

CROSSKEYS



The magazine for the Catholic Parish of St Peter and the Winchester Martyrs

It's a wonderful life

Father Mark Hogan explains why he is inspired by a famous Christmas movie

Christmas is one of my favourite times of the year and one of the best things is watching Christmas films and Christmas TV specials.

When I was a child, one of the early treats of the season was the Christmas edition of the *Radio Times*, which used to be the only reliable place to find out what tv and radio treats lay ahead. Each year I would welcome its arrival with great excitement and accordingly plan my viewing time, which in fairness was most of my holiday time, interrupted only by Midnight Mass, eating and trips to Fratton Park.

One of the most popular and famous Christmas films is *It's a Wonderful Life*. You're likely to find it somewhere on the television schedule just about every year. You're possibly familiar with the plot. A desperate man, George Bailey, contemplates taking his life on Christmas Eve

but has a total change in thinking when, with the help of his guardian angel, Clarence, he gets to see what the world would have been like without him.

The film is all about growing in appreciation and gratitude for the gifts we have in life. It's interesting to note that George Bailey's perspective changes before his situation changes.

He comes to see that he had a wonderful life, even when it appears he is going to go to jail for a mistake he didn't make. He recognises all the gifts he had been given and the impact he had made on the lives of others.

Gratitude is a great way to live our lives. In fact, study after study shows there's no practice more effective at increasing your happiness and well-

being than practicing gratitude. Your own life experience probably validates this.

When you are focused on the good things in life and are thankful for them you feel better, you're probably healthier and more productive, and relationships with family and friends are stronger and more successful. It's not about ignoring problems, it's not false optimism. It's about cultivating gratitude for the very real blessings you enjoy.

The first step is that we actually learn to recognise the gifts and blessings that we are given. The second step is to turn our attention from the gift towards the giver of the gift, God our Father. The third step is simply to practise gratitude.

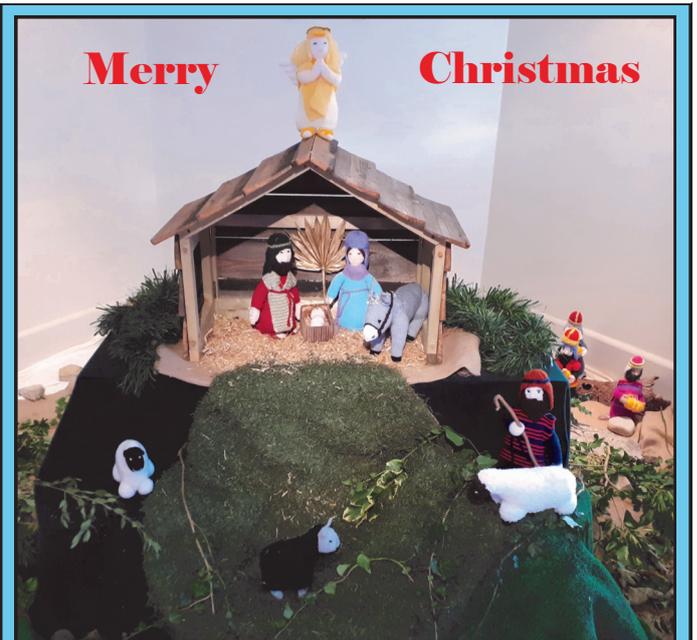
Two obstacles can get in the way of

seeing our blessings: big problems and little problems.

When we are facing the big problems in life such as health concerns, financial stress, marital woes, for example, it is easy to lose any sense of gratitude, sadly at the very time we could use it most.

This is what happens to George Bailey. He is hit with the massive problem of owing a huge amount of money that he cannot repay. Then he is also hit by little problems at every turn, from the annoyance of his noisy kids to a punch in the nose from an irate neighbour.

The big problems and little problems get in the way of him having an attitude of gratitude until the angel Cla-



The crib at St Stephen's Church last Christmas.

Continued on page 2

Celebrating God's greatest gift to us

Continued from page 1

rence helps him recognise the blessings of his life and why his life mattered.

The first step to gratitude is recognising our blessings. But if we are honest we need help to do it. God not only gives us gifts and blessings, He then goes to great lengths to help us see them.

We see this played out in a Christmas passage from the Gospel of Luke. After the birth of Jesus to Mary in Bethlehem, Luke switches scenes, taking us out of Bethlehem to the countryside that lay between the city and its near neighbour, Jerusalem. *"In the countryside close by there were shepherds who lived in the fields and took it in turns to watch their flocks during the night. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified."* (Luke 2:8-9)

The shepherds were struck with great fear. In the King James Version it says they were 'sore afraid.' They were so afraid it hurt. But the angel said to them: *"Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people."* (Luke 2:10)

The angels are about to help the shepherds recognise a gift that will bring them great joy. And Luke records this event because the good news is not just for the shepherds but for all people. He writes so that whole world will know about this good news of great joy.

Think about it, this text, written over 2,000 years ago, has survived all this time. This Christmas, it will be read throughout the world so that people everywhere can recognise or remember the greatest gift we have been given by God. It is a gift for all people, which means it is a gift for you.

The angel describes this gift: *"Today*

in the town of David a saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11)

The gift the angel helps the shepherd recognize is that of a saviour.

This Christmas you might be hoping for some special gift you need or want, but a 'saviour' wasn't actually on your list.

In fact, being told you need a saviour might even sound offensive or condescending.

- Needing a saviour implies that you don't have it all together.
- Needing a saviour suggests that you don't have the ability to solve all life's problems on your own.

But if you think about it, needing a saviour just makes sense. On our own we can have a difficult time admitting our mistakes. On our own we slip into focusing on the negative aspects of life. On our own we can become anxious or annoyed, angry or upset.

- Fears, especially the fear of failure, can overwhelm us
- Stress and tension can exhaust us
- Worry and anxiety can haunt us

These are human problems that cannot always easily be solved with human solutions. We need a saviour who can save us from ourselves, with a power we don't have on our own.

- The gift of a saviour means we can face the past without regret and not allow it to define us.
- The gift of a saviour means we can head into the future without fear, with hope in our hearts.
- The gift of a saviour means we can live in peace each and every day.

Our human problems cannot be solved with human solutions. We need a saviour who is Christ and

Lord. That's the gift we celebrate at Christmas.

