

**CHURCH SERVICES at ST MARY'S  
and ST JOHN'S**

**1st Sunday of the month:** 9.30am Parish Communion at St Mary's

**2nd Sunday of the month:** 9.30am Family Communion at St John's

**3rd Sunday of the month:** 9.30am Morning Worship at St Mary's

**4th Sunday of the month:** 9.30am Worship for All at St John's

**5th Sundays:** 10.30am Langtree Team Service in one of the Team churches.

Coffee and biscuits are served after services: in the Old Stables after services at St Mary's, and in church after services at St John's.  
All welcome!

For more details see the Langtree Team web-  
at [langtreechurches.org](http://langtreechurches.org) or the church website  
[achurchnearyou.com/422](http://achurchnearyou.com/422).



If you would like to give to the work of the church locally you can do so using this QR code. You can also make a lasting gift by including a legacy in your will. For more information contact Ken Baker [baker\\_kenneth2@sky.com](mailto:baker_kenneth2@sky.com)

The magazine can be viewed online in the Church section of the village website, [whitchurchonthames.com](http://whitchurchonthames.com).



St Mary the Virgin

November 2024  
to February 2025

**The Parish Magazine  
for  
Whitchurch  
and  
Whitchurch Hill**



St John the Baptist

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**HELP WITH BRASSES**

We have a beautiful church, which is part of our heritage, but due to age and infirmity the small but willing band who clean the brasses at St Mary's has dramatically contracted so that too heavy a burden is being placed on the few who remain. Please could we have some help.

Lesley Landen 0118 984 2414

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### Letter from the Vicar

Dear Friends,

I wonder how you would describe your relationship with your parish church. The English parish system means that everyone has a parish church that is in some sense 'theirs', simply because they live within that parish. In a similar way, everyone has an MP who is 'their' MP, simply because they live within that constituency. In each case, however, the sense of belonging or connection will be different from person to person.

#### Different ways of belonging

Research done between 2007 and 2010 identified four different ways in which people experience and act out a sense of belonging to a church\*. Some people's belonging is based on participating regularly in church activities, whether that is Sunday services or activities that take place during the week, such as bible studies or coffee mornings. For other people, their connection is through particular people. That person could be a close friend who is a member of the church congregation. Or it could be someone from the church, clergy or otherwise, who visits them at home in a more formal role. A third way of belonging is through special events, which could be baptisms, weddings or funerals, or seasonal services like Christmas and Easter. The final way of belonging is through place. Here the connection is to the church building, the churchyard, or both. Perhaps the church building is tied up with the community's sense of identity or is felt to be significant as a 'spiritual space' in that location. Perhaps the churchyard is where family members are buried and where their memorials can be visited. Thinking about St. Mary's and/or St. John's, are there any of

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special events, with its unique combination of atmosphere, celebration, nostalgia and bringing multiple generations together.

#### The deepest kind of belonging

Finally, whether you currently feel a sense of belonging or not, at the heart of all our Christmas services is an invitation to belong in a way that is truly life-changing. The God who made and loves the world and everyone in it, the God who has reached out to us in the person of Jesus, this God invites us to belong with him, knowing his love and friendship now and forever.  
Every blessing, James

\* You can find this in a book called *God's Belongers* by David Walker (Bible Reading Fellowship 2017)

\*\* Our Service of Remembering is on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> November this year. 4.00pm at St. John's Whitchurch Hill.

*PS Further on the subject of the place of the church in the community: the spire at St. Mary's, an iconic part of the Whitchurch on Thames skyline, is in need of repair, including replacing the wooden shingles. Architects have been appointed to manage the project, an initial survey has already taken place, and we'll know more about the total costs involved in the New Year. We'll be keeping the community informed about the work that needs to be done and ways of supporting the project.*

### Pray for the World



Do you feel in despair and helpless about the state of the world?  
Come and join us to hold the needs of the world in a short time of reflection. We have started to meet monthly on Tuesdays 9.10am – 9.30am, in the Old Stables.  
Next meetings 19<sup>th</sup> November, 10<sup>th</sup> December 14th January

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belonging that resonate with you? Of course, they are not mutually exclusive. You could identify with more than one of them or even all four. What is more, when it comes to the local church you don't have to call yourself a churchgoer, or even a Christian, to have some kind of sense of belonging. This is one reason why people of other faiths or no faith might join a group like The Friends of St. Mary's and St. John's to support the upkeep of their local church.

