

# TOGETHER

The FREE magazine from the Diocese of Rochester | Issue 28 | January - April 2026

CHANGE | SERVE | GROW

COVER STORY: CONVERSATION GROWING FAITH PAGE 16



DRAW NEAR:  
LENT  
INSPIRATION

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LIVING  
WELL WITH  
DIFFERENCE

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"I FEEL  
LIBERATED":  
EVERYDAY FAITH

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The start of a new year can bring the hope of new possibilities. It's this spirit of reflection and offering new perspectives that is the thread running throughout this edition.

For starters, the **centrespread** highlights the Church of England's Lent campaign – Draw Near - which this year focusses on developing life changing habits to enrich our faith and spiritual life.

In the **Big Issue** (pg 18), we explore whether the rule of life set out by St Benedict, and which has such strong connections to this region, can offer fresh insight on how we live well together in an increasingly fractured society.

In **Focus On**, we highlight the positive signs of a culture change taking place around Safeguarding across the Diocese (pg 8), and we celebrate the welcome being offered week on week thanks to a network of church-based Places of Welcome (pg 12).

Finally, ahead of Racial Justice Sunday in February, we meet the new Racial Justice Officer for the Diocese in our **One to One** interview (pg 24).

With the usual great selection of news, events, and resources, this is certainly an edition to put a positive spring in your step. Go well.

*Jennifer*

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## ZIMBABWEAN BISHOP VISITS DIOCESE

Bishop Jonathan Gibbs, the Bishop of Rochester, and parishes around the Diocese, were delighted to welcome the Bishop of Harare, the Rt Rev Dr Farai Mutamiri on a recent visit. The Diocese of Harare in Zimbabwe is one of three Anglican overseas dioceses with which the Diocese of Rochester has a flourishing overseas companion link.

During his visit, Bishop Farai met with the Bishop's Leadership Team, as well as churches who have connections with parishes in his own Diocese. These encounters offered a chance to strengthen friendships and share encouragement. Bishop Farai was also able to share something of the joys and challenges facing the Church and wider society in Zimbabwe.

The visit culminated in the Overseas Link Celebration Service at St Nicholas, Strood, which over 60 people attended to celebrate and give thanks for these vital links.



## BISHOP GOES BACK TO SCHOOL

Bishop Jonathan led worship and enjoyed a tour of St George's School in Gravesend, which offers all-through education from primary ages through to sixth form. While there, he met the Value Ambassadors, where he found out about their role as leaders within the school, and shared with them his own journey of faith as well as his thoughts on the importance of community and connection.



## NEW CHAPLAINS FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Congratulations to Hopeton (Holy Trinity with St John, Penge), Allan (St Mary, Hayes), and Joan (Shipbourne with Plaxtol), who have been commissioned as Anna Chaplains in their parishes. Anna Chaplaincy is a dedicated ministry with older people, and those with dementia, seeking to ensure their spiritual and pastoral needs are met. The ministry is named after Anna, the elderly woman in the Bible who recognised the child-Jesus as the Messiah.



## BLESS THIS HOUSE

St Barnabas, Tunbridge Wells, blessed its church building with chalk as part of an ancient custom associated with Epiphany. Using the initials of the Latin blessing 'Christus mansionem benedicat', the inscription came to be a reminder of the names of the Wise Men who visited Jesus. Even though the Bible does not use the names - Caspar, Balthasar and Melchior - they have become a common part of the Christmas story.



## Café GRACE

Coffee, cake and companionship await visitors to the new 'Places of Welcome' Grace Café at St Mary, Bromley. Bishop Simon Burton-Jones and the local mayor joined the Rev Eucharika Asiegbu and the church team to celebrate the launch of this new space of hospitality and belonging in the community. Read more about Places of Welcome across the Diocese on pg 12.



# NEW COLLEAGUES BRING MORE SUPPORT FOR PARISHES



**TRACY VEDAMUTTU**  
DAC Administrator



**RAVI POONI**  
Missional Development Parishes  
Project Manager



**JEN COLEMAN**  
Children and Young People Mission  
and Ministry Adviser  
(10-18yrs specialist)

In March last year, the Diocese of Rochester secured nearly £11 million of funding from the National Church to support a nine-year programme of work around the shared Called Together vision.

The vision has been designed to build capacity and strengthen mission and ministry across the whole Diocese over time. As part of this, a range of new

diocesan-wide roles are planned to support parishes with key areas of work to help flourishing and growth.

Several of these posts have now been successfully recruited, meaning extra capacity and support available to parishes in the areas of missional engagement, children and young people's work, and care of church buildings.

# RESPONDING BETTER TO DOMESTIC ABUSE

As part of the Diocese's commitment to growing safe and healthy cultures, a Domestic Abuse Awareness Conference was hosted in November by the Diocese's Safeguarding Team.

Taking place during the global 16 days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (25 November to 10 December), the day was an opportunity for clergy and Parish Safeguarding Officers to learn more about the realities of domestic abuse and how churches can respond well to those affected.

Attendees heard from experts and leading practitioners

from domestic abuse services that work in areas covered by the Diocese and there was opportunity to ask questions during a panel discussion.

A collection of slides created and curated by a person with lived experience of domestic abuse was also on display. They had generously agreed to engage with the Diocese and use their own journey and lived experience of abuse to help others become more alert to the consequences of domestic abuse.

