

TOGETHER

The FREE magazine from the Diocese of Rochester | Issue 22 | August - October 2024

CHANGE | SERVE | GROW

COVER STORY: CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF WOMEN'S PRIESTLY MINISTRY PAGE 8



LOOK BACK
TO LOOK
FORWARD

'OUR
COMMON
CALL': BISHOP

POVERTY AND
HOPE APPEAL





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Welcome to this latest edition of Together.

Sometimes you need to look back to see how far you have come and to work out where you are going.

That's just what we're doing this time, as in **Focus On** (pg 14), we share some highlights from the Diocese of Rochester's Annual Report and Accounts for 2023.

There is much to celebrate in terms of what is happening in parishes and the impact being made alongside those within the Diocesan support teams. Our **Centrespread** gives an overview in numbers.

In our **Big Issue** (pg 18) Bishop Jonathan shares his thoughts on how, in moving forward as a family of faith, we might find common ground in our shared calling from Jesus to love others.

We also look back and celebrate 30 years of women's priestly ministry in the Church (pg 8). Plus, head over head to our **Everyday Faith** section (pg 26) for a personal reflection from one of those first women priests on her response to God's call in her life.

Finally, as we approach the Season of Creation in September, our **Resources** (pg 20) focus on helping us lead more sustainable lives.

Go well.

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Front cover: 30th anniversary of the ordination of women to the priesthood by Katerina Gerhardt

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YOUNG PEOPLE CELEBRATE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Young people from across the Diocese and beyond were united in a vibrant evening of prayer and praise as part of a special collaboration between Fuse – a joint youth initiative between the Dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester - and the global prayer initiative, *Thy Kingdom Come*, to mark Pentecost in May.

Pentecost is the day when Christians commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' disciples.

Hosted at St Margaret's Church, Rainham, and led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the event was also live-streamed, connecting youth groups from across the country.

"The Fuse event in Rainham was a real blessing for me to be able to connect with other young people across the Diocese to worship, reflect and pray together." (Kevyn Oliver, Children, Young People and Families Minister at Christ Church, Sidcup,



GREEN OPEN DAY

The Holy Redeemer, Lamorbey, has hosted a successful Green Open Day, bringing together eco church reps from as far as Aylesford, Gravesend, Crayford, Orpington, Beckenham, Rural North West Kent, and Dartford to share green ideas, gather resources, and find out about the Eco Church initiative, of which Holy Redeemer is a gold award recipient.



STAINED-GLASS MEMORIES

A previously undiscovered fragment of stained-glass from the bombed-out windows of St Margaret's Church, Horsmonden, has been renovated, bringing a poignant reminder of when the Second World War came to the village. It also helped form part of the church's commemorations of the 80th anniversary of the D-Day Landings.



SAFE TRAVEL WINNERS

Congratulations to St Paul's Cray CE Primary School's Junior Travel Ambassadors Team who were announced as the top team in Bromley Borough for their promotion of safer and more active travel within their school community. Staving off some strong competition, the team of students were supported this year by a member of the administration team and a Teaching Assistant. Well done everyone!



FAITH AND ARTS FESTIVAL

The Kent Downs and Malling Team's recent Faith and Arts' Festival was inspired by the artwork of Welsh artist Jeremy Thomas, who brought his exhibition, 'The Human One' to St Mary's Church, West Malling. Full of symbolism, the artwork speaks to people of all ages and backgrounds, allowing everyone to explore faith and Scripture in a creative way.



ST MARK, GILLINGHAM

MISSIONAL BUILDINGS CREATED

Two churches have recently completed renovations with help from the Diocese's Missional Property Fund.

Supported by Marshall's Charity, the Fund provides grants of up to £20,000 towards the repair or improvement of church buildings to help them better offer welcome and meet their mission and ministry needs.

In June, St Mark's Church, Gillingham, unveiled its new kitchen and AV hub, during a special church service officiated by the Bishop of Rochester.

Vicar, the Rev Catharina Olsson Gisleskog, Project Leader Chris Gladwell, and Church Treasurer Glyn Allen, said that the new kitchen and improved facilities would greatly enhance their capacity to serve the

Gillingham community, and create a more functional and welcoming space.

Meanwhile, St Nicholas Church in Strood has celebrated the completion of a major reordering of their worship space, a vision over 20 years in the making. The interior makeover was extensive with a tea station introduced at the west end of the church to allow refreshments to be served in the Nave.

