

**ST MARY'S
OLD SWINFORD
Parish Church
MONTHLY NEWS
FEBRUARY 2020
ONLINE EDITION**



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SUNDAYS AT ST MARY'S

8.00 am Holy Communion
 10.00 am Parish Communion and Children Together
 6.30 pm Evensong
 10.00 am (second Sunday) Worship Together

WEEKDAYS AT ST MARY'S

Daily: 9.00 am - Morning Prayer (Monday to Thursday)
 Daily: 5.00 pm - Evening Prayer (Monday to Thursday)
 Wednesday: 1.30 pm - Toddlers' Group at St Mary's (term time) parents & toddlers
 Thursday: 10.30 am - Holy Communion in Lady Chapel
 Thursday: 7.30 pm - Bell Ringing Practice
 Friday: Choir Practice and Youth Groups (in term time)
 Saturday: 10.00 am - 12.00 noon - Open Church – refreshments available
Clergy Day Off Friday

OTHER REGULAR EVENTS

| | | |
|--------------------------|--|--------|
| | | Tel: |
| Prayer Group | Third Wednesday in month 10 -11 am | 393454 |
| Mothers' Union: | Second Tuesday at 2.15 pm | 392951 |
| St Mary's Walking Group: | Last Saturday of the month. Depart 9.30 am | |

CONTACTS

| | | |
|--|--|--------------|
| Reader: | Mr Roger King | 379800 |
| Church Wardens: | Mrs Judy Hall | 377349 |
| | Mr Antony Tatford | 822661 |
| Director of Music: | Mr James Bradley | 07973 934177 |
| PCC Secretary: | Miss Katey Fletcher | 378182 |
| Monthly News Editor: | Vacant –Please contact the Parish Office | |
| Safeguarding Officer: | Mrs Liz Fourness | 394359 |
| Church Hall and Coach House: - Bookings: | Parish Office | 441003 |
| Parish Administrator and Publicity Officer: | Mr John Sutton | 441003 |
| Parish Office: | Open 9.00 am -1.00 pm Tuesday to Thursday, 9.00 am to 12.00 noon Friday Closed Saturday, Sunday and Monday | 441003 |
| Church website address: | www.stmaryschurcholdswinford.org.uk E-mail: st.mary.os@btconnect.com | |
| Facebook: | www.facebook.com/stmaryschurcholdswinford | |
| Magazine e-mail address: | stmary.parishmagazine@hotmail.co.uk | |

ENQUIRIES ABOUT WEDDINGS, BANNES OF MARRIAGE, BAPTISMS.

Please come to the Church on Saturday morning between 10.00 am and 11.00 am for Vestry Hour. You will be warmly welcomed. Tea and coffee will be available.

PARISH REGISTER

There are no register entries this month

DIARY FOR FEBRUARY 2020

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Saturday 1 | 10.00 - 12.00 noon Open Church and Vestry Hour |
| SUNDAY 2 | CANDLEMAS |
| Tuesday 4 | Open the Book team visit Oldswinford Primary School |
| Wednesday 5 | 7.30 pm Baptism Preparation. |
| Thursday 6 | 10.30 am Holy Communion in the Lady Chapel |
| Saturday 8 | 10.00 - 12.00 noon Open Church and Vestry Hour |
| SUNDAY 9 | THE THIRD SUNDAY BEFORE LENT |
| Tuesday 11 | 11.30 am Holy Communion at Hollycroft 2.15 pm Mothers' Union meet in the Coach House 7.30 pm Churches Together in Stourbridge meeting |
| Thursday 13 | 10.30 am Holy Communion in the Lady Chapel |
| Saturday 15 | 10.00 - 12.00 noon Open Church and Vestry Hour |
| SUNDAY 16 | THE SECOND SUNDAY BEFORE LENT 3.00 pm Baptism |
| Monday 17 | Schools' half term holiday week |
| Thursday 20 | 10.30 am Holy Communion in the Lady Chapel |
| Saturday 22 | 10.00 - 12.00 noon Open Church and Vestry Hour |
| SUNDAY 23 | THE SUNDAY BEFORE LENT |
| Wednesday 26 | ASH WEDNESDAY 7.30 pm Service |
| Thursday 27 | 10.30 am Holy Communion in the Lady Chapel |
| Saturday 29 | 10.00 - 12.00 noon Open Church and Vestry Hour |

OPPORTUNITIES TO BECOME INVOLVED

There are many ways in which you might become more involved with the activities of the church in Old Swinford, whether at services of worship or in other supportive situations.