View the slides at: [www.rochester.anglican.org/news/raising-awareness-of-domestic-abuse.php](http://www.rochester.anglican.org/news/raising-awareness-of-domestic-abuse.php)







## SIGNS OF CHANGE

A significant culture shift is taking place within the Diocese of Rochester. Safeguarding is increasingly no longer an afterthought, rather it is something that clergy, volunteers, and employees are actively applying in their daily ministry. Training, and the positive engagement of parishes with the support available through the Diocesan Safeguarding Team, is playing a big part in the change underway.

It's an early winter's evening at Christ Church, Chislehurst, and, seated around a set of low tables, people are gathered in deep conversation.

This is not a bible study group, or an evening social, rather Ruth Campbell, the Safeguarding Trainer for the Diocese of Rochester, is running one of the many in-person training sessions she organises throughout the year.

Tonight, it's Safeguarding Leadership training, and in the room are a mix of clergy, church wardens, lay ministers, and others who hold volunteers roles within the Church such as Parish Safeguarding Officers, and even a bell tower captain.

The Leadership course is one of the six core safeguarding training modules that are a mandatory requirement within the Church of England for particular church roles; other courses include Domestic Abuse Awareness and Safer Recruitment training.

"I'm passionate about safeguarding training," says Ruth, "because when you think about it, Jesus was an excellent safeguarder.

"The way he treated people, the way he responded to people, the way he cared, the way he made us flourish because of the way he looked after the people around him."

Anybody who has a role in a church needs to do safeguarding training, whether they are making coffee on a Sunday morning, helping with the cleaning or the flower arranging or whether they are clergy, church wardens, or parish safeguarding officers.

While the training modules are designed and structured by the National Church's Safeguarding Team, Ruth

has worked hard to make sure the Safeguarding Leadership Pathway training is as accessible as possible for those who need to complete it.

"Zoom training has been running for some time, but we've now established five Local Training Partnerships with parishes and recruited five voluntary trainers, making it possible for us to introduce in-person training in venues around the Diocese too. We're keen to remove or reduce any barriers to training and often just talking through what the course involves is enough to quieten any anxiety and put participants at ease."

Through the workbook reflections and feedback she receives, Ruth says she is seeing the positive impact safeguarding training is having, not just on those who attend, but on helping embed a positive safeguarding culture within churches.

"Culture is changing across the Diocese because leaders are engaging with the training. They are thinking about how they can make their churches safer and healthier and taking action through their action plans to actually make a difference.

"I find they are responding to me by saying that, following the training they've received, their attitudes

*"Culture is changing across the diocese because leaders are engaging with the training."*





SAFEGUARDING BEING DISCUSSED AT CAFE CHURCH, HOO ST WERBURGH

have changed. They now think differently. It's not something they just add on."

A written reflection from one participant, shows the 'lightbulb effect' the training can have: "I had always considered that safeguarding was something I needed to take seriously in case we had "bad people" in our congregation.

"However, I hadn't realised, until the training, how far reaching and diverse safeguarding actually is. We are safeguarding not just against abuse or assault, but mental abuse, prevention of harm, and an individual's well-being. This course has been an eye opener."

Cath Jackson, a Parish Safeguarding Officer attending the training in Chislehurst, has noticed the shift in thinking too, "When I first started taking on the role of Parish Safeguarding Officer, there was a lot of confusion as to what safeguarding meant.

"Now it makes sense to people that it is up to all of us to bring protection and to bring a sense of safety for people within our church. It's vital for us to get to grips with safeguarding and provide safe places."

Alongside changed thinking, there is changed action too. For Deano, a worship leader at St Matthew's Church, South Gillingham, the safeguarding training he undertook inspired him and his church leadership team to take a practical step to better protect the welfare of the older members of their congregation in

their day-to-day life beyond church.

"It was immediately evident to us that a significant proportion of our congregation are elderly and live alone, rendering them susceptible to scammers, cold callers and others who might seek to take advantage of them, not least financially.

"We therefore did some research, and produced a simple fact sheet and HELP card that could be kept by the phone and near the front door. The older person could refer to it quickly whenever they found themselves in a vulnerable position, through a cold caller, phone call or email.

"We printed these off and met with our Thursday Club and Places of Welcome – which older members of our community attend - to give a brief talk about the dangers of falling victim to scams, and practical steps to minimise the risk."

Ruth says it's this 'bigger picture' understanding of what it means to safeguard and to create safe places, that is so encouraging to see and marks a real step forward.

"It's gospel work, isn't it? It's what we should be doing. It's every day, it's ordinary, it's nothing magical or special or awful. It's just getting it right, like Jesus did, gospel work, helping each other to flourish and have the best of well-being."

Greg Barry, Head of Safeguarding and Diocesan

Safeguarding Officer, says that while safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, no one is expected to carry it alone.

That is where, he says, the Diocesan Safeguarding Team comes in – alongside the training – to offer professional advice and encouragement to parishes, clergy, the Bishop, and any other person within the Diocese that needs support and guidance on safeguarding.

"We cannot do safeguarding alone, and so we are incredibly grateful to all those in churches - particularly the Parish Safeguarding Officers who are all volunteers – who are engaging with us and the training, and who are stepping up to one of the biggest challenges, which is to help settings across the Diocese become safer."

For the Rev Richard Jones, Rector at Christ Church and St Paul, Anerley, engaging with the Safeguarding Team has made a real difference, by helping his church think about how they can run their activities safely so that they can become a welcoming space where all can flourish.

He says that being an urban church in one of the most deprived areas of the country, and with over 30 different nationalities worshipping together, brings joy as well as some unique opportunities and challenges.

