

CORNERSTONE

The Magazine of
WITNEY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH



Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone.
In Him the whole fabric is bound together, as it grows into a temple,
dedicated to the Lord (Ephesians 2:21)



2024

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Doesn't time fly! Nearly half-way through the year already. Over the past months the days have been getting longer, and for me personally, for the better. However, this generally means that because of the increase daylight period we try to fit ever more into what is already a hectic schedule. However, and probably due to climate change, the weather has been more wet than sunny these last couple of weeks, which may have resulted not being able to do what you had planned!!

As you read this the schools have just finished half-term which means that holiday time is nearly with us again, and, even though some cannot bear the heat, the increasing good weather has to be encouraging for most of us. Whatever your circumstances, hopefully it will be a chance for most people to take a break of some kind.

Talking about time, June, of course is the month of the summer solstice, the month of the Sun. *Sol + stice* come from two Latin words meaning 'sun' and 'to stand still'. As the days lengthen, the sun rises higher and higher until it seems to stand still in the sky. The Summer Solstice results in the longest day and the shortest night of the year. The Northern Hemisphere celebrates in June, and the Southern Hemisphere celebrates in December.

I now turn to some of this month's contents: along with the standard contributions, Lesley Barter writes about Here we go again; Tony Houghton gives us a foretaste to a forthcoming Bible Study series, and some articles have been extracted from Parish Pump to name but a few

Many thanks for those who have contributed for this edition, but would encourage anyone

to consider submitting article(s) for the next edition by either:

E-mail: terrypowlesland@uwclub.net

jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net

or, just plainly written on paper, which can be typed up

The next 3-monthly Summer edition, covering June, July & August is due on **Sunday 1st September**

Your Editor



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June, July & August 2024 Diary

Services: 10.30am weekly & 6.00pm on first Sunday of the month

June

1 st	11.00am	Saturday Praise	
2 nd	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	
	pm	Rev Bryan Doyle	Communion
9 th	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	
16 th	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	Communion
23 rd	am	Rev Judi Holloway	
30 th	am	Nanna Blackman	
	3.00pm	Rev Judi Holloway	Madley Park Residential Home

July

6 th	11.00am	Saturday Praise	
7 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway	
	pm	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion
14 th	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	
21 st	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Communion
28 th	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	

Aug

3 rd	11.00am	Saturday Praise	
4 th	am	Mike Thomas – Leprosy Mission	
	pm	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion
11 th	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	
18 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Communion
25 th	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	

Sept

1 st	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	
	pm		
7 th	11.00am	Saturday Praise	
8 th	am		

The following events are given for your particular attention:

June

4 th	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15
5 th	Hi 5's Pizza with visitors	Wednesday 6.00pm
11 th	Chair-based Exercise Class & repeated on 18 th & 25 th	10.45 – 11.45am
29 th	Witney Book Circle	10.30am

July

2 nd	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
5 th	Hi 5s Treasure Hunt	Friday 6.00pm
9 th	Chair-based Exercise Class & repeated on 16 th , 23 rd & 30 th	10.45 – 11.45am
27 th	Witney Book Circle	10.30am
28 th	Church Meeting	12.00 noon

Aug

3 rd	Hi 5s BBQ & Games	Saturday 3.30pm
6 th	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
31 st	Witney Book Circle	

Rotas

WELCOMING TEAM

June	02	Jacqui Powlesland
	09	Janet Hayes
	16	Pat Smith
	23	Lesley Barter
	30	Jean Hodgson
July	07	Jacqui Powlesland
	14	Janet Hayes
	21	Pat Smith
	28	Lesley Barter
Aug	04	Jean Hodgson
	11	Jacqui Powlesland
	18	Janet Hayes
Sept	25	Pat Smith
	01	Lesley Barter
	08	Jean Hodgson



FLOWERS

June	02	Judi Holloway
	09	Rita Hayes
	16	Janet Hayes
	23	Jacqui Powlesland
	30	Judi Holloway
July	07	Rita Hayes
	14	Janet Hayes
	21	Jacqui Powlesland
	28	Judi Holloway
Aug	04	Rita Hayes
	11	Janet Hayes
	18	Jacqui Powlesland
	25	Judi Holloway
Sept	01	Rita Hayes
	08	Janet Hayes