#### Ways of belonging at this time of year

In the autumn we move into a season when for many people the local church looms larger in their lives than it does in the rest of the year, whether they are regular churchgoers or not. In the past, harvest celebrations were a significant example of that, though this seems to be declining as society changes. By contrast, many churches, including our own, have seen a growing appreciation in recent years for Services of Remembering. These services take place around the time of All Saints' Day (1<sup>st</sup> November) and All Souls' Day (2<sup>nd</sup> November)\*\*. They provide a way of remembering loved ones that can be deeply meaningful, especially when they are held in a place that is significant to the lives of those being remembered. Later in November comes Remembrance, strictly a civic event, but one in which the church traditionally has a role to play both nationally and locally.

Next in the church's yearly cycle comes Advent. Aside from Advent calendars, Advent struggles to maintain its distinctiveness in popular culture, as the Christmas season seems to start earlier each year. But I wonder if the church has something to contribute here by emphasising the value of patient waiting in a world that rushes towards indulgence and consumption. And so, finally, to Christmas. Every year the Christingle service on Christmas Eve at St. Mary's is the most well-attended church service in the parish by far. It is perhaps the supreme example of belonging through

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My soul magnifies the Lord!  
All is ready  
Stable prepared  
Shepherds working  
Magi journeying  
Gifts are chosen  
My soul magnifies the Lord!  
A city awaits  
Crowded and bustling  
Stars are shining  
People expecting  
A drama unfolding  
My soul magnifies the Lord!  
The Lord is coming  
To save his people  
Mary's obedience  
Jesus' willingness  
Your gracious gift to us  
My soul magnifies the Lord!



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## Advent and Christmas Services 2024

1 <sup>st</sup> December	9.30a.m	St. Mary's	Advent Sunday Communion
8 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30am	St. John's	Communion
15 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30am 6.00pm	St. Mary's St. Mary's	Nativity Service Carols by candlelight
22 <sup>nd</sup> December	3.00pm	St John's	Service of 9 Lessons and Carols (No morning service)
24 <sup>th</sup> December	2.30pm 4.30pm 9.00pm	St. John's St. Mary's St. John's	Christingle Christingle Christmas Night Communion
25 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30am	St. Mary's	Christmas All Age Communion
29 <sup>th</sup> December	10.30am	St. Peter's & St. Paul's Checkendon	Langtree Team Service

N.B. These dates and times are correct at time of going to print but are subject to change. For up to date service information see our website at <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/422/>. For a weekly update on what's going on at the church, sign up for the Vicar's email – contact James at: [jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com](mailto:jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com)

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### Standing in unity with those living in conflict

In early October hundreds gathered in peace, remembrance and unity for a vigil in Oxford. It was led by Bishop Steven and Imam Monawar Hussain, founder of The Oxford Foundation, as co-chairs of the Oxfordshire Civic, Community and Faith Leaders' Group. Standing in unity, to find a third place, neither for nor against, at the point of conflict.

Despite the rain, almost 250 people gathered to hear prayers and readings from Oxfordshire's diverse communities before a two-minute silence was held, lit by candlelit. Welcoming those who attended, Bishop Steven said: "Our purpose is simply to be together, and to be here. Thank you for being here, for doing something in the face of the helplessness that we all feel, in the face of these terrible events." Louise Gordon, co-vice-president of the Oxford Jewish Congregation, used this prayer: "In sharing our pain we share also our prayer. Praying in our distinctive faith and value systems, languages and voices but with the single message; we pray for peace even as we hold our breath dreading the prospect of more conflict and bloodshed ahead. We reach across the things that could divide us, clasping hands in friendship and clinging to hope."