"We want to love God and love others, and attention to safeguarding enables us to do that. I've been very grateful for the diocesan support I've received as I have encountered situations that are new to me.

"I've been able to check my approach, and to seek guidance and counsel, so we can welcome every person safely into the Church as we continue to build our safeguarding culture."

For Richard this includes ensuring safeguarding is on the agenda of every PCC meeting, meeting regularly with the Parish Safeguarding Officer, and speaking about it with the congregation.



ANTI-SCAM CARDS AT SOUTH GILLINGHAM

"I've also found embracing the free management tools available through the Diocese and National Church, for example, the Safeguarding Training Portal, Safeguarding Dashboard, and now the Safeguarding Hub, has really helped me and our team have confidence to keep on track with our safeguarding administration, and to know what actions we need to take."

For Greg, these are all signs of a church working hard to build an all-round positive culture which is vital to good safeguarding.

"Culture is key. If you have the right culture in a church, it will be a safe place. If you have the right culture, people will do the training. They understand the relevance of the training and how it fits with growing healthy and safer cultures."

He adds, "Safeguarding is a journey. We are still on that journey as a diocesan-family. We have to keep learning, we have to keep listening, and we have to keep working together."

Richard agrees, and says being attentive to safeguarding is an intrinsic part of the call to being a Christian: "Safeguarding is not an add on, it's part of everything - because it enables us to love God and to love our neighbour as Jesus would, and to be part of a welcoming Christian community that seeks to share God's love."





## PLACES WHERE EVERYONE BELONGS

People need places where they are welcomed just as they are. This simple yet profound truth lies at the heart of Places of Welcome, a national movement that is finding a strong and compassionate expression across the Diocese of Rochester.

Within the Diocese, the network of Places of Welcome is coordinated by Magali van der Merwe, Lead Adviser for Community Engagement and Social Action. There are currently 15 Places of Welcome across the Diocese, each rooted in values of hospitality, dignity, and love of neighbour.

"Each Places of Welcome is open on the same day, at the same time, every week," Magali explains. "People know they can come and be welcomed warmly. Everybody should feel welcome. Whoever they are, without feeling they need to behave in a certain way."

Importantly, Places of Welcome are not just for churchgoers, nor are they only hosted in church buildings. They exist for the whole community. "This is about the Church being present," Magali says, "not asking people to cross a threshold of belief, but simply offering space, kindness, and connection."

Every Places of Welcome is shaped by five guiding

principles, often known as the Five Ps of Welcome - Place, People, Presence, Participation and Provision. Together, all five ensure that no matter what form the Places of Welcome takes, there is a culture of attentive listening and sincere care, where people are valued simply for being themselves

"It isn't complicated," Magali says. "It's about journeying alongside people, being available, attentive, and kind."

Volunteers are central to this vision and across the Diocese, many are trained as active listeners, ensuring that everyone who comes through the door knows they will be heard. Sometimes those conversations uncover practical needs, such as access to a food bank or help navigating local services.

At St John the Evangelist, Sidcup, Licensed Lay Minister Liz Tragheim recognised loneliness, alongside health challenges and deprivation, as growing concerns across the joint benefice with All Saints, Footscray. Additionally, due to the challenges of Covid, many local charities had closed their doors.

For Liz, establishing a Places of Welcome at St John's Church, in which charities were invited in free of charge,

seemed the ideal way to help tackle the needs being identified in both communities.

Today, St John's Places of Welcome is a vibrant community hub. Visitors are offered free refreshments alongside Wi-Fi and a children's corner, and a wide range of charities attend regularly, including the Alzheimer's Society, Bexley Deaf Centre, National Energy Action, and Bexley Age UK.

The impact, Liz says, has been significant:

"First and foremost, many new friendships have been created. By being present here, charities are easily accessible to the people who come through our doors. The Alzheimer's Society, for example, found that being present in this informal and welcoming space enabled meaningful conversations that may never have happened elsewhere.

"What began as a response to loneliness has grown into a genuine community hub, where care, information, and practical support are all available in one welcoming place."

The flexibility that being a Places of Welcome allows means that each one can adapt to suit the needs of their particular community. In the small, rural village of Platt, near Sevenoaks, St Mary the Virgin Church has quietly lived out its calling to hospitality and connection for more than a decade.

Each week, a room in the church is transformed. Tables are laid, kettles are boiled, and soon the space fills with conversation and laughter. With 30 to 45 people attending regularly, Café Platt Places of Welcome, is deeply woven into village life.

From the earliest days of the café, visitors shaped the space themselves, instinctively pulling tables together into large shared groups which is a practice that continues to this day, ensuring no one ever sits alone.

Around 20 volunteers sustain the café, many of whom have served faithfully for nearly ten years. Most are in their 70s and 80s, offering warmth, wisdom, and steadfast commitment.

Two volunteers, David and Hazel, play key roles in keeping Café Platt running smoothly. Hazel, drawing on her background in administration management, coordinates rotas and week-to-week organisation, ensuring the café remains welcoming and well run.



David says:

"Café Platt was born out of a desire to reach out and connect with our community, and from the very beginning it has been a warm, friendly space where everyone is welcome, and this year we prepare to celebrate our tenth anniversary."

Hazel speaks warmly about the café too:

"This Places of Welcome is so warm and lovely. The community comes together and the café is buzzing with activity and energy."

She adds, "We are also fortunate to have volunteers who provide a weekly quiz, which always sparks conversation and laughter."

For Magali, these stories capture why Places of Welcome matter so deeply. "People need hospitable spaces where they can simply be," she says. "Places where they are listened to, supported, and sometimes helped to find solutions to very real problems."

