

March 2023



50p

Life



swcd-churches.org.uk



.LIFE MAGAZINE EDITOR

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Articles for the April edition are due by **Sunday 12th March**

Editorial Notes

Last month the cover was adorned with snowdrops, this month we are still in the spring mode with Crocus and Daffodils which brighten up the grass verge just past Lidl's in Street and was photographed last year. They are just as good this year, so take a look when you are visiting the shopping complex.

In the February Life Ana was excited about having two up and coming Messy Churches, so I have featured some busy hands getting to the heart of Jesus at Walton.

Thanks to Jenny Collins some more busy hands were showing their skills of craft and artwork in the Mission church at the February Afternoon Teas. The Benefice certainly has some crafty talent in it's midst, as the lower pictures on the back displays.

March is a time to look forward to, after an early holiday we will be looking forward to having the Bishop of Bath and Wells visiting our benefice, our local schools will be given an 'Easter Experience' in one of our churches, and we will be thanking God for our Mothers on 'Mothering Sunday'.

As this goes to print, Trinity Handbells will be entertaining the residents of Southlawns for the first time since before the Covid pandemic set in, so it will be good to be back.

God's blessings to you all, at this Lenten time. Roger.

Rector's Letter

“For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God..” Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8

‘Dust & Glory’

Dear Friends,

This year, the Church of England's Lent material, ‘Dust and Glory’ incorporates key themes of faith, failure and forgiveness inviting us to find God in the mess of our everyday lives. Whether or not you are in a house group or have joined a Lent group, whether or not you have purchased a copy of ‘Dust and Glory’, can I encourage you to use this 40-day period as special time with God, in prayer, bible reading, reflection and study. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians reminds us that it is only by grace that we are saved, God through Jesus has done it all for us.

Our mission statement for SWCD Churches, launched in January this year, reminds us that we are seeking to ‘worship God, love our communities and grow in faith’. As many of you will know by now, I am by no stretch of the imagination a gardener, but I do know that when a plant ceases to grow, it dies. This is a challenging analogy to apply to our faith. Are you growing? Are you learning new things about all that God is and has for you or are you just relying on the former things?

Lent is not the only time when I will be encouraging us to grow in our faith; it is, after all, something that should only end when we stand before our maker in glory. But Lent is perhaps a good time to re-focus and re-start that growth, giving as it does a pattern and a discipline as we journey through the 40 days towards the events of Holy week and Easter when we see the glory through the dust.

With my love and prayers, Ana

It's election time!

Next month sees the Annual Parochial Church Meetings in each of our parishes and I do hope those of you who are on the electoral roll (if you're not sure if you are on the roll, please check with your electoral roll officer – see elsewhere in the magazine) make every attempt to attend.

As well as looking back and looking forward, these meetings are the place where we elect our representatives including church wardens, PCC members and, this year, deanery synod reps.

Have you considered standing for one of these vital rolls? Even if you may have served in the past, this should not preclude you from serving again, particularly as I can promise you that PCC's are quite different these days, whilst deanery synod has some vital issues to wrestle with over the coming meetings.

Nomination forms will be available in our churches. If you don't think this is you, who should it be and could you nominate them?

Ana Lawrence

Saying 'thank you'

Over the coming weeks our church treasurers will be writing to all members of our churches to thank them for their financial giving over the last year. If, for whatever reason, you don't receive a letter please do contact your church treasurer (details elsewhere in the magazine). This is the first time that we have tried to do this, and we are conscious that it is possible our records are not completely accurate! Please bear with us! Ana Lawrence

Bishop's Letter

'When we hoe a field'

'When we hoe a field, we all start in this corner and we go this way' is my favourite Zambian proverb. I've been sharing its words with people from our parishes, schools and chaplaincies as a way of inviting us all to think about how our diocesan vision can be refreshed and developed to help us look towards the future with confidence and joy.

Our vision calls us to 'live and tell the story of Jesus'. It speaks of faith in action. It makes clear that all we do is in the name of Jesus. And it's full of aspiration; living out its words is a life-long task.