SUNDAY COFFEE

June	02	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
	09	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	16	Jean Hodgson
	23	Elaine Kinchin
	30	Pat Smith
July	07	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
	14	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	21	Jean Hodgson
	28	Elaine Kinchin
Aug	04	Pat Smith
	11	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
	18	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	25	Jean Hodgson
Sept	01	Elaine Kinchin
	08	Pat Smith



THURSDAY COFFEE (10 – 12)

June	06	Pat Smith
	13	Ann Clack
	20	Jean Hodgson
July	27	Elaine Kinchin
	04	Judi Holloway
	11	Ann Clack
Aug	18	Pat Smith
	25	Elaine Kinchin
	01	Jean Hodgson
	08	Ann Clack
	15	Elaine Kinchin
Sept	22	Judi Holloway
	29	Pat Smith
	05	Jean Hodgson
	12	Elaine Kinchin



Nanna Blackman as standby - We would be extremely grateful for other people to join

SOUND SYSTEM

June	02	Terry Powlesland
	09	Tony Houghton
	16	Terry Powlesland
	23	Nanna Blackman
July	30	Tony Houghton
	07	Terry Powlesland
	14	Nanna Blackman
Aug	21	Tony Houghton
	28	Nanna Blackman
	04	Terry Powlesland
	11	Tony Houghton
	18	Nanna Blackman
Sept	25	Tony Houghton
	01	Terry Powlesland
	08	Nanna Blackman



For ALL the Rotas, every effort has been made to meet individual circumstances.
However, if the dates are not convenient for you, please change with someone else

June	09	Glenn Ryan
	14	Norline La Fortune
	16	Sandi Franklin
	24	Janet Park-Pratley
	26	Barbara MacLarty
	30	Jacqui Powlesland



July	05	Bob Blackman
		Lynn Swift
	22	Rosemary Lee
	25	Oscar Stanley
	26	Jennie Garrett
	28	Michael Pratley
	30	Irene St Clair

Aug	02	Janet Hayes
	08	Matt Reifsnider

Sep	01	Theo Howells
	02	Gail King
		Claire Woodward
	03	Bryan Doyle

MINISTER'S LETTER

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I recently attended the Congregational Federation's Assembly in Colchester and was encouraged, inspired, and blessed as the overall atmosphere was positive, with many of the speakers showing enthusiasm for their various ministries, and an expectation of *God doing new things and even a word to encourage us to prepare for revival!*

The new President, Elisabeth Sweeney-Smith, announced her theme for the year, which is *Hear the Word of the Lord*, and she expressed the importance for us to be constantly listening to the Spirit because God is a God of *relationship* and in any loving relationship, communication is essential – God's desire is to communicate to us and for us to *hear and to respond in obedience*. He sometimes answers our prayers in ways we do not expect and calls us to do things that are out of our comfort zone or don't make sense – for example the miracle at the wedding of Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine! Imagine being one of the servers? Maybe you'd have responded like this, *"Seriously, you want me to pour water into the wine jars, what will that achieve?"* It didn't make sense, but the result was truly amazing!!! God's ways are not our ways!

Throughout the Bible, God surprises people through His actions – they are often unpredictable and counter-intuitive, but He knows all things and He knows best. Isaiah 43: 19, *"See, I'm doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."* These were words from God to the Israelites, while they were in captivity, to encourage them not to give up, but to trust Him to carry them out of their captivity and to forgive, bless and restore them.

Sometimes, there doesn't seem to be a way forward when we're feeling despondent and dejected about certain issues, or even life in general. Let's lift our eyes above those earthly challenges and focus our eyes on Jesus and place our trust and hope in Him, our faithful and loving Lord and Saviour.

Let's remember what Jesus said, in the conclusion of each of His letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."* Jesus still speaks to us through the Holy Spirit, today.

Perhaps God is calling us as a church, to change, to do things differently, in what may be a new season with Him. Let's be a praying people, grounded in the Word of God, and attentive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Let us be obedient and ready to act, in accordance with His leading.

As we enjoy Spring and Summer together as a church family, I pray that we will experience *renewing, refreshing and reviving*, as the Holy Spirit breathes on us afresh, and *equips, anoints and inspires us*, and takes us on a journey into new pastures, as we help God to build His kingdom!

