

# 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)

**February & March 2024**

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This is the first edition of the magazine for 2024, and this time last year, even though we had world events and the UK unions and political issues, I hoped it would be a good year. However, a year has passed by and the scenario is much worse especially Russia and the Ukraine, in Israel and Palestine, in Yemen and so many troubled places of the world; and therefore, we must pray for the leaders of the nations, that they would be wise, just and compassionate as they exercise their authority.

Once again, and as stated in previous editions, I hope this edition of the magazine will keep reminding you that you are not forgotten; may God bless us for He alone is our refuge and strength when times get tough. May we continue to do our work for Him in the grace which He alone can provide.



I now turn to some of this month's contents: along with the standard contributions, Pip Cartwright gives us the final resume of history of WCC; Lesley Barter writes about some moral questions concerning death; Tony Houghton gives us an article on sustainability in development and some articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, to name but a few

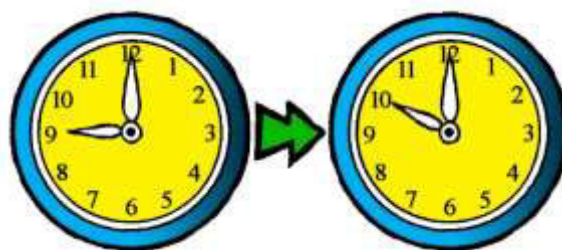
Many thanks for those who have contributed for this edition, but would encourage anyone to consider submitting article(s) for the next edition by either:

E-mail: [terrypowlesland@uwclub.net](mailto:terrypowlesland@uwclub.net)  
[jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net](mailto:jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net)

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

The next 2-monthly edition, covering April & May 2024 is due on **Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> April**

Your Editor



**BST starts on 31<sup>st</sup> March**

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# February & March 2024 Diary

## February

3 <sup>rd</sup>	11.00am	Saturday Praise	
4 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	
	pm	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion
11 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	
18 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Communion
25 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	

## March

2 <sup>nd</sup>	11.00am	Saturday Praise	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin	
	pm	Nanna Blackman	Communion
10 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	
17 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Communion
24 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	
	12.00	Church Meeting	
28 <sup>th</sup>	pm	Rev Bryan Doyle	Maundy Supper 6.15 for 6.30pm
29 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Good Friday
31 <sup>st</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	Easter Sunday
	3.00pm	Rev Bryan Doyle	Madley Park Residential Home

## April

6 <sup>th</sup>	11.00am	Saturday Praise	
7 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway	
	pm	Rev Judi Holloway	Communion

The following events are given for your particular attention:

## February

1 <sup>st</sup>	Safe Place and repeated on 8 <sup>th</sup> ; 15 <sup>th</sup> ; 22 <sup>nd</sup> & 29 <sup>th</sup>	12.00 – 2.00pm
5 <sup>th</sup>	Hi 5's Crafts for Valentines	6.00pm
6 <sup>th</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
13 <sup>th</sup>	Chair-based Exercise Class & repeated on 20 <sup>th</sup> & 27 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 – 11.45am

## March

5 <sup>th</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
	Hi 5's It's a Surprise	6.00pm
7 <sup>th</sup>	Safe Place and repeated on 14 <sup>th</sup> ; 21 <sup>st</sup> & 28 <sup>th</sup>	12.00 – 2.00pm
12 <sup>th</sup>	Chair-based Exercise Class & repeated on 19 <sup>th</sup> & 26 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 – 11.45am

## April

5 <sup>th</sup>	Hi 5's Film Night	6.00pm
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## Rotas

### WELCOMING TEAM

<b>February</b>	04	Pat Smith
	11	Lesley Barter
	18	Janet Hayes
	25	Jean Hodgson
<b>March</b>	03	Lesley Barter
	10	Jacqui Powlesland
	17	Pat Smith
	24	Janet Hayes
	31	Jacqui Powlesland
<b>April</b>	07	Jean Hodgson



## FLOWERS

<b>February</b>	04	Judi Holloway
	11	Rita Hayes
	18	Janet Hayes
	25	Jacqui Powlesland
<b>March</b>	03	Judi Holloway
	10	Rita Hayes
	17	Janet Hayes
	24	Jacqui Powlesland
	31	Easter
<b>April</b>	07	Judi Holloway



## SUNDAY COFFEE

<b>February</b>	04	Elaine Kinchin & Heather Houghton
	11	Pat Smith
	18	Jean Hodgson & Ann Clack
	25	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
<b>March</b>	03	Pat Smith
	10	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
	17	Elaine Kinchin & Heather Houghton
	24	Jean Hodgson & Ann Clack
<b>April</b>	31	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	07	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward



