



**November 2025
to February 2026**

St Mary the Virgin

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



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Letter from the Vicar

Dear Friends,
 Mark Twain once wrote in response to a rumour about him, 'the report of my death was an exaggeration.' Something similar could be said about the Christian church in this country. For many years the standard story told about the church in the media has been one of decline, supposedly terminal. Alongside falling church attendance figures, the results of the 2021 UK National Census were widely reported, with the number of people identifying as Christian dropping below 50% for the first time (46.2% compared to 59.3% in 2011) and the number of people ticking the "no religion" box rising by 12% to 37.2%. If the trend continued then the end of the church in the UK was surely in sight. And yet ...

A Quiet Revival?

Evidence has come to light this year suggesting that reports of the death, or at least the imminent demise, of the Christian church in the UK are an exaggeration. Back in April, Bible Society published a report based on YouGov polling of over 13,000 adults in 2024, called *A Quiet Revival*. Far from reporting an expected decline in church attendance, the research suggested an increase in regular church attendance from 8% of the population in 2018 to 12% in 2024. The increase was especially noticeable in young adults, with 16% of 18-24 year-olds saying that they attended church regularly, compared to just 4% in 2018. For young men, the figure was 21%. While the report does have its doubters, other statistical and anecdotal evidence does support the picture that something surprising is going on, especially among members of Generation Z (roughly those born between 1997 and 2012). Nationally it seems that the youngest generations are becoming more open to faith in God and the Christian message than the two or three generations before them. Here in Whitchurch, we have seen church attendance rising slowly but steadily since our churches reopened after Covid. And people seem especially drawn to church over the Christmas period. Over 350 people came to one of the Christingle services on Christmas Eve in 2024, compared to 227 in 2019 and 180 in 2018. Now, as with the Bible Society survey figures, it is hard to pin down the reasons for these increases. People

come to church looking for all kinds of things, from reassurance and belonging to hope and having something to believe in. No doubt at Christmas there is a heavy dollop of nostalgia as well. But I wonder if people in our community are becoming more open to considering, or reconsidering, the Christian faith and what it might mean for their lives. With that in mind, I'm in the process of planning a pop-up book club exploring questions of Christian faith and spirituality which will read one book in Advent and one in the New Year. The Advent meeting is likely to be in the second week of December, but further details will be on the church noticeboard, website and in my vicar's email (see below).

St. Mary's Youth Club expanding

In other news, it has been wonderful to see the St. Mary's Youth Club expand from three year groups when we started in April 2024, to four in September 2024 and five in September this year. We now run three hour-long sessions in the Old Rectory Stables on a Friday night, with 40 to 50 young people in school years 6 to 10 attending across the three sessions most weeks. Our focus continues to be providing a safe space for young people to meet and have fun together engaging in a variety of games and activities, with a pool table donated by St. Stephen's church in Upper Basildon being a popular recent addition.

There are many more encouraging things going on in the life of the church and I am hugely grateful to everyone who contributes to our shared life, not least to those in the Friends of St. Mary's and St. John's and others who are supporting the Save Our Spire appeal so generously (see the update elsewhere in this magazine). Far from being in terminal decline, our vision and hope is to be a community of faith that embodies God's love for every generation in this community for years and years to come.

Every blessing,
 James

P.S. If you want to receive my weekly Vicar's email with an update on what is happening at the church, please contact me at james.leach.whitchurch@gmail.com

DIARY DATES

The regular service schedule is set out on the back cover

November

- Sun 2nd **Service of Remembering** at 4.00pm in St John's
- Tues 4th **Community Coffee Morning** 10.30am-12 noon every week in the Old Stables
- Wed 5th **Tots on the Thames** 10.00-11.30 am in Old Stables weekly during term time
- Compline Prayer Group** 8.00-9.00 pm weekly on Zoom (p16)
- Thurs 6th **WOTSING Choir** 7.30-9pm at St John's monthly first Thurs.
- Mon 10th **PCC** 7.30pm Old Stables
- Thurs 13th **Ladies Bible Study** 10-11.30am and every 2nd and 4th Thurs in the Old Stables
- Sat 15th **Friends AGM** Old Stables 3.00pm
- Tues 18th **Pray for the World** 9.10-9.30 am and normally third Tues in the Old Stables (not December) see page 11
- Wed 26th **Friends Working Party** in St John's churchyard and every last Wednesday