The fixed pews were removed, and new wooden flooring and seating were installed, aligning with the vision of creating an open, welcoming space for all, and to enable the parish to set the church out for different styles of worship.

CHURCH-SCHOOL LIFE CELEBRATED



Our church schools are a vital and vibrant part of the diocesan family. In June, the Diocesan Board of Education had a wonderful week welcoming year 6 children from across the diocese to Rochester Cathedral, for a time to celebrate and reflect upon their time in primary school as they prepare to move on to secondary.

Celebrations also took place at The Bromley Schools Festival, in Bromley Parish Church, where over 300 year 5 pupils from eight schools had the chance to reflect on God's call to grow his kingdom in our lives and in the lives of those around us.





THE REV CANON JEAN KERR WITH THE REV TRUDI OLIVER

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF WOMEN'S PRIESTLY MINISTRY

There was joy in Rochester Cathedral in June, as over 150 people came to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the ordination of women to the priesthood.

The special Evensong brought together some of those first women to be ordained priest in 1994, as well as supporters and well-wishers from across Rochester Diocese, then and now.

The preacher, the Rev Catherine Williams, Christian writer, retreat leader and spiritual director, reflected on some of the history that led to the ordination of women as priests, as well as some of the pioneers connected to Rochester Diocese.

"From Isabella Gilmore's initial vision down the years, it had been a very long time for some.

"But now there are women in all forms of ministerial roles, lay and ordained. The first female archdeacon, Judith Rose, was from this Diocese, and there are now at least three female bishops with Rochester roots.

In an article especially written for the service, the Rev Canon Pamela Ive, Director of Vocations and Ordinands, explained more about the pioneering part the Diocese of Rochester played in the development of women's ministry, including that of Isabella Gilmore.

She explained how in 1886, the Bishop of Rochester, Anthony Thorold, reviewing the Diocese, recognised that the rapidly growing urban areas in South London presented a problem and sought a suitable candidate to run a Diocesan Deaconess House - the Order of Deaconess being a newly revived Lay Order for women in the Church of England.

He chose Isabella Gilmore to be Head of the Rochester Deaconess House and she developed a style of ministry for those pioneering women which placed them not living together in separate Deaconess houses, but in parishes, ministering alongside male clergy.

Pamela says, "Isabella also insisted that these women

should be trained not only in social care but should also receive theological training.

'This pattern of training and working was 'exported' both around the Church of England and also in other parts of the world such as India, China, Japan, New Zealand, and Australia. The Rochester-trained deaconesses often went to those places to spread the good practice.'

"I wondered whether there would be protest and so on. But there was absolute silence as the bishop laid hands, and for this I was born. For this I was born. I remember thinking that."

The Rev Canon Jean Kerr

It took another 101 years for women to be ordained as clergy in the Church of England, in 1987 to serve as Deacons, together with men, and seven years later in 1994 as priests.

Having been present at those first ordinations in Rochester Cathedral in 1994, Catherine Williams recalled her memories of the day.



ORDINATIONS OF WOMEN PRIESTS, ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL, 1994

"There was a frisson in that season thirty years ago. A deep sense of joy and adventure. A new creation and a coming in. But the celebrations were muted, held within us, because we were told we must not in any way celebrate, be triumphant, or joyous, but always sensitive to those for whom the decision to ordain women to the priesthood seemed like a betrayal."

She continued:

"Wonderfully here in Rochester, a group of Roman Catholic women gathered outside this Cathedral during the ordinations, and no one was going to tell them not to celebrate...This was a momentous occasion for their fellow sisters in Christ."

"Their shouts and cheers are etched in my memory."

For the Rev Canon Jean Kerr - one of the first women to be ordained priest in the Diocese in 1994 - the memories are still vivid:

"I can remember the hands being laid on my head by the Bishop and wondering whether all these things that people had said would happen would actually happen. You know, that the sky would fall in, it would be the end of the world, etcetera."

"I wondered whether there would be protest and so on. But there was absolute silence as the bishop laid hands, and for this I was born. For this I was born. I remember thinking that."

Jean says that sadly, many women priests continue to experience prejudice today:

"I would like to say that everything's fine and dandy but it's not."