## THURSDAY COFFEE

**(10 – 12)**

**Soup Lunch (12 – 2)**

<b>February</b>	08	Ann Clack	See Rota in kitchen
	15	Jean Hodgson	
	22	Pat Smith	
	29	Judi Holloway	
<b>March</b>	07	David Kinchin	
	14	Ann Clack	
	21	Jean Hodgson	
	28	Pat Smith	
<b>April</b>	04	Judi Holloway	
	11	David Kinchin	



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

## SOUND SYSTEM

<b>February</b>	04	Terry Powlesland
	11	Nanna Blackman
	18	Tony Houghton
	25	Terry Powlesland
<b>March</b>	03	Tony Houghton
	10	Nanna Blackman
	17	Terry Powlesland
	24	Tony Houghton
	31	Nanna Blackman
<b>April</b>	07	Terry Powlesland
	14	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

**Feb** 04 Elaine Beechey  
08 Pat Brent  
13 Judi Holloway  
16 Leah Cotton  
22 Dave Wesson  
24 Marian Kew



**Mar** 08 Joan Currie  
11 Lesley Barter  
17 Willow Birdseye-Hartshorn  
22 Peter Sellman  
28 Wendell La Fortune  
30 Sue de Fraine

**Apr** 07 Hazel Woodward

Witney Congregational Church



## LITE BITE

and a piece of the Word



**1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of the Month**  
**12.15pm – 1.30pm**

In the lounge at  
Witney Congregational Church

A friendly informal light lunch  
Share friendship, conversation,  
food and explore  
a short passage of the Bible  
all sat round one table



## Minister's Letter

*Greetings, in the Name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.*

*Have you had a good start to 2024? Over and above the mundane day to day activities, perhaps you have been preoccupied, even overwhelmed with what is happening in our nation and around the world.*

*My prayer is that this letter will be a source of encouragement to look forward to living a life confident in Christ, as you are reminded of the hope, we have in Him.*

*Let's engage our God-given imaginations. Picture a collage containing four scenes, namely:*

*The birth of Jesus conveyed through a manger scene*

*Jesus on the cross, conveying the truth that He died for all our sins*

*The empty cross and the empty tomb point to Jesus' resurrection*

*And finally, a picture of the Holy Spirit and Jesus living in our hearts – the amazing truth that God is ever-present by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.*

*The heading above the collage is*

**OUR LIVING HOPE!!!**

*Are we living hope-filled lives, even during these testing times?*

*Christmas has passed, when we celebrated the birth of the **Saviour of the World, Jesus Christ**, and it's easy for us to forget its significance. It's a time of HOPE. The world was enslaved to sin, it was a dark place but then came the **Light of the World, Jesus Christ**, and shone His life-giving light – whereas all lived in darkness and hopelessness, His birth ushered in light and hope.*

*Easter is fast approaching, when we'll remember firstly, the crucifix and its portrayal of Jesus dying for the sins of the world, and secondly the empty cross, and the empty tomb, which reveals that Jesus is no longer on the cross or in the tomb but has risen from the dead.*

*Through Jesus' self-sacrificial death on the cross, we have hope, because He has conquered sin and we can live, with Him, in victory over sin – no longer slaves to sin! **By His resurrection, He has conquered death and offers us eternal life, with Him.** Those two images ought to bring hope to us – hope of a new life here on earth, free from slavery to sin and free to walk in the power of Christ, and hope of eternal life with God, in a place where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain!*

*Our hope in God should be further bolstered as we move on to Pentecost. **God, in His love and grace, sent the Holy Spirit to live in us and to share our lives with us** – what an incredible blessing and expression of God's love for us!*

***1 Peter 1:3-5**, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."*

*Let's live every day as hope-filled people, who not only place their faith and hope in Jesus Christ and lovingly follow and serve Him, but also live our lives remembering all that He has done for us and looking forward, with anticipation, for what He's going to do in the future.*

**HE'S GOT THE WHOLE WORLD IN HIS HANDS**

**and**

**HE IS OUR LIVING HOPE!**

*Much love and God's richest blessings,*

*Your brother in Christ - Bryan*



## PRAYER LETTER No 211

Over the last few issues of Cornerstone, I have looked at various resources which might help us to develop our relationship with God through prayer. This is because, although communicating with God comes easily to some people, I know that we also struggle some or even most of the time. When dark times hit, some of us run to God and some of us think the darkness hides God...but he is always there, no matter what this world throws at us.

I have mentioned that I often use a 24-7 prayer resource called Lectio365. A while ago Lectio365 focussed on a book by Brian Heasley called Be Still. In the foreword a John Maxwell quotation is included: You will never change your life until you change something you do daily. The secret of your success is found in your daily routine.

Heasley says first we must encounter God – just as Adam and Eve met with God in the Garden of Eden. Unfortunately, we only read of their regular meetings at a grim time but: Genesis 3:8a They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze. Heasley asks: Where is our garden? And reminds us to chat with God when life is good or busy as well as at a time of crisis.

Even with the best of intentions, we get distracted. The best advice I was given about being distracted is to have a notebook to hand – if the thought buy eggs drifts into my mind, I write it down and come back to focus on God.