"What's so beautiful," she continues, "is that all of this happens over companionship, hot tea, coffee, and cake. It's in those ordinary moments that trust grows and hope is restored."

Across the Diocese of Rochester, Places of Welcome are quietly changing lives. They are living expressions of faith in action, places where everyone belongs, and where welcome is not just offered, but lived.

To find a Places of Welcome near you SCAN the code





# DRAW NEAR

## LIFE-GIVING HABITS FOR LENT

**Lent** – the forty days of preparation before Easter - is a time when we are invited to take stock of our lives and develop habits and patterns which help us grow closer to God, day by day.

To explore this more deeply, for Lent 2026, the Church of England has created a range of resources, including a printed booklet and online reflections, on the theme of Draw Near: Life-giving habits for Lent.

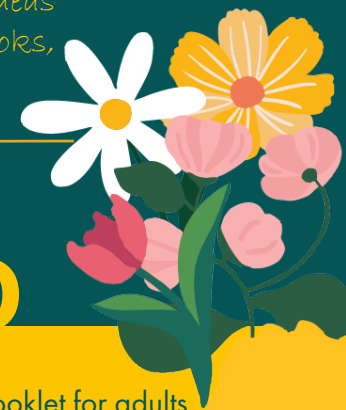
During the six weeks of Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday (18 February), a different aspect of Christian life is explored – **worshipping** together, **praying**, **exploring the Bible**, sharing **communion**, offering **service** and **sharing the good news** with others.

Alongside, this, instead of 'giving something up' for Lent, families and children are invited to turn that on its head, and through a daily challenge, explore the life-giving habit of generosity by giving time, giving encouragement, and giving things away.

*Leave a note, sticker or small treat somewhere for someone to discover with a note that says, "You are loved."*



*Draw a big lightbulb on paper and fill it with ideas for how your family could share things like books, games, food or tools with others.*



## GET INVOLVED

- **Order a copy of the Draw Near**, Lent reflection booklet for adults, available through Church House Publishing (£2.99). Develop a rhythm of life that will help you grow as a disciple of Christ day by day, especially as we prepare to celebrate the mystery of God's saving love at Easter.
- **Download the Church of England's Everyday Faith app**, which will carry reflections for adults every Monday to Saturday throughout Lent, based on the booklet. The app will continue to offer content into the season of Easter and beyond throughout 2026. Available through the Google or Apple app stores.
- **Get inspired by reading Dancing to the Heartbeat of God**, the 2026 Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book (published by SPCK). Full of stories and testimonies of discipleship from across the Anglican Communion, it includes a foreword and an afterword by the Archbishop of Canterbury designate, the Rt Rev Sarah Mullally.
- **Involve the children, young people, and families in your life**, with the help of the Draw Near with Acts40 Lent Challenge booklet. Each day offers a simple Bible verse, reflection, prayer and age-appropriate generous act. Available through Church House Publishing (£2.99)

*Choose one ordinary action today, whether at work or at leisure, and consciously offer it to God as worship. Ask God that your whole life may become an offering shaped by Christ's sacrifice.*





# CONVERSATION GROWING FAITH

An interactive series of sessions enabling people to explore the basic beliefs of Christianity, has become a powerful bridge between two congregations in Gillingham.

In the heart of Gillingham High Street and on the welcoming community of St Mary's Island, a shared commitment to outreach and providing opportunity to explore faith is uniting the two churches and enriching their communities.

Situated on the High Street, with a mission focused on 'Living for Jesus, Loving Gillingham, Learning Together', St Mark's is a church where all are welcome, from students and young families to those seeking a new spiritual home.

Throughout the week the building is buzzing with activity, including a Parents and Toddlers group, a Dementia Café, the Medway Foodbank, and Peace and Hope - a Saturday home group for adults with learning difficulties.

Across the water, St Mary's Island Church gathers for worship in the school hall every Sunday morning. Their mission is simple: "Creating spaces for our community to encounter Jesus."

This vision comes alive through their lay-led services, where members of all ages, including children, participate fully.

While the ministries of St Mark's Gillingham and St Mary's Island may differ in style and setting, they are driven by one Spirit-filled purpose: to love God, serve their communities, and make disciples of Jesus Christ.

In particular, the use of the Alpha Course, has become a fruitful tool for the churches to help people grow in their faith.

Developed in 1977 at Holy Trinity, Brompton in London, Alpha uses a series of group conversations to freely explore the basics of the Christian faith in an open, friendly environment.

As the Rev Catharina Olsson Gisleskog, Vicar of the Gillingham St Mark with St Mary's Island, says:

"Whether someone is exploring Christianity for the first time or rediscovering their faith after many years, Alpha provides a safe and welcoming space to ask questions and deepen understanding."

Many of those recently baptised at the two churches began or strengthened their journey through Alpha. For Catharina, the stories of those who have recently come to faith are hopeful signs that God is continuing to raise up believers who are eager to learn, grow, and share His love.

"For St Mark's and St Mary's Island, celebrations like these are more than events; they are signs of a living, growing church where people of all ages are discovering faith, committing to follow Jesus, and finding a home among God's people."

"Every testimony, every conversation, every moment of prayer reminds us that God is very much at work in Medway."

*"Celebrations like these are signs of a living, growing church where people of all ages are discovering faith, committing to follow Jesus, and finding a home among God's people"*



# HOW DO WE LIVE WELL TOGETHER?

This question lies hidden behind all the dysfunction and dis-ease we find ourselves facing on a daily, local, national and international basis. The Rev Canon Jane Winter, Assistant Director for Mission and Ministry in the Diocese of Rochester, asks whether the monastic tradition of St Benedict might offer a fresh perspective?