"I mean culture's moved on, societal understanding of women has moved on, but I still mentor a number of priests in this Diocese and in Canterbury, and I have a lot of contact with women priests, and some of their experiences of being bullied by lay people and by priests - male priests - are absolutely appalling."

The low-key celebrations called for thirty years ago contrasted with the exuberance expressed at the June event as, after the service, all those women present who had been ordained in Rochester Cathedral in 1994, were met with loud applause and shouts of appreciation as they gathered for a photo on the nave steps.



CELEBRATIONS OF WOMEN PRIESTS 30 YEARS LATER

For the Rev Canon Rachel Knapp, Chaplain at Bennett Memorial Diocesan School, and another of those in that first cohort of women priests, the service was very moving.

"It's been wonderful. Very emotional, which surprised me."

"It's been a great privilege to be back here and to remember that occasion and to give thanks for 30 years of women's priestly ministry, and especially lovely to see some of my peers who were ordained alongside me."

To help support the wide range of women's ordained ministry in Rochester Diocese, during the service, the Rev Judi Hammill, Vicar of St James, Tunbridge Wells, was commissioned as the new Bishop's Adviser for the Ministry of Ordained Women.

An important role, the Bishop's Adviser for the Ministry of Ordained Women seeks to represent and understand the experience of ordained women in ministry, working with the Bishop and his leadership team to ensure that all flourish in the ministries to which they have been called.



COMMISSIONING OF THE REV JUDI HAMMILL



LOOK BACK TO LOOK FORWARD

'With ambition and vision' is the theme of the 2023 Diocesan Annual Report and Accounts that were approved in June. As well as telling the financial story of the Diocese, the report also reflects upon the activity and impact of parishes and the diocesan office teams in bringing about the Kingdom of God within local communities over the previous year. Here are some of the highlights.

Enabling each church to be mission minded

For many churches, the care and maintenance of their buildings, while a privilege, is also a challenge both in terms of time, finance, and their ability to offer welcome to worshippers and visitors alike. To help, diocesan support teams have continued to work hard to secure external funding to boost the support available to parishes in relation to church buildings. In 2023, colleagues were successful in obtaining just over £285,000 in external funding to support churches with their buildings.

Helping children, young people and adults live out everyday faith in Jesus

Seventeen men and women were ordained priest or deacon at Rochester Cathedral last year. It was also a wonderful year for lay ministry, with the Lay Ministry Formation programme receiving an outstanding review from the National Church's Ministry Development Team. A reconvening and reinvigorating of the Diocesan Youth Council has also been underway, providing opportunities for younger members of the diocesan family to grow in faith and play a more active role in the leadership in their own churches and the Diocese.

Supporting loving service in local communities

With the support of the Diocese's Community Engagement and Social Action Adviser, churches across the Diocese have been busy strengthening their outreach to their local communities. In addressing the

cost-of-living crisis, churches have offered warm spaces during the winter, as well as community larders and fridges. Community hubs, in churches have also offered a holistic approach to accompanying guests and visitors on their journey from a difficult matter or situation that they are facing.

Speaking and responding to the prophetic voice of justice and peace

Alongside delivering a full and demanding programme of required safeguarding training, the Safeguarding Team has continued to handle an increasing workload of enquiries and case management, as well as carrying out clergy inductions, Parish Safeguarding Officer meetings, and DBS checks. Work around racial justice was also progressed this year too, with the working group set up to respond to From Lament to Action (FLTA) - a national report of the Archbishops' Anti-Racism Taskforce - producing an action plan for the Diocese.