Use Scripture as a basis – the Bible is full of God and people communicating, either well or badly. Read: a psalm; a few Gospel verses; some of Paul's advice to the young churches – basically open that Book and read! This links in to Heasley's next advice: memorize and meditate. This is time for me to confess: I know very few Bible verses off by heart – I am just not a rote learner. But if it works for you – use it.

Jesus told stories – use your imagination. Perhaps be inspired by the work of artists, or just let your mind imagine: how happy your friend will look when her leg is healed; how peaceful it would be in Gaza if the war ceased NOW...

Church meeting highlighted a few points about the Prayer Chain. Treat the messages that arrive as having been read by everyone – no acknowledgements or pledges to pray are necessary. However, I would love to see more prayers shared among us. I could post nearly every day but what are YOU praying about? Our prayer chain is not just for requests for our friends and relatives – although they are important. World events, local issues, weather problems – is it YOUR role to remind us of these?

Every Blessing, Elaine

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

## Witney Congregational Church History Resume

The following article, written & submitted by Pip Cartwright, was correct when first published in July 2006, and corrections have been made and brought up to date since then, and this resume is the last in the series:

Foundation in 1662 when 23 Ministers were ejected from Parish Churches of Oxfordshire for refusing to accept the newly imposed Prayer Book. The Witney Minister was ejected from St Mary's.

Moved to Cogges – assumed ejected from there, because in 1672 Francis Hubert M.A. (who had been imprisoned for his faith) obtained a licence to preach at his house in Staple Hall, Witney. In those days they were called Independents. The Church flourished

1712: Chapel built in Marlborough Lane (then called Meeting House Lane) – now used by the Scouts, Cubs. Congregations of 400-500 attended. Therefore, needed larger place of worship.

1826: William Townsend (a native of Witney) was one of the principal benefactors – offered to buy land along High Street and build a bigger Independent Chapel. Foundation Stone laid on March 4<sup>th</sup> 1828 by Miss Townsend. Opening Service held on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1828 – (Rev Tozer?)

1970: Due to falling membership and overwhelming costs of upkeep and repair, the Church Meeting under the Minister Rev Clementine Gordon B.D. decided to leave the building and leave the site for development (part of Gateway site but now the Co-op). The Church moved to worship at St Mary's Close on Church Green, Witney (The Dining Room) which had been purchased by Rev C M Gordon for herself and her mother. Last Service

held at High Street, April 19<sup>th</sup> 1970.

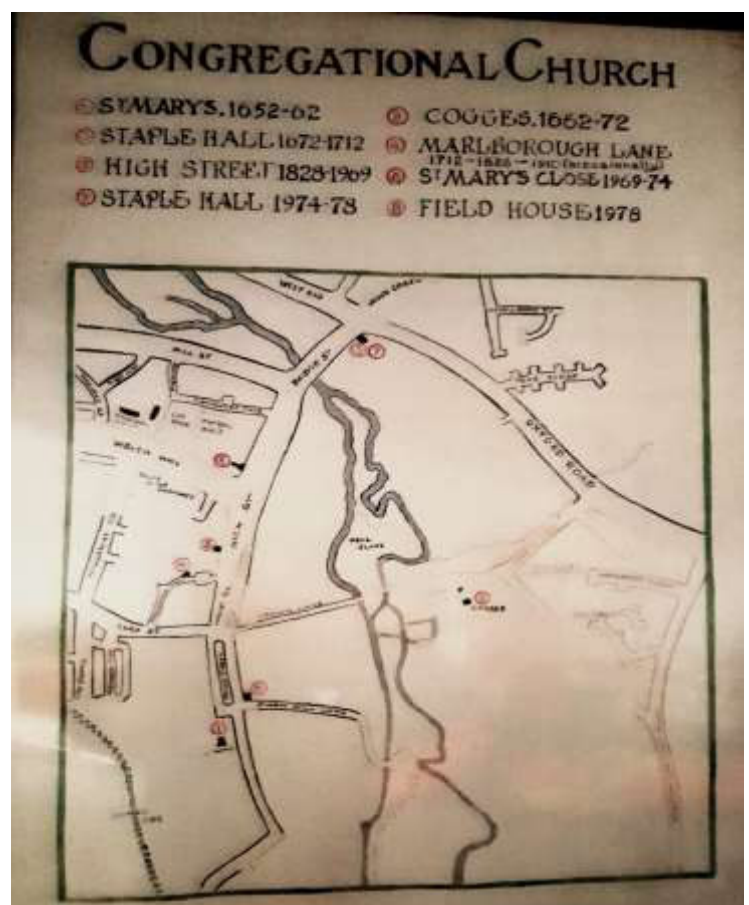
1972: 'United Reform' Scheme to join Congregational Church, Presbyterians – Church elected to remain Congregational

1974: Moved to Staple Hall (Bridge Street, Witney). Membership grew.