December

- Sat 6th **Friends Coffee at Art Café** 10.30-12.30 in the Old Stables
- Community Christmas Concert** 5.00-7.00pm in St Mary's in aid of the Spire Appeal

For all the Christmas Services please see page 7

January

- Sun 11th **Outdoor Church** 4.00pm St John's

February

- Sat 1st **Friends Coffee at Art Café** 10.30-12.30 in the Old Stables

- Sun 8th **Outdoor Church** 4.00pm St Mary's

St Mary's Youth Club : Fridays in the Old Stables

7th November—12th December 16th January - 13th February

27th February—27th March Year 6 : 6.00-7.00pm

Years 7 and 8 7.00—8.00pm Years 9&10 8.00-9.00pm

Deadline for copy for the March issue is Wednesday 11th February 2026

Advent and Christmas Services and Events at St. Mary's Whitchurch on Thames and St. John's Whitchurch Hill in 2025

30th Nov	9.30am	St Mary's	Advent Sunday Communion
6th Dec Saturday	5.00pm	St Mary's	Community Christmas Concert ticketed event for Save our Spire
7th Dec	9.30 am	St John's	Communion
14th Dec	9.30 am 4.00 pm	St Mary's St John's	Nativity Service Service of Lessons and Carols
21st Dec	6.00 pm	St Mary's	Carols by Candlelight (No morning service)
24th Dec	2.30 pm 4.30pm 9.00pm	St John's St Mary's St Mary's	Christingle Christingle Christmas Night Communion
25th Dec	9.30am	St John's	Christmas All Age Communion
28th Dec	10.30 am	St Mary's	Langtree Team Service

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

Angels' Song
 By U A Fanthorpe

*Intimates of heaven,
 This is strange to us,
 The unangelic muddle,
 The birth, the human fuss.*

*We sing a harder carol now:
 Holy the donkey in the hay;
 Holy the manger made of wood,
 Holy the nails, the blood, the clay*

SAVE OUR SPIRE!

ST MARY'S CHURCH, WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES

The Save Our Spire Fundraising team are pleased to report further good progress and a big thanks to all those who have given support and donations to date – these are very much appreciated. James our Vicar successfully completed the Oxford Half Marathon on 12th October in less than 2 hours 20 minutes and was still smiling at the end of it – well done James!



This raised over £1000 for the appeal.

Thank you to everyone who sponsored James.

Fundraising continues with our next key event planned for **Saturday 6th December** which will be our **Community Christmas Concert from 5-7pm in St Mary's Church**. This will include a mix of festive music, sing-along Carols and Songs and Christmas-themed Readings. Tickets will be £10 on the door for adults, with free admission for children. There will be mulled wine and mince pies too – please dress as Christmassy as you like! We hope you can join us and look forward to seeing you there.

Applications for grants also continue to progress and updates on the same will be shared when available. As part of the project, we are seeking partnerships with local organisations that will help ensure extended use of St Mary's Church across the community including improved access and digital capabilities. Please contact the team if you have any ideas or suggestions and/or are able to help in this regard.

Thank you for your continued support for this once in a lifetime community in our village. We will share further updates in the next edition of the magazine regarding both fundraising and potential timelines for the work to commence, which we hope will be able to start in the spring of

8

2026.

From the Save our Spire appeal fundraising team.
James Leach – Vicar of St Mary's Whitchurch & St John's Whitchurch Hill – jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com
Graeme Pearce – Buildings Sub-Committee Whitchurch PCC – graemek-pearce@btinternet.com
Ken Baker – Churchwarden and Assistant Treasurer Whitchurch PCC – baker_kenneth2@sky.com

Community Coffee Morning

Join us every Tuesday morning at the Old Stables, Whitchurch on Thames from 10.30a.m. until 12 noon for a natter and enjoy coffee or tea with biscuits. Contact sally.woolhouse@gmail.com



Saturday 8th November 2025, 3pm
St Thomas of Canterbury Church
Goring-on-Thames RG8 9DS

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Contemporary works and traditional settings from North America

tickets@goringchamberchoir.org.uk

9



The Friends of St Mary's and St John's

Registered Charity no. 1168335
The Friends are an independent charity and welcome members from all faiths and none. We aim to bring together the local community in support of the preservation and improvement of our 2 churches and their churchyards.