Protecting creation's life for future generations

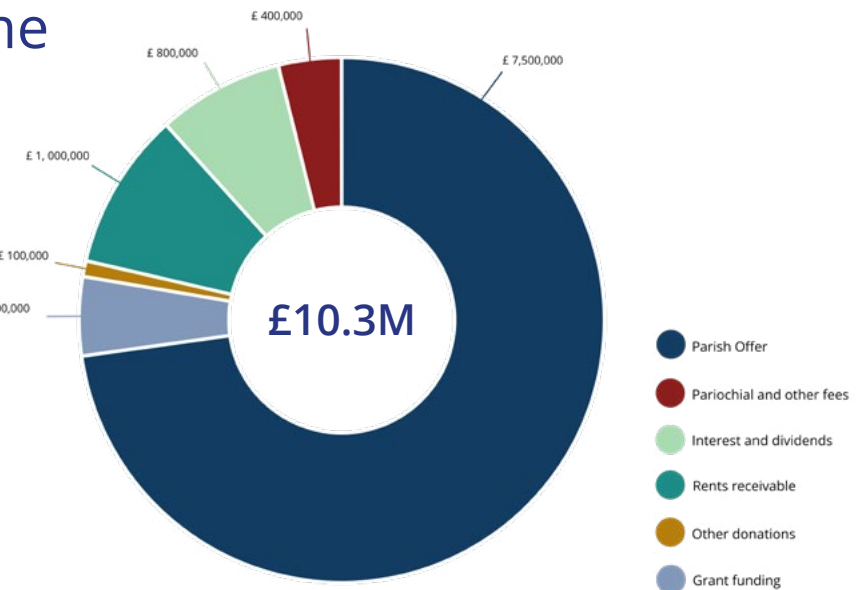
Many churches are working very hard to live out the Christian imperative to care for God's creation, and this year has seen the number signed up to the Eco Church scheme growing; this year saw The Holy Redeemer Church, Lamorbey, become the first Gold Award church in the Diocese. The Bishop's Council also approved the Diocesan Board of Finance's commitment to having no direct investments in fossil fuels across its entire portfolio, now or in the future.

Expenditure still exceeded income in 2023. However, our operating deficit improved by £0.1 million compared to the previous year, and a concerted effort by diocesan staff brought in significant external funding. Our investments too showed a positive return in 2023.

Total Income £10.3M

Meeting the cost of mission and ministry across the Diocese is reliant on the generous giving of parishes through their Parish Offers, into the Common Fund.

In 2023, the total income for the Common Fund was £10.3 million, the vast majority of which - 77% - came from Parish Offers. Despite the prayerful and sacrificial giving of parishes, income from parishes continues to fall, with £7.5 million received in Parish Offers, compared to £7.7 million in 2022.

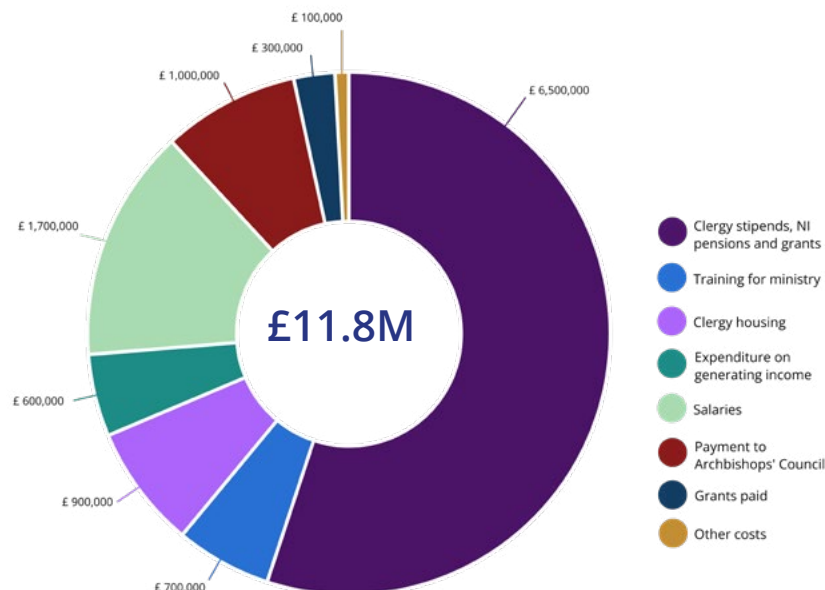


Total Expenditure £11.8M (after transfer from other funds)

The Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) is committed to supporting, maintaining, and developing mission and ministry in the parishes, despite there being an operating deficit.

This is because a flourishing and well-resourced parish structure is central to delivering our shared Called Together vision, and ensuring there is a Christian presence in our communities, now and into the future.

The partnership between parish and the DBF is the answer to continuing to reduce the deficit and growing our mission and ministry in all the communities of the Diocese.



THE YEAR IN NUMBERS...

Thanks to the financial and prayerful support of you and your parish to mission and ministry across the Diocese, this is just some of what has been made possible this year as we seek to change, serve and grow as a diocesan family of faith in Medway, north and west Kent, and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley.
Thank you!

