

Issue 5:  
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A candle in....



# THE WINDOW

*News and Views from the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames*



The Taizé Pentecost Window



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## A Pentecost Sermon

*Preached by Richard Pyke at St Helens 24<sup>th</sup> May 2026 with minor editing by RR*

*“When the day at Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.”*

The Jewish feast of Pentecost comes 50 days after the festival of Passover. Both festivals mark the pivotal moments in Israel’s history and are recorded in the book of Exodus. Passover commemorates the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Pentecost, the festival of first fruits, celebrates the arrival of the Israelites to the Holy Mountain of Sinai and the giving of the Law.

For Christians, Passover embellishes the former with the passage from death to life of Jesus at Easter and the latter festival, Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. So in today’s New Testament reading, faithful to the commands of the risen Jesus, the believers remain in Jerusalem and on the day of Pentecost, they gather in one place. United in their belief in the Risen Jesus, something so powerful, so wonderful happens that transforms them both individually and as a community, into a united dynamic force, propelling them from a hidden life into an encounter with both their own people and in due course the world.

Luke describes the experience like that of seering tongues of fire, a hurricane force like wind sweeping in and through them, transforming them and compelling them to proclaim the good news of the Gospel. Furthermore, they are heard as if communicating in different languages, all the languages of the then Roman World.

From that moment onwards such is the power filled conviction within that united fellowship, that they become the radical alternative movement of those times, confronting the moribund religious culture that put to death Jesus, and in due course, challenging the Imperial power of Rome and its Emperors. To critical onlookers they appear to be fanatics, labelled as drunks, so wild seems their behaviour so much at odds with rational cynical minds and I suspect terrifying to those who are buttoned up in their emotions and the inability to express their feelings. A threat to religious order. Disturbing perhaps for tidy Anglican minds?

This is but the beginning of the experience. As the book of Acts unfolds, we read of Peter, the once petrified man so afraid as to deny his Lord, now boldly addressing a large unpredictable crowd of foreigners and locals in the open city. Then Stephen, full of grace and courage, radiant even at the moment of his cruel death, by a religious mob, whose manner of living whilst even dying, surely influences the onlooker, Saul. Who in turn becomes the Apostle Paul to the wider Pagan world. The power of the Spirit is revealed then, in both outward and inward personality, the fruits of the Spirit, transformed by love.

What then has this remarkable event to say to us here gathered together in **this** place this morning. Let me begin by offering two quotes; the first by Emil Brunner cited by the late Bishop John V Taylor of Winchester in his wonderful book on the Holy Spirit entitled, “The Go between God,”

*“The Church exists by mission as the fire exists by burning.”;*

then his own *‘Only in their togetherness can Christians remain alight with the fire of the Spirit. The Church must be shaped to carry out that purpose or it will be frustrating as a badly laid fire.’*

On the day of Pentecost, the outward sign is a body of people united in their belief in Jesus and the gift of his Spirit. The constant challenge to the Church is to maintain our unity and be shaped for that purpose. We focus on that essential point each week in our liturgy - sharing both the peace and the offering and sacrament of bread and wine. The Holy Spirit has the power to bind us together and the President on our behalf, in the Eucharistic prayer that will follow in a few minutes, prays the gift of the Spirit’s presence to unite us in communion.

Hand in hand with this invocation goes the imperative need to extend that communion ecumenically, - perhaps by beginning with the recognition that we don't have that sense of unity with brother and sisters of other denominations. How can we as a Church, as a local community and individually raise awareness and pray for reconciliation, for that unity our Lord wills? Also to recover, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, a sense of Mission, globally and particularly in our local town setting. Are we on fire enough to see that this is every member of the congregation's calling to prayer and action. To take Emil Brinner's point, that is what we the Church are here for!

Pentecost and the story of the Holy Spirit, encourages us all to support, to the best of our individual abilities, all efforts to engage with our local community to share the Good News of the Gospel. Implicit in Acts and further developed by St Paul is the recognition that the Holy Spirit comes with gifts to enable the body of Christ to grow and flourish and to accomplish, to facilitate that Mission. A good moment then to ponder what gifts we have to serve one another to fulfil the missionary task. Part of this is to raise the subject of vocations to Ministry and Priesthood.

We are currently advertising to appoint a Team Vicar but perhaps we might pray that our Parish might foster a vocation or two of our own to offer to the wider Church in return? It was a sermon such as this that led to my answering the call to ordination. That sermon was delivered by a licenced lay minister. Then, encouraged by nudges from other members of the congregation of St Laurence Upton cum Chalvey and fuelled by the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Who do we know among us who if encouraged, might in due course, begin the process of discernment to that end? And of course, ordination is but one aspect of Church life and discipleship to be nurtured and discovered. So many different roles of lay leadership and positions of responsibility, are needed to be filled to re-shape the Church of England in a post Christian world culture. The story of Pentecost reminds us we are not here for ourselves alone, or the Church, but for the wider world that our God loves so much and gave his son for its redemption.