You are welcome to enquire about helping with readings, as a server, or sidesperson. We are always keen to welcome anyone who can join our linen washing rota or the Holy Dusters. There are many opportunities to help welcome and serve refreshments on Saturday or Sunday and at other occasions and to join our teams working with children.

Whatever your interest please speak to one of the wardens or a member of the clergy or to anyone you see doing what you may be interested in.

FROM THE RECTORY



Dear Friends,

In the church's calendar, February often takes us from the final day of the Epiphany season to the first day of Lent. 40 days after celebrating Christmas we have Candlemas or the Feast of the Presentation. This year Ash Wednesday is the 26th February.

In between these two holy days is St. Valentine's Day and also many secular 'awareness days'. Are you aware, for example, that the first week in February 2020 is National Storytelling week? Or that February 1st has been designated 'Dignity Action day', (an opportunity to 'uphold vulnerable people's rights to dignity' especially in care). On 6th February there is 'Time to Talk Day' to raise awareness of mental health problems, and on the following day you could choose to wear red clothing on 'Wear Red Day' (supporting congenital heart disease). Inevitably, PR and advertising executives get in on the act and have opportunistically created 'awareness days' as various as 'World, (insert here a well-known brand of chocolate spread), Day', National Pizza Day and 'National Tortellini Day'. There's even a day in February called 'National Love Your Pet Day', which rather begs the question: how do you feel about your pet on all the other days of the year?

One such day which caught my attention is February 17th on which you can become a 'RAKtivist' and commit to performing 'Random Acts of Kindness'! It led me to wonder whether carrying out 'random acts of kindness' could be called a Christian practice? The parables of Jesus teach that doing good and being kind are ways of revealing God in the world. Very often the good performed by the protagonists of his short stories seems to run counter to the accepted wisdom of the day. Could the vineyard owner be called 'kind' when he pays the same wage to those who have toiled all day in the sun as to those who work only one hour? Or is the woman who pesters the judge day and night being 'kind' to him? In these cases practicality gives way to generosity and persistence is seen as an act of resistance.

Jesus repeatedly insists that it is not religious profession, but caring for others, (feeding the hungry, visiting people in prison, clothing the naked), that brings entrance to the heavenly kingdom, (Matt. 25: 31-46).

Jesus saves his greatest condemnation for those who advertise their acts of kindness, the ones he calls 'hypocrites'– 'they have received their reward' he concludes. Rather, as far as is possible, perform acts of kindness in secret and 'your father, who sees in secret, will reward you', (Matt. 6: 4).

I think that the impulse behind 'Random Acts of Kindness' day is good and may be called Christian. Other religions, of course, recognise the importance of kindness in the world. Mahatma Gandhi said: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." The Dalai Lama said: "If you want others to be happy, practise compassion. If you want to be happy, practise compassion". And also: "Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible." Amongst Christian teachers, St Basil said: " he who plants kindness gathers love." Finally, in the words of Mother Teresa: "Kind words can be short and easy to speak but their echoes are truly endless".

So, my sisters and brothers, perhaps we can take inspiration from 'Random Acts of Kindness Day' and, in February, decide to plant kindness, sow compassion and scatter generosity. In this way we will show God's love in our community.

God Bless You.

John

CHRISTINGLE 2019

Our Christingle service just before Christmas was a joyous family occasion. What a delight it was to see so many children, past and present. Our thanks go to the children of Old Swinford Primary School, who excelled themselves playing their musical instruments, and singing for us.



Thank you so much for supporting The Children's Society over the years and for being part of Christingle in 2019. For over 50 years Christingle has played a vital role in supporting vulnerable young people. Because of your kindness many of these young people will have light in their lives.

Wendy Tranter

EFFECTIVELY RESOURCING MINISTRY – OPEN CONVERSATIONS

In 2018 the diocese received 76% of the Parish Share that it asked for, compared with a national average of 94%. This was the main reason behind a £1 million shortfall in diocesan finances. The level of stipendiary parish ministry is shaped by the amount of Parish Share that is offered and the Bishop's Council has concluded that plans need to be developed for restructuring the diocese, given the £1 million loss made in 2018.