St Benedict's Centre

Kent is a transient part of the country. Historically people coming from mainland Europe landed in Kent and then journeyed on through England. Christian tradition influenced by Benedict arrived through this route too.

Gundulf, originally a monk from the region of Normandy in France, migrated to become Bishop of Rochester and Prior of the Cathedral's Benedictine community. Once here, he established the original Benedictine community of nuns at Malling Abbey, and ties between the two remain strong. Rochester Cathedral retains its Benedictine foundation, which is central to the way in which it seeks to witness and serve the thousands of people who visit every year. Malling Abbey too remains a place of deep prayer and welcome.

Kent is also a transient community. Today high numbers of migrants attempt to make the crossing to Dover, despite all the preventions that are in place. This region can feel very welcoming and also dream-dashingly hostile. Current political shifting leans toward the latter. What might Benedict's message be for this out-post of Europe, a country conflicted within itself about its relationship with the mainland following Brexit, and in the light of constant transiency?

I am reminded that Benedict quietly set about recalibrating his life in accordance with Christ, and, through his example, drew others to do the same. The movement of monastic living grew and his influence spread, satisfying a deep societal desire for more than infighting, greed, economic success, and culture wars between communities. Benedict offered a different lifestyle that was attractive because it reached where nothing temporal could reach. It touched the soul. 'Listen my child to the voice of a master who loves you' - hardly the propaganda slogan that would win election votes and convince vying communities to peaceful living, but it hit deep and continues to hit deep today.

**Why?** Because our souls, individually and corporately, are crying out to be heard and to hear. It is right that we are concerned and even angry about issues which threaten our living. Protest is a way in which we cry out. We need space where we can honestly share how we feel without judgement because that is part of our need of reassurance. I would suggest however that in all the factionalism we read about, see, and perhaps are even part of, there is a deeper cry to belong well with one another.

Benedict offers the Christ-way which meets that need.

He does this by inviting us to listen, not to him, but to Christ. Benedict offers a lifestyle response that recalibrates what it means to be human in relationship with God, one another, and ourselves through a balance of worship and work, interrelated - not compartmentalised. In a world where pendulums swing from one fad to the next, one plan to the next, one policy to the next, Benedict offers a still point where work, rest, and leisure interrelate in compatible harmony around worship.

Perhaps the most significant offering Benedict might present to the communities of our Diocese today is the recognition that living with others who are different to ourselves is never easy but is essential if we are truly to be the people we are created to be in relationship with one another.

This is what makes us human. Our diversity is what makes us united, not our similarities. Benedict's monastic houses were not always places of calm; they were real homes where people kicked against the goad, ganged up against one another, and battled with selfish desire against the common good. For Benedict, stripping away individuality that judges the other in favour of the self is painful but necessary if we are to bring our true selves into relationship with others.

Our churches are places of radical welcome when we seek to truly welcome the diversity of our wider communities. It is uncomfortable, unsettling, and challenging, but in such welcome Benedict teaches we discover Christ among us.

In the transiency of our Diocese, we seek to serve communities growing in diversity as people from across Europe and the world come to make this land home. We can choose to oppress and expel, or we can choose the harder way of truly welcoming the giftedness of God found in the stranger. I suppose Kent will always be transient; the shape and infrastructure of the county is designed to make transiency easy. That is no excuse for not welcoming. Benedict stresses that each guest is to be welcomed as if welcoming Christ. In Rochester Cathedral each day we pray that we may be true to our Benedictine tradition, that all will be welcomed and everyone valued. We can all pray that we model this behaviour with everyone we meet.

In transient living, communally and individually, stability in Christ, hospitality and the discipline of deep listening are Benedict's wisdom offered to us in our time and season.



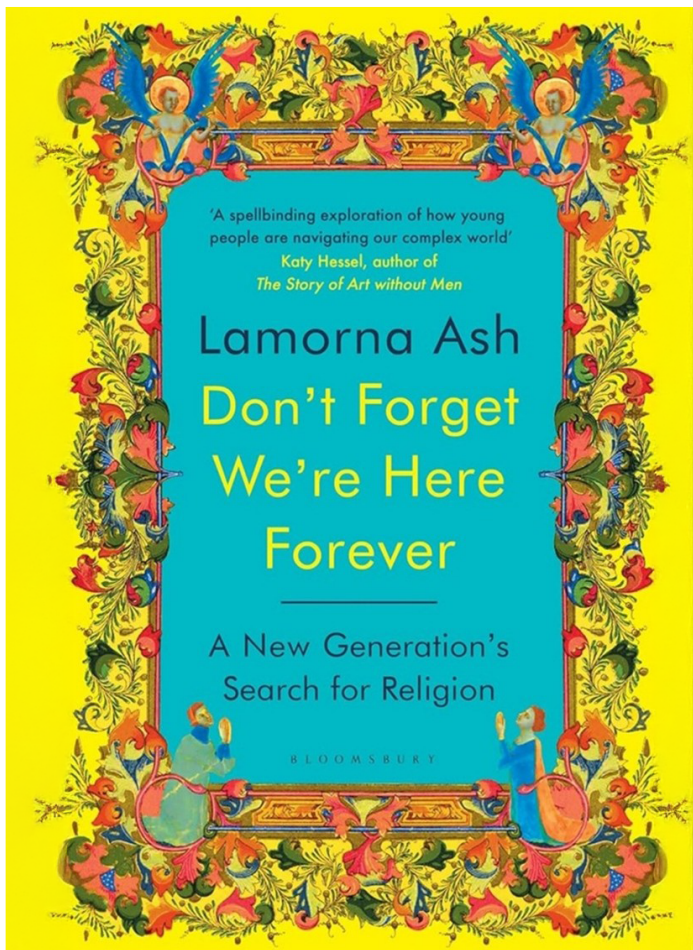
## RESOURCES – NEW YEAR, NEW HABITS?

