perhaps Luke 1:26-38, when the angel Gabriel appears to Mary? Is it the words of a particular carol, rich with the message that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us?

Recent surveys of religious affiliation remind us that only a minority believe that God meets us in Jesus. They oblige us to recognise that Christians no longer have a monopoly over Christmas. Many have created their own Christmas traditions involving chain-store adverts, 'classic' films, and favourite food. The Nativity, if it features at all, is often simply a piece of folklore.

Should we decry this state of affairs? Or should we, following the example of God, get close and join in? For, it seems to me, the modern British Christmas is imbued with the desire for community. It runs through presents and parties like words in a stick of rock. The traditions help us create connections with each other; they nurture relations within communities, in families and between colleagues. In a world where we rush past each other, where loneliness brings early death and social isolation harms mental health, Christmas is an opportunity to join in, to meet up and to connect, both within church and the community. We might contribute to the sense of community by asking those around us when Christmas starts for them.

Because Christmas *does* commence well before 25 December. It has to, if the feasting and festivities are to go with a swing. And I am no exception: I chose the carols for Christmas Day in early November. For me, Christmas starts with the anticipation of those special words we sing just after midnight:

Ye, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning:
Jesus, to thee be glory given!
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!
O come, let us adore him;
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord!

Jonathan Rowe, Rector



Family feedback

We welcome those who have worshipped with us for the first time in recent weeks and hope that you may feel comfortable and encouraged to come again.

We pray for the unwell: Amy, Bob and Elizabeth Harland, Julia Jones, Judy Madin, Kate Morgan, Phil Scott, Chris Walker, John Williams, David Wilson.

We offer our love, sympathy and prayers to family and friends of those who have died recently, including Jean Coffey, Mary Douse, Sarah Jarman, Jo Saunders, Barbara Walters and Martin West.

Notices

Saturday morning Flex and Flow

Saturdays 9–9.45 am, St Paul's Church

A friendly, informal exercise group—come and give it a try! All ages and abilities very welcome. Do bring a friend too! Further details on the parish website and from Stuart Williams (stuartwilliams125@btinternet.com or 07738 420053).

Fusion Choir concert, in aid of Home-Start on

Saturday 2 December at 7.30pm in St Paul's Church. Tickets £10. Available from

<https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/booking/select/RdiEJKhzXNnT>

Scherzo Ensemble recital at St Paul's Church on Sunday 3 December, 5pm. A recital of late-romantic music, performed by Daniella Sicari and Sam Harris. The recital is followed by a drinks reception. Tickets and more information available from <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/scherzo-ensemble>

Coffee Pot with Home Produce and Craft Sale

December 13, 10am-12pm. Join us not just for coffee and cake, but also a chance to buy some cakes, preserves and home-made crafts all in aid of the Beyond Ourselves Charities. This month we will be joined by the SWVG team who will be able to explain how they help refugees in our area.

Winchester Arts concert

Saturday 13 January, 7.30 pm in St Paul's Church.

Setra Consort present a programme of music from their latest album 'In Beauty May I Walk'.

More information and tickets from

<https://www.tickettailor.com/events/sansarachoir/786049>

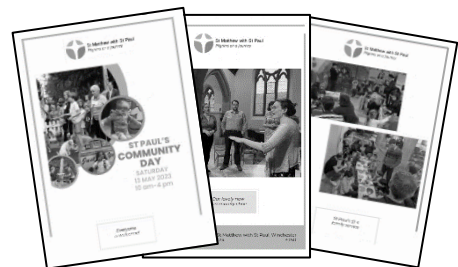
Winchester Chamber Orchestra concert celebrating Mozart's birthday. Prepare to be enchanted by the timeless melodies and harmonies in an exquisite line-up, featuring a renowned piano soloist on Saturday 27 January at St Paul's Church.

* Notice to subscribers *

The way we all communicate has changed, and the PCC is investing in new ways of keeping everyone in touch. With the appointment of Claire Thompson as our new Communications Officer we expect to see new developments soon.