3508

people trained in Safeguarding (basic, foundation, domestic abuse awareness, leadership)



38

people supported in exploring God's plan for them at an *It's Your Calling* day



13

grants given from the Missional Property Fund, enabling churches to better open-up their buildings for mission and welcome



30

church-based groups and activities meeting the spiritual needs of older people and their carers



1

Gold Level Eco Church awarded



16

young people attending the Diocesan Youth Council residential



1641

repair and maintenance works undertaken to clergy properties



£285,000

of external funding brought in to support churches with their buildings



17

men and women ordained as deacon or priest



29

people licensed to lay ministry roles (including Licensed Lay Ministers, Children and Young People workers, and Anna Chaplaincy)





AMOS TRUST IN BETHLEHEM

INVESTING IN HOPE: 40 X 40

The Rochester Diocese Poverty and Hope Appeal has now been operating for over 40 years. And last year more than 40 churches in the Diocese contributed funding, along with gifts from individuals made online or in person.

These donations, topped up with HMRC Gift Aid tax refunds, are being used to support the people Jesus particularly loved – the poor, the prisoners, the oppressed – in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia.

Every penny donated goes to seven trusted partners with feet on the ground around the world: four well-known Christian charities focussed on providing security and dignity to all God's children in difficult situations, and three Companion Dioceses in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, helping them to run small-scale development projects.

As the volunteer Appeal Co-ordinator, Peter Kettle is thankful for all the time, money, and encouragement many people gave to the Appeal. Most important are all the donors who continue to provide income of around £20,000 – £25,000 a year.

He adds: "This is invested carefully in fulfilling needs identified by local communities. I am also really grateful for all the help that I receive from the diocesan staff, especially the Finance and Communications Teams, and the support provided by members of the Companion Dioceses Steering Group."

Working for Peace

Peter says the two leading projects over the next twelve months are concerned with giving hope to people trapped in the midst of war and other forms of violence:



PEACE BUILDING AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

- The continuing efforts through Amos Trust to work for peace and reconciliation in Israel and Palestine, highlighted by the Wi'am Conflict Resolution Centre, working in the shadow of the separation wall in Bethlehem.
- A big new initiative involving Christian Aid, the EU and US Aid, to help people turn away from violence towards peace in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- The immediate focus is on the 'Communities Living Peacefully' project working at the northern border of Haiti and Dominican Republic.

Looking ahead

While the number of beneficiaries of the Appeal has increased from four to seven since 2021, income has remained the same or declined slightly. Peter says that,

as a result cash is being spread more thinly among the partner organisations." I would love to see rising income to go with growing ambitions! In the coming months I hope to look at ways of improving communications with current, past, and potential donors. This may include an online survey of perceptions and attitudes towards the Appeal and other forms of charitable giving."

As Appeal Co-ordinator, Peter is always available to hear from donors about their hopes and concerns, and he is keen to speak at church services or meetings.

For more information about Poverty and Hope, including detailed project descriptions and contact details, visit the diocesan website at www.rochester.anglican.org/poverty-and-hope-appeal.php. To donate SCAN the QR code.



FINDING COMMON GROUND IN FRACTURED TIMES

Bishop Jonathan Gibbs, The Bishop of Rochester, considers how remembering our common call in Jesus to love God and our neighbours can unite us in a divided world and Church.



I heard a statistic the other day that shows how more and more people are switching off the news because it is simply so depressing. It mirrors my own experience, as I cannot do more than listen to the headlines on the Today Programme on Radio 4 these days before I listen to something more soothing!

Indeed, our world is torn apart by strife and wars, some daily on our screens (as in Gaza and Ukraine), and others curiously forgotten (such as in Sudan, Yemen and many other places besides).

There is huge uncertainty in our nation too about what the future holds. And then, of course, there are the issues which we are facing within the Church of England and, indeed, within our Diocese.

The world is a complex place and – apart from perhaps a few brief periods (if ever) in our history – the fact is that humanity has always lived in ‘interesting’ times. It is perhaps all too easy for us to become distracted and obsessed – and then depressed – by the dreadful things that we see and hear going on around us.

I think it is worth reminding ourselves then of our fundamental common calling as followers of Jesus Christ, which is to love and serve God, and to love and care for our fellow human beings and the rich and wonderful world that God has given to us to inhabit and to pass on to those who will share it next.