1978: Moved to Field House, High Street. Dedication Service held in April 1978. Minister elect Rev R A Henry was ordained and inducted 29<sup>th</sup> September 1979 (left January 1988).

1990: Ordination and Induction of Rev Michael Heaney - September 1<sup>st</sup> 1990. Building and dedication of our new Church 1993.

2024: To bring us up to date, and as can be seen above, the building of our current church started in 1993 and was dedicated on Saturday 22nd October 1994 – so this year will be our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary





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

## **Towards sustainability in development – Project Possible**

For over 20 years I have been involved with Heather in a small Christian international development charity called Project Possible (previously Rope). Through a network of partners we seek to help overlooked communities to find a way out from their poverty and deprivation with programmes embracing education, local income generation, community development and access to health care.

In the last 2-3 years we have been working hard to encourage our partners to become self-sustainable over a period of time: moving away from a culture of dependency on external overseas aid with all its associated inequality of relationships and distortions that follow.

I was very encouraged to learn of an example of our new approach in India.

The Asha Kiran Society (AKS) runs a Lingual Educational, (MLE) programme in remote villages in Lamtaput, India. Children learn to read and write in their mother-tongue before going on to learn the state language of Odisha which is taught in schools. This eases the children's entry to education and sees many disadvantaged children in the area completing primary school and progressing to secondary school.

This programme has worked closely with the community from the start by training young people from the villages to teach in the programme and requiring that each MLE centre is supported by a Village Education Committee. Parents were expected to contribute a small fee to support their child's participation and sometimes got involved in building the centre in the village.

However, it took some time for parents in the village to trust the project since for years the language barrier had locked their children out of education.

Project Possible has the funding of the multi-lingual education programme in 16 villages for 14 years. As a result of this work, amazing changes in perceptions towards education have come about within the communities.

Now AKS and Project Possible are working on a new project to build greater community participation and ownership. The road to sustainability with AKS has covered the costs of a Community Organiser who is facilitating the process for each of the Village Education Committees to come together in practical ways to support the MLE programme in their village in the long-term.

**We thank you for the support. Now it is our responsibility."** VEC Member, Hanurnal village



They have begun working on projects together. Some groups have bought and sold cashew nuts, others have given their time to work for the government on local roads and donated the income to the MLE programme. The committees have opened bank accounts and make decisions together about how to use the funds to support the MLE programme or to invest in making more funds.

The aim is to see AKS gradually phase out their direct delivery of the project with each

village reaching the point of taking full responsibility to sustain their own community education centres.

Project Possible currently has about 30 projects in a dozen countries:

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

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

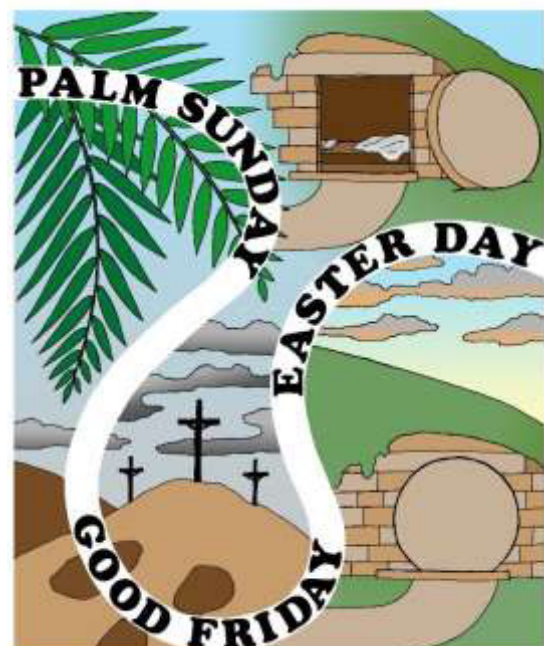
## **Death: Some Moral Questions**

Death has been a hot news topic recently and not just because so much of the world seems to be engulfed in war and violence. The euthanasia lobby has gained new momentum because of vocal support from Esther Rantzen, advocate for a dignified death. A prisoner who has been on Death Row since the 1980s was finally executed in America last week, having survived a previous attempt to put him to death. This alongside the longstanding Pro-life movement, trumpeting the right for all human organisms to survive no matter how conceived or damaged. In this country we have recently seen a triple murderer sentenced to hospital incarceration rather than prison because of severe mental illness. Isn't it the case that all psychopathic murderers are suffering from mental illness – why then are many of them in prison? Finally, there is the increasing cult of knife crime which has seen the death of too many people of all ages on our streets lately. Surely few of the perpetrators can be mentally stable?

As practising Christians, what should be our stance regarding these difficult questions? The Bible offers no unequivocal answers. Or does it? If we look to the Old Testament, we see plenty of death and destruction – some of it apparently at the behest of God Himself. The land of Canaan was promised

to the Israelites without any mention of partition. Is it right then to drive everyone else out in today's world? Is it acceptable to punish heinous crime with death? It appears to have God's blessing in the Old Testament.