But what might our vision mean in terms of what we'd like to focus on specifically? This is where my Zambian proverb comes in. For my sense is that in our common life we would be strengthened if we had a greater focus of what we're all working towards together.

To help us think about this, I'm suggesting four themes that I hope we can all get behind. The aim is not to generate a new initiative, rather it's to identify priorities for our common life upon which we can all focus. Our diverse communities of course mean that anything we do needs to fit local contexts. But I hope the four themes can provide a common framework that will help us all.

Under our overall vision of 'living and telling the story of Jesus', the themes are: (1) Valuing and cherishing the people we already have, (2) Offering worship and sharing our faith together in new and different ways, (3) Developing our own faith and the faith of others. (4) Sharing in ministry and leadership.

I'm inviting everyone to have their say about how these could be developed, adapted or altered. Please do speak with each other and your local church, school and chaplaincy leaders about how this can happen where you are. More information to enable feedback is available at bathandwells.org.uk/vision.

Please be part of the conversation! Your insights, thoughts and experience are invaluable in helping us think together what it means to 'live and tell the story of Jesus'. Bishop Michael



Weddings

It is always a joy to be part of the celebration when couples decide to get married in one of our churches. Current and many former residents of our parishes have an automatic 'qualifying connection' which allows them to marry in 'their' parish church, but many people do not know that this qualifying connection also extends much further, meaning that family members of those currently living or who have formerly lived In Street, Walton or Compton Dundon may also be able to be married here as of right.

The Church of England website has a full list of qualifying connections and do discuss with family members who might be considering 'tying the knot', even those who have 'moved away', the option of getting married in one of our beautiful churches.

If in doubt, please contact the church office who can provide a full list of qualifying connections and, indeed, other ways in which you can still get married in our churches even without such a qualifying connection. Ana Lawrence

Walton Matters

God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. The nation's are in chaos, and their kingdoms crumble. God's voice thunders, and the earth melts. Be still and know that I am God. I will be honoured by every nation. I will be honoured throughout the world.

Psalm 46. V's 1 & 2, 6 & 7. NLT.

At last we have news of the delivery of our shoeboxes. Some of our barcodes boxes went to Central Asia and some went to the Ukraine. If you have heard personally of yours going to a different destination I would love to hear from you. If you have an opportunity to look at Samaritans Purse on line, follow the link for operation Christmas child, and enjoy the short videos shown of children opening their boxes or remembering their experience of receiving a box and the impact it made on their lives, you will see what a difference our gifts make to children and how they learn that they are loved. Thank you all once again.

Our Christmas quiz sheets made £100 for church funds and was won by Wendy Devenish this year. It was a very close thing but well done Wendy and thank you for all of you that bought a copy.

On Saturday 4th March we will be planting a mixed hedgerow for shelter and food for wildlife and would love you to pop over to see us. This event will probably last all day from 10.00 and light refreshments will be served in church. We were fortunate to have received a grant for this from Mendip council as part of our wilder churchyard improvements and are hoping some children can help with the planting.

A quiz evening will be held in Church on the 31st March at 7.30. This will be hosted by Richard and Rachel for us and will be £5 per head. Teams of up to 6 but we can make up teams on the night so do come along.

We plan to celebrate King Charles coronation with an afternoon tea in Church on the lines of our celebrations for the Queens Platinum jubilee. More details will follow but it will be held on Sunday 7th May between 3-5pm. We hope to show highlights of the ceremony and play music through the afternoon.

We are sad to share the news of the death of Marian Carter this month. Marion has suffered with ill health for many years but we were still shocked by the news. Our sympathies and prayers go to Derek, Sharon, Alison, Joanne and families.

No flowers through lent.

Sandra Gristock

Celebrate@6

Have you been to Celebrate@6 yet?

On the 3rd Sunday of each month, at 6pm in the Mission Church, we offer an informal service of worship, music and teaching together with the opportunity to receive ministry. Celebrate@6 is open to everyone from across the benefice and indeed is also designed to support and resource Christians from other local churches. Why not put this month's Celebrate@6 in your diary, come along, and invite others you know who may value this, particularly those who may have served that morning and just need to come and receive. Ana Lawrence

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Ana Lawrence

From far and wide!