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Imam Monawar Hussain and Louise Gordon shared some interesting insights as they spoke about why the vigil is important, [listen to their interview online](#). [Oxford vigil for peace, remembrance and unity](#). by Diocese of Oxford ([soundcloud.com](https://www.soundcloud.com))

Bishop Steven referenced his reflection on the vigil and the importance of community cohesion in the House of Lords debate on the conflict in the Middle East. [Bishop Steven speaks in the House of Lords during a debate on the conflict in the Middle East](#). ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com))

### Welcoming Children and Young People

'Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14). From the earliest days of the church, Christians have understood that children and young people are important to God and so they are to be welcomed, cherished and nurtured. In recent years, however, the church nationally has seen a marked decline in the numbers of children and young people attending regularly. This is now something that is being addressed as a high priority and the national church has identified 'doubling the number of children and young active disciples in the Church of England by 2030' as one of six 'bold outcomes' that it is working towards. Here at Whitchurch the parish church seeks to welcome, support and nurture children and young people in several ways. Both St. John's and St. Mary's have areas where children can play or do activities during services and at several times during the year our services are deliberately designed to include all generations from start to finish, for example at Mothering Sunday, Harvest, Christmas and Easter.

Last year the church took over the running of a local baby and toddler group. Tots on the Thames (formerly Tots on the Hill) now meets on Wednesday mornings during term time at the Old Rectory Stables in Whitchurch on Thames.



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In April we launched St. Mary's Youth Club. The Youth Club meets on Friday evenings with a session for school years 6 and 7 (roughly ages 10 – 11) and one for years 8 and 9 (ages 12 – 13). We aim to offer a safe 'third space' (alongside school and home)

where young people can enjoy a range of activities from table football to jewellery making, or simply hang out together. Recently we've also run some fun team games for the older age group and these have gone down very well. We're now regularly seeing upwards of 40 young people across the two sessions. Finally, we have been experimenting for the last few months with 'Outdoor Church', gathering once a month at the Whitchurch Maze on a Sunday at 4.00 pm for 30 minutes or so. This is an opportunity to engage with God as multiple generations, learning both from the Bible and from nature, reflecting for example on trees, leaves, sunlight and, most recently, fungi (yes, really!). As well as being surrounded by God's beautiful creation, being together outdoors in a space where we can move around freely is great for children with energy to burn. Of course, all of this takes time, energy and creativity, which sometimes feels in short supply. Recently one of the young people at youth club asked a leader 'why do you do this?' The answer is simple, and it is where this article began. It is because we believe that children and young people are important to God, and so they matter to us.



Debbie and James Leach

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## The Friends of St Mary's and St John's, Whitchurch

Registered Charity 1168335

The Friends is an independent charity to which we welcome members from all faiths and none.

A reminder that the Friends aim to:-

- Help preserve the heritage of our two historic buildings in this Parish
- Support the use of the churches by the wider community.
- Help bring together people from Whitchurch on Thames-Whitchurch Hill.

Since last writing, The Friends continue to be active in organising events to raise funds for the Charity.

Our Art Café coffee mornings are held at the Old Stables on bi-monthly Saturday mornings and continue to give us a steady stream of funding. We are so grateful to those that regularly support these events.

On Saturday October 12<sup>th</sup>, The Friends and Supporters attended a Musical Evening at St Mary's which was extremely enjoyable and eclectic. We heard the Oxford Fiddle Group give a stunning display of their talents; folk music was played from Scotland, Ireland and England which was evocative and entrancing. We also heard music from America, and some jigs and songs which were captivating and most enjoyable. After the interval, we heard music from a talented group of local musicians which included contemporary songs, some jazz, and music performed by The Hand Bell group,

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## DIARY DATES

The regular service schedule is set out on the back cover and Christmas services on page 8

### NOVEMBER

- Sat 2nd 10.30—12.30 Friends Coffee at Art Café in the Old Stables  
 Sun 3rd 4.00pm Service of Remembering St John's  
 Tues 5th 10.30am-12 noon every week Community Coffee Morning in the Old Stables.  
 Wed 6th 8-9pm weekly Compline Prayer Group on Zoom (see p.16).  
 Thurs 7th 7.30-9pm WOTSING Choir at St John's monthly first Thurs.  
 Sun 10th 9.30 Remembrance Sunday Service at St John's followed by gathering at the War Memorial 10.45 a.m.  
 Thurs 14th 10-11.30am Ladies Bible Study and every 2nd and 4th Thurs

### DECEMBER

- Sat 7th 10.30—12.30 Friends Coffee at Art Café in the Old Stables

### FEBRUARY 2025

- Sat 1st 10.30—12.30 Friends Coffee at Art Café in the Old Stables  
 Copy deadline for the March issue is Wednesday, 5th February.