Much love and God's richest blessings,

Bryan



PRAYER LETTER No 213

We have been looking at various resources to help us communicate better with God our heavenly Father, Jesus our Saviour and the blessed Holy Spirit. Some help us to begin our daily prayers, others provide a structure, yet others are complete prayers in themselves...or are they?

The following prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr is widely known and quoted, not least because it was adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous! Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) was a theologian and seminary professor in the U.S.A. He often wrote and spoke about where religion, politics and public policy intersected. (If you want to know more, read Wikipedia.)

We have the prayer at home on a plaque in the downstairs loo – you really can talk to God anywhere.

God, grant me the
SERENITY to accept the things I cannot change, the
COURAGE to change the things I can, and the
WISDOM to know the difference.

In just twenty-seven words, Niebuhr encapsulates a good recipe for the Christian life. First that we seek peace – part of the fruit of the Spirit listed by the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22. I cannot count how many people I have listened to and counselled who struggle with things beyond their control – often these are past events that cannot be changed. “If only...” Accept the truth, ask God for the courage to change and rely on his wisdom to understand what is within our remit and what is not.

However, for someone that was not enough. More words were added, no-one is quite sure by whom, but definitely not by Niebuhr.

Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time,
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace;
taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it,
trusting that He will make all things right,
if I surrender to His will,
that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.

These additional words are interesting and bear examination. I don't think the original words hint at the mindfulness advice about living in the moment, rather than planning for the future. I also don't think Jesus took the sinful world as it is – he wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) and instantly went into the temple to turn the tables. He battled constantly over sin wherever he encountered it; he told the adulterous woman to go and sin no more (John 8:11). Jesus warned his disciples that they would experience persecution and hardship (John 16:33) but does that equate with being “reasonably happy”? The only bit of the extra words I can wholeheartedly endorse is being “supremely happy with Him forever”.

Why have I been so critical? Because words express thoughts and both words and thoughts matter. We are too mature to pray: *God I want a new bike* but some modern, adult prayer advice is just as daft!

Prayer is our personal line of communication to God. It needs to be honest, using words we are comfortable with – not jargon unless that is our personal Christian tradition. If we struggle with

praying to God, it is often because we are trying to do it in a way that suits others, but not us. One of my friends prays best on her dog walk – that would never work for me. Another feels closest to God when she is in her greenhouse; again, not my style. We were created in God's image but as individual people. Find your own style and enjoy your chats with God!

Every Blessing, Elaine

Please note that for up-to-date prayer requests contact Elaine 07534 879449)

The following article written by Dr Ruth M Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and Ruth writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith, and is entitled:

Wonders of the Living World

What are the best metaphors we could use to describe biological things? You might be used to hearing phrases like 'your genetic blueprint' or 'survival of the fittest', but are they helpful or even accurate? Some of these words fail to capture the wonder and joy of understanding something new about the nature of living organisms.

I learned that one researcher was using the phrase 'The Snuggle for Existence' as a way to convey the idea, familiar to biologists, that cooperation is at the heart of the living world. For example, every cell more complex than a bacterium contains minute energy factories, each one containing their own piece of DNA – which makes them a sort of miniature cell, hidden away inside the larger host cell. These 'mitochondria', as biologists call them, turn raw materials from the host into chemical energy. In this way, everyone benefits: the mitochondria now have a safe a place to live, and the host receives the energy it needs. There are many more examples of organisms working together to produce something that is more than the sum of its parts, where often the individual

parts could not survive on their own.

'The Map of Life' is a way of describing the regularities we see in biological processes. Eyes, legs and wings have emerged in the living world again and again, and why not? If the properties of light and gravity remain constant, we should expect living things to find the same solutions to seeing or getting around. When we look at these organisms' family trees, we see they share a common ancestor that had no eyes, or no wings. These structures have developed completely independently, or you could say that the paths of the living world have converged on the same solution. That's not to say they had a conscious goal, but that the world has certain properties, and those properties have channelled biological processes in certain directions.

None of these stories give us definite evidence for God. Science simply provides data, which can often be interpreted in several different ways. Perhaps the world just happens to be full of mathematical regularities, maybe there's an overarching physical law we don't yet understand, or perhaps there are multiple universes and ours happens to be the one in which life has arisen. But I believe that the observations scientists make about the living world are compatible with the existence of the God described by Christian faith.