For many years the magazine has been an enjoyable read and a useful way of communicating. As you know, lots of our news is now communicated via other means and so, in the new year, we envisage that the publication of the magazine will move to a quarterly publication: Spring, Summer, Autumn and Christmas, along with all the regular articles, photos and news you have always enjoyed. We will let you know when we have a fixed plan, but wanted to let you know this at the beginning of the subscription year. Please pray for inspiration and watch this space!

We are looking for someone (or a team) to work alongside Claire, encouraging people to write for it and ensuring that it continues to be an interesting publication. If you are interested, please get in touch with the Rector (jonathan@stmatthewstpaul.org).



Christmas at St Paul's and St Matthew's



Especially for children

Sunday 10 December

4 pm St Paul's@4 Christmas special (for 0-7s and siblings)

5.30 pm Youth group (for school years 3-6 and 7-11)

Friday 15 December

11am Under 5s celebration, with St Paul's pre-school

Tuesday 19 December

10 am Animal nativity outside St Paul's, with pop-up café and Christmas crafts

Christmas Eve

3 for 3.30 pm Nativity service at St Paul's (*Children are invited to come dressed as angels, shepherds, wise people or animals*)

Christmas Day

9.30 am Holy Communion at St Paul's (*Especially for families*)

Christmas at St Paul's

Saturday 16 December

5 pm Christmas lessons and carols (*Not suitable for babies or young children*)

Christmas Eve

11.30 pm Midnight Communion

Christmas Day

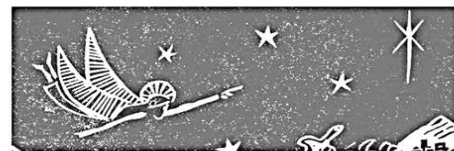
9.30 am Holy Communion (*Especially for families*)

Christmas at St Matthew's

Christmas Day

8 am Holy Communion (BCP)

11.15 am Holy Communion with carols (BCP)



Children & youth ministry activities

As I write this, it's mid-November and the Christmas market in town has opened, the Christmas lights have officially been switched on and there are Christmas pop songs blaring from the radio. Usually this would irritate me, it not even being Advent yet. But here at St Paul's we've been planning, talking and thinking Christmas since at least September! And there will be plenty going on for all children and youth to enjoy (you never know, the adults might like to join in, too!).

Christmas at St Paul's

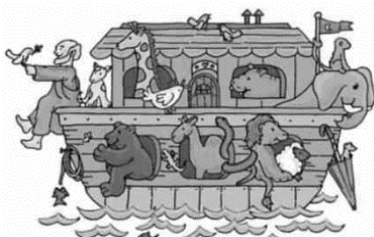
- ❖ **Sunday 10th December, 4pm:** St Paul's @4 Christmas special
- ❖ **Sunday 10th December, 5.30pm:** Youth Group with Nativity Escape Room
- ❖ **Friday 15th December, 11am:** Under 5s Christmas celebration
- ❖ **Tuesday 19th December, 10am:** Animal Nativity with pop-up cafe and craft activities
- ❖ **Christmas Eve, 3pm for 3.30pm:** Nativity (children welcome to come dressed as angels, shepherds, wise people and animals)
- ❖ **Christmas Day, 9.30am:** Holy communion for all ages



Despite the focus on Christmas in the background, we have still been as busy as ever over recent weeks at St Paul's.

We have three separate children's ministry activities running during the 9.30am communion service during term time (aside from the first Sunday of each month).

Scramblers – for our youngest congregation members, we offer a time to pray, play and hear bible stories. This term they have been looking at the themes of God made our world (through the creation story of Genesis) and Getting to know God (through the stories of Moses). The children have enjoyed making their own tabernacles and hiding in them!



Explorers – for our primary aged children c.6 – 10 years old, this group tends to follow the readings in church, spending time reading them and thinking about them in more depth and enjoying relevant games or craft activities. Over recent weeks we have thought about the talents we all have and planted bean seeds to watch them grow; discussed Remembrance Day and made doves of peace; and introduced Lego Church – an opportunity to recreate the gospel of the day using plastic bricks!