There are hints and signs of a slow recovering of interest in Christianity in this country. Perhaps the tide is turning. There is a trickle of visitors beating a path towards our Church, among them some, possibly searching for deeper meaning and answers of life, perhaps even now and in our midst this morning. Are we ready and united in prayer to meet those who are so searching?

From among dry bones has come renewal, almost always through one person, but then leading to small communities of faith. A few examples: the Desert Fathers; St Francis of Assisi and Sister Clare Franciscans; John and Charles Wesley Methodist movement; the Oxford Movement; Brother Roger and the Taizé Community; the Iona Community; Sister Agnes SOLI; Mother Theresa to name just a few. You may want to add others to that list. Perhaps a particular yet ordinary house group?

Often these people began a renewal of Christian life on the very margins of the Church, but through the power of the Spirit, went on building communities of faith attracting others.

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were in one place  
May that story continue to be our inspiration in our church life, here in Abingdon.  
Not merely for our own sakes, but for the sake of others!

Amen

# Bishop Steven

Bishop Steven’s retirement was marked by a service at Christ Church Cathedral on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2026, at the end of which his Pastoral Staff was laid on the altar.



Bishop Steven opened his sermon with thanks to all present for their companionship and support on this journey. His ‘wrestling with God’ linked to his grandchildren’s love of the TV show ‘Gladiators’.  
Photograph: Emma Thompson on behalf of the Diocese of Oxford



Various props were produced and given away!  
Photograph: Rowan Lake on behalf of the Diocese of Oxford



Bishop Steven pronounces the blessing.  
Photograph:  
Rowan Lake on behalf of the Diocese of Oxford



The Dean invited Bishop Steven and his wife Ann to receive a gift from the Cathedral and Chapter  
Photograph: Rowan Lake on behalf of the Diocese of Oxford

Iman Monawar Hussein, a deputy Lieutenant for Oxfordshire, greets the Bishop. He had spoken earlier, paying tribute to the Bishop’s work to promote interfaith dialogue and good community relations.  
Photograph: Rowan Lake on behalf of the Diocese of Oxford



## Is Being Religious Good for your Health?

(Agnostics Anonymous, 26<sup>th</sup> May 2026)

*Summarised by Susan Reynolds*

Considering the privations and mortifications to which certain early Christian saints subjected themselves, and the excruciating forms of martyrdom to which many succumbed, the answer might well be a decided negative. Yet in their discussion of this topic at the last Agnostics Anonymous session of the year, the Rev. Dr. Jen Brown and Professor John Barton provided convincing evidence to the contrary.

Various factors indicated that belonging to a religious community, whether church, synagogue or temple, could indeed have a beneficial effect. Members derived comfort from a consciousness of shared values, and there was a general tendency to discourage harmful types of behaviour such as excessive drinking, drug abuse and promiscuity. Such communities might also provide a sense of security and wellbeing through caring for their members in times of need, or promoting practices such as fasting which could have health benefits.

The discussion was soundly underpinned by research, including the Rector's doctoral thesis comparing church congregations in Oxford and Coventry and Sunday Assemblies in Birmingham, Bristol and Reading. Sunday Assemblies are monthly secular gatherings consisting of readings and talks, music and charitable activities which attract a significantly younger demographic with obvious implications for their state of health. It cannot be denied that certain practices (sleep restriction or excessive fasting, or refusal of medical care) can have damaging consequences. Moreover, abuse by those in authority, and the attraction of religion for vulnerable people needing specialised help, lead to the consideration that candidates for the priesthood require training in the pathology of religion as well as its sociology or psychology. Here Kenneth I. Pargament's religious coping scale was cited, measuring the ways in which people deal with responsibility and control in a religious context. The very activities which help members of the community in need can leave those providing them emotionally and spiritually depleted unless they too are supported, as described by one of the audience who regularly visits an old people's home. However, giving such support can promote self-esteem, and constitute a respite from the frantic pace of modern life, besides reducing feelings of anxiety and helplessness.

The question of healing by direct divine intervention lay beyond the general scope of the discussion, though it was noted that great harm could be done by those who asserted that a failure to be physically healed was the result of insufficient faith. Interior change, though, can actually bring about physical effects. As to the different perspectives on this of various Christian denominations, they could be likened to the conflicts between football fans who all love the game but defend their individual teams fiercely! Václav Havel's recommendation to 'seek the company of those who search for truth, but run from those who have found it' is salutary advice here.

It was suggested that religion, rather than being the 'opium of the people' was more like a vitamin – not dulling the senses, but enabling humanity to engage fully with life on earth.

When the first series of debates was launched, doubts were raised about whether it would attract a sufficiently large audience, but so many people of all faiths and none thronged to them that seating often ran short. The attendance was somewhat lower this time, but the numbers prepared to turn up on a fine sunny evening indicated how popular the talks had become. We hope that this may provide encouragement for them to continue in future.

## Jan of Jenštejn and the feast of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary

*Rhianydd Hallas (Our East European correspondent!)*

I recently visited Rome for the first time to take part in a conference. Over a few days blessed with hot and sunny weather, the conference focused on Jan of Jenštejn, the third archbishop of Prague, including his life, his political clashes with both the Holy Roman Emperor, King Wenceslas IV of Bohemia, and Pope Urban VI, his writings (homilies and accounts of miracles on the Visitation), and his music for the feast of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary.