More at wondersofthelivingworld.org.

The following article has been written & submitted by Tony Houghton, and is entitled:

Exodus 3: Burning bush

In view of our forthcoming Bible studies in July here is a study for you to do in your own time – enjoy and be challenged.

a) Take away message

Who me?

b) Passage

Exodus 3: 1-14 + Ex 4:1 & 10

c) Self reflection – ice breaker

What outdoor fires have you been around? Campfire? Garden waste fire? November 5th bonfire? In any of these situations was the fire still burning the next morning, or at least glowing? What had happened to the wood/waste stuff on the fire by the next morning? How does that compare with our Bible story?

d) General knowledge

The bible says that the events of Ex 3 occur on Mt Horeb. Find out what 'Horeb' is thought to mean. How does that relate to our theme?

e) Some questions

- i) What was Moses' life like back in Egypt before? How does that compare with his life now as a humble shepherd? (v1) How long had he been shepherding until he was called to serve God in a new and demanding way? Compare Ex7:7 with Acts 7:23
- ii) How did God attract Moses' attention? (v2). How does God attract our attention when he wants us to do something?
- iii) What made the ground holy? (v5) How did that render the dialogue between God and Moses more significant?
- iv) Has God heard the cries of those suffering or constrained that we are led to help? (v7) Has God seen the oppression of circumstances? (v9)
- v) What cultural understanding did Moses have to visit Pharaoh? (v10) (Language, customs, dress, procedures) What does that teach us about our approach to people from different nations in our town?
- vi) Why did Moses feel God had got the wrong person for the task? (v11). What other excuses later on did Moses give? (check out Ex 4:1 and 4:10). How does that compare with our sense of inadequacy for what God asks us to do?
- vii) What assurance did God give to Moses about his new job? (v14) Is God with us in all we are called to do in our community and church?
- viii) How many people were helped by one man's response to God's call from a flame in a bush? (check Ex 12:37)

f) Other brief passages

- i) Jer 1:4-8 – What was the excuse of Jeremiah to try and reject the calling God gave him?
- ii) Acts 8: 26-29 – What caused Philip to leave off his previous work and go south? Compare this to what God is asking you to do for your neighbours.

g) Activity

Light a candle. Take off your shoes. Focus on listening to God about Whitney.

The following article has been written & submitted by Lesley Barter, and is entitled:

Here we go again -

And so it begins....weeks of empty promises, haranguing the opposition, advocating change without the money to carry it out. Yes, it's the General Election. As my Indian friends would say 'same, same. But different, It is sometimes difficult to see where Christian ethics fit into all this. Do they even have a place in today's world where consumerism is king and business is what makes the world go around. Money is actually what governs.

And yet, and yet.....on Sundays recently we have been following the origins of Christianity with our young people. Beginning with Christ's resurrection, through his appearances to the Disciples, his Ascension and finally Pentecost. Once again I am filled with amazement that a group of mostly uneducated people managed to develop a movement that has spread across the world. That is truly a miracle and despite all the odds it is still very much alive today – not so much in the privileged west but palpably in poorer parts of the world where it is the doctrine of hope that people long for. All this is made possible by the Holy Spirit, of course and the good news is that we only need to activate it here to truly change the world. Now that would be an election promise to really make a difference.

As previously stated in various editions, the Church has been subscribing to Parish Pump for many, many years and as Ken Lee's Bible Study and Pip Cartwright's History of WCC has come to an end, the following articles have been extracted from Parish Pump:

Tony Horsfall, a retreat leader and author recommends a different type of prayer....

Using Rest to Pray

Most of us think of prayer as a very demanding activity, but did you know it can be extremely restful?

One of the great verses in the Bible says this: 'Be still and know that I am God' (Psalm 46:10). It suggests we experience God most fully when we are still. When we cease rushing around, pausing for a moment of thought and recollection, we are becoming prayerful, and God is very near. Even a break for a morning coffee can be a moment of prayer, if we slow ourselves down and allow our thoughts to turn towards God.