11 – 14s – for our older children, this group is led by our Children's Worker, Katie (see the October magazine for an introduction). This group meets before the service to enjoy hot chocolate, breakfast and a chat, going on to enjoy fun activities and a bible discussion. This term they have looked at Jacob in the book of Genesis and the theme of We are not alone; God's Amazing grace; and are now exploring how the Old Testament points towards Jesus.



Children & youth ministry activities

On Sunday afternoons, we have two offerings:

St Paul's @4 – on the second Sunday of the month.

This is our informal service for Under 7s and their families. We alternate between Old and New Testament stories, recently looking at Joshua and his remembrance stones on Remembrance Sunday, the story of the boy with the loaves and fishes and Joseph & his multicoloured coat. The children really enjoy dancing around to the action songs (some of the adults do, too!), saying prayers and then sharing a picnic tea together afterwards.

Youth Group – once a month (on every third Sunday of the month in 2024), this is a fun, relaxed space for children in school years 3 and above to come and enjoy each other's company, playing games and sharing a cooked meal together. This term we introduced a "Ninety Second Natter" which Katie has been delivering, providing a thought for the day about a relevant aspect of the

Christian faith and how it applies in our lives. Every other session the older children (generally year 6 or age 11 and above) have peeled off for a separate discussion group with Katie and Jonathan while the younger ones play a group activity. In November we challenged the children to make load-bearing structures using only marshmallows and dried spaghetti!

And on Friday mornings our **Toddler Group** runs from 9.30am to 11am and is a wonderful opportunity to reach out to families who might otherwise not come to church. Children enjoy playing a variety of games, singing songs and listening to a story, while parents and carers have a hot drink and get to enjoy time together.

Vicki Tibbitts, Children & Youth Ministry Leader
youth@stmatthewstpaul.org

Get involved!

All of these activities are run by an amazing team of volunteers - I am very grateful to all of them for the time and work they put into it all. Thank you!

Why not come and join us? There is a range of areas that you could get involved with, from offering hospitality (serving teas & coffee, making sandwiches, cooking for the youth) to planning craft activities, organising sound & tech at our @4 services to leading or supporting children's ministry activities.

There is also the fundamental need for this whole ministry to be supported in prayer! Please do pray for both our children and youth and the team who lead. We meet every Wednesday morning for twenty minutes at St Paul's at 9.20am (straight after morning prayer) to pray intentionally for the children & youth ministry. Everyone is welcome to join us.



In a Christmas wreath, the holly represents the crown of thorns worn by Jesus at his crucifixion and the red berries represent his blood.

In Japan, it is a tradition to eat fast food chicken on Christmas day!

Christmas pudding used to be a soup!

**Fun
Christmas
facts!**

The Green Church: who we are and what we do

We are a group of individuals within the Parish who are deeply concerned about what we believe to be an unfolding climate crisis and we have come together to help raise awareness of the issues and to work towards making our personal and church lives more sustainable. Your feedback on what you would like to know and how you would like us to communicate with you would be really helpful.

We recently gave a report on our activities to PCC and presented them with our Mission Statement and our Objectives for the year 2023/2024 (see below), as well as a summary of our achievements so far and our plans for the future.

We installed bike rack planters earlier in the year and have done some initial planting but would greatly value congregation involvement in the on-going maintenance of these. We worked with the clergy team to organise a Green Communion during Green Week this year which was well received - we hope to repeat this in 2024 and to involve the congregation at St Matthew's too. Members of the group attended a number of events during Winchester Green Week in September and publicised the events to the congregation - there were lots of activities for adults and children and we hope you were able to participate in some of them. We are close to attaining the A Rocha Silver Award for St Paul's and are aiming to submit our application soon - we will also be investigating how this can be extended to include St Matthew's. (For those not familiar with it A Rocha UK is a Christian charity working to protect and restore the natural world and committed to equipping Christians and

churches in the UK to care for the environment in part through the EcoChurch Award Scheme.) Members of the group regularly write articles for the Parish Magazine on a range of topics, including most recently the intriguing topic of 'Green' wine!