The angels describe for the shepherd how they will recognise the saviour. *"And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."* (Luke 2:12)

The shepherds needed help recognising the saviour because no one would think to look for one in the time or place or manner in which our saviour came. God sends his blessings in surprising ways which we can't always see on our own. Then Luke tells us: *"And suddenly with the angel there was a great throng of the heavenly host, praising God and singing: 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favour.'"* (Luke 2:13-14)

Gratitude is a great way to live. It begins by recognising the gifts we have been given, which means turning to God in prayer to help us spot them. Even a few minutes a day in quiet time can make a difference.

If we can learn to see our blessings, regardless of the circumstances, we're going to recognise more and more blessings because we tend to see what we're looking for. And when, day after day, we consciously choose to recognise God as the ultimate giver of our gifts and blessings, we come to know more deeply his love for us. His love moves from being a general, abstract love for humanity to a love for you and me, personally.

His gifts are personal, because his love is personal. God gives us gifts that are unique to each of us. He has given me gifts he has not given you. He has given you gifts he has not me, so that we will be drawn into a relationship with Him and each other.

Maybe life isn't always wonderful, but cultivating gratitude is a wonderful way to live.

On the first day of Christmas my true love sent to me a baby in a manger

Weddings — joining the computer age

Alison Young explains some recent changes in registering marriages

In this modern age, many of the traditional milestones in life seem to have lost some of the significance they used to have, but weddings are on the rise again, and getting married in church is always a joyful and extra special event. However, recent electronic opportunities have created a number of changes to the traditional processes and experience.

Until recently, couples signed the marriage register at the end of their wedding service (and often posed for a photograph or two, signing the important book); however, since 4 May, 2021, hard-copy registers are no longer maintained and the information is now held electronically by the General Register Office.

It's not all bad news though, as the new system enables mothers' and step-parents' details to be recorded as well as fathers' details. The initial process remains the same: couples



Signing the marriage register — a thing of the past.

have to give notice to marry at their local register office. A single-page marriage schedule is issued after 28 days and has to be collected from Winchester Register Office and held by the church.

This marriage schedule is checked and signed by the wedding couple, their witnesses, the priest and the wedding registrar at the end of the wedding service (in place of the wedding register). The registrar returns the signed marriage schedule to Winchester Register Office for entry to

the new electronic system, so that a wedding certificate can be issued.

Sadly wedding certificates no longer can be issued by the parish registrars, but they do ensure that the marriage schedule is delivered to Winchester Register Office as soon as possible, to enable the wedding certificate(s) to be issued promptly (especially if they are ordered online, in advance of the wedding).

This also affects the issue of replacement wedding certificates, which can be obtained now only from the local register office.

Another change to weddings which may be considered to be much more beneficial is the fact that the parish now has the facility to livestream ceremonies. So, friends and family, unable to attend in person, can tune in to watch the service, even if they are on the other side of the world! Mind you, in that case probably they will find that the service will be in the middle of the night.

Our parish is especially lucky that we have a wonderful florist who has the skill to make the door of St Peter's extra beautiful as well as fill the church with wonderful displays. We also have excellent organists, who are happy to assist in choosing music for weddings and our clergy always go the extra mile in helping to plan and rehearse the wedding service.

In the midst of change the clergy of the parish remain a willing source of information and support if you would like to be married, but be aware that generally you need to plan at least six months ahead, especially if you would like to marry on a Saturday.

The Winchester Catholic Women's League are pleased to have returned happily to holding monthly meetings in the pastoral centre, and at the time of writing were excited, and looking forward to hosting a pre-Christmas charity soup lunch on 10 December, writes Anne Whitmarsh.

After Covid started they maintained contact by meeting on Zoom, and in the summer meeting outdoors at a local garden centre. They are rebuilding slowly, proposing tentative steps, holding monthly meetings within the safe environment of the pastoral centre, alongside the monthly Zoom meeting.

Their main aims are charity, work and loyalty, and the monthly soup lunch helps to raise funds for the charities they support. Also they continue to be busy knitting hats for merchant seamen.

They are a friendly group who offer friendship and support to one another in a Catholic environment, and would welcome enquiries from interested ladies.

For further details contact the parish office 01962 852804 or email: office@stpeterswinchester.org.uk

On the second day of Christmas my true love sent to me two parental loves

Pope honours Paul Townsend



The Holy Father has made former St Peter's parish priest Paul Townsend a Chaplain of Honour, with the title Monsignor.

In October Bishop Philip went to Our Lady of Sorrows, Fordingbridge, to celebrate Mass in thanksgiving for the intentions of Mgr Paul.

In the Bishop's homily, he recalled once having been asked 'What must you do to become a Monsignor?'

He continued: "When Mgr Paul was ordained by Bishop Emery in Windsor in February 1984, he put on the front of his Order of Service the words of Jesus from the Gospel of John: *'You did not choose me; no, I chose you, to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.'* Those words have surely been much fulfilled in Mgr Paul." He has served in Read-

ing, at the Cathedral, as parish priest of Fareham, Wash Common, Winchester and now Fordingbridge. He has always been much-loved.

Bishops have found in him a loyal support and critical friend, entrusting him with important roles in the Diocese: Vicar General, Dean and Co-ordinating Pastor, Director of Religious Education, a member of the Council of Priests, the College of Consultors, the Board of Trustees, the Priests' Retirement Fund and the Bishop's Council. He is a Canon of the Cathedral and an ecumenical canon of Winchester Cathedral. He is the Vicar for Clergy, with a massive responsibility. The Bishop said he must have a diary with 48 hours in the day and 14 days in a week!

"This honorary title, the Pope nowadays does not give very often. It's

measured not just by what a priest does - the fruit - but for who he is, the example he gives. In Mgr. Paul, we have a great priest, full of wisdom, faith and prayer. I cannot thank him enough for all his help, advice and support.

When I told him the news, he looked at me, with those hang-dog eyes, and said with all seriousness *I am not worthy*. He always hates a fuss being made of him, but I think the Lord wants us to make a bit of a fuss tonight."

How faith may play in to political matters

Dr Elizabeth Slinn reports on a recent diocesan symposium

Are religion and politics or political activities compatible? How challenging is it to be a politician and have faith? Should people of religion be involved in politically driven matters?

On Saturday 6 November the diocese, led by Bishop Philip, held a symposium to discuss these subjects and to hear from politicians who have a faith, and from others who are involved in or have a view on such matters as refugees, climate change, homelessness and the facts behind Catholic social teaching.