When I am out walking or I need to go into St Andrew's Church, I often like to sit in a pew, soak up the atmosphere and have a quiet time of reflection and prayer.

Last week I picked up the Visitors' Book and enjoyed browsing the wonderful tributes to our church from visitors as close as Street or Somerton and as far away as Australia and New Zealand. Just in the last few years there have been entries written by visitors from many European countries, the Canary Islands, Russia, India, Vietnam, Bermuda, Alaska, Vermont, Idaho, Florida, New York, California and Alaska, and all over the British Isles.

So many lovely comments over time, but here is a selection:

'Loving this peaceful space'

'A little gem of tranquillity'

'Beautiful and sweet'

'Wonderful – gurt lush!'

'Deep gratitude, so well maintained'

'Thank you for this little church and its simplicity, beauty and spirituality.'

From Bishop Peter and Jane in 2020: 'What a beautiful church. God bless you all.'

One word comments include peaceful, beautiful, welcoming, serene, stunning, gentle, joyful, divine and spectacular.

Many visitors remarked on and appreciated the church being left open.

The most recent entry was 'When I am here I'm in heaven,' written on 10th February 2023. What a lovely note to end on.

Pat King

A Crafty Afternoon in February

The Mission Church was laid out ready with tables laden with craft materials. Delyth explained to the group of people who attended how they could use the crafty bits and pieces. Everyone had their own ideas and several crafty pieces were produced. I noticed a fantastic key ring, for a church key I think. There was a joint effort by one of the church couples, made with a heart theme. Butterflies and dragonflies also featured in the creations. As all this was happening there was lots of chatter amongst the group. Tea and cake was consumed and people gradually left the building. What on earth are we doing in March?

Afternoon Teas

Friday 17th March

2-30pm

Mission Church Street

Everyone Welcome!

There will be tea, cake, biscuits and time to talk.



What On Earth Are We Doing?

Featuring

A Lighthearted Quiz

And

Related Activities

Led by

Sue Ripley

Children and the church, some good news and a challenge!

One of the things I often hear said around our churches is something along the lines of 'Isn't it sad that we don't have children in our churches in the way we used to?'. I share this sadness; however, the reality is that the days when children just came to church as a matter of course are probably over. Of course, we still want to welcome all generations into our churches and please be assured you will always be welcome to bring children, grandchildren, neighbours and others to any of our services, particularly to those services with more of an all-age focus.

However, even if Sunday attendance amongst children is not as it used to be, the great thing is that we are still seeing children in our churches and finding other ways for them to hear the good news of Jesus in increasing numbers. I want to share three initiatives we are involved in where this is already happening.

'Open the Book' and other schools initiatives. Each week a team from SWCD churches and the Baptist Church takes interactive assemblies into a number of our local schools, telling Bible stories and sharing good news. I, and other colleagues also have the opportunity to take increasing numbers of assemblies, RE lessons etc in our local schools whilst the Parish Church in Street will be hosting an 'Easter Experience' for most of the pupils at Elmhurst this month.

'Little Stars', our term time pre-school group in the Mission Church is seeing growing numbers of families attending for a time of play, friendship and a Christian story or song.

'Messy Church'. This is now running in both Walton and Street and is seeing more primary school age children and their families coming along for a time of worship, stories, craft and food.

Children are coming to our churches and hearing the Christian message even if this is happening in a new way! And now to the challenge. All of the above activities need people and all of them

would welcome new people (you!) to get involved. If you are someone who longs to see more children hearing the good news of Jesus, could you be part of making that happen? If you are interested in getting involved or finding out more, please talk to:

Open the book - Pauline Hatrey

Schools work - Diana Greenfield or myself

Little Stars - Julie Day

Messy Church – myself

You will find all the contact details elsewhere in this magazine or on our church contacts list. Ana Lawrence

Mission Church Office Relocation

Thanks to the work of a number of people behind the scenes our benefice office will shortly be moving from the downstairs vestry in the Mission Church to an upstairs room (Room 2). Not only will this create a far better working environment, it will also allow us to put all of the equipment and other things that we need for our administration in one place as well as freeing up space in the vestry for various bits of storage, which are currently kept in a number of rooms around the Mission Church. This, in turn, will make our rooms available for hire and meetings much more usable for internal and external users.