*If the new year has got you thinking about your relationship with God, check out these thought-provoking resources.*

### DON'T FORGET WE'RE HERE FOREVER: A NEW GENERATION'S SEARCH FOR RELIGION

Lamorna Ash

*Review by Rev Dr Bart Woodhouse, Assistant Curate,  
St Peter and St Paul Swanscombe, and St Mary Greenhithe*



In her 2025 book *Don't Forget We're Here Forever: A New Generation's Search for Religion*, journalist Lamorna Ash offers a compelling insight into the quieter currents of spiritual awakening that are challenging the narrative of Christianity's demise in the UK.

Ash's poetic and deeply personal exploration begins with a simple question: why, in an age of widespread secularism and disconnection, are many young people in Britain turning back to Christianity with earnest curiosity rather than cynical rejection?

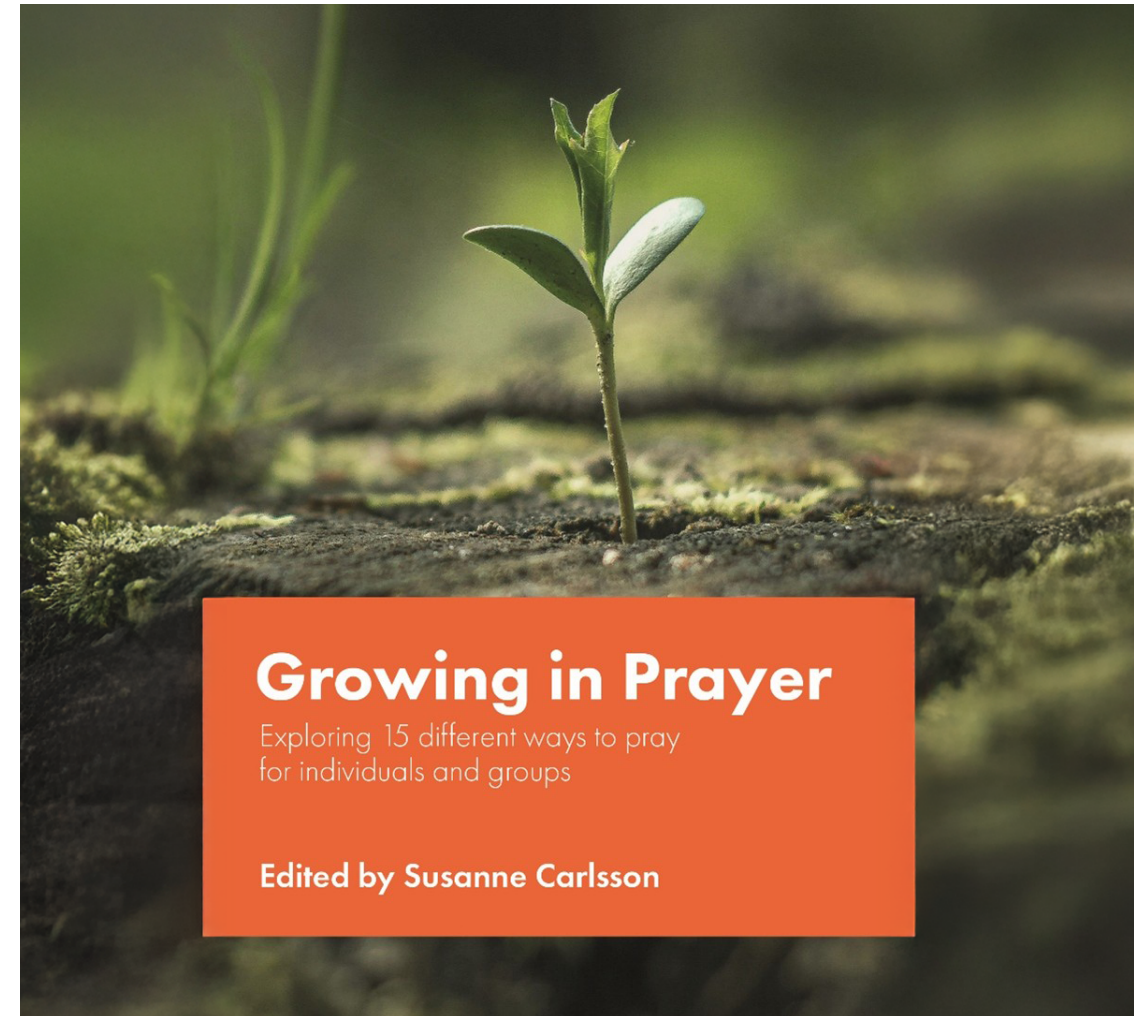
What she discovers is not a monochrome movement, but a colourful assortment of encounters and experiences that reveal a broader, if understated, revival.

Ash's encounters draw out the eclectic richness of this shift. Some young people are drawn to the passionate worship and fellowship of evangelical charismatic communities; others find comfort in the silent contemplative traditions of the Quakers or the ageless beauty of Anglican liturgy.