This was not an opportunity to discuss political views, but to describe the problems and privileges of having faith in politics. The politicians and former politicians taking part

all came over as sincerely motivated people wanting only the best, inspired by their personal faith.

Jacob Rees-Mogg spoke of the history of parliament with the Church and his own experiences. Ruth Kelly spoke movingly of the personal cost of being Catholic and the response by the media to do to attempt to bring the discussion always back to Church teaching and her views on them.

We heard about the Church's response to refugees and our responsibility to care for migrants, as the Holy Family were cared for by those they met on their journey.

Can we solve homelessness, is climate change best left to the politicians or can we as local parishes influence change?

These were just some of the six

workshops held throughout the day as well as the keynote speakers and panel discussion.

The symposium was held virtually as it was felt too soon to gather a large number. The platform used was interactive and endeavoured to replicate discussion rooms and 'booths' where diocesan representatives from Cafod and Caritas, for example, waited to have lunch time conversations with attendees. It was a great opportunity to think about where and how we become involved and how our faith plays in to political matters, or not.

Bishop Philip, in Portsmouth E-News, asked that we pray for all who serve us in public office at local and national level. In our parish let us pray for those involved in all of these out reach, social activities as we try to put faith into action.

On the third day of Christmas my true love sent to me three great hugs

(Nearly) back to normal at our school

Louise Buxton head teacher of St Peter's Primary Catholic School reflects on the autumn term

After 18 months of lockdowns, bubbles and face-coverings we seem to be slowly returning to the regular rhythm of school life, enjoying whole school assemblies and Mass, sporting events, after-school clubs and trips.

Hillier Gardens – Year 3

Year 3 visited Hillier Gardens to learn more about the stone age. In the morning, they learnt how and when it happened and how we know about it today. In the afternoon, they fully embraced stone age life by eating their lunch around a campfire and toasting a stone age snack on it. They also tried flint knapping and creating artwork and jewellery from the period.

Butser Ancient Farm – Year 4

The children had an amazing time at Butser Ancient Farm where they were immersed in Anglo-Saxon life. They gained first-hand experience of sitting in a long house and found out about their daily life. The skills of archaeology were explored, with the children finding a range of different items that helped piece together clues from the past including revealing some of the food the Anglo-Saxons ate. The children also attempted the difficult skill of spinning wool that they would have used to make clothes. They also explored early forms of writing using runes that are written vertically.

The Living Rainforest – Year 5

Year 5 were excited to visit the Living Rainforest in Newbury. They went prepared with great background knowledge having studied the rainforests of the world. The children were fascinated by the plants and animals they observed in this recreated rainforest setting. They experienced the rainforest climate and humidity and developed a better understanding of how plants and animals survive in this ecosystem.



Pupils on their trip to Hillier Gardens.

Anna wrote: *“I liked the way that they made it feel like a real rainforest.”*

Nicholas wrote: *“They had such exotic plants and I liked seeing the armadillo and the snakes.”*

Esmee wrote: *“I learnt that a gumbor was an animal that eats the sap from trees. We saw the pygmy marmosets they were the smallest monkey in the world and they are gumbors.”*

We saw so many different animals, including: monkeys, snakes, turtles, lizards, stick insects, birds of several species, tortoises, an armadillo, fish, spiders, and an alligator. Unfortunately, we did not spot the sloth as she is usually hidden away in the branches of the taller trees.

Thank you to all the parents who helped on our school trips.

London's Burning – Year 2

Meanwhile Year 2, rather than going out on a school trip, did something a little bit special in school learning about The Great Fire of London. The children have enjoyed finding out about the sequence of events in September 1666. We have reflected a lot upon whether the fire was indeed a tragedy or opportunity.

Alice wrote: *“I think it was an opportunity because you could make a bigger city after the Great Fire of Lon-*

don. They could build houses of brick or stone.”

Ashley wrote: *“I think it was a tragedy because many people died. Houses burnt down. People lost lots!”*

Noah wrote: *“It was a tragedy because thousands of houses were burnt down and people lost all their things. It was also an opportunity because London was rebuilt and they built a fire service.”*

We also had a ‘Great Fire’ re-enactment, to bring it to life for the children. They were fascinated to see how the wind made the fire spread and how easily the houses caught alight.

Little Fishes Pre-School

For some of the children at Little Fishes Pre-School, it is the first time they have experienced time away from home. To support them to settle, feel confident and safe, we have been talking about how ‘I am Unique’. The children have enjoyed changing their appearance, using wigs, glasses, and trying on funny hats, as well as painting their portraits and making collages. We used a mirror to help identify our features.

We are talking about how we all belong to a family. The children have brought in a family photo to show. The photo has been put in an album so that if the child is missing home, they can find their family photo to cheer them up.

During autumn, we made good use of the colourful leaves. We are collecting a variety of sizes to create our Leaf Family Tree. The children are choosing leaves to represent the members of their family, so creating a sense of belonging and building confidence in talking about people who are important to them.

Check out our Facebook page for more information about the wonderful things going on at our school. <https://www.facebook.com/St-Peters-Catholic-Primary-School>

On the fourth day of Christmas my true love sent to me four joyful friends

Children finally able to celebrate

Rosanne Walker describes the success of the latest First Holy Communion programme

Like so much of life over the past two years, the First Holy Communion programme also had to adjust to the challenges of the global pandemic.

The 2020 summer First Holy Communion Masses had been postponed to October and November, the latter then having to be deferred a second time, to Masses in both January and July of this year.

As such, we guided and supported the children and their families through this challenging time, with some having to wait a whole year to finally make their First Holy Communion.

With such dedication and commitment, love and enthusiasm from the catechists we were able to continue to grow and pray together and the children were able to maintain their focus on the Sacrament despite the long wait for many.

This sense of waiting was keenly felt; we gently guided them from a time of excitement and anticipation into a quieter time, helping them to wait patiently with expectant hope for the moment when they were finally able to receive Jesus into their hearts in

this very special way.

For many, their experience of receiving Jesus in the Eucharist for the first time was even more memorable than it might otherwise have been; the Masses were smaller and more intimate and many parents commented that this made the celebration even more special. It was wonderful to see so many joyful faces as we looked around the church.

This year's group began their preparations shortly after Easter. We decided to delay the start of the programme from January, so that we would have minimal sessions online; while a wonderful tool in these times, Zoom sessions don't allow the children the full experience of the beautiful programme, with some children struggling to engage with others in quite the same way online.