During December and January there has been a series of Open Conversations to discuss these plans. I attended the first of these Open Conversations and here is a summary of the main proposals:

- Bishop's Council has concluded that there needs to be a saving of £1.67m from the diocesan budget by 2024;
- Around £0.55m of this will come from restructuring the diocesan office, with £1.12m from wider diocesan restructuring;
- Synod has agreed to review office accommodation, which may involve leaving the Old Palace;
- Most of the savings will come from spending less on stipendiary ministry, cutting between 15 (optimistic) and 30 (pessimistic) stipendiary clergy posts;
- Church growth is likely to be focused on the two Resourcing Churches in Worcester and Dudley, and the Calling Young Disciples project;
- Churches that minister in the most deprived areas will also receive more help;
- Around 40 smaller churches may have voluntary leadership (focal ministers) under the oversight of a stipendiary priest;
- Some churches may choose to stop having regular worship;
- Some churches may find an alternative which creates a welcoming, cared-for open presence, others might even close their building altogether;
- The deanery structure will be simplified with fewer deaneries, potentially 6 rather than the existing 13;
- A new, stable Parish Share system will be developed.

We are all invited to engage in the discussions about these proposals. In particular, the diocese would like to hear about what excites you about them? What concerns you? Is there something that hasn't been considered? You can email your thoughts to openconversations@cofe-worcester.org.uk.

Contd

Meanwhile, we are asked to pray

*For all who currently minister in our churches across the diocese,
especially those who minister in our church.*

*That others might hear a fresh call to minister both in the Church and in
living out their faith every day.*

*That more people and money would be found for us to grow as Kingdom
people.*

*That this process might draw us together as a Church, supporting and
encouraging one another.*

Roger King

*The invitation and opportunity to share in these Open
Conversations continues with meetings on 30 January at Worcester and
on 4 February at Bromsgrove in the afternoon and Kidderminster during
the evening. Full details available in church. Several members of St
Mary's congregation will have shared in this opportunity to listen to the
proposals and to contribute to the debate. Please make sure your views
are considered and that you are aware of the plans that will affect you as
the Diocese seeks to find answers to difficult issues and to form a plan
for the future that will bring solutions, rewards and challenges to us all.*

SOMETHING BETTER THAN BISCUITS

One Sunday morning, at a small village church, the new Vicar called upon one of the congregation to lead in the opening prayer. The man stood up, bowed his head, and proceeded as follows: Lord, I hate buttermilk and Lord I hate lard. Also Lord, I am not too keen about plain flour, but after you mix them all together and bake them in the oven, I just love the biscuits.

So Lord, help us to realise that when life gets hard, when things come up that we don't like and when we don't understand what you are doing, that we need to wait and see what you are making. After you get through mixing and baking, it will probably be something better than biscuits. Amen

CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL 2019



A really big **THANK YOU** to everyone who made the Christmas Tree Festival such a huge success. It's really difficult to say thank you to individuals as I'm bound to leave someone out but if you put up a Christmas Tree, made a Christmas Tree, made decorations for trees, helped with stewarding or refreshments, made refreshments, made electricity cables to enable trees to be lit, provided music for the Saturday evening, made a tree out of an old book, came to visit the Festival or helped in any way at all. I really appreciate your efforts.

I do feel I should mention the Monday Craft Group and Elaine Buchan in particular as she inspired and led the group to produce items sold on the Craft Stall. This effort raised £266.62. Thank you Elaine.

The whole Festival raised £860.62 for Church funds. Not only that, it provided a great outreach into the local community. It also provided a wonderful atmosphere for all the Christmas services. All in all a very successful event. Once again a huge thank you to everyone involved.

Sally Frost

Every tree was a winner in its own right and its contribution to the whole festival equally important. Thank you to all who prepared and presented a tree.

Thanks are also due to many people for the part they each played in ensuring this event again brought much joy to all who shared in its creation and to all who came along to enjoy the outcome of their labours. Above all, a very big thank you is shared from us all with Sally and Malcolm Frost who undertook the essential organisation and coordination of the festival.

The Churchwardens

BUCKET COLLECTION GENEROSITY

The generosity with which our Christmas Bucket Collection was supported has resulted in donations of £300 to each of the Stourbridge Street Pastors and the Life Debt Advice Centre. Thank you.

It is both encouraging and rewarding to see the practical realisation of the support that exists for these local charities that are addressing real local issues and are bringing effective help to those in need in our own communities.