The Visitation was one of the last Marian feasts added to the Roman Calendar, and its introduction was a long, complicated process which is well documented in contemporary sources (which I shall not bore you with here). But its origin lies in a terrifying vision experienced by Jenštejn on the night of 15 October 1377.

In this vision, Satan passed the papal keys to a demonic antipope while Jesus watched. In the background sat the Virgin Mary, in a meadow of beautiful flowers and aromatic herbs, with her babe cradled tenderly in her embrace. Word later reached Prague of the Western Schism, with Pope Urban VI elected pope in Rome and Clement VII elected in Avignon by a group of French and Italian cardinals. Jenštejn interpreted the appearance of Mary in his vision as portending peace after the schism and believed that honouring her would bring about the end of the split within the church. As such, the whole Church should celebrate a new feast, that of Mary's Visitation to Elizabeth, found in Luke 1:39-56.

The feast of the Visitation has been celebrated on various dates throughout history. Jenštejn originally suggested 28 April, placing it between Mary's Annunciation and Assumption and within Eastertide. To ensure it wouldn't clash with Easter feasts, Pope Urban VI decreed its date as 2 July. In 1969 the feast was moved to 31 May, placing it between the Annunciation (25 March) and the birth of John the Baptist (24 June). It is now celebrated in the West on either 2 July or 31 May, while in the Eastern Orthodox Church the feast was instituted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the 30 March.

For the conclusion of the conference on 30 May, we sang Vespers using Jenštejn's chants in the Basilica of St Praxedes, next to his tombstone (shown in the picture). It was a beautiful and fitting conclusion to our visit to Rome, celebrating a feast I've studied so intently, next to the tombstone of the archbishop who championed it over 600 years ago.



## A Day of Song and Fellowship at Dorchester Abbey with Sir John Rutter

*Kate Burland*

While our parish celebrated Trinity Sunday together at St Michael's Church on 31<sup>st</sup> May, a small group from St Helen's choir joined 350 fellow singers at the beautiful Dorchester Abbey, for a day of music under the direction of Sir John Rutter.

Renowned worldwide as a composer and conductor of choral music, Sir John led the workshop with warmth, humour, and infectious enthusiasm. What wonderful stories he had to tell us in-between rehearsals! He has a remarkable gift of being able to draw a confident sound from an Abbey full of singers of differing abilities.

We began with two much-loved Rutter pieces, *For the beauty of the earth*, and *A Gaelic Blessing*, works of such beauty they were chosen by Dame Patricia Routledge for her memorial service.



Picture taken from the Dorchester festival website

Sir John had also selected three pieces to mark composers' anniversaries. Rheinberger's *Bleib bei uns* (which we sang in English) was unfamiliar to many, though perhaps one we might encourage Peter to consider for our own repertoire.... Wood's *Hail! Gladdening Light*, written for two choirs, was a sight-reading challenge and Verdi's *Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves* was great fun, especially trying to sing in Italian!

We were then introduced to a piece dating from around the time of the Abbey's own construction - *Sumer is icumen in*. This lively round, with its repeated 'Sing cu-cu', was great fun, particularly for the tenors and basses. It was quite humbling to reflect that it may have been sung in this area for some 750 years. With admirable stamina, Sir John concluded the morning by introducing some of his own musical poetry settings, including *Stone in the Water*, *Foxglove* and two excerpts from *Bird Songs*: 1) *Two owls* 2) *Hope is the thing with feathers* (my personal favourite).

After a welcome lunch break in the Abbey gardens, where we were able to enjoy the sunshine, the afternoon session focused on *Feel the Spirit*, Sir John's cycle of spirituals. We were delighted – and somewhat surprised – to be joined by guest soloist Melanie Marshall whose singing we were all in awe of.

For many of us, the highlight was simply the experience of singing together in such a remarkable space and being reminded of the unique power of music in worship—to lift hearts, to deepen faith, and to bring people together. And, of course, being conducted by Sir John Rutter himself!

We returned home tired but uplifted, grateful for the opportunity and inspired to bring something of that experience back into our own parish music-making. It was a memorable day, that will stay with us for a long time to come.

## St Peter and North Moreton Church

*David Bevington*



If you enjoy historic churches and art, I highly recommend visiting All Saints Church in the village of North Moreton, south-east of Didcot.

The east window in the chantry chapel contains the most outstanding medieval stained glass in Oxfordshire. It dates from about 1305. Tragically most of the faces in the window were smashed, either during either the Reformation or the Commonwealth, but what remains is glorious. The rich colours and delicate painting of faces and fish (!) were enhanced by cleaning carried out by the York Glaziers Trust last year.

The five lancets contain scenes from the life of St Nicholas, the life of St Peter, the Passion of Christ, the life of St Paul and the death and Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

In preparation for St Peter's Day on 29th June, these are some snaps featuring him.. but they are no substitute for the real thing!