A major focus of our work over the next year will be to raise the awareness of green issues within the congregations of both churches, and to involve them more with the work we are doing. This will include liaising with the children's work team, highlighting local issues which have an impact on climate and providing resources and advice on sustainable living. We will be telling you about our plans for this soon and look forward to working with you all to make our churches, homes and lifestyles as environmentally friendly as possible.

The current Group members are: Alexa Heady, Keith Jones, Kathleen Freeman, Max Priesemann, Julia Stolle, Sheila Wilson, Norma Goodwin, Liz Stuart, Rhiannon Wilmott and Barbara Dorward (Chair). That may seem like a lot of people but most of us are fairly heavily committed in other areas both inside and outside the church and we could really do with more ideas and enthusiasm, and more help to realise our plans. If you want to find out more about our work and our plans or are interested in joining the group either as a full member or as a supporter who might be willing to help with tasks and events on a 'one-off' basis, please speak to one of us after church or email us for more information. We are looking forward to hearing from you!

Barbara Dorward
greengroup@stmatthewstpaul.org

MISSION STATEMENT

The Green Group believe that we catch glimpses of heaven in God's glorious creation. We seek to guide our steps as pilgrims on a journey towards a green and sustainable world in which all are able to enjoy abundant life.

STRATEGIC POINTS 2023/24

- To work towards achieving the A Rocha Silver Award for the parish.
- To move forward on our pilgrim journey towards sustainability by taking steps towards measuring the parish's carbon footprint and developing a strategy for improving it where possible.
- To make progress on connecting with the congregation and raising awareness of climate issues and the part we can all play in mitigating our impact on the planet, in a way that is positive and joyful.
- Create a resource for the congregation on eco matters and sustainable living to help empower people to take more control of their impact locally and globally.
- To make our voice heard on local, national and global issues where appropriate, in collaboration with the clergy team.

Reflection: Journey to Christmas

For a long time I really didn't like Christmas. In common with many people I have some miserable formative memories associated with Christmas which made it hard for my young self to jump on board with the whole 'party season' that the world told me I was supposed to.

I had some really happy Christmases as a child due, primarily, to my nan and mum, like a team of synchronised swimmers, moving speedily beneath the surface so that every new surprise above gave the appearance of seamless spontaneity, all executed with unbreaking smiles between held breaths. I loved it all. The magic of the tree, Christmas fairs, a pantomime, a ballet, carol singing at the village Christmas tree, Father Christmas... even the torment of waiting until after church and lunch to rip into a pile of presents and the inevitable arguments with my cousins. It was all magic.

Christmas began to come apart for me when I was 12, and my nan died on the 21st December. She lived in our house and I spent more time with her than anyone, while my parents both had extra full time jobs. That Christmas had a lot of the same markers but added in raw grief and the beginning of family collapse.

After a few years of attempting to continue the Christmas game, I gave up. It just wasn't going to work for me any more. And with that, I felt completely fine about having a Christmas-free home, with the exception of a Christmas stocking, although I was always very clear that it was from me, not 'Santa'.

More recently, since actually being employed by a church, I realised I needed to find a way to make peace with Christmas. It's been a conscious process, that my entire family finds tedious, of untangling the cultural aspects of Christmas and the faith aspects. I realised that I actually love the season of Advent, enjoying it for its peace, fellowship, and joy, rather than as an entire hedonistic month. I found I could love Christmas when it was pared down, acknowledging the brokenness of the world, which God nonetheless is in.

I came to the conclusion the things I love about the overwhelming onslaught of cultural Christmas

are these: Christmas trees, fairy lights, and mince pies. The things I love about Christmas in church are: lighting the white candle at the centre of the Advent wreath at midnight mass, making time to spend with my church family, and weirdly, the service of Holy Innocents, which can be both a deeply personal time for many, but is also when we acknowledge that Jesus being in the world is not a quick fix, and that we all have to play our part.