ST MARY'S WITH ST JOHN'S MOTHERS' UNION

Our January meeting opened with the announcement of the death of Margaret Moulton who had been a member of our branch and served for many years as our treasurer.

Pat Whalley led the service of making New Year's resolutions which were very rarely kept. Instead it might be wiser to consider Minnie Haskins advise in "God Knows" to go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. "That shall be better than light and safer than a known way." (Broadcast by King George VI on 25th December 1939.) Pray and trust God.

Eighteen members attended the AGM.

Next Meeting: 2.15 pm at the Coach House on Tuesday 11th February – Speaker John Hill. All are welcome.

LETTER FROM THE ARCHDEACON OF DUDLEY

Lent will soon be upon us, with its opportunities for taking up spiritual disciplines for a season, doing those things which we know deep down are good for our spiritual health, but often struggle to commit to. Our culture is increasingly short-term, getting people to sign up for anything which stretches indefinitely into the future is challenging, but most of us can manage something for six weeks. And the good news is, research shows it takes about six weeks to form a habit!



So which Lenten discipline might we consider in 2020? What is going to be of most benefit for our growth as disciples of Jesus, as kingdom people? For some of us it may be good to take up something new, like joining a Lent study group in our church, or committing to daily bible readings in one of the many excellent resources available. Others will want to fast from something for the entire season, or a day a week. This may be physical fasting from food, or alcohol or chocolate, or perhaps a lifestyle fast, cutting out social media or TV. The key thing is that all these disciplines serve to help us focus more on God, making some space in our lives to pray and listen to him. Perhaps we may simply want to do something we are already doing, but more intentionally and regularly, with more focus, giving a little more time and effort to it.

Discipline is hard work! If our souls, bodies or minds are not stretched by our Lenten endeavours, we are probably not being disciplined enough. I am learning a great deal about physical discipline as I undertake training for running my first marathon at the end of April. The fact that so many lovely supporters are sponsoring me to raise funds for the Children's Society means I have further incentive to keep going, but on a cold and wet day, getting my running shoes on is all about discipline, mind over matter, doing what I have committed to, however it feels. Sometimes it is inconvenient, sometimes it hurts, but I know that I have to keep going, or I will never complete the race before me.

Often when I run, God reveals to me how spiritual disciplines can be similar to physical ones. Routine, habit, consistency are all the staples for health and fitness whether that is in our physical or spiritual life. I will be praying on my ever-longer runs, and using that space away from the phone and email to build my relationship with God, asking him to show me where I need better patterns in my spiritual disciplines to grow closer to him.

My hope is that my new running regime won't stop at the London Marathon finish line, and that (after a suitable rest!), I will maintain my new level of fitness. I hope and pray too that all of us who take up new spiritual disciplines for Lent will build healthy habits which stay with us and help us mature as followers of Jesus will beyond Holy Week. Just like my running, they will require effort, and also appropriate rest!

Nikki Groarke.

A CONSTANT CYCLE

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters."

Read Genesis 1.6-8

Reflection

Water is constantly moving around the Earth from land and sea to air, and then from clouds back to Earth as rain. God created and continues to create this cycle of water, which is an amazing feature of our world. Although fresh water covers less than 1% of the earth's surface, we depend on it for our survival. It also provides the habitat for 10% of the world's known species.

Action

As you notice water today - when you wash, drink, walk by a local pond, canal, river or beach - pause to thank God for this precious gift which sustains the life of our planet.

The Church of England will once again be offering the chance to journey through the season using their Lent Pilgrim resources.

Launched last year, Lent Pilgrim will offer daily reflections and bite-size bible readings along with a series of Lent challenges, which can be accessed through a printed booklet, on social media, on the Church of England's website or through the Lent Pilgrim smartphone app.

This year, Lent Pilgrim will have a focus on creation and the environment and will link with the Archbishop of Canterbury's recommended Lent book, with a weekly focus based on each of the chapter themes. The book, "Saying Yes to Life" by Ruth Valerio, will focus on care for creation, lifting our focus from everyday concerns to issues that are impacting millions of lives around the world, and suggest actions we can take to protect the environment.

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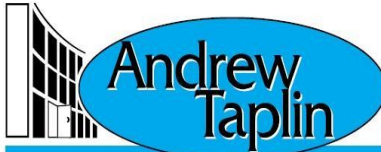


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