Thank goodness for the New Testament. In it we hear of a New Covenant. We have the role model of God's own son to help us in our attitudes. His response was uncompromising. It was always Love. Surely, he would not condone taking another human life under any circumstances? Surely, he wouldn't believe that war would solve any problems. The difficulties of abortion and euthanasia are trickier. They are not so clear cut for most of us. There should certainly be more public debate and it should include a Christian standpoint – perhaps it should also include other religions practised in the UK, although we Christians seem to be uniquely reluctant to air our beliefs publicly. We are left to wrestle with the question of morality on our own, and morals change with time and religious beliefs. After all, there was a time when we believed in burning people with radical Christian views at the stake. Mercifully we gave that up.



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:

## **Celebrating the now and future Creation**

I find that watching buds swelling on trees and plants during the winter months gives me a tremendous sense of hope. After creation's winter shutdown, the sight of tiny flowers poking out of brown earth may be more important than ever.

Getting outdoors during daylight hours, enjoying green spaces and getting some fresh air and exercise are great ways to keep ourselves healthy at any time of year. A psychologist colleague wrote, "Attending to the details of nature can also inspire awe, which has been linked to positive mood and increased life satisfaction." I expect it is this sense of awe that makes it easier for many of us to connect with God outdoors.

Helping ourselves and others to thrive is a good start to 2024, but it is also vital to have hope for the future. In the face of climate change, we urgently need to care for all of Creation, both human and everything else, with God's help.

Our ultimate hope is in God's promise that He will bring about a new heaven and a new earth. We can look forward to the day when Creation will be fully redeemed and liberated from evil. The Greek word used to describe the new creation is the same as that used to describe someone who becomes a Christian, whose humanity is restored and renewed. There will be continuity between the old and new earth as it is cleansed and purified, surpassing and perfecting what has gone

before. There will also be some discontinuity, as there will be no more suffering or death.

So, one source of hope for 2024 is that we can enjoy both caring for and meeting God in Creation. But the parts of Creation that we find most beautiful, giving us a sense of awe and helping us to worship, are also a reminder that there is something much better to come.

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The following article written by the Rev Dr Gary Bowness, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and considers the aim of Lent and is entitled:

## **Life on a spin**

Many years ago, at the Pleasure Beach at Blackpool, there was a certain 'ride' or amusement that was strictly for the physically fit. It consisted of a flat wooden disc about 20 feet in diameter and set at an angle of 45 degrees in the floor. When it began to rotate, the aim was to get to the centre where there was a pole. As the disc rotated faster and faster, everyone who failed to get to the pole got flung off. Nowadays there's probably a European Community regulation banning it as far too dangerous!

The principle of the game was a basic law of physics. When any wheel rotates, the outer rim moves fastest of all. Half way to the centre and you are moving a lot more slowly. And, at least theoretically, at the absolute centre will be a point which is totally still. That's why anyone who reached that pole could stand there quite comfortably.

We will shortly be coming to the Church's season of Lent. It's generally thought of as being a time for giving up chocolate, wine, whatever. But it's really a time to remind us that in our own rapidly spinning world, God is the still centre.

All around God is motion, sound, change and decay – galaxies circling, seasons and years

rotating, life developing and decaying. And at the still centre, where there is no variableness, is God, the same yesterday, today and forever.

Only about seven weeks ago Christians worldwide were thinking of God getting involved in a special way in the ever moving and changing life of the world. And one great characteristic of Jesus was His stillness. Busy, harassed, injured people found someone with neither clever chat nor idle gossip, neither vulgar boasting nor loud opinion. His life always seemed to rotate round a still central point, which gave Him balance and authority.

“Be still then and know that I am God” wrote the Psalmist. Lent is a time for us to try and do just that – to find the still centre of God in our own individual lives.

Of course, we’re all of us very much in the world, and must live our lives in all of its busyness. But it may do none of us any harm to be a little more silent than we often are – quick to listen and slow to speak. And the more silent spaces we give ourselves, the more we’ll give that still, small voice within each one of us the chance to be heard.

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The next two items, author unknown, has been extracted from Parish Pump:

### **13st February: Shrove Tuesday, Pancake Day**

Ever wonder why we eat pancakes just before Lent? The tradition dates back to Anglo-Saxon times, when Christians spent Lent in repentance and severe fasting.

So on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, the church bell would summon them to confession, where they would be ‘shriven’, or absolved from their sins, which gives us Shrove Tuesday. At home, they would then eat up their last eggs and fat, and making a pancake was the easiest way to

do this. For the next 47 days, they pretty well starved themselves.

Pancakes feature in cookery books as far back as 1439, and today’s pancake races are in remembrance of a panicked woman back in 1445 in Olney, Buckinghamshire. She was making pancakes when she heard the shiving bell calling her to confession. Afraid she’d be late, she ran to the church in a panic, still in her apron, and still holding the pan.