The Luxury Lodge Draw

I am pleased to report that this popular fund-raiser was a sell out! The winning ticket was drawn at our successful Art Cafe session in The Old Stables on 2nd August. Thank you to everyone who supported The Friends by buying one of the 100 tickets and congratulations to the lucky winner!

A Musical Evening

Our final big fundraising and social event for 2025, held recently on Saturday 18th October, was A Musical Evening at St Mary's Church. A full report will appear in the next Bulletin (too late to make this issue). Thank you to everyone who came along to support The Friends that evening, and we do hope you found it enjoyable and entertaining.

Work Parties

Our regular churchyard working parties at St John's take place on the last Wednesday of the month, starting at 10am. Work parties at St Mary's are on a more ad hoc basis as the churchyard is well tended at the moment. Thank you to all those that make a regular appearance as many hands really do make light work.

If you fancy joining one of these sessions, please get in touch with Sally Woolhouse whitchurchfriends@gmail.com. A welcome cup of coffee is always provided at half time.

Save our Spire!

The spire restoration at St Mary's is our current main future funding project and the Parochial Church Council has launched the

10

fundraising Spire Appeal, Save our Spire. Approximately £200,000 is needed to replace the cedar shingles, replace the decaying timbers and repair the leadwork, as well as other non-essential work. The Friends have currently set £20,000 aside towards the project. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact graemekpearce@btinternet.com.

AGM

The AGM is being held at The Old Stables on **Saturday November 15th** at 15.00. Everyone is most welcome.

Membership

We are always keen to welcome new Friends. For more information on how to join please go to the Whitchurch on Thames village website at <https://whitchurchonthames.com> and follow the link for the Church, or ask me, or Sally Woolhouse. Sarah Dragonetti, Chair of The Friends whitchurchfriends@gmail.com



Pray for the World

Do you feel in despair and helpless about the state of the world?
Come and join us to hold the needs of the world in a short period of reflection. Monthly at the Old Stables 9.10 - 9.30 a.m.

Tuesdays : 18th November, 16th January, 10th February, 17th March

11

What do we know about
the next Archbishop of Canterbury?



Most people will have heard that the next Archbishop of Canterbury is to be a woman – the first ever! She is the current Bishop of London, the Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally. Bishop Sarah will be installed in a service at Canterbury Cathedral in March 2026.

Bishop Sarah became a Christian at the age of 16. Prior to her ordination in 2001 she was the Government's Chief Nursing Officer for England – the youngest person ever to be appointed to that role at the age of 37 – having previously specialised as a cancer nurse. However her nursing career began with training at St Thomas' Hospital where Sarah Dragonetti was also undertaking her nurse training and they worked together as "hands on" junior staff. Sarah recalls

"At that time, I was either a senior student or a newly qualified nurse. Sarah Mullally was an intake or two behind me and was a 2nd year student nurse. She would report to me when we worked together and it was common practice at that time that senior student nurses and junior staff nurses were often in charge, especially during a late shift, at night, or over the weekend. The ward was for men only, and specialised in gastrointestinal disorders. When I was in charge I would often arrive at work with a mixture of excitement and apprehension as to what challenges might occur during my 8 hour shift, due to frequent staff shortages or the condition of patients who required high levels of nursing care."

excitement and apprehension as to what challenges might occur during my 8 hour shift, due to frequent staff shortages or the condition of patients who required high levels of nursing care."

I always looked forward to working with Sarah as I saw that she was an extremely dependable person, and showed great compassion and calmness as a nurse as well as being able to function in an environment where multi-tasking and efficiency was important. I could completely trust her to look after the sickest patients on the ward whilst I oversaw and managed the whole ward. When she became Chief Nurse I was delighted as she had demonstrated to me what a kind and capable person she was."

Bishop Steven also welcomed news of Bishop Sarah's appointment "This is an historic announcement for the Church of England and for the Anglican Communion. I warmly commend our Archbishop-designate Dame Sarah Mullally and her family to the prayers and affections of the Diocese of Oxford. Sarah will bring proven wisdom, love, dedication and vision to her new role.