So, following a holy hour of led Eucharistic Adoration, the families were welcomed onto the programme in an early evening Zoom session with Fr Mark and the lead catechists. It was a fun, relaxed and informative session where everyone had a chance to meet one another and to be formally welcomed as a whole cohort.

Once again, the catechists rallied superbly and recorded videos for the first five sessions in preparation for

First Reconciliation. Each week, the video was followed up by a live Zoom discussion and prayer session.

We had been hesitant to begin online; for children this is certainly not the best way of getting to know one another nor to be able to grow and share together, however it went as well as we had hoped it might.

One catechist said: "I was concerned that the children would find it difficult to engage over Zoom at the start of the programme, especially as they didn't yet know one another, and as the dialogue between the children and the catechist is such a key element of the programme. However, the commitment from the children and their families to the sessions really filled that gap and it's been a real pleasure to see them all so keen to join in the activities and discussion."

Everyone was delighted when finally we were able to meet in person for the sessions, and thus the second half of the preparation for receiving Jesus' love and forgiveness in the beautiful Sacrament of His mercy continued, with the sense of growing together in Christian community and love of God strengthened.

The group of over 40 children made

Continued on page 7



On the fifth day of Christmas my true love sent to me five gold hearts



Continued from page 6

their First Reconciliation in July. Many thanks, as always, to Fr Mark and Fr Anthony for their wonderful witness to the children, and for guiding them so beautifully in receiving Christ's love, mercy, healing, and forgiveness.

One girl left saying: "When can I do that again? It felt really good, mummy!" One of the boys said: "That was great, just great! I feel amazing! How often can I do it again? Are you allowed to go every week? I feel so good!" Another chose to wait until near the end of his group to go up, but afterwards he felt so happy and peaceful that he wished he'd gone up first!

The children then began their prepa-



ration for receiving Jesus in Holy Communion, continuing to meet after the summer break in their weekly sessions in St Stephen's Church.

October arrived quickly, and the children were ready to receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for the first time. Three beautiful Masses took place in October in St Peter's Church,

with close family members and godparents joining the children to celebrate with them, some being able to travel from abroad. For many, it was the first time attending any sort of communal celebration, and despite the social distancing and masks, the sense of love, community and joy was tangible.

With heartfelt thanks to our wonderful, dedicated team of catechists, and to all the parents who supported their children so wonderfully throughout their time of preparation.

We now look forward to welcoming a new group of children onto this year's programme with a time of guided Eucharistic Adoration this Advent.

Some of the children and congregations at the three First Holy Communion masses.



On the sixth day of Christmas my truelove sent to me six priests a-praying

Alpha resumes face-to-face sessions

Allegra Matunda updates on the parish Alpha programme

Alpha is a series of sessions designed to explore the basics of the Christian faith in a relaxed and interactive way.

The course creates a space where 'friends bring friends' to a conversation about faith, life and God which is authentic and unforced. Each session includes a cooked meal, a talk, and small group discussions.

It was with great joy that finally we were able to offer an in-person Alpha after 18 months of Covid restrictions. Although the lockdown did not stop us from running three seasons of Alpha online and with great success – who knew God is not fazed by technology – it has been wonderful to run Alpha in person again.

This term saw us offering both online and in-person versions. We decided to keep running the online Alpha to provide that extra opportunity for people who could not physically join us. We know many have benefited from the online experience; one person recently shared how the course has helped them grow in faith and that continued access to the teachings has enabled them to dip back into the content over and over.

We started the year by joining with other local churches running Alpha to pray for God's blessing upon our teams and guests. It was an uplifting evening of prayer and intercession which sets us all well to start the course.

And well did it start! To experience the buzz of conversations and laughter, table fellowship around a meal, inspiring talks and thought-provoking discussions was a real joy. Ever conscious of the Covid situation, we have had to ensure an environment that is both welcoming and safe for all involved and with two weeks left before the season ends (at



the time of writing) we can say that it has been an incredible 11 weeks.

Having combined Youth/Parents Alpha and the main Alpha has also given us a sense of togetherness. The youth got to experience their own Alpha at the same time as their parents but with the latter joining a wider group of people thus fostering a greater sense of belonging and of community.

The apex of our Alpha was our Holy Spirit Away Day held at Farleigh Prep school. This gave us the perfect setting to hear more about the Holy Spirit and pray for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It was a powerful experience for us and we know God started a new thing in many of those present.

Youth Alpha joined the same day although they were in a separate space to the adults and their programme ran differently. The sharing of the day re-emphasised the togetherness we have felt throughout the season with both teams working as one.

The time away provided many opportunities for fellowship and getting to know one another as we grow in faith-based friendships with each other. We had a fabulous spread for our bring and share lunch.

As we come to the end of the season, we pray that God will continue the amazing work He has started in both the team and the guests. The team has been truly extraordinary and, as God can never be outdone in generosity, we know He will bless them tremendously for their love, faith,

time and service in enabling all to come closer to Him in hope and joy.

The next season of Alpha will start on Monday, 31 January 2022 and run for nine weeks. If you know anyone who would benefit from doing Alpha, please pass the word around. If you would like to join, you would be welcome. To register on the next Alpha course, please visit www.catholicwinchester.org.uk For more information, email alpha@stpeterswinchester.org.uk

Here is what others have said this season...



Shana writes: Joining Alpha, I initially thought it would be a great opportunity to get to know others in the church. I wanted to

become more active in the community but did not know where to start. But I was already strong in my faith and did not think I'd gain anymore from what I thought was a catechism course.

Boy, was I wrong! What I learned is that our God is such a giving limitless God. He wants to pour more and more of His graces and mercies into you. Just when you think you are already full, He desires to pour into you until you are overflowing with His love. How wonderful is that!

My already strong faith has grown just in the short time of being involved in the Alpha course. I see, through the testimonies of others in my Alpha group, how Jesus is per-

Continued on page 9

On the seventh day of Christmas my true love sent to me seven saints a-singing

sonally working in their lives, healing those they care about, and bringing them closer to him.

My knowledge of Jesus has grown into a more personal encounter with the living God. He is very real. Now knowing more about the Alpha program, I am excited about inviting others to join, especially those who are feeling lukewarm and are in need of a boost. So not only did I receive the gift of a deeper faith, I also discovered a way to become active in the community, by leading others to a personal encounter with Christ.