## 100 YEARS AGO

What was going on in the life of the parish 100 years ago? Here in a new feature is an excerpt from the Whitchurch Parish magazine of December 1924:

### WHITCHURCH DISTRICT NURSING ASSOCIATION

It is with great regret that we have to announce the departure of Nurse Williams from our parish owing to her retirement. She has worked here for the past fifteen years and during all those years has given her time and services most unselfishly and generously for the welfare of our people, not only in her professional capacity which was of the highest possible order, but in personality and advice. She has always stood for high ideals and a strong and Christian way of living. She will be greatly

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the Whitchurch Wallowers. The evening ended with the amazing talent of Derry Pope singing some well-known songs from Broadway and The West End. It was a fabulous evening and made very special by the introductions from our vicar James Leach in the beautiful atmosphere of St Mary's Church and the welcoming and introductory piano playing by Tim Valentine.



Our work of maintenance and clearing in the churchyards continues. Good progress has been made at the church yard of St Mary's whilst at St John's the bramble has grown exponentially with the rain we have experienced this summer. Regular work parties are organised over the year at both church yards and we hope to increase our activity in order to tackle the problem. The next two sessions are scheduled at St John's on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> October and at St Mary's on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> October. Do let Sally Woolhouse at [whitchurchfriends@gmail.com](mailto:whitchurchfriends@gmail.com) know if you are keen to join us for a morning of gardening and being outside with other locals.

We will be planning our future events for the New Year at our next meeting and will keep you posted via the website and on the usual noticeboards.

Paul Witcher decided to step down as Chairman after four years, but will remain as a Trustee. Our sincere thanks go to Paul for all the work that he has done for The Friends as Chairman over that time.

Sarah Dragonetti, Chair, The Friends of St Mary's and St John's.

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missed by all, and not least by the members of our congregation, with whom she was a constant and devout worshipper. In these days of flippant opinion and such disregard of all social and religious responsibilities such a strong character stands out as a real "light" and leaves behind a feeling of loss; but at the same time, while lamenting her absence from our midst, we believe that the effect of such lives is never lost, nor can their influence for good be sufficiently realised. Our earnest wishes for her future happiness go with her.

Our new Nurse, whose name is Nurse Morpheus, comes on the 26<sup>th</sup> of this month (Nov.) to take up her duties. We feel sure that all our people will give her a hearty welcome. A.B. TOMKINS, Hon. Sec.

### INEQE Safeguarding Group independent audit

In June 2024 the Diocese of Oxford underwent an independent audit of its safeguarding work, undertaken by the INEQE Safeguarding Group. It was part of a national programme, commissioned by the Archbishops' Council, to conduct an intensive and comprehensive review of safeguarding at each diocese and cathedral in the Church of England.

The report's authors found the Diocese of Oxford to have 'a solid safeguarding foundation delivered by its exceptionally well-led and blended Safeguarding Team'. The report commended what it described as a 'safeguarding first' philosophy and congratulated our parishes for the sense of optimism it found on the frontline 'where talented Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs) lead by example' and 'collaboration is strong'.

Bishop Steven's response can be seen on youtube He thanks all the trained volunteers, like Jeanette Cabeldu in our own parish, who act as safeguarding officers to ensure good practice to protect vulnerable people in the community. Watch it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7npx39ku10&t=21s>

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### Wednesday Evening Compline Prayer Group at 8pm GMT

In our Compline prayer we practise faithfully the presence of God. We share our prayers and those for the world as a source of divine pleasure. As our hearts and minds return to the word, we are focused upon the love of God. We learn and receive through the Holy Spirit the abundance of God's grace. We are established internationally and ecumenically and it is a thrilling experience to flourish with Christians in other parts of the world as we embrace Jesus with tenderness and joy. Do join us if you can on

ZOOM meeting No 876 0097 2129 at 7.55pm.