That conviction is at the heart of our diocesan vision and strategy – Change, Serve, Grow – which is all about enabling our local churches to take their full and rightful place at the heart of our communities: serving God and serving people, loving God and showing his love in and to our communities.

Change is about the need for us to adapt in a changing world, so that our churches can play their full part in serving God and drawing people once more to faith in Jesus Christ.

Serve is about the attitude we need to adopt if we are to earn and gain that cherished place in people’s hearts and at the heart of our communities.

And Grow is about what God wants to bring about in our and through us, as people growing into the likeness of Christ and as churches where people are being drawn to follow Jesus through our words and through our deeds.

These, I believe, are the things that really matter right now.

I also believe that focussing on these priorities, and working on them together, can enable us as a diocesan family to deal with some of the other challenges we are facing.

For instance, as together we engage with our developing vision and begin to see how it can help reshape and refocus the work we are doing in our local context, then people will be encouraged to commit the resources needed to enable change, to equip us for service, and to grow local churches and even, yes, plant some new ones.

The coming months will bring challenges to us within the Church of England. We will not always agree on everything – and, at times, the bonds of fellowship between some of us may be stretched pretty far. But in the end, it will be our common commitment to Jesus Christ and the cause of his Kingdom that will hold us together.

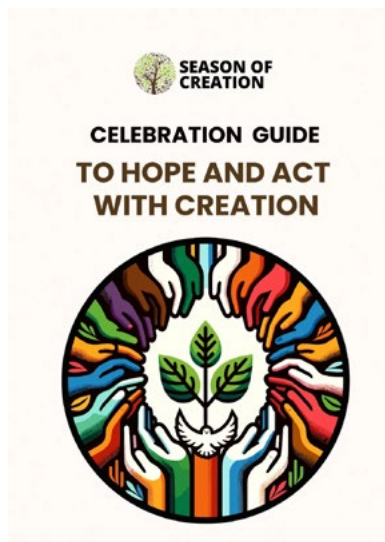
There is so much that we are called to do, so much that needs to be done, so that every person in the communities the Church serves can have the chance to know and receive the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, and so that the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of righteousness and justice and peace, for which we long may come more fully in those same communities.

This is our calling – to love God and to make his love known to all, in word and deed, in our parishes, in our Diocese, and to the ends of the earth.

*“This is our calling
– to love God
and to make his
love known to all,
in word and deed,
in our parishes, in
our Diocese, and
to the ends of the
earth.”*

RESOURCES – CREATIONTIDE

With a climate crisis unfolding around us, it can seem overwhelming to know how we can make a difference. Creationtide in September - a whole month in the Church calendar dedicated to God as Creator - offers the ideal opportunity for us to focus on the part we can play in caring for the environment. This selection of resources will help you mark the season and get you thinking about your role in protecting creation.



SEASON OF CREATION MATERIALS

Encourage your church to hold a Season of Creation service on Sunday 1 September.

Ideas of what to include, as well as a template service, prayers, and some practical ideas to get out and celebrate nature, can be found in the online guide.

Share what you are doing on social via the hashtag #SeasonOfCreation. If what you are doing is through your church, don't forget to tag us on Facebook as well @CofE Diocese of Rochester

Download the guide at: www.seasonofcreation.org

Manageable ways to become more eco-friendly

FLY LESS

RAISE ECO ISSUES WITH YOUR MP

REPAIR AND RE-USE

EAT MORE PLANTS

DRIVE ELECTRIC

WALK AND CYCLE MORE

DIAL DOWN YOUR THERMOSTAT

EAT SEASONAL

INSULATE YOUR HOME

CUT FOOD WASTE

ENCOURAGE GREEN PRACTICES AT WORK

SWITCH YOUR ENERGY

WEAR CLOTHES TO LAST

GREEN YOUR MONEY

TALK TO FRIENDS

GET SOME SOLAR

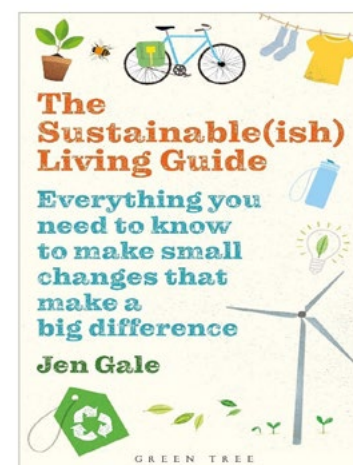


SAYING YES TO LIFE

by Canon Dr Ruth Valerio

Originally written as the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book for 2020, 'Saying Yes to Life', has now been republished and explores how we can view big issues facing the world today through a Christian worldview.