Flipping pancakes is also centuries old. A poem from Pasquil’s Palin in 1619 runs: “And every man and maide doe take their turne, And tosse their Pancakes up for feare they burne.”

Some people have noted that the ingredients of pancakes can be used to highlight four significant things about this time of year: eggs stand for creation, flour is the staff of life, while salt keeps things wholesome, and milk stands for purity.

Shrove Tuesday is always 47 days before Easter Sunday and falls between 3rd February and 9th March.

### **14<sup>th</sup> February: Ash Wednesday, mourning our sins**

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. But why 'Ash' Wednesday? The reason has to do with getting things right between you and God, and the tradition goes right back to the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites often sinned. When they finally came to their senses, and saw their evil ways as God saw them, they could do nothing but repent in sorrow. They mourned for the damage and evil they had done. As part of this repentance, they covered their heads with ashes. For the Israelites, putting ashes on

your head, and even rending your clothes, was an outward sign of their heart-felt repentance and acknowledgement of sin. (See Genesis 18:27; 2 Samuel 13:19; Job 2:8, 30:19; Isaiah 58:5; Jeremiah 6:26; Jonah 3:6)

In the very early Christian Church, the yearly 'class' of penitents had ashes sprinkled over them at the beginning of Lent. They were turning to God for the first time, and mourning their sins. But soon many other Christians wanted to take part in the custom, and to do so at the very start of Lent. They heeded Joel's call to 'rend your hearts and not your garments' (Joel 2:12-19). Ash Wednesday became known as either the 'beginning of the fast' or 'the day of the ashes'.

The collect for today goes back to the Prayer Book, and it stresses the penitential character of the day. It encourages us with the reminder of the readiness of God to forgive us and to renew us.

The Bible readings for today are often Joel 2:1-2, 12-18, Matthew 6: 1-6, 16 – 21 and Paul's moving catalogue of suffering, "as having nothing and yet possessing everything." (2 Corinthians 5:20b - 6:10)

The actual custom of 'ashing' was abolished at the Reformation, though the old name for the day remained. Today, throughout the Church of England, receiving the mark of ashes on one's forehead is optional. Certainly, the mark of ashes on the forehead reminds people of their mortality: "Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return..." (Genesis 3:19)

The late medieval custom was to burn the branches used on Palm Sunday in the previous year in order to create the ashes for today.

The following article, written by the Revd Dr Herbert McGonigle, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and as Lent begins, it is a good time to look at the things Jesus said, and the claims that He made, and is entitled:

## **What's so special about Jesus?**

The gospels record that people were astounded by many of the things that Jesus said. Even His enemies, intent on trapping Him, admitted: "No one ever spoke the way this man does." (John 7:46) Furthermore, "the crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." (Matthew 7:28-9)

For in Jesus, we find something without precedent in the span of human literature. While urging humility on others and while giving the impression of the ultimately humble person, Jesus' teaching and claims are basically *egocentric and completely focussed on Himself*. In ordinary life, that would get a person labelled as crazy or as a megalomaniac!

Just think of the few astounding claims Jesus made about Himself. "I am the Resurrection and the Life." (Jn 11:25) "I am the Bread of Life." (Jn 6:35) "I am the Light of the World." (Jn 8:12) "I am the Good Shepherd." (Jn 10:7,9) "...whoever lives and believes in Me will never die." (Jn 11:26) And – most staggering of all - "anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father." (Jn 14:9)

CS Lewis comments on the inescapableness of Jesus' uniqueness: "There is no half-way house, and there is no parallel in other religions."

That Jesus cannot be ranked among a pantheon of religious leaders or prophets becomes further obvious when one reflects further on His claim of being at both the beginning and at the end of Creation and of History. He said: "I am the



First and the Last” (Rev 1:17), as well as :  
“All authority in heaven and on earth has  
been given to me.” (Mt 28:18).

Clearly the disciples accepted this, as John  
begins his gospel with these words: “In the  
beginning was the Word (Jesus) and the  
Word was with God and the Word was  
God... Through Him all things were made;  
without Him nothing was made that has  
been made....The Word became flesh and  
made His dwelling among us.... and in Him  
all things hold together.” (Col 1:16,17)

When we look at what Jesus goes on to  
say about the end of history, we are even  
more startled, as when He said of any  
person who follows Him: “I will raise him  
up at the last day.” (Jn 6:40) This was the  
local carpenter, remember! And when we  
note that throughout the Bible final  
judgement is a function reserved to God  
alone, it is astounding to register that  
Jesus says of Himself: “For as the Father  
has life in Himself, so He has granted the  
Son .... authority to judge because He is  
the Son of Man.” (Jn 5:26—27)

Yes, between Creation and the end of  
History stands Jesus. That also means, of  
course, and we note it with comfort,  
because everything in between is His also.