Peter's face may have survived the vandalism of the window because it was behind an iron bar and too much trouble to get at. I love the way Peter looks up at Jesus in wonder, after Jesus has guided him to the bumper haul of fish.



Peter at the deathbed of the Virgin Mary, holding the keys to the Kingdom given him by Christ.



Peter was executed in Rome during the persecution by the emperor Nero. According to tradition, he asked to be crucified upside down, as he felt unworthy to be crucified in the same way as Jesus.

## Pope Leo 14<sup>th</sup> and Magnifica Humanitas

On safeguarding the human person in the time of artificial intelligence  
Or why I like Pope Leo  
*Rob Rutherford*

The aim of this article is to give the flavour of the Pope's encyclical. The full text is to be found [here](#): but be warned - it is 245 paragraphs long with 224 references!

I like it that Robert Prevost chose the name 'Leo'. The previous Leo was known for his encyclical of 1891 *Rerum Novarum* on Capital and Labour in which he tried to point out the problems with both rampant capitalism and 'property is theft' communism.

Pope Leo starts with two biblical images – the building of the tower of Babel – a task full of pride and hubris – and an image taken from the book of Nehemiah (not one I have ever read!) of the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Here's quote from paragraph 8: "After the Babylonian exile, a portion of the people returned to Jerusalem, but the city was still in ruins, the walls collapsed and the gates burned (cf. *Neh* 1–2). Nehemiah, a Jew in the service of the Persian King Artaxerxes, received news of the disastrous state of his ancestral city. Before taking action, he fasted, prayed and interceded for the people. He then asked the king for permission to return to Jerusalem and, upon arriving, examined the destroyed areas in silence. He did not impose solutions from above. He convened the families, assigned each of them a section of the wall to rebuild, listened to their concerns, coordinated their efforts and addressed any opposition. The narrative shows how the city is reborn, not through the initiative of one man, but through the shared responsibility of all: men, women, priests, artisans, heads of households and young people all play a part."

The Pope is not anti-science nor anti-technology but he argues that science and technology need to be harnessed in such a way that it enhances the lives of human beings, particularly those "of the most vulnerable. (¶9) "Technology has the power to heal, connect, educate and protect our common home; but it can also divide, exclude and generate new forms of injustice. In the abstract, technology in and of itself is not a solution to humanity's problems, just as it is not inherently evil. In practice, however, technology is never neutral, because it takes on the characteristics of those who devise, finance, regulate and use it."

Straightaway, nine paragraphs into the piece we have the core problem that challenges politics and economics as well as ethics. Who controls AI? How do we regulate AI? Is it reasonable for the market to decide? There is an unspoken idea which I will put in my terms: "how do we stop the 'tech-bros' (Musk, Zuckerberg, &co) from imposing their vision of society" "In examining these questions, the Church regards all who sincerely seek "truth, goodness and beauty" as companions on the journey, and considers them as "precious allies" (¶23)

The Pope writes a lot about the 'common good' and he points out some of possible negative consequences of AI. "Disinformation did not begin with AI, yet today it finds a powerful amplifier in AI. The ability to manipulate content, images and videos exposes people to biased or misleading perspectives." ..... "Only the shared pursuit of the veracity of facts, perceived as a common good, can provide a solid foundation for just communication". (¶132) "On the level of public policy, this entails establishing norms so that the decision-making .... becomes more transparent and protects personal data. Regarding social and cultural aspects, this requires a strengthening of intermediary organizations, serious journalism and forums for debate, where reasoned argumentation and verification carry greater weight than immediate reaction." (¶137)

This concern for truth extends to uncomfortable truths about the church: "We have witnessed with shame the emergence of painful truths concerning even members of the Church and ecclesial realities. In particular, some journalists, driven by a passion for truth, have played a crucial role in bringing

injustices and abuses to light. To them, I wish to repeat the words that Pope Francis used in speaking to journalists: ‘I also thank you for what you tell us about what goes wrong in the Church, for helping us not to sweep it under the carpet, and for the voice you have given to the victims of abuse.’ Yet vigilance and transparency remain first and foremost a grave responsibility for the Church herself, and we must not wait for others to compel us to confront uncomfortable truths about ourselves.” (§138)

This is another reason for liking Pope Leo – he respects truth - unlike another American I can think of.