Ruth, who is Director of Global Advocacy and Influencing at Tearfund, imaginatively draws on the Days of Creation (Genesis 1 - 2.2) in relating themes of light, water, land, the seasons, other creatures, humankind, Sabbath rest, and resurrection hope to matters of environmental, ethical, and social concern.



THE SUSTAINABLE(ISH) LIVING GUIDE : Everything You Need to Know to Make Small Changes That Make a Big Difference

by Jen Gale

Easy, do-able, down to earth ideas and suggestions for everyone to help save the planet. If you want to save the planet, but your to-do list is already pretty long and remembering your re-usable coffee cup feels like a Herculean task, then this is the book for you.

Covering every aspect of our lives from the stuff we buy and the food we eat to how we travel, work, and celebrate, this book provides stacks of practical, down to earth ideas to slot into your daily life, alongside a gentle encouragement to put your newfound knowledge into action.



THE RAINHAM ECO-HUB'S TREAD LIGHTLY PODCAST

Join local Medway eco-warriors Kayleigh Ward, a Christian, and Liz O'Hanlon as they speak with inspiring people at all stages of living more sustainably and discuss various topics of environmentalism, from making your garden more wildlife friendly to climate injustice.

The Rainham Eco-Hub is a judgment free space to explore the important and sometimes complex space of living more sustainably, whilst giving time to recognise what goes wrong and how to tackle those big subjects in our busy lives.

Find their podcast at www.kmfm.co.uk/on-air/podcasts/the-rainham-eco-hubs-tread-lightly-podcast/

UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES



DRACO ROFFENSIS: THE ROCHESTER DRAGON
at Rochester Cathedral
1 JUNE – 21 SEPTEMBER

To commemorate 900 years of the Textus Roffensis, Draco Roffensis: The Rochester Dragon will take flight in the Cathedral this summer. Designed by artist Wendy Daws, the dragon, made of coloured foil on wire panels, will be suspended above the Nave. Textus Roffensis is one of the most important Medieval manuscripts in England. *Photo by Spaghetti Weston*



QUIET DAY – THROUGH THE DOOR OF HOPE
at St Benedict's Centre, West Malling
23 SEPTEMBER

We live in a time when so much seems to be falling apart. Through the Door of Hope will explore the nature of hope, hope's roots in the activity of God, and ways we can actively step into hope's path. Christopher Chapman is an experienced retreat leader and spiritual director. For more information, please email bookings@stbenedictscentre.org



MUSIC@MALLING
Held in historic venues in and around West Malling
20-28 SEPTEMBER 2024

Music@Malling brings outstanding musicians to people's doorsteps through concerts and outreach held in historic venues in and around West Malling, Kent. Works by contemporary composers are illuminated by classical music and jazz. For more information visit www.musicatmallling.com



IT'S YOUR CALLING
at St John's Centre, Meopham
12 OCTOBER, 9:30am-3:30pm

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

LIGHTSHOW BY LUXMURALIS

1ST – 5TH OCTOBER 2024

Scriptorium

The illuminated Histories

The show contains imagery from the British Library Collections

Rochester
CATHEDRAL
Growing in Christ since AD604

Tickets and information
rochestercathedral.org/lightshow





CHAPLAIN ON PARADE

The Rev Jim Horton, Vicar of Hadlow Benefice, is Lead Armed Forces Champion for the Diocese of Rochester. A new role, it aims to help fulfil the diocese's commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant. 'Together' caught up with Jim to find out more.

First of all, what is the Armed Forces Covenant?

This was signed by the Bishop and the Dean on behalf of the Diocese and Cathedral last year. It is a set of commitments that are about ensuring working practices recognise the contribution that military service personnel, both regular and reservist, veterans, cadets, and military families make to both institutions, the community, and to the country.

Where does your role come into this?

My role is to help move forward the Diocese's commitments having signed the Armed Forces Covenant. I hope to raise the profile of the unique issues faced by our serving personnel, reserves and veterans, as well as those involved in the cadet forces.

Some people might be surprised that Christians are involved with the military.