["Please pray for Bishop Sarah"](#) as she seeks to draw the nation, the Anglican communion and the Church of England into a deeper love of God and a stronger love of neighbour." For more information go to [Welcoming the new Archbishop of Canterbury - Diocese of Oxford](#)

**Service of Remembering, Sunday 2nd November
at St John's Church at 4pm**

You are very welcome to join us to remember loved ones who have died during 2025 and those who left us many years ago. If you would like to do so, there will be an opportunity to light a candle in their memory. The service will be followed by refreshments in Goring Heath Parish Hall



100 YEARS AGO

Here is an excerpt from the *Whitchurch Parish* magazine of December 1925 which gives a fascinating insight into what work with young people looked like back then:

THE C.L.B. (Church Lads Brigade) The six weeks' probation are over and 14 out of the 15 lads who joined have held fast and reached the stage of enrolment. Although from past experience of clubs and societies in Whitchurch some have frivings as to its permanence; those of us who are taking part in it have seen signs of grit and determination which promises well for the future. When one remembers that some of the lads are working three or four miles away from the parish and yet face our hill at the close of the day, even in inclement weather, it looks as if they mean to be steadfast.

The lads enjoy the physical drill on Monday evenings and Mr. Chivers, their instructor is pleased with the progress made. I have been telling them the meaning of the title "Church Lads Brigade". Each of the three words conveys the notion of some virtue at which the C.L.B. aims, namely, "Godliness," "Manliness," and "Comradeship."

We do not aspire to uniform nor are we forming a band as yet. Meanwhile we wear the badge and some are practising the mouth-organ with a view to outdoor marching.

On Thursdays Mr. A. Lambourne takes charge for boxing to develop the muscle and make the lads alert. Mr R. Stockley has kindly given another pair of gloves and comes down to help the lads to make the right use of them. A second-hand cinghy has been purchased and the lads are learning about the management of a boat and hope in the spring-time to put their knowledge into practice.

The Old Stables Meeting Room

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

Hire fees start at £15 for 2 hours. For more information please contact Geoff Weir at OldStablesBookings@btinternet.com
The Old Stables Meeting Room is owned by the Diocese of Oxford

Continued...

It is satisfactory to find them so keen and it is encouraging to have the good opinion of their parents already.

Although a new organization in this neighbourhood, the Church Lads Brigade is well established. It was started on St. Martin's Day, November 11th, 1891, and since that time over 1,000,000 lads have passed through its ranks. 25,000 old members died in the war, and old C.L.B. lads won 22 Victoria Crosses.

[Note – the Church Lads Brigade in Whitchurch lasted until 1933.]

The Whitchurch Art & Craft Exhibition

The organising team are very pleased to announce that the next Exhibition will be held on the weekend of **28th February/1st March 2026**. After much consultation, we decided to move it to the early spring, after the half-term break and when there are not so many conflicting events happening. This means of course that you will all have an extra 3 months in which to finish your entries – no excuses!

Apart from this date change, it will be in the same format in the Whitchurch Village Hall in Manor Road, and open for all current residents and ex-residents of Whitchurch-on-Thames, Whitchurch Hill and Goring Heath to enter, and also children attending the local schools.

There are various categories – something for everyone! Our judges will be awarding cups for best exhibits in Art, in Craft, in Photography and for Film & Animation (New Media). There is also recognition for best first-time adult exhibitor, Best in Show overall, and junior winners in four age groups too.

The theme for this year's Joyce Voysey prize is 'My Happy Place'. It will be fascinating to see how this subject is interpreted by you all! Please remember that only one entry per person is permitted in this particular category.

All the information about how to enter the exhibition will be available in the coming weeks on our website at www.wotarts.co.uk and on our Facebook event page. In the meantime, save the dates in your diaries and get busy with your lovely ideas.

We very much look forward to seeing your creations this coming Spring! Sally Woolhouse sally@wotarts.co.uk

Wednesday Evening Compline Prayer Group at 8pm GMT

In our Compline prayer we share our prayers and those for the world as a source of divine pleasure. As our hearts and minds return to the word, we are focused upon the love of God. We learn and receive through the Holy Spirit the abundance of God's grace. We are established internationally and ecumenically and it is a thrilling experience to flourish with Christians in other parts of the world as we embrace Jesus with tenderness and joy. Do join us if you can on ZOOM meeting No 86972849715 passcode 259076 at 7.55pm. Mobile: 07557 383634 Email: peter@pcfconsultancy.com



16

Caring for St. John's

Services at St. John's are usually on the second and fourth Sundays of the month so we need to prepare the church on the preceding Saturday. This involves dusting, hoovering, flower arranging and occasional brass cleaning.