We are aware that, for some people, the stairs to the office may be a problem but just to reassure you that if you can't get to our administrator, she'll come to you! Ana Lawrence

What's this about a Carbon Fast for Lent?

If you have seen the weekly news-sheet Lifeline recently you will see that we suggest a weekly Carbon Fast through Lent. With a different topic each week there are several actions from which to choose one or more to try. Why are we doing this? It is because, as Christians, we are called to care for Creation. We are invited to live more simply, reduce our ecological footprint and live in deeper harmony with all life on God's earth. The Carbon Fast is environmental action which witnesses to ourselves and others that we are taking this seriously. It is intended to be a part of our Lenten spiritual devotion, and helps us discover the benefits of stewarding resources. Many are already taking 'green' actions and will be familiar with basic ways of cutting waste and recycling; for others the ideas may be new and untried. Most actions are intended to be the start of a new way of living. Savings (in money and carbon) may not be immediate but the increasing effects will make a difference to your lifestyle and to the future of God's wider creation. Let us challenge ourselves and lead by example towards a better world.

If you wish to track the impact your changes are having you could calculate your carbon footprint using the calculator on the 360° Carbon website at: <https://footprintr.me/> and check again later to see your progress.

Lent is also an opportunity to reflect on what it means to be concerned for, and to pray about the whole inhabited planet as God commanded. When praying be aware of the destructive effects of climate change on our linked communities overseas; droughts, excessive heat, flooding and rising sea levels.

Combating climate change means being aware of the impacts it will have not just on us but also on our neighbours across the world, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable. You may wish to use the Carbon Fast Prayer below:

Most loving Creator God who has given us a world full of delights and wonders; As we prepare with the grace of self-sacrifice and self discipline for the great festival of Easter remind us how to treasure these gifts and to use them with

care; So that all may equally share in the earth's bounty and all creation may be restored to your image through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This article and the weekly Carbon Fast challenges have been produced using material from Tearfund and Ecochurch Southwest. Sue Ripley for Eco Church Group

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An evening of musical entertainment!

Saturday, March 25th at 7.30 p.m. in St Andrew's Church, Compton Dundon

On Saturday, March 25th we welcome Gregory Steward to St Andrew's Church, Compton Dundon, to entertain us with a variety of well known classics and songs from the musicals. Greg is starting out on his professional career (details below) and we are pleased to support him and look forward to a wonderful musical evening.

Tickets are £10, including a glass of wine/juice and 'nibbles' during the interval.

Available from any of the Churchwardens.

Gregory Steward, 22 yrs, graduated this summer from the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama. Prior to this Gregory, from Taunton and with a passion for opera, was a specialist vocalist and trumpet player at Wells Cathedral School. In 2016 he won the Taunton Young Singer Competition. He has sung with acclaimed vocal ensemble Tenebrae and the Choir of St John's College Oxford. He successfully auditioned for the BBC National Chorus of Wales and has performed at St David's Hall, Cardiff.

Pat

King

A PRAYER ABOUT GIVING

In previous editions of this magazine we have provided lots of different ideas and information about giving to the work and ministry of our parishes. This month, during Lent, can we encourage you to bring this subject and your response, to God in prayer. If it is helpful, consider using the words below, found on another church's web site.

Heavenly Father,

Our generous Provider,
There is nothing I have
That has not come from your hand.
Every act of generosity on my part
Is only a response
To the generosity with which
You have already blessed me.

I reject the image of success,
Into which this world tries to shape me.
An image defined by
Wealth, status, and power.

Instead, I ask that you
Would remake me in your image.
An image defined by
Generosity, humility, and servanthood.

May I model my giving
On the one who gave it all.
And may others see in me
A glimpse of your character,
Against which the riches of this world.
Seem dull and worthless.