One of the more striking themes in Ash's book is the way in which faith

becomes a response to the pervasive sense of disconnection that characterises modern life.

Ash's work is a valuable and wonderful read that gives a unique insight into her internal dialogue regarding the Christian faith, which are likely representative of many in her generation. It also challenges this "quiet revival", suggesting it may present the church with questions as it seeks to make disciples rather than spiritual tourists.



## Growing in Prayer

Exploring 15 different ways to pray  
for individuals and groups

Edited by Susanne Carlsson

### GROWING IN PRAYER - EXPLORING 15 WAYS TO PRAY FOR INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS

Susanne Carlsson

An invaluable guide to new – and ancient – ways of praying, *Growing in Prayer* has evolved from a Rochester Diocese initiative to help people develop their prayer life.

All of us pray in different ways at different stages in our lives. Sometimes we need new ways of praying as we grow in our relationship with God.

Tried and tested by many individuals and groups, this attractive spiral-bound collection offers simple instruction in 15 different forms of prayer. From silent

listening to Lectio Divina; from Centering prayer to praying with icons, music and poetry, there are riches here for anyone looking for fresh ways to engage in prayer and open themselves to a deeper relationship with God.

Susanne Carlsson, is the spiritual adviser for Rochester Diocese. She has been involved in spirituality and specifically Ignatian spirituality for the last 20 years.

Available through [www.brfresources.org.uk](http://www.brfresources.org.uk)



## UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES



**SPIRIT ARTS PRESENT "SPIRIT ANIMALS"**  
at Rochester Cathedral  
17 MARCH – 9 APRIL

An exhibition inspired by biblical animals from the artists behind "Come Eat With Me." The exhibition from Spirit Arts draws on the rich symbolism of animals in the Bible. Around 140 different animals can be found in the Bible. 40 of these have been selected by Jane Furst, Lead Artist. For more information visit [www.rochester cathedral.org](http://www.rochester cathedral.org)



**MESSY CATHEDRAL**  
at Rochester Cathedral  
16 MAY, 1:00-4:00PM

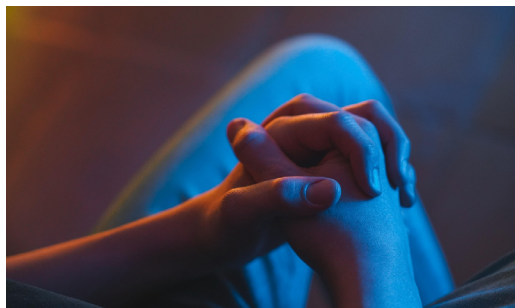
A space to meet Jesus through activities, prayer, games, and worship. Activities until 3pm, followed by worship. Finish with your own picnic from 3.45pm.

For more information contact Sarah Cabella – [sarah.cabella@rochester.anglican.org](mailto:sarah.cabella@rochester.anglican.org)



**IT'S YOUR CALLING**  
at Christ Church Orpington  
16 MAY, 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](mailto:vocations@rochester.anglican.org)



**A PRAYER FESTIVAL**  
ST BENEDICT'S CENTRE, WEST MALLING  
30 MAY, 10AM-4PM

This day will offer the opportunity to find out about the many different ways there are to open our hearts and mind to God; to explore and to experience some of these. Suggested donation £10-£20.

For more information contact the team on [bookings@stbenedictscentre.org](mailto:bookings@stbenedictscentre.org)

# WHALES

SEE IT AT ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL

**10 February – 7 March**

An awe-inspiring artwork by  
Tessa Campbell Fraser

Presented in partnership with  
**M E S S U M S I O R G**

**Free daytime admission**

Charges apply for evenings, schools, groups and special events

## WHALES AFTER DARK

**17 | 27 February  
4 | 7 March**

See Rochester Cathedral  
bathed in underwater  
light after sunset  
Charges apply, book online

## EVENTS UNDER WHALES

**February 13 | 14**

An Evening of Radiohead

**17 | 20**

Jonah and the Whale  
with the Family Trust\*

**19**

Under the Whales:  
A Sea Shanty Evening

**21**

Swinging Under the Sea:  
BBC Big Band

**22**

Leviathans of the sea –  
life in a changing ocean talk\*

**26**

Maritime Majesty:  
Music inspired by the sea  
organ concert

\*Admission free, prebooking essential  
Unless otherwise stated charges apply, book online  
See the Rochester Cathedral website for information  
about opening times and planned closures.

**Find out more**  
[rochester cathedral.org/whales](http://rochester cathedral.org/whales)

*Rochester*  
CATHEDRAL  
Growing in Christ since AD604





## A CALLING TO 'CALL OUT' RACISM

Together, caught up with Zara Rawlinson, the Diocese of Rochester's Racial Justice Officer, to find out more about her work, and the steps underway to help ensure the varied settings of the Diocese are places where all can flourish.

### Can you tell us a little bit about your experience before coming to the Diocese?

I've been working in anti-racism for over ten years, including founding and leading the Panda Anti-Racism Team (PART), delivering anti-racism education to young people, teachers, and professionals. Alongside this, I've also worked in mental health support with young people in schools, which really shaped my understanding of how identity, belonging, and wellbeing intersect from an early age.

### What drew you to this role?

I'm passionate about making real, meaningful impact. In the past, I've worked in roles where anti-racism felt more like lip service than lived commitment, and that never sat well with me. Living close to the Diocese, I can see first-hand the difference churches and faith can make in their communities when they show up well; often at the moments when people need them most. This role felt like a genuine opportunity to explore my faith more deeply while supporting and strengthening work that already has strong foundations.