An essential part of resting is to breathe slowly. Christian tradition has always made a connection between prayer and breathing. You can learn to pray to the rhythm of your breathing, using chosen prayer words to focus. As you breathe in, you might say 'Abba', and then as you breathe out, add the word 'Father'. Choose words which are meaningful to you, deliberately slowing your breathing so you become relaxed and peaceful.

Perhaps you have a favourite chair where you are able to unwind easily. For a few moments sit and do nothing. Simply become aware of the present moment, reminding yourself you are in the presence of God. As you feel yourself relax, bask in the knowledge of God's love and acceptance of you. Sense His smile of approval upon you. You don't have to do anything, just 'be' for a moment. This too is prayer.

Sometimes we are forced to rest by circumstances... illness, disability, growing older and so on slow us down and we can't rush around like we used to do. Never mind. Don't fight against your circumstances. Enter into the place of rest that God is giving you. He loves you for who you are, not for what you do. Turn your thoughts into prayer and offer them to God. You don't need to advise God as to what He should do; simply hold

people before Him, leaving the outcome to Him.

Prayer should be a natural expression of our relationship with God. Sometimes we have words, sometimes silence is enough. We don't need to impress God with our fervour. We can relax and be rested, even as we pray.

Revd Dr Jo White considers the history of our village churches

Reflecting Faith: The Church and politics (with a small'p')

When you drive in the English countryside you should be able to see at least one church spire or tower from pretty much anywhere. Just about every village has its own church building.

The size and grandeur of these village churches varies greatly, and was usually dependent on who paid for them in the first place!

In the main they were built with money from the local 'Lord of the Manor' – not necessarily a 'Lord' in the titled sense, but the person who owned the majority of the land and properties. Most people would work for him and live in a house provided by him. The two went together. Often, in order to keep their job and home, they were expected to attend 'the Lord's' church.

Many such churches were constructed at a time when people assumed that the more money you gave to the church, the greater would be your place in heaven. Hence the ostentatiousness in many a small village church!

By the early 1800s society had begun to change shape rapidly. The Napoleonic Wars which had been raging in Europe for many years were concluded at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. There were new processes being discovered and invented which meant

changes in working practices: the 'Industrial Revolution' was well under-way.

'Society' itself began to change with industrialisation bringing working folk into towns and away from the places, people, family members and authority figures to whom they had deferred all their lives. Politicians and Society leaders were becoming concerned that the political unrest still taking place on the continent might catch on here.

This month: Have a look at a town church or a city church this month. See if you can find out anything about its history. Was there any reason for it being built where it is that reflects faith?

Lester Amann considers the work of King Hezekiah

Tunnels

Of all the remarkable engineering projects in the world, one is surely the Channel Tunnel. This undersea railway subway is the longest in the world and connects Kent, England with Calais, France. It is over 31 miles (50.46 km) long and was opened just over 30 years ago, in May 1994.

After six years of construction, this massive enterprise created three tunnels, running parallel to each other. Trains go through two large tunnels with a smaller service tunnel for ventilation and access. Every day, about 500 trains go through the tunnels carrying passengers, cars, lorries and coaches.

The Bible tells us of another amazing tunnelling project. King Hezekiah wanted to fortify the city of Jerusalem against the invading Assyrian armies and needed to protect the water supply. Using simple hand tools, and digging through solid rock, the completed tunnel was 1,750 feet long (533 m)! It still exists today and tourists with torches can shuffle along the cold, wet and

narrow passageway from one end to the other.

Close to the tunnel is an original written inscription which describes how the tunnel was excavated. Two teams, one starting at each end of the curving channel met in the middle. Apparently, their direction was guided by men listening to hammering sounds as they gouged through the rock.

King Hezekiah's tunnel was indeed an incredible engineering feat and accomplished without modern machines and sophisticated technology. His vision and careful planning saved the people from their enemy. (2 Kings 20:20)

At the end of his eventful life, a eulogy was written that *King Hezekiah did what was right and what was pleasing to the Lord his God. His accomplishments were done in a spirit of complete loyalty and devotion to his God.*

We may well ask, when our time draws to a close, if such a fitting tribute will be given to us.

Tim Lenton considers:

The D-Day Normandy Landings

Eighty years ago, on 6th June 1944, the D-Day Normandy Landings took place. More than 150,000 Allied troops landed on the beaches of Normandy. The Battle of Normandy ended on 25th August with an Allied victory.