Another concern, articulated by the Pope concerns employment. Machines can dehumanise work taking away the ability to be creative. There is also a worry that AI will create unemployment (a particular concern amongst the young). “It is certainly desirable for technology to relieve humans of arduous, repetitive or dangerous tasks and to provide intelligent support for human activity. Yet, the protection of employment opportunities and the irreplaceable role of the individual must remain the general rule. The pursuit of greater profits cannot justify choices that systematically sacrifice jobs, because the human person is an end, not a means, and the economic order must remain subordinate to human dignity and the common good.” (§152) Finance clearly has a role in this but he warns: “Finance for its own sake is fundamentally different from finance aimed at the development, creation and evolution of work.” (§160) “Politics has the task of orientating economies and technologies to the common good, promoting dignified work, social inclusion and an equitable distribution of the benefits of innovation.” (§163)

In §182 Pope Leo starts to reflect on war and the role of AI within it. “Here the question is not merely the efficiency of new tools, but also the risk that technology, detached from ethics and responsibility, will render decisions about life and death more rapid and impersonal, and will present the use of force as an immediate and viable option.” “The digital revolution is changing the nature of conflict. Alongside conventional warfare, there are hybrid forms such as cyberattacks, information manipulation, campaigns of influence and the automation of strategic decisions. AI acts as an accelerating factor in these processes, particularly within a context where many technologies are intrinsically ambivalent. Consequently, what is created for defense can be rapidly repurposed for offense, and the fine line between protection and aggression becomes blurred. While AI can enhance the defense and protection of civilians, it can also lower the threshold for the use of force, shield people from responsibility and foster a culture in which the enemy is reduced to a statistic and the victim to “collateral damage.” (§183) “

At this point, however, a subtle temptation may emerge, namely the thought that the problems are too big and we are too small, and that our choices, therefore, cannot make a difference. This is a polite form of resignation, often disguised as realism. Certainly, not everyone has the same power to make a difference. There are those who govern, make investment decisions, lead institutions, conduct research, educate, produce or provide information, and then there are those who only seem to live their daily lives. Yet, no one is without responsibility. We all have our own areas for action, and it is precisely there — and nowhere else — that we must choose whether to fuel the mentality of force (even if only through indifference, cynicism, lies or hatred), or to preserve the mindset of peace (with truth, moderation, closeness and care). (§212)

The civilization of love will not arise from a single or spectacular gesture, but from the sum total of small and steadfast acts of fidelity that serve as a bulwark against dehumanization. For this reason, it is worthwhile pausing to reflect on some aspects of how we, each in our own way, can cooperate in building the civilization of love. Without presuming to exhaust this theme, I would like to propose five paths toward daily and public responsibility: the need to disarm words, building peace through justice, adopting the perspective of victims, cultivating a healthy realism and reviving dialogue and multilateralism. (§213)

Good luck reading the rest! The archbishop of Canterbury spoke about AI in the House of Lords [here](#):

## Talks, Music, Art (oh and Cakes & Ale as well)

*Compiled by Eluned Hallas*

On May 16<sup>th</sup> Abingdon celebrated St Edmund of Abingdon. For some, the day started with a short Service at Christ Church, North Abingdon before processing to Our Lady and St Edmund for a blessing and hymn to St Edmund, and then to the Market Place for a full programme of events. There was music, participatory art and a display of photographs, in St Helen's; circle dancing, a concert and more dancing (ceilidh) at St Michaels and talks in, and walks from, St Nicolas; a cake sale and more live music and Viking re-enactors in the Market Place all day. The Loose Cannon had brewed a special ale for the day, and there was the opportunity to try cake baked from a mediaeval recipe (plus lots of more modern versions).

As someone commented, St Edmund ordained for 16 May 2026 to be fine for the Cakes & Ale Celebration in his honour. A good day – thanks to Sally & Clare and the many others who got involved

(For more information on St Edmund see Candle 2024/9 & 2026/4 – both available online)



The Pilgrims arrive, including Revd Will Donaldson (author of *The Servant Heart: Exploring the Life and Legacy of St Edmund of Abingdon*) who spoke about St Edmund, and his continuing impact on education at Oxford University and more widely.



A newly painted icon of St Edmund part of a display of images and photos in St Helen's Church.

*With thanks to The Abingdon Blog for the photographs*



Talks and walks at St Nicolas



### Markus Gabriel Ecseghy at St Michael's (his UK debut).

The historic town of Abingdon-on-Thames provided the backdrop for an extraordinary afternoon of romantic piano masterworks, marked by a performance of staggering technical command and emotional depth.

The recital opened with Beethoven's Sonata No. 23, the 'Appassionata'. From the initial, ominous whispers of the opening theme, it was clear that this was to be a reading of immense dramatic scale. Mr Ecseghy navigated the work's violent contrasts with absolute authority, never sacrificing clarity for sheer volume.

The second half of the program was dedicated to Chopin: the four Ballades. Performing all four as a sequence is a monumental test of stamina. Most memorable: the Fourth Ballade in F minor. Here, the pianist's contrapuntal voicing was exquisite, building the complex textures to a devastating, cathartic climax.

A vital contributor to the concert's success was the exceptional acoustic of the venue. The church captured the instrument's sound with pristine clarity allowing the piano to take on a truly orchestral quality.

By the time the final chords rang out into the silence the Abingdon audience was already on its feet. A display of virtuosity that will be remembered by local concertgoers for years to come.

**Dominic Muldowney**

## We should be so lucky

*Susan Scott*

It was lovely to see the Revd Mary Williamson, our former house for duty priest, in church on the 10<sup>th</sup> May, and to see her looking so well despite her onerous work load as a Permission to Officiate (PTO) priest in Launceston, Cornwall. I remember Mary being shocked at the resources our parish had, both in terms of finance and personnel, and in the impression we gave of taking this for granted and being unaware of the difficulties parishes in places like Cornwall faced.