Would you cultivate in me
A spirit of contentment.
Help me not to strive for more and more,
But grow in gratitude,
For all the ways you have blessed me.

Would you mould within me
A generous heart,
Empowering me to give sacrificially,
Not under compulsion,
But in joy and faith.
Amen.

Kevin Lawrence for the benefice stewardship group

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Cream tea anyone?

You are invited to come and share a cream tea on

Saturday, March 4th from 2pm – 4pm

Join us in the

Meadway Hall, Compton Dundon

For an afternoon of good food and good conversation

**We will be asking for donations for the work and mission of
St Andrews, Compton Dundon, but we promise we won't be**

Checking whether you put your jam or cream on first!

We look forward to seeing you there....

CHARITABLE GIVING 2023

The Benefice charitable giving group recently presented a paper to each of our PCCs reflecting on our giving over the last couple of years.

There is much to celebrate. Each of our parishes remains committed to giving in support of other organisations, alongside giving to the mission and ministry of our churches and there was a sense in which, inviting nominations for support from the congregation, had given more 'ownership' of the organisations that we decided to support.

However, we recognised, that there was still much to do in raising the profile of our supported organisations and engaging the church family in their work and ministry. One of the problems identified was the fact that we actually support a large number, and it was difficult for us to keep up with all of them.

The PCCs have agreed that we will, as a result of these reflections, refine our charitable giving for 2023, looking to support just two organisations per parish with, in addition, every effort made to find an organisation that we can support across the parishes as a whole benefice. Those we support should, if possible, be a mixture of local and international.

We are therefore, once again, asking the church family to nominate charities we could support for their parish. If you have a nomination please can you let me know, by the end of March, so that these can go to our next PCC meetings for discussion and approval. A reminder of the criteria we agreed, some two years ago, for the kinds of organisations that we are looking to support.

Principles for SWCD Churches Charitable Giving

- 1. Where possible we aim to support organisations who are specifically Christian, or where no such organisation can be found, those that have a Christian ethos.*
- 2. We value personal contact with those we support and particularly welcome proposals from church family members with personal links to a particular charity or cause.*
- 3. To ensure transparency and accountability, we will generally channel our support through UK registered charities.*
- 4. Our PCC's will always make the final decision on which charities each parish will support, informed by recommendations from church members, which have been reviewed by the churches charitable giving committee from across the benefice.*
- 5. Our support will be limited to a single year unless longer term support is specifically proposed and agreed by a PCC.*

If you have an organisation that you think your PCC should consider supporting please do nominate them. One of the ways in which we want to try and raise the profile of the organisations we support is by designating 'champions' for each one, a person who will be prepared to be the contact point, to share details of the organisation's work both through our publications and at one of two services during the year when our focus will be particularly on our supported charities. If this is something that you would also consider undertaking, please let me know.

Our support makes a huge difference to our partners, transforming communities and saving lives both locally and around the world. Thank you for being part of that.

Kevin Lawrence

for the Benefice charitable giving group

Some reflections following the recent General Synod debate on human sexuality.

I am writing this in the same week that the Church of England General Synod has passed a motion concerning the blessing of same sex marriages in church. This follows a long debate within the church, including the 'Living in Love and Faith' courses run in this Deanery and across the Church of England last year. You may have seen this decision reported in the national media, although I have yet to see the detail of precisely what has been proposed and what that might mean for me as your Rector. I intend to wait for this detail and give myself time to reflect and pray before I respond on the specific proposals.

What I can say now is that my understanding is that the motion does not seek to change the church's fundamental teaching and doctrine on marriage. However, much of the recent debate and discussion following this decision, has been unhelpful, either led by people with extreme positions on either side of the discussion, or by those looking in from outside the church, the latter who sometimes offer comment without necessarily an understanding of either the theological background or the long process that has led us to this point.

I wanted, therefore, at this stage, to offer a theological reflection which, I hope, will serve to counterbalance some of the unfortunate reporting that has surrounded this issue.