Rhiannon Wilmott



THE FUSION CHOIR

presents a

CHARITY CHRISTMAS CONCERT

SATURDAY 2ND DECEMBER 7.30pm

(DOORS OPEN FROM 7pm)

ST PAUL'S CHURCH

ST PAUL'S HILL

WINCHESTER SO22 5AB

Tickets £10.70

(includes booking fee)

<https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/home-start-winchester-districts>

Refreshments, bar and raffle

Please bring cash if possible

In aid of Home-Start

Winchester and Districts

www.winchesterfusionchoir.co.uk

(Winchester and Eastleigh)

www.home-start-winchester.org.uk





**Winchester
Camerata at
St Paul's**



Children's drama



**Remembrance
at St Paul's**



**Remembrance
flowers at
St Matthew's**



Youth group





Coffee Pot



**Flex and Flow
at St Paul's**



**Macmillan coffee
morning**



**Under fives
service at
St Paul's**



Creating the...



**Community
Advent calendar**

Beyond Ourselves

The next in our series written by people directly involved with the charities the parish supports.

Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group has had a busy year providing practical and emotional support for people seeking asylum and refugees both in Winchester and Southampton. We believe that supporting people seeking asylum in their time of need is a humanitarian duty that can make a positive difference in their lives. Thank you to St Paul's Beyond Ourselves group for supporting SWVG's work.

As you can imagine, those seeking asylum are full of joy when they hear that they have finally been granted refugee status. It may have been a very long wait of many months, even several years. However, this joy can be the start of many practical difficulties. Recently the Home Office has reduced the notice period a person is given to leave their asylum accommodation. It was 28 days and now it can be as little as 7 days. That's not enough time for refugees to receive their ID card, National Insurance number, open a bank account, get a job, access benefits and crucially find somewhere to live. So, newly recognised refugees are becoming homeless throughout the UK. In 2018, the Red Cross proposed *increasing* the period to 56 days to reduce the risk of homelessness. *Refugees at Home* and *Welcome Churches* are two charities which connect those with a spare room in their home to those in need of somewhere to stay. Maybe you, or someone you know, would like to help. See <https://refugeesathome.org>. and <https://welcomechurches.org>.

SWVG encourages asylum seekers to study since confidence in English and other skills are vital for all refugees in the UK. For many this will be through 1 to 1 lessons and/or English classes at churches, colleges or at charities such as CLEAR in Southampton. Some have worked hard to learn to read, others have studied Maths, driving theory and plumbing, or have achieved Food Safety and Hygiene certificates. One has qualified as a bus driver and now drives a double-decker bus.

Several have studied at local universities, particularly at local Universities of Sanctuary such as Winchester. Fatima, who won the Sanctuary Scholarship at Solent University in 2021, gained an MSc in Sustainable Building Design in spring 2023 and is now working in her chosen field.

To promote health, wellbeing and friendship, SWVG works with Hampshire and Southampton partner organisations to facilitate sports and cultural activities. Popular options include football, gym, and swimming, cycling and walking in the countryside, music making, and drama, creating art and crafts, visits to museums, galleries and libraries. Our annual summer trip to Bournemouth beach is very popular. We also encourage people to volunteer on our allotment, at the charity Scratch in Southampton and at Tools for Self Reliance in Netley and to do practical conservation work in the New Forest National Park.



Photo: Refugee Week 2023: international music, dance and picnic in Southampton

Refugee Week is a time when everyone in our community can come together to celebrate our shared humanity. On 23rd June 2023 hundreds of people came to Sing for Sanctuary in Winchester Cathedral. At the same time, hundreds joined in our carnival parade, music, dance and picnic in the middle of Southampton. We are now starting to plan events for Refugee Week 2024, which will begin on 22nd June. Do join us!

sue.jessup@swvg-refugees.org.uk

William.brook-hart@swvg-refugees.org.uk

Fundraising Feats Clarendon Walk



Many thanks for everyone who sponsored us to walk between Winchester and Salisbury on a perfect sunny September Saturday. Thirteen of us participated in walking a total of 240 miles between us, with six of us managing to get from cathedral to cathedral. We raised an incredible £676 for the Beyond Ourselves Charities, as well as having a fantastic opportunity to get to know each other better and appreciate our amazing local countryside. Please consider joining us next year!