Mobile: 07557 383634

Email: [peter@pcfconsultancy.com](mailto:peter@pcfconsultancy.com)

### The Old Stables Meeting Room

The Old Stables Meeting Room is a welcoming, carpeted space in the centre of Whitchurch-on-Thames available for hire by local groups and private event organizers. There are tables and chairs for up to 35 people and a well-equipped kitchen.

Hire fees start at £15 for 2 hours. For more information please contact

Geoff Weir at [OldStablesBookings@btinternet.com](mailto:OldStablesBookings@btinternet.com)

The Old Stables Meeting Room is owned by the Diocese of Oxford and managed by Whitchurch Parochial Church Council.

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THAMES VALE SINGERS  
Present  
**A Christmas Celebration**

Friday 13<sup>th</sup> December  
St Mary's Church, Purley

Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December  
The Barn, Purley

Tickets £12.00, £6.00 under 16s  
On sale from: Tuesday 5 November 2024  
From: 0118 942 4372 or  
email: [tickets@thamesvalesingers.org.uk](mailto:tickets@thamesvalesingers.org.uk) or online  
[www.ticketsource.co.uk/thames-vale-singers](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/thames-vale-singers)  
(booking fee £0.50)

Doors open 7.00pm  
concerts start 7.30pm

[www.thamesvalesingers.org.uk](http://www.thamesvalesingers.org.uk)

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### WOTsing Choir is the community choir for

Whitchurch-on-Thames and Whitchurch Hill, which was formed in 2018. It is not a performing choir and members do not have to be able to read music, to take an audition or even to sing in tune! It is simply for people who enjoy singing. We meet once a month in St John's Church, Whitchurch Hill, but we are not in any sense a church choir. We sing songs from the shows, folk-songs, pop songs, the occasional well-known hymn, but most important is that we enjoy singing, have fun and lots of laughter, and go home feeling happier than when we arrived!

Our current accompanist is Tim Taylor and we always meet on the first Thursday of the month from 7.30 to 9pm.

For more information about the choir, please contact Geraldine on [wotsing2018@gmail.com](mailto:wotsing2018@gmail.com)

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### Officers of the Parish

#### Team Rector:

Revd Canon Kevin Davies, The Rectory, Checkendon, Reading, RG8 0SR.  
01491 680252. [revkevkdavies-langtree@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:revkevkdavies-langtree@yahoo.co.uk)

#### Team Vicar:

Revd James Leach, St Mary's House, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames,  
Reading RG8 7DF. 0118 976 5905. [jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com](mailto:jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com)

#### Churchwardens:

Kenneth Baker, 10 Layton Rise, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 6FQ.  
0118 943 2778. [baker\\_kenneth2@sky.com](mailto:baker_kenneth2@sky.com)

Paul Witcher, Shepherds Close, Hardwick Road, Whitchurch-on-Thames,  
Reading, RG8 7HN. 0118 984 4959. [pwwitcher@aol.co.uk](mailto:pwwitcher@aol.co.uk)

#### Vergers:

Kenneth Baker (contact details above).

#### Honorary Secretary: vacant

#### Electoral Roll Officer:

Rosemary Pearce, Little Eastfield, Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch-on-Thames,  
Reading, RG8 7EJ. 07761 056125. [rosemarypearce@btinternet.com](mailto:rosemarypearce@btinternet.com)

#### Honorary Treasurer:

Peter Dragonetti, Covert Cottage, Hill Bottom, Whitchurch Hill, Reading,  
RG8 7PT. 0118 984 4711. [peter@dragonetti.co.uk](mailto:peter@dragonetti.co.uk)

#### Assistant Treasurer:

Kenneth Baker, 0118 943 2778

#### Organist and Choirmaster: rota

#### Contact for the Bell Ringers:

Kenneth Baker, 0118 943 2778

#### Magazine Editorial Team:

Wendy Ferguson, Rosemary Pearce, Angi Simpson.

Correspondence to [wendyf21@icloud.com](mailto:wendyf21@icloud.com)

Copy deadline for the March issue is Wednesday 5th February 2025.

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