The Armed Forces draws its personnel from all parts of society. There is a long history of Christians within the armed forces. Charles II's 1661 Orders Governing the Royal Navy, has as its First Article, 'That all Commanders Captains and other Officers at Sea shall cause the public Worship of Almighty God according to the Liturgy of the Church of England... And that prayers and preachings by the respective Chaplains in Holy Orders be performed diligently and that the Lords Day be observed according to Law.'

So, there have always been military chaplains?

Military chaplains have been a formal part of the UK Armed Forces for hundreds of years, with Naval chaplains tracing their history back to Alfred the Great. Their roles have evolved over the centuries, but their core mission, of providing spiritual and moral support to military personnel, has remained constant.

What's your own connection to the Armed Forces?

As a 17-year-old, I joined the Royal Air Force and served for seven years. Now, I'm Chaplain to the RAF Supply Commando and Tactical Supply Wing Association, the RBL LGBT Branch and Royal Naval Association chaplain.

You are also Southern Area Sea Cadet Chaplain – what do you enjoy about that?

Meeting and working with the amazing young people, and volunteers, who spend two evenings a week, and many weekends, learning skills that they will carry with them for life. The chaplain is 'A friend and advisor to all, regardless of faith or lack of faith'. Ministering to a group of people who probably never darken the door of a church is an immense privilege.

What are you watching at the moment?

With our election just gone and America's just heating up, I'm re-watch (for the umpteenth time) The West Wing. In my view the best TV drama ever made.

Is there anyone who has particularly inspired you?

Archbishop Desmond Tutu. His resilience, generosity, determination and grace in adversity are an example to us all. I have a signed photo of him, depicting his amazing, infectious laugh, on my desk.

How good do you think you would be on a desert island?

I'd like to think I've learnt some things that would help me survive, the reality is probably different!

Do you have any pets?

I have a very old, mostly deaf and partially blind, dog called Colin.

Is there anything about you that people might find surprising?

I'm an open book!

What's your idea of a perfect day?

High Mass with all the bells and smells (where I don't have to preach) followed by a long, really good, Sunday pub lunch, after which I put a good film on the TV and fall asleep on the sofa after the first 10 minutes.



ALLOWING GOD TO WORK IN YOUR LIFE

In 1994 the first ordinations of women as Priests in the Church of England took place in cathedrals up and down the country, amidst considerable public interest and after many years of heated debates. The Rev Canon Katrina Barnes, was among those first women priested in the Diocese of Rochester that year. Her journey to that point had been a long one of trying to resist God's call on her life.

My vocation to priesthood began one morning as I stood in St Augustine's Church, Bromley Common. As I watched the choir and clergy processing at the end of the service, I heard the words, "One day you will be doing that". And I knew that 'that' was not singing in the choir - it was ordination.

To say that it was a bolt from the blue is an understatement! I was stunned! Shocked! I told my husband and we both concluded that it must have been my imagination. I was a contented full-time housewife and mum, involved in voluntary work, but definitely not looking for change.

However, that sense would not go away. So, a few weeks later I spoke to our curate, who happened to be a deaconess, hoping above all else that she would tell me not to be so silly. Her response was not what I had wanted.

Instead, she told me that she had been looking across the church at me a few weeks before and had the conviction that God was going to do something in my life.

I spent the next 10 years doing a very good impersonation of Jonah - I had so many reasons and excuses why I could not possibly be ordained. However, the sense of call would not go away and

eventually my husband and I threw in the towel and very reluctantly entered the process of discernment.

The rest as they say is history. Reflecting back over those years I am amazed at the people I have met and had the privilege of ministering with. The opportunities I have been given, far too many to mention. And yes, there have been highs and lows, laughter and tears, joy and pain.

Really, we can forget just how radical what happened in 1994 was, how life-changing. But, also, a reminder of what God can do in someone's life.

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

We have created a series of filmed recollections from both the Rev Canon Jean Kerr and the Rev Canon Katrina Barnes. Please scan the QR to see these short films on the diocesan YouTube channel.





Diocese of **Rochester**
called together

A PRAYER FOR CREATIONTIDE

Living God,

You call us to be good stewards of this earthly home,
strengthen us to care for your creation;
forgive us when, through our greed and indifference,
we abuse its beauty and damage its potential.
Empower us, through your Spirit, to so nurture and love
the world, that all creation sings to your glory.

Amen