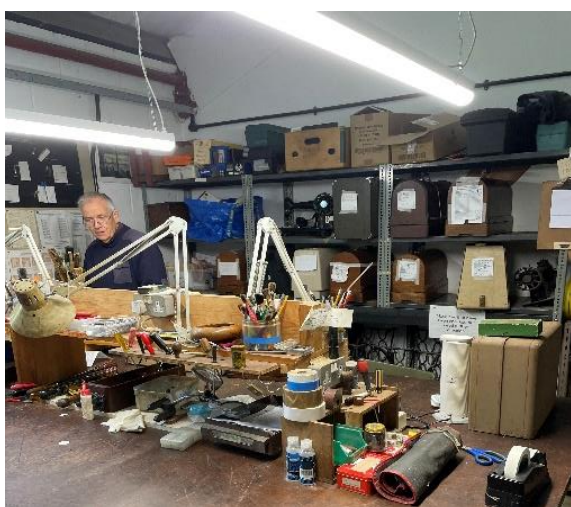


Macmillan Coffee Morning

On October 11th, we had a fantastic Coffee Morning when our Coffee Pot Team joined forces with St Paul's Preschool to take part in the 'World's Biggest Coffee Morning'. It was busy! We raised an amazing £441 for Macmillan. Thank you to everyone who came and supported us.

Harriet Hide

Tools for Self-Reliance



The story started when a parishioner asked me to take a few surplus gardening tools to 'Tools for Self Reliance' in Southampton. TfSR (www.tfsr.org) are an amazing set-up, refurbishing and shipping out huge amounts of tools and haberdashery from a large warehouse in Netley Marsh to a number of African countries (check out their website if you're interested). Following my invitation in the Parish weekly Welcome sheet a good number of other donations were made, including a manual sewing machine, which I duly delivered. One of the volunteers gave me a brief tour of the operation and I was totally blown away with all that they do. So our donated tools, along with many more, are set for a second life giving others the means to make a living. Thank you!

Michael Joseph

Have A Meal On Us (HaMoU)



This was begun in September 2022 by Vicky Scott, Liz Stannard and others to provide, in these difficult times, a free meal to anyone who wanted or needed one.

I have been going to this since it started – not only to eat the delicious food which is made by very many people, but also to chat with all the people who come who, over the months, have included:

- The single parent family of 4 children who come sometimes and love the food and the attention from others and the craft activities
- Ukrainian families
- The busker - who gave us wonderful Christmas music on his guitar when we had the full Christmas dinner
- The grandma who comes with her grandson and sometimes her daughter
- Those from our church who welcome the company, being alone most of the time
- The lady who brings her frail friend each week and says they love the food
- The man who loves to talk to others
- The man who lives nearby, so loves the meals and often there is enough for him to take home to have another day
- The man who lives on his own, comes to church on Sundays as well as coming to these meals

- The homeless man who comes and sits on his own and enjoys the meal
- The man who came then invited people from his family to come

The news of this free meal seems to have spread far and wide and different people come each week finding out about it in different ways.

There is always enough and plenty to eat, even though numbers fluctuate hugely!

What is wonderful is that those who prepare the food and serve it also sit down with everyone to eat and to chat, so it doesn't feel as if the people coming are being given to, it just feels that everyone is enjoying a meal together in a wonderful, friendly atmosphere.

People have said that they feel so welcome and it feels very relaxed. This seems to meet many needs for those who come - those who need a hot home cooked meal, those who need company, those who need a warm place to sit for a while, those who need someone to talk to – and all in the presence of God and the love and welcome He gives through so many of our church community .