Gabrielle writes: I believe that Alpha is a great course that allows people from different backgrounds to fellowship in a safe

space where the difference in opinion is welcomed and embraced. I felt I could be open and transparent, suspending judgement and engaging in profound, meaningful discussions, many of which would leave me still pondering over, long after the session had finished.

Week after week we looked at different topics in the Christian faith, as we grew and learned together. I appreciate the coherency in the course structure, which allowed me to learn the how and whys of my faith, by identifying its many different components, for example, the concept of forgiveness.

I believe that when it comes to the Alpha course, whether you are atheist, agnostic, a new Christian or a mature Christian, all can learn from others and be edified. This course has allowed me to grow in the understanding of my faith and consider different perspectives on a range of topics. I would absolutely recommend this course for those also seeking such understanding – it was truly a blessing.

Matthew writes: I've been involved in delivering Alpha courses for



An Alpha ecumenical prayer evening

around eight years. I had no idea it even existed when one of my fellow Confirmation catechists in Wimbledon inspired us to use it. At the time, I had been a Confirmation catechist for several years and our material was really tired. We were all amazed at the impact Alpha had with our Confirmation candidates; it really made their preparation come alive. I also started using Alpha for parent courses and again the effect was amazing. Parents came to us saying how the course had transformed their children, or sometimes how it transformed their own faith and revealed things about Jesus that they'd never known before.

I've been in Winchester for just over four years now and we've been delivering Alpha courses for about the same time. While the course materials don't change much, the experience of every course is different because of the guests. As a group leader or sometimes as a course leader, I always feel a fresh and renewed encounter with the Holy Spirit. He never ceases to amaze me by the affect he has on everyone, both guests and leaders alike.

Another striking thing about the friendships people make with each other on Alpha courses are so strong and long-lasting. It must be to do

with the extraordinary journey we all experience. For many, it is a journey of faith which takes us through a door in the wall and we never want to return to the way life used to be before.

I was brought up in the Catholic faith – a 'cradle Catholic' as they say. My own faith journey took years to complete: I was well into my forties before I'd made up my own mind and recognised God's calling. How I wish I had known about the Alpha course. I would have got to my destination so much quicker than I did.

Anonymous writes: Holy Spirit Day was the moment when Alpha turned from a pleasant experience to an unforgettable, life-changing one. Some people go with high expectations: I was just looking forward to a day of prayer and ended up with so much more.

I don't think I 'understand' the Holy Spirit, but the away day started me on a journey towards understanding the concept, one that will go on for a long time. There were feelings of calm, and excitement, of great joy and happiness, and of bonding with other people.

It is wonderful to think that I can pray for others and maybe even enable them to receive and experience the gifts of the Holy Spirit.



An Alpha shared meal

On the eighth day of Christmas my true love sent to me eight angels healing

Shopkeepers lowered blinds in respect

Parish archivist **John Thornhill** provides some background to an image in the east window at St Peter's Church

Two windows in St Peter's Church commemorate Winchester priests – Archbishop John Henry King in the Lady Chapel and his predecessor as parish priest, Provost Canon Luke Gunning, in the Sacred Heart Chapel (a detail shown on the right).

In 1869 Fr. Gunning, aged 26, arrived in Winchester fresh from the English College in Rome. This was his first parish; one which he was destined to serve for the rest of his life. Initially he was curate to Fr Ignatius Collingridge and subsequently, parish priest – a total of 54 years.

Quickly gaining the confidence of the congregation, it seemed natural he should become their parish priest on Fr Collingridge's retirement in 1883. He was made one of the first Canons following the diocese's foundation. Later he was to be the diocesan inspector of Catholic schools, Rural Dean and, in 1916, Provost of the Chapter.

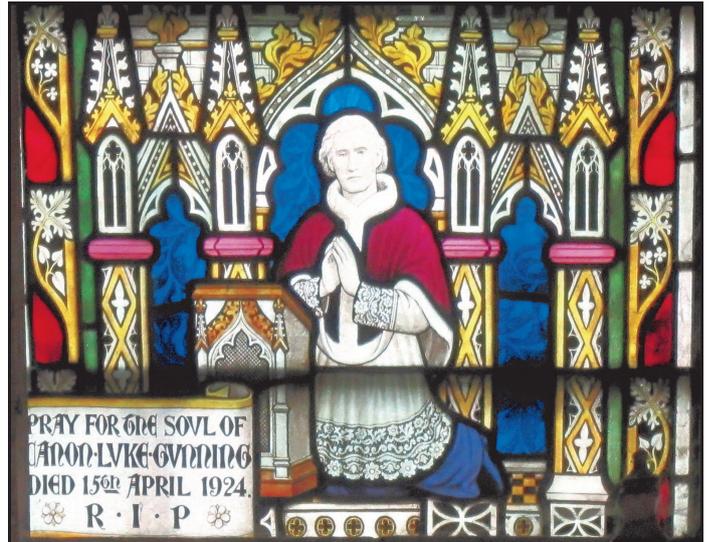
Canon Gunning travelled abroad extensively, believing in the old adage that travel broadens the mind. The parish archive holds his passport to visit the Holy Land (then Palestine) in 1907. Not the small booklet of today but a large impressive single-sheet document signed personally by the Foreign Secretary.

However, travel and diocesan duties did not get in the way of his deep commitment to parishioners and the people of Winchester. He treated everyone as equal, no matter their beliefs or faith, or their station in life. The canon visited the prison and the workhouse at least weekly, and sat on the hospital's house committee, amongst countless other duties. Such untiring work led to great respect and affection for him throughout the city.

Education was one of his great passions. The parish school, opened in 1859 in converted stables of The White House, was by this time inadequate, so he raised the finance for a new one. Opened in 1899, it was built at Gordon Road (where St Peter's car park is now). Here too he was a frequent visitor, recording each occasion in the school log in beautiful copperplate script.

However, his greatest wish was to replace the church. In his day the church was what is now Milner Hall, built in 1792. Canon Gunning commissioned a design in 1888 from a young London architect, Frederick A Walters. His drawings show a church that would have been magnificent, but the money was not available.

However, 35 years later, Walters was to design the present St Peter's built in the gardens of 29 Jewry Street. Canon Gunning had purchased the house and grounds in



1915 as a site, for he never lost the determination to build.