The question of what the *D* stood for has never been absolutely determined: some say it just stood for Day; others maintain it was Disembarkation, because it was an amphibious operation. What is sure is that there was a spiritual dimension. General Eisenhower, the commander of Operation Overlord, urged those taking part to "beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking", and

President Roosevelt broadcast a prayer to the nation – the United States, that is.

Before June 5 – the original date for D-Day, before bad weather forced a rethink – a massive and successful series of deceptions were put in place to make the Nazis think the invasion would come elsewhere. The Germans were certainly confused. Hitler, thinking the attack was a feint, refused to send reinforcements, and their strategy was hampered by the absence of their brilliant Commander Erwin Rommel, who was on leave.

Nevertheless, the Americans suffered over 2,000 casualties at Omaha Beach, which was the most heavily defended. Altogether it was reckoned that over 4000 Allied troops were killed, but about 156,000 successfully stormed the beaches, and many landed behind the lines, including American paratrooper Private John Steele, who descended on to the pinnacle of the church tower in Sainte-Mère-Église, the first village to be liberated by the U S Army. Lit up by searchlights, he survived by pretending to be dead, was captured and then escaped, joining the invading soldiers.

This year handmade silhouettes of almost 1,500 servicemen were transported to Normandy for an art installation, *Standing with Giants*, to mark the anniversary.

Canon Paul Hardingham considers the similarities between faith and sport.

The Euros 24

A former Liverpool Manager Bill Shankly famously said, *'Some people believe football is a matter of life and death, I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that!'*

This month sees the start of the UEFA Euro 24 football tournament, which will be watched by millions across Europe and the

world. Yet it also illustrates some key points about the Christian life. As Paul writes: *'But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.'* (Philippians 3:13b,14).

A prize to be won: The dream of every player in the competition is to be able to hold up the Cup themselves. For us the prize is the eternal life, God's gift of relationship with Him for now and eternity through Jesus. But there's an important difference between football and the Christian faith. To win the Euros you have to be good enough, while Christ's love for us is undeserved and is not dependent on how well we've done.

Training to be undertaken: If a team is going to win Euro 24, they need to have trained hard beforehand. Our training, as Christians, starts the moment we accept the gift of God's life. On a daily basis, we must train ourselves to say *no* to the wrong things in our lives.

As we build up our *godly muscles*, we are better able to choose to do what is right in God's eyes. To enable us to do all this we need to engage in the spiritual disciplines of prayer, studying the Bible and being part of a church and small group. How is your training going?

Chaplains keep faith in football

Chaplains are playing a vital role in the Premier League and other leagues across the UK.

Currently 11 English Premier League clubs and 55 Football League clubs have chaplains, with some clubs having more than one. There are also chaplains throughout the National League and in lower league clubs. The growth in women's football has led to more chaplains being appointed to serve women's teams.

Matt Baker is National Director for England overseeing all of English Sport for Sports Chaplaincy UK. He combines the role with being chaplain at London's Charlton Athletic, a position he has held since March 2000.

He explains: "The role of the chaplain is to be pastorally proactive and spiritually reactive. This means being regularly present, listening and supporting people whether they have a faith or not.

"From a spiritual perspective an example of this was when a player asked me 15 years ago whether I would pray with him before a game. On the first occasion there were a couple of players and we prayed together before every game for the rest of that season.

"This has continued ever since as there always seem to be Christian players in the squad and so pre-match prayers before a home game have become a part of the regular routine for those wanting it. When we have had players of other faiths a room has also been made available for prayers for them as well."

Matt loves his role. He tells me: "I'm a people person so I love being around staff and players, getting to know them, listening and helping to support wherever I can. It's a tremendous privilege to be a chaplain at a football club and I never take that lightly."

Many churches have local football and other sporting clubs on their doorsteps and may want to see if a chaplaincy might be possible. What would Matt's advice be to Christians wanting to make the connection?

He tells me, "Get in touch with us at Sports Chaplaincy UK. Depending on an individual's location and sport we can advise on any vacancies we are aware of, guide them through any openings and offer the relevant sports chaplaincy training and support."

The heavens are telling
the glory of God
and the firmament
proclaims his handiwork



Psalm 19: 1