### What are some of the things you are particularly working on?

A big focus for me is developing a practical toolkit that parishes can use to confidently move forward; including training, resources, and guidance. I'm also committed to supporting all those who hold a church role and diocesan office staff, particularly UKME staff, to feel safe, included, and valued. Alongside this, I'm spending time meeting people across the Diocese, listening, learning, and building relationships.

### Churches are often on the frontline in their communities. What have they been sharing with you about how they have been seeking to respond to recent issues around identity and racial justice?

Many churches have shared how challenging this moment feels, particularly with the rise in far-right rhetoric, debates around flags, and increased tension in communities. Some churches already have wonderfully diverse congregations and are keen to ensure they're doing the very best for everyone. Others are less diverse and are asking important questions about why that is and how they can better reflect and engage the whole of their parish.

**From Lament to Action is a National Church report seeking to bring a change of culture in the life of**

### the Church of England around racial justice. How is work on the recommendations progressing?

Nationally, there are now many Racial Justice Officers, and we're working closely together to ensure consistency and shared learning across dioceses. Locally, I'm currently developing our diocesan racial justice strategy, which will be launched in the coming months. It will set out clearly and transparently how we move forward. Creating this role was a huge and important step, and we're committed to continuing to build on that foundation.

### Is there anyone who has particularly inspired you?

I draw inspiration from lots of people; from Martin Luther King Jr, to Akala, and even Pink, who constantly reminds me to use my voice, take up space, and be unapologetically myself. My children are also always a source of inspiration. They inspired me to set up PART and have all joined me in delivering sessions over the years.

### Do you have any hobbies?

I've recently restarted at the gym and love keeping active. In 2024 I took part in a charity boxing match to raise money for Alzheimer's Society as both parents have been diagnosed, I absolutely loved it so much so that I'm planning on doing it again!

### Do you have a signature dish?

I definitely don't have a signature dish, I'm not the biggest fan of cooking, but I love eating. Caribbean food is my absolute favourite. Family parties are the best because we do food properly: curry goat, jerk chicken, saltfish fritters... the list goes on.

### What are you watching at the moment?

I'm currently hugely obsessed with Yellowstone and would absolutely love to visit a real ranch one day and live out my cowboy dreams!

### What's your idea of a perfect day?

My perfect day would be on holiday with my family – my husband and three children, my five siblings and their children, and my amazing parents. It would involve a slow morning, time by the pool, games, a big dinner together, and then a show or disco in the evening.

*Racial Justice Sunday takes place on 8 February.*

*Find out how to get involved at:*

[www.rochester.anglican.org/everyday-faith/ourfaithinaction/racial-justice](http://www.rochester.anglican.org/everyday-faith/ourfaithinaction/racial-justice)





Photo credit: Kent Association for the Blind

## I FEEL LIBERATED

For more than a quarter of a century, Tony Fitzpatrick, a Licensed Lay Minister at St James, Tunbridge Wells, had just 'got on' with life in spite of his visual impairment, 'masking', as he describes it, the true extent of his loss of vision. As he explored his calling from God, the training he received opened the door for more support in his day to day life.

When I was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa and macular scarring in 1999, I was registered blind, and simply had to make what adjustments I could, such as avoiding going out on bright days - because of the light sensitivity associated with the condition - and relying on taxis.

Up until three years ago, I worked as a storage planner in a warehouse, and I was able to magnify the text on my computer screen and would make my way carefully around the workplace to avoid obstacles.

They knew that I was visually impaired, but they didn't know to what extent.

After being licensed as a lay minister in the Diocese of Rochester, I took redundancy from the warehouse and began working as a workplace chaplain in a shopping centre in Tunbridge Wells. I continued to avoid asking for help, despite deteriorating eyesight.

The turning point was joining Enabling Leaders, the Church of England's leadership development programme for disabled and neurodivergent people, part of the Church of England's Disability Project.

Hearing a talk on the course by the former Paralympian skier Mark Chamberlen, who is partially sighted, on visual impairment and 'masking' was an electrifying moment. Listening to him, what he was saying could have been me. I liked to think I was in control and would tell whoever I wanted to tell about my eyesight.

Returning home, I experienced a fresh bout of isolation stranded at home as the weather was too bright for me to go out. Spurred on by the words of Mark Chamberlen, I decided to contact my local

sight loss charity, Kent Association for the Blind (KAB).

A visit from a KAB staff member introduced me to tools and support, including 'overspecs' to reduce glare and the Seeing AI app, which reads text aloud. They also gave me mobility training with a cane and new skills to navigate my way safely.

I feel liberated. I don't have to plan my day around the weather or rely on someone to take me out. Since this transformation in my life, I've had a number of positive conversations with those with impairment, those with friends or family affected by sight loss, and also with children who are inquisitive of my need for a cane and the benefit of using it.

There are still challenges, but there are so many more possibilities. St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 3:30 comes to mind: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."

*"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."*

*Ephesians 3:30*





Diocese of *Rochester*  
called together

## A PRAYER FOR THE SEASON OF LENT

Most generous God,

During Lent, we often think of giving things up in your honour, yet you call us to seek something deeper, to focus on kindness, compassion and generosity, flowing from the depths of our hearts.

Teach us to willingly share a listening ear, a caring attitude, a helping hand, or a soft and gentle word where needed most.

May our Lent be transformed into an active journey of generosity, using our God given gifts.

Amen.