Sadly, he did not live to see it. In 1921 he suffered a stroke and retired the following year, remaining bed-ridden in the presbytery.

Soon after his arrival, Canon King approached Bishop Cotter about a new church. The bishop agreed, even though it meant incurring debt.

Walters drew up new plans and in February 1924 work on the foundations began. King later wrote that, "Canon Gunning lived to be aware that the new church was being started but he was incapable of appreciating the fact fully".

The canon died on 15 April 1924, aged 80, and was laid to rest in St James's Cemetery. His requiem Mass was attended by the bishop, a large number of clergy and nuns, the mayor and town clerk, councillors and lay people (Catholic and non-Catholic alike). All the major Winchester families were represented.

The route of the funeral cortege was lined with townsfolk and shopkeepers lowered their blinds in respect. The presence of a White Father in the procession led to a rumour that even the Pope had come to the funeral.

Outside the cemetery, a dozen warders from the prison stood to attention in memory of a 'colleague' who had been a prison chaplain for nigh on 50 years.

Perhaps one of the most touching tributes came from the Mayor who issued an *in memoriam* card with a photograph of the canon simply captioned 'The Provost Gunning Memorial, Everyone's friend – and everyone loved him'.

There is currently a display of Canon Gunning memorabilia in the Pastoral Centre.

On the ninth day of Christmas my true love sent to me nine ladies nursing

St Peter's organists under spotlight

Ian Waring Green had known Chris Allain for a number of years as friend and piano tuner when in 2004 he told Ian that St Peter's was in need of an organist, and encouraged him to apply for the post.

He was accepted and began playing for services in that November.

It was a baptism of fire as a non-Catholic; apart from learning his way around the Mass, and getting used to the fact that none of the music was announced (as it is generally in Church of England services), it was coming up to Christmas, with the added demands of accompanying the choir in the midnight Mass.

Thanks to Chris' 'babysitting' talents, he soon got the hang of the layout, although being expected to know his way around the Masses was nerve-wracking for some time!

"I was fortunate in having the able and very dedicated talents of Chris, Sheila Tucker, and Jo Smith to draw on. Later, Richard Codd would add

his experience to the evening services, having played for Mass in the Extraordinary Form for some time."

Chris has fulfilled a good number of roles: organist, sometime choir master, and choir member. It is understandable that he has felt that it is time to retire, as has Jo Smith.

"Their support for me and St Peter's music has been enormously appreciated, and they will be much missed!"

We are down to Sheila, who can be heard at 10.30am Mass a couple of times a month, and me.

My patterns of playing for Mass are still a work in progress, after the changes brought about by Covid – having taken on the job of choirmaster in 2005, I had decided to step back from that role before the pandemic hit and forced my slightly premature cessation in this department.

I have so far resumed playing for weddings and funerals, and plan to start playing for some Masses again in the near future.

Both Jo Smith and Chris Allain are stepping down as organists at St Peter's.

Jo has been playing for the parish for over 40 years but the lockdown stopped everything. As she was unable to play the organ for nearly two years, she says now seems the right time to retire.

She first played for St Stephen's Sunday morning Mass, and for the last 32 years for the Saturday vigil Mass, at St Peter's which had a very appreciative congregation and one that enjoyed singing.

She said it was a special pleasure to take over playing for the first Mass of Christmas at 5.30pm on Christmas Eve, devised by Catherine Christmas, which she did for five years.

"I am very grateful for the experience and for being able to use my music in service of the church. I wish all present and future musicians the same immense satisfaction from the service they give."

Sheila Tucker started playing the organ in St Peter's in about 1979 to help out when the organist had to have a leg operation and the congregation found themselves singing hymns unaccompanied.

Her husband Martin encouraged her to 'have a go' and she began playing on alternate Sundays.

She said: "I started learning the piano when I was six in 1936 and had piano lessons throughout the war, including being evacuated to Canada for two years, and then back in England and at school.

"I obtained LRAM for piano in 1949 and had a busy musical life playing and teaching and later accompanying.

"My knowledge of organ playing was very sketchy then as I had only

had the occasional dabble at schools where I was teaching. I enjoyed the challenge and began to work it all out and develop a repertoire."

She joined a one-week summer course for 'reluctant' organists at Addington Palace run by the RSCM which helped to improve her technique, and several years later she attended a second.

For many years she has been a member of the Winchester District Organists' Association (WDOA) and through them has met a number of local organists, and played many different organs, including the cathedral.

"I have enjoyed playing both for weddings and funerals over the years, and have learned from experience always to have some extra

music up my sleeve – especially weddings, as one never knows how late the bride will be!

"Also it's very difficult to see from the organ console how far up the aisle she has walked, not to mention coming out of the sacristy after the signing of the register which is the signal to start the wedding march, or other processional music – I always need a signal for this."

Having sung in choirs for many years, especially Waynflete, and worked a lot with singers for concerts and so on she is sure it has helped a great deal to develop her ability to accompany the congregation in hymns and psalms, and the Mass settings. I hope so anyway.

She concluded: "We must try to get some more musicians to join us and 'have a go'."

On the tenth day of Christmas my true love sent to me ten lords providing

Returning to active ministry

Fr Stephen Vooght describes his experience over the past two years

Having been away from active priestly ministry for 21 years, in September 2019 I began a process of readmission to the clerical state, this time not as a member of a religious congregation but as a secular priest within the Diocese of Portsmouth.

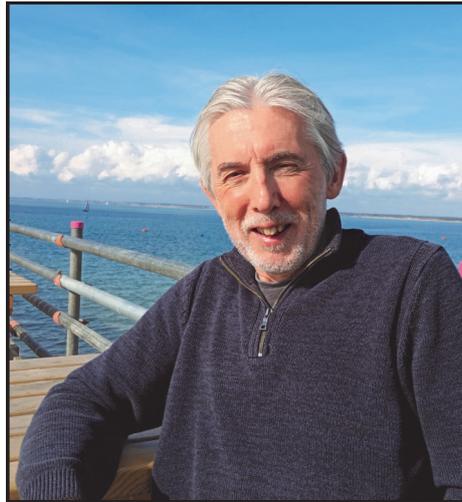
As part of this process, I was placed at St Peter and the Winchester Martyrs where, for two years, I was plunged into parish life helping in a range of challenging pastoral activities.