A quick chat confirmed that things were no better in her part of the world, whereas our parish has a full-time stipendiary Rector, and we are hoping to appoint a full-time stipendiary team vicar this summer. In addition, as a parish, we have a house for duty priest, seven PTO priests, three licensed lay minister (LLMs) and a member licensed to preach. What an abundance of talent for three congregations.

Meanwhile Mary is one of two PTOs, 3 stipendiary priests (one stood down at present), three self-supporting priests, (viz a full-time teacher, full-time solicitor, and a local business man about to take up full-time stipendiary ministry elsewhere), an LLM and of course church wardens ministering to **twenty-one** churches. As a result, the three town churches in the Deanery can only hold two Sunday Eucharists a month, with the rest being lay led. Many rural churches only have a Eucharist service once a month, and there will be some Sundays when they have no service at all. It would be interesting to compare this with our Deanery.

Mary usually takes a Sunday service (and sometimes two) on three Sundays, a BCP Holy Communion Service on alternate Wednesdays plus Home Communions, and visits four care homes. She also takes her turn conducting funerals. Quite a workload for someone who has just entered her eighth decade!

Some of you may be aware of the Save the Parish Campaign, which was launched to support congregations in several dioceses facing yet more and more amalgamations of parishes and the closure of churches with small aging congregations.

A visit to these websites:

<https://www.savetheparish.com>

<https://savetheparish.blogspot.com>

will certainly enlighten anyone as to the situation faced by clergy and laity alike in this large but poor part of the country. Perhaps another Saint Piran is needed to come along to enthuse the current “saints” like Mary, and to “stir up, we beseech thee O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people...” so that the churches are once more the beating hearts of their communities, and the gospel is heard by everyone not just the aged!



Martin Kimber gets creative. What might Quest have been up to?

## The Church Clock Mystery

*Robin Day*

Readers may have noticed the mysterious problem of St Helens Church clock stopping. It always stopped at 22 minutes past the hour - but could be any hour.

The truth we found was that a pigeon was nesting behind the clock face at 22 minutes past the hour and a nest twig stopped the minute hand at that point!

Myself and Stephen went into the bell chamber and crawled under the bells and found a very small access shaft behind the clock face.

If listening quietly, we could hear a very small cheep from a little baby Pigeon!

On climbing down and looking at the clock face, a twig sticks out at 22 minutes past the hour and stopped the minute hand irregularly, but never the hour hand. All explained!

I took photos which I would love to show the parishioners and town people of Abingdon.

There is so much history in all of this tower area and dearly needs a decent book for the church, perhaps using the many photos I took. I saw its rich history when I went up the tower. The stonework and ancient wooden beams below the tower dating back to 1100/1200 and the bells and their inscriptions (the oldest bell dates from the 1600s.)



## Flowers in Church

Alexandra Green

O Lord the creator of all things of beauty,  
grant to those who serve you with their gifts of floral art,  
a sense of your majesty and a desire to heighten the worship of the Holy Church  
by the dedicated use of their gifts.  
This we ask in the name of Him, who with the father, is the Creator and Sustainer  
of all good things. Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



This, the prayer of the Church of England Flower Arrangers' Association (CEFAA), sums up many of the important aspects of what flower arrangers up and down the country hope to do week by week. The CEFAA, founded in 1981 in the diocese of Liverpool, encourages all those who provide and arrange flowers in churches, to enrich places of worship, and support what flowers and creation try to teach. Members share hints and tips on arrangements and showcase their achievements in the quarterly magazine *Faith & Flowers*.

In our parish a band of faithful volunteers provide flowers in each church Sunday by Sunday, with special arrangements for Christmas, Easter and Harvest. But as with many dimensions of life, there are ethical challenges. A recent debate, even reaching the dizzy heights of General Synod, is regarding the use of Oasis (floral foam - the green material which supports flower arrangements) and more generally the use of locally grown flowers and foliage, in order to support sustainable and eco-friendly practices. As with many situations, the practical dimensions of this can be difficult to put into practice.

Flowers are also expensive, especially during the winter. In the parish, donations are very generously given for poinsettias at Christmas and for lilies *in memoriam* of loved ones at Easter. Why not consider making a donation for flowers on a particular Sunday, perhaps a wedding anniversary or significant birthday?

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For more information about the General Synod debate see Helen King's article in the March 2026 issue of A Candle in the window [here](#):

There is clearly a lively debate amongst the flower arrangers about the fact that Oasis is not biodegradable.

Also, about the ethics of buying flowers that have to be transported by air with the implication that they contribute to climate change, and are grown for our benefit, possibly at the expense of local agriculture.

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Thank you to all those who came and helped with the Christian Aid Market Place Sale on Saturday 9th May. The amounts raised were as follows: Cakes & Preserves £107.75, books etc. £136.00, Plants £428.11 (Total cash £671.86) Street Collection Bucket £45.22, Givestar card payments £105.50. The e-envelope is still active and has so far raised £674.28 including gift aid tax. The majority of the spare plants went to St Ethelwolds.