We have a very friendly team to cover these activities. The church is open from 9.30am and we usually finish by 12 noon with a break for coffee and biscuits.

The aim is to have a pool of helpers so that people only need to help once a month for an hour or so and on special occasions such as Christmas, Easter and Harvest Festival.

In recent years we have lost people from our team so if you are able to help with any of these tasks you will be very welcome.

Please can you help?

If so, please contact Angi Simpson on 0118 984 2592

Harvest Festival at St. John's

On 28th September there was a service at St. John's to celebrate Harvest Festival.

On entering the church people were greeted with flower arrangements and displays of fruits and vegetables.

In addition to singing some favourite Harvest hymns all the children and adults also participated in an interactive talk for harvest led by James. This included identifying leaves and their associated fruit and vegetables and we also used gost notes which were displayed on a board to identify which activities we had taken part in during the past week.

After the service we went across the road to the Goring Heath Parish Hall with a play area where we enjoyed a delicious Harvest lunch of homemade soups and sandwiches.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to decorating the church and providing the lunch not forgetting those who came to support the event.



17

WOTSing



WOTSing Choir is the community choir for **Whitchurch-on-Thames and Whitchurch Hill**. It is not a performing choir and members do not have to be able to read music, to take an audition or even to sing in tune! It is simply for people who enjoy singing. We meet once a month in St John's Church, Whitchurch Hill, but we are not in any sense a

church choir. We sing songs from the shows, folksongs, pop songs, the occasional well-known hymn, but most important is that we enjoy singing, have fun and lots of laughter, and go home feeling happier than when we arrived! We always meet on the first Thursday of the month from 7.30 to 9pm. For more information about the choir, please contact Jerry on jcockeram@hotmail.com

The Sir Rickman Godlee Fund

Do you live in Whitchurch on Thames or Mapledurham and have an unmet physical need?

The Sir Rickman Godlee Fund is a small charity that might be able to offer financial help.

Please e mail bowen52@gmail.com for more information and an application form.

Advertising in this Magazine

The Parish Magazine for Whitchurch and Whitchurch Hill is produced and delivered to both villages three times a year. The yearly rate for advertisements is £50 for a half page advertisement, £40 for a third page and £30 for a quarter page.

18

Officers of the Parish

Team Rector:

Revd Canon Kevin Davies, The Rectory, Chesham, Reading, RG8 0SR. 01491 680252. revkevndavies-langtree@yahoo.co.uk

Team Vicar:

Revd James Leach, St Mary's House, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames, Reading RG8 7DF. 0118 976 5905.

jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com

Churchwardens:

Kenneth Baker, 10 Lyxton Rise, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 6FQ. 0118 943 2778. baker_kenneth2@sky.com

Rosemary Pearce, Little Eastfield, Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch on Thames, Oxfordshire, RG8 7EJ 07761 056125

rosemarypearcele@btinternet.com

Verger:

Kenneth Baker (contact details above).

Honorary Secretary: vacant

Electoral Roll Officer:

Rosemary Pearce, (contact details above)

Honorary Treasurer:

Peter Dragonetti, Covert Cottage, Hill Bottom, Whitchurch Hill, Reading, RG8 7PT. 0118 984 4711. peter@dragonetti.co.uk

Assistant Treasurer:

Kenneth Baker, 0118 943 2778

Organist and Choirmaster: rota

Contact for the Bell Ringers:

Kenneth Baker, 0118 943 2778

Magazine Editorial Team:

Wendy Ferguson, Rosemary Pearce, Angi Simpson.

Correspondence to rosemarypearcele@btinternet.com

Copy deadline for the March issue is Wednesday 11th February 2026.

Registered Charity Number 1213356.

19

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For more details see the Langtree Team website at langtreechurches.org or the church website achurchnearyou.com/422.

Registered Charity
Number 1213356.



If you would like to give to the work of the church locally you can do so using this QR code.

You can also make a lasting gift by including a legacy in your will.

For more information contact Ken Baker

baker_kenneth2@sky.com

The magazine can be viewed online in the Church section of the village website, whitchurchonthomes.com.