During this Lent, why not spend some  
time just quietly thinking about these  
claims of Jesus?

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The following article, written by Canon  
Paul Hardingham, has been extracted  
from Parish Pump, and is an introduction  
to the books of the Bible, and is entitled:

### **What’s the Big Idea? Exodus**

This month we are looking at Exodus, the  
second book of the Old Testament. Its

name means departure, reminding us that  
Israel’s flight out of slavery in Egypt is the  
major focus of the book.

Exodus is a book of two halves! The first  
part (chapters 1-19 & 32-34) is the story of  
an oppressed people who are delivered  
from slavery into a life of freedom. The  
second half (chapters 20-31 & 35-40)  
consists of detailed instructions about the  
life and worship of God’s people. The book  
introduces us to their *salvation* or  
deliverance, as *story*. God’s promises to  
Abraham are fulfilled as the people  
journey to the Promised Land. He also  
renews His covenant with them at Sinai,  
expressed in the Ten Commandments (20:  
1-17).

At the heart of Exodus is the person of  
God Himself. In chapter 3 God reveals His  
name as YHWH or ‘*I am who I am*’ (3:14)  
to Moses. This is the name by which God  
is known throughout the Old Testament,  
expressed in the title ‘*the LORD*’. To know  
God’s name is to know Him, as well as His  
character ie His justice, truthfulness,  
mercy, faithfulness and holiness. He is the  
God who controls history, delivering the  
people out of Egypt, while the death of  
the Passover lamb points us to Jesus’  
death on the cross (1 Corinthians 5:7).

God’s promises of help remain true for us  
today: ‘*Do not be afraid. Stand firm and  
you will see the deliverance the LORD will  
bring you today*’ Exodus 14:13.



## Worldwide persecution of Christians on the increase

More than 365 million Christians worldwide now face persecution and discrimination for their faith.

Entire Christian communities face extinction in some parts of the world. Those in sub-Saharan Africa are especially at risk, because of increasingly authoritarian regimes and violence.

So warns the latest global study of persecution.

The World Watch List 2024 is compiled by the charity Open Doors. It rates the top 50 countries where it is most dangerous to be a Christian. This year, something new has emerged: the countries listed have not changed since 2023, and there are no new countries to the list, but the level of violence experienced by Christians globally has grown exponentially in just this past year.

Open Doors reports a sevenfold increase in reported attacks on churches, Christian schools, and Christian hospitals. In 2022 there were 2,110 such attacks. In 2023 it was 14,766.

Attacks on the homes of Christian have also soared – by 371 per cent.

A staggering one in seven Christians worldwide now faces a high level of persecution and discrimination.

This is the 30th year that the World Watch List has been compiled and published. The countries are scored by various factors: pressure levels in private life, family life, community life, and national life, and on church communities, as well as violence levels. This year's list covers the period between 1st October 2022 to 30th September 2023.

The chief executive of Open Doors UK, Henrietta Blyth, says that Christian minorities in East and West Africa face an existential threat from jihadists and

autocratic regimes. Jihadists are viciously attacking Christians across sub-Saharan Africa: Somalia, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali, to name just some countries.

In Nigeria, things have got particularly bad, where Islamist extremism is threatening many Christian communities. In fact, the murder of Christians in Nigeria accounts for a staggering 82 per cent of ALL Christians killed for their faith worldwide. Last year 4118 such murders were recorded, though many more were never even reported.

Open Doors has praised UK government efforts to become a global leader in standing up for the freedom of religion and belief, but it urges that the position of the Prime Minister's special envoy, currently held by Fiona Bruce MP, should be turned into a permanent, statutory post.

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The following article, written by Paul Hardingham, considers that first Easter morning, and is entitled:

### Looking for the Resurrection

An old couple are driving down the motorway when the wife gets a call from their daughter. *'Mum, there's a car driving the wrong way down the motorway!'* The wife warns her husband that there is a lunatic on the motorway. Her husband, clutching the wheel in terror, replies: *'One lunatic? There are dozens of them, all headed straight for us!'* What we see is determined by our perspective on life.

In the Nicene Creed we say: *'We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.'* In the gospel accounts of the Resurrection, there is a lot of looking and seeing. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome went early to the tomb. They saw the stone rolled aside and inside the tomb a young man dressed in white said to them: *'Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was*

*crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him...He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him' (Mark 16: 6,7).*

Like the women we would probably have been left *'trembling and bewildered'* by what we saw that morning. Had the body been taken? Was the young man an angel or deceiver? Was Jesus raised to life again, or was this an elaborate hoax?

Easter gives us a choice. We can approach life looking for disappointment, fear and despair. Or we can look for resurrection and find not just an empty tomb, but encounter the living Christ. He continues to meet us in our daily lives bringing new hope, forgiveness of sin, healing and wholeness and the assurance of His presence through the darkest of times. God invites us to see our lives differently and look for Christ's resurrection life at work in our lives and the people around us.