With thanks to all those who helped on the day, brought items to sell or came and supported the event.

Christie Hutt & Doug Bradshaw

## Events in June

Compiled by Louise Heffernan

**St Nicolas Chamber Concert**  
**Jacqueline Johnson cello Charlotte**  
**Brennand piano – Shostakovich and**  
**Beethoven**

Details

Date: June 14th

Time:

3:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Cost: £12.00

Website: [www.abbeychamberconcerts.org](http://www.abbeychamberconcerts.org)

**Book Sale & Coffee Morning, Saturday**  
 20 June 10.00-12.00 noon at **St Nicolas' Church**

**Faith Forum,**  
 Sunday 28th June in the parish centre.  
 Fr AKMA will speak on the use of symbol  
 in the liturgy.

**Time Out for Parents - The Primary Years**  
 – A course from Care for the Family  
 Thursdays 7.30 - 9.30pm, 4, 11, 18, 25 June, 9  
 and 16 July at Peachcroft Christian Centre,  
 Abingdon. This course of six sessions is  
 designed to help you negotiate the early years  
 with confidence and build strong family  
 relationships for the future. Open to all parents  
 and carers of primary age children. For  
 booking and more information visit the  
 website:  
<https://www.peachcroftcc.org/community/parenting-course>



**ALBERT PARK SINGERS**

**SUMMER CONCERT**

Join us for an evening of choral favourites – from West End shows to traditional folk songs

**FRIDAY 26 JUNE, 7.00PM**

**ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH, PARK ROAD**

Free entry and refreshments  
 Donations to Sobell House and St Michael's Church

More details at:  
[albertparksingers.wordpress.com](http://albertparksingers.wordpress.com)



**Cream Tea**

St Michael & All Angels' Church,  
 Park Road



**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> June**  
**2.30 – 4.30 pm**

Tea/coffee with scone/cake £5  
 Proceeds to church funds  
 All welcome

**Dates for your diary:****CiA AGM and Prayer Meeting - Thursday 8 October 2026, 7.30 pm, ABC**

A chance for people from all the churches to come together to share and pray for the town and all the outreach work. Further details to follow.

**Ecumenical course: Holy Ground to train for spiritual direction**

This course is designed for those, whether lay or ordained, who would like to explore accompanying others on their spiritual journey. Holy Ground offers both theoretical, experiential and prayerful learning, and formation in the practice of spiritual direction. The programme includes 22 online evening sessions and 3 in-person days from October 2026 to May 2027. For more details about the course, look on our website [www.spidirnetwork.org.uk](http://www.spidirnetwork.org.uk) or for quick access use this link [www.spidirnetwork.org.uk/holyground](http://www.spidirnetwork.org.uk/holyground). Or contact the local rep Sue Sheppy ([susan.sheppy@btinternet.com](mailto:susan.sheppy@btinternet.com)).

**ABINGDON MOTHERS' UNION**

Tuesday 7 July 2026  
at 10:30 a.m.

in St Helen's Parish Centre

***Why I joined Mothers' Union***

**Speaker: Maureen Weston**

**All Welcome**

***Plus: Discussion, Quizzes, Bring & Buy***



## A Music Quiz!

*Family Hallas*

Can you name the composers of these pieces?

Q#	Q
1	Dixit Dominus
2	Visitation Office
3	For the beauty of the earth
4	St John Passion
5	The Lord's my shepherd (not the Vicar of Dibley one!)
6	St Nicolas
7	Elijah
8	Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat
9	Miserere mei, Deus
10	St Patrick's Breastplate
11	Be still my soul
12	Locus iste
13	I vow to thee my country
14	If ye love me
15	And did those feet / Jerusalem

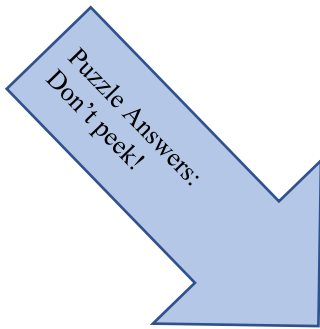
If you need a hint their jumbled names appear below in alphabetical order.

Aahillm Osstt; Abbdde Eelln Orrrwwy; Abch; Adehln; Adenno Rstttuw; Adfnorst; Aegillr; Aprry;  
Beeknrru; Beilssu; Beirrtt; Deehlmnnoss; Eejjnnst; Errttu; Hlost

Answers on page 19



A good year for buttercups! Photograph: David Bevington



Q	A#	A
Dixit Dominus	1	Handel
Visitation Office	2	Jenštejn
For the beauty of the earth	3	Rutter
St John Passion	4	Bach
The Lord's my shepherd	5	Stuart Townend
St Nicolas	6	Britten
Elijah	7	Mendelssohn
Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat	8	Andrew Lloyd Webber
Miserere mei, Deus	9	Allegri
St Patrick's Breastplate	10	Stanford
Be still my soul	11	Sibelius
Locus iste	12	Bruckner
I vow to thee my country	13	Holst
If ye love me	14	Thomas Tallis
And did those feet / Jerusalem	15	Parry