Firstly, we should remind ourselves that, as a church, we are primarily called to follow Jesus. This may seem obvious but even a cursory study of the gospels will show us that this might mean standing against current cultural norms and expectations. Jesus was frequently criticised for mixing with the 'wrong' sort of people and having the 'wrong' sorts of views and therefore we should expect (maybe even welcome?) similar criticism as his followers. We are not called to simply conform to our current culture and societal expectations, indeed there are occasions when we should be bold in speaking out against them on issues of justice and morality, even when that makes us unpopular. In this context, calls for the church to be 'progressive' or 'move with the times' on human sexuality or indeed other issues, misses the point of what the church is actually about. Ephesians chapter 4 verse 14 reminds us that we are not to be people that are 'tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching'. Any decisions about human sexuality, as with all our decisions, should not be based on cultural expectations or

what others might say, but rather on our understanding of the teachings and example of our Saviour.

Secondly, we should remind ourselves that we are called to love radically and inclusively. These words have often been mis-used or appropriated to support a particular perspective, but they are actually at the core of what it means to love. Our new mission statement asks us to seek to 'love our communities' and that includes everyone, whether or not we agree with their life choices and whether or not they are 'people like us'. What I find uniquely wonderful about our Christian community is how diverse we are; we come in all shapes and sizes and bring with us life experiences, histories and opinions that in most other settings would mean we had very little to do with each other. When we share the peace with one another on a Sunday, we are surely tangibly affirming this love; a love we share indiscriminately when we invite others to join us in our journey of faith.

Finally, we should also remind ourselves that we all come to this discussion as an imperfect people, sinners saved by grace. When we pray the Lord's Prayer together, each week we ask God to 'forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us'. Sin may not be a popular concept in the world but, as

Christians, we know that we are both in need of forgiveness and called to forgive others. Romans chapter 3 verse 23 reminds us that 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' and Jesus had equally hard teaching both for those like the Pharisees that seemed to believe that they were without sin and those who felt able to judge other peoples' sin without acknowledging their own, as in the story of the woman caught in adultery (John chapter 8 verses 1 – 11). When discussing human sexuality or indeed other similarly contentious issues, we would do well to begin by recognising our own fallibility and imperfect understanding of the depth and breadth of all that God has to offer to all his people.

I know this is a subject that will raise strong feelings and strong opinions and, if there is anyone who would like to discuss it further, please do come and see me. My prayer is that we can hold any such ongoing discussions, whether here, or in the national church in a spirit of grace and peace.

Ana Lawrence

God's Economics for Tough Times

'... DO NOT WORRY ABOUT TOMORROW ...'
MATTHEW 6:34 NKJV

A television news announcer once quipped, 'Speaking of the economy, if it weren't for bad news there'd be no news at all!' Each time we face a downturn we tend to forget we've 'been there, done that' and got through it by God's grace. Like ancient Israel we anticipate doom, spread discouragement, join those who gripe about the government, and long for 'the good old days.' How does the God who brought water from the rock, manna from the sky and ravens to feed a hungry prophet expect His people to respond to tough financial times?

The answer is: choose the right economy! As a believer you must choose between two economies. The first is the kingdom of God where He rules and reigns, owns all resources and dispenses them generously to meet His people's needs, independent of global economic conditions. The second is the kingdom of this world where men compete selfishly to be number one.

In God's upside-down kingdom the rules are reversed. He says, "... My ways [are] higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9 NIV). In this world's kingdom where the rule is, 'Get what you can and can what you get,' you're always vulnerable to greed and manipulation. So God told His people, '... Choose for yourselves ... whom you will serve ...' (Joshua 24:15 NIV). Which economy will you choose? If you are wise, you will put your faith in God's economy, trust Him, and 'don't worry about tomorrow!'

From the daily readings in 'The Word for Today'. This booklet of devotional readings is published every three months and is available free of charge through the generosity of supporters, from: UCB Operations Centre, Westport Road, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 4JF. Tel: 0845 60 40 401. Email: ucb@ucb.co.uk

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Walton



Afternoon
Teas
and
Craft
at
the
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Church