These included: visiting St Peter's Primary School (sitting in on classes and holding question and answer sessions with pupils), helping with Alpha courses, First Holy Communion and Confirmation courses, baptisms, weddings and funerals, Journey of Faith programme, parish hospitality, acting as chaplain for the SVP, getting involved with city centre ministries (an ecumenical project, visiting local retailers), prison ministry, holy hours, Holy Communion rounds, Eucharistic Adoration promotion, leading the holy rosary and Lectio Divina sessions, assisting the formation team in presenting a series of talks during Advent and Lent, occasionally delivering homilies, performing acolyte and lector ministries and also assisting with sacristan duties.

The process also involved attending St John's Seminary each Monday and Tuesday to undertake some refresher courses on scripture, bioethics, pastoral theology, homiletics, spirituality and Canon Law.

First impressions of parish life

From my first impressions of priestly life within a parish, what struck me most was both the great diversity and the relentless momentum of its pastoral demands. During a very infor-



Fr Stephen Vooght.

native and wisdom-packed lecture that I attended at St John's, which was part of a pastoral course on priestly life and ministry, Fr Stephen Ortiger, a Benedictine monk, shared his personal experience of having to switch from life in a monastery to working as a priest in a parish.

I completely understood and agreed with his conclusions. He remarked that he thought religious life was 'a doddle' compared to the rigorous demands of working in a parish.

He stressed the need to develop good and well-disciplined personal time management skills in order to operate efficiently and effectively as a parish priest. Parish life is quite different to religious community life since you are more of a 'free range chicken' than a 'battery hen'.

In a parish it is down to yourself to structure your daily timetable. He stressed it was necessary to ensure one makes time for what is important and not for what isn't. Time management was certainly an early difficulty that I encountered and had to work hard to improve.

Image of a shepherd

In comparison with my former experience as a retreat giving religious priest, some strong differences that I

noticed from the outset of my immersion into parish ministry was how much more one is exposed to public gaze and also how much more it is about getting to know people and having personal engagement with them.

Befriending and developing a rapport with parishioners is at the heart of a parish priest's work of pastoral care and is essential for building up a strong faith community. Before, as a religious priest, I lived a more secluded existence and did not engage with the same group of people all of the time. However, this is not so for the secular priest who is required to have much greater contact and sustained personal interaction.

He is like a fulcrum at the centre of the community life he shares. This made me realise how strongly the image of a shepherd applies to the role of a parish priest. As Pope Francis so poignantly put it when advising seminarians about how to be priests: "be shepherds, with the 'odour of the sheep', make it real, as shepherds among your flock, fishers of men."

Overall experience

My two years in St Peter's and its adjoining worshipping communities, of St Stephen's, St Gregory's and St Thomas Moore's, and also studying at St John's Seminary, were immensely enriching and rewarding.

At times it was challenging, not just because I was getting used to being an active priest again after a long absence out of the ministry, but because I was also having to learn to adapt to a new kind of priestly ministry.

I am very grateful to Bishop Philip for providing me with the opportunity to return to ministry and I am also very thankful to Fr Mark for mentoring and supporting me. It was also an added bonus to work along side Fr

Continued from page 13

On the eleventh day of Christmas my true love sent to me eleven preachers preaching

Starting afresh on the Isle of Wight

Continued from page 12

Anthony Chiatu for the past year. Lastly, but certainly not least, I praise and thank God for all the wonderful people I have come to know and love in St Peter's parish. I thank all of them for giving me such encouragement and support.

Move to Isle of Wight

On 8 September, I joined Fr Joe McNerney as we arrived on the Isle of Wight to start our new assignment. Fr Joe had been appointed as parish priest of Thomas of Canterbury, Newport and St Saviour, Totland Bay and I was to be his assistant.

After 11 weeks Fr Joe and I are still settling in, getting to know everybody and assessing the pastoral needs and how best to move forward



St Saviour Church, Totland Bay, Isle of Wight.

in building up community life among the parishioners, especially after the Covid lockdowns. Although it will be difficult and take time to achieve, we are very optimistic and motivated.

The following is my vision, which I formed when I applied to join the Portsmouth diocese and the Bishop asked me to write down my aspirations for wanting to return to active ministry:

My wish is to fulfil my duties as a priest by promoting faith in God through primarily proclaiming the Good News, as “faith is born of the Word

and nourished by it” (Vat II: PO #4). I want to do all I can to help people grow in faith and holiness, especially by encouraging them to participate as fully as possible in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church.

I particularly want to help foster a deep love for the Eucharist - “the source and summit of the Christian life” (Vat II: LG #11) - encouraging greater Mass attendance and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. I want to preach about God’s merciful love and the importance of making use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I want to promote strong and sound devotion to Our Lady, especially to praying the rosary, and to always encourage devotion to the saints.

My aspiration is to encourage everyone to engage as fully as possible in all aspects of parish life and to help build a strong and sustainable spirit of fellowship among them.

Ultimately, it will be to help create a truly Eucharistic community of love that would bear authentic witness of Jesus to the world: “By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn13:35).



St Thomas of Canterbury Church, Newport, Isle of Wight.

On the twelfth day of Christmas my truelove sent to me twelve servants serving

Youths and young people to the fore

Youth co-ordinator **Jo Donaldson** reports on their latest initiatives

Since the easing of the Covid restrictions, we have been able to successfully resume some of our initiatives for youth and young adults!

So far, not only have we been able to re-start our youth Alpha programme and our young adults group, we've also started a new youth and young adults music group.

Our youth Alpha course began in September and is taking place alongside the main parish Alpha course so that parents can attend the course for adults while their young person is in the youth course.

This has worked very well, and recently we took part in the Holy Spirit away day at Farleigh School in Andover. The day went really well.

We spent time on talks about the Holy Spirit, discussions around who the Holy Spirit is and the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. We also made sure we had plenty of time for outdoor games of football and table tennis.

Our next course of youth Alpha takes place in the new year and is for anyone in years 7-13 (age 11-17) who



would like to explore their faith with their peers. We do ask that all young people considering Confirmation complete one course of youth Alpha before starting the programme (Easter 2022).

Our young adults group meets after the Saturday 5.30pm Mass. Now that we are able to meet in person, we have formed a large group of students and young adults. Our four weekly programme includes:

- The Uncover Series (A Bible study series based around Mark's gospel)
- Think and drink (we go to a local pub and discuss a theological/philosophical/ethical topic)
- Film night (a Christian film in the parish centre followed by discussion)
- Prayer and adoration (7pm-8pm after mass).