Ox-eye daisies under Wittenham Clumps  
 Photograph: David Bevington

## Useful Weblinks:

Services: for the latest news see the Parish Website:

<https://abingdonparish.org.uk>

for Church of England links: services, daily readings etc

<https://www.churchofengland.org/>

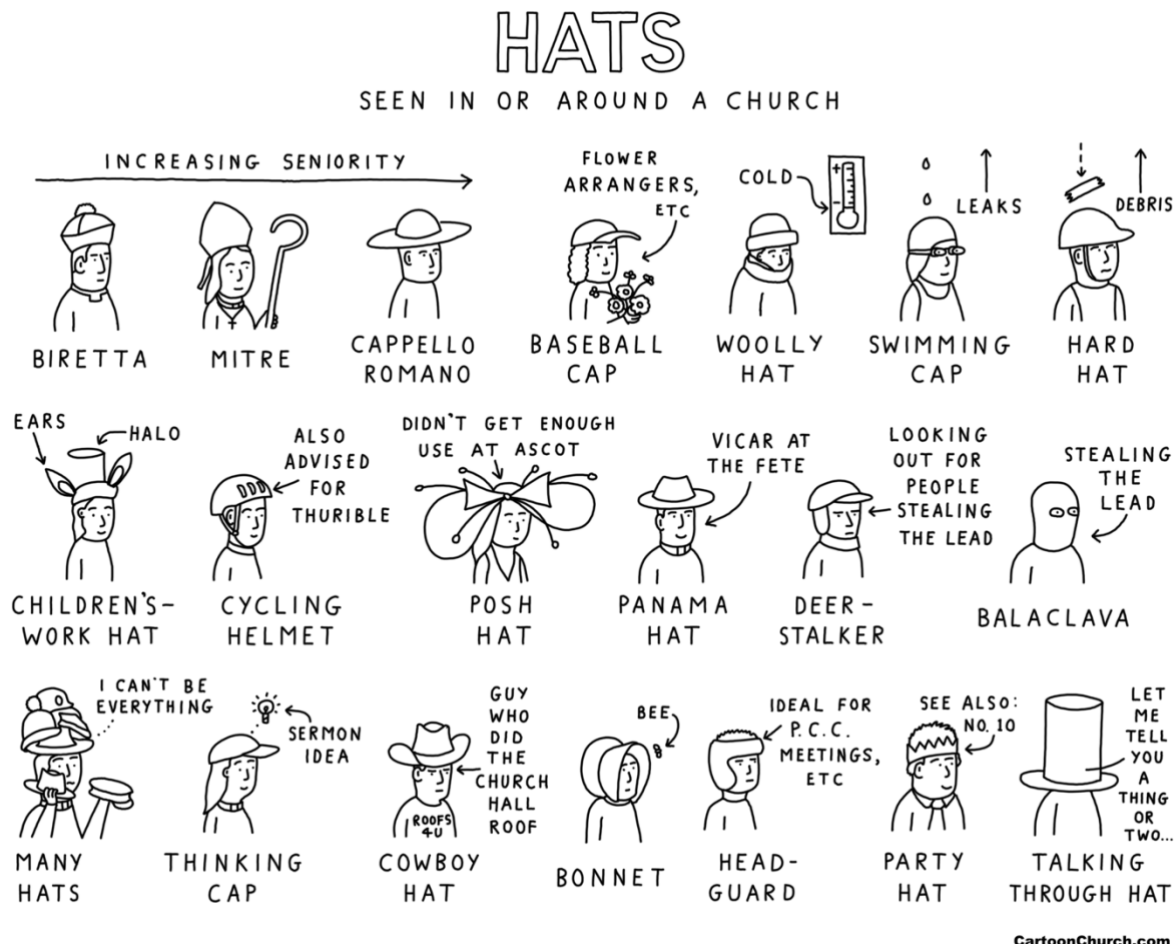
**FOOD BANK.** The Abingdon Foodbank is still very busy and anxious to keep up the support. Northcourt Road (Christ Church) is open to receive donations on Tuesday and Friday mornings between 9.30 am and 1.00 pm. South Abingdon distribution point: Midget Close, Abingdon, OX14 5NR Wednesday 12:30pm-2.00pm

Any food donated in the marked boxes in Waitrose will go to the Foodbank. Any food donated at Tesco goes to the SOFEA run Community Larder based at Trinity Church centre on Fridays.

You can also donate money by sending a cheque made out to *North Abingdon PCC Christ Church*, clearly marked 'for Food Bank' or via the Foodbank website

<https://abingdon.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money/> or the Parish office has details if you want to donate via online banking.

Finally, from Dave Walker,



CartoonChurch.com

**Thanks** and all good wishes to all contributors and to you, the readers.

The next issue will be published on July 12<sup>th</sup>. Please help us by sending feedback, ideas and contributions to [Candle@abingdonparish.org.uk](mailto:Candle@abingdonparish.org.uk)