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The following article, written by Lester Amann, considers the little donkey...

## **Why we should be like donkeys**

Are you a pet-lover? Many people own a dog, a cat or a budgie, but most of us don't own a donkey! Yet in Bible times, donkeys were essential to daily life. They did everything from helping to grind corn, to ploughing, to carrying people, to transporting their belongings. Despite their small frame, donkeys are surprisingly tough. They can survive on poor fodder, can travel an average of 20 miles a day.

There are two occasions in the Christian calendar where donkeys walk into the picture. At Christmas, Mary travelled the 100 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem on a donkey. And although a donkey doesn't get a specific mention in the manger story, that same one that transported her was probably there; where else would it have been?

On Palm Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Jesus deliberately chose this animal rather than a horse. Why? In Bible times, the horse was associated with war, conquest and worldly might. But the donkey was a symbol of peace and humility. So, Jesus used this animal to show that He had come with the dignity of the king of peace. His entry into the Holy City also fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy concerning the Messiah.

Donkeys are hardworking and undemanding. They wait for their master to put them to the work He has chosen for them. And, remarkably, each one bears the mark of the Cross on their backs!

Perhaps that is something we should learn—to wait for Jesus our Master, to be always obedient to Him, to serve Him with all our hearts, and to bear the mark of His grace in our lives.

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The following article, written Norma Murrain, who designs Christian jewellery, has produced a version of the Coventry Passion Cross:

## **The Coventry Passion Cross**

"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement that bought us peace was upon Him and by His stripes we are healed." Isaiah 53:4-6

Coventry Cathedral uses as its emblem the Coventry Passion Cross – three nails together forming the Cross of Christ. Here is my reflection on the Coventry Passion Cross; what does this design mean to you?

The first nail is the carpenter's nail and focuses us on the purpose of the nail. We are reminded that Jesus worked as a carpenter before entering His ministry. As He sat there in His carpenter's workshop, smoothing and working the wood with love,

did He contemplate the rugged cross on which He would one day be crucified? As He hammered nails into wood, did He ever accidentally hammer one into His finger, and as He felt that pain, did He foresee the nails of His crucifixion? As He carried large logs to His workshop to make tables, chairs, and doors, did He contemplate the cross he would one day carry to Calvary?

The second nail is the nail of **Passion**, it represents the nails in Jesus' hands and feet that He accepted because of His passionate love for us.

The third nail is the nail of Promise, like the promise He made to the dying thief on the cross. It was that if we believe in Him, then we will reign with Him in paradise. This is the nail that Christ offers to you and to me. Will you accept this nail as a sign of His passionate love, His forgiveness of your sin and promise of eternal life for all who will come to Him? If so, why not pray the following prayer this Eastertide?

#### Pray

*Dear Lord Jesus, thank You that You have a plan and a purpose for my life, thank You for Your passionate love for me, thank You that Your blood was shed for my sins, thank You for Your promise of eternal life. As I think about that nail of promise, I receive Your passion, Your grace and Your forgiveness, may I fulfil Your plan and purpose for my life, In Jesus name, Amen.*

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## **Rules of living well after 60**

The King is 75. Last year he did 516 engagements, and he has no intention of slowing down. Instead, he was keen to be 'back up and running' as soon as possible after his recent operation. Is he right?

"Absolutely not – you shouldn't slow down," says Sir Muir Gray, 80, former chief

knowledge officer for the NHS. "Ageing exists as a normal biological process but until the age of 90, it has little effect on your ability to look after yourself, engage with others or get about independently. In fact, paradoxically, as we get older, we need to become more active – physically and mentally. Ageing doesn't make you feel old – disease and loss of fitness will."

A study from the Yale School of Public Health found that people who had positive ideas about their own ageing ("I have as much pep as last year") lived for an average of 22.6 years after they first participated in the study, while the people who felt less positively about ageing, lived for just 15 years more on average.

Of course, getting older does involve some loss of energy. But slowing down a bit is never something to be ashamed of, and getting enough rest is the very cornerstone of leading a good life.

Exercise is also crucial as we get older. Focus on the four Ss: stamina, strength, skill (balance) and suppleness. Maintain your stamina by brisk walking every day for 30 minutes.

When you are ill, get up again as soon as you reasonably can. Otherwise, you are at risk of 'deconditioning syndrome', a physiological decline where muscle strength can decrease dramatically if you are over 70.

Thoughtfully review of your personal life-balance. Try to find the 'sweet spot' between activity and rest. Gray advises: "If you're only doing activities, you are inevitably going to burn out. But if you only rest, you will become sedentary and you're more likely to fall ill, feel disconnected and lonely."

Finally, don't run on a hamster wheel of someone else's making. This Lent, before God, rethink your real purpose and calling in life. And live it!



**CHRIST**  
has died

**CHRIST**  
has risen

**CHRIST**  
will come again