The group also goes to diocesan

events and is hoping to plan a pilgrimage in the new year.

We are always open to more members, so please get in touch if you'd like to join, or just come to the parish centre after Saturday 5.30pm Mass.

Our young people's music group rehearses between 3pm and 5pm on a Sunday and plays for the 5.30pm Mass on the first Sunday of each month. We play a mixture of contemporary Christian music and traditional hymns, so there's something for everyone.

We play various instruments with mixed ability, coming together because we enjoy playing as part of the music ministry at Mass. If you'd like to join, get in touch. We welcome any ability and any instrument.

Contact by email:
joanna@stpeterswinchester.org.uk

Focus placed on researching two saints



Sarah Layzell reports on the discussions of the Acorn groups

Our Acorn groups are growing! In early September we welcomed new members to our Acorn family for our third series; those first exploratory roots are definitely taking hold!

Out of our seeds of faith is emerging a community made up of parishioners

and guests from further afield to form a network of small groups.

We again used a short prayer course to introduce our new members, because, while Acorn groups are not prayer groups as such, they are a place where praying for and with each other is very much the essence of who we are. Everyone gelled quickly and fitted seamlessly into our established groups, in fact before not too long it was as if we had always been together. And so we continued our Acorn journey.

The theme this term was to choose a patron saint for each group, a saint that we would endeavour to know better and to learn about their lives and works.

So we began the first week with a great discussion! People within the group pitched for a particular saint; someone they felt they knew too little about and would like to learn more, or a saint that meant something personally to them, or a saint they felt

Continued on page 15

Pray for love, hope, joy, friendship, security and generosity

would be a good fit for our Acorn groups.

After much deliberation and a tense vote, each group came to their decision. The two saints chosen were St Philip Neri, renowned for his joyful countenance and immense love of God, and St Catherine of Siena, one of the outstanding figures from medieval Catholicism and a doctor of the church.

These would become our focus for the coming weeks. At the end of the year each group will present their 'patron saint' to the Acorn community as a whole and share our findings.



Our fortnightly evenings have continued on Zoom for the moment and have become something that our members really look forward to.

We begin with a social time and sharing our week, before moving on to discuss and reflect on what we have read in our chosen book.

The evening ends with a time of prayer. This varies from week to week both in the form that it takes and who leads it.

It offers us the chance to contemplate our week gone by or the one ahead of us, the good we encounter and the blessings we have or to ask for the group to pray for intercession on our behalf if we are finding something troubling, or to offer thanksgiving for the joy in our lives.

It is a time to pause and reflect in the company of others with whom we share our journey of living out our gospel values.

As daily lives begin to open up, we will soon be meeting face to face. We are looking forward to our celebration evening to close the term.

This will be held in the pastoral centre and will be a chance for us all to at last share a physical space and not least to share food in person, rather than from behind a screen.



Also hopefully it will offer us a chance to continue our growth both in number and in faith.

Registration for Acorn Groups will open again in the new year, if you would like to join or to find out more, please email acorn@st.peterswinchester.org.uk

Cycling Walkers raise over £600



Inspired by a family who took their children hiking in Peru, Sarah and Sandy Walker thought it a great idea to take their three girls, Alex, Harriet and Pip and their bikes to Devon and do some cycling.

One hundred miles of cycling to be precise from Ilfracombe to Plymouth along beautifully quiet country lanes and disused railway trails which form the Tarka Trail, The Granite Way and The Drakes Trail.

There was much family discussion about the plan, how many hours would we be cycling, would we stop for lunch, what happens if I get tired...and worst what if the weather is truly awful?

They went to Mass the week before they left for their adventure and there was an appeal for the CWtP; the youngest daughter suggested that this would be an excellent charity to cycle for, give them focus and purpose.

Sarah said: "We were late getting our page organised but with help we were up and running for just as we passed the half way point – by which time the notifications of donations were coming in fast.

"We were really spurred on by the knowledge that through our efforts we may be helping another community. We raised over £600 in total and are actually considering another adventure."

The support crew was Sarah's mum Sue Burton, who was invaluable in providing sustenance and encouragement at the right moments, plus their two dogs Dougie and Angus.



Pies, puds, friendly chatter and a talk

We are the Pies & Puds team: Marion (the custard queen), Moira (pulled pork ahoy) and Sue (the cabbage ninja) – and we want to feed you!

After an 18-month pandemic gap, we are delighted to have re-started our monthly lunch event in the Pastoral Centre, with a new name - **Pies & Puds** - but the same fabulous home-cooked food, good company with a chance to meet people, and a talk.

It's held on the third Wednesday of each month except August, and you just need to turn up – no booking or commitment required. We suggest you arrive 12.45 for 1pm, and we are done by around 2.30-3pm (all timings subject to the temperament of ingredients, equipment, guest speakers and cooks).

Regulars know that the team cooks up a storm with a choice of two pies, mounds of vegetables, vegetarian and gluten-free options, and two proper puddings with custard.

Old favourites back on the rotating menu include pulled pork pie, cottage pie, and beef and stilton pie.

For pudding there is usually a fruit crumble, and a sponge pudding.

The talks have been very wide-ranging – from local history to Winchester Radio, from Agatha Christie to army mules, from climbing Kili-



manjaro to walking from Canterbury to Rome, and we have featured many local projects such as Boaz, Home-Start and Friends of the Family.

We will continue to search out varied and entertaining speakers for you. And if you are a potential speaker, or have a brilliant idea, please get in touch, as we'd love to hear from you.

The event works like this:

Guests give a donation of whatever they can afford (£5 or less): that pays for ingredients, while the team volunteer their time and cooking skills.

We can then give a small donation in turn to the speaker or their charity,

and there is always enough money left over that we can give a sum to food charities once a year.

We split it – over a year it will be more than £200 - between a local one (Basics Bank) and an international one (eg Mary's Meals). So everyone wins.

If this appeals, then do come along – next date is 19 January. We are in the Pastoral Centre in Jewry Street, next to St Peter's church. If you have any questions, or want to join our mailing list, email moirar@stpeterswinchester.org.uk – you can let us know you are coming, or just turn up.



Whether you come alone or in a pair or group, whether you are a long-time regular or a new guest, we guarantee you will be warmly welcomed and have a good time and good food.

CrossKeys welcomes letters, stories and photographs
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