This is a wonderful initiative which relies on many willing volunteers and feels that this is what we as Christians are all about.

Mary Copping

Advanced Notice: Spring Art Exhibition 22nd-23rd March 2024

Here in St Paul's, a friend and I are presenting an eclectic body of artwork in mixed media, paint, textile and collage on the theme 'The Bitter and The Sweet'. We are calling our time together 'an interactive exhibition' as we hope many of you will enjoy taking part in one way or another. Alongside the art there will be Coffee Pot on the Friday and Angel making workshops. On Saturday we feature Lunch Time Jazz with a simple lunch involving Tom and the Hampshire Show Choir. Tea and cake will be available throughout both days. It is a free event concert, - tickets from me in advance but nearer the time. More information in the Spring. Watch this space! **Helen Jesty and Becky Shaylor**



Christmas reflection

The power of human connections: The Rabbit Effect

As the festive season approaches, our hearts turn towards the warmth of human connections, and a lecture I recently gave reminded me of the extraordinary power of these bonds. Conducted by Kelli Harding, a physician and author, the Rabbit Effect study reveals a profound insight into the transformative impact of relationships and community on our lives, which particularly resonates during the Christmas period.

The study's name draws inspiration from an unlikely source - rabbits. Researchers discovered that when rabbits were given the same high-fat diet but had more social interaction, they were healthier and lived longer than their isolated counterparts. This intriguing finding led to an exploration of similar patterns in human beings.

The Rabbit Effect study underscores the deep connection between loneliness and our physical and mental health. It emphasizes the profound truth that our well-being is intricately linked to our relationships with others. In a season defined by togetherness and giving, this revelation takes on special significance, reminding us of the magic of Christmas.

Christmas, at its core, is a time when people come together to celebrate, share love, and foster connections. Families and friends reunite, communities light up with festive cheer, and the spirit of giving permeates the air. In this season of goodwill, we are encouraged to embrace the essence of the Rabbit Effect and recognize that nurturing human connections is one of the greatest gifts we can bestow upon ourselves and others.

The importance of building strong, supportive, and genuine connections cannot be overstated, especially during the Christmas season. The act of coming together, exchanging gifts, and sharing meals symbolises the love and support that binds us. Engaging with our family, friends, and community not only enriches our lives but also contributes to our overall health and longevity. The Christmas season offers a unique opportunity to strengthen these bonds and make them more profound.

In our parish, we can take this lesson to heart and make a conscious effort to nurture our human connections. Christmas provides a special occasion to put this into practice. A simple act of kindness, a friendly conversation, or a shared meal can make a significant difference in the lives of those around



Photo: Our rabbit Jem, spreading Christmas cheer

us. By doing so, we echo the spirit of Christmas, which is centred on compassion, understanding, and selflessness.

The festive season also serves as a reminder of those who may be less fortunate or feeling alone. The Rabbit Effect encourages us to reach out to those in need during Christmas and extend a helping hand or a comforting word. Acts of kindness and generosity, whether through charitable endeavours or simple gestures of love, can bridge the gaps created by loneliness and bring warmth to the hearts of those who may be struggling.

As we celebrate Christmas, let us remember that the Rabbit Effect applies to us as well. By nurturing our connections and embracing the spirit of the season, we can create not only healthier bodies but happier hearts and minds. The joy of Christmas lies in the relationships we cherish, the bonds we strengthen, and the love we share.

For me, this study beautifully illustrates the significance of human connections, especially during the Christmas season. Let us reflect on the study's profound lessons as we come together with our loved ones, give back to our community, and extend kindness to those who may need it most. By doing so, we can truly embody the spirit of Christmas and experience the transformative power of human connections in our own lives.

Philippa Bunch
Guest Editor

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We're grateful to all who supply photographs. This month they are Mary Copping, Ursula Payne, Vicki Tibbitts, Martin West

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**O God, to those who are hungry, give bread
and – to those who have bread – give a hunger for justice.**

Anja Jardine, *Iona Abbey Cookbook 2023*